A Study On the Translation of Xia Culture in Chinese Online Xianxia Novels—A Medio-translatology Approach to Deathblade's Translations

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Abstract

This thesis offers an investigation of the translation and global reception of Xianxia novels—deeply embedded in Xia culture—through the lens of Medio-translatology. Focusing on *I Shall Seal the Heavens* and *A Will Eternal*, translated by Deathblade, it interrogates how translators, readers, and the online platform collectively negotiate cultural meaning in the dissemination of Chinese online literature. Central to the study is the concept of "creative treason", conceptualised here not as mere deviation, but as an essential cultural strategy balancing fidelity and adaptation in cross-cultural contexts.

To capture the complexity of this process, the research integrates several complementary approaches, each addressing specific questions. The translator's interview uncovers the motivations, strategies, and cultural negotiations underpinning conscious and unconscious creative treason. Readers' survey illuminates diverse expectations, reinterpretations and preferences shaped by readers' cultural backgrounds and reading purposes. Textual and paratextual analyses explicate how translation strategies and supplementary materials mediate culturally loaded elements while maintaining narrative appeal. The study also attends to the dynamics of the reception environment, including the role of online platforms such as Wuxiaworld whose serialised publication model, interactive features and evolving glossaries support and reshape the translation's production and reception.

The findings of this study contribute to the expansion of theoretical exploration, the exemplification of mixed methods strength and rigour in studying culture-laden literary translation and empirically unearth a triple role relationship between the translator as active cultural agent, the reader as creative re-interpreter and the online platform as a site for collaborative meaning-making. Theoretically, the thesis extends the research application of the Medio-translatology into the under-explored domain of online literature, exploring the concept of creative treason as a negotiated, multi-agent practice involving translators, readers, and platforms. Methodologically, it exemplifies how distinct qualitative and quantitative approaches can be applied to discrete yet interrelated phenomena, offering a possible model for studying culturally complex literary translation. Empirically, it offers a detailed and empirically informed examination of Xianxia translation, contributing to an

under-researched area of study by revealing how translators act as active cultural agents and readers creatively reinterpret while platforms facilitate collaborative meaning-making. By situating translation within a dynamic and participatory ecosystem, this research underscores that the global dissemination of Chinese literature is not a unilateral transfer but a process of cultural negotiation and recreation. It affirms that translators mediate between traditions and global audiences and that readers and platforms play crucial roles in shaping meaning and reception. The study enriches scholarly understanding of literary translation in the digital age and offers practical insights for translators, publishers, and platforms seeking to balance authenticity with accessibility in cross-cultural exchange.

Keywords: Creative treason, Xia culture, Medio-translatology, Xianxia novel, Online novel

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Abbreviations

Full Form	Abbreviations
A Will Eternal	AWE
China International Publishing Group	CIPG
China Literature Group and the Global Times' Global Poll Center	GPC
Culturally Loaded Words	CLWs
I Shall Seal the Heavens	ISSH
Literature Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	LICASS

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Chapter I Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Literature often moves across languages and cultures, yet its reception depends on how far it can be understood and valued by readers from other contexts. As Damrosch (2003, p. 5) argues, world literature is "not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading". Chinese literature, with its long history and varied narrative traditions, has contributed significantly to world literature. Yet, works containing dense cultural references or distinctive narrative conventions may encounter difficulties when introduced to readers from different cultural contexts.

The rise of Chinese online literature in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has created new channels for cross-cultural literary exchange. Published in serialised form and characterised by active interaction between authors and readers, this form of literature often blends elements from earlier traditions with contemporary themes and global storytelling influences. In this context, Xianxia novel (仙侠小说) has become a distinct genre.[1] It combines Xia culture (侠文化) with ideas from Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, and incorporates martial arts, myth, and imaginative settings.[2] These stories typically follow the main characters as they develop their skills, confront moral challenges, and strive for transcendence, blending elements rooted in culture with themes that resonate with many readers. For readers unfamiliar with the culture, translating such works is more than simply rendering the words. The cultivation systems, ideas, and historical references need approaches that help readers understand them while keeping their cultural richness. The English translations by Deathblade (Jeremy Bai), particularly of Er Gen's *I Shall Seal the Heavens (我欲封天)* [hereafter ISSH] and *A Will Eternal (一念永恒)* [hereafter AWE], provide an illustrative example of how these challenges may be addressed in practice.

[1] Xianxia novel (仙侠小说) is a subgenre of Chinese fantasy fiction combining martial hero traditions with supernatural cultivation, influenced by Daoist cosmology, mythology, and folklore. This genre will be examined in greater detail in section 1.1.3.

[2] Xia culture(侠文化) is a long-standing cultural concept in Chinese tradition, often associated with ideals of chivalry, justice, and personal integrity as portrayed in martial hero narratives. Its definition and historical development will be examined in detail in section 2.4.

This chapter, therefore, begins by outlining the historical and institutional background to the translation and dissemination of Chinese literature. It then examines the emergence of online literature and the evolution of Xianxia novel as a distinct genre, before considering the contributions of Deathblade and his translations of Er Gen's novels. Together, these sections provide the necessary context for exploring how Xia culture is mediated through translation for readers from different cultural backgrounds.

1.2 Research Background

1.2.1 Translation and Dissemination Of Chinese Literature

Since the 1950s, China has made sustained efforts to promote its literature abroad, with state institutions leading large-scale translation and publishing initiatives. Early examples include *Chinese Literature* magazine (1951–2000), which for half a century introduced contemporary works to foreign readers, and the *Panda Books series* (1981), which distributed nearly 200 titles to over 150 countries. Later projects such as the *Great Chinese Library* (1995), the *China Book Promotion Project* (2006), and the *Chinese Culture Translation and Publishing Project* (2009) further exemplified the state's ambition to disseminate Chinese literary heritage internationally.

Despite their scope, these initiatives achieved only modest results. The closure of *Chinese Literature* and *Panda Books* in 2000 marked a significant setback (Geng, 2010, p. 17). Statistics reveal a sharp imbalance: between 1900 and 2010, about 100,000 Western books were translated into Chinese, compared with fewer than 500 Chinese works into Western languages (Bao, 2014, p. 12). In 2009, only 8 of the 348 foreign literary works published in the United States were Chinese (Yang, 2016, p. 151), and the book trade ratio often reached 100:1 in favour of Western imports (Ma, 2007, p. 224). Even by 2010, Chinese literature remained largely absent from bestseller lists in the UK, with most translations confined to classics or Confucian texts (Basu, 2011; McDougall, 2014, p. 56).

Critical voices underscore this marginalisation. Updike described contemporary Chinese literature as "very quiet" from a Western perspective and its English translation as "the lonely province of Howard Goldblatt," highlighting both the paucity of translators and limited institutional support (Updike, 2005, pp. 106–108). McDougall (2014, pp. 58–59) likewise observed that since the 1980s, English translations of Chinese literature—whether

produced in China or abroad—have had limited success due to small output, weak marketing, inconsistent quality, and low reader engagement.

Overall, the international dissemination of Chinese literature has faced persistent difficulties: meagre visibility, weak market penetration, and significant cultural and linguistic barriers. These challenges form the backdrop against which newer genres, such as online Xianxia fiction, have begun to attract global attention.

American anthropologist Edward T. Hall introduced the high-context and low-context framework in his influential 1976 work Beyond Culture, proposing that cultural communication operates along a spectrum between two distinct patterns. High-context cultures, such as those found in Japan and Arab societies, convey meaning primarily through implicit elements including shared cultural understanding, non-verbal cues, and contextual factors, with explicit verbal communication playing a minimal role. Conversely, low-context cultures exemplified by Germany, Switzerland, and the United States prioritise direct verbal expression where meaning is conveyed through clear and precise language (Hall, 1976, pp. 61-70). The implicit meanings in high-context cultures can be difficult for those from different cultural backgrounds to decipher (p. 90). China is a typical high-context culture, whereas English-speaking countries, particularly the United States, are generally low-context cultures (p. 91). The high-context nature of Chinese literature, including the use of metaphors, indirect narrative styles, and complex cultural backgrounds, faces significant challenges when transmitted in a low-context cultural environment.

Additionally, Chinese canon literature is a highly concentrated form of China's rich history and culture, often expressed in classical Chinese, which can be obscure and difficult for readers unfamiliar with Chinese culture to understand. For instance, the extensive use of poetry, allusions, and subtle character relationships in *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*红楼梦*) can be elusive for those without a background in Chinese culture. This cryptic mode of expression in high-context cultures can be misinterpreted or even incomprehensible in other cultural contexts.[1]

Furthermore, much of modern Chinese canon literature, which predominantly features realist stories, serious historical or regional narratives, and the unique context of Chinese

[1] *Dream of the Red Chamber (红楼梦)* is a classic Chinese novel by Cao Xueqin, often regarded as one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature, depicting the decline of the Jia family while exploring themes of love, fate, and social dynamics in 18th-century China.

socialist society, carries strong national consciousness. This has often failed to resonate with English-speaking readers. Gao Fang and Xu Jun (2014, p. 59) point out that the narrative style of Chinese literature often carries a strong national consciousness and historical context, making it difficult to find resonance in other cultures.

For example, as one of the founders of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun's works, such as *The True Story of Ah Q* (*阿 Q 正传*) and *Call to Arms (呐喊*), are regarded as representative of modern Chinese literature due to their profound realist style and critical portrayal of Chinese society.[1] However, the reliance on Chinese social and historical contexts in these works makes it challenging for English-speaking readers to grasp the social criticism and metaphors. Additionally, Lu Xun's concise yet rich literary style makes it difficult for many English-speaking readers to fully appreciate the deeper meanings behind his words. Despite being translated into multiple languages, Lu Xun's works have had relatively limited sales and influence in the West. For instance, only eight Chinese literary works, including some of Lu Xun's, were published in the U.S. in 2009 (Jiang, 2019).

Ultimately, in high-context cultures, understanding information is heavily influenced by one's cultural background. Many Chinese literary works, such as Mo Yan's *Big Breasts and Wide Hips (丰乳肥臀*), explore complex social and historical issues in China, which require specific cultural knowledge for full comprehension.[2] Readers from other cultures often lack the necessary background knowledge, making it difficult for them to grasp the deeper meanings of these works, thereby affecting their acceptance (McDougall, 2014, pp. 51-58).

As the influence and impact of Chinese online literature have significantly increased overseas, online literature, games, and films have become the most important forces of China's cultural export. As an important part of China's cultural industry, the status and

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[1] *The True Story of Ah Q(阿 Q 正传)* is a novella by Lu Xun, one of China's most prominent modern writers. First published in 1921, it critiques the social and psychological issues of early 20th-century China through the character of Ah Q, a delusional and self-deceptive peasant. The novella is an ironic and satirical exploration of Chinese society, addressing themes of national identity, pride, and self-deception.
Call to Arms (呐喊)is a collection of short stories by Lu Xun, first published in 1923. The collection includes some of his most well-known works, including The True Story of Ah Q, and reflects Lu Xun's critique of Chinese society, addressing themes such as the struggles of the common people, the harsh realities of life, and the social injustices of the time.

[2] *Big Breasts and Wide Hipss(丰乳肥臀)* is a novel by Chinese author Mo Yan, first published in 1995. The novel explores the tumultuous history of 20th-century China through the lens of a single family, blending magical realism with social and political commentary. It focuses on themes of suffering, survival, and the complexities of Chinese identity, using the metaphor of the mother's body to represent the country's struggles and transformations.

development trend of online literature's overseas dissemination reflects the overall level of China's culture "going abroad" (Fan, 2023, p. 2). According to the *2023 China Online Literature Development Research Report* published by Literature Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences [hereafter LICASS] (2024), the overseas market for online literature has exceeded 4 billion RMB. There are approximately 410,000 overseas online writers who have created around 620,000 original works, with about 230 million overseas users accessing these works, covering over 200 countries and regions globally. These figures demonstrate the extensive influence and market potential of Chinese online literature worldwide. As Hu Bangsheng, Secretary of the Secretariat of the China Writers Association, mentioned at the *Third Hainan Free Trade Port Online Literature Forum*, after more than 20 years of development, online literature has become an important part of Chinese socialist literature and a crucial carrier and most prominent highlight of Chinese culture going global (Hu, 2023).

The success of this literature abroad is attributed to two primary features. First, its dissemination is platform-based, with sites like Wuxiaworld, Webnovel, and Gravity Tales driving global reach (Li, 2013, p. 13). Second, it adapts to global tastes by integrating Western narrative elements—such as fantasy quests and romance—while retaining core Chinese themes (Xi and Chen, 2024, p. 166). Author-reader interaction and feedback mechanisms allow for story adjustments aligned with local preferences.

However, the overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature continues to encounter major challenges. First, its international presence is concentrated in a few genres, notably Xuanhuan(玄幻), Xianxia(仙侠), and Romance(言情), whose quality and translation standards vary considerably (Wu and Guo, 2024, p. 61).[1] The *2022 Fun Facts Report on the Globalization of Chinese Online Literature*, jointly released by China Literature Group and the Global Times' Global Poll Center [hereafter GPC] (2023), revealed that in 2022, the most popular genres of online novels among readers are urban, Western fantasy, Eastern fantasy, gaming competition, and science fiction. In contrast, genres such as Wuxia (武侠), historical novels, and regional cultural novels face greater

[1] Xuanhuan(玄幻), often translated as "mysterious fantasy", is a broader fantasy category that blends elements of Chinese mythology with imaginative or foreign settings, without being strictly bound to Daoist ideology or the pursuit of immortality, distinguishing it from Xianxia (Wuxiaworld,2024, Xuanhuan section).
Romance(言情) is a narrative genre centred on the emotional and relational development between characters, typically focusing on themes of love, intimacy, and personal growth, often structured around romantic conflict and resolution.

challenges in translation and international dissemination due to their rich traditional Chinese cultural elements, language characteristics, and complex plots.[1]

Second, cultural and linguistic barriers remain significant. Idioms, dialects, and classical references often lose their nuance in translation, while the historical and social contexts of these works can alienate foreign readers. In addition, legal and policy differences—such as Europe's "Cultural Exception"—further constrain the promotion of Chinese cultural products abroad (Fan, 2023, p. 28).

Third, the problem of "cultural discount" persists. The concept of cultural discount was introduced by Hoskins and Mirus in their 1988 paper, *Reasons for the US Dominance of the International Trade in Television Programmes*. They observed that programs which are deeply rooted in a specific culture, and thus resonate within that context, often lose their appeal when viewed in other cultural settings. This occurs because audiences from different cultures may struggle to relate to the style, values, beliefs, institutions, and behavior patterns depicted in these programs (Hoskins and Mirus, 1988, p. 500). This phenomenon is widespread in various forms of cross-cultural communication, whether it involves interactions between countries, ethnic groups, or even different cultural communities or individuals. Similarly, cultural products that are heavily embedded in one culture often lose much of their appeal when introduced to international markets due to differences in cultural backgrounds and levels of cultural understanding. As a result, other audiences may experience a significant decline in interest and comprehension when encountering unfamiliar cultural products.

The process of translating texts involves not just linguistic conversion but also the transfer of cultural and historical contexts, which can significantly alter the meaning of works across different countries and regions (Cheng, 2024, p. 26). Chinese online literature often includes classical Chinese, idioms, and historical references, containing rich cultural connotations that are challenging to convey without loss in translation. Consequently, cultural discount has indeed limited the appeal of Chinese online novel genres such as Xianxia, Wuxia, and historical fiction in overseas markets to some extent. Even when

[1] Wuxia(武侠), often translated as "martial heroes", is a genre centered around Chinese martial artists operating within historical or pseudo-historical settings, emphasising chivalric codes, ethical conflicts, and the pursuit of righteousness within the secular human realm, distinct from supernatural-focused genres like Xianxia (Wuxiaworld, 2024, Wuxia section).

language barriers are overcome, the deep cultural roots and specific references within Chinese literature may fail to resonate with foreign readers, who may find it challenging to connect with the underlying values, traditions, and social norms depicted. To address this issue, the translation of these works must go beyond mere linguistic conversion, incorporating cultural adaptation and localisation strategies to make the content more relevant and engaging for international readers. This is an issue that needs to be considered in the further spread of Chinese online literature overseas.

In sum, while online literature offers greater accessibility than canonical works and benefits from platform-driven global outreach, its long-term growth abroad depends on translation strategies that balance cultural adaptation with the preservation of traditional values.

1.2.2 Chinese Online Literature

The advent of the internet as a fourth-generation new media has profoundly transformed the production and dissemination of literature in China. Since the 1990s, Chinese literature has entered a new paradigm, "internet + literature", leading to the emergence of online literature as a distinct literary form. Defined by Ouyang (2008, p. 5) as a creation of internet users enabled by digital network technology, and by Hockx (2015, p. 4) as Chinese-language writing intended specifically for screen-based, interactive contexts, Chinese online literature primarily refers to serialised genre novels rather than poetry or prose (Yang, 2000, p. 88).

Though it is shaped by popular culture and new media environments, Chinese online literature remains rooted in the broader canon of national literary development. It expands the scope of traditional genre writing while reflecting contemporary social life and popular consciousness. Its development traces back to *Huaxia Digest*, launched in 1991 by overseas Chinese students, widely considered the first work of Chinese online literature (Hockx, 2015, p. 24). With the rise of university BBS forums in the 1990s, novels like *First Intimate Contact (第一次亲密接触)* quickly captured public imagination, offering accessible and emotionally resonant stories to a growing online readership.[1] From 1994

[1] *First Intimate Contact(第一次亲密接触)* is a Chinese romance novel by author Guan Xin, which explores the emotional and psychological complexities of modern relationships, focusing on the theme of love and self-discovery.

onward, platforms such as *Olive Tree* (橄榄树), *Under the Banyan Tree* (榕树下), and *Xici Hutong* (西祠胡同), provided space for online literary creation.[1] The launch of *Under the Banyan Tree* in 1999 marked the onset of a golden era for online literature, featuring author-reader interaction, digital literary competitions, and the emergence of influential authors like Annie Baby (安妮宝贝), Murong Xuecun (慕容雪村), and Tiancan Tudou (天蚕土豆) (Li, 2019, p. 3).

Over the past three decades, the industry has matured considerably. Online literature has evolved from a loosely organised creative community into a structured cultural industry. Monetisation through paid reading, tipping, and intellectual property development has created a robust value chain encompassing novels, films, games, and merchandise (Bi, 2017, pp. 42-44). Chinese online literature now functions as a vital response to both the technological shifts of the internet age and the market-driven demands of digital capitalism.

Chinese online literature features a wide range of genres including Xianxia, Xuanhuan, Romance, Time-travel, Rebirth, Urban life, Campus stories, and Science fiction.[2] These genres offer both ancient and contemporary settings, engaging audiences with imaginative narratives that fulfil diverse reading preferences.

However, critics have noted problems such as repetitive plot structures and formulaic writing. Wang (2019, p. 5) highlights concerns about "labelling" and a "gratification culture", suggesting a lack of depth when compared to classical literature. Others, however, contend that online literature possesses originality, literary merit, and intellectual

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[1] *Olive Tree* (橄榄树): One of the earliest Chinese literary websites established in the mid-1990s, known for publishing sentimental and introspective essays and stories by emerging young writers.
Under the Banyan Tree (榕树下): A landmark online literary platform founded in 1999, which popularised original internet fiction in China and nurtured many influential online authors.
Xici Hutong (西祠胡同): A community-based forum that combined literary discussions with grassroots cultural expression, playing a key role in promoting interactive and reader-driven content creation.

[2] Time-travel(穿越): A genre where protagonists are transported to different historical periods, often altering events or influencing famous figures.
Rebirth(重生): A narrative theme where characters are reborn—either in their own bodies or others'—usually to seek revenge, correct past regrets, or pursue a better fate.
Science fiction(科幻): Stories set in speculative futures or alternate realities, often involving advanced technology, space travel, or parallel worlds.
Campus(校园): Novels focusing on school or university life, exploring youth, romance, friendship, and academic challenges.
Urban(都市): Set in contemporary city environments, these stories typically revolve around career, relationships, personal ambition, and modern lifestyle struggles.

seriousness. Shao (2015, pp. 143-152) argues that its entertainment value should not preclude alignment with mainstream cultural values or participation in literary evolution.

While online literature faces issues such as over-commercialisation and uneven quality due to low entry thresholds, it remains a significant cultural innovation. It has revitalised traditional literary genres like Wuxia and Xianxia, engaging younger readers and transforming how literature is consumed and circulated in the digital era. Its widespread accessibility and real-time feedback mechanisms foster interactive reading cultures and new forms of authorship.

Importantly, Chinese online literature serves as a cultural bridge. By blending traditional themes with modern aesthetics and values, it reactivates Chinese cultural symbols within contemporary contexts. Although market imperatives shape much of its output, the form offers profound literary and communicative potential. Through continual innovation and refinement, it can respond to evolving societal demands and point towards new directions in Chinese literary development.

In conclusion, Chinese online literature is not only a digital literary form but also a socio-cultural force that reflects and shapes the values, desires, and identities of its readers. With sustained investment in quality, cultural adaptation, and global reach, it may serve as both a medium for national storytelling and a platform for global cultural exchange.

1.2.3 Chinese Xianxia Novels

1.2.3.1 Definition and History of Chinese Xianxia Novels

As a significant category within Chinese online genre fiction, Xianxia novels originate from traditional Wuxia novels and ancient Chinese mythology. According to "the glossary of terms in Wuxia, Xianxia and Xuanhuan novels" on Wuxiaworld, Xianxia novels are a subgenre of Chinese fantasy literature where characters pursue cultivation to transcend mortality and achieve god-like power, often incorporating Taoist principles, Chinese mythology, martial arts, and otherworldly adventures (Wuxiaworld, 2024).[1]

Generally set in ancient China, Xianxia novels incorporate Xia culture and Daoist

[1] Cultivation (修炼 xiūliàn) (修真 xiūzhēn) (修行 xiūxíng) (修仙 xiūxiān) - the process of improving health, increasing longevity, and growing powerful. This is accomplished by cultivating Qi and training in martial and mystical arts. In many of these novels, the ultimate goal of cultivation is to become an Immortal or attain godhood. (Wuxiaworld, 2024), see the link: https://www.Wuxiaworld.com/page/general-glossary-of-terms

philosophy at their core, creating a type of online literature that utilises and transforms traditional culture through romantic fantasy. In Xianxia novels, protagonists often aim to achieve ultimate power by becoming immortals, undergoing cultivation and adventures to reach this goal. These novels blend ancient mythology, religious beliefs, and the spirit of martial arts, depicting a transcendental world of cultivation and characters, and constructing a fantastical and philosophical literary space through the portrayal of "immortals" and "heroes".

"Xian" (仙) means "immortal", and "Xia" (侠) refers to ancient Chinese martial heroes who, possessing martial prowess, resisted tyranny and helped those in need. Therefore, "Xianxia" literally means "immortal martial heroes". According to the glossary of Chinese online novel terms on the Wuxiaworld website, Xianxia is described as follows:

> Fictional stories featuring magic, demons, ghosts, immortals, and a great deal of Chinese folklore/mythology. Protagonists (usually) attempt to cultivate to Immortality, seeking eternal life and the pinnacle of strength. Heavily inspired by Daoism (Wuxiaworld, 2024).

Overall, based on the development characteristics of Xianxia novel and the perspectives of scholars such as Zheng Zhenduo (1954) Hamm James (2005) and Luo Liqun (1990; 2012) on the evolution of Xianxia novel, I categorise the development of Chinese Xianxia novel into two main stages: the classical Xianxia stage and the modern Xianxia stage. The classical stage, spanning from the pre-Qin period to the Republican era, can be further divided into six phases, reflecting the changing features of Xianxia novel across different dynasties and historical periods.

The roots of classical Chinese Xianxia novels can be traced back to ancient mythology and religious texts. As early as the pre-Qin and Han periods (221 BCE - 220 CE), there were works like *Biographies of Immortals* (*列仙传*) which, although different from later Xianxia novels, featured characters pursuing immortality and alchemical practices, recording numerous legends and anecdotes about immortals, thus providing rich material and inspiration for later Xianxia novels (Yang, 2022, p. 6;Wang, 2020, pp. 9-12).[1] The pre-Qin and Han periods mark the embryonic stage of Xianxia novels.

[1] *Biographies of Immortals (列仙传)*, is an early Chinese text attributed to Liu Xiang, compiling short hagiographies of Daoist transcendents and mythological figures, with a partial English translation by Lionel Giles in the late 19th century.

During the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties (220-589 CE), social unrest, political fragmentation and frequent warfare weakened the dominance of Confucian thought. This shift led to changes in beliefs and values, with Buddhism and Daoism sparking interest in the supernatural and mystical. Disillusioned intellectuals, seeking spiritual solace, contributed to the rise of tales of the strange. These stories, featuring ghosts, spirits and extraordinary events, reflected both imaginative explorations and responses to societal challenges (Yang, 2022, pp. 5-9).While true Xianxia novels had not yet emerged at that time, numerous stories featuring immortals, demons, and ghosts began to take shape. These tales laid the foundation for the development of later Xianxia novels by introducing key themes such as immortality, supernatural beings, and the blending of reality with the fantastical.The works from this period explored the transcendence of human limitations, spiritual quests, and the interactions between the mortal and divine realms, all of which would become central elements in the Xianxia genre in subsequent centuries. Representative works from this period include Ge Hong's *Biographies of Divine Immortals* (*神仙传*) and Gan Bao's *In Search of the Supernatural* (*搜神记)*.[1] Due to widespread turmoil and the decline of traditional rituals and ethics, Laozi and Zhuangzi's philosophy became the dominant social ethos.[2] As a result, numerous tales of immortals and supernatural beings emerged. These fantastical stories, refined and elaborated upon by literati, evolved into the popular Zhiguai novel (志怪小说, records of the strange) of the time (Wu, 2020, p. 18).[3] This kind of genre combined imaginative explorations with responses to social upheaval (Liu, 2020, pp. 17-19; Zhao, 2022, pp. 194-195). Besides, These fantastical accounts, refined through literati imagination, evolved into sophisticated zhiguai narratives that enriched the portrayal of immortals with more intricate plots and characterisation (Zhao, 2022, pp. 194 – 195). For instance, the love story between a

[1] *Divine Immortals (神仙传)*, is a 4th-century compilation traditionally attributed to Ge Hong, It is a significant text in Daoist literature, focusing on hagiographies of immortals and exploring the spiritual practices and philosophies of attaining immortality. A modern English translation and study of this work is provided by Robert Ford Campany in *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: A Translation and Study of Ge Hong's Traditions of Divine Transcendents* (2002).
In Search of the Supernatural (搜神记) is a 4th century Chinese anthology by Gan Bao, documenting supernatural stories, myths, and legends. An English translation by Kenneth J. DeWoskin and J.I. Crump is available as *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record* (Stanford University Press, 1996)

[2] Laozi, the founder of Daoism, taught the importance of living in harmony with nature and practicing "wu wei" (non-action), while Zhuangzi, a follower of Laozi, emphasised freedom of the mind and escaping worldly concerns to live a peaceful life.

[3] Zhiguai novels(志怪小说) are traditional Chinese chapter-based narratives characterised by a serialized structure, colloquial language, and chapter headings that summarize and foreshadow the content, commonly seen in works like Romance of the Three Kingdoms and Journey to the West.

celestial maiden and a farmer, as well as the revenge plots of Gan Jiang and Mo Ye, blend divine themes with elements of love and vengeance.

During the Tang and Five Dynasties period (618-960 CE), the literary genre Tang chuanqi (唐传奇, Tang legend) emerged, blending supernatural elements with human experiences and often exploring themes of love, adventure, and the otherworldly (Wu, 2020, p. 19).[1] This literary flourishing, driven by an open political climate, economic prosperity, and the refinement of the imperial examination system, was further enriched by vibrant cultural exchanges that shaped poetry, prose, and Tang chuanqi. Set against a backdrop of myths and legends, Tang chuanqi depicted interactions between humans, deities, and supernatural beings, reflecting humanity's longing for immortality and fascination with the mystical. Although these works do not align fully with the modern definition of Xianxia novels, as scholars note, compared with earlier zhiguai tales, Tang chuanqi were more elaborate in both structure and literary quality, with vivid characterisation and imaginative plots that made them an important foundation for the Xianxia tradition (Yang, 2022, pp. 36-37). Furthermore, they popularised the theme of cultivating to become an immortal, influencing the narrative style and creative direction of later Xianxia novel. Tang chuanqi did not fully match the modern definition of Xianxia fiction, but they laid the groundwork for its worldview and character development, and popularised the theme of cultivation to immortality that influenced later narrative styles.

These supernatural elements, combined with Xia culture, gradually gave rise to the early form of Xianxia novels. A notable example is *Bo Yi Zhi* (*博异志*) by Gu Shenzi.[2] It is a collection of supernatural stories where works like *The Ladder to Immortal Kingdom* tell of a character, Yin Yin Ke, who accidentally enters an underground realm full of mysterious beings and landscapes. This story reflects the Tang people's fascination with the unknown and their exploration of fantastical realms. Similarly, *Xuan Guai Lu* (*玄怪录*) by Duan Chengshi, which includes the story of Du Zichun, presents a tale of a man who, after wasting his wealth, undergoes trials under the guidance of a mysterious old man, ultimately

[1] Tang chuanqi (唐传奇) refers to a genre of classical Chinese short stories that flourished during the Tang and Five Dynasties period, characterised by elaborate plots, vivid characters, and a blend of romantic, historical, and supernatural themes; its narrative richness and imaginative scope provided important literary precedents for the development of Xianxia novel.

[2] *Bo Yi Zhi (博异志)* , which could be translated as *Records of Strange Matters*, is a collection of supernatural tales from the Tang Dynasty by Gu Shenzi. There is no a widely available English translation of this novel.

achieving spiritual enlightenment (Niu and Li, 1999, p. 45).[1] These works blended moral lessons with supernatural experiences, placing stronger emphasis on character development and spiritual transformation than earlier zhiguai tales. This blend deeply influenced later Xianxia novels, shaping their focus on the pursuit of immortality, divine justice, and personal redemption. (Li, 2019, pp. 27-28).

The Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE) was a period of rapid urban economic growth and the development of a merchant culture. The rise of the merchant class led to a shift in literary content and language, making them more relatable to everyday life. Compared to earlier works dominated by the scholar-official class, Song Dynasty literature focused on accessibility and used a vernacular style, allowing a broader audience to engage with and appreciate the works. While the Zhiguai novels of the Song period continued the traditions, their content became more secular, with a stronger emphasis on narrative and entertainment (Huang, 2017, pp. 66-68). The rise of Huaben novels (话本小说, story-teller's script), which were typically performed by storytellers, was particularly significant as it laid the groundwork for later vernacular fiction (Zheng, 2000, pp. 284-285).[2] Additionally, the frequent inclusion of Taoist, Buddhist, and folk beliefs in Song Dynasty literature highlights the profound influence of religious culture on literary creation. This fusion of elements provided rich material for the cultural backgrounds of later Xianxia and fantasy novels.

A representative work from this period is *Taiping Guangji* (*太平广记*), a comprehensive collection of Chinese supernatural stories that significantly influenced the development of Chinese fantasy literature, particularly Xianxia and Wuxia.[3] This anthology contains numerous tales about immortals, ghosts, and other supernatural beings, playing a crucial role in shaping the myths and narrative structures central to these genres. Taiping Guangji presents numerous tales of immortals and demons who undergo

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[1] *Xuan Guai Lu (玄怪录)*,which could be translated as *Chronicles of the Supernatural,* a classic Chinese text from the Tang dynasty, which records strange and supernatural occurrences. Currently, there is no a widely available English translation of this novel.

[2] Huaben novels(话本小说) are a type of Chinese storytelling tradition from the Song Dynasty, typically performed by storytellers, characterized by their use of vernacular language and simple, engaging narratives that were accessible to a wide audience.

[3] *Taiping Guangji* (*太平广记)* is a comprehensive collection of Chinese supernatural stories, compiled during the Song Dynasty by Duan Chengshi. It contains over 1,000 tales, including myths, legends, and strange occurrences, and is considered an important resource for understanding Chinese folklore and the supernatural genre. An English translation of this work is titled The *Taiping Guangji*: A Collection of Chinese Supernatural Tales, translated by J. R. L. King.

cultivation to attain transcendence, offering a rich reservoir of motifs, immortality, cultivation, and transcendence, that later became foundational to Xianxia fiction (Zeng, 2008, p. 14) .

For example, the folk tale *The White Snake* (*白蛇传*), included in *Taiping Guangji*, tells the story of Bai Suzhen, a white snake spirit who transforms into a woman and falls in love with a normal scholar Xu Xian. This tale not only introduces a female character with supernatural powers but also explores the theme of love transcending racial and identity boundaries, emphasising sacrifice and the tragic nature of love. These themes, especially the "human-demon romance" and the complex relationships between mortals and supernatural beings, had a lasting impact on Xianxia novels, where similar themes of love, sacrifice, and hidden identities are often explored.

The novels of the Song Dynasty showcased more refined storytelling techniques compared to earlier works. A good example is *The White Snake*, which follows narrative patterns identified by Christopher Booker in *The Seven Basic Plots* (2004). The story fits into the "quest" and "tragedy" categories, reflecting themes of personal sacrifice and conflict with supernatural forces. These novels, with their intricate plots and emotional depth, influenced later chapter-based novels (章回小说, chaptered novel).[1] Thus, the narrative innovations of Song Dynasty literature not only shaped the development of fiction in subsequent eras but also contributed to the formation of the Xianxia genre.

The Ming and Qing periods (1368 CE-1912 CE) were the golden age of classical Xianxia novels. The development of literature during this period was shaped by several key social factors. This period saw the consolidation of imperial power after the fall of the Yuan Dynasty, leading to a more stable political environment. The rise of a prosperous economy, especially in urban areas, created a flourishing intellectual and cultural atmosphere. The printing industry also advanced, making books more widely available and promoting the spread of literary works. Additionally, the growing influence of popular culture and the increasing literacy of the merchant and gentry classes contributed to the rise of new literary forms, such as the novel, which appealed to a broader audience. Therefore, in the Qing Dynasty, the real Xianxia novel theme appeared. The development of a

[1] Chapter-based novels (章回小说): A traditional Chinese narrative form structured in discrete, titled chapters (章) and episodic returns (回), often featuring suspenseful endings and moral commentary to sustain reader interest across instalments.

commercial economy and the rise of citizen literature led to the emergence of many excellent Xianxia works, such as *The seven heroes and five gallants* (*七剑十三侠*).[1] This novel features a relatively mature depiction of the "sword immortal" (剑仙), which serves as a model for character development in later Xianxia novels (Yang, 2019, p. 15; Yang, 2021, p. 25).[2] Ming and Qing Xianxia novels featured more complex and diverse storylines and characters, incorporating more religious and fantastical elements, thereby expanding the worldbuilding of the novels. Besides, the popular Ming and Qing novels, such as *Journey to the West(西游记*) and *Creation of the Gods (封神榜*), have exerted a profound and multifaceted influence on the later development of Xianxia novels.[3] Both works integrated Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian elements, constructing elaborate mythological worlds populated by deities, demons, and mortals (Yang, 2021, p. 26; Zhang, 2020, p. 14). This impact extends across thematic settings, character development, narrative structure, and cultural connotations. By constructing a fantastical world where deities, humans, and demons coexist, these works integrate Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian philosophies into their plots, offering an inexhaustible cultural resource for Xianxia novels.

In *Journey to the West*, the adventurous journey of Tang Sanzang and his disciples to the West not only inspired the common narrative motif of teamwork in Xianxia novels but also laid the foundation for the cultivation narrative of "cultivation-adventure-transcendence". This narrative model parallels Joseph Campbell's classic framework of the "hero's journey" as outlined in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell's structure comprises three key stages: Departure, Initiation, and Return (Campbell, 2004). In *Journey to the West*, Tang Sanzang and his companions depart from Chang'an, endure 81 trials, and ultimately reach the Western Paradise to retrieve sacred scriptures. Their journey vividly illustrates the hero's departure from the ordinary world, undergoing trials, and returning

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1 *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants(七剑十三侠)* is a classic Qing dynasty Xianxia novel by Shi Yukun, narrating the legendary exploits of seven chivalrous heroes and thirteen righteous individuals as they join forces to uphold justice and eliminate evil.

2 Sword immortal (剑仙)，in Xianxia novels, refers to a swordsman who attains divinity through cultivation.

3 *Journey to the West(西游记)* is a classic Ming dynasty novel by Wu Cheng'en that follows the epic pilgrimage of Tang Sanzang and his disciples — Monkey King, Pigsy, and Sandy — as they journey to India to retrieve sacred Buddhist scriptures, overcoming supernatural challenges along the way. Journey to the West has been translated into English multiple times, with one of the most notable translations by Arthur Waley, titled Monkey (1942).

Creation of the Gods is a Ming dynasty novel attributed to Xu Zhonglin, blending mythology, history, and fantasy to recount the rise of the Zhou dynasty and the divine appointments of immortals through epic battles between gods, demons, and mortals. It has been translated into English by Gu Zhizhong in 1992.

with wisdom or a boon, aligning closely with Campbell's theory. This coincidence, to some extent, reflects the maturity of narrative structures and techniques in Ming and Qing dynasty novels, particularly in genres such as Xianxia and Zhiguai novel (Yang, 2021, p. 25).

In contrast, *Creation of the Gods* explores themes of human struggle against divine and demonic forces, as well as the transformation of ordinary individuals into deities through cultivation and fortuitous opportunities. This directly influenced Xianxia novel's exploration of cultivation, ascension to godhood, destiny, and karma (Zhang, 2020, p. 14). Additionally, these Ming and Qing novels enriched Xianxia novel with dramatic conflicts and diverse characterisation, providing a wealth of narrative tension and distinctive character traits. Their fantastical elements and transcendent imagination created a spiritual world that is both detached from reality and imbued with traditional cultural values, endowing the Xianxia novel with its unique charm and enduring vitality.

The Republican era (1912-1949) was a time of profound upheaval and transformation in Chinese history. Society transitioned from the collapse of the Qing dynasty to the establishment of the Republic of China, enduring successive crises such as warlord conflicts, the Anti-Japanese War, and the Liberation War. Meanwhile, the influx of Western ideas and modern scientific advancements spurred social modernisation and intellectual liberation. Amid this turbulence, there was a widespread yearning for national rejuvenation and a better future. The semi-colonial, semi-feudal state of society, combined with economic poverty, led people to idolise heroes with extraordinary powers who could champion justice (Li, 2015, p. 91).

Republican-era Wuxia novels often expressed a nostalgic longing for imagined traditional Chinese values and social structures, while simultaneously integrating modern ideas, revitalising the Xianxia novel in the process (Hamm, 2005, p. 27). These works inherited elements of fantasy and the supernatural but also mirrored societal aspirations for national unity and rejuvenation through the cultivation journeys and struggles of chivalrous characters. One of the most influential Xianxia novels from this period is Huanzhulouzhu's *The Legend of the Swordsmen of Shu Mountain(蜀山剑侠传)*.[1] Against a backdrop of

[1] *The Legend of the Swordsmen of Shu Mountain (蜀山剑侠传)* by Huanzhulouzhu is a classic Chinese Xianxia novel set in the legendary Shu Mountain, blending martial arts with Taoist philosophy and depicting the adventures of swordsmen

political turmoil, the protagonist retreats into the mountains, where encounters with strange creatures and powerful swordsmen unfold within a transcendental world that symbolically addresses resistance to national fragmentation and foreign aggression. The heroes' struggles against evil forces embody not only the pursuit of righteousness and peace but also ideals of collaboration and unity, reflecting contemporary aspirations for national integration and revival. As a form of fantasy literature, the novel thus offered readers spiritual solace and a vehicle for imagining a better future, illustrating the complex interaction between literature and social transformation.

At the narrative level, this novel constructs a richly imagined universe where humans, deities, demons, and spirits coexist, integrating Daoist cultivation systems with mythological motifs (Yang, 2021, pp. 21-23; Zhang, 2020, pp. 19-21). Its significance lies in synthesising the legacies of classical Xianxia and Wuxia while providing a systematic framework later inherited by modern and online Xianxia fiction. Importantly, the novel also popularised motifs that became staples of the genre: encountering a master after a fall, acquiring divine medicine, and receiving a legacy through fortuitous encounters—narrative devices that have since become formulaic in both Wuxia and Xianxia traditions (Wang, 2019, pp. 35-37).

The Legend of the Swordsmen of Shu Mountain exerted a profound and lasting influence on the development of the Xianxia novel, shaping its narrative structure, world-building, and characterisation, and establishing the genre's defining features. Firstly, in terms of narrative structure, the novel emphasises again the "cultivation -adventure-transcendence" model after *Journey to the West*, showcasing characters who achieve growth and enlightenment through self-discipline and eventually ascend to immortality . This framework became a hallmark of later Xianxia novels (Chen, 2010, p. 52). Secondly, in world-building, the novel constructs a rich, multi-dimensional universe where deities, humans, and demons coexist, seamlessly integrating Daoist cultivation systems with mythological elements. This imaginative framework provided a template for the expansive worlds seen in modern Xianxia novels. Thirdly, the novel excels in characterisation, creating a vivid array of heroes with distinct personalities, abilities, and destinies, inspiring the ensemble casts typical of subsequent works. Furthermore, its

as they battle against supernatural forces while pursuing immortality and enlightenment.

exploration of themes such as the conflict between good and evil, karmic retribution, and cosmic order deepened the genre's philosophical foundation while enhancing its narrative tension(Chen, 2010, p.55). As such, *The Legend of the Swordsmen of Shu Mountain* not only defined the essential characteristics of the Xianxia novel but also contributed to its systematisation and maturation, offering endless inspiration to later creators. Many of the setting elements and plot structures commonly found in contemporary Xianxia novels are inherited and reformulated from the system pioneered by *The Legend of the Swordsmen of Shu Mountain*. Plot elements such as encountering a master after falling off a cliff, obtaining divine medicine, or receiving a legacy through a fortuitous encounter were established by this book and have become staples in modern Wuxia and Xianxia novels (Yang, 2022, p. 8).

Classical Xianxia novel developed over centuries, with origins traceable to the pre-Qin period, maturing through the Tang and Song dynasties, and flourishing in the Ming, Qing, and Republican eras. This long evolution laid the foundation for modern Xianxia, establishing a genre defined by the integration of mythology, religious thought, and cultural reflection.

Firmly rooted in Chinese literary traditions, classical Xianxia drew on Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian systems to create imaginative narratives that explored morality, transcendence, and the human condition. Pre-Qin and Han mythology, together with Daoist immortal lore and Buddhist cosmology, provided essential resources for the genre's early formation (Shen, 2016, pp. 76-79; Peng, 2015, pp. 1-3).

The genre was shaped by Zhiguai tales of the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties and by the Chuanqi fiction of the Tang and Song. Works such as Ge Hong's *Shenxian Zhuan*, Gan Bao's *Soushen Ji*, and Duan Chengshi's *Xuan Guai Lu* introduced narrative complexity and moral reflection, while collections like *Bo Yi Zhi* expanded supernatural themes (Yang, 2021, pp. 21-23; Liu, 2018, pp. 11-15). In the Song dynasty, the rise of Huaben novel further secularised the form, blending the marvellous with depictions of everyday life (Huang, 2017, pp. 66-68).

By the Ming and Qing periods, Xianxia fiction reached new creative heights. Journey to the West and Fengshen Yanyi constructed elaborate cosmologies in which gods, demons, and humans interacted, crystallising the narrative arc of "cultivation-adventure-

transcendence" that remains central to the genre (Yang, 2021, pp. 25-26; Zhang, 2020, pp. 14-15). These stories not only elaborated Daoist cultivation systems but also paralleled the "hero's journey" framework later theorised by Campbell.

In the Republican era, Xianxia was revitalised amid national crises. Works such as Huanzhulouzhu's *The Legend of the Swordsmen of Shu Mountain* channelled anxieties about modernity and national survival, expressing ideals of justice and salvation through supernatural conflict and martial heroism (Yang, 2021, pp. 21-23; Zhang, 2020, pp. 19-21). These narratives not only provided spiritual solace but also systematised motifs—such as fortuitous encounters with masters or divine medicine—that became staples of modern Xianxia (Wang, 2019, pp. 35-37).

At its core, classical Xianxia embodies tensions between the mundane and the transcendent, and between humanity and divinity. It fuses "Xian" with "Xia", inheriting the metaphysical quests of Zhiguai and Chuanqi while sustaining the ethical legacy of knightly tales. Through characters navigating love, enmity, and spiritual cultivation, Xianxia offers an enduring philosophical exploration of existence, morality, and the cosmos.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China and in a political climate emphasising class struggle and requiring literature to serve political ends, both Xianxia and Wuxia novels were effectively banned (Hu, 2020, p. 22). From the 1950s to the 1980s, many writers in mainland China either ceased writing or fled overseas, resulting in a near cessation of Wuxia and Xianxia novel production domestically. Meanwhile, in Hong Kong and Taiwan, Wuxia novels flourished, led by luminaries such as Jin Yong, Liang Yusheng, and Gu Long. These authors used Wuxia as a lens to reflect on history, politics, and culture, often embedding their narratives with critiques and philosophical insights (Tang, 2023, p.190). Unlike Xianxia, which centres on cultivation and the pursuit of transcendence, Wuxia focuses on regular humans achieving supernatural martial prowess through traditional Chinese martial arts and inner energy cultivation(Wuxiaworld, 2024). The two genres differ significantly in themes, settings, and narrative priorities. Wuxia novels ground their stories in social realism, exploring the moral dilemmas and justice-driven actions of heroic figures in a world of interpersonal conflict and ethical challenges, often offering social critique or moral allegory (Tang, 2023, p. 187). Xianxia, by contrast, incorporates supernatural elements and revolves around characters striving for

transcendence and immortality through cultivation, frequently blending Daoist, Buddhist, and traditional Chinese philosophical ideas, and addressing ultimate questions of existence and humanity's place in the cosmos. While both genres express the spirit of "xia" (chivalry), Wuxia focuses on the "human path of chivalry", whereas Xianxia extends this pursuit to the "path of transcendence" (Hu, 2020, p. 14).

The Wuxia novels of Hong Kong and Taiwan also integrated Daoist and immortalist elements, creating intersections with Xianxia. For instance, Jin Yong's *The Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils(天龙八部)* features martial techniques with fantastical effects, hinting at Xianxia characteristics.[1] Similarly, Gu Long's *The First Blade of Wind and Clouds (风云第一刀)* portrays the protagonist, Xie Xiaofeng, embracing a lifestyle of introspection and harmony with nature after retiring from the martial world—an approach echoing Xianxia's themes of inner cultivation and unity with the cosmos (Yang, 2022, p. 7).[2]

Furthermore, the structural and character development techniques of Wuxia novels significantly influenced Xianxia, enriching the latter's plot construction and characterisation. Wuxia's emphasis on intricate narratives involving personal growth, moral dilemmas, and conflict resolution was adapted by Xianxia into frameworks such as "cultivation inheritance", "sect rivalries", and "ascension quests". Similarly, Wuxia's methods of deepening character backstories and psychological growth inspired Xianxia to focus on multi-layered narratives and complex character ensembles, allowing it to transcend simple fantasy storytelling. This legacy laid a solid foundation for the revival of Xianxia novel on the mainland and contributed to its narrative and thematic sophistication.

With the advent of the internet age, Xianxia novels experienced a true explosion, carving out their own realm. Enduring several ups and downs and innovations, Xianxia novels diversified in types and genres to meet the diverse interests of readers. Based on the characteristics of Xianxia novels and drawing upon the observations of scholars such as Ouyang Youquan (2008), Yang Yunwen (2022) , Zhang Yeke (2023) and Luo Liqun (1990; 2012) regarding the development of online literature and Xianxia novels, I categorise the evolution of modern Xianxia novel into the following two stages:

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[1] *The Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils(天龙八部)* is one of Jin Yong's most acclaimed works, a Wuxia novel set against the backdrop of the Song Dynasty, filled with political intrigue, martial arts, and philosophical reflection. The story explores themes of fate, loyalty, and the pursuit of personal justice through the intertwined lives of several protagonists.

[2] T*he First Blade of Wind and Clouds(风云第一刀)* is a Wuxia novel by Gu Long, focusing on a legendary swordsman who wields the "First Blade of the Wind and Clouds." The novel explores themes of loyalty, honor, and martial prowess

1. **Initial Phase (1990s-2000s):** This period marks the inception of internet literature in China, facilitated by the rapid spread of digital technologies (Ouyang, 2008, pp. 12-15). In the 1980s, the works of Jin Yong, Gu Long, and Liang Yusheng had revived the declining martial arts market, yet by the late 1990s the Wuxia genre entered a downturn as these masters ceased writing (Luo, 1990, pp. 211-215; Luo, 2012, pp. 88-92). Although younger writers emerged, they could not match the literary stature and cultural impact of Jin Yong or Gu Long (Yang, 2022, p. 15). Consequently, the Wuxia mode, which continued to follow the logic of real society, became increasingly restrictive, leaving younger audiences disengaged and prompting the search for new imaginative frameworks (Zhang, 2023, pp. 42-45).

At this time, authors such as Wen Ruian and Huang Yi experimented with hybrid forms, drawing inspiration from classical Wuxia traditions, sword-immortality fiction, and supernatural tales, while also incorporating influences from Japanese anime and Western fantasy (Yang, 2022, p. 25; Zhang, 2023, pp. 77-80). This experimentation produced early examples of "proto-Xianxia", where cultivation and transcendence were framed within adventure-based narratives, often resonating with Joseph Campbell's "hero's journey" model (Campbell, 2004, pp. 28-30). These works combined Chinese philosophical themes with global fantasy tropes such as supernatural systems of power, moral ambiguity, and the underdog hero rising against fate (Yang, 2022, pp. 25-26).

Huang Yi's *A Step into the Past* (*寻秦记*) is a representative work of Chinese fantasy literature from this period.[1] Yang (2022, p. 15) identifies it as a precursor to the modern online Xianxia novel, while Zhang (2023, pp. 79-80) notes that its incorporation of historical imagination and speculative fantasy reflects the genre's transition from Wuxia to Xianxia. In *A Step into the Past*, the protagonist, Xiang Shaolong, time-travels back to the Qin Dynasty, where, through battles, cultivation, and adventure, he gradually displays extraordinary martial prowess and intelligence. The depiction of cultivation and growth, along with the exploration of supernatural forces, laid the groundwork for some of the core characteristics of modern Xianxia novels.

[1] *A Step into the Past (寻秦记)*, is a popular Chinese historical science fiction novel written by Huang Yi (黄易). It blends elements of martial arts, time travel, and fantasy, as the protagonist, Xiang Shaolong, travels back to the Qin Dynasty and navigates battles, cultivation, and political intrigue. The novel is often credited with helping to establish the modern genre of Chinese fantasy and Xianxia novel. It was translated by Gigi Chang and published by Eastern Press in 2004.

2. **Prosperity Stage (2000s-2020s):** During this period, online Xianxia novels experienced unprecedented growth, driven by the rise of Xianxia-themed TV dramas, the widespread dissemination of related video games, and the rapid expansion of online novel platforms. Platforms such as Qidian Chinese Network (起点中文网) and Jinjiang Literature City (晋江文学城) provided vast spaces for the creation and circulation of Xianxia novels.[1] In 2003, *The Silk Road (缥缈之旅)* by Xiao Qian and *The Legend of Xian* (*诛仙)* by Xiao Ding marked the establishment of modern Xianxia novel as a distinct genre. Set against the backdrop of ancient China, these novels integrated Taoist philosophy and Wuxia themes with Western fantasy elements, creating a unique style for Xianxia novel (Zhang, 2017, p. 65).

As Xianxia novels gradually became an independent genre, the theme of cultivation and ascension to immortality became central, enriching the diversity of both content and form. Many works adopted a narrative structure of "encountering immortals - cultivation - ascension", which became a defining framework for the genre (Zhang, 2023, p. 32). During this phase, Xianxia novels not only flourished within the literary field but also successfully established prominent IPs such as *The Legend of Xian*, *Ashes of Love (香蜜沉沉烬如霜)*, *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation (魔道祖师)*, and *The Eternal Love (苍兰诀)*. These IPs expanded into games, films, and TV series, propelling the popularity of Xianxia culture and sparking the "Xianxia boom" in China.

