



Research Article

Local Knowledge in Translation: Mediation and Ethical Orientation in English Translations of Shen Congwen

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Abstract

This article examines how Xiangxi folk customs in Shen Congwen's *The Husband* and *Biancheng* are mediated as forms of local knowledge in English translation. It compares renderings in four publications, which together provide three English versions of each work by Ching Ti and Robert Payne, Gladys Yang, and Jeffrey C. Kinkley. Drawing on Zhong Jingwen's classification of material, social, linguistic, and spiritual folk customs, this study combines the concepts of local knowledge, intercultural mediation, cultural filtering, and translator ethics. The analysis shows that material customs are often conveyed through literal rendering or functional description, though regional specificity may be reduced. Social customs require the reconstruction of institutional relations; linguistic customs depend on oral form, euphemism, taboo, and shared inference; and spiritual customs rely on coherent relations among ritual objects, actions, sequence, and purpose. Ching Ti and Payne generally favour immediate recognisability, Yang balances narrative fluency with selective clarification, and Kinkley more consistently employs descriptive expansion and paratextual explanation, although greater detail does not always ensure accuracy. These recurrent differences are interpreted as historically situated ethical orientations shaped by anticipated readerships, publishing conditions, and reception contexts. Translation therefore not only conveys Xiangxi culture but also determines how its local knowledge becomes intelligible to English-language readers.

Keywords

Shen Congwen, Xiangxi, Local Knowledge, Folk Customs, Cultural Filtering, Translation Ethics

1. Introduction

Chinese literature has entered global circulation largely through translation [1-3], yet only a limited number of modern Chinese writers have achieved sustained visibility in the Western world. Shen Congwen (1902-1988) is a notable case. Widely regarded as one of the most important figures in modern Chinese literature [4-6], he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1987 and 1988. Shen is best known for his stories set in the rural western Hunan [7, 8], commonly referred to as Xiangxi, a region marked by ethnic diversity and

distinctive cultural practices.

The humanist orientation and largely apolitical character of Shen's work were long undervalued [9]. He described his literary ideal as the construction of a "small Greek temple" dedicated to "human nature" [10]. His stories consistently explore universal ethical concerns through culturally specific forms rooted in local life. Xiangxi is therefore more than a geographical setting. It is a moral and emotional world where dignity, empathy, and the value of ordinary life are explored,

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and these concerns remain relevant in a global context shaped by conflict and division.

Shen was also among the earliest modern Chinese writers to enter English translation. An English version of *Biancheng* (《边城》) appeared in the 1930s, and further translations and collections followed over subsequent decades. His works have since been translated into more than ten languages [5]. From the 1940s onward, translated collections of Shen's selected short stories were published. This study draws on English versions as presented in four volumes: *The Chinese Earth: Stories by Shen Ts'ung-wen* (published in 1947, translated by Ching Ti and Robert Payne), *The Border Town and Other Stories* (published in 1981, translated by Gladys Yang), *Imperfect Paradise: Twenty-four Stories* (published in 1995, translated by Jeffrey Kinkley and four other translators), as well as Kinkley's *Border Town: A Novel* (published in 2009). Published in different periods and editorial settings, these volumes constitute important textual and paratextual contexts through which Shen's Xiangxi fiction has been framed and circulated in English.

A vivid literary rendering of rural Hunan can be found in Shen's fiction as he was a truly "urban transcriber and an interpreter of the countryside," or a "native informant" [11]. This pronounced regional orientation has led to sustained scholarly interest in the translation of Xiangxi folk culture. Previous studies have mainly examined the treatment of culturally marked elements and translation strategies, including personal names and festivals [12], pastoral tone and stylistic effects [13], and dialect as well as the tension between local colour and readability [14]. Related research has also addressed narrative commentary and explanatory paratexts in scholarly translations [15-17], together with questions of translator identity and ethical positioning [18]. Yet the translation of folk customs does more than transfer cultural content: it frames how regionally grounded ways of life are interpreted and made intelligible for readers, and such framing varies across translators and historical moments. Existing work has therefore tended to remain at the level of individual translators or isolated textual features, with less attention to how patterns emerge across different domains of folk culture and to the ethical implications that follow from these interpretive choices.

