

Differences and Similarities of Chinese Cultural Words Based on Intercultural Communication Translation

ZHANG YANG (corresponding author)
School of Languages, Literacies and Translation
Universiti Sains Malaysia
Zhengzhou, China
zhangyang@student.usm.my

SALASIAH CHE LAH (0000-0001-6814-6346)
School of Languages, Literacies and Translation
Universiti Sains Malaysia
Penang, Malaysia
salasiah@usm.my

WANG HUI
School of Languages, Literacies and Translation
Universiti Sains Malaysia
Zhoukou, China
215788817@qq.com

ABSTRACT

With the expansion of economic globalization, international exchanges have become the common phenomenon. Language is the carrier of culture and a necessary condition for cross-cultural communication. Translation is the expression of one language in another language, and the output of this language includes the thinking rules, habits and transfer of ideas of the source language. English translation is an important method to improve English application ability and promote cultural exchange. Any misunderstanding and misuse of the translation will undoubtedly cause negative effects. This paper is intended to explore some effective translation strategies and techniques for translating Chinese cultural words. In this regard, translators need to have an in-depth and comprehensive understanding and mastery of the Chinese and Western cultures. In the process of translation, they should fully follow the principles of appropriateness and use scientific and reasonable translation methods to accurately express the true meaning to the audience, so as to strengthen the Chinese and Western cultures.

Keywords: Chinese cultural words; differences and similarities; intercultural communication; translation strategies

This work is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY)
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

To cite this article: Yang, Z., Lah, S. C., Hui, W. (2022). Differences and Similarities of Chinese Cultural Words Based on Intercultural Communication Translation. *International Journal of Language, Literacy and Translation* 5(2), 1-11.
<https://doi.org/10.36777/ijollt2022.5.2.053>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.36777/ijollt2022.5.2.053>

Received: 19 February 2022

Accepted: 2 June 2022

Published Online: 26 September 2022

INTRODUCTION

With the continuous development of China's globalization, exchanges in different social systems and social environments have become more and more frequent. Although cross-cultural communication translation has built a good platform for the dissemination and communication of Chinese culture, translation would also vary for the differences are found in the language, cultural background and values. There are also huge differences in translation in the process of cross-cultural communication. The differences in the social environment, language system and cultural background of human beings also lead to certain differences in cognitive behavior among various ethnic groups. Translation is mainly to convert two different languages, so that the audience can overcome language barriers and understand the meaning expressed in different languages. Not only that, translation also involves cross-cultural information exchange and exchanged activity, hence its essence is communication. Whether it is interpretation, written translation, machine translation, or the translation of literary works or the translation of scientific and technological styles, the tasks to be completed can be attributed to disseminate the information. As an important communication channel in cross-cultural communication, translation is not only a conversion between languages to meet social needs, but also to explain the cultural connotation in the original language. Therefore, this paper takes the differences and similarities in the translation of Chinese cultural words and Western cross-cultural communication as the breakthrough point, and proposes corresponding translation measures, in order to provide a reference for cross-cultural communication.

AN OVERVIEW OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION THEORY

The beginning of American intercultural communication began in the 1960s when a book titled "*The Silent Language*" was published in the United States. This publication is the foundation of the present intercultural communication. Hall (1976) shows that "there are several practical implications of studying culture as a means of communication." He further mentioned the word "Culture is communication" in his writing. No doubt, cultural words are notoriously complex terms to define. Apte (1994), publishing on the ten-volume *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, stated that the difficulties are "Despite a century of efforts to define culture adequately, there was in the early 1990s no agreements among anthropologists regarding its nature."

DIFFERENCES IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION THEORY

Scholars' research on the different translation problems on intercultural communication theory mainly concentrated in the 1960s and 1970s. In Oberg's acculturation cycle theory, the adaptation period of intercultural communicators is divided into four stages: honeymoon stage, crisis stage, recovery stage, and full adaptation stage. This theory can better indicate the characteristics of cross-cultural communicators in each period in the process of

transformation between local and foreign culture. The above-mentioned theories are only a generalisation of the phenomenon, and based on the feelings of the communicators towards the new culture, which lacks a certain degree of systematic methods. But it does provide some reference for scholars to further study the theory of cross-cultural communication. Y. Kim (1979) believes that the pressure of adapting to a foreign culture will force intercultural communicators to make adjustments in time, and eventually evolve into an intercultural person who transcends himself as he adapts and adjusts continuously. Because of its clear concept and rigorous logic, this theory is highly praised by scholars and widely used in cross-cultural communication research.

