Discussion on the Translation Methodologies of Chinese Ancient Artifacts

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Abstract—**Translation of ancient artifacts plays an important part in cultural communication. The accuracy of translation influences the effects of communication greatly. The translation of ancient works of art has its unique national attribute and cultural connotation. Therefore, the translation of this practical style is different from a general text translation. It is difficult to achieve the ideal result if only translate the Chinese art terms' from the perspective of translation skills. Based on the cultural differences between Chinese and English, this paper illustrates the cultural elements in the translated terms of Chinese ancient art, analyzes and summarizes the existing mistranslations and misinterpretations, and finally comes up with suggestions on the standardization of the translation.**

Keywords—cultural relics translation; cultural differences; receiving culture

I. INTRODUCTION

Ancient works of art are precious heritages during the development of human civilization as well as important carriers of spreading history and culture. Due to the great distinctions between Chinese and Western cultures, the process of translating ancient Chinese works of art into English will definitely influenced by the cultural factors. For some works of art, it is difficult to achieve the ideal result if the translation is only from the linguistic level.

II. BRIEF REVIEWS OF THE PAST RELATED RESEARCHES

Cultural relics translation is a branch of scientific English translation, which has unique national attribute and cultural connotation. Therefore, the translation of this practical style is different from the general text translation. Many translation scholars believe that the principle of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance" summed up in translation practice can not fully guide the new problems occurred in the cultural relics translation, so they have made in-depth thinking and discussion on the translation principles of this practical style and come up with constructive suggestions. Shanpei Mu [1] discusses the issue of faithfulness and smoothness in the translation of Chinese ancient art works, and believes the high-level translations which can be accepted by English readers must follow the two main points, faithfulness and smoothness. Xinzhang Luo [2] and Qingyuan Liu [3] believe that the naming of cultural relics contains different cultural connotations, so it is very difficult to make every Chinese and English name of each artifact fully correspond. Thus in the translation of cultural relics, "expressiveness" is more important than "faithfulness", in other words, during the process of seeking "faithfulness ", there may be "no expressiveness", and what's more important is to follow the "expressiveness". Xinmin Shi [4] reinterprets the translation standard of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance" as "faithfulness, accuracy, fluency and proper style". According to the characteristics of cultural relics translation, he came up with four new principles, nationality, conciseness, informativeness and retranslation. Throughout the previous studies, although it is generally agreed that the English translation of Chinese ancient art names is different from the general translation due to its national attributes and cultural connotations, the focus is mostly on the level of translation skills or the integration between skills and culture, which is insufficient to explore the two language cutural differences between Chinese and English. The author believes what the most important thing in the translation of Chinese ancient art terms is to convey cultural information accurately. Otherwise, even if the words correspond to each other, the translation may look like a body without soul, or even come out completely different from the original meaning. Based on the summary of the previous experience, take the cultural level as a starting point, the author illustrates the cultural elements in the English translation of Chinese ancient art terms, analyzes and summarizes the existing mistranslation and misinterpretation, and finally proposes some suggestions on the standardization of translation.

III. THE CULTURAL ELEMENTS ON THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF CHINESE ANCIENT ART TERMS

In this paper, cultural elements mainly include the following three parts: the background culture of ancient works of art, the differences between the origin culture and the receiving culture, and the selection of cultural information. First of all, translators should fully understand the background culture of ancient works of art and get some basic knowledge. Otherwise, the situation of the "literature" not corresponding to the "meaning" may occur. For example, a translator translated the *Tri-colored Guardian King* unearthed in Hansenzhai, Xi'an in 1955 into *Tri-colored Heavenly King*. It seems that the translation is very smooth, but in fact it misleads the English readers. The Heavenly

Kings Figurine, also known as Tomb Figurine, is one of the components of the Tang Dynasty's funeral. Together with Tomb-guard beast, it is often placed in front of the tomb path or chamber to play a role in tomb control. It can be seen that the *Heavenly King* here is not the king of the heaven, but the guardian of a cemetery, so it is more appropriate to translate it as *Tri-cooled Guardian King*. Secondly, on the basis of understanding the origin culture, the translator should also understand the receiving culture in order ot choose the right words. For example, there are two main translation ways for the word *Qipao* and *Cheongsam*. The origin-cultural translators tend to transliterate based on the pronunciation. However due to the historical and cultural factors, *Cheongsam* is more acceptable for English readers. If they only see *Qipao*, they often don't know what that means. Finally, due to the differences of cultural connotations between Chinese and English, translators should select effective cultural information and know what part of the content to be translated. All in all, the translator should pay full attention to the above cultural elements in the process of translating the names of Chinese ancient art, otherwise the following three problems may arise.

