

A Study on Translation Strategies for Red-Culture-loaded Words in Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army Literature: A Case Study of Kanglian 1st Division

Mingxin Cong, Huilin Cai*

Jilin International Studies University, Changchun 130117, Jilin, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

Copyright: © 2025 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army literature serves as a vivid documentation of the history of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army. It encompasses diverse genres including novels, poetry, biographies, plays, as well as films and television dramas. Against the backdrop of China's cultural outreach strategy, translating and disseminating Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army literature holds profound contemporary significance. Among these works, red culture-loaded words, as unique cultural symbols formed through the historical accumulation of Northeast ethnic groups, possess deep research value. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the English translation of Sun Chunping's novel Kanglian 1st Division. By apply Eugene Nida's classification criteria for culture-loaded words and grounded in functional equivalence theory, it examines translation difficulties and summarizes translation methods and techniques for various types of red-culture-loaded words, contributing to the international dissemination of red culture.

Keywords: Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army literature; Red-cultural-loaded words; Functional equivalence Theory; Literal Translation; Liberal Translation

Online publication: August 26, 2025

1. Introduction

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, "cultural confidence" has become the core guiding principle for cultural development in the new era. Promoting Chinese culture to the world is an essential path to achieving cultural confidence. As a valuable asset of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics, red culture carries unique historical memories and spiritual essence.

Among these, the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army culture represents a vital component of red culture under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, featuring distinct regional characteristics and significant research value. As core vehicles for cultural transmission, culture loaded words encapsulate specific historical contexts and regional cultures. The cultural differences and communication challenges encountered during their English translation constrain the international dissemination of red culture.

Therefore, this article takes Sun Chunping's *Kanglian 1st Division* as its core corpus. By integrating Eugene Nida's classification criteria for culture-laden words and the theory of functional equivalence, it conducts an in-depth comprehensive analysis of the translation of red-culture-loaded words has been conducted to explore how to accurately translate various red culture-laden words in Northeast Anti-Japanese League literature, achieving a transition from linguistic equivalence to cultural equivalence, thereby enhancing the international dissemination of red culture.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition and classification of red-culture-loaded words

2.1.1. Definition

The concept of culture-loaded words was introduced by Guozhang Xu, who defined culture-loaded words as vocabulary carrying the unique connotations of specific cultures^[1]. These words reflect the distinctive patterns of activity accumulated by particular ethnic groups throughout their historical development, exhibiting significant differences from other groups. Professor Wenzhong Hu emphasized cultural distinctiveness in his definition, characterizing them as lexical items belonging to a specific group's cultural domain that directly or indirectly reflect its cultural traits^[2]. American scholar Mona Baker proposed a broader definition, suggesting that any cultural concept or entity unfamiliar to speakers from other cultural backgrounds can be considered a culture-loaded word. These concepts can be concrete or abstract, which encompassing everything from food utensils to religious customs^[3].

Essentially, culture-loaded words are linguistic expressions bearing the temporal and spatial imprint of a specific linguistic community. They convey unique cultural concepts and entities of a particular group, often serving as the most sensitive and direct linguistic carriers of that group's traditional customs and historical heritage.

Red-culture-loaded words are a derivative form of culture-loaded words. Liting Fu posits that red-culture-loaded serve as concrete carriers of the unique historical period of the Chinese Revolution^[4]. Therefore, red-culture-loaded can be defined as vocabulary or phrases rooted in the historical processes of China's revolution, construction, and reform. They function as linguistic symbols that embody specific red spiritual connotations and cultural ideological attributes.

2.1.2. Classification

Scholars have classified cultural-loaded words based on different criteria, forming distinct framework systems: Eugene Nida divided them into five major categories, namely the material cultural load words, ecological cultural load words, linguistic cultural load words, sociocultural load words, and religious cultural load words^[5]. Peter Newmark categorized culturally loaded vocabulary into five types^[6].

- (1) Ecological
- (2) Material culture
- (3) Sociocultural
- (4) Organization, customs, activities, procedures, concepts
- (5) Gestures and habits

Li Jianjun proposes three categories: material cultural load words, conceptual cultural load words, and behavioral cultural load words. Cheng Chen and Zhou Yufen classify cultural load words into four major categories: folklore involving daily rituals and life traditions; religion encompassing beliefs and worship; historical facts covering events, figures, and institutions; and arts related to music, dance, and theater^[7].

