

# **A Study Of The English Translation Strategies Employed For Chinese Commentary In Museums**

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## **Abstract**

*Museums serve as crucial platforms for cultural dissemination and exchange, and the quality of the translations of commentaries directly impacts foreign visitors' understanding and acceptance of Chinese culture. This paper aims to explore strategies for translating Chinese museum interpretation into English. By analyzing the characteristics, translation difficulties, and corresponding solutions of museum commentaries, this paper proposes some practical methods applicable to the English translation of Chinese museum commentaries from the lexical, syntactic, textual, and cultural imagery levels, with the goal of improving the quality of English translations of Chinese museum commentaries and promoting the international dissemination of Chinese culture.*

**Keywords:** *Museums, commentaries in Chinese, English translation strategies*

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## **I. Introduction**

As a treasure house of human civilization, museums are not only important institutions for collecting, protecting and researching cultural heritage, but also important places for disseminating scientific and cultural knowledge, improving the quality of the people and enriching people's cultural life. In recent years, China's economic power and international political status have greatly improved. Museums across the country have become important carriers for displaying Chinese history and culture. Museums represent the local historical and cultural atmosphere, and can also invisibly reflect the spiritual culture of a country, region and city. Today's museums are not only places for local people to learn, educate and entertain, but also Windows for domestic and foreign tourists to learn about Chinese history and appreciate the splendid Chinese culture. Bilingual explanations of cultural relics in museums have also become an important link between Chinese and foreign cultural exchanges. How to accurately describe the exhibition cultural relics, convey the profound cultural connotation, and better play the cultural function of the museum cultural relics publicity and communication has become the primary task of translators.<sup>[1]</sup> In order to better introduce Chinese history and culture to foreign visitors, many Chinese museums have adopted bilingual commentaries in both Chinese and English to enhance the visiting experience of foreign visitors and serve as an important window for displaying Chinese culture. However, it is not an easy task to translate Chinese explanations in museums into English, which requires translators not only to have a solid language foundation, but also to have a deep understanding of the cultural background and historical connotation of the exhibits, so as to ensure the accuracy, fluency and effectiveness of cultural transmission. Therefore, it is of great significance to explore the English translation strategies of Chinese commentary in museums.

## **II. Characteristics Of Chinese Commentary In Museums**

### **Rich Professional Vocabulary**

The museum's exhibitions cover many disciplines, such as history, archaeology, art, and natural science, so the Chinese commentary contains a large number of professional words. These words not only have a specific meaning and usage, but also often carry a deep historical and cultural background.

For example, in the introduction of ancient bronzes, the commentary will involve “铭文”“纹饰”“铸造工艺” and other professional terms; When introducing modern science and technology exhibits, cutting-edge science and technology words such as “量子计算”“人工智能”“纳米技术” will be involved. The accurate transmission of these professional words is crucial for the audience to understand the exhibition content.

### **Profound Cultural Image**

In the museum, not only contains material cultural heritage, but also contains rich spiritual cultural heritage. Chinese commentary usually conveys the cultural connotation and symbolic meaning behind the exhibits to the audience through the description and explanation of the words.

For example, when introducing traditional Chinese painting, the commentary will emphasize such aesthetic concepts as “意境”“笔墨”“气韵生动”. In the introduction of folk arts and crafts, it will highlight its “民俗特色”“地域文化” and other cultural images. The transmission of these cultural intentions not only helps the audience to deeply understand the cultural value of the exhibits, but also stimulates the audience's interest and love for traditional culture. However, due to the differences and uniqueness between different cultures, the cross-language conversion of cultural images is often a challenging task.

### **Diverse Language Styles**

The language style of the Chinese commentary in the museum is diverse due to the different exhibition content and target audience. Some commentaries use a rigorous, academic language style to convey scientific knowledge and historical facts; Some use vivid and vivid language styles to enhance the audience's viewing experience and emotional resonance. In addition, the commentary will be personalized according to the characteristics of the exhibits and the theme of the exhibition, such as anthropomorphic techniques, figurative techniques, etc., to make the commentary more vivid and interesting.

### **Significant Differences In Audiences**

The museum has a wide audience, including people of different ages, occupations, cultural backgrounds and interests. Therefore, when translating Chinese commentary, it is necessary to fully consider the differences and needs of the audience. For young audiences, translators should use concise and easy to understand English expressions; For professionals and scholars, in-depth and academic English expressions should be adopted; For foreign tourists and English lovers, accurate and fluent English translation or bilingual control should be provided to meet their language needs and cultural exchange needs. At the same time, translators also need to pay attention to maintaining the accuracy and integrity of the original text to ensure translation quality.

## **III. Difficulties In Translating Chinese Commentary In Museums**

### **Translation of Professional Vocabulary**

Museum commentaries often involve a large number of specialized words, often with specific historical, cultural and scientific backgrounds.

For example, the name, material, process, texture and dynasty number of ancient artifacts need special attention in translation. These words may have a clear meaning and usage in Chinese, but they may not find an

exact equivalent in English.

