

# Adoption and Adaptation: English Translation of Two Folk Songs in Enshi Tujia Ethnic Region

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**Abstract:** Civilization is the internal value of culture, and culture is the external manifestation of civilization. Exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations is an important driving force to promote the progress of human civilization and world peace and development. Folk songs in Enshi Ethnic Region are rooted in the very land rich in Chinese culture and reflect the local conditions and customs of the region. It is beneficial to explore the translation, introduction and evaluation of the folk songs in the area so as to promote the development of Chinese minority culture. Based on the English translation of *Laborers' Song* (拾工號子) and *A Song for My Lover* (唱起山歌送情郎), this paper discusses principles and techniques in the English translation of Enshi folk songs. It holds that the background, cultural connotation and language style of the two types of folk songs are quite different. We should return to the philosophical origin of translation. We should not only focus on Enshi language and culture, but also use English as the carrier to interpret the corresponding folk songs accurately, comprehensively and appropriately through representing the semantic and cultural connotation of lyrics. In short, both adoption and adaptation are intertwined in the translation process.

**Keywords:** Enshi Folk Songs, English Translation, Adoption, Adaptation, Translation Process

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## 1. Introduction

Language reflects existence of human beings and their culture. Words are interpreted as naming words, and "only words can make things exist". [1] Enshi folk songs, well-known in China, are, to a certain extent, the symbolic representation of geographical location, local customs, love between men and women, way of life, social conventions etc. of Enshi Ethnic Region, which is located in the west of Hubei Province, central China. They are the historical inheritance of the regional culture of Tujia ethnic minorities, and are one of the essences of China's bright national culture. Enshi folk songs constitute one of the big families of Chinese folk songs, which mainly include "Jiangnan Water Town" folk song represented by Jiangnan ditty, "rough and vigorous" folk song represented by northern Haozi, "Northwest Plateau" folk song represented by Xintianyou, "southwest plateau" folk song

represented by Yunnan Guizhou and Sichuan folk song, northern grassland folk song characterized by long tune, Xinjiang folk song with exotic style and folk song in the snowy northeast mountains. [2] All kinds of folk songs reflect the social reality of different times, different regions, different nationalities and corresponding customs. Folk songs are constantly changing and developing in the vicissitudes of life for thousands of years and, so far, they have become a complete artistic whole. [3]

Compared with folk songs of western countries like the U.S., Enshi folk songs emphasize the expression of natural landscape, customs, love between men and women, and are freer and easier in form and rhyme, with more exclamatory modal particles. Enshi folk songs are treated in this paper from three perspectives: translation, introduction and evaluation. From the perspective of foreign exchanges and cultural exchanges, translation is the basis of introduction and evaluation, and introduction and evaluation are the



M: My bonnie lass's so fair weh

W: Come three days (yah geh) earlier (yoo hoo yoo yoo zoh hoo weh)

And you can (yoo hoo) watch the show (yah yoo hoo hoo yoo hoo hoo yi ya zi weh ya)

Chorus: (yoo hoo yoo hoo yi ya zi weh ya)

M: My bonnie lass's so fair weh

W: Come three days (yoo dih geh) later (yoo hoo yoo yoo zoh hoo weh)

And you will (yoo hoo) miss the show (yoo hoo hoo yoo hoo yoo hoo yi ya zi weh ya)

Chorus: (yoo hoo yoo hoo yi ya zi weh ya)

M: My bonnie lass's so fair weh

W: I invite you, yoo dih geh, my darling, (yoo hoo yoo yoo zoh hoo weh)

Do come yoo hoo earlier yoo yoo hoo wah (yoo hoo yoo hoo yi ya zi weh ya)

Chorus: yoo hoo yoo hoo yi ya zi weh ya

M: My bonnie lass's so fair weh

My bonnie lass's so fair weh

Ethnic folk song is one of the unique song genres in China. It is a type rather than a specific track, and usually has no fixed lyrics. Generally, it refers to folk songs compiled and sung by people in a certain region to express their thoughts and feelings in the work of mountains, fields and pastures. Most of them appear in the form of solo or duet. The content is mainly to express labor and love life. The rhythm of this piece of song (號子) is rich in local characteristics and has the most stylistic variety in all folk songs. It has a wide variety in number and is nation-widely distributed.

