

# Construction-based Shanxi Merchants Residence Couplets Translating

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**Abstract:** As the quintessence of Shanxi Merchants culture, Shanxi Merchants couplets reflect the way of merchant success, so their translation and spreading are of great significance. However, so far there has been no related research results. The approach to construction-based translation is an efficient way to couplet translation. It's because the two lines of the couplet have same number of characters, part of speech, syntactic structure, harmonious rhythm, related meanings, shared purpose, rich culture, and approach to construction-based translation stresses taking multiple elements of construction into consideration and balance them. In this paper a multi-dimensional couplet analysis frame has been designed and applied to criticize and better existed Shanxi Merchants couplet translations.

**Keywords:** construction-based translation; Shanxi Merchants residence; couplet translation

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## 1. Background

Yinglian, commonly known as Duilian or Duizi, is a traditional cultural symbol of the Chinese nation. During major ceremonies such as the Spring Festival, weddings and birthday celebrations, people always paste Yinglian on doors or walls. A pair of Yinglian is characterized by equal number of characters in the upper and lower lines, corresponding parts of speech, consistent sentence structures, matching rhythms, harmonious tonal patterns and interrelated meanings. With its phonetic beauty, formal beauty and semantic beauty, Yinglian is deeply loved by the public. The Yinglian in the residential buildings of Shanxi Merchants is a remarkable highlight in the history of Yinglian culture. Originating in the Spring and Autumn Period and flourishing in the Ming and Qing dynasties, Shanxi Merchants achieved the grand feat of “merchandise circulating across the nation and beyond, remittance extending to all under heaven” for the first time in world history. Alongside the prosperity of their commercial activities, the residential architecture of Shanxi Merchants also thrived. As a symbol of the cultural connotations of Shanxi Merchants, the Yinglian displayed in their grand courtyards reflects the merchants' philosophy of self-cultivation, family governance, clan development, business operation and patriotism. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research on the translation and dissemination of Shanxi Merchants'

Yinglian, so as to enhance cultural confidence and contribute to the progress of world civilization. To this end, the author searched the literature on CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) and found that there are only 16 papers related to the translation of materials about Shanxi Merchants, all of which focus on the English translation of cultural and tourism materials, including 12 master's theses and 4 papers published in second-tier journals. Notably, there is not a single paper dedicated to the translation of Shanxi Merchants' Yinglian. This fully demonstrates the urgency and necessity of carrying out in-depth research on this topic.

## 2. Review of research on couplet translation

Wang Zhijuan points out that the differences in culture, thinking patterns, logic, word classification and expressive styles between English and Chinese render them mutually exclusive, thus resulting in translation difficulties. Meanwhile, she holds that couplet translation requires a macro-level overall grasp and flexible translation techniques, and strives to reproduce the aesthetic artistry of the original couplet in terms of phonology, form and meaning<sup>[1]</sup>. Liu Hongmei argues that the antithetical structure and phonological rhythm of couplets make it difficult for their translations to convey the perfect integration of phonetic beauty, formal beauty and semantic beauty inherent in the originals. She also points out that since translators are dealing with meaning in use during the translation process, they must understand the context in which the couplet was created and the author's intent, and grasp both the literal and implied meanings of the source text. Additionally, readers' ideological perceptions should be taken into account, because couplet translation is itself a form of cultural communication<sup>[2]</sup>. Yu Dequan and Jing Tao state that as a single meaning in English can often be expressed in multiple ways, the antithetical structure can be preserved in couplet translation. Just as the random repetition of a character is avoided in Chinese couplet composition, such random repetition of a word should also be eschewed in English translations. Since function words can be repetitively used in corresponding positions in Chinese couplets, the same practice can be applied to function words in English translations. Furthermore, the English translation of Chinese couplets must conform to English expressive conventions<sup>[3]</sup>. From the perspective of cultural communication, Wang Xianhao and Jin Yuanli propose the following strategies for couplet translation: retaining the linguistic form and literally translating cultural images; retaining the linguistic form and providing annotations for cultural images; modifying the linguistic form and paraphrasing cultural images<sup>[4]</sup>. Wang Fen et al. put forward four translation methods for couplets: literal translation, paraphrase, omission and substitution<sup>[5]</sup>. Liu Xiang observes that Professor Zhuo Zhenying's English translations of Li Yu's couplets feature the following characteristics: reproducing the structural features of the original couplets with the two lines of each translation being basically equal in length; achieving end-rhyme in the couplets, with frequent use of internal rhyme and alliteration; recreating the rhetorical devices employed in the originals; and using hypotactic devices to realize the connection of words in the translated couplets<sup>[6]</sup>. Yang Huan and Xia Riguan point out that couplet translation involves the integration of rhythm, words, clauses and discourse. They also emphasize that translations should prioritize conveying the core theme of the original couplets, then preserve their form to the greatest extent possible, and minimize cultural loss as much as possible<sup>[7]</sup>. Based on the similarities and differences between Chinese couplets and English couplets, Wu Weixiong suggests that English translations of Chinese couplets should strive to maintain their similarities. However, translations should follow the linguistic norms of English. For the issue of "untranslatability", he proposes the following approaches: seeking similarity while retaining differences, compensating for losses through creative adaptation, adding annotations after translation, and adopting zero-translation<sup>[8]</sup>.

