Original Paper

Translating Culturally-Loaded Words in Exploring Wuliangye:

A Translation Compensation Perspective

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Abstract

Guided by translation compensation theory, this study systematically analyzes the English translation strategies for culturally-loaded terms (e.g., "Shili Jiucheng" [Ten-Mile Liquor City]) in the text Exploring Wuliangye. As quintessential carriers of Chinese liquor culture, these terms encapsulate unique brewing techniques, brand philosophy, and historical memory, posing significant translation challenges due to conceptual gaps inherent in culture-specific items. The analysis identifies a three-fold compensation mechanism: (1) literal translation to preserve cultural imagery, (2) free translation to ensure readability, and (3) transliteration supplemented by annotations to maintain phonetic associations. This approach facilitates the cross-linguistic transfer of cultural memes. The study demonstrates translation compensation theory's efficacy in addressing cultural default in intangible cultural heritage terminology, balancing source-culture authenticity with target-culture acceptability, and constructing a comprehensive pathway for cultural transmission. Findings offer methodological insights for translating traditional craft texts and advance the international dissemination of China's intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords

Exploring Wuliangye, Culturally-loaded Words, Translation Compensation Theory, Cross-cultural Communication, Cultural Transmission

1. Introduction

The translation dilemma facing Chinese Baijiu (liquor) as intangible cultural heritage has intensified within global cultural communication (Steiner, 2021; Xu, 2021). For example, Wuliangye's philosophy Daoist naturalism encounters dual barriers in cross-cultural conversion: terminological gaps (e.g., no English equivalent for "qu") and cognitive disparities (e.g., Western readers simplifying "jiaochi" to

"cellar") (Nida, 1945; Wang, 2019). This imbalance in translating culture-specific items starkly contrasts with Chinese Baijiu's production of 40% of global spirits yet less than 8% market share internationally (China Alcoholic Drinks Association, 2022) (Note 1). Translation compensation theory provides a systematic framework to address this challenge (Venuti, 2017; Xia, 2006). Its tripartite mechanism includes: Linguistic compensation: Transliteration (e.g., "Baijiu") (House, 2015). Cultural connotation compensation: Annotations (e.g., "qu as fermentation starter") (Wu, 2022). Hybrid compensation: Literal translation preserving imagery (e.g., "Ten-Mile Liquor City") coupled with quantitative annotations (e.g., 6.5 km²) (Fan, 2023).

The theory's evolution spans three phases: Theoretical foundation (1945–2001): Nida's dynamic equivalence (Lan, 2021) to Newmark's explicit/implicit compensation (House, 2015). Model construction (2001–2020): Wilss's cognitive model (Newmark, 2001) and Xia Tingde's three-dimensional framework (Xia, 2006). Interdisciplinary integration (2020–present): Lan Hongjun's memetics combined with corpus methods (Steiner, 2021; Sun, 2016). Critical research gaps persist (Wu, 2022; Wilss, 2001): Domain imbalance: 90% of studies focus on literary translation (Wu, 2022; Zhang, 2012), neglecting technical texts like baijiu (Zhao & Yang, 2022). Strategic disjunction: Existing methods struggle to balance authenticity and commercial appeal (Ma, 2003; Xu, 2021), while Ma Hongjun (2003) notes compensation must align with text type (Venuti, 2017). Systemic deficiency: No framework exists for "craft-brand" hybrid terminology (Steiner, 2021; Sun, 2016). This study innovatively proposes a dual-gradient compensation model (Steiner, 2021; Xia, 2006): Horizontal combination: Glossary (transliteration standards) + cultural annotations (technical principles) + imagery reconstruction (quantitative descriptions) (Venuti, 2017; Wilss, 2001). Vertical layering: Craft layer (literal fidelity) + cultural layer (liberal vividness) + brand layer (communicative adaptation) (Fan, 2023; Ma, 2003). Applied to Wuliangye's global campaigns, this model successfully translated "jiaoni" as "cellar mud (containing 200+ microorganisms)" (Note 2) maintaining academic precision (Zhao & Yang, 2022) while enhancing consumer recognition (Sun, 2016).

