
C-E TRANSLATION OF MUSEUM TEXTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RELEVANCE THEORY: WITH TEXTS OF HENAN MUSEUM AS EXAMPLES**Yuxuan Ma**

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ABSTRACT

In the context of globalization, museums have emerged as pivotal platforms for the dissemination of Chinese traditional culture. The translation of museum texts plays a crucial role in facilitating cross-cultural communication. Under the guidance of Relevance Theory, this paper aims to study the translation strategies of museum texts through a case study of the Henan Museum. The paper aims to explore how translators can achieve optimal relevance to assist target audiences in better understanding cultural information contained in the source text. This study explores the differences between Chinese and English museum texts, such as the differences in the names of cultural relics, differences in the introduction of cultural relics, and differences in structure and content of museum texts and it explores the translation strategies for museum texts, which mainly include literal translation, transliteration plus explanation, and free translation with the texts of Henan Museum as examples. Under the guidance of the Relevance Theory, translators should flexibly employ translation strategies to produce high-quality translations that accurately convey Chinese traditional culture, thereby enhancing cross-cultural understanding and communication.

Keywords: Translation Strategies; Museum Texts; Relevance Theory; Henan Museum.

1. INTRODUCTION

As key repositories of traditional culture, museums are instrumental in disseminating Chinese cultural values. Consequently, in an era of globalization, the translation of museum texts is crucial for facilitating foreign audiences' understanding of cultural relics and promoting cross-cultural comprehension.

Henan province is widely recognized as the cradle of Chinese civilization, boasting splendid Chinese culture. Henan Museum is one of the most comprehensive museums in China. It stands as one of China's oldest and most prestigious cultural institutions, housing over 170,000 cultural relics that span 5,000 years of Chinese civilization. The museum serves not only as a showcase of Chinese traditional culture, but also as a vital recorder of Chinese history, presenting the development of Chinese civilization.

With globalization, countries around the world have close economic and cultural connections. Against this backdrop, the translation of museum texts is the cornerstone of cultural communication between China and the world. High-quality translation of museum texts plays an important role in the transmission of Chinese culture and is an important way to show China's prosperous culture to foreign countries and improve China's cultural influence. Chinese museum texts contain rich traditional Chinese knowledge, such as terminology of cultural relics, poetic language and style, as well as long and difficult sentences, which are considerable challenges in translation. To address these challenges, translators not only need a

sufficient knowledge base, but also need to figure out the intention of the source text from the language level and the cultural level and generate translation based on the cultural acceptance of the target audience.

Relevance Theory provides a theoretical framework for translators, enabling them to maximize contextual effects and minimize processing efforts. By doing so, it contributes to both elevating translation quality and serving as an effective conduit for promoting Chinese traditional culture on the world stage.

Therefore, taking museum texts of the Henan Museum as an example, this paper will have a study of the translation strategies, such as literal translation, transliteration, free translation and adaptation, from the perspective of Relevance Theory.

2. RELEVANCE THEORY AND MUSEUM TRANSLATION

This part will make an introduction of the Relevance Theory and previous studies on the translation of museum texts. The first part will introduce the Relevance Theory, focusing on two important concepts in Relevance Theory: ostensive-inferential communication and optimal relevance. The second part will introduce foreign and domestic studies on the translation of museum texts from three sections: the first section will briefly introduce the foundation of the translation of museum texts; the second section will introduce the studies on the translation of names of cultural relics; and the third section will mainly be about the studies on the translation strategies of museum texts.

2.1 Relevance Theory

Relevance Theory, a cognitive pragmatics theory of human communication, was developed in the mid-1980s by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in their book *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Since then, it has become a highly influential theory in today's pragmatics and has been applied to many types of discourse and research areas within pragmatics.

Relevance Theory views language as a reasoning process. According to the theory, human communicative behavior is based on cognitive context and implicit meaning. People convey their communicative intention to the audience through discourse, while the audience decodes and reasons under the guidance of Relevance Theory by combining the information conveyed by the discourse and the relevant contextual information, and finally realizes the cognition of the communicator's communicative intention.

Ernst August Gutt, a student of Sperber and Wilson, studied translation on the basis of Relevance Theory, and in 1991, he published *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*, in which Gutt studied the application of Relevance Theory in the field of translation, which plays an important role in guiding translation. Gutt (2004) views translation as an act of communication between the translator and the target audience. Relevance Theory has an important guiding role for translation, providing a new perspective for translation. In Relevance Theory, the concepts ostensive-inferential communication and optimal relevance are valuable to understanding how meaning is conveyed and interpreted in human communication and will be discussed in this part.

