

A Study of Culture-Specific Items in *Rickshaw: The Novel Lo-to Hsiang Tzu*, from the Perspective of Aixelá's Theory

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Abstract

Culture-specific items, serving as a bridge between two cultures, have long been a focal point in translation studies. In 1996, Javier Franco Aixelá proposed a widely recognized definition and classification system for culture-specific items, along with corresponding translation strategies, significantly advancing research in this field. *Luotuo Xiangzi*, written by Lao She (1899–1966), is one of the most iconic works of modern Chinese literature. Since its publication, *Luotuo Xiangzi* has garnered international attention and has been translated into four English versions. Among these, Jean M. James's translation stands out for its recognition and inclusion in prominent American university libraries.

Despite this, research on James's translation remains limited, particularly regarding her handling of culture-specific items. To address this gap, the present study, guided by Aixelá's theoretical framework, conducts a comprehensive analysis of James's culture-specific items translation strategies and the challenges she faced in translating culturally bound expressions from Chinese into English. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the study identifies key factors influencing James's translation decisions and explains major challenges in dealing with Chinese culture-specific items. The findings reveal James's preference for conservative-oriented strategies over substitution-oriented strategies, reflecting her tendency to preserve cultural nuances rather than replace them with target culture equivalents. This study provides new insights into the practical application of Aixelá's theory in Chinese-English literary translation and highlights the complexities of cross-cultural translation practices.

Keywords: culture-specific items, translation strategies, Aixelá, E-C translation

1. Introduction

Luotuo Xiangzi, written by Lao She, is a representative work of the author and a renowned Chinese novel. Alexander Brede, a renowned literary critic, highly praised the book, asserting that it deserves the same status in world literature as *Les Misérables*. The novel has been translated into four English versions: *Rickshaw Boy* by Evan King in 1945, *Rickshaw: The Novel Lo-to Hsiang Tzu* by James in 1979, *Camel Xiangzi* by Shi Xiaojing in 1981, and *Rickshaw Boy: A Novel* by Howard Goldblatt in 2010 (Liu & Li, 2021).

The novel contains a wealth of culture-specific items. Lao She (1899–1966), originally named Shu Qingchun, is a prominent modern Chinese writer, novelist, and renowned language expert who has made profound contributions to Chinese literary history. As a native of Beijing and a descendant of the Manchu, he has a profound understanding of Manchu culture and the Beijing dialect. His mastery in depicting traditional culture, Manchu customs, and the sentiments of literati through the Beijing dialect adds to the novel's richness. Consequently, the translation of culture-specific items in *Luotuo Xiangzi* merits detailed exploration.

Cultural studies have consistently occupied a central position in translation research, as the fundamental purpose of translation is to facilitate cultural exchange. The cultural turn in translation studies highlights that language is not merely a symbolic construct but also a vessel for cultural expression. Translators, therefore, are not just practitioners of linguistic transfer but also cultural mediators (Peng & Lu, 2016, pp. 141–143). In 1990, André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett introduced the concept of the cultural turn in translation studies in the preface to their book *Translation, History, and Culture*. They argued that language is an integral component of culture and emphasized their interdependence. This perspective underscores the vital role of culture in translation studies.

The concept of cultural translation was first proposed by Eugene A. Nida, who defined it as the replacement of source language cultural expressions with those of the target language's cultural norms. Inspired by Nida, Spanish translator Javier Franco Aixelá introduced the concept of culture-specific items in his 1996 work *Culture-Specific Items in Translation*. Aixelá defined culture-specific items as textually realized items whose functions and connotations in the source text present translation challenges due to the absence of equivalent items or differing intertextual statuses in the target cultural system (Shokri & Ketabi, 2015, pp. 3–16).

Derived from an analysis of three Spanish translations of an English text, Aixelá proposed 11 strategies for handling culture-specific items, based on varying degrees of cross-cultural manipulation (Aixelá, 1996, pp. 57–59). His framework has provided valuable guidance for translation research. Wang Kefei and Wang Yingchong have noted that among works on cultural term translation, Aixelá's contribution is particularly influential, offering practical insights for translating culture-specific items (Wang & Wang, 2016, pp. 87–93).

The corpora of this study comprise *Luotuo Xiangzi* and James' translation, *Rickshaw: The Novel Lo-to Hsiang Tzu*. Over the past 20 years, academic research on the English translations of *Luotuo Xiangzi* has primarily focused on the translation procedures of three other translations. However, scholarly exploration of culture-specific items in James' translation remains insufficient. This thesis, guided by Aixelá's theoretical framework, aims to examine the strategies employed by Jean M. James in dealing with culture-specific items and to explore the reasons behind these choices. Furthermore, it seeks to shed light on the challenges inherent in translating Chinese culture-specific items.

2. Research Questions

- What are the translation strategies used by Jean M. James in dealing with culture-specific items in *Luotuo Xiangzi* according to Aixelá's theory?
- What are the challenges in translating culture-specific items in *Luotuo Xiangzi*?
- Why does Jean M. James choose these translation strategies to deal with the Culture-specific items in *Luotuo Xiangzi* according to Aixelá's theory?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Culture-Specific Items

The translation of culture-specific items presents significant challenges as it conveys not only lexical meaning but also underlying cultural connotations. Aixelá defines culture-specific items as textual elements whose transfer to the target text poses problems due to their nonexistence or differing status in the target culture. Culture-specific items depend on their function in the source text and their acceptability in the target culture, potentially creating ideological or cultural opacity for readers (Aixelá, 1996, p. 57).

As shown in Figure 1, Aixelá identifies two primary difficulties in translating culture-specific items: (1) the absence of equivalents in the target language and (2) differing textual significance in the target culture (Aixelá, 1996, p. 58). He categorizes culture-specific items into proper nouns and common expressions. Proper nouns include conventional names with no inherent meaning and loaded names with cultural or emotional connotations. Common expressions, on the other hand, involve cultural objects, institutions, or habits that are specific to the source culture (Aixelá, 1996, p. 59).

