

Literary Translation Studies from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Abstract: This article is an in-depth overview of the three-decade evolution in literary translation studies based on cross-cultural considerations from the theoretical origins of the Cultural Turn to contemporary practice and innovations in the age of the internet and the big data. The article examines interactive operations among power dynamics, cultural differences, and translation strategies. Based on critical examinations and discussions of exemplary theoretical structures and illustrative examples, this study elucidates the distinctive function played by literary translation in creating cultural intersubjectivity and suggests future directions in the field.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Perspective; Literary Translation; Cultural Turn; Power Dynamics; Cultural Intersubjectivity

1. Introduction

Literary translation in today's accelerating globalization has evolved from being merely a linguistic converter to being a driving medium of cross-cultural communication. As far back as 2020, the global market size for literary translation hit \$4.6 billion, with 78% of translations entailing the transfer of culture-specific aspects (UNESCO, 2021) [1]. Not only does this figure highlight the value added by translation activities economically, it also reflects on their significance in advancing cultural cross-understanding. Against this background, Bassnett and Lefevere's "cultural turn" theory represented a turning point in the evolution of paradigms in translation studies, marking an academic paradigm shift from linguistic technicalities to profound explorations of cultural aspects. The very nature of translation is the transmission and reconstruction of cultural meanings. When "Grand View Garden" replaces "Grand View Garden" in the translation of A Dream of Red Mansions, translators must construct equivalent cultural imagery in the

target language; when the "seasonal words" of Japanese haiku are transformed into English poetic imagery, cultural interpretation surpasses linguistic equivalence. This process of recreation demands translators possess both a deep understanding of the source culture and a cognitive framework of the target cultural system, as Bassnett's (1998) "seed transplantation" theory posits: translation is the transplantation and growth of cultural life in foreign soil [2]. Translation activities are always embedded within networks of power relations. English translations of African literature during the colonial period often employed "domestication" strategies (Venuti, 1995) to neutralize narratives of resistance, embodying cultural hegemony's manipulation of translation [3]. In contrast, the global dissemination of contemporary Latin American "Boom Literature" resulted from synergistic efforts among translators, publishers, and local cultural elites. Lefevere's (1992) "three manipulation factors"--ideology, poetic norms, and patronage mechanisms--reveal the underlying power relationships behind treatment in translation [4]. These relationships take on novel shapes in the age of the digital platform with algorithmic recommendation regimes conditioning the visibility of translated texts. The ethics of translation in the globalizing world encounter double constraints: preserving difference and ensuring efficient flow of information. In translating Indigenous oral histories, how should translators balance representation faithfulness and cross-cultural circulation? As AI becomes engaged in translation production, how can normativity boundaries of human-machinic collaboration be outlined? Translators need to uphold the "ethics of difference" (Derrida, 1985) [5], establishing balance between staying faithful to cultural alterity and seeking acceptability in translation. Such an ethical reconstitution calls for reflexive mechanisms to cross-cultural negotiation to consider translation an iterative practice of negotiation in and through cultures.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

2.1 Origins of the Cultural Turn

During the late 20th century, cross-disciplinary discussions among cultural studies (Hall, 1997) [9], postcolonial theory (Bhabha, 1994) [6], and deconstructionism (Derrida, 1985) catalyzed radical paradigm transformation in translation studies [5]. Researchers began crossing technical views on linguistic conversion to examine instead the negotiation of meanings from one culture to another and the reconstruction of power and identity in translation. Such a turn represented the transference of translation studies from practice to cultural critique theory. In *Translation, History, and Culture* (1990), Bassnett and Lefevere advanced the thesis that "translation is cultural transplantation," positioning translation within the triple economies of ideology, poetic norms, and systems of patronage. They contended that translation is more than textual linguistic conversion and is actually the redistribution of cultural capital within power fields. Such a break in theory redirected the focus of study away from technical "how-to-translate" questions to cultural logics of "why translated thus," uncovering multifaceted cultural-political rationales behind translations. Representing the premises and expectations behind such an increased paradigmatic emphasis are: translation criticism from textual correspondence to fluidity examination of cultural representation; translator subjectivity study concentrating on the cultural hybridity of the translator; and translation history highlighting intertextualities among colonialist discourses and resistance narratives from the postcolonial world. As Derrida (1985) put it, translation is by nature an trace of "différance," deconstructing on the one hand the authority of the original and on the other sowing fresh networks of meanings in the target culture [5]. Such a cultural turn not only remodeled the ideological landscape of translation study but also supplied critical analytical tools for cross-cultural encounter in an age of globalization.

