On Translation Strategies for Cultural Relics Records: The Case of Shaanxi Cultural Relics Records

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Abstract: As a form of regional cultural documentation, local chronicles contain descriptions of local characteristics, including historical events, cultural traditions, and geographical features. They serve to convey regional information to readers while reflecting the diversity of local culture. The translation and dissemination of local chronicles can facilitate cross-cultural communication, enabling international audiences to better understand China's cultural diversity. This study examines the foreign translation strategies for *Shaanxi Cultural Relics Records* from the perspective of communicative translation theory, analyzing cultural factors and linguistic features. It explores potential cultural discrepancies and linguistic challenges in the translation process, aiming to propose effective strategies for translating Shaanxi's local chronicles.

Keywords: cultural relics records translation; Communicative Translation Theory; cross-cultural communication; Shaanxi cultural heritage

1. Introduction

In April 2020, during an inspection tour in Shaanxi Province, General Secretary Xi Jinping reflected on history and remarked with deep emotion: *"The earliest known inscription of the term 'China' was found on the bronze vessel He Zun, unearthed in Shaanxi."* He emphasized the need to strengthen the protection of cultural relics, promote China's outstanding traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture, cultivate and practice core socialist values, enhance the provision of public cultural products and services, and better meet the spiritual and cultural needs of the people.

As a natural historical museum, Shaanxi boasts profound cultural heritage and abundant historical relics: over 7.74 million movable cultural artifacts, 76 revolutionary memorial halls, and world-renowned historical and cultural sites such as the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor and the Terracotta Army, as well as the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda. The Mausoleum of the Yellow Emperor and the Yan'an Pagoda symbolize the national spirit, while four World Heritage Irrigation Structures—including the Zheng Guo Canal in Jingyang, the Three Weirs of Hanzhong, the Longshou Canal Ancient Irrigation System, and the Fengyan Terraces in Hanyin—have benefited countless generations.

From northern to southern Shaanxi, the land is dotted with the brilliance of human civilization. The province is home to 49,058 immovable cultural relics, including 268 under national key protection, 1,097 under provincial protection, and 3,590 under municipal or county-level protection. Additionally, it encompasses six state-level historical and cultural cities,

seven famous towns, three famous villages, and 30 traditional ancient villages.

Cultural translation and dissemination have become a major focus in global academia, representing a complex process involving information transmission, interpretation of meaning, and cultural representation. As a localized cultural record, local chronicles document regional characteristics, including historical events, cultural traditions, and geographical features, aiming to convey information about the area and reflect its cultural diversity. The translation and dissemination of local chronicles can facilitate cross-cultural exchange, enabling international readers to better understand China's cultural diversity.

2. Local Chronicles and Their Translation

Local chronicles, also known as *fangzhi*(方志), are comprehensive and systematic documentary records that detail the natural, political, economic, social, and cultural history and current conditions of a specific administrative region. They play a crucial role in the preservation and dissemination of Chinese culture.

Domestic research on local chronicles has primarily focused on compilation, revision, and folk culture studies. Ma Jingyi (2018) systematically examined issues in the editing and publishing processes of local chronicles from an editorial perspective, proposing corresponding solutions[1]. Chen Guang (2020) analyzed the characteristics of archival management and chronicle compilation, emphasizing the crucial role of archival systems in local history documentation[2]. Shen Songping (2021) investigated innovations in format, structure, content, and compilation methodologies during two nationwide chronicle revision campaigns in post-1949 China[3]. Recent scholarship has expanded to examine chronicle contents across different historical periods and regions, particularly addressing cultural dissemination (Liang Yunhua, 2021)[4], medical records (Xu Mancheng et al., 2021; Yao Yirou et al., 2022)[5,6], and historical/folk culture documentation (Li Xiaowen, 2022)[7].

Linguistic studies of Chinese local chronicles have also gained academic attention. Qiao Lizhi (2021) compiled and analyzed ethnic language materials from Yunnan and Guizhou chronicles during the Qing Dynasty and Republican era, identifying regional characteristics in distribution, orthography, phonetics, and semantics[8]. Tang Ziting (2021) established standardized descriptive protocols for linguistic documentation by addressing methodological issues in dialect records from Hunan-Hubei border regions, facilitating more accurate studies of Chinese dialects and minority languages[9]. Through systematic examination of 11,780 chronicles, Li Lan (2021) classified 8,370 linguistic records from 741 texts, creating a comprehensive index organized by China's 2016 provincial administrative divisions. This compilation of linguistic materials spanning six centuries (Ming Dynasty to Republican period) provides substantial data support for philological research in local chronicles[10].

