

RESEARCH TITLE

On the Phonetic and Semantic Aspects of Names in Literary Translation - A Study of Translation Strategies of Names and Appellations in the Arabic Version of *Teahouse*

Yara Ibrahim Ahmed Mohamed Zedan¹

¹ Doctoral graduate at Fudan University, Shanghai, China

Email: yarazedan.xuezhe@gmail.com

HNSJ, 2025, 6(6); <https://doi.org/10.53796/hnsj66/19>

Received at 07/05/2025

Accepted at 15/05/2025

Published at 01/06/2025

Abstract

People's names and appellations do not only serve a referential function but also encompass profound sociocultural connotations and reflect the characteristics of their times. Names, including nicknames and appellations, are an organic component of literary works, which, embedding the creativity of the author, serve the purpose of characterization as part of the overall artistic effect of the work. Therefore, when translating names and appellations in literary works, translator must acquire a deep understanding of the historical and cultural context and consider both the phonetic and ideographic functions, and adopt flexible and diversified translation strategies after carefully weighing the morphology and connotation to minimize any possible misunderstanding or weakening of artistic effect. With the Arabic version of *Teahouse* translated by Egyptian sinologist Abdel Aziz Hamdi as an example, this article provides an in-depth analysis of implicit cultural information in names and appellations, hence discussing the application and effects of translation strategies employed by the translator, while offering recommendations for improved translation of certain cases.

Key Words: Arabic translation of *Teahouse*, translation of names and appellations, cultural translation.

I. “With the Properly Named Comes Propriety”, Names in Chinese Culture

As an important category of proper names, people's names and appellations play a significant role in social interaction. Names encompass people's expectations for family legacy and posterity, reflecting the cultural consensus and value orientation in specific historical context. According to *Origin of Chinese Characters (Shuowen Jiezi)*, “name (名)”, meaning “self-reference, is constructed by “口” (mouth; oral) and “夕” (dusk). As people cannot see each other in the dimming light of dusk, one must orally pronounce his name”. The Chinese character “铭” was later derived from “name”, meaning “self-reference”.¹ While the Chinese character for “surname (姓)” was explained as “begotten from a person. According to *Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall (Bai Hu Tong Yi)*, surname is derived from birth, that is, one is begotten under the influence of heavenly forces.”² From these records one may infer that name, as a personal reference, first originated from an actual need in social interactions, i.e. one had to refer to himself by name in the dim light where people's faces were indiscernible. On the other hand, surname (姓) and clan name (氏) point to consanguinity. According to *Guo Yu, Volume of Zhou*, “Surname indicates birth, where generations are born from the same ancestor. The surname runs in the family for a hundred generations without being changed. It is the title of the family shared by all posterity. While clan, or 氏, indicate offshoots.”³ It is clear that surname indicates offspring from the same ancestor, while clan refers to offshoots of one family. Hence in China those who share the same family name are idiomatically called “members of the same family five hundred years ago”, referring to the same ancestral roots.

Equally important in the cultural traditions in China, “courtesy name” (字) for men is generally believed to be rooted the Zhou Dynasty, based on historical evidences. According to the *Book of Rites (Liji): Summary of the Rules of Property (Quli)*, Volume I, “When a man reaches the age of twenty, the coming-of-age ceremony shall be held and a courtesy name is given”, a symbol of entering adulthood. Concerning the origin of courtesy name, a widely accepted belief is that addressing an adult with his name was considered impertinent and offensive, while the use of the courtesy name was a token of respect.⁴ Other scholars associate name with taboo⁵. One finds in *Zuo Qiuming's Commentary on Spring and Autumn Annals (Zuozhuan)*, the 6th Year of Lord Huan's Reign that “people of the Zhou Dynasty avoid (using) the name of those who have deceased.” Endowed by parents, a person's name was associated with certain supernatural powers in folk beliefs in China, hence the superstition that the ill-intended may perform witchcraft with a person's name and time of birth to harm his life, which is quite similar with the threat of “evil eye” in Arab traditions. In this regard, addressing each other with the courtesy name while avoiding the real name was simply a tactic of self-protection in ancient times.

Besides, as an important constituent of the folk culture, appellations reflect the social relationship between people within a particular cultural context⁶, functioning as an indication of blood ties, social hierarchy and psychological distance, thus a valuable research topic in

¹ (Qing Dynasty) Duan Yucai. (1992). *Annotations of the Origin of Chinese Characters (Shuowen Jiezi Zhu)*. Jing Yun Lou Edition. Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House. p.56.

² (Qing Dynasty) Duan Yucai. (1992). *Annotations of the Origin of Chinese Characters (Shuowen Jiezi Zhu)*. Jing Yun Lou Edition. Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House. p.612.

³ Chen Tongsheng. (2003). *Guo Yu*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company. p.401.

⁴ Zhang Lianfang (ed.). (1992). *Names of the Chinese People*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press. p.59.

⁵ Ren Jianyi. (2002). A Preliminary Study on Names in Ancient Times. *Journal of Shandong Education Institute*, Volume 6. p.57.

⁶ Fang Fang. (2018). *Cultural Translation Scrutinized in the Context of Globalization*. Changchun: Jilin University Press. p.205.

folklore and cultural psychology. In the traditional Chinese society imprinted with Confucian rites and institutions, the use of names and appellations play a significant role in social interactions with distinctive cultural features. Therefore, the translation of names and appellations in Chinese literary works shall be studied in the light of the pivotal status of this cultural phenomenon in traditional Chinese culture, and such study must be built on the identity and position on the social ladder, the hierarchy of superiority and the author's attitude towards the characters in question. Decision on translation strategies is therefore made in a flexible way based on a thorough understanding of the literary work in order to maximize the reconstruction of artistic values of the source text in the target language.

II. Translation of People's Names in Literary Works : The Borders of (Un)translatability

From the perspective of translation studies, the translation of names is usually examined within the scope of proper names, of which the general rules in translation apply. The optimal strategy, however, is selected based on the referential meaning in the specific historical and cultural context with the intent of author and the expected artistic effects taken into consideration. However, for a considerable period of time, proper names, including people's name, was considered "not connotative,...they do not indicate or imply any attributes as belonging to those individuals."⁷ "Keeping the names unchanged whenever possible" became the norm in translating people's names, which were considered "pure language" (reine Sprache). As "only what is socially comprehensible, conventionalized with a codified meaning can be translated" (da nur übersetzt werden kann, was eine sozial verständliche, konventionalisierte, eine codierte Bedeutung [...] hat)⁸, and that translation must operate under the precondition of "comprehensibility of the meaning of a common noun" (die Verstehbarkeit einer appellativischen Bedeutung)⁹, translation is only considered feasible under the dual condition that first, the source text is a common noun rather than a proper name and second, it features semantic transparency. Names, in this sense, are considered untranslatable as they are classified as proper names. Translators tend to keep them unchanged or make certain adjustments to accommodate the habit of target language users. The latter is exemplified by the acculturation of orthography from Elisabeth in English to Isabel in Spanish, from Juliet in English to Giulietta in Italian. The above two strategies are very similar in their form and are both challenged by scrutinizing scholars as variations of the same name in different languages rather than translation in a strict sense.

Using the concepts of structural linguistics, the above proposition is essentially based on the belief that names are merely signifiers rather than signified. Newmark in his early works also argued that "unless ... a person's name already has an accepted translation it should not be translated but must be adhered to."¹⁰ Other scholars, instead, described the dilemma faced by translators in translating names from the perspective of parole and langue, the former implying that names also possess semantic connotation which must be revealed in the target language in the same way of the common nouns; while the latter suggesting that names were merely referents; not surprisingly, using different referents in the source text and the translated text for the same object would only create confusion. However, Maria Tymoczko has, in a sense, subverted the canon of "pure language" by arguing that names are "dense

⁷ John Stuart Mill. (1872). *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive*, 8th Edition. London: Longmans, Green and Company. p.20.

