

Translating Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) in *Water Margin*: Balancing Domestication and Foreignization

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Abstract

Every translation of a book is a creation unto itself, wherein the translator imbues the work with their essence while striving to maintain the spirit of the original. Guided by Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization, this study examines their application in translating culture-specific items (CSIs) in the English version of *Water Margin*. This research focuses on the earliest version (1872) titled *The Adventures of a Chinese Giant*, published in the pages of the *China Review*. The study involved analyzing 180 hand-selected CSIs out of 800, using Newmark's classification method. The findings reveal that translators predominantly use domestication to enhance readability for target language readers. However, domestication often leads to a loss of cultural meaning, which directly impacts the accuracy and authenticity of the translation. This study addresses the challenges of domesticating cultural texts and reflects on the implications for translation quality. These insights provide valuable strategic direction for translating culturally sensitive material and lay a foundation for future research on translation strategies across different cultural contexts.

Keywords: meaning, domestication and foreignization, Culture-Specific Items (CSIs), *Water Margin*

1. Introduction

Water Margin is one of the four great novels of the Ming Dynasty; it is a classic masterpiece among Chinese literary works. *Water Margin* has its status in developing Chinese novel fiction of literary translation (Gregory, 2023). Nevertheless, the stories in *Water Margin* have a wealth of cultural connotations and a robust social impact, and this has efficient value for readers who want to understand the social background and culture of ancient China (Fitzgerald, 1986). The upsurge of the peasants of the Xuanhe period of the Song Dynasty, this piece also fully demonstrates the appearance of the leading roles bravely fighting against feudal tyranny then. *Water Margin* combines traditional Chinese cultural elements such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and martial arts, which enriched Chinese culture and profoundly influenced the novels of later China (Hazard, 2020). *Water Margin*, as one of the representatives of Chinese classical novels, this book is a treasure in the treasury of Chinese culture (Gregory, 2023).

There are two main reasons for this study. First, *Water Margin* still has great literary value in contemporary Chinese literature. Translation scholars generally agree that studying this work from different perspectives can help expand the understanding of its cultural and literary significance in the translation process. Second, so far, the cultural words in the English translations of *Water Margin*—especially in the early version, *The Adventures of a Chinese Giant*—have not been studied and analyzed, and this study found that the translators used domestication and dissimulation translation strategies, which may have deviated from the meaning of the original work to varying degrees. Such deviant translations may have triggered the need to further explore of how translation strategies affect the accurate transmission of cultural content.

This study examines approaches to dealing with culturally specific items (CSIs) in the English translation of *Water Margin*, which revolve around the core translation strategies of domestication and foreignization to analyze the gains and losses in the meanings of cultural words. At the textual level, the processing of CSIs involves Newmark's six major classifications of cultural words. By using Newmark's classification of CSIs and applying the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization, this paper presents a detailed analysis of 800 CSIs, thus exploring how these translation strategies affect the retention or loss of cultural meaning. The results of the study show that

although the domestication strategy improves the readability of the text and the comprehension of the target language audience, the extensive use of this strategy also leads to the loss of a significant amount of cultural meaning. What is noteworthy in this study is the need for existing studies similar to the focus and design of this study to the best of the researcher's knowledge. Therefore, the findings of this study provide valuable insights and guidance for translation practitioners as well as educators and students engaged in translation teaching and scholarship.

The *Water Margin*, as one of the four great wonders of Chinese Ming Dynasty novels, has a unique and seminal position in the development of long vernacular novels in Chinese narrative literature (Xie, 2018). *Water Margin* occupies a very important literary position in the history of Chinese literature, and its profound social significance and rich cultural elements also make it an important window for studying ancient Chinese society and culture (Hsia, 2016). By depicting the tragic story of a group of 108 heroes and heroines at the end of the Song Dynasty, this work shows the complexity of human nature and the richness of social conflicts, and its characterization and plot construction still have a profound impact on readers and scholars all over the world (Shi & Luo, 2018).

2. Research Questions

This study focuses on the strategies used in translating *Water Margin* in the Chinese-English translation process and the acquisition, loss, or equivalence of meaning. Realizing the research objectives stated at the beginning of this study and answering the following revised research questions:

RQ1: What are the predominant strategies used in translating CSIs in the classical Chinese literature *Water Margin*?

