

## Translation of Culture-Loaded Words in *The Three-Body*

### *Problem: A Perspective of Functional Equivalence*

**Abstract:** *The Three-Body Problem* is a science fiction novel rich in historical and cultural elements, gaining substantial international attention and positively contributing to the dissemination of Chinese culture. This study aims to examine the culture-loaded words (CLW) in *The Three-Body Problem* and analyze their translation methods. Using a stratified sampling methodology, the research identifies the characteristics of the CLW and evaluates their translations under the guidance of functional equivalence theory in terms of communicative, meaning, and emotional equivalence. The findings reveal that the translation of CLW largely achieves communicative equivalence, though occasional inadequacies in meaning and emotional equivalence arise due to meaning weakening and compensation. Regarding translation methods, the translator primarily employed free translation to ensure accessibility while balancing literal translation and combined translation method to preserve cultural characteristics and maximize information transfer. Through this study, a deeper understanding can be gained of how to achieve functional equivalence in translating CLW, thereby facilitating cross-cultural communication and enhancing the international dissemination of Chinese culture.

**Keywords:** *The Three-Body Problem*; culture-loaded words; functional equivalence; translation

#### 1. Introduction

China's rapid advancements in science and technology, along with its growing cultural influence, have fostered the creation and international translation of many outstanding literary works. Among them, *The Three-Body Problem* has gained widespread attention, marking a significant milestone in Chinese science fiction. Set during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the novel features a wealth of CLW that

**Comment [H1]:** There are too many articles in google and google scholar having the same title or a little bit change in them. Explain your novelty in the manuscript i.e. how your work is different from them.

**Comment [H2]:** Use simple past tense in the abstract

**Comment [H3]:** Correct it

**Comment [H4]:** Try to use simple sentence to make the meaning more pointed and clear. This sentence is ambiguous after the 'while balancing...'

**Comment [H5]:** Be specific, too general statement has been made regarding your study contribution

reflect China's historical, cultural, and religious heritage. These elements not only enhance its literary value but also pose considerable challenges in translation due to cultural differences.

This study adopts a stratified sampling method to analyze the CLW in *The Three-Body Problem* and examines their translation strategies through functional equivalence theory. By categorizing the CLW and evaluating the effectiveness of translation methods, the research aims to identify methods that successfully convey cultural information and achieve functional equivalence.

While *The Three-Body Problem* has been extensively studied, few works have a deeper examination on the translation of its CLW from the perspective of functional equivalence, highlighting the significance and necessity of this paper.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Functional Equivalence Theory

Eugene Nida is a renowned linguist and translation theorist, recognized as one of the most influential figures in Western countries and laying the groundwork for contemporary translation theory. He first introduced the concept of "dynamic equivalence" in his book *Toward a Science of Translating*[1] and later defined it more clearly in *The Theory and Practice of Translation*[2]. To avoid misunderstandings associated with the term "dynamic" and to emphasize the concept of "function," Nida gradually adopted the term "functional equivalence".

Nida contends that "translation is the process of re-expressing the information of the source language in the target language using the closest and most natural equivalents, both semantically and stylistically"[3]. This definition encompasses three fundamental meanings: the equivalence of source language information, the naturalness of target language expression, and the highest degree of closeness between the two. According to this theory, translation should focus not only on comparing the corresponding

**Comment [H6]:** Please specify

**Comment [H7]:** Provide a reference.  
It is a self-created statement.

**Comment [H8]:** Provide a short introduction of source text and target text. Also introduce the translator, whose translation you are going to pursue in this study. Why you selected this novel, why this translator, why culture translation, what will be the unique contribution of your study?

**Comment [H9]:** Provide reference

**Comment [H10]:** Reference?

**Comment [H11]:** Provide year

**Comment [H12]:** Which theory?  
Write its name instead.

meanings of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and rhetorical devices, but also on the consistency of reader response. He further categorized meanings into rhetorical, grammatical, and lexical meanings, with each type divided into two levels: referential meaning and associative meaning.

Comment [H13]: Provide reference

Comment [H14]: Reference?