At the same time, the commercialisation of Xianxia novel led to both an explosion of new works and the growing prevalence of homogeneity and plagiarism. While the commercial drive fueled the production of numerous works, it also resulted in a market saturated with varying levels of quality, affecting the healthy development of the industry. Furthermore, the fusion of Western cultural narrative patterns with traditional Chinese elements has allowed Xianxia to gain international recognition and appeal, becoming a part

[1] Qidian Chinese Network (起点中文网) is one of China's largest and most influential online platforms for online novels, offering a wide range of genres including fantasy, romance, and Xianxia, and serving as a key player in the online literature landscape. It provides a space for both emerging and established authors to publish their works, and has contributed to the rise of popular online novel and the formation of significant intellectual property (IP) in the entertainment industry. Available at: https://www.qidian.com/
Jinjiang Literature City (晋江文学城) is a prominent Chinese online platform specializing in literature, particularly catering to genres such as romance, fantasy, and historical fiction. It supports a wide array of authors, fostering both amateur and professional talent, and plays a key role in the development of online literature and fan culture. Many successful works from this platform have expanded into adaptations in film, television, and other media. Available at: www.jjwxc.net

of global cultural exchange. Through cross-media adaptations, Xianxia novels have evolved into a vast cultural industry chain, extending from novels to games, animation, and film, further enhancing their cultural influence.

1.2.3.2 The Characteristics of Online Xianxia Novels

Modern Chinese online Xianxia novels, unlike classical Xianxia novels rooted in Chinese mythology and supernatural tales, draw upon a much broader range of artistic influences. They are influenced by Chinese Wuxia novels, mythological legends, Western fantasy literature, as well as Japanese animation and gaming cultures, creating a new genre of fantasy Wuxia novels that blend ancient and contemporary elements, East and West, and merge various literary genres (Zhang, 2017, p. 17). This phenomenon is closely linked to the ongoing process of globalisation and the increasing fusion of Chinese and Western cultures, one of the most important factors distinguishing this genre from traditional Chinese Wuxia novels. In other words, Wuxia novels focus on martial arts, heroism, and chivalry, emphasising human abilities and moral codes, while Xianxia novels integrate elements of immortality, cultivation, and the supernatural, blending Daoist, Buddhist, and folk beliefs, creating a more complex and culturally hybrid narrative.

According to Huang Xiaoyang (2006, as cited in Xin, 2018, p. 38), Chinese Xuanhuan fiction draws on multiple sources, including Western fantasy and science fiction, indigenous myths and classical tales, as well as Japanese fantasy, Stephen Chow's nonsensical style, and new Wuxia novel from Hong Kong and Taiwan.[1] Since Xianxia fiction is generally regarded as a key subgenre within the broader Xuanhuan tradition, these origins can also be seen as the cultural and literary roots of Chinese online Xianxia novels.

Chinese online Xianxia novels incorporate characteristics from Western fantasy novels in the construction of their worldbuilding, character settings, and narrative patterns. Western fantasy novels often establish a complete and self-contained world, such as the Middle-earth depicted in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* series. After absorbing this characteristic, Chinese Xianxia novels began to focus on constructing vast cultivation

[1] Stephen Chow's (周星驰) absurdist film style holds an important place in Chinese pop culture, especially from the 1990s to the early 2000s, during which he created several iconic, far-reaching works. His films not only pushed the boundaries of traditional comedy but also explored social realities and human nature through humour and exaggeration, making him a landmark figure in Chinese cinema history. His works are beloved across generations and have had a significant influence on global Chinese culture, becoming cultural reference points for many filmmakers and audiences.

worlds. Authors create self-contained cultivation worlds by depicting different sects, races, secret realms, and magical treasures. For example, Chen Dong's *Covering the Sky (遮天)* establishes a vast cultivation system that encompasses elements like immortals, demons, Buddhism, and Taoism.

Christopher Booker's *The Seven Basic Plots* (2004) identifies seven recurring narrative structures: "overcoming the monster", "rags to riches", "the quest", "voyage and return", "comedy", "tragedy", and "rebirth". These archetypes are deeply ingrained in global storytelling traditions, particularly in fantasy genres. Chinese modern Xianxia novels, which blend traditional Chinese mythology with contemporary narrative techniques, align closely with these structures, showcasing their influence. The evolution of these narratives is fundamental to the genre, strengthening themes of self-discovery and heroism. Many Xianxia novels have developed more intricate and refined narrative structures, reflecting the classic frameworks outlined by Booker. These stories often explore themes of personal transformation and the hero's journey, aligning with Booker's categories like "rags to riches", "the quest", and "rebirth". For example, in *Battle Through the Heavens(斗破苍穹)*, Xiao Yan's transformation from a seemingly useless youth to a powerful figure parallels Booker's "Rebirth" plot, where the protagonist overcomes flaws and limitations to achieve growth and redemption. This narrative trajectory embodies the essence of The Seven Basic Plots and illustrates how the Xianxia genre has absorbed these global storytelling patterns.

In Western fantasy literature, magic systems are highly varied and complex, ranging from the structured schools of magic in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series to the more fluid, elemental systems found in works like *The Wheel of Time* by Robert Jordan. These diverse magical systems, which include intricate rules for spell-casting, magical creatures, and mystical realms, have had a significant influence on the development of magical settings in Chinese Xianxia novels. Xianxia novels, while grounded in traditional Chinese concepts such as Daoist alchemy and cultivation, have incorporated elements from Western fantasy to expand their own cultivation systems.

For example, in *Stellar Transformations(星辰变)* by I Eat Tomatoes, the narrative blends traditional Chinese internal alchemy cultivation with new concepts such as energy conversion and spatial laws that resemble those found in Western magical systems. This

integration reflects a synthesis of both cultures: while Chinese Xianxia retains its focus on spiritual and physical cultivation, it has adapted the complexity and diversity of Western magic systems to create a more intricate and multifaceted cultivation framework. Thus, Xianxia novels blend traditional Chinese cultural elements with the detailed magical world-building typical of Western fantasy, resulting in a unique narrative model that resonates with a global audience (Zhang, 2017, p. 65; Li, 2018, p. 122). This cross-cultural influence enriches the genre and highlights how modern Xianxia novels have evolved, drawing on diverse sources to create compelling and expansive fictional worlds.

The influence of ACG culture (animation, comics, and games) on Chinese Xianxia novels is evident in their integration of game-like task progression systems and adventure frameworks (Yang, 2022, pp. 12-13). Drawing inspiration from Japanese Role-Playing Games, such as their level-up mechanics and dungeon explorations, novels like Er Gen's ISSH reflect these influences through Meng Hao's journey, where completing tasks systematically enhances his abilities and status. Each challenge he faces serves as a narrative milestone, enriching the novel's rhythm and immersing readers in a structured, yet unpredictable world.

Similarly, in character dynamics, Japanese ACG culture introduces team-based cooperation models, enhancing the interpersonal relationships of protagonists and their allies. For instance, Bai Xiaochun and Du Lingfei in AWE demonstrate collaborative problem-solving akin to RPG party systems, where individual strengths contribute to shared goals. This approach adds depth to character relationships and broadens the emotional resonance of the narrative. By adopting these mechanisms, Xianxia novels achieve greater complexity and appeal, paving the way for multimedia adaptations while preserving the integrity of their traditional cultural roots.

Despite being deeply influenced by Western fantasy novels and Japanese ACG culture, Chinese online Xianxia novels have not abandoned the spiritual core of Chinese traditional culture. On the contrary, while absorbing elements from foreign cultures, modern Xianxia novels still firmly grasp the essence of Chinese traditional culture, showcasing its unique cultural charm. The cultivation philosophy in Xianxia novels emphasises harmony with nature and the pursuit of immortality, deeply influenced by Taoist thought of "unity of heaven and humanity". Confucian values of loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, and

righteousness are also prominently reflected in Xianxia novels. Protagonists often exhibit strong patriotism, loyalty to friends, and unwavering commitment to love. Themes from Buddhist philosophy such as karma and reincarnation are also significant in Xianxia novels. Many Xianxia novels convey the concept of retribution for good and evil through narratives of karma. The "Xia" spirit from Wuxia novels is well inherited and developed in Xianxia novels. Protagonists often shoulder responsibilities to eradicate evil, promote good, and aid the needy, demonstrating a strong sense of justice and social responsibility. Chinese online Xianxia novels not only uphold the spiritual core of Chinese traditional culture but also reinterpret and express these traditional cultural elements through innovative approaches.

Xianxia novels often integrate elements from Chinese traditional culture such as mythology, martial arts, and philosophy, which bring novelty and appeal to readers from non-Chinese cultural backgrounds. Modern Chinese internet Xianxia novels bear a strong imprint of traditional Chinese culture while being deeply influenced and packaged by Western and Japanese popular cultures, making them widely embraced by global internet literature enthusiasts. Novels such as *Jade Dynasty*,ISSH, and *Heaven Official's Blessing* (*魔道祖师*) enjoy high subscription rates and ratings on online literature platforms like Wuxiaworld and Webnovel. According to the *2023 China Online Literature Development Report* (ILCASS, 2024), Chinese online literature works targeting global markets have developed into 15 major categories and over 100 subcategories (tags). To date, genres such as fantasy, Xianxia (immortal cultivation), and related speculative fiction themes remain the dominant forces in overseas markets, representing a significant portion of exported online literature (Zhang, 2023, p. 77). Moreover, the *2022 Fun Facts Report on the Globalization of Chinese Online Literature* (GPC, 2023), revealed that In 2022, "Eastern Fantasy", primarily represented by Xianxia novels, ranked third among the top five most popular themes in overseas online literature. Among hundreds of literary tags, "Cultivation", a core tag of Xianxia novels, secured a spot in the top ten. On the Wuxiaworld platform, "Cultivation" novels have consistently been among the six most popular genres.

Among these Xianxia novels, Er Gen's works ISSH and AWE have been recognised by several media outlets as two of the *Top 10 Must-Read Xianxia novels* (You, 2023) and

15 Essential Xianxia novels You Must Read (Agravante, 2024), blending the quintessential elements of modern Chinese Xianxia novel. Reading these novels is an essential way to understand the genre of contemporary Chinese Xianxia and grasp the nuances of Chinese Xia culture. Both novels were translated by the same translator, Deathblade.

1.2.4 Deathblade and His Translations of Xianxia Novels

1. Deathblade

Jeremy Bai, an American translator known by his pen name "Deathblade", is a prominent translator of Chinese online novels. He has played a significant role in bringing Chinese Xianxia and Wuxia literature to an English-speaking audience. He embarked on his career as a published author in 1995 with a noir cyberpunk short story about a computer virus bounty hunter. Then, in the year 2000, the Wuxia movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*(*卧虎藏龙*) sparked a profound interest in China and Chinese culture. This fascination led him to take a month-long trip to China in 2007.[1] Upon his return to the United States, Jeremy decided to dedicate himself to studying Mandarin, understanding that learning the language was crucial to fully engaging with Chinese literature in its original form. His decision to adopt the surname Bai was symbolic-he chose a common Chinese surname that aligned with his personal and professional transformation. Bai (白) is a relatively common surname in China, and by adopting it, Jeremy sought to further integrate into the culture and demonstrate his commitment to understanding and becoming part of it.

In 2010, Jeremy made the bold decision to relocate to China, where he worked as a teacher and manager at a private English school. During his eight years in China, he not only improved his language skills but also formed deeper connections with the culture. His wife, a native of Hebei, and their son, who was born in Hebei, were an integral part of his experience. Jeremy and his wife likely spent time with her family in Hebei, which further immersed him in Chinese life and traditions. This long period of living in China significantly enhanced his fluency in Mandarin and his understanding of Chinese culture, ultimately supporting his transition into a career in translating Chinese literature. A few

[1] *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon(卧虎藏龙)*, a 2000 Wuxia martial arts action-adventure film directed by Ang Lee, won the Best Foreign Language Film award at the 73rd Academy Awards.

years into his stay in China, Jeremy began translating Wuxia novels as a means to improve his Mandarin proficiency, which quickly evolved into one of his primary passions. In 2015, he transitioned to translating Chinese fantasy online literature full-time for Wuxiaworld under the pseudonym Deathblade.

Jeremy Bai is best known for his translations of several famous novels by Er Gen, such as ISSH, AWE and *Beyond the Timescape* (*光阴之外*). His work has garnered positive feedback from readers, particularly for its accuracy and ability to capture the nuances of the original Chinese texts. Bai is praised for his clear and accessible translations, which convey the intricate plots and emotional depth of the novels while retaining the essence of Chinese culture and character development. His translations are often recognised for their precision in explaining complex cultivation systems and cultural concepts, making them easier for English-speaking readers to understand. For example, a reader of *Beyond the Timescape* praised Deathblade as "a peak Xianxia translator and is great at bridging the gap between Western and Eastern cultures" (Daoist, 2023).

Bai's contributions have played a significant role in bringing Chinese online novels to the English-speaking world. Through his translations of novels like ISSH and AWE, he has introduced many international readers to the Xianxia genre. His translations have also received strong ratings on Wuxiaworld, with *Beyond the Timescape* earning 97% positive reviews from 494 users, AWE 92% positive from 202 reviews, and ISSH 83% positive from 204 reviews. While these ratings reflect the novels themselves, the exceptionally high approval ratings are remarkable, especially considering that many novels on Wuxiaworld receive less than 80% positive reviews. This high praise is a testament to Deathblade's consistently excellent translation quality. Furthermore, Bai was named Wuxiaworld's most popular Chinese novel translator in 2023 (Wuxiaworld, 2023). These figures highlight the strong recognition and appreciation of Deathblade's work among English-speaking readers.

Raised in an American cultural environment, Jeremy Bai brings a strong cross-cultural awareness to his translation of Chinese Xianxia novel. His long-term immersion in Chinese language and culture—both through formal study and extended residence in China—enables him to approach the source material with care and insight. Bai demonstrates a clear sensitivity to the expectations of English-speaking readers, often

mediating the intricate systems of cultivation, sect hierarchy, and philosophical ideas central to Xianxia in a way that is accessible yet engaging for an international audience.

While certain cultural and conceptual nuances inevitably present challenges, particularly those embedded in Daoist cosmology, ethical frameworks, or classical allusions, his translations are nonetheless marked by a genuine effort to retain the thematic depth and narrative tone of the original. Bai is particularly effective in rendering key motifs such as treason against fate, personal transcendence, and the moral tensions between power and righteousness. Though occasional misreadings or simplifications occur, his work remains a valuable contribution to the global dissemination of Xianxia novel, opening up this genre's imaginative and philosophical richness to a broader readership.

In conclusion, Jeremy Bai's cross-cultural background, extensive knowledge of Chinese culture, and strong language proficiency contribute to his translations serving as a bridge between cultures, offering English-speaking readers a deeper understanding of Chinese cultivation and Wuxia novels.

2. Er Gen

Deathblade's translations of Xianxia novels are all by the Chinese internet writer Er Gen (耳根). Er Gen, whose real name is Liu Yong (刘勇), is a prominent Chinese online novelist born in the 1980s in Mudanjiang, Heilongjiang Province. Writing under his pen name Er Gen (耳根), he has become a distinguished figure in the Xianxia genre, known for integrating classical Chinese myths into his works.

Er Gen is a platinum author on Qidian, a major Chinese online literature platform. His works have consistently received high praise from readers. For instance, his novel ISSH achieved remarkable success, topping the "Qidian Monthly Ticket" chart for ten consecutive months in 2015. This success led him to the top of the 2015 Forbes China Original Literature Power Ranking. In 2016, his novel AWE earned him a spot in the top three of the same ranking. Er Gen was also named one of the "Five Supreme Authors" at the online novel King Awards in both 2017 and 2018. Furthermore, in May 2018, he was recognised as the "Most Popular Xianxia Author" at the third Orange Melon Network Literature Awards (Wuxiaworld, 2024). In addition to his literary accomplishments, Er Gen is also a member of the ninth National Chinese Writers' Association (Luo, 2016), further cementing his influence in the literary world

1.3 Research Significance and Questions

1.3.1 Research Significance

Deathblade is an outstanding translator of Wuxia and Xianxia novels and is one of the few foreign translators who grew up in a Western cultural background and is devoted to promoting Chinese Wuxia and Xianxia culture. Studying the translation and dissemination of Xianxia novels translated by him allows for a deep exploration of the translation and dissemination of Xia culture from the perspective of English-speaking readers and translators. It also helps to understand the reasons for their popularity, the challenges, and advantages of translation and dissemination. Additionally, it aids in uncovering and preserving the Xia cultural elements in Chinese online Xianxia novels, promoting the global spread of Xia culture, and endowing it with new contemporary significance.

1. **Uncovering Xia Cultural Elements in Chinese Online Xianxia novels**

As Xianxia novels translated by Deathblade are welcomed by many anglophone readers, they contain rich elements of traditional Chinese culture, especially Xia culture. Studying the Xia culture in Deathblade's translated Xianxia novels allows for a deeper understanding of the traditional cultural elements embedded in these stories. Xianxia novels blend elements of immortality and fantasy, showcasing the spirit of traditional Wuxia. This research helps in understanding how traditional Chinese culture is manifested and evolved in modern literature.

2. **Promoting the Global Spread of Xia culture**

Translating Xianxia novels into other languages, especially English, facilitates the global spread of Xia culture. Through translation, these novels reach non-Chinese readers, promoting the understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture. Translated works serve as cultural bridges, allowing more readers to experience and appreciate the unique charm of Xia culture.

3. **Endowing Traditional Wuxia and Xianxia culture with Modern Significance**

Online Xianxia novels are influenced by both Chinese canon literature and global cultures, presenting a modern interpretation of traditional Wuxia elements. Translation is not just a conversion of words but a transmission of culture, bringing these traditional stories to life through modern narrative techniques and themes. This fusion not only

revives traditional Xia culture but also demonstrates its adaptability and relevance in contemporary society.

4. Bridging Cultural Gaps and Enhancing Understanding

Translation work is more than just language conversion; it is a cultural bridge. Through detailed annotations and explanations, translators help readers from different cultural backgrounds understand the complex plots and cultural nuances of Xianxia novels. This cultural bridging is crucial for promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation, helping readers better grasp the philosophies and cultural subtleties behind the stories.

5. Enhancing Global Recognition of Chinese Literature

As a representative genre of Chinese online literature, Xianxia novels have gained widespread recognition globally through translation. For example, Webnovel, the international platform of Qidian, hosted approximately 3,800 translated works of Chinese online literature by the end of 2023, reflecting a 31% increase compared to 2022. Leading online literature companies, such as China Literature Group (Yuewen), have partnered with nearly 100 overseas publishing institutions, including Amarin and Libre, authorizing approximately 2,000 works for digital and print publication across regions such as East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Europe and North America. These novels combine traditional Chinese culture with global popular culture elements, attracting international readers. Translation not only elevates the global status of Chinese literature but also promotes a deeper understanding and appreciation of Chinese cultural values and narrative traditions.

In summary, studying the translation and dissemination of Xia culture in Xianxia novels helps to deeply understand the preservation, transformation, and spread of traditional culture in modern literature. Deathblade's translation of Er Gen's Xianxia novels further highlights the significance of this research, demonstrating the importance of translation in cultural exchange and emphasising the lasting impact of Xia culture in contemporary narratives.

1.3.2 Research Questions

Thus, this study seeks to apply the method of Medio-translatology to examine Xia culture in Chinese Xianxia online novels translated by Deathblade. Its primary aim is to analyse

the “creative treason” contributions of Deathblade and the reception environment to the translated work, thereby exploring the relationship between traditional Xia culture and its representation in the translation of Chinese Xianxia online novels.[1] The study also raises the following research questions:

Question 1: What is the current status of the translation and dissemination of Chinese online Xianxia novels, and how does the reception environment influence the understanding of cultural elements in these works? (Mapped to: Chapter 1 and Chapter 5)

This question seeks to explore the current state of the translation and distribution of Chinese Xianxia novels, focusing on the role of the reception environment. It considers how platforms such as Wuxiaworld shape English-speaking readers' understanding of culturally rich elements in these works, and how these platforms contribute to the broader dissemination of Xianxia novel. Insights from Chapter 1 provide an overview of the landscape, while Chapter 5 delves into the survey data and platform affordances to understand how readers engage with and interpret these cultural elements.

Question 2: What forms of creative treason are manifested in the translation of Xianxia novels by Deathblade and what are the reasons behind these choices? (Mapped to: Chapter 4)

This question examines the specific forms of creative treason that appear in Deathblade's translations of ISSH and AWE. Through textual analysis and the translator's interview, it identifies the translator's strategies for adapting culturally significant elements of Xia culture for English-speaking readers. The focus here is on the detailed motivations behind these decisions, exploring how Deathblade balances the need for accessibility with the preservation of cultural integrity. This study will consider how these choices impact the overall quality and authenticity of the translation, exploring both the advantages and potential drawbacks of creative treason in the translation of culturally rich content.

Question 3: How do English-speaking readers interpret the cultural elements of Xia culture in these translations, and how do their expectations influence their understanding of these elements? (Mapped to: Chapter 5)

In this question, the focus is on how English-speaking readers understand the cultural

[1] creative treason, a term first introduced by French literary sociologist Robert Escarpit in *Creative Treason as a Key to Literature* (1961). The concept of creative treason is central to this study and will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 2

components of Xia culture embedded in the translations of ISSH and AWE. Through analysis of the reader survey data, this question explores how English-speaking readers' expectations, shaped by their own cultural backgrounds, impact their interpretation of key elements of the novels, such as moral values, loyalty, and the concept of treason. This question directly contributes to understanding how the reception of cultural elements varies based on reader context.

Question 4: What are the implications of creative treason for translation strategies when conveying culturally rich elements, particularly in Chinese Xianxia novels, and how can future translations better balance accessibility with cultural fidelity? (Mapped to: Chapter 5 and Chapter 6)

The final question addresses the broader implications of creative treason on translation strategies. It considers how translators can navigate the delicate balance between accessibility and cultural fidelity, particularly in the translation of Chinese Xianxia novels. The focus is on how future translations can more effectively preserve the depth and complexity of culturally rich elements while ensuring they remain understandable and engaging for English-speaking readers. This question connects the theoretical insights on creative treason with practical recommendations for future translation practices, drawing from the survey data and the analysis in Chapter 6.

1.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a comprehensive foundation for the study by exploring the historical and contemporary context of Chinese online literature, with a particular focus on the genre of Xianxia novels. By examining the development and distinctive characteristics of Chinese online literature, this chapter has highlighted the challenges inherent in translating and disseminating texts rich in cultural content. Nida (1964, p. 159) pointed out that cultural elements are among the most difficult to translate, as they demand strategies extending beyond linguistic transfer. This observation is particularly relevant when comparing the translation of traditional Chinese literature with that of contemporary Chinese online Xianxia novels. Moreover, the chapter demonstrates how modern Xianxia novel combines traditional Chinese Xia culture with contemporary pop culture and Western fantasy narrative conventions, offering a space for dynamic

cultural exchange and adaptation.

This chapter also introduced the key figures central to the research—author Er Gen and translator Deathblade. Their contributions to the novels ISSH and AWE are very important for understanding how Xia culture has been translated for international readers. By providing insights into their roles, this chapter laid the groundwork for the subsequent analysis of the translations.

Furthermore, this chapter clarified the significance of the research and set out the key questions that will guide the study. These questions structure the analysis across the subsequent chapters, ensuring a coherent exploration of translation strategies and reader reception. With this foundation established, Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature and theoretical framework; Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology; Chapter 4 investigates the translator's strategies and creative treason; Chapter 5 examines reader reception and analyses the role of the online platform in shaping both the translation and its reception; and Chapter 6 synthesises the insights to draw the overall conclusions. Together, these chapters advance our understanding of how Xia culture is translated and mediated within the framework of Medio-translatology.

Chapter II Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In the first chapter, I introduced the translation and dissemination of Chinese literature, including Chinese online literature, Chinese Xianxia novels and Xia culture, as well as Xianxia novels translated by Deathblade. Based on this research background, I proposed four research questions. To address these questions, it is necessary to review the relevant studies on Medio-translatology, Chinese online novels and Xia culture which will be done in this chapter.

2.2 Literature Review on Medio-translatology

This study adopts the perspective of Medio-translatology as its research framework. Medio-translatology is an innovative theory proposed by Chinese scholar Xie Tianzhen in the 1980s, combining the disciplines of Comparative Literature studies and Translation Studies. This theory has been recognised as one of the fastest-growing and most dynamic fields of research in China over the past few decades (Zha, 2005, p. 40). Given that Comparative Literature studies and Translation Studies form the theoretical foundation of Medio-translatology, their development and key perspectives directly influence the construction and application of the theory. Therefore, a review of the literature on the current state of research and emerging trends in these fields is essential for a deeper understanding of the academic context of Medio-translatology. This approach will also help identify critical issues within the research and ensure the theory's application is both scientifically rigorous and methodologically sound.

2.2.1 Medio-translatology and Comparative Literature

The term "Comparative Literature" first appeared in *Cours de Littérature Comparée* (1816) by François-Joseph-Michel Noël and François de La Place, although the discipline only began to take shape in the late nineteenth century. Early contributions from scholars such as Max Koch and Joseph Texte helped to establish the methodological basis of the discipline. Building on this foundation, Marius-François Guyard emphasised that Comparative Literature should explore the relationships between literatures across national,

linguistic, and cultural boundaries, rather than limit itself to simple juxtapositions (Guyard, 1983). In a similar spirit, Henry Remak (1961) defined the field as the study of literature beyond national borders and in relation to other humanistic disciplines, such as philosophy, history, and sociology.

This subsection revisits the three major schools of Comparative Literature—French, Soviet, and American—whose respective emphases on agency, ideology, and reception constitute the intellectual foundation upon which Medio-translatology is built. These traditions do not directly inform my analytical methods, instead, they contextualise the theoretical evolution that led to the formation of Medio-translatology as a culturally oriented, interdisciplinary approach to translation.

As discussed earlier, Medio-translatology stands at the crossroads of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies. To clarify its structure and function, it is necessary to consider how central concerns in Comparative Literature—textual influence, sociopolitical context, and cultural reception—have been absorbed and reformulated within this framework. On this basis, Medio-translatology highlights the interaction of the translator, the reader, and the reception environment in negotiating intercultural meaning (Xie, 1999, pp. 3-5; Xie, 2020, pp. 48-50).

The French school, which developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was primarily concerned with tracing literary influence across nations. Paul Van Tieghem, in *La littérature comparée* (1931), defined the field as the study of "literary relations" and gave priority to the historical investigation of transmission and authorship. Marius-François Guyard, in *La Littérature comparée* (1951), also argued that Comparative Literature should focus on relationships between literatures across linguistic and national boundaries rather than on simple juxtapositions. This tradition has often been criticised for reducing Comparative Literature to source-hunting and neglecting the reader's role (Bassnett, 1993). Nevertheless, its focus on influence opened the way for later reflections on literary agency. Medio-translatology adapts this legacy by shifting the emphasis from authors to translators, treating them as cultural agents whose choices shape meaning, a perspective central to Xie's discussion of conscious creative treason (Xie, 1999; Xie, 2020).

The Soviet school, rooted in Marxist literary theory, highlighted the ideological function of literature. Literary and translated texts were regarded as instruments within wider social and political systems, reflecting class structures and economic forces. While sometimes criticised for reducing literature to political discourse, this approach strongly influenced Chinese scholarship, where ideology has long been considered a key dimension of literary study (Zajda, 2010). Medio-translatology inherits this perspective by stressing how translation both reflects and reshapes ideological positions, particularly through paratextual framing and the translator's ethical stance.

The American school, which gained prominence after the Second World War, broadened the scope of Comparative Literature by presenting it as a form of cultural exchange. Henry Remak defined it as "the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country" (Remak, 1961, p. 3), and further stressed its connections with other areas of human knowledge such as philosophy, history, and the social sciences. This approach integrated insights from anthropology, psychology, and area studies, placing renewed emphasis on the reader, cultural context, and interpretive diversity. Although some critics have argued that such breadth risks weakening methodological rigour (Bassnett, 1993), the American school's focus on reception provided the basis for a central concern in Medio-translatology: the role of the reception environment in shaping meaning. In this perspective, meaning emerges not only from the source text or the translator, but also through the reader's engagement with cultural and interpretive frameworks. The three schools of Comparative Literature provided the conceptual basis for Medio-translatology, drawing attention to the translator's agency, the ideological dimension of texts, and the significance of reception. Although these traditions will not be applied directly in later analysis, they offer the historical and intellectual framework within which the theory has developed.

Building on this foundation, Chinese scholarship since the 1980s has increasingly turned to intercultural studies, comparing Chinese and Western traditions and exploring how meaning circulates across cultures. This orientation reflects the globalisation of literary exchange, with scholars drawing on both Western perspectives and indigenous intellectual resources. As Hall (1959, p. 186) famously stated, "culture is communication and communication is culture", capturing the intrinsic link between culture and the ways

we interpret messages. This premise underpins intercultural studies, which aim to discern recurring cultural patterns and clarify how meaning is constructed and perceived across cultural divides.

It is within this intellectual climate that Medio-translatology emerged. As Xie Tianzhen observes, Translation Studies that were initially conceived from a media perspective within Comparative Literature have progressively shifted towards a comparative cultural perspective (1999, p. 1). Emphasising translation as a medium, some scholars suggest that Medio-translatology may be regarded as a form of impact studies within Comparative Literature (Zhang, 2003, p. 89). By treating language as cultural action, it focuses on the causes and effects of translation within specific cultural contexts, aligning it with the character of intercultural studies in the Chinese discipline.

At the same time, the cultural turn in Translation Studies (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990) has provided complementary theoretical resources, enabling the field to expand its methodological scope. Against this backdrop, the following section will examine how Translation Studies, particularly through the cultural turn, supplied the methodological foundations that allowed Medio-translatology to be fully theorised.

2.2.2 Medio-translatology and Translation Studies

Translation Studies developed as an independent discipline throughout the twentieth century, partly due to its role in language learning (Ghanooni, 2012, p. 84). Historian Edwin Gentzler cites the 1976 Leuven Conference in Belgium as its formal establishment (Gentzler, 1998, p. 6), while Mona Baker argues it became a "discipline" in the 1990s (Baker, 1998, p. 13). However, many scholars trace its founding to 1972, when James Holmes presented his paper "The name and nature of Translation Studies" at the Third International Conference on Applied Linguistics.

With its detailed conception of the research scope and framework of the discipline, this paper is widely regarded as the manifesto for the establishment of the discipline of Translation Studies. In 1978 André Lefevere suggested that the academic community should adopt Translation Studies as the official name of the discipline and in 1980 Bassnett published the first academic monograph under the title "Translation Studies" (Bassnett-McGuire, 1980). Since then, the term "Translation Studies" has been generally

accepted within academia.

Translation Studies has developed rapidly to include a variety of perspectives. However, as George Steiner argues, the focus remains on the same question: "In what ways can or ought fidelity to be achieved? What is the optimal correlation between the A text in the source-language and the B text in the receptor language?"(1998, p. 275). The pursuit of fidelity often comes at the expense of the translator's own "historical existence" (Liu, 2006, p. 7).

Since the 1950s, this tension has been explored by linguists such as Roman Jakobson, Eugene Nida, and J. C. Catford. Applying sociolinguistic, semantic and semiotic theories to study translations, these researchers emphasised the equivalence of the translated materials in another language and the pursuit of "dynamic equivalence" (Nida, 1964, pp. 166-171) between the translation and the original text.

During this period, debates in translation research centred primarily on issues such as "literal translation" versus "free translation", "translatability" versus "untranslatability", and the "content" versus "form" dichotomy (Zhao and Zhang, 2022, p. 91). Translation research occupied a minor space within applied linguistics and an even smaller one in literary studies, holding virtually no position in the emerging field of cultural studies (Bassnett, 2003, p. 434).

From the 1970s onwards, scholars began to expand the scope of Translation Studies, moving beyond the formalist stage and starting to consider broader issues such as context, history, and customs (Bassnett, 2003, p. 433). Israeli literary theorist Itamar Even-Zohar achieved a breakthrough in the traditional boundaries between linguistics and literature with his polysystem theory. In polysystem theory, translated literature is regarded as an integral part of the literary system, rather than merely a peripheral or secondary role. Translated literature also serves as a cultural intermediary, enabling different cultures to influence and interact with each other. Through translation, foreign literature and ideas are introduced into new literary systems, creating intercultural dialogue (Even-Zohar, 1990). Adopting this system, Gideon Toury, explored cultural-historical factors in translation choices through numerous case studies, while André Lefevere analysed the ideological factors involved in interpretation.

In 1990, Lefevere and Susan Bassnett introduced the "cultural turn" in Translation

Studies in their co-authored essay collection *Translation, History, and Culture*, emphasising the significant role of culture in translation and the cultural impact of translation in the target language region. The "cultural turn" in Translation Studies can be seen as a distinct shift—from a retrospective approach based on the strict linguistic concept of equivalence with the source text to a prospective sociocultural approach based on the function of the translation for the target audience (Snell-Hornby, 2008, p. 42). At this point, Translation Studies gradually moved away from purely linguistic and equivalence models towards more culturally and contextually oriented approaches. This shift was influenced by the development of cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and Comparative Literature, all of which emphasised the importance of context, power relations, and cultural dynamics in translation.

Where traditional Translation Studies were text-oriented and regarded translation as a kind of code-switching, the "cultural turn" in Translation Studies marked a paradigm shift towards translation as an intercultural activity, thereby broadening the horizon of the field.

With the development of the "cultural turn" in Translation Studies, Escarpit's theory of creative treason has attracted increased attention. The French literary sociologist first suggests the term in *Creative Treason as a Key to Literature*, where he argues that creative treason is an inevitable phenomenon in literary translation due to the reception environment (Escarpit, 1961, pp. 16-21). This is because translation places the text in a completely unexpected linguistic reference system. Translation occurs within a different linguistic system; it not only conveys the content of the original text but also reshapes its meaning and cultural essence. This cross-linguistic transformation inevitably requires the translator to creatively adapt the original work, ensuring that its ideas and emotions are accurately understood and appreciated by the target audience within their cultural context. Following the "cultural turn" in Translation Studies, translation is no longer seen as a simple transformation of the original text but also as an activity that is restricted by factors such as the culture of the target language, the purpose of translation, and the cultural background of the translator. In this context, Escarpit suggests that the addition, deletion, reorganisation or even rewriting of the original text by the translator as a result of the influence of the target language culture is creative treason.

Escarpit's theory of creative treason arrived in China in 1987, in the *Handbook of*

Comparison of Chinese and Western Literature, compiled by the Institute of Foreign Languages and Literature at Shanghai University of Foreign Studies. The handbook offered the following interpretation of creative treason:

> creative treason has three layers of meaning: first, it refers to modern readers' "misinterpretation" of past literature. For example, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, contrary to their original intentions, are now read as children's literature in many countries. Secondly, foreign works have often been altered in ways that deviate from their original purpose to cater to the tastes of Chinese readers. Thirdly, it refers to creative treason arising from theoretical errors during the translation process due to the limitations of language.[1] (Institute of Foreign Languages and Literature, Shanghai University of Foreign Studies, 1987, p. 95-96)

The theory of creative treason was immediately embraced by Chinese scholars. In her book, *A Course in Comparative Literature: Chinese and Western Perspectives,* Yue (1988) expanded the term "Medio translatology" to include creative treason which, she argues, was necessary for a text to extend its vitality, readership, and acceptance (Yue Daiyun, 1988, pp. 170-175). In *Introduction to Comparative Literature*, Chen Dun and Liu Xiangyu (2000) argue that literary works translated from one language to another are bound to undergo a process of creative treason and translators cannot be 100% faithful to the original work. On the other hand, they also pointed out that any translation should not deviate from the original work and should take the original as the standard (Chen and Liu, 2000, p. 212).

Meanwhile, some scholars have questioned the definition of creative treason. Duan Junhui thought the definition of creative treason was ambiguous and that it should be redefined as "faithful creation and rebellious creation." Otherwise, it would lead to confusion in the classification of translators, recipients and the reception environment (Duan, 2004, pp. 117-121). Xu Jun believes that creative treason was equivalent to the practice of intentionally deviating from the original work in the pursuit of creation, a

[1] Translated from the following Chinese: "创造性叛逆"具有三层含义:首先，它指的是现代读者对过去文学的"误读"。例如，斯威夫特的《格列佛游记》和笛福的《鲁滨逊漂流记》，与其原本的意图相反，如今在许多国家被当作儿童文学来阅读。其次，外国作品常常为了迎合中国读者的口味而被修改，这些改动偏离了原著的初衷。第三，它指的是在翻译过程中，由于语言的局限性而导致的理论性错误，从而产生的"创造性叛逆"。

practice that runs counter to the fundamental goal of translation. Overemphasis on the translator's subjectivity may result in an extreme opposition between the understanding and interpretation of the original work, constituting a substantial departure from the original. These scholars have narrowly understood creative treason as a guiding method for translation practice, while ignoring the cultural connotations of translation in intercultural communication. (Xu, 2003, pp. 6-11).

One of the Chinese scholars who has further systematically developed the theory of creative treason in translation is Professor Xie Tianzhen. Since the 1990s, Professor Xie has written extensively on and advanced the theory of creative treason[1]. He suggests a division between conscious and unconscious treason. Xie argues that certain instances of creative treason in literary translation do not originate from the translator or the reader but are the result of the reception environment. This concept focused the attention of Chinese Translation Studies on the cultural aspects of translation.

The notion of the reception environment is particularly important here. In Comparative Literature it refers to the ways in which texts are understood within specific cultural and historical contexts, framed by the reader's "horizon of expectations" (Jauss, 1982, p. 22). In Translation Studies the scope is extended to include the systematic adaptation of a translated work to the target culture, encompassing audience expectations, social needs and cultural norms. Reiss and Vermeer's Skopos Theory makes this explicit by asserting that translation strategies should be guided by the intended function of the target text and must respond to its communicative context (2013, p. 96).

Medio-translatology distinguishes translator, reader, and reception environment, but in practice, reader response is usually seen as part of the wider environment. This study adopts that perspective for analytical clarity, situating responses within the reception environment.

It is within this expanded cultural framework that Hans Robert Jauss's concept of the horizon of expectations and Stanley Fish's theory of interpretive communities become particularly relevant. Jauss argues that a reader's interpretation is shaped by prior reading

[1] Xie Tianzhen has written several books and articles related to creative treason. including works such as On Creative Treason in Literary Translation (1992), Mistranslation: Misunderstanding and Misreading between Different Cultures (1994), Translation: The Loss and Distortion of Cultural Imagery (1994), Comparative Literature and Translation Studies (1994), Literary Translation: Literary Translation (1994), intercultural Creative Treason (1994), Creative Treason in Translation (1994), and Literary Translation: intercultural Creative Treason (1996).

experiences, cultural background, and genre conventions, forming a "horizon" against which the new text is judged (Jauss, 1982, p.23). This view aligns with Medio-translatology's focus on the reception environment as an active cultural force, shaped not only by individual readers but also by communities like fan forums and platform commentaries that influence how meaning is constructed.

Within this context, Escarpit's theory of creative treason can be understood not only as a translator-driven phenomenon but as part of a wider interactive process involving audience reception and cultural accommodation. Jauss and Fish thus contribute critical insights to the Medio-translatology framework, highlighting how cultural interpretation, rather than linguistic equivalence alone, governs the success or failure of a translated work.

The integration of Jauss's horizon of expectations and Fish's interpretive communities deepens our understanding of how creative treason functions within translation. These theories foreground the reader's active role in co-constructing meaning and thus support the view of translation as a form of intercultural negotiation, not mere semantic transfer. The following chapter 5 draws on these concepts to examine how Deathblade's translation of ISSH engages with both individual and communal reception dynamics.

2.2.3 Medio-translatology in China

In China, research on the translation of Comparative Literature began in the 1980s. At that time, the research mainly focused on the comparative study of different translations of foreign writers' works in China. In 1997, Chen Dun, Sun Jingyao and Xie Tiantizhen jointly edited the book C*omparative Literature* in which "Medio-translatology" was given an independent chapter. In the context of the increasing status of literary translation in the field of Comparative Literature, Xie Tianzhen expounds on the status and influence of translation and transliteration in Comparative Literature and makes an in-depth analysis of Robert Escarpit's creative treason.

From this point on, Medio-translatology was no longer considered a branch of the theory of "media science" (a theory developed by the French school in Comparative Literature) but an independent theory in Comparative Literature. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the Chinese Comparative Literature community has generally recognised the theory of Medio-translatology, incorporating it into their academic research and including

the theory in textbooks on Comparative Literature and translatology (Zha, 2005, p. 45).

Rooted in the concept of creative treason, Medio-translatology combines the fields of translation and Comparative Literature but focuses specifically on Chinese culture. Chinese scholars have combined intercultural studies with the concept of creative treason, emphasising that translating the cultural connotations of Chinese culture requires the translator to engage in creative treason.

The creative treason of literary translation is not only the creative modification and "deformation" of the original text to produce the same artistic effect in the language environment of the target language but also retaining the original meaning. It also introduces the original work into a reader's environment; one that the original author might never have imagined. It also introduces the original work into a readership context that the author never imagined, giving the original work a second life. For example, in his translation of *Hamlet*, Chinese translator Zhu Shenghao[1] creatively adapted Hamlet's famous soliloquy "To be, or not to be" to "生存还是毁灭，这是一个问题" (To live or to die: that is the question). This translation not only preserves the core meaning of the original text but also enhances the character's inner struggle and emotion through a more culturally resonant expression, ensuring artistic effect within the Chinese context. This process exemplifies how literary translation is closely linked to culture, history and linguistic environment, endowing the original work with new life and profound impact in a completely new readership environment.

Medio-translatology, as a discipline focused on the exchange between Chinese culture and Western culture during the translation process, emphasises the active role and creativity of the translator and has garnered significant attention from many Chinese scholars.

Between 2000 and September 2024, nearly 700 papers related to Medio-translatology were retrieved from China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), the largest academic electronic resource aggregator in China. These papers cover 20 major research topics, including "Medio-translatology", creative treason, "Comparative Literature", "literary imagery", and "literary translation". They span 16 disciplines, including literary

[1] Zhu Shenghao (1897-1962) was a renowned Chinese translator known for his translations of Shakespeare and other Westernliterary works, particularly his classic translation of *Hamlet*.

theory, Chinese language and literature, foreign language and literature and world literature. Among them, approximately 210 papers are directly related to "Medio-translatology."

Between 2000 and 2010, 25 papers were published, primarily introducing the history, content, and methods of phonetic translation and Medio-translatology. Early research on Medio-translatology mainly focused on Comparative Literature, translated literature and translator subjectivity, aiming to clarify disciplinary perspectives and elucidate theoretical connotations. From 2010 to 2024, a total of 163 papers were published with the theme of "Medio-translatology", primarily employing the theoretical framework of Medio-translatology to analyse existing translated literature. Since 2010, 34 papers with the theme of "Medio-translatology" have been published. These papers can be categorised into two types. The first category focuses on exploring translation strategies based on Medio-translatology theory, such as *A study on the translation and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage from the perspective of Medio-translatology* (Zhang, 2022). The second category comprises academic evaluations of the "Medio-translatology" theory, exploring differences and future developments in research on Medio-translatology. An example of this is *A study on creative treason in translation from the perspective of Medio-translatology* (Wang, 2023).

Furthermore, since Xie Tianzhen introduced and extensively promoted this concept, English-language academic works related to Medio-translatology have steadily increased over the years. As of September 2024, searches in academic databases such as Google Scholar and SpringerLink reveal over 50 English academic articles, papers, and monographs on Medio-translatology. These works span multiple disciplines, including Translation Studies, Comparative Literature, and Cultural Studies, and cover various aspects such as theoretical exploration, case analysis, and applied research. For instance, *Medio-translatology: Concept and Application* (Cui and Li, 2022) systematically expounds the theoretical foundations of Medio-translatology and illustrates its application in the translation and dissemination of Chinese literature through relevant case studies. Another example, *A Study on the Introduction and English Translation of Yu Hua's Novels from the Perspective of Medio-translatology* (Yuan, 2021, pp. 269-274), organises and analyses the English translations of Yu Hua's novels from the standpoint of Medio-translatology, exploring the concept of creative treason in translation. It argues that an excellent

translation's "cultural responsibility" and quality must meet the expectations of the target audience, while readers' evaluation and reception are also critical factors influencing the success of a translation.

In summary, the main body of research on Medio-translatology exhibits the following characteristics:

1. Gradual maturation of the theoretical framework. As a intercultural translation theory, Medio-translatology has been widely applied within the Chinese academic community since Xie Tianzhen proposed it in the 1980s. Its core concept of creative treason has undergone in-depth examination and extensive application both in theory and practice, particularly in the translation and dissemination of Chinese literary works. Numerous studies indicate that Medio-translatology not only addresses cultural differences in translation but also provides effective guidance for translation strategies.

2. Interdisciplinary integration. The research on Medio-translatology demonstrates clear interdisciplinary characteristics, particularly in fields such as Comparative Literature, Translation Studies, and Cultural Communication. It integrates various factors, including culture, history, and language, to offer a more comprehensive exploration of translation through an interdisciplinary lens.

3. Focus on the international dissemination of Chinese culture. Medio-translatology places particular emphasis on the effective transmission of the core values of the source culture in intercultural translation. It has been widely applied in the translation and dissemination of Chinese classical literature and intangible cultural heritage.

In recent years, research on translation strategies and translation history has gradually increased. Scholars have explored how Chinese culture is translated for global audiences and reinterpreted cultural conflicts and integration observed in translation history. This trend indicates that the application of Medio-translatology in translation practice is becoming increasingly extensive, achieving significant success in the intercultural dissemination of Chinese online literature and film adaptations. As of September 2024, there are 160 articles analysing literary translations from the perspective of Medio-translatology, with a clear upward trend in related research over the past three years.

These articles can be broadly categorised into two types. The first type employs the core theory of Medio-translatology, creative treason, to analyse the phenomenon of

"deformation" in translation. The second type uses Medio-translatology to interpret "translated literature", analysing the translation subjects, methods, and content of translated works.

In the article *A study on creative treason in the English translation of Border Town from the perspective of Medio-translatology* (Yao and Wang, 2022), the authors primarily investigate the phenomenon of creative treason in the English translation of Shen Congwen's *The Border Town*.[1] They compare the original text and the translation, analysing the translator's strategies in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure, and cultural aspects. Through this analysis, it is pointed out that the translator, Jeffrey C. Kinkley, made flexible use of the strategy of creative treason in his translation of *The Border Town*.[2] His version follows the expression habits of the target language while still keeping the cultural meanings of the original work. The authors apply Medio-translatology to analyse the English translation of *The Border Town* from two main aspects. First, they borrow the concept of creative treason from Medio-translatology to focus on the creative choices made by the translator during the translation process. By comparing the original text and the translation, they provide a detailed analysis of how translator has made flexible adjustments to certain words and sentences while retaining the original meaning. For example, in dealing with reduplicative words and onomatopoeic terms in *The Border Town*, translator reconstructed the translation through free translation and rhetorical techniques to align it more closely with English expression norms. Second, the article particularly emphasises the application of creative treason in the translation of cultural imagery. For instance, the authors note that when handling culturally loaded vocabulary, translators employed strategies such as free translation and metaphor to avoid comprehension barriers that could arise from direct translation for the target language readers. Through these examples, the authors illustrate how the translator's creative choices in cultural conversion contribute to the dissemination of Chinese culture. However, while the article thoroughly discusses creative treason at the levels of vocabulary, sentences, and culture, it provides a relatively brief analysis of the application of Medio-translatology theory and lacks a deeper

[1] *The Border Town* (边城) is the representative work of Shen Congwen, a contemporary Chinese writer. The book expresses the author's aesthetic ideals of "beauty" and "love" and is a work that can express the beauty of human nature.

[2] Jeffrey C.Kinkley (金介甫), born in 1948, is an American Sinologist and currently a professor in the History Department at St. John's University in New York. He has translated and published works such as *Traveler Without Map* and *Border Town*.

discussion of its core concepts and applicable scope. Additionally, it lacks an analysis of the creative treason aspect related to the readers and the reception context. Moreover, the article focuses on individual case analyses and fails to comprehensively demonstrate the universality of creative treason in literary translation.

In *An Analysis of Translation Strategies for Cultural Images in Tang Tales from the Perspective of Medio-translatology: A Case Study of The Curly Bearded Stranger* (Zhu, 2023), the author compares several English translations of the Tang tale *The Curly Bearded Stranger* and examines the strategies used in rendering its cultural imagery.[1] Starting from the perspective of Medio-translatology, the author focuses on the handling of four categories of cultural imagery: clothing, plants, musical instruments, and animals. The article points out that translators employed strategies such as literal translation, literal translation with annotations, and expansion to achieve the goal of cultural exchange when translating these cultural images. The author defines the core task of Medio-translatology as "cultural exchange" and uses this as a theoretical basis to assess the gains and losses of translation strategies. By comparing the different strategies employed by various translators in translating cultural imagery in *The Curly Bearded Stranger* (such as "bu yi" (布衣), the author demonstrates that, in cases where cultural backgrounds differ significantly, strategies like literal translation with annotations and expansion can better preserve the deeper meanings of cultural imagery, thereby facilitating cultural dissemination. The author also emphasises the impact of cultural differences on translation, noting that due to the distinct national characteristics of cultural imagery, translators inevitably face certain challenges during the translation process. Through case analysis, the article illustrates the effectiveness of different strategies in intercultural communication. For example, in the translation of "bu yi" (布衣), different translators employed methods such as free translation and literal translation with annotations to balance the readability of the translation with cultural preservation. However, while the article provides a detailed exploration of the translation strategies for cultural imagery, it appears somewhat weak in summarising the theory of Medio-translatology. Although it proposes the goal of "cultural exchange", it lacks a clear overview of the specific theoretical foundations and frameworks

[1] *The Curly Bearded Stranger* (虬髯客传) is a classic Tang dynasty legend that follows the adventures of a hero with a long beard, exploring themes of loyalty, love, and the complexities of human relationships in a richly depicted historical context.

of Medio-translatology. Furthermore, the article's analysis primarily focuses on the translation of cultural imagery and does not delve deeply into other factors that may influence translation, such as narrative structure or discourse style.

Overall, while research on Medio-translatology has made significant progress, there are still gaps, particularly in empirical studies on the roles of the translator, reader, and reception environment. Much of the existing literature focuses on translator agency and cultural adaptation but tends to overlook the interaction between reader responses and the broader reception environment. As globalisation and cultural exchange continue to grow, future research should prioritise empirical studies, especially exploring how different cultural groups and audiences receive and interpret translations.

Although some studies have applied Medio-translatology to Chinese online literature, many remain theoretical and lack the empirical data necessary to understand how translation strategies work in different cultural contexts.

This gap is particularly relevant to my research, which applies Medio-translatology to the translation of Chinese Xianxia novels. While the theory has been widely used to analyse Chinese classical literature, its application to modern genres like Xianxia remains limited. Furthermore, existing research tends to focus on translator strategies and cultural adaptation, while often overlooking the translator's personal insights, as well as the influence of readers and online platforms on the reception of translated works.

To address these gaps, my research will examine three key aspects: the translator, the reader, and the reception environment to offer new insights into how creative treason operates in the translation of Xianxia novels. The next section will review the literature on online literature, with a focus on the translation of Chinese Xianxia novels, to set the stage for a more detailed analysis of how Medio-translatology can be applied to these works in a global context.

2.3 Literature Review on Chinese Online Literature

2.3.1 Online Literature In China

Online literature, in general, refers to literary works that are only on the Internet. Ouyang Youquan, an expert on Chinese online literature, has defined online literature as:

A new literary style created by Internet users on computers and published through the

> Internet for the appreciation or participation of Internet users. It is a new form of literature with the development of modern computers, especially digital network technology. (Ouyang, 2008, p. 5)

In his book *Internet Literature in China* (2015), Michel Hockx defined China's online literature as follows: "It is Chinese-language writing, either in established literary genres or in innovative literary forms, written especially for publication in an interactive online context and meant to be read on-screen" (Hockx, 2015, p. 4). By definition, online literature also includes online poetry, online prose and so on, but in fact, "online literature" in China usually refers to "genre full-length popular novels first published on the Internet", or "genre online literature" (Hockx, 2015, pp. 4-8). The online literature discussed in this dissertation is limited to this scope.

