

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Translation of Culture-loaded Terms in Martial Arts Fiction from the Perspective of Distancing: A Case Study of *Legends of the Condor Heroes*

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Abstract:

This paper is a descriptive study conducted under the framework of cultural distancing in Liu Miqing's cultural translation theory. This study classifies the culture-loaded terms in *Legends of the Condor Heroes* into culture-reflecting, culture-projecting, culture-refracting, and culture-insinuating based on distancing. Through quantitative and qualitative analysis, various translation strategies and approaches are identified in correspondence to the four categories. Generally speaking, approaches under the domestication strategy are used more frequently than those of the foreignization strategy; and the larger the distancing, the higher frequency of using the domestication strategy. In addition, the combination of approaches under both strategies has also proved effective. This study manages to establish the correlation between distancing degree and the choice of translation strategies and approaches, therefore providing a new perspective for exploring the translation of culture-loaded terms in martial arts fiction.

Keywords: martial arts fiction, culture-loaded terms, distancing degree, *Legends of the Condor Heroes*

1. Introduction

It is not a new attempt to explore the translation of martial arts fiction nor that of culture-loaded terms; however, research conducted from the perspective of distancing is rarely attempted. The cultural translation theory by Liu Miqing, especially the concept of distancing degree, has provided a new angle for literature translation research, particularly the translation of culture-loaded terms. This paper adopts the construct of distancing proposed in Liu Miqing's cultural translation theory to analyze the translation of culture-loaded terms in *Legends of the Condor Heroes: A Hero Born* (hereinafter referred to as *Legends*) (Holmwood, 1994/2018). This is the first published English translation of *She Diao*



Ying Xiong Zhuan by Jin Yong, a celebrated Chinese novel recognized as having the largest number of readers in contemporary China and the world.¹

With a complicated and intriguing plot, well-rounded portrayal of characters, and language appealing to both refined and popular tastes, the novel has attracted tens of thousands of readers, especially in China and other Asian areas that share similar cultural backgrounds and values. But as a martial art literary work set in ancient China, there is inevitably an abundance of expressions unique to Chinese culture, which poses great difficulty in translating and introducing it to Western readers who live in a different cultural background.

The translation is published in four volumes successively by the British publisher MacLehose Press. The title of the series is rendered as “*Legends of the Condor Heroes*”. The one studied here is the first volume “*A Hero Born: Legends of the Condor Heroes Vol 1*”, translated by Anna Holmwood. This volume is mainly about the birth of the protagonist, his life in Mongolia, how he was trained in kung fu, and what he experienced after returning to the Central Plains.²

Liu Miqing (2006:86) proposes that there are four methods for the acquisition of cultural meaning, namely reflecting, projecting, refracting, and insinuating. Cultural meaning acquired in different methods has various distancing from the signified: reflecting, projecting, refracting, and insinuating ranked in a distancing-ascending order. This paper intends to explore the translation of culture-loaded terms in martial arts fiction as exemplified in *Legends of the Condor Heroes* from the perspective of distancing. Specifically, it seeks to address the following three questions:

How can culture-loaded terms in martial arts fiction be categorized?

What translation strategies and approaches have been applied to the translation of culture-loaded terms in *Legends of the Condor Heroes*?

What is the correlation between the distancing degree and the choice of translation strategies and approaches?

The present study will classify the culture-loaded terms into four groups based on the distancing degree. It will then tabulate their respective translation approaches and display the results of the collected data in charts for the sake of clarity. In light of the statistics, this paper will try to analyze the reasons behind these approaches and identify certain patterns or correlations between the degree of distancing and the choice of translation methods.

¹ The novel *She Diao Ying Xiong Zhuan* is set in Southern Song Dynasty. It tells about stories happening between warriors in the kung fu world, and how those heroes fight against Jin Dynasty and the then Empire of Mongolia. Guo Jing, the protagonist of the story, was brought up in Mongolia by his mother after his father was murdered by the Prince of Jin and officials of Southern Song Dynasty. A bet brought Guo Jing seven mentors to teach him kung fu, and changed his life.

² According to customer reviews on Amazon, a global e-commerce platform, the translation of the first volume has received a rating of 4.3 out of 5 stars. Among the total fifty reviews, 62 percent rated it as a five-star book, 22 percent gave it four stars and the remaining 16 percent gave rather critical comments. That indicates the generally good performance of the book.



2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction to distancing in Liu Miqing's cultural translation theory

Distancing is a key concept which dictates that cultural meaning attached to different words is expressed in different methods (Liu, 2006:89). Liu (2006:76) holds that the task of cultural translation is to translate the meaning that contains cultural information instead of translating the culture. The meaning should always be the translator's focus. On this basis, cultural meaning can be explored from two dimensions: macro and micro. Starting from these two dimensions, cultural translation can be divided into general cultural translation and special cultural translation.

From a macro perspective, cultural translation covers any meaning transformation of cultural information, including grammar meanings. Verb tenses, pronoun cases, and degrees of adjective all contain meanings, which should not be ignored. From a micro perspective, cultural translation refers to meaning embodied in every stratum of the cultural system. This system is also known as the cultural matrix, which is further divided into material stratum, institutional stratum, behavioral and customary stratum, and mental stratum (Liu, 2006:30-34). Special cultural translation focuses on the translation of words, phrases, sentences, sentence groups, language styles, and cultural psychology. It fosters the concept of micro-cultural meaning.

