

# Navigating Cross-Cultural Boundaries: Translation Strategies for Culture-Loaded Words in Chinese Yu Opera

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## Abstract

The translation of culture-loaded words is crucial in cross-cultural communication, particularly in traditional Chinese Yu Opera, which contains rich cultural nuances. Proper translation ensures the preservation of authenticity and accessibility for a global audience. Despite extensive research in other fields, the study of culture-loaded words in Yu opera translation remains scarce, highlighting the need to address this gap. This study employs a comparative analysis of the source text (ST) and target text (TT) to identify the translation strategies used by the translator. Additionally, a semi-structured interview with the translator was conducted to understand the rationale behind the chosen strategies. This dual approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the translation process and the factors influencing strategy selection. Key findings reveal that domestication is more prevalent and effective than foreignization in navigating cultural boundaries. The study highlights that the choice of translation strategy is significantly influenced by both social factors, such as the interests of different parties, and individual factors, including the translator's subjectivity. Further research could explore the impact of different cultural contexts on translation strategies in

traditional opera, conduct comparative studies across local operas, and investigate audience reception and translator training to enhance cultural sensitivity and translation quality.

**Keywords:** Cross-Cultural Boundaries, Translation Strategies, Culture-Loaded Words, Chinese Yu Opera, Culture And Translation

### Introduction

In the context of deepening economic globalization, cultural diversification, and growing interdependence among nations, China's President Xi Jinping introduced the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) in 2013 (Li, 2017). This initiative holds significant strategic importance for the realisation of "Chinese culture going global" (Zhou & Ding, 2020). The Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee also views the implementation of this initiative as a means to boost China's cultural confidence and showcase its classic cultures (Zhou, 2019).

Translation plays a pivotal role in facilitating cross-cultural communication and fostering mutual understanding among diverse societies (Venuti, 1995). However, the translation of culture-loaded words presents a unique set of challenges, as these words are deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of the source language, often lacking direct equivalents in the target language (Nida, 1964). As a result, successful translation of culture-loaded words requires a delicate balance between linguistic accuracy and cultural relevance (Nida & Taber, 1974).

Rich in cultural elements, Chinese Yu Opera, also known as Henan Opera or Henan Bangzi<sup>1</sup>, is chosen as the object of this study. It is a traditional regional opera form that holds deep cultural roots in the central Chinese province of Henan. With a history spanning several centuries, Yu Opera has evolved into one of the most celebrated performing arts traditions in China, captivating audiences with its distinctive singing style, emotive storytelling, and vibrant performances. Nevertheless, the transmission of Yu Opera culture encounters multiple challenges due to its distinctive cultural features, which are mostly conveyed via the use of culture-loaded words.

Specifically, this study aims to explore effective translation strategies for culture-loaded words found in Yu Opera *Cheng Ying Rescues the Orphan*. Through in-depth analysis of translation strategies adopted by a professional translator and factors impacting the choice of translation strategy, we seek to identify approaches that preserve the cultural nuances and meanings embedded in the original text while ensuring clear and meaningful communication in the target language.

This research holds significance in its potential to contribute to the wider domain of translation studies, with a specific focus on opera translation. By examining a prominent Chinese art form, the aim is to uncover translation strategies and the factors influencing the translation of culture-loaded words, highlighting the crucial role of cultural sensitivity and competence in bridging the gap between the source and target cultures.

The study comprises several sections: the introductory part establishes context and outlines research objectives. Following this, subsequent sections will cover related studies, the

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1. "Bangzi" meaning wooden clappers with bars of unequal length.

theoretical framework, data collection, analysis of translation strategies and their rationale, and a discussion of findings. The study will conclude by discussing implications for translation practices and future research directions in cross-cultural translation.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Definitions of Culture-Loaded Words***

Human language is profoundly influenced by culture. One manifestation of this influence is the proliferation of culture-specific expressions, customs, beliefs, situations, ideas, and traditions which are referred to as “culture specific, culture bound reference/element/terms/items/expressions, realia, [. . .] or cultural references” (Marco, 2019). Other scholars refer to the same notion as “culture-loaded words” (Li, 2018; Zhuan, 2020).

