



Translating Chu Lacquer Wares

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Abstract

As the precious wealth of human civilization, Chu lacquer wares are the carrier that reflects the long history and culture of Chu State or Chu region. The translation of Chu lacquer wares texts in museums plays a very important role in the exchange and demonstration of Chu culture. This paper tries to make it clear about the structural features of Chu lacquer wares texts in museums: the picture of Chu lacquer ware; the name of Chu lacquer ware; the dynasty of the Chu lacquer ware; the unearthed place of Chu lacquer ware; the dimension and background introduction of Chu lacquer ware. Based on the analysis of “texts in museums” rather than “museum as text”, we seek to explore distinct characteristics of the language of Chu lacquer wares texts in museums that are objective, explanatory, communicative and concise. Through investigating the translation of Chu lacquer wares texts in museums, we are able to observe that the main translation methods of each component are transliteration, literal translation, free translation, addition and omission in translation, and a variety of translation methods. It is noted that literal and free translation are popular among various methods. Considering the cultural and historical factors, adopting transliteration mainly by Chinese pinyin is acceptable to handle some special place names, dates, dynasties and so on.

Keywords: Chu lacquer wares; Texts in museums; Structural features; Translation methods.

1. Introduction

During the 800 years, the daring and innovative Chu people created a rich and profound culture, which can be demonstrated by Chu lacquer wares unearthed in the former territory of Chu. The elegant and magnificent Chu lacquer wares are one of the highlights of Chu culture, embodying its special charm with original shapes, elaborate patterns, rich colors, and profound spiritual meanings. As priceless cultural relics, these Chu lacquer wares are displayed in many museums among Hubei regions to tell ancient stories behind these cultural relics for the visitors. For the opening exhibition, language was something to engage with, a window to a particular world. Ravelli (2016) For the special window, language as a textual means to convey their culture is text in museums, that is to say, Chu lacquer wares texts in museums are the window and channel to the world. In the past ten years, related research mainly focusing on texts in museums from the perspective of translation and linguists (Bernard, 2015; Jiang, 2010; Neather, 2005;2012; Ravelli, 2006a) and pragmatics (Guillot, 2014; Jiang, 2012) have sought to explore the meaning, the bilingual comparison or evaluation of the texts in museums. The representational, organizational, and interactional metafunctions could be meaning-making resources leading to the success of the museum. Ravelli (2016) Structural features of Chu lacquer wares texts in museums and translation characteristics based on its composition, however, remain relatively little studied. With the help of previous findings, this paper attempts to analyze the Chinese source texts (ST) and English target texts (TT) to discover the structural features of Chu lacquer wares texts from which we can observe the rules of each component offered. According to the each component, there are distinct translation characteristics and various translation methods of Chu lacquer wares texts in museums. The bilingual texts are confined to the exhibition halls, descriptions of brochure and official websites collected mainly from the museums among Hubei regions. Comparing bilingual texts, there are some popular and effective translation methods that would create the same effect on the target reader as on the source reader as much as possible.

2. Structural Features of Chu Lacquer Wares Texts in Museums

Having taken some of the relevant studies on bilingual museum texts into account, we now turn to some case studies of bilingual texts from the exhibition halls, descriptions of brochure and official websites in Hubei Provincial Museum, Hunan Museum, Jingzhou Museum and other museums in Hubei regions.

The texts in discussion are bilingual texts on “猪形酒具盒(Box Filled With Wine Object)” from the exhibition halls of *Gallery of ancient Chinese lacquer ware* in Jingzhou Museum referring to the same lacquer ware on display, and let's read as follows:

Table-1.

