

# On Translation Strategies and Methods of Foshan Woodcut New Year Pictures in Cross-cultural Communication

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## Abstract

The cultural connotations of Foshan woodcut New Year pictures are rich, which are roughly reflected in the aspects of praying for good luck, warding off evil, worshipping gods, moral education, religious belief, folk customs, and so on. In cross-cultural communication, the following strategies can be used to deal with the cultural connotations in the translation of Foshan woodcut New Year pictures: preserving the cultural identity of the folk culture, following the principle of seeking common ground while reserving differences, and grasping the scale of wording. At the same time, the following specific translation methods can be adopted: combination of transliteration and free translation, transliteration with annotations, amplification method, and borrowing words translation.

**Keywords:** Foshan woodcut New Year pictures, cross-cultural communication, cultural connotation, translation strategy, translation method

## 1. Introduction

Foshan woodcut New Year picture is the unique form of Lingnan folk culture. It was included in the first list of national intangible cultural heritage in 2006. Foshan woodcut New Year pictures display infinite artistic charm with its profound cultural connotations, rich techniques of expression, colorful artistic contents and ethnic customs. In the context of advocating the “going out” of Chinese culture, in order to make Foshan folk culture “going out”, enhance the cultural connotation of the city, and let more foreign tourists know about Foshan woodcut New Year pictures, the cross-cultural research of Foshan woodcut New Year pictures is

particularly necessary. However, due to the differences in concepts and languages between China and the West, as well as the rich cultural connotations of Foshan woodcut New Year pictures, the communication of Foshan woodcut New Year pictures to the outside world faces huge obstacles. This study attempts to explore the translation strategies and methods of cross-cultural communication of Foshan woodcut New Year pictures by excavating the cultural connotations of the woodcut New Year pictures, so as to contribute to the cross-cultural communication of Foshan woodcut New Year pictures.

## 2. Exploring the Cultural Connotations of

## Foshan Woodcut New Year Pictures

### 2.1 The Connotation of Expressing People's Wishes of Praying for Good Luck and Warding off Evil Spirits

In the process of sorting out the Foshan woodcut New Year pictures, it was found that many of the pictures expressed people's wish for a better life. As in the picture *Wugu Fengdeng*, *Wugu* represents the main food for people's survival, usually referring to rice, millet, wheat, beans, and hemp. *Fengdeng* means a good harvest in a good year. The picture *Wugu Fengdeng* shows people's good wishes for a good harvest and peace of the country. Another picture, *Jia Guan Jin Jue* (*A Promotion to a Higher Rank*) also expresses people's wish for a happy life in the old days. The two officials in the picture hold a Jue (an ancient wine vessel with three legs and a loop handle) in one hand, a Ru Yi (an ancient ornamental scepter) in the other hand. Jue and Ru Yi are homonyms in Chinese. Jue carries another meaning "rank of nobility". Ru Yi also carries another meaning "satisfactory and happy". Therefore, "*Jia Guan Jin Jue*" has the meaning of "promoting sb to a higher rank" and "everything is satisfactory to sb".

Praying for good luck and warding off evil spirits are the good wishes of the folk people during the Spring Festival. The woodcut New Year picture "General with a Knife" is one of the most popular door gods among the people. During the Spring Festival, it is pasted on the door to protect homes, ensure safety, bring good luck, and ward off evil spirits.

Another picture, *Yin Fu Gui Tang*, is also a symbol of warding off evil spirits. Zhong Kui is a Chinese folk god catching ghosts and driving away evil spirits. He gets rid of evils for the people and he is upright and selfless. Therefore, in order to avoid disasters and welcome good luck, people often hang portraits of Zhong Kui on their doors. In the picture, Zhong Kui draws the Bian Fu. Fu (bat) and Fu (blessing) are homophonic. "*Yin Fu Gui Tang*" has the meaning of bringing blessings to home.