In Chinese academic contexts, the term "online literature" is typically translated as "网络文学" (wangluo wenxue), referring to literary works that are primarily published and disseminated through internet platforms, often bypassing traditional publishing channels such as books or magazines. However, in English academic contexts, "online literature" broadly encompasses any literary works published or distributed via the internet, without restriction to specific genres or forms. This includes digitised traditional literature, original online works, transmedia literature, experimental literature, and forms that engage with social media (Hayles, 2008, pp. 3-8). English academic research tends to focus more on "electronic literature" or "online literature".

Literary critic N. Katherine Hayles argues that electronic literature generally excludes digitised print works but instead refers to literature "typically created for reading on a computer" (Hayles, 2008, p. 3). The development of electronic literature is closely tied to advancements in computer hardware and software, with its creative practices predating the coining of the term "electronic literature" itself (Yang, 2019, p. 39). As early as 1952, British computer scientist Christopher Strachey developed a "love letter generator" (a tool that generates romantic love letters using artificial intelligence or predefined templates) which is considered one of the earliest examples of "digital" works (Grigar and O'Sullivan, 2017, p. 14). By the 1980s, many writers began experimenting with hypertext fiction, with Michael Joyce's *Afternoon, a story* (1987) widely regarded as a classic of the genre. Hypertext fiction utilises digital technology to offer a non-linear, interactive narrative

experience. Unlike traditional linear narratives, hypertext fiction allows readers to navigate interconnected nodes of text, images, and multimedia via hyperlinks, thus influencing the direction and meaning of the narrative and positioning it as a transformative force in the digital age (Murugeshwari and Rajeswari, 2023, p. 108). Since the rise of hypertext fiction in the 1980s and 1990s, online literature has expanded into various forms alongside the widespread adoption of the internet globally. As technology permeates everyday life, narrative modes in digital environments have evolved accordingly (Elstermann, 2023, p. 1).

In June 1992, Robert Coover brought the term "electronic text" into public attention with his New York Times article *The end of books*, marking one of the first instances of widespread interest in electronic literature. Western scholars have since delved into the theoretical frameworks of "hypertext", "cybertext" and "ergodic literature", developing associated theoretical methods. For example, Espen Aarseth's *Cybertext: perspectives on ergodic literature* (Aarseth, 1997) and George P. Landow's *Hypertext 3.0: critical theory and new media in an Era of globalization* (Landow, 2006) have been influential works. However, these studies often focus on the material media, namely the internet technologies underpinning the texts, rather than the content, literary quality, or modes of dissemination of online literature. This is related to the developmental paths and current states of online literature in the West, where phenomena like the significant cultural impact of online literature seen in East Asian countries such as China, Korea, and Japan have not materialised comparably. Consequently, Westernresearch tends to favour experimental hypertext literature (Cui, 2011, p. 2).

In 1999, the Electronic Literature Organisation (ELO) was founded in Chicago, USA, dedicated to the study of literary works created in digital media, marking the formal entry of electronic literature into academic discourse. Since then, electronic literature has given rise to sub-genres such as hypertext fiction, interactive fiction games, and digital poetry, propelled by advancements in web technologies. The emergence of social media platforms has also led to new genres and literary practices such as Instapoetry, Twitterature, and netprov (networked improvisational writing). The ELO defines electronic literature as "works with important literary aspects that take advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by standalone or networked computers" (Electronic Literature Organisation,

2023).

With the development of the Internet and online literature, Chinese scholars have increasingly enriched and deepened their research on online literature. Chinese scholars began to study online literature at the end of the 20th century. Since 1999, more and more Chinese scholars have been interested in the emerging literary form of online literature and have been trying to find the "literariness" and the possibility of the development of online literature in network novels. At the beginning of the 21st century, with the development of Internet technology and the continuous emergence of network novels, Chinese scholars have carried out multi-dimensional research on the content, aesthetics, genre, film-oriented communication and other aspects of online literature and obtained abundant research results. In 2015, the Chinese government issued the *Opinions of the CPC Central Committee on The Prosperity and Development of Socialist Literature and Art*, which pointed out that it should "vigorously develop online literature and arts" and since then "online literature" has been included in "mainstream literature" (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2015). Since then, the number of studies on online literature has increased significantly year by year. As of September 2024, there are about 11,800 articles related to online literature on the CNKI website, including 1937 dissertations and 7050 academic journals. These studies mainly focus on the following aspects: 1. The literariness of Chinese online literature, such as *The Balance of Commerciality and Literature--On the Development Tendency of Women's Ancient Language Online Writings* (Xing and Li, 2021); 2. The classification of Chinese online literature, such as *The Literary Scope and Genre Characteristics of online Literature* (Wu, 2023); 3. The overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature, such as *Online Literature and Overseas Dissemination of Chinese Culture* (Miao, 2024); 4. The industrialisation of Chinese online literature, such as *Study on Development Paths and Optimisation Strategies for the Full Industry Chain of Online Literature IP Based on Fan Collaboration* (Wang and Zhang, 2024).

In the early stages, most of the studies on Chinese online literature focused on the application of Western literature theories or philosophy theories to study and analyse the reasons, significance and influence of the existence of online literature. For example, *Research on the Ontology of Online Literature* (Ouyang, 2005), *Research on Current*

Chinese Literature in the Network Social Environment (Gu, 2009), *Online Communities and Commercialisation of Chinese online literature* (Tse and Gong, 2012).

Currently, the Chinese academic community conducts more in-depth and diverse research on online literature than before. For instance, Du (2022) explores the differentiation of online novel writers; Zhong (2022) examines the status of online literature in the digital marketing era; Zhang and Lu (2022) analyse the local dynamics of overseas communication of Chinese online literature. Additionally, Jin and Liu (2022) investigate linguistic features that contribute to the popularity of Chinese online fantasy novels. These studies show that scholars' perspectives on Chinese online literature are more open than ever before.

The growing diversity of research perspectives and an increasing number of studies reflect the maturation of research on Chinese online literature. Compared to earlier studies, which focused mainly on the form, significance, and literary qualities of online literature, recent research trends are moving towards narrative analysis, overseas translation and dissemination, and the industrial value of this literary form. Next, I will provide a literature review on the research concerning the dissemination and translation of Chinese online literature.

2.3.2 Dissemination Of Chinese Online Literature

Since 2010, Chinese scholars have been conducting in-depth studies on the overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature, discussing its popular forms, models, and underlying reasons for its global appeal. For example, in the article *A New Way to Disseminate Chinese Culture to the Outside World -Current Situation and Thoughts on Overseas Export of Chinese Online Literature* (Dong and Liu, 2017), the authors analyse the export mechanism of Chinese online literature at that time. Noting the large number of amateur translations of Chinese online literature, the researchers deemed it necessary to establish the translation and promotion mechanism of online literature in order to export high-quality texts.

In his article *The Social Influence of Chinese Online Literature and Its Overseas Dissemination* (Wu, 2017), Wu analysed the social influence of Chinese online literature. In his article *Research on Overseas Communication of Chinese Online Literature from the*

Perspective of Global Cultural Consumption-A Case Study of Wuxiaworld (Wang, 2018), Wang adopted the perspective of cultural consumption. Starting from the trend and characteristics of global cultural consumption, this paper analysed the possibility of overseas communication of online literature and takes Wuxiaworld website as an example to analyse its successful path, to provide reference for overseas communication of Chinese culture. She argues that the diversification of global cultural consumption has become increasingly evident, leading to greater differentiation in cultural consumption. Online literature, characterized by convenience and an appeal to "instant gratification", has gained growing attractiveness among global cultural consumers. The success of Chinese online literature in entering global cultural markets relies heavily on internet-based dissemination, offering accessible and highly entertaining content to attract international readers. Additionally, Wuxiaworld's flexible user engagement strategies create a free and interactive environment for English-speaking readers, fostering a unique system of tipping and communication between translators and readers. Moreover, leveraging online platforms, online literature effectively reduces cultural barriers, enhances global reader acceptance, and has become a new channel for Chinese cultural export.

Research on the overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature has developed steadily since 2010, with scholars examining its forms, models, industrial mechanisms, and global appeal. Studies highlight the importance of internet platforms such as Wuxiaworld, which foster interaction between readers and texts, and provide new ways of presenting Chinese culture abroad. At the same time, scholars have pointed out challenges, including cultural differences, sustainability of industry models, and the need to integrate the perspectives of authors, readers, and reception environments.

Despite these advances, existing research still leaves space for innovation. Current studies tend to describe patterns of dissemination, but they pay limited attention to how different agents interact in shaping the global circulation of online literature. A more holistic approach is needed, one that considers the combined roles of creators, audiences, and online platforms.

This gap provides the background for my study. In the following section, I turn to the literature on the translation of Chinese online literature, which plays a central role in how these works are made accessible to international readers.

2.3.3 Translation of Chinese online literature

The rise of Chinese online literature overseas started at the beginning of this century with the discussion of Chinese Wuxia novels by Jin Yong and Gu Long, such as the Wuxia Translations section of Spcnet. Since the 2010s, overseas fans of Chinese online literature have established a number of online platforms for translating Chinese online novels, such as Wuxiaworld, Gravity Tales, Radiant Translations and Volare novels. These online literature promotion websites quickly gained a large number of fans and readers overseas, cultivated a large number of overseas Chinese-English translators and even spawned a number of original English Wuxia novel writers. However, most translators of Chinese online literature are Chinese online novel lovers or groups without professional training. Moreover, some online platforms that translate Chinese online novels, such as Lnmtl website, even adopt the mode of "machine translation plus manual proofreading". Therefore, compared with the translation of traditional Chinese literature, although the English translation of Chinese online literature has developed rapidly in the world, its translation quality is uneven.

The studies on the translation of Chinese online literature started relatively late, which was almost at the same time as the overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature. Since 2000, Chinese scholars have focused on the relationship between literary translation and online platforms, analysing and summarising changes and challenges in literary translation in the context of the new media era. For example, in Mu Lei's article *Development of Translated Literature in the Network Era* (2002) and Zhang Xu's article *Also Talking about Online Translation Literature* (2002), authors have keenly captured the impact of the network platform on literary translation, which not only brings new problems and new ideas, but also brings new opportunities and challenges to the development of translated literature.

Since the 2010s, with the gradual development of translation and dissemination of Chinese online literature in the English-speaking world, Chinese scholars have begun to study the translation of Chinese online literature. In the early stages, Chinese scholars mainly focused on applying various translation theories to analyse the translation of Chinese online literature. For example, Zhao (2013) used reader acceptance theory to

discuss the changes of online literature translation in the Internet era. She believes that, according to Reception Theory, readers are the decisive factor and active agents in the historical reception of a text. The convenience and interactivity of online literature, along with the promotion of translation websites, have facilitated frequent and immediate interactions between readers and translators. As a result, readers' expectations significantly influence the translation of online literature. Therefore, translators often need to align their translations with readers' expectations of foreign cultures while also enhancing the quality of their translations to satisfy readers' pursuit of novelty and uniqueness in their reading experiences.

Xie and Peng (2013) started from adaptation theory, combined the relationship between cultural differences and translation and explored the methods and strategies of translation of online literature from two aspects: pragmatic language adaptation and social pragmatic adaptation.

Since 2016, with the emergence and development of a number of online platforms such as Wuxiaworld that translate Chinese online novels, more and more Chinese scholars pay attention to the characteristics of translation mode of Chinese online literature which is different from traditional literature, in its use for example of machine translation + manual proofreading, real-time interactive translation mode and team relay translation mode.

In the article *American Online Novel Translation Group and Chinese Online Literature 'Going Global' -An Interview with Wuxiaworld Founder RWX* (Shao, Ji and RWX, 2016), the authors interviewed Wuxiaworld founder RWX. They reviewed the translation and dissemination of Chinese online novels by Wuxiaworld network platform and its translators, which provided a new perspective for the research on the dissemination of Chinese martial arts online literature and summarised the difficulties in the translation of online literature based on network platform. From a macro perspective, Gao (2014) summarised the overall situation of the output and transmission of the overseas translation and export of Chinese online literature. Yuan and Xue (2022) took the Chinese online novel "Magic Master" as an example to analyse the interaction between readers and translators and the influence of readers' feedback on the translation of Chinese online novels. Jiang and Lu (2021) took the novel ISSH as an example, investigated the current situation and trend of Chinese online novel translation in Wuxiaworld and made an

in-depth analysis of the relationship between the translation of online novels and the interactive network platforms.

Although Translation Studies on Chinese online literature have made some progress, there remain limitations and potential areas for innovation. Many existing studies focus primarily on translation strategies and techniques, often applying translation theories such as Medio-translatology, functional equivalence theory and Skopos theory. However, these studies generally pay attention to the impact of network platform and reader interaction on translation, but do not conduct a more in-depth and thorough analysis of this phenomenon. Many studies remain in the stage of phenomenon description and qualitative analysis, lacking more powerful arguments. At the same time, the most of studies tend to overlook a comprehensive analysis of reader reception and the context in which the translations are received. This oversight restricts the understanding of how translated works are perceived and interpreted in different cultural and social settings. A systematic examination of the interaction between reader reception and contextual factors could significantly enhance the understanding of translation strategies' effectiveness.

Additionally, there is a lack of in-depth analysis of the translator's subjectivity. Few studies explore the purpose, academic background, and personal style of translators working on Chinese online literature. Given that these translators are often enthusiasts or untrained individuals, understanding their goals, influences, and stylistic choices can provide valuable insights into how translations are shaped and received.

Considering these research gaps, focusing on the translation of Chinese Xianxia novels offers a unique opportunity for innovation. Xianxia novel, deeply rooted in Chinese Daoist and Wuxia traditions, yet heavily influenced by Westernfantasy, has consistently topped popularity charts on major online literature platforms. The blend of Chinese and Westerncultural elements in Xianxia poses both challenges and creative opportunities for translators. Analysing this genre from translation and communication perspectives is essential, as it allows researchers to explore how translators can convey the intricate cultural differences while maintaining narrative coherence and appeal to international audiences.

The broader significance of this research lies in understanding how culturally dense and narratively flexible works can navigate intercultural communication barriers. Such

studies can shed light on balancing faithfulness to cultural elements with accessibility for foreign readers. Moreover, this approach deepens the understanding of how translators' creative choices shape readers' perceptions of Chinese culture, potentially reshaping traditional norms in literary translation and intercultural exchange. Focusing on the flexible translation of Xianxia novels could thus mark a new direction in adapting culturally rich literature for global audiences.

2.3.4 The Translation and dissemination of Chinese Online Xianxia novels

A significant genre within Chinese online literature, Xianxia novels are rooted in China's traditional mythology, Taoist culture, and Wuxia literature. This genre rapidly developed in the early 21st century with the rise of online literature platforms, becoming one of the most popular and influential types of online literature. The popularity of Xianxia novels is particularly evident across major online literature platforms, where metrics such as reading volume and clicks often place them at the forefront. For instance, Xianxia works on prominent platforms like Qidian Chinese Network consistently dominate the rankings for clicks and sales. Notable works such as *A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality* (凡人修仙传), *The Untamed* (诛仙), *Shrouding the Heavens* (遮天) and ISSH have held top positions on bestseller lists, attracting vast readerships. On platforms such as Wuxiaworld and Webnovel, Xianxia novels have also maintained high levels of popularity among readers for many years.

Research on Chinese online Xianxia novels is primarily conducted within China. According to data retrieved from CNKI, there have been 81 research papers directly related to Xianxia novels published between 2005 and September 2024. From 2005 to 2016, 20 papers were published, with 13 appearing in 2018 alone. Since then, approximately 10 papers have been published annually. This research trend is closely linked to the growing overseas dissemination of Chinese online literature and the popularity of Xianxia novel adaptations into films and TV series. Overall, studies on Chinese online Xianxia novels can be grouped into the following main areas:

1. Literary characteristics, narrative paradigms, and cultural origins of Xianxia novels. This line of research focuses on the inherent features of Xianxia novels. For example, Ge (2014) summarises the narrative traits of the Xianxia novel, noting that its typical character

design and plot structure form the basic narrative model. Lian (2023) provides an overview of female-oriented online novels and Xianxia novels, discussing the typological features of primary and secondary characters in female-oriented Xianxia novels and exploring the creative limitations and development strategies for the genre.

2. Adaptation of industry models for Xianxia novels. Research in this area focuses on the process of adapting Xianxia novels into television series and the industrial models behind such adaptations. Mei (2018) provides a detailed analysis of marketing strategies and audience psychology in the adaptation of Xianxia novels into TV dramas, exploring the dissemination tactics and creation models for Xianxia fantasy series.

3. Overseas dissemination and translation of Xianxia novels. This research primarily examines how Xianxia novels achieve success in the international market. You (2017) analyses the narrative characteristics and reader-centric writing style of Xianxia novels from a structuralist perspective, exploring the reasons behind their success in overseas markets. Yang (2019) examines how the English translations of Xianxia novels shape the image of China using corpus-based research methods and imageology's "foreign image" concept.

4. Translation practice of Xianxia novels: This area of research focuses on the translation practice and strategies of specific Xianxia novels. For instance, Zhu (2021), drawing on a 2019 translation project of Apotheosis, examines the characteristics of culture-bound terms in the novel and explores strategies for rendering such terms from online Xianxia novel into English. Ou (2022) focuses on the translation of ISSH by Chinese author Er Gen into German, guided by Skopos theory, and provides an analysis of the relevant translation strategies.

These studies reflect the deep engagement and enthusiasm of Chinese scholars towards online Xianxia novels, and they highlight a strong correlation between the volume of research and the real-world dissemination of such novels. It is foreseeable that research on Xianxia novels will continue to increase over time. Among the various topics explored, studies on the translation and international dissemination of Xianxia novels account for a significant portion of the scholarly output in this field.

While these studies offer valuable insights into the factors contributing to the success of this literary genre in international markets, the majority remain focused on textual

analysis, often emphasising the narrative characteristics and structures of individual works. This approach tends to overlook the critical roles played by both translators and readers in the processes of translation and dissemination. Specifically, existing research rarely explores the challenges faced by translators and the impact of these challenges on the quality of translation. Moreover, there is a lack of systematic analysis of how readers from different cultural backgrounds receive Xianxia novels.

Future research should broaden its scope to include the subjective experiences of translators and the strategies they employ, as well as the reception and interpretation of Xianxia novels by readers from various cultural contexts. Such studies would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional factors influencing the international dissemination of Xianxia novel, providing more empirically grounded insights and strategic support for the global promotion of this genre. This will also be one of the focuses of my work in this dissertation.

Among these Xianxia novels that scholars have focused on, ISSH and AWE, both authored by Er Gen and translated by Deathblade, are considered highly influential. These two novels are also key works in Deathblade's translation portfolio. In the realm of Chinese online literature, they hold a significant place due to their portrayal of core elements like Taoist philosophy, Xia culture, self-cultivation, and the pursuit of immortality. ISSH has garnered over 200 million views on Qidian Chinese Network, and AWE has achieved a similar level of popularity. Numerous online literature platforms recognise them as hallmark works in the Xianxia genre.

There are five research papers directly related to ISSH found on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). Four of these studies focus on the novel's English translation. For instance, in his master thesis, *An Analysis of the English Translation of Xianxia novel ISSH from the Perspective of Skopos Theory*, He Wupeng (2018) applies Skopos Theory as a theoretical framework to analyse the English translation of ISSH. He explains that Skopos Theory, as part of the functionalist translation approach, emphasises the ultimate goal of translation, which is the intended function and communicative effect of the translated text. Therefore, during translation, the translator needs to clearly define the purpose of the translated text and then choose appropriate strategies at both linguistic and cultural levels.

He argues that, within Skopos Theory, the principle of purpose is the primary guideline that dictates translation strategy. He specifically analyses the linguistic differences in ISSH (such as differences in sentence structure and expressions of abstract and concrete ideas) and considers cultural differences (like the translation of culturally loaded terms, spells, and Xianxia terminology). From the perspective of Skopos Theory, He explores how the translator, Deathblade, flexibly employs domestication and foreignisation strategies. The aim is to convey the cultural essence of the original while ensuring that the translation aligns with the expectations of English-speaking readers.

Guided by the coherence principle of Skopos Theory, He further examines the differences in grammatical structures between the original text and its translation. He emphasises the importance of coherence and readability in the English context. Through an analysis of sentence transitions, sentence condensation, and tense changes, He illustrates how the coherence principle helps meet the comprehension needs of target readers.

Lastly, He addresses the fidelity principle within Skopos Theory. He notes that fidelity is not only about staying true to the original content but also about maintaining consistency in meaning and effect within the target language and culture. He analyses the translation of Chinese Culturally Loaded Words [hereafter CLWs] and specific terminology, explaining why the translator made adjustments, additions, and deletions in the process. According to He, this approach ensures fidelity not only to the original work but also to the purpose and audience of the translation.

Despite the detailed exploration of Skopos Theory, this thesis still has some limitations. Firstly, although He emphasises the influence of the translator's purpose on strategy, he does not clearly analyse the translator's specific intentions. Instead, he generalises the purpose of translating Xianxia novels as promoting Chinese Xia culture and attracting international readers, which weakens the validity of the conclusions. Secondly, this thesis relies heavily on textual analysis and lacks systematic quantitative research on the reception of the translated text by target readers. This limits a comprehensive understanding of the translation's actual communicative effect. Lastly, this thesis falls short in its exploration of intercultural communication between Chinese and Western cultures, focusing mainly on translation methods and strategies without further examining how translation establishes effective communication across different cultures.

Another work by the same translator, AWE has similarly been the subject of multiple academic papers. On CNKI, there are seven papers related to AWE, six of which focus on its English translation. Scholars have explored the novel's translation and dissemination from various theoretical perspectives, including Translation Studies, communication theory, and Newmark's translation theory.

For example, Li (2023), in the article *A Study on the Reception of Chinese Online Literature by international readers-Taking the English Translation of AWE* as an Example, uses reader comments from the translation's page on the Wuxiaworld website to conduct a combined sentiment and content analysis. This study assesses the effectiveness of the translation's dissemination on both a macro and micro level. Li (2023), in his master's thesis titled *A study on the English translation of Chinese online literature from the perspective of Medio-translatology*, applies Medio-translatology to analyse the roles of translators, content, dissemination methods, audiences, and the impact of translation, exploring the reasons behind the international popularity of Chinese online literature. The thesis also identifies key issues in the translation process and discusses how the translator's creative interpretation is reflected in the English version. However, the thesis also highlights several limitations. Firstly, the study relies heavily on textual analysis of the translated work without direct communication with the translator. This limits the understanding of the translator's motives, goals, and cultural adaptation strategies, weakening the depth of discussion regarding the translator's subjectivity. Secondly, the evaluation of the translation's effectiveness is based on reader comments from online platforms. While these comments offer some insight into reader feedback, they are often random, biased, and lack broad representativeness, making it difficult to fully capture the target audience's overall reception. More importantly, these secondary data sources may reflect individual biases and fail to reveal the readers' cultural backgrounds and deeper understanding of the translated work. Thirdly, in analysing the audience, the study does not differentiate between readers from different cultural backgrounds. Readers from various countries may have differing interpretations and levels of acceptance regarding the cultural elements in Chinese online literature, a factor that was not fully considered in the research. This omission may lead to biased results and fail to capture the complexity of intercultural dissemination.

In conclusion, scholars recognise the significance of studying the translation and dissemination of Chinese Xianxia novels, not only for enriching Chinese literary translation theory but also for promoting global Chinese online literature and culture. Current research often applies frameworks such as Medio-translatology and Skopos theory to examine textual features, translation strategies, and cultural dissemination patterns of Xianxia novels. These theories offer insights into narrative techniques and the translation of culturally embedded terms, contributing to understanding Xianxia novels' role in global cultural transmission.

However, existing studies often focus too much on textual analysis and overlook the subjectivity of translators and readers. Translators' motivations and cultural adaptation strategies are key factors influencing the translated text, yet the lack of research on translators limits the depth and generalisability of findings. Similarly, research on reader reception often relies on qualitative feedback, such as reviews, without sufficient quantitative data, which undermines the representativeness of the conclusions. Moreover, existing research does not fully address how readers from different cultural backgrounds perceive and understand Xianxia novels, hindering a comprehensive understanding of intercultural transmission.

While some studies adopt an intercultural approach to analysing Xianxia novels rooted in Taoist and Xia culture, these discussions often lack depth and fail to systematically explore cultural differences. Understanding the translation of Xia culture is crucial for improving intercultural communication. Translation bridges the Chinese "xia" symbol to global readers, making it essential to understand how this symbol is interpreted across cultural contexts. Xia culture, with its unique value system and culturally significant terms, often lacks direct equivalents in other cultures, presenting a challenge for translators. Analysing how readers from different backgrounds understand Xia culture can help reveal the complexities of cultural translation.

Thus, this study will review the literature on Chinese Xia culture to explore how Xianxia novels address cultural connotations in translation. By integrating this perspective, we can gain a deeper understanding of the intercultural transmission of Xianxia novels and provide more robust theoretical support for the practice of translating Chinese literature.

2.4 Literature review on Xia culture

Xia (侠), also known as "Wuxia". The word "wu xia" is literally a transliteration of the Chinese word "武侠". The word "wu" means force or weapon in Chinese and the word "xia" refers to a person who is willing to sacrifice himself to help others by virtue of his martial arts. Therefore, in Chinese, "Wuxia" means a person with martial arts skills, loyalty and dedication to fight against injustice. In many English-Chinese dictionaries, "Wuxia" is translated as "martial arts", or "swordsman". But the translation is not accurate. The word "martial arts" emphasises the artistry of martial arts and the word "swordsman" emphasises the identity but neither of the two translated words embodies the spirit of sacrificing oneself to save others in the Chinese word "侠". The Chinese have a deep-rooted national sentiment towards the concept of "xia". This sentiment serves as a cornerstone of the cultural spirit that supports the sustainable development of the Chinese nation. Therefore, this thesis adopts the transliteration method to translate the Chinese "侠文化" into "Xia culture", in order to retain the distinct connotation of Xia in Chinese.

2.4.1 Xia culture and Chivalric Culture

A comparison of Chinese Xia culture and Western chivalric culture mainly focuses on their spiritual core, historical development and the relationship between Wuxia and chivalric novels. James J. Y. Liu summarised eight characteristics of Wuxia in his book, *Chinese Knight-Errant* (1991), which are to be helpful, just, free, loyal, brave, honest, to cherish one's reputation and be generous (1991, pp. 4-5).

Chinese Xia culture has a lot in common with Western chivalric culture. For example, Chinese Wuxia and Western knights both advocate force in the pursuit of justice, both emphasise faith, and unyielding loyalty. James J. Y. Liu believes that the common concept of Chinese Wuxia and European knights represents the aspiration of all mankind (1991, p.195). However, the formation of the two cultures originates from the long historical evolution process of different nations. So, there are many differences between Xia culture and chivalry culture.

1. **Comparison of Historical And Cultural Backgrounds**

In medieval Europe, chivalric culture was closely intertwined with the feudal system. Knights served as the military arm of lords and the church, and their conduct was governed

by a strict code of chivalry. French historian Georges Duby, in his seminal work *The Chivalrous Society* (1981), provides an in-depth discussion of the formation of chivalric culture during the Middle Ages and its symbiotic relationship with feudal society.

In contrast, Xia culture originates from China's tradition of knight-errantry. James J.Y. Liu, in *Chinese Knight-Errant* (1967), systematically examines ancient Chinese Xia and points out that Xia culture largely stems from the concept of "youxia" (游侠, wandering heroes) from the Warring States period. However, it was further developed during the Tang dynasty through poetry and literary works.

Yuan Yue (2006, p. 11) pointed out that chivalry culture was the product of knight class and reflects the noble cultural spirit of medieval feudal society. Chivalric literature shows the humanistic style of the knight class and embodies the unique cultural spirit and distinct characteristics of the Western nation. However, Xia culture is different from chivalry culture in that it does not represent all the unique cultural characteristics of a profession or a class of people. Chinese Wuxia are drawn from different social classes, but mainly independent gangs and individuals at the bottom of society.

2. Comparison of Heroic Figures And Roles

Scholars have long debated the social standing and motivations of knights in medieval Europe and of heroes in the Chinese Wuxia tradition. Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949/2004) outlines the "hero's journey" as a cross-cultural framework, showing how heroes leave the ordinary world, undergo trials, and eventually return with rewards for their communities (Campbell, 2004, pp. 28-30). Within this framework, the knight often represents a hero whose duty is tied to aristocratic birth and religious or national service. Richard Barber, in *The Reign of Chivalry* (1981), stresses that chivalry was more than a military ethic: it functioned as a moral code that demanded loyalty, courage and compassion, and that symbolised a wider set of Christian values within medieval society (Barber, 1981, p. 14). Knights were therefore expected to defend the church and their lords while also fulfilling social and religious obligations.

In contrast, Wuxia heroes embody a more diverse and fluid identity. They are not confined to a single class and may arise from humble as well as privileged backgrounds. Their moral actions are guided less by state or religious authority than by principles of personal loyalty and emotional justice. Lao and Lin (2008, p. 62) argue that the essential

values of xia are "chivalry" and "freedom", which often lead protagonists such as Guo Jing or Yang Guo to prioritise righteousness in personal relations above formal obligations.[1] This moral ethos draws on Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist thought, yet it also develops its own codes within the Jianghu (江湖).[2] Luo Xin (2003) observes that the spirit of xia frequently resists Confucian hierarchies, sometimes even rebelling against authority and social conventions. The Wuxia hero thus displays a strong sense of subjectivity, questioning established structures and seeking fulfilment through extraordinary acts, while showing contempt for rigid hierarchies in pursuit of justice and equality.

3. Comparison of Narrative Structures

Chivalric literature typically takes the form of epic, long-form narratives or legends, such as the *Arthurian Legends* (*Le Morte d'Arthur*) and the *Song of Roland.* These stories often employ a linear narrative structure, focusing on the knight's loyalty and moral decisions. Chivalric literature places heroic actions within a highly structured societal framework. Norman F. Cantor, in *The Civilisation of the Middle Ages* (1993), notes that chivalric literature follows a centralised narrative model, designed to reflect the stability and continuity of the feudal hierarchy. A knight's fate is intricately linked to social order. In the *Arthurian Legends*, for example, knights' actions revolve around the king and the Round Table, with their growth framed by loyalty, honour, and faith. The *Song of Roland,* a classic of French chivalric literature, follows a strict three-act structure: conflict, action, and the hero's sacrifice. Roland's courage and loyalty in the face of adversity highlight the chivalric focus on personal responsibility. His unwavering allegiance to Charlemagne underscores the central theme of loyalty between knight and king, a recurring motif in chivalric narratives that emphasises sacrifice, honour, and social status.

In contrast, Wuxia novels feature a more fluid and non-linear narrative structure, reflecting the dynamic and complex nature of the "jianghu" world. Wuxia stories frequently use multiple narrative threads and intertwining plotlines. Relationships between characters are often non-hierarchical and the narrative is dispersed rather than centralised.

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[1] Guo Jing, the protagonist of Jin Yong's *The Legend of the Condor Heroes*, embodies loyalty, integrity and patriotism, often prioritising righteousness and duty over personal interest.
Yang Guo, the central figure in *The Return of the Condor Heroes*, is portrayed as rebellious and emotionally driven, pursuing personal freedom and justice beyond orthodox social and moral constraints. They are all representative figures of the heroic characters in Chinese martial arts novels.

[2] Jianghu (江湖) refers to the imagined "martial world" in Wuxia fiction, an alternative social sphere outside official authority where individuals interact according to their own codes of loyalty, justice and reputation.

The "jianghu" is a fluid and intricate network where characters' actions are not confined by a rigid social structure. In *The Cultural Background of Jin Yong's Novels* (2007), Yu Yingshi highlights the multi-threaded narrative approach of Jin Yong's works, such as *The Legend of the Condor Heroes*. The story's central characters, Guo Jing and Huang Rong, each follow separate narrative arcs, with the overall plot encompassing heroism, romance, national duty, and revenge. These multifaceted narratives unfold on multiple levels, reflecting the complexity of the Wuxiaworld.

Moreover, chivalric literature tends to emphasise romantic love, portraying knights who sacrifice themselves for idealised love (Yuan, 2006, p. 19). In contrast, Wuxia novels display a more complex attitude towards women and romance. Early Wuxia stories often depict female characters as tools to advance the plot or to contrast with masculine ideals. Female qualities were sometimes viewed negatively, with romantic love subordinated to fraternal bonds, filial piety, and patriotism. This reflects the traditional male-dominated social structure in Chinese society (Linghu, 2006, p. 117).

While there are clear differences between Wuxia and chivalric cultures, scholars generally agree that these differences reveal the divergent cultural paths taken by East and West (Lao and Lin, 2008, p. 62). Both knight and Xia cultures have profoundly shaped the character and identity of their respective peoples (Linghu, 2006, p. 118). These influences are reflected in their literary forms: chivalric literature has significantly impacted Western romantic literature, while Wuxia novels have continued to innovate in narrative structure and themes, becoming a vital part of Chinese literature.

2.4.2 Translation and Communication of Xia Culture

The translation and dissemination of Xia culture in the Westernworld has become a very significant part of the study of Xia culture. Studies on the translation and dissemination of Xia culture can be roughly divided into the following categories: translation strategies of Wuxia novels and films; study on the translation of culture-loaded words of Xia culture, and research on the influence of ideology and poetics on Xia culture.

1. **Translation strategies of Wuxia novels and movies**

Zhang Jinxing(2015) discusses the English translation of *The Book of Swords and Enemies* from the perspective of translator's subjectivity. He analyses how the translator's

cultural standpoint, language ability and readers' acceptance affect the translator's translation purpose, translation strategy, interpretation and conversion of cultural elements. He also generalises the translator's translation strategies of Wuxia novels. Xiao Qiang (2011) summarises the macro strategies of Chinese Wuxia novel translation based on the readers' acceptance of English translation of Wuxia novels. Exploring domestication and foreignisation translation strategies, Wu Yuguang (2011) analyses the English translation of Jin Yong's Wuxia novels. She noted that when Wuxia novels were first introduced to English-speaking readers, translators should primarily use a domestication strategy. This approach involves selecting translations that fit English language and cultural norms. It is also important to downplay elements of Chinese Xia culture to enhance readability and interest. After English-speaking readers have developed a basic understanding of Chinese Xia culture, translators can shift towards a foreignisation strategy. This gradual transition will promote the broader dissemination of Chinese Xia culture.

2. Translation of CLWs

Many studies focus on applying various translation theories to analyse the translation of CLWs in Wuxia novels. For example: Zhao Junhe's *Research on the translation strategy of culture-loaded words from the perspective of Skopos theory -- Taking the first volume of legend of the convolving heroes as an example* (2020); Yun Hailun's *Research on the lexical translation of Wuxia novels from the perspective of Skopos theory* (2020), Cheng Zhouludan's *Comparison of the English translation differences of culture-loaded words in Jin Yong Wuxia Novels of different media from the perspective of Construction theory* (2018). These studies analyse the translation of Xia culture-loaded words that cannot be found in English from the perspective of different translation theories and analyse the translation strategies of translators.

3. The influence of ideology and poetics on translation

Studies on the translation of Xia culture have noted that ideology often plays a decisive role in shaping translators' choices. For example, Liu Xuelan (2011) discusses the English version of The Deer and the Cauldron, focusing on how wording differences between the translation and the source text reveal the ideological stance embedded in translation. Similarly, Tang Jie (2014) analyses the impact of ideology on translators from two perspectives: the adaptation of discourse structure and the treatment of names. Tang

argues that the translation strategies adopted are not neutral but serve to align the text with the ideology and cultural expectations of the target readership (Tang, 2014, p. 172).

This line of research highlights how the ideological and poetic frameworks of translators influence not only specific linguistic choices but also the broader narrative style of the translated text. Although such studies are relatively limited, they provide a foundation for examining how Xia culture is reinterpreted in translation under different ideological and cultural conditions.

4. Cultural variation in Wuxia novel translation

Focusing on the phenomenon of cultural variation, Pan Weina (2012), examines the variation of the words "江湖" (Jianghu) and "侠义" (Xiayi); the language of the protagonist, and narrative structure in Minford's translation of the Wuxia novel *The Deer and the Cauldron*. Zhao Luye (2013) discusses the language translatability and cultural acceptability of English versions of Wuxia novels from the perspective of intercultural communication. Xu Tao (2015) examined the concept of zero translation in the context of Xia culture. He focused on elements like names, gangs, martial arts, and weapons, and found that relative zero translation was predominant. This approach was particularly effective for translating names of swordsmen and gangs (Xu, 2015).

5. The present situation and challenge of English translation of Wuxia novels

Many scholars have analysed the current state and challenges of Wuxia novels, focusing on their translation and implications. For instance, Luo Yongzhou (2011) examines the English translations of Jin Yong's novels to assess the status of Xia culture in English literature. He raises two key questions: "What should be translated?" and "How should it be translated?" Luo argues that Jin Yong's Wuxia novels are "worthy literary classics" with a depth of history and cultural significance unmatched by other Chinese contemporary works, emphasising that they should be part of the global representation of Chinese culture (Luo, 2011, p. 54). Regarding the translation process, he suggests that "translators should find a balance between domestication and foreignisation based on the level of cultural integration and the readers' ability to accept new concepts" (Luo, 2011, p. 55).

Overall, research on Xia culture primarily focuses on several dimensions, including comparative cultural studies, discussions of its value within the context of modernity, and

the challenges of translation and dissemination. Xia culture is a significant symbol of Chinese culture. When compared to Westernchivalry culture, it highlights the profound spirit of the Chinese nation and its unique cultural essence. Furthermore, research trends reflect globalisation, as scholars pay increasing attention to translation strategies for Xia culture in international contexts. In particular, they explore how domestication and foreignisation can be used to balance cultural preservation with accessibility for target audiences. Additionally, more studies are addressing the translation of CLWs to ensure that core concepts such as "xia" and "jianghu" are effectively communicated in intercultural exchanges.

However, there are still noticeable gaps in the current research. Firstly, most studies focus on micro-level translation issues, lacking a broader, more systematic exploration of Wuxia translation. In particular, the translation of martial arts techniques and core concepts like "jianghu" and "miaotang"(庙堂, royal or imperial court) has not been thoroughly analysed. Secondly, the scope of research is limited, with most studies focusing on the works of classic Wuxia authors like Jin Yong and Gu Long, whose works have been published for over 40 years, while less attention is given to the translation of modern Wuxia novels and their subgenres, such as online "xuanhuan" (fantasy) novels and Xianxia novels. In summary, future research needs to make breakthroughs in systematic analysis, theoretical innovation, and specific strategies for intercultural dissemination to promote a wider and deeper global appreciation of Xia culture.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the development of Medio-translatology and its relevance to Comparative Literature and Translation Studies, with particular emphasis on the notion of creative treason and its application to cultural transmission. It also reviewed how the concept has been employed in studies on classical literature, intangible cultural heritage, and online writing, while noting the relative scarcity of in-depth work on Chinese online literature. Besides, the application of Medio-translatology often remains at a general level, with relatively few studies that explore its implications in a systematic way. In particular, research seldom considers the translator, the reader, and the reception environment together as interacting agents.

This chapter then examined Chinese online literature, distinguishing the narrower Chinese definition from the broader English notion of electronic or online literature, and summarised its evolution, policy recognition, and academic research. In addition to exploring its literary features and industrial growth, attention was paid to its dissemination and translation, particularly the spread of Xianxia novel. Much of this work has been approached from a linguistic perspective, with relatively few studies adopting a wider intercultural view. This is particularly evident in research on modern online novel, where traditional cultural elements such as Xia culture remain underexplored. In other words, while online literature provides a fertile ground for investigating how Chinese culture travels globally, the role of Xia culture within this process has received little attention.

This leads to the final section of the review, which focused on Xia culture itself. Here, a detailed definition was provided, followed by a comparison with Western chivalric traditions. Studies of its translation and dissemination were also reviewed, with attention to questions of ideology, cultural variation, and translation strategies. Yet, the majority of this research has remained confined to micro-level translation issues and to the works of established Wuxia authors such as Jin Yong and Gu Long. By contrast, relatively little work has considered the broader system of Wuxia translation or the emergence of modern subgenres such as online Xuanhuan and Xianxia novels, which now attract a substantial international readership.

Taken together, these strands of scholarship reveal several gaps. Applications of Medio-translatology to online literature are still limited and often superficial, with insufficient attention to the interaction between translator, readers, and reception environment. Research on online literature, though expanding, remains largely linguistic in focus and seldom explores the transmission of traditional cultural elements such as Xia culture. Meanwhile, studies of Xia culture in translation are narrow in scope, concentrated on a small number of canonical writers, and lacking in systematic exploration of newer forms of Wuxia. Addressing these shortcomings will help to build a more comprehensive understanding of how Chinese online literature, particularly Xianxia novel, participates in global cultural exchange.

Chapter III Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of Medio-translatology and examines how creative treason is manifested in the English translations of ISSH and AWE, with particular attention to the transmission and reception of Xia culture. Medio-translatology, rooted in the Chinese scholarly tradition, conceives of translation as a dual mediatory act—between source and target texts, and more fundamentally, between source and target cultures (Xie, 2003, pp. 1-5). This mediatory perspective informs the methodological orientation of the present research: creative treason is understood not simply as textual deviation, but as a culturally adaptive practice shaped by the translator's agency and the reception environment (Xie, 2020, pp. 48–50). In the case of online literature, this reception environment is further mediated by digital platforms and participatory readership, which add new layers to the circulation and interpretation of Xia culture in translation.

Building on this framework, the study employed a mixed-methods design in which qualitative analysis (textual study and interview) was complemented by quantitative evidence from the reader survey. The two strands were used in a mutually supportive way. The qualitative paradigm, emphasising context-specific meaning and analytic depth over breadth (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018, p. 10), was implemented through textual analysis of ISSH and AWE and a semi-structured interview with the translator, Deathblade. These instruments enabled exploration of both translation choices and the translator's first-person accounts of agency and rationale, aspects that textual evidence alone cannot capture (Patton, 2015, p. 52).

Alongside this, the quantitative paradigm informed a reader questionnaire. Predominantly comprising closed and multiple-choice items, with a small number of open questions, it generated structured and comparable data (Creswell, 2014, p. 4). The dataset was modest (24 responses) and findings are therefore presented as exploratory and descriptive rather than generalisable. Nonetheless, the responses offered useful indications of recurrent tendencies and provided a reception-oriented perspective that complements the qualitative findings.

Taken together, these strands illustrate what Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004, p. 18)

describe as the creative potential of mixed methods, integrating the interpretive richness of qualitative approaches with the pattern-seeking capacity of quantitative ones. In this study, textual analysis and interview yielded a thick description of translator agency, while the questionnaire—despite its limited scale—added a distributional view of reader reception.

The research was thus designed in an accumulative and reflective manner, comprising four interrelated stages: textual analysis, translator interview, reader survey, and online platform analysis. Each stage explores a different dimension of the central phenomenon—creative treason—and contributes to a comprehensive understanding of its formation, motivations, reception, and cultural significance within cross-cultural translation.

The first stage involved close textual analysis of the two translated novels. Through repeated and careful readings of the translations, in conjunction with existing scholarship on both the original texts and their English versions, distinctive instances of creative treason were identified and categorised. These included both conscious and unconscious translator adaptations, particularly in handling Xia CLWs, narrative structure, and stylistic features. The analysis served as an empirical foundation for identifying translation patterns that warranted further contextual explanation.

The second stage comprised a semi-structured interview with the translator (Deathblade), aimed at exploring his professional background, translational motivations, working experience, strategic choices and his interpretation of Xia culture. The interview data were analysed using Thematic Analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, which involves systematic processes of coding, theme generation, refinement and interpretation. This analytical approach facilitated a detailed exploration of the underlying rationales behind both deliberate and intuitive translation decisions, allowing the causes of creative treason to be categorised into conscious and unconscious forms.

The third stage consisted of a reader questionnaire, designed to examine the role of readers in reinterpreting the cultural meanings of Xia. The questionnaire covered participants' reading background, interpretive expectations, understanding of Xia culture, evaluations of the translations, and preferences for specific translation strategies. Employing a mixed-question format (including Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, semi-open, and open-ended questions), the survey enabled both quantitative

pattern recognition and qualitative insight. The analysis focused on three key aspects:1. readers' expectations when approaching translated Xianxia novels; 2. their ability to understand and engage with Xia culture in the translations; 3. their preferences regarding translation strategies and their evaluation of the translator's adaptations.

The final stage turned to the online platform Wuxiaworld, the official website where both translations were serially published and commented upon. This phase involved an investigation of the platform's publishing mechanisms, interactive features (such as real-time comment threads and integrated glossaries), and community dynamics. The aim was to explore how the platform's features, together with the participatory practices of online readers, shaped the way Xia culture was transmitted and reinterpreted in the translations. This process gave rise to a reception-driven form of creative treason.

By bringing together these four phases, this study used the framework of Medio-translatology to examine the translation of Xia culture in Deathblade's versions of two Xianxia novels. The analysis considered three dimensions: the author, the reader, and the online platform. The study identified examples of creative treason in the translated texts and explained the main motives behind these choices, as well as the ways they were transformed in the reception process. Based on empirical evidence, it showed how creative treason worked in both translator-led and reader-driven forms. This design offered a clear view of how creative treason appears in the translation of culturally rich online literature and how it supports the cross-cultural transmission of Xia values.

3.2 Textual Analysis

The first stage of this research employed close textual analysis of the English translations of ISSH and AWE in order to identify manifestations of creative treason within the framework of Medio-translatology. Both texts are exceptionally long, with ISSH exceeding 1.2 million words and AWE more than 1.3 million words in English translation. Their size makes it impractical to construct a corpus or to apply large-scale quantitative methods. A selective and reflective approach was therefore adopted, concentrating on passages where translator intervention is most visible and culturally significant.

This study identifies instances of ‘creative treason’ by following the principle that any alteration affecting the representation of Xia culture or the narrative structure—such as the

omission of honorifics, the addition of explanations, or shifts in moral tone—was recorded and subsequently categorised. The analysis focused on three main areas. First, semantic shifts in culturally loaded words, especially those related to Xia culture. Second, structural and narrative modifications, such as omissions, additions, or simplifications that reshape the storyline and its cultural representation. Third, paratextual strategies, including footnotes and translator's notes, which provide explanations or contextual support for culturally specific elements. These areas were chosen because they best illustrate the translator's active role in negotiating cultural meaning.

The method combined repeated readings of the translations with insights drawn from existing scholarship on ISSH and AWE. Studies such as He Wupeng (2018), Jiang Manxian and Lu Qiaodan (2021), Zhang Yingying (2020), He Qiang (2018), Cao Jiali (2019), Li Mengzhu (2023), Li Qin (2020), and Li Mengting (2022) offered valuable perspectives on translation strategies and cultural adaptation. Their findings informed the selection of passages and helped situate the analysis within the wider academic discussion. Within the framework of Medio-translatology, which views translation as a dual act of textual and cultural mediation (Xie, 2003, pp. 1–5; Xie, 2020, pp. 48–50), divergences from the source text were not treated as errors. Instead, they were examined as deliberate or intuitive acts of mediation shaped by translator agency and contextual demands. By systematically tracing semantic shifts, narrative restructuring, and paratextual interventions, the analysis revealed patterns of creative treason that are central to the translation of culturally rich works.

This textual analysis provides the empirical foundation for the study. It underpins the later chapters, which examine translator motivations (Chapter 4) and reader reception (Chapter 5). By identifying and categorising the most significant translator interventions, the analysis demonstrates how creative treason operates both as a translation strategy and as a cultural phenomenon shaped by audience expectations and reception dynamics.

3.3 Translator Interview

The second phase of this research involved conducting a semi-structured interview with the translator, Deathblade, to gain insights into his motivations, strategies, and the factors influencing his translation choices, particularly with regard to the translation of Xia culture

in ISSH and AWE. The interview served as a critical tool to understand creative treason as a product of translator agency, offering direct insight into the decisions behind the adaptation of culturally loaded concepts and terms from the original Chinese texts into English.

3.3.1 Interview Design and Rationale

A semi-structured interview was chosen for its flexibility, allowing the researcher to explore the translator's thoughts in depth while maintaining a structure that addresses key research questions. The semi-structured format ensures that, while a set of predefined questions guides the conversation, the interviewer has the freedom to probe deeper based on the translator's responses. This method is particularly useful in exploring complex topics such as cultural mediation, where the translator's personal experiences and decisions play a central role in shaping the translation process.

The interview questions were designed to explore several key aspects of the translation process, including:Translator's approach to cultural specificity, creative treason in translation, balancing faithfulness and adaptation and translator's objectivity.

The interview process was divided into three stages: pre-interview, interview, and post-interview.

Pre-Interview Stage

Before the interview, the researcher conducted a comprehensive review of Deathblade's previous translations and writings, focusing on his approach to Xia culture. This involved reading the novels, understanding their thematic and cultural components, and reviewing the translator's background. Furthermore, the researcher familiarised herself with Deathblade's translation style and history, ensuring that the questions were well-informed and tailored to the translator's experiences. A copy of the interview questions was sent to Deathblade in advance to allow him to reflect on the questions and prepare for the discussion. This preparatory phase aimed to establish a mutual understanding between the interviewer and the interviewee, fostering a productive conversation.

Interview Stage

During the interview, the researcher maintained a respectful and open atmosphere,

ensuring that Deathblade felt comfortable sharing his experiences and opinions. The conversation was structured around the pre-established questions but was flexible enough to allow for deeper exploration of issues that emerged organically during the discussion. The interview was conducted online, and audio recordings were made with the translator's consent, ensuring an accurate account of the discussion.

Post-Interview Stage

After the interview, I produced a full transcript to ensure that all relevant information was accurately captured. I then sent the transcript to Deathblade, thanked him for his participation, and invited any corrections, clarifications, or redactions. I also ensured that any citations of his views in the thesis reflected the agreed transcript.

3.3.2 Data Analysis

The researcher then undertook a thematic analysis of the interview data, identifying key themes related to creative treason and the translator's strategies.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This method is particularly effective in capturing the complexities of meaning within a qualitative dataset, making it an ideal approach for analysing the semi-structured interview conducted with the translator Deathblade. The rationale for choosing thematic analysis lies in its flexibility and applicability to a wide range of qualitative data, including interview data. Unlike other qualitative analysis methods, such as grounded theory or discourse analysis, thematic analysis does not require the data to fit into a pre-existing coding framework or theoretical model, allowing for a more nuanced and inductive exploration of interview data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Additionally, thematic analysis provides a rigorous yet flexible framework for analysing interview data, ensuring that the analysis is grounded in the data while allowing for the development of rich and in-depth themes that can help address the research questions posed in this study. This makes it particularly suited to dealing with the complexity and context-dependence of the research questions in this study. Finally, thematic analysis is widely regarded as accessible and suitable for researchers new to advanced qualitative methods (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which aligned well with the practical context of this study.

Thematic analysis is a method that allows researcher to systematically code and interpret qualitative data to discover themes that are significant to the research questions. It involves several key steps, including familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp.60-69).

In this study, thematic analysis has be meticulously applied to analyse the interview data from translator Deathblade. The aim is to delve deeply into his cultural background, understanding of Xia culture, translation purposes, principles, and strategies, as well as the reasons behind his creative treason during the translation process of Chinese online Xianxia novels. The process of applying thematic analysis is as follows:

1. Familiarisation with the Data

First, I carefully reviewed the interview transcript, to gain a comprehensive understanding of his personal background and translation philosophy. Special attention was paid to how his cultural background influences his translation decisions, such as how he reconciles Western cultural values with the moral and philosophical concepts inherent in Xia culture. This step helped identify initial patterns, such as how Deathblade addresses cultural conflicts in his translations and how he leverages his own cultural background to interpret and convey the uniqueness of Xia culture.