## 2.2 Culture-Loaded Words

Different scholars have offered diverse definitions of CLW. Notably, Mona Baker noted that the source-language word may express a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture. The concept in question may be abstract or concrete; it may relate to a religious belief, a social custom or even a type of food. Such concepts are often referred to as “culture-specific”[4]. In contrast, Chinese scholar Liao Qiyi describes CLW as words, phrases, or idiomatic expressions that represent unique cultural phenomena. These elements highlight the distinct lifestyles and traditions formed by particular ethnic groups over long periods of history, setting them apart from others[5]. According to these perspectives, CLW can be viewed as expressions that create lexical gaps due to cultural disparities. Such gaps may cause loss or misunderstanding of cultural content during translation, resulting in discrepancies in information reception between source-language and target-language readers.

Comment [H15]: Reference?

Comment [H16]: Reference?

Comment [H17]: Reference?

Nida categorizes culture into five types: material culture, ecological culture, social culture, religious culture, and linguistic culture[6], which provide a comprehensive foundation for examining the cultural elements in language. Building on Nida's categorization, this study adopts his framework to analyze CLW systematically.

Comment [H18]: Use simple past tense for statement like this in the entire manuscript

## 2.3 Application of Functional Equivalence in Culture-Loaded Words Translation

Functional equivalence theory is suitable for translation in diversified fields, such as literature, medicine, business, legislation, education, politics, etc., particularly in literature. "The cultural turn in translation marks a pivotal shift from bilingual to quasi-monolingual translation theories, fundamentally challenging not only linguistic translation theories but also the two-millennia-old Western tradition of translation

Comment [H19]: Reference?

studies rooted in ancient Rome." [7] CLW, as key carriers of cultural identity, present unique challenges in literary translation. Their accurate rendering requires balancing the transmission of cultural meaning and ensuring readability for target audiences.

As of November 2024, 21 academic journal articles and 267 dissertations are published on CNKI discussing the translation of CLW under functional equivalence theory. These studies analyze source texts with diverse themes, including literature, history, film, conferences, and technology. For example, Huang[8] examined the translation of CLW in Guangxi folktales, emphasizing the need to select appropriate methods based on the characteristics of the CLW. Similarly, Zhuang[9] and Shi[10] explored literary texts from lexical, syntactic, and textual level under functional equivalence theory. In summary, early all studies conclude that functional equivalence is both feasible and practical in guiding the translation of CLW.

### 3. Culture-Loaded Words in *The Three-Body Problem*

#### 3.1 Classification of Culture-Loaded Words

In *The Three-Body Problem*, the author employs a stratified sampling method to conduct an exhaustive investigation of CLW on sampled pages. The novel comprises 299 pages, with one page selected from every ten pages (i.e., p1, p11, ..., p281, p291) for analysis.

While Nida provides a detailed classification of culture, certain specific CLW may still be subject to different interpretations. To ensure the accuracy of the sample, the author cross-validated the findings and collaborated with others to refine the categorization of ambiguous CLW, thereby enhancing the accuracy and objectivity of the sample.

**Table 1: Classification of CLW in *The Three-Body Problem***

Material	Ecology	Social	Religion	Linguistic	Total
9	2	17	4	28	60

**Comment [H20]:** Use active voice verbs

**Comment [H21]:** Provide reference,

**Comment [H22]:** You didn't explain till now what is your stance regarding the translation of cultural loaded words

**Comment [H23]:** How this study is different from yours study? Provide explanation

**Comment [H24]:** How your study is different from these studies, provide explanation. Only three studies are not sufficient to justify your point. Provide up to 10 such studies

**Comment [H25]:** Use simple past tense

**Comment [H26]:** w

**Comment [H27]:** why did you use stratified sampling and why one page from every 10 page? Justify your answer from literature.

**Comment [H28]:** Remove it.

**Comment [H29]:** Provide reference

**Comment [H30]:** Revise it. Also provide reference

**Comment [H31]:** Who are these others?

Material culture refers to the tangible products created to satisfy human survival and development, including food, tools, architecture, medicine, and clothing. Due to geographic differences, material culture varies significantly across countries and regions, reflecting unique cultural identities. In *The Three-Body Problem*, examples of material culture include “高粱酒(baijiu distilled from sorghum)”, “观星台(astronomical observatory)”, “高粱饭(sorghum meal)”, “旗袍(qipao)”, and “浑天仪(huntianyi)”, etc.

