



## ON TRANSLATING CI PAI OF SONG CI

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### **Abstract:**

Song Ci is a popular Chinese literary genre in the Song Dynasty, which marks the highest literary achievement of the Song Dynasty. Ci Pai is the name of the tune of Ci. Only a few sources of Ci Pai can be verified, so it becomes very difficult to translate them into English. But as an important part of Ci, it is particularly important. This paper tries to select as many Ci Pai names as possible, analyze and compare their English translation methods, so as to promote the standardization of Ci terms. This will not only facilitate the exchange between Chinese and Western cultures, but also promote the dissemination and promotion of excellent Chinese traditional culture abroad.

**Keywords:** Song Ci; Ci Pai; English translation methods

### **1. Introduction**

Ci is a kind of musical literature, whose creation, development, composition and circulation are all directly related to music. Although its origin is early, the peak of its development is in the Song Dynasty, which is why later generations regarded it as the most representative literature of the Song Dynasty. Alongside the poetry of the Tang Dynasty arises the expression "*Tang and Song Poetry*" (Shi Yidui, 1985). Song Ci is a shining pearl in the crown of ancient Chinese literature. Among a great deal of ancient Chinese literature, it is certainly one of the most beautiful ones. It has been known to compete with Tang Poetry and the Yuan Qu, and has traditionally been called a double masterpiece with Tang Poetry, both representing a generation of literary excellence. Ci has Ci Pai, that is, the tune, which is the original name of a roughly fixed part of the music often used to accompany poetry in the Tang and Song dynasties, and has a fixed format and meter, which determines the rhythm and meter of Ci. There are more than eight hundred and seventy different types of Ci Pai (including a few from the Jin and Yuan dynasties), and the content of most of them is no longer related to the meaning of Ci Pai.

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From the Northern Song Dynasty, poets often added titles or prefaces to Ci Pai to illustrate its meaning. The origins of Ci Pai are not available for most of them, and only a few have been recorded. There are about three types of the origin of Ci Pai: Firstly, it was originally the name of a piece of music. Secondly, a few words from the lyric are used as Ci Pai. Thirdly, it was originally the title of the lyric (Wu Xionghe, 1985). This classification cannot fully cover the great number of Ci Pai. All of the above has made it difficult to disseminate Ci Pai abroad. In order to translate this Chinese treasure, many experts and scholars have made a lot of pioneering studies, and research on the translation of Ci Pai began at the end of the 20th century (Chen Junqun, 1994). At present, the translation methods of Ci Pai in academic circles are rather diversified, including literal translation, free translation, and transliteration, lacking unified norms. In order to solve this problem, comparative analysis and discussion of several common methods of translating Ci Pai are presented. Only by unifying the translation standards of Ci Pai and reaching a consensus can the exchange between Chinese and Western literary cultures be strengthened and the Chinese culture be better promoted and disseminated.

## 2. Literal Translation

By literal translation, we mean maintaining both the content and the form of the original text in the translation, when possible, in particular, we mean maintaining the metaphors, images and national and local colors of the original text. In simple terms, a literal translation means that the expressions of the original are used in the translation and that the sentence structure is similar to that of the original, although some adjustments at the phrase level are not excluded. This translation method applies to the ordinary Ci Pai, which has few historical allusions. Even if they do, the allusions are no longer available. In such cases, a literal translation into English is undoubtedly the best way. For example:

南歌子	A Southern Song
最高楼	The Highest Tower
更漏子	Song of Water Clock
望江东	Gazing East of River
西江月	The Moon over the West River
西楼子	Song of Western Tower
捣练子	Song of Pounding Clothes
江南柳	Willows on Southern Shore
丑奴儿	Song of Ugly Slave
天仙子	Song of the Immortal
霜天晓角	Morning Horn and Frosty Sky
思远人	Thinking of the Far-off One
江南春	The Southland in Spring
诉衷情	Telling Innermost Feeling
点绛唇	Rouged Lips

