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# The Art of Translation: Methods to Deal with the Cultural Connotations of Monster Names in the *Xiyouji*

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ABSTRACT

*Xiyouji*, one of the four famous works in China and the first romantic long mythological novel by Wu Chengen, contains a large number of monster names that embody numerous Chinese cultures like Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Therefore, it is impossible to avoid dealing with these cultural factors when translating these monsters' names. How translators deal with these monsters' names that are loaded with Chinese culture becomes a question we cannot neglect. This article briefly explores the double meaning of some monster names in *Xiyouji* and examines the translation methods used in the English version of the canon by Antony Yu. The present study holds the philosophy of translation that any translating experiment is advisable in dealing with the names if their appropriate cultural connotations can be made clear.

## 1. Introduction

*Xiyouji*, one of the four masterpieces of Chinese classic novels, appeared in the late Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty, and was widely welcomed by domestic and foreign readers. *Xiyouji* is a story about the journey of a Buddhist monk and his three disciples to India for Buddhist Scriptures during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). On their way they fight devils, conquer eighty-one disasters, and finally they get the Buddhist Scriptures and reward. The story is based on a real person and real events that happened in the Tang Dynasty, and had long been handed

down for many years, was finally finished by Wu Chengen, a novelist in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)<sup>[1]</sup>. *Xiyouji* was immensely popular in China for over 400 years owing to its novel and complicated plots, unique and vivid characters, profound and incisive ideological content, and light-hearted style. There are 100 chapters in the novel.

## 2. *Xiyouji* and Its Monster Names

*Xiyouji* is one of the most classical works of Chinese mythical novels. In *Xiyouji*, the specific names of more than four hundred characters are given. The members of inhuman group in *Xiyouji* are plenty. Besides Taoist

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immortals and Buddhist gods, there are a great number of monsters. Some of them transformed from plants or animals. They have human figures and plant or animal characteristics. Some of them belong to strange-formed ghosts. Therefore, the names of these monsters are various.

Specifically speaking, they can be divided into six categories. The first category is the names with appearance features including the prototype of plants and animals that can transform into human beings, that is, the plant names and animal names. The second category is the names with religious features including Taoist and Buddhist. They are to show the origins and characteristics of the monsters. The third category includes the nicknames which are given after plants and animals become human beings. The fourth category is the names with geographical features which consist of the residences of monsters, and attributive words, such as “大王” (dà wáng). The fifth category is the names with rhetorical features including satire and loop which expose contradictions or shortcomings of the monsters. And the sixth category is the names with folk culture including constellation and 12 symbolic animals.

### 3. Translaton Methods For Monster Names in the *Xiyouji*

Because of its high artistic value, *Xiyouji* has been translated into different languages, among which the number of English versions is especially plentiful. But there are only two unabridged English versions, one is translated by British scholar Jenner, and the other belongs to Chinese American Anthony C. Yu, whose translation is widely considered as the most faithful to the original work and has high academic value [2]. In this article, we make a tentative study of the rendering of some monster names in the *Xiyouji*, focusing on the cultural meanings of the names and the translation methods in the English version of the Chinese classic by Anthony C. Yu. There are dozens of monster names in the *Xiyouji* (see Table 1). Let us look at some examples in the specific paragraphs in the novel.

#### 3.1 Names with Appearance Features

Example:

Wu Chengen: 你受了人间香火，容一个黑熊精在那里领住。( *Xiyouji*, Chapter 17)

Anthony C. Yu: Where you receive the services of fire and incense from the local people. But you also permitted a Black Bear Spirit to live nearby. (2012: 361, Vol, 1)

In the translation of “黑熊精” (hēi xióng jīng), by using the adjective of “black” to convert the adjective of the source text “黑” (hēi), the noun of “bear” and “spirit” to

Table 1. Monsters in the *Xiyouji* and their translations.