### 3. Review of research on construction-based translation theory

According to Goldberg's definition of a construction—a pairing of form and meaning—its formal dimension encompasses phonological, morphological, and syntactic features, while its semantic dimension includes semantic, pragmatic, cultural, and functional characteristics. All linguistic units, from morphemes, words, phrasal words, and phrases to clauses, sentences, and discourses, are constructions. Constructions can be concrete (i.e., actually used linguistic expressions), semi-abstract (e.g., the structure “the more..., the more...”), or fully abstract (e.g., the “SVOO” sentence pattern). Larger constructions are composed of smaller ones, yet they are more than the sum of their constituent parts<sup>[9,10]</sup>. Yang Zi and Wang Xueming point out that Szymańska proposes constructions as the unit of translation. She argues that given the disparities between target language constructions and source language constructions, it is impossible to achieve complete micro-equivalence in translation. This requires translators to strike an optimal balance between micro-equivalence and overall approximation<sup>[11]</sup>. Yang Zi and Wang Xueming further note that adopting constructions as the translation unit ensures the flexibility of the translation unit across linguistic levels, thereby resolving the debate over the optimal size of translation units<sup>[12]</sup>. Wei Zaijiang suggests that translation should take into account the holistic meaning of constructions; employ target language conventional forms to highlight the meaning of the source text; and allow target language verbs to suppress source language constructions to avoid generating non-conventional constructions in the target language. The same components in different constructions are endowed with distinct meanings by their respective constructions, and such differentiated meanings should be accurately rendered in translation<sup>[13]</sup>.

### 4. Translation of antithetical couplets in Shanxi Merchants' residences from the perspective of construction-based translation theory

As can be seen from the above discussion, the antithetical couplet is a special type of construction, which not only bears profound and meaningful connotations, but also features a neat antithetical structure and melodious rhythm. For couplet translation, the primary consideration is to conduct an in-depth investigation and comprehension of the couplet's meaning; the secondary step is to adopt appropriate translation methods; and finally, it is essential to express both the meaning and form of the couplet in native English. Translating a couplet requires not only conveying the semantic beauty of the original, but also reproducing its phonetic beauty and formal beauty. Meanwhile, translators must understand both the context in which the original couplet was created and the author's intent, as well as take into account the ideological feelings of the target readers. If we compare the original couplet to a mosaic work, this mosaic is composed of formal elements such as phonology, rhythm and syntactic structure, as well as semantic elements including grammatical meaning, pragmatic meaning, cultural connotation and functional value. Translation, in this sense, is to render as many characteristics of the constituent elements of the original couplet—the exquisite mosaic—as possible into the target language, thereby creating a new mosaic work. Shanxi Merchants have long been known as Confucian-merchants. Most of the couplets associated with Shanxi Merchants reflect Confucian ideas, such as valuing harmony, emphasizing moral cultivation, advocating integrity, enjoying reading, upholding frugality, prioritizing benevolence, caring for the nation, acting selflessly in public service, and striving to prosper families and serve the country. In what follows, we will analyze the existing English translations of couplets from Shanxi Merchants' residences one by one and propose revisions to refine and enhance them.

Construction Analysis of the Couplet “子孙贤族将大，兄弟睦家之肥” (from the Qiao Family Compound)

Phonetics: /zī sūn xián zú jiāng dà/, /xiōng dì mù jiā zhī féi/

Structure: Subject (zīsūn) + Predicate (xián) + Subject (zú) + Predicate (jiāng dà); Subject (xiōngdì) + Predicate (mù) + Subject (jiā) + Predicate (zhī féi).

