Review

Strategies, Errors, and Challenges in Translating Culture-Specific Items in Chinese-English Literary Works: A Systematic Review

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A B S T R A C T

In this paper, the Chinese to English literary translation of Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) published between 2019 and 2024 is analyzed. Different types of CSIs, such as idioms, historical references, proverbs, and culturally specific phrases, are among the most difficult items to translate because of their deep cultural meaning and the challenge in finding appropriate English equivalents. Although exploration of cultural factors and their translations has become increasingly popular, particularly in Translation Studies, systematic reviews of CSIs especially in Chinese to English literary contexts are limited. We employed a qualitative content analysis to synthesize the findings of 25 selected and refined articles. Among them, 18 were empirical articles, while seven were reviews, mainly focusing on the theoretical and conceptual features of CSIs, collected from Google Scholar, JSTOR, and PubMed databases. Three major themes were identified: (1) definitions and typologies of CSIs, (2) translation strategies, and (3) translation errors. We found that among the various strategies and procedures involved in translating CSIs, domestication, foreignization, annotation, adaptation, and literal translation were the most popular, each acknowledging their context-specific efficiencies and limitations. Furthermore, the identified translation errors included cultural misinterpretation, loss of style, omission, and loss of functionality. These errors could often hinder reader comprehension and negatively influence the narrative. Based on the findings, we recommend maintaining a balance between linguistic and cultural faithfulness, emphasizing genre sensitivity, recognizing the significance of translator visibility, and in-depth exploration of the context, and functional equivalence. Conducting empirical reception studies, in addition to further examination of genre representation, integration of human evaluation, and exploring the potential role of translation technology in translating cultural items could offer theoretical and practical guidance to literary translators dealing with cultural items.

I. INTRODUCTION

CSIs are culturally bound linguistic items with no equivalent direct meaning in another culture. They consist of idioms, proverbs, historical references, social customs, and cultural symbols bearing meaning but also containing a community's unique worldview and patterns of communication (Purwaningsih et al., 2023; Rohmawati et al., 2022; Wan & Amini, 2020). In literary translation, particularly between culturally and linguistically distant languages such as Chinese and English, meaningful and intuitive translation of these items is a fundamental concern (Amini et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025). CSIs are challenging because they have a dual nature—although they possess literal meanings, they are also culturally embedded and can be lost if translated insensitively.

Literature, especially fiction such as novels,

short stories, and culturally rooted poetry or drama, is rich in CSIs. Such writings are not just pieces of art but reflections of their respective cultural settings. Hence, the translation of CSIs is beyond linguistic competence; it requires translators to navigate the two languages' cultures (Amenador & Wang, 2022; He et al., 2024; James et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2022). Neglecting these aspects of culture may result in the loss of meaning, beauty, or even lead to misinterpretation by the target audience (Ikawati, 2022; Antonie, 2022; Wan et al., 2018). For instance, idiomatic expressions, embedded symbolism, and socio-historical allusions are particularly vulnerable to distortion, which can lead to communicative breakdowns unless properly controlled (Abdelaal & Alazzawie, 2020; Effendi et al., 2024; Tukhtarova et al., 2021) and may lead to communicative breakdowns if not handled with care. Due to such challenges, scholars have proposed various strategies for regulating CSIs in translation. There are some in favor of domestication, i.e., translation to fit the culture of the target audience, and there are others in favor of foreignization, i.e., maintaining the distinct features of the source culture. Strategies, such as annotation, adaptation, and literal translation accompanied by contextual changes, are also deemed efficient (Guluzada, 2023; Tsoi, 2022; Chai et al., 2022; Tee et al., 2022). The choice of translation strategy tends to rely on such factors as the goals of the translator, the nature of the source text, and reader expectations in the target market (Jing & Amini, 2019). Such strategic decisions are essential as improper handling of CSIs not only affects comprehension but also tends to lead to cultural dissonance in the translated product.

This review aims to integrate and critically evaluate recent scholarly literature on the translation of CSIs within the framework of Chinese-English literary fiction. Through the integration of knowledge in existing studies, the review aims to evaluate prevailing practices, identify frequent translation errors, and explore the conceptual models that inform CSI translation. Specifically, the review will explore three objectives:

1. To explore how CSIs are identified and typologized in literary fiction.
2. To discuss the major translation strategies used in translating CSIs into English.
3. To describe common translation errors

concerning CSIs in terms of their causes and consequences.

By reviewing the current body of literature, this review seeks to enhance understanding of how CSIs function in literary translation, determine methodological trends, and contribute to areas worthy of future research. Through this process, the paper seeks to enable better translation practice and promote a more culturally sensitive approach to the translation of literary texts.