Ecological culture pertains to the geographic environment and ecological conditions upon which people depend for survival and development, encompassing climate, mountains, lakes, mineral resources, and flora and fauna. Examples from the novel include “乌拉草(ura sedge)” and “野山参(wild ginseng)”.

Social culture encompasses the cultural aspects formed during social development, including units of measurement, names and titles, historical context, literature and art, and moral customs. Examples include “书呆子(book-worm)”, “三结合(the revolution)”, “圣上(the great emperor)”, “御旨(order)”, “红卫兵(the Red Guards)”, and “政委(Political Commissar)”.

Religious culture is a system of ideology developed by different nations throughout social and historical evolution. Driven by fear of the unknown in nature, people began to contemplate and explore their environment, gradually forming distinct religious beliefs. Religion serves as both a spiritual refuge and a common code of conduct. Examples include “长老(abbot)”, “叫天天不答，叫地地不应(no one is listening to their prayers)”, “空(emptiness)”, and “僧人(the monks)”.

Linguistic culture exhibits a certain structural stability and is formed by long-used phrases or expressions, such as proverbs and fables. The syntactic, lexical, and phonological differences among ethnic groups are well represented through CLW. In

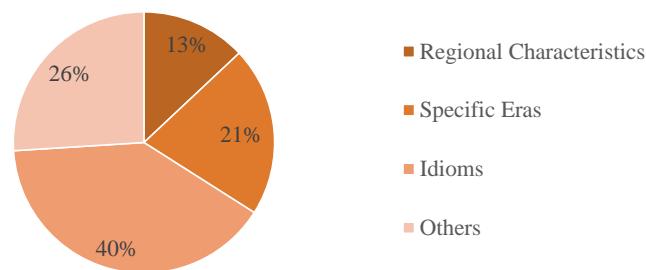
**Comment [H32]:** Use active verbs

*The Three-Body Problem*, linguistic culture is mainly reflected in idioms like “胸有成竹(confidently)”, “志同道合(have common ideals)”, and “耿耿于怀(never forgot)”.

### 3.2 Characteristics of Culture-Loaded Words in *The Three-Body Problem*

In *The Three-Body Problem*, the author identifies three prominent characteristics in the cultural information conveyed by CLW. The distribution of these characteristics is illustrated in the figure below.

fig 1 : Characteristics of CLW in *The Three-Body Problem*



#### 3.2.1 Featuring Regional Characteristics

*The Three-Body Problem* features numerous CLW that are specifically related to the region, particularly northeastern China. The female protagonist, Ye Wenjie, spends many years at the Red Coast Base in the northeast, allowing for a detailed depiction of local products, foods, and plants, providing readers with a glimpse into the unique culture of the region. An example of the description of material products in the village is as follows:

Target Text	Source text
Back translation	

“Everything was warm and intense: the heated kang stove-beds lined with thick layer of ura sedge, the Guandong and Mohe tobacco stuffed in copper pipes, the thick and heavy sorghum meal, the sixty-five-proof baijiu distilled from sorghum.(pp.319)”

**Comment [H33]:** My suggestion is to provide its source text along with its back translation (by the researcher) in the above table

Through these CLW, Liu Cixin vividly portrays northeastern culture, showcasing a blend of China's rich heritage and the distinctiveness of the northeastern ethnic regions. This representation serves to present a typical aspect of Chinese culture to readers at both home and abroad.

**Comment [H34]:** Please also state whether the translator has correctly portrayed the Chinese culture or changed it, resulting in a different scenario.

### 3.2.2 Embracing Specific Eras

The CLW in *The Three-Body Problem* primarily pertain to two significant historical periods in China: the Cultural Revolution and ancient China. The novel employs a rich array of CLW to depict the Cultural Revolution, such as "革命小将(the revolutionary youths)", "红卫兵(the Red Guards)", and "政委(Political Commissar)", immersing readers in that chaotic and tumultuous era, which brought severe setbacks and losses to the entire nation. Additionally, a virtual game depicted in the novel incorporates historical celebrities from ancient China, such as "周文王(King Wen)", "秦始皇(Qin Shi Huang)", and "墨子(Mozi)". Within the game, these figures are placed in the cultural context of the Three-Body world and are assigned new historical missions, allowing readers to engage with ancient Chinese culture.