⁸ Hartwig Kalverkämper, (1996). "Namen im Sprachtausch: Namen übersetzung". Ernst Eichler, Gerhard Hilty, Heinrich Löffler, Gustav Steger, Ladislav Zgusta (eds.) *Namenforschung. Name Studies. Les Noms Propres. Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft* (11) Vol.II. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, p.1019.

⁹ Hartwig Kalverkämper. (1996). "Namen im Sprachtausch: Namen übersetzung". Ernst Eichler, Gerhard Hilty, Heinrich Löffler, Gustav Steger, Ladislav Zgusta (eds.) *Namenforschung. Name Studies. Les Noms Propres. Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft* (11) Vol.II. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, p.1019.

¹⁰ Newmark Peter . (1981). *Approaches to Translation*. Oxford: Pergamon Press. p.70.

signifiers, signs of essential structures of human societies” that indicate “tribal and familial affiliation; gender and class; racial, ethnic, national, and religious identity”.¹¹ This somehow echoes with the link between surnames and clan and familial affiliation in Chinese cultural traditions expounded above.

In the light of the above, there has been growing awareness that the metaphorical meaning of names and appellations, whether real or fictional, as “culturemes” or “culture-specific items”, as well as the context-specific translation methodologies therefore derived, should be more closely observed. Javier Franco Aixelá, a Spanish scholar, cited Theo Hermans in his elaboration of culture-specific items. Hermans distinguished two basic categories of proper nouns, namely conventional and loaded. The former refers to proper nouns that are “unmotivated, and thus having no meaning of themselves” while the latter cover names and nicknames of varying clarity from “faintly suggestive” to “overtly expressive”, around which certain historical or cultural associations have accrued in the context of a particular culture.¹²

“Name and nature oftentimes do agree”, naming a literary character with an implied meaning builds on both realistic and psychological grounds and serves the author’s motive or intention, which can be classified into the following three categories:

(1) To highlight the appearance, personality or comportment of the character, which may be relatively straight-forward or employ rhetoric devices such as irony or pun to leave a stronger impression on readers. For instance, the cruel and cold-hearted landlord in the theatrical work *The White-Haired Girl* is named Huang Shiren (黄世仁), where the irony in “Ren” (仁), meaning “benevolence” is highlighted. Another example is found in *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hong Lou Meng*) where Sun Shaozu (孙绍祖), the brutal and ungrateful husband of Yingchun, is portrayed as “THOU ART an ungrateful wolf that repay good with evil, raging with arrogance once thou hast thy way”, where “thou art” is a semantic rendering of “子” and “系”, the two ideographic components of the villain’s family name “孙” (孫 in traditional Chinese).

(2) To suggest the historical and cultural context set for the literary work. Names indicating specific era, religion or ethnic group enhances the vividness of literary character while bringing the plot into real-life settings. For example, those who are familiar with the modern history of China can easily infer the historical and social context from such names as “Jiefang” (liberation), “Yuejin” (the Great Leap Forward) and “Yuanchao” (aid Korea), etc; while names such as Maryam, Ahmed or Ibrahim naturally indicates that the scene is set in an Arabo-Islamic cultural context.

(3) To foreshadow the destiny of characters and the development of narration, i.e. “prophesy in the interpretation of name”. Interestingly, this apparent superstitious statement echoes with the proverb “nomen est omen” (name is an omen) in ancient Rome. *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hong Lou Meng*) contains a multitude of such examples, of which the best known is the foreboding of “Yuan ying tan xi” constituted by the first character of the four “Springs” (Yuan-chun, Ying-chun, Tan-chun and Xi-chun), meaning “originally (yuan) should (ying) be lamented (tan) and pitied (xi)”, implying the fateful mishaps awaiting the aristocratic ladies of the Jia family as the doomsday of the feudal society was looming.

There is an obvious bias in viewing names that embody both cultural connotation and the

¹¹ Newmark Peter. (1981). *Approaches to Translation*. Oxford: Pergamon Press. p.70.

¹² Theo Hermans. (1988). "On Translating Proper Names, with Reference to De Witte and Max Havelaar". Michael Wintle and Paul Vincent (eds), *Modern Dutch Studies: Essays in Honour of Peter King*. London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone. pp.11-13.

author's literary creativity indiscriminately as "untranslatable pure language". Traditionally, "translating the name as it sounds in the source language" and "following the conventions" have played a pivotal role in preventing misunderstandings and confusions caused by plurality of translation of the same name; while *The Chinese phonetic alphabet spelling rules for Chinese Names*¹³ (GB/T 28039-2011) used for translating Chinese names into English and *A Comprehensive Dictionary of Names of the World's Peoples*¹⁴ used for translating foreign names into Chinese are recognized for their pragmatic values as normative guide for non-literary translation such as political, business and journalistic texts. However, for literary translation, names are "embedded in the story"¹⁵ as part of the aesthetic and narrative construction rather than an isolated string of syllables. Reducing the names of the literary characters to the correspondence between phonemes would, undoubtedly, dilute their cultural connotation and weaken the artistic effect. German scholar Gero Lietz, on the other hand, proposed the "communicative value" in the translation of names while examining Norwegian literary names in German translations from the scope of skopostheorie. According to Lietz, the communicative value of names is determined by three factors: reference, meaning(fulness) and an aesthetic component, further maintaining that the ideal state of translation of names is achieving communicative equivalence ("kommunikative Aequivalenz")¹⁶ in performing the same communicative functions as the source text. In *Proper Names in Translational Contexts*, Japanese scholar Eriko Sato, in particular, examined several key concerns in translating names in Japanese literature into English, namely semantic translation of kanji, cultural transplantation and socio-political factors.¹⁷ With the similarities in writing system between the Chinese and Japanese languages as well as the ideographic features of kanji, Sato's observations are especially enlightening for the translation of Chinese literature into other languages.

In his *On Translating Proper Names, with Reference to De Witte and Max Havelaar*, Theo Hermans elaborated on six strategies of translating literary proper names, i.e. name copies, name transcription, name deletion, name substitution, semantic translation (metonymatosis) and combinations of various techniques.¹⁸ However, the adequacy and clarity of transliteration or semantic translation is challenged by names with rich cultural connotation or word play such as puns, hence more flexible alternatives, such as cultural adaptation, cultural transplantation, transfer of an artistic device, etc. are recommended. Among all, Chinese scholars Bao Huinan and Bao Ang based their strategies on the linguistic features of the Chinese language, i.e. transliteration (phonetic transcription), transliteration with annotation, transliteration with paraphrasing, free translation and adaptation.¹⁹ Within the framework of the above theory review, this article shall analyze the context-specific use of

¹³ Ministry of Education Institute of Applied Linguistics. (2012). *The Chinese Phonetic Alphabet Spelling Rules for Chinese Names* (GB/T 28039-2011). Beijing: Standards Press of China.

¹⁴ Xinhua News Agency. (2007) *A Comprehensive Dictionary of Names of the World's Peoples, 2nd Edition*. Beijing: China Translation & Publishing Corporation.

¹⁵ Jean-François Lyotard. (1992). Universal history and cultural differences. In A. Benjamin (ed.). Cambridge: Blackwell. *The Lyotard Reader, 3rd Edition*. p.320.

¹⁶ Gero Lietz. (1992). *Eigennamen in der norwegischen Gegenwartssprache. Probleme ihrer Wiedergabe im Deutschen am Beispiel belletristischer Texte*. Wissenschaften: Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften. pp.132-135.