II. METHODS

This review considers Chinese-English literary production CSIs' translations. A systematic search was conducted using three major scientific academic databases, namely Google Scholar, JSTOR, and PubMed, by using pairs of keywords, such as "culture-specific items" together with "translation strategies" as well as "Chinese-English translation," "literary translation" (combinations included) using AND and OR boolean operators in expanding the scope for searches. For instance, the search phrase "culture-specific items AND Chinese-English translation" produced 18 articles, but more general terms such as "translation strategies OR culture-specific items" generated over 30 hits. After eliminating duplicates and irrelevant studies, 42 unique records were found.

Screening was carried out in three stages: the removal of duplicates, title and abstract screening, and full-text screening. The inclusion criteria were: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles; (2) English language; (3) published between 2019 and 2024; (4) concerning CSIs in Chinese-English literary translation; and (5) including empirical data or theoretical discussion of translation strategies or translation errors. Exclusion criteria were book reviews, editorials, review papers, or investigations involving other language pairs or non-literary sources. Eighteen empirical articles met all the requirements and were thus included.

Also, seven seminal theory publications between 1988 and 2006 were selected to build the conceptual framework for this study. These are the original publications of theorists such as Newmark (1988), Aixela (1996), and Florin (1993), whose typologies and definitions are still extremely cited and pedagogically very influential. The final corpus of this review thus comprises 25 sources: 7 theoretical and 18 empirical.
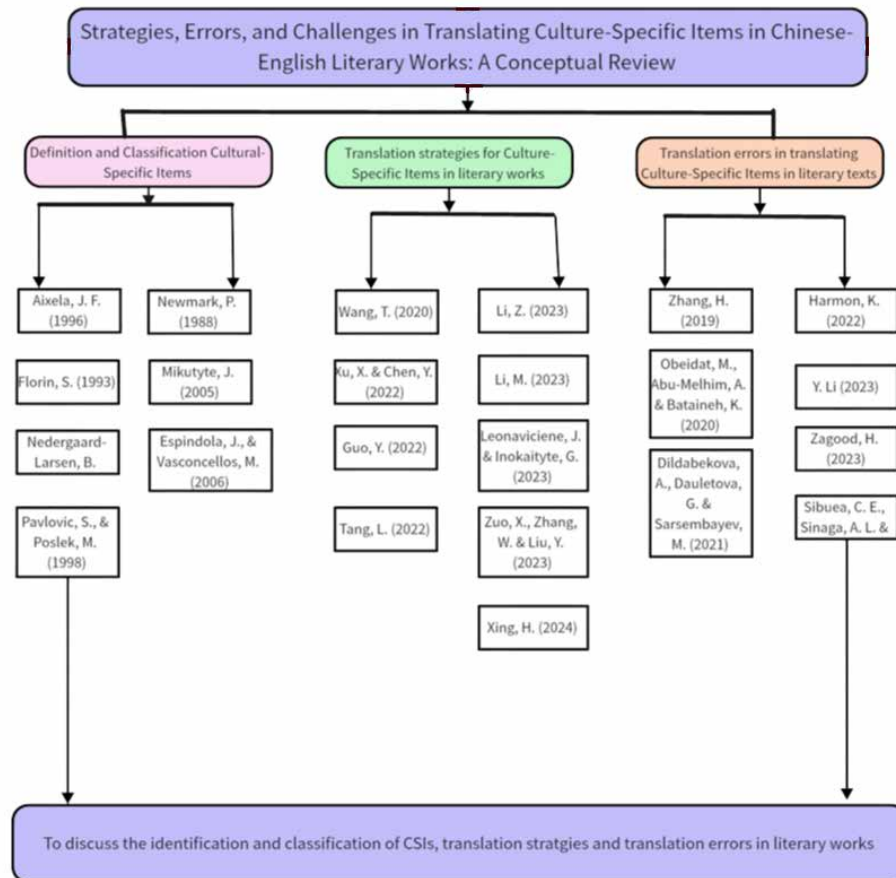
Fig. 1. Thematic categorization of the 25 selected articles in this review, based on their contribution to CSI definition/ classification, translation strategies, and translation errors in literary works.
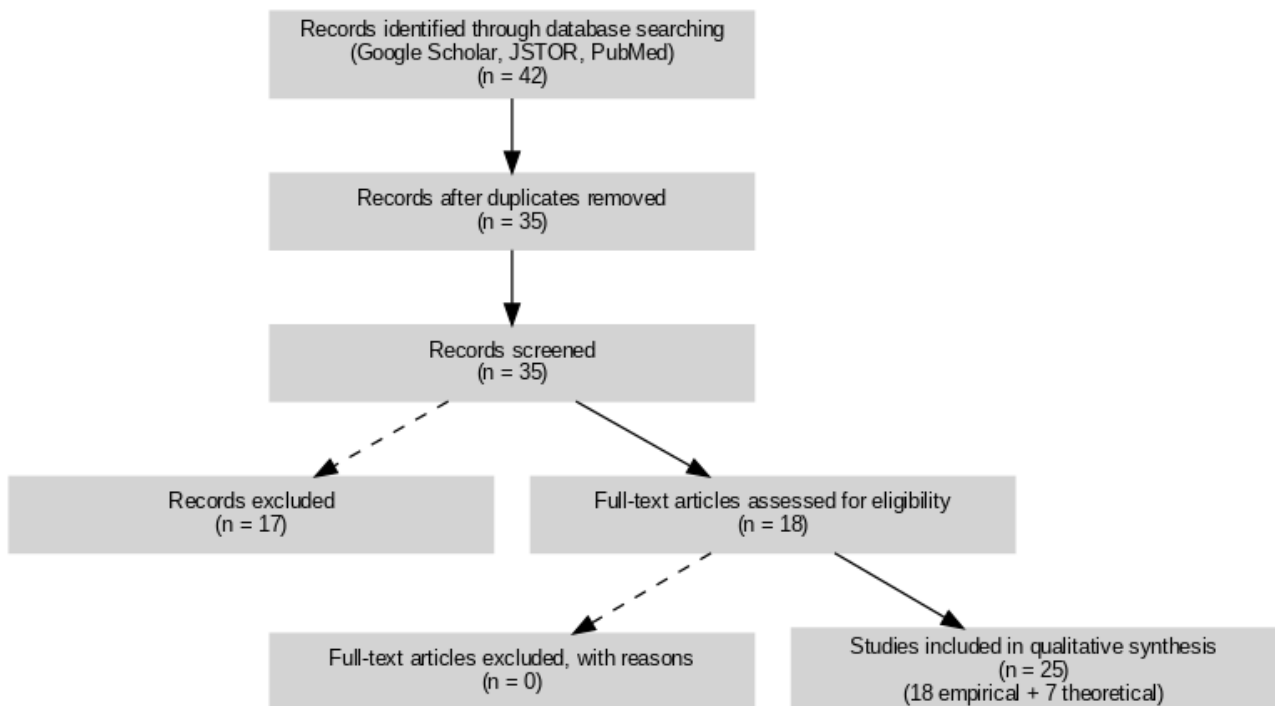

