

A Research on English Translation of Culture-Loaded Words of Manchu Xincheng Opera from the Perspective of Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance and Transmission

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Abstract: As an intangible cultural heritage (ICH) genre integrating Manchu culture and opera art, Manchu Xincheng Opera's (MXO's) culture-loaded words (CLWs) carry rich ethnic folk connotations and unique artistic features. However existing academic studies on this opera mostly focus on its artistic forms and local inheritance with relatively little research on translating its CLWs and a lack of targeted translation strategies hindering the effective communication of its cultural core and artistic value to the international community. From the perspective of ICH inheritance and transmission, this paper focuses on the English translation of CLWs in MXO. This study combines the theory of intangible cultural heritage communication with the core theory of CLWs translation, and comprehensively employs methods such as literature research, text analysis, and case studies to clarify the definition and cultural dimension classification of CLWs in MXO. However, in the actual process of English translation, the core difficulties have gradually emerged: The concept of Manchu's exclusive culture lacks corresponding references in English culture. Its terms not only have the characteristic of efficient communication internally but also have natural exclusivity externally, which is prone to cause semantic transmission gaps. Meanwhile, due to the lack of Manchu cultural background, English audiences also find it difficult to accurately grasp the deep connotations behind the terms, which in turn leads to interpretation deviations. In response to these translation difficulties, this article adopts a variety of targeted translation methods such as literal translation, liberal translation, adapted translation, and creative translation, striving to accurately convey cultural connotations. This study aims to expand the current theoretical system of ICH translation research, and promote the effective inheritance of Chinese ICH in cross-cultural contexts.

Keywords: Manchu Xincheng opera; Culture-loaded words; Literal translation; Liberal translation

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1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has become a global focus. The Basic Text of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage from UNESCO emphasizes the need to pass ICH intact to future generations and enhance understanding of diverse cultural expressions worldwide.

Manchu Xincheng Opera (MXO) is characterized by the deep integration of Manchu culture and traditional opera. It features its own performance format, musical techniques and ethnic cultural symbols. The narrative carries the historical memory, folk beliefs and aesthetic connotations of the Manchu people. It enriches the diversity of Chinese opera with its unique artistic form and is of great significance for promoting the diversity of Chinese culture to the world.

However, existing academic research on this opera mainly focuses on artistic forms and regional inheritance with scarce studies on the translation of its culture-loaded words (CLWs). For example, terms like “腰铃舞” (Manchu Waist Bell Dance) and “寸子舞” (Manchu Cunzi Dance) lack standardized English translations, leading to the loss of their ritual and aesthetic connotations in cross-cultural communication; musical terms such as “霍洛音” (Holo Vibrato) and “垛板” (Duoban) fail to convey their professional characteristics and cultural symbolic meanings when translated literally.

This study, by reviewing existing research on CLWs in opera-related ICH, integrating ICH dissemination theories and core CLWs translation theories, and using literature review, text analysis, and case studies, it classifies MXO's CLWs into four categories: ethnic custom terms, artistic terminology terms, historical geographical terms, and ethnic cultural exclusive concept terms. It analyzes translation challenges and misunderstandings, proposes targeted strategies, constructs the MXO CLWs corpus systematically analyzes translation difficulties and strategies of different core words to verify these methods' effectiveness in ensuring cultural fidelity and target language acceptability.

2. An overview of culture-loaded words

Culture-Loaded words (CLWs) are the core and challenging point of cross-cultural communication. Clearly defining and classifying them forms the foundation of this study. This chapter will first clarify the definition of CLWs, and then organize and review the existing academic classification frameworks.

2.1. Definition and classification of culture-loaded words

CLWs are not just linguistic symbols but carriers of a nation's unique cultural memories, values, and behavioral norms, formed in the long-term development of history, customs, and social systems. Unlike ordinary vocabulary, their core lies in the “cultural connotation gap” when translated into other languages, due to the lack of corresponding cultural backgrounds in the target language, direct literal translation often fails to convey their full meaning.