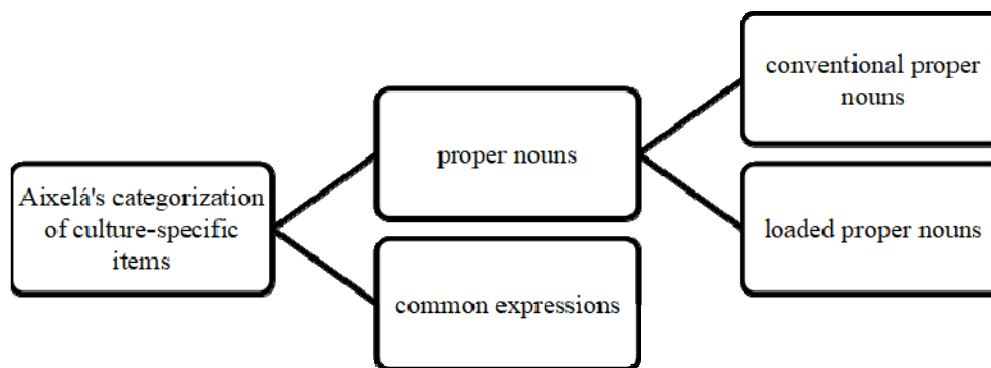


Figure 1. Categorization of culture-specific items by Aixelá (Aixelá, 1996, p. 59).

The following Figure 2 explains that Aixelá's framework classifies translation strategies for culture-specific items into conservation and substitution. Conservation strategies include repetition, orthographic adaptation, linguistic translation, and glosses (intratextual/extratextual), preserving the source culture. Substitution strategies, such as synonymy, universalization, naturalization, deletion, and autonomous creation, adapt or replace culture-specific items to suit target readers' cultural norms (Aixelá, 1996, pp. 61–62).

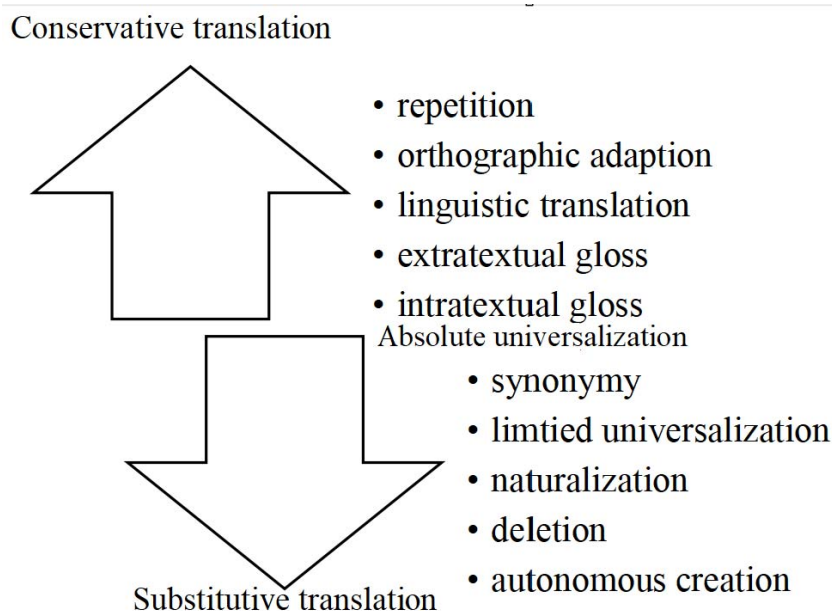


Figure 2. The relationship between substitution translation strategies and conservative translation strategies

Aixelá also identifies factors influencing strategy choice: extratextual factors (e.g., sociolinguistic norms and reader expectations), textual factors (e.g., imagery and text canonization), CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS nature (e.g., transparency and ideological status), and intratextual factors (e.g., item importance and textual coherence) (Aixelá, 1996, pp. 65–70).

3.2 Culture-Specific Items in *Luotuo Xiangzi*

Scholars researching the English translations of culture-specific items in *Luotuo Xiangzi* focus on translation procedures they normally employ relevance and polysystem theory and interest in aspects including domestication vs. foreignization, literal vs. free translation, and fidelity vs. treason. Several scholars have contributed to this field.

Guo Li (2013, pp. 93–94) compares name translations in Evan King, Shi Xiaoqing, and James' versions based on domestication and foreignization theories, highlighting differences in translation orientations.

Zhang Junmin (2016, pp. 72–73) analyzes cultural factors in Evan King, Howard Goldblatt, and Shi Xiaoqing's translations from a relevance theory perspective, noting varying degrees of foreignization and domestication. Wang Qingmei (2016, pp. 52–55) analyzed idiom translation strategies, concluding that Howard Goldblatt's translation retained the cultural characteristics of the original text. Li Sufang (2016, pp. 28–29) examines translation strategies of culture-loaded words in *Rickshaw Boy* by Howard Goldblatt and Shi Xiaoqing using polysystem theory, identifying Goldblatt's foreignization inclination and Xiaoqing's domestication tendency. The research conducted by Zhang Chen (2017, pp. 202–203) focuses on translating culture-specific items in Evan King's *Rickshaw Boy* using cultural translation theory. Fu Dandan's analysis of Howard Goldblatt's translation suggests prioritizing reader engagement by considering their expectations and reconstructing text structures to evoke subjective motivation, emphasizing a reader-centered method (2022, pp. 2–3).

3.3 James' Contribution in Translation

Many American readers have found that Evan King's translation deviates significantly from Lao She's original work. Numerous readers have expressed their shock at discovering that the translator, to cater to Western readers' tastes, altered the tragic ending of *Rickshaw Boy* into a joyful, happy conclusion—something they found utterly

unacceptable (Liu & Li, 2021, pp. 58–67).

James, who holds a PhD in Literature from the University of Iowa, has dedicated years to the study of Chinese language and literature. She has translated two of Lao She's works, *Rickshaw Boy* and *Mr. Ma and Son*, as well as a large number of Chinese poems. Her expertise in translating Chinese novels and poetry is widely recognized (Liu & Li, 2021, pp. 58–67).

To ensure the authenticity and authority of her translation, James consulted the first edition of *Rickshaw Boy*, published in 1939. She emphasized that her translation remains faithful to the original text, with no omissions or alterations. If any additions were made, they were solely to aid English readers in understanding cultural references and idiomatic expressions that might otherwise be difficult for those unfamiliar with Chinese. As a result, her translation serves as a reliable academic resource for studying Lao She's work (Sun, 2013, pp. 40–50).

4. Research Gap

Research on the English translations of culture-specific items in *Luotuo Xiangzi* remains inadequate with no comprehensive studies covering all four translations. Despite its significant role in introducing Lao She's masterpiece to Western audiences, Jean M. James's translation has been received little scholarly attention and few scholars have conducted dedicated research on culture-specific items in her translation as most scholars have focused on the other three versions. James's translation not only preserves cultural nuances and social criticism but also fosters cross-cultural understanding and enhances academic interest in Chinese literature. By capturing Lao She's blend of humor and tragedy, her work has expanded the novel's international reach and impact, establishing it as a key text in the global study of modern Chinese literature (Sun, 2013, pp. 40–50).