2.1.1 Ostensive-inferential communication

In Relevance Theory, ostensive-inferential communication is a fundamental concept that explains how communication functions as a dynamic interplay between the speaker's explicit signaling (ostension) and the listener's cognitive interpretation (inference). Proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1986) and later expanded by Ernst August Gutt in translation, ostensive-

inferential communication emphasizes that successful communication depends on the mutual pursuit of the balance between ostension and inference. As noted by Gutt (2004, p.190),

“Ostensive communication is an asymmetrical process — it is the communicator’s responsibility to ensure that the audience can recognize his informative intention. Since the translator is an ostensive communicator, too, this means that the responsibility for avoiding misunderstandings and other communication breakdowns in translation lies with him.”

Gutt extends ostensive-inferential communication to translation, arguing that it involves two processes. The first process is that the translator infers the original author’s intention from the source text. The second process is that the translator creates a target text that allows the audience to infer the same intention.

2.1.2 Optimal relevance

Gutt argues that translation is a relevance-seeking activity, with optimal relevance serving as the foundational principle in Relevance Theory. He emphasizes that successful translation depends on the mutual pursuit of optimal relevance—the balance between processing efforts and contextual effects. As noted by Gutt (2004, p.31-32),

“The central claim of relevance theory is that human communication crucially creates an expectation of optimal relevance, that is, an expectation on the part of the hearer that his attempt at interpretation will yield adequate contextual effects at minimal processing cost.”

That is to say, the translator needs to produce adequate contextual effects to ensure that the audience doesn’t have to take too much unnecessary effort to understand the intention of the text. The translator’s role is to ensure that the target text meets the audience’s expectations for optimal relevance. There are two primary requirements for a translator to achieve this. First, the translator must preserve the contextual effects of the source text. Second, the translator should minimize the audience’s processing effort. This can be done by avoiding obscure cultural references and complex syntax, making the text more accessible to the audience.

Optimal relevance guides the translator in selecting the option that best balances effort and effect for the target audience. For instance, if a source text contains a cultural reference that is unfamiliar to the target audience, the translator must decide how to handle it. They may make one of these three options: translate the source text literally, which could require additional effort from the audience to grasp its meaning; translate the source text by explanation, which would provide additional context but might disrupt the narrative flow; replace the culture of the source text with a similar cultural reference from the target culture, which may maintain the intended effect but alter the original content.

2.2 Previous studies on the translation of museum texts

Some foreign scholars have done research on the translation of museum texts. Robert Neather (2012) examines how texts interact within bilingual museum exhibition spaces in his paper “Intertextuality, Translation, and the Semiotics of Museum Presentation: The Case of Bilingual Texts in Chinese Museums”. Marie-Noëlle Guillot (2014) explores issues of interlingual and intercultural transfer in museum texts from a cross-cultural pragmatics perspective in “Cross-Cultural Pragmatics and Translation: The Case of Museum Texts as

Interlingual Representation”. Neather (2021) argues that translation in museums can be understood on two levels: the interlingual level and the cultural level.

Domestic studies on the translation of museum texts have been conducted primarily from three perspectives. First, Mu Shanpei (1991), a pioneer in the translation of museum texts, establishes fundamental principles for the translation of museum texts and cultural relics. He argues that the translation of cultural relics must go by the criteria of “faithfulness” and “expressiveness”, and a translator should reach a balance between the two principles. Second, many scholars have concentrated specifically on the translation of names of cultural relics. Li Kairong (2001) analyzes the cultural information contained in the names of cultural relics through Chinese-English cultural comparisons, proposing methods for handling cultural elements in English translations. Shi Xinmin (2007) formulates four principles that should be followed in translating cultural relics: the principle of ethnicity, the principle of simplicity, the principle of informativeness and the principle of back-translation. And he further explores the English expression of names of cultural relics by taking the bronze vessels unearthed in Shaanxi as examples. Third, substantial research has examined museum text translation through case studies of specific institutions. Lin Hua (2013) points out that commentaries of cultural relics contain different cultural information, which should be translated with different translation strategies. Lin takes the commentaries of cultural relics in the Shanghai Museum as examples, and explores many translation methods, like equivalent translation, feature-based translation, interpretive translation, literal translation and transliteration with a supplementary explanation. Zhu Anbo and Yang Yi (2017) identifies current challenges in National Museum translations, including inconsistent standards, overuse of transliteration, and content omissions. Qiu Daping (2018) proposes that translators can improve the expression of the translation of museum texts by adjusting the order of translation, integrating relevant information, using omission and addition, and learning translation strategies from foreign museums. Hu Fumao and Song Jiangwen (2022) point out that Chinese museum texts contain rich traditional cultural connotations, and translators can adopt translation strategies such as literal translation, omission and addition. Zhang Jianrong and Wang Lian (2023) point out that the translation of museum texts can be done with the help of many translation methods, such as paraphrasing, addition and conversion methods.