¹⁷ Eriko Sato. (2016) "Proper Names in Translational Contexts". *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, January 2016, pp. 1-10.

¹⁸ Theo Hermans. (1988). "On Translating Proper Names, with Reference to De Witte and Max Havelaar". Michael Wintle and Paul Vincent (eds), *Modern Dutch Studies: Essays in Honour of Peter King*. London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone. pp.13-14.

¹⁹ Bao Huinan and Bao Ang. (2000). *Applied Cultural Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Popular Science Press. pp.171-176.

these strategies with the translation of names in the Arabic version of *Teahouse*, a masterpiece of modern Chinese drama as an example, while examining the translator's decisions and the subsequent effect in the translation of certain names and appellations from a cultural perspective.

III. Strategies Applied in the Arabic Translation of Names and Appellations in *Teahouse*

Teahouse, a three-act play by Lao She in 1956, epitomizes of the vicissitudes of the Chinese society over half a century from the fall of the Qing Dynasty to the Warlord Era and ends with the the reign of Kuomintang following China's victory in the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, portraying the moribund feudal society and the short-lived splendor of the Hundred Days of Reform. Its Arabic version, translated by Egyptian sinologist Abdel Aziz Hamdi, has been much applauded since its publication as a brilliant success of Arabic translation of modern Chinese literary works. The play features over 70 characters, among which nearly 50 are identified by their names or appellations (nickname, familial ranking, title, etc.), whose fates intertwine on the stage of Yutai Teahouse, producing dramatic conflicts that incarnates a turbulent period in the modern history of China. Lao She invented the names of the characters with utmost ingenuity to create lifelike literary images and, more importantly, reveal the social transformation in China as portrayed in the play. In a comparative study conducted by Chinese scholars on two English translations of *Teahouse*, names and appellations appearing in the play are categorized into six categories: (1) surname+given name; (2) surname+nickname; (3) surname+title; (4) "junior"+father's name; (5) "old"+surname, (6) surname+family ranking.²⁰ The above classification offers a useful framework in the systematic study of translation of names and appellations in *Teahouse* and will be tailored to this study where certain categories will be elaborated and treated with attention to cultural details.

Wang Bingqin in his *Cultural Translation Studies--Theory and Practice of Cultural Translation* pointed out that the significance of translating names lies in the fact that the conception of names of characters are closely related with the author's intention.²¹ The literary images are comparable to the author's own offspring as they represent the timeless continuity of his intention in creating literature. French scholar Michèle Fourment-Berni Canani followed the same logic as she claimed that "the author's choice of a proper name is equal to the symbolic practice of baptism (le choix d'un nom propre par l'auteur est un acte qui équivaut à l'acte symbolique du baptême).²² As is mentioned above, an author does not randomly choose a name for his characters but ingeniously molds and sculpts the name or appellation as part of the aesthetic value and artistic style of the work, endowing it with a context-specific meaning. It is therefore self-explanatory that such connotation deserves to be demonstrated through translation

It is, however, by no means an easy task. Despite increasing awareness of the importance of studying the translation of names among Arab scholars to whom numerous studies from a linguistic perspective are credited, few of them focus on the cultural connotation of people's names in Chinese literature. Professor Hesham Al-Malky (هشام المالكي) of the Department of Chinese Language in the Faculty of Al-Asun (Languages), Ain Shams University discussed the phonetic aspects of translating people's names between Chinese and Arabic in his *On Chinese-Arabic Translation of Proper Names* (إشكاليات ترجمة أسماء الأعلام بين اللغتين الصينية)

²⁰ Yu Hongmei. (2011). "On the Consistency of Name and Essence in the Translation of Names and Appellations--A Comparative Study of Name Translation in Two English Versions of *Teahouse*". *Theory Research*. 2011, Vol. 029. p.151.

²¹ Wang Bingqin. (2007). *Cultural Translation Studies--Theory and Practice of Cultural Translation*. Tianjin: Nankai University Press. p,183.

²² Fourment-Berni Canani, Michelle. (1994). "Le statut des noms propres dans la traduction". *Studi Italiani di Linguistica Teorica ed Applicata*.23(3): p.564. Chinese translation by author.

العربية).²³ However, the phonetic issue is only one of the multiple difficulties in translation, and a superficial one indeed; while more daunting challenges are rooted in differences in linguistic and cultural dimensions. For example, as the writing system of Chinese is constituted by characters that are ideograms with a considerable number of homophones, names featuring such a phonetic curiosity tends to lose their implied connotation "constructed" by homonyms when translated into any foreign language including Arabic. Besides, the traditional appellation system based on genealogy and social status also adds to the difficulty in translating names of literary characters from Chinese to other languages.

Despite the apparent plurality of strategies in translating names enumerated above, these strategies essentially fall into two categories, namely phonetic translation and semantic translation, on which basis complementary strategies, from annotation to creative translation, are adopted to maximize the artistic effect in the translated text. In the Arabic version of *Teahouse*, Aziz has, almost without exception, adopted the strategy of transliteration with annotation, for which the following explanation is provided:

The rule of translation has it that transliteration should be applied in the translation of names, as names remain unchanged when transcribed from one language to another. Any particular meaning should appear in notes in parentheses. For example, the name, age, vocation, and personality of the soothsayer Tang Tiezui in *Teahouse* are described in the list of characters and the analysis of characters in the preface. However, his name is retained in the translated text.²⁴

His prioritization of transliteration is even reflected in the translation of appellations such as nicknames and rank in family. Although relevant information is provided in the annotation after each act, and a simple biography containing the name, age, vocation and personality of main characters is included in the list of characters as well as the preface, these names and appellations are not associated with personality or vocation, hence reducing the author's ingenious conception to invisibility. It is therefore clear that the phonetic features of the source text are preserved to the maximum to create an exotic atmosphere, at the cost of the aesthetic value and rich connotation of the combination of sound, form and meaning in the Chinese name culture. The following sections shall delve into the cultural aspects of names and appellations in *Teahouse* as well as Aziz's translation strategies based on examples, while recommending possible improvement in certain translations.

1. Names That Sound "Real": "Translating Names as their Original Sounds" in Transliteration

(1) 王利发男。最初与我们见面，他才二十多岁。因父亲早死，他很年轻就作了裕泰茶馆的掌柜。精明、有些自私，而心眼不坏。²⁵

وانغ لي فا — عمره يتجاوز العشرين بسنوات قليلة عندما نراه للوهلة الأولى في البداية، أصبح صاحباً لمقهى يو تاي في صدر شبابه نظراً لوفاة والده المبكر، فطن وأريب، أناني بعض الشيء، ولكنه طيب القلب.²⁶

²³ See Hesham Al-Malky (Egypt) Hesham Al-Malky. "إشكاليات ترجمة أسماء الأعلام بين اللغتين الصينية والعربية"، صحيفة الألسن، العدد 23، عام 2007م. (2007). "On Chinese-Arabic Translation of Proper Names". Cairo, Journal of the Faculty of Al-Alsun (Languages), Ain Shams University. Vol.23.

²⁴ Abdel Aziz Hamdi and Yara Ibrahim Ahmed Mohamed Zedan. "Interview with Egyptian Sinologist and Translator, Professor Abdel Aziz Hamdi" (March 3-5, 2023). Cited from Yara Ibrahim Ahmed Mohamed Zedan.(2024). "A Study of Translation of Culture-Loaded Words in Chinese and Arabic Languages--On Abdel Aziz Hamdi's Practice and Strategies in His Arabic Translation of Lao She's *Teahouse*". Doctorate dissertation of Fudan University. p.332.