CHINESE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION THEORY

In the 1980s, with China's reforming and opening up, the importance of cross-cultural communication became increasingly prominent. In 1983, He Daokuan first brought the study of cross-cultural communication into everyone's field of vision in the foreign language field. In terms of theory, cultural differences have gradually become the core issue of cross-cultural communication researchers. Chinese scholars have also made corresponding researches on foreign language teaching, cross-cultural communicative competence and other issues in view of cross-cultural differences.

Translation is not only an act of language change, is also an act of cross-cultural dissemination. Translation and cultural context cannot be separated with each other. Compared with the international research on cross-cultural communication, the research on cross-cultural communication in China is more focused on language teaching. There are fewer studies on translation backgrounds, and fewer researchers with multidisciplinary backgrounds (both familiar with intercultural communication and translation). Tang Jie (2022) in *Translation of Loaded words in Chinese tea culture from the perspective of intercultural communication* mentioned that translators should use different translation strategies according to different situations from the perspective of cross-cultural communication, so as to accurately convey the cultural connotation of culture-loaded words, so as to preserve the language characteristics of local culture and increase the acceptability of target language readers. Zhu Dongjiang (2022) in *Chinese-English Translation from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication* concluded that from the perspective of intercultural communication, studying C-E (Chinese-English) translating techniques and how to strengthen intercultural consciousness and improve intercultural competence will help Chinese culture go global and improve Chinese image. Based on the disciplinary background of intercultural communication research, researchers mostly carry out research from the perspective of intercultural communication competence, but lack in research perspective of translation studies. The real purpose of language translation can only be achieved with the help of translation theory research.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION THEORY

Since the 1980s, with the accelerating process of globalization, China has played an important role in participating in global construction and governance. The frequent exchanges of foreign cultures also make the problems arising in cross-cultural communication. The problem of cultural difference and adjustment in the theory of cross-cultural communication is also expanded into the problem of cultural value. So far, the six stages of cross-cultural theory model proposed by Lewis and Janaman (1986) are the most complete model, which includes: preliminary stage, spectator stage, participant stage, the shock stage, the adaptation stage, and the reentry stage. Although still only described in terms of phenomena, this model is the most complete in cross-cultural theory. The model indicates that individualism and collectivism are mainly reflected in the interdependence of culture on the self in which power distance shows the characteristics of class, uncertainty avoidance shows the tolerance of culture to emotion, masculinity and femininity are reflected in equality or not, and last but not least, long-term and short-term orientations show the recognition of Confucianism in culture. It can be seen that cultural value is not only reflected at the national level, but also verified at the individual level. The personal dimension orientations of cultural values which are the values of power, stimulation, tradition and kindness have different value orientations between different cultures. Throughout the research on the theory of cross-cultural communication, the problem of cultural differences and adjustment has gradually expanded to the problem of cultural value differences, and researchers have expressed their opinions and formed a series of theories.

DIFFERENCES IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION TRANSLATION

As an important way of cross-cultural communication, translation is not only reflected in the mutual conversion of languages, but the conversion between cultures. Translation helps to narrate Chinese stories successfully and become a good voice of China, hence allows Chinese culture contributes to the world of cultures. Due to the influence of cultural differences, the ‘loss’ caused by Chinese-to-foreign translation is particularly serious. Cultural similarities and differences are a major issue in translation. The untranslatability of cultural differences is one of the major problems in our cross-cultural communication translation, which is mainly manifested in low or unreadable cross-cultural communication.

DIFFERENCES IN CULTURAL VALUES

People's different understanding of ‘individualism’ is the best reflection of the difference between Chinese and Western values. Individualism is the core value concept in the West. In the category of individual and collective, Western culture points out that the individual is the center, the individual value determines the collective value, and emphasizes on individual heroism. That is to say, the existence of the collective is to ensure that the interests of each individual can be guaranteed. Only when the individual interests are not damaged, the collective has the meaning of existence. As far as the country and society are concerned, its main task is to safeguard individual interests, which also reflects the fundamental nature of

Western values.

In China, individualism is a derogatory term. This is because the values advocated by the five thousand years of traditional Chinese culture are collectivism. In traditional Chinese culture, home, family, and country are the sum total of all value relationships. Only when individualism creates value for the family and the collective, and satisfies the collective needs and realizes the collective interests.