2. Generating Initial Codes

After reviewing the transcript in detail, this study carried out inductive coding of Deathblade's responses. The organisation and retrieval of data were conducted manually, with coding remaining fully researcher-led to maintain close engagement with the material. The process was iterative, moving from line-by-line coding to the gradual clustering of related codes into broader categories of meaning. The focus was on statements that shed light on the translator's goals, his strategic choices, and the challenges that led to conscious or unconscious divergence from the source text. These categories provided the basis for the thematic analysis presented in the following sections.

3. Searching for Themes

After detailed familiarisation and inductive coding, this study organised the interview data into broader themes designed to explain why the translator might diverge from the source text consciously or unconsciously. The grouping followed a simple analytic logic:

from underlying motivation, to adjustments in translation strategy, to constraints and challenges that can produce misreadings or mistranslation. This sequence moves from intentional to unintentional forms of creative treason and was used to structure the subsequent analysis. The three resulting themes—translation motivation, translation strategy adjustments, and factors influencing misinterpretation—provided the organising framework and formed the basis for the synthesis presented in Chapter 4.4.

4. Reviewing Themes

At this stage, this study reviewed the identified themes to ensure they effectively encapsulate the views expressed by Deathblade during the interview and align with the overall research objectives. During the review process, the themes can be compared with the original interview data to ensure that they not only encompass Deathblade's translation practices but also reflect his evolving thoughts, cultural adaptation strategies, and how he navigates challenges and cultural conflicts in translation.

5. Defining and Naming Themes

Each theme was clearly defined and named so that it directly reflected the translator's cultural mediation and instances of creative treason in translation. This ensured consistency in analysis and provided a transparent framework for linking the themes to the research objectives.

6. Writing the Report

The thematic analysis was written up in a structured account that synthesised the interview data rather than as a separate report. Each theme was defined in relation to the research objectives, with attention to how it clarified the translator's creative behaviour. The analysis distinguished between conscious and unconscious creative treason and provided the framework for the extended discussion in Chapter 4.4.

The account was presented reflectively and transparently, acknowledging that analysis is interpretative and shaped by both the translator's reflections and the researcher's coding. As Creswell (2014, p. 124) notes, interviews are valuable for accessing participants' perspectives, though they inevitably involve subjectivity due to self-reporting and researcher interpretation. For this reason, the interview findings were considered alongside the textual analysis, reader survey, and platform study, allowing different strands of evidence to complement one another.

In sum, the translator interview was crucial for understanding the motivations behind creative treason in the English translations of ISSH and AWE. By examining the translator's strategies and reasoning, the interview provided essential context for interpreting the textual data and, together with other methods, contributed to a holistic understanding of how translator agency and reader reception shape the cross-cultural transmission of Xia culture.

3.4 Questionnaire

To complement the textual and interview data, a questionnaire was employed to examine the role of readers in the reinterpretation of Xia culture within the English translations of ISSH and AWE. The purpose of the survey was not only to record preferences regarding translation strategies, but more importantly, to explore how readers actively participate in reshaping cultural meaning through their engagement with the translated texts. In this sense, the questionnaire is used as a tool to examine how readers, when faced with unfamiliar cultural concepts, generate new interpretations. These responses reveal the creative role that readers play in the reception of translation.

As Fowler (2008, p. 2) points out, questionnaires allow researchers to capture broad patterns of perception and attitude across a sample, producing quantitative descriptions of social or cultural tendencies. In the present study, this instrument was designed to collect both descriptive data (for example, readers' backgrounds, motivations, and expectations) and evaluative feedback (for example, their responses to translation strategies, or their perceived understanding of Xia culture). Such data help to contextualise how reader reception contributes to the transmission and transformation of cultural meaning in translation. Following the framework for survey design proposed by Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 147), which recommends including both descriptive and relational questions, this survey addressed questions such as: What translation strategies do readers find most effective? (descriptive) How does their familiarity with Xia culture influence their evaluation of the translations? (relational).

The questionnaire contained mainly closed-ended questions to ensure comparability and facilitate statistical analysis, while also including a small number of open-ended items to capture nuanced interpretive tendencies. As Dörnyei and Dewaele (2022, pp. 87-89)

observe, closed formats provide reliability, but limited open questions can enrich the dataset by highlighting unexpected patterns in readers' interpretations. These open responses were particularly useful for identifying instances where readers reconstructed cultural terms or values in ways not intended by the translator, thereby indicating reception-driven creative treason.

It is acknowledged that surveys inevitably constrain the depth of individual responses and lack the interactive flexibility of interviews (Bryman, 2012, p. 171). To address this, the questionnaire was carefully worded, piloted, and refined to reduce ambiguity, and its results are interpreted in conjunction with other methods used in this study — textual analysis, the translator's interview, and the examination of the Wuxiaworld platform. While the survey did not aim to capture broad statistical trends due to its limited sample size, it offered indicative insights into how readers perceive and reinterpret Xia culture. In this way, the questionnaire data serve as a useful complement to the qualitative analysis developed in Chapter 4.

By focusing on how readers perceive, reinterpret, and occasionally challenge the translation of Xia culture, the questionnaire captures the active role of the audience in shaping meaning. Their preferences, reinterpretations, and feedback do not merely reflect the translator's strategies; they also highlight how translation outcomes are co-constructed within the reception environment. These findings, presented in Chapter 5, demonstrate how readers contribute to the evolving cultural negotiation that characterises the global circulation of Xianxia novel.

3.4.1 Questionnaire Design

The design of the questionnaire was informed by symbolic interactionism, which highlights how individuals construct meaning through interaction with social contexts (Mead, 1934, pp. 173-175). In survey settings, this perspective underscores the importance of providing respondents with sufficient background information to interpret questions in line with the researcher's intent, and of avoiding ambiguity that might lead participants to infer unintended meanings.

Accordingly, the questionnaire was designed with three considerations in mind:1. conciseness and the clarity of questions, 2. provision of brief contextual explanations

where needed, 3. manageable length and complexity. These principles ensured that responses remained directly relevant to the study's research objectives. Items were explicitly aligned with the study's aims: to capture readers' preferences regarding translation strategies, their interpretations of Xia culture, and their evaluative comments on creative adaptations.

To minimise misinterpretation, all questions were phrased in clear and simple language. Ambiguity and convoluted sentence structures were deliberately avoided. Simple, specific phrasing enabled participants to approach questions from similar interpretive angles. The questionnaire primarily consisted of closed-ended items, including multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions, designed to frame responses within a consistent structure. Predefined options encouraged respondents to focus on comparable key points. The survey was distributed electronically to English-speaking readers, and contact details were provided to facilitate prompt clarification in the event of any uncertainty.

The instrument followed established principles of survey construction (Dörnyei and Dewaele, 2022; Sudman and Bradburn, 1983). Closed-ended questions, mainly multiple-choice and five-point Likert scales, allowed comparability across participants, while limited open-ended items invited respondents to elaborate briefly on factors influencing their understanding of Xia culture or their evaluation of translation strategies. These open responses, though optional, provided insight into reader-driven reinterpretations of culturally loaded terms, an issue explored further in Chapter 5.

To enhance validity, items were reviewed by the supervisory team to ensure alignment with the research questions. Double-barrelled questions were avoided, and culturally specific terms (for example "cultivation") were either briefly defined or replaced with more accessible alternatives. To improve reliability, multi-item scales were used where possible, with composite scores derived from sets of related items (Likert, 1932). A pilot study was carried out to identify and revise ambiguous items, ensuring both face validity and internal coherence.

The majority of questions were closed-ended. Demographic and background information (for example age range, first language, familiarity with the novels) was collected using multiple-choice or categorical formats. Attitudinal data were captured using five-point Likert scales. A small number of checkbox questions permitted multiple

selections. This structured approach ensured standardised responses and facilitated efficient data coding.

To supplement the quantitative data, a limited number of open-ended questions were placed at the end of the questionnaire. These invited respondents to elaborate briefly on specific issues, such as key factors influencing their understanding of Xia culture, their assessment of particular translation strategies, or suggestions for improvement. These items were deliberately narrow in scope to preserve the questionnaire's usability. It was acknowledged that fully open-ended questions can be time-consuming and may discourage completion; for this reason, they were optional and clearly marked as such.

The questionnaire design drew upon existing tools used in translation reception studies, as well as cultural theory, to develop items reflecting values associated with Xia culture. To enhance reliability, multi-item scales were used wherever possible.

For instance, questions related to the endorsement of Xia values were grouped into a short set of statements, the average of which formed a composite attitudinal scale. This approach followed established principles of scale construction (for example, Likert summated rating scales) to improve internal consistency. The draft questionnaire was reviewed by the supervisory team to ensure content validity. During the final pilot phase, any remaining items identified as ambiguous were revised or removed. This process ensured that the instrument demonstrated both face validity and internal coherence in measuring the core constructs of the study.

3.4.2 Questionnaire Implementation

A pilot study was first conducted with a small group of readers of ISSH and AWE to refine the questionnaire and check its clarity. Pilot participants were purposively selected from the active readership of the Wuxiaworld platform, particularly those who had previously commented on Deathblade's translations. They were invited to give feedback on the clarity of items, the overall length, and technical aspects such as sequencing and completion time. Items that caused confusion or produced inconsistent responses were revised or removed. This stage ensured that the final survey was concise, comprehensible, and closely aligned with the research questions.

The finalised questionnaire was distributed electronically through the Wuxiaworld

platform to English-speaking readers of the novels. Purposeful sampling was used to reach participants with direct familiarity with the texts. Screening questions were included to confirm prior readership (for example, "Have you read the novel?", "How far have you progressed?"). A unique URL was employed to prevent duplicate submissions, and contact was limited to user accounts that had shown prior engagement on the forum. Data cleaning procedures were applied after collection to identify and exclude incomplete or anomalous entries, so that the dataset reflected responses from genuine and attentive readers.

The final survey contained 36 items and was administered in English via the secure platform Qualtrics. The estimated completion time was 10-15 minutes. An introductory page explained the purpose of the study, to explore the reception of the translations, and clarified participants' rights to voluntary and anonymous participation. Proceeding to the questionnaire was taken as an indication of informed consent. In line with ethical guidance for questionnaire research (Dörnyei and Dewaele, 2022), no personally identifiable information was collected. Participants could skip any question or withdraw at any point, and all responses were stored in encrypted form with restricted access. Results are reported in aggregate to protect confidentiality.

In total, 45 responses were received (19 for AWE and 26 for ISSH). After removing incomplete entries, 24 fully completed surveys remained. While modest in size, this sample provided useful exploratory data for descriptive analysis. The respondents represented a range of nationalities and linguistic backgrounds, reflecting the international readership of the novels (see Chapter 5, Section 5.2). Although the limited sample size restricts the extent to which the results can be generalised, the responses nevertheless offer valuable insights into how readers perceive, reinterpret, and evaluate the translation of Xia culture, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

3.4.3 Data Analysis

The questionnaire data were analysed mainly through descriptive statistics, with the aim of highlighting patterns relevant to the study's research questions. Responses to Likert-scale items were coded numerically and summarised through means and standard deviations, while categorical items such as translation strategy preferences were presented as frequencies and percentages. These summaries provided an overview of how readers

evaluated translation strategies and engaged with Xia culture in the translations.

To ensure that the results reflected meaningful tendencies, items were carefully aligned with the research objectives during the design and piloting stages. This preparatory work helped to secure coherence across scales and facilitated straightforward interpretation of the data. The descriptive analysis was complemented by simple cross-tabulations to illustrate tendencies, such as how familiarity with Chinese culture corresponded with attitudes towards creative adaptation. These observations are presented as exploratory patterns, forming part of the broader discussion in Chapter 5.

Responses to the small number of open-ended questions were analysed thematically. Each comment was reviewed for recurring expressions and interpretive tendencies, and these were grouped into brief categories. Although concise, these comments provided valuable insight into how readers interpreted CLWs and evaluated the translator's choices. As noted by Dörnyei and Dewaele (2022, p. 105), open-ended responses are best treated as qualitative data, offering supplementary context to numerical findings.

In-text quotations from survey responses are cited with a respondent code (for example, R1, R2). These codes refer to anonymised answers given to the open-ended questions of the online questionnaire conducted in 2025. Quantitative data from the multiple-choice items are presented in aggregated form (tables and charts), whereas qualitative insights are illustrated by selected quotations.

The analysis was conducted consistently across all responses, with complete cases forming the basis of interpretation. The findings are reported in Chapter 5, where the descriptive patterns and thematic observations are integrated with textual and interview evidence. In this way, the questionnaire contributes exploratory but meaningful insights into how readers reinterpret Xia culture and how such reader-driven perspectives relate to creative treason in translation.

3.5 Investigating the Wuxiaworld Platform

The investigation of Wuxiaworld in this study was not undertaken in isolation but as part of a broader attempt to conceptualise the reception environment within which ISSH and AWE were read. Together with the reader survey, the analysis of the platform provides an account of the conditions that shaped how the translations were encountered, interpreted,

and reinterpreted. In line with reception-oriented theories, which view the act of reading as embedded within social and cultural contexts (Jauss, 1982), and with research on digitally mediated translation environments (O'Hagan, 2009, p. 97; Gambier, 2018, pp. 45-46), Wuxiaworld is treated here as an active component of the reception process rather than a neutral host.

Founded in 2014 by RWX (Ren Woxing), Wuxiaworld quickly became one of the most influential platforms for English translations of Chinese web novels, especially in the genres of Xianxia and Wuxia (Salazar, 2022, p. 3). Its model of free, serialised publication, supported by features such as an official glossary, forums, and chapter-based releases, created a participatory reading culture and an interpretive community that extended beyond the translated texts themselves. Both ISSH and AWE were serialised exclusively on Wuxiaworld, making the platform the principal gateway through which international readers accessed the translations. The analysis in this study focused on three aspects of the platform that shaped the reception of Xia culture:

Serialisation and dissemination practices. How the release of chapters in sequence created immediacy and affected reader engagement.

The official glossary. A dedicated resource provided by the platform that centralised the translation of culturally specific concepts, including Xia-related terms, offering consistency and reducing misinterpretation (see Section 5.6).

Interactive affordances. Such as forums and comment functions, which placed the texts within a communal environment and created the potential for shared interpretation and negotiation of meaning.

By examining these features, the study highlights how Wuxiaworld's infrastructures mediated the ways in which readers understood and evaluated Xia culture. In this sense, the platform study complements both the textual analysis and the questionnaire findings, offering a contextual view of how reception-driven creative treason was shaped not only by translator strategies but also by the broader digital ecology in which readers encountered the translations.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study followed the ethical guidelines of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David

(UWTSD), including the *Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice and the Research Data Management Policy*. Approval from the University's Research Ethics Committee was obtained prior to data collection (see Appendix A). This provided a formal and regulated basis for the study and safeguarded participants' rights. Core ethical principles—such as informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, data protection, and integrity—were observed throughout (BERA, 2018, p. 9; Silverman, 2017, p. 67).

3.6.1 Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

All participants were informed of the study's aims, procedures, and their rights before taking part. Data were anonymised at the point of analysis, and confidentiality was maintained (BERA, 2018, p. 9). For the translator interview, an information sheet and outline questions were sent in advance, and verbal consent was audio-recorded at the beginning of the Zoom session, with rights of refusal and withdrawal reiterated (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018, p. 221). For the reader questionnaire, a research information and privacy statement was included on the opening page. Consent was established once participants continued and submitted the survey, a process consistent with accepted standards for online questionnaires (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 141; CUREC, 2021, p. 10; Hewson and Buchanan, 2013, p. 45).

3.6.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anonymity and confidentiality were safeguarded at all stages. Identifiable information was removed from transcripts, which were returned to the interviewee for review, respecting autonomy and ensuring reliability (Silverman, 2017, p. 146; BSA, 2020, p. 11). Questionnaire results were reported only in aggregate or with anonymised labels, for example "Respondent A", following established standards of confidentiality (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 225; AoIR, 2019, p. 6). All data were collected via Qualtrics, stored in encrypted files with restricted access, and retained only for the minimum period required (Silverman, 2017, p. 68).

3.6.3 Data Security and Online Research Ethics

Data security was prioritised throughout. The questionnaire was administered via Qualtrics

and the interview through encrypted video conferencing. Raw data—including recordings and transcripts — were encrypted, stored with restricted access, and deleted after the required retention period, in line with secure storage and purpose limitation (CUREC, 2021, p. 12; Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 55).

Given the online setting, additional safeguards were implemented. Internet-based research is particularly exposed to issues of privacy and consent (Ess, 2013, p. 122). To address these, password-protected links were used for interviews, while the questionnaire was distributed only in targeted communities (Wuxiaworld), following ethical recommendations to safeguard online identities and ensure confidentiality (AoIR, 2019, p. 6; Maldonado-Castellanos and Barrios, 2023, p. 4).

These measures ensured compliance with institutional approval and reinforced the study's commitment to privacy, confidentiality, and participants' rights, while maintaining methodological integrity across all stages of the research process.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

This study employed a multi-method design — textual analysis, a translator interview, a reader questionnaire, and Wuxiaworld platform analysis — to strengthen validity and reliability. Each method illuminated the phenomenon of creative treason from a distinct angle. By combining these perspectives, the research mitigated the limitations of individual methods and offered a more balanced and credible account of how Xia culture was translated and received (Creswell, 2014, p. 124).

Textual analysis. The textual analysis of ISSH and AWE provided the empirical foundation for this research. Owing to their exceptional length, large-scale corpus methods were impractical. A selective and reflective approach was adopted, concentrating on passages where translator intervention was most visible and culturally significant, as revealed through comparison with the Chinese originals. The analysis addressed three areas: 1. semantic shifts in culturally loaded words, particularly Xia-related concepts; 2. narrative modifications such as omission, addition, or simplification; and 3. paratextual strategies, including footnotes and translator's notes. This systematic approach, supported by existing scholarship (He, 2018; Jiang and Lu, 2021; Zhang, 2020; Cao, 2019; Li M., 2023; Li Q., 2020; Li M., 2022), ensured interpretive consistency. Within the framework of

Medio-translatology, divergences were examined not as errors but as acts of mediation shaped by translator agency and contextual demands (Xie, 2003, pp. 1-5; Xie, 2020, pp. 48-50). By documenting recurring patterns of creative treason, the analysis established a credible baseline against which the findings of the other methods were considered (Bowen, 2009, pp. 37-38).

Translator interview. The interview offered first-hand insight into the translator's reasoning and strategic choices, which are otherwise inaccessible to textual analysis alone. As Creswell (2014, p. 124) observes, interviews are valuable for accessing participants' perspectives on complex practices. The potential subjectivity of retrospective accounts was mitigated through procedural rigour: the interview was recorded, transcribed verbatim, member-checked by the participant, and thematically analysed following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework (2006, pp. 60-69). Reflexive memoing ensured that interpretations remained grounded in the data while acknowledging the researcher's positionality. These measures enhanced reliability by reducing the risk of selective or biased interpretation.

Reader questionnaire. The reader questionnaire was subject to equally careful considerations of validity and reliability, despite its small sample size (a total of 45 responses were collected and 24 participants completed all 36 questions in the survey). Recognising that a survey with 24 respondents cannot yield broad generalisations, the study instead prioritised the quality and depth of the data collected. The questionnaire was meticulously designed and piloted to ensure content and construct validity. All items were aligned with the research objectives and reviewed in a pilot phase with representative readers, which led to refinements for clarity and relevance. This process helped establish face validity and ensured the instrument would reliably capture the constructs of interest (for example, perceptions of translation strategies and understanding of Xia cultural concepts) (Dörnyei and Dewaele, 2022, pp. 87-89). Standardised, closed-ended questions provided a baseline of consistency and comparability across respondents, supporting the reliability of the quantitative data. At the same time, a limited number of open-ended questions were included to invite detailed feedback in the respondents' own words. As Dörnyei and Dewaele (2022, pp. 87-89) observe, fixed-response formats enhance reliability, but judiciously chosen open-ended items can enrich the dataset with

unanticipated insights. Indeed, in this study, the open-ended responses were of high quality and offered nuanced interpretations from readers.

The interpretive validity of these findings was addressed by staying close to participants' actual words and meanings: the researcher carefully coded the free-text responses and cross-checked emerging themes against the raw comments to ensure the readers' intentions were accurately understood. Notably, the novels in question had been completed several years prior to the survey, meaning that only the most engaged and committed readers were likely to respond. While this could suggest a self-selection bias, it also meant that respondents were typically core readers with enduring interest and familiarity, capable of providing thoughtful and informed answers. Although the sample was small, the respondents' long-term familiarity with the novels meant that their answers were detailed and well-informed. The questionnaire was therefore treated as an exploratory tool rather than a statistical survey, with its value lying in the way it revealed patterns in reader understanding and preferences that complemented the other methods. The findings are not claimed to represent all readers, but they provide credible insights into the views of dedicated readers, which are considered alongside the interview and platform analysis. Taken together, these sources strengthen the study's credibility and internal validity, even though the data are not statistically generalisable.

Platform analysis. The study of Wuxiaworld added ecological validity by situating translation within the digital environment where reception occurred. Reader comments, forum discussions, translator's notes, and glossaries constituted naturally occurring data, unaffected by researcher intervention (Bowen, 2009, p. 37). As O'Hagan (2009, p. 97) highlights, in participatory translation communities the boundary between producers and audiences often blurs, with readers actively engaging in meaning-making. Analysing these interactions enriched the understanding of how translation strategies were received and clarified in practice, revealing the collaborative role of platforms in shaping interpretation and reception.

Taken together, the four methods offered complementary perspectives. Textual analysis established what changed in translation; the interview illuminated why these changes occurred; the questionnaire explored how readers interpreted them; and the platform study revealed where these dynamics unfolded in real time. Their integration

enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, providing a robust basis for interpreting the mediation of Xia culture in English translation and its global reception.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the multi-methodological framework adopted to investigate creative treason in the English translations of ISSH and AWE. The research does not treat translation as a unidirectional act of linguistic conversion but approaches it as a dynamic and multi-agent process shaped by both production and reception. Accordingly, the methodology was designed to trace creative treason not only at the level of translator intervention but also as it emerges through the reception environment, including reader engagement and platform affordances.

To examine the translator's creative treason, the study combined close textual analysis with a semi-structured interview with Deathblade, the sole translator of both novels. The textual analysis focused on selected episodes marked by semantic, structural, and paratextual modifications, particularly where culturally embedded Xia elements were adapted. The translator interview served to elucidate the motivations, strategies, and constraints behind these modifications, distinguishing between conscious and unconscious acts of creative adaptation.

Beyond analysis on the translator, this research also incorporated a reception-oriented dimension. The reader questionnaire was designed to collect empirical data on how English-speaking readers evaluate and interpret Xia culture, translation strategies, and narrative coherence in the translated texts. These responses shed light on reader expectations, preferences, and misunderstandings—many of which constitute forms of receptive creative treason, whereby readers reconstruct or reframe meaning in light of their own cultural schemata.

Complementing this, an investigation of Wuxiaworld, the platform where both translations were exclusively published in serialised form, enabled a deeper understanding of the reception environment. Wuxiaworld's interactive features—comment sections, footnotes, glossaries, and forums—not only facilitated comprehension but also actively shaped how readers perceived and responded to the translated narratives. These paratextual interventions and user engagements functioned as co-creative agents, often initiating or

reinforcing interpretive shifts that diverged from the source culture's framework, thereby participating in the collective construction of meaning.

Together, these four methods form a triangulated strategy that reflects the dual structure of creative treason as theorised in Medio-translatology: both as a product of the translator's intentional and intuitive decisions, and as an phenomenon within a digitally mediated and culturally hybrid reception environment.

The methodological design thus enables a holistic analysis of how translation is reshaped through both authorial and participatory processes, offering a nuanced understanding of the creative transformations that occur at multiple nodes of translingual and transcultural mediation. The following chapters build directly on this framework by providing detailed case studies of how these two types of creative treason manifest in the selected translations, and by exploring their implications for the cross-cultural circulation of Chinese online literature.

Chapter IV: Analysis of the Translator's Creative Treason in Two Novels

4.1 Introduction of These Two Novels

As previously discussed, ISSH and AWE are Xianxia novels by Er Gen, a renowned Chinese online literature author. ISSH and AWE are Xianxia novels that seamlessly integrate elements of fantasy, philosophy, and emotion. They are exemplary Xianxia novels that represent the fusion of Chinese Xia culture, Taoist philosophy, and contemporary online literature. These works showcase the author's skill in constructing complex narrative structures that vividly demonstrate the blending of traditional Chinese philosophical concepts with modern storytelling techniques. Through these novels, readers are introduced to the narrative style and imaginative elements characteristic of Xianxia novel, offering a foundation for exploring its potential for global dissemination within a multicultural context.

4.1.1 Overview of the Two Novels

ISSH, an epic cultivation saga by Er Gen, was serialised from 2014 to 2015 and spans over 6 million Chinese characters. Its protagonist, Meng Hao, starts as a destitute scholar from the mortal world who is forcibly inducted into the Reliance Sect (靠山宗) and thus enters the cultivation world.[1] In a realm governed by strict hierarchies and the laws of heaven and earth, Meng Hao must overcome countless trials: from sect rivalries to cosmic battles to achieve transcendence. The narrative is grand and philosophically profound, reflecting themes of defiance against fate and the pursuit of self-mastery. Along the way, the novel integrates elements of traditional culture, such as Confucian ethics and Taoist principles of balance, within a modern fantasy plot. By the novel's climax, Meng Hao literally "seals the heavens", symbolising ultimate freedom from worldly constraints.[2] This sweeping hero's journey mirrors the classic monomyth structure (Campbell, 2008, p. 28), a call to adventure, trials and growth, and an eventual transcendence, but it does so while creatively merging Eastern spiritual concepts into the framework of a Western-style epic fantasy.

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[1] The Reliance Sect(靠山宗) in ISSH is a small, declining cultivation sect where Meng Hao begins his journey, serving as the starting point for his growth in the vast cultivation world.

[2] In the finale of ISSH, Meng Hao fulfils his vow by "sealing the Heavens"—he reshapes the cosmic order with his own will, becoming master of the Ninth Mountain and Sea and freeing all beings from the constraints of fate.

Although the novel centres on cultivation and cosmic ascension, it is underpinned by values commonly associated with Xia culture - such as honouring one's word, protecting the weak, acting with loyalty, and resisting unjust authority. Meng Hao's character is not portrayed as a typical martial hero; instead, he often hesitates to kill, shows mercy to past enemies, and remains emotionally attached to his sect, his family, and even to former rivals. These behaviours reflect the tension between survival-driven pragmatism and ethical restraint, a central concern in the Xia tradition.

One key example of this is Meng Hao's repeated refusal to abandon comrades in danger, even when it threatens his own cultivation progress. His sense of justice (yi, 义) overrides calculation in many decisions, such as when he protects his fellow disciples or confronts corrupt leaders.[1] His moral commitments are not always rewarded, and the novel presents an ambivalent stance on whether Xia values are viable in a world defined by ruthless individualism. Nonetheless, his personal code - shaped by early scholarly training and enduring emotional ties - becomes a through-line in his development.

Moreover, the novel often stages conflicts between self-interest and moral duty, inviting readers to evaluate the costs of adhering to Xia ideals in an environment where betrayal and manipulation are routine. In this sense, the cultivation world becomes a testing ground for traditional ethical codes, and Meng Hao's journey mirrors that of a Xia knight errant forced to reconcile inner virtue with external survival.

Though wrapped in the trappings of fantasy and Daoist cosmology, ISSH can thus be read as a modern reinterpretation of the Xia ideal - not through martial prowess alone, but through a persistent, if troubled, effort to remain emotionally and ethically grounded. This tension is crucial to understanding the challenges of translating such culturally embedded values into English, especially when the target culture lacks equivalent moral archetypes.

AWE, another Xianxia novel by Er Gen, famed for its humour and heart, was published in 2016. Its hero, Bai Xiaochun, is a lovable rogue whose terrified attitude toward death paradoxically propels him into cultivating for immortality. Accepted into the

[1] In Xianxia novel, yi (义) refers to a moral code of righteousness that compels individuals to act with honour, loyalty, and self-sacrifice, often in defiance of personal interest.

Spirit Stream Sect(灵溪宗) by chance, Bai Xiaochun's journey is marked by comedic misadventures, clever trickery, and moments of genuine bravery.[1]

Although the novel frequently parodies Xianxia conventions - including exaggerated cultivation levels, overpowered artefacts, and grand cosmic threats - it is underpinned by values central to Xia culture, particularly the ideal of yi (义). Bai Xiaochun repeatedly risks his safety to defend his sect, support his friends, and honour his commitments. These actions are not driven by ambition but by emotional ties and a deep, if inconsistent, sense of moral responsibility. In this way, the novel reframes yi not as stoic righteousness, but as a more humanised, affective ethic grounded in relationships.

Unlike traditional Xia heroes who are defined by discipline and martial prowess, Bai Xiaochun's heroism emerges from his emotional vulnerabilities. He fears death, avoids responsibility when possible, and often relies on cunning rather than combat. Yet despite these traits, or perhaps because of them, he becomes a protector of his community and eventually a cultivator of great power. This paradox - of greatness born from fear, and loyalty born from sentiment - reflects a more accessible interpretation of yi, one rooted in everyday relational ethics rather than abstract virtue.

By the novel's end, Bai Xiaochun attains the state of "Eternal Origin" (永恒本源), a form of immortality that represents ultimate power in the cultivation hierarchy.[2] However, he notably retains his personality traits: he continues to care deeply for his friends, express emotional attachment to the mortal world, and use humour as a way of coping with existential uncertainty. This resolution emphasises emotional continuity over metaphysical transformation, reinforcing a version of Xia culture that is less about transcendence and more about sustained human connection.

Thus, AWE offers a reinterpretation of Xia ideals through a comedic and emotionally driven lens. While less solemn in tone than other works in the genre, it explores key ethical dilemmas and social bonds that form the core of Xia culture. These aspects are crucial when assessing the challenges and strategies of translating such values for non-Chinese

[1] Spirit Stream Sect(灵溪宗) in AWE is a renowned cultivation sect that serves as the starting point of Bai Xiaochun's comedic and adventurous journey, providing a foundation for his growth and development in the cultivation world.

[2] In *AWE*, the "Eternal Origin"(永恒本源) is the primordial, unchanging energy that forms the basis of all cultivation and immortality, enabling Bai Xiaochun to harness remarkable power while remaining emotionally connected to the mortal world.

readers, particularly in contexts where humour, sentiment, and morality are encoded differently.

4.1.2 Analysis of Xia culture in the Novels

Both ISSH and AWE are deeply rooted in Xia culture, the traditional ethos of martial heroes in Chinese literature. Core Xia values include loyalty and honour, defying unjust authority, protecting the weak, and pursuing righteousness (Qian and Lei, 2021, pp. 45-47). Er Gen's characters personify these ideals in differing ways that reflect each novel's tone.

1. **Language Style**

Language style is a vital tool in narrative literature for shaping characterisation and expressing cultural meaning. In Xia culture, the aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of language are often used to convey its complex ethics and emotional depth. Xianxia novels frequently integrate the ideals of chivalry with classical Chinese literary styles, adapting these styles to modern contexts through creative reinterpretations. For instance, while classical Chinese literature often relies on refined poetic expressions and allusions, modern Xianxia novels incorporate these elements into contemporary prose, blending traditional literary aesthetics with accessible narrative structures. This adaptation preserves the elegance, romanticism, and philosophical depth of classical language while making it relatable to modern readers. In the pursuit of immortality, characters demonstrate Xia ideals and the philosophy of the "Dao" characterised by "elegant romanticism, mysterious otherworldliness, and a lofty, reclusive inclination" (Feng, 2000, p. 36). These traits, while rooted in classical Chinese, are reimagined in modern Xianxia novel through a balance of poetic language and straightforward storytelling.

James Phelan highlights language as a key medium for engaging readers cognitively, emotionally, and ethically, noting that different linguistic styles can enhance the emotional depth and cultural expression of a narrative (1996, pp. 8, 107). In ISSH and AWE, Er Gen employs a language style imbued with classical elegance. This stylistic choice not only supports the expression of Xia culture but also enriches the novels with cultural depth through vivid imagery and rhythmic narration.

For instance, in ISSH, Er Gen often integrates ideas from Confucianism and Daoism to illustrate moments of character growth. In Chapter 44, an elder advises Meng Hao: "湖

有竭时，平静无波，自然容不了万物，海则常在，可纳百川千河……" (Er Gen, 2013, p.663). Deathblade translates this as: "Lakes can dry up, grow quiet, become still. If that happened, no living things would remain. But seas last forever and can contain the water of countless rivers and lakes..." (Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 44, para. 50).[1] This metaphor, while rooted in Confucian and Daoist thought about openness of mind, also resonates strongly with the values of Xia culture. Within this tradition, the true hero is not one who is narrow or self-serving, but one whose spirit can embrace all under heaven. By contrasting the lake and the sea, Er Gen underlines that cultivation requires an expansive outlook, transcending personal gain. Such imagery reflects the Xia ideal of a magnanimous character, one whose moral compass lies in "caring for the world" rather than guarding the self.

Additionally, Er Gen employs environmental descriptions to heighten emotional resonance and reinforce characterisation. In Chapter 104, when Meng Hao encounters a dying Kunpeng, the narrative conveys his sorrow and regret through the surrounding setting: "可这些雨水无法落在孟浩的身上，这片叶子散发柔和的光芒，使得那些雨水被阻挡在外，于天地雷雨中而行，孟浩于深夜的身影，每当闪电照耀大地时，都格外的清晰。"(Er Gen, 2013, p. 1379)　Deathblade translates this as: "However, the rain didn't touch Meng Hao. The leaf emitted a glowing shield which blocked the rainwater. Meng Hao shot through the stormy night, occasionally illuminated by the flashes of lightning"(Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 104, para.28). The contrast between the storm's chaos and Meng Hao's solitary figure produces a solemn and poignant atmosphere, reinforcing his image as a lone hero. In the Xia tradition, the hero is often portrayed as one who walks the world alone, confronting hardship and resisting power with only his own strength. Meng Hao's solitary silhouette in the storm embodies this archetype: even when burdened with sorrow, he continues his path in defiance of fate. Such depictions not only deepen his emotional struggle but also highlight a key Xia virtue, the resolve of the solitary hero who acts without regret.

These examples illustrate how Er Gen employs metaphorical language and environmental descriptions to integrate traditional Chinese philosophy and Xia cultural

[1] Due to the serialised nature of Deathblade's translation of ISSH on Wuxiaworld, which lacks page numbers, specific page citations are not feasible. Therefore, thisthesis utilises chapter or paragraph numbers to indicate precise locations in the text.

aesthetics into his narrative. By doing so, he not only conveys emotional depth but also maintains a connection to the classical Chinese literary tradition, adapting it into a modern Xianxia context with clarity and accessibility.

Both novels use classical language to depict the cultivation world, allowing readers to experience the philosophical depth and aesthetic richness of traditional Chinese Xia culture through their language. Imagistic descriptions and rhythmic flow convey core xia values such as "loyalty and righteousness", "helping the weak", and "defying authority." However, the two novels differ in tone and style: ISSH adopts a more solemn and epic tone, focusing on grand scenes and philosophical discourse, while AWE employs a lighter, more humorous tone to narrate Bai Xiaochun's daily life and adventures. This divergence reflects differing interpretations and representations of Xia culture.

The language style of AWE is primarily lighthearted and humorous, blending classical Chinese rhetoric with modern expressions. This style uses accessible language and vivid descriptions to ground Xia culture in a more relatable, everyday context. It highlights Bai Xiaochun's "non-typical hero" characteristics while softening the solemnity traditionally associated with Xia culture.

The novel employs humour in both dialogue and narration to craft Bai Xiaochun's "anti-hero" persona. For instance, when describing Bai Xiaochun's exaggerated fear of death and attempts to avoid danger, the language is rife with over-the-top and playful elements. This allows tension in the plot to be released through humour, shifting the representation of Xia culture from lofty ideals to a more approachable, everyday presentation.

From a translation perspective, these differences present distinct challenges. Deathblade's English versions generally preserve the tone: ISSH maintains formal cadence and rich metaphors; AWE mirrors the original's levity with informal expressions and adaptive humour. However, in both cases, losses inevitably occur. The classical allusions in ISSH may lack equivalent resonance in English, while the puns and cultural humour in AWE often require substitution, which risks altering the ethical tone of Bai Xiaochun's actions.

Both texts, though different in style, use language to shape moral experience. Rhythm, imagery, and tone convey xia values such as righteousness (义), sincerity (情), and

loyalty.[1] Whether solemn or comic, these styles reflect cultural choices that shape how readers, especially outside China, perceive the ethical world of Xianxia novel.

2. Characterisation

Characterisation in these novels is deeply informed by Xia culture and its modern evolution. The protagonists, Meng Hao and Bai Xiaochun, both embody and subvert traditional martial-hero ideals in different ways, illustrating the versatility of Xia values in storytelling. Meng Hao's character arc in ISSH aligns with the classic Xia hero who upholds justice and defies tyranny, but with a strong infusion of Daoist and Buddhist philosophical themes. He starts as a humble scholar with a righteous heart, and through trials becomes a powerful cultivator who challenges even the will of Heaven. Meng Hao's defining traits—resourcefulness, perseverance, a moral code that sometimes puts him at odds with corrupt authority—resonate with the traditional youxia (游侠) of Chinese lore. Yet his journey also explores spiritual themes like transcendence and detachment.[2] By the end, Meng Hao achieves a form of enlightenment and cosmic authority ("sealing the heavens"). It reflects a synthesis of Xia valour and Daoist transcendence. His more aloof, transcendent resolution emphasises ideals of chushi (出世) and ultimate union with the Dao, which can be inspiring but slightly distant for readers not versed in Eastern thought.[3]

Bai Xiaochun's character in AWE, on the other hand, is a deliberate subversion of the stoic hero archetype. He is portrayed as cowardly, sentimental, and comically self-preserving, which is unusual for a Xia hero. However, underlying his fear of death is a profound love of life and loyalty to friends—traits very much in line with Xia virtues of cherishing life and camaraderie. His reluctance to fight unless necessary and his creative, sometimes absurd solutions to conflicts (often using wit over brute force) present an "anti-hero" take on the Xia figure. Over time, Bai Xiaochun grows into bravery and selflessness almost inadvertently; his emotional attachments and humorous misadventures endear him to readers, making his eventual heroism feel relatable and hard-earned. In effect, Bai Xiaochun modernises Xia culture by showing that even a seemingly ordinary,

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[1] 情(qing) in Xia culture denotes profound emotional sincerity, encompassing empathy, affection, and heartfelt devotion. It often motivates characters to act selflessly in defense of others, bridging personal feeling with moral commitment.

[2] Youxia (游侠) is a wandering knight-errant in Chinese culture who upholds justice and righteousness through personal action, often outside the bounds of official authority.

[3] Chushi (出世) refers to the act of withdrawing from worldly affairs in pursuit of spiritual enlightenment, often associated with detachment, transcendence, or a reclusive life beyond secular concerns.

fearful individual can rise to heroic stature without losing his human warmth. His conclusion, wherein he remains connected to the mortal world, underscores a Confucian-inflected message: true heroism includes returning to and caring for one's community and loved ones. This characterisation shapes the novel's tone and enhances its cross-cultural appeal. English-speaking readers often find Bai Xiaochun's humour and personal motives relatable, as they recall the flawed comic heroes of Western literature while remaining grounded in Chinese cultural contexts.

In both novels, the supporting characters and villains also reflect facets of Xia culture adapted to Xianxia. The stories present noble masters and righteous sect leaders embodying honour and benevolence, as well as treacherous patriarchs and corrupt officials betraying Xia ideals. Alongside them are disciples, friends, and rivals whose ties with the protagonists bring out values of loyalty, brotherhood, and integrity. Through these relations, the narratives explore the mentor–disciple bond (师徒), clan loyalty, and the tension between personal ambition and the common good.[1] The translators' handling of titles and terms for these characters (as discussed below in Section 4.3.1.2) helps to maintain the hierarchical and ethical nuances of the original. For instance, titles like Shifu (师父) and Shixiong (师兄) are rendered in ways that keep their respectful and relational meaning apparent to the reader, preserving the Xia cultural emphasis on respect for teachers and elders.[2]

In sum, ISSH and AWE reinvent Xia culture through their protagonists: Meng Hao offers a Xia hero who attains mythic spiritual heights, while Bai Xiaochun offers a Xia hero grounded in human foibles and affections. This dual portrayal serves to highlight the richness of the Xianxia genre and the adaptability of Xia values. It also foreshadows the challenges for the translator: conveying not just the denotative meaning of character dialogue and titles, but the cultural connotations and tones that define each character's identity as a hero, anti-hero, mentor, or villain in a specifically Chinese moral framework. The detailed narrative introductions and cultural context above set the stage for analysing how the translator, Deathblade, approaches these novels. The unique blend of Eastern

[1] 师徒(shitu), in Xianxia novels, implies lifelong bonds of daoist mentorship, arcane knowledge transfer, and shared destiny in immortal pursuits.

[2] 师父(shifu), in Xianxia novels, is a cultivation mentor who transmits arcane arts with paternal authority, bearing karmic responsibility for the disciple's path; 师兄(Shixiong) is a brother-in-training who entered the sect earlier, offering guidance while competing for the master's favour.

cultural depth and universal fantasy appeal in ISSH and AWE is a key reason for their popularity beyond China. However, it also means the translator must navigate a minefield of culturally loaded language, concepts without direct English equivalents, and storytelling conventions that differ greatly from Western norms.

The following sections discuss how these challenges lead to creative treason in translation, including unconscious shifts and conscious adaptations, and consider the translator's own reflections on his work. As Deathblade himself observed in the interview, while exoticism and novelty may draw readers initially, lasting engagement comes from deeper narrative qualities such as moral complexity and the "ruthless, dog-eat-dog" nature of the cultivation world, which Xianxia novels portray more intensely than typical Western fantasy (Appendix C, p. 265). Preserving these qualities in translation, without alienating readers, requires a delicate balance of fidelity and creativity. The notion of creative treason provides a framework for understanding the translator's decisions in achieving that balance.

4.2 Unconscious Manifestations of Creative Treason

Xie (2017, pp. 126–127) extends the idea of creative treason to include forms such as rewriting, omission, abridgement, and adaptation. Some of these are not the result of conscious choice but arise naturally in practice, and can be seen as unconscious creative treason. This refers to unintended changes in translation, often beyond the translator's awareness, influenced by habit, language transfer, cultural gaps, or common stylistic patterns in the target language. In the case of ISSH and AWE, these unconscious modifications are not born of deliberate strategy but emerge as by-products of the translator's interpretive framework and the structural demands of English narration.

As discussed in Chapter 3.2, creative treason can manifest in various forms, including semantic, structural, and paratextual dimensions. When unconscious, such shifts reflect the translator's linguistic habitus and the cognitive filters used when dealing with culturally loaded material. They often appear with Xia-related terms, moral codes, and metaphysical concepts, where English has no direct equivalents.

This section focuses on three primary types of unconscious creative treason observed in the translations: 1. misinterpretation or dilution of CLWs; 2. restructuring of narrative logic and chapter organisation due to target language conventions; and 3.simplification of

metaphor, tone, or imagery to accommodate target reader accessibility. These cases exemplify the subtle but significant impact of unconscious mediation, revealing how deeply translation is shaped by both the translator's internalised norms and the constraints of intercultural transfer.

Rather than treating such shifts as translational errors, this study approaches them through the lens of Medio-translatology—as expressions of the translator's intermediary role, shaped by their own cultural and linguistic positioning (Xie, 2012, p. 47). By analysing these unconscious manifestations, it can gain insight into the limits and habits of the translator's interpretive frame, and the ways in which target language norms quietly reshape the moral, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions of the source texts.

4.2.1 Misinterpretation of CLWs

1. Definition of CLWs

CLWs refer to lexical items that embody distinctive cultural meanings, deeply rooted in the traditions, values, and historical experiences of a particular community. These terms often challenge translation and cross-cultural understanding due to their unique cultural connotations and lack of direct equivalents in other languages.

The concept of CLWs has been explored from various perspectives over time. Lado offered one of the earliest definitions, describing them as words that share similar primary meanings in both the source and target languages but differ in connotations (1972, p. 107). Aixela (1996) refined the understanding of CLWs under the term culture-specific items. He identified these as textual elements that lack direct equivalents or hold differing cultural significance in the target language, thus complicating translation (1996, pp. 55-56). This framework highlighted the intrinsic relationship between language and cultural specificity. Building on these foundations, Newmark defines cultural words as lexical items such as "monsoon", "steppe", "dacha", and "tagliatelle", noting that "there will be a translation problem unless there is cultural overlap between the source and the target language (and its readership)" (1988, p. 94). He further classifies these cultural words into five categories: ecology, material culture, social culture, scocial organisations-political and administrative and gestures and habits (1988, pp. 95–102).

Chinese scholars also contributed significantly to this field. Wang Dechun (1998) introduced the term "国俗词语".[1] It emphasising that CLWs are linguistic elements with unique national characteristics encompassing politics, history, and customs. Similarly, Hu (1999) defined CLWs as lexical units that convey specific cultural information unique to a particular nation, acting as direct or indirect reflections of cultural heritage.

In modern Translation Studies, Baker provided a widely accepted definition. She (1992, p. 21) defines culture-specific words as those where the source-language vocabulary may express a concept that is completely unknown in the target culture. These often relate to domains such as religion, customs, or food culture. She argued that these culturally specific terms, whether abstract or concrete, frequently relate to religion, social practices, or cultural artifacts. This perspective aligns with the idea of "lexical vacancies" (词汇空缺) proposed by Bao (2004), referring to the absence of equivalent concepts in the target culture.

Despite variations in terminology, such as "culture-specific items" or "culture-specific words", the core idea of CLWs is consistent. They are linguistic expressions infused with the cultural essence of the source language, presenting unique challenges in translation. This paper adopts Baker's definition: CLWs are words embedded with cultural information unfamiliar to the target audience, reflecting the depth and specificity of the source culture (1992, p. 21).

Translating CLWs presents a number of significant challenges. One of the most fundamental is the difficulty of achieving literal equivalence. Such terms are deeply rooted in their original cultural context, which often makes direct translation unfeasible. Aixela (1996, pp. 61–62) formalises these translation strategies into two main categories—conservation (repetition, glosses, linguistic translation) and substitution (naturalisation, universalisation, omission, autonomous creation)—which align with more colloquial descriptions of annotation and cultural adaptation.

These strategies, however, frequently result in a loss of semantic depth. The cultural richness that certain terms carry in the source language is often reduced or altered in translation, especially when the target language lacks an equivalent conceptual framework.

[1] "国俗词语" (guo su ci yu), a term coined by Chinese scholars, is equivalent to the concept of CLWs, referring to lexical units with distinctive national characteristics that encapsulate specific cultural information related to a nation's politics, history, customs, and cultural heritage, serving as direct or indirect reflections of its unique cultural identity.

Moreover, the same concept may be understood differently across cultures, creating further tension in the translation process. This places the translator in a difficult position: they must decide whether to preserve the original cultural meaning or to adapt the term in a way that ensures clarity for the target audience. As Venuti (1995, p. 24) argues in his critique of domesticating translation, the translator's choices inevitably shape how foreign cultural elements are perceived in the target culture."

2. Xianxia CLWs in these two novels

The classification of CLWs has been extensively explored by various scholars, each proposing unique perspectives. Nida (1964) first introduced the idea of categorising CLWs in his work Toward a Science of Translating. He divided cultural terms into five categories: ecology, material culture, social culture, religious culture, and conceptual culture. This foundational framework has influenced later scholars' approaches (p. 91). Newmark (1988) further refined Nida's categories and emphasised material culture as one important type of CLW. This includes terms related to tangible objects like food, clothing, housing, and tools. Venuti (1995) highlighted how political and cultural terms embody symbolic meanings of national identity, although he did not propose a formal taxonomy of CLWs. Influenced by Nida, Wang Dechun (1998) proposed the term "国俗词语", highlighting lexical items that reflect distinctive cultural features such as politics, history, and customs. Among the various classifications, Newmark's (1988) system, building on Nida's foundational categories, remains the most widely recognised. His inclusion of material culture, social culture, religious culture, and conceptual culture has become the standard for identifying and analysing CLWs in Translation Studies. Baker's (1992) addition of cultural novelty to the target audience also adds a practical dimension, making her approach equally influential in modern Translation Studies.

AWE and ISSH, both written by the same author, Er Gen, belong to the Xianxia genre and share a unified cultural universe. These novels are set in a fantastical world deeply rooted in Chinese cultural and philosophical traditions, showcasing a consistent system of cultivation, mystical hierarchies, and spiritual concepts. Drawing on the definitions and classifications of CLWs proposed by scholars such as Nida and Baker, as well as prior analyses of these novels by researcher, this study categorises the Xianxia CLWs in AWE and ISSH as follows: cultivation levels, character titles, martial arts techniques, daily

artifacts, and mystical materials. Each category is defined based on its cultural specificity and translation challenges, reflecting the unique cultural structure and narrative traditions of Xianxian novels.

Cultivation Levels

Cultivation levels represent the stages of spiritual refinement that characters must achieve to advance in power and understanding of the Dao (道).[1] These terms are central to the Xianxia narrative, symbolising personal growth and hierarchical progression.

In AWE, terms like "凝气" (Qi Condensation) and "筑基" (Foundation Establishment) indicate the early stages of cultivation, while more advanced stages such as "元婴" (Nascent Soul) reflect significant spiritual breakthroughs. Similarly, ISSH employs terms like "灵海" (Spirit Sea) and "化神" (Spirit Transformation) to signify the character's advancement. The translation challenge arises from the fact that these kind of CLWs are often derived from Taoist cultural vocabulary, which has been creatively adapted by the authors, integrating rich Taoist cultural knowledge and the authors' cultural imagination.

Character titles

Character titles play a crucial role in portraying the social structure and interpersonal dynamics within the Xianxia universe. These titles often denote rank, relationships, or roles within sects, emphasising themes of respect and hierarchy. For instance, in AWE, titles like "宗主" (Sect Leader) and "师兄" (Senior Brother) establish the hierarchical relationships among sect members, while in ISSH, terms like "掌门" (Sect Master) and "长老" (Elder) highlight positions of authority. These terms emphasise respect and authority. Translators often face difficulties in balancing cultural fidelity and reader accessibility, requiring contextual adaptations.

Martial arts techniques

Martial arts techniques, another hallmark of Xianxia novels, are vivid and imaginative depictions of combat and spiritual abilities. These terms are often descriptive and metaphorical, such as "紫气化鼎" (Purple Qi Cauldron Summoning) from AWE and "吞天

[1] In the context of Xianxia novels, the term "道" (Dao) is a culturally loaded word that encapsulates the philosophical and religious essence of Taoism, which is deeply intertwined with the pursuit of immortality and the cosmic order. It signifies not only the path to enlightenment but also the underlying principles that govern the natural world and the human conduct within it. "道" in these novels often represents the ultimate goal of cultivation and the moral framework that guides the protagonists' actions and spiritual development
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魔功" (Heaven-Devouring Demon Art) in ISSH. The metaphorical and lyrical nature of these terms presents a significant challenge in translation, requiring a creative approach to preserve their artistic and cultural essence.

Daily artifacts

Daily artifacts are everyday objects imbued with mystical properties, integral to the daily lives of cultivators. "储物袋" (Storage Bag) and "传信玉简" (Message Jade Slip) are examples. These terms may require transliteration or descriptive translation to convey their magical and practical significance to international readers.

Mystical materials

Mystical materials are rare and invaluable elements in Xianxia novels, central to crafting weapons, refining elixirs, or achieving breakthroughs in cultivation. In AWE, terms such as "丹药" (Elixirs) and "灵石" (Spirit Stones) represent the resources required for spiritual advancement. Meanwhile, ISSH includes treasures like "封天鼎" (Seal of the Heavens Cauldron) and "玄晶" (Mystic Crystal), which signify immense power and rarity. These culturally rich terms often require descriptive translation or annotations to preserve their fantastical qualities while making them accessible to international readers.

By categorising the Xianxia CLWs in these novels, it can better understand the cultural intricacies and narrative strategies of the genre. These terms not only enrich the world-building but also challenge translators to bridge cultural gaps without losing the essence of the original works.

