

Exploring Translation Strategies in the Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang Translation of *Journey to the West*

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Abstract:

Journey to the West, one of the four great classical novels of Chinese literature, has been translated into English through multiple versions, each employing distinct translation strategies that reflect the translators' cultural orientations and communicative purposes. The abridged translation by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, published as *Pilgrimage to the West* by Panda Books in 1981, occupies a unique position in the translation history of this novel. Based on a close examination of the Yangs' translation of the Flaming Mountain episode and drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of domestication and foreignization, Skopos theory, and translator behavior criticism as discussed in the existing scholarship on *Journey to the West* translation, this study systematically analyzes the translation strategies employed by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang in rendering culture-specific items, including religious terminology, personal appellations, idiomatic expressions, poetic language, and mythological concepts. The findings reveal that the Yangs' translation is characterized by a strategic hybridity: they predominantly employ foreignization in translating religious and mythological concepts to preserve cultural authenticity, while adopting domestication for idiomatic expressions and dialogue to ensure communicative effectiveness. This dual strategy reflects the translators' conscious negotiation between fidelity to the source text and accessibility for the target readership, a negotiation shaped by their unique bicultural identity, the socio-political context of the translation's production, and the institutional affiliation with Foreign Languages Press.

Keywords:

Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, *Journey To The West*, Translation Strategies, Domestication and Foreignization; Culture-Specific Items, Chinese Classical Literature Translation

1. Introduction

Journey to the West (*Xiyou Ji*), attributed to Wu Cheng'en of the Ming Dynasty, stands as one of the most celebrated works of Chinese classical literature. The novel, spanning one hundred chapters, narrates the pilgrimage of the Buddhist monk Xuanzang (Tripitaka) and his three supernatural disciples—Monkey (Sun Wukong), Pigsy (Zhu Bajie), and Sandy (Sha Wujing)—as they journey to India to obtain Buddhist scriptures. Beyond its entertaining narrative, the novel is imbued with

profound religious, philosophical, and cultural significance, synthesizing elements of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism within a richly allegorical framework. The translation of this work into English has a history spanning over 180 years, during which numerous translators have produced versions ranging from partial selections to complete renderings [1].

Among the most influential translations are those by Timothy Richard, Arthur Waley, Anthony C. Yu, and W.J.F. Jenner. Each of these translations reflects the translator's unique historical context, cultural orientation, and translation philosophy. The translation by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, published under the title *Pilgrimage to the West* as part of the Panda Books series in 1981, represents a distinctive contribution to the corpus of English translations of this novel. Yang Xianyi was a renowned Chinese translator and scholar who studied at Oxford University, where he met and married Gladys Yang, a British-born translator who became one of the most prolific translators of Chinese literature into English [2]. Together, they translated numerous Chinese classics, and their collaborative translation of *Journey to the West*, though an abridged version covering select chapters, demonstrates a sophisticated approach to cross-cultural translation that merits systematic scholarly investigation.

The Yangs' translation was produced under the auspices of Foreign Languages Press in Beijing, a state-owned publishing house dedicated to promoting Chinese culture internationally. The abridged version, titled *Pilgrimage to the West: Excerpts from Three Classical Novels*, contained selections from the original novel. The Flaming Mountain episode is particularly significant as it involves the confrontation between Monkey and Princess Iron Fan (Rakshasa), the wife of the Ox Demon King, over the palm-leaf fan needed to extinguish the flames of the Flaming Mountain, a pivotal episode that encapsulates many of the novel's thematic concerns—the tension between individual heroism and collective endeavor, the interplay of Buddhist compassion and Daoist alchemy, and the negotiation of masculine and feminine power.

Previous studies on the translation of *Journey to the West* have predominantly focused on the complete translations by Yu and Jenner, as well as Waley's highly influential abridged version. Li Jing conducted a comparative study of personal appellation translation in the Yangs' and Waley's versions, examining how cultural connotations are conveyed through different translation strategies [1]. However, the Yangs' translation itself has received relatively limited scholarly attention, particularly with regard to the specific strategies employed in rendering culture-specific items. This gap is noteworthy given the unique position of the Yangs' translation: it was produced by a Chinese-British translation team with bicultural competence, published by a Chinese state publisher with explicit cultural promotion objectives, and targeted at a general English-speaking readership unfamiliar with Chinese culture.