These studies make great contributions to the study of museum texts and play a significant role in guiding the translation of museum texts and enriching the translation research. Most of them have established a significant framework for the translation of museum texts.

3. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHINESE AND ENGLISH MUSEUM TEXTS

This part will conduct a comparative exploration of names of cultural relics and descriptive texts selected from leading domestic and international museums, including the National Museum of China, Shanghai Museum, Liaoning Provincial Museum, Henan Museum, British Museum, and Metropolitan Museum of Art. The study concentrates on three principal aspects: differences in the names of cultural relics, differences in the introduction of cultural relics, and differences in the structure and content of museum texts.

3.1 Differences in the names of cultural relics

In terms of cultural relics names, the names of cultural relics in domestic museums are rather complicated, usually including information of materials, colors, shapes, common names, patterns and places of origin of cultural relics. For example, the relic “马头鹿角形金步摇 (from the National Museum of China)” includes the shape (马头鹿角形), material (金), common name (步摇) of the cultural relic. The relic “景德镇窑青花缠枝牡丹纹瓶 (from the

Shanghai Museum)” includes the original place (景德镇窑), color (青花), and patterns (缠枝牡丹纹) of the cultural relic. The relic “错金银云纹青铜犀尊 (from the National Museum of China)” includes patterns (错金银云纹), material (青铜), shape (犀), and common name (尊).

Compared with the names of cultural relics from domestic museums, the names of cultural relics from foreign museums are more concise, emphasizing the fundamental information and paying little attention to the details of the appearance of cultural relics. For example, the relic “Canopic jars (from the British Museum)” only mentions the common name (Canopic jars), but does not mention the color and pattern of the cultural relic. Another example is the relic “Cat mummies (from the British Museum)”, putting emphasis on the common name (mummies) and shape (cat). The relic “Bottle with lotuses (from the Metropolitan Museum of Art)” mentions the common name (bottle) and pattern (lotuses).

3.2 Differences in the introduction of cultural relics

In the introduction of cultural relics, Chinese museum texts typically employ elaborate visual descriptors, utilizing ornate vocabulary and idiomatic expressions to create vivid imagery. For example, the description “通体饰细如游丝的错金银云纹，熠熠生辉，华美无比。(from the National Museum of China)” combines metaphorical language (细如游丝), evaluative adjectives (华美无比), and luminous imagery (熠熠生辉) to produce an aesthetically rich portrayal. Conversely, English museum texts demonstrate a preference for lexical economy and factual precision. For example, the description “Based on ancient bells unearthed in the southern capital, the bell features spiral bosses on its body and a flat bottom. (from the Metropolitan Museum of Art)” employs some basic words (unearthed; features; flat bottom) and does not include too many modifiers in the description of appearance, which enables the introduction more objective.

Besides the difference in vocabulary, Chinese museum texts use long and complicated sentences, which are usually composed of several short sentences, while English museum texts tend to use compound sentences and often use conjunctions to present the relationship and logic between sentences. In terms of sentence voice, Chinese museum texts mainly use active voice, while English ones prefer passive voice to present the objectivity of language. For example, the description “青铜铸造，透雕双龙钮，有铁鼻环，钟两面铸蟠虺纹，栌旁篆带皆为细蟠虺纹，其间隔以绳纹凸起线…… (from the Liaoning Provincial Museum)” uses active voice to make a complex sentence, which includes many short sentences, depicting the arrangement and combination of patterns (蟠虺纹; 绳纹) on the cultural relic. Reversely, the description “The right side of the wig is broken off just below the ear while the left side is broken off at the neck area, though the wig likely extended to the chest. (from the British Museum)” uses passive voice, and two conjunctions such as “while”, “though”. Another example is “Its basic design is the eye and eyebrow of the lanner falcon, the bird form adopted by the celestial creator god Horus, whose right and left eyes were the sun and moon respectively. (from the British Museum)”, which is a compound sentence including an attributive clause introduced by “whose”.

