

# An Analysis on the C-E Translation of the Museum of the Yao Nationality from Cultural Translation Theory

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**Abstract:** The museum of the Yao nationality, opened to the tourists in 1992, is located in the Jinxiu county of Guangxi province, China. The museum has been equipped with both Chinese and English publicity materials to people, which is convenient to the world to know more of Yao nationality. Under the guidance of Cultural Translation Theory, this paper aims at studying the English translation of the publicity materials in the museum, analyzes and improves some English publicity material so as to make the text more readable and understandable to the foreign tourists. Based on the case analysis, the paper summarizes some useful translation techniques and methods under the guidance of Cultural Translation Theory.

**Keywords:** museum translation; Cultural Translation Theory; Yao nationality in Jinxiu county

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## 1. Introduction

The museum of Yao nationality is the first museum introduced the Yao people's history, life, culture and wisdom to the whole world. It was built in 1991, and opened to the public in 1992. The museum was expanded and decorated in 2002 and 2012. Its construction area is 4,700 square meters and the coverage area is over 6,000 square meters. The museum is formed by a major one and five subsidiary ones, including Chashan Yao Ecological Museum, Pan Yao Museum, Hualan Yao Museum, Ao Yao Ecological Museum and Shanzi Yao Ecological Museum. Therefore, the museum is also called Jinxiu "1+6" museum.

In recent years, many scholars are interested in the study of Yao culture. When typing "Yao's culture in Jinxiu" in the CNKI search engine, there are 106 journals, 34 dissertations, and 2 conference papers and 7 papers from newspaper (search date: Aug. 25th, 2023). According to the statistics in CNKI, the researches can be divided into four categories: costume culture of Yao nationality, the exploration of tourism in Jinxiu county, festival and folk song culture, translation of publicity materials in Jinxiu. However, there are only two papers on the translation study of Yao's culture. Liao Fei analyzed the publicity materials on Yao's wedding culture from the perspective of Eco-translatology<sup>[4]</sup>. Based on the three-dimension in Eco-translatology, Liao has improved some translation errors in the publicity materials in Jinxiu county. Li Guanlan investigated the status quo of the translation of publicity materials in Jinxiu county, she also pointed out some translation errors in the materials and called on more translators to improve its translation so that it can better spread Yao's culture to the world<sup>[3]</sup>.

According to the above literature review, the previous studies of Jinxiu county are varied from each other. Researchers have done complete studies in Yao's culture from different perspectives. However, there are only two papers related to the translation of the publicity material of Yao nationality, which is not enough to spread the Yao's distinctive culture to the world. The Museum of the Yao Nationality is a non-profit organization to display and show culture, history and life of the Yao people. To translate the publicity material in the museum is both important and urgent to the government-supported organization to spread the culture of Yao nationality to the foreign friends around the world.

## 2. Cultural Translation Theory

During 1920s-1960s, researchers studied translation mainly from linguistic perspectives, such as semantics and semiotics. Therefore, translation at that time tended to be word-to-word correspondence without considering different cultures and varied expressive habits. In 1980s, translation researches are inclined to study different cultures carried by different languages. And more and more researchers believed that translation with a cultural perspective is both acceptable and understandable by the target readers.

One of the most influential and well-known scholars of cultural translation is Susan Bassnett. During 1980s-1990s, she has published a lot of books in this field, including Translation Studies(1980), Translation, History and Culture (writing in collaboration with Lefevere in

1990), *Constructing Cultures*(1997) etc. Those works not only have a profound influence on cultural translation, but also pave the road for future study of cultural translation.

