

Translation of World Heritage Names from the Perspective of Cultural Translation Theory: A Study on Macau

Yifan Jiang*

School of Foreign Languages, Fujian Jiangxia University, Fuzhou, Fujian, 350100, China

*Corresponding author: Yifan Jiang, 313583763@qq.com

Copyright: 2025 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY-NC 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited, and explicitly prohibiting its use for commercial purposes.

Abstract: In the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, the translation of a city's cultural publicity to the outside world is of great significance in improving its international image. Based on the cultural translation theory of postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha, this study discusses how to retain the heterogeneous otherness in the translation of the World Heritage names in Macau, so as to preserve the exotic richness and manifest cultural confidence in the translation of cultural publicity. Based on the basic concepts of "heterogeneity", "hybridity" and "third space", it is found that the translators tend to adopt restorable literal translation to retain the heterogeneous otherness in the source language and culture, and reconstruct the context of the Other so that the translated text present rich linguistic and cultural hybridity, create a third space between the source and target cultures, as well as enhance the city's international influence and communication power. Most importantly, the Macau culture, which is pluralistic, tolerant and harmonious, could be highlighted.

Keywords: Homi K. Bhabha; Cultural Translation Theory; Heterogeneity; Hybridity; Macau

Published: Jun 18, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62177/chst.v3i2.1503>

1. Introduction

Since 2013, General Secretary Xi Jinping has successively proposed the major initiatives of jointly building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road. Over the past decade, China and 142 countries along the Belt and Road have signed agreements or memoranda of understanding in the fields of culture and tourism, giving rise to a new pattern characterized by diversified interaction, collaborative engagement, and symbiotic coexistence. The restructuring of the global order has provided China with a historic opportunity to challenge Western discursive hegemony. How to demonstrate cultural confidence in international communication, strengthen confidence in Chinese discourse, and realize the innovation of national culture has become a core concern in the current construction of national soft power. Meanwhile, an increasing number of cities have also taken advantage of this historic opportunity to showcase their distinctive urban cultural characteristics, enhance their attractiveness as tourism destinations, and facilitate urban economic recovery in the post-pandemic era.

Macao was once the most prosperous entrepôt in the Far East in the nineteenth century, as well as an important transit port and trading stronghold along the Maritime Silk Road. It attracted merchants, travelers, missionaries, and immigrants from dozens of countries across all continents to sojourn and settle there. Having undergone centuries of Portuguese colonial rule, Macao became a site where Eastern and Western cultures encountered, collided, and intermingled, giving rise to a distinctive civilization of its own. As China's international economic and political status continues to rise alongside increasingly frequent

cross-cultural exchanges, international communication translation has become a practice that participates in the relocation of cultures^[1]. Meng points out that it bears directly on the construction of the international image of nations, regions and cities^[2]. The translation of Macau's World Heritage names, as a concentrated form of cultural publicity, constitutes a significant means of shaping the city's international image and enhancing its cultural visibility on the global stage. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's theory of cultural translation, this article takes the English translations of the World Heritage site names in the Historic Centre of Macao as its textual corpus. It explores how translation in urban international communication shapes Macao's distinctive global image.

2. Theoretical Basis

Homi Bhabha is a contemporary postcolonial theorist who has comprehensively and systematically examined the relationship among translation, postcolonial culture, and national identity, and proposed the theory of cultural translation in the postcolonial context. He argues that, with historical change and social transformation, new possibilities emerge in the interstitial spaces between national cultures. By introducing the concept of hybridity into the cultural sphere, he highlights its novelty, heterogeneity, and complementarity^[3]. In cultural translation, this opens up a negotiable space in which translation can move beyond the binary opposition between cultures. While conveying different cultural identities, cultural translation also functions as a medium for communication and interaction between cultures, enabling the construction of identities associated with foreign cultures^[4]. Owing to the presence of Otherness, translation becomes a hybrid act, constituting a third language distinct from both the source language and the target language^[5]. In the process of translation, the heterogeneous Other negotiates with the target culture within the Third Space, generating heterogeneous texts that can shape national identity and cultural identification. Therefore, heterogeneity, hybridity, and the Third Space have become key concepts in the theory of cultural translation, deconstructing the traditional language-centered view of translation.

