

## The Translation of Cultural-loaded Words in *Nezha 2* from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

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**Abstract:** With the in-depth advancement of China's cultural "going global" initiative, domestic animated films have emerged as a crucial carrier for the international dissemination of Chinese culture. While the *Nezha* film series has achieved remarkable success in both domestic and foreign markets, issues such as audience comprehension barriers overseas have arisen. Thus, the quality of subtitle translation is identified as a key limiting factor. This paper focuses on *Nezha 2*, employing a case study approach to analyze its subtitle translation from three dimensions: the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimension. It explores, for instance, the types of culture-loaded words in the film subtitle translation and their corresponding translation strategies. By addressing these challenges in the translation process, this paper seeks to facilitate the "going global" of Chinese animated films, and thereby contribute to the international dissemination of China's culture.

**Keywords:** Translation of Cultural-loaded Words; Eco-Translatology; Three-Dimensional Transformation

### 1. Introduction

As China promotes its cultural industry to "go global", domestic animated films have evolved into a vital carrier for the international dissemination of Chinese culture. In recent years, mythologically adapted works such as *Nezha 1* and *Nezha 2* have achieved remarkable success in both domestic and international markets, with domestic box office earnings surpassing 5 billion yuan and North American box office reaching 3.69 million U.S. dollars. This establishes a new record for overseas distribution of a Chinese animated feature<sup>[1]</sup>. However, beneath these box office triumphs lies a significant challenges in cultural communication: Overseas audiences generally demonstrate limited narrative comprehension and emotional resonance with

the film, as evidenced by audience approval ratings falling below 20% on platforms such as Rotten Tomatoes. The quality of subtitle translation has been pinpointed as a pivotal limiting factor<sup>[2]</sup>.

Current research on audiovisual translation predominantly centers on frameworks such as functional equivalence or skopos theory. The handling of culture-loaded words often falls into the binary opposition of Domestication and Foreignization, making it challenging to strike a balance between cultural fidelity and audience acceptability<sup>[3]</sup>. The "three-dimensional transformation" theory of Eco-translatology offers a approach to addressing this dilemma through adaptive selection and transformation in the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. It emphasizes that translators need to dynamically adapt to the translational eco-environment and make integrated choices in three dimensions by adjusting linguistic forms, transmitting cultural connotations, and realizing communicative intentions<sup>[4]</sup>. This theoretical perspective demonstrates distinct applicability for resolving the inherent contradictions in animated films, such as the constraints of temporal-spatial limitations, the density of cultural elements, and the imperative for broad audience reception<sup>[5]</sup>.

This paper takes *Nezha 2* as its example, analyzing the culture-loaded words in this domestic animated film and the difficulties in their English translation. It aims to explore English translation strategies for culture-loaded words, put forward practical guidance for their English translation, and thereby facilitate the "going global" of Chinese culture.

### 2. Overview of Eco-Translatology

China's engagement with ecological environmental issues gained institutional momentum following the *United Nations declaration of the human environment*, prompting the formulation of related policies and measures. Against this backdrop, scholars

across various disciplines have increasingly adopted an ecological perspective to observe, examine, and reflect on both past and present global phenomena, while also forecasting humanity's future [6]. Ecology has gradually expanded beyond the realm of biology into humanities and social sciences such as sociology and psychology, especially in translation studies. Professor Hu Gengshen pioneered this integration in his work *Translation-Adaptation Selection Theory*, formally establishing Eco-Translatology as a distinct theoretical framework rooted in his Translation Adaptation and Selection Theory [7]. The early 21st century witnessed the burgeoning development of Eco-Translatology as an indigenously developed theoretical framework within China. This theoretical system centers on the translator, dividing the translation process into two phrases: the translator's adaptive engagement with the source text and environment, followed by selective decision-making in the target context. Distinct from other translation approaches, it boasts unique advantages stemming from differences in cultural origins, developmental trajectories, research paradigms, subjects, and modes of thinking compared to Western translation theories, thereby forming a distinctive theoretical paradigm of its own [8]. Eco-Translatology emphasizes that translation must dynamically adapt to the cultural ecosystem, striving for equilibrium across the Linguistic, Cultural, and Communicative dimensions. This characteristic aligns closely with the cross-cultural communication needs of domestic animated films. Such films frequently embed a high density of terms bearing uniquely Chinese cultural connotations, whose translation demands a delicate balance between "cultural fidelity" and "audience comprehension comprehensibility". *Nezha 2*, as a representative work within the burgeoning Chinese animation, holds significant global influence. Crucially, due to its dense concentration of culture-loaded elements, including mythological symbols, religious concepts, and dialectal expressions, it serves as an ideal case study to test the practical value of the "three-dimensional transformation" theory. The following section will elaborate on the basic context of the film and the characteristics of its culture-loaded words.