²⁵ 老舍著：《茶馆》，北京：人民文学出版社，2002年，第3页。（Lao She. (2002). *Teahouse*. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House. p.3.）

²⁶ لاو شه. "المقهى"، ترجمة عبد العزيز حمدي، القاهرة: المجلس الأعلى للثقافة (المشروع القومي للترجمة)، عام 2002م، العدد 479، صفحة رقم 141.

WANG LIFA Male, A few years over twenty when appearing for the first time in the play. Because of his father's early death, he became proprietor of Yutai Teahouse while still very young. He is shrewd and somehow self-centered, but means well.

Wang Lifa is the main character in *Teahouse* that links all plots and events throughout the three acts. In his early twenties, the young proprietor was shrewd and business-savvy, struggling for the survival of the teahouse amid the precarious and turbulent political, economic and social environment. "I do things just like my father did. If I'm not dropping to my knee, in greeting, I'm dropping compliments-- trying to please everybody. That way you avoid trouble."²⁷ In Yutai Teahouse notices were posted everywhere, "Do not discuss state affairs", implying that the philistine and sophisticated proprietor who, in fact, was merely struggling to survive. Lao She creates this key character with sympathy in a subtly humorous tone, with his image merged into the name "Wang Lifa", a homonym of "hope for a thriving business", where "Wang" "Li" and "Fa" respectively indicate "hope", "profit" and "fortune", thus defining the narrative clue for the entire play. Mired in the times of turbulence and the distress of his contemporaries, Wang Lifa tried to please everyone and endured his misfortunes without complaining, with the sole desire of running his teahouse. Yet in reality not only did Wang Lifa fail to "make a fortune" or "run a thriving business" as his name suggested, but ended his life in utter desolation and poverty.

The contrast between his tragic life and the auspicious meaning of his name highlighted the dramatic effect of the play and implied Lao She's deep sympathy for this character.

Adhering to the principle of "naming after the original sound" in the translation of names, Aziz has adopted a transliteration strategy here by phonetically transcoding "Wang Lifa" into "وانغ لي فا", which is very close to the pronunciation in Chinese. However, considering the fact that the name constituted part of the author's intention rather than a random choice. As is stated above, Chinese characters used in names usually carry a semantic meaning, therefore transliteration would result in semantic loss as the sound, rather than the meaning, is reproduced. This inevitably compromised the artistic effect of the text as readers of the translated text are unable to associate "وانغ لي فا" with the dramatic conflict in the character, hence are unlikely to empathize with his fateful tragedy as intended by the author.

It should be noted, however, that the translator's decision is based on the trade-off between sound and semantic meaning. Explication of the meaning implied in the name at all costs would likely do more harm than good. Here if the name "Wang Lifa" is substituted by Arabic words such as "حظ" (good luck) or "تثرو" (make a fortune), the translation is likely to produce a comic effect as these words do not sound like real Arabic names, hence such a bold move of substitution threatens to weaken the realistic effect of the play. An optimal solution, with all the above factors in consideration, would be transliteration complemented by explanatory notes on the semantic meaning of the name, so as to reveal the author's intention in naming this character. Readers therefore are reminded of Wang's precarious livelihood and appreciate the dramatic contrast between the propitious name and the cruelty and absurdity in reality as portrayed in the play.

2. Translation of Nicknames: Explication of Metaphorical Connotation and Characterization of Literary Figures

Numerous examples of appellation in *Teahouse* are structured with "surname +nickname". Nickname is especially effective in shaping the image of literary characters as it

supreme council of culture - the national project for translation. No. 479. p.141.) (Lao She. (2002). *Teahouse*, Cairo:

²⁷ 老舍著:《茶馆》,北京:人民文学出版社,2002年,第13页。(Lao She. (2002). *Teahouse*. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House. p.13.)

is usually associated with the appearance, personality, skill or special experience of its bearer, hence portraying the character with vividness and liveliness and enhancing the artistic effect of the literary work.

It must be pointed out that the use of appellation constitute an important part of courtesy and code of conduct, be in the context of traditional Chinese cultural and Arabo-Islamic cultural horizons. Addressing people with pejorative nickname is viewed as offensive and rude, and insulting each other with appellations is a haram act disapproved and forbidden by Islam. According to Surah Al-Hujurat in Holy Qur'an:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرْ قَوْمٌ مِّنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِّنْ نِّسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُنَّ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ بِئْسَ الْأَسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ الْإِيمَانِ وَمَن لَّمْ يَتُبْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ²⁸

O you who believe! Let not a group scoff at another group, it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor let (some) women scoff at other women, it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor defame one another, nor insult one another by nicknames. How bad is it to insult one's brother after having Faith [i.e. to call your Muslim brother (a faithful believer) as: "O sinner", or "O wicked"]. And whosoever does not repent, then such are indeed Zalimun (wrong-doers, etc.).²⁹ (49:11)

It is therefore clear that discriminating or ridiculing others with appellations is forbidden for Muslims, who are encouraged to exemplify respect and kindness with speech and deeds. In traditional Chinese culture, on the other hand, the axiom "From self-cultivation comes noble behaviors; while appellations are invented by others"³⁰, dates back to the Western Zhou Dynasty. From then on, nicknames have been a device to pass judgment on others which imperceptibly influences people's public image and reputation. As pejorative or ironic appellations challenge social morals and Islamic belief, the use of such appellations in literary works is conducive to building a vivid image with the contrasting effect, hence serving the purpose of literary creation. Therefore, the connotation and expressive effect of nicknames in a given sociocultural context must be transcoded as meaningful cultural information.

(2) 唐铁嘴男。三十来岁。相面为生，吸鸦片。³¹

تانغ تيه ذوي — في العقد الرابع من العمر، عراف يمارس قراءة البخت عن طريق تفرس ملامح الوجه أو أسايريه لكسب أسباب العيش، مدمن أفيون.³²

SOOTHSAYER TANG Male, an opium addict in his thirties; makes a living telling fortunes by reading faces.

"Soothsayer Tang" (Tang Tiezui) is a fortune-teller who made a living by deceiving others with groundless talk. An overall observation of the plot shows that Lao She, with his well-deserved reputation as "maestro of languages", made a deliberate choice of appellation that served three purposes simultaneously. The appellation "Tang Tiezui", literally "Tang the Iron-Mouthed", a combination of surname and nickname, served a referential function in

²⁸ القرآن الكريم. "الأزهر - مجمع البحوث الإسلامية، الإدارة العامة للبحوث والتأليف والترجمة، دار السلام للطباعة، الجزء، عام 2008م، صفحة رقم 516. [Arabic] Al-Azhar Islamic Research Academy. (2008). *The Holy Qur'an*. Al-Salaam Publishing House. p.516.)

²⁹ Translation of the meanings of THE NOBLE QUR'AN in the English language. (1419A.H) trans. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din AL-Hilali, Muhammad Muhsin Khan. Madinah: King Fahd complex for the printing of the holy Qur'an. p.699-700.

³⁰ Zhang Wenyu (tr. with annotations). (2000). *The Complete Translation of Yi Zhou Shu*. Guiyang: Guizhou People's Press. p.219.

