

**EXPLORING TRANSLATION ERRORS,
STRATEGIES AND PERCEPTIONS IN CHINESE-
TO-ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF CSIS IN
HONG LOUMENG**

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**EXPLORING TRANSLATION ERRORS,
STRATEGIES AND PERCEPTIONS IN CHINESE-
TO-ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF CSIS IN
HONG LOUMENG**

by

WANG QIUFEN

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSIs	Culture-specific items
HLM	Hong Lou Meng
ST	Source Text
TQA	Translation Quality Assessment
TT	Target Text
TT 1	Target Text by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang
TT 2	Target Text by Hawkes

LIST OF APPENDICES

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**MENEROKA KESILAPAN, STRATEGI DAN PERSEPSI DALAM
TERJEMAHAN ITEM BUDAYA KHUSUS DARI BAHASA CINA KE
BAHASA INGGERIS DALAM KARYA HONG LOUMENG**

ABSTRAK

Disertasi ini mengkaji terjemahan Item Budaya Khusus (CSI) daripada bahasa Cina ke bahasa Inggeris dalam Hong Lou Meng dengan menggunakan kaedah triangulasi yang menggabungkan analisis teks dan maklum balas penterjemah serta pembaca. Berlandaskan klasifikasi budaya Peter Newmark, strategi terjemahan Vinay dan Darbelnet, Model Penilaian Kualiti Terjemahan oleh House, serta Teori Tindakan Penterjemahan Holz-Mänttari, kajian ini menganalisis dua versi terjemahan bahasa Inggeris Hong Lou Meng. Sebanyak 200 CSI dikenal pasti dan diklasifikasikan melalui kerangka Newmark untuk meneliti kaedah elemen budaya ditangani. Strategi Vinay dan Darbelnet mengenal pasti prosedur terjemahan, manakala model House menilai kesilapan secara sistematik. Teori Holz-Mänttari memperkayakan analisis dengan memasukkan perspektif penterjemah dan pembaca. Penemuan utama termasuk pengkategorian kesilapan terjemahan dan cadangan penggabungan strategi langsung serta tidak langsung dalam penterjemahan CSI. Kajian ini menawarkan implikasi praktikal kepada penterjemah yang ingin mengaplikasi teknik terjemahan, pendidik yang mereka bentuk program latihan terjemahan, penyelidik yang meneliti pemindahan budaya dalam karya sastera, serta penerbit yang meningkatkan komunikasi silang budaya. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada peningkatan kualiti terjemahan, pengurangan kesilapan, dan pemupukan pemahaman budaya dalam terjemahan sastera Cina dengan menghubungkan pandangan teori dan penilaian praktikal.

**EXPLORING TRANSLATION ERRORS, STRATEGIES AND
PERCEPTIONS IN CHINESE- TO-ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF CSIS IN
HONG LOUMENG**

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the translation of Culture-Specific Items from Chinese into English in Hong Lou Meng, utilizing a triangulation method that combines text analysis with feedback from translators and readers. Framed by Peter Newmark's cultural classifications, Vinay and Darbelnet's translation strategies, House's Revised Translation Quality Assessment Model, and Justa Holz-Mänttari's Translational Action Theory, this study analyzes two English translations of Hong Lou Meng. It identifies and classifies 200 CSIs through Newmark's framework, revealing how cultural elements are handled in translation. Vinay and Darbelnet's strategies uncover specific translation procedures, while House's model assesses translation errors systematically. Holz-Mänttari's theory enriches this analysis by incorporating the perspectives of translators and readers. Key findings include a categorization of common translation errors, recommendations for combining direct and oblique strategies in CSI translation. The study offers practical implications for translators seeking to apply their techniques, educators designing translation training programs, researchers exploring cultural transference in literary works, and publishers aiming to enhance cross-cultural communication. By bridging theoretical insights with practical evaluations, this research contributes to advancing translation quality, reducing errors, and fostering cultural understanding in Chinese literary translations.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, scope and limitations of the study, corpus, organization of the study, and definition of related terms. Understanding these elements is crucial for grasping the foundation and direction of the research. At the macro level, translation functions as a key mechanism of intercultural communication. At the micro level, this study specifically investigates culture-specific items (CSIs) in *Hong Lou Meng* and their treatment in two English translations.