### 3. Introduction to *Nezha 2*

The 2019 release of *Nezha 1* fundamentally

reshaped mainstream perceptions of Chinese animated cinema. Boasting an innovative plot and exquisite production, the film triggered a nationwide viewing frenzy, with its box office revenue surging to 5 billion yuan. Its sequel, *Nezha 2*, has hit a record high in terms of Chinese animation. By June 30, 2025, the domestic box office of *Nezha 2* concluded at 15.445 billion yuan, with a total audience of 324 million, and its global box office earnings exceeded 15.9 billion yuan. As an animated film embodying China's mythological worldview, the movie abounds with culture-loaded words such as "Fire-Tipped Spear", "Huntian Silk", "Qiankun Ring" and "Swiftly, as decreed by celestial law" alongside iconic expressions like "Be quick to obey my command" and "Bias is a mountain even gods can't move". These elements serve as condensed carriers of Chinese mythological culture and folk traditions. Precisely due to their profound cultural specificity, these elements constitute significant barriers to cross-cultural transmission. The target culture often lacks equivalent concepts, making them highly susceptible to misunderstanding. Consequently, to conduct an in-depth analysis of their translation strategies, it is first necessary to clarify the definition and classification of "culture-loaded words" as well as their specific applications in the film.

### 4. Introduction to Culture-loaded Words

Culture-loaded words, also referred to as "lexical gaps", refer to linguistic elements in the source language whose inherent cultural information lacks direct equivalence in the target language. Such discrepancies encompass various domains including social customs, flora and fauna, religious beliefs, culinary traditions [9]. They not only give rise to comprehension difficulties stemming from linguistic barriers in cross-cultural communication but also impose significant cognitive inconveniences on target language readers, and may even lead to misunderstandings or prejudices. Consequently, the study of culture-loaded words holds both theoretical significance and practical value. Eugene Nida, the renowned American translation theorist, categorized culture-loaded words into five types in 1993: ecological culture, material culture, social culture, folk culture, and linguistic culture.

#### 4.1 Ecological Cultural-Loaded Words

Ecological cultural-loaded words refer to terms associated with natural ecosystem, encompassing geographical features, landforms, climatic conditions, flora, and fauna. Ecological culture is inextricably intertwined with the natural environment and human lifestyles. Owing to the geographical disparities between China and the West, lexical voids or defaults frequently arise for terms imbued with ecological significance <sup>[10]</sup>. In *Nezha 2*, expressions such as “The Primus” and “water/fire signs” embody the profound ecological wisdom embedded in China’s “harmony between man and nature” cosmology and the five-element theory. The unique ecological-cultural connotations embedded within these terms often lack precise equivalents in the target language, rendering them susceptible to semantic loss or misinterpretation during translation. Hence, during the translation process, translators must possess a sufficient understanding of the cultural backdrop in this domain, take into account the audience’s receptivity. And then, translators need to convert the ecological cultural-loaded words in the source language into terms familiar to target readers, thereby ensuring the accurate transmission of the source text’s cultural essence.

#### 4.2 Material Cultural-Loaded Words

Material culturally-loaded words specifically refer to tangible cultural symbols that reflect the modes of production and daily life, material civilization, and technological achievements of a particular society. In *Nezha 2*, such words are deeply intertwined with Chinese religious rituals, culinary and medicinal practices, and systems of social status, as exemplified by “the lotus root powder”, “The sacred lotus” and “The jasper”. The translation of these terms presents a dual challenge. Primarily, the concrete material forms and its embedded cultural symbolism are intricately interwoven. For instance, “the lotus root powder” not only refers to a specific traditional ingredient but also the mythological setting of *Nezha*’s incarnation as a lotus root. Secondly, certain terms are profoundly embedded in specific historical contexts and social customs. The significance of status conveyed by “The jasper”, for example, lacks analogous cultural symbols in the target language culture. Consequently, literal translation method faces significant distortion of

the original cultural signification.