In her study, she finds that machine translation works very well in most genres of text except the literature<sup>[1]</sup>. As for this phenomenon, she thinks that the translation unit should be changed from text to culture. This idea is later developed by her with “Culture Turn”. Culture Turn requires the researchers and translators to study the translation from the perspective of politics, culture, history, philosophy, historiography and poetics<sup>[5]</sup>. In order to emphasize the Culture Turn as well as to further explain the relationship between language and culture, Bassnett believes that culture to language is what human’s body to its heart. Only when the heart coordinates with the body, can the human keeps energetic and active. Just like when the surgeon takes a cardiac surgery, he or she will strive to maintain other internals in a good condition. The translator will by no means neglect the distinctive culture elements during the translation.

Bassnett and Lefevere make an formal summary of the Cultural Translation Theory in *Translation, History and Culture*. Their viewpoints can summarize into the four aspects. Firstly, translation not only deals with the linguistic level, but also the culture deeply rooted in the language. Secondly, translation is not just a simple process of decoding. The essence of translation is a cross-cultural communication. Thirdly, translation is not merely a decoding of source language text, but obtains a functional equivalence of culture in target language text. Lastly, translation is to satisfy the needs of culture and the needs of different groups in a certain culture<sup>[1]</sup>.

To translate culture correctly is not an easy task. It requires the translators to understand two or more cultures and use their subjective initiative to explain the culture to the target readers in an acceptable way. Bassnett puts forward a term — “culture interpreter”, which requires the interpreter should not only translate the verbal expression but predict its implication. In her work *Constructing Cultures*, she proposes “translation turn”<sup>[2]</sup>. When the studies on “culture turn” became popular in 1990s, she thought there was a “translation turn” in translation study. “Translation turn” offers a broader horizon to translation study. Thanks to the “culture turn”, researchers and translators have long been considered the cultural background of the source text during their translation. While “translation turn” requires them to consider the material conditions in which the text is produced, sold, marketed and read<sup>[2]</sup>.

### 3. Case Analysis Based on Culture Translation Theory

Before analyzing the C-E translation of the Museum of the Yao Nationality, it is necessary and useful to discuss and summarize the characteristics of the publicity material in this museum. The function of the material is to introduce the culture, history and wisdom of Yao people. Therefore, most texts in the museum belongs to the informative and introductory ones. In order to have full play of these two functions of text, defining expressions and numbers are widely used in the source text, for example, “成立于1952年5月28日，是全国最早成立的瑶族自治县。”(It was founded on May 28, 1952, which is the earliest autonomous county of Yao nationality in China). Besides that, culture-load expressions are embedded in the introduction, for example, “圣塘山，离城一百里，石山高峻，人莫能攀登”(With a hundred miles away from the city, Shengtang Mountain is a stone mountain which is too high for one to climb it). Obviously, proper nouns have been widely used to introduce each branch of Yao people and different customs in Yao’s life, like “坳瑶”(Ao Yao), “瑶族石碑”(The stele rule).

Faced with the linguistic characteristic of the publicity material, translating Yao’s culture properly and correctly is a challenge to the translators. The following part will analyze the C-E translation in the museum from a cultural perspective, trying to find some adaptable and concrete translation methods and techniques to deal with the translation difficulties.

#### 3.1. Case Analysis on the Translation of Pronouns

Pronoun is widely used in the publicity material of the museum. Most pronouns are culture-loaded words which only used among Yao people. Though it has been introduced with vivid pictures beside most pronouns, it challenges the translators in their translation.

ST: 盘王节

TT: King Pan Festival

King Pan is a character in China’s ancient myth. He was called as Pan Hu originally. Because he killed the rebel named General Wu for

the emperor, the emperor was so delighted to the success and kept his promise to grant the princess to marry Pan Hu. By this brave deed, Pan Hu became popular among his people and was called King Pan by the later generations. King Pan's kindness and generosity has long been celebrated and memorized by Yao, Miao and Li people of Chinese ethnic minorities. King Pan festival is to memorize and offer sacrifices to Pan Hu among Yao people. Since King Pan and King Pan festival are unique items in China, literal translation can remain its traditional culture and draw more people's attention to the cultural background embedded in the festival.