2.2. Academic classification frameworks of culture-loaded words

Scholars classify CLWs based on different criteria, forming two typical frameworks: One category is the cultural domain classification framework, which divides it into four categories, the folk category related to daily rituals and life traditions, the religious category involving beliefs and worship, the historical category covering events, figures and institutions, and the art category related to music, dance and drama ^[1]. This framework highlights the connection between cultural load words and specific cultural domains, helping clarify its cultural affiliation. Another framework is the classification based on the degree of cultural specificity, which divides it into three categories: completely cultural-specific words unique to the source language culture and with the greatest translation difficulty, semi-cultural-specific words that have some similarities with other cultural concepts but retain the unique connotations of the source language culture, and general words with similar corresponding concepts in cross-cultural contexts ^[2]. This framework focuses on cultural exclusivity to assess the difficulty of translation. This paper chooses the first framework to guide the translation study.

As a national intangible cultural heritage carrying the cultural memory of the Manchu ethnic group, the MXO contains a large number of cultural connotations in its script, performance and stage presentation. These terms are a condensed representation of the historical traditions, artistic features and national spirit of the Manchu ethnic group, directly influencing the accuracy and completeness of cross-cultural communication. Based on the three core criteria of cultural origin, functional role and translation features, this article classifies them into four categories and conducts a detailed analysis in combination with the distribution of vocabulary quantity and representative cases (refer **Table 1**).

Table 1. Four categories of culture-loaded words in Manchu Xincheng opera

Terminology classification	Term count	Original text	Target text	Remarks
Ethnic custom terms	20	摆胯	Hip swinging	Example 1
		腰铃舞	Waist Bell Dance	
		单鼓舞	Single Drum Dance	
		满族秧歌	Manchu Yangko Dance	Example 2
		寸子舞	Cun Zi Dance	
		萨满舞	Shaman Dance	
		太平鼓	Taiping Drum Dance	Example 3
		半弓步	Half bow step	
		拍坟头	Manchu grave-commemoration ritual	Example 4
Artistic terminology terms	15	霍洛音	Huoluoyin	Example 5
		三弦	Sanxian (three-stringed Chinese lute)	Example 6
		弹颂板	Tan Song Ban	
		靠山调	Kaoshan Tune	
		数唱	Shuchang	Example 7
		登山步	Mountain Climbing Step	
		三道弯	Three-Curve Posture	
		四功五法	Four Basic Skills and Five Techniques	Example 8
		鹰式	Eagle Pose	
Historical and geographical terms	10	扶余八角鼓	Fuyu Bajiaogu	
		新城府	Xincheng Prefecture (Established in the 32nd year of the Guangxu reign of the Qing Dynasty)	Example 9
		二十四崮山	Twenty-Four Gushan	Example 10
		渤海时期	The Bohai Kingdom	
		伯咄部	Boduo tribe	
Ethnic cultural exclusive concept terms	12	完颜阿骨打	Aguda of the Jurchen Wanyan Clan	Example 11
		古秀双穗	Gu Xiu Shuang Sui	
		独霸干戈	Duba Gan Ge	
		曲牌	Melodic Suite	Example 12
		海东青	<i>Haidongqing</i> (Sacred Bird of Prey of Manchu people)	
		抓鼓点子	Grabbing drumbeats	
		五谷丰登	Bountiful harvest of five grains	Example 13

The first category is Ethnic Custom Terms. These terms originate from the unique folk customs, rituals and social traditions of the Manchu ethnic group, carrying the most direct and genuine cultural memories of the Manchu people. In operas, they are used to depict scenes of Manchu life and reflect ethnic values. Their core function lies in enhancing the ethnic authenticity of the plot.

The second category is Artistic Terminology Terms. These professional terms originate from the performance, music, costumes and props of the new Manchu opera, reflecting a unique style of integrating Manchu folk art with traditional opera. Through a standardized terminology system, the new Manchu Opera is distinguished from other types of opera, achieving a balance between technical accuracy and cultural symbolic meaning.

