

Translating Four-Character Structures in Chinese Literary Works on Traditional Architecture—A Case Analysis of *Canal Towns South of the Yangtze* and *Folk Houses South of the Yangtze*

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Abstract—Traditional Chinese architecture boasts a unique style and profound cultural connotations. Accordingly, the related literary works attain value for international dissemination. The four-character structures in these works serve as concise expressions for describing architectural details and design concepts. However, due to their linguistic implicitness, grammatical structure diversity, and rich cultural images, their translation into English requires multidimensional shift, redundancy elimination, and the avoidance of cultural defaults. This research has developed an effective translation workflow that leverages the synergistic strengths of Large Language Models (LLMs) and the human translator. By strategically employing tailored methods and techniques, it addresses the challenges in the translation process. Analysis suggests: It is recommended that the technique of shift be employed to address the implicit content and complex grammatical structures in translating four-character structures in Chinese literary works on traditional architecture into English. Besides, the selective application of combination and omission can help deal with information redundancy. Furthermore, it is advisable to apply foreignization and a combined method of literal translation and paraphrasing in conveying cultural images. These approaches will, to a certain extent, convert the untranslatability of four-character structures into translatability, enhancing the dissemination of the essence of traditional Chinese architecture.

Index Terms—Four-character Structures, Chinese literary works on traditional architecture, LLMs, *Canal Towns South of the Yangtze*, *Folk Houses South of the Yangtze*

I. INTRODUCTION

Chinese literary works on traditional architecture serve as the fundamental carriers of traditional Chinese architectural concepts and cultural elements. These texts introduce building components and design principles, and provide comprehensive insights into architecture's history, social context, and cultural significance. Therefore, they are abundant in literary four-character expressions. While research on the translation of architectural works still needs to be conducted in international contexts, Chinese scholars have extensively discussed the translation of such texts. The C-E translation studies encompass lexical and syntactical translation strategies in construction engineering texts (e.g., Sun et al., 2011), hard-to-translate brick masonry terms (e.g., Guo & Zeng, 2020), and the guiding principles for translating architectural drawings (e.g., Zhang, 2023), among others. Existing studies on the English translation of Chinese literary works on traditional architecture primarily focus on architectural terminologies (e.g., Xiao, 2018), cultural-loaded words (e.g., Yin & Wu, 2023), the intertextuality in the translation of multimodal architectural terms (e.g., Tian et al., 2023; Wang & Zheng, 2024), compositional translation of Chinese architectural culture (e.g., Wang & Sun, 2023), among other diverse research aspects. These studies contribute to the multifaceted exploration of translating Chinese literary works on traditional architecture into English.

Feng (1985) divided four-character structures into idioms and four-character phrases that can be flexibly combined according to the context. It is a distinctive word formation in Chinese expression, particularly common in Chinese literary works on traditional architecture. In translation studies, Chinese scholars have delved into four-character structures in the following aspects. In E-C translation, four-character structures have demonstrated full applicability and effectiveness in various contexts. Relevant studies have focused on the advantages and techniques of using four-character structures in the Chinese translation version of English sentences (e.g., Guo, 2009), their application in the translation of film titles into Chinese (e.g., Chen, 2009), and their use in Chinese translations of English literary works (e.g., Zhang & Ding, 2023). Furthermore, the application of four-character structures in different genres has garnered considerable attention in studies on its English translation. These structures are not only prevalent in product manuals (e.g., Zhang, 2011), but are also commonly seen in government work reports (e.g., Wu & Liu, 2016), as well as in traditional Chinese medical classics (e.g., He, 2023; Cui et al., 2023), highlighting their significant position and influence in Chinese language and culture. Currently, there is limited research on the English translation of the four-character structures in Chinese literary works on traditional architecture, and the translation methods and

techniques applied in other genres may not be entirely applicable to this specific context.