Cultural meaning has the features of humanization, dynamism, and stratification. Not all words or phrases have cultural meaning, but they can acquire it through humanization, i.e., using the language. Cultural meaning is endowed by the language user (Wittgenstein, 1953, as cited in Liu, 2006:93). One common example is how natural objects acquire cultural meaning via humanization. Bamboo is simply a kind of plant but is often regarded as a symbol of integrity and inflexibility since Chinese literati frequently use it symbolically. The dynamism of cultural meaning rests with the use of the word or phrase as well. Water and fire are natural objects. But when you say that water and fire are merciless, these two objects have been personified as the enemy of humans and have acquired meaningful dynamism (Liu, 2006:95-96). Cultural meaning can be stratified into three aspects. The first aspect considers meaning as a multidimensional structure that sorts meaning into the general and the cultural. The second aspect classifies cultural meaning under a cultural matrix as mentioned in the paragraph above. In the third aspect, the stratification of cultural meaning is acquired by analyzing the word theoretically; in this process, distancing plays a decisive role (Liu, 2006:99).

There are various methods for the acquisition of cultural meaning. Some give rise to large distancing from the literal meaning, while others present almost no distancing. Below is the incremental distancing model (Liu, 2006:99):

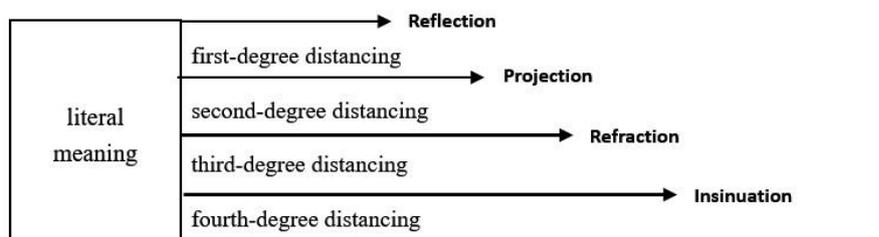


Figure 1.

From reflection to insinuation, the acquired cultural meaning deviates from the literal meaning further and further. Further elaboration on reflection, projection, refraction, and insinuation follows.

2.2 Methods for the acquisition of cultural meaning

According to Liu Miqing (2006:86), cultural meaning from a micro perspective covers a wide range, and it is distinct from macro cultural meaning. The former refers to those meanings which are contained in words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs, and these meanings can be embedded deeply or be taken literally. There are four methods for acquiring cultural meaning, namely reflecting, projecting, refracting, and insinuating.

2.2.1 Reflecting

Reflecting is also known as mirroring, which means that the cultural meaning can be taken literally just as an image is directly reflected in a mirror. This is the elementary method for cultural meaning acquisition in that it portrays the signified straightforwardly. For example, pictographs like “弓” and “刀” are Chinese characters imitating the shape of the substance, an arrow, and a knife, and the cultural meaning behind them is acquired through reflecting.

2.2.2 Projecting

The cultural meaning acquired via projecting is not a cultural image but a projection of the connotation on the level of meaning instead of the form (Liu, 2006:87). As one of the main methods for cultural meaning acquisition, projecting happens when various cultural characteristics or features, including region, caste, profession, social stratum and ethnic group, indirectly make an impact on the language at every level. Such procedure is known as cultural coloring (Massella, 1988, as cited in Liu, 2006:87). The effect of cultural coloring can be projected by culture on pronunciation, grammar, or lexicons so that they will carry cultural information. In addition, the phrase is the main form of projection and one of the major purveyors of cultural meaning. Although the distancing in projecting is larger than that in reflecting, the projected cultural meaning can be understood literally.

2.2.3 Refracting

Refracting usually calls for techniques of deduction, extension, explanation, etc. to clarify the meaning and avoid obscurity. Readers need to have a good command of the culture of the original language, especially its classical allusions, otherwise they may find it extremely hard to acquire the cultural meaning. That is why refracting leads to larger distancing than projecting does. Liu Miqing (2006:90-91) claims that a great number of refracted cultural meanings are originated from the classical allusion or the extended meaning.

2.2.4 Insinuating

Insinuating brings about the largest distancing which lies between the word's external cultural meaning and its internal cultural implication, often certain mentality. Some expressions may seem plain and not special at all, but they can imply a variety of sentiments or attitudes including contempt, ridicule, mockery, hostility, exaggeration, and so forth. Additionally, these hidden sentiments or attitudes are



usually conveyed by unusual means, which is confusing to the outsider, while transparent to those involved.

In brief, there is distancing between the word's literal meaning and cultural meaning, and such distancing increases progressively from reflecting, projecting, and refracting to insinuating. Generally, the larger the distancing, the more the cultural meaning is inclined to the psychological level.

This theory has provided a fresh perspective for studying the translation of culture-loaded terms. However, to make it specifically applicable to the study of MARTIAL ARTS FICTION translation, further discussion and refinement is needed.

