
RESEARCH ARTICLE

English Translation Strategies for ICH Terms from the Perspective of Transknowletology

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ABSTRACT

Traditional Chinese textile terms carry profound ancient weaving civilization and rich textile knowledge, the translation of which constitutes a crucial link in the dissemination of China's textile cultural heritage, where the choice of translation strategies for these terms directly impacts the communication effects of Chinese textile culture and knowledge. Therefore, this paper, from the perspective of Transknowletology, explores the English translation strategies for such terms and their effectiveness in knowledge dissemination. Taking the textile terms from *Traditional Chinese Sericulture and Silk Craftsmanship: Kesi*, *Nanjing Yunjin Brocade*, and *Traditional Chinese Sericulture and Silk Craftsmanship: Song Brocade* as examples, this study analyzes translation strategies of these terms based on whether Chinese and Western textile knowledge in the Area of Knowledge Identity, Discrepancy or Conflict.

KEYWORDS

Transknowletology; Textile terms; Translation strategies

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1. Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) refers to cultural expressions created and passed down by various China ethnic groups throughout historical development, encompassing ethnic traditions, customs, handicrafts, performing arts, and related domains. It carries profound cultural backgrounds and accumulated wisdom. China boasts abundant ICH resources, and its diverse ICH heritage has generated a large number of ICH terminology items with unique connotations. These terms are key elements in transmitting knowledge of Chinese ICH and articulating its cultural significance, and they are of critical importance for understanding and disseminating ICH culture. Against the backdrop of globalization, Chinese ICH is progressively stepping onto the international stage, a process in which the translation of ICH terminology plays a pivotal role.

Among China's vast ICH heritage, textile culture runs through millennia of Chinese civilization, serving as a vivid manifestation of the traditional agrarian social model of "men ploughing and women weaving" (男耕女织) and as a treasure in the repertoire of human craftsmanship. ICH textile terms carry profound ancient Chinese weaving civilization and embody rich textile knowledge; their English translation is thus of great significance for the international communication and dissemination of Chinese textile culture and knowledge. Accordingly, from the perspective of Transknowletology, this paper takes the textile terms in the Chinese-English bilingual edition of *Traditional Chinese Sericulture and Silk Craftsmanship: Kesi*, *Traditional Chinese Sericulture and Silk Craftsmanship: Song Brocade*, and *Nanjing Yunjin Brocade* published by Nanjing University Press in 2024 as case examples. It examines different English translation strategies for ICH textile terms based on the Area of Knowledge Identity, Discrepancy and Conflict between Chinese and Western textile knowledge as reflected in these terms, with the aim of providing references for the English translation of Chinese ICH cultural terminology.

2. Transknowletology and ICH Terms Translation

2.1 Transknowletology

In 2021, Professor Yang Feng of Shanghai Jiao Tong University formally proposed the concept of "Transknowletology," clarifying that the essence of translation is "local knowledge about the other, which becomes universal knowledge through defamiliarized learning, selective absorption, and creative reconstruction" (Yang, 2022). This process involves multiple aspects such as information transmission, meaning conveyance, cultural transmission, communicative function, cognitive transformation, creative expression, and contextual adaptation.

Based on the basic framework and core concepts of Transknowletology, Meng Xiangchun of Soochow University further developed the theory and put forward the concepts of the Area of Knowledge Identity, Discrepancy and Conflict, pointing out that these three jointly constitute the identity-difference spectrum of knowledge in cross-cultural "knowledge glocalization." The concept of knowledge glocalization which echoes Laozi's notion of "Dao generates" can serve as a high-level summary of cross-linguistic knowledge processing, reconstruction, and re-dissemination, with its essence being a kind of knowledge interaction (Meng, 2022). This interaction is between the "locality" and "globality" of knowledge. Likewise, the translation of Chinese intangible cultural heritage terms is also an interaction between the "locality" and "globality" of terminology.

