

A Contrastive Study on the English Translation of Religious Terms in *Honglouloumeng* from the Perspective of Directionality: A Corpus-Based Analysis of the Yang Xianyi and David Hawkes Versions

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of China's "culture going global" initiative, this study investigates how translation directionality shapes religious term translation in *Honglouloumeng*. Through a parallel corpus of 218 terms from the first 40 chapters, it compares Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang's inverse translation with David Hawkes' direct translation across strategies, cultural retention, and length. Results reveal systematic differences: the Yangs' version exhibits a "strategy-deterministic" pattern where foreignization yields 97.0% high retention through concise renderings (mean 2.78 words). In contrast, Hawkes' version, dominated by domestication (56.0%), achieves moderate retention (22.5%) via explanatory compensation, resulting in significantly longer translations (mean 3.55 words). Analysis of 56 lengthened cases confirms explanatory compensation as the primary driver (69%), centered on cultural category analogy (59%). The study demonstrates how "translating out" and "translating in" shape translators' cultural stances, offering empirical insights for translating Chinese classics.

Keywords: *Honglouloumeng*; Religious Terms; Directionality; Self-Built Corpus

1. Introduction

As the pinnacle of Chinese classical literature, *Honglouloumeng* is hailed as an "encyclopedia of Chinese culture." It profoundly integrates Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist thought, with its narrative deeply permeated by rich religious-cultural elements [1]. Among these elements, the culture-loaded religious terms, from "*Tai Xu Huan Jing*" to "*A Mi Tuo Fo*," are core symbols which carry cultural genes, shape character destinies, and participate in thematic

construction. Their translation is thus crucial for transmitting the work's philosophical depth and cultural essence across languages.

Amidst China's "culture going global" strategy, the shift from passive "translating in" to active "translating out" raises a key question: how do different translation pathways affect cultural items? Specifically, how does "direct translation" (translation into the mother tongue) conducted by native-language translators differ from "inverse translation" (out of the mother tongue) undertaken by non-native translators in handling cultural specificity? This question holds significant theoretical and practical importance for enhancing translation efficacy and innovating methods of cultural dissemination.

This study addresses this question by comparing two authoritative English translations of *Honglouloumeng*-David Hawkes' *The Story of the Stone* (representative of "direct translation") and Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang's *A Dream of Red Mansions* (representative of "inverse translation"). To conduct a focused and in-depth analysis, this study explicitly defines its research object as the "religious terms". Herein, the working definition of "religious terms" is culture-loaded items in the novel's text related to Buddhism, Daoism, and folk beliefs (e.g., "*da jiao*," "*Yin Guo*"). Based on this framework, this study analyzes the strategic preferences, degrees of cultural retention, and formal features in both versions. The aim is to investigate how translation directionality shapes translators' micro-decisions and cultural image construction, thereby offering empirical insights for *Honglouloumeng* translation studies and the broader practice of translating Chinese classics.

2. Literature Review

The English translation of *Honglouloumeng* is a crucial site for probing cross-cultural translation. With advances in corpus-based translation

studies and the cultural turn in translation research, scholarly examination has gradually shifted from literary appreciation towards systematic stylistic and cultural analysis. This study aims to explore translation directionality's impact on translator style, using religious terms as a focal point. Accordingly, this review synthesizes literature from three interconnected perspectives: translation directionality, the corpus-based approach to translator style, and research on translating culture-loaded items, especially religious terms, in *Honglougong*, to clarify this study's positioning.

Firstly, translation directionality-whether translation proceeds into (direct) or out of (inverse) the translator's mother tongue-has become a key variable in studying both the translation process and product. Different from the traditional view questioning the quality of inverse translation, recent research confirms the inverse translation's validity and unique value [2], which plays a central role in China's "culture going global" strategy [3,4]. Empirical studies indicate systematic differences in aspects such as lexical variety, information load, and syntactic adjustment. For instance, corpus-based research on Chinese literature suggests that direct translation often achieves "explicitation" for fluency, while inverse translation emphasizes faithful transmission [5]. This divergence shows a translator's native language background may be a more fundamental stylistic factor than generalized "cultural stance." However, research has largely focused on macro-discussion or general textual features, with few studies integrating this perspective to examine specific culture-loaded items.