1.2 Background of the study

Translation acts as a cultural bridge, enabling the transfer of not only words but also the deeper cultural layers embedded in the original work (Kutlay, 2023). To fully understand how this bridge is constructed and maintained, it is crucial to explore translation strategies and identify errors in conveying cultural elements. This exploration provides valuable insights into the complexities of intercultural communication. However, previous studies have mostly focused on general strategies such as domestication and foreignization or on isolated aspects of CSIs. Very few have systematically combined CSI classification, translation strategies, error analysis, and perceptions of translators and readers in one framework. This lack of integration constitutes the research gap. The novelty of this study lies in developing a comprehensive multi-theoretical approach that unites these elements to examine the translation of CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng*. Translation is not just about accurately capturing the essence and nuances of the original text; it also involves bridging cultural and

linguistic gaps by effectively communicating the intended message (Rachael & Mary, 2023).

Understanding the theoretical frameworks in translation studies is essential for analyzing and improving translation strategies. Theoretical perspectives help in understanding the underlying principles that guide translators in making decisions that impact the preservation and transmission of cultural nuances. The examination of translation strategies and errors requires a theoretical foundation to provide a structured approach to analysis. One such theory is functional translation theory, also known as functionalism, which emerged as a response to the limitations of traditional translation theories such as linguistic equivalence in handling pragmatic texts (Z. Wang, 2018). In the early 20th century, German translators pioneered functional approaches to translation, drawing from earlier practices in literary and Bible translation (Z. Wang, 2018). The development of functionalism gained significant momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, resulting in a move toward purpose-oriented translation strategies (Munday, 2016).

Key concepts in functional translation theory include the Skopos theory, introduced by Hans J. Vermeer and expanded upon by Christiane Nord (Vermeer, 2021). The Skopos theory emphasizes that translational actions are determined by the intended purpose of the target text, with the goal of achieving the intended function over strict linguistic fidelity to the source text (Reiss & Vermeer, 2014). Here, “strict fidelity” refers to linguistic fidelity, namely close adherence to the wording and formal features of the source text. For instance, in translating Hong Lou Meng, this theory guides the translator to prioritize cultural relevance and reader engagement over strict linguistic accuracy. Such prioritization is necessary because in high-context Chinese literature, literal fidelity often fails to communicate implicit cultural meanings, whereas cultural

relevance ensures communicative adequacy and accessibility for target readers. American scholar Nida also contributes to functional translation theory with the concept of dynamic equivalence, which focuses on achieving equivalent extra-linguistic communicative effects rather than strict linguistic equivalence (E. A. Nida & Taber, 1982). This approach is particularly useful in conveying the cultural richness of *Hong Lou Meng* to an English-speaking audience.

In the past, Translation Studies (TS) primarily concentrated on linguistics, considering translation as a linguistic endeavor that demanded adherence to the source text (ST) as a criterion for a qualified translation (Nord, 2006). However, it was later recognized that translation is not solely a linguistic process. As a result, more scholars engaged in the study of translation theory and offered their perspectives on Skopos Theory and Translational Action Theory. Skopos theory is an external examination of translation that centers on the selection of different objectives during the translation process. It effectively compensates for the shortcomings of Translation Studies and introduces a fresh research perspective to the multidisciplinary investigation of translation (Q. Chen, 2022). Translational Action Theory applies to various professional translations, including technical translation, and offers guidance for translators to make informed decisions (Nord, 2022).

These theories provide valuable insights into the decision-making processes of translators and help bridge cultural and linguistic gaps. Ultimately, they enhance the effectiveness of intercultural communication.

1.2.1 Translation of culture-specific items

Building upon the evolving domain of Translation Studies, it becomes crucial to delve deeper into the concept of Culture-Specific Items (CSIs). CSIs are elements that are alien to the target culture because they lack equivalent referents, or because the

target culture assigns different values and uses to them, and thus present difficulties for translators when there is not a direct translation for them in the target language (Tsoi, 2022). The translation of CSIs is not merely a linguistic transfer but an act of cultural interpretation and adaptation (Ikawati, 2022).

This challenge is particularly evident in literary works, which inherently mirror the cultural essence of the original text. Literary texts play a dual role in spotlighting the intricacies within a culture and fostering cross-cultural appreciation among nations with similar cultural backgrounds (B. Liu et al., 2023). Embedded within the writer's distinctive style is a manifestation of their history and cultural perspective (Gutt, 2014). Therefore, translating CSIs in literary works entails more than mere linguistic equivalence; it necessitates a profound grasp of the cultural context. Literary works contain more CSIs, unique values, and expressive and artistic features than other text genres, making their translation particularly challenging (Daghoughi & Hashemian, 2016).

A CSI does not exist independently during the translation process; rather, it emerges from a dispute that starts with any reference linguistically expressed in the original text (Aixela, 1999). The translation of this reference into a target language presents a translation challenge because the culture of the target language may not regard the stated object (considering factors like ideology, usage, frequency, etc.) or may ascribe different values to it (Aixela, 1999). Aixela's concept of CSIs has significantly contributed to the discipline of translation, providing a framework for researching and translating cultural elements.