Semantics: When descendants are virtuous and upright, the clan will grow and prosper day by day; when brothers live in harmony, the family business will flourish and never decline.

Pragmatics: This bronze couplet is inlaid on the gate of the “Zhongtang” Courtyard of the Qiao Family. It was composed and presented to the Qiao Family by Li Hongzhang, a prominent minister in the late Qing Dynasty. During the Westernization Movement, Li Hongzhang, who served as the Beiyang Minister of the Qing Dynasty, was faced with a shortage of state treasury funds. The Qiao Family generously donated 100,000 taels of silver to him. Overjoyed, Li Hongzhang specially wrote this couplet to praise and express his gratitude to the Qiao Family.

Cultural Connotation: As an ancient Chinese saying goes, “Harmony in the family leads to prosperity in all undertakings”. This couplet embodies the traditional Chinese family governance philosophy of “valuing harmony as the supreme principle”, which emphasizes harmony, inclusiveness and magnanimity.

Functions: Decoration of residential architecture; demonstration of imperial grace and honor; education of family traditions and ethics.

The author’s intention in composing this couplet is to praise and bless the Qiao Family. The first half of both the first and second lines eulogizes the fine virtues of the Qiao Family members, while the latter half conveys the wish that these virtues will bring increasing prosperity to their family business. Thus, there is a cause-and-effect relationship between the first and second halves of each line. A tentative translation of the couplet is provided below:

The descendants are virtuous and the family will be thriving

The brothers are harmonious and the business will be prospering

The free translation achieves formal parallelism, with both lines consisting of exactly 10 words. Each line follows a SVP (Subject-Linking Verb-Predicative) structure in both its first and second halves, and the tenses are consistent throughout. Semantically, the conjunction “and ” and the modal verb “will” in both lines clearly indicate the cause-and-effect relationship: the first half of each line commends the Qiao Family members, and the latter half extends wishes for the prosperity of their clan and business. Notably, the key terms “descendants”, “brothers”, “clan” and “family business” are all accurately rendered. Phonetically, the words descendants, virtuous, brothers, harmonious and business share assonance, while thriving and prospering form a perfect rhyme. The overall intonation of the translation conveys the composed family tradition and the inevitable conviction of the family business’s prosperity.

Construction Analysis of the Couplet “ 损人欲以复天理， 蓄道德而能文章 ” (From Qiao Family Compound)

Phonetics: /sǔn rényù /yì /fù tiān lǐ/, /xù dào dé/ ér/ néng wén zhāng/

Structure: Verb (sǔn) + Object (rényù) + Conjunction (yì) + Verb (fù) + Object (tiānlǐ); Verb (xù) + Object (dàodé) + Conjunction (ér) + Verb (néng) + Object (wénzhāng).

Semantics: Restrain selfish human desires to conform to the inherent laws of nature; accumulate moral integrity to abide by rituals, music, laws and social norms.

Pragmatics: This couplet is carved on both sides of the Hundred Longevity Patterns screen wall opposite the gate of the “Zhongtang” Courtyard of the Qiao Family. It was inscribed by Zuo Zongtang, a key military and political minister of the late Qing Dynasty, for the Qiao Family. During the Guangxu reign period of the Qing

Dynasty, when Zuo Zongtang, who served as the Viceroy of Shaanxi and Gansu, was plagued by a shortage of military funds, the Qiao Family's draft bank provided him with a loan. Later, when Zuo Zongtang visited the Qiao Family, the family invited him to write a couplet, and he composed this very one on the spot.

Cultural Connotation: The name of the courtyard's owner, Qiao Zhiyong, and the courtyard name "Zhongtang" both derived from the core Confucian concept of Zhongyong (the mean). The Qiao Family governed their household by this philosophy, emphasizing honesty, kindness and harmony, upholding the principle of impartiality and "harmony without uniformity".

Functions: Decoration of residential architecture; demonstration of authoritative favor; enlightenment of moral character and ideology.

The term "wenzhang" (literally "literary works") is a polysemous word, with meanings such as "written works" and "good reputation". However, its connotation in the construction of this couplet differs from its common usage—here it refers to "rituals, music, laws and institutions". Thus, the line "Xu dao de er neng wen zhang" conveys the meaning of "cultivate one's moral character and abide by social codes of conduct". This interpretation is further supported by the horizontal scroll above the couplet, "Lü He", which means "practice the way of harmony and coordination". It is evident that this couplet expresses the idea of harmonious coexistence between individuals and the laws of nature, as well as between individuals and society. A tentative translation of the couplet is provided below:

Restrain desires to follow natural laws

Cultivate virtues to observe social norms

In line with the couplet's constructional features of phonetic beauty, formal beauty and semantic beauty, the above translation not only accurately captures the original meaning, but also conforms to the characteristics of Chinese couplets: consistent part of speech, identical structure and equal number of words in the two lines. The collocations also comply with English expressive conventions. Phonetically, the words desires, laws, virtues and norms share assonance, achieving a rhythmic effect.