**Comment [H35]:** Reference?

### 3.2.3 Prevailing Idiomatic Expressions

Idioms represent the most direct and concentrated form of cultural information storage and aggregation among Chinese people. As the essence of the Chinese lexicon, idioms encompass various aspects of life, including astronomy, geography, politics, and culture. Often, idioms convey two layers of meaning: literal meaning and extended meaning. For example, "天衣无缝", originated from Chinese ancient mythology, literally means "the fairy's clothing has no seams," with an extended meaning of "something being flawless and impeccable." The use of idioms in the text vividly communicates and showcases the rich characteristics of Chinese culture. Other examples include "敬而远之(kept a respectable distance from)" and "寻花问柳(always fluttered carelessly from one woman to another)".

**Comment [H36]:** Reference?

**Comment [H37]:** Provide reference?

**Comment [H38]:** Reference?

## 4. Functional Equivalence in Translation of Culture-Loaded Words

#### 4.1 Translation Methods of Culture-Loaded Words

A total of 60 CLW are collected and classified according to Nida's classification and the translation methods. According to the table below, the translator predominantly uses free translation, followed by literal translation and combined translation method. This section will analyze case studies of the translation of CLW in *The Three-Body Problem* based on the frequency of translation techniques used.

Table 2: Culture-Loaded words and Translation Methods

	Material	Ecological	Social	Religious	Linguistic	Total
<b>Literal translation</b>	2		4	2	7	15
<b>Free translation</b>	1		4	2	16	23
<b>Combined methods</b>	5	2	4			11
<b>Transliteration</b>	1					1
<b>Omission</b>			4		5	9
<b>Substitution</b>			1			1
<b>总计</b>	9	2	17	4	28	60

##### 4.1.1 Free Translation

Free translation involves using a transitive approach when dealing with lexical meanings and rhetorical devices (such as metaphors) to fluidly and authentically convey the original text's meaning. This method can be further divided into paraphrase and idiomatic translation: paraphrase provides an interpretive rendering of the original text, while idiomatic translation employs idiomatic expressions from the target language to replace the original wording[11].

**ST1:** “……已经有这么多书呆子寻了短见，让他去不是‘肉包子打狗’吗？”

**TT1:** “...So many book-worms have already killed themselves. If we send him, he'd be a meat dumpling thrown to the dogs.”

**Comment [H39]:** Do not use passive verbs.

**Comment [H40]:** Reference?

**Comment [H41]:** Use past tense

**Comment [H42]:** Reference?

In the context of the novel, due to the collapse of fundamental physical theories, many physicists committed suicide within two months, so the speaker derogatorily refers to them as “书呆子”. In Chinese, “书呆子” historically refers to someone who is bookish, dogmatic, and inexperienced in practical matters, generally indicating a person who reads without being able to apply their knowledge. So the term carries a negative connotation. The translator employs free translation here, rendering it as “book-worm,” which typically describes someone excessively engrossed in books and studies, often lacking social interaction and practical experience. Some cultures or specific groups may view “book-worm” positively, associating it with being knowledgeable and passionate about learning. Thus, whether “book-worm” is seen as derogatory or complimentary depends on the cultural context and specific circumstances.

To better convey the intended meaning, the author suggests translating the term as “pedant,” which refers to someone overly concerned with traditional rules, particularly those related to academic subjects. While the translator opted for the form-related translation “book-worm,” the author prefers the meaning-related translation “pedant,” aligning with the principles of meaning equivalence theory.

Free translation is employed in the phrase “寻了短见”, a commonly used expression for “suicide.” Here, “寻” as a verb means “to go to a place,” while “短” can be interpreted as “narrow.” Thus, “going to a narrow place” implies “suicide,” or as the translator puts it, “kill themselves.”