As stated by Newmark (1998), culture-loaded words include single-unit lexemes, phrases, or collocations that are intricately linked to the unique way of life and its expressions within a certain group using a particular language for communication. According to Mona Baker, it is possible for the source language term to convey an idea that is entirely unfamiliar within the target culture. The concept in question could be either abstract or concrete; it could pertain to a religious belief, a social custom, or a type of food. The aforementioned concepts are often denoted as "culture-specific" (Baker, 2018). While there may be some variation in the definitions of culture-loaded words, they all share the common characteristic of being unique to the source culture, devoid of equivalents, and possessing semantic and cultural connotations in the target culture (Amenador & Wang, 2022).

Chinese scholars also have provided their definitions of culture-loaded words. According to Hu Wenzhong (1999), culture-loaded words are defined as terms that pertain to a particular cultural context. These phenomena may be seen as either direct or indirect manifestations of cultural practises and beliefs associated with certain ethnic groups. Zhipei (1987) provided a definition of culture-loaded words as the word or phrase that encapsulates the essence of a specific socio-cultural community, representing a distinct entity or concept within the language under consideration, and consequently lacking a direct equivalent in other languages. Furthermore, as stated by Dechun (1998), culture-loaded words are lexical items that encompass the historical, cultural, and traditional aspects of a certain country where a specific language is spoken, and they prominently exhibit the distinctive attributes of the national culture.

Despite the fact that there are multiple definitions of culture-loaded words, they all pertain to the same type of words that might convey cultural connotations. Culture-loaded words possess significant cultural implications and need more consideration during the translation process .

### ***Categories of Culture-Loaded Words***

This study adopts Nida’s classification of culture-loaded words. Nida (1993) categorises culture-loaded words into five types: ecological culture-loaded words, material culture-loaded words, social culture-loaded words, linguistic culture-loaded words, and religious culture-loaded words. Descriptions of each category will be provided in the section of results of this study.

***Studies Related to the Translation of Culture-loaded words***

Western scholars previously focused on the translation of culture-specific items (CSIs). Topics covered are in the field of tourism Amenador & Wang (2023); Ling et al (2018); Rezaei & Kuhi (2014); Turzynski-Azimi (2020), literary works Chibani (2022), architecture (Bagheridoust & Mahabadi Mahabad, 2017), and others. Despite the various fields of study, authors tend to agree that neutralising techniques prevail over foreignising and domesticating ones. This is echoed by Chinese scholars who advocate a "neutralisation strategy" (Sanning, 2010), a "balanced approach" between foreignising and domesticating (Ji et al., 2022), and a "flexible" application of different methods (Liu, 2019).

Compared to their Western counterparts, Chinese scholars seem to have shown a keen interest in the study of the translation of culture-loaded words. Research areas range from films, tourist texts, novels, publicity materials, political documents, and others.

For example, Ji Chaofeng and Yifan (2022) analyzed the translation strategies applied to culture-loaded words in the film "The Last Emperor," advocating for a balanced approach between domestication and foreignisation for effective cultural communication. However, their study lacks specific strategies for achieving this balance.

Similarly, He Sanning's research (2010) explored the translation of tourist texts from Chinese to English, highlighting the inadequacy of relying solely on domestication or foreignisation. He proposed a "neutralisation strategy" to preserve Chinese culture while ensuring comprehension by the target audience. In the realm of geotourism translation, Qiang et al (2021) recommended strategies such as literal translation, transliteration, free translation, and addition, emphasizing the interdisciplinary nature of their study. These studies collectively underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of translation in tourism and geotourism, emphasizing the need for context-specific strategies to ensure effective communication across languages and cultures.

Liu (2019) conducted research on translation strategies for culture-loaded words in publicity materials, suggesting the use of various methods, including literal translation with annotation, transliteration plus notes, free translation, and ellipsis. Liu stressed the importance of flexible application to enhance foreigners' understanding of Chinese culture.

QIAN Ya-xu's investigation (2019) focused on material culture-loaded words in David Hawkes' translation of "The Story of the Stone." Hawkes utilized both foreignizing and domesticating strategies, including transliteration, literal translation, explanation, substitution, addition, subtraction, and combinations thereof, especially for culturally significant words. In a corpus-based analysis by Lin Luo (2023), the translator of the English version of the Chinese novel "Jiutu" predominantly employed a literal translation approach, resorting to equivalence when necessary. The two studies shed light on the diverse strategies employed in translating culture-loaded words in literary works.

Examining the translation of culture-loaded words in "Xi Jinping: The Governance of the Country (Volume III)," Yu-wei and Wei (2022) classified culture-loaded words into four categories and observed a preference for foreignisation strategies. These included literal

translation, free translation, transliteration with annotation, and literal translation with annotation, particularly when preserving the original material's significance.