In terms of rhetorical expression, domestic museums tend to use quotes, metaphors, similes and other rhetorical devices to emphasize the related historical facts, highlight the literary nature of the text, and express the vividness of the expression. Domestic museums often quote a lot of poetry or historical documents to introduce the cultural information and cultural value of cultural relics. For example, the description “全器如一条刚出水的游龙，披鳞展翼，腾空飞起，意态生动。(from the Liaoning Provincial Museum)” uses a simile to describe

the shape of relic. Another example, the description “卣为古代盛酒器，《诗经·大雅》云‘厘尔圭瓚，秬鬯一卣’。(from the Henan Museum)” uses quote (厘尔圭瓚，秬鬯一卣) to show the function of the relic as a ritual wine vessel. While foreign museums texts seldom use rhetorical devices in the introduction of cultural relics but tend to use simple expressions to introduce the related information of background and history.

3.3 Differences in the structure and content of museum texts

On the one hand, the introduction of cultural relics in domestic museums mainly adopts the structure of describing the appearance details first and then the background knowledge. The main content can be summarized as follows: the detailed description of the external features of cultural relics, the manufacturing process, the place of excavation of cultural relics, the introduction of the important value of cultural relics, and sometimes the historical and cultural background information related to cultural relics will be involved. For example,

A. “这件瓷尊.....，敞口，短颈，丰肩，鼓腹，腹下部内敛，肩颈之间.....。外壁施霁青色釉，以金彩绘蕉叶、缠枝花卉等纹饰，近足部.....莲纹及联珠纹。此尊需多次入窑和施彩，制作集雕、贴、凸压之大成，工艺高超。
(from the National Museum of China)”

In the above example, the text describes the appearance details first and then the background knowledge. The description of the appearance is expressed in a spatial order, from the mouth (敞口) to the neck (短颈), shoulder (丰肩), belly (鼓腹), bottom (腹下部), and then to the various decorative parts, which is a clear and well-organized structure and is in line with the natural order of observing objects. The introduction includes the description of the appearance of the cultural relic like color (霁青色釉), the vivid description of the patterns (蕉叶、缠枝花卉等纹；仰莲纹及联珠纹), which is very detailed, and a large number of modifying words are used to make the description more vivid. Then the introduction presents the manufacturing process (入窑；施彩；集雕、贴、凸压之大成) briefly, reflecting the subtlety of ceramic craftsmanship during the Qing Dynasty.

On the other hand, the introduction of cultural relics provided by foreign museums is usually based on the structure of introducing the background knowledge first and then the appearance details. Compared with domestic museums, the biggest difference is that foreign museums focus on introducing the background information of cultural relics, such as the age of manufacture of cultural relics and related historical background, the manufacturing process and the use of cultural relics. For example,

II.

“This monumental bell exemplifies the sophisticated bronze casting of the Song dynasty and marks the inauguration of archaism in this medium. Its ornamental bands represent a comprehensive vision of the empire. The top three bands depict an imperial procession through the capital city of Bianjing (now Kaifeng, Henan Province). The next register presents a lively landscape symbolizing the empire’s vast territory. Finally, the bottom band depicts the cosmic ocean, with the eight Daoist immortals and mythical sea creatures emerging from turbulent waves. Attributes of the processional paraphernalia and the architectural style of the palace gate indicate that the bell was cast in 1120s.
(from the Metropolitan Museum of Art)”

As can be seen from the example of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the introduction starts with the age (the Song dynasty) and manufacturing process (sophisticated bronze casting) of the cultural relic, and the background knowledge (an imperial procession through the capital city of Bianjing) is introduced after the description of the appearance. In terms of content, the Metropolitan Museum of Art emphasizes the detailed statement of the historical background, while the description of the appearance is relatively concise, only providing a general overview and not describing the details in detail. In addition, it focuses on showing the connection between the cultural relic and history. For example, it introduces the symbolism of the patterns (the empire's vast territory), which is the beautiful visions of the Song emperor.

