

# On the Translation Mechanism of Words with Cultural Characteristics in China

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**Abstract:** Since China joined the World Trade Organization, the economic and cultural exchanges between China and other countries have become increasingly close, which makes more and more people in the world want to know China and China. However, the biggest obstacle to the communication between foreign countries is not the language barrier, but the cultural differences mixed in the language. Different cultural differences will directly affect the translation characteristics of language vocabulary, so there are many difficulties in the translation of China's culturally distinctive words. Based on this, this paper analyzes the values of language and culture and the characteristics of Chinese vocabulary, and puts forward some translation strategies of characteristic vocabulary, hoping to be helpful for the translation of cultural vocabulary with China characteristics.

**Keywords:** China culture; Characteristic words; Translate

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## 1. Introduction

Language vocabulary contains the cultural characteristics of a nation. Chinese cultural vocabulary has nurtured the millennium cultural heritage of the Chinese nation. If we can promote cultural vocabulary to the world through correct translation, so that the majority of foreigners can accept it without losing its original flavor, it is bound to give countries around the world a new understanding of China. In the comparison of Chinese and English languages, vocabulary and culture, the meaning and content of Chinese vocabulary are broader, and it is difficult to completely translate Chinese vocabulary with Chinese characteristics into English. Therefore, it is urgent to strengthen the relevance between Chinese and English, strengthen the translation of words with cultural characteristics, and lay a solid foundation for the integration of Chinese culture into the world culture.

## 2. Language and cultural value analysis

Language is a unique cultural form in human civilization. As a culture, language itself has many forms. According to the Handbook of Linguistics and Language Communication Tools published in Germany, there are still 5,561 languages in the world, and each language is the representative of a national culture and a national culture. Language can explain the local conditions and customs of a country or a nation. At the same time, a nation's culture must be reflected in its vocabulary, grammar, semantics and vocabulary usage.

As we all know, Chinese and English belong to two different language families, and different language families have different cultural characteristics. Cultural differences make it impossible for the two languages to coincide completely, which inevitably highlights some linguistic differences and similarities and differences between languages and cultures. Therefore, in the communication and development of language and culture, it is difficult to translate and annotate the cultural words between different languages through the cultural words of another language. For example, in the translation of some English-Chinese documents, we can often see some words with China characteristics translated in transliteration form, such as "Taiji". Of course, many English-Chinese translations may be annotated with additional English words, so as to be easy to understand. From this point of view, transliteration is a common means to translate China cultural vocabulary in the translation mechanism of English-Chinese translation <sup>[1]</sup>.

The translation of culture-specific words in China involves pluralism, especially the value orientation of the translation of culture-specific words, which is a practical problem. That is to say, in the process of foreign language translation, we must ensure the

translation of China's specific cultural words. It is necessary to inherit the deep meaning of Chinese vocabulary instead of simply highlighting the superficial meaning of culture-specific vocabulary. Only in this way can we really highlight the value and function of translation. In the translation of Chinese cultural vocabulary, Chinese vocabulary can't guarantee that every word has a corresponding meaning in English, so cultural adaptation must be considered in translation. Language attaches importance to the choice of specific images, but does not consider acceptability. In Chinese vocabulary translation, different translation methods will inevitably play different roles in highlighting the meaning of words. As far as Chinese is concerned, the prominence of its linguistic and cultural values requires cultural docking in translation, so as to broaden the thinking between English and Chinese languages, and constantly seek the corresponding points of each other's languages in cultural communication, thus laying a solid foundation for language vocabulary translation through mutual competition, dialogue and explanation.