Against this backdrop, this study undertakes a comparative close reading of *The Husband* and *Biancheng* and their English renderings in four volumes which provide three English versions of each work. Drawing on Zhong Jingwen's classification, [26] the analysis is organised around material, social, linguistic, and spiritual folk customs. It examines how the local knowledge represented through these customs is mediated across the versions and what recurrent tendencies in the selected cases suggest about the translators' ethical orientations.

2. Folk Customs as Local Knowledge: Mediation and Ethical Orientation

As Clyde Kluckhohn noted, culture is "the total way of life"

of a people [19]. Folk customs are one of its most tangible expressions. Shen Congwen's novels set in western Hunan present a broad and detailed account of Xiangxi folk culture. The narratives attend to multiple aspects of everyday life, including material practices, marriage and funeral customs, festivals, religious and labour activities, ordinary social routines, and local speech. They are textual representations of practices whose meanings depend on shared contextual understandings. These constitute a sustained literary record of Xiangxi folk life. On this basis, the present study treats Xiangxi folk customs as forms of local knowledge. Following According to Canagarajah, local knowledge are culturally situated beliefs and orientations that take shape through historically embedded social practices [20]. Drawing on this view and Geertz's interpretive account of culture, this article uses local knowledge to refer to practical, institutional, expressive, and symbolic understandings formed within particular histories and communities.

When culturally dense forms of local knowledge are translated into English, translation operates as intercultural mediation rather than straightforward transfer. As Liddicoat observes, "mediation is fundamentally an interpretive act," through which meanings produced in one language are communicated in another [21]. Mediation is necessary because the translator "rewrites the text for an audience that is not the audience imagined by the writer" [21], an audience that does not share the source community's background knowledge. The analytical question is consequently not limited to whether a culturally specific term has been retained or replaced. It also concerns which practical, institutional, expressive, or symbolic relations are preserved, made explicit, condensed, reorganised, or left implicit in translation. Where relevant, explanatory notes are considered together with the translated text because they also participate in the mediation of such knowledge.

Translation is not a neutral activity [22]. Mediation choices, like what to explain, condense, retain, or leave implicit reflect translators' assumptions about readers, cultural difference, and the aims of translation. Ethics is understood here as this recurring orientation in decision-making. This emphasis on the translator as an ethically situated agent accords with what Chesterman [23] describes as the shift from translation ethics to translator ethics, from product to producer. Responsibility is also historically situated: as Drugan and Tipton [24] note, it "can never be ideologically neutral" but is shaped by institutional, cultural, and temporal contexts. Publication and reception contexts are therefore treated as relevant conditions for interpreting translational tendencies, rather than as deterministic explanations of individual textual choices. Accordingly, this article examines how translators working in different periods mediate Xiangxi folk customs as *local knowledge*, and how their ethical orientations formed in those contexts and shape that mediation. Katan's concept of cultural filtering [25] provides a heuristic means of examining how culturally situated meanings are selectively re-articulated in translation. Generalisation, deletion, and distortion are im-

portant manifestations of this process. Zhong Jingwen's classification of material, social, linguistic, and spiritual folk customs [26] provides the organisational structure for the textual analysis. In the sections that follow, Zhong's typology identifies the dominant domain of folk life foregrounded in each case; local knowledge directs attention to the contextual relations through which the custom becomes intelligible; mediation and cultural filtering describe how those relations are reconstructed in English.

3. Translating Xiangxi Folk Customs: A Comparative Analysis

The following analysis is organised around four categories of Xiangxi folk customs, namely material, social, linguistic, and spiritual, following Zhong Jingwen's classification. Through comparison of the corresponding English versions, it

examines how the local knowledge required to understand these customs is mediated in translation.

