

# Research on Translation of Costume Terms in *Chu Ci*

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**Abstract:** *Chu Ci* is the first collection of romantic poetry in China. Based on the four English versions of *Chu Ci* (Yang Xianyi and his wife Gladys Yang, Zhuo Zhenying, Xu Yuanchong, and Hawkes) as corpus, this study aims to make an in-depth analysis of the costume terms in *Chu Ci*, and to solve three major problems: First, sort out the characteristics of clothing or accessory in *Chu Ci*. Second, compared different translations of costume terms in *Chu Ci* as well as translation strategies or methods. Third, summarized its importance and great value of the translation on costume terms in classic works.

**Keywords:** *Chu Ci*, Costume Terms, Translation

## 1. Introduction

Costume terms are an indispensable part of human life. As an important part of Chu culture and even Chinese traditional culture, the costume terms in *Chu Ci* have not received enough attention. *Chu Ci* did not have an English translation until the end of the 19th century, and now nearly 20 different translation versions have been published, most of which are translated by Western Sinologists. The English translation of *Chu Ci* is not comparable to its dissemination in Japan, South Korea and other Asian countries. Zhou Jianzhong (1992), a famous expert on the study of *Chu Ci*, divided the study of *Chu Ci* into nine branches. As an important part of overseas study and communication study of *Chu Ci*, the English translation and research of *Chu Ci* has been lagging behind other branches. The differences and complexity of culture urge the translation of cultural terminology in classics to adopt flexible translation strategies.

## 2. Characteristics of Clothing and Accessory in *Chu Ci*

The costumes in *Chu Ci* are of special shape and style, with gorgeous fabrics, exquisite patterns and bright colors, forming a unique scenery in the history of Chu culture. With its own charm, it has influenced the formation and development of clothing in many regions and times. The aftertaste of the clothing in *Chu Ci* can be seen in many costumes of later generations. Although some of these descriptions have some imaginary elements, they are all based on reality. They are not only the manifestation of the poet's own personal characteristics, but also the reflection of the cultural characteristics of Chu at that time. By sorting out the description of clothing in *Chu Ci*, the author summarizes the following characteristics of clothing in *Chu Ci* from different aspects such as style, fabric, color and accessories:

### 2.1 Advocating luxury, high crown and long clothes

In *Chu Ci*, there are a lot of words and phrases related to clothes, and most of them are extremely gorgeous. Such as “dressed in robes, oh! of varied hues.” (“华采衣兮若英”) (from *Hymn to the Lord of Cloud* translated by Xu Yuanchong), “With cress leaves green my simple gown I made, with lilies white my rustic garb did braid.” (“制芰荷以为衣兮, 集芙蓉以为裳。”) (from *Li Sao* translated by Yang Xianyi) and so on. It's said that “cress leaves” and “lilies” are printed or embroidered on the clothes. We can see that embroidered clothes today seem to be extremely luxurious and beautiful, let alone in the Warring States period more than two thousand years ago. Qu Yuan himself also said that he liked “fantastic garbs” in *the nine Chapters*. “Fantastic garbs” can be understood as either strange clothes or fine clothes. Therefore, we can see from the description above that clothing in *Chu Ci* is luxurious and beautiful. Wearing bright-colored and embroidered clothing is one of the greatest characteristics. Judging from the living conditions of the aristocrats at that time recorded in the ancient books, the unearthed clothes of the aristocrats of Chu State and the aristocrats' clothing depicted in silk paintings,

the adornments of the aristocrats in *Chu Ci* can be proved by a variety of materials. As is shown in the figures below:



Curving-front Robe 1



Curving-front Robe 2

Another important characteristic is that people of Chu often wear high crowns, which can also be seen in *Chu Ci*, such as “My headdress then high-pinnacled I raised” (“高余冠之岌岌兮”) (from *Li Sao* translated by Yang xianyi). “岌岌” in English means something very high. We can also see clearly in figures below:



Tongtian crown



Xiezhi crown

## 2.2 Advocating phoenix bird and clouding patterns

The pattern of the costume in *Chu Ci* is mainly about “phoenix bird”. Twenty-one pieces of embroidery were unearthed from the No. 1 Tomb of Mashan, and the motif of the pattern was all related to “phoenix”, almost without exception. On the lacquered shield unearthed from Tomb No. 4 in Lijiatai, Jiangling, there is a pattern of a dancer dancing with a dragon and a phoenix. A phoenix picture is also depicted on a silk painting of a woman unearthed from the tomb of the Chu Dynasty in Chenjiashan, Changsha. Not only the unearthed material objects, but also many ancient books have relevant records. As is shown in the figures below:



Straight-front Robe with Clouding Pattern



Phoenix Pattern

It can be seen that the people of Chu at that time admired the phoenix very much. In ancient people's consciousness, the phoenix was a kind of divine bird, but it did not exist in reality. It was just a kind of people's imagination. And the imaginary bird not only can fly, but also has super powers, which

can be psychic. People hope that such a divine bird will bring them good luck and a different life experience from others, even after death.