The third category is Historical Geographical Terms. This category includes place names, historical administrative divisions, and tribal names related to MXO's origin and development, carrying the Manchu's regional memories and historical context. Since English readers often lack relevant knowledge, when translating, information such as geographical location and historical evolution must be integrated to help better understand the story.

The fourth category is Ethnic Cultural Exclusive Concept Terms. These relate to the Manchu people's unique identity, kinship, beliefs, and historical figures, serving as core symbols of Manchu culture. Their role is to shape the ethnic cultural identity of characters, distinguishing Manchu roles from those of other ethnic groups. Translation needs to preserve ethnic specificity while ensuring readability.

2.3. Relative researches at home and abroad

2.3.1. Research on intangible cultural heritage inheritance of art aspect

International research on ICH transmission began in the mid-20th century, initially focusing on the protection and documentation of indigenous cultures. UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage identified three core attributes, transmissibility, practicality, and vitality, guiding academic attention to ICH survival in contemporary society. Theoretically, cultural anthropology has two major paradigms: authentic transmission, emphasizing safeguarding ICH in its original form; and adaptive innovation, advocating using modern media to expand ICH communication. For example, it uses virtual reality technology to enhance ICH accessibility, but their research did not involve the translation of CLWs, which are crucial for cultural transmission^[3]. There are limited monographs on the translation of Chinese opera overseas. Most are Sinologists engaged in the practice of English translation of Chinese opera. In their English translation texts of opera repertoires, they usually include annotations on terms. For example, A.C. Scott's *Traditional Chinese Plays* involves terms related to acting roles, costumes, facial makeup, and music. Famous Chinese Plays by Arlington (USA) and Eckstein (UK) were published by the French Library in Beijing in 1937. The book has English expressions for relevant terms, such as "balloon guitar" for pipa, "brass cymbals" for naobo, "old sheng" for laosheng^[4].

In China, ICH research emerged in the 1980s and expanded rapidly after 2006, following the release of the first national ICH list. It evolved from policy-driven initiatives to theoretical construction and practical exploration forming a distinct Chinese model. Scholars established a "government-academia-community" framework guided by the principle: "protection first, rescue second, rational utilization, inheritance development"^[5]. Wu Bingan's "living inheritance" theory underscores the central role of inheritors, arguing that ICH vitality stems from continuous interpretation in practice. However, existing studies on Manchu-related ICH mostly focus on artistic analysis, such as the study of Manchu musical elements in Hongluonü and Xiuhuanü, exploration of community inheritance in Songyuan (the birthplace of MXO), while cross-cultural communication, particularly the translation of CLWs like "萨满舞" and "寸子舞", remains underexplored^[6].

As a fifth-batch national ICH (2021), MXO research is still in its infancy. Current studies primarily focus on artistic form restoration and local inheritance, with few systematically discussing the translation of its CLWs. For instance, existing research has only made preliminary attempts at translating simple kinship terms like "Ama" and "Eniang", but lacks in-depth exploration of complex terms with multiple cultural connotations, such as "霍洛音" (a unique Manchu musical technique) and "二十四崗山" (a symbol of Manchu territorial beliefs), resulting in a research gap that this paper aims to fill^[7].

2.3.2. Research on the translation of culture-loaded words

International research on CLWs originated from the "cultural turn" in translation theory. Before the 1970s, it was mostly

limited to linguistic-level semantic comparison. In 1976, Susan Bassnett proposed in Translation Studies that “the basic unit of translation should shift from linguistic transfer to cultural communication”, marking the entry of CLWs research into a culture-dominated stage^[8]. Spanish scholar Aixelá proposed the concept of “culture-specific items” and divided 11 translation strategies according to the degree of cross-cultural manipulation^[9]. Western translators’ research has largely focused on English translations of Chinese literature (such as *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *Journey to the West*, *Wolf Totem*, *To Live*, etc.), analyzing the handling methods of CLWs and exploring how to balance “cultural fidelity” and “reader acceptance”.

