

Research on Translation Strategies for Culture-Loaded Terms from the Perspective of Translator Subjectivity: A Case Study of Black Myth: *Wukong*

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Abstract

As global cultural exchanges intensify, the translation of culture-loaded terms has become increasingly pivotal in cross-cultural communication. Adopting the perspective of translator subjectivity, this study investigates translation strategies for culture-loaded terms in the game Black Myth: Wukong. Through systematic analysis of representative in-game examples, we demonstrate how translators negotiate between source and target cultures by flexibly applying literal translation, free translation, and transliteration strategies. This approach ensures both effective transmission of cultural meaning and optimal target-audience reception. Key findings reveal that translators' cultural backgrounds, translation purposes, and audience considerations critically shape strategic decisions. Context-sensitive adaptation and strategic selection of methods are essential to enhance translation quality, maximize cross-cultural impact, and facilitate trans-cultural dissemination. This research contributes novel methodological frameworks to culture-loaded term translation and offers actionable insights for advancing the global reach of cultural products.

Keywords

Translator Subjectivity; Culture-Loaded Terms; Black Myth: Wukong; Translation Strategies

1. Introduction

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China points out "Adhering to the Chinese cultural stance, we must refine and showcase the spiritual identifiers and cultural essence of Chinese civilization, accelerate the construction of China's discourse and narrative systems, tell China's stories well, disseminate China's voices effectively, and present a credible, lovable, and respectable image of China." Against this backdrop, video games, as a medium, possess broad reach and

immediacy in cultural dissemination. In 2024, the game *Black Myth: Wukong* emerged with remarkable impact, quickly igniting the enthusiasm of players worldwide. As a pioneering domestic masterpiece characterized by high standards, substantial content, and exceptional quality, the game is rooted in the classical literary work *Journey to the West*, constructing a magnificent and fantastical world of Eastern mythology. With its release in multiple countries overseas, the translation of culture-loaded terms in its English version has been regarded as an exemplary model. Through creative translation and liberal translation techniques, the translators have preserved the cultural core of the original text while endowing the translated version with vivid aesthetic appeal. This allows traditional Chinese culture to reach the global stage with elegance, fully demonstrating cultural confidence and linguistic charm.

This study, grounded in the perspective of translator's subjectivity, takes the English version of the game *Black Myth: Wukong* as its research subject and conducts a systematic analysis of the translation of culture-loaded terms in the text. By comparing the source and target texts, it focuses on how the translators balance style reproduction, content accuracy, and the complete transmission of cultural connotations in their translation practice. Furthermore, through specific translation case studies, the study delves into the proactive role of translator's subjectivity in the selection of translation strategies and cultural adaptation. It examines the value and significance of translator's subjectivity in promoting the effective dissemination of culture-loaded terms in cross-cultural communication, providing both theoretical and practical references for translation studies in cultural products.

2. Translator's Subjectivity

Translator's subjectivity refers to the subjective initiative demonstrated by translators—as the primary agents of translation—in their practice, under the premise of respecting the source text, in order to achieve specific translation purposes. It is fundamentally characterized by the translator's conscious cultural awareness, humanistic qualities, and cultural and aesthetic creativity. Translator's subjectivity permeates every stage of the translation process, including the comprehension and interpretation of the original work, as well as the selection of translation strategies. As both the reader of the source text and the writer of the translated text, the translator "plays a decisive role in translation practice"[1].

In the practice of game localization, translator's subjectivity is fully manifested through three key role transitions: reader, writer, and player. When the translator assumes the role of the reader, it requires an in-depth study of the game's source text, accurately analyzing its linguistic structure, cultural connotations, and narrative flow. This role positioning is not only essential for the translator's accurate understanding of the source text but also a prerequisite for the subsequent translation work. As the writer, the translator must strike an optimal balance between faithful-

ness to the original and creative expression. By reconstructing the text, the translator aligns the language style, narrative pacing, and character development with the aesthetic preferences and expectations of players in the target cultural context, thereby endowing the translation with new artistic vitality. Lastly, in the role of the player, the translator must formulate translation strategies from the perspective of the game's audience, taking full account of elements such as interactivity, entertainment value, and emotional resonance. This ensures that the localized text seamlessly integrates into the gaming experience, providing target users with a smooth, immersive, and engaging gameplay experience[5].