This study aims to address this gap by conducting a systematic analysis of the translation strategies employed by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang in their rendering of the Flaming Mountain episode of *Journey to the West*. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of domestication and foreignization, Skopos theory, and translator behavior criticism as discussed in the existing literature [7], the study examines how the Yangs navigate the tension between preserving the cultural specificity of the source text and ensuring accessibility for the target audience. The analysis focuses on

five categories of culture-specific items: religious and mythological terminology, personal appellations, idiomatic expressions, poetic language, and dialogue.

2. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study approach, combining textual analysis with theoretical interpretation to examine the translation strategies employed by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang in their translation of *Journey to the West*. The primary source material consists of the Yangs' translation of the Flaming Mountain episode, as published in *Excerpts from Three Classical Novels*. The original Chinese text from Wu Cheng'en's novel serves as the source text for comparative analysis.

The analytical framework of this study is grounded in three interrelated theoretical perspectives that have been extensively discussed in the existing scholarship on *Journey to the West* translation. First, the domestication and foreignization dichotomy provides a conceptual lens for categorizing translation strategies. Domestication refers to the adaptation of the source text to conform to target language and cultural norms, while foreignization entails retaining elements of the source culture, potentially creating a sense of linguistic and cultural difference for the target reader. Cui Xuan and Zhang Zhenmei have argued that the proper handling of cultural content in *Journey to the West* requires the flexible application of both domestication and foreignization strategies, depending on the specific nature of the cultural elements being translated [9].

Second, Skopos theory, which emphasizes the purpose of the translation as the primary determinant of translation strategies, has been applied to the study of culture-loaded words in *Journey to the West*. Yan Chunhui and Gou Wenyan have demonstrated that the translation of culture-specific items in this novel requires a clear understanding of the translation purpose and the needs of the target audience [11]. Third, translator behavior criticism, as developed by Zhou Lingshun, provides a framework for evaluating the balance between truth-seeking (fidelity to the source text) and pragmatism (responsiveness to target reader needs) in translator decision-making. Li Jianing has applied this framework to the study of deity and demon translation in Yu's version of *Journey to the West*, providing a useful model for analyzing the Yangs' translation approach [13].

The analysis proceeds through the following steps. First, culture-specific items in the Flaming Mountain episode are identified and categorized into five types: religious and mythological terms, personal appellations, idiomatic expressions, poetic language, and dialogue. Second, the Yangs' translation of each category is examined in terms of the specific strategies employed, including literal translation, free translation, transliteration, substitution, omission, and explication. Third, the overall pattern of strategy use is analyzed to identify the dominant orientation of the translation—whether toward domestication or foreignization. Fourth, the translation decisions are interpreted in light of Skopos theory and translator behavior criticism to understand the factors that shaped the Yangs' approach.

The study also draws upon the comparative insights from the existing literature. Li Jing's study of personal appellation translation in the Yangs' and Waley's versions provides a comparative reference for examining the Yangs' approach to character names [1]. Jiang Zhiwen's analysis of magical instrument translation from the perspective of translation ethics offers a framework for evaluating the Yangs' treatment of culturally specific objects [5]. Liu Shenqiang and Liu Zhenzhen's study

of retranslation behavior patterns in *Journey to the West* provides insights into how different translators respond to the influence of previous translations [4]. Wang Wenqiang's study of Yu's scholarly translation approach offers a useful contrast for understanding the Yangs' distinctive strategies [12].

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Translation of Religious and Mythological Terminology

The Yangs' translation of religious and mythological terms reveals a strategic pattern that balances foreignization for core religious concepts with domestication for terms that have functional equivalents in the target culture. In rendering the term Buddhist scriptures (zhenjing), the Yangs consistently use the English term Buddhist scriptures, a domesticated translation that accurately conveys the religious nature of the objects while remaining accessible to English readers. Similarly, Bodhisattva (pusa) is rendered as bodhisattva, a term that has entered English through religious studies and is recognizable to readers with some knowledge of Buddhism.

The figure of Guan Yin, the bodhisattva of compassion, is referred to by name in the text, and the Yangs translate her title as Guan Yin, employing a transliteration strategy that preserves the Chinese name. This choice aligns with the foreignization approach, as it retains the cultural specificity of the figure rather than substituting a Western equivalent such as Goddess of Mercy. The Yangs' decision to retain the Chinese name reflects an awareness that Guan Yin, as a distinctively Chinese Buddhist figure, cannot be adequately represented through a Western religious label without significant loss of cultural meaning. This approach is consistent with the observation by Cui Xuan and Zhang Zhenmei that religious terminology in *Journey to the West* often requires foreignization to preserve the original cultural connotations [8].

