



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation.

Chinese-English Translation Analysis of an Excerpt from the Book *Chinese Drum Music Studies*

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Article Info

ISSN (online): 2582-7138

Volume: 06

Issue: 02

March-April 2025

Received: 10-02-2025

Accepted: 12-03-2025

Page No: 1673-1677

Abstract

Translation is a cross-language and cross-cultural communication activity. Based on the background of spreading Chinese culture to the world, the author selected the section of gong and drum music used in Chinese opera in the book of *Chinese Drum Culture Studies* as the source text for her translation project. This report adopts the “Comprehension, Expression and Adaptation” framework to analyze the translation process. The practice report is divided into five parts. Part I introduces the background and significance of the translation task, Part II describes the overall translation process, and Part III is the analysis framework of “Comprehension, expression and adaptation” adopted in this translation practice report. Part IV analyzes the problems encountered in the translation process and solutions with the CEA framework. And Part V summarizes the gains and reflections in this translation practice.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMRGE.2025.6.2.1673-1677>

Keywords: Chinese opera music; gong and drum music; artistic function; performance form; traditional inheritance

Introduction

1. The Translation Task

A. The background of subject selection

At the beginning of the 21st century, to better inherit and promote the excellent Chinese culture, Chinese government put forward the policy of spreading Chinese culture all over the world. The symposium on promoting and developing outstanding traditional Chinese culture held in Beijing on November 14, 2024, further emphasized the importance of promoting the inheritance and development of outstanding traditional Chinese culture.

B. The source text

The source text chosen by the translator is section 4 in chapter 5 of the book *Chinese Drum Culture Studies* written by Pu Hengqiang and Yan Changhong.

It discusses the important position and artistic function of gong and drum music in Chinese opera music, the accompaniment of opera performance as well as an independent artistic expression form. The opera drum and gong music embellishes the atmosphere of drama, expresses the characters' emotions and promotes the development of the plot with distinct rhythm and strong sound effect. The chosen section lists the various functions of gong and drum music in opera: expression, emphasis, punctuation, unity, coordination, bridging, rendering, omission and prompt, etc., and discusses its close connection with singing, rhythmic reading, doing, acrobatic fighting and other means of expression in opera performance. The gong and drum music in opera has gradually become a unique art system after absorbing various elements from folk music and religious music. Traditional Chinese opera drum music is a typical representative of China's traditional music culture, carrying rich historical and cultural connotations. Therefore, this translation project is a good demonstration of studying, inheriting and spreading this art form overseas.

2. Translation Process

A. Preparation

After reading the source text, the student translator made some preparations for her translation. She analyzed the textual and linguistic features of the source text, especially the rich cultural information: culture-loaded words, technical terms of Chinese opera, poems, folk sayings cited in the article. To ensure thorough comprehension of the source text, the translator read reference materials on gong and drum music before translating for basic knowledge about opera gongs and drums. Then the translator studied the meanings of the special terms: “singing” and “military” scenes, dock (usually a cultural and economic center with relatively larger population), guild leader (president of the traditional Chinese opera industry association), leading beats, accompaniment styles, variations of various schools (流派), etc.

B. Translating and proofreading

After finishing the first draft, the writer read the whole translated text and adjusted the grammatical structures. To improve the cohesion and coherence of the text, the translator added some conjunctions according to the logical meaning of the source text in the second draft. The course of proofreading further strengthened the translator’s understanding of the source text, and helped the translator with the polishing process.

Subsequently, the translator communicated with her supervisor to solve difficult problems. According to the suggestions put forward by Professor Ji, the translator corrected the translation problems that she had ignored, further modified and polished the translation and completed the whole translation task.