### 3.2. Case Analysis on the Translation of Expressions with Chinese Characteristics

Although the publicity material in Yao's museum is belonged to an informative one, the source text has been full of words and phrases with distinctive Chinese characteristics. Such expressions are quite familiarized by Chinese people while are very strange to the target readers, especially when they are not translated properly. According to the collective materials, it can be divided into three categories. Firstly, it contains some four-character and eight-character idioms, such as “五谷丰登”, “神通升天, 求神送鬼”. Secondly, there are phrases related to the expressions in Chinese lunar calendar, for example, “闰月”. Thirdly, it is the expression Chinese people frequently used in both the oral and written communication, like “天然氧吧”.

ST: 五谷丰登

TT: bumper harvest

“五谷丰登” is a four-character idiom that is used to describe a big harvest in the agriculture. “五谷” refers to five major crops in Chinese agriculture, namely, rice, broomcorn millet, millet, wheat and bean. “丰登” used to express “great harvest”. The English translation doesn't translate “五谷” (the five crops) for considering the length of the text in a display hall. Additionally, there are few millet and wheat grown in Jinxiu county. Thus, the translation of all those five crops may confuse the target tourists. Though “五谷” has been cut in the translation, it becomes more acceptable and understandable, which are two basic principles in the cross-culture communication.

ST: 中国天然氧吧

TT: China's Natural Oxygen Bar

“天然氧吧” is first proposed by the Chinese ecologist—Lv Jian, when he explains the standard to evaluate the air quality in some reserves. As the phrase is very clear and understandable by most ordinary people, it has been widely used in newspaper and publicity material recently. Nowadays, the phrase “天然氧吧” often uses in the introduction to some scenic spots and mountain areas to describe its clear air and reflect its high coverage of trees. This metaphorical phrase has been translated literally in the above case. The target readers can taste the original flavour by literal translation and will not confuse by the illustration beside the text.

### 3.3. Case Analysis on the Syntactic Translation

Since English and Chinese are varied in their expressions, the sentence structures are quite different in written text, especially in some publicity material. Thus, it is necessary to restructure the sentence pattern and remain the key information in the translation. Only by this way, can it be understood by the western tourists and spread Yao's culture to the world. The following cases will be analyzed from a syntactic level.

ST: 有人统计, 中国发现《过山榜》126份, 泰国3份, 越南2份, 共131份。

TT: According to statistics, it has been found 126 ones in China, 3 in Thailand, and 2 in Vietnam, totaling 131 ones.

The above case has introduced a historical literature — Guoshanbang, which records Yao's history in characters. As the source text doesn't mention the people who calculated the amount of Guoshanbang, the target text has omitted it by restructuring the sentence. Moreover, the original text is written in an active voice, while the target text is a passive one so as to adapt to the expressive habit of the target readers. Taken the different expressions between Chinese and English into consideration, free translation is adopted in the translation. Though the target text has restructured the sentence pattern of the original, it remains the important information, namely the amount of Guoshanbang, which is the important information in this informative text.

ST: 瑶族在不断迁徙的历史中逐渐形成了依山而居、据山而坐、靠山而食的生活方式。

TT: In the history of constant migrations, the Yao people have gradually formed a lifestyle of living close to mountain, living on the mountain, and relying on the mountain for food.

The above case describes Yao people's lifestyle. The source text is a simple sentence with three parallel attributes, namely “依山而居”, “据山而坐” and “靠山而食”. All the three attributes are modified “生活方式”(lifestyle). Pre-modifier has been widely used in Chinese, no matter how many modifiers appears in a sentence. However, English is apt to adopt post-modifier when the amount of modifier is more than two. In order to make the translation smooth to read, the translator puts those three modifiers behind “lifestyle” and uses V-ing form to translate the four-character modifiers in Chinese. By the help of inversion, it maintains all the information of the original and present a target text which foreign readers are quite familiar with.