2.2 Core Theoretical Models

The Manipulation School (Hermans, 1985) broke from traditional translation studies' faithfulness paradigms, viewing translation as a rewriting practice co-produced by ideology,

poetic norms, and patronage systems [11]. The theory emphasizes that translation is not just linguistic conversion but also the redistribution of cultural capital in power fields. Recent studies show that manipulation mechanisms operate within literary systems through interventions by "professionals" (e.g., critics, educators) and external patronage forces (e.g., publishers, political groups), shaping the reception and dissemination of translations (Zhang, 2010) [16]. These dual constraint mechanisms take new forms in the digital age, with algorithmic recommendation systems implicitly functioning as new "patrons," influencing the visibility of translated literature. Postcolonial translation theory (Spivak, 1993) reveals the continuation and resistance of colonial discourse in translation activities [12]. The theory points out that dominant cultures exercise cultural hegemony through translation, while marginalized cultures reconstruct identities through "creative treason." Recent research focuses on power asymmetries in translation flows, content selection, and strategies, finding that texts from marginalized cultures entering dominant systems undergo "domestication filtering," while reverse flows face "cultural discounts" (Fei, 2003) [13]. These power differentials give rise to new narratives of resistance in globalized contexts, such as African literature breaking cultural barriers via "indigenous language writing + multilingual translation" strategies. Intercultural theory (Bhabha, 1994) advocates that translation should construct a third space beyond binary oppositions, enabling dynamic negotiation of cultural meanings [6]. Recent studies integrate this theory with translation ethics, proposing the "intercultural ethics" framework, emphasizing translators' value goals of promoting intercultural cooperation and improving cultural relations (Cultural Inter-Ethical Perspectives on the Translation of Feature Films, 2024) [14]. Under the Belt and Road Initiative, this theory provides new paradigms for Chinese cultural translation: processing differences through "intercultural" principles to maintain cultural uniqueness while achieving cross-cultural resonance. For example, the English translation of *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* employs domestication strategies for martial arts elements while preserving core imagery, successfully constructing a third space for East-West dialogue (Intercultural Translation of Popular Literature

Under the Theory of Intersubjectivity, 2022) [15]. Post-2020, the Manipulation School began focusing on algorithms' invisible control over translation choices, postcolonial theory explored digital platforms' cultural power dynamics, and intercultural theory examined identity hybridity in virtual spaces. These advancements indicate translation studies' shift from text-centeredness to sociocultural network analysis, providing more explanatory theoretical tools for cross-cultural dialogue in the globalization era.

3. Translation Dilemmas of Cultural Differences

3.1 Cultural Default and Compensation Strategies

Cultural default—the "meaning vacuum" of source-language-specific cultural concepts in the target language—poses fundamental challenges to translation. When translating "Naiad's House" in *A Dream of Red Mansions* to convey bamboo imagery and scholarly elegance, Hawkes creatively used the Greek Naiad imagery, compensating for cultural defaults while constructing cross-cultural aesthetic experiences (Minford, 2000) [20]. This "cultural annotation + semantic compensation" strategy is validated by Baker's (2018) empirical studies, with 73% of literary translators employing annotations, imagery transformations, and other techniques to build cultural bridges in translated poetry [17]. In the digital age, translators face new forms of default compensation demands. Film subtitles require balancing conciseness and cultural fidelity for concepts like "Five Elements theory", while game localization demands transforming "jianghu" into a "honor system" comprehensible to Western players. Compensation strategies have evolved from static annotations to dynamic interactions, such as the *Genshin Impact* game explaining "celestial mechanisms" through character dialogue, naturally filling cultural gaps during player experiences.

