

# A Study of Translating Xi'an's Traditional Folk Terms From the Perspective of "Cultural Translation Theory"

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## ABSTRACT

Xi'an traditional folk custom, with wisdom of thoughts and emotions, is a great intangible cultural heritage in the history of mankind. Due to the differences in the translators' cultural backgrounds, academic aspirations and research methods, it is difficult to find a unified, accurate and standard way to translate the traditional folk terms in English, thus affecting the international communication of folk culture. This article from the perspective of Susan Bassnette's cultural translation theory aims to study the Chinese-English terminology translation and cross-cultural communication on the folk culture of Xi'an, which bridges the communication between China and foreign countries and support some references for the translation of folk and tourism culture.

**Keywords:** *Xi'an's traditional folk terms, Chinese-English translation, cultural translation, cross-cultural communication*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

On the November 30 of 2016, President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping at the 10th National Congress of China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (CFLAC) mentioned that, "Throughout the ages, all ethnic groups in the world, without exception, have been deeply influenced by the fine works of literature and art produced in the various stages of their historical development and by the great masters. Each era has its own literature and art, and has its own spirit. The classic works of literature and art of any era reflect the social life and spirit and bear the imprints and characteristics of that era. Only when literature and art is closely bound up with the country's weal and woe, they can give rise to a deafening voice. This is the mission of all the artists. Every artist should grasp the pulse of the times, undertake the mission of the times, listen to the voice of the times and answer the questions of the times bravely." [1]

For the unique aesthetics and subtlety of the folk culture of Xi'an, it is difficult for foreigners to understand it. In order to establish the image of Xi'an as an international city successfully, translation must play a role as a bridge in the external promotion and communication of the folk culture of the ancient city. The translation of folk custom terms is an important means of cross-cultural communication, and also the most important link to eliminate the barrier of language understanding. The success of the folk culture of Xi'an, such as the Qinqiang art, ancient architectures, folk arts and other intangible cultural heritages, marks a milestone for the folk culture of Xi'an in the world, and also elevates the local folk culture of Xi'an to a new height, which will surely inject

new vitality into the revitalization of local development. The Chinese-English translation of folk cultural terms has always been a very difficult problem. Because most of the folk customs have been applied and refined for a long time. Therefore, it has rich connotations, obvious features and strong national language characteristics. It is not enough to translate folk art terms simply, but cultural factors should be fully considered. The difficulty lies in how to accurately translate folk terms with historical significance and cultural connotations under two different cultural backgrounds.

### ***1.1. Susan Bassnette's cultural translation theory***

Susan Bassnette emphasizes the position of culture in translation and the significance of culture. The school of culture represented by her made a conscious reflection on the needs of contemporary society and the overall situation of translation, and put forward the concept of cultural translation, which caused a strong response in the field of translation and made the study of translation bright. They believe that text is not a static specimen of a language but a language expression in which the translator understands the author's intentions and creatively reproduces those intentions in another culture. Therefore, translation is not just replication and imitation but cultural coordination and manipulation. According to Susan Bassnette, the basic unit of translation is not words, not sentences, or even texts, but culture, and

“faithfulness” based on word equivalence or textual equivalence does not exist at all.[2]

Bassnette believes that culture is the key factor that determines the core of information. Her “cultural translation view” mainly includes: translation is not only bilingual communication, but also a kind of cross-cultural communication. The purpose of translation is to break through the language barrier and promote cultural exchange. The essence of translation is the transmission of cross-cultural information and the cultural activities of the translator to reproduce the original text in the target language. The main purpose of translation is cultural operational form of translation, but cultural information is the object of translation.[3]

## **2. BACKGROUND**

### ***2.1. Petit-Point Articals in Xi'an from the Perspective of Cultural Translation***

Xi'an's Gauze show, also known as the poke gauze show, is an ancient folk embroidery species. The characteristic of the process is to make the colored silk according to the pattern of the warp and weft of the yarn by one needle. The needle path is regular and even, and the pattern is protruding and bright, which has a strong sense of weave and decorative effect. The bottom cloth of gauze is called sifting silk, which is made of silk with high strength, and not easily deformed. Gauze embroidery line is generally pure cotton texture, and the color is natural and soft. Therefore, this term should convey the original language, which is translated as “petit-point work” or “petit-point articals”. Collins dictionary says this is a small diagonal needlepoint stitch used for fine detail (Also called tent stitch).