Although scholars have devoted a lot to the study of culture-loaded words translation in different fields, it can be seen that most of them did not follow specific translation theories. Gradually, some scholars analysed culture-loaded words translation from different theoretical perspectives.

Notably, scholars have adopted diverse translation theories to analyze culture-loaded words, such as Skopos Theory and Thick Translation. Du and Ren (2018) employed Skopos Theory in the translation of Chinese political, economic, and technological information. LI and LYU (2021) applied Thick Translation theory to identify five translation strategies for culture-loaded words, including transliteration, literal translation, sense-for-sense translation, a combination of both, and translation with footnotes.

However, within the opera domain, there is a dearth of literature on the translation of culture-loaded words. Li Manying (2022) investigated the translation strategies in Peking Opera, adopting the theory of functional equivalence. This study found that free translation and substitution were commonly employed methods, aligning with the principle of functional equivalence to enhance translation quality.

So far, it can be summed up that translation strategies vary from text to text. In addition, there is considerable overlap among the translation strategies identified by authors such as He (2010); Ji and Chen (2022); Li et al (2021); Liu (2019); Lin (2023); PIAN and CHEN (2022) and the same seems to be true of most classifications outlined in previous paragraphs. But there are also divergences: some broadly focused on domesticating and foreignisation, some on free translation and literal translation, others on specific techniques.

Despite recent scholarly endeavors using various translation theories, few have addressed culture-loaded words in Yu Opera through a multidimensional approach encompassing cultural translation studies, functional equivalence, and sociocultural perspectives. Thus, this study focuses on culture-loaded words in Yu Opera, specifically analyzing the strategies used by a professional translator and identifying the influencing factors, using "Cheng Ying Rescue the Orphan" as a case study.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Previous studies rely on a single theory to explore translation strategies for culture-loaded words (Du et al., 2018; Li, 2022; LI et al., 2021; Yu, 2022). The explanation tends to be partial. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the strategies adopted and reasons for choosing a particular translation strategy, this study draws on theories of cultural translation, functional equivalence theory and social-cultural translation approaches.

### ***Cultural Translation***

Translation is an activity that usually encompasses a minimum of two languages and two cultures (Toury, 1978). This remark suggests that translators consistently encounter the challenge of addressing the cultural elements built into a source text (ST) and determining the most suitable approach to effectively communicating these elements in the target

language (TL). The complexity of these issues may differ, depending on the cultural and linguistic discrepancy between the two (or more) interconnected languages (Nida, 1964). The challenges become more evident when translation occurs across Western and non-Western cultures (Lefevere, 1999: 76, as quoted in Bassnett, 2007). It is reasonable to assert that the community of translators has consistently shown awareness of cultural deviations and their importance in the field of translation.

In cultural translation studies, it would be remiss not to mention the concept of “cultural turn” which began with Even-Zohar's work on Polysystems in 1978 and Toury's investigation of translation norms in 1980. They expanded the scope beyond language, exploring the intricate relationship between translation and culture, including how culture influences translation and imposes limitations. They also delved into broader themes like context, history, and convention in the translation process. This shift from viewing translation solely as a text to considering its cultural and political implications is known as the cultural turn in translation studies, later embraced by Bassnett and Lefevere in 1990.

Translation, language, and culture are interrelated with each other. Bassnett (2007) argues that translation is about language, but translation is also about culture because the two are inseparable. Separating language from culture is like the age-old debate about which came first, the chicken or the egg. According to Nida (1964), the translator may encounter more significant challenges due to cultural disparities compared to variations in linguistic structure.

In summary, according to Nida (1964), cultural differences pose more significant challenges for translators than linguistic variations. The notion of a cultural turn in translation studies emerged in 1979, influenced by Even-Zohar's work on polysystems and Toury's 1980 research on translation norms. This shift, known as the cultural turn, signifies a transition from perceiving translation solely as text to acknowledging its role in culture and politics.

### ***Functional Equivalence Theory***

Statham (2003) states that "functional equivalence" was introduced by Nida and de Waard in their work "From One Language to Another" as a replacement for "dynamic equivalence" to avoid potential misinterpretation. This approach emphasizes deriving conceptual significance primarily from the communication functions of language. It starts with the translator being aware of the highest linguistic levels of rhetorical structures. According to Nida (1986: 76), this approach involves a top-down method where "rhetorical functions" take priority, followed by "rhetorical processes," "grammatical meaning," and finally "lexical meaning." Nida highlights the importance of prioritizing meaning equivalence over form equivalence.