Types	ST	Anthony C. Yu
Names with appearance features	黑熊精	Black Bear Spirit
	虎先锋	Tiger Vanguard
	金角大王	Great King Golden Horn
	银角大王	Great King Silver Horn
	九头虫	Nine-headed Insect
	白骨夫人	Lady White Bone
	黄袍老怪	Old Monster Yellow Robe
	九尾狐狸	Nine-tailed Fox
	独角兕大王	Great King One-Horned
	圣婴大王	Great King Holy Child
	红孩儿	Red Boy
	白衣秀士	White-robed Scholar
	斑衣鳜婆	Stripe-coated perch-mother
	六耳猕猴	Six-eared macaque
	百眼魔君	Demon Lord of a Hundred Eyes
	青毛狮子怪	Green-haired lion fiend
	黄牙老象	Yellow-tusked old elephant
	黄狮精	Yellow Lion Spirit
	蜜、蚂、斑、虻、蜡、蜻	Bee, Hornet, Cockroach, Cantharis, Grasshopper, Maggot, Dragonfly
	青脸儿	Child Blue Face
美后	Queen Beauty	
鼍洁	Clean Iguana	
Names with religious features	如意真仙	True Immortal Compliant
	地涌夫人	Mistress Ground-Rushing
	半截观音	Bisected Guan-yin
	凌虚子	Master Transcending Void
	罗刹女	Raksasi
	雪狮	Snow Lion
	黄眉老佛	Old Buddha of Yellow Brows
	混世魔王	Monstrous King of Havoc
	独角鬼王	One-Horn Demon King
Nicknames	平天大圣	The Great Sage, Parallel with Heaven
	复海大圣	The Great Sage, Covering the Ocean
	混元大圣	The Great Sage, United with Heaven
	移山大圣	The Great Sage, Mover of Mountains
	通风大圣	Fair Wind Great Sage
	驱神大圣	God-Routing Great Sage
	齐天大圣	The Great Sage, Equal to Heaven
	黄风大王	Great King Yellow Wind
	虎力大仙	Tiger-Strength Great Immortal
	鹿力大仙	Deer-Strength Great Immortal
	羊力大仙	Goat-Strength Great Immortal

Table 1 continued

Types	ST	Anthony C. Yu
	玉面公主	Princess Jade Countenance
	铁扇公主	Princess Iron-Fan
	大力牛魔王	Mighty Bull Demon King
	春娇	Spring Grace
	小钻风	Little Wind Cutter
	云程万里鹏	Roc of Ten Thousand Cloudy Miles
	万圣龙王	All Saints Dragon King
	九灵元圣	Ninefold-Numina Primal Sage
	辟寒大王	Great King Cold-Deterrent
	辟暑大王	Great King Heat-Deterrent
	辟尘大王	Great King Dust-Deterrent
	狐阿七大王	Great King Fox Number Seven
	灵感大王	Great King of Numinous Power
	拂云叟	Cloud-Brushing Dean
	孤直公	Squire Lonesome Rectitude
	凌空子	Master Void-Surmounting
熊山君	Bear Mountain Lord	
杏仙	Apricot Immortal	
Names with geographical features	南山大王	Great King of South Mountain
Names with rhetorical features	奔波儿蹿 蹿波儿奔	Busy Bubble Bubble Busy
	刁钻古怪 古怪刁钻	Shifty-and-Freaky Freaky-and-Shifty
	兴烘掀 掀烘兴	Hurly-Burly Burly-Hurly
	云里雾 雾里云	Cloud-in-Fog Fog-in-Cloud
	急如火 快如风	Quick-as-Fire Swift-as-Wind
	精细鬼 伶俐虫	Sly Devil Wily Worm
	巴山虎 倚海龙	Hill-Pawing Tiger Sea-Lolling Dragon
	马、流	Ma, Liu
	奔、巴	Ben, Ba
	有来有去	Going and Coming
Names with folk culture	劲节十八公	Knotty Virtue, Squire Eight-and-Ten
	奎木狼	Revati, the Wood-Wolf Star
	特处士	Steer Hermit
	寅将军	General Yin
	赛太岁	Jupiter's Rival
	猢狲	Gibbon-lion
	狻猊	Suanni
	白泽	Baize
	伏狸	Wildcat
	转象	Elephant-Baiter

convert the noun of “熊” (xióng) and “精” (jīng) in original work, the target language completely matches with the source text not only in the aspect of part of speech but also in word order. Such kind of translation could retain the flavor of the original language in the target language.