### ***2.2. The Rubbings of the Stele Forest in Xi'an from the Perspective of Cultural Translation***

The Stele Forest in Xi'an is world-famous which has collected more than 3000 stele pieces from the Eastern Han Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty. It is the gathering place of Chinese calligraphy tablets. Since stone tablets are often made by famous calligraphers in ancient times, the calligraphy art lovers study and copy the calligraphy from the inscription rubbings. Rubbings are pictures of paper and ink being turned on the stone, and the rubbings are exactly the same as those on the original stone, which are often regarded as treasures by many scholars. This character 拓(tà) here means “rubbings” in the English language. Collins Dictionary explains “A rubbing is a picture that you make by putting a piece of paper over a carved surface and then rubbing wax or chalk over it.”

### ***2.3. The Marionettes of Xi'an from the***

### ***Perspective of Cultural Translation***

Marionettes, also known as “String puppets”, are translated as “Marionettes”, and they are suspended and controlled by strings, sometimes with a center pole attached to some of the controls held by the Marionettes from the above. The control bar can be horizontal or vertical. The basic strings used for the operation are usually connected to the head, back, hands (to control the arms) and the knees (to control the legs). This form of puppetry is complex which requires greater control than fingers puppets and gloves puppets. According to the background knowledge, in order to conform to communicative habits and expressions, “Marionettes” can be interpreted as String Puppets, in addition to the conversion of language information and the transmission of cultural connotation, the translator put the focus of choice conversion on the communicative level, and the communicative intention can be successfully reflected in the translation.

### ***2.4. The Noodles with Sauces of Xi'an from the Perspective of Cultural Translation***

The Saozi noodles in Xi'an have a long history and were famous as early as the Qing Dynasty. The Saozi noodles must be hand-rolled with first-class flour. Saozi is made of pork, day-lilys, eggs, wooden ears, tofu and other ingredients with a variety of seasoning. When eating, the noodles will be boiled into the bowl, and then pour the Saozi soup. The characters “臊子” actually has its own English equivalent. According to Collins Dictionary, a sauce is a thick liquid which is served with other food. a thick liquid that is eaten with food to add flavour to it. Thus, it can be translated as “The noodles with sauses”. In the process of cultural exchange and fusion, the concept of cultural translation advocates that new words and terms should be translated and foreign cultures should be considered. After a long period of widespread popularity, they will gradually blend into their own language and become an organic part of their own mainstream culture. [4] At the same time, from the perspective of cultural translation, cultural exchange in the process of cultural convergence is always two-way, and the influence of Chinese and Western cultures should also be mutual. That is why Chinese words such as “Chow Mein” and “Lamian Noodles” have been added to the English lexicon as formal words that have become part of western culture.[5]

## **3. CONCLUSION**

In 1996, Japan introduced the registration system of protecting cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage in Europe and the United States. The registration system is now widely adopted by many countries in the world to protect cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage. UNESCO also uses the registration system for

“World Cultural and Natural Heritage Sites”. South Korea’s protection of cultural and intangible cultural heritage tends to be commercialized and touristic, while France establishes “Cultural Heritage Day” to promote the protection of historical and cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage in Europe, etc. In the October of 2005, Xi’an Declaration on The Protection of Historic Buildings, Ancient Sites and the Environment of Historic Areas was discussed and adopted at the 15th Congress of the International Council on Monuments and Sites. Xi’an Declaration highlights the importance of the environment for heritage value and protection. It is a programmatic document to promote the future protection and sustainable development of cultural heritage in various countries. It is also the first industrial consensus document in the field of site protection named after China’s ancient capital.

Through previous studies, we find that the protection of folk art heritage is facing severe problems: (1) The cultural ecological environment for the survival of the intangible cultural heritage in Xi’an has changed dramatically. The loss of the folk art resources is serious and there are no successors. Some traditional skills are facing extinction. For example, there are only a few folk artists who have mastered the traditional art skills of performing Chang’an music and dance, shadow puppetry, “Xi’an drum music”, woodbine New Year pictures, paper works, paper-cuts, clay sculptures, embroideries, cloth arts and so on. (2) Citizens’ awareness of intangible cultural heritage protection needs to be improved. (3) The mechanism of protection and utilization need to be improved urgently. Therefore, to some degree, this topic has broad social significance and social value.

The protection and utilization of Xi’an folk cultural heritage play an important role in the intangible cultural protection

project, which is an inevitable cultural appeal to maintain the cultural diversification, and carry forward the national spirit, and achieve independent and sustainable development.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was supported by UCLG Research Programs of Xi’an Social Sciences Planning Foundation (cdw70)

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