There is limited discourse analysis on the English translations of culture-specific items in *Luotuo Xiangzi*. Some scholars have analyzed the rewriting of translations by using translation norms theories, such as Zhao Wenjing and Sun Jing (2012, pp. 228–230) who analyzed Evan King's rewriting principles using Toury's norms theory but most research focuses on translation procedures, with few studies examining why translators choose these translation strategies to deal with culture-specific items and the challenges they face.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design and Samples

This thesis is a descriptive qualitative research aiming to provide a deep understanding of James' translation of *Luotuo Xiangzi*, including the translation strategies of culture-specific items, the reasons for choosing these translation strategies and the challenges in translating Chinese culture-specific items. According to Holmes's classification of translation studies in *The Name and Nature of Translation Studies* 1988, this study is product-oriented research, therefore case study will be employed as the research strategy to describe specific strategies. Also, this research employs tables to quantify the number of translation strategies applied to different types of culture-specific items.

The sampling strategy of the case study is criterion sampling. To avoid subjectivity, the researcher selected culture-specific items based on Aixelá's definition. *Luotuo Xiangzi* has 24 chapters. After selection, the researcher found that 112 culture-specific items could correspond to James' translation. So the sample size of the case study is 112 culture-specific items and their translations.

5.2 Instrument

Based on Aixelá's taxonomy of culture-specific items, the table of culture-specific items categories and translation strategy is designed to collect the data. A total of two tables are created according to the two cultural categories. Each table is composed of four columns, with four elements: word number, Chinese source text, English target text, and the translation strategies used in translating culture-specific items. Examples of Table 1 and 2 are shown below.

Table 1. Example of proper nouns of culture-specific items

No.	Source Text	Target Text	Translation Strategy
1	瑞蚨祥(Ruì Fú Xiáng)	Long established shops in Peking	Deletion
2	腊八(Là Bā)	January 8 th	Linguistic (non-cultural) translation
3	颐和园(Yí Hé Yuán)	Summer Palace	Absolute universalization

Table 2. Example of common expressions of culture-specific items

No.	Source Text	Target Text	Translation Strategy
1	跟我犯牛脖子(bá chuāng mài lì qì)	Getting bullheaded with me.	Linguistic (non-cultural) translation
2	拔创卖力气(bá chuāng mài lì qì)	A fine fellow without ties or hindrances.	Absolute universalization
3	顺水推舟(shùn shuǐ tuī zhōu)	We'll pole a boat with the current.	Absolute universalization

5.3 Procedures of Data Collection

- The first step is to extract the culture-specific items from Luotuo Xiangzi and James' translation. Then a bilingual corpus will be created.
- The second step involves classifying the culture-specific items, according to Aixelá's (1996, p. 59). Culture-specific items can be classified into proper nouns and common expressions. The translation difficulties associated with different types of culture-specific items will then be analyzed.
- The third step involves analyzing the translation strategies employed by the translator in the two types of culture-specific items.
- The fourth step involves calculating the frequency of translation strategies used by the translators. This analysis helps us to identify which translation strategy is used more often. Does the conservative translation have more presence, or does the substitutive translation present more frequently?

6. Results

6.1 The Categories of Culture-Specific Items

After analyzing the 112 culture-specific items in James' translation, it was found that the largest proportion is common expressions, totaling 67 instances and accounting for 60% of the total. Following closely were proper nouns, with 45 instances making up 40% of the total count.

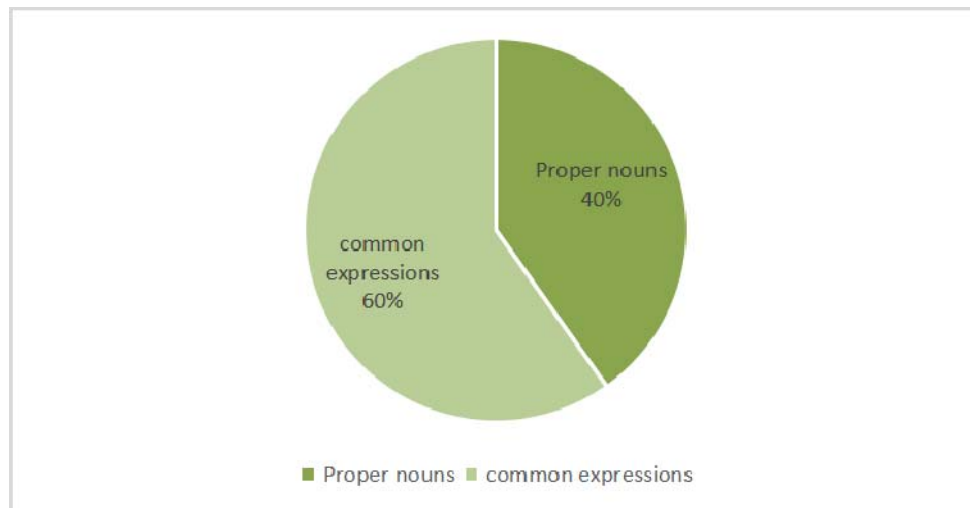


Figure 3. The types of culture-specific items in James's translation

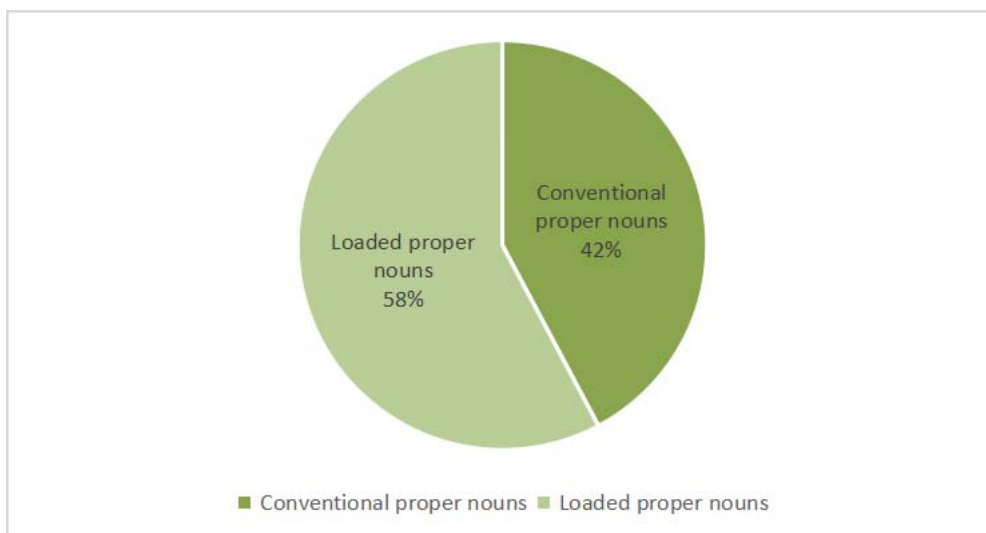


Figure 4. The types of proper nouns

Based on the detailed classification of proper nouns, it is observed that out of the 45 proper nouns, there are relatively fewer conventional proper nouns, totaling 19 instances and accounting for 42% of the total in Figure 4. These mostly comprise place names in the source text. On the other hand, loaded proper nouns have a larger share, with 26 instances and constituting 58% of the total. In the source text, these loaded proper nouns consist mainly of personal names, place names with special connotations and festivals.