RQ2: How do different types of CSIs demonstrate gains, losses, and equivalence in meaning after translation?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Translation

Translation is the complex task of carrying the meaning of the content provided in the service from one language to another (Sulaiman et al., 2024). Translation has been the transmission language from ancient times until now (Alalddin Al-Tarawneh et al., 2024). The translation process is not only translates the language but also retains cultural identity and acclimatization. Within its natural world, at any rate, the area of translation studies advanced and isolated approaches and versions such as primary, devoted, word-based, and communicatory Translation (Nasution & Kharisma, 2024). Every translation tool is crucial for delivering an accurate rendition of the source text and impacts the final translation's faithfulness and quality.

Strategies used in translation are key across multiple fields, such as language learning, literature, and intercultural communication. Huang and Liao (2018) focused on the communicative translation strategies for political metaphors in Chinese, articulating the significance of metaphor domestication and meaning conversion to preserve the original meaning and guarantee coherent communication. The role of translation in communicative language teaching was also discussed by Adil (2020), and he also gave vital attention to what underlies translation as a method of both learning and a communicative approach for language learners. Moreover, Purwaningrum (2023) reportedly uncovers Indonesian EFL students' beliefs regarding the translation approach, concluding that, although cautiously affirmed, the translation still effectively enhances their interactivity in learning.

Students have been found to use translation as a learning method to enhance both their understanding and productive skills in English (Karimian & Talebinejad, 2013). The importance of translation strategies also applies to literature and cultural dialogue. By exploring the cross-cultural adaptation of metaphors in literary prose, Joshua and Xiao (2022) uncover ways for translators to manage metaphors efficiently. Perhaps this will be true to a larger degree after Abdullatief (2020) showed that omission in literary translation can be a strategic choice to handle a certain kind of difficulty and, thus, that the process entails various decisions.

Strategies for translation can help in promoting effective communication, language learning and promote cross-cultural understanding among academics of different disciplines. Using the right translation methods, one can bring people and their love or business, etc., closer together because this is how they can give the correct meaning to anything said in a different place. Shakespeare is the most widely translated author in the literary translation market, an illustrative example of the concern of translators and researchers with objects of their field of study (Bianco, 2023; Hoenselaars, 2012; Kalashnikov, 2016; Omar, 2022; Prushkovska, 2021; Wallace, 2022). For this reason, it is said that everything depends upon the background of that translator, the related degree of translation and academic knowledge as well as the related factors in translation quality (Varzanded & Jadidi, 2015). Translation, as we have learned so far, is not an easy job done by just a set of rules; it is a multi-faceted process that involves special skills of translation and cooperation that can only born if you exert your best understanding of the target language, and the source language. Translation scholarship is crucial for the advancement of the field

and for accurate and effective communication across languages and disciplines. Translation is tricky and time-consuming, requiring lots of focus not to make mistakes and lower its quality. Methods including back translation to detect translation errors and inaccuracies. The same translation method is not applicable in all scenarios of translation due to variations in the context and content of the translation, such as legal documents or scientific articles.

Translation is a complex process that involves expert knowledge, teamwork, and a thorough understanding of the source and target languages (Skopeczková, 2024). By conducting interdisciplinary and applied research, academic research in translation significantly contributes to the advancement of the field and the practice of multilingual, cross-disciplinary communication. The other aspect of this is, of course, that translation is a very accurate and esoteric process that is very hard to perform without both precision and confidence (Maija Hirvonen, 2024). One way to address this is by using back translation to find inaccuracies and mistakes in the transliteration. Different methods of translation are used based on the situation and translation subject, such as legal documents or scientific articles (Adila, 2023).

3.2 *Meaning*

Translation is one of the multifaceted kinds of activity that seeks to guarantee the equivalence of the meaning of the source text and the target text. This theory relates to several strategies and techniques to achieve the said equivalence. Nida's equivalent translation theory underscores the importance of attaining functional equivalence in translation, accounting for lexical meaning, cultural nuances, style, and intended function of the source text (Jiang, 2024). Translation equivalence is a concept explained as signaling a certain level of similarity in the conveyed information between both source and target texts (Putri Septarani, 2022). Deculturalization strategies are also used for a translation that has an equivalence in meaning but with non-correspondent form, which is equivalent but with meaning that is not corresponding due to the different scopes of meaning, and nil equivalent. The idea that the content of the translation must be accurate is closely related to the idea of reproducing the meaning of the text in an equivalent text; therefore, the identification of meaning equivalence at the stage of translation is of paramount importance. Cultural gaps, contextual factors, and personal elements can throw equivalence off-course and into troubled waters; hence, such stumbling blocks are weightily erected in replication across different translation acts. It is argued that one of the methods of preference to achieve meaning equivalence in a parallel or double translation is parallel or double translation (Douglas & Craig, 2007). Therefore, the quality assessment of translation should be based on the aspect of conveying sameness or identity in meaning from one language into another (Smith et al., 2022).