Thus, selecting appropriate translation strategies and avoiding translation errors in literary works can be particularly daunting, necessitating a nuanced approach to translation.

1.2.2 High-context vs low-context cultures

When translating Hong Lou Meng from Chinese to English, it is crucial to consider the inherent cultural variations between high-context and low-context cultures. The source text, written in Chinese, and the selected translations in English present unique translation challenges due to these cultural distinctions, such as kinship and address terms, idiomatic allusions, and ritual-based politeness.

In 1976, cultural anthropologist Edward T. Hall first presented the ideas of high-context and low-context cultures. High-context cultures depend on implicit communication within the cultural and social context, focusing on subtle cues. In contrast, low-context cultures prioritize explicit and straightforward communication, with less reliance on contextual cues (Hall, 1989). This dichotomy is especially pertinent within the framework of translating Chinese literature into English.

According to M. Chen (2023), Chinese culture is high context, i.e., understanding internal communication often involves deciphering hidden meanings in words. For example, Chinese frequently employs subtle and tactful expressions with profound meanings in advertising language, striving for gentle recognition and comprehension among parties (M. Chen, 2023). Consequently, the intended meaning in Chinese literature is difficult to translate due to the high-context nature of the language.

Conversely, Western culture, particularly exemplified by the United States, is characterized as low-context, with a strong emphasis on explicit content and straightforward word meanings (Broeder, 2021). Western nations often prefer straightforward and comprehensible language for communication, typically use strong terms like “unique” and “best” in their advertising language (M. Chen, 2023; Manrai et al., 2019; N. Wang, 2019). This cultural dichotomy adds another layer of complexity to

the translation process, making it imperative for translators to employ strategies that effectively bridge this contextual and cultural gap.

The significant cultural disparities between Chinese and English emphasize the necessity of providing explanations when communicating across cultural boundaries (Wen, 2014). Translators must be acutely aware of these differences and adopt strategies that ensure the translated text conveys the intended message while respecting the cultural context of both the source and target languages.

1.2.3 *Hong Lou Meng* novel by Cao Xueqin

To understand the significance and challenges in translating *Hong Lou Meng*, it is essential to explore the novel's historical and cultural context. This Chinese literary masterpiece, authored by Cao Xueqin in the Qing dynasty, is broadly recognized as one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature (Moratto et al., 2022; M. Li, 2023).

Hong Lou Meng narrates the tale of the fall of the Jia family and centers on the romance between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu, portraying the nuances of life, love, and societal expectations. The novel holds a prominent position in Chinese literature and culture and continues to be a subject of extensive study and interpretation, with scholars engaging in debates over its themes, characters, and literary techniques (D. Chen, 2024). It is praised for its complex characters, intricate storytelling, and profound exploration of human emotions and social hierarchies (Dong, 2003; Y. Wu & Liu, 2022). Its artistic and philosophical value reflects the moral complexities and societal norms of its time.

Furthermore, *Hong Lou Meng* has a pivotal impact on the evolution of Chinese literary tradition and influences later literary creations (Moratto et al., 2022). It serves as a model for later writers and inspires various adaptations in different art forms,

including film, television, and theater. The novel's enduring popularity and cultural significance solidify its place as a timeless classic in Chinese literary history.

Despite some critics comparing it unfavorably to Western literature (D. Chen, 2024), the novel's enduring appeal and relevance continue to captivate readers and scholars alike.

Moreover, *Hong Lou Meng* is an exemplary case where the translation of CSIs plays a pivotal role. Since it is regarded as one of the best classical novels and has significant cultural resonance in China, translating it must take into account both the literary and cultural aspects of the work (J. Wang & Yu, 2019). Therefore, translating CSIs from *Hong Lou Meng* is crucial because it has a significant impact on accurately conveying the cultural nuances and meanings embedded in the original Chinese text to English-speaking readers. These cultural nuances include the intricate kinship and address system (e.g., “贾母,” “二姐姐”), classical allusions and idioms (e.g., “中山狼” signifying ingratitude), ritual practices and festivals that reflect Confucian values, and symbolic use of objects and colors (e.g., jade as a sign of destiny).

The significance of translating CSIs lies in bridging the cultural gap between the source language (Chinese) and the target language (English) (Lau et al., 2022), allowing readers to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the rich cultural heritage depicted in *Hong Lou Meng*. By accurately translating CSIs, translators can ensure that the cultural essence and complexity of the original text are faithfully preserved, contributing to the overall authenticity and integrity of the translated work.

Meanwhile, the translation of CSIs serves as a means of cultural exchange and communication, facilitating cross-cultural understanding and fostering appreciation for diverse literary traditions (Blažytė & Liubinienė, 2016). Through meticulous translation strategies and careful consideration of cultural context, translators are able to effectively

convey the unique cultural values and symbolism embedded in CSIs to English-speaking audiences.