The translation of Rakshasa (Luocha) presents another instructive example. In the original Chinese text, Princess Iron Fan is also referred to as Rakshasa, a term derived from the Sanskrit rakshasa through Buddhist scriptures. The Yangs retain this term as Rakshasa in the English text, with a contextual explanation that identifies her as the wife of the powerful Ox Demon King. This strategy of transliteration plus contextual clarification represents a middle ground between pure foreignization, which might leave the reader confused, and domestication, which might oversimplify the cultural reference. The treatment of the term immortal (xian) further illustrates the Yangs' strategic approach. When the old man at the Flaming Mountain exclaims that Monkey must be one of these immortals that ride on clouds, the Yangs use the English word immortal to render the Chinese concept of xian. This domesticated translation approximates the Chinese concept to a degree, though it does not fully capture the Daoist connotations of the term [12].

The translation of the fan itself—the palm-leaf fan (bajiao shan)—reveals the Yangs' attention to physical accuracy. The fan is rendered as palm-leaf fan, a literal translation that accurately describes the physical object. Jiang Zhiwen has discussed the translation of magical instruments in *Journey to the West*, noting that translators face significant challenges in rendering these culturally specific items due to their embeddedness in Chinese religious and mythological traditions [5]. The Yangs' choice of palm-leaf may reflect a preference for a term more familiar to English readers, even if it sacrifices some botanical precision. This decision aligns with the

domestication strategy, prioritizing reader comprehension over strict fidelity to the original botanical reference.

3.2. *Translation of Personal Appellations*

The translation of personal names and appellations constitutes one of the most challenging aspects of rendering *Journey to the West* into English, as the names often carry significant cultural, religious, and symbolic meanings. Li Jing has conducted a comprehensive comparative study of personal appellation translation in the Yangs' and Waley's versions, identifying significant differences in their approaches to this challenging task [1]. The Yangs' approach to translating personal appellations in the Flaming Mountain episode reveals a consistent pattern of employing descriptive translations that convey the functional significance of the names while maintaining narrative readability.

The main characters are referred to by their translated names throughout the text: Monkey for Sun Wukong, Pigsy for Zhu Bajie, and Sandy for Sha Wujing. These names, which had been established in earlier English translations, particularly Waley's, represent a domesticated approach that prioritizes accessibility over cultural specificity. Monkey captures the essence of the character—his simian nature—while omitting the religious connotations of his full name. Pigsy similarly emphasizes the character's porcine features. Li Jing points out that the Yangs' adoption of these established names reflects a pragmatic recognition of their wide acceptance among English readers, while also noting that Waley's version tends to emphasize the animal attributes of the characters through such naming choices [1].

The translation of Princess Iron Fan (Tieshan Gongzhu) and Rakshasa (Luocha nü) demonstrates the Yangs' dual-naming strategy. The character is introduced as Princess Iron Fan, also called Rakshasa, providing both the descriptive title and the culturally specific term. Princess Iron Fan is a literal translation that conveys the character's royal status and her emblematic object, while Rakshasa preserves the Buddhist mythological reference. This dual presentation allows the reader to understand the character on multiple levels—as a narrative figure with a descriptive name and as a figure embedded in a specific religious and mythological tradition. The Ox Demon King (Niumo Wang) is referred to as the powerful Ox Demon King, a translation that combines literal rendering with an evaluative epithet.

The translation of Red Boy (Honghai'er) as Red Boy represents a literal translation that preserves both the descriptive and symbolic dimensions of the name. The character is referred to through multiple identificatory cues: Red Boy, the Holy Child King of Fire-Cloud Cave, and the son of Princess Iron Fan, providing the reader with sufficient context to understand his identity. This approach is consistent with the Yangs' overall strategy of combining literal translation with contextual clarification to ensure that culturally specific names are both preserved and made comprehensible to the target reader [1].

The Yangs' translation of the term the Holy Child King (Shenghai'er Wang) as a title for Red Boy reveals another dimension of their approach to personal appellations. The original Chinese title carries complex religious connotations, referencing both the child-like appearance of the demon and his claim to spiritual authority. The Yangs' translation as the Holy Child King of Fire-Cloud Cave preserves the hierarchical sense of the title while providing a specific geographical location that contextualizes the character within the narrative geography of the novel. This approach combines

literal translation of the title with contextual specification, reflecting the Yangs' characteristic strategy of balancing fidelity with clarity.

