

On C-E Translation of Cultural Default in *Hong Lou Meng* from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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<p>Corresponding Author Ziyi Yang</p> <p>MTI student of University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China</p> <p>Article History</p> <p>Received: 16 / 03/2025</p> <p>Accepted: 30 / 03/ 2025</p> <p>Published: 05 / 04/2025</p>	<p>Abstract: Skopos Theory is an important part of German Functionalism Theory, and it is a translation theory put forward by German scholar Hans Vermeer in 1970s. Vermeer believes that translation research cannot rely solely on linguistics, and the most important factor in the translation process is the purpose of the overall translation behavior. Skopos Theory holds that the purpose of translation is the most important principle in translation activities, and translation strategies and methods should be determined by and serve the purpose of translation. Due to the differences in language and culture and social life, the problem of cultural default is becoming more and more prominent in cross-cultural communication. This requires us to strengthen cross-cultural awareness and use a variety of translation methods and strategies flexibly in translation. This paper will analyze the translation of cultural default in <i>Hong Lou Meng</i> from the perspective of Skopos Theory, based on the phenomenon of cultural default in China's classic novel <i>Hong Lou Meng</i>, in order to find the correct translation method of cultural default in literary works and improve the communication efficiency between the author and his intended readers.</p> <p>Keywords: Skopos Theory, Cultural Default, <i>Hong Lou Meng</i>, Translation, Fidelity Rule, Coherence Rule, Skopos Rule</p>
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1. Introduction

Hong Lou Meng, as an immortal masterpiece in the history of China's classical literature, reached the pinnacle of China's classical literary and artistic achievements. Its ideological content and artistic techniques have a lofty position in the history of Chinese classical literature, and it is a bright pearl in the treasure house of Chinese literature. Therefore, the translation of *Hong Lou Meng* is beneficial to the spread of Chinese culture, and the translation of cultural default in *Hong Lou Meng* is a great challenge for translators. As we all know, cultural default plays a great role in the translation of *Hong Lou Meng*, but different theories have different translation standards, which usually causes great controversy. Moreover, these theories often ignore the purpose of translation. This thesis will discuss the translation of cultural default from the analysis of the purpose of translation.

Skopos Theory is an important part of German functionalism theory. Skopos Theory holds that the purpose of translation is the most important rule in translation activities, and translation strategies and methods should be determined by and serve the purpose of translation. Therefore, we can explore the cultural default translation from a new perspective through Skopos Theory, and we can stop the arguments in the cultural default translation of *Hong Lou Meng*. Skopos Theory is the core theory of the functionalist approaches whose aim to dethrone the source text, it is put forward by Hans J.Vermeer, a student of Katharina Resis. "Skopos" is a Greek word which means "aims" or "purpose".

Skopos theory can provide theoretical basis for translation studies. "Every translation has its fixed recipients. So translation is a text produced for the target receivers in their circumstances with certain purpose"(Nord, 2001: 12).

This thesis will analyze the translation of cultural default in *Hong Lou Meng* from five aspects of culture. At the same time, under the guidance of Skopos Theory, it will make analysis of the English translation version of Yang Xianyi, find out the translation purpose and its specific influence on the translation process, and analyze how he achieves his goal in the cultural default translation of *Hong Lou Meng*.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is a brief introduction of the thesis. The second chapter firstly introduces the definition and concept of Skopos Theory, and studies three rules of Skopos Theory----skopos rule, coherence rule, fidelity rule. In the next chapter, the definition of cultural default and five classifications for its existence are briefly introduced, respectively are cultural default and ecological culture, cultural default and linguistic culture, cultural default and social culture, cultural default and material culture, cultural default and religious culture. The fourth chapter lists translation principles and strategies for cultural default, and then takes some concrete examples in *Hong Lou Meng* to analyze the phenomenon of cultural default from the perspective of Skopos Theory from five aspects. Finally, the fifth chapter summarizes the whole thesis.