Regarding the translation of Chinese local chronicles, Ba Zhaoxiang (2008) examined the historical transmission of Ming and Qing dynasty local gazetteers to Japan, providing a detailed analysis of the characteristics of their circulation in Japan[11]. Zheng Wei (2019) focused on the challenges and strategies in translating Chinese local chronicles, proposing an eco-translatology-based approach to enhance translation quality[12].

As a province renowned for its historical and cultural heritage, Shaanxi boasts an extensive collection of cultural relics. *The Cultural Relics Records of Shaanxi* meticulously document the province's significant historical resources, including key heritage sites such as the Banpo Neolithic Village, the Daming Palace ruins, the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor, the Xi'an Stele Forest, and the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda. Additionally, these records encompass Shaanxi's unique cultural, linguistic, and regional characteristics, holding substantial cultural value.

The international dissemination of cultural relics records serves as a vital means of promoting and preserving national heritage. Research on the translation strategies and cross-cultural communication of *The Cultural Relics Records of Shaanxi* carries significant academic and practical implications. Its findings can contribute to the excavation and transmission of Shaanxi's cultural legacy, foster intercultural understanding, and enhance regional image-building, thereby offering new pathways for the global dissemination of China's local cultures.

3. Characteristics of Cultural Relics Records Translation

Unlike literary works or journalistic reports, cultural relics records (文物志 , *wenwuzhi*) constitute a unique genre with distinct translation challenges due to their strong regional and historical particularities. These challenges primarily manifest in the following aspects:

3.1. Complex Cultural Connotations

Cultural relics records often contain rich historical and cultural information intrinsically linked to specific historical contexts, ethnic traditions, and regional cultures. For instance, the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor and the Terracotta Army reflect the military, political, and cultural achievements of the Qin Dynasty, while the Zhouyuan Site in Baoji embodies the origins and evolution of Zhou culture. Translators must accurately convey the cultural background of these artifacts to prevent misinterpretations arising from cultural discontinuities.

Regional cultural differences further complicate translation. Relics from northern Shaanxi, such as those from the Shimao Site, are closely associated with nomadic cultures, whereas artifacts from the Guanzhong Plain predominantly reflect agrarian traditions. Translators must avoid oversimplifying these nuanced cultural distinctions to preserve their inherent diversity.

3.2. Abundance of Specialized Terminology

Cultural relics records employ extensive domain-specific terminology, including architectural terms, artifact classifications, and ancient official titles. Translators must ensure not only accuracy but also consistency and standardization across different contexts. For example, in translating Shaanxi Museum artifacts, strategies such as lexical expansion, loan translation, and semantic adaptation are often employed to maintain terminological precision.

3.3. Diverse Textual Functions

The textual variety in cultural relics records—ranging from artifact descriptions and historical accounts to archaeological reports—demands tailored translation approaches. Artifact introductions should be concise yet supplemented with cultural annotations to facilitate comprehension by international visitors with varying backgrounds. Conversely, scholarly archaeological reports require stricter adherence to formal and precise translation norms.

3.4. Challenges of Culture-Specific Terms

A significant hurdle lies in translating culture-loaded terms, which lack direct equivalents in target languages. Translators must strike a balance between preserving original cultural connotations and ensuring accessibility for foreign audiences. For instance, the distinction between a Chinese painter's *zi* (字) and *hao* (号) —artistic sobriquets with no Western parallel—necessitates creative linguistic solutions to retain their cultural integrity.

3.5. Flexible Translation Strategies

Given the multifaceted nature of cultural relics records, no single translation strategy suffices. Translators must dynamically adapt their methods based on text type, stylistic requirements, and contextual demands. A holistic approach—considering linguistic, cultural, communicative, and audience-specific factors—is essential to effectively transmit the cultural essence embedded in these records.