3. Black Myth: Wukong and Culture-Loaded Terms

3.1. Definition and Relevance of Culture-Loaded Terms

Culture-loaded terms refer to words, phrases, and idioms that denote elements unique to a particular culture. These terms reflect the distinct ways of life accumulated gradually by a specific ethnic group throughout its long history, setting it apart from other nations. Characterized by strong ethnic connotations and distinctive cultural identities, culture-loaded terms most vividly embody the cultural information carried and transmitted by language and best reflect human social life. As crucial carriers of ethnic culture, they represent a special type of informational text, possessing not only literal meanings but also rich cultural connotations.

Translation, superficially a conversion between two languages, is fundamentally an exchange between two cultures. Expressions that are self-evident in one cultural context may require extensive explanation when introduced into another. In video games, entertainment is the primary objective, while cultural transmission remains secondary.[2] Due to limited interface space, excessive textual annotations may distract players. Therefore, game translation should minimize the effort required for players to comprehend cultural elements, prioritizing a seamless and enjoyable gaming experience.

Although Black Myth: Wukong belongs to the category of game texts, its character dialogues and cutscene narratives contain a wealth of culture-loaded terms. Linguistically, its dialogues are concise and refined, frequently incorporating four-character idioms, proverbs, and classical Chinese expressions. Moreover, the game integrates numerous elements of Buddhist and Taoist thought, reflected in religious terminology such as “佛位” “三界六道” and “长生不老”[7].

3.2. Challenges Posed by Culture-Loaded Terms in Game Translation

For the internationalization of the domestically developed AAA game Black Myth: Wukong, the choice of translation strategies for culture-loaded terms plays a critical role. Both game developers and translators must navigate multiple considerations: On the cultural front, a balance must be struck between preserving the essence

of the native culture and ensuring comprehension and acceptance by global players. While literal translation maintains fidelity to the source text, it may fail to convey the emotional and cultural depth of culture-loaded terms. Conversely, liberal translation prioritizes target-audience understanding but risks diluting the original cultural distinctiveness. To enhance clarity and cultural relevance, supplementary methods such as annotations and cultural explanations can be employed. From the perspectives of player receptiveness and cultural education, translation strategies should not only align with player cognition but also leverage the game as a cultural vehicle. This allows the presentation of Chinese history and culture to a worldwide audience, aiding comprehension while sparking interest in the underlying cultural heritage. At the intersection of technology and artistry, translators must exercise creativity, utilizing narrative design, character dialogue, visual cues, and other innovative means to localize culture-loaded terms. This approach preserves the game's aesthetic integrity and cultural richness, helping players grasp the cultural connotations embedded within the terminology. Furthermore, achieving an equilibrium between globalization and localization is essential. Translations should resonate with a broad global audience while steadfastly retaining the uniqueness of Chinese culture. Through thoughtful game localization, *Black Myth: Wukong* can effectively build bridges for cross-cultural dialogue and narrate China's stories on the international stage[4].

4. Analysis of Selected Examples from *Black Myth: Wukong* under the Perspective of Translator's Subjectivity

As a form of modern translation practice, game localization requires translators to fully leverage their subjective initiative. This involves making reasoned choices regarding the form and content of the source text—including adaptation, adjustment, or even rewriting—to ensure that target-language players can better comprehend the game's text and achieve a deeper gaming experience. In this process, translator's subjectivity is primarily manifested in two aspects: First, it eliminates comprehension barriers posed by the source language, helping players grasp the essence of the text and enhancing their immersion in the narrative. This aligns with the domestication strategy, which reduces the unfamiliarity of foreign cultural elements by converting culturally specific content into equivalents that are more readily understood within the target culture. By fostering a sense of resonance and identification, this approach allows players to integrate into the game more quickly and improves their sense of presence[6]. Second, it appropriately preserves the cultural distinctiveness of the source text through accurate cultural transposition and innovative communication strategies. This helps create digitally-native Chinese cultural products with global appeal and establishes a sustainable model for cultural influence export—reflecting the foreignization strategy. This approach retains elements of exotic cultural flavor, allowing players to experience the charm and novelty of a foreign