Cultural translation theory advocates heterogeneity, adopts an open attitude toward heterogeneous cultures, and emphasizes preserving the uniqueness of culture itself. It argues for retaining Otherness in the source-language culture so that an appropriate degree of foreignness may be preserved in the translation, allowing target-language readers to experience the foreign culture as well. In 1990, Homi Bhabha first proposed hybridity as a fundamental concept in *Nation and Narration*. Since linguistic and cultural heterogeneity are unavoidable in translation activities, translation itself is also a form of hybridity. After this theory was introduced into China, Chinese scholars likewise carried out in-depth discussions of it. Wang Zuoliang (1984) pointed out that translation must confront two different cultures, and cultural differences lead to variations in the reception and understanding of information within the two linguistic systems, therefore hybridity is extremely common in translation^[6]. However, the existence of hybridity plays a positive role in highlighting cultural differences and promoting cultural exchange. Han Ziman (2005) points out that hybridity may take the form of a blending of multiple cultural intentions or linguistic features, or a blending of different registers and text types^[7]. In the field of cultural studies, hybridity is commonly used to describe the fusion of two or more different cultural elements, which may come from different cultural backgrounds, social groups, or historical periods. In linguistics, hybridity can refer to the mixing of two or more different languages or dialects. Ni (2011) emphasizes that cultural translation carries a powerful ideological capacity to shape national identity and cultural recognition^[8]. This insight is particularly relevant to the present study. When the heterogeneous otherness embedded in Macau's World Heritage names is retained rather than domesticated, translation becomes an active practice of constructing cultural identity. Preserving heterogeneity in cultural publicity is a deliberate manifestation of cultural confidence.

In 1996, Homi Bhabha proposed that cultural identity exists in the Third Space formed through contact with other cultures, namely the hybrid and interstitial space opened up in the process of cultural translation^[9]. In the process of globalization, translation plays an important role in the Third Space. Heterogeneity and hybridity negotiate boundaries with the target culture within this space, breaking down the subject-object distinctions, national similarities and differences, and binary oppositions between the self and the Other, thereby promoting cultural exchange, mutual learning, integration, and symbiosis among diverse cultures. Through negotiated dialogue between different ethnic and cultural identities, heterogeneous texts are produced, new cultural identities are shaped, and their distinctiveness is brought to the fore.

3. Historical Origins of Macao's Urban Culture

Macao is a peninsula covering just over 30 square kilometers. In the 1550s, during the Jiajing reign of the Ming dynasty, the Portuguese arrived here by sea and, seeing the flourishing incense offerings at the A-Ma Temple from afar, named the place Magang in Portuguese. It was precisely this remarkable piece of land that became one of the earliest windows through which the west encountered Eastern civilization. Merchants, missionaries, immigrants, and their families from dozens of countries across various continents, driven by curiosity about and ambition toward Eastern culture, flocked to the Macao Peninsula, bringing with them a rich and colorful array of foreign cultures. Some scholars have compared Macao to a “cultural melting pot” and “a global land-and-sea realm”^[10]. This metaphor aptly captures Macao's unique and distinctive historical and cultural characteristics: religious diversity, multiethnic coexistence, and linguistic hybridity, especially the indelible imprint left by Portugal.

When different cultures encounter one another, Samuel P. Huntington (1996) argues that conflict tends to outweigh integration and confrontation tends to outweigh dialogue when different civilizations encounter one another^[11]. Toynbee describes the outcomes of contact between civilizations in terms of two possible patterns. Either a dominant civilization prevails while a weaker one disintegrates, or both civilizations disintegrate and give rise to a new civilization. However, in Macao, 500 years of contact between Eastern and Western civilizations, transcending ethnic barriers and religious differences, gave rise to a third culture distinct from both Chinese civilization and Western civilization^[12], and left behind a rich and splendid legacy of world cultural heritage. On July 15, 2005, the Historic Centre of Macao was officially inscribed on the World Heritage List, becoming China's 31st World Heritage site. The historic district consists of 22 buildings located on the Macao Peninsula and 8 adjoining squares, with each heritage site's name sign marked and annotated in Chinese, Portuguese, and English. These landmark buildings, emerging in response to the times, have become Macao's irreplaceable cultural profile.

4. Translation of Macao World Heritage Site Names from the Perspective of Cultural Translation Theory

Homi Bhabha's cultural translation theory has been widely applied to the translation of postcolonial literary works, and some scholars have also used it in the translation of classical Chinese poetry and political discourse for international communication, reflecting the translational mission of preserving traditional Chinese culture while embracing foreign cultures. As Macao is a representative place where various Eastern and Western religions and cultures converge and interact, cultural translation theory has likewise been appropriately applied to the international communication translation of the names of Macao's World Heritage sites. Specifically, the following strategies have mainly been adopted:

4.1 Literal Translation and Transliteration

The most commonly used method for the English translation of place names in the World Heritage sites of the Historic Centre of Macao is restorable literal translation, which preserves certain Portuguese terms, Cantonese expressions, or religious personal names. If the translation is rendered back into the original language, the content obtained would be basically consistent with that of the source text.