6.2 Translation Strategies

Figure 5 shows that the most common strategy used by James to translate culture-specific items is linguistic (non-cultural) translation, with a total of 39 instances. This is followed closely by the use of absolute universalization with 28 cases. With 12, 18 and 13 instances respectively, deletion, orthographic adaptation and intratextual gloss translation are nearly equal in frequency. The least frequently used strategy is naturalization, with only 3 instances.

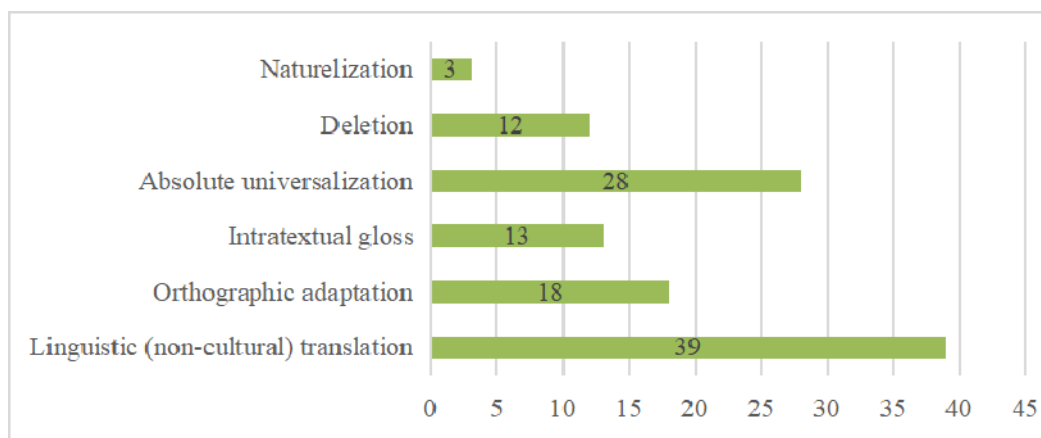


Figure 5. Frequencies of selected translation strategies of culture-specific items by Aixelá (1996, pp. 63–64)

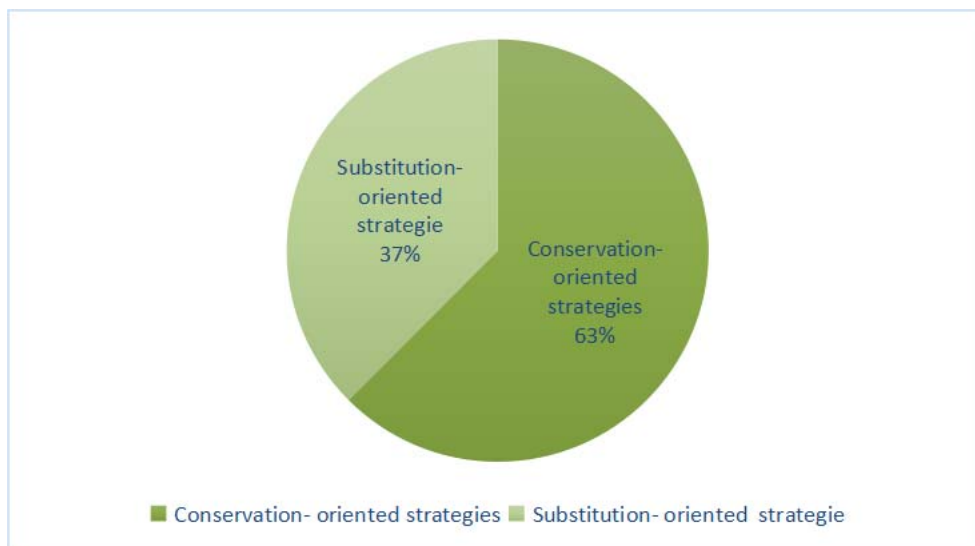


Figure 6. The orientation of translation strategies

As illustrated in Figure 6, an examination of the overarching trend reveals that James demonstrates a preference for the implementation of conservation strategies in the process of translating culture-specific items, with a total of 70 instances. The utilization of substitution strategies is observed to occur 42 times. In summary, James's translation manifests a pronounced conservation-oriented characteristic.

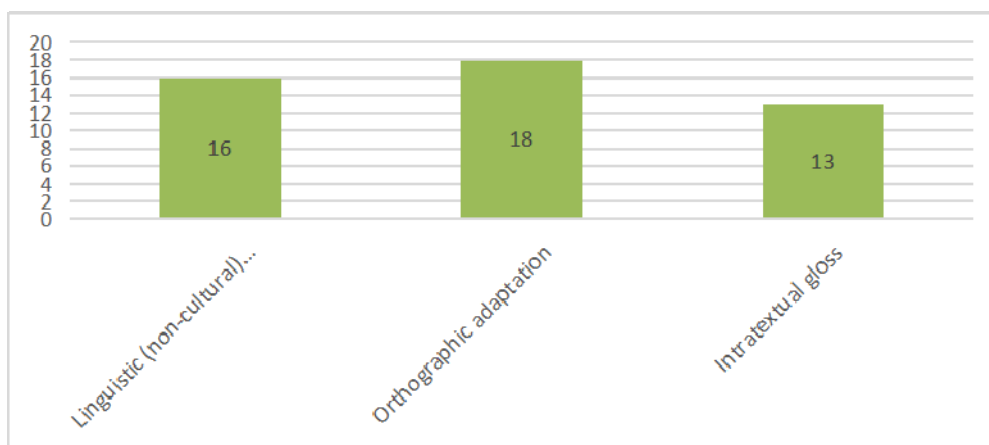


Figure 7. Frequencies of the selected translation strategies of proper nouns by Aixelá (1996, pp. 63–64)

It can be seen that Figure 7 presents three main translation strategies that James employed to translate proper nouns. Among these, orthographic adaptation is the most frequently used strategy, appearing a total of 18 times and mainly applied to the translation of conventional proper nouns. The next most prevalent strategy is the linguistic (non-cultural) translation strategy, which is used 16 times and applied to both loaded and conventional proper nouns. The least frequently used strategy is the intratextual gloss, which occurs 13 times and was utilized in the translation of loaded proper nouns. The overall observed tendency in James's translations of proper nouns is towards the use of conservation strategies.