3.1. Material Folk Customs

Material folk customs, as defined by Zhong [26], refer to recurrent practices and their material manifestations in everyday life, including modes of production, food, housing, and transportation. In Shen Congwen's stories, these customs are closely woven into everyday life. They serve as a window into Xiangxi culture. Typical examples include *diaojiaolou* (吊脚楼), *youku bing* (油枯饼), *yinmi* (阴米), *nianfang* (碾坊), *weiyao* (围腰) and etc. *Diaojiaolou*, a stilted dwelling form, is particularly representative. It reflects local people's adaptation to mountainous and riverine environment in Xiangxi as well as a culturally embedded way of dwelling, through which material culture becomes legible as local knowledge.

Table 1. English Renderings of Selected Material Folk Customs in *The Husband*.

Translator	Diaojiaolou (吊脚楼)	Sanyuan Gong (三元宫)	Ciba (糍粑)
Ching Ti and Robert Payne	the houses with hanging feet [27]	theatre called the "palace of the three Gods" [27]	dumplings [27]
Gladys Yang	stilt buildings [28]	omitted	cakes of sticky rice [28]
Jeffrey Kinkley	houses hanging over the water on stilts, the balconies with hanging feet [29]	Palace of the Three Top Scholars opera house [29]	corn-and-rice biscuits [29]

The three renderings of *diaojiaolou* give different degrees of access to the knowledge associated with the dwelling. Ching Ti and Payne preserve the literal image of "hanging feet" but leave its structure and physical setting implicit. Yang's "stilt buildings" identifies the construction more directly, although it removes the imagery and regional character of the Chinese term. Kinkley combines the literal image with references to stilts and the waterside setting, thereby conveying the relationship among architectural form, environment, and local habitation. The comparison shows that even a visible material object may depend on contextual knowledge that cannot be conveyed through lexical substitution alone.

With Sanyuan Gong, the issue is not simply the identification of a building, but the relationship among local naming, spatial function, and cultural association. Ching Ti and Payne's "palace of the three Gods" places the name within a broad religious frame that is not inherent in the original. Yang omits the proper name and retains only the performance in the paragraph, preserving its narrative function while removing the cultural identity of the place. Kinkley retains both the name and its function as an opera house, although "Three Top Scholars" represents a particular interpretation of Sanyuan. Each version therefore selects a different aspect of the place

as most relevant to the target reader.

Ciba introduces food as another form of material knowledge. In the passage, the husband brings it when visiting his wife, so that the food also participates in the representation of their continuing domestic relationship. Ching Ti and Payne's "dumplings" places it within a familiar but imprecise English food category. Yang's "cakes of sticky rice" describes the form commonly associated with ciba and foregrounds its principal ingredient. Kinkley's "corn-and-rice biscuit" appears to draw on a more locally specific understanding of Xiangxi food culture, where a corn-and-glutinous-rice variety, also known as *baogu ba* (苞谷粑), is traditionally made. His rendering therefore draws on contextual knowledge not stated in the source term itself. At the same time, it narrows the more general term *ciba* to a particular regional variety, while "biscuit" may evoke a texture or method of preparation different from that of the original food. The rendering is thus both culturally informed and interpretive.

The examples show that translating material folk customs involves more than transferring the names of visible objects. Literal rendering may preserve local imagery while leaving practical meaning implicit; functional description may improve accessibility while reducing regional specificity; and

contextual supplementation may recover locally relevant detail while also narrowing or reframing the source referent. Cultural filtering therefore operates not only through omission and generalisation, but also through the selective emphasis and supplementation of the local knowledge attached to material life.