The word ‘competition’ can also see the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western values. In the Western culture of values, confrontation is advocated and competition is emphasized. In such a cultural climate, competition is everywhere. Biden (2020) said before his election that “the most effective way to deal with challenges is to build a united front with American allies”. It shows that competition is ubiquitous in Western society and competitive relations are particularly prominent in Western social and cultural values. This better projects the extroverted characteristics of Western cultural values.

However, in traditional Chinese culture, the most respected thought by the Chinese is ‘harmony’. The Chinese have always disliked competition, did not participate in competition, and advocated solving problems in a peaceful way. Whether it is at the individual level, or at the national or collective level, the pursuit of “harmony is precious, family and prosperity”. It can be seen from this phrase that the Chinese stress great importance to the harmonious relationship between things in all aspects. The collective harmonious relationship is the best state of this relationship. Because Chinese are consistent in the value concept of ‘harmony is the most precious”, they will have the national spirit of giving up the small family and serving everyone in the collectivism. In order to maintain the harmonious state, Chinese are never extreme in doing things, seek common ground while reserving small differences, so as to ensure the harmony and unity of the relationship between people and things, which is also the basic criterion for them to do things. Maintaining unity and harmony are indeed the most important features of traditional Chinese culture.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION TRANSLATION

Intercultural communicative translation exists because of the exchanges between communities in different regions and cultural backgrounds, and it is also a bridge for the interpenetration of multiculturalism. Therefore, intercultural communication translation is not only a process of cultural similarities, but also a product of cultural communication. The translations represented by the Bible clearly shown that translation is the main way for a culture to reach the world, and cross-cultural communication translation has a significant impact on the spread and exchange of cultures. Ji Xianlin (2001) said: “In the long river of Chinese culture, there are times when the water is full, and there are times when the water is low, but it never runs out. The reason is that new water is injected. The number of times of injection is quite large. Second, one is water from India, and the other is water from the West. The two injections rely on translation. The reason why Chinese culture can maintain its youth is the translation.”

Cultural translation methods are the most common problems in intercultural communication translation. The differences mainly include two aspects. On one hand, the

complexity of language structure in intercultural communication translation. In the process of cultural exchange, local allusions, slang words, etc. are usually used in order to achieve the purpose of translation. These words contain the local historical and cultural information with a long history, and have regional cultural characteristics. If it is not clearly understood in translation, it will be very easy to make mistakes. On the other hand, there is a lack of cultural empathy in intercultural communication translation. Gao Yongchen (2003) pointed out that cultural empathy is the most important component in the elements of cross-cultural communicative competence, and cultural empathy should follow the principle of moderation. Context has a strong restrictive effect on translation. In translation, very often translators have to deal with pragmatic errors according to the context, and adopt the corresponding “remedial” principle.

STRATEGIES FOR CHINESE CULTURAL WORDS TRANSLATION

TRANSLATION PRINCIPLE OF HARMONY AND UNITY

In cross-cultural communication translation, the international unified translation principles should be followed. This is because, as two coexisting subjects, cultural differences and similarities could possibly have a key impact on the communication results. Choosing proper translation strategies could promote the fluency and precision of intercultural communication. From a macro perspective, the differences and similarities of cross-cultural communication and translation are manifested in the translation studies. Therefore, in the process of translation, it is necessary to formulate appropriate principles so as to avoid errors and risks, and improve the accuracy of translation. However, even if reasonable, appropriate and scientific translation principles are set, it is still difficult to solve all the differences. In this regard, we propose effective improvement measures from the following perspectives of translation principle compliance and cultural similarities to help translators in cross-cultural translation.

CONTEXT PRINCIPLE

In the process of cross-cultural communication translation, a translator not only need to pay attention to the differences in cultural background, language, and thinking mode of the two parties, but also pay attention to the expressions, speed, intonation and context taken place in the process of language expression. It is worth noting that the translation of cross-cultural communication should follow the principle of context.

The context refers to the language environment formed by both parties in the communication practice according to their own traditional cultural characteristics. The meanings expressed by different language environments have subtle differences.