Text Structure	ST	TT
Name	猪形酒具盒	Box Filled With Wine Object
Dynasty	战国（公元前475-前221年）	Warring States Period (475-221B.C.)
Unearthed place	荆州天星观2号墓出土	Unearthed from Tomb No.2, Tianxingguan, Jingzhou
Dimension	长64.2、宽24、通高28.6厘米	length: 64.2cm, width: 24cm, height: 28.6cm
Background introduction	酒具盒是盛放酒具的盒子，出土时盒内尚有三个耳环。该酒具盒的造型为双首连体猪形器身，器表的主体纹样为一首双身龙纹。这种器形和纹样在《山海经》中有多处记载，分别称为“并封”和“肥遗”。这件艺术品反映了楚人对这两种神物的信仰和崇拜。	There were three ear-cups in the box when it was excavated. The shape of this box is like a pig with two heads joining together. The main texture decoration of the box's surface is like a dragon of one head with two bodies. This sculpt and decoration were recorded many times in “Shan Hai Jing (a famous book)”, and they were called “Bing Feng” and “Fei Yi”. This work shows that Chu people adore and believe in this two kinds of holy animals.

Fig-1. Box Filled With Wine Object (from Jingzhou Museum, Hubei)



By comparing two versions of the text structure: source text and target text, we shall first discover there are similar structure patterns. Take the above bilingual texts for explanation, there are five components: the picture of cultural relics, the name of cultural relics (relic level or dynasty), the unearthed time and place of cultural relics, the dimension of cultural relics and background introduction of cultural relics. Luo (2017) Based on the above analysis, we could have six components of the structural feature of Chu lacquer wares texts in museums: the picture of Chu lacquer ware; the name of Chu lacquer ware; the dynasty of the Chu lacquer ware; the unearthed place of Chu lacquer ware; the dimension and background introduction of Chu lacquer ware. Due to the limited space of each brochure, omitting some components of texts is common in Chu lacquer wares texts. Meanwhile, the six components could exchange the sequence of each other. However, there are three basic components remaining in each Chu lacquer ware, that is, the picture, the name and dimension of cultural relics. Generally, more effective information is likely to place the visitors in the centre of travelling. Therefore, structural features can be observed and needed completely to offer maximum information effectively.

3. Translation Characteristics of Chu Lacquer Wares Texts in Museums

Chu lacquer wares are mostly demonstrated in museums especially Hubei regions, therefore, it is needed to study Chu lacquer wares texts in museums. Considerations of the translation characteristics of texts in museums, firstly learn the reference about the texts in museums, which can be understood: The first is that of texts in museums: the ‘texts’ with which visitors, and museum professionals, are very familiar. These might be called labels, extended texts, wall texts, catalogue entires, brochure descriptions. Meanwhile, ‘museum texts’ could mean museum as texts: the way a whole institution, or an exhibition within it, makes meaning, communicating to and with its public. Ravelli (2006a) The former depends on the organization of a verbal sign system. Jiang (2010) The paper focuses on the translation characteristics of “texts in museums” rather than “museum as text”, the level that generally relies on the use of language.

Analysis must be based on identifiable features in the text, not merely on interpretative commentary. Ravelli (2016) These components are the name of Chu lacquer wares, dynasty, unearthed place and dimension of Chu lacquer wares referring to objective information of the Chu lacquer wares. They are mainly ‘facts’ and amount of scientific information, basically unchanged by other subjective factors. Consequently, texts relating to these parts

can be described objectively. Luo (2017) From a systemic perspective, text analysis is not interpretive, but explanatory. Jiang (2010) Despite the objective information, there are many texts to explain what the lacquer ware is and related background introduction of Chu lacquer wares that are descriptive or explanatory. In terms of potential definitions and technical explanations of language, the knowledge that is represented is not overwhelming, and is manageable in terms of the visitor’s capacity to take in the information. Ravelli (2016) Communicative translation lays emphasis on conveying the message of the original in a form that is in agreement with the cultural, linguistic and pragmatic conventions of the target language instead of creating the actual words of source text as closely as possible. Newmark (2001) Indeed, the visitors would receive more information from the concise and lucid language to gain the equivalent communicative effect. The exhibition text is a central form of communication and a potential source of knowledge. The recommendations are: Write short texts; keep jargon to minimum. Matilde and Kjeldsen (2015) Above all, the language of Chu lacquer wares texts in museums with distinct characteristics is objective, explanatory, communicative and concise.