The functional equivalence approach demands that translators possess extensive skills, linguistic proficiency, and prior literary knowledge. They must identify the closest equivalents in their target languages by drawing from their understanding of culturally bound rhetorical forms in both the source and target languages. Nida and de Waard assert that functional equivalence involves the translation of a source text element into its closest natural equivalent in the target language, first in terms of meaning and second in terms of form.



### ***Sociocultural Translation***

Traditional approaches to social and cultural translation primarily focus on textual research methods (Brisset, 1990; Gouanvic, 1999; Nida, 1996). The sociology of the translator has received limited attention in these approaches. Toury (1995) applied sociological norms to descriptive translation studies, viewing them as patterns in human behavior. Lefevere's 2016 work explored power dynamics between translators and patrons. Additionally, Venuti's 1995 study delved into the social consequences of specific translation norms and their impact on cross-cultural inequalities. Despite these efforts, a comprehensive "sociology of translation" framework has yet to gain widespread legitimacy.

Vermeer (1978; 1989; 1996a; 1984); Manttari (1984) take functionalist approaches, acknowledging translators' ability to negotiate with clients. They prioritize studying social relationships over textual analysis. In the realm of interpreting, there is a greater emphasis on mediators and their social contexts compared to textual translation. The interpreter's position is inherently visible, making it hard to ignore their social network. There has been a shift from focusing solely on texts to examining mediators. We now seek deeper insights into the individuals, entities, networks, and societal consequences involved in the mediation process.

Relations between peoples are shaped by various factors, including social aspects like translation statistics, censorship, and publication costs, as well as cultural factors like translator strategies, the role of text, representations of different cultures, academic disciplines, and postcolonial discourse, all influencing the translation process (Toury, 1998).

In summary, cultural translation theory highlights the intricate relationship between language and culture, focusing on the challenges of conveying cultural elements across linguistic divides. Functional equivalence theory ensures translations preserve the original text's intended meaning and communicative function. Sociocultural translation approaches broaden this perspective by examining the social and cultural contexts that shape translation practices, viewing translators as mediators navigating complex socio-cultural landscapes. Together, these theories offer a comprehensive framework for understanding the strategies and challenges in translating culture-loaded words in Chinese Yu Opera, ensuring both linguistic accuracy and cultural relevance.

### **Materials and Methods**

Data for this study were collected from a native Chinese professional translator accredited by the China Translators Association (CTA). The translator holds a master's degree in translation and interpreting, has over twenty years of translation practice, and is currently pursuing a doctorate in translation and interpreting.

The translations undergo a two-step review process. Initially, two native English speakers, employed as foreign language teachers at a Chinese university, assess the language readability. Subsequently, two translation professors evaluate the translation quality. These peer review procedures are designed to ensure the overall quality of the translation product.

Thirty-two arias from the Yu Opera "Cheng Ying Rescues the Orphan" are translated and analyzed, focusing on culture-loaded words. The source text contains 2,566 Chinese

characters, amounting to 14 A4-sized pages. We used Tmxmall online matching software to align the source and target texts, exporting them as TXT files for storage. Ultimately, we identified five types of culture-loaded words using the software's search function, totaling 130 examples, from which samples were selected for analysis.

To investigate factors impacting the translator's choice of strategy, a semi-structured interview is conducted. The interview is audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed thematically.

### Results and Discussion

Results include the translator's translation strategy and factors impacting choice of strategy which will be presented below. For the convenience of presentation, source text in Chinese character is represented in ST1, and source text in Chinese pinyin is represented in ST2. If another translation is suggested, it is represented in TT2 to differentiate from the original translation represented in TT1.

Before discussion, distinction between strategy and methods is made. Translation method refers to the way a particular translation process is carried out in terms of the translator's objective. Strategies refer to the procedures by which the translator addresses problems that may arise during the course of translating.(Hurtado Albir 1996, 1999, as cited in Molina & Hurtado Albir, 2002).

### *Strategies for translating culture-loaded words in Yu Opera*

Translation strategies and methods are manually counted and shown in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3.