The treatment of the woodcutter's form of address for Monkey is also revealing. The woodcutter addresses Monkey as friar, a term that the Yangs use consistently throughout the translation to refer to Buddhist monks. This choice represents a domestication strategy that employs a term familiar to Western readers, even though friar carries specifically Christian connotations. The Yangs' decision to use this term reflects their awareness that the target reader may not be familiar with the Chinese term heshang (monk) and that a familiar Western religious term, despite its cultural inaccuracy, is preferable to a term that might confuse the reader. This pragmatic approach to religious terminology is consistent with the overall pattern of strategic domestication that characterizes the Yangs' translation.

3.3. Translation of Idiomatic Expressions and Proverbs

The translation of idiomatic expressions in the Flaming Mountain episode reveals the Yangs' predominant reliance on domestication strategies. The Chinese proverb Without heat and cold no crops will grow (Bu leng bu re, wu gu bu jie) is rendered through a functional equivalent that conveys the essential meaning while using natural English expression. The Yangs do not attempt to preserve the Chinese cultural context of the proverb but instead focus on conveying its universal agricultural wisdom. Cao Shuang has discussed the translation of culturally loaded expressions in *Journey to the West* from the perspective of Skopos theory, noting that the purpose of the translation and the needs of the target audience should guide the choice of translation strategies [10].

The Yangs' translation of Monkey's boastful speech further illustrates their approach to idiomatic language. When Monkey says, Don't talk like a fool! We're a long way from Sicily (Mo yao hushuo! Women li Xiliang guo hai yuan zhe ne), they adapt the cultural reference to make it more accessible to English readers. The original Chinese refers to Xiliang, a historical kingdom in the western regions, but the Yangs substitute Sicily, a place name familiar to Western readers that conveys a similar sense of distant exoticism. This substitution represents a bold domestication strategy that prioritizes the reader's immediate comprehension over geographical accuracy.

The translation of the descriptive passage about the heat employs a combination of literal and free translation strategies. The phrase as hot as burning charcoal or red molten iron in a furnace (ru huotan yiban, you si shaohong de tiekuai) is rendered through a literal translation that preserves the sensory imagery of the original. However, the Yangs occasionally add explanatory phrases to clarify culturally specific references. For instance, when the old man explains that the mountain is sixty li from here, the Yangs retain the Chinese unit of distance li without converting it to miles or kilometers, a foreignization strategy that preserves the Chinese cultural context while relying on the reader to infer the meaning from context. This mixed approach reflects the Yangs' pragmatic recognition that different types of idiomatic and cultural expressions require different translation strategies [7].

The Yangs' translation of the proverbial expression Without heat and cold no crops will grow (Bu leng bu re, wugu bu jie) exemplifies their approach to translating Chinese agricultural and folk wisdom. The original Chinese proverb reflects the deep connection between agricultural cycles and daily life in traditional Chinese society.

The Yangs' translation preserves the essential meaning of the proverb while using natural English syntax, making the wisdom accessible to readers who may have no knowledge of Chinese agricultural traditions. This approach reflects the Yangs' recognition that the communicative function of the proverb—to convey a universal truth about the relationship between hardship and growth—is more important than the preservation of its specific cultural formulation.

The Yangs' handling of the idiomatic expression to have a taste of my staff (*chang wo yi zhang*) in the context of Monkey's confrontation with Rakshasa reveals their approach to translating threatening or confrontational language. The original Chinese expression uses the verb *chang* (to taste), which is a metaphorical way of issuing a challenge. The Yangs render this as have a taste of my staff, preserving the metaphorical structure of the original while using natural English syntax. This choice represents a successful integration of literal translation and idiomatic naturalness, preserving the vividness of the original expression while ensuring that the meaning is immediately clear to the English reader.

3.4. Translation of Poetic Language

The translation of the poetic passages in the Flaming Mountain episode presents particular challenges due to the tight integration of form and content in classical Chinese poetry. The Yangs' approach to these passages reveals a strategy of semantic fidelity combined with formal adaptation. The opening poem, which sets the scene for the chapter, is translated into free verse with irregular line lengths and no consistent rhyme scheme, prioritizing the communication of meaning over the preservation of the original poetic form. Wang Feng, Su Jing, and Wang Xinglong have conducted a detailed corpus-based study of onomatopoeia translation in Lovell's version of *Journey to the West*, noting the significant challenges that poetic language presents for translators and the tendency of some translators to simplify or omit such passages [9].