#### 4.3 Social Cultural-Loaded Words

Social cultural-loaded words encompass vocabulary related to social customs, interpersonal relationships, and modes of social interaction. These terms are, to a significant degree, a product of their specific socio-cultural environment. Within *Nezha 2*, such vocabulary extensively spans multiple dimensions including religious systems, patriarchal clan institutions, and social identities. Instances include “The Primeval Lord of Heaven” representing the supreme deity within Taoist cosmology; “Shen Gongbao”—a quintessential antagonist originating from the classic *Creation of the Gods*; “The Third Prince” reflecting patrilineal succession principles; the specific religious sect “Chan Sect”; the honorific ecclesiastical title “Master immortal”; and terms from the Taoist cultivation system such as “Immortal Ascension Assessment”. All these terms are home to distinct relational paradigms, religious belief systems, and structural characteristics inherent to their particular socio-cultural contexts.

#### 4.4 Folk Cultural-Loaded Words

Folk cultural-loaded words bear profound historical connotations, reflecting the cultural beliefs and value systems of distinct ethnic or regional communities, thereby manifesting a nation's cultural heritage. In *Nezha 2*, “Heaven Made Curse” embody the concept of celestial decree and beliefs in calamitous tribulations; “Mixed Yuan Bead” reflects the Taoist philosophical notion of primordial chaos; and concepts of “body” and “souls” manifest the dualism of form and spirit. Collectively, these terms show the spiritual cosmology and belief systems within a specific folk cultural context.

#### 4.5 Linguistic Cultural-Loaded Words

Linguistic cultural-loaded words embody the profound depth and richness of Chinese linguistic heritage, emphasizing significant historical and cultural connotations. In *NeZha 2*, such terms predominantly manifest through dialectal expressions and culture-specific pragmatic usage. Examples include the dialectal modal particle “sāi”, the dialectal negation “yàobude”, pejorative terms with vulgar cultural overtones such as “guī’ér” and “sǐ pàngzi”. These expressions collectively exemplify, from diverse perspectives, the unique forms and

implications of language in regional cultures and daily communication. In the process of translation, a critical issue that demands careful consideration from translators is how to accurately convey the charm of dialects and the emotional nuances of pejoratives, while enabling target-language readers to grasp the underlying cultural context.

The five categories of culture-loaded words respectively embody perspectives on nature, material civilization, social structures, folk beliefs, and linguistic characteristics. Their translation problems centers on preserving intrinsic cultural connotations while ensuring target-audience comprehensibility. Three-Dimensional Transformation framework provides a systematic methodology to address this issue: the Linguistic Dimension entails formal adaptation between Chinese and English structures; the cultural dimension concerns the transmission of profound cultural essences; and the communicative dimension ensures the equivalence of cross-cultural emotions and intentions. The following section will, by integrating specific cases from *Nezha 2*, analyze how these three types of transformations guide the English translation practice of different categories of culture-loaded words.

## 5. Case Studies of English Subtitle Translation of *Nezha 2*

### 5.1 Linguistic Dimension Transformation

As the foundation of the three-dimensional transformation theory in eco-translatology, linguistic dimension transformation emphasizes the implementation of multi-faceted adaptive adjustments to linguistic forms during the translation process. Its primary objective is to achieve alignment between the source language and the target language across the dimensions of context, semantics, and grammar<sup>[5]</sup>. Chinese and English belong to distinct language families, with inherent differences in their structural logics: Chinese prioritizes parataxis, relying on the implicit transmission of logical relationships between words and clauses; in contrast, English emphasizes hypotaxis, constructing logical frameworks through explicit conjunctions. This inherent disparity necessitates targeted formal adaptations when translating the subtitles for *Nezha 2*. The essence of linguistic dimension transformation lies in realizing contextual alignment between the source and target

languages by adjusting linguistic forms—such as grammatical structures and logical connectors. The following section will extract examples of ecological cultural-loaded words and linguistic cultural-loaded words from *Nezha 2*, analyzing how linguistic dimension transformation guides the translation of these corresponding loaded words.

