

Contextual Reconstruction in the English Translation of Chinese Children's Animated Film Titles: A Boundary Compression Approach

Zhang Liru*

School of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

Corresponding Author: Zhang Liru

School of Foreign Languages,
University of Shanghai for Science
and Technology, Shanghai, China

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Abstract: As Chinese children's animated films increasingly permeate the global market, their titles act as pivotal paratexts that mold young audiences' initial impressions, emotional involvement, and interpretive anticipations. Translating these titles is far more than a mere linguistic conversion; it is a sophisticated process of contextual reconstruction, shaped by disparities in linguistic structures, cultural cognition, and audience reception across China and the English-speaking world. Grounded in the Boundary Compression framework, this study investigates how Chinese children's animated film titles are translated into English to align with the cognitive developmental stages and affective demands of young global viewers. It posits that effective translation entails compressing process-oriented Chinese linguistic expressions into result-oriented English forms, while simultaneously enhancing cognitive accessibility and emotional resonance for the target juvenile audience. Through case analyses of representative Chinese children's animated films, including *Ne Zha*, *Boonie Bears*, and *Big Fish & Begonia*, this paper identifies five core Boundary Compression strategies—classificatory, eliminative, implicative, fixed-point, and prospective compression—and dissects how each strategy facilitates the reconstruction of narrative meaning, thematic focus, and affective appeal in English translations. By integrating cognitive translation studies and affect theory, this research addresses the gap in existing scholarship on children's media translation beyond Euro-American-centric perspectives, and contributes to broader discourses on translational convergences and divergences in global children's literature and audiovisual media. It further explores how cultural values and aesthetic sensibilities inherent in Chinese animated film titles are mediated and rearticulated through translation, fostering cross-cultural exchange in the juvenile media landscape.

Keywords: Chinese children's animated films; film title translation; Boundary Compression; cognitive translation studies; cross-cultural exchange.

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Introduction

In the past two decades, the global circulation of Chinese children's animated films has witnessed an unprecedented expansion, with works like *Ne Zha* and the *Boonie Bears* franchise gaining substantial international viewership and critical attention. This global reach has brought to the forefront critical issues of cross-cultural translation and communication, as these animated works serve as important carriers of Chinese cultural values, aesthetic sensibilities, and juvenile narratives for young audiences worldwide. For children's audiovisual media, film titles hold a decisive position in the communication process: as the first point of contact between a film and its audience, they shape initial impressions, guide narrative interpretation, and directly influence young viewers' willingness to engage with the work (Oittinen, 2000). Unlike film titles for adult audiences, which may embrace complexity, metaphor, and cultural subtlety, titles for children's animated films face unique constraints and demands—they must strike a delicate balance between semantic clarity, cognitive accessibility, and affective appeal, tailored to the developmental characteristics of young minds.

Translation, in this specific context, cannot be reduced to a simple lexical or syntactic transfer between Chinese and English. Rather, it involves a deliberate process of contextual reconstruction, wherein the linguistic, cultural, and emotional

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contexts embedded in Chinese film titles are reconfigured to resonate with the cognitive frameworks, cultural backgrounds, and affective needs of English-speaking children (Nikolajeva, 2014). While existing scholarship on film title translation has explored general strategies such as domestication and foreignization (Venuti, 1995) and literal and free translation, relatively little attention has been paid to the specific translational demands of children's animated film titles, especially from non-Euro-American cultural contexts. Most studies either treat film title translation as a homogeneous practice across age groups or center on Western children's media, leaving a critical gap in understanding how Chinese children's animated film titles, rooted in Chinese linguistic conventions and cultural values, can be effectively translated for global young audiences.

This paper addresses this scholarly gap by applying the Boundary Compression framework (Wang, 2025; Wang & He, 2014) to the analysis of English translations of Chinese children's animated film titles. Boundary Compression, which posits that Chinese as a process-oriented language with fluid semantic and syntactic boundaries can be systematically compressed into English as a result-oriented language with clear, segmented boundaries, offers a nuanced theoretical lens to examine the linguistic and cognitive adaptations in translation. What makes this

framework particularly relevant to children's film title translation is its emphasis on clarity, conciseness, and cognitive alignment, core principles for communicating with young audiences. Moreover, this study integrates affect theory (Stephens, 2010) and cognitive translation studies into the Boundary Compression framework, moving beyond pure linguistic analysis to explore how translation mediates emotional resonance and cultural meaning for juvenile viewers.

This research investigates how cultural values (e.g., collectivism, filial piety, and Chinese mythological traditions) and aesthetic sensibilities (e.g., the four-character poetic structure, symbolic imagery) inherent in Chinese children's animated film titles are preserved, adapted, or rearticulated through Boundary Compression strategies. It further examines the translational convergences and divergences that emerge when catering to the universal cognitive and affective needs of children and honoring the cultural specificity of Chinese animated works. The study selects representative Chinese children's animated films spanning mythological epics (*Ne Zha*), domestic comedies (*Boonie Bears*), and poetic fantasy (*Big Fish & Begonia*) as case studies, as these works cover diverse thematic and stylistic dimensions of Chinese children's animation and have achieved significant global distribution.

Features of Chinese Children's Animated Film Titles and Translation Challenges

Chinese children's animated film titles are a condensed embodiment of Chinese linguistic conventions, cultural values, and juvenile aesthetic preferences, with distinctive features that set them apart from their Western counterparts and adult-oriented Chinese film titles. These features, while contributing to the unique charm and cultural identity of the titles, also pose significant challenges for English translation, particularly when catering to the cognitive and affective needs of young global audiences. This section first analyzes the linguistic, cognitive, and cultural features of Chinese children's animated film titles, then outlines the core translation challenges arising from these features in the cross-cultural context.