2. Skopos Theory and Its Three Rules

Skopos Theory refers to “the highest rule of a theory of translation, that is, any action is determined by its purpose. In other words, the end justifies the means”(Reiss and Vermeer, 2014: 90). The core concept of Skopos Theory is that the most important factor in the translation process is the purpose of the overall translation behavior. Obviously, translation is a purposeful activity based on the source text, which plays a leading role in choosing translation strategies. “Skopos Theory reflects the general change from the main language and quite formal translation theory to a more theoretical and socio-cultural oriented translation concept”(Gentzler, 2004: 78). Therefore, Skopos Theory is a cross-cultural translation theory, through which we can rethink the internal relationship between translation and culture. Translators can achieve the expected translation purpose by transmitting a certain language and culture. Skopos Theory provides a new explanation for translators, target readers, source texts and target readers, so that translators can choose appropriate translation strategies more freely in order to achieve translation purposes. Skopos Theory holds the view that the primary rule of translation activity is translation purpose, and its ultimate goal is to obtain appropriate results, which also need to clearly show that the translation should meet the needs of the predetermined communicative purpose and functional purpose in translation behavior.

2.1 Brief Introduction to Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory is mainly put forward by four representatives, and its development process is as follows.

The first is Katharina Reiss, who introduced functional category into translation criticism for the first time. She believes that the ideal translation is “in the target language, the purpose is to achieve equivalence in the conceptual content, language form and communicative function of the source text”(Nord, 2001: 9).

The second is Vermeer, who put forward Skopos Theory, and he believed that translation studies needed to get rid of the shackles of the original text-centered theory. According to this theory, translation is a purposeful and fruitful behavior based on the original text, which must be completed through consultation, and a series of rules must be followed in translation, with the purpose rule in the first place.

The third is Justa Holz Mantari, another scholar who promotes functionalism theory. She put forward the theory of translation behavior by referring to the theories of communication and behavior, and further developed the functionalist translation theory.

The fourth is Christine Nord, who comprehensively summarizes and perfects the functionalist theory. She sorted out the theories of functionalism and put forward that translators should follow the guiding rule of “function plus loyalty”, thus perfecting the theory.

2.2 Three Rules of Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory consists of three rules—skopos rule, coherence rule, fidelity rule. Among them, the skopos rule is the primary rule, and the other two rules are complementary.

Skopos rule is the first rule to be followed in all translation activities, that is to say, translation should function in the specific situation and culture of translation in the way expected by the receiver. “The first rule of any translation process is to determine

the purpose of the whole translation action” (Nord, 2001: 27). The use of the skopos rule includes the purpose, situation, time and place of the recipient of the translation, the communication medium and the due function of the translation.

The Coherence rule refers to “intra—textual coherence, intra—textual coherence means that the message makes sense to the recipient in a certain situation”(Reiss and Vermeer, 2014: 91). The rule of coherence is to help translators choose translation strategies under the guidance of coherence, so that the translation has practical significance in the target culture and the recipients can understand the translation. The translation is readable and acceptable, which can make the receiver understand and make sense in the target culture and the communicative context in which the translation is used.

Fidelity Rule refers to “inter-textual coherence, which means the coherence between the source text and the target text”(Reiss and Vermeer, 2014: 102). This is equivalent to the so-called faithfulness to the original in other translation theories, but the degree and form of faithfulness to the original depend on the purpose of the translation and the translator’s understanding of the source text. Under this principle, the purpose of translation and the translator’s understanding of the original text determine the similarity between the translation and the original text, and also depend on the purpose of translation, which can vary with the purpose.

3. Introduction to Cultural Default in *Hong Lou Meng*

Cultural default is defined as “the lack of relevant cultural background knowledge between the author and his target readers” (Wang Dongfeng, 1997: 234). Cultural default is of great significance to translation studies. In translation, cultural default is inevitable, which brings great challenges to translators’ work. Translators need to consider and use a variety of appropriate methods to skillfully deal with cultural defaults. Cultural default is of great significance to translation studies. In translation, cultural default is inevitable, which brings great challenges to translators’ work. Translators need to consider and use a variety of appropriate methods to skillfully deal with cultural defaults.

3.1 Definition of Cultural Default

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3.2 Classifications of Cultural Default in *Hong Lou Meng*

Classifications of cultural default in *Hong Lou Meng* will be discussed to further the study of it. Since cultural default is closely associated with culture, we can analyze its causes according to the classification of culture. “Culture can be divided into five types: ecological culture, linguistic culture, social culture, religious culture and material culture”(Eugene A. Nida, 1993: 114). Next, these five categories will be elaborated in detail, and these five

categories with specific examples in *Hong Lou Meng* will be analyzed, namely: ecological culture default, linguistic culture default, social culture default, material culture default and religious culture default.