The descriptive poem about the old man at the Flaming Mountain is translated as a series of parallel couplets: He wore a linen gown neither yellow nor red, / A straw hat neither green nor black; / He held a gnarled bamboo cane neither crooked nor straight, / And was shod in leather boots neither new nor old. This translation preserves the repetitive structure of the original (neither...nor...) while adapting it to English syntax. The Yangs' use of parallelism creates a rhythmic effect that approximates the formal quality of the original without attempting to reproduce its specific metrical patterns. The poem describing the scenery of the Mountain of Emerald Clouds is rendered in free verse: Rocks formed the bones of the mountains, / The essence of the earth. / The mist held last night's moisture, / Moss made a new, fresh green. The Yangs employ a combination of literal translation and creative adaptation to convey the Daoist-infused imagery of the original.

The Yangs' translation of the fight scene between Monkey and Rakshasa employs a distinctive approach. The original Chinese uses a combination of parallel couplets and descriptive prose to convey the action. The Yangs translate this passage as a series of short, dynamic phrases: Hating Monkey, eager to avenge her son; / Though Monkey, too, was angry, / He spoke her fair when the road west was blocked, / Asking patiently, he asked for the loan of the palm-leaf fan, / Making no parade of his strength. This translation captures the dramatic tension of the scene while maintaining a poetic quality through the use of present participles and parallel structures. The Yangs' decision to include this passage as poetry rather than converting it to prose

reflects their commitment to preserving the literary form of the original, even when the translation cannot fully reproduce the original's prosodic features [4].

The Yangs' translation of the poetic description of the Mountain of Emerald Clouds reveals their approach to rendering the Daoist-infused landscape imagery that pervades the novel. The original Chinese poem employs a series of parallel couplets that describe the mountain in terms of its geological features, its flora and fauna, and its atmospheric qualities. The Yangs' translation preserves the descriptive content of the poem while adapting the formal structure to English poetic conventions. The use of free verse with occasional rhyme creates a poetic effect that is accessible to English readers while retaining the essential imagery of the original. This approach reflects the Yangs' recognition that the poetic passages in the novel serve important atmospheric and aesthetic functions that require formal preservation, even when the specific prosodic features of the original cannot be directly transferred to English.

The Yangs' translation of the chapter's closing poetic passage, which describes the confrontation between Monkey and Rakshasa, employs a distinctive rhetorical strategy that combines narrative summary with poetic elevation. The passage alternates between descriptive narration and direct dialogue, creating a hybrid form that captures the dramatic tension of the scene. The Yangs' translation maintains this hybrid quality, using short, emphatic phrases to convey the intensity of the conflict while preserving the poetic register of the original. This approach demonstrates the Yangs' sensitivity to the generic conventions of Chinese vernacular fiction, where the boundaries between prose narrative and poetic description are often fluid and deliberately ambiguous.

3.5. Translation of Dialogue and Speech Patterns

The translation of dialogue in the Flaming Mountain episode reveals the Yangs' sensitivity to the pragmatic functions of speech in the narrative. The different characters' speech patterns are differentiated through register and tone, reflecting their distinct personalities and social positions. Monkey's speech is characterized by colloquial directness and occasional humor, as in his retort to the old man: Don't bother about tea and food, sir. Just tell me where the Iron Fan Fairy lives. This translation captures Monkey's impatience and his prioritization of action over social niceties, key features of his character. Liu Kequiang, Pang Yongfang, and Wang Feng have studied the rhetorical intervention of translators in the identification rhetoric of abridged translations of *Journey to the West*, noting that dialogue translation involves complex considerations of interpersonal dynamics and persuasive strategies [14].

Rakshasa's speech, in contrast, is rendered with greater formality and emotional intensity, reflecting her anger and grief over her son's captivity. Her exclamation, Vile ape! If you were our sworn brother, would you injure my child? conveys both her fury and the rhetorical force of the original. The Yangs' translation preserves the emotional register of the original while using natural English syntax, achieving a balance between fidelity and readability. The woodcutter's speech is translated with a colloquial quality that reflects his humble social status. His advice to Monkey, Just watch your step, friend. Simply ask for the fan and say nothing about the past. I'm sure you'll get it, employs informal language that creates a sense of folk wisdom and practical experience.

The old man's speech at the Flaming Mountain is rendered with a formal, respectful tone that reflects his age and status as a local elder. His explanation of the Flaming

Mountain and the Iron Fan Fairy is presented in measured, explanatory prose that conveys both factual information and cultural attitudes. The Yangs' translation of the old man's dialogue employs a register that is more formal than the woodcutter's but less formal than Rakshasa's, creating a gradation of speech styles that mirrors the social hierarchy of the narrative. The translation of Monkey's internal monologue reveals the Yangs' approach to conveying psychological depth. When Monkey realizes that Rakshasa is Red Boy's mother, the translated text reads: Up against an enemy again!... That Red Boy we captured was said to be their son. When we met his uncle in Poer Cave on Jieyang Mountain, he refused us water and wanted to take revenge. Now here I am up against the mother—how am I to borrow the fan? This translation preserves the colloquial, self-directed quality of Monkey's thoughts while providing sufficient contextual information [14].

The Yangs' translation of the dialogue between Monkey and the old man at the Flaming Mountain reveals their ability to convey important cultural information through natural-sounding conversation. The old man's explanation of the Iron Fan Fairy and the annual ritual of offerings is rendered in clear, informative prose that serves both narrative and cultural functions. The Yangs' translation of this passage demonstrates their understanding that dialogue in the novel often serves as a vehicle for cultural exposition, and that effective translation requires not only linguistic accuracy but also cultural sensitivity and the ability to present unfamiliar information in an accessible format.

The Yangs' translation of Rakshasa's angry response to Monkey's request for the fan reveals their approach to rendering emotionally charged speech. The original Chinese text uses a series of short, emphatic phrases that convey the character's fury and indignation. The Yangs' translation preserves this emotional intensity through the use of exclamatory syntax and forceful vocabulary: Vile ape!... You smooth-tongued baboon! The translation captures the rhetorical force of the original while using natural English expressions of anger. This approach reflects the Yangs' sensitivity to the pragmatic functions of dialogue in the narrative, where characters' speech patterns serve not only to convey information but also to reveal their emotional states and social relationships.

3.6. Overall Translation Strategy: A Hybrid Model

The analysis of the Yangs' translation of the Flaming Mountain episode reveals a consistent pattern of strategic hybridity, characterized by the principled alternation between foreignization and domestication strategies based on the nature and function of the specific textual element being translated. This hybrid model can be characterized as a form of strategic domestication within an overall framework of cultural preservation, where the primary orientation is toward maintaining the cultural authenticity of the source text, but with strategic concessions to target language norms and reader expectations when necessary for communicative effectiveness.

In the domain of religious and mythological terminology, the Yangs' translation tends toward foreignization, retaining terms such as bodhisattva, Rakshasa, and Guan Yin in their original forms. This choice reflects the translators' recognition that these terms carry specific cultural and religious meanings that cannot be adequately represented through Western equivalents. In the domain of personal appellations, the Yangs' translation adopts a mixed strategy. Major characters are referred to by established English names that represent a domesticated approach, while secondary

and culturally specific names are rendered through a combination of literal translation and contextual explanation. In the domain of idiomatic expressions and dialogue, the Yangs' translation is predominantly domesticated, with frequent use of free translation, substitution, and adaptation. In the domain of poetic language, the Yangs' translation strikes a balance between formal preservation and semantic communication.

The overall pattern of the Yangs' translation strategy can be understood through the lens of Skopos theory. The primary purpose of the Panda Books series, in which the Yangs' translation was published, was to introduce Chinese literature to an international audience, with an emphasis on cultural promotion rather than academic scholarship. This purpose shaped the Yangs' translation decisions in significant ways, encouraging a balance between cultural preservation and reader accessibility. Yan Chunhui and Gou Wenyan have argued that the application of Skopos theory to the translation of culture-loaded words in *Journey to the West* requires a flexible approach that considers both the purpose of the translation and the needs of the target audience [11]. Unlike Yu's scholarly translation, which prioritized academic completeness and cultural explication, or Waley's popular translation, which prioritized narrative entertainment and reader engagement, the Yangs' translation occupies a middle ground, seeking to preserve the cultural essence of the original while maintaining readability for a general audience.

The Yangs' translation strategy also reflects their unique bicultural identity. Yang Xianyi, educated in classical Chinese literature and Western classics at Oxford, brought a deep understanding of both Chinese and English literary traditions. Gladys Yang, born in China to British parents and educated at Oxford, possessed an intuitive grasp of English literary norms and reader expectations. Their collaborative translation process allowed them to combine these complementary perspectives, producing a translation that is simultaneously faithful to the Chinese original and natural in English expression. Liu Shenqiang and Liu Zhenzhen have discussed the role of the translator's identity and institutional affiliation in shaping translation decisions, noting that different types of translators—academic, government-affiliated, and market-oriented—tend to adopt different approaches to translation [4].