4. Translation Methods of Chu Lacquer Wares

Understanding a text involves the use of linguistic analysis to show how and why the text means what it does. Jiang (2010) It is particularly significant and necessary to explore the translation methods used in translation. As a matter of fact, it may be impossible to adopt one translation strategy in the actual translation process. Therefore, the translators generally use several or more translation methods and employ them interchangeably so as to obtain better translation results. Generally, the main translation methods of Chu lacquer wares texts in museums are transliteration, literal translation, free translation, addition and omission translation, and a variety of translation methods. According to the structural features of the museum texts and the translation characteristics of the texts, different translation methods are adopted.

4.1. Translating the Name of Chu Lacquer Wares

From the structural analysis, the name of Chu lacquer wares is mainly composed of two parts: category name and attribute name. Category names refer to different categories of cultural relics, such as cups, statues, swords, lamps, ink-slabs, and so on. What’s more, the unique features and shapes of Chu lacquer ware can be displayed through the attribute description, which is a significant and distinguishing complementary part between various Chu lacquer wares. At the same time, the huge differences between the Chinese and English languages have brought greater difficulties to translation, especially the emphasis on parataxis and the relative looseness of the structure in Chinese while the emphasis on hypotaxis and strictly grammatical structure in the English. In addition, the name of Chu lacquer wares have to be presented within limited space in the text, and it is necessary to consider this reading environment where the visitors need to obtain information in a relatively short period of time. Therefore, it is necessary to avoid the long name of the translation, and to highlight the essential information from the source language. The texts on the name of Chu lacquer wares from *Gallery of ancient Chinese lacquer ware* in Jingzhou Museum:

Table-2. Name of Three Categories of Chu lacquer wares

ST	TT	Category Name	Attribute Name
透雕座屏	Chasing Screen	Screen	Chasing
四龙座屏	Screen with Four-Dragon Design		Four-Dragon Design
蟠龙豆	Lacquer Dou-dish with Painted Design of Dragons	Lacquer Dou-dish	painted design of dragons
鸳鸯豆	Lacquer Dou-dish in Mandarin Duck Shape		Mandarin Duck Shape
浮雕龙凤纹豆	Phoenix and Lotus-shaped Dou-dish		Phoenix and Lotus-shaped
彩绘几何变形凤鸟纹漆圆盒	Round Lacquer Box in the Shape of a Crown with Painted Design of Transmuted Phoenixes	Lacquer Box	Shape of a Crown with Painted Design of Transmuted Phoenixes
彩绘抽象对称凤鸟纹铜环钮漆盒	Round Lacquer Box with Bronze Knob and Painted Design of Abstract Symmetrical Phoenixes		Bronze Knob and Painted Design of Abstract Symmetrical Phoenixes
彩绘抽象凤鸟纹铜半环钮漆盒	Round Lacquer Box with Bronze Knob in the Shape of a Half Ring Painted Design of Abstract Phoenixes		Bronze Knob in the Shape of a Half Ring Painted Design of Abstract Phoenixes

There are three respective groups of Chu lacquer wares belonging to three different categories: “座屏 (screen)”, “漆豆(lacquer dou-dish)” and “漆盒(lacquer box)”. All of them are goods of furniture for displaying, and specifically “screen” is interior furnishings while “lacquer dou-dish” and “lacquer box” are practical decorations.

The two exhibits “透雕座屏(Chasing Screen)” and “四龙座屏(Screen with Four-Dragon Design)” adopt the word “screen” as the core word of the two Chu lacquer wares, indicating that both belong to the category of “screen”. The former highlights the technique translated as “Chasing” from the Chinese text “透雕” to show the

whole shape by literal translation; the latter lays stress on the attribute of design and shape and translates the “四龙” into “Four-Dragon” by literal translation and “Design” is the addition in translation.