3. Analysis Framework

A. The “comprehension, expression and adaptation” (CEA) framework

The “Comprehension, Expression and Adaptation” (CEA) framework proposed by Professor Li Changshuan was used to illustrate the translation process.

i. Comprehension

The hardest part of the translation is the understanding. (Li, 2020:21) The “comprehension” section shows how to

achieve “faithfulness”, focusing on the process, including the efforts to correct the original translation errors. It can be divided into several sections according to different standards. (Li, 2020:13) This part includes the understanding of the content and the language characteristics of the original text. And the translator’s understanding of the text content must be thorough and detailed, close to, reach or even exceed the level of the author. (Li, 2020:8)

In the report, the translator exemplifies how she dealt with the difficulties in comprehension by paying close attention to the professional terms and writings in classical Chinese and so forth.

ii. Expression

Li (2020:15) argues that the “Expression” section shows how to achieve “expressiveness”, focusing on linguistic logic and smoothness. The meaning of the original text should be expressed in full, without increasing, decreasing or distorting. The target text should conform to the language habits of target readers, without Chinglish or European Chinese. (2020: 26) All in all, the translator should faithfully convey the meanings of the original work and the author’s intentions in line with the expressing habits of English.(2020:8)

In the process of expression, the translator focuses on how to achieve “expressiveness”. In this report, the translator gives some examples to present how she attempted to tackle problems like converting the part of speech and choosing the proper translation methods, etc.

iii. Adaptation

To achieve “appropriateness,” original content and expression methods may be adjusted. Adaptation can better convey the original information when translating according to the original text word by word is not feasible. (2020:16) Adaptation depends on the translator’s understanding of the translation context, including the client’s requirements, differences in the social and cultural backgrounds of the source and target readers, and the usage scenarios of the translation. (2020: 8)

4. Case Analysis

A. Comprehension

i. Professional terms

Example 1:

terms	meaning	English Translation
文、武场面	传统戏曲乐队分为文场和武场，合称文、武场面	“singing” and “military” scenes
码头	商业、经济繁荣以及人口密集的地方	dock(usually a cultural and economic center with relatively larger population)
会首	戏曲行业协会的会长	guild leader (president of the traditional Chinese opera industry association)
打头	戏曲开场或段落衔接时由打击乐演奏的固定节奏套路	pre-performance and intermission drum beats
帮腔	有后台人员或乐师在演员唱段间隙接唱，形成主唱与伴唱的呼应	accompaniment singing
路子	戏曲表演的传承脉络与风格	variations of different schools(流派)

Analysis

It is necessary to find the meanings of these professional terms before translating and then ensure the accurate transmission of the cultural connotation. For example, “文、

武场面” should be “singing’ and “military” scenes. Similarly, “码头” cannot be simply translated as “dock”, but an explanation should be added.

Example 2:

ST	这些音乐形式,乃至整个戏曲构成中唱、做、念、打的每一方面,都离不开锣鼓乐的直接配合。
TT-1	These musical forms, and even every aspect of singing, acting, reciting, and <u>fighting</u> in the entire opera structure, cannot do without the direct accompaniment of gong and drum music.
TT-2	These musical forms, and even every aspect of singing, acting, reciting, and <u>acrobatic fighting</u> in the entire opera, cannot do without the direct accompaniment of gong and drum music.

Analysis

“打” in Chinese opera refers to fighting as well as various martial arts skills, figure performance and special effects.

Using “acrobatic fighting” to translate “打” highlights the technical and ornamental nature of the opera fighting scene.
ii. Background information

Example 3:

ST	“鼓是龙头钹是板,小锣舌头锣填眼”,“鼓指挥、锣引路、钹, 眼、小锣加花”(汉剧)。
TT-1	Therefore, folk sayings describe the performance of percussion instruments as the following:“The drum as the dragon head, cymbals as the beat-keeper, small gongs as the articulator, and large gongs light beat”; and “The drum conducts, gongs lead the way, cymbals give the light beats, while small gongs embellish.”(Han Opera)