This flexibility underscores the need for a multidisciplinary perspective, integrating translation purpose theory, cross-cultural communication principles, and audience analysis to optimize both accuracy and cultural resonance.

4. Translation Strategies for Cultural Relics Records

In the specialized field of cultural relics records translation, the selection of translation strategies and techniques must carefully account for textual characteristics, cultural connotations, and target audience receptivity to ensure the translated

work maintains both cultural authenticity and readability. Given these considerations, domestication strategies and related techniques prove particularly suitable, as they enable translators to maximize the target audience's accurate comprehension and acceptance of the source cultural information.

The following translation techniques demonstrate high applicability in the translation of cultural relics records:

4.1. Literal Translation / Direct Translation

Many culturally significant terms, proper nouns, or stylistically distinctive expressions in cultural relics records possess universally recognized meanings or require preservation of their original form. Literal translation effectively retains the source text's linguistic structure and cultural distinctiveness while offering target readers an "authentic" reading experience.

4.2. Cultural Adaptation

Culture-specific terms and concepts often lack direct equivalents in the target language. Through cultural adaptation, translators can convey core meanings using familiar target-language expressions or supplement necessary cultural context to mitigate cross-cultural barriers.

4.3. Amplification

Historical contexts, craftsmanship techniques, and cultural symbolism in cultural relics records frequently demand additional explanatory details. For instance, translating "唐三彩" (*Tang sancai*) as "Tang tri-colored glazed pottery" should be augmented with a brief note on its firing process and artistic significance to ensure audiences appreciate its cultural value.

4.4. Functional Equivalence

When direct lexical correspondences are unavailable, functionally or culturally equivalent expressions can bridge the gap. For example, "鼎" (*ding*) might be rendered as "ritual bronze tripod cauldron" to approximate its ceremonial and utilitarian roles.

4.5. Compensation

Inevitable cultural losses in translation can be offset by strategically embedding compensatory information elsewhere in the text. This technique preserves the original's cultural integrity while maintaining reader comprehension.

4.6. Semantic Condensation

Redundant descriptions or repetitive information may be distilled to their essence, enhancing conciseness without sacrificing key content. For example, lengthy archaeological typologies could be streamlined for readability.

4.7. Transposition

Structural differences between Chinese and Western languages often necessitate grammatical or syntactical reorganization. Passive constructions or nominalizations may be converted into more natural target-language patterns.

4.8. Modulation

Adjustments in tone or perspective (e.g., shifting from impersonal to reader-friendly phrasing) can align the translation with target-audience expectations without altering substantive meaning.

These eight techniques collectively address the challenges of cultural relics records translation by minimizing cultural and linguistic obstacles, thereby ensuring accurate transmission of historical and cultural values. However, successful translation requires flexible, context-driven combinations of these methods tailored to specific textual content and communicative purposes. Crucially, balancing cultural fidelity with readability and scholarly rigor remains the cornerstone

of effective cultural relics records translation.

Ultimately, translators must function as cultural mediators—leveraging strategic adaptations to make specialized knowledge accessible while preserving the unique identity of China's material heritage in global discourse.

5. The Application Value of Communicative Translation Theory in the Translation of Cultural Relics Records

Peter Newmark advocated for the museum industry to prioritize multilingual translation and strive for idiomatic language expression. He once remarked, *"Translation, as a subject of public interest in EU and national conferences, should be equally reflected in museums and art galleries*[13].*"* In September 1992, Newmark criticized the lack of translated labels at the Reims Museum of Fine Arts, stating, *"Providing multilingual brochures, leaflets, and manuals in public spaces like museums is as essential as requiring specialized skills in architecture* [14].*"* These comments underscore Newmark's emphasis on multilingual translation in museum texts, particularly in the linguistic adaptation of cultural relics for international audiences.