3. Culture-loaded Terms in *She Diao Yin Xiong Zhuan*

3.1 Categories of culture-loaded terms in *She Diao Yin Xiong Zhuan*

3.1.1 Culture-reflecting terms

As mentioned in 2.2.1, reflecting is the most direct way to acquire cultural meaning as the signified can be reflected or depicted by the image itself. Some ancient Chinese characters are the typical examples of pictograph and they are culture-reflecting terms. However, this is not the case for modern Chinese characters. After several thousand years of development, characters strongly indicative of cultural meaning are rare in modern Chinese.

In this study, we define culture-reflecting terms as those that: 1) describe an image, object, or concept, and 2) involve no extended meaning or the speaker's emotion.

Some common expressions in *She Diao Yin Xiong Zhuan* are such as traditional Chinese food, weapons, daily utensils, historical places, measuring units, chronography are listed as follows:

Chinese food: 咸蛋, 豆腐干, 糟溜鱼

Weapons: 腰刀, 单刀, 长刀, 短戟, 长枪, 暗器

Daily utensils: 蓑衣, 斗笠, 炕

Historical places: 云栖寺, 桃花岛, 众安桥

Measuring units: 斤, 十几两银子, 两文三文, 里, 丈, 几簇

Chronography: 初二, 三更时分, 一个时辰, 亥末子初

All these terms reflect certain Chinese culture but contain no extended meaning, and they just refer to the object or concept itself.

3.1.2 Culture-projecting terms

Culture-projecting terms are words or expressions that are conferred with cultural information by the characteristics of ethnic group, region, caste, profession or social stratum.

In this study, we define culture-projecting terms as those that: 1) involve rich extended meaning but little speaker's emotion, and 2) frequently used figures of speech.



For example, “狼牙棒” is a sort of weapon in ancient China. “狼牙” literally refers to the teeth of the wolf, but it does not mean the weapon is made of wolf’s teeth. The weapon is given that name because there are many spikes, which look like the teeth of a wolf, spread around the upper half of the stick.

Furthermore, culture-projecting terms in MARTIAL ARTS FICTION may show the feelings or standpoint of the speaker or the author. For instance, “妙手书生” (Quick Hand Zhu Cong the Intelligent) and “黑风双煞” (Black wind double evils) are both aliases of characters in the novel. Another example is the alias of Guo Jing’s seven mentors. Their friends usually refer to them as “江南七侠” (The Seven Swordsmen of the South), but the villains call them “江南七怪” (The Seven Freaks of the South). “侠” is used to describe people who are heroic and chivalrous, but “怪” means freaks.

“推窗送月” is a culture-projecting expression containing no personal feelings. It is just the name of a fighting style. Taken literally, it portrays an image that a person pushes the window outwards and a moon appears. Fighting styles including “双掌移山”, “懒驴打滚”, “灵猫扑鼠” and so forth have the same effect. The author resorts to these terms to represent a series of fighting movements.

Some idioms and proverbs can also be classified into the category of culture-projecting. “三脚猫” refers to a cat with only three legs. It is used to describe someone whose skill in a certain area is not superb, even clumsy. “犹如热锅上的蚂蚁” compares a person, who is anxious and unsettled, to an ant on a hot pan. In these expressions, specific objects are used as rhetorical devices.

3.1.3 Culture-refracting terms

As the cultural meaning in culture-refracting terms is largely deviated or even distorted from their literal meaning, it is quite difficult to grasp the essence without the techniques of deduction, extension, and explanation.

What makes this category different from the last one is that the rhetorical vehicles in such cultural terms are comparatively abstract and often derive from classical allusions or historical tales. Hence readers can only catch the embedded meaning by resorting to relevant background knowledge. That justifies Liu Miqing’s (2006:91) statement that a great majority of figurative phrases, including idioms and common sayings, contain refracted cultural meanings.

In this study, we define culture-refracting terms as those that: 1) involve extended meaning, 2) sometimes involve the speaker’s or the author’s emotion, and 3) frequently used figures of speech.

Take “到阎王那里去” as an example. To understand this idiom, readers need to know who is “阎王” and where is “阎王那里”, which are related to Chinese myths and religious legends. That is the key to grasping the cultural meaning behind this term.

Also, the emotions or mentalities of the speaker can be frequently found in culture-refracting expressions. For example, “那穷酸” is a contemptuous appellation for poor and pedantic scholars in ancient China. It conveys the speaker’s feelings of scorn and detest. If readers lack relevant knowledge, it can be hard for them to grasp the cultural meaning accurately, even though they can infer from the characters that it is a disrespectful word.



Another telling case is “卧薪尝胆”. This idiom derives from the story of Gou Jian, the King of Yue. It suggests that someone endures hardships in order to strengthen his or her resolve and accomplish his or her ambition. If readers know nothing about the idiom’s origin, they are likely to end up in bewilderment. To better understand culture-refracting terms, an extensive knowledge of Chinese culture is required.

3.1.4 Culture-insinuating terms

Cultural meaning acquired through insinuation is the most obscure among these four categories since distancing between the term’s literal meaning and its cultural meaning is the largest.

In this study, we define culture-insinuating terms as those that: 1) contain deep extended meaning, and 2) strongly reflect the speaker’s emotions or mentalities. It exactly corroborates Liu Miqing’s viewpoint that the larger the distancing, the more the mental elements (2006:93).