#### 4.1.2 Literal Translation

Literal translation refers to a method that preserves the meaning and form of the source text. Unlike free translation and word-for-word translation, literal translation does not employ transitive approaches but allows for appropriate adjustments in word order. This method can effectively retain metaphors, national imagery, and significant political meanings.

**ST2:**她身穿一件很不合体的草绿色衣服，显然想与红卫兵的色彩拉近距离……

**ST2:** She walked onto the stage dressed in an ill-fitting green outfit, clearly intended to imitate the military uniform of the Red Guards.

The Red Guards were a mass organization established during the Cultural Revolution to defend Chairman Mao, consisting of students from universities and high schools. The literal translation clearly presents the character's image.

**ST3:** 两人相依为命，在篝火边抵御严寒，泡在湖水中度过酷热。

**TT3:** The two relied on each other for survival. They lit fires to hold off the cold, and ducked into lakes to avoid the heat.

**ST4:** 众目睽睽之下，元首走上巨摆的基座，扳动了一个红色的开关，转身对执政官们说……

**TT4:** Under the watchful eyes of the crowd, the princeps ascended onto the base of the pendulum and flipped a red switch. He turned to the consuls and said...

In the above sentences, “相依为命” (relying on each other for survival) and “众目睽睽” (under the watchful eyes of the crowd) are Chinese idioms that carry only a literal meaning. Through literal translation, the target audience can easily grasp their significance.

In Example 1, “肉包子打狗” (a meat dumpling thrown to the dogs) is a Chinese pun that implies something is thrown away with no chance of return. By literal translation, the metaphor and stylistic elements are preserved. Although this expression is steeped in Chinese cultural connotations, the literal translation allows the target audience to understand it without difficulty.

#### 4.1.3 Combined Translation Method

When literal and free translations alone cannot effectively convey meaning, combined translation method is employed, such as transliteration with free translation and transliteration with annotation.

**Comment [H43]:** Use academic language

**ST5:** 沿着石阶，汪淼攀上了金字塔的顶部，看到了一处类似于古观星台的地方。平台的一角有一架数米高的天文望远镜，旁边还有几架较小型的。另一边是几台奇形怪状的仪器，很像古中国的浑天仪。

**TT5:** Wang climbed up the stairs and reached the apex. The platform looked like an ancient astronomical observatory. In one corner was a telescope several meters high, and next to it were a few smaller telescopes. In another corner were a few strange instruments that reminded him of ancient Chinese armillary spheres, models of objects in the sky.

“浑天仪” is an ancient device invented by Zhang Heng, a great Chinese scientist in the Eastern Han dynasty. The term“浑天仪”is a combination of “浑仪”, an instrument for measuring the celestial sphere's coordinates of celestial bodies, and “浑象”, an instrument used to demonstrate celestial phenomena. And “浑” is shortened from theory of sphere-heavens, an ancient theory that the Earth is inside the heaven as a yoke in an egg. In this sentence, the combination of free translation and addition—“armillary spheres, models of objects in the sky”—clearly describes its structure and function.

**ST6:** ……还有那张床，铺的显然是东北的乌拉草。

**TT6:** And then there was the bed, apparently lined with ura sedge from Northeast China.

China has a vast territory and is rich in resources, with countless flora and fauna found in the mountains of Northeast China. “乌拉草” is a plant that primarily grows in the Changbai Mountains, known for its deodorizing, invigorating, and fatigue-relieving properties. In the example, transliteration with literal translation are adopted. The transliteration of “乌拉” enables the reservation of Chinese cultural characteristics, while the literal translation of “草” identifies their attributes. Overall, this method achieves both meaning and formal equivalence, helping readers understand the terms and appreciate Chinese ecological culture.

#### 4.1.4 Omission

Omission refers to the practice of removing certain words, sentences, or paragraphs

from the original text due to the cultural norms of the target language, ensuring the target text's conciseness and fluency.

**ST7:** “叶哲泰！”绍琳指着丈夫喝到……“你没想到我会站出来揭发你，批判你吧！？是的，我以前……它认为宇宙有限，更是彻头彻尾的唯心主义……”

听着妻子滔滔不绝的演讲，叶哲泰苦笑了一下。

**TT7:** “Ye Zhetai!” She was clearly unused to such theater... “You didn’t think I would stand up and expose you, criticize you? Yes, in the past... It threatens that universe is limited, which is absolutely a form of reactionary idealism...”