This article aims to explore and provide valuable references for the English translation strategies of the four-character structures in Chinese literary works on traditional architecture. The research objects are the original and English-translated versions of *Jiangnan Water Village (2nd ed.)* and *Jiangnan Folk Houses*, primarily based on the following considerations: Firstly, the Jiangnan region is one of the significant birthplaces of Chinese culture. “Jiangnan region’s traditional folk houses boast small bridges over flowing water, stucco-covered walls and dark blue tiles, carved beams and painted rafters, as well as *toukong* and flying eaves, all of which serve as vital cultural strands within the traditional architectural heritage” (Li, 2008, p. 88). It can be seen that Jiangnan architecture embodies a distinctive architectural style and mirrors the typical features of traditional Chinese architecture. Secondly, these two books are excellent works in the “Jiangnan Architectural Culture Book Series”, written by Lin and Ding, two experts in the field of architecture. The books render detailed explanations of architectural forms and decorative techniques, such as eave colonnades, *qilou* (similar to *sotto porticos*), brick carvings, and mud walls of houses, as well as the portrayal of the humanistic spirit contained in the architectural forms under the reflection of Jiangnan culture. Professional and accessible, these two books embody the quintessence of typical Chinese traditional architectural literature. One year after the original publications, their English translations, *Canal Towns South of the Yangtze* (translated by Jin & Chen) and *Folk Houses South of the Yangtze* (translated by Li), were released, showcasing the artistic and cultural charm of traditional Jiangnan architecture to international readers. Additionally, these two works frequently feature four-character structures, and they cover common patterns and translation difficulties in Chinese literary works on traditional architecture. The detailed analysis of the original texts and their English versions in these works will be crucial for understanding the English translation of the four-character structures in Chinese literary works on traditional architecture. The translated examples cited in this article are all from these two books.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF FOUR-CHARACTER STRUCTURES IN CHINESE LITERARY WORKS ON TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

“Four-character structures possess characteristics such as concise and condensed language, symmetrical and rigorous structure, harmonious and pleasant tones, as well as rich connotations and images” (Qiu, 2013, p. 149). In addition to these features, four-character structures in architectural texts exhibit implicitness brought about by their highly generalized nature, a diversity of grammatical structures due to their rigorous construction, and profound cultural images stemming from their implications.

A. Implicitness in Language

Feng (1985) noted that four-character structures, known for their brevity and profound meaning, allow for a concise and precise conveyance of the original text when translated from English to Chinese. However, this highly generalized nature may result in ambiguity and pose challenges to Chinese-to-English translation. Hall (1976) introduced the concept of high-context and low-context cultures. As a typical high-context language, Chinese is characterized by its implicit expressions and succinctness with profound meaning, with information transmission highly reliant on context. These features are particularly evident in four-character structures, where intricate meanings are condensed into refined four-character forms. When translated into English, it is often challenging to find precise equivalent expressions. For example, in the four-character structure “*笼捻巧意*” (Ding, 2008, p. 64), “*笼*” and “*捻*” refer to the finger techniques of the Chinese instrument *Pipa*. Within the specific cultural context of traditional Chinese architecture, the whole structure symbolizes that the ingenious design of the entrances of Jiangnan dwellings resembles the dexterous finger techniques of the *Pipa*. Given this example, grasping the four-character structures’ implicit and profound meanings requires contextual amplification.

B. Diversity in Grammatical Structures

The four-character structures in Chinese can be broadly categorized into four primary types according to their grammatical structures: parallel relations, semantic overlap, objective relations, and attributive structure (Pei, 2021, p. 57). What is similar yet slightly different is that, the most frequently encountered four-character structures in Chinese literary works on traditional architecture include parallel relations, semantic overlap, attributive structure, and subject-predicate structure. For example:

TABLE 1
EXAMPLES OF THEIR GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES

parallel relations	semantic overlap	attributive structure	subject-predicate structure
“灰瓦白墙” (Lin, 2008, p. 70)	“精致玲珑” (Ding, 2008, p. 179)	“枝叶扶苏” (Ding, 2008, p. 15)	“芙蓉出水” (Ding, 2008, p. 13)
words in parallel relations without a clear distinction between main and subordinate	coordinating words stress the same meaning	composed of a headword and modifier components	composed of a referent and a predicate serving as the semantic focus

As displayed in Table 1, the phrase “灰瓦白墙” (Lin, 2008, p. 70) employs a parallelism of notional words, “灰瓦”

