



Translation Strategies for the Dinghai Folk Culture in the Context of ‘Culture Going Global’

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Abstract. Cultural soft power has increasingly become a core aspect of international competition. The urgency of promoting outstanding Chinese culture to the world cannot be underestimated. However, the translation of folk culture has not received sufficient attention within the translation community. Taking Dinghai folk culture in Zhou Shan as an example, this study investigates and researches the translation of Dinghai folk culture. By identifying existing issues and proposing targeted measures, the study puts forth appropriate translation strategies. The aim is to achieve accurate and precise English translations of Dinghai folk culture, enabling a better global understanding of its essence and significance. This, in turn, contributes to enhancing Zhou Shan's cultural soft power and improving the cultural experience of international visitors in Zhou Shan.

Keywords: Translation strategies; Folk culture; Cultural globalization; Outstanding traditional Chinese culture; Cultural soft power

1 Introduction

Cultural soft power has increasingly become the core strength in international competition. Throughout history, the study of folk culture has been a topic of significance in both Eastern and Western cultural realms, leading to the establishment of an independent discipline known as folk culture studies. In order to enhance China's comprehensive strength, promote Chinese culture, showcase Chinese traditions, and uphold cultural confidence. The strategies of "cultural going global" have been emphasized in the 18th and 19th National Congresses of the Communist Party of China. The mission of taking Chinese culture global is imperative.^[1]

In recent years, significant achievements have been made in the dissemination of Chinese folk culture, allowing more international friends to gain deeper insights through online and offline means. However, challenges persist in the translation of cultural terms and phrases, leading to translation dilemmas and frequent instances of misinterpretation. To address these issues, a more diversified approach should be employed for translating Chinese folk culture, aligning with the times and providing readers with enhanced experiences and deeper insights.

2 Research Background

Folk culture, representing the customs and habits formed over time through people's daily lives and work, has been a focus of attention in cultural studies both East and West. Given its diversity resulting from varying natural, geographical, and social conditions, folk culture manifests in a vibrant spectrum across regions. Zhou Shan, a port city known for its fishing industry, possesses rich folk cultural resources. Effectively showcasing local folk culture during international interactions remains a challenge. In 2018, Dinghai initiated the "Fifteen Ancient Sites" campaign, unearthing 226 sites associated with the "Dinghai Mountain Series Culture," including ancient bridges, wells, pavilions, historical relics, exquisite old houses, the residences of notable figures, ancient streets, venerable shops, temples, and tombs.

With China's rapid economic development, Zhou Shan's frequency of receiving international visitors as a port city has increased. In this process, folk culture, as the foundation of the city's cultural soft power, has gained prominence. However, the dissemination of folk culture and its translation still lack sophistication and often suffer from inaccuracies and non-standard practices.

Through investigating and studying the translation of Dinghai folk culture, this research identifies existing issues, proposes targeted measures, and outlines appropriate translation strategies. This approach ensures accurate representation of folk culture, showcasing Dinghai's outstanding folk culture comprehensively to international friends. Such dissemination not only highlights the colorful tapestry of Chinese culture but also holds significance for Zhejiang Province's development strategy. Moreover, it promotes the global reach of Chinese culture, fosters cross-cultural communication, showcases Chinese traditions, and enhances China's influence worldwide.

3 Current Translation Status and Challenges

Zhou Shan has been designated as the first national marine economy comprehensive development pilot zone and Zhejiang Province's only pioneer in comprehensive marine economic development. In recent years, increasing attention from Chinese folk culture scholars has led to a rise in research related to folk culture translation. However, compared to other fields, the breadth and depth of research on folk culture translation remain insufficient. Research specifically focused on translating Dinghai folk culture is scarce. A search for "Dinghai folk culture translation" on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and a visit to local libraries in Dinghai revealed a significant research gap. Few existing translations also exhibit inaccuracies and defects in precision. Consequently, the translation challenges associated with Dinghai folk culture demand attention.

Translation issues are mainly manifested in the following three aspects:

3.1 Inconsistent Translation of the Same Proper Nouns

The translation of the same proper nouns lacks consistency and conciseness, and the usage of possessive forms and singular/plural forms is prone to errors or misunderstandings. For example, in the same document, the translation of "定海渔民画" (Dinghai Fishermen's Painting) is rendered as "Fisherman Painting" in the title and as "Fisherman's Painting" later in the text. While such inconsistency might seem trivial, it can create comprehension difficulties for readers, especially for specialized proper nouns that involve transliteration or free translation. In cases where translations are not unified, there is a significant risk of introducing comprehension ambiguity.