Consistent with the general characteristics of Chinese film titles (Wu & Liu, 2014), children's animated film titles prioritize conciseness and rhythmic harmony, with the four-character structure being the most prevalent and iconic form. This structure aligns with traditional Chinese linguistic aesthetics: it is phonetically balanced (with tonal matching and syllabic symmetry), syntactically compact, and semantically rich, allowing for the conveyance of a clear narrative hint or emotional tone in a minimal linguistic space. For example, 《大鱼海棠》 (*Big Fish & Begonia*) and 《风语咒》 (*The Wind Guardian*) both adopt the four-character structure, using two pairs of symbolic nouns or verbs to construct a poetic and imaginative narrative frame that is easy for Chinese children to remember and recite. In addition to the four-character structure, two or three-character titles are also common for children's animated films, such as 《哪吒》 (*Ne Zha*) and 《熊出没》 (*Boonie Bears*), as their brevity caters to the limited attention span and cognitive load of young children.

Another key linguistic feature is the heavy reliance on concrete imagery and dynamic verbs. Chinese children's animated film titles avoid abstract or overly complex vocabulary, instead using vivid, perceptible images (e.g., fish, bear, lotus, wind) and action-oriented verbs (e.g., 出没 appear and disappear, 降世

descend to the world, 守护 guard) to construct meaning. This choice is consistent with the cognitive development of children, who process information primarily through concrete, sensory-based representations (Nikolajeva, 2014). For instance, the title 《熊出没》 uses the dynamic verb 出没 to depict the playful and elusive nature of the bear characters, creating a lively and engaging image that resonates with Chinese young audiences.

Cognitively, Chinese children's animated film titles reflect the process-oriented thinking characteristic of the Chinese language (Wang & He, 2014). Unlike English, which emphasizes results and static states, Chinese tends to focus on the process, action, or sequence of events in its expression. This process-orientation is evident in children's film titles, which often depict an ongoing action, a developmental process, or a situational state rather than a fixed result. For example, 《哪吒之魔童降世》 emphasizes the process of *Ne Zha's* birth as a "demon child" and his subsequent life journey, while 《熊出没》 focuses on the repeated action of the bears appearing and disappearing in the forest, both titles center on process rather than a definitive result. This process-oriented expression is deeply rooted in Chinese cognitive habits and is easily understood by Chinese children raised in this linguistic and cultural context.

Culturally, Chinese children's animated film titles are deeply embedded in Chinese mythological traditions, folk culture, and core cultural values. Many mainstream Chinese children's animated films draw on classic Chinese myths and legends (e.g., *Ne Zha* from the Classic of Mountains and Seas, Journey to the West: The Monkey King) or reflect traditional Chinese values such as filial piety, courage, perseverance, and collectivism. These cultural elements are often condensed into the film titles through symbolic imagery or allusions. For example, 《大鱼海棠》 integrates Chinese mythological concepts of "the underworld" and "spiritual reincarnation" and the aesthetic of Chinese landscape painting, while 《哪吒之魔童降世》 reinterprets the classic myth of *Ne Zha*, a beloved figure in Chinese children's culture, and conveys the value of "defying fate through self-effort". In addition, some titles reflect contemporary Chinese juvenile culture, such as the *Boonie Bears* franchise, which depicts the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, a theme aligned with China's contemporary ecological values.

The linguistic, cognitive, and cultural features of Chinese children's animated film titles give rise to three interrelated translation challenges when targeting English-speaking young audiences, which align with the focus on cross-cultural mediation in children's literature:

First, the cognitive misalignment between process-oriented Chinese and result-oriented English poses a fundamental challenge. English-speaking children are raised in a linguistic environment that prioritizes clear results, static states, and distinct syntactic boundaries (Wang, 2025). Process-oriented Chinese titles that focus on ongoing actions or situational states may appear vague, unstructured, or difficult to comprehend for these young viewers, who require concise, direct, and result-focused expressions to reduce cognitive load. For example, the dynamic process implied in 《熊出没》 (the bears' repeated appearing and disappearing) cannot be directly translated into English, as such a process-oriented expression would fail to convey a clear core meaning to English-speaking children.

Second, the cultural specificity of Chinese titles risks creating

comprehension barriers for global young audiences. Mythological allusions, cultural symbols, and traditional values embedded in the titles may be unfamiliar to English-speaking children, who lack the relevant cultural background knowledge. A literal translation of these cultural elements would either lead to confusion or fail to evoke the intended emotional and narrative associations. For example, the term 魔童 (demon child) in 《哪吒之魔童降世》 carries specific connotations in Chinese mythology (a child born with extraordinary demonic power, yet capable of good) that cannot be simply translated as “demon child” in English, as the latter may evoke negative and one-dimensional associations for Western children unfamiliar with the *Ne Zha* myth.

Third, the need to balance affective appeal with cultural preservation is a unique challenge for children’s film title translation. Affect is central to children’s engagement with media (Stephens, 2010): young audiences rely on emotional responses (curiosity, joy, empathy, excitement) to connect with a film, and the title is the first trigger of these emotions. Translators must therefore ensure that the English title retains the affective appeal of the original Chinese title (e.g., playfulness, wonder, courage) while avoiding over-domestication that erases Chinese cultural specificity. Overly foreignizing translations may hinder emotional resonance due to cultural unfamiliarity, while overly domesticating translations risk reducing Chinese animated films to generic Western children’s media, losing their unique cultural identity. This balance is particularly delicate in the context of cross-cultural translation beyond the Euro-American center, where the need to honor peripheral cultural expressions while achieving global accessibility is paramount.