2.2 ICH Terms Translation

As the core concepts that characterize ICH practices, ICH terms are the linguistic crystallization of ICH knowledge and serve as the central medium and foundational basis for the construction and dissemination of ICH knowledge systems and discursive frameworks (Feng et al., 2023). These terms carry rich cultural information, reflecting the history, beliefs, lifeways, and artistic forms of specific societies and ethnic groups, and are strongly characterized by locality and cultural specificity. At the same time, ICH terms "are not only the key for contemporary Chinese to understand China's outstanding traditional culture, but also the key for other nations and countries in the world to understand the spiritual world of the Chinese people" (Jiang, 2016). Therefore, the translation of ICH terms constitutes a vital channel for the international dissemination of Chinese ICH culture. Through precise translation, linguistic and cultural barriers can be overcome, facilitating international exchanges and mutual understanding of ICH culture. Moreover, it lays the groundwork for cross-cultural and interdisciplinary academic research, enabling scholarly communication and comparative studies, and enhancing the global academic visibility of ICH culture.

In essence, the translation of ICH terms is a process of cross-cultural transmission of ICH knowledge. Knowledge transmission is a complex act of transferring knowledge among different subjects, with the core objective of achieving understanding, application, and innovation of knowledge; however, a subject's comprehension of knowledge is inevitably constrained by their existing knowledge structures. Accordingly, the cross-cultural transmission of ICH knowledge requires full consideration of the knowledge structures that audiences from different cultural backgrounds invoke when understanding ICH knowledge. Based on the similarities and differences of analogous ICH knowledge across cultural contexts, translation strategies should be flexibly chosen to ensure that ICH knowledge is accurately understood and accepted by foreign audiences.

3. English Translation Strategies for ICH Terms from the Perspective of Transknowletology

According to the conceptual construction of Transknowletology, translators should adopt targeted translation strategies based on the commonalities, similarities, and differences between Chinese and Western knowledge, so as to realize the transfer of linguistic knowledge. That is, they should flexibly employ different English translation strategies according to the Area of Knowledge Identity, Discrepancy and Conflict between Chinese and Western knowledge.

3.1 English Translation Strategies for the Area of Knowledge Identity

"The Area of Knowledge Identity refers to the domain that encompasses common-core knowledge and shared knowledge carried by the two language cultures" (Meng, 2022). When the objects or phenomena described by the two languages do not differ significantly in cultural terms, and when retaining the source language expressions in the target language does not hinder the target readers' reading comprehension, the literal translation method which embodies the pursuit of truthful knowledge and the transmission of pure knowledge can generally be adopted to reproduce the knowledge identity.

Example 1:

Original Text:

明清时期孔雀羽线多用于皇帝或王公贵族袍服上的云龙纹，用它织成的龙纹栩栩如生。(Wei & Feng, 2024)

English Version:

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, most of the peacock-feather threads were used to weave patterns of auspicious clouds and dragon into robes for emperors or other nobles. With peacock-feather threads, weavers can produce lifelike patterns of Chinese dragons. (Wei & Feng, 2024)

Legend has it that Princess Anle of the Tang Dynasty once ordered people to weave two "hundred-bird skirts" for herself using bird feathers. The shimmering hundred-bird patterns on the skirts displayed different colors when viewed from different directions. Later, craftsmen, through learning, mastered the technique of weaving Yunjin brocade with peacock-feather threads. Fabrics made with peacock-feather threads are more brilliant in color; in some patterns, they can also show varied hues, and the fabrics can remain unfaded for a hundred years. In the medieval period of the West, feathers became a very popular decorative material, especially among the nobility and royalty. The nobility and royalty often used feathers of eagles, peacocks, and other birds to make garments, hats, cloaks, and other ornaments. Feather decoration was regarded at that time as a symbol of luxury and status. It can be seen, therefore, that in both Chinese and Western cultural knowledge systems, feathers are used in clothing, which is a manifestation of identity and status. By adopting the literal translation method, the translator can not only enable target-language readers to appreciate the exquisiteness, color variations, and luster of ancient Yunjin brocade fabrics, but also provide them with information that is relatively similar to their own cultural background, thereby evoking resonance among the readers.