In this song, the 抬工號子 (laborers' song or chant of workers whose job usually is jointly lift something up) is one of them. "抬工" refers to the people who are specialized in shouldering work with heavy physical strength under the background of complex geographical terrain, winding and uneven roads and rudimentary aid tools. In order to control the labor rhythm and slow down fatigue, people naturally generate the "chant" by controlling their breathing and singing tune during labor. In the corresponding English language environment, due to the different stages of economic and social development, it is difficult to find the corresponding modern vocabulary. Therefore, this paper adopts the method of "adaptation" and translates them into "laborers" and "song".

The central meaning of the lyrics is very simple. Without the repeated sentences, it can be reduced to seven sentences. The man picked up the pestle (a tool for workers); The sun has risen and shines all over the mountains; The sun is higher, shining on all the rocks; There is a stage on the top of a huge rock; You can watch show if you come three days in advance; If you come three days later, you will miss the show; You should come earlier next time. The repeated sentences praise a woman's beauty.

It can be seen in the main body of the lyrics that there are a large number of repeated modal particles. This part should adopt "adoption" principle, which means they are directly corresponded to the relevant English expression through

transliteration or literal translation. Other notional words, with no need to go to details, can be handled according to the general principles of translation. It is worth saying that, as a special style, rhyme of the song in the translation in this paper is not categorically embodied in some form due to rules of English expressions.[7]

The following is another short example of Enshi ethnic songs.

## 2.2. 唱起山歌送情郎

(女) 太陽出來嘛, 花花扇兒扇,

四山紅啊, 紅花對牡丹,

打一把滴扇子嘛, 一把紅扇子,

送情的郎哦, 繡球花兒圓。

我拉住郎的手啊, 問郎幾時來呀?

(男) 我今天不得空哦, 我明天要砍柴嘞, 我後天才到我么妹的家中來。

(男) 太陽出來嘛, 花花扇兒扇,

四山黃啊, 紅花對牡丹,

唱一個山歌嘛, 一把紅扇子,

送哥的妹嘛, 繡球花兒圓。

我拉住妹的手, 問妹幾時來?

(女) 今天不得空, 我明天要做鞋,

後天才到哥的家中來。

(合) 後天才到哥的家中來。

後天才到妹的家中來。

### *A Song for My Lover*

Girl: The sun rises from east; flowers sway in wind

All over red mountains are red flowers and peonies

I flutter a fan, a red fan

My dear love, what a silk ball I have

I hold you tight by hand

And ask when you see me next time

Boy: I'm busy today, and cut firewood tomorrow

After tomorrow, I'll come to your home

Boy: The sun rises from east; flowers sway in wind

All over golden mountains are red flowers and peonies

I sing a mountain song with a red fan in hand

My dear love, what a silk ball I have

I hold you tight by th' hand

And ask when you see me next time

Girl: I'm busy today, and make shoes tomorrow

After tomorrow, I'll come to your home

B&G: After tomorrow, I'll come to your home

After tomorrow, I'll come to your home

From the title, it can be seen that this song is about the theme of love between men and women, which is much more straightforward than the first song. Although the first song also expresses the love between men and women, it is much more euphemistic. The main content can be divided into two parts. The first part is the description of the environment and the fact that the girl invites the boy to her home while the boy does not have time; The second part also begins with the description of the environment. Later, it is written that the boy invites the girl to his house but the girl has other things to do. From the perspective of the lyrics, there are fewer modal particles, the content is relatively plain, the daily

language is common, and the translation is relatively simple. The biggest obstacle to folk song translation lies in the transmission of special meanings or images. Although images are based on words, their richness and abstraction have qualitative changes.[8] It is worth mentioning that some words with special meanings adopt the basic principle of "adoption" in the translation to maintain the style of the original text. Generally, they are literally translated. For example, "silk ball (绣球)", "Peony (牡丹)" and other words symbolize mutual admiration and pure love between men and women in the Chinese context; The words "郎 (word describing boy in folk song)" and "妹 (word describing girl in some regions)" are adjusted into personal pronouns according to the needs of the translation, so as to be more suitable for English expression. [9]