A-Ma Temple is a typical example. Mazu culture originated in the Song dynasty, and as the saying goes, wherever there is seawater, there are Chinese people, and wherever there are Chinese people, there is Mazu. Mazu is regarded as the third major spiritual pillar of the Chinese people, following the Yellow Emperor and Confucius. A-Ma Temple is an ancient temple in Macao where local people worship Mazu, and it is similar to the Mazu Temples and Tianfei Temples found along China's southeastern coast; in early Guangdong, it was also called Niangma Temple. For this World Heritage site name, the translation adopts a simple form of restorable literal translation, A-Ma Temple, which reproduces the authentic phonetic features of the source language and carries the deep-rooted national sentiment embedded in the Chinese spirit, thereby creating linguistic hybridity. Similarly, names such as Section of the Old City Walls for 旧城墙遗址, Protestant Cemetery for 基督教坟场, and Holy House of Mercy for 仁慈堂大楼 all reflect the characteristics of restorable literal translation.

In addition, there is a special form of restorable translation, namely transliteration. When there are substantial differences between the source culture and the target culture, semantic gaps, or no appropriate equivalent can be found, transliteration is

used in translation. The most common objects of transliteration are personal names, place names, technical terms, or culture-loaded words. From the perspective of cultural translation theory, transliteration is also an important means of constructing heterogeneous linguistic elements and achieving linguistic hybridity in the target text^[13]. Transliteration is also widely used in translating the place names of Macao's World Heritage sites, preserving elements of Chinese culture, Portuguese culture, Cantonese culture, and religious culture, and reflecting the social paradigm of interaction among civilizations. For example, when translating World Heritage site names containing figures from ancient mythology, the translators did not adopt a domestication strategy; instead, they chose a Cantonese romanization scheme and conveyed the information to foreign audiences through transliteration. Thus, 哪吒庙 is rendered as Na Tcha Temple, 三街会馆 as Sam Kai Vui Kun Temple, and 卢家大屋 as Lou Kau Mansion. By adopting this translation strategy, the translators effectively project the Cantonese culture of South China to the outside world and, by increasing the sense of unfamiliarity in the language, draw readers' attention to the presence of Chinese culture, thereby effectively preventing the distinctive culture of the source language from being overlooked in the translation process. Especially when the target culture is more dominant than the source culture, preserving heterogeneous linguistic elements through transliteration can protect the source culture from disappearing through absorption by a dominant culture. The linguistic hybridity that emerges in these translation practices, from another perspective, shows that in a globalized context, translators not only communicate the culture of a city to the world through translation, but also effectively demonstrate cultural confidence at a broader, macro level.

4.2 Preserving the Heterogeneous Other

Cultural confidence in translating the place names of Macao's World Heritage sites is also reflected in the preservation of the heterogeneous Other. How to construct cultural identity and communicate cultural elements is crucial to whether a culture can engage in equal exchange and dialogue with other cultures on the international stage. Preserving cultural heterogeneity in external communication and highlighting cultural otherness are key to the construction of cultural identity. Wu Nansong (2003) has pointed out that the ultimate purpose of translation is to seek symbiosis and integration among different cultures, and he calls on translators to preserve the differences of the original text in the translation process^[14]. Zheng (2016) argues that, in order to promote Chinese culture going global, translators should adopt foreignization as the dominant strategy when rendering culture-loaded words, so as to retain their distinctive cultural connotations rather than dissolve them into the target culture^[15]. This view aligns closely with Bhabha's emphasis on heterogeneity. The translation of Macao's World Heritage names should likewise foreground, rather than erase, the cultural specificity embedded in the source expressions. The power of communication determines the power of influence, and the right to discourse determines the initiative. The preservation of the heterogeneous Other in the English translation of the place names of Macao's World Heritage sites highlights cultural hybridity. As for the Portuguese traces left by former colonial rule, the Macao Government Tourism Office did not simply erase them in its external publicity translations, but instead retained them appropriately. This approach not only adds a strong Portuguese flavor to the city, but also indirectly demonstrates China's confidence as a major country and its cultural inclusiveness.