For the three Chu lacquer wares: “蟠龙豆(Lacquer Dou-dish with Painted Design of Dragons)”, “鸳鸯豆(Lacquer Dou-dish in Mandarin Duck Shape)” and “浮雕龙凤纹豆(Phoenix and Lotus-shaped Dou-dish)”, it is evident that they are all the sort of category of “漆豆(Lacquer Dou-dish)”. The shape of first lacquer ware is “蟠龙(Dragons)” with literal translation and addition in translation for “Painted Design”. In traditional Chu culture, dragon is the totem of Chu people and that explains why it is seen frequently in Chu lacquer wares. The shape of second lacquer ware is “Mandarin Duck” with literal translation standing for love from traditional Chinese culture’s perspective, and addition in translation for “Shape”. Though it may be possible to highlight phoenix and lotus in the last lacquer ware, the surface of last lacquer ware was painted with dragon, phoenix, snake and toad. As a matter of fact, one of the cultural characteristics of Chu lacquer wares is the ornamentation preference of phoenix and dragon pattern, even Chu people gives priority to phoenix which has been occupying a dominant position. Moreover, lotus is very common in the Chu region and in the picture of Chu lacquer ware. That explains why the visitor would find the “凤纹 (Phoenix and Lotus)” from the translation without “浮雕(embossed)” and “龙(dragon)” by adaption in translation.

For the last group of Chu lacquer wares: “彩绘几何变形凤鸟纹漆圆盒(Round Lacquer Box in the Shape of a Crown with Painted Design of Transmuted Phoenixes)”, “彩绘抽象对称凤鸟纹铜环钮漆盒(Round Lacquer Box with Bronze Knob and Painted Design of Abstract Symmetrical Phoenixes)” and “彩绘抽象凤鸟纹铜半环钮漆盒(Round Lacquer Box with Bronze Knob in the Shape of a Half Ring Painted Design of Abstract Phoenixes)”, all of them are on the list of “漆盒(lacquer box)”. The difference is on the attribute names among them elaborating the varied shapes just by literal translation. From the first attribute name, it is noted that this lacquer box looks like a crown shape with irregular pattern of phoenixes; the last two are both round lacquer box with bronze knob and painted design of abstract phoenixes. However, the one is the pattern of symmetrical phoenixes while the other is in the shape of a half ring.

Therefore, it can be discovered that the translation mode on translating the name of Chu lacquer wares is similar, that is to say, category name is the center position with attribute name. when it comes to translating category name, literal translation is employed even more. For attribute name, it is suitable to adopt several translation methods to deal with, such as addition, adaption and literal translation.

4.2. Translating the Dynasty of Chu Lacquer Wares

The dynasty is usually displayed after the name of Chu lacquer wares. Literal translation or transliteration can be employed for translation of dynasty. It is suggested to append the exact year with the AD chronology which is still used around the world up to date, so that foreign visitors can understand the corresponding concept of time in their familiar time system. The texts about different dynasties in Chinese history from *Gallery of ancient Chinese lacquer ware* in Jingzhou Museum:

Table-3. Dynasty of Chu lacquer wares

ST	TT	Translation methods
座屏	Screen	Literal translation
战国（公元前475-前221年）	Warring States Period (475-221B.C.)	
漆豆	Lacquer Dou-dish	Literal translation
战国（公元前475-前221年）	Warring States Period (475-221B.C.)	
漆盒	Lacquer Box	Literal translation and transliteration
西汉（公元前206-公元25年）	Western Han Dynasty (206B.C.-25A.D.)	
漆盘	Lacquer Plate	Literal translation
秦（公元前221-前207年）	Qin Dynasty (221-207B.C.)	

According to the above examples, “座屏(Screen)” and “漆豆(Lacquer dou-dish)” are historical relic of lacquer wares in “战国(公元前475-前221年)” literally translated as “Warring States Period(475-221B.C.)”; and “漆盒(Lacquer Box)” is a cultural relic of “西汉（公元前206-公元25年）” and is translated as “Western Han Dynasty(206B.C.-25A.D.)” by literal translation and transliteration; The dynasty of lacquer plate is “秦（公元前221-前207年）” translated as “Qin Dynasty” in Chinese pinyin.