In Chinese language, 云锦 (yunjin), refers to a silk fabric with a unique process and texture. If it is only translated as "Yun Brocade", it may not accurately convey its cultural connotation and technological characteristics. Therefore, it is necessary to combine the material, process and texture information in translation for more detailed description and explanation.

In addition, the museum commentary may also involve some scientific terms and concepts, such as geology, biology, physics, etc. The translation of these terms also needs to be accurate and professional to ensure that the audience can correctly understand the relevant information of the exhibits.

### **Transmission of Cultural Images**

Museum commentaries often contain rich cultural images, which are an important part of Chinese language and culture. However, in the process of translation, these cultural images are often difficult to convey directly to foreign audiences.

For example, the cultural image of “四神” (sishen) in Chinese refers to four kinds of gods, namely the green dragon, the white tiger, the Suzaku and the basalt, which represent the four directions of east, west, north and south respectively. If it is only transliterated as "Sishen", it may not be able to make foreign audiences understand its cultural connotation and symbolic meaning. Therefore, the translation needs to combine the source, shape and meaning of the information, for more detailed explanation and explanation.

In addition, the museum commentary may also involve some cultural elements with Chinese characteristics, such as poetry, couplets, idioms and so on. The translation of these elements also needs to take into account the transmission of cultural images to ensure that foreign audiences can correctly understand and appreciate the beauty and meaning contained in these cultural elements.

### **Maintenance of Language Style**

The language style of museum commentary often has specific characteristics and requirements. For example, the captions of some history museums may be more solemn and formal; The commentary of some art museums may be more vivid and vivid. In the process of translation, how to maintain the language style of the original text is an important difficulty.

On the one hand, translators need to deeply understand the linguistic characteristics and style of the original text, including diction, sentence pattern, tone and so on. On the other hand, translators also need to make appropriate adjustments and transformations according to the characteristics of the target language and the acceptance habits of the audience. For example, when translating some vivid commentaries, the translator may need to adopt more vivid and vivid expressions to attract the audience's attention and interest. However, when translating some solemn and formal commentaries, translators need to adopt more rigorous and formal expressions to reflect the authority and accuracy of the original text.

### **Adding Related Information**

In the process of translation, museum commentaries often need to be appropriately supplemented and modified according to the actual situation. This is because Chinese commentaries may have been written with the cultural background and knowledge level of Chinese readers in mind, but this background knowledge and information may not be familiar to foreign audiences when translated into English.

In addition, it is necessary to pay attention to some details in the translation process, such as the use of punctuation marks and the expression of numbers. Although these details may seem trivial, they may affect the audience's understanding and acceptance of the commentary.

#### **IV. English Translation Strategies Of Museum Chinese Commentary**

##### **Translation Strategies at the Lexical Level**

###### **Combination of Literal Translation and Free Translation**

Literal translation can preserve the semantic features and expression of the original text, so that the translation has exotic flavor and cultural characteristics. However, due to the differences in vocabulary, grammar and cultural background between Chinese and English, literal translation sometimes makes the translation difficult to understand or ambiguous. Therefore, in the process of translation, it is necessary to flexibly use the combination of literal translation and free translation. For example, “青铜器”(qingtongqi) can be literally translated as "bronze ware", but in order to better convey its cultural characteristics, it can be freely translated as "bronze vessel", because "vessel" in English usually refers to a vessel for holding liquid or solid, which is closer to the function of bronze ware [2].

###### **Harmony Between Domestication and Foreignization**

The domestication strategy emphasizes the transformation of the cultural information of the source language into the cultural information of the target language, so that the translation is easier to understand and accept. The alienation strategy focuses on preserving the uniqueness of the source language and culture, so that readers can feel the charm of the foreign culture. In the translation of museum Chinese commentary, domestication and foreignization strategies should be coordinated. For example, “龙”symbolizes authority and auspiciousness in Chinese culture, but in Western culture, "dragon" is often associated with evil and ferocity. Therefore, when translating “龙”, the domestication strategy can be adopted to translate it as "loong" (an English word specifically used to refer to Chinese dragons) to avoid cultural misunderstandings. At the same time, cultural relics with Chinese characteristics, such as “玉璧”(yubi), can be directly translated into "jade disk" by foreignizing strategy to retain their cultural characteristics.

##### **Translation Strategies At The Syntactic Level**

###### **Adjust Sentence Structure**

In the process of word order expression, Chinese usually narrates first and then expresses itself, while English expresses first and then narrates.<sup>[3]</sup> The former tend to focus on parataxis and have a looser structure; While the latter pays attention to form, the structure is more rigorous. Therefore, in the process of translation, it is necessary to adjust the sentence structure of the Chinese commentary to adapt to the English expression habits. For example, a long sentence might appear in a Chinese commentary: “这件青铜器制作精美，纹饰繁复，体现了古代工匠的高超技艺。” In translation, it can be divided into two short sentences: “This bronze vessel is exquisitely crafted with intricate decorations, reflecting the superb skills of ancient craftsmen. "This kind of translation is more in line with English expression habits.