3.2 Inaccurate Translation of Culture-Bearing Terms^[2]

Culture-bearing terms refer to words, phrases, and idioms that symbolize specific things in a particular historical context, reflecting the unique ways of activities that a nation accumulates over its long history. However, during the translation process, translators often mistranslate due to a lack of understanding of the cultural connotations.^[3] For example, terms related to local customs in Dinghai folk culture such as "下定" ("lowering the tripod"), "过书" ("passing the book"), and "抬茶" ("carrying tea") carry the distinctive cultural heritage accumulated over Dinghai's long history. Achieving accurate translation requires a certain level of cultural understanding.

3.3 Limited Use of Translation Methods

An over reliance on direct translation methods. Cultural presupposition^[4] is a pragmatic presupposition that exists in a certain latent assumption form. This latent form is accepted and shared by individuals living in the same society. Individuals within the same societal background share common cultural background knowledge, and cultural presupposition comes into play when they communicate. However, for two individuals from different societal backgrounds, their cultural presuppositions differ, leading to difficulties in intercultural communication. In translation, solely relying on direct translation often results in recipients failing to fully understand or accept the conveyed content from the speaker. Cultural presupposition's impact on translation strategies is significant, and exclusively using direct translation can hinder effective cross-cultural communication.^[5]

4 Translation Research Strategies

4.1 Principles of Folk Cultural Translation

4.1.1 Timely Supplementation of Cultural Omissions

In translation, the translator must not only transplant the cultural imagery from the source language into the target language's culture but also fully retain the local folk

cultural image, strengthen the ethnic folk characteristics, and cultural attributes. Additionally, the translator should consider the reader's receptiveness in the target language and compensate for cultural omissions in a timely manner. This approach aids the target language readers in better understanding, thereby facilitating the mutual infiltration and communication between two distinct cultures.^[6] For instance, Qu Yi is an art form where stories are narrated and societal life is reflected through accompanying actions of speech and song. From the perspective of Chinese people, Qu Yi carries the inheritance and cultural lifestyle. A simple translation of Qu Yi as "music" would erase its cultural connotations and personality. It is advisable to use a transliteration accompanied by annotations, translating it as "Qu Yi (a kind of folk art)". This method accurately conveys the complete meaning of Qu Yi in Chinese and enhances the understanding of target language readers, ensuring smooth cultural communication.

4.1.2. Avoiding Simplistic Substitution

In the process of translation, translators should respect the folk cultural information present in both the source language and the target language, ensuring that the unique aspects of the source language's folk culture are perfectly reproduced within the target language's culture. Only by doing so can genuine communication and interaction between Eastern and Western cultures be promoted. For instance, if "红白喜事" (hóng bái xǐ shì) were simply and crudely translated as "red white happiness," it would completely detach from its cultural context. This approach would not only confuse target language readers but also fail to effectively convey the folk culture. In translating folk culture, translators should first "see the essence through the phenomenon," delving into its cultural connotations and grasping its core values. Consequently, "红白喜事" could be translated as "weddings and funerals." Similarly, "红娘" (hóng niáng) could be appropriately translated as "a matchmaker," which not only succinctly conveys the meaning but also ensures clarity for target language readers, effectively avoiding cultural clashes.

4.2 Specific Translation Strategies

4.2.1. Literal Translation with Annotation Compensation

While literal translation methods retain the linguistic form of the source language, they may result in awkward phrasing or confusion for target language readers. Annotations can compensate for cultural omissions and enhance target language readers' understanding of the cultural connotations in the source language. For example, translating "击鼓的蓬蓬之声" as "clanking sound (pengpeng: The drumbeat of the news)" preserves the professional and specific onomatopoeia in English while explaining the source of the sound, making the translation more authentic and precise.

4.2.2. Phonetic Transliteration with Annotation Compensation Method

The phonetic transliteration with annotation compensation method involves transliterating source language words while utilizing annotations to provide additional information that addresses cultural gaps. This compensatory approach offers distinct advantages: phonetic transliteration retains the exotic characteristics of the source language terms, while the annotations consider the reader's receptiveness, thereby compensating for cultural omissions and achieving a "two birds with one stone" effect.

One of the hallmark features of folk culture is its distinctiveness. When translating, this method involves using phonetic transliteration along with annotations to maximize the preservation of the unique cultural traits of the source language, thereby effectively disseminating cultural information. For instance, translating the traditional Chinese concept of "灶头" (zào tóu), which has deep rural connotations, as "stove" with annotations can aid readers in comprehending the related folk culture.

By employing the "Phonetic Transliteration with Annotation Compensation Method," translators can strike a balance between maintaining the source language's cultural flavor and enhancing the target language's accessibility, ultimately fostering a more comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural folk traditions.

4.2.3. Augmentation Compensation Method

The augmentation compensation method involves adding words, phrases, or sentences during translation to effectively convey the information contained in the original text while adapting it to the target language's expression. This approach allows for the direct integration of cultural information into the translated text, preserving both the linguistic characteristics and cultural nuances of the source text while ensuring the coherence of the reader's experience.