The Boundary Compression Framework: Integration with Cognitive and Affect Theories

The Boundary Compression framework, developed by Wang (2025) and Wang & He (2014) based on systematic contrastive analysis of Chinese and English, provides a rigorous theoretical foundation for understanding the linguistic and cognitive adaptations in Chinese-to-English translation. This framework moves beyond the traditional binary of domestication/foreignization and literal/free translation, offering a structured, multi-dimensional approach to analyzing how process-oriented Chinese is converted into result-oriented English. For the study of children’s animated film title translation, the Boundary Compression framework is uniquely valuable due to its focus on clarity, conciseness, and cognitive alignment, core principles for communicating with young audiences. To further address the affective and cultural dimensions of children’s media translation, this study integrates affect theory (Stephens, 2010) and cognitive translation studies into the Boundary Compression framework, expanding its analytical scope from pure linguistic compression to the reconstruction of cognitive and affective contexts for juvenile viewers.

At the heart of the Boundary Compression framework are two fundamental Chinese-English differences identified via contrastive analysis (Wang, 2025). First, the basic difference lies in boundary awareness: Chinese speakers exhibit weak boundary awareness, with the language characterized by fluid semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic boundaries and a preference for paratactic, meaning-centered expression without strict grammatical markers. English, by contrast, features strong boundary awareness, with clear linguistic boundaries and a reliance on hypotactic, structure-centered expression and explicit grammatical markers to clarify logical relations. Second, the salient difference is in temporal

cognitive awareness: Chinese speakers have strong retrospective awareness, focusing on process and sequential events, while English speakers possess strong prospective awareness, emphasizing results and static states. This duality manifests linguistically as Chinese’s process-orientation and English’s result-orientation, and the framework posits that Chinese-to-English translation is essentially a strategic compression of Chinese’s fluid, process-oriented linguistic and cognitive form into English’s clear, result-oriented one, not a simple reduction of meaning, but a contextual reconstruction that preserves core semantic and cultural meaning while aligning with target language conventions and audience cognitive habits. The ultimate goal of this compression is to enable the translated text to break free from the source language’s cognitive and cultural context and integrate into the target language’s context.

Wang (2025) identifies five core Boundary Compression strategies that form the analytical basis of this study: Classificatory Compression restructures unstructured paratactic Chinese into hypotactic English with clear syntactic relations and hierarchical information; Eliminative Compression removes redundant modifiers, rhetorical words, and semantic repetitions in Chinese that appear verbose in English, retaining only core semantic information; Implicative Compression uses highly lexicalized English words to condense multiple associated Chinese words or phrases into a single concise expression; Fixed-Point Compression compresses the semantic boundaries of culturally loaded words and proper nouns into an unambiguous English referent (e.g., via transliteration or conventional translation) to eliminate ambiguity and anchor the target audience’s interpretation; and Prospective Compression—a cognitive compression strategy denoted as $n+1$ —converts Chinese’s retrospective, process-oriented expression into English’s prospective, result-oriented one, with specific methods including process-to-result, question-to-answer, and active-to-passive conversion.

While the Boundary Compression framework provides a robust linguistic and cognitive foundation, its application to children’s animated film title translation demands integration with cognitive translation studies and affect theory, two theoretical lenses to address the unique demands of translating for young audiences. Cognitive translation studies centers on how translators’ cognitive processes and target audiences’ cognitive characteristics shape translation decisions (Halverson, 2010). For children’s film title translation, the primary determinant is the age-specific cognitive development of young viewers (3-12 years old), who have limited working memory, rely on concrete sensory-based information processing, and lack abstract thinking ability and extensive cultural background knowledge (Nikolajeva, 2014). The Boundary Compression framework aligns perfectly with these traits: its classificatory, eliminative, and fixed-point compression strategies all reduce cognitive load by simplifying linguistic structures, removing redundancy, and creating clear, concrete referents—critical for ensuring English translations are cognitively accessible to young audiences. This study thus frames its analysis through cognitive translation studies to explore how Boundary Compression strategies adapt Chinese film titles to the cognitive developmental stages of English-speaking children.

Affect theory, as applied to children’s literature and media (Stephens, 2010), emphasizes emotion and affective experience as the core of children’s engagement with audiovisual works. Affect, pre-conscious, bodily felt emotions such as joy, curiosity, wonder, and empathy, drives children’s interest in a film, with the title

serving as the primary trigger of such affective responses. The Boundary Compression framework, originally focused on linguistic and cognitive compression, can be expanded to include affective compression and reconstruction: its five strategies not only adjust linguistic form but also mediate the affective cues embedded in Chinese film titles, preserving and rearticulating these cues in English to evoke the intended emotional responses in young viewers. For example, implicative compression of the playful dynamic in *Boonie Bears* preserves the original's lighthearted affect, while prospective compression of the poetic imagery in *Big Fish & Begonia* retains the sense of wonder and fantasy that resonates with children globally. This study integrates affect theory to analyze how each Boundary Compression strategy facilitates the reconstruction of affective context in English translations, ensuring translated titles retain their emotional appeal for young global audiences. Collectively, the Boundary Compression framework, cognitive translation studies, and affect theory form a comprehensive analytical lens for this study, enabling a multi-dimensional analysis of Chinese children's animated film title translations that addresses linguistic, cognitive, affective, and cultural dimensions.

Contextual Reconstruction via Boundary Compression: Case Analyses

This section presents a detailed case analysis of the five core Boundary Compression strategies, drawing on representative Chinese children's animated films (*Ne Zha*, *Boonie Bears*, *Big Fish & Begonia*, *The Wind Guardian* and *Kuiba*) as case studies. For each strategy, the analysis explores its application in the English translation of Chinese children's animated film titles and how it facilitates the linguistic, cognitive, affective and cultural contextual reconstruction for English-speaking young audiences. It further highlights how each strategy addresses the translation challenges outlined in Section 2, balancing cognitive accessibility, affective appeal and cultural preservation in line with the focus on cross-cultural mediation beyond the Euro-American center.

Classificatory Compression: Restructuring for Cognitive Clarity

Classificatory Compression restructures unstructured, paratactic and weakly bounded Chinese expressions into hypotactic English with clear syntactic relations and hierarchical information structures (Wang, 2025). This strategy is critical for Chinese children's animated film titles—often framed as unmarked “theme-comment” structures as English-speaking young audiences rely on distinct syntactic relations for efficient information processing. Though more commonly applied to sentence and discourse-level translation, it plays a vital role in translating longer Chinese titles with multiple thematic elements.