Table 1

#### *The Percentage of Translation Methods in Foreignisation*

Translation methods	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Literal translation	47	79.66
Literal translation plus annotation	2	3.39
Transliteration	6	10.17
Transliteration plus annotation	4	6.78
Total	59	100

Table 2

#### *The Percentage of Translation Methods in Domestication*

Translation methods	Frequency	Percentage (%)
free translation	51	71.83
Substitution	5	7.04
Omission	15	21.13
Total	71	100



Table 3

*The Percentage of Translation Strategies*

Translation methods	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Foreignisation	59	45
Domestication	71	55
Total	130	100

In Table 1, literal translation in foreignisation is the most common approach, at 79.66%, preserving the original Chinese culture without altering its form for the target readers. According to Table 2, the translator predominantly uses free translation (71.83%) for culture-loaded words in the opera. This choice ensures readability, acceptance, and audience understanding (Li, 2022). In Table 3, out of 130 culture-loaded words, 59 (45%) use foreignisation, with the rest mainly favoring domestication (55%). Higher percentage of domestication in the translation of culture-loaded words in the librettos of the Yu Opera *Cheng Ying Rescues the Orphan* contradicts with previous findings which suggest “neutralising”, “balanced”, or “flexible” techniques (Amenador & Wang, 2023; Khye Ling et al., 2018; Ji et al., 2022; Liu, 2019; and others).

In his book "The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation," Venuti (1995) proposed domestication and foreignisation as two primary translation strategies for handling linguistic and cultural differences. Domestication is an ethnocentric approach that aligns the foreign text with target-language cultural values, while foreignisation applies pressure on these values to maintain linguistic and cultural differences in the foreign text. Foreignisation preserves cultural nuances but can be challenging for specific terms. In such cases, domestication minimizes foreign elements but sacrifices some cultural identity. When translating the Yu Opera libretto, the choice between domestication and foreignisation is crucial. Domestication may suit fast subtitles, prioritizing audience readability and understanding. In the context of “China's cultural going global” initiative, professional translators may resort to foreignisation to promote Chinese culture. Previous researchers suggest that neither approach is universally effective, advocating a flexible integration of multiple methods (HE, 2010; Ji et al., 2022; Liu, 2019; Qian, 2019).

*Translation methods of Ecological Culture-loaded Words*

Ecological culture-loaded words refer to the environmental and geographic features of a specific region (Xia, 2020), highlighting the connection between humans and nature. In China, a nation historically reliant on agriculture, names often carry cultural significance. Translating these words often involves free translation due to cultural disparities, which can obscure the original text's meaning for the audience.

## Example 1

ST1: 心头山始终压着一座山

ST2: xīn tóu shàng shǐ zhōng yā zhe yī zuò shān

TT: A huge pressure never released from my mind.

In Chinese culture, "shān" holds various connotations, including "tough times and enormous pressure." Many associate "xīn tóu shàng shǐ zhōng yā zhe yī zuò shān" with the grandeur of mountains. In this context, "shān" reflects Cheng Ying's immense strain over sixteen years caring for the orphan. However, this term lacks a specific English equivalent, potentially

causing confusion. Therefore, the functional equivalence theory guides the use of free translation to enhance foreign audience comprehension of Cheng Ying's emotions.

#### Example 2

ST1: 忧孤儿刚落地即陷深渊

ST2: yōu gū ér gāng luò dì jí xiàn **shēn yuān**

TT: It's so worrisome that the new born orphan's life is at stake.

In this case, the Chinese term "shēn yuān" carries rich cultural connotations, signifying a difficult situation or dilemma, despite its literal meaning of "deep water" or "chasm" in English. To enhance target-language readers' comprehension and achieve functional equivalence, the translator employed free translation to reduce the foreignness of the source-language text.

#### *Translation methods of Material Culture-loaded Words*

Material culture-loaded words in Yu Opera, which refer to human-made goods and technologies like crafts and structures (Xia, 2020), can be translated through free translation or omission.

#### Example 3

ST1: 等孤儿回书房打开天窗

ST2: děng gū ér huí shū fáng **dǎ kāi tiān chuāng**

TT: Waiting for the orphan back to tell him the truth openly.

"Tiān chuāng" refers to a roof window for ventilation and light in old buildings. "Dǎ kāi tiān chuāng" literally means "open the window to let light in." In idiomatic Chinese, it's typically used in the phrase "dǎ kāi tiān chuāng shuō liàng huà," meaning to have an open and honest conversation. In this case, a direct translation like "open the roof window" isn't suitable. Instead, the translator used free translation to convey "tell the orphan openly about the truth" first in terms of meaning (Nida, 1986).

#### *Translation methods of Social Culture-loaded Words*

Societies differ in their historical accumulations and traditions (Nunn, 2012). Social culture deeply influences daily life, with certain words and names holding significant connotations. Methods such as free translation, substitution, explication, and annotation are commonly employed to improve comprehension of social cultures and enhance the viewing experience.

#### Example 4

ST1: 仁兄你黄泉路上耐心等

ST2: rén xiōng nǐ **huáng quán lù shàng** nài xīn děng

TT: My dear bro, please wait for me on the way to heaven.

In Chinese culture, "huáng quán" refers to the underworld, intricately connected to burial practices. When digging tombs in China's Central Plains, water mixed with loess is often encountered, referred to as "huáng quán" or yellow water. This term represents the realm believed to be inhabited by the deceased. To make this concept more accessible to foreign readers, the translator has opted for free translation, substituting "huáng quán lù shàng" with "on the way to heaven." This approach requires a high level of proficiency in both languages and cultures, aligning with the functional equivalence approach proposed by Nida (1986), which prioritises meaning over form.

## Example 5

ST1: 我程婴绝了后代根，我绝了后代根

ST2: wǒ chéng yīng jué le hòu dài gēn, wǒ jué le hòu dài gēn

TT: Me, Chengying, I made my son killed. I, hence, severed my family line.

In traditional Chinese culture, "hòu dài gēn" refers to the male successor responsible for continuing the ancestral lineage. In the source text, the implicit gender reference might be clear to Chinese readers but less so to Western audiences without a Chinese cultural background. The translator skillfully included "I made my son killed" in the translation to make it more accessible to Western readers, following Venuti's idea of "sending the reader abroad" (1995). Additionally, a literal translation strategy was employed for "jué le hòu dài gēn," rendering it as "severed my family line," accentuating Cheng Ying's grief, despair, and powerlessness after losing his son. This use of literal translation, a form of foreignisation, aligns with Nico Wiersema's (2004) perspective on effectively promoting source culture to global audiences.

## Example 6

ST1: 喜新主登基天地变

ST2: xǐ xīn zhǔ dēng jī tiān dì biàn

TT: Comfortably, the new King ascends the throne, bringing a great change to his regime.

In ancient China, "dēng jī" signified the emperor's ascension to supreme authority, while "tiān dì biàn" represented transformations under heaven. As dynasties changed, newly enthroned emperors altered year counting and reign designations to mark new eras. Due to screen size, audience reading speed, and text complexity, the translator couldn't elaborate on these details (de Linde, 1995). This instance involves a combination of literal and free translation methods, as recommended by scholars He (2010); Ji et al (2022); Li et al (2021); Liu (2019); Qian (2019), since relying solely on domestication or foreignisation is insufficient; both strategies complement each other.

*Translation methods of Linguistic Culture-loaded Words*

Chinese and English belong to distinct language families: Chinese falls under the Sino-Tibetan family, while English is part of the Indo-European family (Matisoff, 1991:469; van Driegen, 1997: 455). Unlike English, Chinese, particularly in idiomatic expressions, often employs a four-character syntactic structure with nuanced connotations. This can pose challenges for Western readers in grasping their intended meanings. Baker (2018) notes that the source language may contain culturally-specific concepts unfamiliar to the target culture, often requiring free translation as the preferred method for handling culture-loaded words.

## Example 7

ST1: 生怕你有个三长并两短

ST2: shēng pà nǐ yǒu gè sān cháng bìng liǎng duǎn

TT1: If you contract some unexpected misfortunes, ...

"Sān cháng bìng liǎng duǎn" is often simplified to "sān cháng liǎng duǎn," which contains two numbers: "sān" for "three" and "liǎng" for "two." Additionally, "cháng" means "long," and "duǎn" means "short." Translating "sān cháng liǎng duǎn" directly as "three longs and two shorts" can be confusing. For Chinese speakers, this four-character idiom carries vague meaning, and the translation as "unexpected misfortunes" in the target text may not clarify the sense. It appears the translator successfully employed free translation to convey the

idiom's meaning in English. This translation prioritizes equivalence of meaning over equivalence of form, as per Nida's principle 1986. Grammatically, the simple present tense in the target text's first condition can be replaced by the third condition with an inverted structure to convey an unwanted situation.

TT2: Should you contract some unexpected misfortunes, ...

#### *Translation methods of Religious Culture-loaded Words*

Religious culture may be seen as an ideological construct that emerges from the historical development of a country (Berger, 1969). While religion is rarely a popular topic for translation study in the modern Chinese context, literal translation can still be used to convey the religious meaning of the source text to the audience.

