

Article

On the English Translation of the Peking Opera Term *Qing Yi*

 Jiarui Wu ¹ and Ke Chen ^{1,*}
¹ School of Foreign Languages, Xi'an Shiyou University, Xi'an, China

^{*} Correspondence: Ke Chen, School of Foreign Languages, Xi'an Shiyou University, Xi'an, China

Abstract: Peking Opera plays a crucial role in the overseas dissemination of traditional Chinese culture. Currently, there is still no unified standard for the translation of Peking Opera terms. The translation method of *Qing Yi* is frequently used and has been subject to various translations irrelevant studies. To address this, this paper examines the definition of the term, compares different translation methods, and analyzes the reasons for different translations from the perspectives of terminology awareness and complexity. Based on the findings, the paper suggests that within the field of translation studies, the English name for *Qing Yi* should be unified as "Leading Dan" to promote normative and consistent use of terminology.

Keywords: terminology translation; Chinese opera terms; *Qing Yi*

1. Introduction

Opera terms, serving as a crucial linguistic medium for the art of opera performance, encapsulate a wealth of cultural information and traditional knowledge [1]. It plays an irreplaceable role in the cultural exchange between China and the West. Peking opera stage revolves around role types. *Qing Yi* is an important role type within Peking opera and is acclaimed as the "foremost of the Dan roles." *Qing Yi* embodies traditional Chinese virtues such as perseverance and loyalty in numerous classic opera stories, enabling audiences to gain in-depth insights into Peking Opera culture. Therefore, *Qing Yi* requires accurate and unified English translations, which are essential for the overseas dissemination of Peking Opera culture. However, there is no clear standard for the English translation of *Qing Yi*. Research on the translation of Chinese opera term is not only a branch of linguistic and cultural studies but also represents the challenges and strategies associated with the standardization and normalization of term translation in Chinese traditional culture [2]. The scholars' researches mostly focus on the traditional fields, such as the originalities, paradigms, scripts, schools and so on [3]. However, few scholars have conducted specialized research on the standardization of *Qing Yi* translation, which restricts the cross-cultural transmission of Peking opera culture. Therefore, the standardization of the translation of *Qing Yi* is an urgent issue to be addressed. This paper conducts an in-depth exploration of existing translations of *Qing Yi* and proposes optimized translation strategies, aiming to facilitate the standardization of relevant terminology and further boost the overseas communication of Peking Opera culture.

2. The Connotation of *Qing Yi*

Peking Opera role types refer to the categorization of characters in Peking Opera, which are mainly divided into four major categories: Sheng, Dan, Jing, and Chou. The Dan category includes *Qing Yi*, Hua Dan, Wu Dan, and Chou Dan. *Qing Yi* is a subcategory of the Dan role type in Peking opera. It derives its name from the simple and plain costumes worn by its characters, who typically wear black or cyan traditional opera robes. *Qing Yi* occupies the most important position within the Dan category, hence it is also called Zheng Dan. *Qing Yi* is distinctly differentiated from other Dan role types in terms of character positioning and performance styles. It mainly portrays dignified,

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solemn, and morally upright female figures. The performance features of *Qing Yi* are primarily song-based, emphasizing beautiful vocal techniques and graceful body movements. *Qing Yi* roles are predominantly young or middle-aged women, usually portraying tragic characters. Through emotionally rich performances and moving arias, they reveal the inner world of the characters, evoking empathy and emotional resonance from the audience. Since ancient times, *Qing Yi* has been hailed as the "foremost of the Dan roles", and has attained remarkable artistic achievements. Mei Lanfang, one of the most renowned Peking Opera masters and a member of the prestigious "Four Great Dan Artists", was exceptionally proficient in interpreting *Qing Yi* roles.

3. Reasons for the Inconsistent Term Translations

The field of term translation is marked by widespread confusion, which reflects translators' neglect of the essence of terminology translation and their lack of terminological awareness. Meanwhile, as a term in the humanities and social sciences, *Qing Yi* possesses complex characteristics that increase the difficulty of standardizing its translation.