In this article, we adopt Eugene Nida's classification framework for cultural-loaded words as our core framework which exhibits systematic and scientific characteristics, making it highly compatible with the textual features of *Kanglian 1st Division*, which combines historical documentary elements with regional cultural specificity. Based on actual textual corpus analysis, religious cultural loaded words were found to have no direct connection to revolutionary culture. Therefore, this study makes targeted adjustments to Nida's classification, categorizing the red culture-laden words

in *Kanglian 1st Division* into four types: red material culture-loaded words, red ecological culture-loaded words, red linguistic culture-loaded words, and red social culture-loaded words.

2.2. Relative research at home and abroad

2.2.1. Research on the translation of anti-Japanese united army literature

Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army literature serves as a vivid historical record of the region's resistance forces. It encompasses diverse genres including novels, poetry, biographies, plays, films, and television dramas. As a significant topic at the intersection of revolutionary literature translation and regional cultural dissemination, research on the translation of Anti-Japanese United Army literature is closely tied to China's strategy of promoting its revolutionary culture internationally.

From a developmental perspective, research on Anti-Japanese United Army literature translation has two core phases. The 1980s-early 21st century was the "Practice and Preliminary Systematization Phase", focusing on classic works' translations like Xiao Hong's *The Field of Life and Death* (Translated by Haowen Ge) and Xiao Jun's *The Village in August* (Translated by Evan King). Scholars analyzed their reception and translators' strategies, e.g. Gao's domestication of Northeast vernacular balancing readability and cultural specificity, and controversies over Evan's over-weakened revolutionary narratives. This phase relied on case studies, lacking systematic theoretical frameworks and resulting in fragmented strategy summaries.

Since the 21st century, research on the translation of Anti-Japanese United Army literature has entered a "phase of specialized deepening". Scholars have begun to employ translation theory to conduct in-depth deconstructions of translation practices, with research focus gradually shifting toward core issues such as the translation of culturally loaded words, ideological transmission, and cross-cultural adaptation. Domestic scholars primarily draw upon functional equivalence theory and domestication/translation theories to explore translation approaches for unique elements within Anti-Japanese United Army literature.

Some studies also examine translation practices for non-fiction literary forms like Anti-Japanese League ballads and martyrs' letters, emphasizing their unique value in conveying revolutionary spirit. For instance, comparative analyses of multilingual translations of Yang Jingyu's "Military Song of the First Route Army of the Northeast Anti-Japanese League" explore the balance between preserving rhythmic patterns and conveying spiritual essence.

Notably, scholars have introduced a philosophical hermeneutics perspective to enrich the translation theory of Anti-Japanese Alliance documents. As composite texts, these documents integrate informational, appellative, and expressive functions. Their translation can be achieved through three interpretive pathways: "author-centered theory" reconstructs historical context, "text-centered theory" addresses distancing, and "reader-centered theory" achieves fusion of perspectives^[8]. Philosophical hermeneutics further establishes an "understanding-interpretation-reconstruction" chain: analyzing translation realities, interpreting differences through theoretical analysis, and constructing adaptive strategies that integrate historical context with target-language cognition, thereby deepening theoretical depth^[9].

Moreover, existing research exhibits significant gaps: First, studies have primarily focused on a handful of classic works, with limited attention given to recent translations of full-length novels and biographical literature on the Anti-Japanese United Army; Second, there is scant exploration of deeper issues such as translators' decision-making mechanisms and the ideological manipulation of translations, indicating room for greater research depth. Overall, while a preliminary foundation for the translation studies of Anti-Japanese United Army literature has been established, substantial scope for expansion remains in terms of research scope, theoretical depth, and methodological innovation.

2.2.2. Research on the translation of red-culture-loaded words

Discussions within the international academic community regarding the translation of red-culture-loaded words primarily revolve around classical translation theories. Eugene Nida's functional equivalence theory established the core theoretical foundation, emphasizing that translation should prioritize reconstructing "dynamic equivalence" centered on target reader

comprehension rather than rigidly adhering to formal equivalence. This aligns with the historical documentary nature and red connotations of terms laden with red culture^[5].

Lawrence Venuti further developed the theories of domestication and foreignization, stressing that translators must achieve domestication of the source language while also accommodating the linguistic characteristics of the target culture^[10]. Mona Baker proposed multiple strategies for addressing lexical mismatches, such as generic translation and cultural substitution, offering guidance for translating red culture-laden vocabulary^[3].