The socio-political context of the Yangs' translation also merits consideration. Produced in the late 1970s and published in 1981, the translation was part of China's post-Cultural Revolution effort to re-engage with the international community through cultural exchange. The Panda Books series, published by Foreign Languages Press, was explicitly conceived as a vehicle for cultural diplomacy, presenting Chinese literature to foreign readers in a format that was both accessible and appealing. This institutional context placed certain constraints on the Yangs' translation decisions, encouraging a domestication-oriented approach that would make the translation accessible to a broad audience while also requiring a level of cultural preservation that would present Chinese culture in a positive light [12].

The Yangs' translation can be usefully compared with other major translations of *Journey to the West* to highlight its distinctive features. In comparison with Waley's translation, which freely abridges and adapts the original to create a fast-paced narrative focused on Monkey's adventures, the Yangs' translation is more faithful to the original structure and content, retaining more of the religious and cultural elements that Waley excises. Liao Shilan has conducted a comparative study of the translation contexts and purposes of the Richard, Waley, and Yu versions, revealing

how each translator's historical context and personal motivation shaped their translation approach [3]. In comparison with Yu's complete translation, which incorporates extensive scholarly apparatus and strives for comprehensive cultural explication, the Yangs' translation is more selective and streamlined, prioritizing narrative flow over academic completeness. In comparison with Jenner's complete translation, which is generally more literal and less interpretive, the Yangs' translation is more domestication-oriented, with greater willingness to adapt cultural references for the target audience [4]. These comparisons suggest that the Yangs' translation occupies a distinctive position in the landscape of *Journey to the West* translations.

The Yangs' handling of the spatial and geographical references in the Flaming Mountain episode reveals another dimension of their strategic hybridity. The Flaming Mountain (Huoyan Shan) is translated literally as the Flaming Mountain, preserving the vivid imagery of the original. The Mountain of Emerald Clouds (Cuiyun Shan) is translated as the Mountain of Emerald Clouds, a literal translation that maintains the poetic quality of the Chinese name. These choices reflect a foreignization strategy that preserves the cultural and aesthetic qualities of the original place names. The treatment of the distance unit *li* is particularly instructive: the Yangs retain the Chinese term without converting it to Western units, writing sixty *li* and one thousand four hundred and sixty *li*. This foreignization strategy preserves the Chinese cultural context while relying on the reader to infer the approximate meaning from context.

The Yangs' translation of the narrative voice also reveals their strategic approach. The original Chinese text frequently employs the conventional storytelling formula Our story tells how... (*que shuo*), which is a characteristic feature of Chinese vernacular fiction derived from the oral storytelling tradition. The Yangs retain this formula in their translation, using Our story tells how... at the beginning of the chapter. This retention of the oral storytelling convention represents a foreignization strategy that preserves the distinctive narrative voice of Chinese vernacular fiction. Wang Feng and Yu Yiqun have discussed the functional narrative features of Chinese chapter novels, noting that the retention of such narrative conventions is important for preserving the distinctive literary character of the source text [15]. The Yangs' decision to retain this feature suggests an awareness that the oral quality of the narrative is an integral part of the novel's literary character.

3.7. Implications for Cross-Cultural Translation of Chinese Classics

The findings of this study have several implications for the translation of Chinese classical literature. First, the Yangs' hybrid model suggests that effective cross-cultural translation does not require the exclusive adoption of either domestication or foreignization but rather the strategic alternation between them based on the nature of the specific textual element being translated. This finding challenges the assumption that a consistent translation strategy is necessarily superior to a mixed approach, suggesting instead that the most effective translations may be those that adapt their strategies to the specific demands of different textual elements.

Second, the study demonstrates the importance of considering the translator's bicultural identity in understanding translation decisions. The Yangs' collaborative approach, combining a Chinese translator's deep cultural knowledge with a British translator's native linguistic intuition, produced a translation that achieves a level of cultural and linguistic balance that would be difficult for a single translator to achieve. This finding is consistent with the observations of Liu Shenqiang and Liu Zhenzhen,

who have noted that the role of the translator—whether academic, government-affiliated, or market-oriented—significantly influences the translation approach adopted [4].