To comprehend such terms, readers are required to not only be familiar with the specific culture but also be cognizant of the context. A case in point is “草字”. Taken literally, it refers to the Chinese character “草”, which means grass. Contextually, it is a self-deprecating expression of the speaker’s own given name. Likewise, “鸟皇帝”³ is a contemptuous word, which means “bird emperor” if understood literally. However, it has nothing to do with birds in that particular context. Instead, it is an abusive expression that shows the speaker’s hatred toward the emperor.

4. Strategies and Approaches Applied in the Translation of Culture-loaded Terms in *Legends of the Condor Heroes*

4.1 Statistics of the techniques employed in translating culture-loaded terms in *Legends of the Condor Heroes*

In accordance with the working definition proposed in Section 3, the culture-loaded expressions in the sample are sorted into four categories. The translation techniques employed for each category are represented in the table below.

³ This expression originally refers to Emperor Huizong in Song Dynasty, who was fond of painting birds. Later refers to a corrupt and incompetent ruler.



Table 1. Categories and Translation Approaches

Approaches		Categories				Subtotal	Total	Proportion
		Culture-reflecting Terms	Culture-projecting Terms	Culture-refracting Terms	Culture-insinuating Terms			
Foreignization	Literal Translation	28	113	50	3	194	283	38.45%
	Transliteration	6	17	29	0	52		
	Combinaiton of Foreignizing Approaches	7	23	7	0	37		
Domestication	Free Translation	33	118	124	35	310	373	50.68%
	Amplification	1	1	2	1	5		
	Omission	0	10	10	2	22		
	Substitution	2	3	3	0	8		
	Generalization	10	8	3	0	21		
	Comination of Domesticating Approaches	0	4	3	0	7		
Combination of Foreignization and Domestication		3	31	7	1	42	42	5.71%
Approaches with Annotation		7	11	11	2	31	31	4.21%
Improper Translation		4	1	1	1	7	7	0.95%
Subtotal		101	340	250	45	—	736	—
Proportion		13.72%	46.20%	33.97%	6.11%	—	—	100%

Table 1 shows that culture-projecting and culture-refracting terms account for the largest proportion reaching 80.16%. As mentioned in the previous section, these two categories contain literal meaning and extended meaning which require imagination, deduction, cultural knowledge, etc. As for translation strategies applied to the novel, both foreignization and domestication are used. Over half of the cultural expressions are translated using the strategy of domestication while 38.45% are translated using that of foreignization. A combination of both strategies can also be found. Moreover, annotation is applied in the translation with a proportion of 4.21%.

The following part will discuss the correlation between distancing and translation approaches based on data obtained.

Table 2. Translation Approaches of Culture-reflecting Terms

Approaches	Foreignization			Domestication						Combination of Foreignization and Domestication	Approaches with Annotation	Improper Translation
	Literal Translation	Transliteration	Combinaiton of Foreignizing Approaches	Free Translation	Amplification	Omission	Substitution	Generalization	Comination of Domesticating Approaches			
Subtotal	28	6	7	33	1	0	2	10	0	3	7	4
Proportion	27.72%	5.94%	6.93%	32.67%	0.99%	0.00%	1.98%	9.90%	0.00%	2.97%	6.93%	3.96%
	40.59%			45.54%						2.97%	6.93%	3.96%



Table 3. Translation Approaches of Culture-projecting Terms

Approaches	Foreignization			Domestication						Combination of Foreignization and Domestication	Approaches with Annotation	Improper Translation
	Literal Translation	Transliteration	Combinaiton of Foreignizing Approaches	Free Translation	Amplification	Omission	Substitution	Generalization	Comination of Domesticating Approaches			
Subtotal	113	17	23	118	1	10	3	8	4	31	11	1
Proportion	33.24%	5.00%	6.76%	34.71%	0.29%	2.94%	0.88%	2.35%	1.18%	9.12%	3.24%	0.29%
	45.00%			42.35%						9.12%	3.24%	0.29%

Table 4. Translation Approaches of Culture-refracting Terms

Approaches	Foreignization			Domestication						Combination of Foreignization and Domestication	Approaches with Annotation	Improper Translation
	Literal Translation	Transliteration	Combinaiton of Foreignizing Approaches	Free Translation	Amplification	Omission	Substitution	Generalization	Comination of Domesticating Approaches			
Subtotal	50	29	7	124	2	10	3	3	3	7	11	1
Proportion	20.00%	11.60%	2.80%	49.60%	0.80%	4.00%	1.20%	1.20%	1.20%	2.80%	4.40%	0.40%
	34.40%			58.00%						2.80%	4.40%	0.40%

Table 5. Translation Approaches of Culture-insinuating Terms

Approaches	Foreignization			Domestication						Combination of Foreignization and Domestication	Approaches with Annotation	Improper Translation
	Literal Translation	Transliteration	Combinaiton of Foreignizing Approaches	Free Translation	Amplification	Omission	Substitution	Generalization	Comination of Domesticating Approaches			
Subtotal	3	0	0	35	1	2	0	0	0	1	2	1
Proportion	6.67%	0.00%	0.00%	77.78%	2.22%	4.44%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.22%	4.44%	2.22%
	6.67%			84.44%						2.22%	4.44%	2.22%

Based on Tables 2-5, it is not difficult to infer the correlation between the choice of translation techniques and distancing degree in cultural terms. As a whole, domestication is applied at a higher frequency than foreignization.⁴ For the first two categories, i.e., culture-reflecting and culture-projecting terms, the use of domestication and foreignization strategies is around 45% and the degree of distancing is relatively low.