### **3. Cultural interpretation of the uniqueness of Chinese vocabulary**

#### **3.1 There are angle differences in conceptual differences**

Because of the differences in national cultural characteristics, there will be different definitions of language concepts. Compared with English, Chinese vocabulary is more detailed in its unique meaning. For example, it is deeply reflected in the names of different relatives. In China's cultural concept, the names of different relatives need to be detailed, which is determined by the traditional cultural characteristics of the Chinese nation. For example, in English, uncles refer to the brothers of both mother and father. It should be noted that uncles do not strictly define the brothers of mother and father, as long as they are the brothers of either father or mother, they can be expressed as uncles. In contrast, China's name is slightly cumbersome and detailed, and can be divided into father's brother, mother's brother, father's sister's husband, mother's sister's husband, etc. Therefore, when communicating with English-speaking foreigners, you can refer to the uncle in the introduction as "older brother of my father". This introduction and explanation can more clearly translate China's vocabulary culture and accurately express the appellation object <sup>[2]</sup>

#### **3.2 Differences in the meaning of specific words**

In the translation of Chinese vocabulary, the translation of substantive vocabulary is often relatively simple, and the corresponding words can be found in English vocabulary. Such as "table", "car" and "computer". However, in China culture, there are many abstract words, which are not only not materialized, but also difficult to understand even if they are explained and explained in Chinese. For example, "Qigong" is a kind of traditional martial arts health culture in China. Qigong is not only divided into yin and yang, but also into vitality and qi. Therefore, it is difficult to show its original intention accurately in the translation of such words with Chinese cultural characteristics. In the past English-Chinese translation, Qigong's qi was often translated into "vital" and its power into "breathing" and "exercise". However, such translation is simply impossible. Up to now, many foreign scholars have proposed to replace qi in Qigong with the pinyin "Qi", which can effectively retain the original meaning of its vocabulary and at the same time make a comprehensive explanation with the help of English. It can be seen that the differences between Chinese vocabulary and foreign vocabulary will be very obvious in the vocabulary expression of abstract and non-materialized things <sup>[3]</sup>.

#### **3.3 The conceptual meaning of culturally specific vocabulary itself**

The conceptual meaning of vocabulary is the most direct explanation of vocabulary itself, and it is the most comprehensive exposition of vocabulary itself. However, due to the differences in cultural characteristics between different countries and different nationalities, the lexical meaning of conceptual classes will also shift, which will lead to differences in generalizing the same thing between the two languages. For example, "work unit", in China, means a form of social organization that carries a person's material consumption base. Having a work unit means that people have a basic guarantee for their lives, and they won't worry about medical care, insurance and old-age care. However, this situation is not the same thing in western countries. In addition, the subdistrict office, which is a social organization inherent in China's local culture, not only does not exist in western countries, but its conceptual meaning can't reflect the meaning of household registration management in China subdistrict office in the translation of western English words <sup>[4]</sup>.

#### **3.4 Similarities and Differences of Cultural Elements of Different Vocabulary**

Due to the obvious cultural differences among different nationalities, there are differences in different language communication and information transmission. People's language and cultural habits in China are different from those in foreign countries. For example, different colors have different connotations in language. In Chinese language and culture, red often means diligence, progress,

diligence and success. However, the opposite is true in English, where red is full of negative emotions and meanings. Therefore, red is the main color in Chinese weddings, while black and white is the main color in western weddings, which is the difference of cultural elements in different words caused by cultural differences.

## **4. Translation Strategies of Words with China Cultural Characteristics**

### **4.1 Skillfully use “literal translation” to accurately convey vocabulary connotation.**

“Literal translation” is one of the common methods in the translation mechanism of cultural words in China. Its greatest advantage is that it can intuitively express the attributes of things and let foreigners know them directly and intuitively. “Literal translation method” is based on literal translation, which is a direct split translation from Chinese literal. For example, “春卷” is directly translated into “Spring Roll”. Although this “literal translation method” is easy for foreigners to understand for a while, they can understand the characteristics of China culture through constant contact with China culture. Language is constantly innovating and developing. With the continuous advancement of history, many new words have emerged with the development of the times. New words often come from people’s imagination, and the famous word “纸老虎” in history has been directly translated into “paper tiger”<sup>[5]</sup>.