3.1. Translators' Terminological Awareness

Terminology translation is more than a simple lexical conversion between different languages. It refers to the cross-cultural input and output of professional concepts, as well as the process of re-naming in the target language. In terminology translation, the translated term should be standardized terminology that conforms to terminological features such as accuracy, conciseness, and specialization. Translators must be equipped with terminological awareness and an in-depth understanding of terminological connotations. For terms with official or established translations, translators should adopt such standardized versions to ensure the accuracy and consistency in term translation, and prioritize recognized conventional translations on the premise of guaranteeing accuracy. For unstandardized terms, translators are required to adopt a rigorous and scientific attitude to ensure that the translated versions conforms to the standards of term translation. The term *Qing Yi* belongs to the humanities and social sciences. Inappropriate translations exist among its various English renderings, and there is currently no unified standard for its translation. Through a comparative analysis of the existing translations, this study proposes Leading Dan can most accurately convey the core connotation and conceptual meaning of the Peking Opera role *Qing Yi*.

3.2. Terminological Features of *Qing Yi*

Term translation requires a deep understanding of the essential nature of terms. As a Peking opera role type term, *Qing Yi* possesses complex characteristics, which increases the difficulty of its standardized translation and naming. First, *Qing Yi* exhibits a certain degree of monosemy. It has a fixed meaning and belongs to a role subcategory within the Dan role type in Peking opera. Second, it has systematicness. As shown in Table 1, the naming of Peking opera role type terms follows a systematic logic. The Dan role type in Peking opera can be divided into Older Dan (Lao Dan), Flower Dan (Hua Dan), Martial Dan (Wu Dan), and Zheng Dan (*Qing Yi*), all of which are named with the pattern "X + Dan." It is evident that Peking opera role type terms have a clear hierarchical structure. Systematicity should be emphasized in translation. Third, *Qing Yi* has the feature of conciseness. Its naming is easy to understand and remember, and concisely summarize its core status of this Dan role in the Peking Opera role system without further explanation. Finally, *Qing Yi* is highly specialized. It closely tied to operatic role types. Translators should possess professional knowledge of Chinese opera.

Table 1. Classification of Peking Opera Role Types

First-level Term	Second-level Term	Third-level Term
Hang Dang (Role Type)	Sheng	

Dan	<i>Qing Yi</i> (Zheng Dan)
	Lao Dan
	Hua Dan
	Wu Dan
	Chou Dan
Jing	
Chou	

4. Existing Translations of *Qing Yi*

By searching the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), this study identified nine existing English translations of the term *Qing Yi*, which are classified into four major categories according to their translation method, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Different Translations of the Term *Qing Yi*

No.	Translator/Source	Translation	Translation Method
1	Scott	<i>Qing Yi</i>	Transliteration
2	Mao Fasheng	<i>Qing Yi</i> Actress	
3	Elizabeth Wichmann	Blue Cloth Dan	Based on costume
4	Zhang Baojie	Black-dressed Female	features
5	Zhang Bihang, Sun Hongbing	Chief Dan	Based on role status
6	Zhang Jiadong, Zou Deyan	Leading Dan	
7	L.C. Arlington	Qingyi (Respected Matrons)	Free translation
8	Zhang Zhiyi	Dignified young female role	
9	Zhang Linlin	Virtuous Lady	

4.1. Category 1

Translations 1 and 2 adopt transliteration. The English renderings of terms must remain clear enough for the readers who are unfamiliar with the traditional practices [4]. However, for foreign readers unfamiliar with Peking Opera culture, the translation of *Qing Yi* fails to deliver substantive information about the role and cannot help them form a clear understanding. This approach is not conducive to the overseas dissemination of Peking Opera and is therefore inadvisable. Translation 2 translates the role type Dan into the concrete word "actress". In fact, the term Dan in Peking Opera refers exclusively to female roles rather than female performers. Historically, many Dan roles were portrayed by male artists. Consequently, this translation is inaccurate.

4.2. Category 2

Translation 3 adopts the character's costume feature by combining "Blue Cloth" with the category term Dan. This approach is logically sound, yet its back-translation into Chinese (*Qing Yi* Dan) sounds awkward. Translation 4 literally means a female role in black costumes. The character "Qing" originates from the traditional dark pleated robe worn by Dan roles in opera, symbolizing dignity, gentleness and simplicity. In Western culture, black often connotes nobility, mystery, or death. This translation may mislead English readers into interpreting the role as a noble lady or a mysterious female figure. Therefore, this translation is not recommended.