Fig. 2. PRISMA-style flowchart outlining the article selection process, including empirical screening (n = 18) and addition of conceptual literature (n = 7), resulting in 25 final studies.

To describe the thematic split, Figure 1 illustrates the split of the literature selected into three categories: (1) definitions and classifications of CSI (n = 7), (2) translation strategies (n = 9), and (3) translation errors (n = 9). A flowchart of the article selection in PRISMA style is presented in Figure 2.

All the chosen works were examined using qualitative content analysis to establish important themes, persistent concerns, and emphasize translation strategies. The examination enables critical understanding of available CSI translation practice and finds areas that are still underdeveloped for further study.

III. RESULTS

Definitions and Classifications of Culture-Specific Items

In order to establish a coherent analytical framework for evaluating the translation of CSIs, it is necessary to first define what constitutes a CSI and then to compare the most influential classification systems in translation studies. Different terminologies and conceptualizations have emerged across scholarly traditions, each reflecting distinct perspectives on the cultural, linguistic, and semiotic complexity of such items.

The term "culture-specific item" was popularized by Aixela (1996), who uses it as a general label for all textual elements that are anchored in a given culture and which thus pose interpretive and translational challenges when transferred into another linguistic and cultural system. Aixela argues that CSIs are not confined to fixed categories but rather emerge contextually in discourse, depending on how the source text evokes its own cultural environment. From a functionalist perspective, Aixela suggests that the translator either preserves the foreignness of these items or adapts them in a way that renders them accessible to the target audience. This approach emphasizes the translator's role as a cultural mediator who must make choices about visibility, equivalence, and cultural accommodation.

In contrast, Newmark (1988) proposes a more structured and widely adopted taxonomy. He defines CSIs as elements tied to the social and organizational culture of the source language, which often include institutional names, social customs, or material objects. His five-category model includes: (1) ecology (e.g., flora, fauna, geographical features), (2) material culture (e.g., food, clothing, tools), (3) social culture (e.g., sports, leisure activities), (4) organizations, customs, activities, procedures, and concepts (e.g., educational, legal, or political systems), and (5) gestures and habits. Newmark's classification provides practical guidelines for recognizing and translating CSIs in literary and non-literary texts.

Pavlović and Poslek (1998), in their comparison of British and Croatian culture-specific concepts across cultures, expand the classification of CSIs by proposing thirteen types. They include ecology, everyday life, material culture, history, religion, economy, political and administrative tasks, armed forces, education, forms of address, gestures and habits, work, and leisure or entertainment. Their classification is constructed from literary and non-literary examples, with the focus on transmission of subcultural values and reference to institutions through specific lexical options. They also mention that seemingly synonymous words in other cultures may go in different directions due to differing cultural assumptions and that it is the translators' task to identify not only overt but also covert cultural features. Their work is most useful in delineating the embeddedness of CSIs in linguistic and extralinguistic structures like branded goods, TV culture, and public rites. This kind of understanding adds depth to CSI study by reminding students and professionals that translational decisions are not just linguistic but ideologically situated too.