Ecological culture is a culture formed by geographical location, climate and ecological environment in a specific environment, including the geographical environment, place names and climate characteristics of a nation. For example, “*海上方*”(Cao Xueqin, 1982: 104) of *Hong Lou Meng* refers to Penglai, Fangzhang and Yingzhou, which symbolize great energy and are fascinating places. If people don't know exactly where the “*海上*” refers in translation, they can't explain the word accurately.

Language culture refers to “the culture that expresses things through the language formed in the specific historical development process and social precipitation”(Eugene A. Nida, 1993: 136). The two languages belong to two different cultural systems, and their respective linguistic features will also be reflected in any language level such as pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax and rhetoric. In fact, language itself embodies the culture of a society, but because people in the same language and cultural area know the same language knowledge and vocabulary expression, it makes it easy for the original readers to understand the meaning expressed in the text, while the target readers can't do this because of the lack of relevant cultural knowledge. Therefore, the translator should find out the default problems behind the language and culture. For example, “*二哥哥*” and “*爱哥哥*” in *Hong Lou Meng*(Cao Xueqin, 1982: 277), in which “*二*” refers to the sequence of brothers and sisters in the family, while “*爱*” refers to an intimate relationship, which shows the straightforward character of the characters. Because we don't know the similar pronunciations and their meanings in Chinese, it is difficult for readers to understand the specific meaning.

There are many social cultures, including customs, traditions, historical background, ideas and meanings. This is determined by a specific social and cultural background, that is, social culture contains everything in a specific language and culture. People living in the same social and cultural background can easily understand the meaning behind the original, but such social and cultural customs are difficult for the target readers to understand.

For example, “*七月初七*” in *Hong Lou Meng* is the social cultural default word for cowherd and weaver girl in Chinese mythology. They fell in love but were separated and allowed to see each other only on the seventh day of July. So to some extent, “*七月初七*” has the connotation of “separation”. Yang translated “*七月初七*” into “the seventh of the seventh month” because Chinese readers have knowledge of this mythic information and can understand why Wang Xifeng considers her daughter's birth date to be a very unlucky day.

Material culture means the culture produced by the different living environment and habits of each nation and the different articles used and their cultural connotations. In translation, material culture represents materials or products different from other cultures. Some substances are invisible in other products, and people will have different views on them. Therefore, the meaning vacuum should be avoided in translation, and the meaning of the material should be compensated to prevent asymmetry.

For example, in many places in *Hong Lou Meng*, the characters' dresses are written, which are basically consistent with

the traditional dress culture and etiquette culture. When Xifeng made her debut, she wrote her “different from other girls” dress characteristics from Daiyu's eyes, which was very bright; Baochai's clothes are ordinary and elegant. Such a contrast, one is an aristocratic young woman, and the other is a girl from a good family, completely without losing their identity.

People are influenced by religious culture everywhere in their daily lives. In the feudal society of China, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism were the three religions that had the greatest influence on China society, and they usually infiltrated each other. In *Hong Lou Meng*, these three religions are also reflected. Religious culture can usually be divided into religious beliefs, religious systems, religious works and religious rules.

For example, Zhen Shiyin was mentioned for the first time in the book, and he lived a free life without seeking fame and wealth. In his dream, he dreamed of a monk, met Baoyu, a psychic, and then saw this couplet, “*假作真时真亦假, 无为有处有无*”(Cao Xueqin, 1982: 193). In fact, this sentence means that people in society usually mistake the false for the true for the sake of fame and gain, but treat the true as false instead, treat what is not as real, and treat what does exist as nothingness.

4. Translation Principles and Strategies for Cultural Default

In summary, guided by Skopos Theory, the translation of cultural default in *Hong Lou Meng* should follow three fundamental principles: realizing the communicative and aesthetic value of cultural default, ensuring the readability of the translated text, and maintaining appropriate fidelity to the source language. Based on these principles, translators can adopt four main strategies—literal translation, free translation, literal translation with notes, and amplification. Literal translation helps retain original cultural elements; free translation enhances understanding by overcoming cultural barriers; annotation provides necessary cultural explanations without disrupting the flow; and amplification fills semantic gaps to ensure clarity and completeness. Together, these strategies allow translators to balance cultural preservation with effective cross-cultural communication, achieving both functional accuracy and cultural resonance.