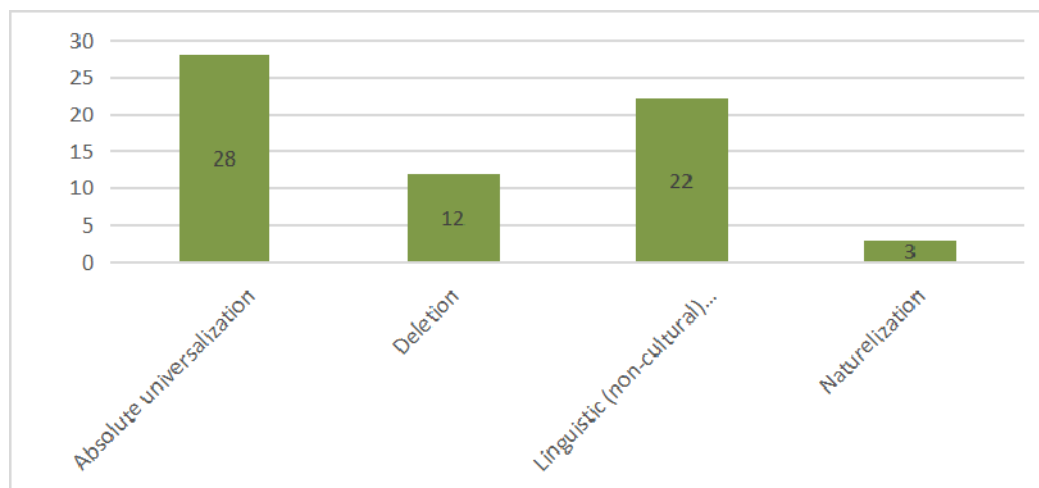


Figure 8. Frequencies of the selected translation strategies of common expressions by Aixelá (1996, pp. 63–64)

As illustrated in Figure 8, the translation strategies employed for the 65 common expressions are diverse. It is evident that the most frequently employed translation strategy is absolute universalization, with a frequency of 28. Linguistic (non-cultural) translation is the second most prevalent strategy, with a frequency of 22. The least frequently employed strategies are deletion and naturalization, with frequencies of 12 and 3, respectively. The analysis indicates an overall tendency towards substitution strategies in James’s translation of common expressions.

And the discussion section will provide a comprehensive explication of these translation strategies, exploring the factors that influenced James’s selection of each strategy.

7. Discussion

7.1 Translation Strategies of Proper Nouns in James’ Translation

According to Aixelá, proper nouns can be divided into two groups, including conventional proper nouns and loaded proper nouns. Conventional proper nouns refer to those that have no inherent meaning on their own. Loaded proper nouns, on the other hand, are specific names and nicknames that carry subtle emotions and expressions. In comparison to conventional proper nouns, loaded ones have a much higher level of ambiguity (Aixelá, 1996, p. 59).

In the source text of *Luotuo Xiangzi*, conventional proper nouns mainly include names of places. Their usage and meaning are singular and relatively fixed; often, they can be directly matched with the target language, resulting in relatively low translation difficulty. Therefore, James extensively employs the translation strategies of linguistic (non-cultural) translation and orthographic adaptation, which fall under the category of conservation-oriented translation. The examples are presented in Table 3:

Table 3. Translation examples of conventional proper nouns.

No.	Source text	Target text
1	万寿山(Wàn Shòu Shān)	Longevity Mountain
2	玉泉山(Yù Quán Shān)	Jade Fountain Mountain
3	妙峰山(Miào Fēng Shān)	Miao Feng temple
4	天安门(Tiān Ān Mén)	T’ien An Gate
5	齐化门(Qí huà mén)	Chi Hua Gate

In Table 3, these culture-specific items are all place names, carrying relatively limited cultural information. Therefore, James opted the straightforward strategy by using linguistic (non-cultural) translation, translating “万寿山” as “Longevity Mountain” and “玉泉山” as “Jade Fountain Mountain.” The English translation of “妙峰山” “齐化门” and “天安门” follows a similar strategy, where James employed the orthographic adaptation strategy, transliterating the Cantonese pronunciation of these two place names into English.

As for loaded proper nouns in the source text of *Luotuo Xiangzi*, they mainly include names of people, holidays

and places. These words often carry not only their surface meanings but also deeper connotations. In order to faithfully convey the original text, James utilizes the translation strategies of linguistic (non-cultural) translation and intratextual gloss which belong to conservation-oriented translation. The examples are presented in Table 4:

Table 4. Translation examples of loaded proper nouns.

No.	Source text	Target text
1	中秋节(Zhōngqiū Jié)	Mid-autumn festival
2	黄天霸(Huáng Tiān Bà)	Huang T'ien Pa, the leader of the Yellow Turban rebels ages ago
3	八大胡同(Bā Dà Hútòng)	Pa ta hu Tong (the red-light district)
4	孔圣人(Kǒng shèng rén)	Confucius
5	腊八(Là bā)	January 8 th

In Table 4, the translation strategy of “中秋节” belongs to linguistic (non-cultural) translation, “中” and “秋” means “mid” and “autumn” in English. Mid-Autumn Festival, the 15th day of the eighth lunar month (usually September or October in the Gregorian calendar), is associated with expressing gratitude for the harvest, celebrating the full moon, as well as meeting family members. Mooncake, a round pastry with sweet or savory fillings, is a key tradition. And the full moon symbolizes unity and completeness. However, James’ translation does not convey the underlying meaning of the Mid-Autumn Festival. While this translation strategy may not promote a profound comprehension of Chinese culture for the target reader, it does preserve the distinctive qualities of the source text.

