

# Study on the English Translation of Chinese Ethnic-Minority Festival Terms

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Chinese ethnic-minority festival terms are the concentrated embodiment and wisdom collection of the culture of ethnic minorities, which are important parts of Chinese culture. The paper discusses the characteristics of the minority festival terms and illustrates the four main English translation strategies of the minority festival terms through examples. Hopefully, the paper can be of positive significance for the protection and dissemination of ethnic minority characteristic culture.

*Keywords:* ethnic minorities, festival terms, English translation strategies

## Introduction

The festival terms of Chinese ethnic minorities gather the historical culture, humanistic spirit, mode of thinking and folk art in the long historical development of Chinese ethnic minorities. They are not only the precious civilization wealth of Chinese ethnic minorities, but also one of the great treasures of human civilization. Due to historical reasons, many ethnic groups do not have their own written language, so it is more important to study the folk literature, folklore, language and language translation of all ethnic groups (Ding, 1995). Furthermore, Chinese culture can better spread if it is translated accurately and properly. Similarly, the minority festival terminology is the concentrated embodiment of the minority culture; the translation of the minority festival terminology will be of great importance for the spread of the minority culture as well as the Chinese culture. Scholars can see the trend of translation studies from the terminology of translation studies (Fang, 2008). The study of minority festival terminology is the study of minority culture. It is necessary to collate and update ethnic culture. Besides, terminology is the representation of professional field concepts at the linguistic level, which is related to the condensation, dissemination and accumulation of professional knowledge. Therefore, terminology must be standardized and unified (Tao, 2019). Given the situation, it is essential to discuss the characteristics and analyze the strategies of the English translation, of which the highly accepted publicity translation helps to shape China's image, tell Chinese stories and spread Chinese minority culture.

## Characteristics of Chinese Minority Festival Terms

There are 55 ethnic minorities in China, where the festivals present the colorful characteristics. In general, most of the festival terms of ethnic minorities in China have distinctive features in three aspects: background, form, and content.

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### **Long History With Ancient Origin**

There are deep historical background and allusions behind the festivals, especially those Chinese traditional festivals, which are related to the extensive and profound Chinese traditional culture. For instance, Uyghur nationality has a festival—Nowruz Festival (诺鲁孜节) with a history of at least 3,000 years. In the early formation of the festival, the ancestors of Turkic tribes including Uighurs lived a nomadic life. When snow melted, everything recovered and livestock gave birth, the herdsmen celebrated the festival cheerfully and then were about to start grazing after counting the livestock which had survived the winter. Around 1000 BC, the Uighurs in the West recorded in historical materials called this festival “Nowruz Festival” in Tajik language. After the reform and opening up, the party’s ethnic policy has been truly implemented, setting off an upsurge of inheriting and developing ethnic cultural heritage and restoring traditional festivals. All counties and cities in Xingjiang begin to hold Nowruz festival activities, including playing the drums, singing and dancing until dawn, eating meals of the Nowruz Festival, etc. Another example is the Gannian Festival in Tujia people who celebrated Chinese New Year, one day earlier than the Han people during Jiaping period of Ming Dynasty. The people of Tujia nationality seized the opportunity of invaders unpreparedness before the New Year to annihilate Japanese pirates. National defense is more important than the celebration of the Spring Festival. Subsequently, the Gannian Festival, showing their intelligence and bravery, is followed so far by Tujia people. Through the two examples, it can be concluded that many Chinese minority festivals have long histories and can be traced back to the ancient origins.

### **Conciseness With Three-Word Form Most**

Either minorities or Han people, the names of their festivals are brief and clear. Most of the festival terms are in three-character format, such as March Street (三月街), Torch Festival (火把节), and Yutanhui (渔潭会) of Bai people, Liuyueliu (六月六) and Siyueba (四月八) of Bouyei people, the Water-Splashing Festival (泼水节), the Open-door Day (开门节), the Closed-door Day (关门节) of Dai people and the Tibetan Calendar Festival (藏历节), the Ongkor Festival (望果节), the Shoton yogurt Festival (雪顿节) of Tibetans, etc. Generally, these terms with three-word form are catchy and concise.