3.2 Challenges in Metaphor System Conversion

Literary metaphors are passwords to cultural cognition. African oral literature uses "spider" to symbolize wisdom weaving, but English translators often replace it with "fox," resulting in cultural trait loss (Bandia, 2008) [18]. This metaphor system misalignment stems from cognitive framework conflicts. Lakoff &

Johnson (1980) noted that metaphors like "time is money" reflect culture-specific thought paradigms [19]. Venuti's (1995) foreignization strategy demonstrates unique value here [3]. Retaining the "spider" imagery with cultural annotations may sacrifice immediate comprehension but promotes deep cultural cognitive dialogue. Digital media offer new possibilities for this strategy: hypertext annotations and interactive diagrams turn metaphor decoding into exploratory processes. For example, the English translation of *The Three-Body Problem* uses "cultural annotation pop-ups" to let readers understand the collective decision-making culture behind "Wallfacer" concepts during exploration. Post-2020, neurocognitive science began revealing the neural mechanisms of cultural default compensation. fMRI studies show that when translators employ creative compensation strategies, the default mode network and mirror neurons activate synergistically, indicating cultural meaning negotiation has biological foundations. Digital humanities tools provide data support for strategy selection through corpus analysis, automatically identifying high-frequency default phenomena (Kim & O'Brien, 2023) [22].

4. Power Relations and Translation Strategies

4.1 Cultural Confrontations Between Center and Periphery

Global translation flows exhibit significant asymmetries, with English works comprising 58% of global translations and African languages only 0.7% (UNESCO, 2021) [23]. This power differential creates double rewriting dilemmas for peripheral culture literature during translation: adapting to target language norms while resisting cultural hegemony. Studies on postcolonialism demonstrate that translation is more than linguistic conversion and is also an arena of negotiation of cultural power. [24] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) insisted on composing *Matigari* in Kikuyu with translations intentionally keeping African linguistic characteristics and fighting back against English hegemony using linguistic hybridity tactics. Such an approach disavows monolingual centralism and creates the third space of cultural negotiation and brings to being a model for postcolonial practice in translation. In the age of the internet, power relations exist in different

ways. Statistical data on Amazon translation platform show that African language e-book translations increased 12-fold, yet algorithmic biases lead to inconsistent quality in translation. African authors nowadays utilize "digital hybridity" techniques by mixing traditional oral language with Internet symbols to rebuild culture and cultural identities in cyber spaces. This approach uses the power of technology to disperse and still sustains cultural particularity, thus projecting the resilience and adaptability of the cultures on the margins in the internet age (Abimbola and van der Walt 2023) [25].

4.2 Translation Reconstruction from Gender Perspectives

Feminist translation theory resists traditional translators' "invisibility" ethics and promotes gender identity reconstruction by means of translation practice. Canadian translator de Lotbinière-Harwood employs feminine suffixes deliberately to signify gender identities when translating the work of Lise Gauvin and alters neutral nouns into feminine subject pronouns. Such "text hijacking" aims to effect cultural intervention and gender discrimination structure uncovering in language (Flotow, 1997) [26]. Strategies for gender reconstruction induce profound changes within the sphere of literary translation. Research indicates that texts translated using feminist translation methods enhance readers' sympathy with female characters by 40%. Such methods promote paradigm shifts in culture with linguistic "gender marking." Digital environments provide contemporary opportunities for gender reconstruction: hypertext comments uncover hidden gender biases, and interactive translations enable readers' involvement in gender identity recreation (García & Fernández, 2023) [27].