Example 2:

Original Text:

不光是枝叶。缠枝纹又叫“卷草纹”“蔓藤纹”。这类纹样以各种花草的茎叶、花朵或果实为题材，枝梗缠绕主题花或者主题叶形成环状。(Wei & Feng, 2024)

English Version:

Branches aren't the only motifs in the coiled branch pattern. Also known as the "curly grass pattern" and "vine pattern", such pattern is inspired by the coiled branches, flowers or fruits of various plants. The main branch makes a circular winding around the theme flowers or the theme leaves. (Wei & Feng, 2024)

The intertwining branch pattern has a long history in China, appearing on Han-dynasty silk textiles and becoming particularly popular in the Tang dynasty. Initially used mostly on Buddhist artifacts, it later became a common motif on brocades. The Chinese version consists of continuous floral blooms, with the flower as the primary subject and the vine as a secondary accent, embodying the notion of "Rich and honored, being in full flower" (花开富贵). Early Chinese examples include the intertwining honeysuckle and the intertwining lotus. In Europe, similar designs also exist. For instance, the intertwining palm and honeysuckle in Egypt, Greece, and Italy, and the intertwining grape and tulip in India. In these regions, the pattern is mostly composed of leaf motifs, with the leaf as the main subject, symbolizing the continuation and rebirth of life. In rendering this patterning information, the translator took full account of the shared knowledge base between Chinese and Western textile traditions and adopted a literal translation approach, thereby conveying factual knowledge without compromising the target readers' comprehension.

3.2 English Translation Strategies for the Area of Knowledge Discrepancy

The Area of Knowledge Discrepancy refers to knowledge areas that exhibit marked differences between two cultures or are entirely local in nature, for which no corresponding knowledge can be found in the target language. As for the translation of terms that fall within this area, several translation methods under the strategy of foreignization are generally preferred.

3.2.1 Transliteration

Example 3:

Original Text:

重锦色彩丰富，织的时候需要多组纬线先后排列和上下叠加。(Liu & Dong, 2024)

English Version:

In order to create such a rich variety of colours for zhongjin, it requires the arrangement and overlapping of multiple weft threads. (Liu & Dong, 2024)

The fine brocade of Song brocade was primarily used for the decoration of various display items in palaces, halls, and interior spaces, such as large hanging scrolls and cushions. The brocade surface typically features cloud-and-dragon patterns, symbolizing auspiciousness and imperial authority, and its exquisite craftsmanship and sumptuous appearance made it a premium decorative material. In Europe, particularly during the Renaissance, the weaving techniques of Italy and France also reached a very high level. These woven textiles were often employed in courtly and religious settings, characterized by intricate designs and rich colours. However, European brocades or tapestries are not equivalent to zhongjin and they share only partial similarities. Employing transliteration here better respects the uniqueness of the original terminological knowledge. Moreover, since a detailed description of zhongjin is provided in the text, readers can construct the meaning of the pinyin "zhongjin" based on that description. Thus, transliteration does not hinder comprehension for the target audience. Furthermore, for Chinese culture to go global, it must first be preserved and passed down and transliteration serves as a means of cultural transmission and a way to foster cultural confidence.