3.2. Social Folk Customs

Social folk customs refer to patterned social relations and collective practices sustained within a community over time. They include territorial and occupational forms of organisation and customary regulations, such as the unwritten rules governing local life [26]. In Shen Congwen's novels, such customs often appear through characters under the *baojia* (保甲) system, including *baozhang* (保长) and *shuibao* (水保). These roles point to a community-based order in Republican-era Xiangxi. The *baojia* system organised households into mutual-responsibility units and assigned local heads to maintain security and mediate disputes [30]. Translating these institutional terms therefore involves more than lexical choice as it requires mediating a locally specific governance for readers who may not share the relevant background knowledge.

Example (1):

“.....是五区一个老水保” [31].

Ching and Payne's translation: "...water sheriff" [27].

Yang's translation: "...river warden" [28].

Kinkley's translation: "...river warden, *baojia* head" (footnote: Local governments organized citizens into mutual responsibility groups, called *bao* and *jia*, for self-policing. Influential private citizens were named as heads of these units) [29].

The three versions make the role intelligible through different institutional frames. Ching Ti and Payne's "water sheriff" conveys local authority, but "sheriff" places the role within a familiar Anglo-American legal framework. The rendering thus increases immediate recognisability while recasting the office through a target-cultural category that does not reproduce its position within the *baojia* system.

Yang's "river warden" avoids the stronger legal associations of "sheriff" and presents the role in terms of supervision or custodianship. It offers a plausible functional description, but the local administrative structure remains implicit. The office is consequently understandable at the level of general function, while its institutional specificity is reduced.

Kinkley combines the functional label "river warden" with "baojia head" and supplements it with a footnote. The unfamiliar institutional term is retained, while the note reconstructs the system of mutual responsibility within which the role operated. Meaning is therefore distributed between the translated narrative and its paratext: the main text provides an immediately intelligible function, whereas the note supplies the institutional relations necessary for a fuller understanding of the office.

The comparison shows that social folk customs cannot be

adequately conveyed by replacing one official title with another. The meaning of *shuibao* lies in a network of local authority, communal responsibility, and administrative organisation. The three translations mediate this knowledge through cultural reframing, functional generalisation, and paratextual supplementation respectively. In each case, cultural filtering determines not only how the role is named, but also how much of the social structure surrounding it remains accessible to the reader.

3.3. Linguistic Folk Customs

Linguistic folk customs refer to culturally embedded expressive forms that are transmitted orally and sustained through collective practice. They include dialect, colloquialisms, and proverbs, as well as oral genres such as myths, folktales, and songs [26]. Such forms carry more than local speech habits. They also preserve shared memories and values and help sustain social ties through communal performance [32]. Their meanings often depend on verbal content, shared pragmatic conventions and cultural associations. The following song from *The Husband* illustrates this point. Its effect rests on the interaction between rhythmic form and the euphemistic expression *pa hui* (爬灰), whose literal image conceals a socially taboo implication.

Example (2): 用杨村人不庄重口吻，唱得是“山坳的团总烧炭，山脚的地保爬灰；爬灰红薯才肥，烧炭脸庞发黑” [31].

Ching and Payne's translation: Omitted.

Yang's translation:

In the hills the bailiff burns charcoal,

The constable scrabbles about in the ashes below;*

Ashes fatten the sweet potatoes,

Charcoal-burning makes your face black as a sloe.

(*Meaning that he has an affair with his daughter-in-law)

[28].

Kinkley's translation:

The militia chief burns charcoal in the hollow,

The town head crawls o'er his ashes down below!

It's them ashes makes a yam begin to swell, oh! While charcoal burning only leaves you yellow.

(*“Crawling over ashes” is associated with “getting one's knees dirty” (*wu xi*), which is a pun on “defiling the daughter-in-law” (getting her dirty, *wu xi*). Hence, line 2 alludes to the town head (*dibao*, as in the *baojia* system) having an affair with the militia captain's daughter-in-law. If the image of a yam inflating while roasting in hot ashes requires further explanation, see “Songs of the Zhen'gan Folk” below) [29].