A representative example is *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child*, the extended English translation of the original Chinese title 《哪吒之魔童降世》 (the official global translation is simply *Ne Zha*). The Chinese title is a typical paratactic “theme-comment” structure, with 哪吒 (*Ne Zha*) as the theme and 魔童降世 (the demon child descends to the world) as the narrative comment, presented as an unstructured unit without explicit grammatical markers, an embodiment of Chinese's weak boundary awareness. The English translation restructures this into a clear hypotactic main title-subtitle structure, with *Ne Zha* (primary information) identifying the core character and *Birth of the Demon Child* (secondary information) clarifying the central narrative event. This restructuring aligns with English's strong boundary awareness and

syntactic conventions, and reduces cognitive load for young audiences by following a natural processing order: concrete character identification first, then narrative context.

Another example is *The Wind Guardian*, the translation of 《风语咒》. The original four-character paratactic title (风语 wind language + 咒 spell) implies an ambiguous “wind language spell” with no explicit syntactic relation, a poetic construction that would confuse English-speaking children requiring clear semantic connections. The English translation restructures it into a definitive noun phrase (article + modifier + head noun) with an attributive relation, compressing the vague imagery into a concrete, action-oriented character referent. This creates a clear syntactic boundary and a memorable concrete image, significantly enhancing cognitive accessibility for young viewers.

In both cases, Classificatory Compression achieves linguistic and cognitive contextual reconstruction: it converts unstructured Chinese parataxis into logically layered English hypotaxis, aligning with target language conventions and children's cognitive processing habits. By distinguishing primary and secondary information, it reduces cognitive load and enhances clarity, ensuring translated titles are easily comprehensible for English-speaking young audiences.

Eliminative Compression: Removing Redundancy for Brevity and Memorability

Eliminative Compression removes redundant modifiers, semantic repetitions and rhetorical words in Chinese that serve emotional emphasis or rhythmic adjustment, retaining only core semantic information (Wang, 2025). Such elements are central to the appeal of Chinese children's film titles for domestic audiences but appear verbose in English, which prioritizes conciseness, a critical demand for children's media titles, as young audiences have limited memory and attention spans. This strategy thus achieves contextual reconstruction by aligning translations with English linguistic conventions while preserving the original's core semantic and affective meaning.

The *Boonie Bears* franchise exemplifies this strategy. While the core Chinese title 《熊出没》 has no explicit redundancy, its sequel titles use four-character rhetorical modifiers for rhythmic and emotional effect, which are eliminated in English translation: 《熊出没之夺宝熊兵》 becomes *Boonie Bears: To the Rescue* and 《熊出没之熊心归来》 is rendered as *Boonie Bears: The Big Top Secret*. The Chinese modifiers (夺宝熊兵 seize the treasure, bear soldiers; 熊心归来 bear heart returns) are semantically rich but would result in unwieldy English titles; the translations eliminate these redundant elements and retain only the core narrative theme of each sequel. This not only makes the titles concise and memorable for young children but also preserves the original's playful, adventurous affect, ensuring emotional resonance is not lost in compression.

A second example is *Monkey King: Hero is Back*, the translation of 《大圣归来》, a Journey to the West adaptation. The original title uses the honorific 大圣 (the Great Sage) for rhythmic emphasis and cultural connotation, a modifier that would require additional cultural explanation and complicate the title for young global audiences. The English translation eliminates this honorific, retaining the universally recognizable Monkey King as the core referent, and compresses the verb 归来 (returns) into *Hero is Back*, a concise phrasing that adds a child-friendly heroic affect.

This achieves cultural and linguistic contextual reconstruction, balancing conciseness, cognitive accessibility and affective appeal by removing culturally inaccessible redundancy.

Eliminative Compression's core value lies in its ability to filter out linguistically and culturally redundant elements in Chinese titles while preserving core semantic and affective meaning. By crafting concise, memorable English titles, it caters to the cognitive limitations of young audiences and ensures translations are linguistically natural and cognitively accessible.

Implicative Compression: Condensing Meaning for Affective Resonance

Implicative Compression uses highly lexicalized and grammaticalized English words to condense multiple associated, overlapping or complementary Chinese words or phrases into a single concise expression (Wang, 2025). This strategy is particularly valuable for Chinese children's animated film titles, which often use multi-character symbolic or action-oriented expressions to build imagery and affect; for young audiences, overly complex expressions dilute affective appeal and hinder engagement, making a clear, concrete core meaning essential for emotional resonance. Implicative Compression thus achieves affective and semantic contextual reconstruction by distilling multi-layered Chinese meaning into impactful English expressions that resonate with young viewers.

The most iconic example is the translation of 《熊出没》 into *Boonie Bears*. The original two-character title combines 熊 (bear) and 出没 (appear and disappear), depicting the playful, elusive dynamic of the bear protagonists, a process-oriented action paired with a character referent that forms the core affective and semantic image for Chinese children. The English translation condenses these two complementary meanings into a single noun phrase: the neologism Boonie (a playful variation of "boony", meaning "wild or rural") encapsulates the process-oriented dynamic of 出没, evoking the bears' wild, playful nature, while Bears directly refers to the core characters. This compression aligns with English's result-oriented focus (fixing the character as the core referent) and preserves the original's playful, humorous affect: Boonie is lighthearted and child-friendly, triggering an immediate positive emotional response and facilitating engagement with English-speaking young audiences.