### 3.2 Names with Religious Features

Example:

Wu Chengen: 旁边那个盘儿底下却有字，刻道：“凌虚子制”。(*Xiyouji*, Chapter 7)

Anthony C. Yu: The tray, which had fallen to one side, had an inscription on the bottom: “Made by Master Transcending Void.” (2012: 459, Vol. 1)

“凌虚子” (líng xū zi) is a Daoist name. His prototype is a gray wolf, who appeared in Chapter 7. He holds a glass tray on which there are two magic pills to celebrate Black Bear Spirit’s birthday.

Taoism is a traditional Chinese religion. Taoist ideology generally focuses on nature, the relationship between humanity and the cosmos, health and longevity, and Wu Wei (action through inaction), which is thought to produce harmony with the Universe. In the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), Liu Ze’en, a Daoist, whose pseudonym is also “凌虚子”. It is said that he is an undisciplined, erudite and eccentric person who can reach the world in an instant and knows the past and the future, thus people write *Liu Ze’en: A Biography* to honor him. For literal meaning, “凌” (líng) means “to become free of negative attitudes, thoughts, or feelings that limit what you can achieve”. The essence of the Daoist is invisible, that “虚 (xū)”, and the void is the state that carries nothingness. As to “子” (zi), there is no difference between men and women in Taoist names. This shows that “凌虚子” is related to Daoist culture. This example implies that the monster pursues immortality, which is a kind of metonymy for Daoist culture. Generally speaking, we have to do research on the cultural meaning of the monster and figure out its cultural contextual meanings.

Yu’s translation of “Master Transcending Void” enables target readers to realize how magical the monster is. By adding the noun “master”, the characteristics of the monster are conveyed accurately. However, it fails to convey the connotation of the monster. It can be argued that, without the contextual knowledge about the word “虚” in Chinese Daoist culture, the target readers may have to make great effort to get the associative meaning in Yu’s version.

In my opinion, adding a note may facilitate target readers’ understanding: “the Chinese word xu, literally a situation in which something important that is usually present is no longer there, is used here by the novel in addressing his Daoist culture”.

### 3.3 Nicknames

Example:

Wu Chengen: 道士云：“我大师父。号做虎力大仙；” (*Xiyouji*, Chapter 44)

Anthony C. Yu: The Daoist replied, “The eldest master is called the Tiger-Strength Great Immortal;” (2012: 271, Vol, 2)

The name “虎力大仙” (hǔ lì dà xiān) is comprised of four Chinese words, namely “虎” (hǔ), “力” (lì), “大” (dà), “仙” (xiān), each of the four words has the meaning of “power” in the source language. By piling up such words together to make up a name, the author of the original work wants to show that the owner is very powerful and is a leader among the demons. Furthermore, the word “虎” of the name could reveal the nature of the monster that it is a tiger. Therefore, Yu chooses fairly equivalent words to transmit the meaning that the author of the original work wants to express to the target language.

### 3.4 Names with Geographical Features

Example:

Wu Chengen: “那泼和尚，你认不得我？我乃南山大王，数百年放荡于此。” (*Xiyouji*, Chapter 86)

Anthony C. Yu: “Brazen monk, don’t you recognize me? I am the Great King of South Mountain.” (2012: 283, Vol, 4)

In the original context, Pilgrim said: “How many years have you lived that you dare assume that title.” And the prototype of this monster is a leopard who lives in Joined-Ring Cave, the Broken-Cave, the Mist-Concealing Mountain. James Legge, a famous translator, offers the description of the “南山” (nán shān) in the *She King Minor Odes of the Kingdom* as follows: “As the age of the southern hills, never waning, never falling.<sup>[3]</sup>”. The above shows that “南山” implies longevity. While Yu retains the mountain image and translates it into “South Mountain”, but fails to clarify the symbolic meaning of “南山”. In my opinion, adding a note may facilitate target readers’ understanding: “the Chinese word nan shan, literally South Mountain, is used here by the novel in addressing his longevity”.