2. Literature Review

Culturally-loaded words (Culturally-loaded Words) are both a key focus and a persistent challenge in translation studies. As Liao Qiyi (2000) pointed out in his book "Exploring Contemporary Western Translation Theories," 'culture-loaded words refer to words, phrases, and idioms that denote things unique to a particular culture. These vocabularies reflect the unique ways of activities that a specific nation has gradually accumulated during its long historical process, distinguishing it from other nations'. Such words not only carry rich cultural information but also constitute a major obstacle in cross-cultural communication. In this regard, Liu Miqing (1999) also emphasized in "An Outline of Cultural Translation" that 'the translation of cultural words requires the translator to have not only bilingual competence but also knowledge and vision of bicultural or even multicultural aspects'. Regarding translation compensation theory, scholars both domestically and internationally have conducted

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relatively in-depth research. Outside of China, Newmark (1988) proposed that compensation is 'a technique used to make up for the losses in semantics, sound effects, rhetoric, or pragmatic effects in translated texts'. In domestic research, Ma Huijuan (2003) systematically summarized the classification of compensation strategies, dividing them into 'domestication compensation' and 'foreignization compensation'. Xia Tingde (2006), in his monograph "A Study of Translation Compensation," constructed a more complete theoretical framework for compensation, proposing 'eight major compensation methods', which provides an important theoretical support for this study. In recent years, with the rising interest in Chinese national studies, many scholars have applied this theory to the translation of traditional Chinese culture.

3. Method

Analytical Tool: Dual-Gradient Compensation Model

We developed a translation assessment scale (Sun, 2016) to evaluate strategies across:

Horizontal axis: Terminology consistency + cultural annotations + imagery adaptation.

Vertical axis: Craft (fidelity) → cultural (expressiveness) → brand (adaptability).

4. Culturally-Loaded Words and Their Translation

4.1 Definition and Translation Challenges

Culturally-loaded words refer to lexical items or expressions that originate within specific cultural contexts and carry distinctive cultural connotations (House, 2015; Lan, 2021). These expressions often reflect the historical heritage, traditional customs, social structures, and value systems of a particular ethnic or cultural group (Nida, 1945; Wang, 2019). In cross-cultural translation, culturally-loaded words pose substantial challenges due to their embedded meanings and context-specific nuances (Bassnett, 2014; Ma, 2003). Existing scholarship has identified three major characteristics of such words, which significantly influence the strategies employed in their translation:

Culture-Specificity: Culturally-loaded words are deeply rooted in a particular cultural environment. Their referents often do not exist or are only partially understood in the target culture. For instance, the term "jiàoní" (cellar mud) in Chinese baijiu brewing culture refers to the mud lining fermentation pits that are rich in microorganisms essential to the fermentation process. This term denotes not only a physical material (a microbial ecosystem) but also its functional value (a fermentation medium), both of which are culturally and technically specific, requiring detailed paraphrase or compensatory translation to ensure accuracy and clarity (Steiner, 2021; Wu, 2022).

Semantic Gap: The culture-specific nature of these terms often results in a lexical void during cross-cultural transfer. For example, "Bāobāo qū" refers to a dome-shaped starter culture block used in fermentation—a concept without direct equivalence in Western brewing traditions. Translation of such terms typically relies on a combination of transliteration, descriptive annotation, or compensation strategies to convey meaning effectively (Venuti, 2017; Zhao & Yang, 2022).

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Multidimensional Meaning: Many culturally-loaded terms carry multiple layers of meaning, encompassing material objects, technical processes, historical references, and symbolic significance. For instance, "Wǔliángyè" refers to a specific brand of baijiu (literal meaning), incorporates the traditional Chinese philosophical notion of the "Five Elements" (cultural connotation), and is associated with unique production techniques and historical legacy (technical and historical layers). Translators must evaluate which layers to prioritize based on the communicative purpose and target audience, often making difficult decisions regarding what to retain, adapt, or omit—adding further complexity to the translation process (Wu, 2022).

4.2 Classification Framework and Translation Implications

To address these challenges systematically, a structured classification of culturally-loaded words is essential. This study builds on Eugene Nida's (1969) cultural categorization—comprising ecological, material, social, religious, and linguistic aspects (Lan, 2021)—and integrates this model with data and features found in Exploring Wuliangye (Zhao & Yang, 2022). Based on this framework, culturally-loaded terms within the text are categorized into five types, allowing for more precise translation analysis and informed strategy selection (Steiner, 2021; Xia, 2006).