(grey tiles) and “白墙” (white walls), depicting a tapestry of distinctive visual features of the architecture. Concerning the semantic overlap observed in “精致玲珑” (Ding, 2008, p. 179), both “精致” (exquisite) and “玲珑” (delicate) emphasize the intricacy of the architecture, with these “two parallel terms... appearing in pairs and conveying the same meaning” (Pei, 2021, p. 57). In the attributive structure “枝叶扶苏” (Ding, 2008, p. 15), “枝叶” (leaves and branches) serve as the headword, while “扶苏” (in overflowing vitality) functions as a modifier, forming a clear phrase hierarchy to describe the lushness and vigor of a foliage tree. Furthermore, within the subject-predicate structure of “芙蓉出水” (Ding, 2008, p. 13), the referent “芙蓉” (lotus) is promptly followed by the predicate “出水” (emerging from water), thus creating a distinct semantic focus. Besides the syntactic structures shown in Table 1, the phenomenon of multiple similar four-character structures arranged in parallel is referred to as consecutive four-character sentences. This term refers to the arrangement of “more than one four-character structure arranged in sequence... using synonymous repetition to enhance linguistic sense” (Zhang, 2011, p. 225). Therefore, during the translation, it is critical to follow the structural characteristics of the four-character structures and analyze the grammatical relationships between the notional words within them to convey the semantic meaning more accurately.

C. Richness in Cultural Images

“The four-character structures epitomize the cultural orientations embedded in Chinese phrases” (Lu & Yang, 2008, p. 104). They are abundant in cultural images, usually making it challenging to find expressions in the target language that fully align with the cultural schemas. For instance:

TABLE 2
EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL IMAGERY IN THE FOUR-CHARACTER STRUCTURES

“鹅兜差参” (Ding, 2008, p. 13)	“芙蓉出水” (Ding, 2008, p. 13)	“壶中天地” (Ding, 2008, p. 88)
“‘鹅兜’ refers to a round wooden container used for washing clothes in Wenzhou, with a handle shaped like a goose’s head” (Ding, 2008, p. 17).	The literal meaning is that of a newly bloomed lotus, commonly employed to depict an exquisite and captivating woman or characterize poetry or prose as fresh and elegant.	“壶” refers to a gourd, stemming from the legend of <i>Biographies of Immortals</i> .
It is the portrayal of the eaves of Jiangnan residences. They resemble a scattered but artful arrangement of round wooden vessels placed by a stream for laundry, vividly capturing the dynamic beauty of the roof eaves.	It depicts the harmonious blend of Jiangnan folk houses with the natural surroundings, evoking the understated charm like a budding lotus, embodying an innate and captivating allure.	It illustrates the sophisticated techniques of traditional Chinese garden design, capturing the essence of “large scenes within a small space”, where a confined space accommodates a diverse array of natural landscapes.

As illustrated in Table 2, these cultural images tend to carry rhetorical effects, incorporating elements of regional culture, historical allusions, and philosophical thoughts. During cross-cultural translation, it is challenging to find expressions corresponding to the cultural schemas of English. Therefore, ensuring that these images are comprehended and appreciated in the target language culture poses a considerable challenge for translators.

III. DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSLATING FOUR-CHARACTER STRUCTURES IN CHINESE LITERARY WORKS ON TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

The translation of four-character structures in Chinese literary works on traditional architecture presents significant challenges due to their implicit meanings, diverse structures, and rich cultural images: 1) The complexity of multidimensional conversion derives from their nuanced meanings and varied grammatical structures. 2) Four-character structures generally feature parallel relations, semantic overlap, and consecutive four-character sentences, inherently leading to redundant information. 3) There is a challenge of conveying cultural images likely to be absent in the target language.

A. The Complexity of Multidimensional Shifts

Catford posited that “by ‘shifts’ we mean departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the SL to the TL” (1965, p. 73). This view highlights the inherent differences in expressions between the source and target languages, particularly pronounced between four-character structures and their English translation versions. Thus, “translators must perform multidimensional conversions in terms of structure and content when translating four-character structures” (Wang, 2023, p. 108). The complexity arises mainly from two key characteristics of them: their highly implicit content and diverse grammatical structures. To begin with, the vast majority of them convey meanings implicitly, frequently applying metaphor and symbolism. Such implicitness challenges translators to capture the intended meanings. It necessitates a profound grasp of the context to ensure precise content-level conversion. Moreover, these four-character structures demonstrate a wide array of complex grammatical structures. Each type displays unique semantic features and word formation patterns, which complicates the task of adapting the original text to English expressions in a versatile manner.

B. The Presence of Redundant Information

“In terms of diction, Chinese includes many redundant modifiers to achieve rhetorical effects or to create balanced language. Regarding the sentence structure, Chinese also uses synonymous repetition to set the mood” (Shi & Zhang, 2022, p. 47). Tian (2001) classified redundant information into two types: grammatical redundancy, which originates from the inherent characteristics of the language system, and semantic redundancy, which stems from semantic analysis. On account of the literary rhetoric and expressive effects required, the four-character structures in Chinese literary works on traditional architecture typically manifest florid linguistic features. Given this, grammatical redundancy is less common in them, while semantic redundancy may arise from two situations: the “repetition of identical terms” (Tian, 2001, p. 31) and the “repetition of synonymous terms” (Tian, 2001, p. 31). For instance:

TABLE 3
EXAMPLES OF REDUNDANT INFORMATION IN FOUR-CHARACTER STRUCTURES

repetition of identical terms	repetition of synonymous terms
frequently found in parallel relations	primarily seen in semantic overlap and consecutive four-character sentences
“一错一落” (Ding, 2008, p. 41)	“张弛有度, 挑拽自如, 伸缩得法” (Ding, 2008, p. 41)
“或低或昂” (Ding, 2008, p. 41)	“有堂皆井, 无宅不花” (Ding, 2008, p. 83)

Table 3 illustrates that identical term repetition frequently occurs in parallel relations, such as the repetition of “一” in “一错一落” (Ding, 2008, p. 41) and “或” in “或低或昂” (Ding, 2008, p. 41). Meanwhile, synonymous term repetition is typically found in the semantic overlap of four-character structures, like “有” and “皆”, and “无” and “不” in “有堂皆井, 无宅不花” (Ding, 2008, p. 83). Additionally, this repetition can be observed in consecutive four-character sentences, like the three phrases “张弛有度”, “挑拽自如” and “伸缩得法” (Ding, 2008, p. 41) in a row. Translators are required to balance the rhetorical effects of the source text with expressions of the target language to carefully simplify and restructure redundant information to maintain the text’s fluency and readability.

C. The Phenomena of Cultural Defaults

The concise and refined nature of four-character structures can be seen in the omission of supplementary information to introduce cultural images, sometimes leading to potential comprehension difficulties and creating a “vacuum of sense” (Wang, 1997, p. 55). For example, “飞檐翘角” (Ding, 2008, p. 12) refers to a distinctive architectural component in Chinese buildings. Translating it as “cornice” in the Western cultural context would strip away its aesthetic value and cultural significance. While such a translation might be appropriate in specialized architectural texts to specify the exact component, it fails to convey the cultural essence in traditional Chinese architectural contexts. To preserve the cultural essence, the translator could consider adopting a foreignization strategy with a combined method of literal translation and paraphrasing. Hence, the translation version “*feiyan*, flying eaves in Chinese architecture” rather than the English equivalent “cornice” highlights the upward motion of the eaves and allows readers to gain new knowledge. This approach ensures that the aesthetic significance is maintained, showcasing the unique cultural charm of traditional Chinese architecture.

IV. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Translation Workflow

Wu (2024) has ushered in a new avenue of intelligent translation based on the reflection workflow. Leveraging LLMs, he structured the translation process into distinct stages: initial translation, reflection and suggestions, and optimized output. Drawing on the insights of his core viewpoint, this research follows the reflection principle, commencing with the use of the ChatGLM AI agent for the first-round translation, followed by the proofreading suggestions by Ernie Bot, and then an improved version by Kimi, all underpinned by the author’s post-editing to render the final translation.

B. Prompt Design

The AI agent features a novel, task-oriented, and custom-tailored approach to specific requirements and complex problems, without adhering to a universal standard or employing a one-size-fits-all design (Crouse et al., 2023). Therefore, in the first round of translation using the ChatGLM AI agent, it is crucial to design the prompts, with a thorough consideration of the characteristics of four-character structures in Chinese literary works on traditional architecture and the inherent challenges of their translation. The author has crafted the following prompt: “As a translation expert specialized in the English translation of four-character structures from Chinese literary works on traditional architecture, you are adept at capturing the subtleties, diversities, and cultural essence embedded within these concise phrases. When translating, be mindful of the implicit meanings, the variety in grammatical structures, and the richness of cultural images. Ensure that your translations navigate the complexities of multidimensional shifts between contexts and structures, streamline the presence of redundant information, and clarify cultural nuances to avoid

misunderstandings for the target audience. Your expertise lies in transforming these structures into the target language while preserving their depth and elegance, making them accessible and engaging for readers worldwide”.

The initial translation may reveal certain deficiencies, such as inappropriate content or structural transformations, the inclusion of redundant information, or the defaults of cultural images. Therefore, it is essential to have another LLM conduct a review. The prompt is as follows: “As a translation expert specialized in the review and refinement of translations for four-character structures from Chinese literary works on traditional architecture. Your task is to critique and suggest improvements for the existing translation provided, ensuring that implicit meanings are correctly interpreted, grammatical diversity is appropriately rendered, and cultural images are vividly conveyed. Address any complexities in context and structure, eliminate redundant information that detracts from the translation’s impact, and refine cultural nuances to prevent misinterpretation by the target audience. Your task is to elevate the quality of the existing translation, ensuring it retains the original structures’ depth and elegance, and resonates with a global readership.” Suppose proofreading suggestions provided by the Ernie Bot in the second round fail to adequately address these issues. In that case, the author will refine these suggestions to uphold the quality and accuracy of the translation. This iterative process allows for continuous improvement in translation quality and accuracy, ultimately leading to the generation of precise and fluent translations.

Subsequently, the final iteration of Kimi is tasked with integrating the refinements proposed by its predecessor to deliver the ultimate translation version. This final LLM must adeptly consolidate the suggested enhancements, ensuring that the translation is not only an accurate and elegant rendition of the original text but also culturally nuanced and contextually appropriate for the intended audience. The ultimate goal is to produce a translation that is both authentic and accessible. The prompt is detailed here: “As a translation expert specialized in translating four-character structures from Chinese literary works on traditional architecture, your role is to synthesize the suggested improvements and provide the definitive version. Build upon the recommended enhancements in implicit meanings, grammatical structures, and cultural images. Ensure that the final translation adeptly manages the complexities of multidimensional shifts at the content and structural level, is free of redundant information, and conveys the cultural subtleties to prevent any misinterpretation by the target audience. Your expertise is crucial in transforming the suggested revisions into a polished translation that preserves the original depth and elegance and resonates with and engages readers worldwide. Please craft the final translation based on the following revised text and suggestions”.

Most importantly, for the four-character structures’ implicit nature, contextual information and the architectural features associated with these terms should be fully integrated into the prompts to facilitate better understanding by the LLMs. For their complex and diverse grammatical structures, it is necessary to accurately convey their grammatical structural properties to aid the LLM in comprehension. Additionally, regarding cultural images, as much useful information as possible should be provided, or the model should be tasked with collecting and integrating this information to ensure accuracy and cultural relevance in the translation.

V. ANALYZING AND REFINING FOUR-CHARACTER STRUCTURES TRANSLATION VERSIONS IN *CANAL TOWNS SOUTH OF THE YANGTZE* AND *FOLK HOUSES SOUTH OF THE YANGTZE*

In *Jiangnan Water Village* (2nd ed.) and *Jiangnan Folk Houses*, the translation of four-character structures encounters difficulties in certain aspects: multidimensional conversion related to both content and structure, reduction of redundant information, and cultural defaults. By examining the translation examples in the English editions *Canal Towns South of the Yangtze* and *Folk Houses South of the Yangtze* (as seen in Tables 4, 5, and 6), this study aims to analyze their noteworthy strengths for reference and identify cases for enhancement based on the translation workflow, thereby proposing translation strategies that can serve as valuable references for future works.

A. Handling Multidimensional Shifts

TABLE 4
EXAMPLES OF MULTIDIMENSIONAL SHIFT

	Improper transformation at the content and structure level	Technique: Shift	
Number	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
The Original Text	“参差玲珑、顾盼生情” (Ding, 2008, p. 43)	“线条屈曲、圆转自如” (Ding, 2008, p. 25)	“方圆互寓” (Ding, 2008, p. 205)
The English Version	“multi-level” (Ding, 2009, p. 47)	“the crooked lines and the smooth shapes” (Ding, 2009, p. 24)	“the square-curved composition” (Ding, 2009, p. 243)

(a). Inadequate Multidimensional Shifts

In Example 1, the phrase “参差玲珑” (Ding, 2008, p. 43) consists of two parallel components: “参差”, which describes the staggered yet harmonious arrangement of buildings, and “玲珑”, which denotes their delicate and intricate construction. These two terms do not overlap in meaning. However, the translation only uses “multi-level” (Ding, 2009, p. 47) to convey the sense of “参差”, neglecting the nuance of “玲珑”, thus resulting in an undertranslation as defined

by Newmark (2001). This four-character structure is employed to depict the beauty of the horsehead wall. Following the translation workflow, the final version of “参差玲珑” is “tiered exquisiteness”. It encompasses the whole meaning of the structure to rectify the error of undertranslation. On top of that, the phrase “顾盼生情” (Ding, 2008, p. 43) embodies implicit meanings. In light of the context, it can be inferred that it compares the evocative gesture of someone lifting his or her gaze and glancing back to the play of light and shadow on horsehead walls. The translation fails to capture this poetic literary expression and preserve the original text’s meaning. Instead, a shift technique is recommended to convert the verb phrase “顾盼生情” (Ding, 2008, p. 43) into an adjective and a prepositional phrase “alive with the dance of light and shadow”. This version avoids verb accumulation at the structural level and clarifies the meaning at the content level, effectively illustrating the vibrant interaction in the horsehead wall design.

(b). *Approaches to Addressing Multidimensional Shift Challenges*

“English sentence structures are complex and lengthy, with flexible arrangements in logical order and semantic emphasis. In contrast, Chinese rarely use long sentences; semantic information is arranged according to specific rules, and semantic and logical relationships are usually indicated by word order” (Li, 2014, p. 12). In Example 2, the two four-character structures “线条屈曲，圆转自如” (Ding, 2008, p. 25) each form an independent clause. Here, “屈曲” serves as the modifier of “线条”, and “自如” modifies “圆转”, both being attributive structures that depict the aesthetic beauty of lines and the technique of brush strokes in calligraphy. Directly translating them into parallel short sentences without altering the sentence structure would result in a rigid version that does not conform to English expressions. The translator employs a transformation technique, converting the Chinese run-on sentences into noun phrases within a long English sentence, “the crooked lines and the smooth shapes” (Ding, 2009, p. 24), which offers a valuable approach to translation.

In Example 3, the phrase “方圆互寓” (Ding, 2008, p. 205) is a subject-predicate structure that has been translated as “the square-curvature composition” (Ding, 2009, p. 243), effectively achieving shifts in both content and structural dimensions. On the content level, this translation accurately conveys the aesthetic effect of Qing Dynasty furniture design. Here, “圆” refers to the curves in the lower part of the furniture rather than a complete circle. The word “curvature” captures a broader range of curvilinear characteristics. Thus, it ensures precise meaning. Additionally, on the structural level, the translator converts the subject-predicate structure into an attributive structure, which aligns with English stylistic conventions.