### 2.3 Advocating red color

The clothing fabric of the Chu is very exquisite and colorful. As a matter of fact, we can find from some ancient records that clothes in the State of Chu were often red, but also brown and yellow. Clothes of other colors were seldom seen.



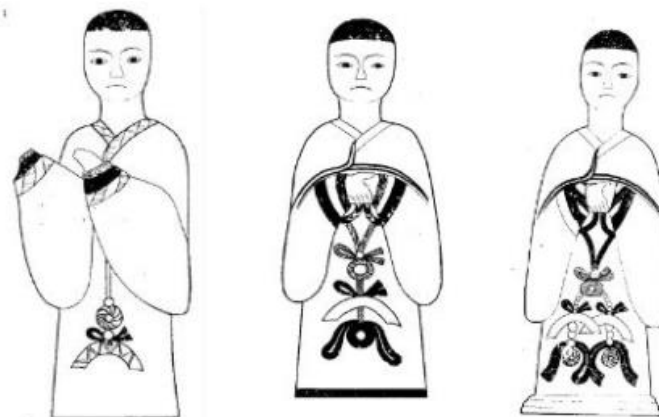
Red Curving-front Robe

The king of Chu still needed all aspects of etiquette to restrain the behavior of the people, so as to maintain his royal power. Therefore, in terms of costume, even though Chu did not divide the colors and patterns of clothing according to the requirements of Zhou Rites, they would highlight their status and status in their own way. In the unearthed material objects, red is more common in high-grade fabric--brocade. But the red dye mainly depends on madder and red sand, these two kinds of goods are produced in the state of Chu, so it will not limit the use of red because of the high price. It can be inferred that the State of Chu at that time restricted the use of red color by civilians, which also proved the status and importance of red color in the minds of the people of Chu.

### 2.4 Most of accessories being herbs, jade and long sword

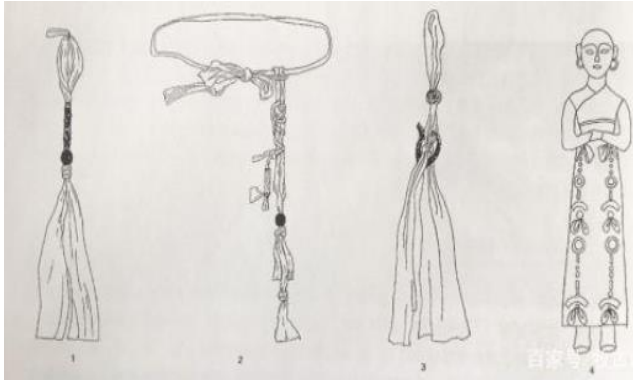
According to the description in *Chu Ci*, almost every ancient wore accessories, including some tools for cleaning clothes and some small decorative objects. According to the opinions of some scholars, the former are called “useful accessories”, while the latter are called “gentle accessories”. The ancients often pay attention to the former at home, outside the latter. In *chu ci*, these accessories are mainly “gentle accessories” and are often jade, herbs and swords.

In *the Nine Hymns*, some words like “Bao Lu” refer to jade. These kinds of Jade accessories were often used by aristocrats with different shapes, to show their status mainly including round and ring, block, sulfonate, pendants, tubes, etc.



Jade Ornaments

Herbs accessories are the most eye-catching in *Chu Ci* that Qu yuan has mentioned in *Li Sao* and *the Nine Chapters*. The land of the State of Chu is fertile, rich in products, and the geographical environment is superior. The water pool is covered with fragrant flowers and weeds. The people of Chu living in this environment often use herbs to describe beautiful things, thus gradually forming a custom of wearing herbs. In addition, there was the custom of wearing a sachets at that time, that is, putting herbs and spices into the sachets and wearing them, similar to the appearance of the pocketbook for later generations. These customs of Chu can be verified from the physical objects unearthed in recent years. The smoke furnace unearthed from the No. 1 Han Dynasty tomb in Mawangdui, Changsha, and the sachets held by the female corpses are full of herbs such as pepper, orchid, balance and cinnamon.



Different Types of Jade Ornaments



Long Sword Ornament

Besides, in ancient times, people wore swords for decoration as well as for self-defense. Therefore, the sword accessories were formed because of this. And this custom of using swords as ornaments has a profound influence on later generations.