Chinese research on CLWs began in the 1990s, influenced by the Western “cultural turn” theory, and combined with Chinese language characteristics, forming a development path of “theoretical introduction—local innovation—practical application”. In the field of ethnic minority culture, research on CLWs is relatively weak. Existing achievements mostly focus on vocabulary collation and lack in-depth analysis of translation practice. For example, some studies have sorted out Manchu CLWs such as “八角鼓” but failed to propose targeted translation strategies based on their cultural connotations and functional roles in the opera^[10]. Meanwhile, existing research mostly analyzes individual vocabulary in isolation, failing to form systematic research by combining the context of theatrical works with ICH preservation needs. For instance, when translating “鹰舞” (a Manchu dance imitating the Haidongqing), existing studies only translate it literally as “Eagle Dance” without explaining its symbolic meaning of “courage” and its function in shaping heroic characters in the opera, leading to the loss of cultural information^[11].

In conclusion, although international research on CLWs has gradually developed into a mature field driven by theory, the Chinese scholarship has developed rapidly and still has significant gaps. The current main challenge lies in breaking through the simple translation of minority language words and establishing systematic and culturally-aware translation methods, especially in the field of intangible cultural heritage, where it is necessary to fully retain the deep cultural connotations in the translation.

3. Theoretical basis

This section constructs two key frameworks, namely the ICH communication theory and the CLWs translation principle, which directly guide the translation strategies proposed in the following text.

3.1. Intangible cultural heritage communication theory

In 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Paris. To address ICH threats from globalization and social change, it emphasizes ICH protection’s importance for promoting cultural diversity and sustainable development. ICH communication theory is dedicated to ICH’s dissemination, preservation and inheritance. The definition is closely related to MXO as CLWs typically encapsulate performance techniques, historical knowledge and cultural values simultaneously.

The theory highlights two key translation aspects acknowledging ICH communication’s multi-stakeholder nature, requiring translators to balance cultural authenticity and target audience accessibility. Distinguishing ICH content layers technical skills specialized knowledge and underlying values, this stratification provides a translation information prioritization framework reflecting core theoretical categories to help audiences grasp performance form and cultural connotation.

3.2. Communicative translation principle

Translation theorist Peter Newmark’s communicative translation principle emphasizes translation should not rigidly adhere to the source text’s literal form but be target-reader-centered aiming for fluent natural easily comprehensible translations that achieve practical communicative effects equivalent to the original, guiding accurate error-free English translation of the following text in line with English expression habits, ensuring unobstructed message reception for effective cross-

language communication, prioritizing information transmission impact and reader response over strict word-for-word correspondence with the core goal of building a smooth communication bridge^[12].

3.3. The theory of cultural translation

Cultural translation theory explores accurate conveyance of the original text's cultural connotations and contextual meanings in translation emphasizes translator initiative, adopts localization, foreignization and other strategies to respond to cultural differences and achieves cultural functional equivalence^[13].

In translation practice, the dynamic interaction of these theoretical perspectives sees communicative translation prioritize target-culture acceptability, cultural translation center on preserving source-culture authenticity. The strategies developed in Chapter 4 are negotiated solutions to this tension: for terms with strong cultural specificity, cultural translation is prioritized to retain authenticity; for terms with high professionalism, communicative translation is appropriately used to ensure readability; for terms with complex historical and geographical backgrounds, a combination of both theories is adopted to balance context and readability.

4. Difficulties and solutions in translation

Based on the classification of MXO's CLWs, by constructing a corpus of CLWs for MXO, the translation difficulties and strategies are systematically analyzed. This chapter analyzes the translation challenges of each type and explores the application of literal translation and liberal translation to include cultural fidelity and target-language readability.

4.1. Translation of ethnic custom terms

These terms deeply embedded in distinctive Manchu traditions and worldview find artistic expression through the opera's storytelling and character development regarded as "living fossils of Manchu culture" their strong cultural uniqueness and absence of English equivalents present distinctive translation obstacles. Key difficulties include: culturally unique referents causing semantic gaps; connotations tied to Manchu values that resist literal translation; and narrative embedded requiring contextual and cultural knowledge for full comprehension.