### **Supernatural Culture With Mystery**

In China, with the color of ancient legend, many customs of the Chinese festivals involve the culture of offering sacrifices to ghosts and gods, which are full of the sense of secrecy and mysteriousness. For instance, The Li nationality has a festival—Ghost Festival (中元节) as well as Han people. It is said that from July 1st every year, the king of hell ordered to open the door of hell to release the wraiths and evil ghosts imprisoned who suffered all year from the hell, which allowed them to get short-term wandering and enjoy human blood food. Therefore, July was called the ghost month by people who considered it a bad month, neither suitable for marrying nor moving. Especially on July 15, the middle July (七月半) also called the Ghost Festival, the day when the ghost gate was opened was the heaviest hour in the upper world. Hence, it was generally believed that people had better not go out to avoid hitting ghosts, nor go to the riverside, lest you inadvertently fell and became an avatar for water ghost. Therefore, there are some sacrificial activities such as Middle Purdue, ancestor worship, chanting, floating river lanterns and burning paper ingots to appease the ghosts and to prevent them from wreaking havoc on the human world. In addition, there is a popular activity called Tong Yin Jiang Shen in Li areas, where every night from the first to the fifteenth day of July, people gather in the wilderness to carry out activities, such as “watching sticks”, “watching brooms”, “watching blind plays”, and “watching tree seeds”. Apparently, they are full of superstition and mystery.

### Translation Strategies for Chinese Minority Festival Terms

Chinese minority festival terms are the concentrated embodiment, typical representative of culture and the essence of inheritance from generation to generation. The English translation of these culture-loaded words is a medium of communication and inheritance, so that translating terms can be an important way for foreign friends to understand and enjoy many Chinese cultures. Whether the English translation is clear and expressive determines the efficiency of communication and affects the cultural exchange between minority culture and the external culture. Therefore, the English translation of some minority festival terms and translation strategies will be discussed as follows, to attract more translators' attention to this kind of problem aiming to help them to overcome the obstacles caused by different languages and cultures, thus, better conveying minority festival culture.

#### Literal Translation

Literal translation is a manifestation of language similarity, which maintains both the original contents and the original form (Li & Yan, 2020). Literal translation refers to a method that appropriately retains the meaning, content and language form of the source language. Examples include the Open-Door Festival (开门节) and Close-Door Festival (关门节) of Dai people. Table 1 lists some minority festival terms which adopt the literal translation. The source languages of these festival terms are well understood, most of which are the content of festivals, which makes the target readers accurately understand the meaning of the festival terms.

Table 1

#### *Examples of Minority Festival Terms Using Literal Translation*

Source text	Translation	Source text	Translation
火把节	Torch Festival	收获节	Harvest Festival
泼水节	Water-Splashing Festival	冬捕节	Winter Fishing Festival
鲜花节	Flower Festival	苗年	The Miao's New Year
驱鬼节	Driving off Evil Spirits	斗牛节	Bullfight Festival

#### Free Translation

Free translation is a method to deliver the intended meaning of the source text without paying attention to details such as syntax, style of the original text, which is suitable in case the translation is difficult to be understood. Free translation emphasizes the relative independence of the target culture system and the source culture system. However, the target readers who still do not know the cultural significance transmitted by the source language may misunderstand some translations like literal translations. In this situation, it is necessary to use the words familiar to the target readers to help convey the cultural connotations. For example, “上刀山, 下火海” is the most famous activity on the Arbor Day (刀杆节). The free translation of “Sword-climbing and Flame-crossing” is more comprehensible than the literal translation of “a mountain of swords and a sea of flames”, which is also more appropriate to the target language effect. “百家宴”, as another example, is the most important way for the Dong people to entertain distinguished guests. “百家” does not mean “one hundred families”, but is just a numeral that describes many dishes. Therefore, it is translated into “Public Dinner”, which embodies the grandness of the banquets and is easily understood by foreign readers (Huang, 2021). More examples are seen in Table 2.

