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A Study on Interdisciplinary Terminology Translation: A Case Study of the Culture loaded Word "Loong"

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Abstract: Culture-loaded word translation is a core issue in interdisciplinary terminology research. Beyond linguistic transfer, it requires reconstruction of cultural connotations. Rooted in national ethos, Chinese culture-loaded terms carry both symbolic and communicative values and risk semantic loss and cultural mismatch in overseas dissemination. This article takes the Chinese "Loong" as a case, reviewing its translation evolution since the 16th century and comparing dragon, loong and Chinese dragon across historical contexts. Drawing on linguistics, cultural studies, translation studies, history and intercultural communication, it explores driving factors, Sino-Western metaphor gaps, discourse power shifts, domestication-foreignization tensions and debates on loong. It concludes that such translations reflect cultural discourse contests rather than mere technical decisions. Translators should avoid binary extremes, balance cultural fidelity and readability, adopt scenario-based strategies and promote terminology standardization for effective Chinese cultural communication.

Keywords: *culture loaded terms; interdisciplinary terminology; translation strategies; Loong; contextual reconstruction.*

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Introduction

The meanings of terminology are never static. Instead, they keep evolving with social changes and interdisciplinary integration. Some concepts become increasingly precise, some expressions fade out of use, while others are replaced by emerging terms. Inter-disciplinary terms, also known as cross-disciplinary terms, according to the definition of interdisciplinary in the Random House College English Dictionary, refer to terms that cover two or more different disciplinary fields. Evidently, interdisciplinary terms demonstrate borrowing and innovation characteristics in practical application.

As special interdisciplinary terms, culture-loaded words span multiple fields such as linguistics, anthropology and cultural studies. They can hardly be processed through literal translation. Since they carry unique cultural connotations within source-language cultures, fully equivalent concepts may not exist in target-language cultural systems — a phenomenon known as "lexical gap". A lexical gap is not merely the absence of certain words on the linguistic level. Essentially, it reflects the projection of discrepancies in national history, society and belief systems onto lexical systems. Under such circumstances, translators must handle culture-loaded words prudently. Instead of rigidly pursuing literal equivalence, they need to balance concept delivery, cultural retention and target-reader acceptability.

In the international dissemination of Chinese culture, a large number of culture-loaded words have gone global, such as Yin-Yang, Tao, Li (ritual) and loong. Some of them have achieved terminological institutionalization and have been included in authoritative dictionaries. Others remain mired in disputes over translation alternatives, among which "loong" serves as a highly representative example.

This paper selects "loong" as the research case for three reasons. First, it occupies a landmark position within Chinese culture, running through myths, imperial rituals, folk festivals and literary works, and bears profound humanistic connotations. Second, its cross-cultural translation has followed a tortuous evolutionary path: from tentative translations by missionaries in early periods, to the long-term dominance of dragon, and further to the proposal of the coined transliteration loong. Translation renderings have kept evolving alongside shifts in China-West power relations. Third, academic debates surrounding its translation have persisted for years, and scholars have not reached consensus on whether loong qualifies as a feasible standardized term. Therefore, this subject boasts prominent research value.

Through in-depth analysis of this case, this paper attempts to answer the following research questions: What evolutionary trajectory has the translation of the culture-loaded word "loong" undergone? What social and historical motivations lie behind different translation choices in various historical periods? What major factors influence translation shifts for culture-loaded words? How can translators convey the core cultural essence of the source language while ensuring comprehension among target-language audiences? How should translators select optimal renderings for different communication contexts?

Theoretical Foundations for Culture-loaded Word Translation

Definition and Classification of Culture-loaded Words

Culture-loaded words refer to lexical units embedded in specific cultural contexts, accumulated with social traditions, values and belief systems, and reflecting unique modes of thinking and lifestyles. Peter Newmark defines culture-loaded words as items or concepts specific to one culture that do not exist or take

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different forms in other cultures. Culture-loaded words can be categorized according to their connotative features. Different categories vary significantly in cultural orientation and translation difficulties. Based on core cultural carriers, they can be grouped into history-oriented, folk-custom-oriented and value-oriented categories [1].