Jurgita Mikutytė (2005) offers one definition that negotiates between cultural specificity and conceptual non-equivalence. She defines CSIs as "distinct items or experiences, material and spiritual components of a culture, intrinsic to a particular ethnic group, a nation or a region, which generally have no equivalents in other cultures or languages." Her typology distinguishes between geographic realia, ethnographic realia, social and political realia, and situational realia. This difference emphasizes that CSIs are special as opposed to general non-equivalent terms because they are inextricably embedded within specific symbolic and historical contexts.

Espindola and Vasconcellos (2006) further enrich the field by proposing a twelve-category approach that incorporates linguistic and extra-linguistic characteristics. These are: (1) toponyms,

(2) anthroponyms, (3) entertainments, (4) transports, (5) fictional characters, (6) legal systems, (7) local organizations, (8) measures, (9) victuals and beverages, (10) scholastic terms, (11) religious festivals, and (12) dialects. This typology, initiated amid unequal cultural contacts, is particularly relevant in postcolonial and multilingual translation contexts. It points to how translation may reproduce or resist dominant cultural narratives by managing certain items.

In an independent effort to characterize the dimensions of culture-specific phenomena, Pavlović and Poslek (1998) offer a typology from their comparative examination of British and Croatian conceptions of culture, emphasizing both linguistic and extralinguistic aspects. Their system includes thirteen distinct categories: ecology, everyday life, material culture, history, religion, economy, political and administrative institutions, military, education, titles of address and terms of reference, gestures and posture, occupations, and leisure activities/entertainment. They also use the terms subcategories such as mass media references (e.g., TV shows), branded products, and consumer behaviors. Their typology is particularly attuned to cultural structures reflecting not only national identity but also subcultural and generational distinctions. They argue that successful translation of CSIs depends on the capacity to sense these multiple levels of meaning and how they operate across both the source and target cultural systems. This method is especially useful for literary translation because it emphasizes the importance of untangling both overt and covert cultural signals in narrative discourse.

Apart from the above models, there have been other researchers, e.g., Florin (1993) and Nedergaard-Larsen (1993), who have offered other models, with a focus on audiovisual translation and realia, respectively. Nedergaard-Larsen's model, for example, has classes like geographical references, cultural references (everyday culture, institutions, history), and linguistic references. Florin, by contrast, introduced the notion of "realia" as words and expressions referring directly to objects, phenomena, and concepts that are culture-specific, proposing a typology founded on pragmatic and semantic features.

In spite of the divergent orientations of these frameworks, there are a number of convergences to be noted. Further, the scope and depth of typologies converge in the significance of ecology, material culture, social institutions, and expressive practices as fundamental domains of CSI occurrence. However, the scope and depth of categories vary, as some authors emphasize institutional and ideological dimensions, while others address ordinary life and linguistic variation. Curiously, earlier typologies are more likely to favor the precision of categorization and practical recommendations for translators, whereas more recent systems emphasize socio-political importance and cultural relations of power, in line with post-structuralist and critical translation theories.

Critical comparison of these systems identifies their respective merits and demerits. Newmark's model is useful in its simplicity and applicability across types of texts, but may be overly simplistic to accommodate dynamic manifestations of culture. Pavlović and Poslek's (1998) and Espindola and Vasconcellos' (2006) models have greater descriptive detail, but risk becoming burdensome to implement in practice in translation analysis. Aixela's approach, though theoretically versatile, is less useful in the supply of empirical classification information. Nedergaard-Larsen and Florin complement by integrating pragmatic concerns and foregrounding challenges typical of media and realia translation, though their models require contextual adaptation upon utilization in the case of literary works.

For literary translation, where stylistic subtlety and cultural sophistication are most relevant, the collective use of these typologies is most useful. Combining categorically defined types with contextual sense enables more fine-grained identification and interpretation of CSIs. Such a hybrid model not only benefits textual analysis but also allows for more rigorous evaluation of translation strategies, making it especially useful for comparative analysis of translated texts.

Thematic Analysis of Challenges and Strategies in Translating CSIs

In translating CSIs from Chinese to English, more than one layer of complexity is faced by the translators. These complexities are not merely linguistic but also cultural, contextual, and even ideological in nature. From the reviewed literature, an array of recurring themes concerning both the

challenges of CSI translation and the strategic options embraced in response is found. Instead of presenting each of these studies individually, these findings are synthesized into thematic clusters underpinned by recent empirical evidence.