³¹ 老舍著：《茶馆》，北京：人民文学出版社，2002年，第3页。（Lao She. (2002). *Teahouse*. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House. p.3.）

³² لاو شه. "المقهى"، ترجمة عبد العزيز حمدي، القاهرة: المجلس الأعلى للثقافة (المشروع القومي للترجمة)، عام 2002م، العدد 479، صفحة رقم supreme council of culture - the national project for translation. No. 479. (Lao She. (2002). *Teahouse*, Cairo: 141 p.141.)

replacement of his real name while providing clues of his vocation and comportment in an ironic tone. First, “Tang” is a paronym of “dang”, indicating wantonness and idleness. Second, “Tie” (iron) is semantically associated with “iron rooster”, a Chinese wisecrack meaning stingy and selfish, echoing with Wang Lifa’s reproach in Act II, “It’s been over ten years, did you ever count how many bowls of free tea you’ve got here? Do the math! You are faring pretty well now--did it ever come to your mind to pay for your tea?”³³ Thirdly, good soothsayers usually enjoy the reputation of “iron-mouthed”, indicating that the words coming out of those lips are as firm and reliable as iron. The choice of this appellation is almost at the pinnacle of linguistic ingenuity as it breathes life into the character and, as a pun with three layers of information--surname, trade and personality--seamlessly merged in one term insinuating sarcasm and disdain. It is only natural for the translator to exert maximum efforts to reproduce this commendable art of naming and its expressiveness. As Wang Bingqin stated in his *Cultural Translation Studies--Theory and Practice of Cultural Translation* when discussing the cultural connotation of names in Chinese and world literature:

Names can be meaningful, that is, the meaning is self-telling from the name itself, or “the name speaks of its meaning”. Authors usually embed the comportment, physical appearance and even the social status and livelihood of the character in his or her name as part of the characterization.³⁴

In the Arabic version of *Teahouse*, “Soothsayer Tang” is rendered through transliteration as “نوي تيه تانغ”, which, though accurate from a phonetic perspective, failed to convey the connotative meaning of the nickname. As the metaphor of “iron mouth” does not exist in Arabic, readers of the translation would not be able to associate “iron-mouthed” with “a capable and glib-tongued soothsayer”. A literal translation of the metaphor would therefore necessitate a lengthy explanatory note and consequently compromise its rhetoric effect. A more appropriate strategy, on this basis, is to render the surname Tang into “تانغ” through transliteration, followed by explication of the metaphorical meaning of “iron-mouthed” as “soothsayer” and translating it into “العَرَّاف” in Arabic. The word “العَرَّاف” means “a person capable of foretelling the future”³⁵, including astrologer, soothsayer, fortune-teller by observing the facial features, etc.

In fact, fortune-telling and other superstitious practices are strictly prohibited in Islam. For Muslims, resorting to soothsayers is an act of relying on the extremely limited human wisdom or even witchcraft in an attempt to speculate the will of Allah and avoid calamities, hence implying doubt and disbelief. Such superstition is incompatible with the Muslim society as it leads astray from Islamic belief. According to Surah 6, Al-An’am in Qur’an, “And with Him are the keys of the Ghaib (all that is hidden), none knows them but He.” (6:59) Even the Prophet (PBUH) did not possess the powers of foretelling the blessings and calamities yet to come, as in Surah 7, Al-A’raf, “Say (Oh Muhammad PBUH): ‘I possess no power over benefit or hurt to myself except as Allah wills. If I had the knowledge of the Ghaib (Unseen), I should have secured for myself an abundance of wealth, and no evil should have touched me. I am but a warner, and a bringer of glad tidings unto people who believe.’” (7:188) It is also recorded in Sahih Muslim that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said “He who visits a diviner (‘Arraf) and asks him about anything, his prayers extending to forty nights will not be accepted.” (Sahih Muslim 2230) In the Age of Ignorance, however, “العَرَّافَة” (divination) used to be a common practice in the Arab society, and the trade of “العَرَّاف”

³³ 老舍著：《茶馆》，北京：人民文学出版社，2002年，第26页。(Lao She. (2002). *Teahouse*. Beijing: People’s Literature Publishing House. p.26.)

³⁴ Wang Bingqin. (2007). *Cultural Translation Studies--Theory and Practice of Cultural Translation*. Tianjin: Nankai University Press. p.185.

³⁵ Translation by author.

(diviner; soothsayer) was familiar for Arabs and easily associated with stories or anecdotes. Therefore, for an accurate understanding of this character, compared to transliteration, a semantic translation of Tang Tiezui into “العَرَّافُ تَانغُ”, meaning “Soothsayer Tang”, omitting the metaphor of “iron-mouthed” for explication of his vocation, would be a more suitable strategy. This is termed as “semantic translation” which “helps readers to understand the implied meaning in the name, hence enabling a deeper understanding of the psychology, personality or physical appearance of the character”.³⁶

An alternative strategy is name substitution, which, among the six strategies proposed by Hermans in translating names, “replacing a source text name either with a semantically unrelated/equally expressive target name or with a name equivalent”. Here it refers to substituting the source text with an Arabic name with similar connotation.³⁷ In Arabic, the word for “diviner” is “عراف”, which is also used as a masculine name. The surname Tang is still rendered as “تانغ” by transliteration, while “Tiezui” is substituted with “عراف”, hence preserving the connotation of the source text. A combination of the two strategies begets the translation “تانغ العَرَّافُ”, which, for translating Chinese literature into Arabic, is an innovative proposal to be tested for readers’ reactions.

(3) 刘麻子 男。三十来岁。说媒拉纤，心狠意毒。³⁸

ليو ما ذي: في العقد الرابع من العمر، متحجر القلب، وشديد الكراهية للأخيار، وسيط بين الناس.³⁹

POCKFACE LIU Male, in his thirties, a cruel and treacherous flesh merchant.

As one of the villains in *Teahouse*, Liu Mazi (Pockface Liu) called himself a matchmaker but was in fact a flesh merchant engaged in the evil business of human trafficking. In the play, taking advantage of the Sixth Born Kang’s desperate situation, he bought Kang’s daughter for ten taels of silver and sold her to be Eunuch Pang’s wife for two hundred taels. Two deserters asked Pockface Liu about “happy threesome”, i.e. marrying the same woman. Unabashed, Liu was excited about the profit he would make from this immoral deal and immediately directed the discussion towards silver dollars. Mistaken for a deserter, Pockface Liu ended up in the hands of the Execution Squad and died under their gun. Liu was an epitome of the evildoers in the morbid and perverted society of his time.

Like the previously example, Pockface Liu (Liu Mazi) was an appellation constructed by surname and nickname, where his unbecoming physical feature implied his perverted moral which was just as repugnant as the contagious disease. As “Mazi” is a polysemous word in Chinese, this article shall only deal with meanings that are relevant to the nickname “Pockface Liu” (Liu Mazi).

“Mazi”, or pockmark, refers to the sunken scars left on the skin as a result of variola virus (فيروس الجدري) infection. There are multiple references for those who have been infected with smallpox, including “مَجْدُور” and “مُجَدَّر” in *Al-Mu’jam Al-Waseet Arabic Dictionary*⁴⁰ and “جَدِير” in *Lisān al-‘Arab Dictionary*⁴¹, which are in fact very similar in their reference to

³⁶ Bao Huinan and Bao Ang. (2000). *Applied Cultural Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Popular Science Press. p.176.

³⁷ Theo Hermans. (1988) “On Translating Proper Names, with Reference to De Witte and Max Havelaar”. Michael Wintle and Paul Vincent (eds), *Modern Dutch Studies: Essays in Honour of Peter King* [M]. London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone, pp.11-13. Translation by author.

³⁸ 老舍著:《茶馆》，北京:人民文学出版社，2002年，第3页。(Lao She. (2002). *Teahouse*. Beijing: People’s Literature Publishing House. p.3.)

³⁹ لاو شه. "المقهى"، ترجمة عبد العزيز حمدي، القاهرة: المجلس الأعلى للثقافة (المشروع القومي للترجمة)، عام 2002م، العدد 479، صفحة رقم supreme council of culture - the national project for translation. No. 479. (Lao She. (2002). *Teahouse*, Cairo: 141 p.141.)

⁴⁰ مجمع اللغة العربية. "المعجم الوسيط"، القاهرة: مكتبة الشروق الدولية، عام 2004، صفحة رقم 110. ([Arabic] Council of the Arabic Language Society. (2004). *Al-Mu’jam al-Waseet Dictionary*. Egypt: Al-Shouroq International Press. p.110.)