4.1.1. Literal translation

The literal translation method strictly adheres to the source term's surface meaning retains its original form and readability applies to terms where core actions or objects can be directly conveyed and cultural connotations supplemented via annotations may lose cultural characteristics or symbolic meaning when used alone.

Example 1:

ST: 腰铃舞

TT: Waist Bell Dance

Analysis: The literal translation "Waist Bell Dance" gets straight to the dance's core components. However, to enable readers to have a more accurate understanding, the translator can also add annotations to supplement three key cultural background points: its ethnic roots as a Manchu ritual dance, its ritual purpose of communicating with spiritual entities, and its use in opera, specifically in blessing or exorcism scenes. This approach eliminates the vagueness of a bare literal translation and ensures target readers grasp both the dance's form and its cultural meaning.

Example 2:

ST: 寸子舞

TT: Cun Zi Dance

Analysis: Directly use transliteration for translation. The purpose is to preserve the expression of this dance name in Chinese and better highlight its cultural uniqueness. When readers of other languages use this expression with people from Chinese-speaking countries, it can also enable them to quickly understand. It should be noted that the translator should add

a note later: “Cun Zi Dance” is a dance performed only by noble women wearing high-heel shoes, which shows the class attribute of this dance.

4.1.2. Adapted translation

Adapted translation is particularly suitable for ethnic custom terms that carry specific ritual functions and cultural meanings, as it prioritizes conveying the term’s core function in rituals and cultural contexts over literal form.

Example 3:

ST: 太平鼓

TT: Taiping Drum Dance

Analysis: The Taiping Drum Dance is a dance variety with hand-held drum; it is also known as Dangu and “Drums of Great Peace”. It is popular in North China and commonly performed by the Manchu ethnic group for shamanism priests. With the passage of time, it became a way for people to express joy and happiness this translation method combining transliteration and free translation preserves the pronunciation of the Chinese dance name to reflect its cultural uniqueness and facilitates foreign readers’ understanding of its meaning.

Example 4:

ST: 拍坟头

TT: Manchu grave-commemoration ritual

Analysis: Literally translating “patting the grave” only conveys the surface action. It fails to reflect the ritual’s funerary nature and its ethnic cultural differences, which set it apart from Han customs. The alternative translation “grave-commemoration ritual” defines the ritual’s essential character. The annotations supplement key details the gentle patting of the earthen mound as the core action its distinction from Han tombstones as a cultural difference its role as an emotional climax in the Manchu opera Red Gao. This meets the requirements of ICH Communication Theory, transmitting both technical skills and cultural connotations. It ensures target readers understand not only the ritual’s ethnic specificity but also its function in the opera.

4.2. Translation of artistic terminology terms

These terms originate from professional jargon in opera performance music costumes and props embody an artistic style integrating Manchu folk music dance and Shamanic traditions face three major translation challenges. Lack of precise English counterparts hinders the conveyance of professionalism. Dual attributes as artistic form and cultural symbol make balancing technical accuracy and cultural connotation difficult. Limited understanding of the art system among target audiences requires explanation through specific contexts.

4.2.1. Transliteration

Transliteration directly converts the phonetic form of source language vocabulary into similar-sounding target language expressions maximizes restoration of the original word’s unique title attribute enables target readers to grasp core cultural positioning while recognizing phonetic marks serves as an important translation choice for balancing cultural specificity and cross-cultural readability.

Example 5:

ST: 霍洛音

TT: Huoluoyin

Analysis: It directly uses transliteration for translation, aiming to preserve the expression of this performance technique in Chinese and better highlight its cultural uniqueness. When readers of other languages use this expression with people from Chinese-speaking countries, it can also enable them to quickly understand. The translator should add relevant notes: This is a Manchu ethnic throat trill performance technique, characterized by rich and resounding sounds.

Example 6:

ST: 弹颂板

TT: Tan Song Ban

Analysis: As a unique way of creating rhythm with traditional Chinese musical instruments, the author still chooses to use transliteration to handle its translation. By doing so, its cultural uniqueness can be preserved, and the right to speak can be demonstrated in the context of external publicity. At the same time, it can also help Chinese learners communicate. Of course, necessary annotations are also indispensable.

4.2.2. Liberal translation

Liberal translation rephrases terms with strong cultural symbolism or complex professional attributes ensures target readers grasp both technical functions and cultural meanings is particularly suitable for terms where literal translation is overly obscure or fails to reflect dual attributes.

Example 7:

ST: 三道弯

TT: Three-Curve Posture

Analysis: This translation implies the three - bend posture of the body, suggesting that it is suitable for female characters, matching actions such as brushing the temples and stroking the eyebrows, and embodying the cultural connotation of the elegant demeanor of Manchu noblewomen. This solves the problem of the direct translation being too abstract. Without these details, it would be difficult for readers to guess how the three bends are formed or what they symbolize.

4.3. Translation of historical geographical terms

These terms including place names historical titles and event-related terms integral to the opera's origin and development preserve its historical memory and geographical identity. Translating them faces three principal challenges: difficulty conveying embedded contexts concisely; culturally specific concepts lacking equivalent English expressions, causing contextual gaps; and audiences' limited knowledge of Chinese geography and history requiring supplementary explanations.

4.3.1. Literal translation with annotation

The core of literal translation and annotation is to first perform a literal translation of the source language terms, fully preserving their surface semantic and cultural morphological features, and then fill in the possible cultural cognitive gaps of the target readers through supplementary annotations. While accurately conveying the original text's information, enable the target readers to fully grasp the profound cultural implications behind the terms.

Example 8:

ST: 新城府

TT: Xincheng Prefecture (Established in the 32nd year of the Guangxu reign of the Qing Dynasty)

Analysis: "Xincheng Prefecture" adopts the literal translation "Xincheng Prefecture", precisely corresponding to the literal meanings of "new", "city" and "prefecture" and the administrative system attributes of the Qing Dynasty, retaining the dual core characteristics of geography and administration. The annotations in parentheses supplement the key historical background and the core connection of the text, which not only avoids the limitation of literal translation that only shows surface names, but also fills the cognitive gap of the target readers about the evolution of modern Chinese administration and the origin of drama genres through precise information. This conforms to the core logic of "preserving form and supplementing meaning" in literal translation with annotations, while closely adhering to the context of the text.

4.3.2. Liberal translation

Liberal translation rephrases terms where literal translation fails to convey symbolic meaning or historical context,

integrating multi-dimensional information (geography, history, opera connection) to ensure comprehensibility.

Example 9:

ST: 二十四崗山

TT: Twenty-Four Gushan

Analysis: A literal translation of “Twenty-Four Ancient Mountains” might easily lead readers to mistake it for a real geographical entity. The translator’s free translation approach clarifies its symbolic nature by adding that it is a symbolic concept representing the territory and sovereignty of the Qing Dynasty. The annotation connects it to the design of the octagonal drum and its role in the opera. This treatment effectively addresses the challenge of conveying the non-geographical symbolic meaning of a unique status as a sacred Manchu totem that a literal translation fails to capture.

4.4. Translation of ethnic cultural exclusive concept terms

As core symbols of Manchu identity, these terms include kinship titles, sacred animals, historical figures and linguistic-specific concepts face unique translation challenges. Literal translation often causes semantic loss, excessive adaptation risks erasing ethnic specificity, requiring a balance between cultural preservation and readability.

4.4.1. Liberal translation

Liberal translation adapts terms where cultural symbolism or narrative purpose outweighs literal wording particularly those referring to historical figures and complex concepts rephrases to highlight cultural meaning and storytelling value makes the term accessible to new audiences while preserving its distinctive ethnic character.

Example 10:

ST: 完颜阿骨打

TT: Aguda of the Jurchen Wanyan Clan

Analysis: A literal translation of “Wanyan Aguda” only preserves the name but omits the historical context. The free translation clarifies his title as the founding emperor of the Jin Dynasty his ethnic affiliation with the Wanyan clan of the Jurchen people and his cultural status as a revered ancestor of the Manchu. It also connects him to his role in the opera *Manzhou Tie Xue*. This translation approach effectively addresses the problem of readers’ unfamiliarity with Manchu historical figures allowing them to understand why he serves as the core character of this opera.

4.4.2. Creative translation

The Creative Translation involves coining new expressions in the target language that faithfully convey the term’s cultural spirit while ensuring readability. It is used for terms that condense profound cultural meanings and have no conventional equivalents in the target language.

Example 11:

ST: 曲牌

TT: Melodic Suite

Analysis: There is no direct equivalent in English for the “曲牌” structure in Xincheng Opera. We innovation propose the concept “melodic suite” skillfully integrating the core elements of “connected tunes” with the musical form. This annotation emphasizes its dramatic function such as the balance between cultural uniqueness and audience comprehension in scene transitions literal translation struggles to convey structural subtleties creative translation strikes a balance between accuracy and readability.

4.4.3. Transliteration with annotations

This method prioritizes conveying the multi-layered cultural metaphors of ethnically exclusive concepts by supplementing detailed annotations on their symbolic meanings and dramatic functions, compensating for the target readers’ cultural knowledge gaps regarding ethnic-specific beliefs and historical symbols.

Example 12:

ST: 海东青

TT: Haidongqing (Sacred Bird of Prey of Manchu people)

Analysis: Translating it simply as “a type of falcon” would lose its three core connotations its symbolic status as a “sacred bird” its significance as an emblem of emperors and its narrative function in the opera. This annotation emphasizes its dramatic function such as the balance between cultural uniqueness and audience comprehension in scene transitions literal translation struggles to convey structural subtleties creative translation strikes a balance between accuracy and readability. Following Bassnett’s cultural translation theory that “culture is the basic unit of translation” this approach preserves the core cultural spirit of the Manchu people’s reverence for sacred birds while connecting it to the opera text Tie Xue Rou Qing thus striking a balance between cultural authenticity and communicative needs.

4.4.4. Literal translation

This method directly translates the core meaning of the source language to retain the source culture’s concepts and symbolic meanings fully preserve inherent connotations including national beliefs and folk customs and helps target readers grasp both surface meaning and deep cultural implications.

Example 13:

ST: 五谷丰登

TT: bountiful harvest of five grains

Analysis: The translation uses literal translation with cultural connotation retention. “Five grains” directly corresponds to the original term’s reference to staple crops in traditional Chinese agriculture, preserving the cultural specificities of Manchu agricultural beliefs. “Bountiful harvest” accurately conveys the core meaning of prosperity and abundance implied by “ 丰登 ”. This method aligns with the text context the double tassels on the octagonal drum symbolize this blessing balances target language clarity with the source term’s cultural symbolism ensures English readers grasp both the literal meaning and the auspicious connotation rooted in Manchu life and customs.

5. Conclusion

This study explores the English translation of MXO’s CLWs from the perspective of ICH inheritance. Through literature review, theoretical framework analysis, and research method discussion, combined with the analysis of translation difficulties and strategies, this paper deeply expounds the significant value of the translation of this cultural load word in opera for cultural inheritance and dissemination.

In terms of theoretical support, the research integrates the theories of intangible cultural heritage communication, communicative translation principles and cultural translation theories, and constructs a translation logic that balances “cultural fidelity” and “readability of the target language”. For the translation difficulties of different types of vocabulary, the research proposes targeted strategies. For example, for ethnic custom terms, literal translation with annotations or adapted translation is employed, taking into account both form and ritual connotation; For artistic terminology terms, transliteration or free translation should be used to preserve cultural uniqueness. Historical and geographical terms take literal translation and annotations as the core supplement information on historical evolution and geographical connections. The ethnic cultural exclusive concept terms dedicated to ethnic culture strikes a balance between ethnic specificity and readers’ comprehension through methods such as Liberal Translation and creative translation.

This study expands the theoretical system of ICH translation research and offers practical references for the external translation of MXO. It effectively addressed core issues such as the gap in semantic transmission, the loss of cultural connotations, and readers’ cognitive impairments. However, the scale of this study is limited. In the future, the scope of the research will be expanded to cover more CLWs and diverse translation strategies.

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