### **4.2 Magical use of “free translation” to excavate the original meaning of vocabulary**

“Free translation” is one of the most detailed methods in all translation methods, and it helps people to understand the literal translation. Free translation can explain the original characteristic cultural vocabulary through narration, so that people can directly understand the connotation or function of vocabulary. “Free translation” focuses on expressing the words to be translated in another language, such as self-study (education) Higher education examination program for self-taught. The application of “free translation” must adhere to the respect for other countries’ cultures, and analyze the understanding and actual meaning of other countries’ cultures, so as to translate the content with characteristics without losing its true colors. For example, in translating the socialist system, we must first understand the national conditions of China, and then crack the word from the cognitive level of Chinese people, so as to use the “free translation method” for translation, which can dig out the truest characteristic meaning of its vocabulary.

### **4.3 Skillfully use “domestication” to strengthen the conciseness of translation**

“Domestication” actually refers to translation by using expressions similar to the original words. This translation method can convey the meaning of words by using another expression on the basis of breaking away from the original meaning of words. Therefore, “domestication” is more casual than other translation methods, as long as we have a correct understanding of the original words and replace them with similar words. However, among the words with strong sense of national characteristics, this alternative vocabulary should highlight the national cultural characteristics as much as possible, otherwise its translated content will give people a sense of neither fish nor fowl. For example, “leave without saying goodbye”, “Speak of the devil, here he comes” and so on.

## **5. The transliteration of words with cultural characteristics in China**

### **5.1 Overview of transliteration of vocabulary with cultural characteristics in China**

“Transliteration” is one of the common usages in language vocabulary translation. It can directly translate the words with traditional cultural characteristics of China by using Pinyin. This translation method preserves the words with cultural characteristics in an all-round way, which not only enriches English vocabulary, but also retains the melody beauty of traditional China cultural words. Therefore, transliteration is also called phonetic translation. For example, “steamed bread -man tou” and “qipao”. In the examples of transliteration of Chinese and English words, names are the most typical transliteration method. Besides, in the actual translation mechanism, in order to let foreigners know the meaning of China’s words more clearly, English annotations are often made in dictionaries, such as -paifang (Chinese gateway). It is worth noting that “transliteration” must take into account the semantics and pronunciation of Chinese cultural characteristics. Some words are similar in pronunciation and semantics, and can also reflect the characteristics of the original text, but the functional characteristics of expression are different<sup>[6]</sup>. For example, a product in China is called wire drawing oil, and its translated English is rose. Although it is different, it yearns for beauty, so it can still be quoted even if it is not the original meaning.

### **5.2 Cultural and psychological background and transliteration**

English and Chinese are formed in different social backgrounds, and their different historical and cultural differences lead to many grammatical differences between them. In a sense, this grammatical difference will directly affect the communication of lexical meaning between the two, because each culture has its own specific cultural communication way, and different communication ways will make people have different understandings. In the process of transliteration translation, whether the transliteration can be fully

understood by people depends on cultural psychology, which directly determines a person's acceptability of a certain culture. In the translation of China's cultural characteristics, if the language and cultural psychology can accept the meaning of its words, it will be helpful for social application. On the contrary, it is not only detrimental to language communication and dissemination, but also affects the expression of the contact language. Therefore, whether it is English-Chinese translation or Chinese-English translation, transliteration should pay attention to the acceptance of cultural psychology in translation, and always keep the attitude of innovation and cultural responsibility in the process of accepting other countries' cultures, so as to continuously promote the integration and progress of each other's cultures.

## 6. Conclusion

Under the background of increasing globalization, in order to make many developed countries in the world realize the growth and expansion of China, it is necessary to break the traditional era of English-Chinese translation, gradually publicize and spread China language and culture to the whole world, and let all countries in the world have a new understanding of China. China has a long cultural history and numerous characteristic words. Only by ensuring that foreigners fully understand the characteristic words of China culture can they have a better understanding of China. Therefore, in the construction of the translation mechanism of cultural characteristic words, we should pay attention to the publicity of national cultural colors as much as possible, be flexible and master the original intention, so as to translate every characteristic word well.

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