Translation is a complex operation comprising transferring words from one language into another by maintaining adequate conveyance from the original meaning and delicate shades of textual information. The process of translation is replete with possible gains or losses in meaning that take place through the nature of choices in translation (Abdallah & Tan, 2022). Cultural translation is a real opportunity for the loss and gain of culture-based elements during translation, affecting the text's overall semantic wholeness (Tiwiyanti & Retnomurti, 2017). It is the responsibility of the translator to mediate the originality between sources so that the receiver cannot improve cultural idiosyncrasies and other source-language features. The concept of translation competence is also important according to how a translator can effectively move from one organizational context to another to realize the desired results (Røvik, 2016).

3.3 *Domestication and Foreignization*

Domestication and foreignization are two translation strategies defining the notion of the target audience's acceptance and rejection of the text (Yang, 2010). Although domestication tries to make the foreign text less foreign to the readers, foreignization intentionally violates target conventions to keep them aware of its foreignness (Yang, 2010). Similarly, in literary translation, it is proposed that foreignization should be the core strategy, with only those parts of the text that need to be domesticated given domesticated translation (Wang, 2014).

This works based on the cultural context or the translated text. It is suggested that in translation practice, domestication is more popular than foreignization (Putrawan, 2018). But in other cases—translating cultural collocations in literary texts in layman's terms, for example, domesticating and foreignizing are needed to be used (Obeidat & Mahadi, 2019).

Domestic or foreign in translation is a change of direction, it is not just cadre, it should be determined based on author's intention, reader demand and the cultural matters of the text (Wang, 2014). Some researchers suggest that these two strategies need to be used together instead of being separated (Wang, 2014). Moreover, the translator should be able to balance the cultural aspect of the source text when translating culture-specific items, meaning a fine line between domestication and foreignization (Ba-award an, 2016). Whether or not one domesticates or

foreignizes in translation depends, in the end, on factors such as the text, the cultural ingredients in the text, and the intended readers. Both techniques are important in checking that the translated culture is correct, not just the translated language being correct for the target readers.

3.4 Culture-Specific Items (CSIs)

Culture-specific items (CSIs) are a list of CSIs that was first introduced by Peter Newmark in 2010 to be used as guidance for the translator in understanding and translating a culture-specific unique item that has definite cultural meaning. The overarching culture categories that Newmark groups the CSIs into are six: from ecology and public life to social life, personal life, customs and pursuits, and private passions. The classification is done through Newmark's theory is to be a brief version, and it may help in finding some appropriate translation strategies even while translating CSIs for which culture references are significant.

Peter Newmark thus categorizes into detail the culturally specific items (CSIs) in translation theory, which will help the translator understand and appropriately deal with elements of deep culture in the source language. Some of these categorizations are ecological (including geography and geology), public life (which includes the political and legal systems), social life (how it deals with economics and professions), personal life, customs and pursuits (which include sports and recreational activities), and private hobbies (such as religion and art). In the process of translation, there are cultural terms that would, therefore, need domestication and foreignization strategies for the maintenance of the cultural color of the original text or increase the readability of the target language.

Newmark's approach emphasizes the importance of appropriately interpreting or annotating these CSIs in translations to facilitate cross-cultural communication and understanding. This comprehensive strategy is key to ensuring translation quality and cultural accuracy.

Culturally Specific Items (CSIs) are inclusive of all elements of a culture. The natural surroundings within which people, plants, and animals live is known as ecology, which includes landforms like hills, seas, and mountains. Public life includes politics, laws, and government structures such as political parties, fencing laws or abolishing road chewing gum. Social life includes the economy, occupations, social welfare, health, and education systems, university. Personal life includes everything from food and what we wear to how we live like how Mexicans eat tacos or how they wear their clothes or how they arrange their homes. Customs and pursuits—things like body language, hobbies, sports, and idioms (think bungee-jumping and soccer)—Private passions include religion, music, poetry and social groups like Buddhism, reggae and poetry societies. All these elements combined form the unique identity of a culture.