One of Macao's World Heritage sites is called Lilau Square. It was once one of Macao's main water sources and, being close to the Inner Harbour, was also one of the earliest Portuguese settlements in Macao. As a result, the area around Lilau Square is lined with many brightly colored Southern European-style buildings featuring arched windows. In translation, the name was rendered neither literally as Grandma Well Square nor phonetically as Apogee Square, but as Lilau Square. In Portuguese, Lilau means mountain spring. This translation not only preserves the heterogeneous Other within the culture, but also conveys the cultural connotations of the source language, allowing visitors there to feel as if they have traveled back to an evening in the seventeenth century, when Portuguese residents gathered at the site to fetch water, chat, wash clothes, attend prayers, and sing Portuguese folk songs. Another of Macao's World Heritage sites is the 'Leal Senado' Building, which served as the city hall in the eighteenth century. Rather than simply translating it as City Hall Building, the translator rendered it as 'Leal Senado' Building. In Portuguese, Leal Senado means loyal senate. Dongwangyang Fortress is translated as Guia Fortress, with Guia meaning guide in Portuguese. The Headquarters of the Orient Foundation was originally the garden residence of the Portuguese nobleman Ferreira do Amaral, and the translator rendered it as Casa Garden by drawing on the

Spanish word *casa*, meaning home. The translations of these World Heritage site names do not adopt fully English renderings, but instead preserve Portuguese or Spanish words in an effort to reconstruct the othered context of the source culture. They reflect Macao's role as an important port in modern China's opening to the outside world and as a key hub for the eastward spread of Western learning and the westward transmission of Eastern learning. They also evoke the grand spectacle of intense collision and integration among heterogeneous civilizations here, from which the diverse, inclusive, and harmonious culture of Macao was born. In this way, they highlight cultural hybridity and embody cultural confidence in translational discourse.

4.3 Seeking the Third Space

Homi Bhabha once pointed out that it is impossible to preserve cultural purity in intercultural communication. In the zone where two cultures meet, there inevitably exists a Third Space, a space that is neither one nor the other, yet also both. Only within this space can cultural differences and discursive meanings be interpreted. The translator's task, therefore, is to consciously reconstruct the context of the Other by bringing two heterogeneous cultures into this Third Space, so that the source culture and the target culture can negotiate within it. As Chen (2023) observes, a place name condenses the historical memory and cultural distinctiveness of a locality. The act of translating it inevitably involves negotiating cultural difference^[16]. Viewed through the lens of Bhabha's cultural translation theory, the translation of Macao's World Heritage names becomes a process of border negotiation in the "third space," in which the cultural specificity carried by each name must be foregrounded.

When translating the World Heritage site name Zheng Family Mansion, the translator took into account that it was the former residence of Zheng Guanying, a famous modern Chinese thinker, but also recognized that most foreign visitors might not be familiar with his name. As a result, the translator stepped back and chose the rendering Mandarin's House. Through the intermediary term Mandarin, the translation accurately conveys Zheng Guanying's identity as a late Qing official and a prominent merchant, while at the same time avoiding confusion for target-language readers. In addition, the translator provided a note explaining in detail the major events of Zheng Guanying's life, thereby presenting the roots of traditional culture on an equal footing and making the source culture clearly visible. The note seeks to reconstruct the context of the Other in the source culture and create a Third Space in which the two cultures can collide and merge.

Another historical World Heritage site in Macao is the former Port Authority Building. This Arab-style barracks was originally a camp for Indian police officers who came to Macao in the nineteenth century. It now serves as the office building of the Macao Maritime and Water Bureau and is a Moorish-style structure designed by an Italian architect. Rather than translating it literally as Port Authority Building based on its current function, the translator chose to respect its historical significance and rendered it as Moorish Barracks. Through this translation practice, the historical connotations of the source culture are preserved, and its historical value within its own era is re-presented in the Third Space.

5. Discussion

With the deepening of globalization, intercultural communication has grown increasingly frequent. As treasures of human civilization, the international communication of World Heritage sites plays a vital role in promoting cultural exchange and strengthening mutual understanding among peoples. Within the framework of cultural translation theory, the translation of urban World Heritage names for international communication entails far more than the accurate conveyance of information. It also bears the significant mission of disseminating culture and enhancing mutual understanding and friendship among nations. As one of the starting points in modern Chinese history for opening to the outside world and looking outward, Macao's accumulated civilization and written records all highlight its urban culture, which embodies both Eastern and Western charm, and also bear witness to China's earliest imprint of integrating into globalization and embracing maritime civilization. Macao's urban culture is closely intertwined with the interactions among the world's civilizations. In the new era, as a participant in the building of international communication capacity, the external translation of urban culture can, through the appropriate use of translation strategies, help convey urban information and cultural traditions effectively and on an equal footing, thereby further expanding the influence of a city's World Heritage sites.