###### **Use the Passive Voice**

The passive voice is often used in English, especially when describing things or phenomena. Therefore, the passive voice can be used appropriately to enhance the objectivity and accuracy of the translation when translating the Chinese commentary in the museum. For example, “这件文物被发掘于汉代墓葬中。”It can be translated as "This artifact was unearthed from a Han Dynasty tomb." Such a translation is more in line with English expression habits.

## **Translation Strategies at the Discourse Level**

### **Consistency**

Textual coherence is one of the important measures of translation quality. When translating the Chinese commentary of the museum, it is necessary to ensure that the translation is logically coherent and complete in content. This requires the translator to deeply understand the original text and accurately grasp its internal logical relations. For example, when describing a series of artifacts, it is necessary to ensure that the translation clearly reflects the chronological order, spatial relationships or functional connections between these artifacts. The coherence of the translation can be enhanced by the use of connectives, pronouns and other means.

### **Focus on Contextual Adaptability**

Context adaptability refers to the applicability and appropriateness of a translation in a specific context. When translating the Chinese commentary of the museum, factors such as the cultural background, cognitive level and interest point of the target audience should be considered to ensure that the translation can arouse their resonance and interest. For example, when introducing cultural relics with local characteristics, some background information or explanations related to the cultural background of the target audience can be appropriately added to enhance the attractiveness and readability of the translation.

## **Transmission Strategies of Cultural Images**

### **Retain Cultural Characteristics**

The Chinese commentary of the museum often contains rich cultural images and symbolic meanings. In the process of translation, it is necessary to preserve these cultural characteristics as much as possible to show the unique charm of Chinese culture. For example, “玉” has great symbolic significance in Chinese culture, representing purity, nobility and auspiciousness. When translating cultural relics commentaries involving “玉”, the foreignization strategy can be adopted to translate them directly into "jade" and appropriately add some explanations to explain its unique status and significance in Chinese culture <sup>[4]</sup>.

### **Proper Explanation**

For cultural relics or cultural phenomena with strong cultural deposits, it is necessary to add some explanations in translation to help the target audience better understand the cultural connotation and symbolic significance behind them. For example, in the introduction of “青铜器”, you can add some explanations about its production technology, historical background and historical value; In the introduction of “玉璧”, we can explain its use and symbolic significance in ancient Chinese society. Such translation not only helps the target audience to better understand the cultural relics themselves, but also deepens their knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture.

## **V. Case Study**

The following is a museum's commentary on ancient jade and its English translation. Taking it as an example, this paper analyzes the English translation strategy of the museum's Chinese commentary.

“这件玉器名为‘玉璧’，是古代人们用于祭祀和礼仪活动的重要器物。它呈圆形，中间有一圆孔，象征着天圆地方。玉璧的质地温润细腻，色泽温润如脂，给人以宁静祥和之感。在古代，玉璧被视为吉祥之物，能够辟邪驱凶、保平安。此外，玉璧还常常作为贵族之间的馈赠礼品，象征着尊贵和友谊。”

“This jade artifact is called ‘Yubi’, an important vessel used in ancient sacrificial and ceremonial activities. It is circular in shape with a central hole, symbolizing the concept of ‘heaven being round and earth being square’. The texture of the Yubi is smooth and delicate, with a warm and greasy luster, giving people a sense of tranquility

and harmony. In ancient times, the Yubi was regarded as an auspicious object capable of warding off evil and bringing peace. Additionally, it was often given as a gift among aristocrats, symbolizing nobility and friendship.”

First, the professional word “玉璧” is accurately transliterated as "Yubi" and retains its unique cultural connotation. At the same time, by explaining its use and symbolic meaning, readers can have a deeper understanding of this specialized term.

Second, the cultural image of “天圆地方” is literally translated as "heaven being round and earth being square" and retains its original meaning. At the same time, through the explanation and explanation of the context, readers can understand the importance of this cultural image in ancient Chinese culture.

Third, the English translation maintains the concise language style of the Chinese commentary and avoids the lengthy and complex sentence structure. At the same time, proper vocabulary selection and sentence arrangement can make English translation more in line with English expression habits.

Fourth, in the process of translation, the translator appropriately added explanations about the status and symbolic significance of jade in ancient Chinese culture to help foreign audiences better understand the cultural connotation and historical background of the exhibits.

## VI. Conclusion

The English translation of museum Chinese commentary is a complicated and meticulous task, which requires the translator to have a solid language foundation, profound cultural deposits and rich professional knowledge. By adopting accurate word translation, flexible syntactic processing, coherent discourse construction and effective cultural image transmission strategies, the English translation quality of museum Chinese commentaries can be ensured, and the international dissemination of Chinese culture can be promoted. At the same time, translators should continue to learn and practice, improve their translation level and cultural literacy, in order to meet the new needs of international communication of museum culture.

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