Additionally, corpus methods provide a powerful tool for objective description of translator style. Corpus-based translation studies emphasize the quantitative analysis of authentic translated texts to uncover underlying patterns such as translator preferences and translation universals [6,7]. In *Honglougong* translation studies, this approach has yielded fruitful results with quantitative comparison of the stylistic features of different translations. Research consistently finds that David Hawkes' version features rich vocabulary and flexible syntax conforming to English norms, while the Yangs' version is more concise and source-text adherent [8,9]. These studies have advanced style discussion empirically and linked features to broader contexts [10]. Yet, they predominantly focus on overall linguistic

features, lacking concentrated investigation of high-density cultural subsystems like religious terms.

Finally, religious culture, one of the three pillars of *Honglougong*, makes translating its related terminology a major cross-cultural challenge. Existing studies, primarily employing close reading and case analysis, point to markedly different tendencies in how the Yang and Hawkes versions handle religious-cultural information. The Yangs employ foreignization including literal translation and transliteration to preserve cultural characteristics, while Hawkes utilizes domestication and cultural analogy, prioritizing reader acceptance [11,12], attributed to distinct "cultural orientations" [13]. Although these studies provide valuable insights into specific translation strategies, they exhibit certain limitations. These illustrative studies rely on binary frameworks, failing to incorporate "directionality" to interrogate whether strategic divergence is mechanistically linked to the translator's operational pathway.

In summary, while existing research provides a macro-framework through directionality theory, empirical tools via corpus methods, and rich observational data on strategies, research organically integrating all three is rare. Specifically, no study has constructed a dedicated corpus for systematic quantitative analysis of *Honglougong*'s religious terms or used directionality theory to explain the essential stylistic differences between the two translations. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by constructing a self-built parallel corpus, performing multidimensional analysis, and demonstrating that the differences trace to the fundamental distinction between the Yangs' "inverse translation" and Hawkes' "direct translation," providing a novel analytical perspective.

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the study's design, including corpus construction, operationalization of key variables, annotation procedures, and data analysis methods, ensuring a transparent and replicable process. Adopting a quantitative-led, qualitative-supplemented approach, this research systematically compares the translation of religious terms in the *Honglougong* English versions by Yang Xianyi and David Hawkes.

3.1 Corpus Construction

The source text is the 120-chapter Chinese *Hongloumeng* annotated by the Institute of Redology, Chinese Academy of Arts. Two authoritative full English translations were selected: *A Dream of Red Mansions* by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (Yangs' version) and *The Story of the Stone* by David Hawkes (Hawkes' version). To ensure analytical depth and feasibility, the corpus of this study is limited to the first forty chapters.

Religious terms were identified through systematic close reading and existing scholarship. Operationally, they are defined as proper nouns, ritual activities, religious implements, deities, core doctrines, and common expressions explicitly referencing Buddhism, Daoism, or folk beliefs. Representative examples include “*A Mi Tuo Fo*,” “*da jiao*,” and “*Tai Xu Huan Jing*.” Through manual marking and electronic verification, a parallel corpus of 218 valid religious term entries was established. Each entry records the source term, its context, and its corresponding translations in both versions.

3.2 Analytical Dimensions and Annotation Framework

To transform abstract translation style into observable analytical objects, this study constructed an annotation framework comprising three core dimensions.

The first dimension is translation strategy, grounded in Venuti's domestication and foreignization [14], with operational refinements. Domestication replaces source culture concepts with target-culture equivalents or employs fluent, idiomatic translation. Foreignization preserves and highlights the heterogeneous features of the source culture via transliteration, literal translation, or neologisms, allowing for a certain degree of strangeness in the translation. In this study, a mixed strategy integrates both elements within one unit, typically as “a foreignized cultural symbol coupled with a domesticating in-text explanation.”

The second dimension is degree of cultural retention, based on Baker's discussion of culture-specific items [15]. This dimension aims to judge the extent to which a translation conveys the unique cultural connotations of the source term. High retention implants the source concept intact via transliteration or unique literal translation. Moderate retention mediates the concept through in-text explanation, superordinates, or cultural analogy. Low

retention replaces or generalizes the source concept, resulting in loss of cultural identity.