The translation strategy of “黄天霸” is the intratextual gloss translation. James translated “黄天霸” into “Huang T'ien Pa” according to its Cantonese pronunciation and added annotation. “Huang Tianba” was an alias used by Li Zicheng in Chinese history. He played a significant role during the transition from the Ming to Qing dynasty as a peasant leader. He led uprisings against Qing dynasty rule, being often regarded as a patriotic general. The alias “Huang Tianba” reflects the perception of him as a heroic figure, divinely empowered with exceptional strength and prestige. After the fall of the Ming dynasty, he established the “Great Western State” and proclaimed himself emperor. However, his rule was short-lived as he was ultimately defeated by Qing forces. The alias “Huang Tianba” embodies his spirit of resistance and the reverence he garnered during his struggle. When employing the intratextual gloss translation strategy, the distinctiveness of the source text is preserved and the comprehension of the underlying meaning of the culture-specific items is facilitated for target language readers.

The translation strategy of “八大胡同” is the intratextual gloss translation. James translated “八大胡同” into “The Pa ta hu Tong” according to its Cantonese pronunciation and added annotation. “The Pa ta hu Tong” refers to a collective term for eight alleys near the Qianmen area outside the Front Gate of Beijing, which are known for their concentration of brothels and courtesan establishments. The term is used to describe the bustling streets and lanes of the red-light district rather than referring to a specific alley, and it has been closely associated with the culture of concubines, young male entertainers, and song performers since its inception. Utilizing the intratextual gloss translation allows readers to retain the source text’s features while also facilitating a more profound understanding of the source text. This strategy helps to prevent ambiguity or mistranslation.

The translation strategy used for “孔圣人” and “腊八” falls under linguistic (non-cultural) translation. Confucius is a Latinized transliteration of “孔夫子” by the Western missionary Matteo Ricci in the 16th century. With the spread of the Enlightenment, this translation gains widespread recognition globally and eventually becomes the standard name for Confucius in the Western world. “腊八” refers to the traditional Chinese festival, which falls on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month. It is a significant festival leading up to the Spring Festival, during which people honor ancestors and deities, prepare porridge, and express wishes for prosperity, peace, and good health. In James’s translation, the term was merely transliterated, with no elaboration on its rich cultural significance.

7.2 Translation Strategies of Common Expressions in James’ Translation

According to Aixelá’s explanation, common expressions differ from proper nouns in that they have complex word forms. They encompass words related to objects, institutions, habits, and opinions that are specific to each culture and cannot be classified as proper names (Aixelá, 1996, p. 59). Some concepts are more abstract and lack direct equivalents in the target language’s vocabulary, thus resulting in a variety of translation strategies.

In James’ translation, the primary strategy employed for translating common expressions is absolute universalization, which falls under the category of substitution strategies. This strategy involves selecting

non-culturally specific terms to translate culture-specific items. For example:

Example 1

ST: 补气散火 (Lao She, 2006, p. 89)

Pinyin: bǔ qì sàn huǒ.

TT: Restore their spirits and cool off (James, 1979, p. 98)

Analysis: In traditional Chinese culture, “气” is a highly abstract concept. In traditional Chinese medicine, “气” refers to the substance that constitutes the human body and sustains its life activities. It also encompasses the material that maintains the functions of internal organs. Hence, translating “气” as “spirits” may not fully convey the meaning of the source text. In traditional Chinese culture, the significance of “火” is not simply “fire”, but rather a more abstract concept. It generally refers to the inflammation of certain parts of the body that occurs when there is an imbalance in the body’s Yin and Yang. Therefore, “散火” refers to treating the symptoms of inflammation in specific parts of the body. James’s translation of “cool off” may only convey the superficial meaning and not capture the underlying concept.

Therefore, James’s use of “absolute universalization” can only convey the surface meaning and cannot capture the deeper cultural implications. This also represents one of the challenges in translating culture-specific items from Chinese to English, where certain concepts lack direct equivalents in English and result in complete absence.

Example 2

ST: 本家亲戚 (Lao She, 2006, p. 52)

Pinyin: běn jiā qīn qī.

TT: Father or mother, brother or sister, and relatives (James, 1979, p. 61).

Analysis: In traditional Chinese culture, the term “本家” is used to denote close relatives who share the same surname and clan. In Chinese society, children typically assume their father’s surname, thereby defining the term “本家” as relatives on the father’s side of the family. James’s translation of “本家亲戚” as “father or mother, brother or sister, and relatives” is therefore quite general, as it fails to include relatives from the mother’s side of the family. Utilizing absolute universalization in translation can assist in enhancing the comprehensibility for target language readers; however, it may inadvertently overlook the cultural nuances intrinsic to the source text.

This phenomenon is also influenced by cultural factors, as English does not differentiate between relatives to the same extent as Chinese does. Many Chinese terms for expressing kinship relationships do not have direct equivalents in English, such as “叔叔” (uncle) and “伯伯” (paternal uncle).

Example 3

ST: 跳到黄河里也洗不清 (Lao She, 2006, p. 51).

Pinyin: Tiào dào Huáng Hé lǐ yě xǐ bù qīng.

TT: Even jumping into the Yellow River wouldn’t make him clean. (James, 1979, p. 106).

Analysis: This idiom, which is frequently used in Chinese, signifies that an individual has been egregiously misinterpreted or erroneously accused, and regardless of the extent to which they elaborate or clarify, they are unable to dispel suspicion or substantiate their innocence. The Yellow River is renowned for its substantial sediment content and turbid waters, rendering the concept of “washing clean in the Yellow River” inherently ironic. This idiom conveys the notion that an individual’s efforts to purify themselves may paradoxically result in greater soiling and that the more they explain, the more their assertions become dubious. In James’s translation, absolute universalization is adopted and the literal meaning is conveyed exclusively. While the original imagery was retained, the ironic and sarcastic tone embedded in the Chinese expression was not fully captured.

Example 4

ST: 狗事巴结人 (Lao She, 2006, p. 37).

Pinyin: gǒu shì bā jié rén.

TT: Trying to get himself in good like a stray dog (James, 1979, p. 46).

Analysis: The phrase “狗事巴结人” is a sarcastic expression used to denote someone who is ingratiating or flattering others. James’s translation of the phrase as “Trying to get himself in good like a stray dog” is a

successful interpretation of the expression's meaning. However, it should be noted that the cultural differences between Chinese and Western cultures can result in the word "dog" in Chinese carrying negative connotations and evoking ideas of degradation or unpleasantness. Conversely, in Western culture, dogs are frequently regarded as symbols of loyalty, diligence, and hard work. This discrepancy in cultural interpretation underscores the importance of nuance in translation, where absolute universalization may lead to ambiguity for English readers.