Moreover, it needs to be emphasized that for famous classical novels like *Hong Lou Meng*, errors in the translation of CSIs can arise due to cultural disparities (Ding & Tang, 2023). Hence, to mitigate translation errors and overcome translation obstacles such as semantic discrepancies, ambiguous information transmission, mistranslations, and omissions arising from linguistic, cultural, and cognitive disparities, the use of adaptable translation strategies is imperative.

This research utilizes a comparative analysis method to investigate the translation of literary texts, placing particular emphasis on translating Chinese classical novels. It centers on the renowned Chinese literary work *Hong Lou Meng* and examines translation strategies, translation errors in the translated text, and the perceptions toward translation challenges and strategies on the target audience's understanding and appreciation of CSIs.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Translation plays a key role in shaping literary systems (Venuti, 2021) and is embedded in transcultural cooperation (Santos & Jones, 2020). According to Holz-Mänttari (1987), translation involves more than converting words, sentences, or paragraphs; it facilitates effective communication across cultural differences. Thus, the translation process should be viewed as a complex endeavor involving multiple stakeholders. Translators face the challenging task of retaining the cultural richness of the original text while ensuring coherence, relevance, and authenticity. This difficulty is heightened when dealing with CSIs, which underscores the importance of translating words with corresponding cultural meanings (Chan, 2023). In this study, corresponding

cultural meanings refer to the implied social, historical, or moral connotations embedded in CSIs. For example, the expression “中山狼 [Zhongshan wolf]” carries the cultural connotation of ingratitude, which goes beyond its literal zoological meaning. Chan’s perspective supports the need for research on CSIs, emphasizing their critical significance in Translation Studies. The central problem, however, is that although the difficulty of CSIs is widely acknowledged, existing studies have not provided an integrated framework that combines CSI classification, translation strategies, error analysis, and perceptions of translators and readers. Translating culturally rich literary works such as *Hong Lou Meng* posed considerable challenges owing to the intrinsic cultural and linguistic disparities between Chinese and English. This study aimed to address these challenges by exploring the translation strategies, errors, and perceptions associated with translating CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng*.

Within the setting of *Hong Lou Meng*, cultural values and language are intertwined, making cultural values and social standards crucial in the translation process (Y. Wu & Liu, 2022). Due to cultural and linguistic differences, it was often impossible to avoid losing some meaning when translating from Chinese to English (Y. Sun, 2022). This highlighted the importance of CSIs in translation and the need to classify them.

Examining and contrasting translation strategies for CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng* were essential for two reasons. Firstly, CSIs are parts of the source culture that are easily understood by the source culture community but may be missing or have different sociocultural meanings in the target culture (Turzynski-Azimi, 2020). This made them difficult for readers with different cultural backgrounds to understand. Therefore, translating CSIs was a complex task that required appropriate strategies (Ikawati, 2022).

Secondly, differences in translation strategies led to linguistic structure differences and implied that translators interpreted the same passage differently (Purnawati, 2022). Different strategies resulted in markedly different representations of cultural features within the target language. For example, the translation of 中山狼 [zhōngshān láng] demonstrated how different strategies — literal translation versus modulation—impacted the target reader’s understanding.

ST: 子系中山狼，得志更猖狂。金闺花柳质，一载赴黄梁 (Cao, 1996, p. 77).

Transliteration: Zǐ xì zhōngshān láng, dézhì gèng chāngkuáng. Jīn guī huāliǔ zhì, yī zài fù huáng liáng.

TT1: For a husband she will have a mountain of wolf, His object gained he ruthlessly berates her. Fair bloom, sweet willow in a golden bower, too soon a rude awaits her (Cao, 2001, p.75).

TT2: Paired with a brute like the wolf in the old fable, who on his saviour turned when he was able. To cruelty not used, your gentle heart, Shall, in a twelvemonth only, break apart (Cao, 2012, p. 73).

Based on the classification of CSIs (Newmark, 1988), in this example, 中山狼 [zhōngshān láng] belongs to Organizations, Customs, Activities, Procedures, and Concepts. They are CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng* because they are from Chinese allusions of “中山狼传”[zhōngshān láng Zhuàn] (X. Wang & Jiang, 2021). Drawing on Vinay and Darbelnet’s theoretical framework, Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang employed a strategy of direct translation, specifically literal translation procedure, translating 中山狼 [zhōngshān láng] to “wolf”, while Hawkes used oblique translation, specifically modulation procedure, translating 中山狼 [zhōngshān láng] to “a brute like the wolf in

the old fable”. TT2’s oblique translation strategy and modulation procedure enhanced the translation’s vividness, communicating the implications and message of the original text, thus simplifying comprehension for the audience. This example demonstrates that different translation strategies led to different interpretations and expressions of cultural elements in the target language.