Shi (1996), considered “约前11世纪末（西周初）周成王以子男之田封熊绎于楚蛮（At the end of the 11th century BC (early Western Zhou Dynasty), the monarch Chengwang(posthumous name) of Zhou conferred the Viscount upon Xiong Yi with Chu region)”. From then on, as the leader of Chu people, Xiong Yi established the Chu State. In 223 BC, the Qin army broke through the capital of Chu and the kingdom of Chu perished. The history of Chu State is about eight hundred years, however, it is noticed that at present a mass of Chu lacquer wares are unearthed from the Warring States Period. That is because the Chu State are powerful and prosperous during the

Warring States Period and the design, lacquer-paint and painting of lacquer-ware and wood-ware were developed well in Chu State during the same period. Therefore, it is acceptable that a large amount of Chu lacquer wares are still unearthed from Qin Dynasty and Western Han Dynasty mainly because the popularity of the well-developed techniques of Chu lacquer wares.

Note that generally cultural relics are marked with the level of cultural relics. Chu lacquer wares should also have the identical label as the supplemental information to indicate the important value in history. While demonstrating its importance, the level of Chu lacquer wares also provides visitors with more information. Though we yet discover the description on the level of Chu lacquer wares from these museums mentioned in the paper, translations of the level of Chu lacquer wares should be translated by literal translation.

4.3. Translating the Unearthed Place and Dimension of Chu Lacquer Wares

The unearthed place and dimension of Chu lacquer wares are generally regarded as supplementary information. In order to facilitate the target readers to obtain effective information during reading the texts, it is necessary to make an arrangement separately as an arranged list followed by the name of Chu lacquer ware.

When Chu lacquer wares are unearthed, the unearthed time and place of excavation can be obtained. Though we can just collect a few of the description on the unearthed time of Chu lacquer wares from these museums mentioned in the paper, both the exact unearthed time with the AD chronology and the name of place are recognized and accepted today. Therefore, the unearthed time and place that the cultural relics are unearthed are translated by literal translation and transliteration. As a demand of the standard measurement and international system of weights and measures, the size of Chu lacquer wares can be received after Chu lacquer wares are unearthed. Consequently, the dimension of Chu lacquer ware shall be translated literally, coupled with pictures or some close-up pictures to demonstrate the specific shapes, a variety of emblazonries and patterns of Chu lacquer ware. The following brochure description refers to “彩绘木雕小座屏 (Painted carved wooden screen with small bases)” from *Chu Culture* in Hubei Provincial Museum adopting the the AD chronology and international system of weights and measures:

Table-4. Unearthed Place and Dimension of *Painted Carved Wooden Screen with Small Bases*

Components	ST	TT	Translation methods
Unearthed place & Unearthed time	1965年江陵望山1号墓	unearthed from Tomb 1 at Wangshan, Jiangling in 1965	Literal translation and transliteration
Dimension	通长51.8厘米 高15厘米 屏宽3厘米 座宽12厘米	length: 51.8cm, height:15cm, width of screen:3cm, width of base:12cm	Literal translation

Unearthed place and time of the wooden screen is “1965年江陵望山1号墓出土” which is translated as “unearthed from Tomb 1 at Wangshan, Jiangling in 1965” with combination of literal translation and transliteration. The dimension of the cultural relics “通长51.8厘米 高15厘米 屏宽3厘米 座宽12厘米” is literally translated as “length: 51.8cm, height: 15cm, width of screen: 3cm, width of base: 12cm”.

4.4. Translating the Background Introduction of Chu Lacquer Wares

From the perspective of content, the background introduction of Chu lacquer ware is mainly divided into three categories: the appearance and techniques of Chu Lacquer Ware, the historical origin of Chu Lacquer Ware, and the application and historic status of Chu Lacquer Ware.