Despite the absence of systematic specialized research, these theories still provide methodological guidance for translation practice.

Domestically, research on translating red-culture-loaded words has established a “practice-oriented, regionally focused” paradigm and exhibits an increasingly strong interdisciplinary development trend. Since the early 21st century, scholars have concentrated their research on specific contexts of red texts, including the translation of red tourism materials (e.g., in Jiangxi, Heilongjiang, Shaanxi), red songs (e.g., “Red Songs of Longshan”), and revolutionary literary works (e.g., *The Field of Life and Death*). Youya Zhou and Yonghe Xiao proposed a composite strategy combining literal translation, liberal translation, and adapted translation, tailored to the characteristics of red tourism texts^[11].

Lin Zou emphasized that the translation of red-culture-loaded must adhere to principles of authority, accuracy, standardization, and consistency^[12]. With the convergence of ecological translation studies and functional translation theory, interdisciplinary development has emerged: Yanshi Liu proposed the “three-dimensional conversion” method from an ecological translation perspective, advocating adaptive adjustments across linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions to optimize translations of complex red texts like revolutionary songs^[13].

In summary, although research on red-culture-loaded words of the research on interpreting tourism texts and historical documents has comparative matured, while specialized studies on translation strategies for culture-loaded words in literary works remain scarce.

2.3. Functional equivalence theory

The theory of functional equivalence was proposed by an American translation theorist, who emphasized that translation should not be confined to word-for-word correspondence but should focus on conveying the functional meaning of language. He categorized “functional equivalence” into distinct levels, with “dynamic equivalence” occupying a central position, meaning the response of the target audience to the translation should be substantially equivalent to the response of the original audience to the source text.

Consequently, functional equivalence theory advocates that translators should flexibly adjust strategies, achieving translation effectiveness by integrating the cultural context and linguistic conventions of the target language^[5].

This core theory aligns closely with the translation demands of red-culture-loaded words in *Kanglian 1st Division*. These words in Northeast Anti-Japanese League literature carry profound historical weight and regional specificity. The central challenge in their English translation lies in balancing “cultural authenticity” with “cross-cultural intelligibility”. The theory of functional equivalence provides principled guidance for resolving this tension.

3. Analysis of red-culture-loaded words in *Kanglian 1st Division*

The red-culture-loaded words in *Kanglian 1st Division* are deeply rooted in the complex historical context of Anti-Japanese period and unique regional cultural soil of the Northeast, exhibiting distinct characteristics and translation difficulties.

3.1. Features of red-culture-loaded words in *Kanglian 1st Division*

The terms within *Kanglian 1st Division* that embody revolutionary culture are not mere symbols of communication. Instead, they serve as complex carriers deeply intertwined with the historical context of the Northeast Anti-Japanese War, regional characteristics, ethnic culture, and revolutionary spirit. Consequently, they possess the following four core

characteristics.

3.1.1. Regional specificity and climate adaptability

Its regional specificity is most vividly reflected in its mapping of Northeast China's unique geographical identifiers and folk cultural artifacts, such as the red ecological culture-loaded words “辽东山脉” “松嫩平原” and “苇荡” which directly point to the region's distinctive topography of mountains, plains, and wetlands, serving as geographical symbols that distinguish its red culture from other regions.

Climate adaptability, meanwhile, centers on how these loaded terms align with Northeast China's harsh winters and significant temperature fluctuations. Red material culture-loaded words like “乌拉靴” embody the function of “withstanding cold and snow”, while “地窖子” (underground shelters) feature designs for “mountain concealment + cold resistance”. Similarly, “sweep-sleeve soup”, all attest to the material and ecological dimensions of how these cultural carriers adapted to the region's extreme climate. They also implicitly reveal the historical context where Anti-Japanese guerrilla fighters leveraged local climate conditions to wage their struggles with resourceful ingenuity.

3.1.2. Historical context dependency

These words are closely tied to the unique era of the War of Resistance Against Japan (particularly the Japanese occupation period), while also serving as a reminder of colonial oppression and national resistance. For instance, the “良民证” (police clearance certificate), used by the Japanese government to control the Chinese populace, carries the connotation of “official scrutiny”.