3. Misinterpretation of Xianxia CLWs

Translation is not merely a linguistic conversion but also a cultural recreation (Xie, 2017, p. 126). In Medio-translatology, mistranslation is regarded as an unconscious act of creative treason by the translator. This treason not only reflects the translator's cultural background and interpretative ability but also highlights the complexity and creativity inherent in cross-cultural communication. Mistranslation can imbue the original text with new cultural interpretations, allowing it to exhibit different values within the target culture (Xie, 2017, p. 133). Although Deathblade's translations are vivid and detailed, and have been well-received by readers, there are still many translation errors, particularly with CLWs. The translator's misinterpretation of CLWs in novels can be classified into the following categories.

(1) Literal Translation Leading to Loss of Cultural Connotation

In Chapter 3 of ISSH, the lines are as follows:

"见过虎爷，小生……"孟浩赶紧从床上下来，紧张的站在一旁，话还没说完，那大汉眼睛一瞪。

"小个屁声，觉得虎爷声音大？" (Er Gen, 2013, Chapter 3, para. 3)

This was translated as:

"Greetings, Grandpa Tiger", said Meng Hao, scrambling off the bed and standing there nervously. "Maybe you could quiet down a..."

Before he could finish speaking, the large man fixed his eyes on him.

"Quiet farts! You think I'm speaking too loud?" (Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 3, para. 3)

There are two characters titled CLWs that were mistranslated in this passage:

"虎爷" translated as "Grandpa Tiger"

In the Chinese context, the term "爷" is a respectful form of address, used to show reverence and is not meant to imply that someone is an actual grandfather.[1] In this instance, "虎爷" should be translated as "Master Tiger" or "Lord Tiger", which better conveys the respect intended in the original text. The use of "Grandpa" in the translation is overly familiar and inappropriate in this context, as it misses the formal tone and respect that the original term carries.

"小生" translated incorrectly

"Xiaosheng" (小生) is an ancient, self-deprecating term used by men to refer to themselves humbly. It conveys modesty and is often used when a man is speaking politely about himself. A more accurate translation would be "I" or "this humble person." The translation "Maybe you could quiet down a..." completely misinterprets the phrase, turning it into a request or suggestion directed towards the large man, which changes the meaning of the original text. This translation fails to convey the humility and self-referential nature of "小生".

Misunderstanding the humour in the wordplay

The term "小生" also has a phonetic similarity to "小声" (meaning "quiet" or "soft

[1] "爷" (ye) in Chinese can refer to one's grandfather, but it is also used as a term of respect for someone, similar to "sir" or "master", often conveying deference.

voice"), which leads to a misunderstanding on the part of "虎爷" (Master Tiger), who believes Meng Hao is telling him to be quiet. This misunderstanding leads to the humourous line "小个屁声" (Don't make such a small noise), which is a playful expression reflecting the difference in character between the two individuals. However, the translation "Quiet farts! You think I'm speaking too loud?" completely loses the humour derived from the phonetic confusion, and fails to convey the subtle dynamic between the characters.

(2) Misinterpretation of Key Cultural Concepts

In Chapter 9 of ISSH, the phrase "儒道礼乐仁义" is translated as "The etiquette, happiness, kindness, and justice of Confucianism." (Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 9, para. 33).[1] This translation is problematic, particularly with regard to the terms 礼, 乐, 仁, and 义, which are key CLWs within Confucianism and also part of the vocabulary of everyday life, known as "Daily artifacts" terms.

In this context, "乐" refers to music, not happiness. The relationship between 礼 (ritual), 乐 (music), and 仁 (benevolence) is mutually reinforcing. 礼 represents the basic social norms, 乐 refers to the relaxation of the mind and body through music, and 仁 signifies the harmonious relationships between people. Together, these three elements work in unison to create a harmonious and beautiful social atmosphere.

The primary issue in this translation is the misunderstanding of the term "乐". In the original text, "乐" refers specifically to music, which plays a central role in Confucian philosophy as a way to cultivate inner peace and harmony. However, the translator has incorrectly interpreted it as "happiness", which completely changes the intended meaning. "Happiness" does not convey the cultural and philosophical significance that "music" holds in Confucian teachings.

The translation reduces the rich, interrelated concepts of 礼, 乐, 仁, and 义 to "etiquette, happiness, kindness, and justice." While these are indeed parts of the broader Confucian ideology, they fail to capture the depth and complexity of these terms in the context of Chinese philosophy. 礼, 乐, and 仁 are not merely moral concepts but are interwoven to represent a way of life that fosters societal harmony. "Etiquette" does not sufficiently encompass the moral and ritualistic connotations of "礼", and "justice"

[1] "儒道礼乐仁义" refers to key values in Confucianism, where 礼 (ritual) represents social norms, 乐 (music) symbolises the cultivation of inner peace, 仁 (benevolence) emphasises harmony in human relationships, and 义 (righteousness) highlights moral duty and justice, all working together to create a harmonious and well-ordered society.

simplifies the deeper notion of "义", which involves both righteousness and a sense of duty.

(3) Replacing Unique Cultural Symbols with Target-Culture Analogues

In chapter 35 of ISSH, "鲲鹏"is translated as "roc" (Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 35, para. 26).[1]

"鲲鹏" is a mythological creature in Chinese culture, symbolising transformation and boundless potential. "Roc", from Arabic mythology, is also a giant bird but lacks the transformative connotation of "鲲鹏."

In chapter 25, "应龙" is translated as "flying rain-dragon" (Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 35, para. 45).[2]

"应龙" is a specific divine creature in Chinese mythology, and while "flying rain-dragon" captures some surface meaning, it diminishes its cultural uniqueness.

Substituting culturally distinct symbols with target-culture equivalents often prioritises readability at the expense of cultural authenticity, reflecting the translator's unconscious compromise when faced with unfamiliar concepts.

(4) Omission or Avoidance of Key CLWs

In Chapter 33 of AWE, "此剑子母一对" is left untranslated (Er Gen, 2018, Chapter 33, para. 28).[3]

The term refers to a pair of complementary swords ("mother-and-child swords") and carries connotations of unity and relational harmony in Chinese culture. Omitting this deprives the target audience of cultural and narrative depth. The concept of "mother-and-child swords" is rare in an English context because English typically uses symmetrical relational terms (such as brother or sister) rather than emphasising generational hierarchy, inheritance, or complementary relationships like "mother and child". Key cultural terms are either ignored or omitted, often due to their perceived complexity or lack of equivalent expressions in the target language. Such omissions undermine the narrative's completeness and the reader's understanding of its cultural richness.

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[1] 鲲鹏(kun peng) is a mythical creature from Chinese mythology, described in Zhuangzi as a giant fish that transforms into an enormous bird, symbolising boundless freedom and immense potential.

[2] 应龙(ying long) is a mythical winged dragon in Chinese mythology, known as a rain deity and a servant of the Yellow Emperor, symbolising strength and the ability to control water and weather

[3] Zimu Sword (子母剑): A paired weapon consisting of a larger "mother" sword and a smaller "child" sword, often used together in coordinated combat for versatility and deception.

(5) Misinterpretation of Polysemous Words

In chapter 41 of AWE, "神识" translated as "attention" (Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 41, para. 37).[1]

In Xianxia contexts, "神识" refers to spiritual awareness or supernatural perception, but "attention" reduces it to a mundane concept, stripping it of its metaphysical implications.

In the same chapter, "青罗宗" translated as "Black Sieve Sect" (Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 41, para. 44).

The term "青罗" likely denotes a specific colour and cultural symbolism. Translating it as "Black Sieve" neglects its layered meaning and potentially diminishes the narrative's aesthetic resonance. Polysemous words are translated with a single, surface-level meaning, ignoring their broader semantic range or cultural context. The challenges in translating such terms lie in their embeddedness in cultural, spiritual, or symbolic systems that do not easily map onto the target language. For "神识", terms like "spiritual awareness" or "divine perception" could better capture its metaphysical dimension, while "Qingluo Sect" could retain the term's cultural nuance.

4.2.2 Transformations of Narrative Structure

Unconscious changes to narrative structure during translation are a form of unconscious creative treason. As Deathblade shared with me (see analysis of the interview in Section 4.4), this reflects the translator's effort to balance culture, language, and audience expectations. Such alterations affect the translated text's authenticity and acceptability.

In translation practice, the translator's cultural awareness inherently influences the narrative style. For instance, cultures where linear storytelling is widely favoured may prompt translators to simplify complex nested structures (Holman and Boase-Beier, 2016, p. 12). Alternatively, translators might adjust the narrative style to align with the literary traditions or preferences of the target language audience (Venuti, 1995, p. 23).

On the positive side, unconscious treason can make translated texts more accessible. Toury (1995, p. 61) explains that translators internalise cultural and textual norms which

[1] 神识(Shen shi),A spiritual awareness or supernatural perception in Xianxia novel that allows cultivators to perceive, scan, or communicate across distances beyond physical sight, often used for detecting danger, exploring surroundings, or probing others' cultivation levels.

guide their choices without the need for deliberate reflection. Such norms often help create translations that are more acceptable to target readers. He further notes that these norms influence translation behaviour at every stage of the process (Toury, 1995, pp. 93–95). By aligning with readers' cognitive expectations, unconscious changes reduce the effort needed to process complex narrative structures.

However, these non-deliberate shifts may also weaken the cultural distinctiveness of the source text. Berman (2000, pp. 300–302) points out that translators tend to favour clarity and fluency, and that this tendency often works at an unconscious level. He stresses that such "deforming tendencies" can gradually erode the foreignness of a work. Venuti (2004, p. 233) also highlights that Berman regarded these tendencies as largely unconscious, and that they can distort the cultural resonance of the original text. In this sense, unconscious adaptation may improve readability but at the risk of diminishing the artistic and cultural integrity of the source work.

In novels such as ISSH and AWE, instances of unconscious narrative restructuring by Deathblade are particularly evident in the following aspects:

1. Adds the Missing Parts

Classical Chinese is characterised by its brevity, precision, and implicit meaning. Sentences often omit subjects and rely on concise expressions to convey profound meanings. This linguistic style poses challenges for translators, particularly when interpreting texts with such structures into English, a language that demands explicit clarity in grammar and syntax. The phenomenon of subject and predicate omission in written Chinese reflects its high context-dependence and linguistic economy. Cai and Zhang (2017) highlight that the grammatical structure of Chinese is relatively concise, often omitting subjects or predicates to streamline expressions. For instance, in a series of clauses where the subject remains consistent, subsequent clauses frequently omit the subject entirely, relying on the context to maintain coherence (p. 45). This characteristic underscores the language's adaptability and efficiency, yet it also places a greater cognitive burden on readers to infer omitted elements from the surrounding context. Furthermore, such omissions align with the cultural emphasis on implicit communication in Chinese, where brevity and mutual understanding through shared context are highly valued.

Translator Deathblade, when translating, often adds missing nouns or subjects to

sentences in accordance with English grammatical norms, ensuring that readers can correctly comprehend the content of the novel. This process represents an unconscious act of creative treason, as the translator engages in a creative reinterpretation shaped by the conventions of English grammar.

For example, in ISSH, Chapter 34, the sentence:

"三十岁以下，或凝气七层，或内门试炼第一，可入内门……" (Er Gen, 2013, Chapter 34, para. 3)

Translation: "I reached the seventh level of Qi condensation before I was thirty. I was the number one disciple in the Inner Sect. But now..." (Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 34, para. 3)

The original Chinese uses a structure that omits the subject, a common rhetorical feature in Classical Chinese. This omission caused the translator to misunderstand the requirements for entering the Inner Sect, leading to an inaccurate rendering. The original intended meaning is conditional: "Only those under thirty, at the seventh level of Qi condensation, or first in the Inner Sect trial, may enter." The translator's misinterpretation alters the narrative logic, demonstrating how linguistic differences in subject omission can reshape the narrative structure.

Such unconscious changes dilute the nuanced implicitness of the source text and may disrupt the cultural authenticity of the narrative. On the other hand, this adjustment makes the content more comprehensible for English-speaking readers unfamiliar with Classical Chinese grammar.

2. Non-Interpretation of Cultural Content and Symbols

Chinese cultivation novels often incorporate culturally rich imagery and symbolic phenomena rooted in Daoist philosophy. For example, the process of physical purification during cultivation breakthroughs, described in both novels, is laden with cultural and symbolic meaning. In ISSH, Chapter 9, and AWE, Chapter 4, the protagonists experience physical changes during cultivation:

In ISSH: "孟浩体内轰鸣，大量的污垢出现时，他睁开的双眼内露出炯炯之芒。" (Er Gen, 2013, Chapter 9, para. 52)

Translation: "Meng Hao's body roared, and a large amount of filth appeared. His eyes shone brightly as he opened them." (Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 9, para.52)

In AWE: "发现自己胖了一圈，全身黏糊糊的，贴着一层黑色的污垢。" (Er Gen, 2016, Chapter 4, para .3)

Translation: "He realised he'd grown fatter and was covered in a sticky, black filth." (Deathblade, 2018, Chapter 4, para. 3)

In Daoist culture, it is believed that through neidan (internal alchemy) cultivation, bodily impurities, such as "stale qi" and "turbid qi", can be purged, enabling practitioners to achieve a state of "purity and tranquillity" (清静无为).[1] The expulsion of impurities during a breakthrough symbolises a return to an untainted, original state of being, representing the unity of bodily purification and spiritual advancement. The translations render these scenes literally, without explaining their cultural significance, thus missing the philosophical and narrative depth they provide. While the direct translation aids readability, it fails to convey the symbolic richness of the source text, potentially leaving target readers with a superficial understanding of these pivotal moments.

3. Simplification of Cultural Imagery

Terms such as "玄妙" (xuan miao), deeply rooted in Chinese philosophy and literature, are often simplified in translation. For example:

In ISSH, Chapter 9: "玄妙是真的，真的有玄妙！" (Er Gen, 2013, Chapter 9, para. 47)

Translation: "So it's true! How profound!" (Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 9, para. 47)

The term "玄妙" is composed of two elements: "玄" (xuan) and "妙" (miao). In the *Tao Te Ching*(道德经), "玄" is one of the core concepts of Daoism.[2] The first chapter of the *Tao Te Ching* states: "玄之又玄，众妙之门" (Can be translated as: The mystery within mysteries, the gateway to all marvels). Profound upon profound, it is the gateway to all wonders"). Here, "玄" signifies the unfathomable and transcendent nature of the Dao, representing the universal origin and essence beyond sensory perception and conventional understanding. "妙" refers to beauty, subtlety, and the marvellous. The *Tao Te Ching* highlights that the Dao's manifestations are "妙"—formless yet capable of generating all things.

Together, "玄妙" encapsulates the ineffable and immeasurable essence of the Dao, as

[1] 清静无为, A Daoist ideal meaning “purity and tranquillity achieved through non-action,” referring to a state of inner calm and natural harmony attained by aligning with the Dao rather than forcing artificial effort.

[2] 道德经, The *Tao Te Ching* is an ancient Chinese philosophical text attributed to Laozi, emphasising living in harmony with the Tao, the fundamental principle underlying the natural order of the universe.

well as its transcendent and intricate mysteries that surpass ordinary experience. Translating "玄妙" as "profound" reduces its rich cultural and philosophical connotations to a simplified narrative expression, thereby losing much of its symbolic depth.

4. Structural Adjustments

English and Chinese exhibit significant differences in narrative construction, particularly in their approaches to grammatical structure and subject identification. English narratives are characterised by explicit grammatical clarity, often requiring clear subject identification and syntactic completeness. In contrast, Chinese narratives frequently employ contextual reliance, where subjects and other elements can be omitted if they are inferable from the surrounding text or discourse. This distinction necessitates structural adjustments during translation, as evidenced in ISSH and AWE.

In ISSH: "完了，这一次估计又要被重伤几个月……" (Er Gen, 2013, Chapter 9, para. 20)

Translation: "I'm finished!" (Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 9, para. 20)

Here, the Chinese text omits the subject "I", relying on context to convey the speaker's identity. This is a typical feature of Chinese, where brevity and contextual inference are favoured over explicit specification. The English translation, however, introduces the subject "I" and attributes the thought explicitly to the character Cao Yang. This adjustment conforms to English grammatical norms, where such omissions could lead to ambiguity.

While this structural change enhances clarity and aligns the sentence with the expectations of English-speaking readers, it also shifts the narrative tone. The Chinese original conveys a sense of immediacy and implicitness, allowing readers to engage interpretatively with the text. In contrast, the English translation feels more direct, which, while aiding comprehension, may detract from the interpretive richness of the original.

Scholars have noted that the differing linguistic characteristics of English and Chinese reflect their broader cultural and cognitive frameworks. According to Li and Thompson (1981, p. 15), Chinese is a topic-prominent language, where contextual relationships often take precedence over strict grammatical rules. In contrast, English is subject-prominent, requiring explicit identification of grammatical roles to ensure clarity. This fundamental difference means that Chinese narratives often exhibit a fluid and flexible structure, while English prioritises linearity and precision.

This divergence extends to narrative styles. As Huang (2006, p. 48) observes, Chinese texts often rely on ellipsis to maintain brevity, with readers expected to infer missing elements based on context. English texts, however, are less reliant on such inferential mechanisms, as their grammatical conventions demand a more explicit articulation of ideas. Consequently, translations from Chinese to English often involve a shift from implicit to explicit narrative structures, leading to what Vinay and Darbelnet (1995, p. 48) term "modulation", where adjustments are made to suit the cognitive and cultural expectations of the target audience.

4.3 Conscious Manifestations of Creative Treason

Conscious creative treason is a key notion in Medio-translatology, describing the translator's deliberate intervention in the source text with the intention of achieving specific communicative or cultural aims. Unlike unconscious treason, which stem from ingrained linguistic habits or internalised norms, conscious treason involves an active decision to reshape the text. This may take the form of adjusting style, restructuring narrative, or modifying cultural references. The ultimate goal, as emphasised by Xie Tianzhen, is not the mechanical reproduction of the original, but the creation of a version that facilitates cross-cultural communication and resonates with target readers (Xie, 2018, p. 9).

Xie further points out that such treason reflects the translator's dual responsibility to the source and target cultures: it is at once "a flexible handling of linguistic transfer" and "an innovative act of mediation on the cultural and ideological levels" (Xie, 2017, pp. 126–127). This definition highlights the translator's agency, as conscious creative treason requires both awareness and intention in order to balance fidelity with adaptation. As Hermans (2007, p. 77) notes, translation is always enmeshed in cultural and ideological positioning; conscious treason therefore represents an overt negotiation between preserving cultural specificity and ensuring communicative effectiveness.

Building on these theoretical insights, the translations of ISSH and AWE by Deathblade demonstrate conscious creative treason most clearly in two areas. First, his handling of CLWs often involves deliberate shifts of strategy, such as alternating between transliteration, literal rendering, or interpretive glosses, depending on context. Secondly, his use of paratextual devices, including glossaries and translator's notes, reveals an

intentional attempt to bridge cultural distance. Both strategies show how conscious creative treason operates as a purposeful means of mediation, allowing Xia culture to be transmitted in forms accessible to a global readership.

4.3.1 Creative treason in the Translation of CLWs

The translations of AWE and ISSH highlight Deathblade's efforts to balance cultural fidelity with reader accessibility. Building on Xie's (2018, p. 9) conceptualisation of creative treason in Medio-translatology, and drawing on the established classifications of CLWs proposed by Nida (1964, p. 91), Newmark (1988, p. 95) and Venuti (1995, p. 20), this section examines how the translator negotiates the competing demands of preserving Xia culture and ensuring readability for international audiences.

1. Cultivation Levels

The progression system in AWE and ISSH reflects a classic Xianxia hierarchy with intricate metaphysical concepts. The major stages include:

Qi Condensation (气凝期): The foundational stage for gathering spiritual energy.

Foundation Establishment (筑基期): Laying the groundwork for future cultivation.

Core Formation (结丹期): Creating a "golden core" within the body.

Nascent Soul (元婴期): Cultivators form a spiritual nascent soul.

Spirit Severing (化神期): Severing ties with worldly desires for spiritual refinement.

Dao Seeking (问道期): Pursuit of enlightenment and alignment with the Dao.

Immortal Ascension (飞升期): Achieving transcendence beyond the mortal plane.

As Zhang (2020, pp. 24–25) points out, the translation of such CLWs carries significant cultural weight, guiding readers' understanding of Chinese thought traditions.

(1) Reinterpreting Philosophical Concepts

A key example of conscious creative treason is seen in the rendering of metaphysical concepts through cultivation stages. The term Spirit Severing (化神期) conveys the Daoist principle of detachment from worldly ties. By highlighting the metaphor of "severing", the translation communicates the idea of spiritual transformation in a way that is accessible to English readers. Likewise, Nascent Soul (元婴期) presents the notion of spiritual rebirth in a concise form. He (2018, pp. 18–19) notes that such choices keep the main philosophical message intact while also reducing cultural barriers.

(2) Cultural Simplification for Accessibility

Some terms are simplified to avoid overwhelming readers unfamiliar with Chinese cultivation traditions. For example, Foundation Establishment (筑基期) is translated literally, which gives clarity to its role as the basis for further cultivation. Ma (2023, pp. 124–125) observes that literal renderings of structurally transparent CLWs allow readers to enter the world of the story more easily while still reflecting cultural meaning.

(3) Amplifying Narrative Engagement through Localisation

In AWE, which often employs humour and exaggeration, cultivation levels are adapted to fit this style. The translation of Dao Sovereign (道主期) keeps its literal sense but is expressed with a heightened tone that matches the comic exaggeration of Bai Xiaochun's adventures. Li (2020, pp. 53–54) explains that such adaptation makes the cultural terms consistent with the novel's humorous narrative and more engaging for international readers.

(4) Balancing Fidelity and Innovation

Other terms remain closer to the original. Core Formation (结丹期), for instance, is kept as a literal translation that is clear and culturally faithful. This reflects what Xie (2018, p. 9) calls conscious creative treason, in which the translator adapts terms deliberately to mediate between fidelity to the source and the expectations of the target audience. As Cao (2019, p. 21) shows in her analysis of AWE, such a balance between semantic and communicative translation ensures both accuracy and accessibility.

(5) Preserving Immersive Worldbuilding

Cultivation levels are not merely technical terms but integral elements of Xianxia worldbuilding. Deathblade's translations ensure that these terms contribute to the immersive quality of the novels. By adapting names like "Immortal Ascension (飞升期)" into universally comprehensible language, he facilitates the readers' emotional and imaginative engagement with the narrative.

In conclusion, Deathblade's treatment of cultivation levels demonstrates a consistent pattern of conscious creative treason: he employs literal renderings when terms are structurally transparent (for example, Foundation Establishment), reinterprets abstract Daoist concepts through metaphorical phrasing (for example, Spirit Severing), and adapts tone to match narrative style, particularly in AWE. These strategies show how fidelity and

innovation are deliberately balanced, allowing cultivation terminology to retain its philosophical resonance while remaining accessible to readers unfamiliar with Xianxia lore. Having considered cultivation levels as metaphysical CLWs, the discussion now turns to forms of address and titles, another crucial category where translation choices similarly reveal how Xia values are reframed for a global audience.

2. Character Titles

The character titles in ISSH and AWE reflect a rich linguistic heritage, embodying an ancient Chinese aesthetic. These titles convey the hierarchical structures of feudal society, intertwining with Daoist cultural values and philosophies, offering a profound sense of historical and spiritual depth.

To translate the culturally-rich titles effectively, Deathblade adopts a strategic blend of translation methods that prioritise both accuracy and comprehensibility. For terms like 师兄 and 师姐, a literal translation approach is taken, translating them as "elder brother" and "elder sister", respectively.[1] This choice, while not capturing the exact master-apprentice relationship, maintains the hierarchical context, enabling readers to grasp the underlying implications through the surrounding text. The translation of 小生, 某 and 老夫 as the singular "I" simplifies the narrative, although it does forfeit some stylistic diversity.[2]

For names with significant cultural weight, Deathblade opts for transliteration paired with annotations, which helps to retain the profound significance of these terms and provides explanatory footnotes to aid English-speaking readers in understanding. As for mythological terms like 妖 (Yao) and 仙人 (Xianren), a domestication strategy is applied, translating them as "demon" and "immortal".[3] This approach leverages familiar English mythological figures to enhance the readers' connection to the narrative, ensuring that the story's immersive quality is preserved.

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[1] 师兄(Shixiong) refers to an elder male fellow apprentice, and 师姐 (Shijie) denotes an elder female fellow apprentice.

[2] 小生 (xiaosheng) refers to a young man or oneself in a humble manner, 某 (mou) is a pronoun used to refer to oneself in a modest way, and 老夫 (laofu) denotes an elderly man or oneself as an old man; these are all modest forms of self-reference used by people of different statuses in ancient China.

[3] 妖 (Yao) refers to a supernatural being or spirit in Chinese mythology, often with a connotation of mischief or malevolence, while 仙人 (Xianren) denotes an immortal being or a transcendent individual who has achieved spiritual enlightenment and longevity in Chinese folklore.

Overall, examples of creative treason made by Deathblade in terms of character titles fall into four categories: relative semantic underspecification, simplification for stylistic consistency, domestication of cultural archetypes and transliteration with annotation.

3. Martial Arts Techniques

Many martial arts techniques in AWE and ISSH are embedded in the Chinese philosophical framework of Yin and Yang and the Five Elements (阴阳五行).[1] These concepts, which symbolise the balance of complementary forces and the dynamic cycles of nature, shape not only the names of techniques but also their symbolic significance in the narrative. As Nida (1964, p. 91) notes, culture-specific terms often carry layers of meaning that extend beyond their immediate referents, which creates challenges for translators seeking equivalence.

Deathblade often employs literal translation for martial arts techniques, for example rendering 紫气东来功 as Violet Qi from the East (Deathblade, 2014, Chapter 23, para. 3). This strategy ensures recognisability and retains key cultural markers such as Qi, but at the same time it compresses the Daoist cosmological connotations embedded in the original phrase, particularly its associations with auspiciousness and directional symbolism in Chinese thought. Newmark (1988, p. 95) observes that such lexical items function as "cultural markers", and literal rendering tends to privilege communicative fluency over cultural depth.

When confronted with more abstract or invented names, Er Gen's creative coinages require corresponding innovation in translation. In these cases, Deathblade adopts metaphorical or symbolic renderings to preserve imaginative resonance. Ma (2023, pp. 124–125) notes that invented martial techniques are frequently adapted through semantic translation, which retains narrative consistency while easing comprehension. Similarly, Zhang (2020, pp. 30–31) argues that the translation of martial techniques illustrates how literal and creative strategies are combined to preserve both narrative immersion and cultural identity.

Thus, the translation of martial arts techniques illustrates conscious creative treason: fidelity is maintained where direct rendering is possible, but deliberate adaptation is

[1] Yin and Yang and the Five Elements (阴阳五行) are foundational concepts in Chinese philosophy, where Yin and Yang represent opposing yet complementary forces, and the Five Elements—Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water—symbolise the dynamic interactions and cycles that govern the natural world and human life.

introduced where philosophical abstraction or invented terminology risks alienating international readers. This balance reflects the translator's active negotiation between cultural retention and accessibility.

4. Daily artifacts

In these two novels, terms denoting daily artefacts constitute a distinctive category of CLWs. These lexical items encompass temporal markers, practical objects, and references to social structures. On the surface, they may appear mundane, yet they carry profound cultural meanings rooted in Chinese philosophy, social hierarchy, and daily practices. As Nida (1964, p. 91) notes, even seemingly ordinary lexical units can embody deep cultural categories that resist direct equivalence. Similarly, Newmark (1988, p. 95) identifies objects and social terms as central to the cultural lexicon, whose translation requires sensitive negotiation between semantic accuracy and communicative effect.

Temporal Markers

Temporal markers such as 一息的时间 (the time of one breath), 一盏茶的时间 (the time of a cup of tea), and 一炷香的时间 (the time of one incense stick) are deeply rooted in Chinese culture, reflecting traditional methods of measuring time.[1] Deathblade employs a flexible approach to their translation:

The term "一息" is literally translated as "one breath.", preserving its metaphorical resonance and cultural rhythm (Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 91, para.16).

Simplification is used for 一炷香的时间, translated as "half an hour", prioritising narrative fluency over cultural specificity (Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 39, para.36).

This strategic variation illustrates creative treason, where Deathblade selectively omits or adapts cultural nuances to ensure the narrative remains accessible while retaining a sense of cultural depth. His choices reflect a nuanced understanding of the target audience's cultural framework, minimising potential confusion without compromising the immersive quality of the text.

Ma (2023, pp. 124-125) observes that such alternation between literal and adaptive renderings reflects a pragmatic balance between cultural retention and readability. Here,

[1] "一息的时间" (yixi de shijian) refers to the brief period equivalent to the duration of a single breath, symbolizing a fleeting moment in time. "一盏茶的时间" (yizhan cha de shijian) denotes the time it takes to brew and sip a cup of tea, representing a short, leisurely interval. "一炷香的时间" (yizhu xiang de shijian) signifies the span of time an incense stick burns, which is traditionally used to measure a longer, more contemplative period.

conscious creative treason is visible in the translator's deliberate choice either to preserve cultural rhythm or to adapt it for immediate comprehension.

Social Structures

Terms referring to social organisations such as sect (宗门) and clan (家族) are not mere labels but embody the political, ethical, and communal tiers of the Xianxia world. Deathblade's translation preserves this distinction: "sect" foregrounds spiritual community and shared cultivation, whereas "clan" signals kinship, lineage, and social hierarchy.

This deliberate lexical choice is reinforced by Deathblade's own explanation in a YouTube video, What's the difference between a sect and a clan?, where he clarifies how the two terms diverge in function and connotation within Chinese fantasy narratives.[1] This represents a rare instance where the translator steps outside the text to educate his readers about nuanced cultural semantics - a vivid example of conscious creative treason, where translation goes beyond linguistic transfer to act as cultural mediation.

Zhang (2020, pp. 26-27) emphasises the necessity of such precision. In ISSH, accurate rendering of "sect" versus "clan" enables readers to grasp the layered dynamics: communal spiritual order versus familial affiliation. Without this distinction, the depiction of Daoist institutions and lineage politics would be blurred, weakening the narrative's cultural texture.

Practical and Symbolic Objects

Daily items like 传信玉简 (jade slip for communication) (Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 77, para.34) and 储物袋 (storage bag) (Deathblade, 2016, Chapter 3, para.38) are translated literally to preserve their functional roles while introducing readers to the unique elements of the Xianxia world. These translations retain the cultural distinctiveness of the original text, enriching the fantastical atmosphere without overwhelming readers with unnecessary exposition.

5. Mystical Materials

In both novels, mystical materials play a important role in shaping the fantastical atmosphere and advancing the plot. Terms like "丹药" (Elixirs) and "灵石" (Spirit Stones) in AWE, and "封天鼎" (Seal of the Heavens Cauldron) and "玄晶" (Mystic Crystal) in

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmn5Hw09qp4

ISSH have significant cultural and imaginative weight, requiring careful translation to preserve their cultural connotations and fantastical nature.

In AWE, the translator combines communicative and semantic strategies. For example, "丹药" is translated as "Elixirs" (Deathblade, 2018, Chapter 2, para.54), drawing on Western concepts of alchemy and immortality, making the term accessible to English-speaking readers while maintaining its mystical significance. Similarly, in ISSH, "灵石" becomes "Spirit Stones" (Deathblade, 2018, Chapter 3, para.9), preserving its spiritual energy connotation and clarifying its role in cultivation.

Deathblade's translation of CLWs in ISSH and AWE reveals a consistent mode of conscious creative treason, characterised by selective negotiation between cultural fidelity and target accessibility. His approach is marked by strategic flexibility: he decides when to retain cultural markers, when to simplify or rationalise them for fluency, and when to reshape them through interpretive reformulation. This pattern demonstrates what Xie (2018, p. 9) identifies as the translator's mediating agency, whereby translation is not mechanical transfer but a deliberate reconfiguration of meaning to enable cross-cultural communication.

At the same time, such choices highlight the paradox inherent in creative treason. Cultural nuances embedded in CLWs are not always fully preserved; some are inevitably diluted, transformed, or reframed in the process of adaptation. As Berman (2000, pp. 300-302) argues, clarification and rationalisation, while enhancing readability, can also diminish cultural alterity. Yet these losses are not accidental but the outcome of conscious prioritisation, reflecting Deathblade's attempt to balance immersion with intelligibility. In this respect, his practice exemplifies Eco's (2001, p. 19) notion of translation as negotiation, a process of weighing gains against losses.

Overall, Deathblade's handling of CLWs positions him as more than a linguistic mediator: he acts as a cultural broker who actively reimagines Xia culture for an international readership. His translations embody both the possibilities and the limitations of cross-cultural transfer, showing that creative treason entails not only preservation and innovation but also inevitable compromise. The rationale behind these choices, as will be further explored, becomes clearer when considered alongside his paratextual strategies and personal reflections in interviews.

4.3.2 The Application of Paratexts in Translation

1. Paratexts Applied in the Translation

The concept of paratexts was first introduced by Gérard Genette in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. He describes them as the "thresholds" through which a text reaches its readers (Genette, 1997, p. 1). Paratexts include the linguistic and non-linguistic features that surround a text and shape how it is read. Genette further distinguishes between peritexts, which are physically part of the book such as prefaces or notes, and epitexts, which are outside the book but still influence how it is received, for example interviews and publicity (Batchelor, 2018, p. 8).

In translation, paratexts are important because they reduce cultural barriers and support communication. Batchelor (2018, p. 22) notes that annotations and glossaries help readers to understand culture-specific terms. Frías (2019, p. 15) also points out that paratexts act as a form of mediation, making the source culture easier to grasp without removing its distinct character. In today's digital environment, this role is even stronger. O'Sullivan (2020, p. 63) explains that online paratexts, such as blogs and interactive forums, give translators and readers space to share views and negotiate meaning.

Paratexts are therefore not only supporting tools but central to cross-cultural communication. They improve readability, widen the circulation of translations, and create opportunities for cultural exchange. In online literature, where platforms like Wuxiaworld provide glossaries, comment sections and translator notes, paratexts play a crucial role in making the text accessible and engaging for international readers.

2. Paratexts Applied in These Two Novels

Through an analysis of the texts of ISSH and AWE, combined with existing scholarly perspectives, the application of paratexts in these two novels is notably concentrated in four key areas: cover design, the use of footnotes, glossaries, and the role of translators' engagement on social media platforms. Each of these aspects demonstrates distinct contributions to the reception, understanding, and cross-cultural dissemination of the works, highlighting the interplay between textual presentation and reader engagement.

(1) Cover Design

A book cover, as a peritextual element, plays a pivotal role in shaping readers' initial perceptions of the text. According to Gérard Genette's theory of paratexts, the cover acts as a "threshold" that bridges the external world and the internal content of the text, offering readers their first interaction with the narrative and its cultural context (Genette, 1997, p. 1).

Chinese online novels have cover images to attract readers, reflect the story's themes, and boost marketability. These covers typically appear on reading platforms, book detail pages, apps, and promotional banners. A comparative analysis of the cover designs on Qidian (the original Chinese publishing platform) and Wuxiaworld (the English translation platform) for ISSH and AWE reveals striking differences in paratextual strategies. These differences reflect the distinct audiences and cultural expectations of the platforms while highlighting the strategic use of cover designs as paratexts.

On Qidian, the cover for AWE is minimalist, featuring the title "一念永恒" as its focal point, surrounded by a simple ink wash landscape (as shown in Figure 1). Similarly, the cover for ISSH devotes less than one-tenth of the space to a lone figure, evoking a sense of solitude and introspection associated with the journey of a cultivator (as shown in Figure 2). These designs resonate with traditional Chinese aesthetics, emphasising subtlety, abstraction, and the philosophical depth of the cultivation genre.



Figure 1: Book cover of AWE (Qidian, 2024)



Figure 2: Book cover of ISSH (Qidian, 2024)

In contrast, the Wuxiaworld covers are visually dynamic, designed to immediately capture the attention of a global audience unfamiliar with Chinese literature. The cover of AWE features two central characters, dressed in traditional Chinese attire, locked in an intense duel. This dramatic scene occupies two-thirds of the cover, projecting action and excitement (as shown in Figure 3). For ISSH, the cover depicts a lone male figure in traditional garb overlooking a vast valley filled with Chinese architectural structures, symbolising both the grandeur of the cultivation world and its philosophical underpinnings (as shown in Figure 4). These covers highlight the core elements of the Xianxia genre, cultivation, fantasy, and Chinese philosophical themes, creating an immersive visual representation of the narrative.

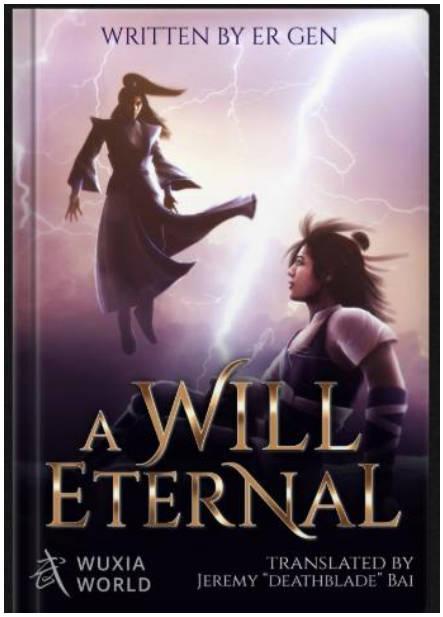


Figure 3: Book cover of AWE (Wuxiaworld, 2024)

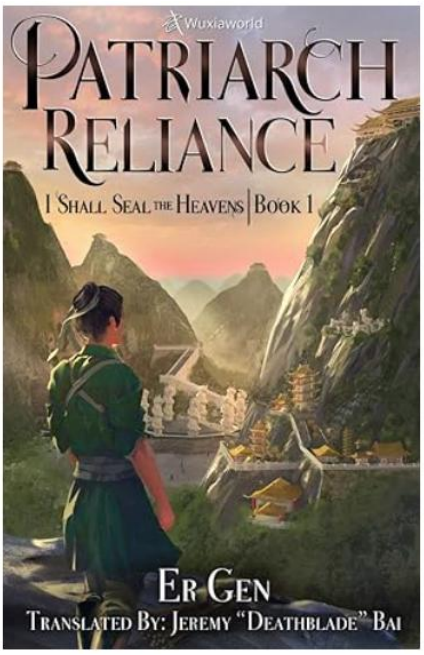


Figure 4: Book cover of ISSH (Wuxiaworld, 2024)

The differences between the Chinese and English covers underscore distinct paratextual strategies tailored to their respective audiences. In Genette's (1997, p. 23) terms, covers constitute a central part of the peritext, framing the text and shaping the reader's expectations even before the first page is read. Qidian's minimalist covers cater to a Chinese readership already familiar with the cultivation genre and its cultural codes. Their simplicity reflects an assumption that readers will intuitively grasp the narrative's themes and emotional undertones without visual guidance.

By contrast, Wuxiaworld's covers are designed for an international readership, many of whom may be encountering Chinese literature for the first time. Batchelor (2018, p. 76) points out that cover designs in translated works often serve as cultural mediators, signalling the genre and cultural setting to new readers. The use of traditional Chinese costumes, architectural motifs, and dynamic action scenes on Wuxiaworld covers foregrounds the novels' cultural and thematic essence while inviting readers to explore a narrative world grounded in Chinese philosophy and fantasy.

Moreover, as Bosseaux (2015, pp. 92–94) argues, paratextual choices are not neutral but actively contribute to the reception of translated texts. By vividly displaying the Xianxia genre's cultural markers, Wuxiaworld's covers create a visual contract with readers, filtering for an audience already interested in Chinese culture and fantasy. This strategy not

only enhances market appeal but also, in Lefevere's (1992, p. 14) terms, exemplifies translation as "rewriting", where paratextual mediation reinforces authenticity and positions the texts within a recognisable cultural tradition.

(2) Footnotes

Footnotes, a common form of peritext, are an essential paratextual tool that provides supplementary information directly tied to the main text. As Gérard Genette (1997, p. 1) explains, paratexts function as "thresholds" of interpretation. Within this framework, footnotes can be considered peritextual elements that provide readers with access to additional layers of meaning and cultural context. Genette (1997, pp. 319–320) observes that footnotes often provide clarification, commentary, or cultural background, allowing readers to access layers of meaning that would otherwise remain implicit. In translation, such notes are particularly valuable for bridging cultural and linguistic gaps. Kathryn Batchelor (2018, p. 22) similarly stresses that footnotes and annotations "expand the reader's comprehension by explicating elements that are culturally or linguistically alien". They also serve to maintain the fidelity of the source text while respecting the interpretive needs of the target audience. Footnotes, therefore, provide a means of mediation, enabling translators to balance the tensions between source-oriented and target-oriented approaches.

In the English translations of ISSH and AWE by Deathblade, footnotes are employed extensively and strategically to address the linguistic and cultural complexities of the original Chinese texts. These footnotes can be categorised into two primary types, each serving distinct purposes:

Footnotes on Chinese Names

Deathblade often includes footnotes that provide both the phonetic transcription and an explanation of the meaning behind Chinese names. For instance, in ISSH, Deathblade translated the name of the main character, Meng Hao, in the main text, then noted the following in a footnote: Meng Hao's name in Chinese is 孟浩 (mèng hào) - Meng is a family name. Hao means "great" or "many" (Deathblade, 2016, chapter 1, footnote). This approach not only preserves the cultural significance of the name but also educates readers on the linguistic and semantic intricacies of Chinese characters. Such annotations help maintain the authenticity of the narrative while making it accessible to a global audience. As Batchelor observes, paratextual strategies foster cultural understanding by enabling

readers to confront the foreignness of a text while reducing the risk of alienation (2018, p. 42).

Footnotes on Chinese Idioms and Sayings

Chinese idioms (成语) are a distinctive hallmark of the source texts, often carrying profound cultural and historical connotations. Deathblade translates Chinese idioms in these two novels through literal translation supplemented with footnotes, preserving their poetic quality while providing cultural context for better reader understanding.

An example is the phrase "一念成沧海，一念化桑田", which appears in chapter 1312 of AWE.[1] This phrase is translated literally as "With one thought, oceans turn to fields, and fields to oceans." Accompanying this translation is a footnote that explains its metaphorical significance, describing it as a reflection of the impermanence of the world and the transformative power of thought within the cultivation philosophy central to the Xianxia genre. This approach ensures that the poetic quality of the original idiom is preserved, while the footnote provides the necessary cultural context for readers unfamiliar with Chinese philosophical and literary traditions.

By supplementing literal translation with explanatory footnotes, Deathblade strikes a balance between fidelity to the source text and accessibility for the target audience. This method allows readers to engage more deeply with the text, appreciating both its linguistic nuances and its broader cultural significance, thereby enriching their overall reading experience. While this strategy maintains the poetic nature of idioms and provides cultural context, it has some drawbacks. Footnotes can disrupt the reading flow, especially in fast-paced scenes, making the experience less immersive. Additionally, some readers may skip footnotes, leading to a partial understanding of the idioms' deeper meanings.

Footnotes on Xianxia CLWs

In cases where mystical materials present challenges for English-speaking readers, either due to their cultural specificity or potential ambiguity after translation, Deathblade incorporates footnotes to clarify these terms and facilitate comprehension. For example, in Chapter 64 of AWE, the term "不死金刚" (literally, "Undying Vajra") is translated as

[1] "一念成沧海，一念化桑田" is a traditional Chinese saying that illustrates the transformative power of thought or intention, suggesting that a single idea or decision can bring about profound and sweeping changes, akin to turning oceans into fields or vice versa.

"Undying Heavenly King" (Deathblade, 2018, chapter 65, para.26).[1] A footnote accompanying this translation provides further explanation:

> The word here, "Heavenly King" is one of those Chinese words that can be translated in many different ways. One slightly more accurate rendition might be "Lokapala", but I'm not a huge fan of complicated religious terms like that, especially not in the context of how it's being used here, so I'm going with "Heavenly King."(Deathblade, 2018, chapter 65, footnote)

This use of footnotes reflects Deathblade's translation approach, highlighting his preference for accessibility over rigid adherence to source-language religious terminology. By explaining his reasoning, he makes his translation process more transparent, allowing readers to understand his linguistic and cultural considerations.

Moreover, footnotes encourage reader engagement beyond passive consumption. After gaining insight into the translator's choices, readers often share their perspectives in comment sections or online forums, discussing the effectiveness of different translation strategies. This interaction creates a dynamic exchange between the translator and the audience, fostering a participatory translation experience that continuously shapes and refines the reception of Xianxia novel in English.

(3) Glossary

Glossaries represent a significant form of paratext in translation, particularly in genres rich in culture-specific terminology such as Xianxia. They do more than explain unfamiliar words: they also reveal the translator's interpretive stance and frame how cultural concepts are introduced to readers. Batchelor (2018, p. 42) describes glossaries as a "site of cultural negotiation", highlighting how choices to retain, adapt or explain a term affect the balance between authenticity and accessibility. Frías (2019, p. 15) similarly notes that glossaries reduce cultural distance by providing essential background knowledge, while still preserving the foreignness of the original.

In the case of ISSH and AWE, glossaries function on two distinct levels. At the platform level, Wuxiaworld provides a shared glossary that supports readers across multiple works by introducing genre-specific terms and ensuring consistency. At the

[1] "不死金刚" refers to an indestructible and immortal entity, often symbolizing ultimate resilience, strength, and invincibility, commonly used in Chinese culture to describe something or someone that cannot be defeated or destroyed.

translator level, Deathblade supplements this with glossaries placed at the end of his translations, offering targeted explanations for key terms in the novels themselves. The following sections will examine these two layers in turn, showing how platform-wide resources and translator-specific tools work together to enhance accessibility and sustain the cultural integrity of the texts.

Platform-Level Glossary Support

On Wuxiaworld, the general glossary of terms provides readers with a shared reference point for navigating genres, such as Wuxia, Xianxia, and Xuanhuan. Organised thematically into sections on cosmology, cultivation, martial systems, artefacts, and measurement units, the glossary offers concise explanations that establish the conceptual scaffolding required to enter these fictional worlds.[1] By presenting terms in a standardised form across multiple novels, it reduces the cognitive effort for new readers and fosters a sense of continuity within the platform's corpus.

As Gray (2010, pp. 25–27) observes in his study of media paratexts, such resources are not neutral add-ons but shape the interpretive framework through which audiences approach a text. In the context of Wuxiaworld, the glossary performs precisely this function: it lowers the threshold of entry for international readers while at the same time filtering for those willing to engage with the unfamiliar codes of Xia culture. O'Sullivan (2020, p. 63) adds that digital paratexts in participatory environments encourage ongoing negotiation between readers and translators, highlighting the glossary's role in sustaining an interactive reading culture.

However, while the platform glossary provides general orientation, it remains necessarily broad. It offers readers a grounding in genre conventions but cannot fully capture the narrative-specific nuances or creative reinterpretations present in individual translations. This is where translator-specific glossaries assume greater importance. In the case of ISSH and AWE, Deathblade appended his own term lists at the end of the novels, tailoring explanations to the stylistic and philosophical features of each work. Compared to the platform glossary's standardisation, these personalised glossaries represent a form of conscious creative treason: they reveal the translator's interpretive agency, his prioritisation

[1] https://www.Wuxiaworld.com/page/general-glossary-of-terms

of certain cultural meanings, and his effort to mediate between the foreign and the familiar in ways that resonate with his readership.

Translator-Specific Glossaries

In AWE and ISSH, Deathblade includes detailed, translator-specific glossaries at the end of each volume, meticulously organised into categories. These glossaries not only serve as a reference for readers but also exemplify a deliberate effort to enhance cultural understanding and narrative coherence.

The glossaries are structured into sections such as "Character Introductions" (grouped by sect or faction) and "Items and Techniques", offering detailed descriptions of key figures, materials, and martial arts techniques. For instance, in AWE, the glossary includes a "Necromancer Rankings" section, where Deathblade aligns specific necromancer ranks with the corresponding terms used in the narrative. This approach provides readers with a clear framework for understanding the hierarchical structure within the story, enabling them to follow complex plotlines and character developments more effectively.

By categorising and systematically explaining intricate terminology, these glossaries allow readers to navigate the dense cultural and fictional world of Xianxia novels without becoming overwhelmed. Furthermore, this meticulous organisation reflects the translator's effort to preserve the cultural integrity of the source material while making it accessible to a global audience. In doing so, these translator-specific glossaries not only facilitate comprehension but also enhance readers' engagement with the text, fostering a deeper appreciation for the narrative's cultural and philosophical underpinnings.

In this sense,the glossary can be read as a paratextual manifestation of Deathblade's creative treason: a conscious effort to mediate between cultural specificity and international readability, while leaving traces of his interpretive authority embedded within the translated text.

4.4 Analysis of the Causes of Creative Treason

After identifying the manifestations of creative treason in Deathblade's translations, attention now turns to the underlying causes. Why do these creative treasons occur? What drives the translator to sometimes stray from literal fidelity? These questions are approached through insights drawn from the thematic analysis of the translator's interview.

By coding and categorising his reflections, it becomes possible to explore the circumstances and considerations that shaped his translation practice.

4.4.1 Application of Thematic Analysis on the Interview

As detailed in Chapter 3, this section applies Thematic Analysis to the interview with Deathblade to explore the underlying motivations and strategies behind his creative treason in translation. Through a systematic coding and theme development process, three core themes were identified: Translation Motivation, Strategy Adjustments, and Factors Influencing Mistranslation. These themes respectively reflect his intended goals, the conscious strategies employed to meet reader expectations and the unintentional shifts caused by linguistic or cultural constraints.

Rather than viewing creative treason as an isolated error or deviation, this thematic structure allows for a more comprehensive understanding of its emergence as a negotiated outcome shaped by translator agency, methodological choices and contextual limitations. In the following subsections, these themes are discussed in relation to interview data and textual examples drawn from ISSH and AWE, thereby linking the translator's reasoning to observable outcomes in the translated texts.

4.4.2 Encode and Analyse Interview Content

1. Initial Coding

These statements were coded, with a focus on those that illuminate potential conscious or unconscious divergences from the source text. This study coded these statements, focusing on those that shed light on why he might consciously or unconsciously diverge from the source text. The coding was iterative and inductive, gradually building up categories of meaning. The following discussion presents selected excerpts from the interview, alongside their assigned initial codes. For clarity, theses codes related to improving translation skills (as they indirectly affect translation choices) have also included.

(1) Codes Related to Translation Goals:

Cross-Cultural Communication: "I wish more people can develop an interest in Chinese culture." (In context, he said, "I really like [Wuxia/Xianxia] and wish more people

could be interested in it… I wished people could read these stories and enjoy them without the language barrier.") (Appendix C, p. 263).

Code: Using translation as a tool to promote Chinese culture and remove language barriers.

Improving Translation Quality: "The low quality of many translations frustrated me." (He noted that many fan translations were so poorly written that they turned readers away, and he "wished people could read these stories and enjoy them without the language barrier.") (Appendix C, p. 263).

Code: Enhancing the overall quality of translated works (to attract and retain readers).

Expanding Reader Base: "I aim to make it easier for English-speaking readers to understand and enjoy these stories." (He mentioned including details so readers can learn about the culture, for example, through footnotes, which shows a focus on reader comprehension and enjoyment) (Appendix C, p. 268).

Code: Making Chinese online literature accessible to a broader international audience.

Enhancing Translation Skills (personal goals):

Interest in Chinese Xia culture: "I've always been interested in historical things, whether medieval Europe, China, or Japan. Wuxia tends to be something that..." (Implying that his passion for the cultural aspect drives him to research deeply and convey those concepts) (Appendix C, p. 264).

Code: Interest in Xia culture drives in-depth research into cultural contexts (which affects how he translates those concepts).

Support from Chinese wife: "If none of that works, then I ask my wife." (He mentioned asking his native Chinese wife when he does not understand a term) (Appendix C, p. 274).

Code: Family support enhances understanding of Chinese culture (mitigating misinterpretations).

The above codes show that his goals-like spreading Chinese culture and improving quality-directly influence why he might, for example, add explanatory footnotes or take liberties to make the text flow well. His drive to do justice to these stories and present them well is the root cause of many conscious decisions.