The third dimension is term length, measured by English word count, serving as an objective formal indicator of translation economy and stylistic preference. During counting, supplementary explanatory content within parentheses was disregarded to focus on the direct expression of the core term.

3.3 Annotation Procedure and Reliability Assurance

All annotation was jointly conducted by the researcher and a collaborator with translation studies background. Prior to formal annotation, both underwent training and pilot annotation, reaching consensus on borderline cases. First, terms like “Buddha” and “Taoist,” despite English assimilation, were classified as foreignization due to their exclusive association with Chinese religious culture. Second, cultural retention judgments strictly distinguished “retention of cultural distinctiveness” from “conveyance of general meaning.” For instance, rendering “*Xin dao Shen zhi*” as “it's the thought that counts” was judged as low retention due to complete loss of cultural form and imagery.

Following a unified manual, both annotators independently coded all 218 entries across the three dimensions. Inter-rater reliability was assessed on a randomly selected 20% sample. Cohen's Kappa coefficients were 0.92 for translation strategy and 0.88 for cultural retention, indicating “almost perfect” agreement [16]. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion, and this agreed-upon dataset formed the basis for subsequent analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Based on the annotated quantitative and qualitative data, this study follows a stepwise analytical procedure. Descriptive statistics first present the overall distribution of the three dimensions for both versions, outlining their macro-stylistic profiles. Chi-square tests then determine whether differences in strategy and retention distributions are statistically significant, and an independent samples t-test compares average term length.

Subsequently, the intrinsic relationships between variables were delved. Cross-tabulation analysis explores within-version associations between strategy choice and cultural retention. To explain prominent quantitative findings—such as Hawkes'

“lengthened translation” feature-the study shifts to focused qualitative text analysis, examining selected cases to uncover operational mechanisms underlying the data trends.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Overview and Stylistic Comparison

This section presents the systematic differences between the two versions in handling religious terms across three dimensions.

Regarding translation strategy distribution, a chi-square test reveals a significant difference ($\chi^2(4) = 71.65, p < .01$). As shown in Figure 1, while both versions predominantly employ domestication (Yangs: 48.62%; Hawkes: 56.02%), Hawkes’ reliance on domestication is notably stronger, exceeding the combined total of foreignization (26.39%) and mixed strategies (17.59%). In contrast, the Yangs’ strategy distribution is more balanced, with smaller gaps among the three categories.

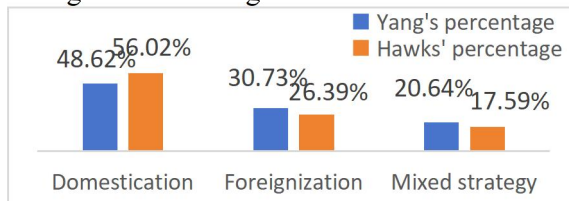


Figure 1. Distribution of Translation Strategies in the Two Versions

Concerning cultural retention, the two versions also show a significant difference ($\chi^2(4) = 69.73, p < .01$), and are visualized in Figure 2. As illustrated in this figure, the Yangs’ version exhibits clear bipolarization: high retention accounts for 42.20%, low retention 41.74%, while moderate retention is only 16.06%. This indicates direct strategy execution: foreignization successfully achieves high retention, while domestication leads to substantial cultural loss. In contrast, Hawkes’ version is dominated by low retention (44.95%), but its moderate retention proportion (22.48%) is significantly higher than the Yangs’, suggesting Hawkes may employ mechanisms that achieve cultural buffering within a domestication-dominant framework.

Regarding term length, an independent samples t-test shows Hawkes’ average translation length ($M = 3.55, SD = 3.58$) is significantly greater than the Yangs’ ($M = 2.78, SD = 1.97$), $t(337.41) = -2.932, p < .01$. Furthermore, box plots (Figure 3) reveal more outliers in Hawkes’ version. This

formal difference, together with Hawkes' greater moderate retention, suggests that increased length may serve as a key mechanism for cultural mediation—a hypothesis tested in the following section.