Ching Ti and Payne omit the song altogether. What disappears is not only its propositional content, but also a moment of oral performance through which sexual insinuation and social ridicule enter the narrative indirectly. The omission therefore removes both the expressive form and the shared cultural knowledge required to interpret it. Yang renders the song as a four-line stanza with an ABCB rhyme scheme and a ballad-

like cadence, thereby recreating part of its rhythmic and oral quality. This choice aligns with her wider practice of transforming Chinese minority oral poetry into English folk-ballad patterns [33]. Yang renders *pa hui* as “scrabbles about in the ashes” and adds a brief explanatory note (“Meaning that he has an affair with his daughter-in-law.”). Her solution therefore combines stylistic recreation with moderated mediation: the euphemism is not translated literally, but its social implication is made available through paratext. This approach reduces semantic opacity while retaining the song as a form of local expressive knowledge.

Kinkley likewise preserves the song, but his note reconstructs the interpretive chain in considerably greater detail. It moves from the literal image of crawling over ashes to the pun and then to the social referent, while also explaining the administrative title *dibao*. This makes several layers of contextual knowledge available to the reader, but it also shifts part of the interpretive work from the song itself to the translator’s commentary. The local expression is thus presented not only as a poetic utterance, but also as an object of cultural explanation.

The comparison shows that linguistic folk customs cannot be treated as detachable verbal items. The meaning of *pa hui* emerges from the relation among euphemism, social taboo, oral performance, and shared cultural inference. Across the three versions, that relation is respectively removed, divided between verse and note, or reconstructed through extended paratextual explanation. Cultural filtering therefore affects not only how much information is retained, but also the form in which readers encounter it: as performed indirection, explicit explanation, or silence.

3.4. Spiritual Folk Customs

Spiritual folk customs, as defined by Zhong [26], refer to shared beliefs, ritual practices, and value orientations that are sustained through collective tradition. In western Hunan, such practices are often associated with Chu-Wu cultural traces. The *Book of Han: Geographical Records* notes that “The Chu people believed in spirits and engaged heavily in sacrificial rituals”¹. Funerary rites are a key site where this ritual world becomes visible. In *Biancheng*, Shen Congwen’s funeral description brings together a sequence of actions and objects that carry dense symbolic meaning. Their meaning often lies not in individual ritual terms, but in the relationship among ritual specialists, material objects, prescribed actions, and their sequence.

Example (3):

到后帮忙的人来了，从大河船上运来的棺木也来了，住在城中的老道士，还带了许多法宝，一件旧麻布道袍，并提了一只大公鸡，来尽义务办理念经起水招魂绕棺诸事，

也从筏上渡过来了 [34].

Ching and Payne’s translation: More men came to help, the coffin arrived, and an old taoist priest crossed the stream on the raft, bringing the musical instruments and a cock by which the rites could be performed [27].

Yang’s translation: “Other helpers arrive, and the boat with the coffin is rowed round from the river. The old Taoist from town has brought his stock-in-trade, an old linen gown and a large rooster with which to carry out the due rites by the coffin, chanting masses and calling back the dead man’s spirit” [28].

Kinkley’s translation: Others came to help out, and the coffin arrived on the boat sent over from the big river. An old Daoist priest from town ferried across on the raft, bringing his ritual musical instruments, an old sackcloth Daoist robe, and an old rooster, the better to intone scripture, make his waterside pronouncements, and fulfill his other ritual duties [35].

The funeral scene brings together several ritual practices including *nianjing* (念经), *qishui* (起水), *zhaohun* (招魂), and *raoguan* (绕棺) as an integrated sequence of funerary acts. Their significance depends on knowledge of how the actions relate to the Daoist priest, the ritual objects he carries, and the obligations he performs for the deceased. Translation therefore involves more than finding separate equivalents for ritual terms; it also determines whether the structure of the ceremony remains intelligible.