4.3. Category 3

Qing Yi is also known as Zheng Dan, the most important female role in Peking opera. Thus, Translations 5 and 6 take Zhengdan as the translation basis, appear more appropriate. However, the word "chief" in Translation 5 carries a connotation of administrative hierarchy, which makes it unsuitable for theatrical role naming. Translation 6 not only corresponds to the superordinate term Dan but also maintains consistency with other parallel role terms. Hence this translation is reasonably well-founded.

4.4. Category 4

Translation 7 uses Respected Matron to interpret the symbolic meaning of Qingyi as a typical female image in ancient China. Since Qingyi belongs to the Dan role type, the role-type suffix should not be omitted. Translation 8 depicts women of high moral virtue. This translation presents the cultural connotation of "high moral character." However, *Qing Yi* is primarily defined from the perspective of operatic role types, and the role-type suffix should not be omitted. Translation 9 similarly emphasizes the moral traits of the role. The use of "young" is not entirely accurate, as *Qing Yi* roles include both young and middle-aged women. typically represent young to middle-aged women. Additionally, this expression is overly lengthy and violates the conciseness principle for terminology naming.

In summary, the existing translations of *Qing Yi* are diverse in form and lack unified and standardized criteria. They present prominent deficiencies in terminological accuracy and systematicity. Some translators neglect the inherent systematic correlations of Peking Opera terms. Meanwhile, the accuracy of terminology translation highly depends on the precise characterization of specialized concepts [5], but some translations lack sufficient theoretical and naming rationale.

5. Optimal Translation of *Qing Yi*

Translation analysis is an academic practice that examines and discuss specialized concepts and terminologies in translation. Based on the preceding discussion, *Qing Yi* is also known as Zheng Dan, the most important female role type in Peking opera. For this reason, this study takes Zheng Dan as the primary reference and proposes Leading Dan as its English translation. This translation maintains consistency with the superordinate term Dan and other peer terminologies for opera roles. This translation should be analyzed and verified against the terminological standards.

5.1. Accuracy

Accuracy is a core requirement for terminology translation, which means a term should accurately convey the original meaning without misleading the reader. Cultural differences make it difficult for foreigners to understand the connotation of Peking Opera [6]. Inaccurate translation of a term may lead to ambiguity and confusion in expression. Peking opera terms also require standardization and accurate translation. In Chinese opera, *Qing Yi* is typically one of the major Dan role types, undertaking significant dramatic and performance tasks. The translation Leading Dan accurately conveys the important status of *Qing Yi* as a leading role in the operatic role system, enabling readers to understand its key position in opera performance.

5.2. Readability

A good translation must be readable and user-friendly. The strategy of transliteration is adopted in translating Peking Opera terms to enhance readability while preserving cultural connotations. For this reason, the term Dan is directly transliterated as Dan. Furthermore, the readability principle requires that the translation of Peking Opera terms be concise and clear. Overly complex semantic explanations should be avoided to lower reading barriers and arouse readers' interest in learning more about Peking Opera. Accordingly, *Qing Yi* is translated as Leading Dan, which is easy to read and comprehend.

5.3. Systematicity

Systematicity means that terms within a specific domain should form a well-defined hierarchical structure. The naming of terms for a series of related concepts should exhibit logical relevance. Therefore, the role type Dan in Peking opera is named with Dan as the foundation. Other subcategories like Older Dan and Martial Dan adopt the structure of "modifier + Dan". As a type of Dan, *Qing Yi* is translated as Leading Dan. This translation conforms to the naming pattern of other Dan roles and builds a relatively systematic English translation framework for opera roles. This approach enhances the consistency and logic of the overall translation system for opera terminology, and helps readers understand the relationships between Qingyi and other role types.

6. Conclusion

With the continuous global dissemination of Peking Opera culture, only by adopting appropriate translation strategies and flexible methods for Peking Opera terms such as *Qing Yi* can their unique cultural connotations be effectively conveyed. Based on a comprehensive analysis of the definition and existing translation versions of the Peking Opera role term *Qing Yi*, this study concludes that "Leading Dan" is the most appropriate English translation for the humanities and social science term *Qing Yi*. This translation accurately conveys its cultural connotations and specific role positioning in the Peking Opera system. The inherent characteristics of terminology and the complexity of translation are key factors contributing to the challenge of standardizing terminological translations. Translators need to continuously enhance their terminological sensitivity and translation competence to effectively tackle difficulties in terminology translation, thereby promoting the accuracy and uniformity of terminological translations.

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