A second example is *Kuiba*, the transliteration of the invented Chinese character 魁拔, the title of a fantasy animated franchise. The character combines two radicals with complementary meanings: 魁 (chief, leader) and 拔 (pull out, rise), implying a "mythical rising leader" and creating a sense of mystery and wonder for Chinese children. The English transliteration condenses these multi-layered symbolic meanings into a single syllabic proper noun, a clear and fixed referent that retains the original's core affective appeal (mystery and fantasy) for the young audience. The concise single-word form also aligns with children's memory capacity, enhancing memorability and cognitive accessibility.

Implicative Compression's unique strength is its ability to distill multi-layered Chinese semantic and affective meaning into a single, concrete English expression. By using highly lexicalized words or child-friendly neologisms, it creates clear referents that young children can easily identify and emotionally connect with, ensuring the translated title retains the original's affective core—a key element of children's media engagement.

Fixed-Point Compression: Anchoring Meaning for Cultural

Mediation

Fixed-Point Compression is the pivotal strategy for translating culturally loaded proper nouns and mythological symbols in Chinese children's animated film titles, core elements of the films' cultural identity. It compresses the fluid, multi-layered semantic boundaries of culturally loaded words into a single, unambiguous English referent (via transliteration, conventional translation or category word compression; Wang, 2025), with the dual goals of eliminating ambiguity (anchoring the target audience's interpretation to a fixed cognitive point) and preserving cultural specificity. For English-speaking young audiences, who lack the cultural background to interpret Chinese mythological and cultural symbols, this strategy reduces cultural comprehension barriers and enables cross-cultural engagement without over-domesticating titles and erasing their Chinese cultural identity.

The quintessential example is the translation of 《哪吒之魔童降世》 into *Ne Zha*. As a core figure in Chinese mythology, *Ne Zha* carries rich, multi-dimensional cultural meaning, a child god of extraordinary power, known for courage, rebelliousness and filial piety, and a beloved cultural icon for Chinese children. This fluid semantic boundary is an embodiment of Chinese's weak boundary awareness; a literal translation (e.g., Ne Zha the Third Prince) would overload young audiences with cultural explanation, while a domesticating translation (e.g., The Demon Child Hero) would erase the character's unique Chinese identity. The official English translation uses transliteration, the most common Fixed-Point Compression method for Chinese proper nouns, to condense this multi-layered cultural meaning into a single, unambiguous proper noun *Ne Zha*. This anchors the audience's interpretation to the core character (a fixed cognitive point), eliminates ambiguity by restricting imaginative space, and preserves cultural specificity by retaining the original phonetic form. For young English-speaking audiences, *Ne Zha* is a simple, memorable referent, with the character's cultural connotations revealed through the film's narrative—an ideal balance of cultural preservation and cognitive accessibility for children's media.

A second mythological example is *Jiang Ziya*, the transliteration of 《姜子牙》, a film based on the classic Chinese myth Investiture of the Gods. *Jiang Ziya*, a wise strategist and immortal in Chinese culture, carries multi-layered cultural meaning; the transliteration compresses this into a single proper noun, anchoring interpretation to the core character and preserving cultural identity while creating a clear, accessible referent for young audiences unfamiliar with the myth.

Fixed-Point Compression also applies to non-mythological culturally loaded titles, such as *Big Ears Tutu* (the translation of 《大耳朵图图》). The original title combines the protagonist's nickname 图图 (Tutu) and his distinctive physical feature 大耳朵 (big ears), core to his identity for Chinese children. The English translation uses transliteration for the nickname (Tutu) and literal translation for the physical feature (Big Ears), compressing the character's identity into a single, unambiguous referent. This anchors interpretation to a concrete, visual feature (easily visualized by young children) and preserves cultural specificity via the transliterated nickname, achieving cultural and cognitive contextual reconstruction.

In all cases, Fixed-Point Compression achieves cultural and cognitive contextual reconstruction: it distills the multi-layered meaning of Chinese cultural symbols and proper nouns into clear,

unambiguous English referents, reducing cultural comprehension barriers for young global audiences while preserving the unique Chinese cultural identity of the titles. This strategy is central to cross-cultural exchange in children's media, as it enables English-speaking children to engage with non-Western animated works without losing the cultural distinctiveness that defines them.

Prospective Compression: Shifting to Result-Oriented for Cognitive Alignment

Prospective Compression is the cognitive core of the Boundary Compression framework and the most distinctive strategy for translating process-oriented Chinese children's animated film titles into result-oriented English (Wang, 2025). It converts Chinese's retrospective, process-oriented expressions (focused on actions, sequences or situational states) into English's prospective, result-oriented ones (focused on outcomes, static states or definitive conclusions), denoted as n+1 (where n = the literal process-oriented source meaning, and n+1 = the result-oriented target meaning). Of its 11 specific methods (Wang, 2025), process-to-result and concrete-to-abstract (symbolic) are the most widely used for children's animated film title translation. For English-speaking young audiences, raised in a result-oriented linguistic and cognitive environment, this strategy is critical for cognitive alignment: it reframes the title from process to result, making meaning direct and accessible for children who process information through result-focused representations, while preserving the original's affective appeal by converting process-oriented affective cues into result-oriented ones that resonate with young viewers.

A striking example of process-to-result Prospective Compression is the translation of 《大鱼海棠》 into *Big Fish & Begonia*. The original four-character title is a poetic, process-oriented expression (大鱼 big fish + 海棠 begonia) that depicts an ongoing situational scene—a big fish swimming in a sea of begonia flowers—a central visual and narrative motif that unfolds throughout the film and evokes wonder and fantasy (the core affective appeal) for Chinese children. The English translation converts this dynamic process into a static, result-oriented state, listing the two core symbolic elements as fixed, discrete referents connected by an ampersand. This shift does not erase the original's poetic imagery or sense of wonder; instead, it condenses the process-oriented scene into two concrete, visual symbolic referents that young English-speaking children can easily visualize and remember. The ampersand preserves the sense of connection and fantasy, ensuring affective resonance while aligning with the target audience's result-oriented cognitive frame, a masterful blend of cognitive and affective contextual reconstruction.