As he listen to his wife’ lecture, Ye allowed himself a wry smile.

The Chinese idiom “滔滔不绝” describes someone speaking continuously and at length, akin to an unending stream of water. This meaning is vividly conveyed in the context, where Shaolin's long-winded defense and critique of her husband is illustrated. The translator's choice to omit this phrase does not detract from its intended meaning.

**ST8:** ……但在不长的研究生生涯中，他与导师的关系若即若离，他们之间保持着敬而远之的距离。

**TT8:** But during his brief time as a graduate student, he always kept a respectable distance from his thesis advisor.

“若即若离” implies a relationship that is neither close nor distant, while “敬而远之” conveys a similar sense of maintaining a respectful distance. To better convey the intended meaning and avoid redundancy, the former phrase is omitted in the translation. The example demonstrates that the meaning of the omitted CLW can still be inferred from the surrounding context.

#### 4.2 Realization of Functional Equivalence Theory

After analyzing the translation methods, the author is able to determine the extent to which functional equivalence is achieved. There are generally four types of functional equivalence: communicative, meaning, emotional, and textual equivalence. Here, the

**Comment [H44]:** Underline the idiom in the target text.

focus will be on the first three.

#### 4.2.1 Communicative Functional Equivalence

Communicative functional equivalence is the primary and dominant function of language, referring to the transmission and exchange of information between people. In *The Three-Body Problem*, the meanings of all CLW in Chinese are effectively conveyed, allowing target readers to understand the translated text with minimal ambiguity, thus achieving communicative equivalence.

For instance, the translation of CLW featuring regional characteristics—such as “高粱饭” (sorghum meal), “关东烟” (Guandong tobacco), and “红卫兵” (the Red Guards)—demonstrates this success. By employing various translation methods, target readers are able to both understand and appreciate these elements of Chinese culture.

Furthermore, in cases where idiomatic translation method could not be used, idioms with dual meanings also convey their implied significance to enhance the fluency and readability of the target text. For example, “寻花问柳” (always fluttered carelessly from one woman to another) literally means “to enjoy the spring scenery,” while its implied meaning refers to seeking physical pleasure. Instead of opting for a literal translation, the translator chose to directly convey its implied meaning to improve readability. As a result, communicative equivalence is largely achieved.

#### 4.2.2 Meaning Functional Equivalence

Meaning function is one of the most important functions in everyday communication and literary works. It encompasses not only the information expressed by the speaker but also what the receiver comprehends. In *The Three-Body Problem*, many references to ancient Chinese figures may be unfamiliar to foreign readers, making explanation necessary. For instance, when “墨子” (Mozi) first appears in the story, the translator uses transliteration with annotation to explain his era and achievements:

*“Translator’s note: Mozi was the founder of the Moist school of philosophy during the Warring States Period. Mozi himself emphasized experience and logic, and known as an accomplished engineer and geometer.”*

**Comment [H45]:** Provide page number

Similarly, the historical context of “纣王” (King Zhou of Shang) is elaborated. Through this combined translation approach, the translator enables target readers to gain a deeper understanding of these figures and the development of the plot, thereby achieving semantic equivalence.

#### 4.2.3 Emotional Functional Equivalence

Emotion is a crucial component of literary works, conveying feelings, sentiments, and attitudes. Thus, the translator must pay attention to emotionally charged terms to enhance the target reader's empathy towards characters, achieving emotional equivalence.

**ST9:** 杨卫宁很有才华，风度和修养俱佳，不是一个让她讨厌的人，但她自己已心如死灰，很难再燃起爱情的火焰了。

**TT9:** Yang was a talented man, cultured and with good taste. She didn't find him unpleasant, but her heart was like ashes from which the flame of love could no longer be lit.

Here, “心如死灰” vividly expresses Ye Wenjie's despair towards love. By employing literal translation, her emotions are powerfully conveyed, thus achieving emotional equivalence.

### 4.3 Cases of Lessened Functional Equivalence

**Comment [H46]:** What is lessened?

Through the previous analysis, it is evident that communicative functional equivalence is often achieved during translation. However, emotional and semantic functional equivalences may not be fully realized due to following reasons.

#### 4.3.1 Meaning Weakening

**Comment [H47]:** It does not seem to be a correct heading

During translation, to enhance readability, the meanings of some CLW may be weakened. This phenomenon often occurs in the translation of linguistic CLW, which typically encompasses both literal and extended meanings. The simultaneous transmission of two meanings can be achieved by idiomatic translation, which, however, is hard to come into practice as the exact corresponding idioms may not exist due to semantic void between the two languages. Therefore, for language CLW, paraphrasing is often employed, conveying only the extended meaning and failing to achieve full semantic equivalence.

**ST10:** “系统重新热启动！”冯·诺伊曼胸有成竹地命令道。

**TT10:** “Restart system!” Von Neumann ordered confidently.

The term “胸有成竹” originates from a traditional Chinese idiom story, where it literally refers to “having a complete image of bamboo in one’s mind before painting it.” Over time, it has evolved to convey the figurative meaning of “possessing a thoroughly considered plan or strategy beforehand.” Here, the extended meaning is conveyed but the literal meaning lost, which fails to achieve the meaning equivalence.

**ST11:** “下连队这么长时间了，不能总是甩手到处转，劳动得参加，三结合嘛。……”

**TT11:** “I have been here with the company for so long. I can’t just walk around all day doing nothing. Have to participate in labor. That’s the spirit of the revolution, right?...”

The term “三结合” refers to the revolution carried out by three parties of the revolutionary masses, cadres and the representatives of the PLA. It is simplified to the easily understandable “the spirit of the revolution” for clarity. Providing an explanation or annotation for this term would not add much value; instead, it could confuse readers. Consequently, the weakening of this term's meaning reduces semantic functional equivalence.

#### 4.3.2 Meaning Compensation

Given that *The Three-Body Problem* is a hard science fiction novel, the role of cultural references in the plot development is limited. Consequently, the translator

prioritized the fluency of the narrative, often employing omission method in meaning transmission. As analyzed regarding omission, Shaolin's lengthy speech conveys the meaning of "滔滔不绝" (to talk incessantly), while the synonym "敬而远之" expresses the meaning of "若即若离" (to maintain a relationship that is neither too close nor too distant). This approach leads to a loss of meaning equivalence.

Additionally, there are other instances:

**ST12:** 现在，眼前这位历经沧桑变得平静淡泊的老人，和那位无知而无畏大史，成了他摇摇欲坠的精神世界的两根支柱。

**TT12:** In his current state, his mental stability depended on two pillars: this old woman, who had weathered so many storms and become as gentle as water, and Shi Qiang, the man who feared nothing because he knew nothing.

In the story, when Wang Miao got to know about the alien civilization, he was so astonished that he started to doubt human science and his world view. As a result, his mental state nearly collapses; the phrase "摇摇欲坠" (teetering on the brink) can be inferred from the text's context.

In this case, while the specific cultural nuances may be lost, the essential meaning is compensated through the context and the narrative, maintaining the overall emotional impact and coherence of the story.

#### **4.4 Evaluation of Translation Methods in *The Three-Body Problem***

After analyzing the CLW and their translation methods in *The Three-Body Problem*, it becomes evident how important these methods are for achieving functional equivalence.

Free translation was mostly adopted in the English version, allowing the natural transmission of the meaning, and facilitating the understanding for target readers. Although some profound cultural significance of certain terms—especially those related to linguistic culture—may be lost for the sake of fluency and readability, the

fundamental meanings are still conveyed within the context. This approach helps prevent misunderstandings, thus achieving communicative function equivalence.

In the case of free translation, phrases like "寻了短见" are rich in Chinese cultural context. A literal translation could confuse readers, thereby failing to achieve even the most meaning equivalence. By free translation, the text aligns with the second principle of functional equivalence proposed by Nida: "If a close, formal translation makes no sense, i.e. is totally obscure in designative meaning, certain changes may be introduced into the text"[12]. Moreover, "三结合", which carries a political connotation potentially unfamiliar to the target audience, is translated simply as "revolution." This aligns with Nida's first principle: "If a close, formal translation is easily to result misunderstanding of the designative meaning, certain changes must be introduced into the text of the translation" [12]. Therefore, when there is a conflict between form and meaning, the latter is prioritized.