Folk-custom-oriented words cover folk beliefs, festivals and daily life practices. Closely bound to people's real-life experiences, they feature practicality and intergenerational inheritance, for instance "Spring Festival couplets" and "zongzi (sticky rice dumplings)". History-oriented words involve historical figures, institutions and cultural relics. Tied to specific historical phases, they carry collective historical memory, such as "imperial civil-service examination" and "ding (ancient bronze cauldron)". Value-oriented words embody core values, philosophical ideas and worldviews, representing national thinking patterns and cultural spirit, such as "the Doctrine of the Mean" and "Tao". According to this classification, "loong", the totem and symbol of cultural identity for the Chinese nation, falls into value-oriented culture-loaded words. Meanwhile, it also bears folk-custom and historical attributes, making it a composite culture-loaded word and adding extra difficulties for translation.

Practical translation of culture-loaded words faces four major challenges. First, discrepancies in cultural frameworks trigger semantic distortion, where core concepts get overwritten by pre-existing imagery in target cultures. Second, loss of in-depth cultural connotations leaves only superficial concepts, preventing target readers from grasping the real implications of culture-loaded words. Third, many culture-loaded words have no direct equivalents in target-language systems, resulting in lexical gaps. Fourth, old established translations have formed ingrained perceptions, so revising conventional translations and promoting new renderings will meet resistance from audience habits.

Domestication and Foreignization

The concepts of domestication and foreignization were systematically formulated by Lawrence Venuti, offering vital theoretical references for analyzing culture-loaded word translation. Domestication is target-reader-oriented. It adapts cultural elements to target-culture norms to enhance readability and affinity for texts. By contrast, foreignization inclines toward source-cultural norms, preserves source-text cultural peculiarities and introduces exotic cultural elements to target readers (Venuti, 1995) [3].

Both strategies have strengths and weaknesses. Domestication facilitates target-reader comprehension and relieves readers' cognitive burden brought by foreign cultural elements. Nevertheless, it may dilute cultural uniqueness and "rewrite" foreign concepts with local cultural frameworks. Foreignization helps maintain cultural integrity and authenticity and exposes target readers to source-culture features. Yet unfamiliar expressions may confuse readers who lack background knowledge and disrupt reading fluency, and may even lead to misunderstanding [4].

It should be noted that domestication and foreignization do not constitute an absolute binary opposition. Instead, they form a continuous strategic spectrum, with abundant hybrid strategies in-between, such as "foreignization plus annotations" and "domestication supplemented by restrictive modifiers". In translation practice, translators often seek dynamic balance between domestication and foreignization according to cultural categories, readership, textual functions and communication goals. Besides domestication and foreignization, auxiliary approaches including transliteration, transliteration plus notes, paraphrasing and restrictive modification are widely adopted [6].

Supplementary Theories: Intercultural Communication and Terminology Standardization

Beyond domestication-foreignization theory, this research draws on intercultural communication and terminology studies. From the intercultural-communication perspective, translation is far more than linguistic transformation; it represents negotiation and contestation of meanings. Translated terms shape overseas audiences' collective perceptions of Chinese culture. From the terminology-studies perspective, qualified foreign-origin terms should satisfy requirements of recognizability, stability, dictionary-inclusion potential and general applicability. For newly-coined renderings such as loong, translators need to consider not only cultural appropriateness but also practical feasibility as formal terminology [8].

Case Analysis: Translation Evolution and Cultural Reconstruction of "loong"

Comparison of Cultural Connotations of "loong" in Chinese and Western Contexts

In traditional Chinese culture, "loong" functions as a composite symbolic sign with rich implications. First, it symbolizes imperial power. Ancient Chinese emperors called themselves "true-dragon sons of heaven". Dragon robes, dragon thrones and dragon-patterned artifacts all served as emblems of imperial authority. Second, it represents national identity. Chinese people refer to themselves as "descendants of the dragon", and "loong" has become a vital symbol of cultural identification for Chinese people both home and overseas. Third, it symbolizes auspiciousness and blessings. As an embodiment of good fortune, the dragon governs rainfall, embodying people's wishes for favorable weather and bumper harvests. Furthermore, "loong" permeates idioms, folktales and folk celebrations such as dragon-boat races and dragon dances, deeply embedded in ordinary people's daily life [2].