The “保甲制度” (the Bao-Jia system, a household registration and control system), employed by the Japanese government to strengthen local governance, reveals its essence of “collective liability”. Without this historical context, the oppressive implications behind these concepts remain incomprehensible.

3.1.3. Manchu-centric culture

In *Kanglian 1st Division*, Manchu culture stands as the core of cultural expressions, integrating with Han daily life and Anti-Japanese struggle.

Linguistically, Manchu terms like “阿玛” (ama, father) and “额娘” (eniye, mother) are retained, directly marking ethnic identity. Materially, “乌拉靴” (traditional Manchu boots, lined with uraria grass for cold resistance) and “地窖子” “撮罗子” (traditional Manchu cuoluozi, a temporary nomadic tent made of birch bark or animal hides, adapted by the Anti-Japanese United Army as hidden shelters in mountain guerrilla warfare) are repurposed as Anti-Japanese equipment, blending Manchu heritage with red revolutionary functionality.

3.1.4. Duality of function and spirit

That is, these words not only carry specific practical connotations such as tools, scenarios, and identities, but also distill the spirit of the United Army's struggle, national integrity, and historical memory.

For instance, among red material culture-loaded words, the “三八大盖” (functional: combat equipment) as the Japanese military's standard-issue rifle conveys its weaponry nature through its English translation. Yet within the context of “Japanese military equipment” and “captured by the Anti-Japanese League”, it also communicates the League's tenacious spirit of “confronting a powerful enemy with rudimentary gear”.

This dual nature dictates that translating red-culture-loaded cannot merely convey functional meanings. It must also achieve cross-cultural transformation of their spiritual essence. This is precisely why translation must balance “semantic fidelity” with “spiritual transmission”.

3.2. Classifications of red-culture-loaded words in *Kanglian 1st Division*

As an integral part of red culture, Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army literature embodies rich cultural connotations.

These terms reflect the Northeast people's history of resistance, regional characteristics, and national spirit, directly impacting the accuracy and integrity of cross-cultural communication. This paper employs Eugene Nida's classification criteria to guide translation research (refer Table 1).

Table 1. Four categories of red-culture-loaded words

Terminology classification	Term count	Original text	Target text	Remarks
Red Material culture-loaded words	32	乌拉靴	Ula boots	Example 2
		地窖子	Diyinzi	
		甩袖汤	Shuaixiu soup	
		三八大盖	Type 38 rifle	
Red Ecological culture-loaded words	41	辽东山脉	Liaodong Mountains	Example 1
		松嫩平原	Songnen Plain	
		龙兵营子	Longbing Battalion	
		苇荡	Reed Marsh(a natural hiding place for the Anti-Japanese United Army to avoid Japanese "mopping-up")	
Red Linguistics culture-loaded words	26	北口	Beikou (a medium-sized city in Northeast China)	Example 3
		王八羔子	Bastard	
		八格牙路	Bakayarou	
		太君	Taijun (fawning term for Japanese officers)	
Red Social culture-loaded words	23	滚犊子	get out / roll away (Northeast dialect)	Example 4
		抗联一师	Kanglian 1 st Division(Short for the First Division of the Counter-Japanese United Army)	
		良民证	Police clearance certificate	
		伪满洲国	Puppet Manchukuo (Japan's puppet state)	
		开拓团	Pioneer group (Japanese migration organization)	
		关东军	Kwantung Army (Japanese invading army in Northeast China)	
		保长	village head appointed by Japanese (Baozhang)	
		小和屋	Xiaohewu (Japanese word for luggage room)	

According to the table, it can be analyzed by three dimensions:

In terms of classification, this can be divided into four categories:

- (1) Red material culture-loaded words embodying both physical forms and the spirit of the revolutionary cause
- (2) Red ecological culture-loaded words encompassing geographical features, climatic characteristics, and natural landscapes intrinsically linked to the anti-Japanese guerrilla warfare
- (3) Red social culture-loaded words focusing on the social structures and ideologies prevalent during the anti-Japanese period.
- (4) Red linguistic culture-loaded words comprising linguistic symbols imbued with revolutionary connotations and distinctive Northeast regional characteristics.

In terms of quantity, red ecological culture-loaded words (41) > red material culture-loaded words (32) > red linguistic

culture-loaded words (26) > red social culture-loaded words (23), which is deeply consistent with the characteristics of the text. In terms of the target language, most of the red-culture-loaded words are mainly literal and liberal translation, which retains their cultural connotation and accurate meaning.