如梦令	Dreamlike Song
卜算子	Song of Divination
踏莎行	Treading on Grass
南乡子	Song of a Southern Country
采桑子	Gathering Mulberries
摸鱼儿	Groping for Fish
钗头凤	Phoenix Hairpin
鹧鸪天	Partridge in the Sky
声声慢	Slow Slow Song
相见欢	Joy of Meeting
满江红	The River All Red
玉楼春	Spring in Jade Pavilion
珍珠令	Song of Pearl
豆叶黄	Bean Leaves Yellow
凤凰台上忆吹箫	Playing Flute Recalled on Phoenix Terrace
桂枝香	Fragrance of Laurel Branch
解佩令	Doffing the Pendants
画堂春	Spring in Painted Hall
唤春愁	Spring Grief Awakened
醉落魄	Drunk with Soul Lost
离亭燕	Swallows Leaving Pavilion
醉太平	Drunk in Time of Peace
醉桃源	Drunk in Peach Grove
沁园春	Spring in a Pleasure Garden
满庭芳	Courtyard Full of Fragrance
木兰花	Magnolia Flower
柳梢青	Green Willow Tips
蝶恋花	Butterflies in Love with Flowers
调笑令	Song of Flirtation
定风波	Calming Wind and Waves
风入松	Wind Through Pines
江城子	Riverside Town
山亭柳	Willow by Mountainside Pavilion
少年游	Wandering While Young
十二时	Twelve Hours
双双燕	A Pair of Swallows
四字令	Song of Four Words
水龙吟	Water Dragon Chant
水调歌头	Prelude to Water Melody
雨霖铃	Bells Ringing in the Rain

There are many other examples of this kind of translation. This translation method is essentially the same as the original in form, but may be slightly less effective in conveying the content and emotion, and thus may cause some readers to misunderstand. It is not the best method, but it is a good one when the origin of the Ci cannot be verified. The meaning and mood of a good Ci are usually consistent with the feelings and state of mind of the lyricist, regardless of whether Ci Pai is related to its content, so that the literal meaning of Ci Pai can be dealt with by the literal translation, but usually, the inner flavor cannot be fully expressed, which is a pity in many cases when translating the Ci Pai with cultural imagery.

### 3. Free Translation

The free translation is a common translation method that is faithful to the content of the original text according to its meaning, but not bound to its form. These Ci Pai are usually derived from famous historical allusions, and the use of the free translation method can, to a certain extent, satisfy the reader's reading needs, enable the reader to better understand the meaning of the lyrics, and is a further interpretation of the Ci Pai. The following are examples of Ci Pai based on their origins.

#### 1) Ci Pai named after a piece of music.

*"Po Zhenzi"* (Dance of the Cavalry) was composed in the 7th year of the Tang Dynasty (633). The music is a celebration of the achievements of Emperor Tang Taizong in his crusade against the surrounding tribes, and expresses a sense of grandeur. *"Yong Yu Le"* (Always Be Together in Joy), although its content is not known, is thought to be nothing more than a reminiscence of past joys and a wish to meet again in the next year to renew old friendships. *"Lin Jiang Xian"* (Riverside Daffodils), according to a modern scholar Ren Bantang, is based on a phrase from a Dunhuang poem, *"Standing on the wide shore you are able to see the sand at the bottom of the river"*. The original meaning of *"Lin"* is to look down at something and what the lyricist looks at is the daffodil. For *"Huan Xi Sha"* (Silk-washing Stream), the word *"Huan"* means *"to wash or rinse"*, *"yarn"* is the ancient meaning for *"Sha"*. Therefore, the object of *"Huan"* can only be *"yarn"*. *"Haoshi Jin"* (Song of Good Event) is a common Ci Pai used by the lyricists of the Song Dynasty. According to Wang Yi's *History of Lyrics and Music*, *"'Jin' is also called 'the beat of Jin', and all the Ci Pai with 'Jin' are of short lines, frequent rhymes and long sounds."* It is clear that the word *"Jin"* is a name for the tune of the Ci and does not refer to *"approaching"*.