White Snake, the translation of 《白蛇：缘起》, is another process-to-result example. The original title is process-oriented, combining 白蛇 (White Snake) and 缘起 (the origin of fate) to focus on the ongoing narrative event of the White Snake's fateful encounter with Xu Xian. The English translation compresses this process into a fixed, result-oriented character referent (White Snake), reducing cognitive load by centering on a concrete character (easily identifiable by young audiences) and leaving the process-oriented narrative backstory to be explored in the film. This preserves the film's mythical affect by retaining the iconic White Snake referent-familiar to global audiences through cultural diffusion-while achieving cognitive alignment with English's result-oriented focus.

A third example, illustrating concrete-to-abstract (symbolic) Prospective Compression, is *Abominable*, the translation of 《雪人奇缘》. The original title is process-oriented: 雪人 (snowman) + 奇缘 (a wonderful fate/adventure) centers on the snowman's ongoing adventure with human protagonists, the core narrative process for Chinese children. The English translation converts this process-oriented adventure into a result-oriented character attribute: *Abominable* (a playful term meaning “lovably monstrous”) describes the snowman's unique, lovable quality, a fixed, affective trait that evokes playfulness and wonder for young children. This compression condenses the entire narrative process into a single, child-friendly affective attribute, aligning with English's result-oriented cognitive frame and preserving the original's playful, adventurous affect for the target audience.

In all these cases, Prospective Compression achieves the most fundamental cognitive contextual reconstruction of the Boundary Compression framework: it shifts the cognitive frame of Chinese titles from process to result, aligning translations with English linguistic and cognitive conventions and the developmental characteristics of English-speaking young audiences. By converting process-oriented expressions into direct, concrete and memorable result-oriented ones, it ensures cognitive accessibility for children while preserving the original's affective appeal and cultural symbolic meaning.

Discussion: Translational Convergences, Divergences, and Cross-Cultural Mediation

The case analyses in Section 4 reveal that the application of the Boundary Compression framework to the English translation of Chinese children's animated film titles results in distinct translational convergences and divergences, shaped by the universal cognitive and affective needs of young audiences and the unique cultural specificity of Chinese animated works. This discussion section first identifies the key translational convergences and divergences revealed by the analysis, then explores the power dynamics of cross-cultural translation between the Chinese (peripheral) and Euro-American (central) contexts. Finally, it examines how translators negotiate cultural specificity and audience accessibility through Boundary Compression strategies, fostering cross-cultural exchange in global children's literature and media beyond the Euro-American center.

Translational Convergences: Universal Cognitive and Affective Needs of Young Audiences

The most prominent finding of the study is the strong translational convergence in the application of Boundary Compression strategies, driven by the universal cognitive and affective needs of young children across cultural contexts. Regardless of their cultural background, children aged 3–12 share core cognitive developmental characteristics: limited working memory, reliance on concrete and sensory-based information processing, lack of abstract thinking ability, and a preference for concise, memorable, and playfully framed expressions (Nikolajeva, 2014). They also share core affective needs: a desire for emotional engagement through playfulness, wonder, adventure, and empathy (Stephens, 2010). These universal needs act as a unifying force in children's film title translation, leading to convergent application of Boundary Compression strategies across all case studies.

All five Boundary Compression strategies are applied with a primary focus on catering to these universal needs:

Classificatory and Eliminative Compression prioritize cognitive accessibility by restructuring linguistic form and removing redundancy, reducing cognitive load for young audiences with limited working memory.

Implicative and Fixed-Point Compression prioritize memorability and concrete reference by condensing meaning into clear, fixed referents that children can easily identify and visualize.

Prospective Compression prioritizes cognitive alignment by shifting the cognitive frame from process to result, aligning with the universal tendency of children to process information through concrete, result-focused representations.

Moreover, every Boundary Compression strategy preserves the core affective appeal of the original Chinese titles—playfulness, wonder, adventure, fantasy—an essential convergent feature, as affect is the primary driver of children’s engagement with media across all cultures. For example, Implicative Compression of 《熊出没》 into *Boonie Bears* preserves the original’s playful affect, while Prospective Compression of 《大鱼海棠》 into *Big Fish & Begonia* retains the original’s sense of wonder. This convergent focus on affective preservation ensures that the translated titles resonate with young audiences globally, regardless of cultural differences.

This translational convergence highlights a key insight for global children’s literature and media translation: the universal cognitive and affective needs of young children create a common ground for cross-cultural exchange. Translators can leverage this common ground to create accessible, engaging translations of non-Euro-American children’s media, as the core principles of children’s communication, clarity, conciseness, concreteness, and affective appeal, are universal. The Boundary Compression framework is particularly effective in capitalizing on this common ground, as its strategies are inherently aligned with these universal principles.

Translational Divergences: Cultural Specificity and Linguistic Differences

Against the backdrop of strong translational convergence, translational divergences emerge from the unique cultural specificity of Chinese children’s animated film titles and the fundamental linguistic differences between Chinese and English. These divergences are most evident in the application of Fixed-Point Compression (for cultural loaded terms) and Prospective Compression (for process-oriented expression), and they reflect the challenge of mediating Chinese cultural values, mythological traditions, and linguistic conventions in a global English-speaking context dominated by Euro-American cultural norms.

The first key divergence is the cultural divergence in the use of mythological and cultural symbols. Chinese children’s animated film titles are deeply embedded in Chinese mythological traditions (e.g., *Ne Zha*, *Jiang Ziya*, *the White Snake*) and cultural values (e.g., defying fate, filial piety, harmony with nature), which are largely unfamiliar to English-speaking young audiences. This cultural divergence leads to the unique application of Fixed-Point Compression (via transliteration) for Chinese proper nouns, a strategy that is rarely needed in Euro-American children’s media translation (where cultural symbols are often shared across the English-speaking world). Transliteration of Chinese mythological figures (e.g., *Ne Zha*, *Jiang Ziya*) creates a distinctive divergence from Western children’s film titles, which typically use familiar proper nouns or descriptive terms. This divergence is a deliberate

choice by translators to preserve Chinese cultural specificity while reducing cognitive load for young audiences, a balance that is not required in translations of Western children’s media, which operate within the Euro-American cultural center.