4.1 Translation Principles for Cultural Default in *Hong Lou Meng*

There are three translation principles for cultural default, next, these principles will be elaborated respectively.

The skopos rule requires that translation should function in the target language situation and culture in the way expected by the target language recipients. The purpose of translation behavior determines the whole translation behavior. Cultural default is the omission of the common cultural background in the process of communication, which has both communicative and aesthetic values in the process of translation. One is to improve the efficiency of communication, and the other is to improve the simplicity and beauty of the original text. A good translation should conform to or adapt to the behavior or expectation of the target culture. When readers associate the text with nonverbal information, they can realize coherent interpretation of the text and readers can fully understand the translation. Also, in literary works, cultural default is inevitable. This is created unconsciously by the author in most cases, but it still has important aesthetic value to

literary works. It reflects the interaction between the text and the reader in the process of reading. Therefore, when we translate the examples of cultural default in *Hong Lou Meng*, we need to fully reflect its value.

The coherence rule of Skopos Theory requires that the translated text should be readable. This is also intra-textual coherence. In this process, the translator needs to select information from the original text for translation, and the translator should ensure that the receiver of the target culture can understand the translation and make sense in the communication situation. As a common writing skill, the coherence rule can make articles brief and coherent by cultural default. Therefore, when encountering cultural default, we should fully grasp the relevant knowledge of the two cultures to make translation meaningful in the target culture.

The rule of fidelity in Skopos Theory requires that the translated text should be faithful to the original text, and the degree and form of faithfulness to the original text depend on the purpose of the translated text and the translator's understanding of the original text. Also, the relationship between the source text and target text cannot be neglected. "Fidelity rule is subordinate to coherence rule, and they are both subordinate to the skopos rule"(Nord, 2001: 32). Therefore, when we translate *Hong Lou Meng*, we must ensure that our translation is faithful to the plot of the novel.

4.2 Translation Strategies

The cultural default examples in *Hong Lou Meng* mainly use four translation methods, namely, literal translation, free translation, literal translation and note and amplification.

Literal translation, or direct translation, is rendering of the text from one language to another word-for-word rather than convey the sense of the original. This method can retain the national or local to some extent. When the original coincides with Chinese in the sequence of vocabulary, and the text has a high demanding for readability, we should adopt literal translation. Therefore, Yang's translation adopts literal translation when the cultural default may not bring readers understanding difficulties, and readers can infer its meaning according to the context. When enough information is provided in the context, the translation will not only affect the communication of cultural connotation, but may also play a role in introducing foreign cultural customs.

Next, some concrete examples in *Hong Lou Meng* will be listed to further elaborate the literal translation method, and I will elaborate them from the ecological cultural default, material cultural default one by one.

Example 1: 枉自温柔和顺, 空云似桂如兰。(第五回)

Yang: Nothing avail her gentleness and compliance, Osmanthus and orchid with her fragrance vie.

In fact, "桂" and "兰" are two kinds of flowers with fragrance. In Chinese, these two kinds of flowers are often used to describe the fragrance of women and to compare people's character and quality, but this is not known to English-speaking readers. Yang Edition directly translated these two kinds of flowers into "osmanthus, orchid", mainly to preserve the meaning of these two kinds of flowers, so that readers can infer the connotation from these two words. Here, Yang Xianyi adopts literal translation method, and retains the original culture.

Example 2: ".....巧媳妇做不出没米的粥来, 叫我怎么样呢?....."

Yang: "...Even the cleverest housewife can't cook a meal without rice. What do you expect me to do?..."

Every country has its own specific food culture. For China, its staple food is rice, but in Britain and the United States, wheat and bread are their staple foods, which is equivalent to rice in China. Mr. and Mrs. Yang chose to keep China's unique food culture in their translation, so they literally translated "粥" into "rice". Therefore, literal translation is also adopted here, which fully reflects the respect for the original culture.