3.5 Framework

The objectives of this study are to investigate the process of translating CSIs in *The Water Margin*, and how the two translation strategies of domestication and foreignization are employed to render the large number of cultural items, respectively. In the construction of our analysis, the theoretical core will be the coupling of a general typology of CSIs based on Peter Newmark (2010) and Lawrence Venuti's thought on translation strategies.

3.6 Theoretical Foundation

Peter Newmark categorization of CSIs: Newmark divided CSIs into six genres: ecology, public life, social life, personal life, customs and pursuits, private passions. Based on this classification, the corresponding study is equipped with a system for identifying and analyzing *Water Margin* cultural words.

Lawrence Venuti, a translation theorist, proposed two translation strategies: domestication, which adapts the foreign text to the values of the destination culture, and foreignization, which preserves the cultural differences in the source text and encourages target audience familiarity with it.

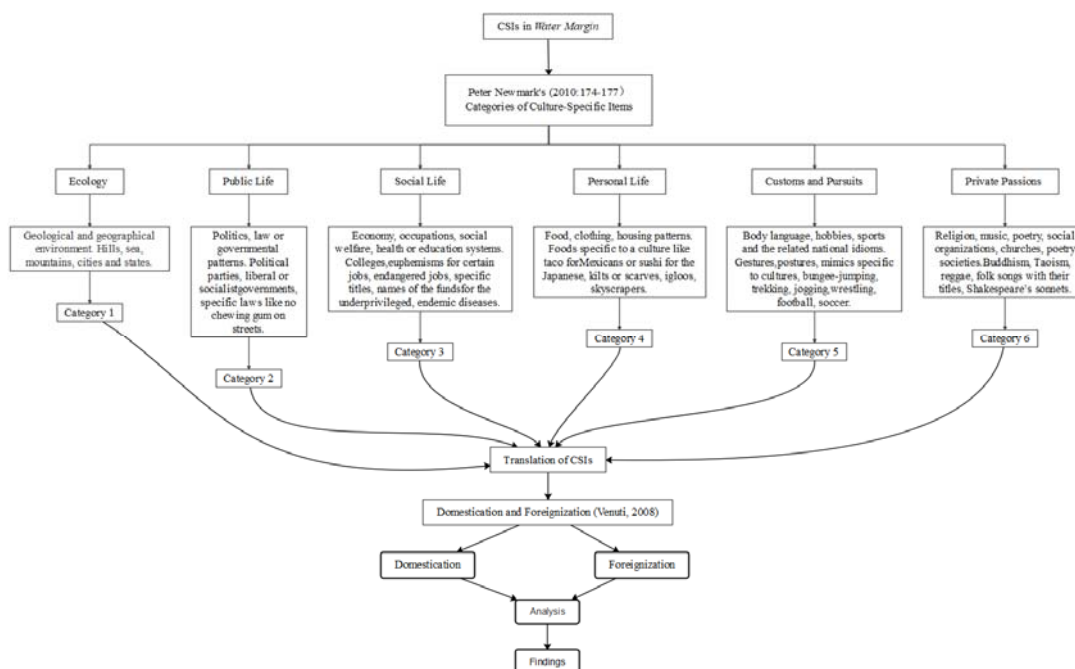


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of this study

4. Method

In this study, a comparative research method between Chinese and English was used to build a corpus based on the 800 CSIs in the earliest translations of *Water Margin*. Purposive sampling was used to select the corpus. This non-probability sampling approach is recommended for two reasons: 1) to better correspond the sample to the research objectives and 2) to improve the credibility of the data and results of the study. 180 CSIs will be examined. The frequency of the use of domestication and foreignization was statistically calculated by comparing the Chinese and English of 180 cultural words through the Chinese-English comparison, based on the analysis of the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization.

