

## **Research on the C-E Translation of the Culture-Loaded Words in Hainan Folktales**

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**Abstract:** Hainan folktales are precious folk cultural heritage in Hainan Province. Using culture translation theory as the theoretical framework, this paper studies the C-E translation strategies of material culture-loaded words, ecological culture-loaded words, social culture-loaded words, linguistic culture-loaded words in Hainan folktales. After the research, it is found that when translating these culture-loaded words into English, strategies such as literal translation, free translation, amplification, transliteration, and explanatory translation are frequently used. This research contributes to a better dissemination of Hainan culture and displaying the image of Hainan.

**Keywords:** Hainan Folktales; Culture Translation Theory; Culture-Loaded Words; C-E Translation; Culture Dissemination

### **1. Introduction**

Hainan has a unique climate and natural landscape that has given rise to many unique folktales. These folktales are a valuable part of Hainan's cultural heritage, and they not only carry the wisdom and emotions of Hainan's different ethnic groups, but also depict the history of Hainan Island and the lifestyle of its people. These stories are not only entertaining in nature, but also reflect local people's unique understanding of nature and social culture. With the continuous development of economic globalization and the construction of a free trade port in Hainan, Hainan is attracting more and more foreign investors and tourists. By translating these folktales into English, foreign investors can gain a deeper understanding of local values and lifestyles and better connect with local residents. At the same time, this can also enable overseas tourists to have a deeper cultural experience, making them better explore and appreciate Hainan's unique

charms.

### **2. Previous Researches on Folktales in Hainan Province**

Different scholars have studied the folktales in Hainan Province from different perspectives. For example, Sun Shaopei studied the creation myths of the Li ethnic group, and she believed that the creation myth "Hercules". the epic "Legend of Wuzhishan" and the myth of human origins "Flies Eating the Sun and Moon" all glorify the diligent, wise, simple, and brave national qualities of the Li people [1]; Li Mo analyzed the image of heroes in Li ethnic group, and he believed that all heroes in Li ethnic group embody a spirit of resistance and fearlessness [2]. Du Wei and Yang Wenjing believe that Hainan has many legends related to the ocean, which showcase the poetic imagination of the traditional folk culture towards the mysterious ocean and contain the idea of harmonious coexistence between humans and the sea [3,4].

Hainan is an island inhabited by many ethnic groups. At present, scholars mainly have studied the folktales of the Li ethnic group, and little research has been done on other ethnic groups. In addition, the dissemination of folktales in Hainan is very limited. Folktales in Hainan were only transmitted through oral introductions by tour guides or local friends when foreigners come to Hainan for tourism. Due to the lack of uniformity and authority, there may be misinterpretation and misunderstanding in these oral introductions. Translating Hainan folk stories into English is an important way for overseas people to understand the cultural connotations of various ethnic groups in Hainan. Therefore, this paper will collect folk stories from various ethnic groups in Hainan and translate them into English. This research can help improve the effectiveness of the external dissemination of folktales in Hainan.

### **3. An Introduction to Culture Translation Theory**

Traditional translation theories focus on semantic equivalence, considering translation as the conversion of language codes between two languages. In the early 1990s, a new translation theory called “culture transfer theory” emerged, advocating that translators should pay more attention to the cultural background of the translation rather than being limited to the conversion of static language codes. Susan Bassnett strongly supports this theory, and in her co-authored book “Translation, History, Culture” with Lefevere, she formally introduced the concept of “culture transfer” and provided a systematic exposition of cultural translation theory. In her opinion, the core of cultural translation theory is that the essence of translation is the transmission of culture and intercultural communication. Translation should convey the cultural connotations of the source language, and translation is not a simple process of linguistic code conversion; the purpose of translation is to achieve the transmission of culture. A good evaluation criteria for translation is that readers should perceive the cultural significance and connotations of the original text in the translation [5,6].

### **4. A Study on the English Translation of Culture-Loaded Words in Hainan Folktales**

Culture-loaded words, also known as culturally connotative words and culturally distinctive words, are words (phrases) that express things and concepts unique to a certain culture, which are deeply imprinted with the social, regional and temporal marks of a society. These words (or phrases) not only carry rich cultural connotations, but also “only exist in a certain culture and are blank in another culture.” Due to their characteristic of existence in one culture and absence in another, they are barriers to cross-cultural communication and translation [7].

#### **4.1 C-E Translation of the Material Culture-Loaded Words in Hainan Folktales**

Material culture refers to the material civilization in the forms of material products, household goods, tools, and architectures created by human beings in their life and production. It is the product of the continuous

development and evolution of human society, and also an important symbol reflecting the level of social productive forces and cultural civilization. Material culture-loaded words reflect the characteristics of the material culture created by people within a particular linguistic and cultural group.