Construction Analysis of the Couplet “位中央而赞化育，配三才以大生成” (From Qiao Family Compound)

Phonetics: /wèi zhōng yāng/ ér/ zàn huà yù/, /pèi sān cái/ yì /dà shēng chéng/

Structure: Verb (wèi) + Object (zhōngyāng) + Conjunction (ér) + Verb (zàn) + Object (huà yù); Verb (pèi) + Object (sān cái) + Conjunction (yì) + Verb (dà) + Object (shēng chéng).

Semantics: The earth occupies the central position, nurturing all things in the world; only the unity of heaven, earth and humanity can constitute a complete world.

Pragmatics: This couplet is carved on both sides of the large brick-carved screen wall of the "Fude Shrine" in the Qiao Family Compound. It eulogizes and expresses gratitude to the God of Earth for his grace in nurturing all living creatures. It implicitly echoes the name of the Qiao Family Compound's main hall "Zhongtang" (Hall of the Mean), and also embodies the philosophy of self-cultivation, family governance and business management pursued by Qiao Zhiyong, the prominent Shanxi merchant and leader of the Qiao Family. The Confucian idea of "upholding the mean"—that is, "avoiding extremes and adhering to the middle way"—laid a profound cultural foundation for the Shanxi merchants' grand vision of "connecting the whole country through financial services".

Cultural Connotation: In the Five Elements Theory of traditional Chinese culture, the five elements refer to five basic modes of material movement: metal, wood, water, fire and earth. Ancient Chinese thinkers used this theory to explain the formation of all things in the world and their interrelationships. Although earth is listed



last among the five elements, it holds the central position and is the most important one—for the earth is the place where human beings live and thrive. The “Three Powers” (san cai) refer to heaven, earth and humanity in the traditional Chinese philosophical concept of “harmony between heaven and humanity”. With “earth” as the intermediary between heaven and humanity, there comes the saying that “earth occupies the central position”.

Functions: Decoration of residential architecture; inheritance of cultural traditions; offering sacrifices and praying for blessings; enlightenment of family traditions and ethics.

This couplet reflects Zhongyong (the Mean), a traditional Chinese philosophical thought. It is dedicated to worshipping the God of Earth, who should be referred to by a unified title in translation. In addition, the character “zan” here does not mean “praise”, but rather “assist and support”. A tentative translation of the couplet is provided below:

Earth, lies in the center, fostering the whole universe

Earth, unites heaven and human, forming a perfect world

This translation achieves harmonious rhyme with fostering and forming. In terms of form, the two lines are of equal length and exhibit neat parallelism. Semantically, it highlights the central theme of “the God of Earth”. More importantly, the central status of “earth” in traditional Chinese culture—embodied in both the Five Elements Theory and the concept of “harmony between heaven and humanity”—is conveyed through such words and expressions as the initial position of “Earth”, “center”, “in the universe”, “unites” and “a perfect world”. The pauses marked by commas distinctly highlight the noble and imposing spirit of the God of Earth.

Construction Analysis of the Couplet “言必典彝行修壇宇，門無雜塵家有賜書” (From Qiao Family Compound)

Phonetics: /yán bì diǎn yí/ xíng xiū tán yǔ/, /mén wú zá chén/ jiā yǒu cì shū/

Structure: Topic (yán) + Comment (bì diǎnyí) + Topic (xíng) + Comment (xiū tányǔ); Topic (mén) + Comment (wú záchén) + Topic (jiā) + Comment (yǒu cìshū).

Semantics: One’s words and deeds must comply with moral principles and codes of conduct; the family, which values the inheritance of literary traditions, should especially keep itself away from worldly vulgarities.

Pragmatics: This is a couplet in the Southeast Courtyard of the Qiao Family Compound. Its horizontal scroll “TuiSi” (Reflect in Retreat) is derived from the line “When in office, strive to be loyal; when in retreat, reflect to mend one’s faults” in Zuo Zhuan, implying the idea of retiring from public life to engage in self-reflection.