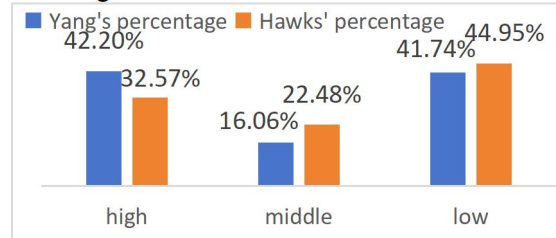


Figure 2. Distribution of Cultural Retention in the Two Versions

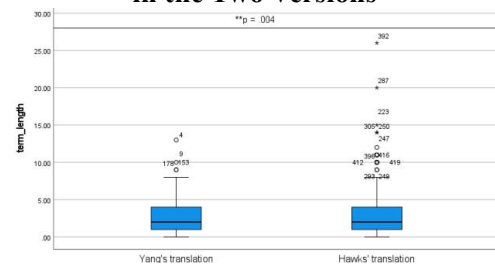


Figure 3 Box Plot of Translation Length of the Two Versions

The macro data reveal fundamental differences: the Yangs’ style is direct and binary, pursuing cultural fidelity through foreignization, resulting in bipolarized retention and concise translations; however, Hawkes’ style is more complex and mediatory, producing considerable moderate retention despite heavy domestication, with generally longer translations. These differences suggest Hawkes’ version embodies a unique cultural compensation mechanism.

4.2 Correlation Patterns between Translation Strategies and Cultural Effects

Figure 4 and chi-square results (Yangs’ version: $\chi^2(4) = 138.93, p < .001$; Hawkes’ version: $\chi^2(4) = 164.14, p < .001$) reveal markedly different “strategy-retention” mapping relationships.

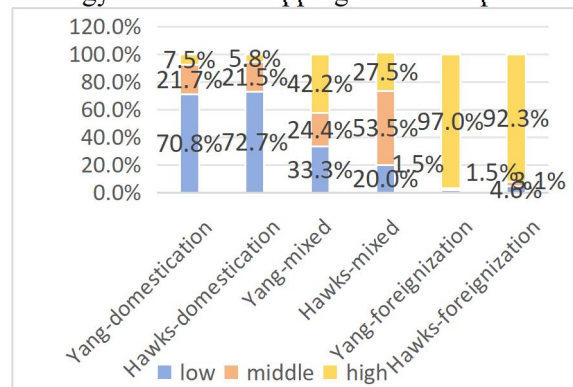


Figure 4. Strategy-Cultural Retention Correlation of the Two Versions

The Yangs' version exhibits a highly predictable "strategy-deterministic" pattern: foreignization almost always yields high retention (97.0%), domestication primarily low retention (70.8%), with mixed strategies occupying an intermediate position.

In contrast, Hawkes' version displays significant complexity. While domestication similarly leads to low retention (72.7%) and foreignization achieves relatively high retention (92.3%), two key findings subvert a simple correspondence.

First is the functional transformation of the mixed strategy. In Hawkes' version, mixed strategies predominantly yield moderate retention (53.5%), rather than serving as transitional middle ground. For example, translating "Jin Gang" as "Vajra-kings" (cf. Yangs' "guardian angel") retains the transliterated "Vajra-" while adding "-kings" to domesticate the concept, achieving moderate retention through active cultural adaptation. By contrast, the Yangs' mixed strategy combines foreignizing and domesticating elements without additional explanatory adaptation, as in "Bodhisattva powders" (translation of "Pu Sa San"), where "powders" merely describes form without religious culture retention.

Second, even with foreignization strategy, there exists a clear difference in the efficacy of cultural transmission between the two translators. While Hawkes' foreignization achieves 92.3% high retention, the Yangs' achieves 97.0%. Crucially, low-retention instances among Hawkes' foreignized translations (4.6%) are triple the Yangs' (1.5%). This quantitative gap, combined with the minority of borderline cases present in both versions, suggests that Hawkes' system exhibits lower reliance on and certainty about "foreignization" as a cultural fidelity tool, with effects more context-dependent.

Synthesizing these findings, Hawkes' cultural mediation mechanism lies in functionally repurposing the mixed strategy and contextually adapting all renderings. This "adaptation" manifests as explanatory intervention, leading to a testable hypothesis: Hawkes' overall increased length is the linguistic manifestation of this pervasive explanatory intervention.