3.3. Translation difficulties

3.3.1. The diversification of cultural connotations

The red-culture-loaded words in the original text encompass multiple dimensions including specific historical events, ethnic cultures, and regional folk customs, making their connotations complex. Certain terms relate to colonial rule during the Republic of China era, the history of the War of Resistance, Manchu nomenclature and culture, and numerous concepts reflecting Northeast China's regional folklore. The meanings of these terms cannot be directly mapped to single English words. Therefore, the process requires condensing multi-layered cultural information, preserving core connotations while avoiding textual redundancy caused by excessive explanatory additions.

3.3.2. Contextual adaptation

The meaning of red-culture-loaded words depends on specific linguistic contexts, with the same lexical item exhibiting significant variations in semantic emphasis and emotional connotations across different scenarios. When translating into English, it is crucial to accurately capture contextual features: In the context of a grandfather's dementia and confusion, the term should convey a sense of logical incoherence; -In confrontational or interrogative contexts, it should highlight the emotional tension inherent in the word. In everyday conversational settings, it should restore the colloquial nature of the expression. Simultaneously, ensure consistency in translation to prevent referential ambiguity that could hinder comprehension.

3.3.3. Idiomatic translation

The original text contains extensive use of Northeastern Chinese dialects, slang, poetry, and other idiomatic expressions, inherently carrying regional cultural attributes and strong emotional overtones. Most of these are colloquial expressions lacking fixed grammatical structures. The English translation faces dual challenges: First, it must preserve the idioms' "regional flavor" and "emotional resonance", avoiding generic English expressions that would erase cultural distinctiveness. Second, it must adapt to English colloquial habits, not translating Chinese idioms literally, but finding functionally and emotionally equivalent English expressions while conveying the cultural context underlying the original phrases.

4. Translation method and technique

Based on the features and translation difficulties of red culture-loaded words mentioned in the previous chapter, this section further summarizes translation methods and techniques through specific case studies according to different types of red cultural load words, ensuring the accuracy of cultural connotations and cross-cultural comprehensibility.

4.1. Translation of red-material culture-loaded words

Red material culture-loaded words refer to tangible entities integrating material functions and red spiritual symbolism, including weapons, daily necessities, and ethnic artifacts. The translation prioritizes conveying "core functional meaning" and "cultural specificity", flexibly combining liberal translation, and annotation methods.

4.1.1. Liberal translation

Free translation focuses on conveying the core essence of terminology while avoiding literal word-for-word correspondence—particularly for colloquial nicknames or terms whose literal meanings fail to capture their actual

significance. It adheres to the functional equivalence theory, ensuring the target audience accurately grasps both the practical and historical implications of the term.

Example 1:

ST: 三八大盖

TT: Type 38 rifle

Analysis: “三八大盖” is a colloquial nickname for the Japanese Army’s standard-issue rifle during the War of Resistance. The literal meaning breaks down into “三八” (Type 38, the rifle’s model) and “大盖” (literally “big cover”, referring to the rifle’s dust cover). A strict literal translation would be “Type 38 big hat”, which is meaningless in English and fails to convey the weapon’s identity. Therefore, it should use liberal translation to transfer as “Type 38 rifle”, allowing English readers to immediately recognize what it is. Implied clues such as “Japanese military equipment” further supplement its historical connotation, achieving the unity of “functional accuracy” and “spiritual transmission”.

4.1.2. Annotation

Annotations supplement key information (cultural context, red functionality) while preserving the core form of the original terminology, thereby preventing the loss of cultural characteristics that might result from literal translation.

Example 2:

ST: 乌拉靴

TT: Ula boots (Boots with ula grass to retain warmth)

Analysis: “乌拉靴” is a unique cold-resistant boot of Northeast China’s ethnic groups, with its core cultural feature lying in the “ula grass”, a key detail previously omitted. The literal translation “Ula boots” preserves the phonetic characteristics of the Manchu-derived term, avoiding the loss of ethnic cultural specificity that would occur with a generic translation like “cold-resistant boots”, enabling foreign readers to understand both the boot’s practical function and its connection to the revolutionary struggle.

4.2. Translation of red linguistic culture-loaded words

Red linguistic culture-loaded words include Northeast dialects, colonial Japanese vocabulary, and era-specific nicknames, characterized by strong emotional overtones and regional/historical features. Translation prioritizes “emotional equivalence” and “contextual adaptation”, mainly adopting liberal translation and transliteration.