Cultural Connotation: The name of the courtyard’s owner, Qiao Zhiyong, and the hall name “Zhongtang” (Hall of the Mean) both derive from the core Confucian concepts of “Zhongyong” (the Mean) and “upholding the middle way while embracing both extremes”. The Qiao Family governed their household by these doctrines, emphasizing honesty, kindness and harmony, and adhering to the principles of impartiality and “harmony without uniformity”.

Functions: Decoration of residential architecture; emphasizing decorum in speech and behavior and conducting moral education; highlighting the inheritance of literary traditions in the family.

Here, the term “dianyi” refers to “time-honored norms and codes of conduct”, and “tanyu” literally means “altars and shrines”, which is metaphorically used to denote “lofty moral standards”. Thus, the first line of the couplet conveys the meaning of “one’s words and deeds must be standardized and measured”. The “zachen” refers to “worldly vulgarities”, and “cishu” means “books bestowed by the monarch”, which are regarded as precious treasures. A tentative translation of the couplet is provided below:

Words must be modest and behaviors must be ritual

Trifles must be abandoned and books must be cherished

This translation achieves structural symmetry between the two lines. The use of “modest” and “ritual” in the first line makes the meaning more closely aligned with the original text, while the words “abandoned” and “cherished” in the second line create the same contrasting relationship as in the source couplet. The repetition of the four “must be” constructions lends a rhythmic flow to the lines when read aloud. In this translation, the second line follows the syntactic structure of the first line, realizing the parallelism required of couplets. This demonstrates that translating couplets not only requires thorough research of relevant documents to accurately understand the original meaning, but also demands attention to the interactive relationship between the two lines, as well as careful refinement and polishing of the translation to pursue excellence.

Construction Analysis of the Couplet “读书即未成名究竟人高品雅，修德不期获报自然梦稳心安”  
(From Qiao Family Compound)

Phonetics: /dú shū jí wèi chéng míng /jiū jìng rén gāo pǐn yǎ/; /xiū dé bù qī huí bào/ zì rán mèng wěn xīn ān/

Structure: Subordinate clause (dú shū jí wèi chéngmíng) + Main clause (jiūjìng rén gāo pǐn yǎ); Subordinate clause (xiū dé bù qī huíbào) + Main clause (zìrán mèng wěn xīn ān).

Semantics: Even if reading does not bring one fame and prestige, it can still foster a noble character and elegant speech; if one cultivates virtue and does good deeds without seeking returns, they will naturally enjoy sound sleep and a peaceful state of mind.

Pragmatics: This couplet is hung on the gate tower of the main courtyard in the southwest section of the “Zhongtang” Courtyard.

Cultural Connotation: Ancient people believed that reading poetry and books could refine one’s moral character, and pursuing knowledge could nourish one’s spiritual nature. Raising well-educated, reasonable and righteous offspring would ensure the continuity of the family and its legacy.

Functions: Decoration of residential architecture; a moral warning and source of inspiration; enlightenment through literary education and moral cultivation.

Here, both the first and second lines of the couplet express a concessive relationship. The phrase “rén gāo pǐn yǎ” means “having a noble character and elegant speech”, while “mèng wěn xīn ān” translates to “enjoying sound sleep and a peaceful mind”. A tentative translation of the couplet is provided below:

Reading classic books without achieving fame still brings about noble character and elegant manners

Doing good deeds without expecting reward naturally results in sound sleep and peaceful mind

The translation employs the structures without...still... and without...naturally... respectively for the two lines, which ensures a more precise conveyance of the original meaning and a neat parallelism between the upper and lower lines in form. It also enhances phonetic rhythm and prosody, making the whole translation more in line with the creation standards and principles of couplets.

Construction Analysis of the Couplet “孝友和亲渊源传作家政，诗书礼乐根底蔚为国华” (From Qiao Family Compound)

Phonetics: /xiào yǒu hé qīn yuān yuán/ chuán zuò jiā zhèng/; /shī shū lǐ yuè gēn dǐ /wēi wěi guó huá/

Structure: Topic (xiào yǒu hé qīn yuān yuán) + Comment ( chuán zuò jiā zhèng); Topic (shī shū lǐ yuè gēn dǐ) + Comment ( wēi wěi guó huá).