The situation begins to change in the translation of culture-refracting terms. According to Table 4, the divergence between proportions of foreignization and domestication has slightly increased, with a preference for domestication strategy in the translation of such terms.

⁴ Domestication and foreignization are two terms coined by American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti in 1995 to describe two different translation strategies. Domestication refers to the translation strategy in which a transparent, fluent style is adopted in order to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for target language readers, while foreignization refers to the translation strategy in which a target text deliberately breaks target conventions by retaining something of the foreignness of the original. For example, “The sauce is better than the fish (汤比鱼鲜) is a case of foreignization, while “喧宾夺主” is a case of domestication.

The use of foreignization and domestication strategies demonstrates a sharp contrast in the last category at 6.67% and 84.44% respectively. The reason is that the degree of distancing in culture-insinuating terms is the highest. In other words, such expressions contain an abundance of Chinese cultural meaning. If they are translated literally or simply with the technique of transliteration, it is hardly possible for the target reader to catch the meaning.

4.2 Translation of culture-reflecting terms

Culture-reflecting terms in *Legends* are mainly names of places, weapons, food, and measuring units. The most frequently used approaches are literal translation, free translation, generalization, and translation plus annotation.

4.2.1 Literal translation

According to the statistics, over one-quarter of culture-reflecting terms are translated using literal translation. Here are some examples:

鸡舌羹: chicken-tongue soup

云栖寺: Cloudy Perch Temple

桃花岛: Peach Blossom Island

暗器: secret weapon

罗帕: silk scarf

“鸡舌羹” is a kind of soup prepared from the chicken’s tongue and “罗帕” is the scarf made from silk. Rendering “暗器” as a “secret weapon” has fully expressed its function and features. Also, “Cloudy Perch Temple” and “Peach Blossom Island” can reveal the words’ cultural meaning and characteristics of these sites. These cultural words are either material objects or names of a particular place. There is no extended meaning contained, and the literal meaning is exactly the cultural meaning. That is to say, the distancing is minimal. Thus, even if translated literally, the cultural meaning can be conveyed fully.

4.2.2 Free translation

Free translation accounts for the largest proportion in the translation of culture-reflecting terms at 32.67%. Typical examples are shown below:

一个时辰: two hours

初二、十六: the second and sixteenth days of the month

亥末子初: close to midnight

几筷: a few mouthfuls

一百丈: three hundred paces

官府: the authorities



行台: the Governor's residence

比武: fight

Given the small distancing, the translator resorted to free translation to give the target reader a clear conception.

4.2.3 Generalization

Generalization is a translation strategy that subsumes a specific item into a certain category and then translates it generally. For example, “腰刀” is a kind of sabre hung on the waist with a single long blade. But in the English version, the translator treated it as one type of sabre and simply rendered it into “sabre”. In light of the statistics, 9.9% of culture-reflecting terms are translated in the method of generalization in the novel. More examples are listed below:

单刀: sabre

长刀: sabre

兵刃暗器: their weapons

炕: hard bed

青骢马: a horse

监寺: the monks

“单刀” is a short-hilted broadsword and “长刀” is a broadsword with a long blade. Both are different from “腰刀”. But the translator chose to translate them all in the same way. “炕” is a brick-bed in northern China which can work as a heater. “青骢马” and “监寺” also have their special meaning. But the translator employed the approach of generalization, maybe for the reason that the nuance is of little significance for foreign readers, nor will it affect the development of the plot.

4.2.4 Approaches with annotation

Transliteration, amplification, substitution, annotation, and combinations of different approaches have also been employed. Among them, annotation is most noteworthy.

一大锭银子: a large sycee ingot of silver

中都: Zhongdu

The first example is translated literally. In the book's appendix, the translator has attached an annotation to explain the meaning of “sycee” and its monetary value. The other example “中都” is the name of a place. It used to be the capital of Jin in ancient China, the translator adopted the means of transliteration but provided many details of its special cultural and historical meaning in the appendix.



4.3 Translation of culture-projecting terms

Culture-projecting terms are the largest category of culture-loaded words in the sample. Apart from literal and free translation, the most frequent approaches are transliteration and a combination of different approaches. Typical cultural terms included in this category are Chinese idioms, fighting styles, and various kinds of appellations including names, honorific titles, aliases, and disparaging titles.

4.3.1 Literal translation

Items translated literally are mainly appellations, fighting styles, and idioms. Here are some examples:

灵猫扑鼠: the mischievous cat catches the mouse

推窗送月: open the window and push back the moon

江南七怪: the Seven Freaks of the South

铁脚仙: the Iron Foot Immortal

削铁如泥: slice through metal as if it were mud

天有不测风云, 人有旦夕祸福: the heavens unleash unexpected storms, people suffer unforeseen misfortune.