Table 2

*Examples of Minority Festival Terms Using Free Translation*

Source text	Translation
尝新节	The New-rice-tasting Festival
赶秋节	Autumn Harvest Festival
祭山会	Mountain-worshipping Ceremony

**Transliteration and Annotation**

The festival terms directly translated according to the pronunciation of the source language are called transliteration (Li, 2014), such as doufu (tofu) and gongfu (kung fu). Since most of the terms come from the minority language and they are only familiar to minorities, most terms have no specific meanings when transliterated into Chinese, let alone the translation into English. It is usually impossible to find equivalents and form untranslatability. Therefore, this kind of ethnic festival terms carrying the national cultural connotation mostly adopts the strategy of transliteration. We can view transliteration as the manifestation of cultural confidence. This strategy is convenient for readers to directly and quickly learn about the basic information such as the festival terms of the source language.

For example, Ewenki people have a traditional and ancient festival which is named as Serbin Festival (瑟宾节). Besides, there is a traditional event of Bai people called Raosanling (绕三林). In this case, using the pronunciation of the source language can keep its original and achieve the purpose of culture spread. However, as the most target language readers are the initial learning of Chinese ethnic festivals, it is undeniable that the single strategy of transliteration can easily lead to the lack of information and cultural misunderstanding. Especially some culture-loaded words with strong cultural color are unknown to most English readers. Thus, the strategy of transliteration and annotation can be used to solve the cognitive difficulty of the target readers and achieve the communicative effect.

For example, the traditional Anie Festival (阿涅节) of Daur people can be translated as “Anie Festival, a kind of the traditional festival of Daur group, the same as Spring Festival of Han people”. Compared with the Anie Festival in China, foreign readers are more familiar with the Spring Festival of the Han nationality. Moreover, Yifan Festival (依饭节) of the Mulam nationality is a unique holiday custom. On that day, Mulan people would celebrate the harvest, pray for people well, clear up disasters as well as wish for a harvest bumpering and domestics thriving for the coming year. Therefore, Yifan Festival can be translated as “Yifan Festival, a grand religious ceremony”. From the perspective of domestication and foreignization, the strategy of transliteration and annotation belongs to a way of foreignization, which can maximize the spread of some expressions in the source culture but not in the target culture to the target culture, better promoting the publicity translation of folk culture. More examples are shown in Table 3.

In addition to the above four major translation strategies of festival terminology, there are some other translation strategies. For example, with the strategy of literal translation and free translation, “三月街” is translated into “(The) Third Month Fair” in which one of the main projects “洞经古乐” is translated into “Dong Jing Ancient Music”. Moreover, “阔时节” of Lisu people is translated into “Broad season (New Year’s Day in Lisu nationality)” by literal translation and annotation. And amplification is used to translate “赶秋节” into “Autumn Harvest Festival”, and so on.

Table 3

*Examples of Minority Festival Terms Using Transliteration and Annotation*

Source text	Transliteration	Annotation
四月八	Siyueba	The Memorial Day of Miao Minority
鼓藏节	Guzang Festival	The Drum-worship Festival
游方节	Youfang Festival	Dating Festival
卡雀哇	Ka Que Wa	The New Year of Drung Nationality

### Conclusion

Chinese ethnic minority festival terminology, with profound culture and long history, is a typical representative and an important part of Chinese traditional culture. Learning, inheriting, developing, and innovating traditional culture is our contemporary responsibility. The English translation of festival terms is not only a matter of methods, but also involves cultural background knowledge. As the people who build a bridge between different languages, translators should comprehensively and accurately understand the festival culture of ethnic minorities, analyze the characteristics of minority festival terms and flexibly use translation strategies. In this way, the value of the national language can be reflected in translation, and the better translation of festival terms is conducive to preserving and inheriting the festival culture of ethnic minorities, making chances for foreigners to learn about it and meanwhile promoting development of tourism.

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