### 2.5 Clothing are made from thin and fine fabrics

As far as silk weaving technology is concerned, according to the ancient documents and the present archaeological excavations, there were 12 kinds of silk fabrics in the state of Chu at that time, including sha, luo, juan, xian, ti, zu, gao, qi, wan, jin, jian, and tao, etc. These silk fabrics almost included all kinds of silk woven in the states before the Qin Dynasty.

There are some relevant text records in *Chu Ci*, such as *Evocation*, *Song to Fate the Great*, and *Calling Back the Spirit*. From the description in *Chu Ci*, we can infer that the fabrics of clothing are mainly juan, luo, sha and other silk fabrics. Clothes are fluttering, and long sleeves brush the face. If a dress could convey such a charm, its material must have a soft and light quality.

In *Li Sao*, Qu yuan wrote: "With cress leaves green my simple gown I made, with lilies white my rustic garb did braid." ("制芰荷以为衣兮，集芙蓉以为裳。") (from *Li Sao* translated by Yang xianyi) Qu Yuan used flowers and plants as clothes, which is to show his innocent temperament, but he could not do that in reality. Zhou Binggao put forward that the so-called "cress leaves" and "lilies" refer to the printing or embroidery on clothes. Regardless of the specific printing or embroidery, this inference at least shows that they are patterns on the clothes. These patterns are very exquisite, colorful, and be of rich variety, showing that the weaving technology of Chu at that time was quite advanced.

## 3. Case studies of Translation on Custumes Terms in Chu Ci

### 3.1 Head Wear

“高余冠之岌岌兮，长余佩之陆离。”（《离骚》）

Yang xianyi and Gladys Yang: My headdress then high-pinnacled I raised, Lengthened my pendants, where bright jewels blazed.

带长剑之陆离兮，冠切云之崔嵬。（《九章·涉江》）

Zhuo Zhenying:

The sheath of th' sword I wear is motley and long; My Cloud-Touching Hat bears a grandeur

untold.

Xu Yuanchong: My long sword dazzles far and nigh; oh! My cloud-cleaving crown towers high.

### 3.2 Body Wear

“浴兰汤兮沐芳，华采衣兮若英。”（《九歌 云中君》）

Zhuo zhenying: In orchid water he has bathed and been perfumed, Brilliantly the Lord Incarnate is now plumed.

Xu Yuanchong: Bathed in orchid's, oh! sweet-scented dews, And dressed in robes, oh! of varied hues.

In the original text, the mood auxiliary word “兮” is widely used in the article. On the one hand, it can assist the mood, on the other hand, it can control the reading rhythm of the article. Here and in above sentences, Xu Yuanchong chose “oh” for “兮” in the original text, which enhances the tone and makes the foreign readers empathize with the author.

### 3.3 Patterns

“制芰荷以为衣兮，集芙蓉以为裳。”（《离骚》）

Yang xianyi and Gladys Yang:

With cress leaves green my simple gown I made,

With lilies white my rustic garb did braid.

Here “芰荷” and “芙蓉” refer to a kind of plants, Yang adopted the literal translation method, without too much extension, giving foreign readers sufficient imagination space.

### 3.4 Fabrics

“蒹阿拂壁，罗帟张些纂组绮缟，结琦璜些。”（《招魂》）

In terms of four-color ribbons, “纂” refers to red ribbons, “组” refers to variegated ribbons, “绮” refers to silk fabrics with patterns, and “缟” refers to white silk fabrics. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang translated these words into “red, and silken Garments”. Xu Yuanchong translated them into “Ribbons of varied hues”. Zhuo Zhenying translated them into “silks and ribbons”.

These popular translated names form conceptual references and avoid some complicated names that may affect the coherence and musical beauty. Similarly, when translating some material nouns such as plants, animals, musical instruments and food in *Chu Ci*, these translators used concise words to summarize the general features of the translation, which did not affect the expression of the overall effect of the translation. Because the translator does not take academic textual research as the purpose, some things that are too real can be blurred, so as to fully mobilize the experience, emotion and thinking of the target language readers. But in other hand, this kind of concentrated expression more or less loses the vividness and perfection of the original cultural information in *Chu Ci*.

## 4. Conclusion

As China's reform and opening up and the strategy of "going global" are going deeper, the profound Chinese culture is gradually accepted and appreciated by the people of the world. Specifically, in terms of Traditional Chinese Costume, which represents both material and spiritual culture, can reflect the culture of aesthetics, culture of institutions, culture of customs, as well as the cultural religions of ancient China. The differences and complexity of culture urge the translation of cultural terminology in classics to adopt flexible translation strategies. This report aims to provide a certain reference for the future to better translate Costume terms and make a due contribution to Costume culture to go to the world and promote communication concerning costumes.

### Acknowledgement

\*This paper was sponsored by the research project of Education planning in education department of Hubei, Project No. Q20191709 and Project No. 18Q084.

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