A. Improper Use of Words or Mistranslation Due to Insufficient Recognition of Cultural Relics' Background and Culture

In the *Three Treasures of Shaanxi Cultural Relics*, there is such content: the kettle, also known as "Fu, Wok". Cooking utensils, its shape is mostly round mouth, arc abdomen, thin wall and round bottom. "Kettle is the cook ware, most of which have round edge, bowed away, thin side and surrounding bottom." Here the Fu is translated to Kettle and said "Kettle is the cook-ware". Cambridge advanced English dictionary defines Kettle as a covered metal or plastic container with a handle and a shaped opening for pouring, used for boiling water. It's not hard to find out Kettle is pot with handles for boiling water. In contrast, cauldron is more appropriate in form, usage and use.

The yellow glazed dragon-handled pot is a type of double-handled pot with narrow neck, which is a common shape in Tang Dynasty porcelain. In early Tang Dynasty, the handles of this pot are relatively short. With the development of the times, the length of the body and handle has increased gradually. In terms of shape, this yellow glazed dragon-handled pot is a porcelain of the early Tang Dynasty, with a relatively short handle, which is similar to the oval shaped pottery with two ears and narrow neck of ancient Rome. So it's not hard for us to understand that some translators may choose the word, amphora. The two eared jug, which is called amphora, is a nearly round double-handled jug. It was popular in ancient Greece and Rome, and people used it to store oil and wine [6]. Many similar pots were found in the Han Dynasty of the same period in China. In the Cambridge high level English dictionary, amphora's explanation is a clay container wider at the top than at the base which has two handles and was used in ancient times especially for storing oil or wine. So it can be seen that amphora is a type of pottery, and the author's query results in other authoritative English dictionaries are the same explanations, which pottery

is mentioned without exception. Therefore, strictly speaking, it is not appropriate to use amphora as the translation of Tang Dynasty porcelain. However, if the translator used amphora to describe the shape of cultural relics, it might be a good translation as well. In conclusion, the translation of cultural relics should not be based on the appearance of an object, the age, functionalities, morphological characteristics and cultural connotation should all be taken into consideration.

B. Inconsistency of Translation Caused by Lack of Understanding over the Receiving Culture

Looking through many publications and publicity materials, there are five main translation methods for the translation of Avalokitesvara. It is worth noting that Bodhisattva corresponds to Bodhisattva in Chinese, and Avalokitesvara is one of the Bodhisattvas, often referred to "Bodhisattva of Compassion" or "Bodhisattva of Mercy". (See "Table I") It can be seen that Bodhisattva is the superior word of Avalokitesvara. The translator should also decide which word to choose. Kuan-yin Pu-sah is a Wade Giles. Before the 1980s, such translation was quite popular, especially the translation of names, such as Chou En-lai and Teng Siao-ping. With the development of China's economy and strong national power in recent years, more and more translators begin to abandon such translation but use Pinyin instead. Therefore, there are two translations later on: Guanshiyin and Guanyin. Some translators think that the latter one is only a simple abbreviation of the former one, so they translate it into Guanshiyin and Guanyin in one paragraph. In fact, in the early Tang Dynasty, in order to avoid the name of Emperor Li Shimin, "GuanShiYin" was renamed as"Guanyin" [7]. Through the search of Google, the world's largest search engine, the author finds out the frequency of using the translation of Guanyin and Avalokitesvara is higher than that of the other three. In particular, Wikipedia and Christie's auction in New York adopt the translation of Guanyin, while the British museum uses Avalokitesvara. Although online cognition is only one aspect of translation evaluation, the translation methods adopted by mainstream media and authoritative organizations also reflect the orientation of accepting cultural choices from one aspect, which should be brought the attention of the translators.

