

## A Study on the Translation of Culture-Loaded Words in the Movie *Ne Zha* From the Perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory

LIN Qifeng<sup>[a]</sup>, LI Changbao<sup>[b]</sup>,\*

<sup>[a]</sup> MA Student, School of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics, Hangzhou, China.

<sup>[b]</sup> Ph.D., Professor, School of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics, Hangzhou, China.

\*Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

This paper mainly introduces the theory of functional equivalence and its application in translating culture-loaded words into English in the movie subtitles. It takes the theory of functional equivalence as the guideline, and analyzes the translation of culture-loaded words in Chinese movie *Ne Zha*. It studies the specific translation strategies of culture-loaded words, and tries to apply the theory of functional equivalence to guide the translation of culture-loaded words. This paper will try to come up with a reference version and some suggestions for translation of culture-loaded words, with the purpose of improving the translation condition of culture-loaded words to promote China's culture transmission, strengthening China's cultural soft power and speeding up China's cultural exchanges with foreign countries.

**Key words:** Chinese to English translation; Culture-loaded words; Subtitle translation; Functional equivalence theory

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### INTRODUCTION

Culture-loaded words come into being with the development of various nationalities and meet the needs of social development. With the development of world multi-

polarization and economic globalization, the exchanges between countries become increasingly frequent, and the contact between countries becomes increasingly close. Therefore, in the context of globalization, culture-loaded words have penetrated into many aspects of people's lives.

As a unique product of a nation, culture-loaded words indicate the characteristics of a nation, which can reflect a nation's culture. Therefore, the translation of culture-loaded words is regarded as an important way for national culture to spread out. Since 21st century, especially in recent years, the translation of culture-loaded words has become the focus of domestic translation. However, there are still many problems in translating culture-loaded words into English, and the quality of translation of culture-loaded words is poor, which not only brings inconvenience to international friends in travelling, working and studying in China, but also affects the national image of our country. All of these are not conducive to the international exchange and development of our country. It is very important to solve the problems existing in the translation of culture-loaded words and to improve the quality of translation of culture-loaded words so as to deepen the reform and the opening up to the outside world.

With the rapid development of China in all aspects, more and more things created by China independently are exported to foreign countries, and movies have become one of the indispensable things for people to enjoy as the entertainment of modern life. More and more domestic films are exported to foreign countries, while these exported films often contain some words which belong to their own nation, commonly known as "culture-loaded words". Therefore, it is increasingly important to translate culture-loaded words into corresponding English. Only by translating these words or sentences with cultural characteristics accurately, can foreigners really understand the meaning of our films, especially the special meaning of our own culture. Therefore, this paper intends to

study how to translate culture-loaded words into English accurately, hoping that the study of translation of culture-loaded words can help other translators to better translate subtitles of domestic films into English. It is also hoped that the national culture can be widely spread.

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## 1. NE ZHA

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The movie is mainly about a chaos pearl with a huge energy nurtured by the Heaven and the Earth. Then the pearl is divided into two pearls, one is good, and the other is evil. Taiyi Zhenren is ordered to deliver the good one to Ne Zha, the son of Li Jing in Chentang Pass. But by accident, the good one and the bad one are replaced accidentally, and Ne Zha becomes the evil one. The evil pearl has been cursed and will be destroyed in three years. Ne Zha, who is supposed to be the hero of the Chentang Pass, turns out to be the great devil of the world. Naughty Ne Zha has the heart of being a hero. However, in the face of people's misunderstanding and the coming curse, Ne Zha is destined to become a demon, but what is his future depends on himself.

In the movie people can see the love from Ne Zha's parents and his own struggle to fight against his destiny.

The movie is full of the characteristics of Chinese culture, so a bunch of culture-loaded words can be found in this movie. By analyzing the translation of culture-loaded words in the movie, foreign people can learn the Chinese culture.