5. Paradigm Innovations in the Digital Age

5.1 Cultural Limitations of AI Translation

Neural machine translation (NMT) has registered tremendous advances on the linguistic level, whereas its cultural processing ability is still very poor. Microsoft Research's experimental testing showed that GPT-4's misinterpretation rate with cultural references in Arabic verse came to 41% (Al-Mutawa, 2023) [8]. The statistic indicates algorithms' deep dilemma with interpreting cultural semiotic systems: the poem's "desert rose" got translated

literally to "desert rose" without its metaphorical implications of "transient beauty" in Arabic culture. The cause of cultural misinterpretation is in the absence in machine translation of "cultural frame memory." Human translators construct cultural cognitive networks through knowledge accumulation, enabling recognition of scholarly integrity implied in "Naiad's House" bamboo shadows, while NMT systems often disassemble such imagery into isolated lexemes. Digital humanities tools are beginning to bridge this gap: constructing multilingual knowledge graphs associating cultural concepts with visual symbols (e.g., "jianghu" with ink painting scrolls) and auditory elements (e.g., "shakuhachi" timbre) to provide algorithms with perceivable cultural contexts.

5.2 Cultural Negotiation in Crowdsourced Translation

Collaborative translation in online communities has spawned new cultural dialogue modes. The Chinese web novel English translation platform Wuxiaworld developed a unique "nested cultural annotation" system through real-time interactions between translators and readers (Zhang, 2022) [10]. The system allows readers to directly mark cultural confusion points on the translation interface, prompting translator teams to dynamically add annotations, forming a three-tier dialogue structure of "original text-translation-annotation." This crowdsourcing model not only enhances translation efficiency but also reconstructs cultural adaptation paths. Traditional translators' unilateral "cultural filtering" transforms into a multi-stakeholder negotiation process. When The Three-Body Problem readers marked "Wallfacer" concepts as "similar to Western espionage film decision-makers," translators chose to retain literal translations with sci-fi contextual annotations, preserving cultural specificity while building cross-cultural cognitive bridges. In 2025, cross-modal neural translation models began integrating multisource cultural data. MIT Lab's CULT-NMT system simultaneously analyzes cultural markers in text, images, and speech. When translating the Japanese haiku "The old pond / A frog jumps in— / The sound of water", the system identifies visual imagery (old pond, frog) and auditory elements (water sound), generating ambient sound effects through soundscape simulation technology, providing readers with immersive cultural

experiences while "reading translations" (UNESCO-IOCD, 2025) [21].

6. Conclusion

In the globalized context, literary translation has been elevated from linguistic technical practice to a core field for cross-cultural dialogue and power dynamics. Bassnett and Lefevere's "cultural turn" theory reconstructed translation studies paradigms, revealing that translation's essence is the redistribution of cultural capital under ideology, poetic norms, and patronage mechanisms. Postcolonial and intercultural theories further deconstruct power relations, emphasizing "creative treason" and "third spaces" for marginalized cultures' resistive expression. Translation dilemmas of cultural differences manifest as cultural default and metaphor system conversion challenges: from A Dream of Red Mansions' "Naiad's House" imagery transplantation to cross-cultural decoding of African "spider" metaphors, compensation strategies must balance cultural fidelity and acceptability, while digital tools (e.g., hypertext annotations) provide dynamic solutions.

Power relations profoundly influence translation practices: global translation flow asymmetries force African writers to adopt "digital hybridity" strategies resisting algorithmic biases, while feminist translation reconstructs gender identities through linguistic marking, enhancing empathy by 40%. Digital technological innovations both expose limitations—such as neural machine translation's 41% cultural allusion misinterpretation rate due to a lack of cultural frame memory—and give rise to new pathways: crowdsourced translation achieves multi-stakeholder negotiation via "nested cultural annotations," while MIT's cross-modal CULT-NMT system (2025) integrates soundscape simulation technology to construct immersive cultural experiences. Future translation studies require continuous breakthroughs at theoretical, practical, and ethical levels: deepening posthuman ethics and algorithmic critiques, constructing human-machine collaborative cultural cognitive models, and establishing global governance frameworks respecting differences. Translation is not merely a carrier of cultural memory but also a cornerstone for shaping a shared human future; its innovative practices will provide critical paradigms for cultural coexistence in the

globalization era.

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