4.4.1. Translating the Appearance and Techniques of Chu Lacquer Wares

Because most of cultural relics referring to various shapes, forms, and techniques that are commonly recognized in Chinese and Western cultures, it is better to accept to employ literal translation.

Table-5. Appearance and Techniques of Three Chu Lacquer Wares

ST	TT	Translation methods
“环绕“斗”字，书写着二十八星宿星名，两边分别绘有龙与虎的图像。	It is surrounded by the names of the twenty-eight constellations, and flanked by images of a dragon and a tiger.	Literal translation
瓮内髹红漆，外髹黑漆。	This ceramic urn is applied with red lacquer inside and black outside.	Literal translation
该酒具盒的造型为双首连体猪形器身，器表的主体纹样为一首双身龙纹。	The shape of this box is like a pig with two heads joining together. The main texture decoration of the box's surface is like a dragon of one head with two bodies.	Literal translation

From **Table 5**, the source text “环绕“斗”字，书写着二十八星宿星名，两边分别绘有龙与虎的图像(It is surrounded by the names of the twenty-eight constellations, and flanked by images of a dragon and a tiger)”

describes a picture from the lid of a wooden suitcase. The cultural points “二十八星宿星名” and “龙与虎的图像” are translated by “the names of the twenty-eight constellations” and “images of a dragon and a tiger”; another texts indicating the techniques and shapes of, “髹漆彩绘陶瓮(Ceramic Urn with Lacquer Coat)” and “猪形酒具盒(Box Filled With Wine Object)” are translated by literal translation.

Meanwhile, due to the complex processes and procedures, the visitors even from China find it is a tough job to image a three-dimensional appearance and comprehend craftsmanship precisely through the limited descriptions of source language. The translations will be even more difficult to vividly convey such images and techniques. Thus, adopting free translation as a complement of literal translation can make up for the lack of sensory evaluation. The visitors could acquire a better sense of the appearance and three-dimensional quality and achieve an expected effect of cultural exchange. The texts are from “《二十八宿图》木衣箱 (Wooden Suitcase with Diagram of Twenty-eight Constellations)” of *Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng*:

Table-6. Appearance of Wooden Suitcase with Diagram of Twenty-eight Constellations

ST	TT	Translation methods
衣箱盖面正中写有篆文“斗”字。	At the center of the lid is an ancient character <i>dou</i> .	Literal translation, free translation and transliteration
在亢宿附近刻写“甲寅三日”四字。	Next to the constellation of <i>kang</i> there are four characters recording a date.	Literal translation, free translation and transliteration
公元前433年农历大年初三傍晚，这一天在月相上叫“初吉”，是一个吉利的日子。	the evening of the third of the first lunar month in 433BC, which is an auspicious day according moon phase.	Free translation

From the source text “衣箱盖面正中写有篆文‘斗’字 (At the center of the lid is an ancient character *dou*)”, the information “篆文‘斗’字” is translated as “an ancient character *dou*” with combination of free translation and transliteration while skillfully dealing with the complex knowledge on Chinese characters given by “篆文”. From the text “在亢宿附近刻写‘甲寅三日’四字”(Next to the constellation of *kang* there are four characters recording a date.)”, there are two terms “亢宿” and “‘甲寅三日’四字”, yet lacking corresponding English expressions for them. Hence, both of them are translated as “the constellation of *kang*” and “four characters recording a date” by transliteration and free translation. From the text “公元前433年农历大年初三傍晚，这一天在月相上叫‘初吉’，是一个吉利的日子”(the evening of the third of the first lunar month in 433BC, which is an auspicious day according moon phase.)”, “‘初吉’” and “吉利的日子” are the similar meaning in Chinese culture, so there is “an auspicious day” with free translation.

4.4.2. Translating the Historical Origin of Chu Lacquer Wares

The historical origin of cultural relics involves an abundant cultural background, various contents and wide range of themes. There are many historical events and some of them are not easily comprehended by visitors, even if there are the readers of source language. The texts from *Chu Culture* in Hubei Provincial Museum refer to many ancestors in Chinese history especially some outstanding celebrities in the world such as Lao Zi and Qu Yuan and a political policy in Chu during the Eastern Zhou Dynasty:

Table-7. Historical Origin of Some Chu Lacquer Wares

ST	TT	Translation methods
颛顼帝 高阳氏 老童、祝融 鬻熊	Gao Yang, Zhuan Xu, Lao Tong and Zhu Rong, and Yu Xiong	Transliteration
先祖、远祖和始祖	ancestors	Free translation
农、商无本末之别	merchants enjoyed equality with farmers (Physiocracy is the traditional policy in Chinese history)	Free translation Annotation

The names from the sentence “楚人认为颛顼帝高阳氏是他们的先祖，老童、祝融是远祖，鬻熊是始祖 (The Chu people believed that their ancestors were, in terms of age, Gao Yang, or Emperor Zhuan Xu, Lao Tong and Zhu Rong, and Yu Xiong.)” are “颛顼”，“高阳”，“老童”，“祝融” and “鬻熊” translated in transliteration. “先祖、远祖和始祖” are different generations in Chinese culture, yet they are the ancestors in English language so they can be translated into “ancestors” by free translation in order to achieve the equivalent effect among visitors between source language and target language since the titles in English are relatively simpler than those in Chinese. Hence, literal translation is suitable to handle the person name and geography name when translating the historical origin of Chu lacquer wares.

In ancient China, history and politics are closely linked and the historical origin of cultural relics also involves policies. For example, “楚国的农、商也无本末之别” which is evidently different from the traditional policy of “重农轻商 (the thought of emphasizing agriculture and scorning business)” in Chinese history. Therefore, appending

explanatory notes following the translation “The State, in which merchants enjoyed equality with farmers (Physiocracy is the traditional policy in Chinese history)...” Adopting free translation when handling the troublesome points like the policies can achieve instantaneous communicative effects.

4.4.3. Translating the Application and Historic Status of Chu Lacquer Wares

The application of Chu lacquer wares is the value in use in a specific historical period. It is generally objective and can be translated literally while a small number of free translation is employed. The following examples are about the application and historic status of Chu lacquer wares from *Gallery of ancient Chinese lacquer ware* in Jingzhou Museum and *Changsha Mawangdui Han Dynasty Tombs Exhibition* in Hunan Museum :

Table-8. Application of Five Chu Lacquer Wares

ST	TT	Translation methods
上古时代的中国人席地而坐，休息时把手臂靠在身前的一张长条形小矮桌上，这种桌叫做‘几’。	In ancient times, Chinese just sat on the floor, when they had break, they just rested their arms on a small of long table in front of them, and this kind of small table is called ‘Ji’	Literal translation
虎座飞鸟是东周楚墓中特有的神器。	Flying phoenix standing on tiger’s seat is a peculiar sculptures in Chu tomb in Eastern Zhou Dynasty.	Literal translation
此种造型，或认为是山神的化身，或认为是龙的形象，是用来镇墓辟邪的神物。	One has suggested that tomb guardian might have symbolized the Mountain Deity or dragon, employed to terrify various evils who had attempted to burst into the chamber.	Free translation
一般认为座屏用于室内摆设。	Generally, it is expected that this kind of screens is only used as indoor furnishing	Literal translation
此屏风是为随葬而制作的冥器。	This screen therefore is a specially made funerary object.	Literal translation

From Table 8, there are four texts about the application of five Chu lacquer wares with literal translation. However, merely about the function of a sculpture of “Tomb Guardian” adopted free translation. According to the source text “此种造型，或认为是山神的化身，或认为是龙的形象，是用来镇墓辟邪的神物(One has suggested that tomb guardian might have symbolized the Mountain Deity or dragon, employed to terrify various evils who had attempted to burst into the chamber.)”, visitors can learn a brief impression from the description. For “山神的化身” and “龙的形象”, they are the imaginary Table without the real image in the world, so they are translated by “have symbolized the Mountain Deity or dragon” with free translation. The general function of the tomb guardian is to protect the tomb and prevent evils who had attempted to burst into the chamber that is “镇墓辟邪”. Thus, the expression “镇墓辟邪的神物” is translated into “terrify various evils” without translating “神物”.