(1) Ecological Cultural Words:

These terms relate to the geographical and environmental conditions critical to baijiu production. Examples include specific coordinates such as "28°48′N, 104°36′E," descriptions of climate like "humid climate with minimal temperature variation," and unique soil and water features such as "purple soil" or the confluence of the Yangtze, Minjiang, and Jinshajiang rivers (Zhao & Yang, 2022). Translation strategies must address the accurate conversion of geographical data (House, 2015), find accessible yet technically accurate equivalents for ecological features (Wilss, 2001), and provide brief contextual explanations where necessary, especially for culturally or geographically unfamiliar references (Lan, 2021).

(2) Material Cultural Words:

These refer to tangible materials, ingredients, and tools used in the brewing process. Key terms include the five grains—"sorghum, rice, glutinous rice, wheat, corn"—along with technical terms such as "Baobao Qu starter""aged fermentation pit complexes" and aging containers like "aged in pottery jars" (Zhao & Yang, 2022). Translators must standardize ingredient names using established glossaries (House, 2015), and address conceptual gaps through descriptive translation, transliteration with explanation, or compensation (Venuti, 2017; Wu, 2022).

(3) Social Cultural Words:

This category includes expressions related to social institutions, professional practices, and industrial organization within the liquor industry. Representative examples include Wuliangye Group Co., Ltd.," "Chen family secret recipe," "Fan family blending technique," and "Ten-Mile Distillery Complex" (Zhao & Yang, 2022). Translation strategies involve standard transliteration combined with explanatory notes for company names (Ma, 2003), explicating the cultural value of family traditions or craft inheritance

(Steiner, 2021), and resolving metaphorical place names (e.g., "ten miles") by adding spatial equivalents like"covering X square kilometers" to maintain clarity (Sun, 2016; Xia, 2006).

(4) Religious/Philosophical Cultural Words:

These terms embody Chinese philosophical or ritual elements. Key examples include "Five-Elements Philosophy," applied in conceptualizing ingredient balance and brewing logic, and "wine deity worship," which reflects traditional sacrificial practices (Zhao & Yang, 2022). Translators must employ explanatory strategies or cultural analogies for abstract philosophical concepts (Lan, 2021), and render religious customs with precision to preserve their cultural and ritual significance without misrepresenting them as superstition (Wang, 2019).

(5) Linguistic Cultural Words:

This type includes idiomatic expressions, proverbs, literary allusions, and aesthetic descriptions. Notable examples are brewing proverbs such as "Aged pits yield eternal ferment", poetic lines like "Yaozi's Snowy Qu, cup rivaling jade", and sensory depictions such as "A single drop on the lips, fragrance fills the mouth" (Zhao & Yang, 2022). Translation challenges involve preserving conciseness, cultural imagery, and technical precision in proverbs (House, 2015), recreating literary and historical allusions in poetic expressions (Bassnett, 2014), and conveying sensory experiences using equivalent or evocative language to elicit similar reader responses in the target culture (Wilss, 2001).

5. Case Analysis of Translation Compensation Strategies for Culturally-Loaded Words in Exploring Wuliangye

5.1 Compensation Strategies for Ecological Cultural Loaded Words

Example 1

Source: The core production area of Wuliangye is located in Yibin City, Sichuan Province, situated at 28°48′N, 104°36′E. This region has unique climatic advantages for liquor production (Zhao Dong & Yang Yunxia, 2022:65).

Translation: The core production area of Wuliangye is located in Yibin City, Sichuan Province (28°48′N, 104°36′E), a region with unique climatic advantages for liquor making.

Compensation Strategy: Literal translation + in-text explanation

Analysis: The geographic coordinates (28°48′N, 104°36′E) are literally translated to ensure precision (House, 2015); the inclusion of the administrative divisions (Yibin City, Sichuan Province) in parentheses helps establish a geographic frame of reference for the reader (Fan, 2023). This balances fidelity to the original information with reader comprehension. This translation example fully embodies the dialectical unity of 'fidelity' and 'fluency' in translation practice. The translator remains faithful to the original geographical information while also considering the cognitive environment of the target language readers through parenthetical supplementation, achieving the purpose of cross-cultural communication. This approach is commendable and effective.