Example 1: cong ming mei li de li jia gu niang a gan xin ling shou qiao, suo zhi de li jin tu an duo yang, se cai ban lan, yin de hu die qian lai cai hua. (gan gong niao de gu shi)

Translation: Aracan, a clever and beautiful girl of the Li nationality, was so dexterous that the Li brocade she wove was so varied and colorful that it attracted butterflies to come and pick flowers. (The story of Gan Gong Bird)

“lijin” is a unique silk specific to the Li ethnic group in Hainan Island. It is a thick fabric woven from colored silk and has a long history. In English, “brocade” refers to a thick fabric with convex patterns which is woven with colored threads, especially with gold and silver threads, so, literal translation is used here and “li jin” is literally translated as “brocade”.

Example 2: zhi hui de hai nan xian min, ba ye zi zi yuan fa hui dao liao ji zhi, you qi shi chuang zao chu liao ge zhong ge yang de ye diao gong yi pin. (ye ke de gu shi)

Translation: The wise ancestors in Hainan made the most of their coconut resources, especially by creating a wide variety of coconut shell carving handicrafts. (Coconut shell story)

“coconut shell carving handicrafts” are exquisite handicrafts made from coconut shells, which are a unique specialty in Hainan. They are not made from the whole coconuts, but from the coconut shells left over when the coconut water and meat is removed. So in order to make it easier for readers of the translation to understand, the word “shell” should be added in the translation. Amplification is used here.

#### **4.2 C-E Translation of Ecological Culture-Loaded Words in Hainan Folktales**

“Ecological culture-loaded words” refer to the vocabulary that reflects various natural elements such as local biology, plants, geology, topography, landscape, climate, etc., conveying rich and profound ecological cultural information and symbolic meanings. Hainan Island is the southernmost tropical island in China, located between the Tropic of

Cancer and the Equator. The unique geographical location also exhibits the unparalleled characteristics of its ecological conditions.

Example 3: ping hai yuan tiao, hai tian yi se, bi bo dang yang. (nuo shi he yu dan de gu shi )

Translation: Looking out over the sea, you can see the sky and sea merge into one and the blue waves are rippling. (The story of Nuoshi and Yudan)

“the sky and sea merge into one” doesn’t emphasize that the sea and the sky has the same color. Instead, it means that “the sea is boundless, connected to the sky and one can’t distinguish the boundary between the sea and the sky.” So here, “the sky and sea merge into one” is freely translated into “the sea and the sky merge into one”, which describes the unique ecological landscape of Hainan, conveying the vastness of both the sea and the sky in Hainan.

Example 4: wu hou de yang guang chuan guo ye lin sa luo zai nuo shi shen shang. ye feng hai yun rang nuo shi xin qing fei chang shu chang. (nuo shi he yu dan de gu shi)

Translation: The afternoon sun shines through the coconut grove and falls on Nuo Shi. The coconut-scented breeze and the rhythm of the sea put Nuoshi in a very comfortable mood. (The story of Nuoshi and Yudan)

Hainan is located in the tropical climate zone and coconut trees are Hainan endemic palm trees. “the coconut grove” refers to the coconut trees growing in patches. It is neither a bush nor a small forest. The term “grove” refers to a patch of trees that are neatly arranged on the clean ground, so it is appropriate to literally translate it as “coconut groves.”

#### **4.3 C-E Translation of the Social Culture-Loaded Words in Hainan Folktales**

Social culture is an umbrella term for all kinds of cultural phenomena and activities that have a wide impact on social groups, which are closely related to the production and life of the masses, and are characterized by regional and national features. In simple terms, social culture-loaded words refer to words that reflect the cultural traditions, historical experiences, social systems, values, traditional customs, etc. of a society or culture group.

Example 5: da jia xin li hen dan you, you xie ren dao chu qiu shen bai tian, bao you ping

an ,you xie ren da qi tui tang gu, zhun bei qian ju wai tao. (bai hu shi de gu shi)

Translation: Everyone was quite worried. Some people prayed God for safety and peace. While others backed down, preparing to move out. (The story of tiger-shaped stone)

“backed down”originally referred to the beating of a drum as feudal officials announced the adjournment or end of a court session. In modern society, it metaphorically means “retreating in the middle when doing something with others”. Therefore, “da tui tang gu” can’t be literally translated and the literal translation doesn’t fit the semantic context. It is more appropriate to freely translate it into “back down”.