#### Example 8

ST1: 京郊外青酒祭英贤

ST2: jīng jiāo wài qīng jiǔ jì yīng xián

TT: I'll sacrifice the virtuous souls with wine in the capital suburb.

Over China's 5,000-year history, sacrifice has transformed from early innate behavior to a prevalent cultural practice in contemporary society (Qu et al., 2005). Sacrificial offerings hold distinctive cultural significance across various historical and cultural contexts. This explains the translator's use of a literal translation, rendering "qīng jiǔ jì yīng xián" as "sacrifice the virtuous souls with wine."

#### *Translation methods of Other Culture-loaded Words*

While processing the source texts, we identified a category of culture-loaded words that defy easy categorization, necessitating their placement in the "Other" group for analysis. These words relate to self-deprecating expressions and terms of respect, concepts that are largely unfamiliar in the target culture and often lack English equivalents (Baker, 2018). Translating such expressions and terms from Chinese to English typically involves omission, resulting in inevitable loss of meaning.

#### Example 9

ST1: 我再叫了声我的公孙仁兄啊

ST2: wǒ zài jiào le shēng wǒ de gōng sūn rén xiōng ā

TT: Calling the name of my good brother, Gongsun

In old usage, "rén xiōng" is a respectful term for same-generation friends, similar to "my dear friend" in letters. In modern Chinese, especially in speech, "brother" is often abbreviated to "bro" in casual conversations, but it lacks the intimacy of close friends. "rén xiōng" can also respectfully address an "elder brother." In the Yu Opera libretto, Cheng Ying and Gongsun Chujiu are close friends, almost like blood brothers, so the translator used "good brother" for "rén xiōng." For example, "yú dì" is translated as "me" using the same approach. In essence, even if translated as "my dear friend," the beauty and expressiveness of the Chinese language may still be lost. It can be said translating self-deprecating expressions and terms of respect from Chinese into English poses great challenges to the translator not only because of the language disparities but also due to cultural differences (Lefevere, 1999; Nida, 1964).

**Factors Affecting Translator’s Choice of Strategy**

This research employs conventional social and cultural approaches for translating Yu Opera, involving the analysis and comparison of source and target texts (Brisset, 1990; Gouanvic, 1999; Nida, 1996).

In the context of the "Chinese culture going global" initiative and cultural confidence-building, translators serve as bridges connecting diverse peoples, languages, and cultures. They operate within a complex framework, including the interests of policy makers, opera's performability, producer and actor requirements, and audience acceptance (Manttari, 1984; Vermeer,1978; 1989; 1996a; 1984).

Table 4 shows the main results of the interview conducted on the factors that influence translators' choice of specific translation strategies. There are two types of factors: social factors and individual factors. For the social category, there are three themes identified: national policy, performability of the opera (producer and actor), and intelligibility of the views/readers. For the individual category, two themes were identified: competence and subjectivity. Under the theme of competence, three codes were generated, including language knowledge, cultural knowledge, and translation knowledge.

Table 4

*Category of factors affecting strategy choice*

Categories	Themes	Codes
Social	National policy	Need of the policy maker
	Performability	Requirement of the producer and actor
	Intelligibility	Acceptability of the viewers
Individual	Competence	Linguistic knowledge
		Cultural knowledge
	Subjectivity	Translation knowledge Personal preference

*Social factor*

Social factors can be associated with relations between people and these factors affect translator’s action (Tourey, 1998). Table 5 presents three social factors that affect the translator’s choice of strategy.

Table 5

*Social Factors*

Theme	Code	Content
National policy	Need of the policy maker	Chinese culture going global Cultural confidence
Performability	Requirement of the producer and actor	Lines that reflect plots Lines suitable for singing
Intelligibility	Acceptability of the viewers	Ability of the viewer to understand the opera

Table 5 shows that as a professional translator, her decision to choose a certain translation strategy is influenced by the nation's policymakers, the opera producer, the actor, and the viewer. As the Chinese translator stated, "I am not unaware of the social context of opera translation." While exporting Chinese opera culture to a world audience, the translator has to consider their ability to understand some cultural concepts typical in Chinese as "they might not have related knowledge of the language and culture." The translator further recalled, "If the target text is too long, it will be unfriendly to the actor and will also increase the viewer's mental effort for comprehension." The details of the transcripts are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

*Need of the policy maker, producer and actor, and the viewer*

Code	Content	Transcript
Need of the policy maker	Chinese culture going global Cultural confidence	T: As a professional translator engaged in translation practice for many years, I am not unaware of the social context of opera translation. As we know, Chinese leaders are advocating cultural confidence and supporting Chinese culture going global.
Requirement of the producer and actor	Lines that reflect plots Lines suitable for singing	T: In the process of translation opera libretto, I was in a dilemma, if the target text is too long, it will be unfriendly to the actor and may not reflect the plot.
Acceptability of the viewer	Ability of the viewer to understand the opera	T: Further more, it will also increase the viewer's mental effort for comprehension as they might not have related knowledge of the language and culture.