Hence, translators should construct strict contextual principles in cross-cultural communication translation, and take this as a starting point to fully analyze, judge and make decisions based on the context of the source language and the context of the translated text in

actual communication so as to further perfect completed the translation of cross-cultural communication. From this point of view, it can be seen that the translator should consider the translation source and the translation from two perspectives during the translating processes, namely ‘translation’. For example, in some translated works, there are no loopholes in the sentence pattern and grammar, but there is a lack of charm in the auditory sense, hence making it difficult to achieve the result of effective communication. In response to this problem, many scholars have carried out research and enriched their theoretical results, but this problem still exists in practice, which shows that context has a great influence on cross-cultural communication.

From a practical point of view, the deletion or addition of contextual factors in the translation process is a way of conveying the actual meaning of communication. Especially in literary works, the context principle should be strictly followed to achieve accurate information transmission effect. For example, in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, one of the four famous literary works in China, the word ‘Master’ cannot be translated to ‘father’, because the meaning is not effectively delivered and expressed. The reverence of Chinese characters for ‘Master’ can reflect the profound connotation represented. Whether translating from English to Chinese or from Chinese to English, in actual communicative translation, we should pay attention to explaining the actual context, and follow the principle of unity for cross-cultural communicative translation so as to reduce conflicts and misunderstandings between different cultures. The purpose of the World Health Organization (WHO) is “health for all”. Another example is the translation of Shakespeare's *Sonnet No. 50* into Chinese. It says “The old man who speaks nonsense.” For the Chinese, the image of an “old man” should be respected. Therefore, in order to highlight the connotation of this context and make it understandable to readers, the translator needs to add supplement to the contextual factors, such as “the old man and the distant guest both like to lie in a high-sounding manner.”

MEANING PRINCIPLE

The key point of cross-cultural communication translation is the transmission of information, but the real meaning and connotation should also be considered. Among them, the translator must strictly follow the principle of meaning, which is parallel to the principle of context, thereby improving the substantive effect of communicative translation. Under the meaning principle, translators should proceed from the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of both sides of the communication to ensure the equivalence of words and at the same time pay attention to the actual communicative meaning to ensure the accuracy of communicative meaning transmission. Among them, the meaning principle should be based on the context principle, and the lexical meanings will be different under different expressions. Therefore, the translator should pay attention to the original meaning of the original text in actual translation and information transmission. Even in the process of translation, contextual factors need to be added or deleted according to the actual situation, but the accurate translation and transmission of the meaning of the original text must be guaranteed.

For example, ‘teacher’ in English and ‘teacher’ in Chinese are equivalent at one time, but in China, teacher not only represents a professional title, but also represents the speaker’s

respect for the profession. Then, in the process of translation, the translator should not only increase the context of expression, but also follow the principle of meaning, express the actual meaning contained in Chinese boldly and accurately, and realize the unity of emotion, context and meaning on both sides of the communication.

Another example is the Chinese word 'disabled'. In cross-cultural communication translation, it can be translated into the equivalent words 'disabled person', 'disabled', 'and disadvantaged'. However, in the follow-up research, the translator formulated and followed the meaning principle, choosing disadvantaged, and replace the Chinese 'disabled' with 'vulnerable groups', making the English and Chinese words a translation relationship.

It can be seen that in the actual process of cross-cultural communication translation, with the continuous similarities of culture, language, thinking and other aspects of the two sides of the communication, it will inevitably promote the sublimation of language differences into the fusion of meanings.

TABOO PRINCIPLE

In cross-cultural communicative translation, there must be taboos on both sides with different cultural backgrounds, and this is what the translator must focus on during the translation process. If the translator, without considering the other party's cultural taboo words, simply pursues the perfect interpretation of the context and the original expression of meaning in the process of translation, it will affect the harmonious relationship of cross-cultural communication and the emotions of both parties in which will result to unnecessary misunderstandings and lead to confusion of meaning expressions. For example, in cross-cultural country communication, when translating a sensitive word like 'backward country', the translator should take into account the emotional relationship between the two sides of the communication, hence change the method, adhere to the taboo principle, and replace the word 'backward country' to 'developing country'. Another example is the English word 'less developed country' or 'developed country' which requires the translator to not only take into account the emotional problems of both parties, but also use friendly vocabulary to resolve the embarrassment in communication, further showing the importance and advantages of the taboo principle. From the perspective of cultural fusion of both sides of communication, the use of the taboo principle could change the thinking mode of both sides. Colleagues who maintain the transmission of meaning can also form a translation relationship between English and Chinese words, which truly realizes the fusion of cross-cultural communication.