(2) Codes Related to Translation Strategies:

Optimising Reader Experience: "I mostly just did it on instinct based on what I thought readers would have the best reading experience." (Paraphrased from him saying his philosophy is to make English-speaking readers experience the story as thrillingly as Chinese readers do) (Appendix C, p. 269).

Code: Adjusting language and expressions to enhance readability and engagement (for example, smoothing prose, explaining as needed).

Cultural Adaptation: "...without providing extra context, English-speaking readers wouldn't understand what's going on." (He gave the example: "Without a footnote explaining the drinking culture… this would go completely over the heads of the readers.") (Appendix C, p. 267).

Code: Adding explanatory information to bridge cultural gaps (via footnotes or slight clarifications in text).

Footnote Supplementation: "I'm pretty known for my footnotes, and I'm not afraid to use them." (Appendix C, p. 267).

Code: Using footnotes (paratexts) strategically to supplement cultural and historical background without interrupting narrative.

These strategy codes highlight the deliberate techniques that he uses, which cause conscious treason. For instance, to optimise reader experience, he might cut redundant text (unconscious treason) or rearrange sentences (conscious treason). For cultural adaptation, he chooses to add footnotes rather than overly localising or leaving readers baffled, which is a conscious decision on how to handle treason.

(3) Codes Related to Misinterpretation (Constraints/Challenges):

Limited Cultural Knowledge: Even though he has been studying Chinese for a long time and have translated a lot, "almost every single day there are things ...don't understand" (Appendix C, p. 274). (He admitted, for example, "For instance, I would hesitate to try to read a Jin Yong novel because the level of Chinese is more complicated and harder" because the language/culture is more difficult, implying he knows his limits) (Appendix C, p. 264).

Code: Insufficient understanding of certain Chinese historical or literary nuances can lead to errors or simplifications.

Language Transfer Effect: "I was always worried that I was letting things about Chinese sentence structure and narrative structure negatively influence my writing" (Appendix C, p. 275) (From his remarks on how Chinese implicitness vs English explicitness means he sometimes has to change sentence structure, which can inadvertently change tone or emphasis).

Code: Target language characteristics (English grammar and style) unconsciously influence expressions in translation (for example, adding subjects or breaking sentences, as discussed in 4.2.2.1 and 4.2.2.4).

Contextual Misinterpretation: Some cultural symbols may be misunderstood. (Referring to his note that "the unfortunate thing is a lot of people aren't going to read that footnote…", leading him to simplify terms in the text itself sometimes) (Appendix C, p. 269).

Code: Misunderstanding or underestimating how to convey a culturally loaded term's context might lead to choosing a less precise translation (for example, translating 乐 as "happiness" rather than "music" as in the Confucian concept, which was likely not intentional but a knowledge gap issue). Another angle: if readers would not get it, he might proactively simplify, like '一炷香' incense stick has been translated as 'half hour', which is conscious but caused by expected misinterpretation.

These codes address why unconscious treason happens: if he does not know a term well, he might guess or approximate (limited knowledge). If English demands clarity, he might unconsciously over-clarify or miss nuance (language effect). If he suspects readers would not get something, he might consciously adjust or omit it (contextual adaptation). They serve as a reality check against his motivations: even if he wants to be faithful, these factors sometimes push or pull the translation away from the original. After the initial coding was completed and grouped, the next step involved integrating these into the three core themes. The coding table shows how each quote and code maps to a broader concept relevant to creative treason. For example, cross-cultural communication and expanding reader base codes both feed into the translation motivation theme, as they explain the why behind his approach of being a cultural bridge (which results in creative strategies). The limited knowledge and language difference codes feed into the factors influencing mistranslation theme, explaining the why behind unconscious slip-ups or necessary shifts.

2. Thematic Integration and Analysis of the Causes of Creative Treason

From the coded data, I inductively derived three core themes that influence the translator's creative treason: translation motivation, translation strategy adjustments, and factors leading to mistranslation. These themes encapsulate the driving forces behind both the intentional adaptations and the unintentional shifts observed. During coding, I noticed natural clusters:

The ideas of "cross-cultural communication" and "expanding reader base" were closely intertwined. Both relate to Deathblade's primary motivation of sharing Chinese stories with English-speaking readers in an enjoyable way. This study groups these under Translation Motivation.

Similarly, "optimising reader experience" and "cultural adaptation" were frequently mentioned in context of how he alters or supplements the text for readers. These reflect his Translation Strategy Adjustments-deliberate techniques to achieve his motivated goals.

Meanwhile, "limited cultural knowledge" and "linguistic transfer effects" (as well as the need to simplify when footnotes might be ignored) pointed to inherent constraints that can lead to errors or omissions. These fell under Factors Influencing Mistranslation.

Classifying the data into these themes provides a coherent framework to examine creative treason:

Translation Motivation explains why he might commit certain treasons on purpose-for example, he might downplay a joke's wordplay because his goal is that the humour comes across (motivated by entertaining the reader, even if it means changing the joke).

Translation Strategy Adjustments covers how he executes those purposeful changes-for example, using a footnote instead of altering the main text, or rephrasing a sentence entirely to maintain pace.

Factors Leading to Mistranslation account for why certain unintended changes occur-for example, he simply did not know a particular myth reference, or English forced him to add a subject that slightly changed a nuance.

This framework ensures logical consistency in analysing creative treason. It allows us to attribute each instance of creative treason to either: a conscious adherence to his skopos (purpose), a chosen strategy, or an unconscious slip due to human or structural limitations.

With this in mind, this study examined each theme in turn, correlating them with concrete examples from section 4.2 and 4.3 to show how they manifest in practice.

Theme 1: Translation Motivation

Deathblade's translation is fundamentally driven by a passion to share Chinese online novels with a English-speaking reader in a way they will love and understand. This motivation shapes many of his creative decisions. One key motivator is to maximise reader enjoyment and immersion. He said outright, "the point of it is that the readers are supposed to be having fun. That's the most important thing" (Appendix C, p. 273). This echoes Joseph Campbell's notion (Campbell, 1949, p. 3) that a successful story resonates universally, which Deathblade harnesses by emphasising the two novels' universal elements (such as their heroes' journey) to English-speaking readers. it is why he prioritises readability: if a literal translation sounds awkward or dull in English, he will tweak it so that the excitement or humour shines through.

The thematic analysis coding for "reader experience optimisation" indicates that he instinctively adjusts cultural elements to align with target readers' expectations without losing too much meaning. For example, as mentioned earlier, when translating a mythic creature like 鲲鹏, he chose "roc".

Although not a perfect equivalence (a roc lacks the metamorphic aspect of 鲲鹏), "roc" is something Western fantasy readers recognise, thus mitigating alienation. This is an unconscious creative treason driven by the desire to avoid pulling the reader out of the story. The cultural term is replaced with a rough Western analogue-a small betrayal of the exact meaning but one that serves the higher goal of reader immersion. In his mind, this likely is not even "treason" but practical translation: he wants the reader to feel the AWE of a giant bird creature without stumbling over a foreign term.

It reflects what his motivation and Venuti's theory both acknowledge: some domestication is employed to keep readers engaged. At the same time, Deathblade sees himself as a cultural bridge, not just an entertainer. This perfectly encapsulates his motivation: he is not content to simply strip away culture for easy consumption; he also does not want to preserve culture at the expense of story flow. Therefore, he finds a balance-a hallmark of conscious creative treason. For instance, for a title like 不死金刚, which has Buddhist connotations, he might translate it in-story as "Undying Heavenly

King" to convey a sense of might and divinity (which English fantasy readers can process), but then he adds a footnote explaining its unique Buddhist meaning.

By doing so, he achieves cross-cultural communication (the reader learns something of the original concept's depth) and keeps the narrative punchy. This footnote strategy is directly fueled by his cross-cultural motivation: he is deliberately reinterpreting cultural elements in ways that resonate with English-speaking readers yet gives a nod to the original. It is a form of conscious creative treason–adding explanatory context or sometimes slightly altering terms–but it is treason in the service of enlightenment rather than ignorance. Another manifestation is how he handles humor and references. As Deathblade noted in the interview, Er Gen frequently incorporates modern cultural elements into his narratives, including internet slang and references to contemporary popular culture. A notable example is the parrot character in ISSH, who often sings catchy tunes. These songs are not entirely original; rather, they are playful adaptations of well-known Chinese pop songs of the time. Deathblade specifically mentioned the "Little Apple" song, which appears in the novel with slight alterations to suit the story's context (Appendix C, p. 273). This example reveals that his motivation to share Chinese culture led him to resist fully domesticating the joke. Instead of replacing the reference with a Western equivalent, such as "Happy Birthday", he translated the original lyrics and added a footnote. His conscious decision to preserve the foreign element demonstrates a form of creative treason–he needed to make the Chinese lyrics intelligible in English. At the same time, he balanced this by explaining the joke in context, ensuring that the humour would still resonate with target readers.

This shows that even when motivated to keep the culture intact, he does so in a way that supplements the reader's understanding. In summary, Translation Motivation is perhaps the root cause of all his creative treason–it sets the compass. Whether he domesticates or foreignises in a given instance depends on what will best accomplish his goals of engaging and educating the reader. The cross-cultural success analysis from 4.1 indicates that the novels succeeded globally partly by blending universal themes with Eastern philosophy.

Deathblade's translation mirrors that: blending familiarity with exoticism. This is no accident but the result of his deeply held motivation to share these stories widely. These

motivations indicate that the translator possesses a strong awareness of cultural dissemination and a reader-oriented philosophy. This awareness drives him to actively bridge cultural differences in translation, such as proactively adding footnotes for explanation. This resonates with Venuti's (1995, p. 19) view that translation is both communication and rewriting, suggesting that translators may intentionally deviate from literal translation and adopt creative approaches to fulfill their personal translation missions.

Theme 2: Translation Strategy Adjustments

Translation Strategy Adjustments alone does not explain how changes happen–that comes through strategies, which are the conscious methods Deathblade applies to implement his goals. From the TA, "optimising reader experience" and "cultural adaptation" were key strategy-related codes.

The theme of strategy adjustments in Deathblade's approach can be connected to established frameworks in Translation Studies, notably Chesterman's taxonomy of strategies and Venuti's domestication/foreignisation dichotomy. According to Andrew Chesterman (1997), translators employ various pragmatic strategies to resolve issues and meet their goals-strategies such as explicitation, omission, and cultural adaptation are clearly at play in Deathblade's case.

A primary strategy is simplification for clarity, which can be both unconscious (habitual) and conscious. Wanting English-speaking readers to have a similar experience to Chinese readers means he sometimes simplifies complex cultural symbols when he suspects they might impede understanding. For example, in AWE, he omitted a direct equivalent for 子母剑 ("zimu jian", literally "mother-and-child swords", a pair of paired weapons) in one instance.

Instead of coining an awkward term or leaving it in pinyin, he perhaps described it just as "swords" or contextually left out the detail. This was likely an unconscious treason–the nuance of the specific term is lost–but it is guided by a strategic sense that explaining it might break the flow for English-speaking readers unfamiliar with the concept. Such omissions are part of a pattern to maintain a fluid reading experience. He said in the interview, "occasionally, I will leave [little details] out if I think it is not important… it is kind of an intuition." (Appendix C, p. 274)

That intuition is exactly his strategic adjustment at work. Conversely, a conscious strategy is a detailed reinterpretation of key concepts. Deathblade will go the extra mile to clarify important cultural points actively. The coding for "cross-cultural communication goals" in thematic analysis highlights how he actively adds context for dense elements. An example of this is his extensive use of footnotes to explain Chinese drinking customs, honorifics, historical references, and so on. In the translation, you will often see an asterisk after something like "he performed a ketou" with a note explaining it is a type of bow. By doing so, he supplements or reinterprets references to bridge gaps.

This claim from the thematic analysis integration likely stems from his practices like moving dialogue tags to the front or adding reminders of who a character is when they reappear after many chapters (something Chinese texts often do not do because the original readers might recall, but translations sometimes reintroduce characters for clarity). Aligning with this observation, he might restructure some passages. The thematic analysis suggests he even rearranges text to clarify timelines for English-speaking reader segments. For example, if a chapter starts in medias res with a flashback and then returns to the present (a common Chinese literary device), he might insert a line or adjust tenses to signal that clearly to an English reader, who could otherwise be confused. This is conscious creative treason on a structural level-not altering content per se, but altering the order or explicitness. it is driven by his strategic sense that English narrative needs certain signposts that Chinese can omit.

This self-awareness is important: it means his strategies are targeted and not necessarily objectively "right", but tailored to the community of web novel fans he interacts with. In practice, this could mean he engages with reader feedback on Wuxiaworld forums and perhaps fine-tunes his approach accordingly (for instance, if readers complain about too many footnotes, he might reduce them, or vice versa). So, his strategy is dynamic and responsive. An illustrative strategy example combining conscious and unconscious: the translation of terms like 虎爷 to "Grandpa Tiger" as mentioned earlier. Unconsciously, he might have picked "Grandpa" because English commonly uses it as a nickname and it felt natural (language transfer effect). Consciously, upon reflection, he might realise that it turned a fearsome title into a somewhat cute one in English. Strategically, he could then decide to let it stand because readers can still glean that Tiger is

an elder of some sort, and perhaps "Grandpa" conveys a bit of the ironically affectionate tone Chinese might intend. Or he might adjust it in future occurrences (maybe later he just calls the character "Tiger Lord" or something more intimidating if he felt "Grandpa" was misread by readers). This hypothesis illustrates how strategy adjustments are an ongoing process of tweaking translation choices to get the desired effect.

In conclusion, Deathblade's reader-oriented textual adjustments are a clear instance of conscious creative treason. This practice aligns with what Xie Tianzhen (1999) identifies as the translator's subjective agency, emphasizing that translators make innovative strategic choices rather than adhering to mechanical fidelity (p. 138). These translation strategy adjustments are how Deathblade operationalises his goals. They are directly observable in the way the translation reads: relatively smooth, accessible, yet enriched with footnotes and occasional elegant phrasings for complex ideas. These strategies cause creative treason in the sense that the translated text's form and sometimes content deviate from the original structure or literal meaning, but in a controlled and purposeful way. The net effect is largely positive for his aims: English-speaking readers often praise his translations as both easy to read and culturally informative. That is a strong validation of his strategic choices. This tendency is further corroborated in Chapter Five, where the analysis of reader questionnaire data demonstrates that readers themselves frequently highlight smooth readability alongside an enhanced awareness of cultural elements, thereby reinforcing the effectiveness of his translation strategies.

Theme 3: Factors Influencing Mistranslation

Even with clear motivations and well-considered strategies, no translation is perfect. "Factors influencing mistranslation" covers the involuntary side of creative treason-the mistakes or oversights that slip in due to human limitations or the inherent difficulty of bridging languages. Deathblade is an excellent translator, but by his admission and as the analysis reveals, some misinterpretations have occurred. One prime factor is gaps in cultural or linguistic knowledge. Despite being very learned, Deathblade acknowledged that "almost every single day there are things I don't understand [in Chinese]". When confronted with an unfamiliar term or reference, he has a hierarchy for solving it (dictionaries, Baidu, or asking his wife). Usually, he finds the answer. But if all else fails, he may have to guess or default to a general translation. For example, the earlier-discussed

mistake translating 乐 as "happiness" in a Confucian context likely stems from not recognising that 乐 meant "music" there. This could be due to context misunderstanding or simply not catching the cultural specificity. it is an unconscious creative treason-an error, essentially-caused by limited knowledge. He might have thought "礼乐" was "ritual and joy" (since 乐 commonly means "happy" in modern usage), which is a plausible but wrong interpretation. Once such a mistranslation is made, unless someone points it out or he later catches it, it remains, illustrating how a translator's knowledge limitations can imprint on the text. Another factor is the influence of English language structure. As we explored in 4.2.2.1 and 4.2.2.4, Chinese often omits subjects and relies on context, whereas English requires explicit subjects and clear pronouns. In bridging this gap, the translator might inadvertently introduce a slight change in meaning or emphasis.

The example in 4.2.2.1 is a case in point: he added "I" where the original had none, altering the sentence's meaning. This was not a conscious attempt to adapt cultural meaning but rather a decision prompted by the demands of English grammar; because he misinterpreted the implied subject, the result was a mistranslation. The "language transfer effect" code from the thematic analysis refers to such shifts, where the structural requirements of English lead to deviations. A further example is his consistent avoidance of honorific self-references such as 老夫, which is often rendered literally as "this old man". Instead, he uses the plain "I". On one level, this can be explained by the fact that English rarely uses third-person self-reference, and the translator therefore strives for a natural voice in English. Yet this choice may also be influenced by broader cultural norms. In Western societies, terms describing older people have been the subject of debate, with international bodies such as the UN Human Rights Commission and advocacy groups highlighting the potentially offensive implications of certain age-related expressions (Bytheway, 2005, p. 67; Age UK, 2019). Against this backdrop, the decision to avoid "this old man" can be read not merely as a linguistic adjustment but also as reflecting the translator's sensitivity to cultural perceptions of age and respect.

A third factor is audience reception and practicality. If he knows (or strongly suspects) a typical Western reader will not understand a term and might even skip the explanation, he sometimes opts to simplify or omit it in the text. This is a conscious choice influenced by an external factor (reader behavior), but it can cause a loss of nuance, which is a form of

intentional mistranslation (or at least under-translation). For instance, translating 一炷香 as "half an hour", as we saw, sacrifices the cultural image. He did that because, as he mentioned, "the unfortunate thing is a lot of people are not going to read that footnote… unless I put it in the text" (Appendix C, p. 269). So, anticipating misinterpretation, he preemptively adjusts. One could argue this is strategy (and indeed we discussed it as such), but it is also driven by an external reality-that footnotes have limits to their effectiveness. When combining these factors, we see how they play out in specific creative treasons.

Interestingly, the thematic analysis also mentions a "habitual translation practice" code, noting he relies on intuitive decisions which maintain fluency but can lose connotations. This is essentially saying that his personal translation style-honed by doing it daily-is to go with what reads well and while that usually works, it "often results in inadvertent loss of cultural connotations." That line encapsulates unconscious creative treason: smooth output at the subtle expense of some depth. And it is not deliberate in each instance. He is not thinking "I will drop this nuance because who cares", it is a byproduct of prioritising other things like flow or meeting daily quotas. Acknowledging these causes is not to criticise, but to humanise the process. It reminds us that translation, especially of serial fiction, is done in a specific context-under time pressure, serially, for a fan community-and the translator is balancing quality and speed. Deathblade himself notes that the translation of online literature is challenging due to the length and the ongoing nature of such literature, and "he (Er Gen) is making up stuff as he goes, and I have no way to check [future context]. I have to guess his meanings, and if I'm wrong, everyone will know about it later because I'm releasing the chapters publicly" (Appendix C, p. 265).

This scenario has surely happened in ISSH or AWE: he might choose a term early on, not realising the author would pun on it or reveal additional meaning later. If his guess was off, then retroactively it would become a mistranslation. For instance, a technique name that turns out to have double meaning-he may not catch that double meaning until 100 chapters later, when a plot twist reveals it. By then, his initial translation stands as a sort of creative treason against the author's foreshadowing. Not his fault-a situational factor of translating an ongoing serial. Thus, Factors Leading to Mistranslation are a crucial theme because they temper our evaluation of creative treason. They show that not all deviations are purposeful or avoidable; some are the collateral result of translating between languages

and cultures in real-time.

To conclude this theme analysis, the causes of creative treason in Deathblade's translations are multifaceted. His motivations give him the big picture goals that justify deviating when needed; his strategies are the immediate tools and methods by which he implements changes; and the limiting factors are the realities that cause slips or necessitate certain changes. All three interplay in each instance of creative treason we have seen. Understanding them makes it clear that creative treason is not random or due to negligence, but rather an inherent part of the translation process-a "delicate negotiation" shaped by the translator's intent, the audience's expectations, and the challenge of crossing languages.

3. Conclusion of the Analysis

Through thematic analysis of Deathblade's interview, we can see that creative treason is an inevitable aspect of literary translation, especially in a culturally rich genre like Xianxia. The translator's motivations, strategies, and limitations all contribute to how and why the translated text diverges from the original. Far from being purely negative "betrayals", these shifts often serve higher goals of readability and cross-cultural communication. Deathblade's case illustrates that what might appear as a deviation (like simplifying a term or adding an explanation) is frequently a calculated adaptation-an adaptive mechanism that allows him to bridge linguistic and cultural divides while keeping readers engaged. The following discussion summarises how conscious and unconscious creative treason differ in terms of their driving forces, forms of expression, and impacts. We can populate it with insights from our analysis:

Driving Force: Conscious treason is driven by the translator's purpose and cultural adaptation strategy (for example, the goal to entertain and educate).

Unconscious treason stems more from the translator's background, limited knowledge, and language proficiency constraints. In Deathblade's case, conscious changes come from his desire to optimise the story for his audience and his method of doing so (footnotes, slight rephrasing, and so on.), whereas unconscious changes come from, say, him not being a formally trained sinologist or the structural necessity to clarify subjects in English.

Forms of Expression: Conscious treason shows up as active cultural adaptation, terminology innovation (like coining "Spirit Severing" or localising jokes in footnotes), and perhaps even linguistic humourisation (altering a joke to make it funny in English,

though he usually keeps the original humour).

Unconscious treason appears as unintentional mistranslations, deviation from original meaning, or neglect of cultural context (like missing a reference or simplifying a symbol without realising what was lost).

Positive Impact: Conscious treason often enhances readability, promotes cultural exchange, and enriches the target culture's literary expression. Indeed, Deathblade's choices have arguably opened up the Xianxia genre to a whole new audience and even influenced the style of fan translations widely. Unconscious treason, interestingly, can have some positive side effects in offering fresh perspectives or creative interpretations of the target culture. For instance, even a mistake can sometimes lead to a new idea or discussion among readers (some fans might research Confucian terms because the translation made them curious why "happiness" felt odd there, thereby learning in the process). But largely, unconscious changes are not aiming for positive outcomes—they just happen, though sometimes readers roll with them and even enjoy the "mistake" in its own right.

Negative Impact: Conscious treason risks simplifying or diluting cultural connotations. For example, calling 鲲鹏 a "roc" loses the Daoist metaphor of transformation. Unconscious treason can misinterpret cultural nuances, diminish the original's depth, or create cultural misunderstandings. Thankfully, In Deathblade's case, the major cultural and story points are handled well and the negative impacts are relatively minor compared to the overall understanding conveyed.

The analysis of Deathblade's interview underscores a key argument: translation is not merely a technical substitution of words but a series of informed compromises and creative decisions. His knowledge, attitudes, and environment all shape those decisions. Ultimately, his creative treason has been instrumental in crafting an English text that feels accessible and engaging while still echoing its Chinese roots-a feat that pure literal translation could not achieve. By situating Deathblade's practice within translation theory, we see that what he calls intuition or balance aligns with long-standing debates on domestication vs. foreignisation. His heavy use of footnotes is reminiscent of Schleiermacher's idea of moving the reader to the author (foreignisation) but doing so considerately (Schleiermacher, 1813/2012, p. 49). Meanwhile, his occasional adaptations resemble Nida's dynamic equivalence-altering form to preserve effect (Nida, 1964, p. 166). This synthesis is very

much in the spirit of Medio-translatology, which advocates for "proactive adaptation and innovation on cultural and ideological levels" in the service of effective translation (Xie, 2004, p. 108).

Deathblade's work exemplifies this–he is not a passive conveyor of text but an active mediator. In closing, our findings reinforce that creative treason, both conscious and unconscious, is an integral and often necessary component of translating culturally saturated literature. Far from being simply "errors" or "betrayals", these creative deviations, when guided by a skilled translator with clear intent (like Deathblade), become the very techniques that allow the target text to live and breathe in a new cultural space. The translator's task is to manage them judiciously-to calibrate how much to adapt and how much to retain-ensuring that the spirit of the original thrives in translation, even if the letter cannot always be kept unchanged.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter provides an empirical analysis to address the core research question posed at the outset of the dissertation: to what extent and why translators deviate from the source text. The findings reveal that such "deviation" is not merely accidental or erroneous, but represents strategic adaptation in cross-cultural communication, characterized by its dual nature. This chapter has offered a systematic analysis of the creative treason manifested in Deathblade's translations of ISSH and AWE, drawing on Medio-translatology and thematic analysis of interview data. Rather than viewing these deviations as errors or inconsistencies, the study has demonstrated that creative treason results from a dynamic interplay between conscious strategic adaptation and unconscious constraints shaped by linguistic and cultural distance. The analysis began by mapping the cultural and structural complexity of the two source texts (Section 4.1), highlighting the embeddedness of Xia values and Daoist thought. These elements posed considerable challenges to cross-cultural transfer, demanding that the translator navigate between fidelity and accessibility. As detailed in Sections 4.2 and 4.3, this navigation gave rise to two distinct but interrelated forms of creative treason: unconscious deviations (such as cultural misinterpretations or structural shifts) and conscious interventions (including the use of footnotes, terminology modification, and narrative adjustment).

Section 4.4 synthesised the findings through thematic analysis, categorising the causes of creative treason into three overarching drivers: translation motivation, strategy adjustments, and constraining factors. Unconscious treason was often the product of knowledge gaps or the influence of English syntactic norms, resulting in subtle distortions or omissions. Conscious treason, by contrast, reflected intentional decisions to enhance reader comprehension, cultural resonance, and narrative fluency. Examples include replacing culturally unfamiliar terms with recognisable analogues or providing explanatory paratexts to preserve meaning without interrupting flow.

These forms of treason, while involving varying degrees of transformation, were shown to be integral to the translator's negotiation of cultural integrity and reader engagement. Deathblade's work illustrates that creative treason—when strategically calibrated—can enhance readability and broaden cultural appreciation, particularly in the context of genre-specific works like Xianxia, where cultural opacity may otherwise alienate target readers.

However, the chapter also underscored the risks involved. Unconscious treason may distort or oversimplify cultural depth, while conscious adaptation may dilute source-text nuance. Identifying such trade-offs enables a more precise assessment of translator agency and highlights the importance of reflective decision-making in literary translation.

In sum, this chapter argues that creative treason should be viewed not as a flaw to be eliminated, but as an essential aspect of transcreation: a constructive deviation that enables cultural transmission. Especially in the translation of culturally dense genres, it is both inevitable and invaluable. Deathblade's translations exemplify this: they preserve core cultural elements while achieving resonance with English-speaking readers, thereby contributing to the global dissemination of Chinese online literature.

Future research might explore how creative treason manifests across different translators or genres or how readers interpret and respond to such strategies. Developing methods to better detect and evaluate unconscious treason, possibly through collaborative editing or digital annotation tools, would also be beneficial.

Ultimately, the findings reaffirm that effective translation lies not in absolute equivalence, but in meaningful mediation. Creative treason, when executed with cultural

sensitivity and narrative skill, becomes not a betrayal of the source text, but a form of fidelity—one that allows stories to cross borders and take root in new cultural soils.

Chapter V Analysis of Creative Treason in the Reception Environment of Two Novels

In this study, the reception environment is understood in line with the earlier literature review as the cultural and historical framing within which a translation is encountered and evaluated. In Comparative Literature this framing draws on the reader's "horizon of expectations", where prior reading, cultural background and genre conventions guide interpretation (Jauss, 1982, pp. 22–23). Translation Studies extends this view by emphasising the target context's communicative function and the need to align strategies with that function (Reiss and Vermeer, 2013, p. 96). Reception is therefore shaped not only by textual decisions but also by wider conditions such as sociocultural setting, media habits and prevailing ideologies (Gambier, 2018, p. 47).

Within Medio-translatology, the reception environment is treated more broadly, comprising platform infrastructures, institutional discourse and readers' expectations in specific communicative situations (Guo, 2017, p. 6). Although Medio-translatology distinguishes the reader from the environment at the level of analysis, this thesis follows the practical position adopted in the review: reader response is examined as part of the reception environment. The reason is empirical and theoretical. In platformed contexts, readers form interpretive communities whose practices and norms are inseparable from the surrounding medium; their activity is embedded in the environment that enables it (Fish, 1980, pp. 13–14). Treating reader response and platform ecology together therefore offers a clearer account of how reception conditions operate in practice.

Building on this, the chapter investigates Wuxiaworld as both publication mechanism and mediating platform for the English translations of ISSH and AWE. The reception environment here is transnational and digital, constituted by continuous audience engagement and by the site's serialisation, interaction and moderation systems. The analysis proceeds on two linked planes: (1) readers' reported preferences and evaluations (questionnaire data and representative commentary) and (2) platform features that shape access, pacing and discussion. The aim is to show how these conditions bear on the translations' uptake and meaning-making in a globalised space, providing the basis for the chapter's subsequent sections.

5.1 Analysis of the Reader Demographics

This section offers a detailed analysis of respondents' nationalities, language backgrounds, familiarity with Xia culture, prior experience with Wuxia/Xianxia novel, reading motivations, and pre-reading expectations. A total of 45 responses were collected, including 19 related to AWE and 26 to ISSH. Of these, 24 participants completed all 36 questions in the survey.

Although the sample size is relatively modest, the questionnaire was carefully designed to capture multiple dimensions, ensuring both depth and reliability of the data. Moreover, given that both novels were completed several years ago, the willingness of participants to engage with the survey indicates a sustained interest in this literary genre. Their responses were both detailed and perceptive, and offer significant insights into how the reception environment on Wuxiaworld can shape the translation process of Wuxia novels on that platform.

This dataset, while not statistically large, offers valuable insight into reading preferences and interpretive approaches across different cultural backgrounds. It also sheds light on how readers perceive creative treason in the translation process. Therefore, despite its scale, the survey effectively reflects the key characteristics of the core readership and their nuanced engagement with translated Xianxia novel.

5.1.1 Nationality of Readers

As shown in Figure 5, the questionnaire respondents come from a diverse range of national backgrounds, highlighting the international reach of the readership. Among the 24 respondents who provided valid nationality information, readers from English-speaking countries made up a substantial portion. This group included 3 from Australia, 3 from the United Kingdom, 2 from the United States, 3 from Singapore, and 1 from Canada, making a total of 12. The remainder included 3 respondents from Indonesia, 2 from Japan, and 1 each from China, India, Italy, Mexico, and Turkey. Additionally, 2 participants chose not to disclose their nationality. This distribution reflects a culturally diverse readership with a strong presence from Anglophone regions, as well as notable engagement from Southeast and East Asia, offering insight into the globalised reception of translated Xianxia novel.

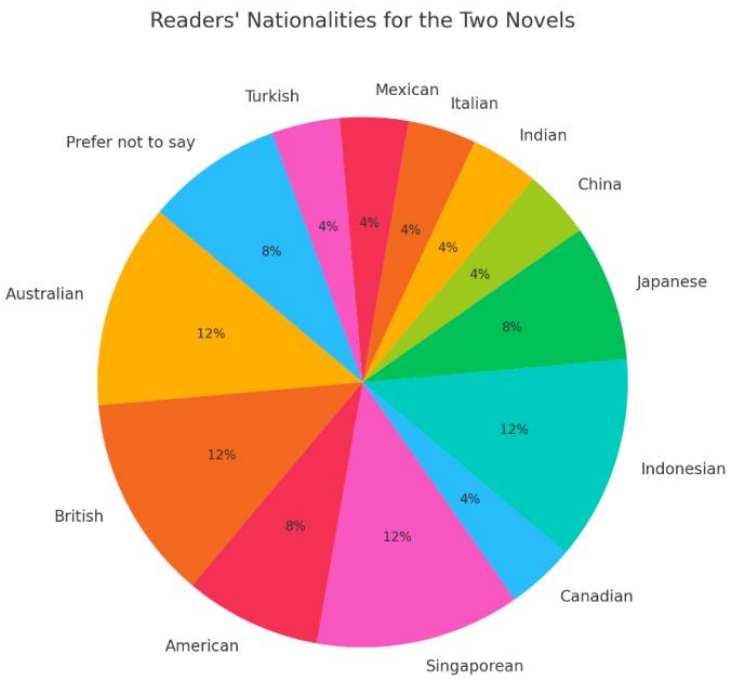


Figure 5: Nationality of survey respondents

This distribution underscores the global and multicultural nature of the readership, reflecting the extensive reach of Wuxiaworld, the platform where the translated novels were published. The platform's role has enabled these novels to attract readers from vastly different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, this trend suggests that readers from Chinese-speaking regions may be more inclined to read the original versions rather than the translations. This indirectly highlights the distinct cultural needs and reading preferences of the translated text's audience.

5.1.2 Language Background of Readers

As shown in Figure 6, among the 24 respondents, half (12) identified English as their primary language, while 3 reported Chinese. The remaining 9 participants indicated other languages, including Japanese, Indonesian, Turkish, Assamese, and Spanish. This distribution highlights the predominance of English as the main medium through which readers engage with translated Xianxia novel. However, the substantial proportion of respondents from non-English and non-Chinese linguistic backgrounds reflects a broader international readership. The data suggests that the appeal of such literature transcends native-language boundaries, with many readers relying on English translations as a shared platform for accessing and interpreting culturally specific content.

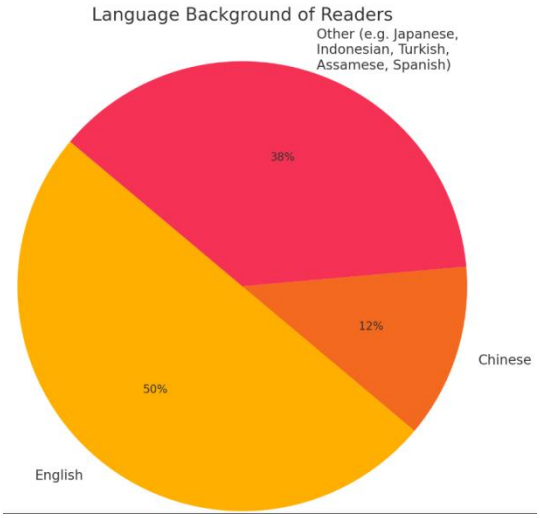


Figure 6: Reader Language Background

5.1.3 Respondents' Awareness of Xia culture

The respondents' prior understanding of Xia culture showed noticeable variation. As illustrated in Figure 7, among the 24 participants, a majority reported limited familiarity. Specifically, 14 indicated a basic understanding of Chinese traditional culture, one had merely heard of the concept, and one reported complete unfamiliarity. A smaller group, including one respondent from China and another from Singapore, demonstrated a comparatively higher degree of familiarity, which may reflect greater cultural proximity or prior exposure.

Although the overall sample is modest, this distribution suggests a tentative trend. Participants from Chinese or culturally adjacent backgrounds may be more likely to possess interpretive frameworks aligned with the symbolic structures commonly found in Wuxia fiction. Such frameworks could be shaped by socialisation processes including family experiences, educational contexts, and media consumption. In contrast, readers from Western or culturally distant contexts may encounter greater interpretive challenges when engaging with culturally specific motifs such as honour, cultivation, or sectarian codes.

While the data do not support definitive conclusions, the differing levels of familiarity observed among respondents point to the relevance of cultural background in narrative comprehension. These insights highlight the need for translation strategies that take into account varying degrees of cultural awareness, particularly when adapting culturally

embedded genre conventions for a global readership.

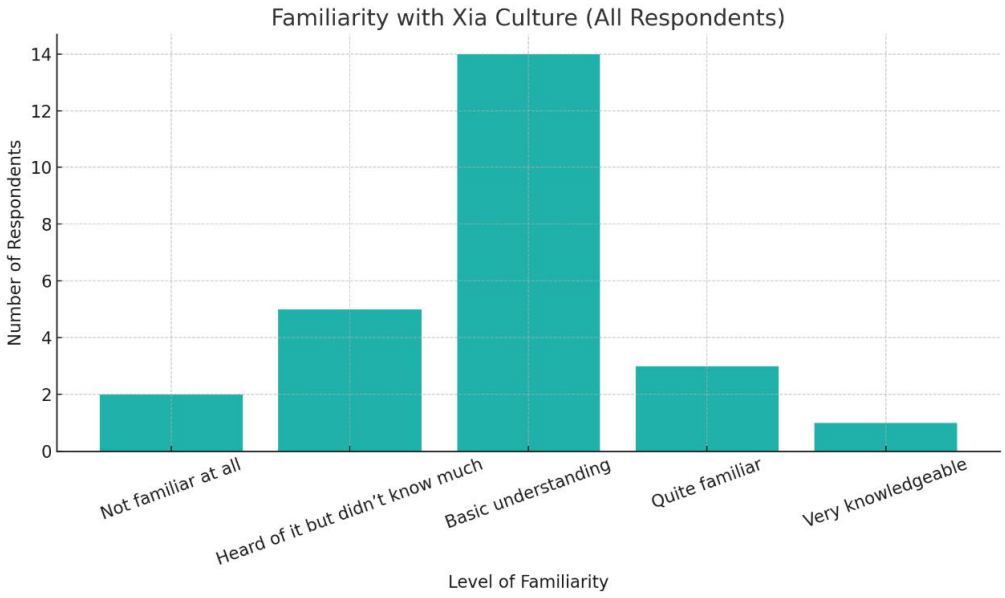


Figure7: Familiarity with Xia culture

5.1.4 Readers' Prior Experience with Xianxia and Wuxia Literature

The survey results indicate that most respondents had prior experience reading Xianxia or Wuxia novels, yet their self-assessed familiarity with Xia culture remained relatively limited. This contrast underscores the layered complexity of Xia culture itself. While many readers are familiar with the literary genre, their understanding of its underlying cultural philosophies appears to vary considerably.

Among the 24 participants, 21 (87.5%) reported previous exposure to Xianxia or Wuxia literature, whereas only 3 (12.5%) were engaging with the genre for the first time. This distribution suggests that the majority of the sample comprises active readers of Chinese fantasy fiction, which may influence how the translated works are received and interpreted. A closer analysis reveals certain patterns: native English speakers were more inclined towards Xianxia narratives, while readers from Asian cultural backgrounds tended to have broader exposure to traditional Wuxia texts. This may reflect broader cultural access as well as the popularity of specific subgenres across linguistic communities.

Further distinctions emerged between the two novels under study. Among readers of AWE, five had previously read Xianxia novels and three had prior experience with Wuxia. Similarly, among readers of ISSH, Xianxia reading experience was consistently reported.

Importantly, there was significant overlap: 15 out of the 18 respondents who had read Wuxia novels had also read Xianxia novel. This pattern suggests that the sample is largely composed of genre-savvy readers who are already invested in the thematic and stylistic conventions of Chinese fantasy literature. Such a readership profile should be taken into account when evaluating the accessibility of Xianxia works for first-time or culturally distant audiences.

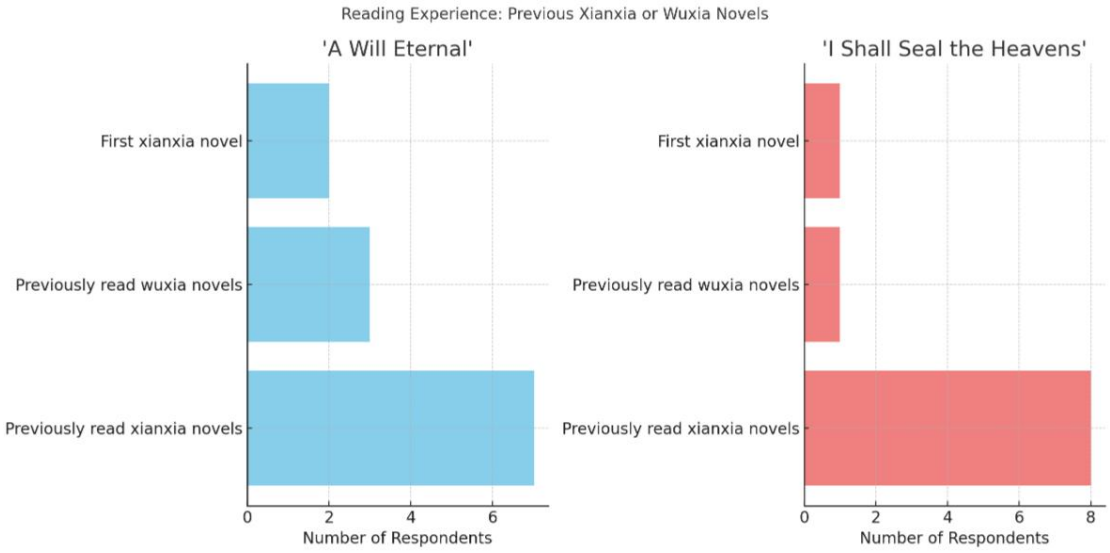


Figure 8:Reading Experience: Previous Xianxia or Wuxia Novels

This divergence in reading preferences between English-speaking and Asian respondents may be tentatively interpreted through the lens of cultural proximity theory. According to this theory, first proposed by Straubhaar (2007), audiences tend to prefer media content that shares linguistic, aesthetic, ideological, and cultural similarities with their background. Rather than engaging with foreign content purely on the basis of novelty or global popularity, viewers and readers often gravitate toward familiar cultural codes that reduce the cognitive distance between themselves and the text (Straubhaar, 2007, pp. 78-82). Wuxia literature, with its deep roots in Confucian ethics, historical imagination, and culturally embedded symbols such as jianghu, filial piety, and martial sects, may therefore be more intuitively accessible to readers from East Asian cultural contexts. In contrast, Xianxia novel blends these traditional motifs with fantasy tropes such as cultivation, ascension, and immortality, which, while still culturally grounded, incorporate more universalised narrative structures. These fantasy elements may enable English-speaking readers to engage with the stories despite limited familiarity with the

underlying cultural philosophy.

Survey data confirm that the respondent group exhibits considerable international diversity. Among the 24 participants, the majority were from English-speaking countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. Others were from East and Southeast Asian contexts such as China, Japan, Singapore, and Indonesia, while a small number of participants came from European countries and Turkey. Although the sample is not large enough to generalise, this diversity nonetheless highlights the global reach of the translated works. Notably, one respondent with a Chinese-speaking background chose to read the English translation, potentially due to language preference or perceived translation quality. This suggests that translation not only functions as a bridge between languages but also actively shapes how different audiences engage with culturally rich texts like Xianxia.

In terms of cultural familiarity, the majority of respondents reported only a basic understanding of Xia culture or none at all prior to reading. This was especially common among participants from Western cultural backgrounds. Such responses suggest that readers from outside the Chinese cultural sphere may face challenges in fully grasping embedded concepts such as jianghu, sect hierarchies, and moral values like loyalty and righteousness. In contrast, participants from East Asian backgrounds were somewhat more likely to indicate familiarity with these themes. While this does not prove that cultural background determines interpretive capacity, it indicates that prior cultural exposure may influence how certain elements are received and understood.

Regarding reading experience, 87.5% of respondents had previously read Wuxia or Xianxia novel, while only 12.5% were encountering the genre for the first time. Although the sample size limits conclusive interpretation, some trends can be cautiously noted. Native English speakers in the sample showed a stronger orientation toward Xianxia novels, whereas respondents from Asian backgrounds reported greater familiarity with Wuxia texts. This pattern aligns with Straubhaar's (2007) argument that cultural proximity not only determines access but also shapes long-term genre preferences. In his model, genre familiarity is reinforced through repeated exposure within culturally resonant frameworks. In this study, both novels—AWE and ISSH—belong to the Xianxia subgenre and were written by the same author. This commonality may explain why the sample

attracted readers who had already developed a preference for this category, particularly among those less familiar with traditional Chinese culture but more attuned to fantasy-based storytelling conventions.

In summary, while the study's limited sample size precludes definitive conclusions, the data suggest some indicative trends. Respondents from different cultural backgrounds appear to bring distinct levels of cultural familiarity and reading experience to their engagement with Xianxia novel. These differences may shape not only their comprehension but also the interpretive strategies they employ. For readers unfamiliar with Xia culture, this often entails reinterpreting unfamiliar concepts through their cultural frameworks. In this sense, translation does not simply transmit meaning; it also invites creative negotiation, particularly when readers encounter deeply embedded cultural content outside their experiential domains.

5.2 The Influence of Readers' Motivation and Expectations on Creative Treason in Translation

5.2.1 Reading Motivations and Their Influence on Interpretive Divergence

Within the framework of Medio-translatology, translation is not confined to the linguistic transfer undertaken by the translator but is equally conditioned by the cultural, social and institutional contexts through which it circulates. As Guo (2017, p. 6) observes, the discipline shifts attention away from prescriptive methods and towards the broader dynamics of dissemination, reception and cultural influence. Reader motivation forms a crucial part of this environment, shaping both levels of engagement and interpretative approaches. In this respect, interpretive divergences—sometimes amounting to reader-centred creative treason—can be linked to the expectations readers bring to the translated work.

The survey results show that, out of 24 responses, ten readers (around 42%) reported that their primary motivation was entertainment. Within this group, four highlighted their interest in the development of characters and relationships, while seven emphasised the appeal of unique fantasy adventures. A smaller number of respondents, three in total (12%), indicated that their reading was motivated by curiosity about Chinese culture and its underlying worldviews. Taken together, these findings suggest a general tendency to

approach the novels as works of genre fiction rather than as cultural documents. However, the categories were not mutually exclusive, and it should not be assumed that interest in narrative enjoyment necessarily excludes cultural engagement.

What emerges more clearly is that a significant portion of readers attach primary value to narrative elements such as story progression and character arcs. This tendency resonates with Jauss's notion of the "horizon of expectations", which emphasises that readers interpret texts through the lens of their previous cultural and literary experiences (Jauss, 1982, p. 23). Horizons evolve as readers encounter new works: expectations may be confirmed, adjusted, or overturned. In the case of Xianxia, when features such as sect hierarchies, cultivation stages or codes of loyalty appear in unfamiliar settings, readers may absorb them uncritically or reinterpret them in simplified terms aligned with genre conventions already familiar to them. This illustrates how prior expectations both guide and constrain the reception of cultural elements, shaping interpretations that may diverge from the cultural resonance intended in the source text.This is particularly relevant when translators employ domesticating strategies. As Venuti (1995) observes, domestication increases accessibility for the target audience, often by aligning the text with familiar narrative norms. While this facilitates fluency, it may reduce the visibility of culturally specific references. Readers with limited cultural background may accept these representations as authentic, potentially leading to partial or reconstructed understandings of Xia culture.

Cognitive models such as schema theory (Bartlett, 1932; Rumelhart, 1980) provide insight into this process. Readers may assimilate novel content into familiar cognitive structures, particularly when translations omit or simplify culturally dense references. Although our data do not include direct statements from respondents indicating such interpretive acts, the potential for schema-driven simplification remains plausible. For example, the concept of "cultivation" may be interpreted as a system of magic by some readers, though this was not explicitly confirmed in the survey.

In sum, while the survey results cannot definitively demonstrate causal links between motivation and interpretive outcome, they do suggest that different motivations influence the likelihood of cultural simplification or reinterpretation. These tendencies contribute to the broader phenomenon of creative treason, not as deliberate misreadings, but as the

product of engagement shaped by genre familiarity and translational accessibility.

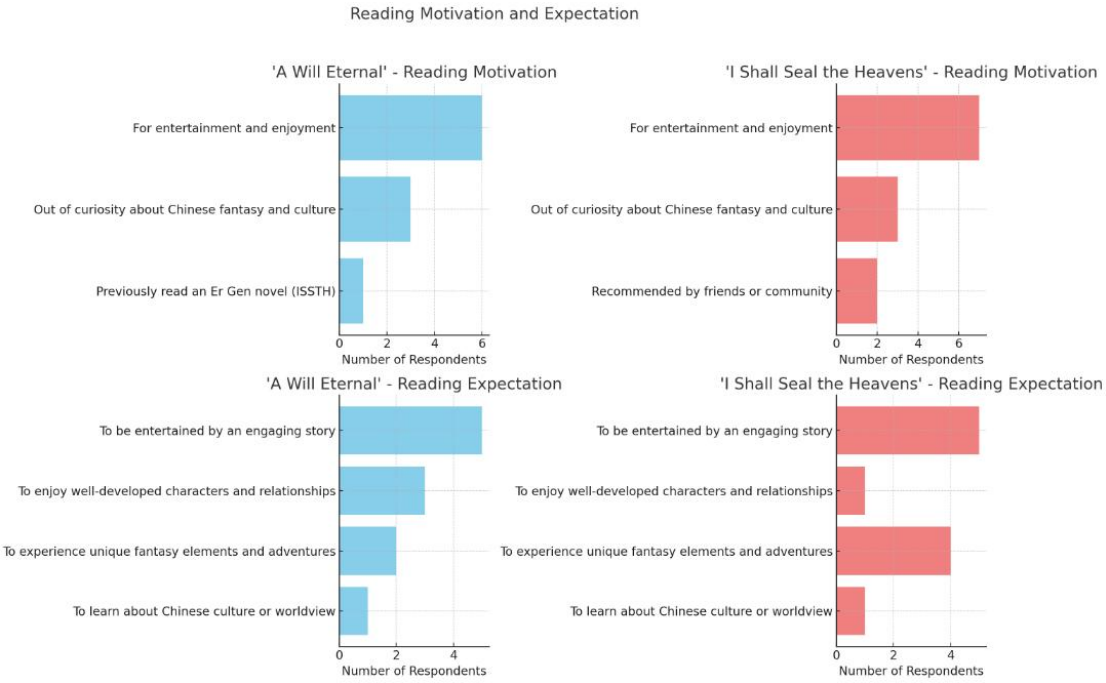


Figure 9:Reading Motivation and Reading Expectation

5.2.2 Reader Expectations and Cultural Mediation

Reader expectations play a critical role in shaping how translated texts are interpreted. As Figure 9 shows, the dominant expectation among respondents was an engaging and immersive story. Nine readers across both novels indicated this preference, while only two respondents noted a desire to understand Chinese cultural perspectives. Again, it is important to note that these options were not mutually exclusive and the questionnaire did not frame them in opposition. As such, it would be inaccurate to infer a prioritisation of plot at the expense of culture without further evidence.

Nonetheless, the data point to a pattern in which narrative enjoyment functions as a key interpretive lens. When expectations are met in terms of story development, readers are likely to remain immersed and to accept the translated narrative without questioning its cultural adaptations. On the other hand, when expectations relating to cultural discovery are unmet—for instance, when cultural references are glossed over or simplified—some readers may seek to supplement their understanding through external resources or community discussion. Although this was not directly measured in the survey, the possibility of such behaviour is supported by previous research on reader engagement in

fan communities.

Only two respondents explicitly stated that their primary expectation was to explore the Chinese cultural worldview. Such readers may be more attentive to how key terms and concepts are translated. If they perceive a loss of nuance due to excessive adaptation, they may question the translation's authenticity or attempt to reconstruct the intended meaning. While this behaviour was not directly recorded in the present data, it reflects plausible outcomes based on readers' stated motivations.

Given this diversity, it is reasonable to suggest that creative treason may take different forms depending on the reader. Those focused on entertainment may unconsciously internalise altered cultural representations, whereas those interested in cultural exploration may actively adjust their interpretations or even contest the translation's strategies. Both responses reflect modes of reception shaped by reader expectation rather than textual fidelity alone.

In conclusion, although the available data do not confirm interpretive behaviour beyond stated motivations and expectations, they highlight the varied ways in which readers approach translated Xianxia novel. Understanding these patterns is crucial for translators seeking to navigate the balance between accessibility and cultural integrity.

5.3 Reader Acceptance of the Novels and Creative Treason

5.3.1 Overall Acceptance of these Two Novels

Survey data suggest that both AWE and ISSH were well received by readers. Among the twelve respondents for AWE, five rated the novel as "Excellent", six as "Very Good", and one as "Good". For ISSH, five respondents rated it "Excellent", five "Very Good", and two "Good". Notably, no participants selected "Average" or "Poor" for either title.

Although the question measured general evaluation rather than specific aspects, the complete absence of negative feedback indicates a consistently high level of satisfaction across the sample.