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Example 2

Source: The Yangtze River. Besides the Yangtze, the Minjiang and Jinshajiang rivers flow through the region, along with more than 600 smaller tributaries and streams (Zhao Dong & Yang Yunxia, 2022:65)

Translation: The Yangtze River system in Yibin encompasses not only the trunk stream and its two major tributaries (the Minjiang and Jinshajiang rivers), but also boasts a dense network of over 600 secondary branches and streams, forming an exceptional hydrological environment for baijiu production.

Compensation Strategy: Transliteration (proper names) + paraphrase (description)

Analysis: "Yangtze River" uses the internationally accepted name (Lan, 2021); "Minjiang" and "Jinshajiang" use pinyin transliteration with "rivers" appended; "three rivers flow through" is paraphrased as "trunk stream and major tributaries" (Steiner, 2021), with added explanation of hydrological significance to emphasize ecological value for baijiu production (Wilss, 2001).

Example 3

Source: Yibin has diverse soil types, among which purple soil is rich in minerals, providing a superior microbial environment for Wuliangye brewing (Zhao Dong & Yang Yunxia, 2022:58).

Translation: Yibin has a rich variety of soil types. Among them, purple soil, rich in minerals, provides an excellent microbial environment for the brewing of Wuliangye.

Compensation Strategy: Literal translation of features + functional association

Analysis: The term referring to the region-specific soil type characterized by its purple hue is translated literally as "purple soil", preserving the cultural information of soil color (House, 2015). Additional phrases "rich in minerals" and "provides an excellent microbial environment" elucidate the material properties and functional link between soil and brewing, forming a complete chain of ecological relevance for the target reader.

Example 4

Source: The Wuliangye brewing bases are distributed along both banks of the Minjiang River, forming a ten-mile-long industrial belt (Zhao Dong & Yang Yunxia, 2022:60).

Translation: Wuliangye's brewing bases stretch along both banks of the Minjiang River, forming a ten-mile-long industrial belt dedicated to baijiu production.

Compensation Strategy: Literal translation of orientation + functional annotation

Analysis: The phrase "both banks" is translated literally, retaining clear geographic orientation (Fan, 2023). "stretching ten miles" is quantified as "ten-mile-long" for spatial clarity (Wilss, 2001). The addition of "dedicated to baijiu production" explicitly states the industrial belt's function, linking geography and industry for the reader (Sun, 2016).

Summary: The translation of ecological cultural loaded words is essentially a process of cultural information reconstruction. It requires establishing a three-dimensional compensation system of "geographic accuracy–ecological functionality–cultural comprehensibility" (Steiner, 2021; Wilss, 2001; Xia, 2006). Practically, translators ensure scientific accuracy via literal translation of geographic data

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(Fan, 2023; House, 2015), use transliteration plus annotation for culturally specific proper nouns (Lan, 2021; Steiner, 2021), and employ paraphrase plus functional explanation to convey the ecological value of the production environment (House, 2015; Wilss, 2001). This multi-layered compensation strategy preserves geographic and cultural features while enabling target readers to understand the intrinsic connection between ecology and brewing craft. Importantly, this approach goes beyond surface-level linguistic transfer, constructing a cognitive bridge from concrete geography to abstract cultural concepts such as the "harmony between humanity and nature" embedded in Chinese baijiu culture. The case analysis demonstrates a balanced translation pathway reconciling cultural difference with informational accessibility, offering methodological insights for similar ecological cultural translations.

5.2 Compensation Strategies for Material Cultural Loaded Words

Example 5

Source: "Wuliangye Daqu is named 'Baobao Qu' because its central part bulges like a bun." (Zhao Dong & Yang Yunxia, 2022:73).

Translation: Wuliangye's Daqu (fermentation starter), characterized by its dome-shaped center, is named 'Baobao Qu starter' (lit. 'bun-shaped starter', a microbial culture cultivated from five grains and indigenous microorganisms).

Compensation Strategy: Transliteration + literal shape description + process annotation

Analysis: The transliteration "Baobao Qu starter" preserves the cultural marker (Steiner, 2021); "bun-shaped" literally describes the physical form (House, 2015); the added annotation explains the microbial cultivation process, clarifying the fermentation science behind "Daqu" (Wu, 2022).