Moreover, exploring translation errors in *Hong Lou Meng* was significant for several reasons. The translation process inevitably involved potential errors that had to be addressed to preserve the intended meaning (Lemine, 2023). Furthermore, the language of *Hong Lou Meng* is categorized as “Old Chinese”, which posed additional challenges due to its linguistic disparity from Modern Chinese (W. Li, 2011). For example, the word “曰” [yuē] in Old Chinese, meaning “say”, differed from the modern “说” [shuō]. Such differences posed challenges for translators, as many expressions were no longer commonly used in contemporary China.

As one of the greatest ancient novels, *Hong Lou Meng* held strong cultural resonance in China (J. Wang & Yu, 2019), and addressing translation errors was critical due to the intricate interplay between language and culture. Cultural differences were a primary cause of cross-cultural translation errors, which could significantly distort the original text’s cultural essence and intended meaning (Qiu, 2023). For instance, translating the color term “Qiuixiang” as “russet-green” instead of its traditional meaning “light olive” or “light yellow-green” demonstrated how errors could affect the translation’s fidelity and the reader’s appreciation of the novel’s cultural depth (Liào, 2018). Few studies had comprehensively examined translation errors in *Hong Lou Meng*. Existing research often focused on domestication and foreignization, with limited attention to error classification (An & Tan, 2021). This study aimed to fill this gap by

classifying translation errors from a cultural perspective through the classification of CSIs.

Thirdly, the problem also lies in the insufficient attention given to CSIs in Hong Lou Meng as a focal point of research. Previous studies have primarily focused on linguistic aspects of translation, broader cultural meanings, or individual elements such as translation strategies, without integrating CSI classification, translation strategies, and error analysis within a single framework. As a result, the challenges posed by CSIs—such as semantic ambiguity, culturally embedded allusions, and symbolic references—remain only partially understood. This lack of integration has left a research gap in systematically examining how CSIs are translated and how translation errors impact cultural transmission.

Another critical problem is that translation errors associated with CSIs have not been adequately classified or analyzed. While errors are inevitable in literary translation, especially when dealing with classical texts written in Old Chinese, the absence of a clear typology of errors from a cultural perspective limits our understanding of how mistranslations distort cultural meaning. Without such an analysis, translators risk obscuring cultural references, misrepresenting symbolic values, and weakening the cultural integrity of the text. For instance, translating the color term “Qiuixiang” as “russet-green” instead of its traditional meaning “light olive” or “light yellow-green” demonstrates how errors can distort the cultural depth of the original text.

Moreover, limited attention has been paid to the perceptions of translators and readers regarding CSIs. Translators’ perspectives on the challenges they encounter, and the strategies they employ, have not been systematically connected to readers’ reception of those translations. This disconnection makes it difficult to evaluate whether

translation strategies successfully convey cultural meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

In sum, the central problem being investigated in this study is threefold: the lack of an integrated framework for analyzing CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng*; the inadequate classification and examination of translation errors from a cultural perspective; and the insufficient exploration of the relationship between translators' strategies and readers' perceptions. Addressing these problems is essential for deepening our understanding of how CSIs function in translation and for improving the accuracy, accessibility, and cultural fidelity of Chinese-English literary translation.

1.4 Research objectives

This section aims to clarify the reasons and objectives behind the research. The main goal of this study is to investigate the complexities involved in the translation of CSIs within the framework of this thesis. Specifically, the study intends to accomplish the following key objectives:

1.4.1 To identify the CSIs in two selected English translations of the Chinese novel *Hong Lou Meng*.

1.4.2 To compare the translation strategies employed in the two selected English translations of *Hong Lou Meng*.

1.4.3 To evaluate the translation errors in the two selected English translations of *Hong Lou Meng*.

1.4.4 To explore translators' perceptions of the challenges and strategies involved in the translation of CSIs in classical novels.

1.4.5 To explore the target readers' perceptions toward the translation of CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng*.

1.5 Research questions

This study seeks to address the following questions:

1.5.1 What culture-specific items are found in the two selected English translations of *Hong Lou Meng*?

1.5.2 What translation strategies are applied to these CSIs in the two English translations?

1.5.3 What types of translation errors occur in the two English translations when handling CSIs?

1.5.4 What are the translators' perceptions of the challenges and strategies in translating CSIs?

1.5.5 How do the target readers perceive the translation of CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng*?

To address these questions, the focus of this translation study will be on analyzing David Hawkes's translation of "The Story of the Stone" (Cao, 2012a) and Gladys Yang and Yang Hsien-yi's translation of "A Dream of Red Mansions" (Cao, 2001a), both of which are translations of *Hong Lou Meng* under different titles.