B. *Handling Redundant Information*

TABLE 5
EXAMPLES OF REDUNDANT INFORMATION

Number	Oversimplification	Technique: Combination	Technique: Omission
The Original Text	Example 4 “得心应手，神投气合，水乳交融” (Ding, 2008, p. 217)	Example 5 “依河设市，夹岸为街” (Lin, 2008, p. 59)	Example 6 “浓妆淡抹，美在相宜” (Ding, 2008, p. 31)
The English Version	“can match the colour” (Ding, 2009, p. 251)	“The streets...stretch along rivers and canals” (Lin, 2009, p. 67)	“Beauty Lies in Appropriate Make-ups” (Ding, 2009, p. 29)

(a). *Inadequate Redundancy Tacklement*

In Example 4, “得心应手，神投气合，水乳交融” (Ding, 2008, p. 217) is composed of three four-character structures forming consecutive four-character sentences. Translating this as “can match the color” (Ding, 2009, p. 251) oversimplifies the redundant information, focusing solely on the physical color match and neglecting the connotation of the harmonious integration between the wall and its surrounding environment. Inspired by the translation workflow, a combination technique is suggested to be applied to translate it as: “be attuned to the color palette in harmony and resonates with the quintessence of the surroundings”.

(b). *Approaches to Dealing With Redundant Information*

In Example 5, “依河” and “夹岸”, and “设市” and “为街” are repetitions of synonymous terms. They outline the development layout of streets along the river, creating semantic redundancy. The translator focuses on delivering the core meaning and avoiding redundant constructions in the original text. Hence, the translation applies a combination technique, and “The streets...stretch along rivers and canals” (Lin, 2009, p. 67) succinctly and precisely conveys the notion of spatial extension.

In Example 6, “浓妆淡抹，美在相宜” (Ding, 2008, p. 31) is a chapter title. It specifically refers to wall decorations: Whether the design is elaborate or simple, the key is its harmony with the environment to achieve a perfect balance. The omission of “无论” results in a semantic gap; it is categorized as “implicit semantic redundancy” (Tian, 2001, p. 31). Furthermore, the repetition of the synonyms “妆” and “抹” introduces semantic redundancy. The translator employs a

combination technique by merging “妆” and “抹” into a single concept and applies an omission technique by removing “浓” and “淡”, while retaining the core idea of “相宜”. The translation version, “Beauty Lies in Appropriate Make-ups” (Ding, 2009, p. 29), is attractive and readable. As Yan (1997) put forward, article titles should be brief and eye-catching. The translator’s approach in this instance is exemplary and thus furnishes an outstanding reference for other translators.

C. Handling Cultural Defaults

TABLE 6
EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL DEFAULTS

Loss of Cultural Images		Misinterpretation of Cultural Images		Strategy: Foreignization Method: Literal Translation Technique: Paraphrasing	
Number	Example 7	Example 8	Example 9	Example 10	Example 11
The Original Text	“菰雨生凉” (Ding, 2008, p. 92)	“五岳朝天” (Ding, 2008, p. 41)	“鸟篆虫书” (Ding, 2008, p. 25)	“四水归堂” (Ding, 2008, p. 41)	“檐牙高啄” (Ding, 2008, p. 179)
The English Version	“Chilly Rain” (Ding, 2009, p. 107)	“mountainous” (Ding, 2009, p. 44)	“seal script and clerical script” (Ding, 2009, p. 24)	“the courtyard house” (Ding, 2009, p. 44)	“rising eaves like birds sticking up their beaks” (Ding, 2009, p. 213)

(a). Loss of Cultural Images

In Example 7, “菰雨生凉” (Ding, 2008, p. 92) is the name of a pavilion by the water. “菰” refers to the aquatic plant zizania, “雨” denotes rain, and “凉” describes the refreshing coolness felt after the rain. This name blends natural landscape with sensory experiences, creating an ambiance of coolness and comfort amidst the zizania by the water. Translating this as “Chilly Rain” (Ding, 2009, p. 107) fails to convey the intended aesthetic, as it omits the visual elements of “菰” (zizania) and “雨” (rain), and “chilly” suggests an uncomfortable coldness, which contradicts the pleasant coolness intended in the original text. Adhering to the translation workflow, an apt translation is deemed “Pavilion of Rain-Born Coolness Amidst the Zizania”. This translation employs a foreignization strategy, aiming to preserve the cultural image inherent in the original phrase. Additionally, the term “pavilion” is incorporated to enhance the clarity and evoke a more vivid image of the architecture.

In Example 8, “五岳朝天” (Ding, 2008, p. 41) is used as an adjective to portray the grandeur of the horsehead walls. The metaphor of the Five Sacred Mountains is used due to their overlapping and multilevel features, as noted by the fact that “the trilevel-form horsehead wall is often employed” (Ding, 2008, p. 40). The use of “mountainous” (Ding, 2009, p. 44) cannot fully convey the layered meaning of the cultural image. Under the translation workflow, it is better to revise it into “the imposing eaves soaring skyward, reminiscent of the Sacred Peaks of China”. This translation effectively highlights the distinctive structure of the horsehead walls, allowing readers unfamiliar with the Chinese culture to appreciate their unique characteristics.

(b). Misinterpretation of Cultural Images

In Example 9, “鸟篆虫书” (Ding, 2009, p. 24) is a four-character structure with semantic overlap. “鸟篆”, also known as “虫书”, is an ancient Chinese pictographic script. Given the context in the article, which notes that “鸟篆” and “虫书” serve as “tile ornaments” (Ding, 2008, p. 25) and are “pictorial arts” (Ding, 2008, p. 25), it is clear that this term refers to an ornamental form of script characterized by the shapes of its strokes. The translated version of “seal script and clerical script” (Ding, 2009, p. 24) misinterprets the term and fails to capture the pictorial images of “bird” and “insect”. Translating it as “Bird-and-Insect Script” is advisable to preserve the ornamental and pictographic nature.

In Example 10, the term “四水归堂” (Ding, 2008, p. 41) describes the unique drainage design of horsehead walls in Chinese Hui-style architecture. The translator’s rendering as “the courtyard house” (Ding, 2009, p. 44) only acknowledges the shared feature of central drainage between horsehead walls and courtyard houses, but it fails to recognize that they represent distinct architectural concepts. Instead, it can be considered to apply the version as “‘funnel pattern’ house” (Ding, 2009, p. 91) by using the technique of paraphrasing. Thus, it will better engage the cultural schema of English readers, allowing them to comprehend the architectural layout more accurately.

(c). Approaches to Conveying Cultural Images

In Example 11, “檐牙高啄” (Ding, 2008, p. 179) originates from Chinese poet Du Mu’s Ode to Afang Palace. It is a distinct cultural image in Chinese literature. This term vividly describes the eaves of ancient Chinese buildings, which jut out like teeth, resembling bird beaks pecking at food. The translator avoids a literal translation or a rigid equivalent like “cornice brackets”. Instead, he employs the foreignization strategy and the paraphrasing technique, using “like” to introduce a simile, forming a translation of “rising eaves like birds sticking up their beaks” (Ding, 2009, p. 213). This approach effectively captures the dynamic visual effect of the eaves extending upwards, and preserves the essence and vivid images of the original description. A refined version of “yanya, rising eaves like birds sticking up their beaks” could serve better, for it enhances the transmission of traditional Chinese architectural and cultural images with a substantial impression on English readers.

VI. CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of the original books and English translations of *Jiangnan Water Towns (Second Edition)* and *Jiangnan Folk Houses*, this paper concludes that managing the implicit meanings and complex grammatical structures of four-character structures can be effectively achieved through shift technique and, when necessary, text reconstruction. To handle the redundancy commonly presents in these phrases, combining synonymous expressions or using reduction translation can help retain the core meaning. Upon addressing cultural defaults, the translator can employ the foreignization strategy, the literal translation method, and the paraphrasing technique to preserve cultural images while making suitable adjustments and interpretations. Since there is no direct equivalent to the four-character structures in English, researching their translation allows for a deeper understanding of and valuable insights into the linguistic and cultural differences between Chinese and English. The translation workflow is a collaborative effort, harnessing the generation and reflection of LLMs and the critical post-editing expertise of the human translator. These efforts, in turn, aid in disseminating China's rich traditional architectural culture and fostering a more nuanced and comprehensive global understanding and appreciation of China.

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