Example 6

Source: Wuliangye is a strong-aroma baijiu made by fermenting five grains: sorghum, rice, glutinous rice, wheat, and corn (Zhao Dong & Yang Yunxia, 2022:07).

Translation: Wuliangye is a strong-aroma Baijiu (a traditional Chinese liquor) made from Daqu (fermentation starter) and five grains: sorghum, rice, glutinous rice, wheat, and corn.

Compensation Strategy: Transliteration (category terms) + functional annotation

Analysis: "Baijiu" is transliterated to avoid ambiguity of "white liquor" (Venuti, 2017); the annotation "a traditional Chinese liquor" clarifies the beverage category; "Daqu" is transliterated with the explanatory note "fermentation starter," replacing literal but less comprehensible translation (Lan, 2021); explicitly listing the five grains resolves ambiguity in "wuliang" (five grains) concept (Xia, 2006).

Example 7

Source: "Aged liquor" is a crucial step in improving Wuliangye's quality, requiring storage in pottery jars for over five years (Zhao Dong & Yang Yunxia, 2022:75).

Translation: "Aged liquor" is a crucial step in enhancing the quality of Wuliangye, which must be stored in pottery jars for over five years.

Compensation Strategy: Conceptual literal translation + time annotation

Analysis: The term referring to the craft of maturing liquor to enhance its quality and flavor is literally

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translated as "Aged liquor" accurately conveying the core concept (House, 2015). The additional phrase "must be stored in pottery jars for over five years" specifies the storage method and duration critical for understanding quality enhancement, transforming an abstract craft concept into an accessible process description (Venuti, 2017).

Example 8

Source: Wuliangye's aged fermentation pit complexes were first built in the Ming Dynasty and have been continuously used for hundreds of years, featuring rich and unique microbial communities (Zhao Dong & Yang Yunxia, 2022:70).

Translation: Wuliangye's aged fermentation pit complexes, first built in the Ming Dynasty and continuously used for hundreds of years, boast a rich and unique microbial community.

Compensation Strategy: Historical literal translation + characteristic description

Analysis: The term referring to the clustered, long-used fermentation facilities critical for Baijiu brewing is literally translated as "aged fermentation pit complexes," emphasizing the long history with "aged." Historical facts like "built in the Ming Dynasty" and "used continuously for centuries" are directly translated to highlight heritage. The phrase "boast a rich and unique microbial community" details the scientific features, combining historical tradition with modern microbiology, showing that the pits represent both material carriers and a cultural symbol integrating history and science (Steiner, 2021).

Summary: The translation of material cultural loaded words is fundamentally a process of cultural decoding and reconstruction, requiring a three-dimensional compensation system of "physical form–manufacturing process–functional value" (Venuti, 2017; Wu, 2022; Xia, 2006). In practice, translators retain cultural markers via transliteration (e.g., "Baobao Qu"), present physical forms literally (e.g., "bun-shaped"), and provide functional annotations explaining fermentation principles (e.g., "fermentation starter"). This approach conveys the full transition from material entity to cultural connotation. It preserves the traditional craft's cultural specificity while enhancing cross-cultural comprehensibility through scientific language and explanatory methods. More importantly, this method surpasses pure linguistic conversion by building a cognitive bridge from tangible material carriers to abstract cultural values, effectively transmitting the Chinese baijiu brewing philosophy of "tools carrying the Way". The resulting multi-layered compensation strategy forms a balanced translation paradigm respecting cultural authenticity while ensuring informational accessibility, providing a methodological framework for translating similar material cultural loaded words. This has important practical value in promoting the international dissemination of traditional Chinese craft culture.

5.3 Compensation Strategies for Social Cultural Loaded Words

Example 9

Source: The blending technique originated in 1953 by Wuliangye's chief technician Fan Yuping... He pioneered the baijiu blending method known as "Fan's Blending Technique," characterized by "enhancement, moderation, and balance." (Zhao Dong & Yang Yunxia, 2022:46).

Translation: Known as Fan's Blending Technique (a method that harmonizes flavors through

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enhancement, moderation, and equilibrium).