One of the fundamental challenges invariably encountered is the linguistic ambiguity and semantic density in most CSIs. There are certain words or onomatopoeias that carry meaning beyond their literal interpretation. Wang (2020), for instance, examines how Chinese stand-up comedy ambiguity creates challenges to effective cultural transference. His study illustrates how subtlety of humor, especially punchlines based on cultural expectations, makes direct translation ineffective. Similarly, Xu and Chen (2022) evoke the issue of onomatopoeia in literature, arguing that literal translation fails to provide representation of sound symbolism or emotional tone. Such authors demonstrate that onomatopoeic terms evoke auditory and emotional connotation that is highly culture-bound. In light of this, strategies such as italicized transliteration or literal translation with explanatory footnotes have been utilized. Whereas these preserve shape and some amount of semantic coherency, they can undermine smoothness or interrupt accessibility to regular readers. Thus, such strategies are best usually effective where cultural fidelity predominates over smoothness of the narrative. Yet they might be inappropriate to apply to readers of low tolerance of linguistic foreignness or in need of entertainment more than ethnographic understanding.

Yet another important theme is the translation of allusions and historical mentions buried in cultures. Examples include idiomatic phrases grounded in Confucian philosophy, words symbolically laden and linked with cultural rituals, or the religious lexicon absent in any Western language. Guo (2022) argues, drawing an example from Ku Hungming's translation of the Analects, that defaulting strategies borrowed from culture and generalization enable historical and conceptual lacunas to be overcome between cultures for European readers. Such strategies, in her observation, while simplifying the foreign-dense, at times obscure subtleties of ideology embedded in the original. Tang (2022) disagrees, arguing that cultural identity is best maintained by conservation rather than replacement in Diary of a Madman. By avoiding simplification, Tang believes the translator can guarantee textual authenticity so that overseas readers can experience cultural dissonance firsthand. Li, Z. (2023), in a discussion of Red Sorghum, argues that some forms of annotation, such as interlined notes and footnotes, are a good compromise between access and depth. Concurrently, Li, M. (2023) discusses title translation in chapter headings of Dream of the Red Chamber's Russian translation, revealing the application of literal and free translation strategies. These findings confirm that title translation has a lot to do with dealing with symbolic resonance and cultural references embedded in framing narratives. Such additions or modifications, though enriching comprehension, may detract from narrative development and ruin aesthetic experience. Thus, the performance of each strategy relies on the cultural information density, the source text genre, and the reader's predicted familiarity. Cognitive overload may result from over-annotation, while oversimplification can deprive the original of its cultural meaning.

The genre of the literary text also determines the choice of strategy. Poetic or symbolic works are often in need of solutions other than those for straightforward prose narratives. Zuo et al. (2023) address this in their analysis of Big Breasts and Wide Hips, where they propose context-dependent solutions such as literal translation with amplification or free translation with substitution. These approaches preserve the aesthetic effect of metaphorical passages. For example, metaphors referring to traditional beliefs about femininity, fertility, and motherhood require culturally adaptive strategies to maintain their evocative power. Similarly, Xing (2024), examining Li Bai's Silent Night Thoughts, emphasizes that poetic images require strategic creativity, combining cultural knowledge with reader-oriented decisions. Free translation in such cases is not merely deviation but an act of literary recreation. But such creative interventions must be used judiciously to avoid tone or meaning distortion. Misused or overused, they can result in reinterpretations that favor target-language aesthetics over original authorial intent. This challenge emphasizes the necessity of genre-sensitive approaches that balance artistic form, thematic content, and cultural fidelity.

Of equal concern is the effect of the translator's visibility and reader expectation. Some translators have an overt presence in the text on purpose by

giving interlinear glosses or in-text commentary. Li, Z. (2023) is a good illustration of how cultural information, if added quietly, can contribute to understanding without interfering with flow. Leonaviciene and Inokaityte (2023) confirm that such practices are successful in intercultural contexts when foreignization is pedagogically appropriate. Their findings suggest reader engagement increases if translators take up the role of cultural mediators rather than neutral transmitters. In contrast, in fiction set for mass audiences, invisibility on the translator's part could be a desideratum. Strategies such as domestication—including where CSIs are translated as culturally familiar forms—are frequent attempts to mitigate disruption. This, however, is a danger factor for erosion of cultural subtlety. If the translator over-domesticates, the end product may be culturally homogeneous and stripped of the richness of the original.

A final thematic aspect in CSI translation involves the function of CSIs elements within the source text. Scholars like Zuo et al. (2023) and Tang (2022) argue that policy on translation cannot be dictated by linguistic form but should respond to the functional function of CSIs in context. For example, some CSIs can be metaphorical or symbolic and can aid character development, thematic unity, or social commentary. In these cases, the original wording should remain even if it is at the expense of reader comprehension. Where CSIs add background information to the environment that does not further the narrative, more liberal strategies such as omission or adaptation may be viable. This functionalist strategy promotes decision-making on the basis of rhetorical effect, rather than formal equivalence. It goes against the idea of cultural retention always being the best choice and rather promotes strategic maneuverability guided by textual function and communicative intent.