“灵猫扑鼠” and “推窗送月” are both fighting styles mentioned in the novel. The novelist Jin Yong has hardly depicted the movements of these fighting styles, leaving readers space to imagine thus increasing the fun of reading. Aliases including “江南七怪” and “铁脚仙” are also culture-projecting terms; readers can infer the cultural meanings and features of various characters from the literal meaning. Thus, the translator has applied the approach of literal translation which can make the translation brief and comprehensible. Idioms and proverbs like “削铁如泥” and “天有不测风云, 人有旦夕祸福” are easy to understand literally. They were translated literally as well for the same reason.

4.3.2 Free translation

Honorific titles, disparaging titles, and idioms in this category are often translated freely. See the following examples:

师兄: martial brother

师叔: martial uncle

浑小子: a young hooligan

“臭小子”: the little vixen

犹如热锅上的蚂蚁: with ever increasing alarm

吹胡子, 瞪眼睛: angry

害相思病: fall madly in love with her



“师兄”“师叔” and many other honorific titles are peculiar to Chinese martial arts fiction. “浑小子” and “臭小子” are both disparaging titles. As for idioms (5), (6), and (7), literal translation can be long-winded. So for the sake of brevity and intelligibility, the translator has decided to convey the hidden meaning explicitly.

4.3.3 Transliteration

Culture-projecting terms translated by transliteration are mostly appellations.

曲三: Qu San

张阿生: Zhang Asheng

辛弃疾: Xin Qiji

师父: *shifu*

Many characters in the novel like “曲三” are people of no consequence and some even appear only once. Besides, their names contain no special meaning. As a result, transliteration seems to be the most economical approach. “张阿生” and “辛弃疾” are typical examples of either fictitious characters or historical figures. They have played important roles in the novel. Although these terms have been transliterated, there are supplementary explanations before and after the main body of the translation. In terms of “师父”, even being transliterated with no extra explanation, readers may have little difficulty in understanding the term since *shifu* has appeared in some popular films like *Kung Fu Panda*.

4.3.4 Combination of different approaches

Combinations of different approaches found in this category are literal translation with transliteration, free translation with transliteration, and different approaches with annotation.

郭啸天: Skyfury Guo

杨铁心: Ironheart Yang

欧阳克: Gallant Ouyang

韩宝驹: Ryder Han

汤祖德: Officer Tang

全真派: the Quanzhen Sect

清明: Tomb-Sweeping Day

The rendition of “郭啸天” and “杨铁心” are typical examples of appellation translation in martial arts fiction. For both brevity and comprehension, the last name is transliterated and the first name with implications is translated literally. There are also exceptions. “Ryder Han” and “Officer Tang” have exactly revealed the specialty or profession of the characters. As for “全真派” and “清明”, both have been translated with an annotation though one is transliterated and the other translated freely.



4.4 Translation of culture-refracting terms

Culture-refracting terms in the sample are Mongolian names, courtesy titles, religious terms, idioms, terminologies of traditional Chinese medicine, etc. There is a significant change that the rate of approaches under the foreignization strategy outnumbers those of the domestication strategy, with a gap of 23.6%. Among them, literal translation, transliteration, free translation, omission, and approaches with annotation are most used.

4.4.1 Literal translation

Literal translation is the second most frequently used approach under this category at 20%. Representative cultural expressions are terminologies of traditional Chinese medicine and terms with strong Chinese features like nouns of locality from *I Ching*.

神阙: the Spirit Gate

鸠尾穴: the Turtledove Tail

熊胆: bear's gall bladder

参茸: ginseng and deer antler

丰位: the Abundance

小过: the Small Surpassing

Acupuncture points in traditional Chinese medicine like “神阙” and “鸠尾穴” are culture-refracting terms with figurative vehicles. But most non-experts take them merely as code names. So in the English version, they have been translated literally with no annotations or explanations. “熊胆” and “参茸” are Chinese herbal medicine and the signified is exactly what the signifier has referred to literally. Concepts of locality in *I Ching* including “丰位” and “小过” have also been translated literally. They are culture-refracting terms with complicated cultural origins. However, the translator has an inclination for literal translation without any supplementation, which has retained reading flow but at the cost of comprehension.

4.4.2 Free translation

Courtesy titles, religious terms, idioms, and other Chinese-specific expressions that have relatively large distancing have been rendered freely. And the figure has reached a particular high of 49.6%. The following are some typical examples.

令尊: your father

令爱: your daughter

成道: came to the Way

出家: turned to a life of celibacy and meditation

还俗: cast off my religious robes



打秋风:demanding money

总角之交: had grown up together

有喜: is pregnant

瞑目: find peace

借光借光: Please let me pass!

Different from culture-refracting terms, these words not only function as signifying symbols but also involve the development of the plot. Courtesy titles like “令尊” and “令爱” show the speaker’s respect for the listener. “Your father” and “your daughter” have conveyed the literal meaning but lost the mental meaning. “成道” “出家” and “还俗” are all examples of obscure religious terms under this category, and the approach of free translation has been employed to make the cultural meaning explicit. But a fly in the ointment is that “the Way” mentioned in the translation of “成道” has not been clarified. The last five illustrative terms are Chinese idioms or literary expressions. The approach of free translation is also frequently found in the translation of such words for the sake of intelligibility.