Table-9. Historic Status of Five Chu Lacquer Wares

ST	TT	Translation methods
可谓是一件精美的艺术品	This is really an exquisite piece of artwork.	Literal translation
鸳鸯豆、凤鸟莲花豆、浮雕龙凤纹豆等是其中的精品。	Lacquer dou-dish in mandarin duck shape, phoenix and lotus-shaoed dou-dish, dou-dish caved with dragon and phoenix are exquisite antiques among them.	Literal translation
因此，也可以说这件纱冠是我国迄今所见最早的乌纱帽实物。	It can thus be said that this artifact is the earliest real object of black gauze cap found in China so far.	Literal translation
漆色艳丽，纹饰繁缛，是西汉早期髹漆陶器中的佳作。	It is evaluated as the most magnificent work in such category in early Western Han Dynasty, due to its brilliant color and delicate design.	Free translation
(辟邪)是目前我国发现最早的根雕艺术品之一。	It exhibits the earliest unprecedented example of the root sculpture.	Free translation

The historical status of cultural relics is mostly objective and can be translated by literal translation while some evaluations towards cultural relic are from experts whose viewpoints can be subjective, hence, the number of free translation is also adopted. From Table 9, there are three texts about the historic status of five Chu lacquer wares with literal translation. From the source text “漆色艳丽，纹饰繁缛”，it means there are several colors covered the lacquer ware and emblazonment is various and delicate. Therefore, it is simple to understand for foreign visitors by “brilliant color and delicate design” with free translation. From the target text “the earliest unprecedented example of the root sculpture”, which is a high evaluation and means “最早的且前所未见的根雕艺术品范例”，the corresponding source text is “最早的根雕艺术品之一”，so the expression “unprecedented example” is dealt with free translation.

5. Conclusion

As a product of human civilization, Chu lacquer wares are the carrier that reflects the long history and culture of Chu State or Chu region. The translation of Chu lacquer wares texts in museums plays a very important role in the exchange and demonstration of Chu culture.

This article aims to make it clear about the structural features of Chu lacquer wares texts in museums that are: the picture of Chu lacquer ware; the name of Chu lacquer ware; the dynasty of the Chu lacquer ware; the unearthed place of Chu lacquer ware; the dimension and background introduction of Chu lacquer ware. According to attributes of each components, the language of Chu lacquer wares texts in museums with distinct characteristics is objective, explanatory, communicative and concise. For translating the name of Chu lacquer ware, literal translation is employed even more for category name while it is suitable to adopt several translation methods to deal with attribute name such as addition, adaption and literal translation. Furthermore, literal translation or transliteration can be employed for translation of dynasty. When it comes to translating unearthed place and time, combination of literal translation and transliteration are employed. The dimension of Chu lacquer ware is translated with literal translation. Additionally, for appearance and techniques of Chu lacquer wares, it is better to accept to put to use literal translation and adopt free translation as a complement of literal translation. When translating the historical origin of Chu lacquer wares, adopting literal translation is suitable to handle the person name and geography name, while free translation handling some uneasy-to-explain points like the policies can achieve instantaneous communicative effects. Last, the application of and historical status of Chu lacquer wares is generally objective and can be translated literally. Due to subjective evaluations towards Chu lacquer wares from professionals, the number of free translation is also adopted.

Therefore, the main translation methods of Chu lacquer wares texts in museums are transliteration, literal translation, free translation, addition and omission in translation, and a variety of translation methods. Above all, different translation methods are adopted. It is noted that literal and free translation are popular among various methods. Meanwhile, considering the cultural and historical factors, the translators adopted transliteration mainly by Chinese pinyin to handle some special place names, dates, dynasties and so on.

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