Compensation Strategy: Surname transliteration + technique literal translation + functional annotation

Analysis: The surname corresponding to the individual associated with the craft is transliterated as "Fan" to clearly establish attribution to the relevant figure (Ma, 2003); the core term referring to the specialized craft of adjusting liquor components to optimize flavor and quality is literally translated as "Blending Technique," which effectively conveys the essence of this craft process (House, 2015); an in-text explanation elaborates the principles of "enhancement, moderation, and balance," making implicit cultural knowledge explicit (Venuti, 2017).

Example 10

Source: The Wuliangye liquor production area... gradually formed a vast "Ten-Mile Liquor City."

Translation: Evolving into the vast 'Ten-Mile Liquor City' (a sprawling complex covering approximately 6.5 km², symbolizing its industrial scale and legacy in Baijiu production).

Compensation Strategy: Conceptual paraphrase + quantification annotation + symbolic meaning explanation

Analysis: The term referring to a linear distance traditionally used in the context is paraphrased as "Ten-Mile" to preserve the cultural imagery inherent in the original expression, while avoiding potential misunderstanding that might arise from directly transliterating the phonetic "Shi Li" (Wilss, 2001); The component referring to the large-scale area associated with liquor production and related industries is translated as "Liquor City," activating industrial recognition; an annotation adds the complex's area (covering 6.5 km²) to quantitatively reconstruct spatial scale and address unit comprehension differences between Chinese and English speakers (Sun, 2016).

Example 11

Source: The "Liquor Capital Craftsman" award has been held for ten consecutive sessions, promoting the advancement of brewing skills (Zhao Dong & Yang Yunxia, 2022:52).

Translation: The "Liquor Capital Craftsman" award, held for ten consecutive years, has promoted the refinement of brewing techniques.

Compensation Strategy: Cultural title paraphrase + event function explanation

Analysis: The term referring to skilled craftspeople specializing in liquor brewing who are associated with the renowned liquor-producing region is paraphrased to preserve both regional and occupational attributes (Lan, 2021); "ten consecutive sessions" emphasizes continuity; "promoted the advancement of brewing skills" clarifies the award's value, conveying how social recognition supports craft development (Sun, 2016).

Example 12

Source: Wuliangye has over 70 national-level baijiu judges and has formed a talent cultivation system of "mentor-apprentice inheritance" (Zhao Dong & Yang Yunxia, 2022:48).

Translation: Wuliangye has over 70 national-level baijiu judges, with a talent cultivation system of "mentor-apprentice inheritance."

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Compensation Strategy: Title paraphrase + direct translation of inheritance model

Analysis: The term referring to professionals authorized to evaluate Baijiu at the highest national standard is paraphrased as "national-level baijiu judges," clearly defining professional status and level; The phrase describing the traditional method of passing down craft skills is directly translated as "mentor-apprentice inheritance," preserving the traditional craft transmission mode and enabling readers to understand this unique talent cultivation system (Steiner, 2021). The addition of "talent cultivation system" clarifies its role in corporate human resource development, linking individual professional identity with the overall inheritance framework, highlighting Wuliangye's talent advantage and transmission mechanism in the baijiu industry (Fan, 2023).

Summary: The translation of social cultural loaded words is essentially a process of constructing cultural identity and transmitting values, necessitating a three-dimensional compensation system of "technical inheritance–industrial symbolism–talent cultivation" (Sun, 2016; Xia, 2006; Xu, 2021). In practice, translators use surname transliteration (e.g., "Fan's") to establish technical ownership, literal translation of core concepts (e.g., "Blending Technique") to convey craftsmanship essence, and functional annotation (e.g., "harmonizes flavors through...") to explain technical principles; paraphrase cultural symbols (e.g., "Ten-Mile Liquor City") to retain regional characteristics, symbolic annotation (e.g., "symbolizing industrial scale) to reveal deeper meanings; paraphrase titles (e.g., "Liquor Capital Craftsman") to maintain professional attributes, and literal translation of inheritance models (e.g., "mentor-apprentice inheritance") to preserve cultural genes. This multi-layered compensation strategy retains the uniqueness of social cultural relations and enhances cross-cultural comprehensibility through value explanation and functional description. More importantly, this translation method transcends pure term conversion, building a cognitive bridge from technical practice to cultural identity, effectively transmitting the interactive relationship between craftsmanship inheritance and social development in the Chinese baijiu industry. The final outcome is a balanced translation paradigm that respects cultural subjectivity while emphasizing social functionality, offering an operational methodological framework for similar social cultural loaded words translation, with significant practical implications for promoting international recognition of traditional Chinese industrial culture.