Example 6: wo cong tian shang xia fan ,yi wei neng yu ni bai tou xie lao, shui zhi ni que shi chen shi mei! (fu xin han de gu shi)

Translation: I’m a fairy descending to the world from the heaven, hoping that we can live happily together till old age. However, you are an unfaithful lover! (The story of an unfaithful lover)

“Chen shimei” is a historical allusion word. During the Song Dynasty, Chen Shimei, who came from a poor family, was deeply in love with his wife Qin Xianglian. When Chen Shimei went to the capital to take the imperial examination and became the top scholar, he was summoned by Emperor Renzong to serve as a son-in-law. Qin Xianglian, having heard nothing from Chen Shimei for a long time, took their son to the capital to find him. However, Chen Shimei refused to acknowledge them and even sent someone to murder his wife. As a result, in Chinese history, “Chen shimei” has always been a byword for a love rat. If “Chen shimei” was directly transliterated as “Chen Shimei”, it is difficult for readers of the translation to understand what kind of character it is. So free translation is used here and it is freely translated as “unfaithful lover” [8-10].

#### **4.4 C-E Translation of the Linguistic Culture-Loaded Words in Hainan Folktales**

“Linguistic culture-loaded words” refer to words that carry local linguistic information (vocabulary, grammatical structure, linguistic habits, etc.). Chinese is a semantic language with its own special linguistic forms, such as four-character idioms, five-character quatrain, seven-character octave and so on. In Hainan

folk tales, “Linguistic culture-loaded words” mostly refer to the Hainan dialect and Hainan’s distinctive folk songs.

Example 7: chuan shuo shen shan li de chang ni niang bian cheng liao yao jing, tian tian xia shan chi xiao hai ,lao bai xing du hen pa ta, yi dao wan shang, jiu guan men bi hu, bu gan wai chu .(chang ni niang de gu shi)

Translation: Legend has it that the gibbon in the deep mountains has turned into a demonic spirit and goes downhill every day to eat children. The people are so afraid of it that they close their doors at night and dare not go out. (The story of gibbon)

In the Hainan dialect, “Chang ni niang” means gibbons, so explanatory translation is used here. If it is literally translated, it would easily leave the readers of the translation in the dark.

Example 8: wan fan guo hou, da jia you yi qi chang qi liao huan kuai de xian shui ge. (qin long de gu shi)

Translation: After dinner, everyone sang the cheerful vernacular fisherman's song together. (The story of catching the dragon)

Boat dwellers live by the sea, and the the vernacular fishing songs they sing are called “vernacular fisherman's song”, which is also known as the boat-dwelling song or the saltwater song. Therefore, it is more appropriate to translate it into “vernacular fisherman’s song.” Literally translating it as “salty-water song” would confuse the readers of the translation.

#### **4.5 English Translation of Traditional Culture-Loaded Words in Hainan Folktales**

Example 9: yin ju zai si miao de du du de qi zi wang shi, tian tian shao xiang bai fo, zhong yu gan dong liao da ci da bei de guan shi yin pu sa. (nan hai nv shen ma zu de gu shi )

Translation: Wang, the wife of the Governor who lived in seclusion in a temple, burned incense and worshiped the God every day, and finally touched the merciful guan shi yin pu sa. (The story of Mazu, the goddess of the South Seas)

“shao xiang bai fo” and “guan shi yin pu sa” are traditional culture proper nouns, which have corresponding English expressions, so literal translation here is proper.

Example 10: you yi tian, liang ge xian nv yin hu song yu ren hui jia, bei wang mu niang niang fa xian. wang mu pai lai lei gong dian mu zhua ta men qu zhi zui .(nan tian yi zhu de

gu shi)

Translation: One day, two fairies were discovered by the queen of heaven for escorting a fisherman home. Then, she sent the god of lightening and the goddess of thundering to arrest them and punish them. (The Story of the Southern Pillar)

“Wang mu niangniang” is the goddess who is in charge of all things and gives birth to all female immortals. Therefore, it cannot be literally translated as “the queen”. Instead, it needs to be translated as “the queen of heaven” by using the method of amplification. Similarly, “Leigong Dianmu” in this context does not refer to mortals, but to the male and female gods in the heavenly court in charge of wind, rain, thunder, and lightning, so it should be translated as “the god of lightning” and “the goddess of thundering.”

#### **5. Summary**

When translating folktales in Hainan into English, translators should firstly focus on culture-loaded words and fully understand their culture connotations, choosing appropriate translation methods to convey them. For material culture-loaded words specific to Hainan and ecological culture-loaded words reflecting Hainan’s unique environment and geographical features, literal translation, amplification and free translation are often used; for social culture-loaded words derived from the production and practical activities of the ethnic groups, free translation is frequently used; for linguistic culture-loaded words composed of dialects and Hainan’s characteristic folk songs, explanatory translation is frequently used; for traditional culture-loaded words focusing on ideology, literal translation and amplification is frequently used. Chinese culture is an important part of the world culture, and to enable more excellent Chinese folk customs and culture to be understood by the world, it requires collaborative efforts from more translators to effectively convey the culture connotations of folk stories from all regions of China. Only in this way, can the external dissemination of Chinese folk culture be promoted.

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