5. Result

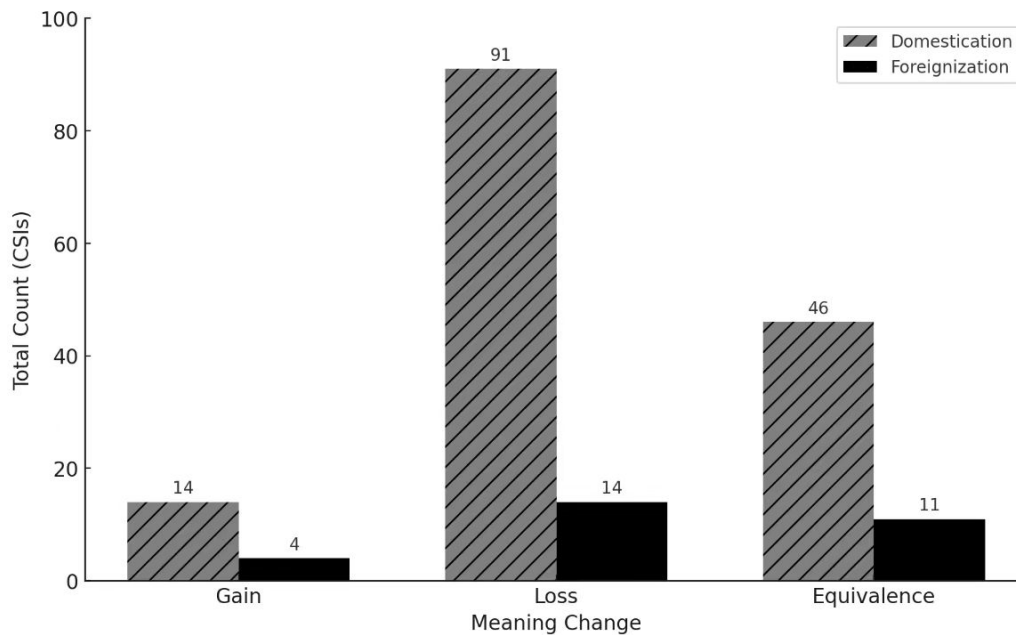


Figure 2. Translation Strategies and Meaning Change

This chart shows the statistics of applying of the two strategies of domestication and foreignization in translating culturally specific vocabulary in *Water Margin* in the three meaning change categories (gain, loss, and equivalence). It is obvious from the chart that in terms of meaning gain, the domestication strategy (represented by solid black bars) has a greater number of applications relative to the foreignization strategy (represented by diagonal bars), which are 14 versus 4, respectively. This indicates that the domestication strategy performs better in making the translated content more understandable and acceptable to the target language readers.

The chart categorizes the impact of two translation strategies, domestication and foreignization, across three meaning change categories: gain, loss, and equivalence. In the category of gain in meaning, the domestication strategy results in 14 times, substantially higher than foreignization, which records only 4 times. The loss in meaning shows a stark contrast, with foreignization leading significantly 91 times compared to domestication's 14. For equivalence in meaning, domestication again surpasses foreignization with 46 times against 11 times. The visual representation employs the solid black bars to denote domestication and striped bars for foreignization, facilitating an easy comparison across categories. The y-axis is marked from 0 to 80 in increments of 20, ensuring clarity in data presentation.

In summary, the chart indicates that when considering all categories together, the domestication strategy results in higher total counts of gain and equivalence than the foreignization strategy. However, the foreignization strategy leads to a significantly higher total count of loss in meaning during the translation process.

For Research Question 1, according to the data analyzed, the translators used the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization proposed by Venuti (2008). However, the translators used more domestication strategies to translate the cultural words in the *Water Margin*. The translators used the translation strategy of domestication 151 times, the strategy of foreignization 29 times, and the translators used the strategy of domestication 151 times. Domestication translation strategy is better for giving translators an understanding of the interpretation of cultural words in classical Chinese literature, hoping that more readers can understand the meaning of culture.

For Research Question 2, this study analyzes the Chinese and English meanings of 180 cultural words, which are divided into six categories according to the analysis of cultural words proposed by Newmark (2010) and then according to the gain of meanings proposed by Bassnett (2013), Bassnett and Lefevere (1998), and Venuti (2004), and the loss of meanings proposed by Newmark (2008), Newmark (2008), and Venuti (2008) and equivalence of meaning proposed by Newmark (2008). Although each category involves gain, loss, and equivalence, according

to the most cultural words in which gain in meaning occurs, category 1 (Ecology) occurs 6 times. The most lost meaning is category 6 (Private Passions), totaling 25 times. The category 3 (Social Life) is the most equivalence in meaning, 14 times. The results are discussed in detail below.