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## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

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### 2.1 Functional Equivalence Theory

The concept of "dynamic equivalence" was put forward by Bible translation expert Nida in the book *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964) as the standard of translation. Since "dynamic equivalence" was often misunderstood, he renamed "dynamic equivalence" to "functional equivalence" in *Language, Culture and Translating* (1993). "Functional equivalence" or "dynamic equivalence" means that translation should not be confined to the grammatical structure and literal meaning of the original text. Instead, the translation should focus on the receptors' reaction, so that the target receptors can have the psychological feeling which is similar to the psychological feeling of the original receptors when they read and appreciate the original text. This requires the translation to be kept as the closest natural equivalence as possible in terms of lexical meaning and stylistic features. In this theory, Guo (2000) points out that translation is to reproduce the information of the source language from semantic aspect to stylistic aspect using the most appropriate, natural and equivalent language. The equivalence in dynamic equivalence includes four aspects: lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence,

text equivalence, and stylistic equivalence. Therefore, in literary translation, according to Nida's theory, the translator should use the four aspects of dynamic equivalence as the principle of translation to accurately reproduce the cultural connotation of the source language in the target language.

Nida (1993) thinks that functional equivalence includes different levels of equivalence in translation, from minimum-level equivalence to maximum-level equivalence. The minimum level of functional equivalence refers to sufficient equivalence, that is, receptors of translated texts should understand the text to the degree that they know how the original receptors of the source text appreciate and understand the text. Translation below this equivalent level is not acceptable. The maximum level of functional equivalence means that the receptors of translated texts understand the text to the degree that the target receptors can understand and appreciate the text like the original receptors.

In addition, in order to accurately reproduce the source language culture and eliminate cultural differences, the translator should follow the three steps:

First, the translator should try to create a translation that not only accords with the semantics of the original text but also embodies the cultural characteristics of the original text. However, two languages are from two countries representing two different cultures, which may have similar contents but cannot be exactly the same. Therefore, perfect translation works that fully show the cultural connotation of the original text are impossible to exist, and the translator can only reproduce the source language culture to the maximum extent.

Second, if meaning equivalence and culture equivalence cannot be taken into account at the same time, the translator can only abandon the equivalence of form and achieve the purpose of reproducing the original meaning and culture by changing the form of the original text in the translation.

Last, if the change of form is still not enough to express the semantics and culture of the original text, the translation technique of "recreate" can be used to solve the cultural differences and make the source language and the target language achieve the meaning equivalence. "Recreate" means that the deep structure of the source language is transformed into the surface structure of the target language (Guo, 2000), that is, the cultural connotation of the source language is explained by words of the target language.

A movie's main function is to entertain and attract people's attention and interest, so receptors' response plays a critical role in understanding the meaning of the movie and appreciating the movie, which is also what functional equivalence theory emphasizes. Therefore, functional equivalence theory can be used to guide the translation of domestic movies, especially the translation of culture-loaded words in them.

### 2.2 Culture-Loaded Words

The concept of culture-loaded words was first put forward by Liao Qiyi, who defined culture-loaded words as words, phrases and idioms that mark the unique things in a certain culture. These words, gradually accumulated in the long historical process, can reflect the unique way of activities different from other nationalities (Liao, 2000). These kind of culture-loaded words bear the background of culture, and embody the essence of a nation and a country's traditional culture more intensively.

Nida's classification of culture-loaded words is the easiest one to be understood by the public. He divides culture-loaded words into five categories, namely, ecological culture-loaded words, material culture-loaded words, social culture-loaded words, religious culture-loaded words and linguistic culture-loaded words.

Ecological culture-loaded words are the words which are influenced by the special ecological environment of a nation, such as geographical location, climate characteristics, natural scenery and living environment. For example, the Yangtze River, Yellow River, Huangshan and so on are cultural images with their unique geographical and natural characteristics. Such ecological images usually cannot find equivalent things in other civilizations and cultures, which mean there are no equivalent words in other nations.

Material culture-loaded words mainly refer to the words of labor products or material that human beings may have or invent in the process of improving their material life, including many aspects such as economy, science, technology, diet, clothing, transportation, measurement and so on. The material culture-loaded words reflect the material condition of a nation at a specific stage and its demand for survival. Because of the differences in geography, climate, eating habits and so on in a nation, the material culture between different places is also very different. Material culture-loaded words cannot only refer to the products that are tangible, but also can be used to refer to the virtual substances that exist in myths and legends or in people's imagination, such as “乾坤圈”, “金箍棒”.

Social culture-loaded word refers to the words that reflect the culture of a country or a nation at the level of social consciousness, which are influenced by different historical backgrounds, social systems, political activities and cultural atmosphere. It is mainly manifested in the people's appellation, customs, political system, social activities, values, historical background, life style and so on. In Chinese culture, appellation is an interesting and special category in culture-loaded words. Appellation usually refers to the names of people because of their relations in various aspects, such as kinship, identity, professional relation and other relations. They can be roughly divided into four types: kinship terms, such as “爹”, “娘”, professional relation terms, such as “大夫”, “司机”, identity relation terms, such as “大人”, “夫人”, and other relation terms, like “师傅”, “徒弟”.

Religious culture-loaded words are the words which are deeply branded by different religions and beliefs. These culture-loaded words fully reflect the unique religious beliefs and ways of thinking of specific nationalities. For thousands of years, Chinese culture has been deeply influenced by Buddhism, Taoism and other religious cultures. The three cultures have formed a lasting and far-reaching influence on the thought and spirit of the Chinese nation, and produced a large number of culture-loaded words, such as “下凡”, “转世”.

Linguistic culture-loaded words reflect the different characteristics of language under different language families. Chinese belongs to the Chinese-Tibetan language family and English belongs to the Indo-European language family. The two languages have great differences in pronunciation, intonation, word formation, grammar and structure. For example, there are a large number of four-character phrases, idioms, sayings, proverbs and so on in the Chinese lexical system. These words reflect the unique language characteristics of Chinese, so they are called “linguistic culture-loaded words”, like “负荆请罪”, “望梅止渴”, “完璧归赵”, etc. These kind of culture-loaded words usually come from classical literary works, historical allusions, myths and legends, folk stories and so on. They are widely used and handed down from generation to generation. They are so popular that almost everyone in China knows these culture-loaded words. In a certain sense, it embodies the essence of a country's history, literature, astronomy, geography and other disciplines (Wei, 2020).

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### 3. TRANSLATION OF CULTURE-LOADED WORDS

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In the paper, the author will adopt Nida's classification to divide culture-loaded words into five categories and analyze the translation of these culture-loaded words. The first one is ecological culture-loaded words, such as “陈塘关”, where Ne Zha and his family live. The second one is linguistic culture-loaded words, like “不共戴天”. The third one is material culture-loaded words, such as “混天绫”, which is the weapon used by Ne Zha when he fights with other evil characters. The fourth one is social culture-loaded words, such as “师尊”, “少爷”, and the last one is religious culture-loaded words, such as “宿命”, “天劫”.

#### 3.1 Methods for the Translation of Culture-Loaded Words

The translation of culture-loaded words should not only use Nida's functional equivalence theory to guide the Chinese to English translation, but also should adhere to the principles of popularization, conciseness, and cultural richness. When translators translate culture-loaded words in domestic movies, they should make target language viewers understand the meaning and appreciate the movie as the original viewers do as well

as to keep the popularization, conciseness and cultural richness of the target translation. There are some methods can be used to translate these culture-loaded words, such as literal translation, free translation, transliteration and combination, and the author applies these four methods to translate culture-loaded words.

### 3.1.1 Literal Translation

Literal translation is a translation method that maintains the form and meaning of the original text in the target language. It can retain the style and national characteristics of the original text, thus ensuring the cultural richness of the translation to a certain extent and facilitating the dissemination of the source language culture. In carrying out literal translation, translators need to make the translation easy to understand on the basis of keeping the sentence structure and rhetoric of the original text. At the same time, the literal translation text must be readable and natural, which means that the translation will not cause misunderstanding among the target language receptors or violate the expression of the target language. It is in line with the translation principle of popularization. Therefore, it is a translation method which should be considered first when translating.