Ching Ti and Payne reduce the sequence to the general phrase “the rites”. Although the presence of the priest and the rooster retains a broad ritual frame, the individual actions and most of the ritual apparatus disappear. The scene consequently remains recognisable as a religious ceremony, but its locally specific organisation is replaced by a generic account of ritual performance. Yang preserves more of the material setting and explicitly renders *zhaohun* as “calling back the dead man’s spirit.” Other elements are less distinct. “Due rites by the coffin” condenses several actions into their general function, while “chanting masses” introduces a Christian liturgical association into a Daoist context. The *Gazetteer of Guzhangping*, vol. 10, records that in funeral rites Daoist priests performed rituals before the coffin, known as “circumambulating the coffin”², suggesting that its spatial and procedural meaning is not fully conveyed by Yang’s general formulation. Her version thus retains selected parts of the ceremony while reframing others through more familiar religious language.

Kinkley gives greater attention to the priest’s robe, rooster, and ritual instruments, and his “intone scripture” preserves the Daoist character of *nianjing*. His rendering of *qishui* as “waterside pronouncements,” however, changes the action itself. At the same time, he interprets *起水* (*qishui*) as “waterside pronouncements,” which does not match the practice. His rendering of *qishui* as “waterside pronouncements,” however, alters the nature of the action and does not correspond to the

¹ 《汉书·地理志》(Han Shu: Dilizhi [*Book of Han: Geographical Records*]), compiled by Ban Gu (班固, 32-92 CE), Han dynasty. Original Chinese text: 楚人信巫鬼，重淫祀。

² 《古丈坪厅志·卷十》(Guzhangping Tingzhi, juan 10 [*Gazetteer of Guzhangping*, vol. 10]), Qing dynasty. Original Chinese text: 民间丧礼……亲友以文致祭，道士作法于柩前，曰绕棺……

practice described in the *Gazetteer of Qianzhou*, vol. 5 *Customs* which notes that at the beginning of mourning Daoist priests would fetch river water to bathe the corpse and perform rites³. Moreover, “other ritual duties” subsumes zhaohun and raoguan without distinguishing them. The version therefore supplies substantial material detail while only partially preserving the relations among the ritual actions.

The comparison shows that the translation of spiritual folk customs depends less on the sheer amount of ritual vocabulary retained than on whether the relations among objects, actions, sequence, and purpose remain coherent. Ching Ti and Payne compress the ceremony into a generic ritual frame; Yang preserves selected actions but partly recasts them through Christian terminology; Kinkley retains more material context but misinterprets one action and generalises others. As Geertz [19] argues, culture is “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols,” and such symbols function as vehicles of ‘culture’ as Ortner [36] suggests. Cultural filtering here operates through compression, religious reframing, and interpretive reconstruction. The passage also demonstrates that fuller explanation or greater textual detail does not in itself guarantee the accurate mediation of ritual knowledge.

4. Discussion

4.1. Local Knowledge, Mediation, and Ethical Orientation

The analyses above show that Xiangxi folk customs in Shen Congwen’s stories function as different forms of local knowledge. Material practices, social roles, linguistic expression, and ritual activities vary in how much background knowledge they assume and in how directly their meanings can be conveyed to readers unfamiliar with the source culture. As a result, mediation operates unevenly across these categories.

The translations reveal different recurring priorities. Ching Ti and Robert Payne often favour immediate recognisability, using broad target-language categories or omission when the source material requires substantial contextual explanation. Their versions retain some striking images, as in “the houses with hanging feet,” but institutional, performative, and ritual relations are frequently left implicit or compressed. Gladys Yang more often balances narrative fluency with selective clarification. Her translations may reduce local naming or institutional detail, yet her rendering of the folk song preserves its poetic form and uses a brief note to convey its taboo implication. Kinkley assumes a greater degree of explanatory responsibility through descriptive expansion, retained cultural terms, and paratextual commentary. This approach generally makes more contextual information available, although his

rendering of qishui shows that greater detail does not necessarily ensure interpretive accuracy.