### 2.2 The Connotation of Cultural Function of Maintaining Social Harmony and Development, and Educating

When sorting out the pictures of Foshan Woodcut New Year pictures, we can clearly see that harmony, loyalty, righteousness, benevolence, trustworthiness, filial piety, brotherhood, integrity, and shame have been its

traditional themes, which are reflected in the following pictures: such as *Gods of Harmony*, *Long Feng Cheng Xiang*, *Harmony Brings Wealth*, *Twenty-four Filial Piety* and so on. Generations of Foshan people also like these propaganda New Year pictures with the nature of moral education. They generally regard them as treasures for self-cultivation, career development, and household management, and therefore hanging them high in their rooms, which has become an enduring local cultural phenomenon. No matter the woodcut New Year pictures used for festivals, for decoration of the environment, or for religious beliefs and superstitious activities, they have not been found to be intended to worsen social contradictions and destroy social harmony. Whether it is to whitewash peace, criticize current problems, or promote humanity or theocracy, Foshan woodcut New Year pictures should be aimed at creating an auspicious atmosphere for a peaceful and prosperous era, promoting and educating people to calm their anxious and impetuous mentality, maintaining peace and openness, compatible with the spirit of righteousness, and maintaining social harmony and stable development. This is the cultural consciousness and function that Foshan woodcut New Year pictures possess in maintaining social harmony and development.

### 2.3 The Connotation of Reflecting People's Worship of Gods and Faith in Religion

Foshan has a tradition of worshiping gods since ancient times. The profound culture of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and folk beliefs has led to almost every household in Foshan setting up a divine position to worship. Some worship the local god of land at the entrance of the house, and others worship Buddha indoors. In accordance with the three-dimensional shapes of the gods in temples and homes, people use simplified woodcut pictures to hang them at home, praying for the protection of the gods. A large number of woodcut New Year pictures reflect this folk custom, such as *God of Wealth*, *Yuecheng Dragon Mother*, *Jiang Tai Gong*, *Avalokiteshvara*, *Marshal Zhao*, *Peach Fairy*, and so on.

### 2.4 The Connotation of Reflecting the Simple and Peaceful Atmosphere of Folk Life and the Taste of People's Lives

Foshan woodcut New Year pictures are derived from real life and reflect people's real-life scenes. For example, the New Year picture *Foshan Qiuse*

is a folk custom in Foshan. As early as the Ming Dynasty, people celebrated a bountiful harvest by taking out their homemade crafts and prepared programs to participate in parades and performances on autumn nights, gradually forming a unique parade with local characteristics. The picture *Foshan Qiuse* reflects the lifestyle of the common people. Another picture *Flying Kites* depicts the joy of children flying kites in the mountains and fields. The ancients also had the saying of flying kites to take away afflictions and disasters. When kites fly high into the sky, they cut off the wires and let them take away the afflictions and illnesses. There are also many pictures that clearly record the fun life of children in Foshan in the past, such as *Boys with a fish Lantern*, *Boys with Plum blossom*, *Boys with lotus flower*, *Hide and Seek* and so on.

### **3. Translation Strategies for Cross-cultural Communication of Foshan Woodcut New Year Pictures**

Foshan woodcut New Year picture is an important folk custom in Foshan, a cultural phenomenon with cultural commonalities. Chinese folk culture is an important component of the vast and profound traditional Chinese culture, and many folk culture words have a strong cultural color to some extent, reflecting the individuality of Chinese culture. Due to the great differences between the Eastern and Western languages, how to maintain its uniqueness and achieve cultural authenticity in Chinese-English translation is the most challenging aspect of interlingual translation. The study of English translation of folklore should be placed in the context of cultural studies and pay attention to the following strategies.

#### *3.1 Preserving the Cultural Identity of the Folk Culture*

If we explore the translation of folk culture from the perspective of cultural research, it will involve the issue of cultural identity in the translation of folk culture. Cultural identity is often seen as something that is held by a particular culture. It is also a set of characteristics inherent in a specific nation. The characteristics of a particular culture should be reflected through the identification of its cultural identity in the translation process. In the process of translation of folk culture, the difference of folk culture should be preserved as much as

possible, which is the national personality or cultural characteristics.