Free Translation also called creative translation, is a supplementary translation method. The free translation is a translation that reproduce the general meaning of the original text. Free translation can make readers understand the translation more coherently, and can dilute the content with distinctive cultural characteristics, which can overcome language and cultural barriers. Although free translation is not an ideal way to spread the culture of the source language, it removes the cultural barriers that bring readers difficulties in understanding and enables readers to appreciate the translation better. It not only excludes cultural barriers, but also excludes the source language culture. Therefore, Mr. Yang, who aims at promoting cultural exchange, is cautious in using free translation in *Hong Lou Meng*.

Next, a concrete example of adopting free translation from the perspective of social cultural default in *Hong Lou Meng* will be explained.

Example: 宝玉又问表字。黛玉道: "无字"。(第三回)

Yang: "And your courtesy name?" "I have none."

In ancient China, the system of personal names was very complicated. Except for an ordinary name, terms like "字" and "号" are often used by people to address themselves or others, because these terms can show people's social status and official position. In order to show respect, people will use the word "字" and "号" to address others. Therefore, when translating, Mr. and Mrs. Yang Xianyi translated the "表字" into "courtesy name", the purpose of which was to show respect, so that such important cultural information was preserved, and the target readers could also learn the cultural connotation through reading.

Literal Translation and Note means literal translation in the text, with notes outside the text, and explanations about cultural defaults are placed in annotations, in which cultural defaults are filled or cultural differences are corrected. Annotation can better convey the author's artistic motivation, preserve the cultural factors of the original work, and is not limited by space, so Yang's translation of *Hong Lou Meng* also adopts annotation to deal with cultural default.

Next, a concrete example of adopting annotation from the perspective of Linguistic cultural default in *Hong Lou Meng* will be explained.

Example: 将那三春看破,(第五回)

Yang: She will see through the three Springs, ...

Note: A pun meaning the three months of spring and the three elder Jia girls. All the Jia girls had the character chun or spring in their name.

This is a pun, because Yuanchun, Tanchun and Yingchun are Xichun's three sisters, and Xichun lost hope in life after seeing the tragic lives of the three sisters. Through the pun of Sanchun, she skillfully expressed Sanchun's tragic life. In the translation of Yang's version, the tragic fate of three Jia girls is reflected. Yang Xianyi's annotation method not only shows the linguistic features, but also fully shows the tragic fate of the characters.

Amplification is a commonly used translation technique, which means adding some words, short sentences or sentences in translation according to the different ways of thinking, language habits and expressions between English and Chinese, so as to express the meaning contained in the original text more accurately. The premise of amplification, that is, it can't affect the original meaning, and the translator can't add translation as he wants, which draws a bottom line for the translator to use amplification.

Next, a concrete example of adopting amplification of cultural default in *Hong Lou Meng* will be explained.

Example: 却说王夫人唤上金钗的母亲来.....

Yang: Our story last told how Golden's mother was summoned...

This sentence is translated by the method of amplification. As we all know, amplification means adding words to the translation to make the translation complete and faithful to the original. In this sentence, there was no subject originally, and the subject actor "our story last told" was added before "却说" to make the translation more complete and fluent.

5. Conclusion

This thesis analyzes the translation of cultural default in *Hong Lou Meng* from the perspective of Skopos Theory, based on the cultural default phenomenon in China's classic novel *Hong Lou Meng*, in order to find the correct translation method of cultural default in literary works and improve the communication efficiency between the author and his intended readers. The translation of *Hong Lou Meng* is beneficial to the spread of China culture, and the cultural default translation in *Hong Lou Meng* is a great challenge for translators. In the past, the research on cultural default in *Hong Lou Meng* was usually based on some specific translation strategies and methods, so the conclusions were different. However, the study of English versions of *Hong Lou Meng* is attracting more and more attention and gradually becoming a hot spot. In the process of writing this thesis, I collected a lot of documents about Skopos Theory, cultural default and *Hong Lou Meng* and made a comparative study. I elaborated the definition and principle of Skopos Theory, the definition and classification of cultural default, and listed translation examples in *Hong Lou Meng*, and found translation strategies of cultural default in *Hong Lou Meng* from the perspective of Skopos Theory, including literal translation, free translation, literal translation and note and amplification, and I also understood that translation skills should be widely used in subsequent translation practice.

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