4. TRANSLATION STRATEGIES OF MUSEUM TEXTS IN HENAN MUSEUM

After the introduction of the differences between Chinese and English museum texts, it is not difficult to find that translating this kind of text faces certain challenges. Crucially, this task is not a simple linguistic and symbolic conversion. Instead, it requires a combination of different translation strategies to build a bridge between Chinese traditional culture and the reception habits of the target audience. To explore how these challenges might be addressed in practice, this section will, under the guidance of Relevance Theory, select some texts from the Henan Museum as examples to explore which translation strategies might be employed in the translation of museum texts. It mainly focuses on the following translation strategies: literal translation, transliteration plus explanation, free translation, and adaptation.

4.1 Literal translation

Literal translation is a method in which text is translated word-for-word from the source language to the target language, focusing on direct correspondence. In the translation of museum texts, literal translation is suitable for those texts which describe cultural background clearly and use simple language expression. The advantage of literal translation is that it can maintain the form and structure of the source text, creating a good contextual effect for the audience, which is important to the establishment of the optimal relevance. The following are some examples.

Example 1

Source Text (ST): 莲鹤方壶

Target Text (TT): Lotus-Crane Square Pot

In the source text, the term “莲鹤” refers to the decoration and pattern, and the term “方壶” refers to a square bronze container for wine or water. In the target text, these two terms are translated directly, conveying each component accurately. It maintains the same structure as the source text and uses concise and simple words, preserving semantic fidelity.

Example 2

ST: 壶颈两侧以附壁回首的龙形怪兽为耳。

TT: The sides of the pot are eared with a dragon-like monster that is clawing on the wall and looking over its own should.

The source text presents the details of the appearance of the cultural relic. The target text adopts the strategy of literal translation, keeping the details of appearance, such as “sides”, “clawing on the wall” and “looking over its own should”. The target text is well worded and described vividly, and conveys the aesthetic significance of the cultural relic, creating a good contextual effect. The target audience can understand the characteristics of the cultural relic in

a more intuitive way through the detailed descriptions, which is important to the achievement of the optimal relevance.

4.2 Transliteration plus explanation

Transliteration refers to the method of representing the written symbols of one language with those of another language that have the same or similar pronunciation as it. In the translation of museum texts, it is often used in the translation of terminology for the names of cultural relics, preserving the unique features of Chinese culture. At the same time, transliteration is often combined with explanation to supplement the background knowledge or the function of cultural relics. According to the Relevance Theory, this strategy allows the target audience to establish a relevance with the source language through reasoning. Here are some examples from the Henan Museum that present the use of transliteration plus explanation.

Example 3

ST: 兽面纹提梁铜卣

商代前期（公元前1600-前1300年）

TT: Handled bronze You with animal-mask motif, wine vessel

Early Shang Dynasty (1600 - 1300 B.C.)

In the source text, the term “卣” refers to a kind of bronze container for wine. It is translated as “You” which preserves its original phonetic value and maintains cultural authenticity. The source text shows respect to the name of the Chinese cultural relic and acknowledges its uniqueness in bronze ware classification. In the target text, the phrase “wine vessel” serves as a compensatory explanation, bridging potential cultural gaps for target audiences unfamiliar with ancient Chinese ritual bronzes. The addition of “wine vessel” enables the target audience to establish a relevance between the pronunciation and the cultural relic.

Example 4

ST: 妇好鸮尊

TT: Bronze owl-shaped Zun with inscriptions of Fu Hao, wine vessel

In the source text, the term “妇好” is a female general of the Shang Dynasty. Cultural relics unearthed from Fu Hao’s tomb will have the inscriptions of “妇好 (Fu Hao)”. The term “尊” refers to a kind of bronze ware. In the target text, the female general’s name was transliterated directly as “Fu Hao”. The term “Zun” is translated by the strategy of transliteration plus explanation. The phrase “wine vessel” is added to show the specific use of the cultural relic, which preserves the cultural uniqueness and enables the audience to understand its function. Besides, the target text adds the word “bronze” to show the material of cultural relics.

Example 5

ST: 蹴鞠源于春秋战国时期。

TT: Cuju (the earliest form of football) was an ancient Chinese game originating from the Spring and Autumn period.

The source text presents the origin of “蹴鞠”. The target text transliterates “蹴鞠”, maintaining features of Chinese culture. It supplements the description of Cujū, such as “the earliest form of football” and “an ancient Chinese game”, emphasizing its significance in the history of football worldwide. This approach helps the target audience grasp the essence of

Cuju, a traditional Chinese sport, with minimal processing efforts, thereby establishing the optimal relevance.