1.6 Significance of the study

This study investigates the classification, translation strategies, and translation errors related to CSIs in the renowned Chinese literary masterpiece *Hong Lou Meng* and its English translations. The significance of this study is primarily demonstrated in its theoretical and practical implications.

1.6.1 Theoretical significance of the study

Understanding the theoretical significance of translation studies, particularly in the context of CSIs, is crucial for advancing the field. This section explores the

theoretical implications of the study, focusing on how it contributes to the understanding of intercultural communication, translation strategies, and the perception of CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng*.

Translation Studies increasingly recognizes the importance of culture in the translation process. According to Chowdhury and Hossain (2022), language serves as a medium for speakers to display their culture and uniqueness, influencing how they interpret the world. This study underscores the theoretical significance of CSIs by demonstrating their critical role in preserving cultural nuances in translation. By examining CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng*, this research contributes to the theoretical understanding of how cultural elements are maintained or altered in translation, providing deeper insights into the intersection of language, culture, and translation.

Examining the translation strategies applied to CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng* offers significant theoretical contributions. Strategies such as literal translation, modulation, and adaptation are explored, providing a comprehensive understanding of how different approaches can impact the translation's fidelity and readability. By highlighting the theoretical implications of choosing specific strategies and their effects on conveying cultural meanings, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on translation methods.

Moreover, understanding the perceptions of translators and readers regarding CSIs offers valuable theoretical insights. This dual focus enriches the theoretical framework by incorporating perspectives on both the production and reception of translations. Such insights are crucial for developing more effective translation theories that consider the holistic process of translation, from creation to consumption (Taber, 2018; Hu & Cadwell, 2016; Long, 2024). This comprehensive approach not only enhances the understanding of translation strategies and challenges but also ensures that

cultural nuances are effectively conveyed and appreciated across different contexts. By addressing both production and reception, the study aims to fill the existing research gap and promotes a more integrated approach to translation studies.

In summary, this study provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the translation of CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng*. By exploring the identification of CSIs and examining translation strategies and errors, it offers valuable insights that contribute to the broader field of Translation Studies. The study's findings on translators' and readers' perceptions further enrich the theoretical discourse, highlighting the complex dynamics involved in translating culturally rich texts.

1.6.2 Practical significance of the study

This study aims to provide practical insights into improving the quality of translations, particularly concerning CSIs. By examining effective translation strategies and common errors, it seeks to address core issues within Translation Studies, contributing to the improvement of translation quality, particularly concerning classical literary works like *Hong Lou Meng*.

At the core of Translation Studies is the issue of translation quality (Byrne, 2007). This study provides practical insights into improving the quality of translations, particularly concerning CSIs. Identifying effective translation strategies and common mistakes plays an important role in improving translation quality (Al-Mufti & Al-Rubai'i, 2023). This is particularly important for translating classical literary works, where maintaining the cultural essence is crucial (M. Xu, 2023). The findings highlight the importance of balancing cultural authenticity with readability in the target language, a challenge that is important to translating CSIs. Practical recommendations are offered to address this challenge, equipping translators with strategies to navigate the complexities of such tasks effectively.

The practical findings of this study also have significant implications for translator training and education. By analyzing translation strategies and errors, the analyzed examples can be used in translator training courses to teach translators. Understanding frequent translation errors and effective strategies is critical for improving students' translation skills, ultimately enhancing the quality of future translations (Jun, 2008).

It is expected that the study's findings will serve as a reference for establishing standards and norms in literary translation, especially in handling CSIs. This not only enhances the quality of translated works but also contributes to elevating the professional standards of the translation industry as a whole. Such standards are crucial for creating a more consistent and reliable process for translating CSIs, ensuring that they resonate authentically with diverse audiences.

From the perspective of translators and publishing houses, the findings of this study are instrumental in addressing and correcting translation errors. Publishers, in particular, bear the responsibility of ensuring rigorous quality assurance processes. By providing practical references for identifying and correcting translation errors in *Hong Lou Meng*, this study fills a critical gap in the field. It underscores the necessity of collaborative efforts between translators and publishers to maintain high standards of accuracy and cultural fidelity. Publishing houses can use the insights from this research as benchmarks for evaluating the cultural authenticity of their translations, ensuring that their works meet the expectations of both academic and general readers.

Accurate translation of *Hong Lou Meng* is vital for promoting Chinese culture globally. The preservation of cultural richness in translations not only fosters deeper cross-cultural understanding but also mitigates the risk of cultural misinterpretation.