These findings of influence uncover the effects of these domestication and foreignization strategies when dealing with culturally native vocabulary. That form renders perfect translation and equivalence, but the domestication strategy loses the least amount of the meaning with a higher equivalence rate. In contrast, foreignization loses the most meaning with the lowest equivalence rate. The domestication strategy is more appropriate for translation in cultures where it is essential for the acceptance and deep understanding that work has within the target culture. At the same time, foreignization is better for restricting a translation from completely absorbing the foreign work and its cultural characteristics. In short, the study demonstrates the necessity of choosing translation strategies according to the contents of a work, which is very referential and empirical for translating English versions of Chinese classical literature such as *Water Margin*.

The English translation of Lu Zhishen's fragment from *Water Margin, The Adventures of a Chinese Giant*, demonstrates the complex application of domestication and foreignization strategies, which is particularly evident when dealing with culturally specific items (CSIs). While this approach to translation enhances the text's acceptability for Western readers, it also leads to a partial loss of the original's unique cultural connotations, reflecting the trade-offs and challenges of early translation practices.

5.1 Example of Domestication and Foreignization

Firstly, in the translation of personal names, the translation of “鲁智深” as “Lo Deep-wit” is a creative compromise. This treatment not only preserves the phonetic translation of the surname, but also tries to convey the meaning of “智深” through “Deep-wit”. Although this domestication strategy is easier for Western readers to understand and remember, it may also obscure the cultural meaning of the original name. This reflects the translator's endeavour to find a balance between cultural fidelity and reader acceptance.

In terms of scene description, the translation of “寺院” as “monastery” and “禅房” as “dormitory” reflects a significant tendency towards domestication. Although these Western religious terms increase readability, they also erase the uniqueness of Chinese Buddhist architecture. In particular, the translation of “禅房” as “dormitory” completely loses the special significance of this space in Buddhist practice. Although this treatment reduces cultural barriers, it also leads to the loss of cultural depth.

For the important Buddhist concept of “坐禅”, the translator chose to translate it as “sit in meditation”. This treatment is somewhere between domestication and foreignization, retaining the basic cultural connotations, but also simplifying the deep religious and cultural significance. This reflects the translator's trade-off between conveying cultural characteristics and ensuring comprehensibility.

In the dialogue translation, the rough and straightforward linguistic features of Lu Zhishen in the original text are substantially softened in the English translation. For example, “你这头大肥猪!” was translated as “No!” roared Lo, “good big fish; who'd eat eels?” In the dialogue translation, the rough and straightforward linguistic features of Lu Zhishen in the original text are substantially softened in the English translation. For example, “你这头大肥猪!” was translated as “No!” roared Lo, “good big fish; who'd eat eels?” This domestication translation strategy retained the vividness of the dialogue but weakened the rude and blunt features of Lu Zhishen's character in the content. This translation will change the reader's accurate understanding of Lu Zhishen's character, which is a significant loss brought by the domestication strategy.

However, the domestication translation strategy also brings some positive effects. By using concepts and expressions that are familiar to Western readers, the translation creates a sense of cultural intimacy that may increase the reader's interest and engagement. For example, the comparison of a “佛教环境” to Western monastic life, although not accurate enough, provides the reader with a starting point for understanding. In addition, the simplification and domestication make the storyline more coherent and easier for Western readers to follow, reducing reading barriers due to cultural differences.

5.2 Example of Meaning

Translations of *The Adventures of a Chinese Giant* present a complex and worthy of deeper exploration when it comes to the gain, loss and equivalence of meaning:

5.2.1 Gain of Meaning

By translating some Chinese concepts into expressions that are familiar to Western readers, the translation provides additional comprehension support for readers in some ways. For example, the translation of “禅房” as “dormitory,

which was also a sacred place of meditation, and worship of Buddha”, although not precise enough, provides readers with an explanation of the multiple functions of the place, which helps readers to understand the setting in which the story takes place.

Creative translations such as “Lo Deep-wit” provide the reader with direct insight into the character’s traits, although it changes the original name. “Deep-wit” hints at the deep wisdom that Lu Zhishen may possess, and this hint may lead the reader to focus more on this trait of the character.

5.2.2 Loss of Meaning

The dilution of Buddhist cultural features is the most obvious loss. “禅房” is simply translated as “dormitory,” which completely loses the special significance and sacredness of this space in Buddhist practice. “坐禅” is translated as “sit in meditation”, which conveys the basic action but loses the special status and deeper meaning of this practice in Chinese Buddhism.