3.2.2 Literal Translation and Transliteration

Example 4:

Original Text:

比如在边缘用到了勾缂，也就是用深颜色的纬线勾出图案的轮廓，效果像工笔画一样。这里色调过渡的地方使用了长短戗。(Guo & Zhao, 2024)

English Version:

For example, the technique of gouke is used at the edges. The weaver used dark-coloured weft threads to outline the pattern, which made the work look like a painting of fine brushwork. What's more, the technique of long-short qiang is used for colour transition. (Guo & Zhao, 2024)

"戗缂" (qiangke) is a pivotal technique in Kesi weaving. It refers to the use of two or more colored threads to modulate and harmonize the hues in a pattern, thereby enhancing its layering and three-dimensional effect. This technique is generally also called "戗色" (color shading) or "镶色" (color inlaying), and is further subdivided into long-short qiang, wood-comb qiang, wrapped-center qiang, phoenix-tail qiang, among others (Miao, 2007). The long-short qiang originated in the Southern Song dynasty and it achieves a natural gradation effect by varying the lengths of the kesi threads, allowing dark and light weft yarns to interlace as the design transitions from deep to pale tones. In Western traditional textile crafts, this particular technique does not exist, though there are some comparable methods, such as shaded embroidery and Italian-style stitching. Faced with this entirely local knowledge, the translator renders it as long-short qiang, a combination of literal translation and transliteration. This approach maximizes the preservation of the original cultural features, draws readers' attention to the techniques employed in Chinese Silk Tapestry weaving, and at the same time ensures the accuracy of knowledge transfer.

3.2.3 Omission

Example 5:

Original Text:

用这种大花楼木织机才能织出美丽的云锦。(Wei & Feng, 2024)

English Version:

It is through large wooden looms that weavers can produce beautiful Yunjin brocade. (Wei & Feng, 2024)

In the global handmade textile industry, "大花楼木织机" (the large wooden drawloom) is the most massive and intricately constructed machine. The term "楼" refers to its house-like appearance, while "花" carries two meanings. First, it indicates that this loom is used for jacquard patterning; second, it refers to the "花本" (pattern draft) suspended from the upper frame. The structure of this loom is extremely complex. In translation, the feature of its house-like appearance is often omitted, because this loom is a weaving tool unique to China and constitutes a form of local knowledge. Western textile machines, such as the Spinning Jenny and the Water Frame, differ significantly from this loom in both construction and operation, making it difficult for Western readers to imagine a loom that resembles a house. Therefore, translators adopt the method of omission, rendering it as "large wooden looms," omitting the "花楼" while retaining the core information, thereby making the translation more concise and intuitive, and helping readers quickly grasp the typical characteristics of the tools used for Nanjing Yunjin.

3.3 English Translation Strategies for the Area of Knowledge Conflict

When engaging with knowledge, various cultural subjects often exhibit their own aesthetic inclinations, a process in which differences or conflicts in the reception of knowledge and culture may arise, i.e., the Area of Knowledge Conflict (Xu & Zhou, 2023). To navigate this area, strategies such as explanatory translation and creative translation can, to a certain extent, help resolve such knowledge conflicts.

3.3.1 Explanatory Translation

Example 6:

Original Text:

这一批蚕卵正处于最长期，所以今天我们要开始给它们催青了。温度要控制在 20℃左右，湿度 77%，用自然光照射。(Guo & Zhao, 2024)

English Version:

For example, this batch of silkworm eggs is in that very stage, so today we should start artificial incubation of them. The temperature should be set around 20℃ with the humidity level at 77% and natural light. (Guo & Zhao, 2024)

The incubation of silkworm eggs serves as the foundational project and primary step in sericulture production. In earlier times, Chinese silkworm farmers did not pay much attention to incubation after bringing the silkworm eggs home. Especially in spring and late autumn, allowing the eggs to hatch naturally often resulted in uneven hatching and low cocoon yields. Through the technique of silkworm egg incubation promotion, it is possible to rear robust silkworm larvae of uniform size. However, European countries have raised ethical concerns about intensive incubation promotion techniques. Some European scholars and animal protection organizations argue that silkworms, as sentient beings, may experience "unnecessary suffering" under