However, this symbol receives totally different interpretations in Western contexts. In traditional European culture, a dragon usually refers to a gigantic, fire-breathing monster that hoards treasures and harms human beings, symbolizing evil and brutality. In the Bible, Satan is metaphorically depicted as a great dragon, further consolidating its negative connotations. Admittedly, dragon is not entirely pejorative in all Western works. Some modern fantasy productions portray dragons as neutral or even positive figures. Even so, its mainstream traditional cultural memory remains centered on ferocious evil monsters. The two images differ fundamentally in prototype, symbolic system and social implications.

From dragon to loong: Trajectory of Translation Evolution

Tentative Stage: Early Missionary Translation in the 16th-17th Centuries

In the 16th century, Italian missionaries Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci compiled the Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary.

Realizing no direct equivalent existed for the Chinese "loong" in Western languages, they rendered "loong" as bicha-serpens, meaning "a large serpent-like creature", deliberately avoiding simplistic equivalence. In the same dictionary, "Jiao" (flood dragon) was translated into Portuguese dragão, cognate with the English word dragon. This inadvertently built an indirect translational connection between Chinese "loong" and Western dragon.

In the 17th century, missionary Nicolas Trigault translated the Western concept dracō into Chinese "poisonous dragon" and "ferocious dragon" in religious texts, making initial attempts of mutual rendering. During this phase, translators were predominantly Western missionaries whose translation work served religious proselytization. Their understanding of Chinese culture remained limited. No unified translation had been formed, nor had fixed terminology been established.

Establishment Stage: dragon as the Dominant Rendering in the 19th Century

In the 19th century, British missionary Robert Morrison translated the Bible and compiled the Chinese-English Dictionary. He formally established dragon as the English counterpart for Chinese "loong". From then on, the mutual translation relationship between "loong" and dragon became widely accepted and circulated.

This choice bore historical limitations. In the late Qing Dynasty, Western powers dominated global cultural discourse. Translation was centered on Western perspectives, giving priority to analogies with pre-existing Western lexical items, which constituted a typical domestication practice. For more than a hundred years afterwards, dragon was adopted for Chinese "loong" by dictionaries, textbooks and news publications both in China and abroad. Nevertheless, the auspicious and totemic connotations of Chinese "loong" got obscured. Western readers tended to interpret Chinese "loong" with the preset imagery of Western evil monsters.

Even so, dragon played a role as a communication bridge under the conditions of early China-West exchanges by lowering overseas readers' cognitive barriers. To mitigate ambiguity, the modified form Chinese dragon emerged in practical texts. By adding restrictive modifiers, it represented a hybrid strategy of "domestication plus qualification".

Reflection and Controversy Stage: Proposal and Academic Debates over loong in the 21st Century

Entering the 21st century, alongside growing Chinese cultural subject consciousness, scholars started to re-examine the rationality of the rendering dragon. Many researchers argue that translating "loong" as dragon easily triggers cultural misinterpretation and that "loong" and dragon should not be conflated. Against this background, the coined transliteration loong was put forward. It aimed to break away from negative associations attached to dragon and reconstruct the cultural image of Chinese "loong" [5].

The strengths of loong lie in three aspects. First, as a foreignized transliteration strategy, it effectively avoids cultural confusion with Western dragon. Second, its pronunciation approximates the Chinese phonetic value lóng, demonstrating respect for source-culture features. Third, as a newly-coined word, it can theoretically accumulate exclusive cultural connotations of Chinese "loong" through long-term usage and serve as a carrier for disseminating Chinese culture.

Still, numerous academic doubts have been raised regarding loong. Firstly, from a terminological perspective, loong is not an established English word. Major authoritative English dictionaries have not included it, and its acceptance within international general-purpose texts remains low. Secondly, Loong already exists in English as a family name, which may produce spelling confusion. Thirdly, promoting a newly-coined term entails enormous costs. General audiences lack prior relevant cognition, so widespread popularization cannot be achieved in a short time.

Therefore, some scholars propose a compromise solution: retain Chinese dragon. By applying restrictive modifiers, it draws a dividing line between Chinese "loong" and Western evil dragons. Instead of completely discarding old translations, we may revise them to strike a balance between domestication and foreignization. In reality, Chinese dragonis intermittently adopted in some official Chinese external-communication documents. By contrast, loong is mostly confined to academic discussions and partial cultural-creation contexts, and has not become a universal standard term.

Comprehensive Analysis from an Interdisciplinary Perspective

From the linguistic perspective, translating "loong" concerns cross-cultural concept transformation and conflicts of semantic frameworks. The fundamental reason for the poor match between Chinese "loong" and Western dragon rests in their divergent metaphorical frameworks: Chinese "loong" symbolizes auspiciousness, authority and national identity, while Western dragon serves as a metaphor for evil and demons. When translators directly adopt dragon, they involuntarily import the metaphorical framework of Western dragons and trigger conceptual deviation. This represents a typical "false friend" phenomenon: two expressions appear equivalent on the surface, yet diverge drastically in in-depth cultural semantics [7].

From the historical-cultural-studies perspective, translation shifts of "loong" mirror transitions in cultural discourse power. Translating "loong" with terms for "serpent" or "flood dragon" in the 16th century reflected Western unfamiliarity toward this Chinese cultural symbol. The predominance of dragon in the 19th century demonstrated Western hegemony over cultural discourse, with translation largely standing from target-reader stances. Nowadays, scholarly discussions on loongand advocacy for Chinese dragon signal the awakening of Chinese cultural subjectivity and active pursuit of rights for cultural interpretation. Translation no longer unilaterally prioritizes target-language norms, and the intrinsic value of source culture gains due attention.

From the translation-studies perspective, the case of "loong" reveals the dialectics between domestication and foreignization. dragon exemplifies typical domestication: it analogizes Chinese cultural concepts with familiar Western imagery. loong represents radical foreignization via lexical creation, requiring Western readers to accept a brand-new Chinese cultural concept. Chinese dragon belongs to a hybrid strategy: based on existing vocabulary, it adds qualifiers to balance reader familiarity and cultural differentiation. The selection among the three renderings is not merely a technical translation decision but relates to cultural stances. No single rendering is absolutely

superior to others; choices must be made in light of concrete textual contexts.

From the intercultural-communication perspective, communication effects of translated terms are conditioned by audience stratification. For general public audiences with minimal knowledge of Chinese culture, overly alien newly-coined terms impose high comprehension burdens. For sinologists and academic readers, translators may adopt more foreignized renderings to preserve cultural uniqueness.

Implications Drawn from the Case of "loong"

The evolutionary course of translations for "loong" is far more than a lexical technical issue. It reflects complex interactions among power relations, cultural identity and translation strategies in cross-cultural communication. This case brings the following insights:

First, translation means cultural reconstruction beyond linguistic transformation, and translators ought to develop cultural awareness. As intermediaries for cross-cultural communication, translators' translational choices directly shape target readers' cognitive frameworks of source cultures. When processing culture-loaded words, translators must maintain acute cultural awareness, anticipate potential associations and misunderstandings caused by translations, and refrain from mechanically adopting superficially similar target-language vocabulary. Confronted with cultural "false friends", translators should distinguish literal denotations from deep-rooted cultural metaphors and fully assess emotional overtones and cultural associations of candidate renderings. Where necessary, supplementary notes and contextual explanations should be provided to bridge cross-cultural cognitive gaps.

Second, domestication and foreignization should avoid binary opposition; dynamic balance and hybrid translation strategies should be prioritized according to contexts. The case of "loong" breaks the simple dichotomy of domestication versus foreignization. Ostensibly, dragon stands for domestication and loong for foreignization. Upon deeper analysis, however, they are not mutually exclusive. They are strategic options formulated for specific communication objectives under different historical contexts.

In initial phases of cultural exchanges, appropriate domestication lowers comprehension thresholds and facilitates preliminary information delivery. In advanced stages of cultural communication, foreignization helps safeguard cultural authenticity and advance cultural diversity. In numerous real-world translation scenarios, hybrid strategies such as "domestication plus restrictive modifiers" (e.g. Chinese dragon) and "transliteration plus annotations" prove highly applicable.

Distinctions should be made for different communication contexts: - For popular international publicity and tourism-oriented popular-science texts: readability should be prioritized, and Chinese dragon is recommended. - For academic papers, specialized research and in-depth cultural external communication: foreignized renderings can be adopted, supplemented with explanatory notes when necessary. - For cultural-creative products and brand-specific proper nouns: loong may be used as appropriate. Nevertheless, translators must keep in mind that it is not an internationally-accepted general-purpose term and should not be applied to official documents oriented toward ordinary overseas audiences.

Translators ought to flexibly adjust the weight of domestication and foreignization according to communication purposes, audience profiles and text genres, pursuing dynamic balance between intelligibility and cultural uniqueness.

Third, research on culture-loaded-word translation requires interdisciplinary visions, alongside emphasis on terminology standardization construction. The complexity surrounding the translation of "loong" originates from its intersection of linguistics, cultural studies, translation studies, history, intercultural communication and terminology science. Relying solely on translation-studies perspectives cannot fully explain social-historical motivations behind translation changes. Therefore, research on culture-loaded-word translation should break disciplinary barriers, adopt interdisciplinary research methodologies, and comprehensively examine multiple factors including linguistic transformation, cultural contexts, historical evolution, power dynamics and terminological acceptability, so as to achieve holistic and in-depth understanding of translation phenomena.

Furthermore, standardized sorting of Chinese distinctive cultural terminology should be promoted at the national level. The global spread of culture-loaded words cannot depend solely on spontaneous lexical creation by individual translators. Joint efforts from academic communities, dictionary compilers and international-communication institutions are required. While upholding cultural stances, international linguistic usage conventions should be respected to develop higher-recognition terminological schemes and reduce translation chaos.

Fourth, newly-coined renderings should be evaluated dialectically: besides cultural sentiments, practical communication feasibility must be considered. Advocacy for safeguarding Chinese cultural imagery does not equate to blind promotion of brand-new lexical inventions. New translations must satisfy both cultural rationality and practical communication feasibility. Though loong embodies aspirations for cultural autonomy, its low acceptance in the English-speaking world cannot be ignored. To assess renderings for culture-loaded words, researchers should not only consider emotional positions but also examine real-world usage in overseas corpora, dictionary inclusion status and audiences' cognitive burdens.

Conclusion

The translation of culture-loaded words provides a crucial entry point for interdisciplinary terminology research. Taking "loong" as a typical case, this paper investigates its translation evolution and multiple restrictive factors. Research demonstrates that translating culture-loaded words is not merely transferring linguistic symbols, but a process of re-positioning and re-interpreting cultural meanings in cross-context communication. From dragon to academic explorations of loong, translational debates over "loong" reflect shifts in cultural discourse power and rising cultural awareness among Chinese scholars.

The case indicates that strategic choices for culture-loaded-word translation are constrained by cultural contexts, historical conditions, communication purposes, audience stratification, text genres and terminological universality. Dynamic

balance must be pursued between cultural fidelity and communication effectiveness. To improve competence in translating culture-loaded words, translators should make multi-faceted efforts: comprehend connotations and cognitive modes of source-culture concepts in depth, accurately grasp reception contexts and reader expectations in target cultures, flexibly deploy domestication, foreignization and hybrid strategies for diverse scenarios, and leverage parallel corpora and authoritative dictionaries as terminological tools to support translation decision-making.

This paper only analyzes one classical culture-loaded word and suffers from limited case samples. Future research can expand in four directions. First, comparative analysis can be conducted on more value-oriented culture-loaded words such as “Yin-Yang”, “Tao” and “Li”, observing institutionalization paths of different terms. Second, large-scale bilingual corpora can be adopted to count real-world frequency of different renderings in overseas publications, media reports and dictionaries, so as to quantitatively evaluate term acceptance. Third, researchers may further explore the application and limitations of large-scale AI models in culture-loaded-word translation and examine strengths and defects of AI when handling cultural-image mismatches. Fourth, paths for standardizing Chinese-characteristic cultural terminology for international use can be explored. More scholars are expected to join in to advance research on culture-loaded-word translation.

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