TABLE I. INCONSISTENT TRANSLATION

Original Name	Translated Name
观世音菩萨	Bodhisattva; Avalokitesvara Kuan-yin Pu-sah Guanshiyin; Guanyin
花冠	flower hat; foliate crown; tiered crown
紫砂	purple clay pottery; violet sand earthenware purple earthenware; red ware Yixing Zisha/Zisha

In addition, there are many translations for the corolla on Guanyin's head, such as flower Hat, foliate crown and tiered crown. Obviously, the first translation is caused by the lack

of understanding of the receiving culture. Flower hat is far from Guanyin's Corolla in terms of shape and use. In contrary, tiered crown is more accurate and easily accepted by English readers.

Finally, there are many translated versions of Zisha. The first two translations are purple clay pottery and violet sand earthware. Although the Chinese names correspond to the English names completely, they've lost the cultural connotation of the cultural relics and misled the English readers. Purple sand is a kind of stoneware with a firing temperature different from an ordinary pottery. Therefore, it has the characteristics of dense structure and warm color, which make it a very precious vessel. It is not an ideal choice to equate the first two translations with the ordinary pottery. In addition, purple earthware is translated into purple earthenware. In English speaking countries, it refers to a kind of purple pottery, not purple sand. Another translation is red ware, which actually refers to a red pottery rather than the purple sand. Red pottery can be divided into two types: red pottery with sand and red pottery with mud. Because the color and texture of the red pottery with mud are similar to that of the purple sand, many profit-driven business in the market sell red pottery products as purple sand to make profits. In other words, if the exquisite purple sand products were translated into red pottery, whether they were for exhibition or for sale, they would somehow lose its own value. In view of the value and unique cultural attributes of Zisha, the most popular translation in the world currently is Yixingzisha / Zisha. The author noticed that Zisha or Yixing Zisha are the most frequently used for Zisha products, no matter on the main foreign shopping websites such as eBay, Amazon, etc., or art websites. In this regard, Chinese people have every reason to be proud of the Chinese cultural influence. At the same time, the translators should also deeply reflect that the receiving culture is using Zisha, while the translators are using all kinds of translations, which will undoubtedly have a negative impact on the promotion of international influence.

C. Invalid Information Produced by Inappropriate Selection of Translation Content

In the process of cultural relics translation, the translator is facing the problem of content selection all the time. Some words in the names of cultural relics should be translated accurately because they convey important cultural information, while some contents can be used as annotation or be ignored. The main forms of the Buddhist cultural relics names in China are: age + name + texture + shape. The translation of these contents should be flexible according to the specific situation. As shown in the "Table II", the first translation seems to be the most concise, but actually provides invalid information. There is no necessary chronological annotation for Tianhe five years, which makes readers unable to understand the era of this cultural relics. Moreover, the translator tries to embody all the contents in one single translation name without outlining the point, which can not attract readers' interest. In contrast, the latter two translations have clear the primary and the secondary with complete information that can maximize the

transmission of cultural relics information. Taking *Buddha, probably Amitabha (Amituo), Tang dynasty* as an example, it can be seen that the translator has increased or decreased the names of cultural relics through information screening. The explanation of the texture and age of the relics were added. In order to ensure the readers who are not familiar with Chinese culture to understand the "nationality" of the statue which is different from the Buddhist statues in Southeast Asian countries, the translator added the content of early 7th century China after Tang Dynasty (618-906) for explanation. Regarding the "sitting image" of the statue, the translator chose to ignore, because the reader can fully understand this information through the object or picture without "sitting image" this piece of information.