### 3.5 Names with Rhetorical Features

Example 1:

Wu Chengen: 他叫做奔波儿灞，我叫做灞波儿奔。 (*Xiyouji*, Chapter 62)

Anthony C. Yu: He is called Busy Bubble, and I am called Bubble Busy. (2012: 172, Vol, 3)

It has been mentioned in previous text that name is a sign that could be translated by transliteration, but it also

said that names, especially those in the literature, have their implied meanings. The appellation “奔波儿灞 (bēn bō ér bà)” and “灞波儿奔 (bà bō ér bēn)” is an interesting group, ‘their titles mean that both of them are keen to run back and forth to serve their bigwigs.’<sup>[4]</sup>. The first word and the tail word of the two original appellations are entirely inversion and the pronunciations are perfect in rhyme. To get the appropriate translation, Yu adopts free translation here by choosing the words “Busy Bubble” and “Bubble busy” which is matching both in word inversion and phonetic rhyme. The two translations could also convey the implied meaning of the original language. Yu’s translation here not only conveys the meaning of the original text figuratively but also vividly reproduces the feature of the source language.

Example 2:

Wu Chengen: 都有名字一个叫做云里雾，一个叫做雾里云；一个叫做急如火，一个叫做快如风；一个叫做兴烘掀，一个叫做掀烘兴 (*Xiyouji*, Chapter 41)

Anthony C. Yu: Their names were: Cloud-in-Fog, Fog-in-Cloud, Quick-as-Fire, Swift-as-Wind, Hurly-Burly, Burly-Hurly. (2013: 405, Vol, 2)

The rhetorical features of each set of names are the first word of one name is the last word of another name and vice versa.

Yu misunderstands the meanings of the first two names. In his version, the renditions of “云里雾” (yún lǐ wù, fog in cloud) and “雾里云” (wù lǐ yún, cloud in fog) are “Cloud-in-Fog” and “Fog-in-Cloud” respectively, while the real meanings of these two names should be “Fog-in-Cloud” and “Cloud-in-Fog” respectively.

As to the next two names, the key word “掀烘” (xiān hōng) originated from *Shenlou Zhi* (蜃楼志) by Yuing Laoren (庾岭劳人)<sup>[5]</sup>. It is set in the southeastern province of Guangdong, and largely in the city of Guangzhou itself—in fact, it is a regional novel. Hanan, Patrick (1927-2014), a famous translator, offers the description of the “掀烘” in the *Mirage* as follows: “A priest and a nun are in bed together.<sup>[6]</sup>” While he did not translate the second line, we can know the word “掀烘” (hōng xiān) refers to a sexual configuration according to the original context. Li Xiaolong<sup>[7]</sup> offers the description of the monsters in the *A Study of the Names of “Little Monsters”* in *Journey to the West* as follows: “the meaning of “掀烘” in Cantonese is likely a homonym for “必古” (bì gǔ), a nickname for Scholar Wen in *The Golden Lotus*”.

Yu skillfully uses the English compound “Hurly-Burly” and reverses the two parts of that word into “Burly-Hurly”. These vividly present the original language features, but miss their cultural meaning.

In my opinion, adding a note may facilitate target read-



ers' understanding: "the Chinese word "掀烘", literally heater and cooker, but here it evidently refers to a sexual configuration".

### 3.6 Names with Folk Culture

Example 1:

Wu Chengen: 十八公道: "霜姿者号孤直公, 绿鬓者号凌空子, 虚心者号拂云叟, 老拙号曰劲节。" 劲节十八公笑道。(Xiyouji, Chapter 64)

Anthony C. Yu: "The one with the frostlike feature," replies Squire Eight-and-Ten, "is called Squire Lonesome Rectitude. The green-haired one has the name of Master Void-Sormounting, and the humble one goes by the title of Cloud-Brushing Den. This old moron bears the name of Knotty Virtue." Smiling, Knotty Virtue, Squire Eight-and-Ten said. (2012: 343, Vol, 3)

There are four monsters, whose prototypes are cypress tree, juniper-tree, bamboo and pine tree respectively. Unlike other greedy monsters, they caught Tripitaka not for immortality, but for views exchange in the poem.