For the case of these two folk songs, the main content is about the young men and women in Enshi Tujia area who express their love directly or implicitly by singing folk songs in pairs, with real emotion and simple content; The English translation process of text is not too difficult. By comparing the characteristics of English language and combining the translation principles of "adaptation" and "adoption", the English translation can be displayed smoothly. The ideal and almost impossible state is to fully convey the essence of Enshi ethnic culture to foreign audiences. It is absolutely not enough for this communication process to rely only on the translation of the text. Moreover, as far as text translation itself is concerned, it is not simple considering the genre of "song" if it were to be sure that folk songs can be sung in real life in the English context as in the original context. This may require the joint participation of composers and singers, rather than just English-Chinese translators. Finally, if someone wants to comprehensively appreciate Enshi's local customs and cultures, in addition to the medium of folk songs, a more appropriate and rewarding way should be to pay a visit.

### 3. The Balance Between Adoption and Adaptation in English Translation of Enshi Folk Songs

In essence, the English translation of Enshi folk songs is to express the direct meaning and implied meaning of Enshi folk songs through English in a way that is easy for the target audience to accept. However, as far as folk songs are concerned, text translation has its own limitations. Because translation are usually the translation of lyrics, it can not translate other artistic components, such as dance moves, music score, singer, environment, props and so on, and each one of these factors may just constitute the reason why a folk song is popular and worthy of spreading.

Although text translation bears some limitations, it is a necessary option in the external communication of Chinese culture, because the main part of the cultural core is embodied in language, which is regarded as the so-called "the home of being". To promote the external dissemination of Chinese minority culture, strengthen cultural exchanges between

countries, and maintain cultural diversity, all of these call for the translation of Enshi folk songs. On the other side, if there is no purposeful interference, few people will be motivated to keep, translate or promote those ethnic culture. Under the background of globalization, marketization and industrialization, Enshi folk song culture, which is in a weak position and has a history of thousands of years, may gradually disappear in the tide of the times until it is silent.

Different language forms have their own characteristics and traditions. They have similarities and differences in vocabulary, grammar, idiomatic expressions and so on. Therefore, different means must be adopted in translation, either free translation or literal translation in a tailored and flexible way.[10] In order to do well in the translation of Enshi folk songs, the paper contends that it is necessary to comprehensively compare various translation theories, combine the local language, culture, history, customs and folk characteristics of Enshi, learn from the paradigm of English folk songs belonging to the same mountain area, integrate introduction and comments in the translation, respect the habits of the audience, and convey the essence of Enshi traditional folk songs culture.

#### 3.1. Translation Theory

There are many schools of translation theories. Every translator and translation researcher can put forward his own views on translation, and each has his own set of theories. It is well known that traditional translation theories include Yan Fu's "faithfulness, expressiveness, elegance", Fu Lei's "expressiveness", Christina Nord's "functional translation theory", Eugene Nida's "functional equivalence theory", Bassnett's "cultural-turn theory", etc. Some scholars [11] believe, at present, the feasible theories mainly include German functionalism, Peter Newmark's and Eugene Nida's theories, which should be guided by functionalism and combine the relevant elements of Newmark, Nida and other theories to form a relatively complete theoretical system to solve the problems of translation both in strategies and methods.