4.3 Analysis of the Explanatory Compensation Mechanism in Hawkes' "Lengthened Translations"

To test this hypothesis, cases of significant lengthening (≥ 4 words difference or ≥ 1.5 times

relative ratio) were analyzed, yielding 56 cases. According to whether the expansion served explanatory functions, these cases were classified into Category A (Explanatory Lengthening) when added material served explanatory functions—paraphrasing cultural concepts, supplementing background or implicit purposes, or replacing source categories with target-culture analogies—and Category B (Non-explanatory Lengthening) when lengthening resulted from syntactic restructuring or stylistic embellishment without adding semantic or cultural information.

Based on these criteria, approximately 69% (39 cases) belong to Category A, confirming explanatory compensation as the primary driver of length increase. Further categorization of Category A cases in Figure 5 reveals cultural category analogy/substitution dominates (59%), followed by background/logical supplementation (21%), function/purpose explanation (10%), and action/scene specification (10%). Hawkes' core compensatory method is thus "transcoding" source concepts into target-culture cognitive frameworks.

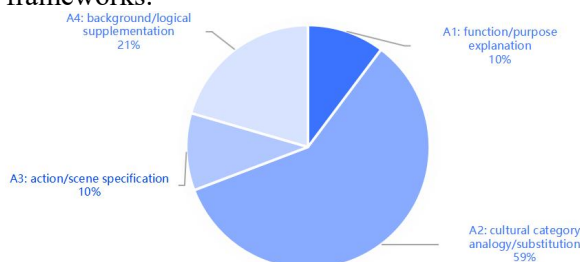


Figure 5. Proportions of Functional Cases of Category A in Hawkes' Lengthened Translations

In Figure 6, data show the average length premium for Category A cases ($M = 4.69$ words) significantly exceeds Category B ($M = 2.88$ words), indicating that cultural mediation explanations require more textual resources.

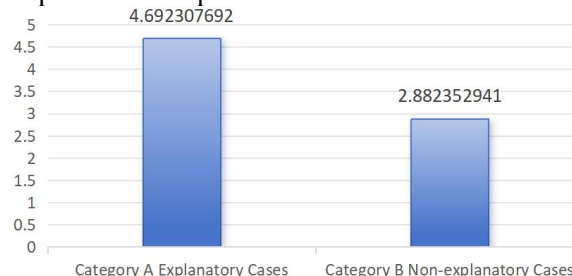


Figure 6. Average Length Premium of Explanatory (Category A) and Non-explanatory Cases (Category B)

The following table 1 presents operational examples of this compensation mechanism.

Table 1. Examples of Hawkes’ Compensation Mechanism

Category Mode	Percentage	Core Strategy Description	A Case Study of Hawkes vs. Yang	Explanation
A2: cultural category analogy/substitution	59%	The source language cultural concept is usually placed in the target language familiar category, system or value frame through the appositive and the appositive phrase.	Terminology: <i>Sha Men Si</i> Hawkes: Ever Arankuil Church of the Lord Buddha Yangs: Chief Buddhist Abbot	Hawkes carried out a systematic replacement: completely reconstructing the official positions of Buddhism in China with the “church-committee” system is the ultimate localization.
A4: background/logical supplementation	21%	Supplement the implicit but self-evident premises, scenarios, or logical information for China readers.	Terminology: <i>tuò shēng</i> Hawkes: cease from haunting you and be reborn into another life. Yangs: be born again	The addition of the premise “cease from haunting you” clarifies the purpose of “ <i>tuò shēng</i> ”.
A1: function/purpose	10%	Through structures like for... and to..., the purpose and function of actions or things are clearly revealed.	Terminology: <i>fāng Yān Kǒu</i> Hawkes: scattering of little cakes for the hungry ghosts to feed on Yangs: sacrificed to the hungry ghosts	The addition of the purpose adverbial (for...to feed on) clarifies the specific purpose of the ritual act.
A3: explanation/action/specification	10%	The general verbs are decomposed into a series of specific and perceptible action or scene details.	Terminology: <i>hào Fō Xīng Xiāng</i> Hawkes: invoked the names of the Buddha with waving of burning joss-sticks Yangs: invocations to Buddha and offerings of incense	The phrase “with waving of...” was added to vividly depict the ritual of “ <i>xīng Xiāng</i> ” (a traditional Chinese incense-burning ceremony).