4.4.3 Transliteration

In this category, transliteration is also an important technique that has been consistently used in the translation of Mongolian names, Taoist terms, etc.

成吉思汗: Genghis Khan

铁木真: Temujin

托雷: Tolui

华箏: Khojin

阴: Yin

阳: Yang

Apart from names of Han nationality, Mongolian names account for a large portion of the novel. These names have various connotations in the original language. “成吉思汗” for example, means being in a dominant position in the world. In *Legends*, the translator has kept this transliterated version since it has been widely accepted in the English world. Other Mongolian names like “铁木真” “托雷” and “华箏” have also been transliterated without revealing their cultural meaning. “阴” and “阳” are representative concepts of ancient Chinese philosophy. Sadly, the translator simply transliterates them without offering any explanation. Similarly, “Yin” appearing in the translation of “九阴白骨爪” (Nine Yin Skeleton Claw) is not elaborated either.

4.4.4 Omission

Omission is not much used in the sample but still fetches a comparatively high figure under this category.



“奋力杀死敌兵二千余名，刺死万户长撒八孛堇、千户长、百户长一百余人……”(Jin, 1994:20)

“They killed over two thousand Jin men that day, including their highest-ranking commander.” (Holmwood, 2018:17)

“撒八” was the leader of Khitan’s revolt against the Jurchen Jin Empire, and “孛堇” refers to “commander” in the Jurchen language. “万户长” “千户长” and “百户长” are all official titles for different ranks of soldiers. In the English version, “撒八孛堇” “千户长” and “百户长” have all been omitted and “万户长” was rendered as the “highest-ranking commander”. In addition to “撒八”, names of characters with little significance for the plot have also been omitted, such as “粘没喝” and “斡不离”.

“郭靖大怒，施展擒拿手中的绞拿之法，左手向上向右，右手向下向左，双手交叉而落，一绞之下，同时拿住了那公子双腕脉门。”(Jin, 1994:267)

“Stunned, Guo Jing crossed his hands and seized the Prince’s wrists.” (Holmwood, 2018:289)

“脉门” has been omitted in the translation. “脉门” has nothing to do with a door or gate but refers to the point near the wrist where the pulse can be felt. In martial arts fiction, pressing the point forcefully can cause deadly damage.

4.4.5 Approaches with annotation

Annotations are mostly used when the cultural meaning is embedded deeply, and the translator needs to supply background knowledge to ensure a better understanding for the target reader. See the examples below.

梁山泊: the Marshes of Mount Liang

九泉之下: beneath the Nine Springs of the Underworld

伏羲六十四卦: points of the wheel from the I’Ching

内功: inner strength / neigong inner strength

外功: external skills

运气: gathering the *qi*

An annotation of these terms has been provided in the appendix. “梁山泊” is not only a place but the symbol of revolt for justice. In the original, Skyfury Guo’s ancestor was introduced as a heroin on the Marshes of Mount Liang. To reveal Guo’s identity and highlight his uprightness, the term has been kept and supplemented with a detailed explanation. “九泉之下” and “伏羲六十四卦” are also cultural expressions with classical allusions. The former is translated literally while the latter is rendered freely. However, annotation is required to convey the cultural meaning fully and faithfully. “内功” “外功” and “运气” are expressions exclusive to martial arts fiction. “外功” is translated literally, so is “内功” in the



second chapter of the novel. But in the fifth chapter, “内功” has been rendered as “neigong inner strength” employing both transliteration and literal translation. In the appendix, the Chinese phonetic letters of “外功” and a detailed interpretation of both are provided. As for “气”, an extremely abstract concept in Chinese culture, an explanation is provided with explanation in the appendix.

4.5 Translation of culture-insinuating terms

The great majority of culture-insinuating terms in the sample are courtesy titles, contemptuous titles, or terms of endearment which contain strong but obscure sentiments. Also, there are some special items whose literal meaning is misleading and extremely distinct from its cultural meaning. The distribution of translation approaches in this category is intensely different from that of the first two categories: domestication is employed for 84.44% of cultural items and only 6.67% is translated literally.

4.5.1 Literal translation

The number of terms translated literally is quite small. Below are three examples.

小鬼: you little devil

牛鼻子: (stinky old) cow muzzle

小畜生: you animal

“小鬼” and “小畜生” are both disparaging forms of address. “鬼” or “畜生” does not mean that the called person is a real devil or animal, but shows the speaker’s contempt for the addressee. Translating these culture-insinuating terms literally may not result in great obscurity. After all, “you little devil” is not a new expression in English. “牛鼻子” was used to address the Taoist Qiu Chuji, which is a disparaging title for Taoist monks as the bun over their heads looks like the muzzle of an ox. The translator chose to render the term literally and modified it with “stinky” and “old” to reflect the speaker’s sentiment.

4.5.2 Free translation

Over 75% of culture-insinuating terms are translated freely and the majority of them are contemptuous titles and terms of endearment.

是你老子: Yes, it’s me.