The external translation of the names of the World Heritage sites in the Historic Centre of Macao vividly confirms Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural translation. Through restorable literal translation and transliteration, translators objectively

preserve the heterogeneous elements in the source culture and actively seek a Third Space between the source and target cultures. In this way, the translations display rich linguistic hybridity and cultural heterogeneity, break down ethnic and binary oppositions, and help construct a global cultural landscape of pluralistic dialogue. This creates a medium for enhancing Macao's international urban influence and communicative power, while also contributing positively and meaningfully to the establishment of a civilizational order characterized by harmonious development and multicultural coexistence on the international stage.

Conclusion

This article has examined the English translation of World Heritage site names in Macao from the perspective of Homi K. Bhabha's cultural translation theory. The discussion shows that the translation of heritage names is a form of cultural negotiation in which historical memory, local identity, and intercultural communication are jointly involved. In the case of Macao, English translations preserve visible traces of Chinese, Portuguese, Cantonese, and religious cultures, thereby presenting Macao as a city shaped by long-term cultural encounter and coexistence.

At the same time, this study has certain limitations. The research mainly focuses on the official English names of World Heritage sites in the Historic Centre of Macao, while other forms of heritage-related publicity, such as guidebooks, museum introductions, tourism websites, signboards, and audiovisual materials, have not been fully examined. Future research may expand in this direction.

In conclusion, the translation of Macao's World Heritage names offers a meaningful example of how a city can communicate its cultural complexity to the world through language. By preserving cultural difference while enabling cross-cultural understanding, these translations participate in the construction of Macao's urban identity and contribute to the wider dissemination of Chinese and intercultural heritage.

Funding

No

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Reference

- [1] Wang, N. (2013). Translation and the relocation of cultures. *Chinese Translators Journal*, (2), 5-11.
- [2] Meng, X. (2021). Publicity translation and city image building under the new situation. *Journal of North China Institute of Aerospace Engineering*, 31(2), 21-23.
- [3] Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- [4] Liu, Y. F. (2010). Cultural translation and the construction of cultural identity. *Journal of Zhengzhou Institute of Aeronautical Industry Management (Social Science Edition)*, 29(3), 107-109.
- [5] Zhao, J., & Zhao, Q. R. (2019). Manifestation of cultural confidence in political publicity discourse from the perspective of cultural translation: A case study of the English translation of Xi Jinping: *The Governance of China*. *Foreign Language Research*, 7(4), 49-54.
- [6] Wang, Z. L. (1984). Cultural comparison in translation. *Chinese Translators Journal*, (1), 2-6.
- [7] Han, Z. M. (2005). *A study of hybridity in literary translation*. Shanghai Translation Publishing House.
- [8] Ni, B. (2011). On Homi K. Bhabha's cultural translation. *Journal of Minzu University of China (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 38(5), 128-132.
- [9] Bhabha, H. K. (1996). *The post-colonial question: Common skies*. Routledge.
- [10] Pan, R. M. (1992). *Different paths, same destination: Cultural integration in Macao* (Q. Su, Trans.). Cultural Department of Macao Government.
- [11] Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. Simon & Schuster.
- [12] Hao, Y. F., Tang, K. J., Zhu, S. T., et al. (2011). *The Macao paradigm of interactive development in global civilization*

- history: On the academic possibilities of Macao studies. *Academic Research*, (12), 1–10, 159.
- [13] Zhao, J., & Zhao, Q. R. (2019). Manifestation of cultural confidence in political publicity discourse from the perspective of cultural translation: A case study of the English translation of Xi Jinping: *The Governance of China*. *Foreign Language Research*, 7(4), 104–105.
- [14] Wu, N. S. (2003). Translation: Seeking cultural symbiosis and integration—On preserving the heterogeneity of the source text in translation. *Chinese Translators Journal*, (3), 13–17.
- [15] Zheng, D. (2016). Chinese culture going global and the translation of culture-loaded words. *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, (2), 53–56.
- [16] Chen, J. (2023). Translation strategies of tourist place names in cross-cultural contexts. *Geography Teaching Reference for Middle Schools*, (21), 87.