⁴¹ ابن منظور. "لسان العرب"، المجلد الخامس، القاهرة: دار المعارف، عام 1998م، صفحة رقم 565. ([Arabic] Ibn Manzur. (1998). *Lisān al-‘Arab*. 565. Dictionary. Vol.5. Cairo: Dar-Elmaaref Publishing House. p.565.)

those who have pockmarks on the face due to smallpox infection, Records of smallpox (الجدري) are seen in an abundance of Arabic literature including medicine publications, religious writings, literary works and translations. For example, variola virus and those who are infected (المَجْدُور) are mentioned in “موسوعة علماء الطب حياتهم وأثارهم” (Encyclopedia of Medical Scientists) co-authored by Heikal Namh Allah and Walyas Mlyhh in 1991, where an extensive collection of symptoms and treatments of many diseases is recorded.

In China, the earliest record of the symptoms and prognosis of this infectious disease is seen in *Handbook of Prescriptions for Emergency (Zhouhou Beiji Fang)* by Ge Hong (283-363), a medical scientist of the Eastern Jin Dynasty. “An infectious disease hit in that year. Sores were first seen on the head and the face and would cover the entire body within a very short period. The appearance resembled that of red-fire sore with white pus. New sores appeared once the old ones healed. The disease was fatal if not treated immediately; those who did recover would have dark purple scars on the skin. It took over a year for the outbreak to end, and the cause of the epidemic was believed to be noxious airs (qi).”⁴² The sequelae of smallpox is scars left on the face, commonly known as pockmark (*mazi*) in Chinese. As the scars are sunken on the surface of the skin, idioms such as “the other word for pockface--a treacherous man” and “the pockface guy is knocking at the door--utterly deceptive” are quite common in Chinese. (Note: these idioms are essentially word plays. “Pockmark” as a sunken scar on the skin resembles a pit, therefore “a pockface man” can be called literally “a man of pits” (*keng ren*) which in Chinese means “to deceive or entrap someone” as the image of pit is associated with pitfall or trap. Hence “pockface” metaphorically points to “a deceitful man who constantly looks for opportunities to entrap others”.) Although nicknaming someone based on physical defect or health condition suggests discrimination and stigma, hence is by no means to be encouraged; yet the nickname of “Pockface” perfectly matches the nature of the treacherous evildoer in the context of *Teahouse*. Based on the metaphor of “deceiving or ensnaring others” in “pockface”, Lao She expressed his strong disgust for the social malaise in his time reflected in Pockface Liu’s unsightly image. Based on the above analysis, the translator must adopt whatever strategies that are appropriate to convey the semantic meaning and referential connotation of “pockface” to serve the purpose of uncovering and denouncing social evils.

In the Arabic version of *Teahouse*, the nickname “Pockface Liu” (Liu Mazi) is rendered as “ذي ما ليو” through transliteration. Similarly, this strategy falls short of the vividness of the image of “pockface” and has failed to convey its profound sarcasm. In fact, the phenomenon of nicknaming someone for their physical appearance or personality as a subtle way of showing appreciation or disapproval also exists in Arabic; these nicknames include, for example, “الأمين” (the honest one), “الأحذب” (hunchback) and “الأعرج” (lame), etc. As the appellation “Pockface Liu” not only highlights his physical feature, making him a representative figure of the evildoers in the Chinese society who made a fortune out of others’ suffering, but also makes use of the metaphorical association between “pockmark” and “deceitful” in Chinese idioms. Such associative meaning abundant in cultural implications is entirely lost in the exclusive employment of transliteration strategy. Instead, a combination of transliteration and semantic translation, i.e. rendering “Liu” as “ليو” and “Pockface” (*mazi*) as “المَجْدُور”. Therefore, the cultural connotation in “Pockface Liu” would be preserved to the maximum by transcoding the source text into “ليو المَجْدُور” while adding explanatory notes on the historical facts about smallpox outbreaks in Chinese history as well as the metaphorical meaning of “pockface” or “pockmark” in Chinese.

3.“Ranking in Family Plus Honorific Title”: A Special Cultural Phenomenon in Chinese and Its Translation Strategies

In a traditional Chinese cultural context heavily influenced by Confucianism, appellations as cultural elements situated in a network of social relations reflect the seniority

⁴² [Jin Dynasty] Ge Hong, documented by Wang Jian, Zou Yunguo and Luo Sihang. (2016). *Handbook of Prescriptions for Emergency (Zhouhou Beiji Fang)*. Beijing: China Press of Chinese Medicine. p.32.

in the family and the status in social hierarchy. Traditionally, the hierarchical order of seniority is closely observed in the family where “the elder brother shall be kind and the younger brother shall be respectful”. On the other hand, the long history of centralized feudal monarchy has shaped the social conception of officialdom, which permeated the cultural psychology of Chinese. These traits are vigorously encompassed in the appellations associated with familial relations and social hierarchy. As early as in the Western Zhou Dynasty, Chinese terms of “伯” (*bo*, the first born), “仲” (*zhong*, the second born), 叔 (*shu*, the third born) and “季” (*ji*, the fourth born) were used to indicate seniority for siblings, of which “伯” was sometimes replaced by “孟” (*meng*). Some scholars maintain that “伯” refers to the firstborn boy from a wife while 孟 refers to the firstborn boy from a concubine on the ground of records in *Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall (Bai Hu Tong Yi)* that “The firstborn from (his) wife was called Bo, with the name Bo Qin; while the firstborn from (his) concubine was called Meng, who was appointed as Grand Official of Lu”; while other scholars hold that at least in the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, *Bo* usually referred to the firstborn boy while *Meng* usually referred to the firstborn girl. In the flow of time, appellations constructed by “numerical word + appellation for kinship”, such as “eldest brother, second elder brother” or by “old (*lao*) + numerical word”, such as “first born, second born” have become increasingly common in vernacular, and these appellations are still widely used today in interpersonal interactions.

In *Teahouse*, many a leading character is addressed by surname plus family ranking plus “爷” (elder/ master/sir) as an honorific title, where “爷” (*ye*) appears after the surname or given name to show respect to a male adult. The use of this appellation helps to define the historical context of *Teahouse*, reflecting the fact that despite the looming eulogy of the feudal society, the conception of hierarchy still functioned as the conceptual discipline that governed people’s mindset and social interactions. The following paragraphs shall provide an in-depth and systematic analysis of this language phenomenon.

(4) 松二爷、常四爷、马五爷

السيد سونغ أر، السيد تشانغ سي، السيد ما وو

Second Elder Song, Fourth Elder Chang, Fifth Elder Ma

《茶馆》中“姓氏+排行+爷”的称谓及其阿语翻译

原名	译名	源文人物表	译文人物表
松二爷	السيد سونغ أر	男。三十来岁。胆小而爱说话。 ⁴³	عمره حوالي ثلاثين عاما، جبان ولكنه ثرثار. ⁴⁴
常四爷	السيد تشانغ سي	男。三十来岁。松二爷的好友，都是裕泰的主顾。正直，体格好。 ⁴⁵	في العقد الرابع من العمر، صديق حميم للسيد أر، وهما من الزبائن القدامى في مقهى يو تاي، يتسم بدمائة الأخلاق والبنية القوية. ⁴⁶
马五爷	السيد ما وو	男。三十多岁。吃洋教的小恶霸。 ⁴⁷	عمره أكثر من ثلاثين عاما، طاغ يعتمد على الدين الأجنبي لكسب أسباب الرزق. ⁴⁸

⁴³ 老舍著：《茶馆》，北京：人民文学出版社，2002年，第3页。(Lao She. (2002). *Teahouse*. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House. p.3.)