TABLE II.   INFORMATION SCREENING AND COMPARISON

Source	Original and Translated Names
Tri-colored glazed pottery of Xi'an Cultural Relics	天和五年释迦年尼鎏金造像 Gilt Sykyamuni statues built in the 5th year of Tian He
British Museum (Exhibition Photos)	北齐观世音菩萨砂岩石塑像 Sandstone figure of the Bodhisattvas, Avalokiteshvara(Guanyin) Six Dynasties period, North Qi dynasty (AD550- 577)
Metropolitan Museum of art, New York (Official website)	唐阿弥陀佛坐像 Buddha, probably Amitabha (Amituo), Tang dynasty (618-906), early 7th century China Dry lacquer with traces of gilt and pigment

In addition, for the description of cultural relics, the information selected by the three translators is not the same. Due to the space limitation, the author can't display the three paragraphs completely, so here the author just gives a brief explanation. The book "Tri-colored glazed pottery of Xi'an cultural relics" focuses on the specific depiction of cultural relics shapes, and finally introduces Shakya Mani's life experience. The British Museum first gives a brief introduction to Avalokitesvara, and then compares the sculpture of the statue with that of Southeast Asia. There are only a few studies on the morphological characteristics of cultural relics. The Metropolitan Museum of art in New York also focuses on explaining the cultural information and craftsmanship process of the sculptures.

The author believes that the choice of translation content should be based on the specific situation. For museums or publications with illustrations, some information is quite obvious, but some needs to be carefully annotated by translators. For the obvious information, the translator can ignore or translate it with one word, and emphasizes more on the cultural information behind the cultural relics.

IV. SUGGESTIONS ON THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF CHINESE ANCIENT ART TERMS

The government should pay sufficient attention to and support the translation of cultural relics. The process of translating cultural relics into English is actually the process of spreading national culture [8]. The most convenient

platform for spreading the national culture is the official English website. It's hoped that the relevant government departments will give more guidance and support to the museums, send experts and scholars to criticize and correct the existing non-standard phenomenon in the museums, and put forward constructive suggestions on the structure of the official English website, in order to comprehensively enhance the international influence of urban history and culture.

Relevant managers should promote the internationalization process of scenic spots with advanced working concepts. It's necessary for them to master certain translation knowledge, understand the cultural differences between China and the west, and to give translators enough support and space. If the managers of scenic spots and historic sites don't have certain translation common sense, simply require the translators to translate the corresponding words but ignore the untranslatable content, it is likely to lead the translation work astray. For the translators, no matter for economic reasons or for the pressure of the work to be accepted, it's impossible to translate works with satisfaction.

Translators are the most important part of the translation process. Their translation ideas and methods are the key to the quality of a translation. Translators should have a clear understanding of the characteristics of ancient Chinese art translation and pay full attention to cultural elements. First of all, they should understand the background culture of cultural relics and master some basic knowledge. In addition, the translator should also understand the receiving culture based on the origin culture, so as to choose the appropriate words. Many people think that as long as they know a foreign language, they can do a translation. In fact, the basic skills of cultural relics translation not only rely on a foreign language level, but also the understanding of the receiving culture. Finally, effective cultural information screening should be carried out to make a reasonable choice over the translation content.

Typesetting is not only the last step before releasing to the readers, but also a very important step. The typographer's mistakes will lead to a wrong translation, which can't spread the culture, but has a very negative impact. However, if any ambiguity or inappropriate part is found, please contact the translation company in time in order to avoid unnecessary errors. Therefore, the typesetting and printing personnel must constantly improve their own knowledge, strive to have the basic English level, be responsible for the work, and ensure the final step of the cultural relics translation.

V. CONCLUSION

To sum up, it is difficult to achieve the ideal effect of ancient works of art translation only from the language level, and even the situation of mistranslation and mistranslation can occur. In the future work, the relevant managers should pay enough attention to the translation of ancient works of art, understand the cultural differences in the translation, and give the translators enough space, rather than blindly require to translating the corresponding words. In the process of

translation, translators should pay attention to their cultural attributes, which is the background culture of ancient works of art, the differences between the origin culture and the receiving culture, and the selection of cultural information. In the process of translation, translators should have a deep understanding of the relevant background and cultural knowledge of ancient works of art, screen effective cultural information, and make a reasonable choice over the translation content. Finally, the typesetting staff should also be very detailed in order to avoid typography errors during the work.

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