Generally speaking, in domestic films, many culture-loaded words can be translated by literal translation as long as the translation could express the meaning of the culture-loaded word. In the movie, the translation of some weapons, such as “火尖枪” and some Chinese idioms, such as “命中注定”, could use literal translation.

In the use of literal translation, the translator must first thoroughly understand the author's thoughts and the feelings expressed in the original text, and then translate the original language into target language in accordance with language habits and some basic translation criteria and methods. Only in this way, can translators say that they are responsible to both the author and the receptors. In addition, in literal translation, translators should try their best to get rid of rigid patterns and strictly adhere to translation norms and try to use them flexibly.

### 3.1.2 Free Translation

Free translation is another translation method that is frequently used in Chinese to English translation, especially in the translation of culture-load words which are often specific to one culture (Xue, 2016). Due to the differences between Chinese and English cultures, it is difficult for translators to find words corresponding to some Chinese expressions in English, and it is difficult for the translation to retain the cultural characteristics of the source language. In addition, the same word may have different meanings and associations in Chinese and English culture. If literal translation is used, it cannot accurately convey the cultural background of the source language. If the annotation is adopted, it will be restricted by the time and space of subtitles. Only by using free translation, can translators reproduce the meaning and

pragmatic values of the original words on the basis of maintaining the macro structural characteristics of the original text and not be bound by the micro-language structure of the original text, focusing on the meaning instead of the structure (Huang, 2009).

In the use of free translation, translators also should first thoroughly understand the author's thoughts and feelings expressed in the original text, and then translate the original language into a target language in accordance with language habits according to some basic translation criteria and methods. In addition, in the practice of free translation, translators should be careful to avoid subjectivity, unfounded assertions or arbitrary combinations.

### 3.1.3 Transliteration

Transliteration has been used in translation for a long time no matter it is Chinese to English translation or English to Chinese translation. This method usually can make the target text concise and rich of culture of the source text. It is often used in the translation of people's names, places' names as well as terms specific to Chinese culture. When translators cannot find out the equivalent expression of the source text in target language such as names of people and places, transliteration can be used to help translate these words because the names of people and places in movies only serve as language signs and there is no need to point out their meanings.

There are three principles that should be followed by translators when the translators translate the culture-loaded words using transliteration. First, no matter it is the name of a place, a person, or a culture-loaded word, its transliteration should follow the principle of convention. The so-called “convention” is to cite the translation according to the existing name translated by other translators. There is no need for a new name, even if the original translation is inaccurate. For example, there were over twenty transliteration of Karl Marx in the 1900s, including “马克思”, “马科斯” and etc., but later the name was transliterated as “马克思”. Otherwise. The same name will have multiple names translated by different translators, which will inevitably lead to confusion of these names.

Second, when transliterating culture-loaded words, translators should be associative to transliterate the word. The association of transliterated words should describe the essential characteristics of the things as much as possible, that is, let the receptor understand its meaning.

Third, words that describe the things should be translated by using the combination of transliteration and free translation as much as possible. It can not only retain the original exoticism, but also express the referential meaning of words.

### 3.1.4 Combination

The author deems that combination is a translation method that is often used in translation. Combination means using two or more translation methods in translation.



This translation method is pretty common in translation, including transliteration plus literal translation, literal translation plus free translation, and transliteration plus free translation. The author deems that combination can make the foreign receptors easily understand the meaning of culture-loaded words. For example, translators could combine transliteration and literal translation to translate the name of place, such as “陈塘关”, which could be translated as “Chentang Pass”.

## 3.2 Application of the Methods in Translation of Culture-Loaded Words in *Ne Zha*

### 3.2.1 Application of Literal Translation

Example 1: 我施了天劫咒。

I have cast a curse of heavenly tribulation.

The sentence is said by the master called Yuanshi Tianzun to his disciples Taiyi Zhenren and Shen Gong Bao after he divides the chaos pearl into two pearls. And the sentence means he has cast a curse on the evil pearl, so the sentence “我施了天劫咒。” is translated as “I have cast a curse of heavenly tribulation.” According to Nida’s classification, “天劫咒” is a religious culture-loaded word, and there is no equivalent word in English. In order to make foreign viewers understand what it is, the translator uses literal translation and translates it as “a curse of heavenly tribulation”, making “天” correspond to “heavenly” and “劫” correspond to “tribulation”, which is understandable and not confusing for foreigners to understand the meaning. This sentence is translated maintaining the form and meaning of the original text in the target language.

Example 2: 火尖枪

Fire-tipped spear

“火尖枪” is a weapon used by Ne Zha when he fights against other evil people. According to Nida’s classification, “火尖枪” is a material culture-loaded word. The word is translated as “fire-tipped spear”, because on the top of the weapon, it would produce fire if someone touched its switch on the weapon. Using literal translation can make foreign receptors know what “火尖枪” is. In addition, the translation of “火尖枪”, which achieves the equivalence of form and meaning, ensures the cultural richness of the translation to a certain extent and facilitates the dissemination of the source language culture.

Example 3: 我是来给三公子说亲的。

I’m here to be the boy’s matchmaker.

This sentence is said by a matchmaker, which means that she would help Ne Zha find a wife. “我是来给三公子说亲的” is translated as “I’m here to be the boy’s matchmaker”. Among the sentence, “说亲” is a social culture-loaded word, and it means that the person who will help other people to be engaged. And the person who helps other people to be engaged with other people will be called matchmaker. Therefore, in order to make foreign viewers understand the sentence said by the matchmaker, “说亲” is translated as “matchmaker”, which achieves

the equivalence of meaning, so English receptors can understand it as well as the original receptors.

### 3.2.2 Application of Free Translation

Example 4: 急急如律令

Be quick to obey my command

According to Nida’s classification, “急急如律令” is a religious culture-loaded word. Literally, “急急如律令” means that the situation is very urgent now, and people must follow the legal procedure to do it quickly, but later it slowly developed into a common mantra in the Chinese culture. In addition, this sentence is often used at the end of casting a curse. In order to make foreign viewers have the same feeling and understand the meaning of this sentence, it is translated as “be quick to obey my command”, which is easy to understand and know why the characters in the movie say something like that. In addition, the translation achieves the equivalence of meaning.

Literal translation is almost impossible. If translated as “doing it quick as the command requires”, it would not be as short but imposing as “be quick to obey my command”. If this sentence is transliterated as “ji ji ru lu ling”, the foreigners would not understand the meaning and do not know why the immortals say this sentence at the end of their talk. Generally speaking, “be quick to obey my command” is a better translation than others.

Example 5: 不过这样太便宜哪吒了。

But this let Ne zha pass easily.

This sentence is said by a boy who wants to play tricks on Ne Zha. In this sentence, “便宜” is a social culture-loaded word. The adjective “便宜” means low in price and the verb of “便宜” means let somebody pay a low price, which can be extended to let someone pass easily, so the sentence is translated as “But this let Ne zha pass easily”. The author deems that the translation can make foreign viewers have the same feeling as original views do. In addition, the translation achieves the equivalence of meaning so that English receptors could understand it as well as the original receptors.

Example 6: 关内百姓和妖魔不共戴天。

The people in the Pass can’t stand living with a demon.

This sentence is said by an old man after Ne Zha hurt the people in the Pass and destroys the Pass. “不共戴天” is a linguistic culture-loaded word, which means someone is unwilling to coexist with his enemy under the same sky. “和妖魔不共戴天” is translated as “can’t stand living with a demon”, which express the strong desire of people in the Pass that they are unwilling to live with Ne Zha, who is regarded as a demon by the people in the Pass. In this way, the receptors can have the same feeling and the translation achieves the equivalence of meaning.

### 3.2.3 Application of Transliteration

Example 7: 太乙真人、申公豹、敖丙

Taiyi Zhenren, Shen Gong Bao, Ao Bing

There are many names of people which are translated

using transliteration, such as “太乙真人” is translated as “Taiyi Zhenren”, “申公豹” is translated as “Shen Gong Bao” and “敖丙” is translated as “Ao Bing”. They are social culture-loaded words, and the translator cannot find out the equivalent expression of the source text in target language. In addition, the names of people in movies only serve as language signs and there is no need to point out their meanings, so the translator turns to transliteration for help to translate these names.

“真人” doesn't mean “real person”, it means someone becomes immortal, but if translators translate this word according to its meaning, the name would become complicated in English. The author think that there is no need to translate this word in accordance with its meaning, the transliteration of this word can still reach the purpose of functional equivalence. Besides, the author deems that the transliteration of names is more conducive to transmit Chinese culture.

Example 8: 我昆仑十二金仙已有十一。

I have found 11 of my 12 golden immortals of Kunlun.

This sentence is said by Yuanshi Tianzun when he talks to one of his disciples Taiyi Zhenren. In this sentence, “昆仑” is a place where the immortals inhabit, and it is an ecological culture-loaded word. There is no need to explain its meaning, what foreigners need to know is that this word represents a Chinese city. Besides, in order to maintain the cultural characteristics and promote the spread of Chinese culture, this word is translated as Kunlun, so the foreigners can know this word represents one of the Chinese cities.

### 3.2.4 Application of Combination

Example 9: 李大人，太乙仙长还不施法。

Lord Li, Master Immortal Taiyi has not cast a spell yet.

Some names cannot just be translated by using transliteration, because some names carry the words that can identify the person's status, so they are social culture-loaded words according to Nida's classification. In order to make foreign views better understand the status of the characters in the film, it is necessary to translate the words that indicate the status, so the translator should also use free translation to explain the status of the characters. So “李大人” is translated as “Lord Li”, which achieves the equivalence of cultural connotation. In addition, “仙长” is a respectful name for immortals, so “太乙仙长” is translated as “Master Immortal Taiyi”, which achieves the equivalence of meaning.

“李大人”和“太乙仙长” is translated by using the combination of transliteration and free translation. Among these culture-loaded words, free translation is used to indicate the status of the characters to make these characters' identity clearer to foreign viewers, and it can enhance the audience's understanding of Chinese traditional characters.

Example 10: 陈塘关、乾坤圈

Chentang Pass, Qiankun Hoop

In addition, in the movie *Ne Zha*, the combination of

transliteration and literal translation is used to translate some places and weapons. “陈塘关” is an ecological culture-loaded word, and it is translated as “Chentang Pass”. “乾坤圈” is a material culture-loaded word, and it is translated as “Qiankun Hoop”. Among these culture-loaded words, the words translated by transliteration can maintain the cultural characteristics of Chinese geography and material, and the words translated by literal translation can explain the characteristics or functions of these places and weapons. Through the combination of transliteration and literal translation, the translator realizes the equivalence of meaning and form between the translated text and the original text.

## CONCLUSION

To put it in a nutshell, using literal translation is the best method to translate the culture-loaded words, because literal translation can maintain the original style and the characteristics of a nation to the greatest extent, which is conducive to the dissemination of Chinese culture. However, in order to make foreign viewers better understand the meaning of these culture-loaded words, most of the culture-loaded words need to be translated by free translation. For the translation of some names of people and places, the method of transliteration is generally adopted, but some names will have words to express characters' status, so in this case, it is not enough to use transliteration to translate culture-loaded words, the translator also need to use free translation to explain the status of the characters.

At the end of this paper, there are some limitations and suggestions that need to mention. Firstly, it is admitted that the examples displayed in this paper to demonstrate the translation methods for translating culture-loaded words in domestic movies are rather limited. Besides, the paper from one translation project cannot be comprehensive enough to discuss all those questions found in the translation of culture-loaded words in domestic movies. So, this paper still needs further research and more typical examples of *Ne Zha* under the functional equivalence theory. It is expected that more and more domestic movies can be exported to foreign countries and future discussion on the translation of culture-loaded words in domestic movies could be more detailed.

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