⁴⁴ لاو شه. "المقهى"، ترجمة عبد العزيز حمدي، القاهرة: المجلس الأعلى للثقافة (المشروع القومي للترجمة)، عام 2002م، العدد 479، صفحة رقم supreme council of culture - the national project for translation. No. 479. (Lao She. (2002). *Teahouse*, Cairo: 141 p.141.)

⁴⁵ 老舍著：《茶馆》，北京：人民文学出版社，2002年，第3页。(Lao She. (2002). *Teahouse*. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House. p.3.)

⁴⁶ لاو شه. "المقهى"، ترجمة عبد العزيز حمدي، القاهرة: المجلس الأعلى للثقافة (المشروع القومي للترجمة)، عام 2002م، العدد 479، صفحة رقم 141. supreme council of culture - the national project for translation. No. 479. p.141.) (Lao She. (2002). *Teahouse*, Cairo:

⁴⁷ 老舍著：《茶馆》，北京：人民文学出版社，2002年，第3页。(Lao She. (2002). *Teahouse*. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House. p.3.)

Appellations of “surname+family rank+honorific title” and their Arabic translation in *Teahouse*

Source text	Translated text	Description in the list of characters in source text	Description in the list of characters in translated text
<u>Second Elder Song</u>	السيد سونغ أر	Male, in his thirties, timid but talkative.	عمره حوالي ثلاثين عاما، جبان ولكنه ثرثار.
<u>Fourth Elder Chang</u>	السيد تشانغ سي	Male, in his thirties, a habitué of Yutai Teahouse as is his good friend Second Elder Song. A well-built and morally upright man.	في العقد الرابع من العمر، صديق حميم للسيد سونغ أر، وهما من الزبائن القدامى في مقهى يو تاي، يتسم بدمائة الأخلاق والبنية القوية.
<u>Fifth Elder Ma</u>	السيد ما وو	Male, in his thirties, using his connection with the Western church to lord over his compatriots.	عمره أكثر من ثلاثين عاما، طاغ يعتمد على الدين الأجنبي لكسب أسباب الرزق.

A review of historical literature shows that the Chinese character “爷” (爺 in traditional Chinese) first appeared in *Fragments of the Original Yupian* (*Yuanben Yupian Canjuan*), “爺”, father, also written as “耶”, colloquially refers to father⁴⁹, indicating its referential meaning of father, which underwent a drastic change in the Northern Song Dynasty from “father” to “grandfather or male of the same generation as grandfather”, as in the appellation “阿爷” in *Taiping Guangji*. According to Qiu Xigui’s classification of phonogram variations in Chinese,⁵⁰ “爷” (爺) is composed of a phonetic radical “耶” and an ideographic radical “父”, referring to grandfather. In *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, explanations of “爷” includes (1) (dialectal) father; (2) grandfather; (3) an honorific term to address elderly male or male of older generation; (4) an archaic term to address officials or wealthy people; (5) a term to address deities in folk vernacular.⁵¹ Studies on the semantic change of “爷” from the perspective of explanation and seme show that the transition from “grandfather” to other explanations represents a metaphorically-based semantic expansion, with “male” and “high position” as the basic seme, and the appellation indicating familial or genealogical order is projected to the scope of interpersonal interactions, offices and spirituality.⁵² It is therefore deduced that “爷” in *Teahouse* intends to show respect to the elderly or those who hold a senior position, hence a dual projection of the conception of family genealogy and social hierarchy. Therefore, the translation of “爷” as a polysemous word must depend on the specific context. The five explanations provided in *Dictionary of Modern Chinese* above can be respectively translated as “أب”, “جد”, “سيّد”, “سيّد” and “خالق/إله”.

In Example 4, “爷” in each of the appellation is rendered as “السيد”, which is a precise reproduction of the author’s intention, hence a complete transcoding of the source text in semantic and cultural perspectives. In Arabic dictionaries, the following explanations of

⁴⁸ لاو شه. "المقهى", ترجمة عبد العزيز حمدي، القاهرة: المجلس الأعلى للثقافة (المشروع القومي للترجمة)، عام 2002م، العدد 479، صفحة رقم 141.

supreme council of culture - the national project for translation. No. 479. p.141.) (Lao She. (2002). *Teahouse*, Cairo:

⁴⁹ Gu Yewang. (1985). *Fragments of the Original Yupian* (*Yuanben Yupian Canjuan*). Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company. p.529.

⁵⁰ Qiu Xigui. (1988). *An Outline of Philology*. The Commercial Press. p.151-155.

⁵¹ Division of Dictionary Compilation, Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. (2017). *Modern Chinese Dictionary*. Beijing: The Commercial Press. 7th Edition. p.1527.

⁵² Jiang Lili. (2013). “Derivation, Variation and Pragmatic Functions of “爷(Ye)” in the Word Family of ‘X ye’”. *Journal of Tangshan Normal University*. Vol.35, No.4. July 2013. p.42.

“السيد” are provided: (1) “المالك”, i.e. proprietor, owner, person-in-charge; (2) “المؤلى ذو العبيد”, i.e. master, sire, slave owner; (3) “كل من افترضت طاعته”, i.e. authority. Arabs also use “السيد” as an honorific title meaning “sir”. It is clear that all explanations of the word imply respect and veneration, which are highly consistent with “爷” in Chinese in both semantic and emotive aspects.

It is worth mentioning that *Teahouse* was first published in 1957; while Egyptian novelist, Nobel Prize laureate Naguib Mahfouz published “Al-Thulāthiyyah” (الثلاثية, Trilogy) from 1956 to 1957. The three novels, namely “Bayn al-qasrayn” (بين القصرين, Palace Walk), “Qasr al-shawq” (قصر الشوق, Palace of Desire) and Al-Sukkariyyah (السكرية, Sugar Street)⁵³ were highly acclaimed in literary circles in Egypt and worldwide. The protagonist “أحمد عبد الجواد” (Ahmed Abdel-Gawad), portrayed as a powerful and wealthy merchant in old Egypt, was addressed as “السيد” to show respect. Following the publication of Al-Thulāthiyyah, “السيد” has become a cultural symbol in the Arab world ; most Arabs would immediately associate this appellation with Gawad in Al-Thulāthiyyah, an interesting case of intertextuality between “السيد” and “爷”.

Viewing the appellation “surname + familial ranking + honorific title (爷)” as one complete term, however, it is observed that the transliteration of familial ranking has compromised the transcoding of the source text, let alone conveying the message of familial seniority and social hierarchy observed the Chinese culture. Instead, an improvement of Aziz’s translation is recommended by rendering the ranks “second, fourth and fifth” with the corresponding ordinal numbers in Arabic “الثاني، الرابع، الخامس”, which features more semantic accuracy and cultural relevance, as the use of ordinal numbers to indicate rank in seniority will lead to a better understanding of the culture-loaded traits of Chinese appellation system.

IV. Conclusion

In both Arab and Chinese cultural contexts, names have implied the continuity of family ties and encompassed the family expectations for the character, knowledge and future of their offspring since the ancient times. Most Arabs names feature Islamic cultural indications that symbolize the inheritance of genealogy and spirituality; while Chinese names usually highlight the harmony of phonetic and semantic elegance and, due to the ideographic features of the writing system, are embedded with semantic content which may even direct towards some metaphor or pun. As an extension of the referential function of name, appellation as a reflection of sociocultural conception and interpersonal relations, emphasizes social network and emotive inclination. In literary works, the author does not randomly or accidentally determine the name and appellation of the characters, but identifies naming as a deliberate component of characterization. Although transliteration remains one of the most common strategies in translating people’s names, indiscriminate application of this technology based on exaggerated untranslatability of names as “pure language” would oftentimes result in significant weakening or loss of cultural connotation in the transcoding process. In this regard, Chinese scholars have proposed alternatives such as “transliteration plus paraphrasing”, i.e. “when implications in the name of a literary character constitutes an important part of the textual content, paraphrasing usually becomes necessary apart from transliteration, i.e. the meaning of name must be translated to help readers understand the textual content.”⁵⁴ This is especially thought-provoking for translators when examining the translation methodology of people’s names and appellations in context.