#### *3.2 Following the Principle of Seeking Common Ground While Reserving Differences*

To preserve the cultural identity of folk customs, it is first necessary to protect their core cultural values. Professor Xu Chongxin believes that translation work, in a sense, is like diplomatic work. It should be good at seeking common ground while reserving differences, respecting both others and oneself, which should become a basic principle in handling cultural relations. Therefore, in the translation of folk customs such as woodcut New Year pictures, foreign folk words cannot be simply used as substitutes to avoid cultural identity displacement. We should follow the principle of seeking common ground while reserving differences, respect the cultural differences of various ethnic groups, and preserve the cultural characteristics of the original language as much as possible to achieve better communication.

#### *3.3 Grasping the Scale of Wording*

The characteristics of folk culture determine that the translation of folk culture should focus on the wording and tone of language. Folk customs are diverse and colorful, but because they are a social and collective phenomenon, they also have their common popularity. In addition, folk culture is a culture of speech, which also reflects the emphasis on colloquialism in folk language. Therefore, in the translation of folk culture, attention should be paid to grasping the scale of language expression.

### **4. Translation Methods of Cross-cultural Communication of Foshan Woodcut New Year Pictures**

In the cross-cultural communication of Foshan Woodcut New Year picture pictures, one main principle of translation can be grasped: except for the words fully anglicized, the names of most pictures can be translated into Chinese pinyin, especially four-character idioms. Then, the main characteristics of the picture can be described in English, followed by an explanation of the keywords, and finally a free translation of the connotations of the picture. In the process of translating the content and culture of a picture, the following specific translation methods can be used:

#### *4.1 Combination of Transliteration and Free Translation*

Transliteration refers to the use of Chinese pinyin to represent the name of the picture, and a free translation is a translation that reproduces the general meaning of the original text. It may or may not closely follow the form or organization of the original. The picture *Bao Gong* can be translated in this way with the combination of transliteration and free translation.

**Example 1: 《包公》(Bao Gong)**

**Chinese original:** 包公即包拯, 字希仁, 庐州合肥(今属安徽)人。由于为官清廉, 铁面无私, 深受百姓爱戴。后世把他当作清官的化身。

**English translation:** *Bao Gong was Bao Zheng, whose courtesy name was Xiren, and from Hefei, Luzhou (Anhui). He was an impartial and incorruptible official. Therefore, he was respected by common people. He was considered as the incarnation of the honest and upright official by descendants.*

**Example 2: 《佛山秋色》(Foshan Qiuse)**

**Chinese original:** 佛山秋色是佛山的一种民间习俗。早在明朝时期, 人们为庆祝丰收, 于每年秋夜, 在商定的晚上, 各自拿出自制的工艺品及准备好的节目参加游行表演, 逐渐形成富有地方特色的秋色赛会, 佛山人称为“出秋色”。每到赛会举办之日, 佛山城内万人空巷, 热闹非凡。

**English translation:** *Foshan Qiuse is a kind of folk custom of Foshan. Early in the Ming Dynasty, People went to attend the parade with homemade crafts and well prepared programs at a regular time each autumn for the autumn harvest. This parade gradually grew into a parade with local characteristics, called “chu Qiuse” by Foshan people. When this day comes, the whole town bustles and turns out to celebrate it.*

**4.2 Transliteration with Annotations**

Foshan woodcut New Year pictures often use homophones to express people's beautiful aspirations and wishes. When translating, Chinese Pinyin is used to represent words with homophones, and the connotation is annotated after the words. The pictures *Yin Fu Gui Tang* and *Gods of Harmony* are examples of them.