#### 2) Ci Pai based on the name of a person.

*"Zhaojun Yuan"* (Lament of a Fair Lady) is about Wang Zhaojun, a court-servant from Zigui in the southern county of Han. In the first year of the reign of the emperor Hanyuan (33 B.C.), a Hun from the southern Xiongnu came to the capital for tribute and asked to be the emperor's son-in-law, so the emperor gave him Zhaojun. *"Niannu Jiao"* (Charm of a Maiden Singer) is named after a singer named Niannu in the Tang Dynasty. The Emperor Xuanzong's appraisal goes, *"This girl is beautiful and her eyes are*

*charming*”, which made her famous. So, her beauty was often quoted by the literati. “*Yu Meiren*” (The Beautiful Lady Yu): this lady was a native of the late Qin Dynasty, named Yu Ji. She was the concubine of Xiang Yu, King of Chu, and often accompanied him in the army. When Han soldiers besieged Xiang Yu, he got up at night to drink in his tent and sang generously, and Yu Ji accompanied him on songs.

3) Ci Pai named after the custom.

“*Pusa Man*” (Buddhist Dancers): it is said that, in the reign of the Emperor Tang Xuanzong, a small country named “*Numan*” (Female Barbarians) came to pay tribute. With their high hair buns, gold crowns and jewels, they looked like Bodhisattvas. For “*Su Mu Zhe*” (Waterbag Dance) in the early Tang Dynasty, the “*Huntuo Dance*” was a popular dance. According to scholars’ research, “*Huntuo*” means “*a bag*”, which originally referred to a leather bag made of cow or sheep skin, used as a floating bag for crossing rivers, and was also a tool used by nomads in the West to hold water or milk. The dancers used oiled bags to fill with water and splashed it on each other, while the performers wore an oiled hat to keep the cold water from pouring over their heads, called “*Waterbag Dance*” in Gaochang language. The word “*Waterbag*” refers to the “*Huntuo*”, that is, the oil bag that holds the water. So, this translation echoes the theme and can make the readers appreciate the beauty of the dance.

4) Ci Pai named after a line of the poem.

“*Yi Qin’e*” (In Memory of the Belle Qin) was first used in the poem “*In Memory of the Belle Qin, The Low Sound of Xiao*”. The name “*Qin’e*” originally refers to Nong Yu, a woman from the ancient state of Qin. It was said that she was the daughter of the Duke Mu of Qin, Ying Renhao, who loved to play the flute and married the immortal Xiao Shi.

5) Ci Pai named after a story.

“*Queqiao Xian*” (Immortals Meeting on the Magpie Bridge) is from an ancient myth about the meeting of the Cowherd and the Weaving Maiden on the Magpie Bridge. Since the description in the “*Nineteenth Ancient Poems*” “*Far, far away, the Cowherd, / Fair, fair, the Weaving Maid*”, poets of all dynasties have included it in their compositions. Therefore, it was chosen as a Ci Pai to sing about the meeting of the Cowherd and the Weaving Maiden, and the translation should reflect the ancient legend of the meeting.

6) Ci Pai named after geography.

“*Jiuquan Zi*” (Song of the Water Like Wine) first appeared in Ying Shao’s *Record of Geography and Customs* in the Eastern Han Dynasty: “*Jiuquan County, its water like wine, was called the Water Like Wine.*” This is the name of a tune based on the name of a place, Jiuquan. It can therefore be poetically translated as “*Song of the Water Like Wine*”.

7) Ci Pai derived from the original meaning.

“*Xie Chi Chun*” (A Chance Meeting with Xie Meiqing by the Pool): as it is written in the *Ancient and Modern Comments on Ci*, Zhang Ziyue (Zhang Xian) went to the Immortal Temple and met Xie Meiqing on the way. Although they never met, they heard each other. Ziyue was talented, and Xie was very beautiful. They liked each other as soon as they met and were sure of their feelings from the look in their eyes. So, Zhang Xian composed “*A Chance Meeting with Xie Meiqing by the Pool*” to describe the momentary

encounter. The name of the tune is meant to be a chant about the springtime feelings that arose from meeting Xie Meiqing on the road by the pond.