Analysis

To translate these opera industry folk sayings, the translator should know that there are five major kinds of percussion instruments used in Chinese opera: the drum, the clapper, the large gong, the small gong, and the cymbals. The drum and clapper play a leading role. The large gong serves the function of “the brain.” The small gong plays the role of “the

heart”. The cymbals are usually positioned in the latter half of the beat to fill in the gaps. The strong beat in the opera percussion is called “板”, and light beat in it is called “眼”. The “舌头” in the saying means embellishment, making the sound of the big gong and the big drum more expressive.
iii. Writings in classical Chinese

Example 4:

ST	南宋诗人刘克庄诗《观社行》第一首:“边头刁斗幸小休,棚上鼓笛姑同乐。”
TT	Liu Kezhuang, a poet in Southern Song Dynasty, wrote in his poem “Watching Village Opera” (Poem I): “The border’s watch drums are silent. In the rare temporary peace people watch the village sacrificial play and enjoy drum and flute music.”

Analysis

Before translating, the background of the poem and its meaning should be understood accurately. The poet made a strong contrast between the border’s quietness and peoples’ joy. The key words for the translator are: “刁斗” a copper appliance in the military used in the border for cooking just

one person’s meal and sounding watches and patrolling; “小休” thanks to the temporary peace on the border; and“鼓笛” a symbol of folk celebration and accompaniment instruments for the village opera.

Example 5:

ST	杨燮的《锦城竹枝词》中记载:“玉泰班中薛打鼓, 滚珠洒豆妙难言, 少年健美多花点, 学向元宵打十番。”
TT	As documented in Yang Xie’s <i>Bamboo Branch Songs of Jincheng</i> :“In Yutai troupe, Mr.Xue’s drumming sounds like rolling pearls and scattering beans—a marvel beyond the description of any words. Eager youths admire his splendid drumming skills striving to master the ‘Shi Fan Drumming’ for Lantern Festival performances.”

Analysis

“玉泰班” is the name of a theater troupe or performance group, since ancient times, opera performance groups often added “班” after their names;“薛打鼓”refers a drum master whose family name is 薛;“花点” refers to the drumming skills and the sounds produced; “元宵” is the festival when

people offer various performances to thank the folk gods, including opera performances and dragon and lion dances, etc.;“打十番”: playing“ Shi Fan Drumming”, a kind of traditional folk drum music.

B. Expression

i. Adjusting the order of words

Example 6:

ST	京剧《雁荡山》全剧仅一、二百字的台词，几十分钟的剧情，主要是靠表演和打击乐的紧密配合来表现一场千军万马的水陆大战场面。
TT	<i>Yandang Mountain</i> , a Peking opera, which lasts about 40 minutes and has only less than two-hundred-word dialogue, conveys grand naval and land battle scenes with percussive accompaniment and physical acting of the characters.

Analysis

In Chinese, sentences are sometimes loosely organized. The meanings in the source text need to be adjusted according to English expression habits.

In the translation of this sentence, after selecting the main components, it is necessary to adjust the order of these

qualifiers: “一、二百字的台词”、“几十分钟的剧情”and “靠表演和打击乐的紧密配合”.

ii. Converting the part of speech

Example 7:

ST	它运用打击乐的轻与重、静与动、缓与急的演奏手法，以及人物夸张的表演,使观众完全相信这是一场黑暗中的打斗。
TT-1	It employs the techniques of <u>playing light and heavy, still and moving, slow and fast with percussion instruments</u> , as well as exaggerated performances by the characters, making the audience fully believe that this is a fight in the dark.
TT-2	It employs a variety of playing techniques of percussion instruments to <u>express lightness and heaviness, stillness and moving, slowness and fastness</u> , as well as exaggerated performances by the characters, showing the audience that this is a fight in the dark.