As previously discussed, various translation strategies and techniques guided by Skopos Theory can be effectively applied to the translation of cultural relics records. Similarly, within the framework of Communicative Translation Theory, several techniques prove particularly suitable for this genre. These can be summarized as follows:

5.1. Textual Restructuring Techniques

Guided by Communicative Translation Theory, textual restructuring involves reorganizing and adjusting sentences or paragraphs according to the expressive conventions and discourse structures of the target language. This ensures the translated text achieves a communicative effect similar to that of the source text in the target culture. This technique primarily includes **consolidation** and **division.**.

a. Consolidation refers to merging scattered information or multiple sentences from the source text into a single sentence or paragraph to enhance coherence and logical flow. For instance, the source text may contain several short sentences describing different aspects of an artifact (e.g., historical context, craftsmanship, and cultural significance). In the target language, these details might be more effectively conveyed in a unified passage. Consolidation reduces fragmentation, making the translation more concise and natural.

Example:

Source text: *"这件青铜器出土于商代晚期""它采用了复杂的铸造工艺""象征着古代王权的威严"*

Translated text: This bronze artifact, dating to the late Shang Dynasty, showcases intricate casting techniques and symbolizes the majesty of ancient royal authority.

b. Division involves breaking down long or complex sentences into shorter, more digestible units to align with target-language readability norms. Some languages favor lengthy sentences, while others prioritize brevity.

Example:

Source text: *"这件陶俑高约30厘米，出土于唐代，采用了三彩工艺，色彩鲜艳，造型生动，反映了唐代的审美风格"*

Translated text: This pottery figurine stands approximately 30 cm tall and was excavated from the Tang Dynasty. It employs the *sancai*(tri-colored) glaze technique, characterized by vibrant hues and dynamic forms. Its design epitomizes the Tang Dynasty's aesthetic style.

The essence of textual restructuring lies in flexibly adapting the source text's expression to the discourse norms and reader expectations of the target language. This technique not only enhances the translation's fluency and accessibility but also ensures its communicative effectiveness, allowing the target audience to engage with the content as intended.

Communicative Translation Theory provides a robust foundation for addressing the unique challenges of cultural relics records translation[15]. By employing techniques like consolidation and division, translators can bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, ensuring that specialized knowledge is both accurately conveyed and readily comprehensible to international

audiences. This approach aligns with Newmark's vision of multilingual accessibility, fostering cross-cultural appreciation of China's material heritage while maintaining scholarly rigor and cultural fidelity.

Ultimately, the strategic application of these methods underscores the translator's dual role as a cultural mediator and a communicative facilitator, enabling global audiences to connect with the rich historical narratives embedded in cultural relics records.

5.2. Semantic Transformation Techniques

Within the framework of Communicative Translation Theory, semantic transformation techniques involve adapting and converting the meaning of the source text according to the expressive conventions of the target language and the needs of the target audience, thereby achieving the intended pragmatic and communicative effects. These techniques primarily include **transliteration**, **transliteration-translation combination**, **annotation**, and **creation of new elements**.

a. Transliteration

This method involves directly transcribing the pronunciation of source-language words or phrases into the target language. It is commonly used for proper nouns, brand names, or culture-specific terms. For Example, the term "*唐三彩*" can be transliterated as *"Tang Sancai"* to preserve its cultural distinctiveness.

b. Transliteration-Translation Combination

This approach blends transliteration with translation, retaining the original pronunciation while conveying its meaning. For example, "*唐三彩*" could be rendered as *"Tang Sancai (Tri-colored Glazed Pottery of the Tang Dynasty)"*, maintaining phonetic authenticity while clarifying its significance.

c.Annotation

Annotations provide explanatory notes within or alongside the translation to elucidate cultural context or specialized terminology. For example, for "*青铜器*" (*qingtongqi*, "bronze ware"), an annotation might be added: *"Bronze ware, ritually and functionally significant in ancient China, symbolized power and social status."* This bridges cultural gaps by compensating for the absence of equivalent concepts in the target language.

d. Creation of New Elements

When a culture-specific term lacks a direct counterpart, translators may creatively devise new expressions rooted in the target language's linguistic norms. This technique enriches the target lexicon while facilitating cross-cultural understanding. For example, the ancient casting technique "*失蜡法*" (*shila fa*), which has no precise equivalent in English, could be adapted as "lost-wax casting technique." This translation not only accurately conveys the technical process but also aligns with established English terminology in metallurgy and art history, thereby ensuring clear comprehension among English-speaking audiences while maintaining the term's cultural specificity.

The essence of semantic transformation lies in flexibly adapting source-text semantics to optimize communicative efficacy for the target audience. By judiciously employing these techniques, translators can balance cultural authenticity with readability, ensuring that specialized or culture-bound content resonates effectively across linguistic boundaries.