4.2.1. Liberal translation

For dialectal curse words or colloquial expressions, free translation abandons the literal form and selects English expressions with equivalent emotional intensity, ensuring the target text conveys the original’s emotional tone without cultural misunderstanding.

Example 3:

ST: 王八羔子

TT: Bastard

Analysis: “王八羔子” is a vulgar Northeast dialect expressing intense hatred toward traitors or invaders. The liberal translation “Bastard” is an English colloquial curse with matching emotional intensity, preserving the original’s colloquial style and hostile tone. This translation adheres to Nida’s “dynamic equivalence” principle, ensuring the target audience’s emotional response is consistent with the source audience’s, achieving effective cross-cultural emotional transmission.

4.2.2. Transliteration

Foreign words or ethnic-specific terms are transliterated, with cultural context implied through dialogue explanations or scene descriptions. No additional annotations are added to avoid disrupting narrative flow while preserving cultural specificity, reflecting an alienation translation strategy.

Example 4:

ST: 八格牙路

TT: Bakayarou

Analysis: “八格牙路” is a phonetic transcription of the Japanese insult “ばかやろう” (bakayarō). Transliteration preserves the Japanese pronunciation, vividly reflecting the brutality and arrogance of Japanese soldiers in the context of “cursing villagers”. The insulting nature is implicitly conveyed by the scene, eliminating the need for an annotation like “Japanese insult”, which would disrupt the narrative flow. This method retains the “linguistic conflict” of the War of Resistance era, reinforcing the core theme of “resisting aggression” while adhering to the foreignization strategy of preserving cultural otherness.

4.3. Translation of social culture-loaded words

Red social culture-loaded words relate to military organizations, colonial systems, and historical entities, bearing profound historical and political connotations. Translation prioritizes “historical accuracy” and “authority”, mainly adopting liberal translation and annotation.

4.3.1. Annotation

Annotations are used for terms with complex historical backgrounds or unique organizational attributes. They supplement the core meaning and historical context of the term beyond mere transliteration or literal translation, ensuring readers grasp its revolutionary essence and significance.

Example 5:

ST: 抗联一师

TT: Kanglian 1st Division (Short for the First Division of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army)

Analysis: Kanglian 1st Division showing the brevity of translation. The annotation directly clarifies the red organizational attribute. English readers can immediately recognize it as a revolutionary armed force through the term, avoiding the possible ambiguity of liberal translation. This translation ensures the authority of red historical communication and conveys the core connotation of “organized national resistance”.

4.3.2. Liberal translation

Applicable to terms with established historical translations, international usage, or unambiguous core meanings. Direct translation ensures authority and consistency without requiring additional notes, avoiding redundancy and adhering to the principles of “accuracy and conciseness” in historical document translation.

Example 6:

ST: 良民证

TT: Police clearance certificate

Analysis: “良民证” is a product of Japanese colonial rule, with its core function being “identity verification and population control” rather than “certifying a good citizen”. A strict literal translation would be “good citizen certificate”, which distorts its colonial nature and misleads readers into regarding it as an ordinary civic document. The free translation “police clearance certificate” conveys its core function of “identity inspection”, while the annotation clarifies its historical context and oppressive nature. This translation achieves the unity of “functional equivalence” and “historical fidelity”.

4.4. Translation of ecological culture-loaded words

Red ecological culture-loaded words refer to natural landscapes closely linked to the Anti-Japanese United Army’s guerrilla warfare, including mountains, rivers, and wetlands. Translation prioritizes “geographical accuracy” and “strategic implication”, combining literal translation and annotation.

4.4.1. Annotation

Annotations supplement its strategic significance in the War of Resistance, revealing the connection between ecology and revolutionary struggle.

Example 7:

ST: 苇荡

TT: reed marsh (a natural hiding place for the Anti-Japanese United Army to avoid Japanese “mopping-up”)

Analysis: “苇荡” is a natural wetland landscape in Northeast China. The literal translation “reed marsh” accurately describes its ecological feature, while the annotation supplements its red function” hiding from Japanese mopping-up” and “guerrilla attacks”. This helps readers understand that the landscape is not merely a scenic backdrop but a “natural fortress” for the Anti-Japanese United Army, aligning with the functional equivalence requirement of “conveying contextual meaning”.