This is another challenge in translating Chinese culture-specific items, namely that culture-specific items hold different textual statuses in the target language cultural system. Although it is feasible to identify indicative translations for culture-specific items in the target language, these translations may lack the cultural significance present in the source language.

In James' translation, the second most common strategy employed for translating common expressions is linguistic (non-cultural) translation, which belongs to the conservation-oriented translation category. This strategy involves the translator selecting a reference in the target language that closely corresponds in meaning to the source text, while enhancing its clarity by providing a version that aligns with the cultural context of the source text. The subsequent illustrations will elaborate on this strategy.

Example 5

ST: 徐庶入曹营——一语不发 (Lao She, 2006, p. 103).

Pinyin: Xú Shù rù Cáo yíng - yī yǔ bù fā.

TT: Hsu Shu in Ts'ao Ts'ao's camp and won't talk (James, 1979, p. 106).

Analysis: The term originates from the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Xu Shu served as a strategist for Liu Bei and assisted Liu Bei against Cao Cao. However, Cao Cao took Xu Shu's mother as a hostage and sent a letter in her name, which requested Xu Shu to abandon Liu Bei and join into Cao's ally. But Xu Shu's mother perceived it as a betrayal and consequently passed away with a deep sense of resentment. Xu Shu, grateful for Liu Bei's benevolence, elected to refrain from political discourse within the confines of Cao's encampment. Therefore, this narrative ultimately led to the creation of a proverb. James employs linguistic (non-cultural) translation, thereby retaining the literal expression from the source text. However, since many target language readers may not be familiar with *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and this proverb, this translation may potentially lead to confusion.

Example 6

ST: 空城计 (Lao She, 2006, p. 47).

Pinyin: Kōng chéng jì.

TT: Empty City ruse (James, 1979, p. 100).

Analysis: This term, an ancient Chinese military treatise, originates from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. It denotes the creation of an illusion of a well-defended and composed city, despite the presence of insufficient troops. By deceiving the enemy, it can force them to retreat. In James' translation, the strategy employed for this term is linguistic (non-cultural) translation. While the literal meaning of "Empty City" was conveyed, the deeper cultural connotations embedded in the term were overlooked.

Example 5

ST: 琼宫玉宇 (Lao She, 2006, p. 118).

Pinyin: Xú Shù rù Cáo yíng - yī yǔ bù fā.

TT: Jasper palaces and jade mansions (James, 1979, p. 126).

Analysis: This excerpt is attributed to the renowned Song dynasty poet Su Shi and is featured within his poem *Shui diao Ge tou*. The term "琼宫" is a reference to a palace constructed by jade, which is frequently employed to symbolize celestial palaces where immortals reside. The term "玉宇" is employed to denote magnificent and grandiose architectural structures that crafted by jade. In *Luotuo Xiangzi* this term is employed to depict buildings covered in snow, thereby showcasing their aesthetic appeal following a snowfall. Given the well-documented fact that poetry is characterized by aesthetic properties, this term is also a reflection of the balanced structure and rhyme that is characteristic of Chinese poetry.

James employed a linguistic (non-cultural) translation to render it as "jasper palaces and jade mansions," thereby ensuring the preservation of the original characteristics and the Chinese element of jade. Nevertheless, this translation falls short in capturing the underlying meaning of the original text, which signifies the beauty of

buildings after being covered in snow. Additionally, it does not achieve the aesthetic effect of rhyme and parallelism present in the source text.

This also represents the third challenge in translating Chinese culture-specific items into English. When rendering Chinese terms into English, the onus is not only on explaining the meanings, but also on achieving a balance between preserving the forms and the essences of the terms. And this challenge is especially evident in the context of idiomatic expressions, poetic verses, and the maintenance of rhyme and rhythm. So it is a task for translators to fully accommodate all these aspects simultaneously.

The third most common translation strategy employed in common expressions is deletion. In James' translation, she elects to omit content from the source text, which falls under the substitution-oriented translation strategy. The illustrative examples follow.

Example 6

ST: 周瑜打黄盖，愿打愿挨 (Lao She, 2006, p. 139).

Pinyin: Zhōu Yú dǎ Huáng Gài, yuàn dǎ yuàn ái.

TT: It was mutual aid (James, 1979, p. 148).

Analysis: This is a pun in Chinese, also deriving from the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Before the Battle of Red Cliffs, as a part of the Sun-Liu alliance's strategy to defeat Cao Cao, Huang Gai voluntarily proposed to Zhou Yu that he would inflict visible wounds on himself to make it appear as if he had been mistreated. This would serve as a ruse to deceive Cao Cao and make him believe that Huang Gai had defected. Subsequently, Huang Gai would secretly coordinate with the alliance forces and set fire to Cao Cao's fleet from within. This was a mutually agreed arrangement. As time passed, this pun was extended in the Chinese language to metaphorically signify a situation where both sides are willing participants.

In order to convey its extended meanings, James utilizes the deletion strategy. The objective is to foster an unobstructed reading experience for the target language reader. Nevertheless, James's strategy is not accompanied by the transmission of cultural imagery and nuances that the source culture-specific items would have conveyed.

Example 7

ST: 吃两丸三黄宝蜡 (Lao She, 2006, p. 180).

Pinyin: Chī liǎng wán sān huáng bǎo là.

TT: He took two cured pills (James, 1979, p. 188).

Analysis: The term is the name of a traditional Chinese medicine prescription. It is employed in the treatment of external injuries and bleeding, with the property of reducing swelling and providing pain relief. James translates it as "two cured pills," which retained its intended meaning but omitted the original Chinese name of the prescription. The use of direct transliteration in the translation of medicine names may result in the target language readers experiencing difficulties in comprehending the translation, given their limited familiarity with the cultural background associated with traditional Chinese medicinal practices. Therefore, in this case, James employs the deletion strategy.

Example 8

ST: 祥子打算合稀泥(Lao She, 2006, p. 67).

Pinyin: Xiáng zi dǎ suàn hé xī ní.

TT: Hsiang Tzu tries a little sweet talk (James, 1979, p. 138).

Analysis: This is a well-known Chinese idiom. The literal meaning of the idiom is to mix mud in order to make it thinner and softer. In a figurative sense, it can be interpreted as a metaphor for addressing disputes or conflicts without a clear distinction between right and wrong and endeavoring to resolve issues through ambiguous and compromising means, resulting in a reluctant acceptance of the outcome by both parties. Nevertheless, this strategy frequently falls short of achieving an authentic resolution of the fundamental conflict.