Analysis

Converting “light”“heavy”“still”“moving”“slow”“fast”into noun forms can make the translated sentence more

grammatical.

iii. Choosing the proper translation methods

Example 8:

ST	TT-1	TT-2
开打	Kai Da (combat scenes)	starting to fight (Kai Da开打)
亮相	Liang Xiang (make a stage pose)	making a stage pose (Liang Xiang亮相)
整冠	Zheng Guan (adjusting headgear)	adjusting headgear (Zheng Guan 整冠)
投袖	Tou Xiu (flicking sleeves)	flicking sleeves (Tou Xiu投袖)

Analysis

To help the target readers to understand, English annotations with pinyin and Chinese characters in the brackets are used to enhance cross-cultural understanding and improve the

readability of the target text.

C. Adaptation

i. Amplification

Example 9:

ST	据著名川剧鼓师王官福说，解放前品评一个戏班的优劣，十分注意鼓师的才能和场面人员的演奏技巧。
TT-1	According to the famous Sichuan opera drummer Wang Guanfu, <u>before the liberation</u> , the evaluation of a theatrical troupe’s quality paid great attention to the talent of the drummer and the playing skills of the stage personnel.
TT-2	According to the famous Sichuan opera drummer Wang Guanfu, <u>before the founding of People’s Republic of China(1949)</u> , the talent of the drummer and the playing skills of the stage personals are the important criteria to evaluate a theatrical troupe’s quality.

Analysis

The word “解放前” is a culture-loaded, referring to the

unique historical background of China. Therefore it should be translated as “Before the founding of People’s Republic of China (1949)”.

Example 10:

ST	……, 唱时·的笃、的笃·地敲打着拍子……·所以又叫·的笃戏”。
TT	When the performers are singing, these percussion instruments were struck to keep the rhythm with “di-du” sounds,...

Analysis

Chinese is a paratactic language. So long as the meaning can be understood, some sentence elements can be omitted. Sentences with no subjects often presuppose that the readers

know the subjects from the context. Therefore, in this sentence “performers” should be added as the subject for the English sentence.

ii. Division

Example 11:

ST	在中国民间音乐中有着深厚基础和传统的各种打击乐形式,为中国戏曲打击乐的形成发展奠定了雄厚的基础。
TT	Various percussion music forms, with a profound foundation and tradition in Chinese folk music, have laid a solid foundation for the formation and development of Chinese opera percussion.

Analysis

The translation divides the sentence into two parts through comma and inserts. And the causal relationship is clearly expressed with the use of comma.

Acknowledgments

1. This article is a phased achievement of the research project of *Teaching Research on Shanxi Drum Music Culture* (J20231097), sponsored by Shanxi Provincial Department of Education. Project leader: Prof. Ji Lingzhu
2. This paper is a phased achievement of the research project of *Research on Multimodal Spreading of Shanxi Anti-corruption Opera Culture* (2022YY143), sponsored by Shanxi Provincial Philosophy and Social Science Planning Office. Project leader: Prof. Ji Lingzhu

Conclusion

The translation of Section 4 in Chapter 5 of *Chinese Drum Culture Studies* has been a comprehensive and enlightening task involving linguistic transformation and cultural interpretation. The application of the CEA (Comprehension, Expression, and Adaptation) framework helped the translator analyse the complexities of translating a text rich in cultural and professional nuances.

Thorough understanding was crucial to ensure the accurate transmission of the original meaning of source text and its cultural connotation. In the comprehension process, the translator paid meticulous attention to professional terms, background information, and classical Chinese quotations. In the translation process, the translator tried to achieve clarity and coherence in the target language. Appropriate translation methods were employed, such as adjusting the word order and converting the part of speech. The translator tried to make the translated text as natural as possible. Adaptation played a significant role in bridging the cultural gap between the source and target languages. Techniques such as amplification and division were utilized.

The translation task has provided the translator with an opportunity to appreciate the Chinese opera percussion music and understand a translator's responsibility in cross cultural communication. She has gained valuable insights for translating culture-loaded materials. In the future, the translator will keep improving her proficiency level in both English and Chinese, enrich her source and target cultural knowledge to contribute her share to the international spreading of excellent Chinese culture.

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