Third, the study highlights the role of the institutional context in shaping translation strategies. The Yangs' translation was produced within the framework of China's cultural diplomacy efforts, which imposed certain expectations regarding both cultural preservation and accessibility. This institutional context influenced the Yangs' translation decisions in ways that are not always visible in the translated text itself. Liao Shilan has emphasized the importance of understanding the translation context in analyzing translation decisions, noting that the historical and cultural context in which a translation is produced significantly shapes the translator's approach [3].

Fourth, the study contributes to the ongoing discussion about the translation of culture-specific items in literary texts. The Yangs' approach to translating religious terminology, personal names, idiomatic expressions, and poetic language offers a model for handling these challenging elements that balances the competing demands of cultural preservation and reader accessibility. The study suggests that the choice between domestication and foreignization should not be made on ideological grounds alone but should be informed by a careful consideration of the nature and function of the specific cultural element being translated. The Yangs' translation also demonstrates the importance of what might be called pragmatic foreignization—the strategic retention of culturally specific elements that enrich the reader's understanding of the source culture without impeding narrative comprehension [7].

Finally, the study underscores the importance of considering the target audience in translation decisions. The Yangs' translation was designed for a general English-speaking readership, and their strategic choices consistently reflect this audience orientation. The study suggests that the effectiveness of a translation depends not only on its fidelity to the source text but also on its appropriateness for its intended audience, and that the most successful translations are those that achieve a balance between these two considerations. This finding is consistent with the Skopos theory approach to translation, which emphasizes the purpose of the translation as the primary determinant of translation strategies [11].

4. Conclusions

This study has examined the translation strategies employed by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang in their translation of the Flaming Mountain episode of *Journey to the West*. Through a systematic analysis of the Yangs' rendering of religious and mythological terminology, personal appellations, idiomatic expressions, poetic language, and dialogue, the study has identified a characteristic pattern of strategic hybridity that distinguishes the Yangs' translation from other major English versions of the novel.

The Yangs' translation is characterized by a principled alternation between foreignization and domestication strategies, with the choice of strategy determined by the nature and function of the specific textual element being translated. Religious and mythological terminology tends to be translated through foreignization, preserving the cultural specificity of the source concepts. Personal appellations are rendered through a mixed strategy, with established English names used for major characters and culturally specific names preserved for secondary characters. Idiomatic expressions and dialogue are predominantly domesticated, with frequent use of free translation,

substitution, and adaptation to ensure communicative effectiveness. Poetic language is translated with a balance of formal preservation and semantic communication, adapting the prosodic features of the original to conform to English poetic conventions.

The study has identified several factors that shaped the Yangs' translation strategy. Their unique bicultural identity, combining Yang Xianyi's deep knowledge of Chinese literature with Gladys Yang's native English intuition, enabled them to achieve a balance of cultural preservation and linguistic naturalness. The institutional context of the Panda Books series, with its mission of cultural diplomacy, encouraged a translation approach that was both accessible to a broad audience and respectful of Chinese cultural heritage. The target audience of general English-speaking readers, with limited prior knowledge of Chinese culture, necessitated a degree of domestication to ensure comprehension and engagement. These findings are consistent with the broader observations in the literature about the factors that shape translation decisions in the context of *Journey to the West* translation [6].

The study contributes to the broader understanding of cross-cultural translation of Chinese classical literature by demonstrating the effectiveness of a hybrid translation strategy that adapts its approach based on the specific demands of different textual elements. The findings suggest that the choice between domestication and foreignization should not be made on ideological grounds alone but should be informed by a careful consideration of the nature and function of the specific cultural element being translated, the characteristics of the target audience, and the institutional context in which the translation is produced.

The Yangs' translation of *Journey to the West*, though less well-known than the complete translations by Yu and Jenner or the popular abridged version by Waley, represents a significant achievement in cross-cultural translation. Its strategic hybridity, balancing cultural preservation with reader accessibility, offers valuable lessons for translators of Chinese classical literature and for scholars seeking to understand the complex factors that shape translation decisions. The translation stands as a testament to the Yangs' skill as translators and to the potential of collaborative translation to bridge cultural and linguistic divides.

Future research could extend the scope of this study by examining additional chapters from the Yangs' translation, conducting comparative analyses with other translations of the same chapters, and investigating the reception of the Yangs' translation among English-speaking readers. Such research would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the Yangs' translation approach and its place in the history of *Journey to the West* translation. As the existing literature has demonstrated, the study of *Journey to the West* translation continues to offer valuable insights into the challenges and strategies of cross-cultural literary translation.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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