When it comes to the practice of translating lyrics of Chinese folk songs, some scholars put forward a more specific recognition of the principles of English translation. Wang [12] pointed out that the translation of folk song lyrics should have some principles: dialects must be translated into English idiomatic expression, at least oral expression; according to the length of syllables, the short translation method is adopted, and some of them are appropriately enhanced; the translation should have more poetic flavor than the general lyrics, but its meaning should be more straightforward than that of poetry; semantically, the content of figurative expressions has certain correspondence or implied connection with the real situation; In the area of translating specific events, try to translate as much content as possible, otherwise give up the translation of those inappropriate; lyrics pad words and decorative words should be completely omitted, and interjective words used to create certain mood should be utilized in the translation process; do not force or avoid rhyme, pay attention to rhythm and sentence length; strive to compensate for the inherent

drawbacks of translation by making use of the characteristics of English poetry; the cultural background knowledge that cannot be translated should be noted; it is better to alienate cultural factors than to force them to be naturalized.

Language is the most important tool for human beings to represent the world and to realize communication. [13] Lyrics, as the specific expression of language, carries a reflection of a certain reality. The paper emphasizes that the translation of Enshi folk songs should return to the philosophical origin of "translation", namely, what translation is, why translation takes place and how translation should be done. As far as the English translation of Enshi folk songs is concerned, it is a practice, based on Enshi language and culture under the needs of external (English World) communication, to accurately, comprehensively and appropriately convey the word semantics and cultural connotations of the corresponding lyrics into English language.

### 3.2. Translation Tips and Comments

The English translation of Enshi folk songs should embody the vocabulary, cultural knowledge and charm of the source language in the target language. For the majority of Chinese translators, they are more familiar with the knowledge of the source language, while for the target language, they can refer to English folk songs. They should pay attention to the following aspects: first, they'd better rhyme in a fixed format. In these two cases mentioned above, the eager to rhyme is prominent, but it is not a must in practice; second, mood particles in general sense are kept intact in translation, but there are some omitted; third, dialects, which are prominent in lyrics of ethnic folk songs, are recommended to first translated into standard Chinese, then translated into English; fourth, the vocabulary should be easy to understand and concise; fifth, it is suggested to use four line format and the length of each line is generally consistent; sixth, they should use complete syntactic structure. Initiating newlines within the same meaning group, it is appropriate to use function words to open a new line; seventh, cultural connotation and central idea are clearly reflected.

In doing translation, there are two concepts worth mentioning: "readability" and "singability". These concepts are proposed to distinguish the two purposes of lyrics translation. One is that the translated lyrics can be covered. In this case, the ultimate purpose of translation is "singing", which requires the lyrics translation to adapt to the melody; When translation is for people to appreciate the artistic performance and understand the content that the performer wants to express through subtitles, the ultimate purpose of translation is "readability", that is, the audience can understand the content of lyrics.[14] Poetry or its meaning is difficult to transfer. This not only means that it is difficult to translate poetry (songs), but also is the highest praise for the literariness of the original text: it is a beautiful and complete ecology, which will inevitably failed to be acclimatized in transplant. [15]

Based on the English translation of *Laborers' Song* and *A Song for My Lover*, this paper discusses principles and techniques in the English translation of Enshi folk songs. It is

obvious that, like any translation between whatever two cultures, translation is in fact a bridge building process. This process entails two parts, the source language/environment and target language/environment, both of which require representations in the translation. In practice, there might be more than one perfect version of translation, considering the factors of different audience and purposes. Anyway, both adaptation and adoption are reflected in transmitting the message of Chinese ethnic culture to Western receivers and, in practice, priorities should be put on honing techniques of translating mood particles, dialects, rhyme and metaphorical words into corresponding forms.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper holds that cultural confidence should be strengthened in the ethnic area, the excellent traditional folk song culture is worthy of preserving and spreading. By comparing with American folk songs, the "introduction" and "evaluation" in the English "translation" process is more integrated with the help of the general rules of translation and the combination of Enshi's special language and culture. While following the local culture, adapting to the target language environment achieve high-quality reproduction through excellent "translation", which constantly promotes the Chinese ethnic culture "Going Out".

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