In conclusion, these methods collectively empower translators to navigate the complexities of cultural relics records, where precision and cultural fidelity are paramount. Whether through phonetic preservation, hybrid translations, contextual annotations, or innovative coinages, the goal remains consistent: to make China's material heritage accessible and meaningful to global audiences while fostering intercultural dialogue.

This approach not only adheres to Newmark's advocacy for functional equivalence but also exemplifies how translation serves as a dynamic conduit for shared cultural appreciation.

5.3. Cultural Transformation Techniques

Within the framework of Communicative Translation Theory, cultural transformation techniques refer to the translator's adaptation and conversion of cultural elements in the source text based on the target language's cultural background and the needs of the target audience, aiming to achieve the pragmatic effect and communicative function of the translation. The core of this technique lies in cultural adaptation - ensuring the translated text can be accepted and understood within the

target culture while preserving the original cultural connotations as much as possible.

The implementation of cultural transformation techniques requires translators to possess profound understanding of both the source and target cultures. During the translation process, translators may encounter cultural differences between the two systems, including variations in customs, values, historical backgrounds, etc. To achieve effective communication in the target cultural context, translators need to make appropriate adjustments to these cultural elements.

A common approach to cultural transformation is **Cultural Domestication**, which involves replacing cultural elements in the source text with more familiar equivalents in the target culture. In the translation of cultural relics records, certain cultural symbols like the " 龙 *(dragon)* " may be perceived as evil in Western cultures while symbolizing power and auspiciousness in Chinese culture. Translators may substitute the "dragon" with more recognizable symbols in Western culture, such as "lion" or "eagle," to facilitate the target readers' comprehension of its symbolic meaning.

Another method is **Cultural Annotation**, where explanatory notes are added to the translation to clarify the cultural context of the source text. For instance, when translating the element of "dragon", a note could be added: "In Chinese culture, the dragon is a mythological creature symbolizing power, wisdom, and good fortune." This approach helps target readers better understand the cultural connotations while preserving the cultural distinctiveness of the original text.

Furthermore, translators may employ **Cultural Omission** by eliminating cultural details deemed unimportant for the target audience. For example, cultural relics records might contain peripheral cultural descriptions unrelated to the main theme. Depending on the purpose of translation and readers' needs, translators may appropriately omit such content to prevent information overload.

The essence of cultural transformation techniques lies in achieving the adaptability of the translated text within the target culture while maintaining the original cultural connotations. Through methods like cultural domestication, annotation, and omission, translators can build bridges between different cultures, enabling the translated text to fulfill communicative functions similar to the source text in the target cultural context. These techniques not only facilitate cross-cultural communication but also promote mutual understanding and respect between cultures.

In conclusion, Communicative Translation Theory adopts a reader-centered approach, emphasizing the communicative function and cultural adaptability of translations. In the translation of cultural relics records, this theory helps translators better address challenges posed by culture-loaded terms and specialized terminology. By flexibly employing annotations, amplification, cultural notes, and other means, translators can effectively supplement cultural background information, eliminate reading barriers for target audiences, thereby enhancing the readability and communicative effectiveness of translations. Simultaneously, the theory's emphasis on textual coherence and naturalness significantly contributes to improving the overall quality of cultural relics records translations.

6. Conclusion

This study examines translation strategies for Shaanxi Cultural Relics Records through Communicative Translation Theory, addressing challenges in cultural-specific terms and specialized terminology. The proposed techniques—textual restructuring, semantic transformation, and cultural adaptation—balance accuracy with accessibility while preserving cultural authenticity. Findings highlight translators' role as cultural mediators in global heritage discourse. The research contributes practical solutions for cross-cultural communication and enriches methodologies for translating regional chronicles. Future studies could explore multimodal dissemination or audience reception. Ultimately, this work supports China's efforts to share its cultural heritage globally, fostering intercultural understanding in an interconnected world.

Funding

(2) Xi'an Fanyi University Horizontal Research Project "Research on Multimodal International Communication Strategies for the Integration of Xi'an Intangible Cultural Heritage and Tourism," (Project No. 25XYH098.)

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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