culture, thereby stimulating curiosity and a sense of discovery. This section examines selected culture-loaded terms from *Black Myth: Wukong*, analyzing the translation strategies employed and illustrating the significance of translator's subjectivity through concrete examples[8].

4.1. Overcoming Linguistic Barriers in Source Text Comprehension

Game text translation serves as a vital bridge for cross-cultural communication, with its core objective being to accurately eliminate the cognitive gaps and cultural barriers that target-language players may encounter when comprehending the source-language game narrative. It aims to help players transcend linguistic boundaries and fully immerse themselves in the fantastical worlds games construct, thereby achieving a more fluid, profound, and resonant gaming experience. Amid the wave of globalization sweeping the gaming industry, players from different countries and regions—marked by significant differences in language habits, cultural perceptions, and value systems—often struggle to directly grasp the rich imagery, metaphorical expressions, and culture-specific concepts embedded in the original game texts.

In this context, translators, as facilitators of cultural exchange, must fully exercise their subjectivity. Armed with professional expertise and acute cultural sensitivity, they delve deeply into the essence of the source text to uncover its underlying logic and emotional layers. Centered on the translation goal—enhancing target players' gaming experience and cultural receptivity—they make deliberate choices and adaptive adjustments to both the form and meaning of the original. This requires translators not only to possess solid bilingual competence but also strong cross-cultural communication skills, enabling them to accurately capture subtleties in the source culture and skillfully transform them into expressions readily understood and accepted by the target audience. Through this process, translators must ensure that the translation retains the core message and artistic appeal of the original while precisely aligning with the cognitive patterns, aesthetic expectations, and cultural context of the target players. By removing comprehension obstacles and narrowing the distance between players and the game, they enable players to not only enjoy the gameplay but also appreciate the encounter and interplay of diverse cultures. This, in turn, enhances the fluency, richness, and sense of identification in their gaming experience, ultimately realizing the true value of game text translation.

Ex.1

ST: 下降尘凡第一难

TT: Home is behind

Analysis: The translator employs a Western allusion with a meaning parallel to the Chinese original. The game's first achievement, 下降尘凡第一难 ("Descending into the Mortal World: The First Trial"), is rendered as Home is behind, a phrase drawn from the song in *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, whose opening lines

are: Home is behind, the world ahead, and there are many paths to tread. In the game context, this echoes the protagonist's embarkation on a new journey, marking a beginning. Instead of a literal translation, the translator adopts a domestication strategy, embedding a culturally familiar reference as an "Easter egg" for Western players. This not only bridges potential cultural gaps but also enables target players to grasp the intended meaning more readily, thereby enhancing their overall gaming experience.

Ex.2

ST: 不杀生，仇恨永无止息；不偷盗，强弱如我何异；不邪淫，一切有情皆孽；不妄语，梦幻泡影空虚。不饕酒，忧怖涨落无常；不耽乐，芳华刹那而已；不贪眠，苦苦不得解脱；不纵欲，诸行了无生趣。

TT: Thou shalt kill, lest feuds instill; thou shalt snatch, a fair play in a fair match; thou shalt lust, before all loves turn into dust; thou shalt boast, for prestige and legacy in doth hoast; thou shalt drink, and drenched unease shall sink; thou shalt revel, prime vearshan't be spent to settle; thou shalt dream, to reach in bleak void the sole gleam.