**Example 1:** Blessed by heaven and earth, the Chaos Pearl was born.

The original phrase presents the origin of the Chaos Pearl through a concise Chinese expression. As a typical Chinese concept, “the spiritual essence of heaven and earth” embodies the nature of the Chinese language: it connects “heaven and earth” with “spiritual essence” via implicit logical associations, and further links the subject to the result through the verb phrase “was born”. In contrast, the translated version—“Blessed by heaven and earth, the Chaos Pearl was born”—undertakes targeted linguistic dimension transformation. The English version, “Blessed by heaven and earth, the Chaos Pearl was born,” conducts a linguistic transformation. It employs the past participle phrase “Blessed by...,” a structure commonly used in English, to explicitly construct the causal relationship between “heaven and earth” and “the Chaos Pearl,” thereby conforming to the hypotactic grammatical norms of English. However, a deeper analysis reveals semantic and cultural nuances potentially lost in translation. While “heaven and earth” preserves its literal meanings, so this translation fails to fully convey the unique connotation of “the subtle life-giving energy permeating heaven and earth.”

**Example 2:** The lotus root must be powdered to make your bodies.

The original phrase exhibits a distinct colloquial flavor, with the final particle “sāi” serving as a vivid linguistic enhancer. The sentence structure implicitly conveys the conditional relationship (“only if... can...”) between the process – sacred lotus root turned into powder and the outcome – reconstitute physical bodies, exemplifying the paratactic characteristic inherent in Chinese. Thereby, it shows the implicit causal logic within English grammatical constraints.

However, two significant semantic and pragmatic nuances emerge upon closer examination. Firstly, the simplification of “Xian Ou” to “the lotus root,” while adhering to principles of lexical concision, results in the loss of the critical semantic component “Xian”. This

may lead readers unfamiliar with the plot to mistake it for ordinary lotus roots, overlooking the uniqueness of the ingredient as a key factor for restoring the physical body. Additionally, the omission of the colloquial particle “sāi” though contributing to stylistic conciseness, entails the loss of its pragmatic functions.

In essence, linguistic dimension transformation lies in making adaptive choices regarding linguistic forms. On the premise of preserving the integrity of the source language’s meaning, it enables the translated text to conform to the linguistic norms and expressive habits of the target language, thereby laying a linguistic foundation for ecological balance in cross-cultural communication [3].

## 5.2 Cultural Dimension Transformation

Within the subtitling translation of *Nezha 2*, cultural dimension transformation focuses on transcending the cultural barriers between the source and target languages to achieve the effective conveyance of cultural connotations. It requires translators to possess profound bicultural literacy and a high level of cultural sensitivity—while accurately conveying the meaning of culture-loaded words in the source language, translators must also take into account the cultural cognitive background of target-language audiences [5]. The following section will extract examples of folk cultural-loaded words and material cultural-loaded words from *Nezha 2*, analyzing how cultural dimension transformation guides the translation of these corresponding loaded words.

**Example 3:** The celestial energy within became the Spirit Pearl, while the demonic energy formed the Demon Orb.

In Example 3, “celestial energy”, “demonic energy”, “Spirit Pearl”, and “Demon Orb” exhibit notable merits from the perspective of cultural dimension transformation. Specifically, the lexical choices of “celestial” and “demonic” effectively conveys the cultural implications of righteousness and wickedness embodied in the Chinese concepts of “Xian” and “Mo”. Meanwhile, “energy” serves as a functional equivalent that successfully abstracts the metaphysical notion of “Qi” enabling target viewers to grasp the fundamental nature of these opposing forces. Additionally, “Pearl” and “Orb” accurately correspond to the morphological characteristics of pearl and orb, endowing the

translation with a certain degree of effectiveness in cultural transmission.

Nevertheless, this translation approach is not without limitations. “Qi” as a concept of profound uniqueness in Chinese culture, encompasses rich connotations such as the origin of life and the flow of vital energy. Although “energy” can convey the basic meaning of “energy”, it fails to fully capture the profound cultural implications embedded in “Qi”. This may result in audiences unfamiliar with Chinese culture gaining an incomplete or superficial understanding of these culturally specific concepts.