In summary, this analysis confirms the hypothesis: Hawkes’ overall length increase is the linguistic manifestation of a proactive, systematic cultural compensation strategy, highly dependent on cultural category analogy. This explains why its mixed strategy yields moderate retention and why its “foreignized” translations exhibit instability.

4.4 Comprehensive Discussion: A Contrast and Reflection on Translation Directionality, Philosophy, and Stylistic Systems

Based on the above data and analyses, this section transcends specific data to engage in theoretical reflection on the two translations from higher-level perspectives.

4.4.1 Philosophical Directionality: “Translating Out” vs. “Translating In”

The translation directionality profoundly shapes a translator’s cultural stance and overarching strategic blueprint. Yang Xianyi’s work, grounded in “translating out” to disseminate Chinese culture, exhibits a “cultural fidelity”

orientation. His philosophy faithfully transmits source cultural information, viewing the original’s heterogeneity as valuable while maintaining readability. The balanced strategy distribution, strong foreignization-high retention correlation, and overall conciseness are natural outcomes. The Yangs’ version constructs a “cultural direct bridge,” presupposing readers’ willingness to cross cultural distance.

In contrast, Hawkes’ translation, rooted in “translating in”, embodies “reader-oriented” reception aesthetics, ensuring classical narrative is understood and appreciated by contemporary English readers. His translational act is thus profound cultural mediation. The domestication dominance, explanatory lengthening prevalence, and resulting moderate retention constitute a complex mediation system. Hawkes’ version builds a “cultural interpretation bridge,” prioritizing smooth passage and clarified meaning, even at the cost of creatively transforming source forms.

4.4.2 Stylistic Systems Construction:

Consistency vs. Compensation

The Yangs' stylistic system operates on "consistency" and "transparency," with highly predictable correspondence between strategy and effect. This bestows a direct, candid character. In this version, the translators act as a restrained reporter, presenting cultural choices and their consequences clearly to the reader, with strategy itself constituting style.

Hawkes' system centers on "compensation" and "dynamism," systematically "trans-coding" source concepts into target cognitive frameworks. Strategy labels, particularly "mixed," serve as vessels for compensatory explanation, with cultural effects determined more by compensation specifics than strategy names. This explains the "decoupling" complexity and the context-dependency of his foreignization efficacy.

4.4.3 Theoretical Implications

In summary, by focusing on religious terms as a focal point of cultural conflict, this study offers two key theoretical implications.

First, it highlights translation directionality's decisive role: "translating out" and "translating in" prioritize "cultural fidelity" versus "reader acceptance," generating comprehensive differences from macro-strategies to micro-operations. Second, it refines the domestication/foreignization dichotomy, revealing that simple strategy taxonomies may obscure nuanced operations. Hawkes' practice suggests a "continuum of cultural adaptation" moderated by explanatory compensation. Translation studies should attend to concrete operational means-explanatory lengthening, category analogy-and their pragmatic functions, rather than remaining at typological labels.

Ultimately, these translations represent two classic responses to translation's mission. The Yangs' version takes faithful representation of the source culture as its guiding principle; its value lies in preserving the text's cultural heterogeneity and historical authenticity to the greatest extent possible. Hawkes' version takes creative reception by the target-language reader as its aim; its achievement lies in bringing a Chinese masterpiece to life in English through masterful literary recreation. Together, they constitute the dual faces of *Hongloumeng* in English, providing invaluable paradigms for examining translator roles, strategies, and styles.

5. Conclusion

This study conducted a systematic comparative analysis of the Yang and Hawkes translations through a parallel corpus of religious terms from *Hongloumeng*. The findings confirm that translation directionality profoundly shapes the translators' philosophies: the Yangs' version exhibits a "cultural fidelity" style with concise, direct translations, while Hawkes' version demonstrates a "reader-oriented" mediatory style, using explanatory compensation centered on cultural category analogy to achieve cultural mediation. This comparison reveals the operational logic behind preserving original form versus proactive adaptation.

However, this study has limitations. The corpus is limited to the first forty chapters, not encompassing the novel's full religious-cultural trajectory, and relies on static product analysis without process-oriented methods to examine cognitive aspects. Nonetheless, through rigorous textual empiricism, this study outlines translation directionality's pivotal role in cultural re-presentation, providing an analytical framework for understanding Chinese classics translation and contributing to effective cross-cultural communication.

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