Analysis: The translator's adoption of archaic English, exemplified by the use of "thou shalt," serves to enhance the solemn and historical tone of the text. While "thou" and "shalt" are archaic forms of "you" and "shall," their deliberate use recalls the biblical Ten Commandments. This is particularly significant as the source text alludes to the Buddhist Eight Precepts, which the character Huangmei subverts. By mirroring the "anti-Eight Precepts" with the rhetorical form of "anti-Ten Commandments," the translation not only underscores Huangmei's deceptive and quasi-divine role but also evokes in international players a sense of being lured or misled. From the standpoint of translator subjectivity, this strategy reflects a nuanced understanding of the cultural and religious layers of the source text, thereby deepening the immersive experience for players across languages.

Ex.3

ST: 甘为铜钱做马牛，不怕阎王命不休。

TT: Life of human, all for gold. We cheat death and ever grow.

Analysis: The couplet "甘为铜钱做马牛，不怕阎王命不休" satirizes people's obsession with wealth through metaphor and hyperbole, critiquing utilitarian values with a tone of irony. The translation adopts a free translation strategy, rendering it as "all for gold" and "cheat death," which condense the essence of profit-seeking and the defiance of mortality. The rhyme between "gold" and "grow" also conforms to English poetic convention, preserving both meaning and aesthetic effect.

4.2. Retaining the Cultural Characteristics of the Source Text

Game texts in Chinese domestic titles embody a wealth of cultural elements, including mythology, poetry, and classical allusions, which contribute to their depth and unique appeal. Translators, as cultural mediators, must move beyond literal conver-

sion and employ strategies such as literal translation, free translation, and transliteration with annotation to preserve cultural resonance and stylistic nuance. By annotating idioms and carefully adapting poetic language, translators help international players appreciate the aesthetic and philosophical dimensions of Chinese culture. Such practices not only enhance the global reception of Chinese games but also promote the international dissemination and influence of Chinese culture.

Ex.4

Table1. Character translation comparison

ST	TT
悟空	Wukong
黑熊精	Black Bear Guai
赤髯龙	the Red Loong

Analysis: A comparison between the source and translated texts in Example (4) reveals that the name "悟空" (Wukong) is rendered through transliteration as "Wukong," rather than being translated as "Monkey King." Transliterating personal names helps introduce the structure of Chinese names to audiences from other cultural backgrounds, potentially sparking their interest in learning more about Chinese culture.

As for the translations of "黑熊精" and "赤髯龙," a combination of literal translation and transliteration is adopted. The term "妖怪" in the game is directly translated as "Yaoguai." In Chinese culture, "妖怪" or "精" typically refers to mystical beings with supernatural abilities or incarnations of certain deities, and can be considered a neutral term. This choice is motivated by the conceptual differences between the Chinese "妖怪" and the Western "monster," justifying the creation of a new term to define the Chinese concept of "Yaoguai." Similarly, "龙" is translated as "Loong" instead of "dragon." This is because the Western "dragon" is often portrayed as evil, while the Chinese "龙" symbolizes auspiciousness and nobility. Using "Loong" better conveys the distinctive characteristics and cultural connotations of the traditional Chinese dragon.

Ex.5

ST: 雷长老

TT: Thunder Rhino Master

Analysis: The translation of 雷长老 employs an addition strategy. Foreign players may find it puzzling that "rhino" is used in reference to 雷长老, as he is not literally a rhinoceros in the game. This translation, however, can stimulate players' curiosity, encouraging them to explore the connection between Lei Elder and the rhino. In fact, 雷长老 once saved a rhinoceros spirit, who in gratitude gave him its horn, thereby extending his lifespan. By adopting a domestication strategy, the translator generates interest in the character and promotes cultural dissemination. Additionally, the translation may also draw inspiration from the popular animated film Kung Fu Panda 2, which features a Master Thundering Rhino, creating a subtle intertextual

reference that enriches foreign players' cultural experience and engagement with the game.