4.4.2. Literal translation

For geographical names with established English translations or clear ecological characteristics, literal translation ensures narrative fluency, with strategic significance implied by the context to avoid redundant annotations.

Example 8:

ST: 龙兵营

TT: Longbing Battalion

Analysis: “龙兵营子” is a village name in Northeast China, with “兵营子” (literally “military camp”) hinting at its historical connection to garrisons. The literal translation preserves the phonetic form “Longbing” and retains “Battalion” to imply its military relevance, avoiding cultural distortion from a literal translation like “Dragon Camp Village”. Contextual clues such as “reed marshes outside the village” and “villagers assisting the Anti-Japanese United Army” further reveal its role as a rear base for the league, balancing “regional specificity” and “narrative coherence”.

5. Conclusion

Red culture, as a precious part of Chinese excellent traditional culture, carries unique revolutionary spirit, historical memories and cultural connotations, and is an important carrier for telling Chinese stories and enhancing cultural confidence. The translation of red culture-loaded words, as a key link in cross-cultural communication, directly affects the effectiveness of red culture’s international dissemination. Based on Nida’s theory of culture-loaded words and functional equivalence, this study summarizes translation methods for red culture-loaded words in Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army literature. For words with complex meanings, liberal translation conveys core ideas. For those lacking equivalents, literal translation and annotations provide context. For linguistic and cognitive differences, domestication adapts to the audience. For culturally unique words, foreignization retains original features.

These translation methods are not isolated or mutually exclusive. Translators must flexibly select and combine them based on context, audience, and purpose, while balancing cultural preservation and readability. Adhering to the principle of “being close to foreign audiences’ thinking habits” avoids cultural loss and semantic deviation, enabling international readers to understand and recognize red culture’s spiritual essence.

In the context of cultural “going out”, the translation of red culture-loaded words is of great significance. The summarized translation methods not only provide practical references for similar red culture translation practices but also contribute to promoting the international dissemination of red culture, enhancing national cultural soft power and shaping a positive national image. Future research can further explore more diversified translation paths in combination with new media communication forms to better inherit and carry forward red culture.

Funding

2025 Undergraduate Research Project at Jilin International Studies University, “A Study on Translation Strategies for Red-Culture-loaded Words in Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army Literature” (Project No.: JWXSKY2025B100)

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Reference

- [1] Xu G, 1990, On Defining Culture and Civilization. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 1990(2): 11.
- [2] Hu W, 1999, Introduction for Intercultural Communication. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 64.
- [3] Baker M, 2000, In Other Words: Coursebook on Translation. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 21.
- [4] Fu L, 2025, Study on the English Translation of Cultural Load Words in Red Tourism in Longyan from a Teleological Perspective. *New Legend*, 2025(32): 35–38.
- [5] Nida E, Taber C, 1974, The Theory and Practice of Translation. Brill Archive, 8.
- [6] Newmark P, 2001, A Textbook of Translation. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 94.
- [7] Cheng C, Zhou Y, 2025, English Translation of Culture-Loaded Words in Tourist Texts in Light of Skopos Theory: A Case Study of Attractions in Nanjing. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 15(5): 1471–1479.
- [8] Wang Y, Jiang L, Zhang D, et al., 2020, Study on the Hermeneutic Approach to Translating Anti-Japanese League Documents for Overseas Dissemination. *Heilongjiang Education (Theory & Practice)*, 2020(12): 25–26.
- [9] Zhang D, Jiang L, 2019, Philosophical Hermeneutics-Based Study on Publicity Translation of Anti-Japanese Federation Documents. *Teaching of Forestry Region*, 2019(4): 71–73.
- [10] Venuti L, 1995, The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation. London and New York: Routledge, 20.
- [11] Zhou Y, Xia Y, 2013, Types of Mistranslations in Overseas Promotion Translations for Red Tourism Sites and Their Translations. *Knowledge Economy*, 2013(23): 105–106.
- [12] Zou L, 2015, Translation of Culture-Loaded Words: A Case Study of the Red-Tourism Texts in Jiangxi Province, thesis, Jiangxi Normal University.
- [13] Liu Y, 2011, Translation of Red Cultural Tourism Materials into English from an Ecological Translation Studies Perspective. *Foreign Languages and Literature*, 27(S1): 74–76.

Publisher’s note

Whioce Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.