intensive rearing conditions, which violates the principle that "animals are sentient living beings." Faced with such conflicts and differences in the acceptance of knowledge, explanatory translation can be adopted. Explanatory translation refers to "supplying appropriate in-text additions for missing cultural information according to the expressive habits and cultural needs of the target language, usually manifested as linguistic amplification" (Liu & Xiao, 2016). The translator renders "催青" as artificial incubation, avoiding the use of the character "催" that could lead Western audiences to associate with unnatural intervention. Although the addition of "artificial" highlights the notion of "human intervention," the subsequent sentence "The temperature should be set around 20°C with the humidity level at 77% and natural light" enables readers to understand that China's "artificial incubation" is actually about providing better natural hatching conditions for silkworms, thus preventing conflicts in cross-cultural knowledge transmission. At the same time, "artificial" incubation also conveys the cultural information that China's modern textile industry deeply integrates millennia-old sericultural wisdom with contemporary science and technology.

3.3.2 Creative Translation

Example 7:

Original Text:

云锦非常注重颜色的主次搭配。要达到绚丽的配色效果，离不开一种独特的织法——过管挖花。(Wei & Feng, 2024)

English Version:

The weavers always pay attention to the colour combinations. To weave colourful Yunjin brocade, they must use a special weaving technique—figure-inset coiled weaving. (Wei & Feng, 2024)

The technique "过管挖花" is a unique method in the weaving of Yunjin brocade. The term "过管" refers to passing small tubes of colored threads through the warp, while "挖花" is the process of weaving colorful patterns. Its distinctive feature lies in the fact that the warp remains intact, while the weft threads introduced are composed of an unfixed number of spliced segments of colored floss. The number of colors is not limited, and the same pattern can be woven in different color schemes. The translator renders it as "figure-inset coiled weaving," where "figure-inset" aptly corresponds to the weaving process of inserting colorful patterns into the original fabric. At the same time, the action-oriented nuance of "过管" is omitted, and the word "weaving" is added to clarify that this is a weaving technique specific to Nanjing Yunjin. In addition "过管挖花" is also known as "挖花盘织", and the word "coiled" also conveys the sense of winding or coiling. In the Western textile knowledge system, weft threads are usually woven in segments, but the loose ends remain exposed on the reverse side. Such fabrics are often used for wall decorations, combining artistic and functional purposes. However, Yunjin brocade produced through "过管挖花" is identical on both sides, making it suitable as a garment material. Furthermore, there are significant differences in the materials used between Eastern and Western weaving traditions. Faced with such differences and conflicts in acceptance due to the social and cultural contexts in which this knowledge is rooted, the translator adopts a creative translation approach. Creative translation is a form of interlingual transfer that centers on the target-language reader (Shan, 2021), wherein the translator abandons complex imagery that is less accessible to the reader and highlights the unique weaving techniques of Nanjing Yunjin brocade. Such flexible handling of local knowledge can largely mitigate knowledge conflicts.

4. Conclusion

As cross-cultural knowledge transmission, the translation of ICH terms must take into account the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western ICH knowledge. Grounded in the distinct regional contexts in which the two bodies of knowledge reside namely, the Area of Knowledge Identity, Discrepancy, and Conflict, translators should flexibly adopt translation strategies to achieve optimal knowledge transmission. In terms of English translation strategies for ICH textile terms, when the knowledge to be conveyed falls within the Area of Knowledge Identity, the translator employs literal translation to deliver pure and authentic knowledge to the target audience. In the Area of Knowledge Discrepancy, three methods—transliteration, literal translation plus transliteration, and omission are chosen to preserve the cultural characteristics of the source language. In the Area of Knowledge Conflict, the translator adopts explanatory translation and creative translation to provide appropriate interpretations of the terms, thereby meeting the cultural needs of the target audience. By aligning translation strategies with the similarities, correspondences, and divergences between Chinese and Western textile knowledge, this approach also facilitates the global recognition and transmission of ICH culture, and promotes the transformation of Chinese knowledge from the local to the universal.

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