These thematic findings are combined graphically in Table 1, which encapsulates the main CSI-related challenges and plots them against corresponding approaches. The diagram is also an analytical tool to depict how translator choice is influenced by text type, culture, and communicative objectives. It also reveals the multi-dimensional nature of CSI translation and the interplay of fidelity, fluency, and functionality.

Categorization of Translation Errors in CSIs

Translation errors in CSIs remain a chronic issue with Chinese-English literary translation. In an extended integration of more recent research, five prevalent types of translation errors emerge, each a variant of misrepresentation, misinterpretation, or strategic shortcoming. They include pragmatic errors, cultural misinterpretation, over-literal translation, stylistic and aesthetic loss, and machine translation limitations. All these categories are not only technical flaws but more general conceptual tensions among fidelity, accessibility, and communicative purpose. Rather than analyzing these errors through isolated examples, this section synthesizes findings thematically from multiple studies on how errors in translation occur, why they are important, and how they can be avoided.

One of the most common types of translation error is pragmatic errors, where the translatable message in translation fails to align with the intended communicative function of the target culture. Y. Li (2023) finds most common errors to be pragmatic errors in CSI translation, especially with culturally specific speech acts, addresses, and implied meaning. Li's analysis emphasizes that such errors frequently stem from the translator's insufficient awareness of target-language pragmatics, or from their unfamiliarity with how politeness, hierarchy, or indirectness are expressed across cultures. The consequence is often an output that, while grammatically correct, appears

Table 1. Thematic Model of Challenges and Strategies in Translating CSIs.

Challenge	Preferred Strategy	Supporting Studies
Linguistic Ambiguity	Transliteration; Footnotes	Wang (2020), Xu & Chen (2022)
Cultural Allusions	Annotation; Generalization	Guo (2022), Tang (2022), Li, Z. (2023), Li, M. (2023)
Genre Constraints	Amplification; Free Translation	Zuo et al. (2023), Xing (2024)
Translator Visibility	Interlinear Gloss; Domestication	Li, Z. (2023), Leonaviciene & Inokaityte (2023)
Functional Role	Conservation; Omission	Zuo et al. (2023), Tang (2022)

inappropriate, offensive, or overly literal in context. Such an error impacts not only interpersonal tone but also the credibility of the story, particularly in character speech and culturally rich interactions. The cultivation of pragmatic competence and cross-cultural sensitivity must therefore be regarded as part and parcel of training literary translators rendering CSIs.

Cultural misinterpretation is another red thread in CSI translation error. Zhang (2019) and Zagood (2023) offer compelling evidence that errors of this sort are most likely to result when the translator does not adequately appreciate the cultural significance of a term or conception. For example, Zhang (2019) describes how misunderstandings of key values and ideologies such as filial piety, collectivism, or ritual result in oversimplifications that minimize Chinese cultural representation. Similarly, Zagood's examination of an Arabic-English translation elucidates how literal renderings of cultural idioms failed to reach local habits, and resulted in skewed readings. What these investigations point out is that surface equivalence can be misleading when deeper contextual knowledge is lacking. Not being able to observe the symbolic or ideological functions fulfilled by CSIs generates substitutions that are either tone-deaf or semantically inadequate. Over-literal translation also appears as a severe category of error when formal equivalence is the priority of translators over communicative accuracy.

Harmon (2022) and Obeidat et al. (2020) analyze how hyper-literal translations could lead to translations that are syntactically precise but semantically awkward. Harmon's contrastive analysis of three Polish translations of The Great Gatsby reveals how rigid adherence to surface form immures subtextual sense and emotional depth. Similarly, Obeidat et al. illustrate how translations attempting to be natural in terms of grammar but lacking in accuracy—or vice versa—result in unnatural or misleading expressions. Their discovery of three subtypes—natural but inaccurate, unnatural but accurate, and unnatural and inaccurate—offers a diagnostic model for determining CSI-related errors. Collectively, these studies argue that good CSI translation involves a dynamic balance between fidelity and functionality. Translators must make interpretive decisions that are in the service of the tone, rhythm, and communicative purpose of the narrative, and not constrained by fixed lexical substitution. Loss of stylistic and aesthetic features is another major area of concern.

Literary translation as a principle is about recreating content, but also form, tone, and texture. Dildabekova et al. (2021) show how weakening of metaphor, rhythm, or imagery in style diminishes the literary effect of the translation. In their contrastive analysis of English translations of Kazakh prose, they found that many errors involved in metaphorical flattening, tonal incongruity, and cohesion error were due to a lack of adequate concern for the poetic organization of the original. In literary prose, CSIs typically carry multi-faceted meanings and stylistic connotations that cannot be translated by literal equivalence. Their replacement or omission, unless conceived with strategic intent, destroys the global narrative effect. Therefore, translation strategies must be focused on stylistic preservation, such as compensatory methods or rhetorical re-creation, while translating CSIs with figurative or symbolic language. The fifth theme involves machine translation and automation errors.