Semantics: Passing down the Confucian six ethical behaviors—“filial piety, fraternal love, amity with clan members, affinity with in-laws, trustworthiness and compassion”—as a long-standing family governance tradition; taking the Confucian six classics—The Book of Songs, The Book of History, The Rites of Zhou, The

Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial, The Book of Rites and The Book of Music—as the essence of the Chinese nation to be cherished and passed down forever.

**Pragmatics:** Above the gate of Courtyard No.1 in the Qiao Family Compound is inscribed the three characters “Da Fu Di”. In ancient China, Da Fu referred to a senior civil official, while a senior military officer was called Jiang Jun, and Di means a mansion. The couplet is hung right below this inscription, with the first line reading “Xiao you he qin yuan yuan chuan zuo jia zheng” and the second line “Shi shu li yue gen di wei wei guo hua”.

**Cultural Connotation:** The Confucian six ethical behaviors summarize all virtuous conducts. As recorded in The Rites of Zhou, “The six ethical behaviors are: filial piety, fraternal love, amity with clan members, affinity with in-laws, trustworthiness and compassion”. The “Shi, Shu, Li, Yue” refer to the six classics of Confucianism from the six dynasties, namely The Book of Songs, The Book of History, The Rites of Zhou, The Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial, The Book of Rites and The Book of Music. Their significance is noted in The Book of Rites·Royal Regulations: “The Director of Music honors the four arts and establishes four teachings, following the ancient kings’ guidance of The Book of Songs, The Book of History, The Book of Rites and The Book of Music to cultivate talents”. Origin: The concept of the six ethical behaviors is derived from The Rites of Zhou·Local Officials·Minister of Education: “The second [category of education] is the six ethical behaviors: filial piety, fraternal love, amity with clan members, affinity with in-laws, trustworthiness and compassion”. Zheng Xuan’s annotation explains: “Amity means being close to the extended family; affinity means being intimate with relatives by marriage; trustworthiness means keeping faith in friendship; compassion means relieving the poor and the distressed”. The term “filial piety and fraternal love” refers to being dutiful to parents and affectionate to siblings, which originates from The Book of Songs·Minor Odes·June.

**Functions:** Decoration of residential architecture; inheritance of family traditions; enlightenment through reading and education; inculcation of benevolence and virtue.

Here, the phrase “xiao you he qin” means “being dutiful to parents, affectionate to siblings, harmonious with clan members and intimate with relatives by marriage”. It reflects the Confucian philosophy of “being kind to others”. “Shi shu li yue” refers to the Confucian classic works. “Filial piety, fraternal love, harmony and kinship” are the fundamental principles of personal conduct, and thus should be passed down as a family heirloom from generation to generation. “The Book of Songs, The Book of History, The Book of Rites and The Book of Music” are the cornerstones of cultivating people through education, and should be preserved and studied as the national essence. A tentative translation of the couplet is provided below:

Keep the kind practices to parents, brothers, relations and relatives as the housekeeping principles

Honor the classic books of Songs, History, Rites and Music as the national quintessences

This translation accurately conveys the connotation of “xiao you he qin” as the “code of conduct” in Confucianism and “shi shu li yue” as the Confucian classics. Meanwhile, it achieves neat parallelism between the two lines of the couplet, with the repeated “s” sounds creating a harmonious rhyme.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, the numerous problems existing in the translation of antithetical couplets in Shanxi merchants’ residences stem from translators’ insufficient understanding of the original couplets. They fail to grasp the context in which the original couplets were created, the authors’ creative intentions, the traditional Chinese culture and philosophical thoughts behind the couplets, as well as the meanings of classical phrases, thus being



unable to accurately convey the significance of the original couplets. On the other hand, due to translators' lack of knowledge about the structural and phonological features of couplets, the translated versions often lack parallelism and rhyme. The construction-based translation theory is capable of fully considering the phonological, formal and semantic aspects of a construction, making it a perfect fit for guiding the translation of couplets. Specifically speaking, the translation of couplets should first involve a comprehensive understanding of multiple elements of the original couplet's construction, including phonology (rhythm and rhyme), syntactic structure, grammatical meaning, pragmatic meaning, cultural connotation, historical origin, philosophical thought and function. Then, translators need to form a cognitive image of these elements in their minds. Finally, the translation should be expressed in a structure consistent with that of the original couplet while complying with English expressive conventions. If it is impossible to replicate the original structure, appropriate adjustments should be made in accordance with English usage, with the ultimate goal of producing target-language couplets that embody the formal characteristics of Chinese couplets: parallelism, rhyme and rhythmic beauty. Only such translations can achieve the standards of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance".

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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