Ex.6

ST: 五行山

TT: Five Elements Mountain

Analysis: “五行山” originates from Journey to the West as the sacred mountain that imprisons Sun Wukong. Its name is rooted in the ancient Chinese philosophy of the Five Elements (Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, Earth), referring not only to the mountain's material composition but also implying the Daoist cosmological concept of mutual generation and restriction, making it a highly culture-loaded symbol. The translation Five Elements Mountain adopts a literal translation strategy, with “Five Elements” corresponding directly to “五行,” preserving the integrity of the concept. This aligns with internationally recognized translations of Chinese philosophy (e.g., the Five Elements in Traditional Chinese Medicine) and helps the target audience establish a foundational understanding.

5. Evaluation of the Translation Strategy for Black Myth: Wukong

5.1. Advantages

In terms of preserving cultural features, the game mainly uses transliteration for terms with strong Chinese cultural characteristics. For example, “悟空” is rendered as Wukong and “金箍棒” as Jin Gu Bang, retaining the original pronunciation and conveying distinct Eastern cultural elements. The term “龙” is translated as Loong to differentiate it from the Western concept of a winged, malevolent Dragon, accurately reflecting the Chinese dragon's auspicious and majestic symbolism. To enhance player comprehension, creative free translation strategies are employed. “妖怪” is rendered as Guai rather than Monster, with in-game explanations helping players grasp this culturally specific concept. Similarly, complex Buddhist and Daoist ideas, such as the “八诫,” are adapted using the framework of the Christian Ten Commandments, allowing Western players to understand the content through familiar religious references. The localization also demonstrates creative expression. The Tiger Vanguard character, originally voiced in a northeastern Chinese dialect, is given a Cockney accent in English, preserving the “grounded” dialectal character and enhancing personality and overall aesthetic experience.

5.2. Problems

Some translations in Black Myth: Wukong weaken cultural imagery and disrupt understanding. For example, “筋斗云” is rendered as Jindou Cloud; while this preserves pronunciation, it fails to fully convey the mythological and symbolic significance of Sun Wukong's signature ability, diminishing its legendary aura. Similarly, “八十一难” is translated as The Eighty-one Trials, but the cultural and philosophical

significance of the number eighty-one in Chinese and Buddhist contexts—representing spiritual hardships, karmic cycles, and attainment of perfection—is largely lost to Western players. In addition, inconsistent terminology, such as translating “经文” as both Scriptures and Sutras, hinders players from forming a stable understanding of core concepts, particularly in narratives involving Buddhist teachings, thereby disrupting coherent comprehension of religious and cultural content.

5.3. Recommendations

To address cultural imagery loss, insufficient background conveyance, and inconsistent terminology in *Black Myth: Wukong*, a multidimensional strategy is proposed. Cultural symbols are preserved through transliteration combined with dynamic annotation, visual cues, and narrative integration—for example, translating “筋斗云” as Jindou Cloud, marking skill effects, and highlighting its symbolic meaning in dialogue. Abstract cultural elements are embedded into gameplay scenes, such as rendering “八十一难” as The Eighty-one Trials of Nirvana and providing contextual explanations via level unlocks and loading screens. Terminology consistency is ensured by standardizing core terms like “经文,” explaining them through NPC dialogue, reinforced by icons and an official Terminology Manual. By integrating translation with gameplay and visual design, these strategies enable players to perceive Chinese cultural connotations through interaction, fostering both emotional engagement and effective international dissemination of Chinese mythology and traditional culture.

6. Conclusion

This study examines *Black Myth: Wukong* with a focus on the translation of culture-loaded words, emphasizing the significance of cultural adaptability in game localization. By analyzing cases such as “悟空” and “八戒,” it outlines the use of literal translation, free translation, and transliteration, and evaluates their effects on cross-cultural communication. The findings suggest that effective strategies should balance fidelity to source culture with target audience reception, employing techniques like dynamic annotation and contextualized expression to convey deeper meanings. The study provides insights for optimizing the translation of *Black Myth: Wukong* and offers practical reference for the internationalization of Chinese AAA games, contributing to the global dissemination of Chinese gaming culture.

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