This study provides insights into how cultural nuances can be effectively conveyed, ensuring that the unique aspects of Chinese culture are preserved for foreign audiences. The findings can be applied in cross-cultural education to enhance learners' understanding of cultural differences, thereby improving their cross-cultural communication skills. Such applications have far-reaching implications for nurturing international talent and facilitating global cultural exchange.

Furthermore, by examining translators' decisions and behaviors when dealing with CSIs, this research contributes to the practical implementation of functionalist theories in Translation Studies. It provides concrete examples of how theoretical models can be adapted to real-world translation challenges, bridging the gap between theory and practice. Understanding how translators navigate the dual demands of cultural fidelity and audience readability offers valuable lessons for refining translation methodologies and strategies.

Therefore, the significance of this study lies in its comprehensive examination of CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng*, its analysis of translation strategies and errors, and its exploration of the perceptions of translators and readers. The practical implications extend to translators seeking to refine their skills, educators developing training programs, publishers aiming for high-quality outputs, and policymakers promoting cultural exchanges. By addressing both theoretical and practical aspects, the study contributes to creating a more integrated and effective approach to translation that ensures cultural nuances are preserved and appreciated across different contexts. This perspective is essential for fostering meaningful cross-cultural dialogue and understanding.

1.7 Scope of the study

The primary emphasis of this research is on fiction literature, particularly examining the translation of works that delve into cultural aspects. Within the realm of fiction literature, the study specifically concentrates on analyzing the translation of CSIs in the two selected translations. The analytical scope is limited to the novel genre; other literary forms (e.g., poetry, drama) are not included.

For the purpose of this study, two authoritative English translations of Hong Lou Meng are examined. The first is *A Dream of Red Mansions*, translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang and published by the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing in 1978. The second is *The Story of the Stone*, translated by David Hawkes and published by Penguin Classics between 1973 and 1986. Both translations are explicitly introduced by their translators and publishers as complete English versions of Hong Lou Meng and are widely recognized in Chinese literature and translation studies as the two most authoritative English translations of the novel. Accordingly, the time frame of the corpus is bounded by the source edition used (Cao, 1996a) and these two complete English translations (1973–1986; 1978). Abridged, children's, excerpted, fan-produced or otherwise partial translations fall outside the scope.

Firstly, the scope of this study is confined to the study of Hong Lou Meng by Cao Xueqin (Cao, 1996a), and its two translations: *A Dream of Red Mansions* translated by Gladys Yang and Yang Hsien-yi (Cao, 2001a), and *The Story of the Stone* translated by David Hawkes (Cao, 2012a). This study does not include analyses of translations by other translators. Despite these constraints, this research strives to provide valuable insights into translation strategies and translation errors within the context of the chosen novel. While the scope may be limited, the study aims to add to the corpus of knowledge

on Translation Studies and its application to literary works. The languages covered are limited to Chinese (source text) and English (target texts); no other language pairs are examined. The empirical dataset consists of 200 CSIs identified in the source text and aligned across both translations using purposive sampling, as defined in the methodology. Only verbal/textual CSIs are studied; non-verbal or paralinguistic cultural codes (e.g., performance, images, prosody) are excluded.

Secondly, the research on the translation strategies of CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng* is based on Vinay and Darbelnet's model (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995), which includes direct translation and oblique translation. This study does not apply translation strategies proposed by other scholars. The classification of CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng* is based on Newmark's cultural classification (Newmark, 1988a), which includes Ecology, Material Culture, Social Culture, Organizations, Customs, Activities, Procedures, Concepts, and Gestures and Habits. The analysis focuses on these categories as operationalized in Chapter 3; items not meeting these operational criteria are not included.

Thirdly, this study examines the application of Translational Action Theory in addressing translation challenges and its connection to CSIs, translation strategies, and translation errors. The scope of the application of the theory includes its guidance in explaining how translators approach these challenges. Perception data are limited to CATTI-certified translators and translation students who have read both the source text and the two English translations, consistent with the definitions in Section 1.8.

Finally, the scope of this study includes an analysis of the perceptions of both translators and readers regarding CSIs. Following requests from other reviewers,

detailed methodological limitations (e.g., sampling boundaries, measurement constraints) have been relocated to Chapter 5; this section delineates scope only.

1.8 Definition of key terms

1.8.1 Conceptual definition

Culture-specific items: Culture-specific items (CSIs): CSIs are elements within a text that are deeply embedded in a culture and not universally understood outside of that cultural context. They refer to words or expressions that carry distinct cultural significance and are challenging to translate without altering their meaning (Newmark, 1988). In this study, CSIs are operationally defined and categorized according to Newmark's cultural classification, which includes ecology, material culture, social culture, organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts, and gestures and habits.