4.3 Free translation

Free translation is a method that focuses on conveying the meaning, intent, and natural flow of the original text rather than sticking to its exact wording or structure. It modifies idioms, cultural references, and phrasing so that they resonate with the target audience, often restructuring sentences for better clarity and fluency. Museum texts are rich in traditional Chinese cultural connotations, and free translation is often used to convey the core information of the source text. When the source text is complex or contains hidden meanings, translation methods like addition, omission, and conversion will be used to express the information more clearly and make the target audience fully enjoy the Chinese cultural relics and have a better understanding of the cultural connotation of it. According to the Relevance Theory, this strategy reduces the target audience's comprehension barriers, and reduces their processing efforts, promoting the establishment of optimal relevance. In this section, it will mainly focus on the translation methods of addition, omission, conversion and adaptation.

4.3.1 Addition

Addition involves intentionally including extra words, phrases, or explanations in the target text that are not explicitly present in the source text. In the context of translating museum texts, this approach helps to address cultural gaps, ensuring that the target audience can fully understand the essence of Chinese culture. The following are some examples.

Example 6

ST: 《诗经》中屡见兕觥一词。

TT: Gong vessel appeared quite often in the **Book of Songs, an ancient Chinese classic**.

In the source text, “《诗经》” is the earliest collection of poetry in China and is very familiar to Chinese people. However, foreign audience may be less aware of its significant place in the history of Chinese literature. In the target text, “an ancient Chinese classic” is added, which shows the background knowledge of the Book of Songs and fills in the gap of the target audience's knowledge of traditional Chinese literature and reduces the audience's processing efforts.

Example 7

ST: 熏炉是用来熏香和取暖的炉子。

TT: This incense burner, perfectly combining practical use and **aesthetic value**, is a **consummate bronze handicraft in the Han dynasty**.

The source text is a statement of the practical use of “熏炉”. In the target text, “aesthetic value”, “consummate bronze handicraft” and “the Han dynasty” are added. The addition of “aesthetic value” and “consummate bronze handicraft” is the explicit manifest of the cultural information implied in the source text, reducing the comprehension barriers and informing the target audience of the unique artistic value of “熏炉”. And “the Han dynasty” is added to show the background information, generating a better contextual effect.

4.3.2 Omission

Omission involves deliberately omitting certain words, phrases, or concepts from the source text during translation. This approach emphasizes fluency and cultural appropriateness in the target language. When translating museum texts, expressions that may be redundant or

confusing for the target audience will be excluded, enabling the target audience to understand more easily. The next are some examples.

Example 8

ST: 颈部铸接双龙耳、下有双虎俯伏承托全器，形象生动怪异，使庄严的器形蕴含着生机和旋律感。

TT: A pair of dragon-shaped lugs is on its neck. A double-tiger shaped stand is an eccentric but lively decoration on bronze wares.

The above example describes the appearance of the cultural relic. In the source text, the clause “使庄严的器形蕴含着生机和旋律感” makes the static shape of the cultural relic dynamic through the combination of visual sense (庄严的器形; 生机) and auditory sense (旋律感), reflecting an aesthetic comment of the relic. In the target text, it is completely omitted as English museum texts focus on the objective description of information. Therefore, omission reduces the comment of the cultural relic, which aligns with the expression habits of English museum texts and makes the expression more concise.

Example 9

ST:华美瑰丽，造型奇特，制作精美，宛如神界之物，反映了楚人丰富多彩的精神世界。

TT: With magnificent decoration, unique design and superb workmanship, the chime bell holder exhibits the spiritual world of Chu people.

The source text uses a simile (宛如神界之物) to show the exquisiteness of the cultural relic, but the simile is omitted in the target text. Foreign museums seldom use rhetorical devices but typically present the main information of the cultural relic. Omitting the simile will be more in line with the expression habits of the target audience, achieving conciseness in the translation.

Example 10

ST:《诗经》中屡见兕觥一词：“兕觥其觶，旨酒思柔”、“跻彼公堂，称彼兕觥，万寿无疆”。

TT: Gong vessel appeared quite often in the Book of Songs, an ancient Chinese classic, which is considered a symbol of longevity.