Lu Zhishen’s rough and straightforward language has been greatly softened in the translation, resulting in a partial loss of the character’s personality traits. For example, the rudeness of the original text in which Lu Zhishen swears, “你这头大肥猪,” is directly transformed into the relatively mild “No!” roared Lo, “good big fish; who’d eat eels?”, which significantly weakens the character traits of Lu Zhishen.

The hints of monastic class and monastic hierarchy embedded in the original text are almost completely lost in the translation. For example, titles such as “师兄” that might be used between monks are omitted in favour of a more direct form of dialogue, which results in the loss of subtleties in the original text reflecting the social structure and interpersonal relationships.

5.2.3 Equivalence of Meaning

The translation achieves a degree of equivalence in the colloquial treatment of the dialogue, retaining the vividness of the conversation. For example, the translation of “If I choose to sleep, what business is that of your’s?”, although not literal, achieves a better equivalence in tone and intent with the original “我喜欢睡觉，关你们什么事？” achieves a better equivalence.

Through creative translation, such as translating “你这样很粗俗” as “You’re genteel, sir” (using irony), the translator achieves a certain degree of discourse equivalence and conveys the irony of the original text.

When dealing with culturally specific humour or puns, the translator tries to find equivalence. For example, translating “大肥猪这么嫩，谁不想吃？” as “Big fish is tender, I tell you! If you’ve got a good load to work with, what about it?”, although the specific imagery has changed, an effort has been made to retain the humorous and provocative meaning of the original.

However, the realisation of equivalence is limited, especially when dealing with deeper cultural concepts. For example, the equivalent translation of “出家人” as “recluse”, while conveying a certain degree of detachment from the secular, fails to fully equate the social roles and identities of Buddhist monks in China.

Overall, this early translation of *Water Margin* in China demonstrates a complex trade-off between gain, loss, and equivalence of meaning. It reflects the idea of translation at the time to promote cross-cultural communication and understanding through strong domestication. While this approach achieved some success in increasing readability and the reader’s sense of cultural intimacy, it also inevitably led to the loss of the original’s culturally rich and linguistically distinctive content. This case highlights the central challenge in literary translation: how to preserve the cultural characteristics of the original while at the same time the translator needs to ensure the comprehension and appreciation value of the target readers. This study finds that an ideal translation should not only convey the literal meaning, but also endeavour to retain and convey the cultural connotations, linguistic appeal and artistic value of the original.

6. Discussion

This research paper has scrutinized in detail the two strategies of translation, that is, domestication and foreignization, focusing on the various categories of meaning change and the influence of each on the general effect of translation of the English version of the cultural items in *Water Margin*. This study analyzed two translation strategies of domestication and foreignization in detail concerning the different categories of meaning changes and the impacts of each on the general effect of the translation of the English version of the cultural items in *Water Margin*. Compared with the analysis, a comparative exercise offers several practical aspects, which is probably the most satisfying way of them all, the strategies to choose one and may serve as a guide to the translation practice in the future.

First, according to the data above, it can be clearly seen that the domestication strategy is superior to the

foreignization strategy, both in terms of meaning gain and equivalence.

This is mainly because the “domestication” strategy mainly works by converting specific cultural elements in the original text into a form that is more familiar or more acceptable to readers in the target language culture. This translation strategy makes it easier for target language readers to understand and accept. This translation strategy of domestication is especially suitable for situations where there are large cultural differences or where the target language readers know little about the source language culture, this translation can then effectively reduce the readers’ comprehension barriers and improve the text’s accessibility and readability.

However, this advantage of the domestication strategy comes with a significant disadvantage: more data loss of meaning. If the reader is tempted to read the CSI’s contents in the original text as natural, readers cannot discover the Indigenous and unique meanings. Thus, the tastes of the source text and the translator would have restricted the cultural aroma and flavors produced and emanating from the original text. As a result, it might not be ideal for texts heavily saturated with cultural values to need a profound cultural atmosphere to apply their domestication strategy too extensively.

Compared with domestication and foreignization, the translation strategy of foreignization, though more prominent in terms of loss of meaning, can retain the cultural characteristics and cultural colors of the original text to a greater extent. This translation strategy of foreignization preserves more of the original text and enables the target language readers to have direct contact with and understanding of the culture of the source language, thus increasing the depth of the readers’ cultural communication and understanding of the original text. However, it may also lead to cultural barriers to the target language readers’ reading and comprehension process, especially when there are great cultural differences.