Literal translation was adopted as much as possible to present Chinese culture when the literal translation version can be understood by the target readers. Examples include "相依为命" (the two relied on each other for survival), "善解人意" (was so considerate of his feelings), "敬而远之" (kept a respectable distance from), and "心如死灰" (her heart was like ashes). In terms of social CLW, translations like "红卫兵" (the Red Guards) and "政委" (Political Commissar) also achieve meaning and communicative function equivalence. Although readers might face some challenges during reading, repeated exposure to these terms in cross-cultural exchanges will help foreign readers become familiar with and accept such expressions. For instance, "白酒" has been formally accepted and translated as "Chinese Baijiu" by literal translation.

The translator also adopted combined translation method when transliteration, literal or free translation couldn't independently convey the meanings. Most CLW are

translated using a mix of transliteration and literal translation. For instance, "关东烟" (Guandong tobacco) and "乌拉草" (ura sedge) not only identifies their attributes by literal translation of "烟", "草", but also reserves Chinese culture characteristics by transliteration of "关东" and "乌拉". This approach achieves both meaning and formal equivalence, enhancing readers' understanding of geographical and ecological culture. The same applies to instances of transliteration with addition, such as "神州 19 号" (Shenzhou 19 spacecraft) and "火炕" (the heated kang stove-bed), which convey Chinese characteristics and meanings, allowing target readers to appreciate the text as original readers do, thus achieving equivalence in both meaning and communicative function.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper analyzes the translation of CLW in *The Three-Body Problem* and evaluates the degree to which translation methods achieve functional equivalence. The study finds that communicative equivalence is largely achieved, but there is still room for improvement in terms of meaning and emotional equivalence. The translator frequently employs free translation to achieve communicative equivalence, yet the incomplete transmission of cultural meanings may impact meaning equivalence. While literal translation can help achieve both communicative and meaning equivalence, it may also increase interpretive difficulty for readers.

Comment [H48]: Past tense

When neither free nor literal translation can independently convey the intended meaning, the translator resorts to combined translation method, such as transliteration with free translation or literal translation with omission, to maximize functional equivalence. Translating, especially CLW, presents a complex and challenging process for translators. Both translators and researchers in the field should have a deep understanding of both cultures to achieve the highest level of equivalence between the source and target texts, thus facilitating cross-cultural communication.

Comment [H49]: Correct it.

**DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)**

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

## References

- [1] Nida, E. (1964). *Toward a science of translation*. London: E. J. Brill.
- [2] Nida, E. (1982). *The theory and practice of translation* (2nd photomechanical reprint). Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- [3] Tan, Z. X. (1984). *Nida on translation*. Beijing: China Translation & Publishing Corporation.
- [4] Baker, M. (2000). *In other words: A coursebook on translation*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- [5] Liao, Q. (2000). *Exploration of Contemporary Western Translation Theories*. Nanjing: Yilin Press.
- [6] Nida, E. (1945). Linguistics and ethnology in translation-problems. *WORD*, 1(2), 194–208.
- [7] Pan, W. (2024). From Literary Translation back to Cultural Transmission: Re-Siting Translation of Chinese Classics to Other Cultures. *Foreign Languages in China*, 21(5), 97–105.
- [8] Huang, L. (2024). A study on the English translation of culture-loaded words in Guangxi folktales from the perspective of functional equivalence. *Master and Masterpiece*, 2024(13), 88–90.
- [9] Zhang, Y. (2023). A translation report on the Chinese-English translation of *Ancient Bashu and Its Cultural Interaction and Integration with South Asia* (excerpt) guided by functional equivalence theory [Master's thesis, Sichuan Normal University].
- [10] Shi, F. (2024). A Chinese-English translation practice report on *Shaanbei Elders* (excerpt) guided by functional equivalence theory [Master's thesis, Yan'an University].

UNDER PEER REVIEW