#### *Individual factor*

The individual factors are conceptualised into two themes, namely, competence and subjectivity, which are presented in Table 7 and Table 8. Table 7 shows the components and the importance of competence. The translator emphasised the importance of language knowledge, culture knowledge, and translation related knowledge in the interview. The translator said, "To provide quality translation, I have to be proficient in both languages and be sensitive to cultural differences." Further more, the translator stressed the importance of professional training. As translation competence is not the focus of this study, it will not be fully discussed. Readers can refer to great works by Campbell (1991); Lesznyák (2007); Presas (2000), and many others.



Table 7

*Translator's competence*

Code	Content	Transcription
Linguistic knowledge	Chinese language knowledge English language knowledge	T: I do two way translation between Chinese and English. To provide quality translation, I have to be proficient in both languages.
Cultural knowledge	Chinese culture English culture	T: Translation means translating culture. You have to be, you know, to be sensitive to cultural differences.
Translation knowledge	Translation approaches, strategies, methods, etc.	T: In my opinion, not every learner that is proficient in two languages and two cultures can do translation. It is best for him or her to have been trained with translation theories, strategies, methods, and perhaps, better to know how to use translation soft wares.

Apart from being capable of doing translation because the translator is equipped with the required knowledge and skill, subjective factors are also found in the interview. According to the translator, choosing which translation strategy “has something to do with personal habit” and the translator is “aware of the different results of various translation strategies”. Translators always possess a wide array of strategies to translate cultural specifics, and the choice of strategy used will influence how the target culture perceives and embraces the source culture (Ramière, 2006). Table 8 shows the subjectivity of the translator.

Table 8

*Translator's subjectivity in strategy choice*

Code	Content	Transcription
Personal preference	Different strategy choice	T: This is an interesting question. I think this has something to do with, what we call translator style. Frankly speaking, I always try different translation strategy. It has something to do with my translation habit and I am aware of the different results of various translation strategies.

**Conclusion**

This article mainly delves into the translation strategies of culture-loaded words in Chinese Yu Opera against the background of “Chinese culture going global” initiative.

The study identifies the relevance of Nida's functional equivalence theory in English translations of culture-loaded words in Chinese Yu Opera. Bassnett's insights on language-culture relationships are foundational for rendering these words in English. Venuti's domestication and foreignisation strategies shed light on the translation process. Generally,

translators prefer domestication or free translation, but foreignisation or literal translation is also used to promote Chinese culture. Translating culture-loaded words presents challenges, particularly in cross-cultural translation between Western and non-Western cultures, as noted by Lefevere.

Second, this study highlights the necessity of using various translation strategies for culture-loaded words in Yu Opera. Seven primary translation methods are identified: free translation, substitution, omission, literal translation, literal translation with annotation, transliteration, and transliteration with annotation. Material culture-loaded words are often translated using free translation or omission. Social culture-loaded words are typically translated with free translation and annotation, while linguistic culture-loaded words use free translation and substitution. Religious culture-loaded words may employ literal translation. Respect and self-deprecating terms are usually omitted. Overall, free translation is the dominant method. Translators must select from these strategies based on linguistic context and word characteristics to achieve functional equivalence, ensuring foreign audiences fully grasp the script's intended meaning and the allure of traditional Chinese culture.

Third, we interviewed the translator to understand her strategic choices. The translator noted that strategy preference can be subjective and emphasized the importance of a deep understanding of language, culture, and translation. She also stressed the need to consider the social and cultural context of their work.

Finally, given that this paper focuses on a single opera's libretto, which falls within specialised translation, the results may not apply to other text types. Overlaps in culture-loaded words categories may lead to some repeated analysis. Future research can explore opera's rhyme and rhythm to examine how professional translators maintain or alter rhythmic effects in translation. The extensive use of four-character idioms in this opera's libretto also merits attention from future researchers.

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