5.4 Compensation Strategies for Language Cultural Loaded Words

Example 13

Source:"Yaozixue Qu, its cup rivals jade in radiance." (Huang Tingjian, Northern Song, 1100) (Note 3)

Translation: "Yaozixue Qu, its cup rivals jade in radiance." (Note 4)

Compensation Strategy: Transliteration (proper name) + dynamic metaphor transformation

Analysis: The transliteration "Yaozixue Qu" preserves the original poetic rhythm and cultural mark (Bassnett, 2014); The metaphor "rivals jade in radiance" is strategically crafted: the verb "rivals" effectively conveys the competitive connotation embedded in the original descriptive term, while "radiance" captures the translucent brilliance linked to the precious material (jade) referenced in the

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source—avoiding the simplistic, flat effect that a more literal translation (such as using "color") would produce (Wilss, 2001); the footnote succinctly explains the cultural symbolism of jade from classical texts, reconstructing the cultural gene across linguistic contexts (Wang, 2019).

Example 14

Source: "A thousand-year-old cellar and ten-thousand-year-old lees; the quality of liquor depends entirely on the age of the fermentation cellars (Note 5)." (Zhao Dong & Yang Yunxia, 2022:71).

Translation: A thousand-year-old cellar and ten-thousand-year-old lees.

Compensation Strategy: Literal translation (rhetorical structure) + scientific annotation

Analysis: The literal translation preserves the numerical exaggeration (thousand-year/ten-thousand-year) and the parallel structure (cellar/lees) (House, 2015); The term referring to the fermented grain residue critical for Baijiu brewing is translated as "lees," which may carry a negative connotation, but the footnote scientifically reconstructs its value in fermentation, achieving a positive cultural conceptual transformation (Wu, 2022).

Example 15

Source: The initial distillate and final distillate must be strictly separated; extract the essence and discard the dregs (Zhao Dong & Yang Yunxia, 2022:72).

Translation: The "head liquor" and "tail liquor" should be strictly separated, taking the essence and discarding the dregs.

Compensation Strategy: Literal translation (technical terms) + process annotation

Analysis: The terms referring to the two distinct fractions produced during Baijiu distillation (the volatile early fraction and the low-alcohol, impurity-rich late fraction) are literally translated, which preserves the original specialized terminology unique to Baijiu brewing culture (Xia, 2006). The annotation clarifies the production process, ensuring the target audience comprehends the functional distinction.

Example 16

Source: "The fermentation starter is the backbone of liquor." (Zhao Dong & Yang Yunxia, 2022:69).

Translation: Qu is the backbone of liquor (Note 6).

Compensation Strategy: Literal translation (core concept) + analogy explanation

Analysis: The key term specific to Baijiu brewing (a fermentation starter essential for flavor development) is directly transliterated "Qu," preserving the authenticity of this unique brewing term; The phrase describing the foundational role of the core Baijiu-brewing ingredient is literally translated as "is the backbone of liquor," employing the analogy of the backbone to vividly convey Qu's supportive role (Lan, 2021). The footnote further elaborates Qu's critical function in flavor determination, combining analogy with explanation to bridge potential cultural gaps in understanding (Steiner, 2021).

Summary: The translation of language cultural loaded words is essentially a process of decoding cultural symbols and reconstructing them cross-culturally, requiring a three-dimensional compensation system of "literary artistry–professionalism–philosophical depth" (Bassnett, 2014; House, 2015; Wu, 2022). In practice, translators employ transliteration for proper names (e.g., "Yaozixue Qu") to retain cultural

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identity, dynamically transform metaphors (e.g., "rivals jade in radiance") to convey poetic aesthetics; use literal translation for specialized terms (e.g., "head liquor") to maintain professional specificity, supplemented by process annotations to explain technical meanings; and translate core concepts literally (e.g., "backbone") combined with analogies to establish cognitive footholds. This multi-layered compensation strategy preserves the linguistic and cultural uniqueness of expressions, while through literary transformation and professional explanation, it enhances cross-cultural comprehensibility. Importantly, this translation approach goes beyond surface linguistic equivalence, constructing a cognitive channel from language symbols to cultural connotations, achieving the linguistic philosophy of Chinese baijiu culture—"literature carrying the Dao" . The resulting paradigm balances respect for linguistic artistry with professional accuracy, offering a practical methodological framework for translating similar language cultural loaded words, with significant insights for promoting the international spread of traditional industry cultures in China.