## 4. Defaults and Improvements

By collecting and analyzing the publicity material in the Yao nationality museum, it has found some defaults in the English translation, which is detrimental to better spread its culture to foreign friends. Some of the errors are spelling mistakes which can be avoided if the translators check the translation after finishing it. However, other translation errors are caused by the misunderstanding of the distinctive culture in Yao nationality. The reason for such default may be that the translators are lack of the knowledge of Yao's culture. Besides that, some of the English expressions are not grammatically and logically correct, which fails to present a smooth and coherent translation. The following part will analyze the defaults from lexical and syntactic level.

### 4.1 Lexical Default and Improvement

The following cases are contained some defaults in lexical level. By analyzing the default in each case, this paper will provide a better solution to translate the lexical expression in the publicity materials of the Yao nationality museum.

ST: 坳瑶是勉瑶的一支，自称“三盘四赵”。

TT: Being a branch of Mian Yao, Ao Yao calls itself “Three Pan and Four Zhao”.

“盘 (Pan)” and “赵 (Zhao)” are two surnames that enjoy the most population in the branch of Ao Yao. According to the source text, the number “三 (three)” and “四 (four)” are abstract in the underlined phrase, “三盘四赵”. Cultural Theory requires the translator strive to maintain the original culture in a text as much as possible. Thus, it can be used transliteration plus annotation to translate “三盘四赵” into “San Pan Si Zhao”(most people share the surnames Pan and Zhao).

### 4.2 Syntactic Default and Improvement

The syntactic defaults can be divided into three categories. Firstly, the target sentence doesn't translate the information hidden in the source. Secondly, the target sentence misunderstands the meaning of the original. Lastly, grammatical mistakes make the translation less logical and relevant to the context.

ST: 费孝通先生初上瑶山负伤后，回江苏吴江休养。

TT: Mr. Fei Xiaotong first went to Yaoshan to investigate his injury and returned to Wujiang, Jiangsu Province for rest.

Fei Xiaotong, a well-known Chinese anthropologist went to Jinxiu county with his wife, Wang Tonghui in 1930s. Unfortunately, they had an accident when they were on their way to Ao Yao village. Wang Tonghui died in the accident while Fei Xiaotong was seriously injured. The underlined part in the above target text mistranslates the information in the source. It regards “his injury” as an object of Mr. Fei's investigation. Such a translation will cause misunderstanding and confusion to foreign friends who come here to know more about Mr. Fei's story. Thus, it can be revised as follows. “After Mr. Fei Xiaotong was seriously injured in his first visit of Da Yao mountain, he returned to Wujiang, Jiangsu Province for rest.” The improvement can achieve an equivalence with the original text and provide a correct logic to the foreign guests.

## 5. Conclusion

As one of the few museums that has both Chinese and English publicity material in Guangxi, the museum of the Yao nationality has

shown the distinctive culture of Yao people with vivid illustration and decent introduction. Guided by the Cultural Translation Theory, most of the translations provided in the museum are acceptable and readable. When translating culture, the translators should try their best to achieve a functional equivalence rather than a word-to-word equivalence with the original text.

As it is known by all, translation is by no means an easy task, especially when it comes to cultural translation. By analyzing the defaults in the above cases, it has summarized some principles dealing with cultural translation. First and foremost, translators should have a full understanding of culture-load expressions before they start to translate the publicity material. Before they render the translation, translators not only serve as decoders but readers with cross-cultural thinking. When it comes to some unfamiliar expressions, they should try their best to search the correct meaning and strive to explain the meaning to the target readers. Moreover, translators should grasp the grammatical rules, contextual coherence, and expressive habit of target culture and language, which will ensure the culture they conveyed is accepted and understood by target readers. Last but not the least, translators should be more considerate when they translate the culture literally. Literal translation is an effective and convenient method to translate culture. But sometimes the culture of ethnic minorities is too unfamiliar to be understood by the target readers. For this sense, connotation, paraphrase and free translation are likely to use in translation so as to achieve a functional equivalence with the source text.

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