For Ci Pai related to allusions or with deeper meanings, the translation should try to reflect the cultural connotations of the original text, so as to serve the purpose of promoting traditional Chinese culture. To a certain extent, the free translation method meets the reader's reading expectations by conveying the cultural connotations of the Ci Pai. At the same time, it also requires the translator to have a correct understanding of the meaning of the Ci Pai and their cultural background when translating it. In addition, after an in-depth study of the English translation of the Ci Pai in the poetry of Li Qingzhao, Li Qing also believes that free translation is the best way to translate Ci Pai, as it can preserve the writing style and cultural imagery of the original text, while faithfully conveying the beauty of classical culture to target readers (Li Qing, 2005).

#### 4. Transliteration

Transliteration is the process or result of using one textual symbol to represent that of another textual system, and is an inextricable solution linked to the literal and free translation. When there are significant differences between the source language and the target language, and when there are semantic gaps, it is not possible to start directly with the form or the semantics of the translation. In this case, transliteration is the main means of translation. It is case-sensitive and can be done in both standard Chinese phonetic alphabets (preferably) and Wade-Giles romanization. Xu Zhongjie, the Yangs and Gong Jinghao are representatives. For the same Ci Pai, translators have different transliterated versions, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Translators' Transliteration of Tune Names

Translator Tune name	Xu Zhongjie	The Yangs	Gong Jinghao	Lin Yutang	Daniel Bryant
声声慢	Shengshengman	Sheng Sheng Man	Sheng Sheng Man		
如梦令	Rumengling	Ru Meng Ling	Ru Meng Ling		
念奴娇	Niannujiao	Nian Nu Jiao			
西江月		Xi Jiang Yue	Xi Jiang Yue	To the Tune of Hsichiangyueh	
浣溪沙	On the Pattern of Huanxisha	Huan Xi Sha			
清平乐	On the Pattern of Qingpingyue				
虞美人					To Yu Mei- ren
临江仙					To Lin- Chiang Hsien

These transliterations can reproduce the sound of the original Chinese, but make no sense to those who do not understand the original tune or its content. In other words, this method completely abandons the attempt to reflect the cultural background of the Ci Pai in the translation, and does not convey its true meaning to the reader. Moreover, for foreign readers who do not have a cultural background in Chinese, it is easy to be at a loss as they do not know Chinese phonetic alphabets or the pronunciation. However, for foreign readers who have some knowledge and interest in the culture of ancient Chinese poetry, it is possible to stimulate their desire to explore the origins and meanings behind the Ci Pai, so that these readers can better understand the connotations, thus reducing cultural loss in translation.

In fact, there are some translators who adopt zero translation and annotation methods. As a translator, we should not sacrifice the form for the content when translating Ci Pai. Obviously, it is too extreme not to translate Ci Pai, but at the same time, the annotation should not be too complicated. Although annotations can provide a more comprehensive explanation of the cultural implications of Ci Pai, they are usually not desirable because Ci Pai are supposed to be short and precise, like the titles.

## 5. Conclusion

Ci Pai, as “*cultural terms*”, are rich in cultural meaning and historical connotation. In the process of translation, the translator must take into account not only the understanding and translation of the Ci Pai themselves, but also the transmission of their cultural message. When evaluating the translation of Ci Pai, we must also take into account the cultural connotation and message. To sum up, there are many ways to translate Ci Pai, such as literal translation, free translation, transliteration, zero translation and annotation. In our opinion, when translating Ci Pai, it is important to convey its cultural connotations, so we should give priority to the free translation method for most Ci Pai, and literal translation for the Ci Pai that cannot be verified. Only in this way can the communication between the original text and the target language readers be realized to the greatest extent and the best effect of cultural transmission can be achieved. This requires translation scholars to have not only solid basic skills, but also rich cultural knowledge, so that they can further study the English translation of Ci Pai, so as to carry forward the traditional culture of our country. It is therefore imperative to standardize the English translation of Ci Pai in order to facilitate the “*going out*” of Chinese culture, thus promoting cultural exchange between China and the outside world, helping people of different cultures to improve their understanding of each other and promoting the process of civilization.

This paper also has some limitations. Due to the large number of Ci Pai, the corpus of this paper is still a little small. In addition, this paper is subjective in that it only selects some scholars’ English translation of Ci Pai and a few self-translated versions. The standardization of Ci Pai of Song Ci is a long and difficult process, and it is hoped that each of us can contribute to enhancing the influence of Chinese culture.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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