The second key divergence is the linguistic divergence between process-oriented Chinese and result-oriented English. This divergence leads to the widespread application of Prospective Compression, a strategy that is unique to Chinese-to-English translation (as English-to-Chinese translation requires the opposite shift from result to process; Wang, 2025). In Euro-American children’s film title translation (e.g., English to French or Spanish), linguistic differences do not involve a fundamental process-result cognitive shift, and thus Prospective Compression is not a required strategy. This linguistic divergence creates a distinctive feature of Chinese children’s animated film title translation: the need to shift the cognitive frame of the title from process to result, which shapes all other translation decisions and leads to divergences from Western children’s media translation practices.

A third key divergence is the aesthetic divergence in linguistic form. Chinese children’s film titles prioritize the four-character poetic structure and tonal rhythm, which are central to Chinese linguistic aesthetics but have no equivalent in English. This aesthetic divergence leads to the application of Eliminative and Implicative Compression to convert poetic Chinese structures into concise English expressions, which often lack the rhythmic harmony of the original but retain the core semantic and affective meaning. This divergence reflects the challenge of mediating non-Euro-American aesthetic sensibilities in a global context that is accustomed to Western linguistic and aesthetic norms.

These translational divergences are not barriers to cross-cultural exchange; rather, they are the essence of cross-cultural mediation in non-Euro-American children’s literature. They reflect the unique cultural and linguistic identity of Chinese children’s animated films, and the Boundary Compression framework enables translators to preserve these divergences while ensuring that the translated titles are accessible to global young audiences.

Power Dynamics and Cultural Negotiation in Cross-Cultural Translation

The translational convergences and divergences identified in this study are deeply shaped by the power dynamics of cross-cultural translation between the Chinese (peripheral) and Euro-American (central) contexts. The Euro-American cultural center dominates the global children’s media market, with established aesthetic, cognitive, and linguistic norms that shape audience expectations and reception (Tymoczko, 2007). Chinese children’s animated films, as a peripheral cultural product, must negotiate these central norms to achieve global distribution and reception, while also preserving their unique cultural identity. The Boundary Compression framework provides a structured approach to this negotiation, enabling translators to navigate the power imbalance between the center and the periphery by balancing convergence with central norms (for accessibility) and divergence (for cultural preservation).

The power dynamics of center-periphery translation are evident in two key aspects of the analysis:

Convergence to central cognitive and linguistic norms: Translators apply Boundary Compression strategies to align Chinese film titles with Euro-American linguistic (result-oriented, strong boundary awareness) and cognitive (concrete, result-

focused) norms, as these norms dominate the global children's media market. This convergence is a pragmatic choice to ensure that Chinese animated films are accessible to English-speaking audiences, who are socialized into these central norms. However, this convergence is not cultural assimilation; it is a strategic adaptation of linguistic and cognitive form, not a loss of cultural content. The core cultural meaning of the titles (e.g., *Ne Zha*'s rebelliousness, the harmony with nature in *Boonie Bears*) is preserved in the film's narrative, while the title is adapted for cognitive accessibility.

Divergence as cultural resistance: The deliberate preservation of Chinese cultural specificity via Fixed-Point Compression (transliteration of mythological figures) is a form of cultural resistance to the Euro-American center's homogenizing influence (Venuti, 1995). By retaining the phonetic form of Chinese proper nouns (e.g., *Ne Zha*, *Jiang Ziya*), translators refuse to domesticate these cultural symbols into Western equivalents, instead introducing English-speaking young audiences to Chinese mythological and cultural figures. This divergence challenges the Euro-American center's monopoly on global children's media culture, fostering cross-cultural exchange by inviting young audiences to engage with non-Western cultural symbols and narratives.

The Boundary Compression framework thus enables translators to negotiate the center-periphery power dynamic in a nuanced way: it allows for strategic convergence to central norms for accessibility and global distribution, while preserving cultural divergence to honor the unique identity of Chinese children's animated films. This negotiation is critical for cross-cultural exchange beyond the Euro-American center, as it avoids the two extremes of cultural assimilation (over-domestication) and cultural isolation (over-foreignization). For young audiences, this negotiation is particularly valuable: it introduces them to non-Western cultural symbols and values in a cognitively accessible way, fostering global cultural literacy and empathy from an early age, a core goal of global children's literature.

Balancing Cultural Specificity and Audience Accessibility

The ultimate challenge of translating Chinese children's animated film titles for global audiences is balancing cultural specificity and audience accessibility, a challenge that the Boundary Compression framework addresses masterfully through its five core strategies. The case analyses reveal that this balance is achieved through a hierarchical application of the strategies:

Primary layer (cognitive/linguistic): Classificatory, Eliminative, and Prospective Compression are applied first to ensure cognitive accessibility and linguistic appropriateness, addressing the universal needs of young audiences and aligning with English's linguistic norms. This layer forms the foundation of translation, as without cognitive accessibility, cross-cultural engagement becomes impossible for young viewers with limited cognitive development.

Secondary layer (cultural/affective): Implicative and Fixed-Point Compression are applied second to preserve cultural specificity and affective appeal, ensuring that the translated title retains its Chinese cultural identity and the original's emotional resonance for young audiences. This layer infuses the translation with cultural authenticity, distinguishing Chinese children's animated films from generic Western media and fostering meaningful cross-cultural exchange.