**Example 3: 《引福归堂》(Yin Fu Gui Tang)**

**Chinese original:** 钟馗是我国民间家喻户晓的捉鬼辟邪之神, 他为民除害, 一身正气, 无私无畏。钟馗牵引蝙蝠, “蝠”与“福”相通, “引福归堂”寓意把福带回家中。

**English translation:** *Zhong Kui is a Chinese folk god catching ghosts and driving away evil spirits. He gets rid of evils for the people and he is upright and*

*selfless. Zhong Kui draws the Bian Fu. Fu(bat)and Fu(blessing) are homophonic. “Yin Fu Gui Tang” has the meaning of bringing the blessing to home.*

**Example 4: 《和合二仙》(Gods of Harmony)**

**Chinese original:** 和合二仙是民间传说之神, 一人持荷花, 另一人捧圆盒, 意为“和(荷)谐合(盒)好”。人们借此祝贺新婚夫妇白头偕老, 永结同心。

**English translation:** *The Gods of Harmony are Chinese folk gods. One holds a lotus, and the other one has a round box. The homophones of He (lotus)and He (box) mean harmony. People use this as a blessing for newly — married couples, so they would live together in harmony till they are old and grey, as two in body but one in spirit.*

**4.3 Amplification Method**

**Example 5: 《鸿鸿》(Hong Hong)**

**Chinese original:** 鸿鸿是广东省第十二届省运会的吉祥物。以家喻户晓的少年黄飞鸿舞狮为题材, 寓意鸿运当头, 大展宏图。

**English translation:** *Hong Hong is the mascot of the twelfth provincial games of Guangdong Province. The young Huang Feihong is performing lion dance. “Hong Hong” implies the meaning of “good luck and chances to get ahead in one’s career”. (Huang Feihong was a martial artist of Foshan. He was highly skilled in wushu. He upheld justice and helped the weak and the poor. He had many anecdotes that won universal praise in wushu circles.)*

The content in parentheses is supplemented by means of the Amplification method.

**Example 6: 《天官赐福》(Tian Guan Ci Fu)**

**Chinese original:** 财神骑着麒麟, 手拿“天官赐福”的条幅, 从天而降, 给老百姓赐福。表达了老百姓对天神下凡赐福的憧憬和对美好生活的期盼。

**English translation:** *The God of wealth was riding on the Qi Lin with the scroll of “Tian Guan Ci Fu” in his hands and beatified the common people. It showed that the common people long the Gods to beautify them and for the good life. (The Chinese legend says that Qi Lin is an auspicious animal and as long as Qi Lin appears, the good luck would arrive.)*

**4.4 Borrowing Words Translation**

**Example 7: 《财神》(God of Wealth)**

**Chinese original:** 财神爷在民间传说中是能给人带来好运与财富的神明。人们常年供奉财神, 在庆祝中国春节时尤其受到重视。做生意供奉财神是一种传统习俗, 在中国历代相传。

**English translation:** *The God of Wealth is a deity of prosperity based on the folklore, who could bless one*



*with good luck and wealth. He is worshipped throughout the year and is especially popular during Chinese New Year celebrations. It is a tradition for businessmen to worship the God of Wealth, which has been handed down from generation to generation.*

The word God is borrowed from the West.

### **5. Promoting Foshan Woodcut New Year Pictures in Multiple Ways**

In order to spread the Foshan woodcut New Year pictures and better show the cultural connotations of Foshan to foreign tourists, a booklet in both Chinese and English can be compiled including the following contents, such as the introduction of Foshan woodcut New Year pictures, the classification of woodcut New Year pictures, representative pictures and the cultural connotations of the pictures and so on. The booklet can be provided to the inheritors of Foshan woodcut New Year pictures, tourist attractions and Foshan Folk Art Research Society. The content of the booklet can also be made into a professional website for dissemination. The professional websites, propaganda films and television programs can also be full used to promote Foshan woodcut New Year pictures. It is also possible to use the current Foshan Museum website and Foshan Lingnan Cultural Research website to promote standardized woodcut New Year picture translation terms. In addition, the production of woodcut New Year pictures, the classification of pictures, and the production of classic pictures can also be made into documentaries or propaganda videos to promote Foshan woodcut New Year pictures to the world.

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