Renowned British translator Hawkes applied the augmentation compensation method to the transliteration of the names of historical figures, Bi Gan and Xi Shi. In his translation, he added the terms "martyred" and "beautiful" before their names, resulting in "Martyred Bi Gan" and "Beautiful Xi Shi." This technique serves to accentuate the distinct qualities and enrich the underlying meanings of these figures, enhancing their characterization.

By utilizing the "Augmentation Compensation Method," translators can seamlessly weave cultural context into the translated text, achieving both fidelity to the source and readability in the target language, thereby facilitating effective cross-cultural communication.

4.2.4. Dynamic Equivalence Compensation Method

Dynamic equivalence is a flexible approach to translation that focuses on conveying the intended meaning and content of the original text rather than adhering strictly to its literal structure. This method allows for adaptations that ensure a better understanding for readers, regardless of their cultural background. For instance, in the context of the "Cultural Revolution" era in China, there is a phrase that goes, "‘文革’十年，艺人悬琴歌唱，‘文革’后已是后继乏人". Within this phrase, the expression "悬琴歌唱"

contains historical allusions and idiomatic significance. Its literal meaning is "to suspend playing the zither and cease singing."

Directly translating this expression might strip away its intended atmosphere and appear cumbersome. To achieve dynamic equivalence and capture the essence of the original, a more suitable translation could be "abandoned their work." This translation not only conveys the idea of stopping artistic activities during the "Cultural Revolution" but also maintains a clear and concise expression that resonates with English-speaking readers.

The "Dynamic Equivalence Compensation Method" allows for creative adaptation while ensuring that the translated text retains the intended message and impact, thereby facilitating effective cross-cultural communication.

4.2.5. Adapted Compensation Translation Method

This approach involves leveraging existing idiomatic expressions within the target language. In this method, direct transliteration and completely new translations are avoided. Instead, a middle-ground approach is taken, where idiomatic expressions with similar meanings or structures in the target language are utilized. Through this adaptation, the imagery is adjusted to convey the meaning of the source language's fixed expressions.

For successful implementation, the key is to identify idiomatic expressions in the target language that share similar meanings or structures. The goal is to convey the essence of the source language's cultural context while utilizing readily understandable idiomatic language in the target language.

For instance, when translating the phrase "命靠天保佑," a straightforward transliteration or a direct translation like "Life depends on the protection and blessing of sky" could be confusing for audiences unfamiliar with the cultural context. However, by applying the Adapted Compensation Translation Method, it can be rendered as "Life depends on the protection and blessing of Jesus." This instantly conveys the intended meaning to English readers.

Similarly, for the expression "掌上明珠," the method can be employed to translate it as "the apple of the eye." This ensures that the cultural nuance is preserved while using a familiar idiom in English.

4.2.6. Literal Translation with Compensatory Paraphrasing^[7]

Chinese culture is profound and diverse, and the translation of certain idiomatic expressions requires a flexible and comprehensive approach rather than a simple application of a single method. In the local customs of Zhou Shan, at the start of the fishing season, there is a practice of "请龙王" which can be challenging to translate. The term "龙" here cannot be directly translated as "dragon" since dragons are often associated with evil symbolism in Western culture. However, in Eastern culture, dragons are considered auspicious, and the "龙王" in this context refers to a deity who governs aquatic life in mythological stories.

Translating "龙王" as "Dragon King" would distort its intended meaning. Instead, a more suitable translation for "请龙王" in this context could be "Invite the Rain God," which captures the essence of the practice and aligns with the cultural significance.

Similarly, in the traditional wedding customs of Zhou Shan, there is a ceremony called "拜堂" where the bride and groom pay respects to their ancestors by bowing to their belongings during the wedding. However, the act of bowing here signifies reverence rather than just politeness. Translating "拜堂" as "Bow" would not accurately convey the intended meaning. A more appropriate translation could be "Formal bow as a gesture of respect," highlighting the ceremonial and respectful nature of the act.

In summary, Literal Translation with Compensatory Paraphrasing involves a combination of literal translation and contextual adjustments to accurately convey the cultural nuances of idiomatic expressions, ensuring effective cross-cultural communication.

5 Conclusion

Folk culture is a treasure of the Chinese nation. Amid the strategic context of the "Belt and Road," effective translation of folk culture not only disseminates Chinese culture and stories but also contributes to the establishment of China's international cultural image. To achieve this, translators must thoroughly understand the cultural connotations of folk culture and utilize diverse translation strategies to bridge cultural gaps. Such efforts will allow Chinese folk culture to shine on the global stage, contributing to the colorful mosaic of global culture.

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