⁵³ Note: Bayn al-qasrayn (بين القصرين, Palace Walk) was published in 1956; Qasr al-shawq (قصر الشوق, Palace of Desire) and Al-Sukkariyyah (السكرية, Sugar Street) were published in 1957.

⁵⁴ Bao Huinan and Bao Ang. (2000). *Applied Cultural Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Popular Science Press. p.173.

The study of names and appellations in *Teahouse* proceeds from the plurality of translation strategies to explore the various possibilities apart from transliteration. An in-depth understanding of the historical and cultural context of the source text helps the translator to identify with the cultural connotation of names and appellations of literary characters. Due to distinctive differences in both linguistic (writing system, phonology, etc.) and cultural (religion, folk customs, conceptions, etc.) dimensions, any translation strategy, whether single or multiple, would fall short of perfection in language transcoding on phonetic, semantic and connotative levels. That is to say, the translation of names and appellations always involve a certain degree of trade-off. Under this precondition, a thorough understanding of culture plays a constructive role in exploring the cultural connotation of names and appellations as well as apprehending the motive of the author, which in turn helps the translator to optimize the decision-making process in translation.

Chinese references:

- [1] 阿齐兹 (Abdel Aziz Hamdi), 乐珍 (Yara Ibrahim Ahmed Mohamed Zedan - 笔者): “埃及汉学家、翻译家阿齐兹教授访谈录” (2023年3月3至5日), 引自乐珍: 《汉语与阿拉伯语文化负载词的翻译研究——论阿齐兹对老舍〈茶馆〉的阿译和策略》, 复旦大学博士学位论文, 2024年。
- [2] 包惠南, 包昂著: 《实用文化翻译学》, 上海科学普及出版社, 2000年。
- [3] 陈桐生著: 《国语》, 北京: 中华书局: 2003年。
- [4] [清]段玉裁著: 《说文解字注》, 经韵楼藏版, 上海: 上海古籍出版社, 1992年。
- [5] 方芳著: 《全球化语境下的文化翻译审视》, 长春: 吉林大学出版社, 2018年。
- [6] [晋]葛洪著, 汪剑, 邹运国, 罗思航整理: 《肘后备急方》, 北京: 中国中医药出版社, 2016年。
- [7] 顾野王著: 《原本玉篇残卷》, 北京: 中华书局, 1985年。
- [8] 姜礼立: “X爷”词族中“爷”的衍生变异及其语用功能, 唐山师范学院学报, 第35卷第4期, 2013年。
- [9] 教育部语言文字应用研究所: 《中华人民共和国国家标准: 中国人名汉语拼音字母拼写规则》 (GB/T 28039-2011), 北京: 中国标准出版社, 2012年。
- [10] 老舍著: 《茶馆》, 北京: 人民文学出版社, 2002年。
- [11] 裘锡圭著: 《文字学概要》, 北京: 商务印书馆, 1988年。
- [12] 任建义著: 《古人名字问题初探》, 山东教育学院学报, 第6期, 2002年。
- [13] 王秉钦著: 《文化翻译学——文化翻译理论与实践》, 天津: 南开大学出版社, 2007年。
- [14] 新华通讯社: 《世界人名翻译大辞典》第二版, 北京: 中国对外翻译出版公司, 2007年。
- [15] 于红梅著: 人名、称谓翻译要“名副其实”——《茶馆》两英译本人名翻译对比研究, 学理论, 第029期, 2011年。
- [16] 张联芳主编: 《中国人的姓名》, 北京: 中国社会科学出版社, 1992年。
- [17] 张闻玉译注: 《逸周书全译》, 贵阳: 贵州人民出版社, 2000年。
- [18] 中国社会科学院语言研究所词典编辑室编: 《现代汉语词典》, 第七版, 北京: 商务印书馆, 2017年。

English references:

- [1] Aixelá, Javier Franco. (2007). "Culture-Specific Items in Translation". In Álvarez, Román and Vidal, Carmen-África (eds.), *Translation, Power, Subversion*. Beijing : Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- [2] Eriko Sato. (2016) "Proper Names in Translational Contexts". *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, January 2016.
- [3] Fourment-Berni Canani, Michelle. (1994). "Le statut des noms propres dans la traduction". *Studi Italiani di Linguistica Teorica ed Applicata*, 23(3).
- [4] Gero Lietz. (1992). *Eigennamen in der norwegischen Gegenwartssprache. Probleme ihrer Wiedergabe im Deutschen am Beispiel belletristischer Texte*. Wissenschaften: Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften.
- [5] Hartwig Kalverkämpfer. (1996). "Namen im Sprachtausch: Namen übersetzung". Ernst Eichler, Gerhard Hilty, Heinrich Löffler, Gustav Steger, Ladislav Zgusta (eds.) *Namenforschung. Name Studies. Les Noms Propres. Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft* (11) Vol.II. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter.
- [6] Hermans, Theo. (1988) "On Translating Proper Names.with Reference to De Witte and Max Havelaar", in Wintle, Michael (ed.), *Modern Dutch Studies* . London: Athlone.
- [7] Jean-François Lyotard. (1992). Universal history and cultural differences. In A. Benjamin (ed.). Cambridge: Blackwell. *The Lyotard Reader, 3rd Edition*. p.320.
- [8] John Stuart Mill. (1872). *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive*, 8th Edition. London: Longmans, Green and Company.
- [9] Kalverkämpfer, Hartwig. (1996). "Namen im Sprachtausch: Namen übersetzung". Ernst Eichler, Gerhard Hilty, Heinrich Löffler, Gustav Steger, Ladislav Zgusta (eds.) *Namenforschung. Name Studies. Les Noms Propres. Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft* (11) Vol.II. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter.
- [10] Mill, John Stuart. (1872). *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive*, 8th E dition. London: Longmans, Green and Company.
- [11] Ministry of Education Institute of Applied Linguistics. (2012). *The Chinese Phonetic Alphabet Spelling Rules for Chinese Names* (GB/T 28039-2011). Beijing: Standards Press of China.
- [12] Newmark, Peter. (1981). *Approaches to Translation*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- [13] Ren Jianyi. (2002). A Preliminary Study on Names in Ancient Times. *Journal of Shandong Education Institute*.
- [14] Theo Hermans. (1988). "On Translating Proper Names, with Reference to De Witte and Max Havelaar". Michael Wintle and Paul Vincent (eds), *Modern Dutch Studies: Essays in Honour of Peter King*. London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone.

Arabic references:

1. ابن منظور. "لسان العرب"، المجلد الخامس، القاهرة: دار المعارف، عام 1998م.
2. "القرآن الكريم". الأزهر- مجمع البحوث الإسلامية، الإدارة العامة للبحوث والتأليف والترجمة، دار السلام للطباعة، عام 2008م.
3. لاو شه. "المقهى"، ترجمة عبد العزيز حمدي، القاهرة: المجلس الأعلى للثقافة (المشروع القومي للترجمة)، العدد 479، عام 2002م.
4. مجمع اللغة العربية. "المعجم الوسيط"، القاهرة: مكتبة الشروق الدولية، عام 2004م.
5. هشام موسى المالكي. "إشكاليات ترجمة أسماء الأعلام بين اللغتين الصينية والعربية"، صحيفة الألسن، العدد 23، عام 2007م.