1.8.2 Operational definition

Culture-specific items: In this study, CSIs are identified as words or phrases within *Hong Lou Meng* that fall into categories such as ecology, material culture, social culture, organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts, gestures, and habits. These items are analyzed based on their presence in the source text and their translation in the target texts by Gladys Yang and Yang Hsien-yi, and David Hawkes.

Literary Work: For the purposes of this research, the term “literary work” specifically refers to the novel *Hong Lou Meng*, as well as its translations “A Dream of Red Mansions” and “The Story of the Stone”. The study examines these texts to analyze how CSIs are translated, focusing on narrative techniques and cultural nuances conveyed in the translations.

Translation strategies: In this study, translation strategies are categorized as either direct or oblique, as defined by Vinay and Darbelnet. The specific strategies examined include borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation. These strategies are analyzed in their application to translating CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng* and its translations.

Translation errors: In this research, translation errors are specifically those discrepancies that impact the translation of CSIs in *Hong Lou Meng*. They are categorized into lexical mismatches, syntactic mismatches, and textual mismatches, and are analyzed based on how they affect the understanding and appreciation of the novel in its translated forms.

Translator: In this context, a translator is defined as a professional who holds the China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters (CATTI) certificate, indicating recognized competence in translation as per the standards overseen by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of China.

Reader: For this study, a reader is specifically a translation student at Wuhan University of Engineering Sciences, who has read both the original and translated versions of *Hong Lou Meng*. These readers are evaluated based on their ability to discern and evaluate the translation of CSIs, as well as their understanding of the translation strategies used and the quality of the translation.

1.9 Organization of the study

This thesis is structured into five distinct chapters. The introductory chapter serves as a preparatory section, thoroughly discussing and expanding upon the following topics: a preface; background, providing an introduction to the research

object, background, and significance of the chosen research object—namely the literary masterpiece *Hong Lou Meng*; statement of the problems; research objectives; research questions; limitations of the study; significance of the study; terms in the study; and subsequently providing a concise overview of the thesis organizational structure.

The second chapter provides a thorough discussion and examination of the literature pertaining to language, culture, translation, literary works, and novels, along with related academic research on *Hong Lou Meng* (Cao, 1996a) and its translations *A Dream of Red Mansions* (Cao, 2001a) translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, and *The Story of the Stone* (Cao, 2012a) translated by David Hawkes. The first part provides a historical overview of trends in language, culture, and translation. It examines the concept of culture, the significance of culture and language from a translation perspective, and cultural aspects as challenging areas in translation. The latter part is dedicated to the theoretical framework of the study.

The third chapter presents the methodology used to conduct the study. It elucidates the approach used to address the research questions and outlines the starting point of the research process. The chapter introduces the corpus chosen for analysis and provides the rationale behind its selection. The detailed methods for conducting a qualitative analysis to identify translation norms are outlined, ensuring a transparent and systematic examination of the data. The methodology section serves as a robust guide, offering clarity on the research process and how the findings are derived to effectively answer the research questions.

The fourth chapter undertakes a comprehensive examination of the source text of *Hong Lou Meng* (Cao, 1996a) and the translated works *A Dream of Red Mansions* (Cao, 2001a) translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, and *The Story of the Stone* (Cao, 2012a) translated by David Hawkes. Employing the approach of qualitative

research, this chapter aligns with the theoretical framework introduced in the second chapter and follows the methodology outlined in the third chapter.

The fifth chapter serves as the conclusive part of the entire study. It commences with a comprehensive review of all the results obtained from the research. Subsequently, the findings are discussed and interpreted to derive meaningful insights. The implications of the study are presented, highlighting the significance of the research in the context of literary translation and CSIs. Furthermore, this chapter provides valuable recommendations for future research, taking into account the limitations and delimitations of the current study. It also highlights the potential benefits of replicating this study with other text types and across different languages, thereby broadening the scope and applicability of the research. The concluding chapter presents a succinct summary of the contributions made by this study to Translation Studies and literary analysis, providing a clear and concise summary of the research's key findings and their relevance in shedding light on the complexities of translating CSIs.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of the study by outlining its background, statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, significance, scope, and key terms. In doing so, it establishes the research gap and highlights the novelty of this study, which lies in its comprehensive examination of CSIs in Hong Lou Meng. By integrating the analysis of CSI classification, translation strategies, translation errors, and the perceptions of both translators and readers, the chapter lays the groundwork for a holistic investigation into the complexities of literary translation.

The chapter also clarifies the theoretical and practical contributions of the study, explains the scope of the research, and defines the central concepts as they are applied