**Example 4:** The sacred lotus protects and nurtures spirit.

In Example 4, from a translation merit perspective, the term “sacred” effectively conveys the divine nature inherent in “Baolian”, while “lotus” accurately refers to the core entity of “Lian”. This enables target-language audiences to quickly grasp the basic attributes and sacred cultural positioning of the object.

However, this translation also exhibits obvious shortcomings. The crucial morphological feature of “Qise” is completely omitted in the target text, resulting in the loss of the rich visual information and uniqueness embedded in the original term. Furthermore, the cultural connotation of “Bao” (precious, treasure-like) — which implies rarity and value — cannot be fully conveyed solely by “sacred”. In traditional Chinese culture, “Baolian” is not only sacred but also embodies the precious attribute of a “Baowu”; the translation fails to adequately transmit this dual cultural implication. Consequently, audiences may develop an incomplete understanding of “Qise Baolian”, overlooking both its distinctive visual characteristics and its inherent value as a precious artifact.

## 5.3 Communicative Dimension Transformation

The adaptive selection and transformation in the communicative dimension require translators to focus on the equivalent transmission of bilingual communicative intentions. It ensures that the translated text achieves a communicative effect consistent with the original within the target cultural context, enabling target-language audiences to accurately grasp the emotional attitudes and communicative purposes underlying the discourse [11]. In the subtitle

translation of *Nezha 2*, translators must fully consider the contextual background and emotional orientation of characters' dialogues, and realize the equivalence of cross-cultural communication through linguistic adjustments. The following section will extract examples of social cultural-loaded words from *Nezha 2*, analyzing how communicative dimension transformation guides the translation of these corresponding loaded words.

**Example 5: Master Immortal**

In Example 5, "Master Immortal" demonstrates distinct strengths from the perspective of communicative dimension transformation. Specifically, the term "Master" accurately conveys the inherent connotation in the original term—reserved for elders, individuals of virtue, or those with exceptional expertise—while "Immortal" directly clarifies the specific identity of "仙". This enables target-language audiences to quickly comprehend the recognition of the addressee's identity and the respect, thereby achieving the basic equivalence of communicative intentions.

**Example 6: Yu Xu Palace is at the core of the Chan Sect, protected by formidable powers.**

In Example 6, "Yu Xu Palace is at the core of the Chan Sect, protected by formidable powers" demonstrates rationality in terms of communicative dimension transformation. For "Yu Xu Palace" and "Chan Sect", the adoption of transliteration—"Yu Xu Palace" and "Chan Sect"—preserves the uniqueness of these culture-specific items, avoiding potential information distortion that might arise from free translation. This facilitates target-language audiences in establishing accurate conceptual associations when engaging with relevant cultural contexts. As for the latter half of the sentence, "protected by formidable powers" clearly conveys the core message, namely "possessing great strength and being guarded by numerous powerful figures." This enables target-language audiences to comprehend the significant status of Yu Xu Palace within the Chan Sect as well as its background of strength, thereby achieving the effective transmission of key information.

To summarize, the collaborative operation of these three dimensions effectively balances the contradiction between "cultural fidelity" and "communication efficiency" in the translation of culture-loaded words in *Nezha 2*. This practice also provides a specific case for the application

of eco-translatology in the translation of animated films.

**6. Conclusion**

Through an analysis of English translation cases of culture-loaded words in *Nezha 2*, this study reveals the practical value of the "three-dimensional transformation" theory of eco-translatology in the subtitle translation of animated films. Specifically, the formal adjustments in the linguistic dimension lay the foundation for the translation of culture-loaded words; the transmission of connotations in the cultural dimension ensures the preservation of cultural characteristics; and the effect equivalence in the communicative dimension realizes the resonance of cross-cultural emotions. This research not only provides a relevant reference with both theoretical basis and practical operability for the English translation of culture-loaded words in domestic animated films but also verifies the adaptability of eco-translatology to audiovisual translation studies in the context of cultural "going global". Furthermore, it offers valuable insights for enhancing the international communication power of Chinese cultural IPs.

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