In general, domestication and foreignization could not be a absolute decision but should make proper adjustment according to the concrete material or readers’ expectation of the target, also function for which it is used. Depending on the text, and whether a translator is translating regarding its text or cultural narrative, they should decide which one to prioritize (or strike a balance) to offer an authentic rendering of the original text and facilitate comprehension or acceptance from target readers. And future work can consider other kinds of culture-specific vocabulary and the effects produced when different translation strategies are chosen to inform more finely grained guidelines for translators.

In a word, whether the translator chooses the strategy of domestication or foreignization should not be a fixed decision, the translator needs to adjust the translation strategy flexibly according to the specific content of the text, the expectation of the target readers and the purpose of using the text. Translators should weigh the pros and cons of domestication or foreignization strategies according to the text and its purpose to retain the cultural characteristics of the original text and ensure target readers understand and accept the translated text. To sum up, future research can further explore the effects of different types of texts and culturally specific vocabularies when different translation strategies are adopted, to guide translation practice in a more detailed way.

7. Conclusion

In this study, we systematically explore the application of two translation strategies, domestication and foreignization, in translating of cultural vocabulary in *Water Margin* and their effects on meaning change. Through detailed data analysis and visual representation, this study reveals the differences in the performance of these translation strategies in the three categories of meaning gain, meaning loss and meaning equivalence.

Domestication was noted to be far better than the dissimulation strategy in meaning gain and meaning equivalence. It implies the domestication strategy gives the translated text a much better understanding of the target language. Adapting cultural vocabulary to near expressions of the target culture is undoubtedly a domestication strategy that contributes much to increased readability and liking of the text, which will greatly benefit intercultural understanding and communication. It means that foreignization does many times better than domestication does in the meaning loss category, showing that foreignization is more effective in maintaining cultural features and profound meaning from the source text. It keeps the original cultural expression, giving readers of the target language the most direct access to the source culture. This might make understanding a bit more complicated, but it is very precious as it keeps the original cultural features and helps in a better understanding of other cultures. In other words, this paper highlights the importance of choosing appropriate translation strategies while undergoing a translation process of such a culturally rich text as *Water Margin*. Domestication and foreignization strategies have their strengths and weaknesses, which translators must flexibly adapt according to specific purposes for translation, target readers’ expectations, and features of the cultural text. Future research can thus delve deeper into how these two strategies can be balanced in different types of texts and under various cultural conditions to yield more efficient cultural communication and dissemination. Besides, it will be interesting to study further the

effectiveness of applying these strategies in actual translation so that translation practices become optimized and respect for cultural diversity and complexity is guaranteed.

This study attempts to explore the effectiveness of the domestication and foreignization strategies of Newmark's classification of translation strategies in translation, starting from the English translation of culture-bound words in *Water Margin*. Through qualitative analyses, the study reveals how these two translation strategies interact with each other and may affect readers' understanding of the meanings of culture-bound words in works of classical Chinese literature. The results show that both translation strategies of domestication and foreignization strive to remain faithful to the culture and ideology in the original text while attempting to construct textual coherence and make complex cultural elements comprehensible to international readers. The role of translators as cultural mediators is therefore crucial, as they need to balance maintaining the original text's integrity and creating resonance for different international audiences.

This work contributes in a noteworthy manner to translation studies, cultural translation theory, and international literary communication. They evidence the practical application of domestication and foreignization strategies for culturally specific term translation evaluation. Translation emphasizes the necessity for cultural intercourse and conveys international literary dissemination. It provides insight into how translators balance coherence and fidelity and further refines understanding of the nature of translation as a complex interpretive endeavor. Given that it is difficult to avoid challenges and limitations in applying domestication and dissimulation strategies, future research is necessary to discuss more deeply the influence of applying these two strategies to different literary genres and cultural backgrounds and further conduct a large-scale questionnaire survey on acceptance by international audiences. These findings can be important in the international dissemination of *Water Margin* and other works of classical Chinese literature. A detailed understanding of the strategies will inform translation practice better so that Chinese literature will not only be rendered accurately but also be culturally and contextually reproduced for international readership. Such understanding would help refine how Chinese literature could reach the world's global people: translations would help understand the cultural differences, and mutual respect and understanding would thus be fully realized.

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Authors' contributions

An Gang conceived and designed the study, collected and analyzed the data, and wrote the manuscript. He performed statistical analysis and collaborated with Dr. Debbita Tan Ai Lin. She revised the study's design and provided critical feedback. She reviewed and edited the manuscript. Supervise the entire research process.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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