Across these four categories, mediation is closely linked to ethical orientation. Translators differ in how much contextual effort they expect from readers and how much cultural density they are willing to preserve. Ching Ti and Robert Payne frequently reduce contextual detail through generalisation or omission, and sometimes recast culturally specific items through familiar categories. Gladys Yang tends to limit explanation in order to maintain narrative flow and readability. Jeffrey Kinkley, by contrast, more consistently sustains contextual detail and justifies this approach explicitly, noting that his translations are intended “for scholars and students as well as the general public” [29]. This statement signals a readership design that makes more extensive explanation acceptable and helps account for his preference for explication.

Translators’ ethical orientations are further shaped by historically specific conditions of publication and reception. Robert Payne and Ching Ti’s *The Chinese Earth* came out in the 1940s, a time when Anglophone readers had limited exposure to modern Chinese literature, and strategies favouring accessibility were difficult to avoid. In the 1980s, Gladys Yang’s *The Border Town and Other Stories* formed part of the Panda Books programme, which was designed for low-cost, wide distribution and sought to reach readers with limited prior knowledge of Chinese literature [37]. Within this context, limited explanation was consistent with publishing expectations.

From the 1980s onward, research on Shen Congwen developed into a sustained wave of scholarly activity [38], and Kinkley’s specialised studies further reinforced this reception momentum [38]. Evaluative scholarship has also highlighted the scope of his translations, describing *Imperfect Paradise* as the most extensive English collection of Shen’s works to date [9]. These shifts help explain why later translations show a greater willingness to preserve cultural specificity and to support readers through explanation. By the mid-1990s and into the 2000s, the growth of Shen Congwen studies and the expansion of academic readerships made a more explanatory mode of translation easier to sustain. Kinkley’s work, published by a scholarly press, reflects these changed conditions.

4.2. Limitation

This study adopts a focused comparative approach *The Husband* and *Biancheng* and their English renderings in four publications. Its findings are therefore situated within this defined textual scope and are not intended to represent every translational tendency across Shen Congwen’s fiction. Although the four categories of folk custom provide a productive structure for comparison, material, social, linguistic, and spiritual dimensions may intersect within individual practices. Moreover, ethical orientation is inferred from recurrent textual and paratextual choices rather than reconstructed through

³ 《乾州厅志·卷之五·风俗》 (Qianzhou Tingzhi, juan 5, Customs [Gazetteer of Qianzhou, vol. 5: Customs]), Qing dynasty. Original Chinese text: 初丧……随道

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comprehensive archival evidence concerning the translators' intentions.

5. Conclusion

This study examines how Xiangxi folk customs in Shen Congwen's fiction are mediated in English translation as different forms of local knowledge. It shows that material, social, linguistic, and spiritual customs invite different forms of mediation because they rely on different kinds of contextual understanding.

Differences are shaped by translators' ethical orientations and by historically specific conditions of readership, publishing, and reception. Earlier translations tend to reduce contextual density in favour of readability, while later ones are more willing to sustain explanation and cultural specificity. This is especially relevant for regional literature as Liu [39] argues, the translation of Chinese literature should be grounded in the aim of facilitating cultural dialogue and mutual learning between civilizations. In this sense, the translation of Xiangxi folk customs shows how local knowledge is selectively made accessible to foreign readers and how regional writing gains a place in intercultural literary exchange.

Future research could extend the analysis to a larger parallel corpus of Shen's fiction, test whether the tendencies identified here recur across works and periods, and examine translations into other languages. Greater use of translators' prefaces, editorial records, correspondence, reviews, and reader-response evidence would also clarify how translation, publication, and reception jointly shape the mediation of local knowledge.

Author Contributions

Shan Su: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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