THE SIMILARITIES OF CHINESE AND WESTERN CULTURAL PENETRATION

In cross-cultural communication translation, the biggest challenge is the difference between Chinese and Western cultural backgrounds. However, in the context of global similarities and the continuous increase in trade transactions, cross-cultural communication is indispensable. For this reason, a large number of Chinese loanwords are used in communicative translation.

It was integrated into English and gradually converted into normative English vocabulary, which promoted better communication and cooperation between China and the West. In recent years, China's position in foreign trade exchanges has gradually stabilized, and a large number of words with Chinese characteristics have emerged. Regardless of words, grammatical structures or phrases, they have had a great impact on cross-cultural communication.

At the same time, China's industry is getting better in cross-cultural communication translation. It has formed the introduction and similarities of culture, which has played a key role in promoting the development of the country's cultural undertakings. The gradual reform and innovation of culture, language and thinking environment in the new era not only brings great opportunities to the economy, society and science and technology of Chinese and Western countries, but also promotes gradual convergence and similarities of cultures of various countries.

In the historical evolution, China's cultural, economic, social, educational and technological development forces are good, and the exchanges between Chinese and Western countries are becoming more and more frequent. In cross-cultural communication, countries with different cultural backgrounds learn from each other. Experience and through diversification of translation channels have prompted a large influx of Western cultures into Eastern cultures, either in differences or similarities, or providing diverse ideas and methods for cross-cultural communication translation work. For example, 'democracy', 'science', 'socialism', 'capitalism', 'philosophy', 'logic' in Western social science writings, 'olive branch', 'sour grapes', 'film', 'radar', 'radio', 'camera' and 'vitamin'. In the development of the new era, the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures is reflected in the 'mix and match' of the organically formed English and Chinese vocabularies, which not only means that the economic and trade exchanges between China and the West are becoming more frequent and the values and worldviews are gradually unified, but that the cultures of both are further integrated.

CONCLUSION

The continuous popularization and development of cross-cultural communication translation makes cross-cultural communication translation occupies an important position in the international development. In the process of translation, translators should have an in-depth understanding of countries and regions with different cultural backgrounds and living customs, solve the existing differences well, and effectively integrate these existing differences. Only in this way could we promote the development of cross-cultural communication translation so that more cultures emerge in different countries. This will allow people to realize the great similarities of cross-cultural communication hence helps people to understand the cultural background and living customs of different countries and regions while laying the foundation for the development of society and the country.

Through the research of this paper, it is concluded that different countries have their own unique cultural systems, and the differences between Chinese and Western cultures will have different degrees of influence on cross-cultural communication translation. In this

regard, translators need to have an in-depth and comprehensive understanding and mastery of Chinese and Western cultures. In the process of translation, they should fully follow the principles of appropriateness and use scientific and reasonable translation methods to accurately express the true meaning to the audience, so as to strengthen the Chinese and Western cultures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Upon completion of this thesis, I would like to express my gratitude to my main supervisor Professor Dr. Salasiah Che Lah for her encouragement and patient supervision. Without her help, its completion would not be a smooth ride. Special thanks to my friends from China who offered me a lot of advice and gives me many constructive suggestions.

REFERENCES

- Apte, M. (1994). Language in sociocultural context. In R. E. Asher (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, 4, 2000-2010. *Pergamon Press*.
- Hall, T. (1976). *Beyond Culture*. New York: *Anchor Books*
- Gao, Y. C. (2003). The principle of appropriateness of empathy in intercultural communication. *Foreign Language and Foreign Language Teaching*.
- Ji, X.L. (2009). *Ji Xianlin on Translation*. Ji Xianlin Research Institute: *Contemporary China Press*.
- Oberg, K. (1960). Cultural shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical anthropology*, 7(4), 177-182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182966000700405>
- Lewis, T. J., & Jungman, R. E. (1986). *On being foreign: Culture shock in short fiction: an international anthology*. Yarmouth, Me.: Intercultural Press.
- Tang, J. (2022). Translation of Loaded words in Chinese tea culture from the perspective of intercultural communication. *Overseas English*, 30-31
- Yun Kim, Y. (1979). Toward an interactive theory of communication-acculturation. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 3(1), 435-453.
- Zhu, D.J. (2022). CE Translation from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication. *Journal of Xiang Yang Polytechnic*, 21(3), 109-112