This hierarchical application ensures that the translated title is first and foremost accessible to young English-speaking audiences (a prerequisite for cross-cultural engagement), while also preserving the unique cultural and affective elements that make Chinese children's animated films distinct. For example, in the translation of 《哪吒之魔童降世》 into *Ne Zha*, Prospective and Classificatory Compression are applied first to shift the cognitive frame to result-oriented and create a clear, character-centered structure, then Fixed-Point Compression (transliteration) is applied to preserve the Chinese cultural identity of the protagonist. In the translation of 《熊出没》 into *Boonie Bears*, Eliminative Compression removes potential linguistic redundancy first, then Implicative Compression condenses the original's playful process-oriented dynamic into a memorable neologism that retains the film's affective core and Chinese cultural context. This balance is essential for global children's literature and media translation, as it ensures that non-Euro-American works are not only accessible but also authentic, a key factor in fostering meaningful cross-cultural exchange and global cultural literacy in young audiences.

Conclusion

This study has applied the Boundary Compression framework, integrated with cognitive translation studies and affect theory, to a systematic analysis of the English translation of Chinese children's animated film titles, exploring how translation facilitates the multi-dimensional contextual reconstruction of linguistic, cognitive, affective, and cultural meaning for English-speaking young audiences. This research addresses a critical gap in existing scholarship: the lack of nuanced, audience-specific analysis of non-Euro-American children's media translation, particularly the unique demands of translating Chinese children's animated film titles rooted in Chinese linguistic conventions, mythological traditions, and cultural values.

Key Findings

Boundary Compression as a tailored framework for children's film title translation: The five core strategies of the Boundary Compression framework (classificatory, eliminative, implicative, fixed-point, and prospective) provide a structured, multi-dimensional approach to translating Chinese children's animated film titles, moving beyond the traditional binary strategies of domestication/foreignization and literal/free translation. Each strategy addresses a specific linguistic or cognitive challenge of translating process-oriented, weakly bounded Chinese into result-oriented, strongly bounded English, and together they facilitate a holistic contextual reconstruction that aligns with the age-specific cognitive developmental stages and affective needs of young English-speaking audiences, a critical consideration often overlooked in general film title translation research.

Translational convergences and divergences in global children's media: Strong translational convergence is driven by the universal cognitive and affective needs of young children (clarity, conciseness, concreteness, affective appeal), creating a common ground for cross-cultural exchange. Distinct translational divergences emerge from Chinese cultural specificity (mythological traditions, four-character aesthetics) and Sino-English linguistic differences (process vs. result orientation), which are preserved via Fixed-Point and Prospective Compression to maintain the cultural authenticity of Chinese children's animated films.

Nuanced negotiation of center-periphery power dynamics: The Boundary Compression framework enables translators to navigate the power imbalance between the Euro-American cultural center and the Chinese peripheral context. Strategic convergence to central linguistic/cognitive norms ensures global accessibility, while deliberate cultural divergence (via transliteration of mythological proper nouns) acts as a form of cultural resistance to homogenization, introducing young global audiences to non-Western cultural symbols in a cognitively accessible way.

Affect and cognition as core pillars of children's media translation: Integrating affect theory and cognitive translation studies into the Boundary Compression framework expands its analytical scope to the reconstruction of affective and cognitive contexts. All compression strategies preserve the original's affective appeal (playfulness, wonder, adventure) while reducing cognitive load, ensuring that translated titles elicit the same emotional resonance for English-speaking children as the original does for Chinese children.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This study makes three key contributions to the field of global children's literature and audiovisual translation:

Theoretical contribution: It validates the applicability of the Boundary Compression framework to children's media translation and integrates it with affect theory and cognitive translation studies, providing a new, non-Eurocentric theoretical lens for analyzing audience-specific translation of non-Western children's media.

Practical contribution: The detailed case analyses of the five Boundary Compression strategies offer concrete, actionable guidelines for translators, film producers, and cultural mediators working on the global distribution of Chinese children's animated films, which can be extended to the translation of other non-Western children's audiovisual works.

Cultural contribution: It highlights the role of Chinese children's animated film title translation as a vital vehicle for cultural diplomacy. Translated titles act as the first step in introducing young global audiences to Chinese culture, fostering global cultural literacy, empathy, and mutual understanding—core goals of cross-cultural exchange in children's literature beyond the Euro-American center.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has three limitations that point to future research directions:

Case study scope: The study focuses on mainstream Chinese children's animated films with significant global distribution; future research could expand to independent/regional Chinese children's animated films and age-specific works (preschool vs. pre-adolescent) to explore adaptive applications of Boundary Compression.

Translation process analysis: This study analyzes the product of translation (translated titles) rather than the process; future empirical research (e.g., translator interviews, eye-tracking experiments with young audiences) could explore translator decision-making and audience perception of translated Chinese children's animated film titles.

AI-assisted translation: The study does not address the

impact of AI-assisted translation on Boundary Compression strategies. Future research could explore how AI tools can be trained to apply Boundary Compression to children's film title translation, and the advantages/limitations of AI in balancing cognitive accessibility, affective appeal, and cultural preservation.

Final Remarks

In an era of deepening global cultural exchange, Chinese children's animated films have emerged as an important carrier of Chinese culture for young global audiences, and their title translation is a critical first step in cross-cultural communication. This study demonstrates that the Boundary Compression framework, integrated with affect theory and cognitive translation studies, provides a powerful tool for effective translation of Chinese children's animated film titles. By compressing process-oriented Chinese into result-oriented English while preserving cultural specificity and affective appeal, translators can create translated titles that are both cognitively accessible for young English-speaking audiences and culturally authentic to Chinese children's culture.

Ultimately, the translation of Chinese children's animated film titles is more than a linguistic task; it is a form of transcultural storytelling that bridges the Euro-American center and the Chinese periphery in global children's literature. By crafting translated titles that balance accessibility and authenticity, translators foster a more diverse, inclusive global children's media landscape, one that moves beyond the Euro-American center and celebrates the richness of children's culture from all over the world.

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