6. Result

The results of this study demonstrate that the translation of culturally-loaded words in Exploring Wuliangye can be effectively addressed through a structured, three-dimensional compensation framework, which includes literal translation, free translation, and transliteration with annotations. By classifying culturally-loaded terms into five distinct categories—ecological, material, social, religious/philosophical, and linguistic—this study systematically identifies how different types of cultural information require tailored translation strategies. The case analysis validates that literal translation is most appropriate for ecological specificity, whereas metaphorical reconstruction and cultural explanation are essential for linguistic and religious expressions. The incorporation of functional annotations, contextual clarifications, and metaphorical adaptation ensures not only terminological accuracy but also the transfer of symbolic, historical, and aesthetic values across languages. Moreover, this research highlights that effective translation of intangible cultural heritage texts—especially those related to traditional crafts and branding—demands more than linguistic equivalence. It requires cultural reconstruction through layered compensation strategies that take into account both the source culture's integrity and the target audience's cognitive accessibility. These findings enrich translation studies by extending compensation theory from its traditional literary base to specialized domains, and they offer a replicable methodology for translating complex cultural discourse with clarity, fidelity, and cultural resonance.

7. Discussion

This study confirms translation compensation theory's viability in bridging cultural gaps in heritage texts (Steiner, 2021; Venuti, 2017). Key findings include: Hybrid strategies (e.g., "Baobao Qu starter" + annotation) resolve cultural default while preserving authenticity (House, 2015; Zhao & Yang, 2022). The dual-gradient model balances fidelity and adaptability across craft, cultural, and brand layers (Fan,

2023; Ma, 2003; Xia, 2006). Quantitative reconstructions (e.g., "6.5 km² brewing complex") enhance spatial cognition for target readers (Sun, 2016). Theoretically, this research extends compensation theory to technical texts (Steiner, 2021; Wilss, 2001), addressing a literature gap dominated by literary studies (Zhang, 2012; Zhao & Yang, 2022). Practically, it supports global dissemination of Chinese cultural heritage (Xu, 2021), particularly for brands like Wuliangye (Zhao & Yang, 2022). Limitations include: Contextual boundaries of strategies (e.g., academic vs. commercial use) (Ma, 2003; Xu, 2021). Untapped potential of digital tools (e.g., augmented reality annotations) (Baker, 2018; Fan, 2023). Need for empirical validation of reader reception (Wu, 2022; Wilss, 2001). Future directions: AI-driven dynamic compensation mechanisms. Multimodal strategies for cross-media communication. Industry standards for traditional craft terminology.

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Notes

Note 1. China Alcoholic Drinks Association. (2022). *2022 China Baijiu Import-Export Report*.

Note 2. Wuliangye Group. (2023). Wuliangye Global Report 2023 (p. 23).

Note 3. Huang Tingjian (1045-1105), poet of the Northern Song dynasty and founder of the Jiangxi poetry school. This line praises the predecessor of Wuliangye, "Yaozixue Qu."

Note 4. The phrase "cup color rivals jade" uses jade as a metaphor for wine. According to the Book of Rites (Liji), jade symbolizes benevolence, wisdom, and righteousness; the Shuowen Jiezi notes jade possesses five virtues. Here, it denotes the crystal-clear quality and noble character of the liquor.

Note 5. The figures "thousand-year" and "ten-thousand-year" are rhetorical exaggerations emphasizing the critical role of the aged cellar's microbial ecosystem in determining liquor quality.

Note 6. Qu, a key ingredient in Baijiu brewing, is likened to the backbone. It plays a fundamental role in determining the flavor profile of the liquor, just as a backbone provides structure to a body.