The first two words of the four monsters' names are their characteristics, manifesting cultural meanings of their prototypes. For the first three monsters, Yu adopts literal translation, which brings more deep cultural trace of the original language. As for "十八公" (shí bā gōng) of the fourth monster "劲节十八公" (jìng jié shí bā gōng), it derives from the *Annotation of The Records of the Three Kingdom* written by Pei Songzhi<sup>[8]</sup>: Ding Gu dreamed of pine trees, and he interpreted the dream that "松 (pine)" can be broken down into the three characters "十 (ten) 八 (eight) 公 (squire)", indicating that he can be made a squire after eighteen years. As a result, "十八公" becomes another name for pine trees. Not quite in line with the symbolism of the pine tradition, it shows the secular character of the pine.

Yu adopts literal translation plus annotation which not only retains the original cultural image, but also discloses the relationship between "松" (sōng) and "squire eight-and-ten".

Example 2:

Wu Cheng'en: 忽然一阵风至, 半空中现出一个妖精, 自称赛太岁。(Xiyouji, Chapter 79)

Anthony C. Yu: Suddenly a gust arose and a monster-spirit appeared in the air. Calling himself Jupiter's Rival. (2012: 281, Vol, 3)

In China, there is an old saying: "dare to start building on the head of Tai Sui". In the Contemporary Chinese Dictionary (Revised), "Tai Sui" was defined as "an appellation of a legendary immortal. In ancient superstition time, Tai Sui was considered living on the earth and moved corresponding with Jupiter in heaven. When one

starts building a house, people must avoid the place where Tai Sui lives, otherwise misfortune will befall them". Nowadays people usually use the proverb to describe people who dare to offend those bigwigs who will be avenged and Tai Sui is a symbol referring to fearful people. Thus the intention of this appellation which the demon gives himself is that he wants to advocate how powerful he is.

In Yu's version, this name is freely translated into "Jupiter's Rival". Because it took planet Jupiter one year to circle around the sun, "in ancient China planet Jupiter was also called '岁星' (suì xīng)"<sup>[9]</sup>. "In ancient time Chinese people presumed that there was a star which also circled around the sun but its direction was opposite to that of planet Jupiter. They called this star '太岁星' (tài suì xīng)" (ibid). So we can see, here, Yu mistakenly believes that "太岁" (tài suì) is planet Jupiter. Yu's translation of "Jupiter" is entirely the missing of the culture connotation.

According to the data analysis, the frequency of the translation methods used by Yu to translate monsters' names in the *Xiyouji* is obtained based on the statistic results (see Table 2). The data in Table 2 clearly show that it is the method of literal translation that the translator uses most frequently when translating the monsters' names.

**Table 2.** Translation methods for monsters' names in the *Xiyouji*.

	T	L	F	I	A	C	O
Yu	6	68	6	7	9	2	1

Note: T = transliteration, L = literal translation, A = annotation, F = free translation, I = imitation, D = addition, C = corresponding translation, O = omission.

## 4. Concluding Remarks

The majority of the names in Yu's English version correctly reflect the original meanings and express cultural verve and language features of the original names. He exerts his utmost effort to retain the original culture flavor of the monsters' names and offer his readers as much cultural and historical information of these monsters' names as he can. His version makes a great contribution to the dissemination of Chinese culture to foreign countries. Because of the translator's limitations on some Chinese cultures, it is hard to avoid personal thoughts affecting translation. Some renditions are even wrong. Of course, some translation errors and omissions inevitably occur. This enables other translators to learn the mistakes that exist in Yu's version and avoid making the same mistakes in the further when they try to translate monsters' names in *Xiyouji* or other novels. There are no fixed translation methods when it comes to deal with monsters' names, because every

translation method has its own advantages and limitations.

### **Conflict of Interest**

No conflict of interest.

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