贼婆娘: my dear harpy / old hag / dearest crone

贼汉子: my loving bastard

你叫我一声亲哥哥: call me your beloved

“老子” has different meanings in different contexts. It can mean “a well-respected old man” in ancient Chinese, one’s father, or the Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu. Here in this context, it is a self-addressed form of arrogance. Hence the translator simply renders it into “it’s me.”



4.5.3 Amplification

The approach of amplification is seldom used; only two culture-insinuating words are being translated in this method.

梨肉好郎君: some pear, done in the style of Lord my Master

辛大人: an official of the court, His Excellency Mr. Xin

The first example “梨肉好郎君” is the name of a dessert invented by Jin Yong. As described in the novel, it is a kind of preserved fruit. To figure out what it is, we can allude to a traditional food in Fujian Province, “荔枝好郎君”, lychees preserved in salt, and “好郎君” indicates that it is usually presented as a gift by a son-in-law to his mother-in-law. By analogy, “梨肉好郎君” is pears preserved in salt. The translator tried to maintain the cultural element by adding “done in the style of Lord my Master”, but it may still be confusing to the target reader.

The second example “辛大人” refers to Xin Qiji, an outstanding poet, as well as a statesman and military activist in ancient China. “大人” here is used to address an official respectfully. The English translation has revealed his profession and conveyed the reverence in “大人”. In the annotation, a portrait of him and his poetry works mentioned in the novel are provided so that the target reader can comprehend the plot better.

5. Conclusion

By combining quantitative evidence with qualitative analysis, this paper seeks to explore the correlation between distancing degree and translation strategies and approaches applied to culture-loaded terms in martial arts fiction. The concept of distancing has provided a new perspective for formulating a new classification criterion. All cultural expressions collected have been classified in accordance with the criterion and data have been gathered correspondingly. The findings can help us to answer the three questions raised at the beginning of the paper.

First, culture-loaded terms in martial arts fiction can be categorized into four groups, i.e., culture-reflecting terms, culture-projecting terms, culture-refracting terms, and culture-insinuating terms, according to their distancing degree. This is a new criterion for classifying culture-specific terms and is also the starting point for carrying out the study from the perspective of distancing.

Second, according to the statistics obtained, both domesticating and foreignizing strategies can be found in the English translation, and approaches such as literal translation, free translation, transliteration, omission, and multi-approaches have been applied. Among the cultural terms in the sample, over half have been translated under the strategy of domestication.

Third, for the correlation between distancing degree and the choice of translation strategies and approaches, it is found that overall, the larger the distancing, the higher the proportion of domesticating strategy used in each category, except for that of culture-projecting ones which are mostly names and titles of characters. Despite their special connotations and distancing degree, characters' names and titles are frequently rendered in the method of foreignization, whether in literal translation or transliteration.



Finally, with the rise of distancing, the difference between the frequency use of domestication and foreignization is getting bigger. For culture-insinuating terms with the highest distancing, the difference has reached a peak of 77.77%. This suggests that the distancing between literal meaning and cultural meaning is highly and positively correlated with the choice of domestication. The reason is that the higher the distancing, the higher the difficulty for the target reader to comprehend culture-loaded terms. Naturally, more efforts are needed to convey the cultural meaning and domestication strategy is applied.

That said, it does not mean that domestication is more effective for translating culture-loaded terms in martial arts fiction. After all, over 38 percent of cultural expressions in the sample have been foreignized, and the combination of approaches under both strategies has reached 5.71%. Besides, annotation can be easily found in each category. Although its relevance to distancing is not obvious, it is noted that a little over half (17 of 31) of the annotations appear in the first two chapters of *Legends*. The translator may intend to offer more information to guide the reader into the novel at the beginning. But once reading gets going, annotation is not very necessary for the comprehension of cultural-loaded expressions in martial arts fiction.

Since its publication, Holmwood's translation of *She diao ying xiong zhuan* has been studied from various perspectives. The culture-loaded words in the English version have been examined from functional equivalence, reception aesthetics, semantic gap, cultural presupposition, schema theory, relevance theory, etc. While each theory provides a valid account, Liu Miqing's cultural distancing theory boasts its own analytic rigor. As he argues, the key problem of the hierarchical way in which words acquire cultural meaning is the "degree of distancing". The acquisition of cultural meaning from mapping (first-degree) to insinuation (fourth-degree) is a step-by-step process that gradually deviates from its original meaning. (2006:108). Lefevere (1981) first put forward the idea that translation is retraction (1981:71), but it is to Liu's credit that the specific degrees of retraction are differentiated. Such differentiation indicates the cultural distance and cultural fidelity between the target language and the source language, which enables us to accurately compare the fidelity of cultural items in the target language to the source language. When culture is reflected or retracted through the prism of translation, the degree of reflection or retraction of cultural factors at different levels varies greatly. The higher the distancing, the greater the cultural deviation; the smaller the distancing, the higher the cultural fidelity. The perspective of distancing emphasizes the multi-level nature of culture. It allows for a more comprehensive examination of the convergence and divergence between the source language culture and the target language culture, and demonstrates how cultural elements are transmitted and adapted through the process of translation at different cultural levels. The quantitative calculation of the cultural distance and cultural faithfulness between the source text and the target text helps us to gain a deeper insight into the translator's translation strategies and cultural positions, thus improving the quality of cultural translation.



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