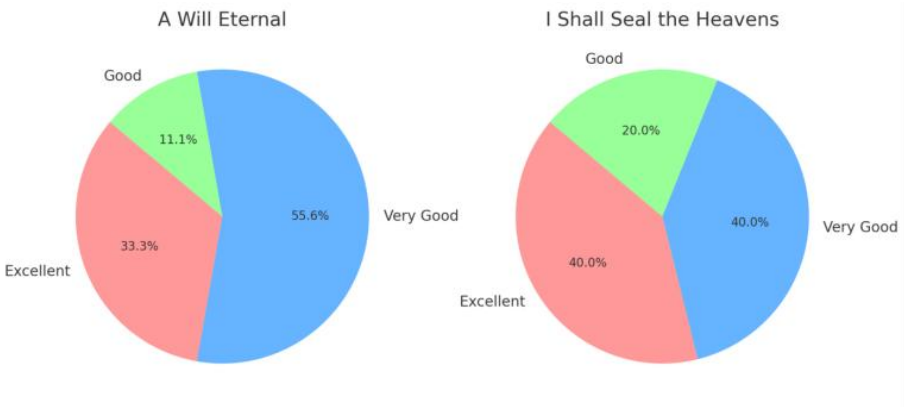


Figure 10: Evaluation of These Two novels

5.3.2 Expectations, Reception, and Reader-Centred Creative Treason

As discussed in Section 5.2, readers' motivations and expectations form part of the reception environment and influence how they engage with translated texts. While earlier sections explored the role of motivation in shaping interpretation, this section considers how readers' overall evaluations reflect the interaction between expectation and perceived textual experience.

Survey results show that most readers responded positively after reading. In response to "Would you recommend this book?" (Q31), 21 out of 24 participants selected either "Very likely" (17) or "Maybe" (4). Similarly, 21 indicated interest in reading more Xianxia novel (Q32), with 18 choosing "Very likely". These responses suggest that readers, regardless of initial motivation, were generally satisfied and inclined to continue engaging with similar works.

On the question of cultural interest (Q26), 19 readers reported an increase, including nine who selected "Increased significantly". Only one participant reported no change. These results point to a modest but observable impact, although they do not clarify whether the cultural interest generated was sustained or superficial.

Regarding whether the translation conveyed culturally distinctive elements (Q25), 20 of 24 respondents answered positively—eight selected "Yes, very much" and twelve "Yes, somewhat". One participant chose "Neutral" and three left the item unanswered. While this suggests that cultural markers were perceptible to most readers, it is not possible to assess from this data alone whether those elements were understood as part of a coherent cultural system.

Some differences in evaluation may relate to initial expectations. Readers motivated by cultural interest tended to rate the novels slightly more conservatively than those whose primary goal was entertainment. This difference is consistent with Jauss's (1982) concept of the "horizon of expectations": when texts do not meet a reader's anticipated cultural insight, their reception may be qualified rather than wholly enthusiastic.

The translator's stylistic choices may also help explain the broad satisfaction. Deathblade's translations have often been regarded by readers as accessible and engaging, which likely enhanced the reading experience for those unfamiliar with the genre. However, such readability does not necessarily imply extensive preservation of culturally dense material. For some readers, particularly those hoping for deeper insight into Xia culture, the translation may have appeared to offer limited cultural context. This interpretive gap—between expectation and textual availability—may lead readers to rely on prior knowledge or assumptions, thus engaging in what Medio-translatology refers to as reader-centred creative treason.

In conclusion, the reception data suggest a high level of satisfaction among readers, but that satisfaction is mediated by expectations, reading purposes and how the translated text aligns with those frameworks. The findings reinforce the idea that creative treason does not only originate from translator strategy but can emerge from the interpretive adjustments readers make when their expectations encounter cultural unfamiliarity.

5.4 Reader Acceptance and Reinterpretation of Xia CLWs

The translation of Wuxia and Xianxia novels often involves culturally rich CLWs that become a focal point for both translators and readers. Readers do not passively accept these translations; rather, they interpret terms based on their own cultural background and reading expectations. In some cases, this leads to creative treason, where readers actively diverge from the translator's intended meaning and reconstruct the significance of certain terms. This process of reinterpretation influences their understanding of Xia culture and shapes their perception of the translator's strategy.

5.4.1 Reader Attitudes Toward Cultural Adaptation in Translation

Survey results indicate that most readers are open to a degree of cultural adaptation in translation, though opinions differ on how far such modifications should go. Out of 24 respondents, 9 (37.5%) explicitly stated that cultural adaptation is necessary to make the text more accessible. They viewed adaptation as a means of enhancing clarity and engagement, particularly when dealing with unfamiliar cultural contexts.

A further 10 respondents (41.7%) expressed a more moderate view, acknowledging that minor adaptations may be acceptable if they assist with comprehension, provided that essential cultural elements remain intact. Taken together, these two groups constitute nearly 80% of the sample, suggesting broad support for translational flexibility, especially when the goal is to reduce cultural barriers and maintain readability.

By contrast, a smaller subset of readers showed greater resistance to cultural modification. Four participants (16.7%) preferred that changes be kept to a bare minimum, indicating that the translation should stay as close as possible to the source. One respondent (4.2%) firmly opposed any form of cultural adaptation, emphasising the importance of preserving the author's original cultural framework, even if it poses challenges to reader understanding.

This distribution highlights the tension in translated literature between cultural authenticity and accessibility, with most readers favouring adaptation while a minority emphasise fidelity, revealing the translator's complex mediating role.

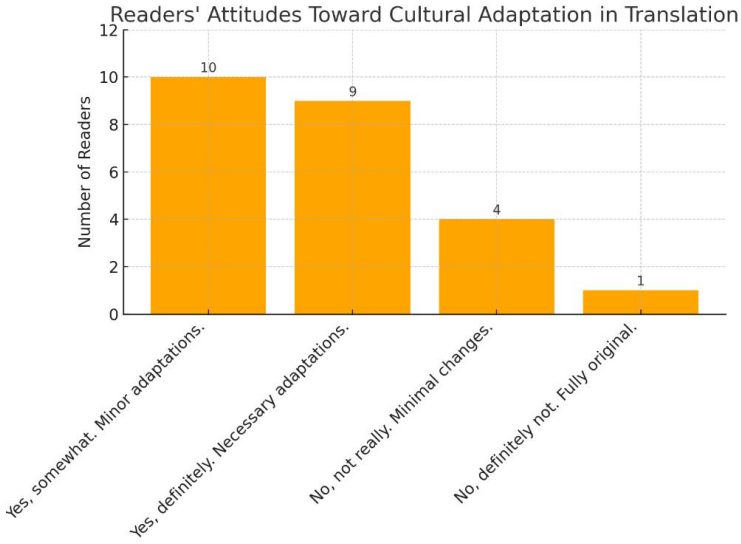


Figure 11: Reader's Attitudes Towards Cultural Adaptation in Translation

These findings suggest that while most readers tolerate and even support moderate cultural adaptations to facilitate understanding, a significant portion prioritises faithfulness to the original text and resists alterations. This reflects differing preferences regarding the balance between accuracy, readability, and elegance in translation. Some readers prioritise readability, favouring adaptations that improve accessibility, while others insist on fidelity, advocating for a direct representation of the source material. These perspectives provide valuable insights for a translator navigating cultural differences. He must balance the broader audience's acceptance of adaptation with the expectations of those who seek an authentic and unaltered reading experience.

5.4.2 Reader Preferences for Translation Strategies of Xia CLWs

As shown in Figure 12, among the 24 valid responses, the largest proportion of participants (9 respondents, 37.5%) favoured a mixed strategy, indicating a preference for flexible choices depending on term and context. Free translation was the second most common option (5 respondents, 20.8%), followed by transliteration (4 respondents, 16.7%). Literal translation (2 respondents, 8.3%) and adaptation (1 respondent, 4.2%) received little support. Overall, the distribution reflects diverse expectations, highlighting the tension between readability, fidelity, and cultural authenticity in the translation of Xia CLWs.

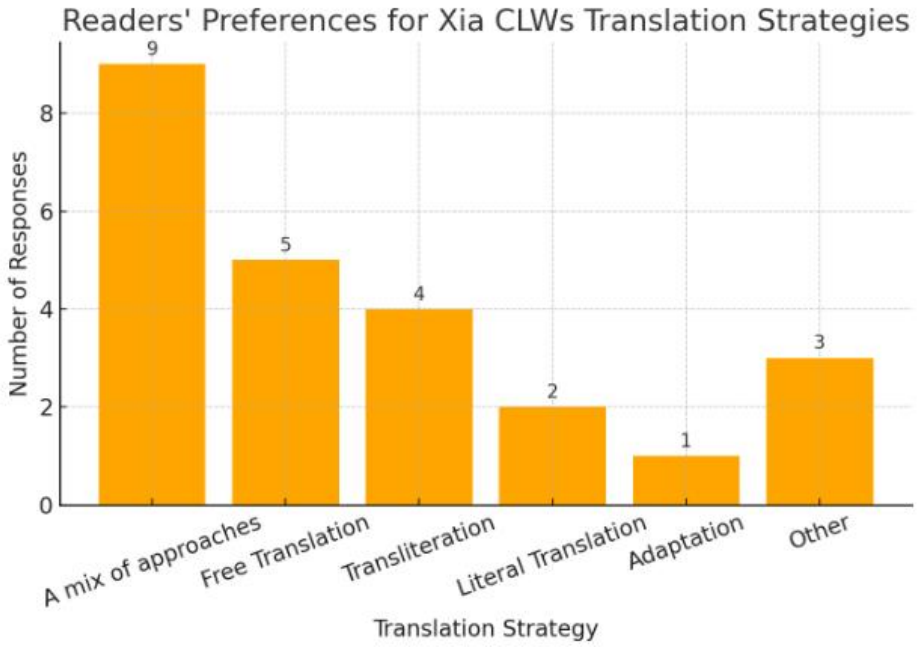


Figure 12: Reader's Preferences for Xia CLWs Translation Strategies

Beyond the predefined options in the questionnaire, some respondents shared their personal translation preferences. A respondent from Italy argued that translation strategies should depend on the reader's familiarity, stating that certain terms, like shifu (师父) and shijie (师姐), are already recognisable and should be retained while less common terms may benefit from adaptation.[1]

Another respondent from Canada, who is bilingual in Chinese and English, reflected on their personal experience of engaging with Xianxia literature in both languages. He suggested that while direct translation can preserve cultural authenticity, free translation is sometimes necessary to fully convey complex cultivation-related concepts. He explained that "Since I understand both languages, I can grasp certain Chinese terms, but in some cases, depending on the context, free translation better conveys cultivation concepts" (Survey respondent R17, 2025).

An English-speaking respondent noted that she would have welcomed more translator's notes to assist with understanding. She observed that annotations could make it easier for readers to become gradually familiar with Xia CLWs, rather than encountering many unexplained terms at the outset. As she explained: "Maybe more translators' notes. Sometimes, I wanted to learn more about a topic (mythology, cultivation technique) and it was quite hard to google with just the English term" (Survey respondent R1, 2025).

The richness of these open-ended responses underscores the extent to which readers actively engage in reflecting on the translation process. Their comments demonstrate not only a clear interest in preserving the balance between cultural integrity and readability, but also a nuanced awareness of how different strategies influence comprehension. While their suggestions do not always align with professional translation conventions, they reveal interpretive tendencies shaped by linguistic background, genre familiarity and individual preferences.

This variability highlights the reader's role as a co-creator of meaning. When faced with culture-loaded terms that lack direct equivalents, readers often draw on their own linguistic and cultural frameworks to interpret the text. In doing so, they may arrive at

[1] 师父 (Shifu): A master or mentor in Xianxia novels, usually an experienced cultivator who teaches and guides their disciple in cultivation, martial arts, and life principles, often fostering a bond of deep respect and loyalty.
师姐 (Shijie): A senior female disciple within the same sect or cultivation school in Xianxia novels, typically providing guidance and support to junior disciples while maintaining a hierarchical relationship.

meanings that partially diverge from the translator's intended rendering. Whether this constitutes a form of reader-initiated creative treason remains a question explored further in the following section.

5.4.3 Reader-Initiated Creative Treason in Understanding Xia CLWs

Within the theoretical framework of Medio-translatology, particularly as developed by Xie Tianzhen, translation is not limited to linguistic substitution but is better understood as a dynamic act of cultural mediation involving the translator, the medium, and the reader. As Xie argues, the concept of creative treason originally referred to the translator's deliberate departure from the source text, but it also accounts for how readers reconstruct meaning based on their own cultural background, expectations, and interpretive habits (Cui and Li, 2022, pp. 134-136).

From this perspective, the reader is not a passive receiver of translated content but an active participant in meaning-making. When encountering Xia CLWs, readers may engage in a form of interpretive adjustment that reshapes how they understand terms that appear obscure, redundant, or misleading within their linguistic frameworks. This process, though internal and non-textual, aligns with what Medio-translatology views as "reader-oriented creative treason", a phenomenon that reflects the influence of the reception context on cultural translation (Zhao and Geng, 2022, p. 5).

Several examples from survey responses help illustrate this point. One respondent reported modifying the phrase "Undying Live Forever Technique" into "Undying Eternal Technique" for better stylistic fluency, perceiving the original as redundant (Survey respondent R6, 2025). Another reader initially misinterpreted "Flame Serpent Art" as referring to an aesthetic performance due to the ambiguity of the word "Art", only later realising it was a combat spell (Survey respondent R7, 2025).

These mental reformulations do not alter the translation text itself but do shift how the reader perceives its meaning and cultural significance. This is especially relevant in cases where the translation lacks sufficient contextual cues to support comprehension, prompting readers to draw upon their own schemas or genre assumptions. As Xie notes, "the translation process is not complete until it has been interpreted in its target environment" (Cui and Li, 2022, p. 135). Thus, the reader's interpretive role becomes part of the

translation's cultural effect.

In this sense, reader-initiated creative treason is not a failure of translation, but a manifestation of how intercultural texts are negotiated. It shows that translation is not only produced by the translator but also co-constructed through readers' reception. This process may lead to interpretive divergence from the source-cultural logic, but it also allows the translated text to function within new cultural environments and readerships.

5.4.4 Types of Xia CLWs That Trigger Reader-Initiated Creative Treason

Not all Xia CLWs lead readers to reinterpret or modify their meanings. Survey responses suggest that certain types of terms are more likely to cause confusion or resistance. These CLWs generally fall into four categories, shaped by the interaction between translation choices and the reader's cultural horizon of expectations (Jauss, 1982, pp. 22–23).When readers encounter terms that diverge from their expectations—whether through literal awkwardness, lack of equivalence, or cultural opacity—they often engage in interpretive acts that amount to what Escarpit (1961) first termed "creative treason," here realised at the level of reception.

1. Unnatural or Overly Literal Translations

Survey responses show that readers generally considered the translations clear and readable. However, several noted that some culturally specific terms appeared overly formal or misleading, which at times disrupted immersion and cultural interpretation. As one respondent remarked, "The translation is generally clear and readable, but some culture terms feel overly formal or misleading, occasionally affecting immersion and cultural interpretation" (Survey respondent R9, 2025). Such responses exemplify Fish's (1980, pp. 13-14) notion of interpretive communities: readers collectively evaluate whether translations conform to shared linguistic norms. When martial arts techniques or realm names are rendered too literally, readers may mentally rephrase them for fluency, effectively performing their own adaptive strategies. This practice shows that meaning is co-constructed between translator and audience, with the reception environment shaping the final effect (Guo, 2017, p. 6).

4. Cultural Concepts Without Clear Equivalents

Terms without direct English equivalents highlight Nida's (1964, p. 159) principle of dynamic equivalence: when functional effect is lost, readers compensate through imaginative reconstruction. Experienced readers tolerate transliterations, while novices require explanations; in both cases, unmet expectations prompt reinterpretation. This aligns with Jauss's (1982) idea that the gap between the reader's horizon and the foreign text generates either resistance or new understanding.

Certain Xia terms have no direct match in English. Some respondents preferred transliterations, especially for well-known terms, while others found too many unfamiliar words overwhelming. Experienced readers were more comfortable with untranslated terms, while new readers often needed explanations. When the meaning was unclear, some readers guessed based on their knowledge of fantasy stories, while others adjusted their understanding as they read. These differences in familiarity led to various forms of creative reinterpretation.

3. Hierarchical Titles and Sect-Specific Roles

These terms, deeply rooted in Confucian ethics and collective social structures, often clash with English linguistic and cultural norms. In Chinese Xia culture, titles like 师兄 (senior martial brother) or 长老 (elder) encode not only hierarchical positions but also unspoken obligations, emotional bonds, and power dynamics within sects.[1] However, English translations tend to reduce them to generic labels like "senior" or "elder", stripping away their contextual richness. For instance, Shixiong implies mentorship, fraternal responsibility, and a lifelong bond forged through shared training, whereas "senior martial brother" risks sounding like a bureaucratic rank.

The structural incompatibility between Chinese compound terms (for example, 外门弟子 Waimen Dizi) and English phrasal constructions further complicates comprehension.[2] Direct translations often feel old-fashioned (outer sect disciple), while pinyin retention (Waimen Dizi) forces readers to infer meaning from context—a challenge for those unfamiliar with Xia conventions.

4. Poetic/Figurative Expressions

[1] 长老 (Zhanglao), a high-ranking figure overseeing sect administration or discipline.
[2] 外门弟子(Waimen Dizi), a junior member in a sect's peripheral branch

These terms rely on classical Chinese aesthetics, Daoist/Buddhist cosmology, and literary allusions that lack direct cultural analogues in English. For example, 金丹 (golden core) symbolises the fusion of spiritual and physical cultivation in Daoist alchemy, but literal translations like "golden pill" reduce it to a mundane object, erasing its metaphysical significance.[1] Similarly, 心魔 (heart-demons) ambiguously straddles psychological struggles (inner demons) and supernatural tribulations (demonic possession), forcing translators to prioritise one interpretation and leaving readers unaware of the term's dual nature.[2]

Readers do not always accept translations as they are. When a term seems unnatural, unclear, or out of place, they may question it, reword it mentally, or construct their own meaning. Their responses show that translation is not a one-way process but an ongoing interaction between the text and the reader.

In sum, reader-initiated creative treason occurs where translation choices collide with cultural expectations. Jauss's horizon of expectations explains why some readers reinterpret terms to fit familiar frames, while Fish's interpretive communities show how online spaces mediate collective meaning-making. From a Medio-translatological perspective, these findings highlight reception as an active cultural force, not a passive endpoint (Guo, 2017, p. 6). For translators, the challenge is to balance fidelity and accessibility: overly literal renderings invite rejection, while excessive adaptation risks cultural dilution. Flexible strategies—combining transliteration, functional equivalence, and selective annotation—offer one way to bridge this divide, supporting both cultural preservation and dynamic reception.

5.5 Reader-Initiated Creative Treason in Understanding Xia culture

5.5.1 Themes in Reader Interpretations of Xia culture

Within the framework of Medio-translatology, literary translation is viewed not merely as linguistic transfer, but as a culturally mediated act of meaning reconstruction involving both translator and reader.

As Xie Tianzhen argues, translation entails a complex interaction shaped by the

[1] 金丹 (Jindan), Daoist concept representing the pinnacle of spiritual-physical refinement.
[2] 心魔 (Xinmo), internalised psychological or supernatural obstacles in cultivation.

socio-cultural context in which it is received. He defines 'creative treason' not simply as translator-led deviation, but as a multi-agent phenomenon that also includes reader-initiated reinterpretation shaped by expectations, background knowledge, and genre familiarity (Xie, 1999, pp. 130-133).

This theoretical orientation is reflected in survey responses collected in this study. Readers from East Asian or culturally adjacent backgrounds were more likely to identify Xia values—such as loyalty, righteousness, and moral integrity—as central to the narrative. Their interpretations resonated with traditional Chinese ethical frameworks, which foreground the importance of collective moral codes and Confucian ideals.

In contrast, some English-speaking readers interpreted Xia culture through the lens of individualism, focusing instead on themes such as personal struggle, destiny, and heroism. This is consistent with Jauss's theory of the 'horizon of expectations', which posits that readers make sense of texts using historically and culturally shaped cognitive frameworks (Jauss, 1982, p. 22).

These readers tended to assimilate Xia protagonists to Western heroic archetypes, emphasising personal autonomy and emotional fulfilment over social obligation. Other responses indicated either partial misunderstanding or minimal engagement with Xia culture as a moral system. Some respondents equated Xia with stylistic elements or novel settings, describing it simply as "a traditional fantasy setting not influenced by the weastern concept of traditional fantasy" (Survey respondent R13, 2025) or a cultivation framework with "endless training" (Survey respondent R8, 2025).

These comments suggest a more surface-level reception, in which cultural specificity is reduced to generic exoticism. As Venuti notes, when a translation fails to provide sufficient cultural orientation, readers may default to interpretive habits shaped by the target culture (Venuti, 1995, pp. 20-21).

In summary, this section demonstrates how reception is shaped not only by translation strategies but also by the reader's genre expectations, cultural proximity, and interpretive schema.

Reader-initiated reinterpretations, whether consciously or not, exemplify what Xie refers to as reception-driven creative treason—where meaning is not only transferred, but reshaped through the act of reading (Xie, 1999, pp. 130-133; Cui and Li, 2022, pp.

97-102).

5.5.2 Comparison Between Reader Interpretations and Core Xia culture Values

Classical sources and modern scholarship provide a clear picture of the moral foundations of Xia culture. In Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*, the *Biographies of the Wandering Knights* describe figures of Xia as men of integrity who kept their promises, acted decisively, and risked their lives to rescue others, without seeking recognition for their virtue (Watson, 1993, p. 451). Later writers such as Liu Ruoyu further systematised these ideals, listing qualities such as helping others, justice, loyalty, bravery, integrity, honour and generosity as the core of Xia values (Liu, 1991, pp. 4-5).

These established descriptions offer a benchmark against which the survey responses can be considered. While earlier chapters have outlined the definition of Xia, the present section turns to how contemporary readers interpret these values when encountering them in translation. By comparing readers' views with the traditional moral virtues, it becomes possible to see not only points of convergence but also areas where reception produces reinterpretation or new emphases. This comparison provides the foundation for the following analysis of how Xia culture is understood, adapted, or transformed in a cross-cultural context.

1. **Aligned Understandings:** Several readers articulated interpretations that correspond with classical Xia ideals. Concepts such as "loyalty to friends" (Survey respondent R6, 2025), "righteousness"(Survey respondent R2, R9, R16, 2025), and "bravery and responsibility" (Survey respondent R14, 2025) appeared recurrently.

These responses mirror values described by Liu (2003) and Sima Qian, suggesting that certain core traits—especially those associated with interpersonal loyalty and moral action—have been effectively conveyed through the translations. This may be attributed to Deathblade's narrative strategies, including his use of paratextual devices such as glossaries and footnotes, which subtly foreground such values. It also reflects the thematic universality of some Xia traits, as concepts like loyalty and justice resonate across cultures.

2. **Overlooked Values:** Despite these positive alignments, several classical Xia values remained under-recognised among readers. Notably, the notion of self-effacing altruism—so central to Sima Qian's depiction—was seldom mentioned. While readers

frequently noted "heroic" acts, few identified the moral restraint and humility that underpin the Xia ethos. The idea that true Xia do not boast of their deeds or seek recognition appears to have been lost or diminished in translation and reception.

Similarly, "freedom" as a Xia value—implying resistance to authoritarian structures and a commitment to moral autonomy—was rarely invoked. Instead, readers often associated Xia with obedience to sect hierarchies or loyalty to clan structures. This divergence suggests that the embedded cultural tension between individual morality and institutional power may not be readily apparent to non-Chinese readers, especially within the cultivation-based hierarchies typical of Xianxia narratives.

These interpretive gaps align with what Berman (2000) terms the "trial of the foreign," where the encounter with unfamiliar moral frameworks often leads either to their assimilation into more familiar categories or to their erasure (pp. 285-286). From a Medio-translatological perspective, such omissions may be classified as instances of unconscious creative treason, stemming from translational constraints or unavoidable cultural asymmetry (Xie, 2010, pp. 84-86).

3. Misreadings and Cultural Displacement

A third and more complex category involves reinterpretations that diverge from classical Xia values by foregrounding themes such as revenge or ruthless competition. Several respondents (R8, R11, R20, R22) associated Xia with acts of vengeance, framing characters as individuals who seek to redress personal grievances. In a similar vein, one respondent (R15) described the fictional world as "dog eat dog" and emphasised the presence of "hidden power", suggesting an understanding of Xia culture that stresses survival and power struggles rather than altruistic self-sacrifice.

While retribution often appears in Xia narratives, it is not traditionally enumerated among the core virtues. Rather, classical accounts present acts of vengeance as extensions of the value of justice (义), framed as responses to deep moral injury rather than expressions of personal vendetta.

Another reinterpretation concerned the role of destiny. Several respondents (R6, R20, R21, R22) identified destiny as a central element of Xia culture, viewing the idea of fulfilling or following one's fate as integral to the concept. This emphasis shifts attention

away from the classical virtues of justice or loyalty, highlighting instead an understanding of Xia as closely tied to predetermined paths and cosmological order.

This conceptual blending reflects the influence of the Daoist and Buddhist cosmologies that permeate Xianxia, yet it may obscure the humanistic core of Xia values. In classical texts, Xia are agents of change within society, not passive instruments of cosmic will. The emphasis on destiny in reader responses may thus represent an interpretive merging of Xianxia genre conventions with romanticised ideas of spiritual transcendence.

These reinterpretations illustrate what Jauss (1982) termed the "horizon of expectations"—the cultural and aesthetic frameworks readers bring to the act of reception. Anglophone audiences approach translated Xianxia novels with genre expectations formed by Western fantasy, martial arts films, and the hero's journey trope. As a result, certain aspects of the Xia figure, especially those that resist glorification or rely on Confucian restraint, may be distorted, while others are amplified or recontextualised.

From a Translation Studies standpoint, these findings suggest that reader reception is not merely a reflection of translation fidelity but also of the broader cultural environment in which the text is consumed. The misalignments identified here do not necessarily constitute failure but rather reflect what Nida (1964) might term "dynamic equivalence" at work—albeit filtered through the reader's schema rather than the translator's intent. The presence of such reinterpretations may be seen as a form of reader-initiated creative treason: a re-inscription of meaning guided by audience expectations rather than source-text values.

5.5.3 Implications for the Translation of Xia culture

The findings from this section highlight the complex interplay between translation strategies, textual form, and reader reception in the transmission of culturally embedded moral values. While Deathblade's translations successfully convey many Xia ideals, particularly those that align with global values such as loyalty and justice, others are diluted, omitted, or reinterpreted due to cultural dissonance.

This reinforces the need for translational mediation that extends beyond textual fidelity. For culturally specific concepts like Xia, explanatory footnotes, prefaces, or in-text clarifications may assist in foregrounding less visible values such as humility or

self-effacing righteousness. At the same time, it may be necessary to accept a degree of creative divergence as an inevitable outcome of intercultural reading practices.

Ultimately, the comparison between reader interpretations and classical Xia culture values reveals both the translatability and fragility of moral codes across cultures. Translation becomes not merely an act of linguistic transfer, but a site of negotiation where meaning is reshaped by narrative convention, reader ideology, and cultural expectation.

5.6 Platform-Initiated Creative Treason in Xianxia Translation

The previous sections explored how readers, as one part of the reception environment, generate creative treason through reinterpretation and selective emphasis. This section shifts attention to the online platform, which forms the other crucial dimension of the Xianxia novels' reception environment. In Medio-translatology, reception is not confined to individual acts of reading but extends to the broader cultural and technological settings in which translation is encountered (Guo, 2017, p. 6).

Wuxiaworld, the host of ISSH and AWE, provides a clear example of how platforms shape the reception of translation. Its model of incremental release established a continuous relationship between text and audience, while interactive features such as comment threads, rating systems and glossaries structured the ways in which readers engaged with cultural material. As Gambier (2018, p. 47) observes, studies of reception must consider the specific socio-cultural and contextual conditions under which audiovisual translations are consumed, since such factors decisively shape how meaning is processed and interpreted. In this case, the digital environment itself influences which elements are emphasised, downplayed or reinterpreted.

This dynamic has been described in Media Studies as participatory culture, where readers are not passive consumers but active participants in the ongoing negotiation of meaning (Jenkins et al., 2009). On Wuxiaworld, translator–reader exchanges, discussion forums and paratextual resources lowered barriers to understanding and encouraged collaborative interpretation. Readers from different cultural backgrounds brought varied perspectives to the text, resulting in a collective process of engagement that was shaped as much by the platform as by the translations themselves.

The following subsections examine these dynamics in greater detail. Section 5.6.1 considers the implications of serialised dissemination, Section 5.6.2 discusses translator–reader interactivity, and Section 5.6.3 explores how the handling of culture-loaded words combines standardisation with reinterpretation**.**

5.6.1 The Serialised Online Dissemination Model

Wuxiaworld's chapter-by-chapter publishing model transformed the pace and manner of reader engagement. By emulating the serial release format of Chinese online novels, the platform cultivated a habit-forming reading rhythm—readers followed updates daily or weekly, mirroring episodic viewing habits in television culture. This structure created an ongoing sense of anticipation and community, as readers consumed chapters incrementally and frequently interacted through comments and forums.

Wuxiaworld's platform creates a unique two-way flow of communication between translators and readers that fundamentally impacts the translation process. Traditionally, once a translation is published, the interaction between translator (as sender) and readers (as receivers) is one-directional and deferred. In the serial online model, by contrast, the boundary between producer and consumer is blurred. Liang(2020, p. 464) describes Wuxiaworld's success as "a shared translation and communication model" in which "the binary opposition between the subject and the audience is broken" .

This mode of serialisation produced two significant effects on reception. First, it sustained prolonged immersion. Novels like ISSH, with over a thousand chapters, retained readers over months or even years. Such extended exposure allowed readers to gradually absorb and reflect upon unfamiliar cultural concepts, including Xia values. Rather than facing cognitive overload in a single extended sitting, readers had space to digest content and clarify uncertainties, often with support from community discussions or the platform's integrated glossary. Survey responses indicated that many readers engaged simultaneously with ancillary materials, treating the experience as a gradual cultural immersion rather than a traditional linear reading.

Second, the open-access, online format facilitated organic growth and wide dissemination. Readers could join at any point and share links freely, removing both economic and logistical barriers. English functioned as a lingua franca, enabling fans from

diverse backgrounds—including Turkey, Indonesia, and other non-Western regions—to engage with the texts, even where translations in their native languages were unavailable. Wuxiaworld thus became a multilingual hub, amplifying interpretive diversity. The comments section often revealed divergent understandings of key concepts, with readers from different cultural traditions debating and renegotiating meaning in real time.

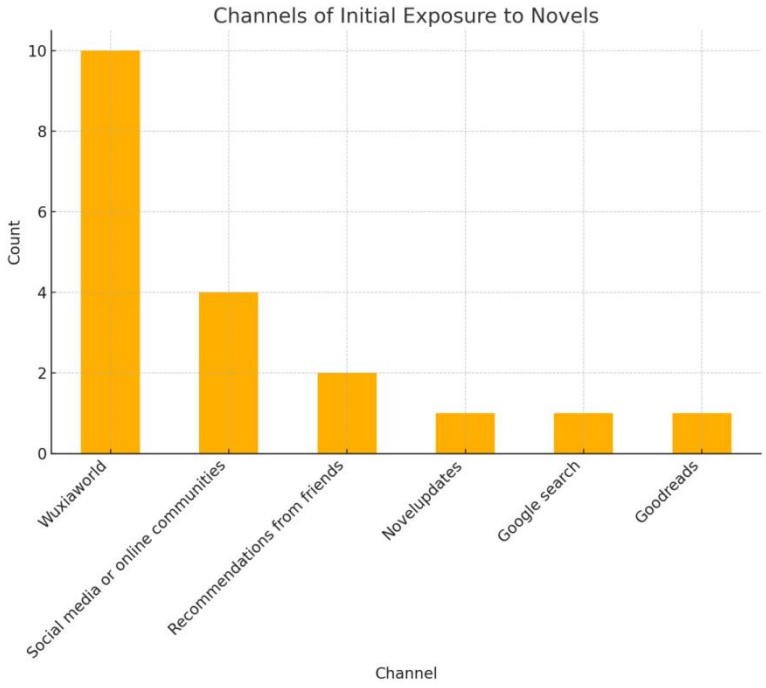


Figure 13: Channels of Initial Exposure to Novels

Moreover, the platform's ecosystem extended beyond the textual narrative. Transmedia features, such as character art, maps, fan-made wikis, and links to related adaptations (for example donghua or manhua), augmented the story world. As Han Xu et al. (2023, pp. 1-2) argue, Chinese online novel frequently evolves into multimedia franchises, and each format contributes distinctively to reception. On Wuxiaworld, this expanded reception field provided visual and explanatory cues that enriched readers' understanding. Translator commentaries, YouTube videos, and community forums functioned as "paratexts" that reinforced cultural context, aiding in the comprehension of culturally loaded elements like "immortal caves" or the significance of a sect hierarchy.

In reception theory terms, this environment actively shaped and reshaped the horizon of expectations. Readers formed expectations about Xia values incrementally and revised them as new chapters were released. Initial impressions—such as equating Xia solely with martial strength—were frequently refined through successive narrative developments and

peer discourse. For example, early perceptions may have foregrounded bravery or aggression, but repeated exposure to episodes of sacrifice, loyalty, and restraint often corrected these misreadings over time.

Thus, the serialised model offered a pedagogical advantage: rather than allowing misconceptions to persist, it enabled iterative clarification. The communal, staged format of reception allowed readers to gradually reconstruct their understanding of Xia culture, aligning it more closely with the values embedded in the source text. In contrast to single-volume translations consumed in isolation, Wuxiaworld's structure provided an adaptive and educative environment that promoted interpretive depth through cumulative engagement.

5.6.2 Translator-Reader Interactivity and Its Impact on Cultural Translation

A defining feature of the Wuxiaworld reception environment is the unprecedented interactivity it fosters between translators and readers. Unlike traditional print settings—where the translation process is finalised and reader feedback is largely absent—Wuxiaworld supports a dynamic, dialogic relationship. Translators engage directly with their audiences via comment sections, forums, and external platforms such as YouTube, shaping translation choices in real time. This creates a fluid, collaborative model of translation, in which feedback from readers can influence decisions ranging from word choice to cultural explanation.

A striking illustration of translator–reader interactivity shaping cultural translation occurred in a Wuxiaworld forum discussion over the rendering of 蜂王 (fēng wáng). The term had initially been translated as "Queen Bee", a choice that carried unintended connotations of femininity in English. Readers quickly pointed out that the original Chinese expression is gender-neutral, and that the narrative later confirmed the character's human form to be male. In response, an editor publicly explained: "...we changed it to Bee Sovereign and he/him pronouns because in ch310, it was established that the bee's human form is that of a young man" (kei_Editor, Wuxiaworld Forum, 21 December 2024).[1] This exchange demonstrates how audience feedback can directly influence translation choices,

[1] See the link: https://forum.Wuxiaworld.com/topic/655-why-are-readers-banned-from-commenting-on-the-translation/

preventing semantic distortion while foregrounding cultural nuance. It also exemplifies the wider role of digital platforms in mediating translation: rather than being finalised at the point of production, terminology remains open to negotiation between translators and readers. From a Medio-translatological perspective, this collaborative adjustment constitutes a form of reception-environment agency, whereby the platform's affordances enable readers to act as co-constructors of meaning and thereby generate instances of platform-induced creative treason.

A telling example of platform-driven negotiation can be found in Wuxiaworld's Translator QandA forum, where Deathblade engaged directly with readers about his translation practices. In one exchange, he explained that dialogue and character development were his preferred aspects to translate, but also admitted that illness or exhaustion could affect the pace and manner of his work: "Dialogue and character development scenes are my favourite to translate for sure. … That point in which, if I'm too sick, I can't physically do it" (Deathblade, 2024, Wuxiaworld Forum).[1] By responding in real time, the translator not only clarified his approach but also foregrounded the contextual pressures shaping the text that readers encountered. This exchange demonstrates how the boundaries between production and reception become porous: readers' questions initiated a dialogue that, in turn, influenced the translator's subsequent decisions. From a theoretical perspective, this form of interaction illustrates the mediating role of the reception environment. As Guo (2017, p. 6) notes, Medio-translatology shifts attention away from prescriptive methods to the broader functions of translation in dissemination, influence, and reception. In this case, the forum itself becomes part of the reception environment, actively shaping how cultural meaning is interpreted. Gambier (2018, p. 56) similarly stresses that reception must be examined within specific socio-cultural and contextual conditions, which here include the platform's affordances for dialogue between translator and readers. The interpretive community formed around these exchanges (Fish, 1980, pp. 13–14) co-constructs meaning by negotiating both linguistic choices and cultural explanations. Thus, the translator's responsiveness to readers' concerns exemplifies how Wuxiaworld's interactive ecology produces a form of platform-induced creative treason,

[1] See the link: https://forum.Wuxiaworld.com/profile/36-deathblade
https://forum.Wuxiaworld.com/topic/276-deathblade-celebrating-a-will-eternals-book-1-9-amazon-launch/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

whereby shifts in tone and meaning emerge not solely from the translator's agency but also from the dialogic conditions of reception.

Such cases demonstrate that translators on Wuxiaworld are not isolated agents but embedded participants in a semi-public interpretive process. Figures like Deathblade accrued reputational capital through visibility, transparency and perceived linguistic integrity. This reputational capital, in turn, enhanced reader engagement. As one respondent observed:

> Deathblade is a great translator. It's definitely one of the novels I will reread bilingual one day and marvel at the translator's proficiency. I've been learning Chinese, but I doubt I will ever get to the level where I would pass on a Deathblade translation to read the original instead (Survey respondent R1, 2025).

This statement highlights how readers not only valued the quality of the translation but also treated the space as educational, using bilingual comparison to appreciate the translator's skill.

Furthermore, the platform's forums operated as decentralised cultural learning sites. Readers posed questions, interpreted Xia values collaboratively, and contextualised unfamiliar terms. Phrases such as "giving face" or "cultivation bottleneck" were not simply read—they were discussed, defined, and internalised through community interaction. This process aligns with Fish's (1980) notion of "interpretive communities", wherein groups of readers collectively shape textual meaning through shared norms and strategies.

In this light, translator-reader interactivity functions as a mitigator of unintentional creative treason. Reader feedback can help steer the translator away from misleading equivalents and foster more authentic renderings. However, this same participatory environment can also incubate new forms of meaning-making. As readers interpret, extrapolate, and theorise, they often go beyond the original text, creating "fanon" or attributing contemporary values to traditional concepts. While this creative appropriation departs from authorial intent, it constitutes a legitimate aspect of transnational reception and highlights the evolving nature of meaning in digitally mediated translation spaces.

In conclusion, the high interactivity characteristic of Wuxiaworld's platform enabled real-time cultural negotiation between translator and audience. Through dialogic adaptation, terms like "Bee Sovereign" were refined in ways that preserved cultural integrity while

enhancing readability. This process turned translation into a co-constructed experience, helping to reduce misinterpretations and fostering communal ownership of meaning. While the interpretive outcomes were sometimes divergent from the original, the platform's structure allowed for iterative clarification and deepened cultural literacy. In this environment, translation becomes less a fixed product than a collaborative process—living, evolving, and shaped by the very community it serves.

5.6.3 The Dual Effect of Standardising CLWa and Cultural Reinterpretation

One major outcome of the interactive environment was the creation and refinement of a Glossary of CLWs for the Xianxia novels. Wuxiaworld provided this Glossary as a reference tool, and it became a crucial mediating device between cultures. By standardising translations of key terms and providing consistent definitions or links for them, the Glossary lowered barriers to understanding Xia culture for international readers. Our data shows that about 63% of respondents used the Glossary or footnotes regularly. This high uptake indicates that many readers wanted to learn the meanings behind unfamiliar terms rather than skip over them. For example, when encountering a term like 玄武龟 (Xuanwu Turtle) [1], a reader could consult the Glossary.

In the Glossary, the translator might provide concise notes (for example, "Xuanwu: a tortoise-snake deity representing the north and water, often depicted as a black turtle") and occasionally include references for further reading. One survey respondent explicitly remarked: "I need more footnote about cultural words, I'm curious about them" (Survey respondent R22, 2025). Such comments suggest that readers actively seek additional cultural information and value paratextual support. The presence of a glossary therefore tangibly augmented their comprehension of cultural references. By standardising CLWs, the translator also avoided confusion that could arise from inconsistent renderings. In early fan translations (or less coordinated efforts), the same term was often translated differently in English, producing inconsistency. Wuxiaworld's professional approach ensured that terms like 丹药 (dan yao) were always called "pellets" or "elixirs" rather than oscillating

[1] 玄武龟 (Xuan Wu Turtle): In Chinese mythology and Daoist cosmology, Xuan Wu is a divine beast depicted as a black tortoise entwined with a snake, symbolising the northern direction, water element, and longevity. It is also revered as a guardian deity in Daoist tradition. (Translator's note: No official English translation exists; this is my own rendering of the original concept.)

between "pills", "potions", and so on.[1] This consistency helped readers accumulate knowledge - they effectively learned a mini lexicon of Xianxia terms over time. Many readers eventually became comfortable using terms like Dao, Qi, sect, Nascent Soul, and so on. in discussion, almost as loanwords. The foreignness of these terms gradually shifted from being an obstacle to becoming an aesthetic marker of authenticity. As Venuti (1995, p. 20) explains, foreignisation deliberately preserves linguistic and cultural difference rather than smoothing it into target-language fluency, thereby compelling readers to recognise the distinctiveness of the source culture. Even-Zohar (1990, pp. 46–47) similarly argues that translated literature often occupies a peripheral yet innovative position in the target system, introducing unfamiliar forms that may ultimately enrich the receiving culture. In this sense, Wuxiaworld's glossaries and consistent terminology helped transform CLWs into aesthetic resources, reinforcing the perception of Xianxia as a culturally distinctive literary experience.

By anchoring foreign concepts in consistent English labels, the translations achieve what Chan (2010) describes as a textual hybridity that remains coherent – a blending of Chinese cultural material with English narrative form that readers can learn to navigate. The translated text "provide[s] different models of reality" yet maintains internal cohesion through its standardised terms (Chan, 2010, p. 2). In practice, readers are effectively reading a hybrid English, one that embeds Chinese realities in an accessible, systematically explained way.

However, the very strategies that streamline comprehension also set the stage for reinterpretation of cultural meanings. A standardised translation can never fully replicate the resonances that a term carries for native readers, and as a result, international readers often fill the semantic gaps with their own cultural understandings. Over time, they may come to attach different connotations to a term than those intended in the original. This phenomenon has been referred to in comparative literature as creative treason – the idea that when a text crosses into a new culture, readers' divergent interpretations represent an inevitable form of "betrayal" of the source intent, albeit a creative and often unconscious one (Escarpit, 1971; Xie, 1999).

[1] 丹药 (dan yao) refers to alchemical elixirs or medicinal pellets refined by cultivators to enhance their spiritual power, heal injuries, or advance in cultivation.

In our case, although Wuxiaworld's glossary can explain what a "Foundation Establishment" stage or "Dharma Protector" is, it cannot by itself transplant the full cultural context that gives those terms meaning in Chinese. Readers, operating from a different framework, will interpret these terms in light of their own genre knowledge, fantasies, or misconceptions. The survey responses revealed numerous small misreadings or shifts in understanding that illustrate this process. For instance, one reader confessed that the term "Flame Serpent Art" initially misled them – "I thought it was some kind of artistic performance, like a dance, but later realized it was actually a spell," they wrote (Survey respondent R7, 2025). Here the word "Art" in the translation (intended in the sense of a martial art or technique) was interpreted through a Western lens as fine art, demonstrating how an unfamiliar collocation can trigger a wrong mental image. Another respondent noted that the cultivation rank names (like Foundation Establishment, Core Formation, Gold Core, Nascent Soul, etc.) felt "abstract – [they] didn't really tell me how strong someone was compared to another. It felt like I was just guessing based on context" (Survey respondent R21, 2025).

Despite the translator's consistent use of these standard terms, their meaning remained somewhat opaque, forcing the reader to infer power hierarchies on their own. In doing so, readers might equate these ranks to, say, levels in a video game or grades in a familiar fantasy magic system, which can subtly distort the nuances (a form of creative reinterpretation). Similarly, a few participants struggled with kinship or address terms: one mentioned confusion over words like "elder sister" used outside of literal family context , and "Daoist magic," finding them "confusing… and some cultivation words [too]" (Survey respondent R11, 2025). This suggests that even when a term is translated into a common English word (sister, magic), the cultural usage (such as calling an unrelated fellow disciple "sister") can be misread if the reader projects their own cultural conventions onto it. The standardised translation might prevent outright inconsistency (the term is always rendered the same way) but it cannot prevent the reader's interpretation from sliding toward domestic familiarity – in this case, interpreting "senior sister" as a biological sibling, or "magic" as Western sorcery, where the original implies different relationships or principles.

Notably, some readers bypassed the provided glossaries and notes entirely, which further heightened the scope for reinterpretation. In the survey, about 20% of respondents admitted they did not use the glossary, and another (17%) were not even aware a glossary existed. These readers had to rely solely on context and their imagination to make sense of CLWs. As a consequence, they often naturalised the terms in unexpected ways.

Each reader's cultural and linguistic background mediates how they understand the "standard" terms. Chan's concept of cultural hybridity is useful here: the translated text is a hybrid carrying both Chinese and English elements, and readers must negotiate between these two. As Chan (2010) observes, translated novels are "split apart by two languages [and] two cultures" and are characterised by inherent hybridity and "double voicing" – they speak in a foreign idiom using the target language. The reception of A Will Eternal and I Shall Seal the Heavens exemplifies this: readers hear the voice of Chinese culture, but filtered through English words, they often mentally "re-voice" it in terms they find familiar. In doing so, they may appreciate the exotic aspects (indeed, many survey respondents noted that they did gain a sense of Chinese culture from the translation), but they also inevitably reframe some of those aspects. In one sense, the standardised terms become loanwords in the readers' minds, but the signified of those words can drift. A telling comment from a relatively new reader was: "There are some places where the feeling of the translation is not quite appropriate and the sense of substitution is not ideal"(Survey respondent R17, 2025).

This reader perceptively felt that certain phrases gave the impression of a translation workaround ("substitution") rather than a direct carryover of meaning – suggesting that they detected a loss or change in cultural nuance. Such awareness is evidence of the tension that standardisation can create: it makes the text readable, yet reminds the reader that something might have been altered or omitted for their sake, prompting them either to fill the gap with imagination or to sense that an alien concept lies just beyond their grasp.

The interplay between standardisation and reinterpretation in these translations underscores the delicate balance the translator must strike. By using a glossary-backed, foreignising approach, the Wuxiaworld translator clearly prioritised cultural authenticity and consistency over seamless naturalisation. This approach has paid off in fostering a devoted international readership that actively engages with Xia culture on the story's own

terms. Readers by and large reported high levels of enjoyment and could follow the complex plots of AWE and ISSH despite the cultural distance. The standard terminology, much like a scaffold, gave them footholds to grasp concepts like immortality, sect hierarchy, or martial arts philosophies that have no easy equivalents in Western fantasy. In fact, many readers indicated that experiencing these novels expanded their interest in Chinese culture – the strange terms and ideas piqued their curiosity rather than repelled them. This suggests that foreignisation, when coupled with thoughtful explanation, can enhance a text's appeal as an exotic novum (Venuti, 1995, p. 20; Chan, 2010). The Xia world comes through as distinct and intriguing precisely because it wasn't fully domesticated. The platform-based standardisation thus facilitates cross-cultural reception by inviting readers into a new conceptual space with guidance.

At the same time, the findings also highlight a subtle cost of this strategy: the translations may encourage a surface understanding that conceals deeper cultural nuances. Readers come to learn the "dictionary" meaning of terms, but not automatically the cultural ethos behind them.

In sum, the standardisation of culture-loaded words on Wuxiaworld has greatly facilitated the transmission of xia culture by making complex Chinese concepts more accessible to Anglophone readers. Consistent terminology and glossaries provided a cultural compass, fostering clarity and continuity. Yet this very process also reshaped authenticity, as readers often reinterpreted terms through their own cultural frames. The result is a dual effect: on the one hand, the translations serve as an entry point where foreign concepts become familiar; on the other, the received text is inevitably transformed by negotiation between translator intent and reader imagination. Venuti (1995, p. 20) reminds us that the goal of foreignisation is to move the reader toward the foreign text, effectively sending them abroad. However, once exposed to the foreign element, readers inevitably interpret it through their own unique lens, thereby charting their own course of understanding. Such meaning shifts echo Escarpit's notion of creative treason (1971, pp. 29–34), where translation and reading are both betrayal and creation. As Chan observes, the hybridity of translated fiction allows it to speak across cultural divides, though always in a modified voice (2010, pp. 1–3; p. 79).

5.7 Conclusion

Chapter 5 has demonstrated that the reception of Deathblade's English Xianxia translations is a dynamic, multilateral process shaped jointly by the diverse readership, their motivations and expectations, the translator's strategic mediation, and the interactive online platform environment. The international, culturally heterogeneous audience drawn to ISSH and AWE brings varied interpretive horizons to these texts. Survey data show that a majority of readers approached the novels for entertainment rather than explicit cultural edification. Consequently, narrative enjoyment often takes precedence, and many readers interpret the story through familiar genre frameworks, consistent with Jauss's reception theory that readers' "horizon of expectations" shapes their understanding (Jauss, 1982, pp. 22-23).

Respondents from Chinese or adjacent cultures tended to recognise classical Xia virtues such as loyalty and righteousness, whereas many English-speaking readers focused more on personal struggle, revenge, or fate, reflecting individualist heroic tropes common in Western fantasy traditions. These reader-initiated reinterpretations illustrate what Xie Tianzhen terms creative treason, whereby the target audience reconfigures the cultural content into more familiar terms, potentially distorting its ethical core. As Xie explains, translation is not a unidirectional transfer but a process shaped by the reader's own knowledge, expectations and cultural background (Xie, 1999, pp. 130-133). In this study, survey responses revealed that certain Xia values, particularly those less prevalent in Western literature, such as self-sacrifice for moral duty or resistance to authority, were frequently under-recognised. In contrast, values that align more closely with Western norms, such as honour in combat or fraternal loyalty, were often highlighted. As Nida (1993, p. 105) argues, cross-cultural communication inevitably confronts divergences in value systems and conceptual presuppositions. These findings confirm that reader reception of Xia culture is an ongoing negotiation between source-text ethics and target-culture interpretive tendencies.

The translator's strategic choices and the affordances of the online platform emerged as key mediating forces. Deathblade adopted a predominantly foreignising approach, preserving culture-loaded concepts through transliteration or literal rendering. This strategy

aligns with Venuti's position that foreignisation can resist the erasure of cultural distinctiveness through excessive domestication (Venuti, 1995, pp. 20-21). However, the translator also provided supportive paratexts such as footnotes and a glossary to aid comprehension. Readers who engaged with these explanatory tools demonstrated a deeper understanding of Xia ethics and cosmology. Conversely, readers who overlooked these aids often interpreted the novels as generic fantasy, using familiar analogies to fill cultural gaps. These included comparisons to Western institutions like Hogwarts or equating cultivation systems with video game mechanics. As Venuti (1995) argues throughout his seminal work, the prevailing fluency in translation domesticates the foreign text, reinforcing dominant cultural values in the target language and effectively "inscribing the foreign text with [target language] values and providing readers with the narcissistic experience of recognizing their own culture in a cultural other" (p. 15). This confirms that without strategies to disrupt this fluency, readers are left to rely solely on their own cultural schemas, often at the expense of the text's intended meaning.

Wuxiaworld played a crucial role in shaping reception. Its serialised, interactive model turned reading into a collective practice, with comment sections, translator–reader exchanges, and forum glossaries enabling clarification and shared learning. This interactive setting fostered a community that reduced misunderstandings and developed common terminologies and interpretive norms, showing how meaning evolved through dialogue among readers, translators, and the platform.

Chapter 5 therefore illustrates that the translation and reception of Xia culture online extend beyond the binary of fidelity and accessibility. They emerge from the interplay of reader agency, translator strategy, cultural proximity, and platform affordances. The notion of creative treason highlights how meaning is reshaped in this environment, while Medio-translatology provides a framework for understanding translation as a culturally embedded, negotiated act. This analysis prepares the ground for the theoretical reflections of the next chapter on how such insights may inform future practice in translating culturally rich narratives.

Chapter VI Conclusion

This study explores the translation of Xia culture in Chinese online novels from the perspective of Medio-translatology, with a particular focus on the Xianxia novels ISSH and AWE, translated by Deathblade. It adopted a mixed-methods approach that combined textual analysis, a reader survey, and a direct interview with the translator. Although these methods are well established in qualitative research, their complementary application to the study of online Chinese novel translation is innovative, since few previous works have integrated translator perspectives with empirical data from readers and digital platforms. This design provides a more nuanced account of translator agency and the reception environment and highlights the value of combining different kinds of evidence when analysing the global circulation of Chinese web fiction. The following conclusion summarises the core findings, outlines the original contributions, reflects on limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

6.1 Research Background and Research Questions

This study investigates the international dissemination of Chinese online literature, with a focus on Xianxia novels, a genre that combines the ethical ideals of Xia culture with Daoist philosophy, supernatural motifs, and fantasy narratives. While such works have gained visibility on global platforms like Wuxiaworld, their transmission remains constrained by linguistic and cultural barriers, raising questions about how their distinctive values can be effectively conveyed to international readers.

Since the 1950s, Chinese literature in translation has had limited impact in global literary markets, reflecting its marginal position compared to the dominance of Western works in China. By contrast, online literature has flourished since the late 1990s, becoming a central strand of contemporary Chinese literary production and attracting a growing readership worldwide. Yet the internationalisation of Xianxia novels continues to encounter significant challenges, particularly in balancing entertainment-driven storytelling with the communication of cultural and ideological content.

Within this context, the thesis examines Deathblade's translations of Er Gen's ISSH and AWE, the only two Xianxia novels that he has translated to completion on Wuxiaworld.

These works provide a coherent case study through which to analyse how creative treason operates at the levels of translator strategy, reader reception, and digital platforms in the global circulation of Xia culture. The research is guided by four interrelated concerns: the status of Xianxia translation and dissemination pathways, the forms and motivations of translator creative treason, the interpretive tendencies of international readers, and the broader implications for balancing accessibility with cultural fidelity in future translation practice.

6.2 Overview of the Research Approach

The research methodology section is developed based on the theoretical framework of this research, which draws on Medio-translatology, is discussed. Within this framework, this study combines qualitative and quantitative research methods to systematically explore the translation and global dissemination of Deathblade's translations of Xianxia novels. The following provides a detailed explanation of the theoretical framework and research methods.

6.2.1 Theoretical Framework

Medio-translatology is the core theoretical framework of this study. Proposed by Chinese scholar Xie Tianzhen in the 1980s, this approach combines translation studies and comparative literature to examine the role of the medium in the translation process and its cultural adaptability. Medio-translatology is not merely a theory of linguistic conversion; it emphasises that translation is not just the transformation of language but also the re-creation and re-dissemination of culture (Xie, 2011, pp. 10-25). Translation activities should be conducted within a cross-cultural context.

One of the core concepts of Medio-translatology is creative treason—the process in which the translator makes appropriate cultural adjustments and innovations while maintaining the spirit of the original work, ensuring that the translated work can be smoothly integrated into the target culture and accepted. Additionally, in the theory of Medio-translatology, creative treason is not only the translator's responsibility but also involves the influence of readers and the acceptance environment (Xie, 2011, p. 25).

The uniqueness of this theoretical framework lies in its focus not only on the linguistic aspects of translation but also on the cultural turn in translation. Specifically, translation is viewed as a process of cultural reproduction, particularly when there are significant differences between the source and target cultures. In this regard, the translator's strategies for cultural adaptation become crucial. Medio-translatology takes a cross-cultural communication perspective, exploring how translation acts as a cultural mediator, bridging different cultures. It especially examines how translation, in the context of globalisation, can preserve cultural diversity and richness.

Using this theoretical framework, this study focused on cultural adaptability in translation, particularly how CLWs, background knowledge differences and the reading habits of the target culture are handled in the translation process. This provided theoretical support for the analysis of the studied Chinese online translated novels by Deathblade. Medio-translatology was chosen as a theoretical framework for this study because it offers a clear perspective, arguing that translation is not merely a "language" conversion but a process of "cultural" conversion and "cultural conflict resolution".

6.2.2 Research Methods

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, grounded in the theoretical framework of Medio-translatology, which combines qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the translation and reception of Xianxia novels, particularly focusing on the role of creative treason in the transmission of Xia culture.

1. **Qualitative Research Methods**

Qualitative methods are central to this study, particularly for understanding the translator's subjective experience and the cultural mediation involved in the translation process. To gain insights into the translator's strategies, interviews were conducted with Deathblade, the translator of ISSH and AWE. These interviews focused on the translator's decision-making, including their strategies for balancing faithfulness to the original text with cultural adaptation. Special attention was given to how the translator addresses cultural differences, particularly the challenge of translating CLWs and ensuring that the meaning of Xia culture is accurately conveyed to English-speaking readers.

This research also drew heavily on textual analysis. By comparing the original Chinese texts with the English translations, the study examined how translation strategies—such as semantic shifts, structural modifications and paratextual additions (for example, footnotes, glosses)—function as tools for cultural adaptation. The aim was to identify instances of creative treason, both conscious and unconscious and to understand how these strategies influence the overall narrative and cultural transmission.

2. **Quantitative Research Methods**

Quantitative methods were employed through surveys designed to gather feedback from readers on their reception of the translated texts. The survey explored readers' understanding of Xia culture, their acceptance of the translation strategies, and their overall reading experience. By collecting data on readers' preferences and evaluations, the study provided a statistical foundation to validate the qualitative findings and explore the broader reception of the translated works.

The survey concentrated on three interrelated dimensions: 1. readers' expectations when approaching translated Xianxia novels; 2. their ability to understand and engage with Xia culture in the translations; 3. their preferences regarding translation strategies and their evaluation of the translator's adaptations. The quantitative data also offered insights into the extent to which readers accepted or rejected the translator's creative treason, thus providing empirical evidence on the cultural and narrative impact of the translation.

3. **Integration of Research Methods**

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the translation process. While the qualitative methods offered an in-depth exploration of the translator's strategies and decisions, the quantitative data provided empirical evidence on how readers responded to these adaptations. In addition, the study examined the role of the online platform as part of the reception environment, highlighting how mechanisms such as serialised release, comment spaces and glossaries shaped the circulation and interpretation of Xianxia translations.

These strands complemented each other by addressing the production side (translator decisions), the reception side (reader feedback), and the mediating function of the digital platform. This integrated approach enabled the study to move beyond theoretical discussions of creative treason, providing tangible evidence of how the translation of Xia

culture is negotiated, disseminated and reinterpreted across different cultural contexts. By bringing together these perspectives, the study offers a more comprehensive account of the translation process, from the translator's initial choices to the interactive reception of the translated works within global online communities.

4. Relationship Between Theoretical Framework and Research Methods

The theoretical framework of Medio-translatology provided the foundation for the methodological choices in this study. As Guo (2017, p. 6) observes, Medio-translatology does not primarily aim to establish translation norms but focuses on translation as part of wider literary and cultural interaction, particularly dissemination, influence and reception. This orientation guided the use of qualitative methods, such as textual analysis and the translator interview, to explore how cultural adaptation and creative treason emerged in the English versions of ISSH and AWE.

At the same time, the framework also supported the inclusion of quantitative evidence. The reader questionnaire generated structured data on how Anglophone audiences engaged with Xia culture and responded to translation strategies. Creswell (2014, p. 4) explains that mixed methods allow researchers to combine qualitative depth with quantitative measurement, thereby capturing different dimensions of a single research problem. In this study, the integration of both approaches linked translator agency, reader interpretation, and the mediating role of the online platform. This alignment between theory and method not only highlighted cultural adaptation as a conceptual concern but also anchored it in empirical evidence, offering a comprehensive account of how Xia culture is transmitted and reinterpreted in global online literature..

6.3 Core Findings

The study answers the four research questions raised in the following aspects.

Question 1: What is the current status of the translation and dissemination of Chinese online Xianxia novels, and how does the reception environment influence the understanding of cultural elements in these works?

The study demonstrates that Chinese online literature, particularly Xianxia, has expanded from a domestic phenomenon to a global cultural force. Platforms like Wuxiaworld have been instrumental in this global dissemination, where its serialisation

model, standardised glossaries, and translator–reader interaction create a distinctive reception environment. These elements not only provide essential cultural references for readers but also foster a shared understanding of Xia culture. Despite the lowering of comprehension barriers through glossaries and annotations, readers, influenced by their cultural backgrounds, often reinterpret the text. This leads to a form of creative treason at the reader level, where the original meaning undergoes transformation based on individual interpretations, thus highlighting the interactive and dynamic nature of translation within a global community.

Question 2: What forms of creative treason are manifested in the translation of Xianxia novels by Deathblade, and what are the reasons behind these choices?

The study categorises Deathblade's translation deviations into two distinct types: unconscious creative treason and conscious creative treason. Unconscious deviations result from linguistic and cultural gaps, where the translator's language habits or lack of cultural knowledge lead to subtle shifts in meaning, such as mistranslation of CLWs or narrative simplifications. In contrast, conscious creative treason reflects purposeful decisions made by the translator to enhance the readability and accessibility of the text for the target audience. Thematic analysis of Deathblade's interview reveals that his primary motivations—spreading Chinese fantasy globally, maximising reader enjoyment, and clarifying unfamiliar concepts—drive these choices. These strategies reflect a balance between the translation's cultural authenticity and the needs of the English-speaking audience, with both forms of creative treason shaping the final outcome.

Question 3: How do English-speaking readers interpret the cultural elements of Xia culture in these translations, and how do their expectations influence their understanding of these elements?

Given the exploratory nature of the reader survey and the qualitative analysis of platform discourse, the study offers nuanced insights into how English-speaking readers interpret Xia culture in the translations. While the sample size is too small to generalise findings, the results underscore that readers actively reshape the cultural concepts presented in the novels based on their own expectations and cultural frames. The study finds that certain deviations from the original text—far from being "errors"—serve to engage readers, sparking curiosity and fostering deeper interest in Xia culture. These

changes encourage discussion about translation strategies, including terminology choices and the role of paratexts. The study indicates that the reader's re-framing process complements the translator's creative decisions, further reinforcing the value of creative treason as a dynamic and interactive aspect of cross-cultural translation.

Question 4: What are the implications of creative treason for translation strategies when conveying culturally rich elements, particularly in Chinese Xianxia novels, and how can future translations better balance accessibility with cultural fidelity?

Based on the above research results, this study provides specific suggestions for the best practices in translating fantasy novels. Terminology should be standardised: key terms related to cultivation, sects, and other cultural concepts should have consistent English equivalents or transliterations, ideally compiled into a shared glossary. Paratextual interventions are critical: footnotes, in-text glosses, and appendices should be used to explain culture-loaded terms and value-laden concepts that lack direct equivalents in English. These interventions preserve the core values of Xia culture while preventing excessive domestication of the text. To balance accessibility with cultural fidelity, future translations should use targeted paratexts, avoid over-simplification, and calibrate their approaches based on reader feedback within a serialised medium. Creative treason, when managed effectively, can enhance both the cultural depth and readability of Xianxia translations, providing a richer experience for the reader without sacrificing the authenticity of the source material.

Having addressed the research questions, the following sections will provide a more detailed analysis of the study's key findings, focusing on how the translator, readers, and online platforms each influence the translation and reception of the works.

6.3.1 Translator's Creative Treason

Through in-depth analysis of the translation strategies employed by the translator Deathblade in ISSH and AWE, along with interviews with the translator, this study reveals how the translator navigates creative treason. While staying faithful to the original cultural content, the translator adapts these works to align better with international readers' cultural understanding. The findings indicate that the translator is not merely a language converter

but also a re-creator of cultural symbols, which highlights the important role of translation in cross-cultural communication. Moreover, the translator's selection of strategies demonstrates their agency in the translation process, with factors such as translation motives, objectives, cultural background, and linguistic context profoundly influencing the form and outcome of their creative treason.

1. Unconscious Creative Treason

The unconscious creative treason by the translator manifests primarily in two areas: the misinterpretation of CLWs and the distortion of narrative structure. This form of "unconscious" creative treason arises from the translator's own language and cultural background, which, while remaining faithful to the original, inevitably leads to creative adjustments of the text. These changes often occur unintentionally, yet they deeply affect the presentation of the translation.

Mistranslation of CLWs: The translator misinterprets many culturally-specific terms from the source language, leading to the distortion or weakening of the original cultural meaning in the translation. Such unconscious deviations can be categorised into various types, including: literal translation that loses the cultural essence, misunderstanding core cultural concepts, replacing unique source culture symbols with familiar target culture imagery, omitting difficult-to-translate cultural elements, incorrectly selecting a word with multiple meanings. These mistranslations reflect gaps in the translator's cross-cultural understanding and the influence of language transfer, which are typical manifestations of unconscious creative treason. While striving to maintain the literal fidelity of the original text without violating syntax, the translator unintentionally sacrifices the deep cultural significance of the source language terms.

Change of narrative structure: Due to differences in linguistic structure and narrative conventions between Chinese and English, the translator unconsciously adjusts some narrative structures. This represents another form of unconscious creative treason. First, the frequent omission of subjects and implicit meanings in Chinese often requires the translator to supply missing information to fit English expression patterns. This supplementation sometimes leads to misunderstandings or changes in the causal relationships within the plot. Second, the translator often fails to elaborate on symbolic phenomena within Chinese cultural contexts, opting for a literal translation that fails to

convey the full cultural meaning. Additionally, culturally rich philosophical imagery is sometimes simplified in the translation. Lastly, to align with the linear narrative preferences in English, the translator restructured certain paragraphs and re-ordered the sequence of events, making the narrative more linear and clear.

These unconscious modifications enhance the clarity and readability of the translation, allowing English-speaking readers to more easily understand the plot. However, they also dilute the subtleties and narrative tension created by the original text's implicit storytelling style, causing subtle shifts in the translation's style.

2. Conscious Creative Treason

In contrast to unconscious deviations, the translator also intentionally adopts a series of creative strategies to moderately adapt the original work to meet cross-cultural communication goals. Deathblade is well aware of the tension between the cultural unfamiliarity of Xianxia themes and readers' expectations. Therefore, he seeks a balance between faithfully conveying the essence of Chinese culture and ensuring that the translation is accessible and fluid. This conscious creative treason primarily manifests in adjustments to the translation strategies for CLWs and the clever use of paratext resources.

(1) Translation Strategies for CLWs

In response to the abundance of unique concepts and terms in Xianxia novels centred on cultivation, the translator consciously applies creative strategies to preserve cultural connotations while ensuring readability for English-speaking audiences. Overall, the translator adopts a principle of primarily foreignisation, supplemented by domestication. The majority of terms are either directly translated or transliterated to maintain their original appearance, allowing target readers to experience the novelty of Eastern terminology. For terms with a higher threshold of understanding, explanatory notes or roughly equivalent concepts from Western culture are employed to facilitate comprehension.

Specifically, for cultivation levels, the translator frequently adopts a combination of literal translation and free translation to convey abstract philosophical ideas. This approach preserves the religious and philosophical essence of the original concept while making it more accessible to English readers. In the case of titles rich in historical and cultural significance, flexible strategies such as direct translation, simplification, and transliteration

are used to avoid potential confusion caused by complex forms of address—though this may result in the loss of character nuances reflected through varied self-references in the source text.

When dealing with terms imbued with mythological elements, moderate domestication is applied by borrowing familiar supernatural concepts from Western culture to assist readers in quickly integrating into the narrative context. For martial arts techniques, the translator primarily employs direct translation to present the literal imagery, encouraging readers to imagine their power. However, for invented or obscure technique names, free translation is selectively used to both reflect the original meaning and enhance the expressive appeal.

Regarding daily artifacts and mystical materials, the translator balances the preservation of cultural atmosphere with reading fluency. Some traditional expressions, such as time-keeping methods, are retained through direct translation to maintain an archaic tone, while overly unfamiliar terms are adapted into more commonly understood expressions.

These deliberate translation choices demonstrate the translator's creative interpretation and re-packaging of CLWs. By employing transliteration combined with annotations, the cultural authenticity of the source text is preserved. Through semantic adjustment and moderate localisation, comprehension barriers are reduced. Consistency in terminology and stylistic coherence further enhances the readability and engagement of the translation. In this process, the translator not only achieves the effective transplantation of cultural symbols into the target text but also shapes a narrative style aligned with the aesthetic expectations of English-speaking readers, thereby exemplifying a proactive practice of creative treason.

(20 Use of Paratexts

In order to further bridge cultural differences and optimise reader comprehension, the translator actively utilises various paratextual strategies to supplement and present the translation, forming a crucial part of the conscious creative treason. This study finds that these paratextual strategies primarily include localisation of cover design, footnotes and annotations, glossaries, and interaction with readers.

Firstly, regarding cover design, the Chinese and English versions adopt entirely different aesthetic strategies. The Chinese original cover is often minimalist and subtle, highlighting the philosophical undertones of the Xianxia genre through ink-wash imagery. In contrast, the English version cover, influenced or designed by the translator, is more direct and visually striking, featuring character scenes and dynamic visual elements aimed at attracting international readers. For instance, the English cover of AWE features an intense battle between cultivation characters, while the English cover of ISSH depicts the protagonist gazing into the distance, with a grand background of classical architecture. These dramatic and fantastical images cater to the Western market's expectations for fantasy genres, helping to lower the entry barrier for unfamiliar cultural content.

Secondly, in terms of footnotes, the translator extensively and cleverly adds explanatory notes to provide cultural information that cannot be directly conveyed in the translation. The footnotes cover explanations of names and places, the origins of idiomatic expressions, the background of specific cultivation concepts, and even brief explanations of certain translation decisions. This ensures that the rich cultural connotations of the original text are not completely lost in translation. Even if readers are unfamiliar with the Chinese cultural context, they can access the necessary background knowledge through the footnotes, allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of the text's meaning. Of course, the extensive use of footnotes may slightly interrupt the immersive reading experience, but the translator considers this an important tool to maintain a balance between faithfulness, expressiveness and clarity.

Next, the translator makes full use of the glossaries and appendices provided by the translation platform and himself to strengthen readers' grasp of the background culture. Using the English serialisation platform Wuxiaworld, the translator, in addition to the general Xianxia glossary, created detailed, exclusive glossaries and character lists for ISSH and AWE, which were included at the end of each volume. These glossaries systematically categorise and explain key terms, such as main characters, sect systems, Xia techniques, and magical treasures. This helps readers navigate the complex world-building in the novels. In this way, the translator provides a self-guided cultural reference outside the text: on one hand, it allows readers to easily look up unfamiliar concepts, reducing confusion;

on the other hand, it ensures consistency and accuracy in the translation, enhancing the coherence of the reading experience.

In summary, the integrated use of cover design, footnotes, glossaries, and interaction with readers through paratextual strategies greatly mitigates the limitations of pure textual translation in cross-cultural dissemination. These strategies reflect the translator's conscious creative treason: enhancing the work's appeal to foreign readers through multimodal approaches, while preserving and conveying the cultural symbols and meanings of the original text to the greatest extent possible.

3. Causes of Creative Treason

The formation of the translator's creative treason is not accidental but is the result of multiple interacting factors. Through in-depth interviews with translator Deathblade and Thematic Analysis of his work, this study further reveals the main reasons driving the translator's unconscious and conscious creative deviations.

Firstly, differences in language structures and cultural contexts form significant objective causes of unconscious creative treason. The differences between Chinese and English in grammar, reference modes, and narrative styles compel the translator to make certain adjustments, such as supplementing implied information and clarifying ambiguous references, as discussed earlier. These adjustments made to conform to English norms unintentionally alter some of the original text's meaning. Similarly, due to significant cultural differences between China and the West, many Chinese cultural symbols lack equivalents in the target language, and the translator is more likely to misinterpret or simplify these elements, leading to a loss of cultural meaning.

Secondly, the translator's personal cultural background and knowledge base directly influence his translation decisions and misinterpretation tendencies. Deathblade, as an American translator, though proficient in Chinese, grew up in a Western cultural environment, which inevitably influences his translation of Xianxia novel. Certain deeply rooted Chinese concepts (such as metaphysical allusions or the meanings of rituals) may be misunderstood or overlooked due to gaps in the translator's knowledge. At the same time, his intuitive use of English and established translation routines may unconsciously dominate phrasing, leading to subtle divergences from the source text. This reflects what Chesterman (1997, p. 90) describes as "translation habits", where repeated patterns and

preferred linguistic choices shape a translator's style. In the Chinese context, Wang (2003, p. 15) similarly refers to 翻译习惯 ("habitual translation"), noting that long-term linguistic habits can influence the translator's rendering and sometimes produce deviations from the original.

Thirdly, the translator's motivation and strategic orientation as subjective factors guide the occurrence of conscious creative treason. The interviews reveal that Deathblade has a strong desire for cross-cultural communication and a reader-oriented mindset. He hopes that through translation, more international readers will come to understand and appreciate Xia culture. This motivation drives him to actively adjust the text to improve readability and expand its audience. For example, he focuses on the smoothness of the reader's experience, rewriting or adding annotations to sections that may seem obscure to international readers. He also considers that online readers prefer more intuitive and straightforward narrative rhythms, so he consciously smooths out the narrative structure of certain chapters, making the plot easier to follow. Additionally, the translator's pursuit of high translation quality and professional responsibility encourages him to continually reflect on and improve his translation strategies, ensuring the story's appeal while striving to preserve cultural authenticity.

Finally, reader expectations and the nature of the medium also shape the translator's creative treason. In the context of online serialisation and the global reader market, the translator must balance commercial readability with cultural fidelity. This external pressure may strengthen his tendency to consciously rewrite sections. international readers generally prefer clear and straightforward narratives, with a full, coherent logic, and have limited tolerance for entirely unfamiliar cultural concepts. Thus, the translator tends to use the aforementioned strategies to lower the cultural reading threshold and align with the psychological expectations of the audience.

In conclusion, the translator's creative treason is the result of a complex interplay of internal and external factors: both the rigid linguistic and cultural differences between the source and target languages and the softer driving forces of the translator's individual knowledge background and translation philosophy. Unconscious deviations often arise from misunderstandings or habitual expressions in the language conversion process, while conscious adaptations reflect strategic choices based on translation goals and audience

needs. These factors collectively determine when and to what extent the translator deviates from the original text, reflecting the balancing act between faithfulness to the original and flexibility in adaptation.

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive and in-depth empirical explanation of the translator's creative treason, offering original contributions both theoretically and practically. On one hand, by conducting a detailed analysis of the entire process of the English translator's adaptation of Chinese Xianxia online literature, this study enriches the concept of creative treason. The analysis of translation examples highlights the unconscious errors and conscious adaptations and their specific characteristics, offering a fresh case study for translation research, particularly in the handling of CLWs and paratextual support. On the other hand, through interviews with the translator and Thematic Analysis, this study deeply explores the underlying mechanisms behind creative treason, a perspective that has been insufficiently addressed in previous research. The results show that the translator is not only a transmitter of cultural information but also an active reconstructor: influenced by his bilingual background and the expectations of the target audience, he makes creative choices in translation to achieve a re-interpretation and transmission of cultural symbols in heterogeneous cultures. This finding is enlightening for translation theory—it underscores the value of the translator's subjectivity in cross-cultural text production, suggesting that in translation, "fidelity" is not passive reproduction but a balanced art of creativity. In conclusion, the core findings of Chapter four not only deepen our understanding of cultural variation in literary translation but also provide theoretical guidance for exploring how translators can more effectively convey cultural imagery, offering valuable insights for both translation practice and cross-cultural communication research.

6.3.2 Creative Treason in the Reception Environment

This study incorporates both the recipient of the translation (the reader) and the dissemination medium (online platforms) into the research framework of creative treason, offering an in-depth analysis of the recreation process of Xia culture within the reception environment of the translated work. Guided by the perspective of Medio-translatology, this study argues that the construction of meaning in translation is not solely the result of the

translator's actions, but the outcome of an interaction between the translator, the reader, and the platform. Thus, this study also focuses on the creative "reinterpretation" by target-language readers and the role of online platforms, represented by Wuxiaworld, in the publication and communication of translations. It comprehensively reveals how creative treason in the reception environment impacts the cross-cultural dissemination of Xia CLWs and their cultural connotations in the English translations of ISSH and AWE.

1. Readers' Creative Treason

(1) Motivations and backgrounds

Findings in this subsection come from a limited-sample survey and are presented as exploratory. They are read together with the textual analysis and the translator interview so that the methods complement one another rather than claim statistical generalisation.

The survey responses highlight how differences in reader motivation shaped the reception of Xianxia translations. Of the 24 participants, 10 (42%) described entertainment as their primary motivation, with 4 emphasising interest in character development and relationships, and 7 drawn to the distinctive appeal of fantasy adventures. A smaller group of 3 readers (12%) expressed cultural curiosity, approaching the texts with the intention of engaging with Chinese culture and worldviews. These contrasting motivations generated distinct expectations: those who read for entertainment were generally more accepting of adaptations that enhanced fluency, while culturally curious readers placed greater emphasis on authenticity and were inclined to reinterpret the translations through their own knowledge frameworks. Taken together, these tendencies illustrate how the "horizon of expectations" (Jauss, 1982, p. 23) functions in practice: prior cultural and literary experience guided how readers interpreted the texts, either by smoothing cultural detail into familiar genre conventions or by actively seeking to uncover the deeper values associated with Xia.

(2) Active reinterpretation of CLWs

The study shows that readers frequently engaged in active reinterpretation of CLWs, adjusting meanings when translations appeared redundant, ambiguous, or overly literal. This tendency was evident in their preference for smoothing awkward phrasing, clarifying semantic ambiguities, and mentally replacing terms that felt culturally misaligned.

Such behaviour demonstrates that reception is not passive but involves reader-centred creative treason. Within the framework of Medio-translatology, these reinterpretations reflect how cultural concepts are renegotiated in the target environment. The findings confirm that the translated text ultimately acquires meaning through the combined agency of translator and reader, illustrating both the adaptability of Xianxia and the decisive role of its international audience in shaping cross-cultural transmission.

(3) Uneven susceptibility across CLWs

Not all CLWs trigger reinterpretation to the same degree. This study categorised four types were especially prone to reader reworking: over-literal or unnatural renderings, culture-specific notions without clear English equivalents, sect titles and hierarchical ranks and poetic or imagistic expressions. These items tended to feel either opaque or under-expressive in English, prompting readers to draw analogies, negotiate meanings in comments, or recalibrate terms against familiar genre frames. In Venuti's terms, foreignising choices "send the reader abroad", but readers then chart their own route through the text (1995, p. 20).

(4) Preferences for translation strategies (CLWs)

Because the survey is limited in size, the figures are not generalisable and are presented as exploratory indications rather than population estimates. Within this sample, a sizeable share of respondents expressed conditional openness to adaptive strategies for CLWs, while a smaller portion preferred minimal or no adaptation. This tendency suggests that readers do not demand absolute consistency in strategy but value a balanced approach that negotiates between cultural authenticity and readability.

These findings correspond to the earlier analysis of translator-initiated creative treason, where strategic departures from the source text were shown to be motivated by the need to make Xianxia intelligible to an international audience. The fact that readers explicitly endorse a flexible or adaptive approach confirms that such creative choices are not only justified but also welcomed. It further explains why Deathblade's translations, characterised by clarity, consistency and selective annotation, have attracted sustained appreciation: they align with the expectations of readers who desire both immersion in an unfamiliar cultural world and a manageable reading experience.

In broader terms, this outcome reinforces the significance of Medio-translatology's reception dimension. The translator's success is not solely a matter of textual fidelity but also of responding to the interpretive horizon of the audience. The interplay between translator strategy and reader preference demonstrates how creative treason operates as a reciprocal process, enabling Xianxia novel to circulate successfully across cultural boundaries. Although limited in scope, these figures are valuable because empirical studies of CLWs in the reception of Xianxia translation remain scarce. The findings complement the textual analysis and translator interview, together illustrating how creative treason is negotiated through translator decisions, reader expectations, and the affordances of the online platform.

2. The Role of online platforms

The reception of translated Chinese Xianxia novels is fundamentally mediated by their digital ecosystem, with platforms like Wuxiaworld serving as critical sites for cultural negotiation. Serialised publication, characterised by real-time chapter updates, proved instrumental in cultivating sustained reader engagement; over half the surveyed audience discovered the works through this model, with one American participant noting weekly updates had become a habitual practice. This framework, coupled with multilingual dissemination (spanning English, Turkish, and beyond), facilitated global access yet revealed audience stratification: Sinophone readers largely preferred originals, while translations catered to distinct cross-cultural needs.

Crucially, Wuxiaworld's interactive architecture catalysed dynamic collaboration between translators and readers. Community forums enabled real-time discourse on translation strategies, with approximately 63.2% of respondents utilising glossaries refined through collective feedback. Translators iteratively adjusted renderings demonstrating how serialisation allows for responsive equilibria between domestication and foreignisation. This co-creative process enhanced textual clarity and cultural resonance, reflected in 84% of readers rating translations as "good" or "excellent". The platform further reinforced translator authority through institutional mechanisms like annual awards (for example, Deathblade's 2023 accolade), fostering reader trust and incentivising close textual engagement.

However, this very infrastructure also precipitated subtle forms of cultural reinterpretation. While glossaries standardised terms and reduced comprehension barriers, they risked oversimplifying complex concepts. Readers ungrounded in Daoist cosmology often assimilated such imagery into familiar fantasy paradigms. This exemplifies creative treason in the reception environment: despite translators' contextual scaffolding, readers inevitably reframed cultural signifiers through personal cognitive lenses.

Theoretically, online platforms thus extend Medio-translatology by revealing translation as a tripartite hermeneutic process. Meaning emerges not through unilateral transfer but via continuous negotiation between translator, reader, and platform. Reader motivation further mediated this dynamic: those prioritising entertainment accepted strategic adaptations favouring narrative coherence, while culturally-oriented readers actively supplemented translations to probe deeper significances. Consequently, platforms like Wuxiaworld transcend mere distribution channels; they function as participatory spaces where cultural narratives are simultaneously transmitted, contested, and remade—a fertile ground for examining how technology reshapes cross-cultural literary exchange.

6.4 Original Contributions

6.4.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study represents a theoretical breakthrough by applying and expanding the framework of Medio-translatology to the field of Chinese online literature. Traditional translation research often focuses on linguistic equivalence and fidelity, whereas this research adopts a Medio-translatology perspective, emphasising the role of translation as a cultural transformation intermediary.

The analysis of Deathblade's translations demonstrates that creative treason is a necessary strategy for bridging the cultural gap between traditional Chinese and Western narrative conventions. This application not only clarifies the role of the translator as a cultural intermediary but also argues that a certain degree of deviation in translation holds both inevitability and positive significance in international cultural exchange, challenging traditional notions of translation fidelity.

Additionally, this study contributes to the field by clarifying the boundaries of the concept of creative treason. It suggests that creative treason should not be automatically

regarded as a betrayal of the source text; rather, it is a subtle process of selective adjustment that preserves the essence of the original work while adapting it to global readers' aesthetic needs. This reinterpretation expands academic discussions on translation ethics and aesthetics, offering new insights into how cultural elements can be transformed without sacrificing their intrinsic value.

6.4.2 Methodological Contributions

Methodologically, this study demonstrates the value of combining quantitative and qualitative approaches in examining the cross-cultural transmission of Xianxia novel. The integration of a reader survey, close textual analysis, and an interview with the translator has enabled a multi-layered perspective on the phenomenon of creative treason. While the survey was modest in scale, it provided indicative evidence of readers' expectations and their attitudes towards translation strategies, offering empirical support that complements the more interpretive dimensions of the research.

The qualitative analyses, including textual and interview-based, added necessary depth, showing how translation decisions were made and how they resonated within the socio-digital environment of reception. This dual approach clarifies the relationship between translator agency and reader response, highlighting how cultural adaptation and interpretive practices intersect in shaping the reception of Xia culture. By linking empirical data with contextualised analysis, the study not only enhances the credibility of its findings but also offers a methodological model for future research on the translation of culturally complex literary genres, where the perspectives of both producers and audiences must be considered together.

6.4.3 Practical Contributions

From a practical perspective, this study provides insights that may be of value to translators and cultural intermediaries working with culturally dense texts such as Xianxia novel. By examining the rationale behind Deathblade's strategies, the research illustrates how translators can balance readability with cultural integrity, showing that literal accuracy alone is insufficient when dealing with terms and values without direct equivalents. The findings suggest that sensitivity to both source and target cultural frameworks, supported

by selective annotation and consistent terminology, can enhance accessibility without erasing cultural specificity.

For online platforms and publishers, the study highlights the importance of supporting translation practices that acknowledge reader expectations while maintaining cultural nuance. In the digital environment where interaction and feedback shape reception, providing tools such as glossaries, paratextual notes, and interactive spaces can help readers navigate cultural complexity and deepen engagement. In this way, the research demonstrates how translation, as a mediatory practice, can facilitate cultural exchange and sustain the global circulation of Chinese online literature. Rather than claiming universality, the study points to the practical conditions under which Xianxia translations are more likely to achieve both reader acceptance and cultural resonance.

6.5 Research Limitations

6.5.1 Limitations of Samples and Data

Despite employing a multi-faceted research approach, certain limitations remain. First, the study concentrates on the translations of two Xianxia novels by Deathblade. While these works are influential and representative of the genre's global reach, they cannot capture the full variety of strategies employed by other translators or the range of textual styles across Chinese online literature. This necessarily limits the generalisability of the findings, as patterns of creative treason may vary with different translators, texts, or readerships.

Second, the reader survey, although providing valuable empirical evidence, was based on a relatively small number of responses. The dataset offers indicative rather than generalisable results, meaning that the preferences and interpretive tendencies identified should be read as exploratory insights rather than definitive claims about the wider Anglophone readership. Nevertheless, when combined with textual analysis and the translator interview, the survey data enrich the overall picture by highlighting recurring tendencies and illustrating how readers engage with CLWs in practice.

6.5.2 Methodological Limitations

Although the mixed-method approach is robust, challenges remain. The quantitative survey, though extensive, relies on self-reported data that may be influenced by response bias. The

qualitative interviews, while insightful, have a relatively small sample size, which may affect the depth and representativeness of the findings. Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution, and further research is needed to verify the observed trends.

6.5.3 Theoretical Limitations

While the application of Medio-translatology enriches the theoretical framework, it also presents limitations. As this theory is primarily rooted in Chinese academic traditions, its conceptual nuances may not fully align with Western theoretical paradigms. This potential divergence in interpretative frameworks may present challenges when applying the findings to the broader field of global Translation Studies. This study calls for the development of an integrated framework that can reconcile different perspectives while preserving the unique insights offered by Medio-translatology.

Reflecting on these limitations, this study acknowledges the inherent complexity of the translation process, especially when dealing with culturally dense texts like Xianxia novels. The balance between preserving cultural authenticity and ensuring readability is delicate and difficult to measure. Nevertheless, acknowledging these challenges enriches academic discourse and paves the way for future theoretical and practical advancements.

6.6 Future Research Directions

This study has provided exploratory insights into the translation and reception of Xia culture through the lens of Medio-translatology, but its scope also points to avenues for further investigation.

6.6.1 Comparative Translator Corpus

One important next step is to move beyond a single-translator focus. While Deathblade's work offers a coherent case for analysis, future research should include other translators to test whether the patterns observed here are distinctive or more widely shared. A comparative design could, for instance, examine Deathblade alongside Etvolare.[1] Analysing 2–3 novels by each translator would create a balanced corpus in which

[1] Etvolare, a leading female translator on Wuxiaworld known for works such as *Sovereign of the Three Realms* and *Unrivaled Tang Sec.*

differences in strategy, style, and reader reception could be systematically compared, revealing how individual habitus and cultural background shape creative treason.

6.6.2 Parallel Corpus Development

To address methodological limits, a parallel corpus of 4-6 Xianxia novels should be developed. Aligning source texts with their English translations would enable both qualitative close reading and quantitative analysis of key CLWs, stylistic tendencies, and shifts in narrative structure. Such a corpus would not only strengthen the validity of claims about translation strategies but also provide a replicable resource for future scholarship in Chinese online literature translation.

6.6.3 Expanded Reception Research

The modest scale of the reader survey in this study provided only indicative results. Future research should aim for a larger sample of 100–150 responses, supplemented by data from online forums and reader commentaries. Combining structured questionnaires with naturally occurring discourse would produce a more robust account of how readers interpret cultural elements in practice. This would also allow for finer-grained comparisons across demographic groups and interpretive communities, refining our understanding of reader-initiated creative treason.

6.6.4 Research Plan and Feasibility

A practical timeline for such a project could extend over 18 months: six months for corpus construction and preliminary textual analysis, six months for data collection through surveys and forum analysis, and six months for synthesis and writing. This staged design balances depth with feasibility, ensuring that future studies can address the current limitations while building a richer comparative framework.

6.6.5 Theoretical Development

Finally, future research should also consider how these empirical expansions can contribute to theoretical refinement. Applying Medio-translatology to a multi-translator corpus and an enlarged reader base would test its explanatory power beyond a single case

study, clarifying how the framework can accommodate cross-cultural reception in digital environments. At the same time, integrating insights from reception theory and polysystem theory could situate Medio-translatology within a broader disciplinary dialogue, ensuring that its distinctive concepts—such as creative treason—remain relevant to global translation studies while retaining their Chinese scholarly origins.

This study has examined the translation of Chinese Xianxia novels as a form of cultural mediation, focusing on how creative treason operates across translator choices, reader reception, and the wider digital environment. The analysis of ISSH and AWE demonstrates that translation is not a straightforward act of linguistic transfer but a negotiated process in which cultural meaning is both preserved and reshaped. Deathblade's strategies show how accessibility and narrative fluency can open Chinese cultural material to international audiences, yet they also highlight the risk that key values of Xia culture may be simplified or reinterpreted in the process. The findings therefore reinforce the need to balance cultural fidelity with communicative clarity in the global circulation of Chinese literature.

The contributions of this research are threefold. Theoretically, it extends the scope of Medio-translatology by situating creative treason within the reception environment and showing how readers and platforms co-produce meaning. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of combining textual analysis, reader surveys, and translator interviews, which together provide a more layered account than any single method alone. Practically, it offers insight into the challenges faced by translators of culturally dense genres and into the expectations of international readers, providing useful reference points for future translation practice and publishing strategies.

At the same time, the study acknowledges its limits: the reliance on a single translator, a small-scale survey, and a theoretical framework grounded primarily in Chinese scholarship. These constraints remind us that the results should be read as exploratory rather than exhaustive. Yet by highlighting these limits, the research also points towards clear directions for future work, including comparative studies across translators, larger-scale reception research, and the refinement of theoretical models.

Ultimately, this thesis affirms the dual role of translation as both a creative and a mediatory act. It shows how Chinese Xianxia novel, when carried across languages and

cultures, becomes part of a wider literary dialogue that both connects and transforms. In an age where online platforms accelerate the global dissemination of Chinese literature, the insights offered here provide a foundation for continued exploration of how cultural narratives are negotiated, reimagined, and sustained through translation.

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Appendix A: Application For Ethical Approval

Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

PG2 / E1 FORM

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically. A researcher may not be covered by the University's insurance if ethical approval has not been obtained prior to commencement.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**: "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications". As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the "principal researcher".

Ethical approval is not required for routine audits, performance reviews, quality assurance studies, testing within normal educational requirements, and literary or artistic criticism.

Please read the notes for guidance before completing ALL sections of the form.

This form must be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity. Please see Checklist for details of process for different categories of application.

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

1	Full Name:		Wei Huang			
2	Tick all boxes that apply:		Member of staff:	☐	Honorary research fellow:	☐
	Undergraduate Student	☐	Taught Postgraduate Student	☐	Postgraduate Research Student	☒

3	Institute/Academic Discipline/Centre:	Institute of Education and Humanities
4	Campus:	Lampeter
5	E-mail address:	2005369@student.uwtsd.ac.uk
6	Contact Telephone Number:	0086-19983396279
	For students:	
7	Student Number:	2005369
8	Programme of Study:	Professional Doctorate in English Language Education and English Literature
9	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Genevoix Nana, Sarah Reynolds

SECTION B: Approval for Research Activity

1	Has the research activity received approval in principle? (please check the Guidance Notes as to the appropriate approval process for different levels of research by different categories of individual)		**YES**	☒	**NO**	☐
					Date	
2	If Yes, please indicate source of approval (and date where known): ***Approval in principle must be obtained from the relevant source prior to seeking ethical approval***	Research Degrees Committee		☒	**12/05/2022**	
		Institute Research Committee		☐		
		Other (write in)		☐		

SECTION C: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

	Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, location-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines. You may add rows to this table if needed.	
1	**UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice**	☒
2	**UWTSD Research Data Management Policy**	☒
3	*[List any other relevant documents here]*	☐

SECTION D: External Collaborative Research Activity
If there are external collaborators then you should gain consent from the contact persons to share their personal data with the university. If there are no external collaborators then leave this section blank and continue to section E.

1	Institution					
2	Contact person name					
3	Contact person e-mail address					
4	Is your research externally funded?		**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
5	Are you in receipt of a KESS scholarship?		**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
6	Are you specifically employed to undertake this research in either a paid or voluntary capacity?	Voluntary	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
7		Employed	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
8	Is the research being undertaken within an existing UWTSD Athrofa Professional Learning Partnership (APLP)?	If YES then the permission question below does not need to be answered.	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
9	Has permission to undertake the research has been provided by the partner organisation?	(If YES attach copy) If NO the application cannot continue	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐

Where research activity is carried out in collaboration with an external organisation

10	Does this organisation have its own ethics approval system?	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☒

	If Yes, please attach a copy of any final approval (or interim approval) from the organisation (this may be a copy of an email if appropriate).

SECTION E: Details of Research Activity

1	Indicative title:	A Study of the Translation of Wuxia Culture in two Chinese Online Novels from a Medio-translatology Perspective		
2	Proposed start date:	1st January 2022	Proposed end date:	31st August 2023
	Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words per section) **Ensure that you write for a <u>Non-Specialist Audience</u> when outlining your response to the points below:** *Purpose of Research Activity* *Proposed Research Question* *Aims of Research Activity* *Objectives of Research Activity* Demonstrate, briefly, how **<u>Existing Research</u>** has informed the proposed activity and explain *What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge* *How it addresses an area of importance.*			
3	**Purpose of Research Activity** Since the 1980s, although the Chinese government have made great efforts to promote the overseas dissemination of Chinese literature, the path of overseas dissemination of Chinese classics has been frequently blocked and has not received the expected popularity due to the huge cultural differences between China and the West, the limited level of translation and the difficulty of spreading a weak culture (Chinese culture) in a strong cultural circle (Western society). However, in recent years, Chinese online novels, especially those with martial arts elements, have been translated overseas through online platforms, generating a welcome for many English-speaking readers. The very different attitudes of Western readers towards the acceptance of officially recommended Chinese classic literature and folk-disseminated online literature are worth pondering. Taking two Chinese online novels popular with Western readers as the object of study, the study of the spread of Chinese online literature in the English-speaking world and the reasons for its acceptance and popularity by Western readers will help to sort out the process of "creative treason" of traditional Chinese culture in cross-cultural communication, clarify the role and influence of translation in the spread of heterogeneous cultures. It will also help to explore strategies for the intercultural transmission of traditional national cultures in literature.			
4	**Research Questions** 1. "I Shall Seal the Heavens" and "Lord of Mysteries", what was the impact and evaluation of these two novels among Western readers? 2. How are the contents of wuxia culture in the novels translated and how do English readers understand the wuxia culture in the two novels? 3. What are the reasons for the popularity of these two novels among English-speaking readers? 4. How do translators from different cultural backgrounds understand and interpret the Wuxia culture in Chinese web novels in English?			
5	**Aims of Research Activity** **The main aim of this study is:** To research the translation of Wuxia culture in the English versions of two online Chinese novels using medio-translatology.			

	To be specific, by studying the translation mode, translation subject, reader subject, dissemination channel and dissemination environment of Chinese online literature overseas and using the theories of cultural discount and cultural proximity, we analyze the phenomenon of overseas readers' understanding and acceptance of wuxia cultural thinking in Chinese online novels and draw a paradigm for the overseas dissemination of Chinese literature that carries classical Chinese traditional culture, so as to promote communication and cooperation between Chinese and Western cultures.
6	**Objectives of Research Activity** **The major objectives of this study aim at:** 1. Gaining insights from analysing the experience of spreading "wuxia" culture in Chinese online literature that could provide an understanding of why Chinese online literature is more popular than canonical literature overseas and impact the ways of spreading classical traditional Chinese culture. 2. Highlighting the similarities and differences between Chinese Wuxia culture and British chivalric culture and documenting the influences on Chinese and English novels (such as chivalric culture and Western Romantic literary trends, Wuxia culture and the plot of class struggle in Chinese literature). 3. Investigating how the cultural imagery in Chinese online literature, such as the "wuxia" culture, is translated and disseminated in the context of Chinese culture and how the "creative treason" (Robert Escarpit, 1987) of "wuxia" culture is realised in translation. 4. Apprehending how Western readers understand the "wuxia" culture in Chinese online literature. 5. Differentiating between the connotation expression of Wuxia culture in Chinese online novels and traditional Chinese wuxia novels. For example, in traditional Chinese martial arts novels, the expression of wuxia culture is more direct and explicit, with the spirit of wuxia often shown through every action of the protagonist himself, whereas the expression of wuxia spirit in online novels is more implicit, running through the narrative structure and plot of the novel. 6. Understanding the extent to which the "creative treason" in the translation of wuxia culture in the two online novels studied departs from or reflects classical Chinese wuxia culture.
	Proposed methods (maximum 600 words) Provide a brief summary of all the methods that **may** be used in the research activity, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed. You do not need to justify the methods here, but should instead describe how you intend to collect the data necessary for you to complete your project.
7	I plan to use two methods in my research activities: a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interview. **I. Questionnaire Survey:** 1. Implementation venue: I will send questionnaires to readers of the novels "I Shall Seal the Heavens" and "Lord of Mysteries" on Wuxia world and webnovel, two of the most internationally influential online literary sites, through forums, chat groups, in-site letters and emails. 2. Interviewees: Approximately 50 online readers will be sampled based on their reviews of "I Shall Seal the Heavens" and "Lord of Mysteries". 3. Questionnaire content: age, gender, nationality, occupation, education, time spent reading online, reading preferences, evaluation of the content and translation of the two novels, favourite episodes (famous scenes), understanding of Wuxia culturally load words in the novels, understanding of Wuxia culture, and so on. In this research activity, I will respect the interests and needs of the research participants and choose methods of collecting, analysing and presenting the data that are ethical and comply with relevant laws and regulations. I will make it clear to respondents that the purpose of the survey is for academic purposes only and that the data will be stored and cited with the permission of the respondent. No sensitive issues such as personal privacy, politics or religion will be involved in the questionnaire and only the respondents' screen names will be used when quoting relevant information. Through a questionnaire survey of readers of the two novels, I will analyse the data from the returned questionnaires to profile and categorise the readership of Chinese online literature with Wuxia culture

	and to qualitatively evaluate the results and impact of the "creative treason" of Wuxia culture in online literature in cross-cultural communication. **II. Semi-structured interview** 1. Implementation venue: network video conference 2. Interviewee: Deathblade (American), the English translator of "I Shall Seal the Heavens" and Cktalon (Chinese-singaporean), the English translator of "Lord of Mysteries". 3. Interview content: understanding of the novel, translation style of the novel, difficulties in novel translation, understanding of wuxia culture, translation strategies of wuxia culturally loaded words, etc. 4 Thinking ahead: Should any of the English translators of the two web novels be unavailable for a videoconferencing interview, I would record the questions and send them to them by mail with an enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope so that they could provide their answers through recording or in writing. In this research activity, I will respect the interests and needs of the research participants and choose methods of collecting, analysing and presenting the data that are ethical and comply with relevant laws and regulations. I will make it clear to the interviewees that the purpose of the interview is for academic purposes only and that the interview data will be stored and quoted with the permission of the interviewees. The interviews will not involve sensitive issues such as personal privacy, politics and religion and I will avoid using the interviewees' real names when quoting relevant information. Through the interviews with the translators of the two novels, I will analyse the interview information. The process of "creative treason" in the cross-cultural transmission of Wuxia culture and the influence of the translators' cultural background on the "creative treason" in the translation of the novels will be analysed. For both the questionnaire and the interview, participants' informed consent will be obtained prior to data collection.
	Location of research activity
8	Online 1. Questionnaire Survey: On the Website: Wuxia World and webnovel **2.** Semi-structured Interview: Teams or Zoom
	Research activity outside of the UK If research activity will take place overseas, you are responsible for ensuring that local ethical considerations are complied with and that the relevant permissions are sought. Specify any local guidelines (e.g. from local professional associations/learned societies/universities) that exist and whether these involve any ethical stipulations beyond those usual in the UK (provide details of any licenses or permissions required). Also specify whether there are any specific ethical issues raised by the local context in which the research activity is taking place, for example, particular cultural and/or legal sensitivities or vulnerabilities of participants. If you live in the country where you will do the research then please state this.
9	This research activity will be conducted by me using internet technology within mainland China, and I will ensure that this research activity is in line with Chinese ethical considerations, complies with Chinese laws and regulations relating to research ethics and does not involve religious, political, culturally specific or other sensitive content. *(this box should expand as you type)*

10	Use of documentation not in the public domain: Are any documents **NOT** publicly available?	**NO**	☒
		YES	☐
11	If Yes, please provide details here of how you will gain access to specific documentation that is not in the public domain and that this is in accordance with the current data protection law of the country in question and that of England and Wales.		

	(this box should expand as you type)

	Does your research relate to one or more of the seven aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?	**YES**	**NO**
12	A prosperous Wales	☐	☒
13	A resilient Wales	☐	☒
14	A healthier Wales	☐	☒
15	A more equal Wales	☐	☒
16	A Wales of cohesive communities	☐	☒
17	A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	☐	☒
18	A globally responsible Wales	☐	☒
19	If YES to any of the above, please give details:		
	(this box should expand as you type)		

SECTION F: Scope of Research Activity

	Will the research activity include:	**YES**	**NO**
1	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☒	☐
2	Use of interviews?	☒	☐
3	Use of focus groups?	☐	☒
4	Use of participant diaries?	☐	☒
5	Use of video or audio recording?	☒	☐
6	Use of computer-generated log files?	☐	☒
7	Participant observation with their knowledge?	☐	☒
8	Participant observation without their knowledge?	☐	☒
9	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	☐	☒
10	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	☐	☒
11	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	☐	☒
12	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	☐	☒
13	Use of procedures that involve deception?	☐	☒
14	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	☐	☒
15	Working with live vertebrate animals?	☐	☒
16	Procedures that may have a negative impact on the environment?	☐	☒

17	Other primary data collection methods. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) below.	☐	☒
	(this box should expand as you type)		

If NO to every question, then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and **may** be exempt from **some** of the following sections (please refer to Guidance Notes).

If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.

SECTION G: Intended Participants

If there are no participants then do not complete this section, but go directly to section H.

	Who are the intended participants:	**YES**	**NO**
1	Students or staff at the University?	☐	☒
2	Adults (over the age of 18 and competent to give consent)?	☒	☐
3	Vulnerable adults?	☐	☒
4	Children and Young People under the age of 18? (Consent from Parent, Carer or Guardian will be required)	☐	☒
5	Prisoners?	☐	☒
6	Young offenders?	☐	☒
7	Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator or a gatekeeper?	☐	☒
8	People engaged in illegal activities?	☐	☒
9	Others. Please indicate the participants below, and specifically any group who may be unable to give consent.	☐	☒
	Details of any other participant groups: (this box should expand as you type)		

	Participant numbers and source Provide an estimate of the expected number of participants. How will you identify participants and how will they be recruited?	
10	How many participants are expected?	50 *(this box should expand as you type)*
11	Who will the participants be?	online literature readers *(this box should expand as you type)*
12	How will you identify the participants?	1. I will sample them based on the reviews that they have made after reading the two online novels that I am researching. 2. