

# Research on Culture in Translation Studies

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**Abstract:** Culture is an unavoidable topic in translation studies. Due to different perspectives, there has been confusion or misunderstanding in the understanding of cultural studies related to translation in domestic translation circles for a long time. Based on existing studies, this paper distinguishes three different research methods, and discusses the differences between these three types of translation culture studies. This paper holds that in the process of globalization of cultural universalism and cultural relativism, it is necessary to adopt a cross-cultural perspective and treat cultural differences correctly, so as to promote the further exchange and integration of foreign cultures and local cultures.

**Keywords:** Translation Studies; Cultural Studies; Cultural Differences

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## Introduction

“Culture is another important aspect of translation studies after language. The history of translation studies shows that the study of general translation theory mainly focuses on language or/and culture.” In fact, for a long time, cultural issues have been a common topic in Chinese and Western translation field, and even once became a hot spot in translation studies. Translation plays an important role in the whole process of human communication. The natural demand of human beings for cross-cultural communication is actually the demand for human beings for survival and development space, as well as the demand for cultural prosperity and social progress. The attention to modernization, modernity and post-modernity has spawned the repeated emergence of the theme of cultural turn. Naturally, the modern cultural form has become a proposition of concern in academic circles. Since the 1980s, the cultural turn of translation studies is not accidental, and apart from the needs of its discipline development, it is also consistent with the development trend of the whole humanities and social sciences, and many humanities and social sciences have experienced cultural turn. In a sense, “cultural turn” can be said to be a cultural return, because the whole humanities were occupied by cultural themes in the second half of the 20th century. Since the Renaissance in Europe, cultural topics, their forms, values and history have always been the objects of intellectual concern. On a deeper level, cultural turn not only represents the choice of instrumental rationality, but also the need for value rationality.

There is no doubt that translation has strongly promoted the process of China’s modernization, which is mainly reflected in the transformation and development of local cultural traditions, among which the most crucial thing is the impact on cultural thoughts. In the generation of taking cultural themes as research format, there is a hybrid form of hidden heterogeneity and variation derived from conflict or dissolution, which virtually carries out an overall historical dialogue of cross-culture, cross-discipline and multi-complementarity. Translation also enables China to successfully go to the world and show our splendid national culture on a broader international stage. Being in a noisy and pluralistic era, it is necessary to take a cross-cultural perspective to effectively promote the vigorous development of translation.

## 1. Cultural Turn in Translation Studies

In this paper, cultural studies in the field of translation are divided into three categories, namely, cultural studies in translation practice, cultural studies in translation activities and cultural studies in translation theory. There are differences and connections among those topics.

## 1.1 Cultural Study on Translation Practice

Cultural study on translation practice is a study of the processing of cultural factors involved in texts and their transformation rules in the process of translation practice. The “practice” in translation studies is not the concept of practice in Marxist philosophy theory, but refers to the concrete operation practice of translation. The “culture” in translation studies is relative to language, that is, the culture carried by language. Therefore, the research object of this kind of cultural research is the cultural factors in the text, which belongs to internal research and has the nature of prescriptive research. In addition to the study of language conversion, cultural factors are also the object of study in the early linguistic translation theories. For example, Nida attaches great importance to the influence and role of different cultural contexts in translation practice. Hatim, a representative of the new generation of linguistics, regards translation as a kind of way of cross-cultural communication, and makes an in-depth discussion on various factors of cross-cultural communication by using discourse linguistics and discourse analysis. The translation of cultural texts is a typical cultural translation, and the so-called “Thick Translation” is a common translation method used to translate cultural texts. Taking “domestication” and “foreignization” as examples, if we only discuss domestication and foreignization from the perspective of translation strategies at the cultural level, it belongs to a cultural study in translation practice, such as the discussion on domestication and foreignization of cultural factors in Yang’s and Huo’s English versions of *A Dream of Red Mansions*. Although the starting point or perspective of discussion is different, several works on cultural translation published in China, such as Wang Bingqin’s *Cultural Translation* and Liu Miqing’s *Introduction to Cultural Translation*, basically discuss problems at the cultural research level of translation practice. In addition, the discussion of translation strategies of specific cultural factors in translation practice from the perspective of translation criticism is also a part of this kind of research. Regarding translation practice as an applied activity, cultural studies of translation practice can be marked as “applied cultural studies of translation”.

## 1.2 Cultural Study on Translation Activities

Cultural study on translation activities refers to the study of translation as a whole from the perspective of social culture. The “activity” here is not a concept of activity in Piaget’s genetic epistemology, but a concept of social psychology, which is influenced by factors such as demand, motivation, purpose and condition. In other words, translation activities not only meet the needs of translators, but also meet the needs of society; the motivation of the translator is not individual, but governed by society. Therefore, this kind of cultural study is more like social translation study than cultural translation study, which is similar to the first type of cultural study. However, compared with the cultural study of translation practice, the cultural study of translation activity presents three characteristics. First, the extension of “translation activity” in translation studies is wider than that of “translation practice”, which mainly refers to a series of translation facts or events from the original translator’s choice of the original text to the influence and dissemination of the translated text, including the actual transformation process of translation in a narrow sense. Secondly, it is not a culture with language as its carrier, but a broad concept, involving a series of cultural factors such as social politics, economy, system, customs and academic norms. For example, the three elements of the translation theory of Western cultural schools, such as “ideology, poetics and patron”, “translation norms”, “translation politics” and “power manipulation of translation”, all belong to the cultural concepts. Thirdly, the object of study is not the translation strategies or rules of cultural factors in the text, but the translation itself and its result-the translated version, which is the description or explanation of the translation activities that have taken place. Taking culture as the means or way of such research, therefore, extends to descriptive and explanatory external research. The translation theory of Western translation culture schools introduced into China in the middle and late 1990s refers to the cultural study of this translation activity. For example, if we discuss domestication and foreignization from a deeper cultural background (such as post-colonialism), such as Venuti’s view of “foreignization”, it belongs to the cultural studies of translation activities. Regarding the study of translation activities as the premise and foundation of the construction of translation theory, the cultural study of translation activities can be marked as a “theoretical cultural study of translation”.

### 1.3 Cultural Study on Translation studies

Cultural study on translation studies refers to the study of existing translation theories from the perspective of social culture. If the first two kinds of studies mainly focus on the process and results of translation practice, then the object of cultural study on translation studies is the study of translation theory itself, which belongs to meta-translation studies. This kind of cultural research is basically the same as the second one, that is, exploring the existing translation theories from various social and cultural elements, analyzing the process and reasons of their generation and development, as well as the situation of their spread and acceptance outside the country, so it is also a descriptive and explanatory external research. Taking “domestication” and “foreignization” as examples, if we regard it as a translation theory and discuss its background from the perspective of social culture, it belongs to the cultural study of translation theory, such as Liu Yanli and Yang Zijian combing the origin of “domestication” and “foreignization”, and Wang Hongzhi’s study of Lu Xun’s “literal translation” theory belongs to this category. If the study of translation theory is regarded as a meta-translation theory study, then the cultural study of translation theory can be marked as a “meta-theoretical translation culture study”. According to the understanding of this paper, the latter two kinds of cultural studies, namely, the cultural study on translation activities and the cultural study on translation studies, are all based on instant facts, so a considerable part of them constitute a kind of “historical” research.

## 2. Conclusion

This paper divides the cultural turn in translation studies into cultural study on translation practice, cultural study on translation activities and cultural study on translation theory. It is found that the coexistence of multiple cultures is not easy, cultural hegemonism and cultural colonialism may still prevail, and the mission of cultural translation is of great significance both in practice and in theory. With the widespread development of translation studies, a cross-cultural perspective has been gradually established, and foreign cultures and local cultures have been further mixed and integrated, which may form a multicultural pattern in the world.

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