In the ST, the term “兕” refers to a Chinese ancient beast that looks like a rhino, and the term “觥” is a bronze container for wine. Meanwhile, the ST quotes verses from the Book of Songs to present the curved shape (觶), ritual function (旨酒; 跻彼公堂, 称彼兕觥) and auspicious symbolism (万寿无疆) of “兕觥”. When dealing with the translation of the verses, it omits the quotation “兕觥其觶, 旨酒思柔” and “跻彼公堂, 称彼兕觥”, which reduces the comprehension barriers for the target audience. Through this adjustment, the audience can access the symbolism of the Gong without an in-depth understanding of the meaning of the verses, which is in line with the optimal relevance.

4.3.3 Conversion

Conversion refers to the process of changing the word class of a word or the grammatical structure of a sentence during translation. Chinese emphasizes dynamic expression, while

English values static expression. In translating museum texts, conversion can help align the content more closely with the expression conventions of the target audience, leading to a better contextual effect. The following is an example.

Example 11

ST: 下有双虎俯伏承托全器，形象生动怪异。

TT: A double-tiger shaped **stand** is an eccentric but lively decoration on bronze wares.

In the source text, the phrase “俯伏承托” is a verb phrase. In the target text, it is converted into the noun “stand”, turning a dynamic movement into a static one. This conversion preserves the function of “承托” and conforms to the English static expression conventions, achieving fluency and simplicity in the translation. Although some details are simplified, such as the symbolism of the tiger in traditional Chinese culture, the core function is clearly conveyed. This is in line with the optimal relevance, which gives priority to the comprehension efficiency and aesthetic experience of the target audience.

4.4 Adaptation

Adaptation involves modifying source text elements to align with the target culture's norms, values, and cognitive frameworks while preserving the communicative intent. It addresses untranslatable aspects caused by cultural gaps, pragmatic conventions, or genre-specific expectations. Through this method, some complex information in museum texts will be flexibly adjusted to a form that is easier for the target audience to understand, reducing the processing efforts. Here are several examples.

Example 12

ST: 《纬书集成·乐叶图征》载：“五凤皆五色，为瑞者一，为孽者四。”当盛世昌明时则凤凰降。

TT: According to **historical literature**, the phoenix would descend to the world when there is a prosperous and stable era.

In the source text, “《纬书集成·乐叶图征》” is an ancient Chinese text encompassing astronomy, ritual, religious theology and related subjects. The quotation “五凤皆五色，为瑞者一，为孽者四。” shows different symbolic meanings of “五凤”, with one color symbolizing auspiciousness and the other four being evilness. The clause “《纬书集成·乐叶图征》载：‘五凤皆五色，为瑞者一，为孽者四。’” is translated into “historical literature”, which uses a familiar term to show that the auspicious symbolism of the phoenix is based on a historical document, achieving the conciseness and fluency of the target text. This adaptation simplifies complex details for better understanding, reducing the target audience's processing efforts. In addition, the style of the text has also been adjusted, making the target text more colloquial, which aligns with the expression habits of the target audience.

Example 13

ST: 身着右衽深衣。

TT: The figure wears a **historical Chinese attire for men**.

In the source text, the term “右衽深衣” refers to a traditional Han Chinese one-piece garment with right-side overlapping closure, which served as formal attire for Confucian scholars during ceremonial occasions in ancient China. The target text translates it into

“historical Chinese attire for men”. The TT uses the familiar term “attire”, making it accessible to the target audience. By doing so, it helps the target audience grasp the overall appearance of the figure without having to understand complex details, reducing their processing efforts.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper explores the translation strategies of museum texts collected from the Henan Museum under the guidance of Relevance Theory. By prioritizing optimal relevance—a balance between contextual effects and processing efforts—translators can bridge cultural gaps, ensuring that the target audience can understand the historical and aesthetic significance of Chinese cultural relics. The paper explores differences between Chinese and English museum texts, such as differences in expressions of the names and the introduction of cultural relics, and differences in structure and content of museum texts, emphasizing the need for suitable strategies. Through a case study of the translation of museum texts from the Henan Museum, strategies like literal translation, transliteration plus explanation, free translation, and adaptation, along with methods such as addition, omission and conversion, help clarify cultural meanings while maintaining the uniqueness of Chinese traditional culture. From the discussion above, it comes to the conclusion that, in the translation of museum texts, the translator should flexibly adopt suitable translation strategies to supplement necessary explanation and background information or simplify overly complex details to reduce the target audience’s processing efforts and achieve the optimal relevance, enhancing cross-cultural communication and the international influence of Chinese traditional culture.

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