James adopts a deletion strategy in his translation, omitting the literal meaning while preserving the semantic content. It enhances comprehension for the target readers, however also overlooks the metaphorical rhetoric employed by the original author.

As demonstrated in the preceding data analysis, the most prevalent translation strategy, irrespective of whether the subject is proper nouns or common expressions, is linguistic (non-cultural) translation. This is the

predominant strategy adopted by James. Orthographic adaptation and intratextual gloss constitute the second most common translation strategies and are frequently utilized in the translation of proper nouns. Absolute universalization, the third most common strategy, is comparatively more prevalent in the translation of common expressions. The fourth-ranked strategy is deletion, which is also applied to the translation of common expressions. It is evident that the top two strategies employed by James are conservative-oriented translation strategies, indicating the limited use of substitution-oriented translation strategies.

7.3 Factors Influencing James' Choice of These Translation Strategies

Aixelá's seminal work on translation strategies identified factors influencing the selection of strategies. These factors include extratextual, textual, culture-specific items nature and intratextual elements. The subsequent sections will methodically explore these aspects.

Extratextual Factors: In terms of the expectations of potential readers, the translation by Evan King cannot be considered faithful, as it distorted Lao She's original intent. Indeed, Lao She himself was not very satisfied with his translation. As Lao She's reputation grew in the English-speaking world, the demand to understand the true essence of his works became increasingly urgent. In this context, James's translation employs conservative translation strategies to preserve the distinctive features of the source text (Sun, 2013, p. 45). From the perspective of the translator's translation purpose, James states that her translation has not been abridged or modified in her book's preface. Any alterations made were for the sole purpose of facilitating comprehension for English-speaking readers of terms and references with which those without a Chinese background are unacquainted. This assertion is further substantiated by the title and introductory notes of her translation, which appear to be consistent with the objective of facilitating comprehension for English-speaking readers. She emphasizes that her translation, in comparison with the King translation, has undergone no abridgment or modification (James, 1978, pp. 8–10). Consequently, the translation employed by James is predominantly conservative in order to preserve the characteristics of the source text. However, there are also minimal uses of substitution-oriented translation strategies, with the aim of facilitating English readers' understanding of Chinese culture.

Textual Factors: In terms of the classification of the source text, the most widely translated work of Lao She's novel is *Luotuo Xiangzi*, which has been translated into 17 different languages and published. It holds significant significance in the history of translating modern and contemporary Chinese novels as Lao She's first Chinese modern vernacular novel to gain effective acceptance in the English-speaking world. Therefore, the existence of the translated versions of *Luotuo Xiangzi* has significantly contributed to the global dissemination of Lao She's works and modern Chinese literature as a whole (Xie, 2012, p. 127). In order to ensure the effective dissemination of this novel within the English-speaking world, James therefore primarily utilized a conservative translation strategy, with the objective of preserving the original meaning as faithfully as possible.

The Nature of culture-specific items: In addressing the question of whether a definitive translation exists, it is crucial to acknowledge that James' translation of *Luotuo Xiangzi* represents the second rendition of the novel. The initial translation was undertaken by Even King, and while this translation played a pivotal role in introducing *Luotuo Xiangzi* to international readers and contributed to its initial overseas recognition, it exhibited substantial deletions and alterations. These alterations have been met with criticism, including from Lao She himself, and thus cannot be regarded as a faithful representation of the original work or a definitive translation. Consequently, James is at liberty to adopt translation strategies with a high degree of flexibility, primarily employing conservative-oriented translation strategies and supplementing them with substitution-oriented translation strategies. This strategy enables James to convey the essence of the source text while ensuring the readability of the target language.

Intratextual factors: It is important to acknowledge that numerous culture-specific items are not able to be translated into English in the source text directly and fully. This results in gaps or omissions in the translation, as illustrated by the example “周瑜打黄盖,愿打愿挨”. To address this challenge and enhance the understanding of the target language readers while maintaining translation coherence, James has employed strategies of absolute universalization and deletion to a lesser extent. In terms of the coherence of translation, it should be noted that various culture-specific items cannot be directly and fully translated into English in the source text, resulting in gaps or omissions in the translation, such as “周瑜打黄盖, 愿打愿挨”. Therefore, to enhance the understanding of the target language readers and maintain translation coherence, James has employed the strategies of absolute universalization and deletion to a lesser extent. In doing so, she has simplified the culture-specific items that do not have a direct equivalent in English. Accordingly, the employment of a dual strategy, comprising both conservative-oriented and substitution-oriented translation strategies, as adopted by James, becomes paramount.

8. Conclusion

Drawing upon Aixelá's framework, James employs sophisticated translation strategies for culturally specific items in her work *Rickshaw: the Novel Lo-to Hsiang Tzu*, encompassing conservative strategies, such as linguistic translation, orthographic adaptation, and intratextual glosses, as well as substitution-oriented strategies, including absolute universalization, deletion, and naturalization. James's inclination towards conservative strategies is primarily motivated by a desire to preserve the essence of the source culture while ensuring its accessibility to readers without a prior familiarity with it.

James employs linguistic (non-cultural) translation extensively, particularly in the case of proper nouns and common expressions. This strategy maintains the core meaning of culture-specific items while simultaneously simplifying cultural nuances. Orthographic adaptation and intratextual glosses are primarily utilized for proper nouns. Substitution-oriented strategies, such as absolute universalization, which are employed predominantly for common expressions, replace cultural-specific items with more universally comprehensible alternatives, thereby ensuring clarity for readers unfamiliar with the source culture.

The following factors have been identified as influential in the selection of strategy, as guided by Aixelá's theory. The first is the extratextual factor, the inadequacies of Evan King's translation, which lead James to adopt conservative strategies. The second is the translator's purpose, James emphasizes faithful preservation whilst aiding English readers in understanding unfamiliar terms. The third is the textual factor. The prominence of *Luotuo Xiangzi* in the dissemination of Chinese literature prompts James to utilize conservative strategies for effective communication in the English-speaking world. The last is the nature of culture-specific items, given the absence of a fixed translation of *Luotuo Xiangzi* and the criticism of King's version, James employs conservative strategies, supplemented by substitution strategies.

Translating Chinese culture-specific items into English presents three challenges related to cultural absence. The first of these is the absence of direct English equivalents for certain concepts, which creates translation gaps. The varied cultural statuses of culture-specific items between English and Chinese can potentially result in a loss of cultural significance. Another challenge arises in the balancing of conveying the meaning of Chinese culture-specific items and maintaining idiomatic expressions, poetic verses, and rhyme, it often causes necessitating trade-offs in translation.

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