Because CSIs are highly dependent upon cultural expectations, socio-pragmatic sensitivity, or world knowledge, algorithms lack such sensitivities and therefore produce incoherent or culturally inappropriate translations. Sibuea et al. (2023) address this issue by looking at the Google Translate translation of Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix. They discover repeated inability to cope with culturally unique words, idioms, and expressions. From their findings, while the software is very proficient in syntactic form, it has an extremely difficult time with metaphors embedded in culture, intertextual references, and implied meaning. These are the signs that human intervention is needed, particularly post-editing. They also pose general questions regarding the constraints of the state-of-the-art neural machine translation (NMT) models on literary styles, where narrative flow, subtlety, and context are top priority. The five categories mentioned are united in the fact that they are evidencing systemic and not accidental errors.

Each category of error points to a particular kind of knowledge or judgment required by translators in order to perform effectively with CSIs. The implications are both applied and theoretical. From a training perspective, it goes without

Table 2. Categorization of Translation Errors in Chinese-English CSI Translation

Error Type	Typical Characteristics	Example Studies
Pragmatic Errors	Misaligned speech acts; inappropriate register	Y. Li (2023)
Cultural Misinterpretation	Symbolic/ideological misreading	Zhang (2019), Zagood (2023)
Over-literal Translation	Syntactic fidelity over clarity	Harmon (2022), Obeidat et al. (2020)
Stylistic Loss	Tone, metaphor, rhythm ignored	Dildabekova et al. (2021)
Machine Translation Gaps	Lack of cultural sensitivity	Sibuea et al. (2023)

saying that translators require interdisciplinary competence—not only in language and literature but also in sociolinguistics, cultural studies, and communication theory. Procedurally, classification of translation errors contributes to building stronger evaluation models and criteria. Instead of basing judgments of CSI translations on faithfulness, the judges must also consider cultural adequacy, narratological coherence, and stylistic closeness. These categories of CSI-related translation errors are schematically represented in Table 2. This can assist in recognizing translation errors and finding translation solutions for them. On the broader literary translation level as well, it also reiterates the need for integrative methodology that combines linguistic skill with cultural competence and narrative sensitivity.

IV. DISCUSSION

The translation of CSIs in literary works is challenging, as noted by several studies, particularly about the translations of contemporary Chinese literature. While most studies focus on classical literature or canonical fiction, the contemporary literary works often contain some novel cultural elements and new social values which differ from those of older texts. Translation of such texts need more attention considering the evolving cultural practices and uses of language that can complicate the common practices and approaches in translation, often leading to only partial or outdated theoretical explanations.

Furthermore, various cultural subtleties embedded in historical contexts of literary texts require translators' deep understanding of the unique features to be received in the target language and culture. One common gap in the existing literature is integrative examination of the source and target languages' specific cultural contexts rather than generalizing the cultural elements independently of the context (Bayraktar, 2022). In other words,

specificity in contextual examination of the cultural elements together with the application of appropriate translation strategies can assist in preserving the cultural essence of the original texts (Hamamoto, 2023). Some studies (e.g., Amenador and Wang's (2022) have examined how modern cultural elements are passed across languages, or how refinement of the existing methodologies have assisted in achieving cultural fidelity (Hamamoto, 2023).

Another gap is the (over)generalization of cultural phenomena beyond their communicate purpose and setting. For example, in some cases, culture-specific items and idiomatic expressions, and phrases are discussed without complete acknowledgement, or analysis of the particular social and communicative setting, such as time and place, in which these items are being described. Therefore, an effective CSI translation depends not only on the identification of cultural elements (e.g., Bayraktar, 2022; Hee et al., 2022; Hamamoto, 2023), but also on a thorough understanding the functional operations of the items within the cultural, ideological, and communicative frameworks. For genres like poetry, science fiction, and modern drama, where symbolic meaning and cultural subtlety are significant, a detailed textual analysis becomes indispensable. As stated by Liu (2022) in examination of CSIs in Ming and Qing novels, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, exploring the translation of CSIs is not only investigating how decision-making works in terms of lexico-grammatical choices and their denotative meanings, but is also about the symbolic, ideological and even in-depth analysis of the emotional connotations of the items as CSIs are central to a narrative's social and aesthetic values.

Furthermore, narrative prose prevails compared to other genres such as satire, fantasy, and illustrated fiction, while the influence of literary genres also needs further exploration,

particularly in Chinese-English translations. These genres are more likely to include hybridized or invented cultural elements that resist traditional categorization. As Calvert (2022) suggests, a wider variety of genres would allow for a more subtle understanding of the manner in which culture dictates literary expression. These less typical genres may also demand more flexible and imaginative translation strategies.

The translator's personal and professional background is another factor worth greater consideration. Amenador and Wang (2022) and Mallah (2022) argue that the cultural sensitivity and linguistic ability of a translator strongly influence the way CSIs are translated. The ability to interpret and reproduce cultural meaning is likely to be guided by the translator's academic training, life experience, and familiarity with the target audience. These can affect strategic decision-making at all levels of the translation process. El Mallah (2022), for instance, demonstrates that even religious texts such as the Quran may be ideologically screened, depending on the translator's beliefs or affiliation. This emphasizes the translator's role not just as a linguistic intermediary but also as an active cultural transmitter.

At the same time, the lack of practical instruments and translation support still frustrates efficient handling of CSIs. Translators would benefit from greater resources, including glossaries, strategy recommendations, and computer-based support tools. As implied by Setiawan (2022), Qian and Wu (2023), Bihych and Strilets (2020), and Petronienė et al. (2019), systematic aids can help translators to identify CSIs, choose relevant strategies, and justify their choices in professional practice. Smith, Adams, and Munnik (2022) also note that standard checklists and quality assessment tools can similarly enhance training outcomes by introducing greater coherence into translation practice. These tools are particularly important as global translation demands continue to rise.

Translation technology has also been a central part of this debate. Google Translate and other such tools often fail when working with culture-specific material, especially idiomatic language, figurative language, or culturally loaded concepts. Alonso and Vieira (2020) observe that the development of automated translation processes has transformed the role of the translator. Human translators are now assuming a critical role of editing and polishing machine outputs. Xu and Shin (2023) note that collaborative workflows, blending automated processing and specialist editing, offer one feasible way ahead. These approaches may maximize efficiency without compromising cultural sensitivity and interpretive depth.

In the future, more research should be carried out on how technological systems can be developed to better process CSI translation. This includes teaching artificial intelligence on datasets with annotated cultural elements, and calibrating algorithms to consider contextual and pragmatic cues. Furthermore, the reception of translated CSIs by readers is worth investigating more deeply. How readers respond or interpret various approaches will tell researchers whether an approach enhances accessibility or leads to cultural distortion. Comparative testing and user-based feedback would be informative.

Cumulatively, these observations suggest that CSI translation is not an activity where one size fits all. Instead, it is a highly adaptive and context-contingent practice. It involves multiple levels of decision-making and necessitates attention to language, genre, cultural appropriacy, and reader expectation. To be useful, future research must reflect this complexity and offer solutions that are not just conceptually rigorous but also pragmatically feasible.

V. CONCLUSION

Translating CSIs between English and Chinese particularly in literary contexts is often challenging mainly because of the entanglement of these items within their source cultures and the uncertainty in the acceptable level of adaptation to the target culture. A main challenge is identifying direct equivalent values in the target culture because translating CSIs entails analyzing various factors, such as forms of social norms, idiomatic expressions, and historical references. A solution to this translation problem could be incorporating a substantial understanding of both source and target cultures in addition to the linguistic expertise to ensure that translations are adequate and fluent. Language and culture continue to evolve and upgrading translators' cultural knowledge of the source and target norms and values plays a key role in this respect. Previous studies have emphasized the intricate balance needed between remaining

faithful to the source text and ensuring that the translated text is well adjusted and adapted to the target audience's expectations. Various translation strategies such as domestication or foreignization are employed based on the context and function of the CSIs, with foreignization being favored when the cultural reference is central to the text's meaning, while domestication or adaptation is preferred when the reference is less familiar to the audience.

Moreover, translation style may vary significantly across literary genres; for example, it is evident that poetry, or any form of creative literary writing, typically requires more creative adaptation to preserve aesthetic features, while for example informative prose can often utilize more direct translation strategies and procedures. Some of the common pitfalls in translating cultural items include loss of contextual nuances, cultural misunderstandings, misrepresentation, and over-reliance on word-for-word translations that can deliver the denotative meaning, but fail to convey the complete original intent, connotative meaning or sense. Likewise, idiomatic expressions and cultural allusions frequently suffer when translated word-for-word, leading to a dilution of meaning that is critical to the CSIs. Finally, as machine translation software struggle to accurately convey cultural nuances and contextual intricacies, the role of human translators and their awareness of cultural sensitivity remains undeniable where a collaborative approach could enhance both the accuracy and cultural relevance of translations.

Future research can investigate comparative effectiveness of translation strategies across different genres and contexts, exploration of translation methods that prioritize representation of cultural richness in translation.

ETHICS STATEMENT

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Wang Qiufen was responsible for writing the manuscript and other related tasks. Mansour Amini and Debbita Tan Ai Lin provided suggestions and guidance for the paper.

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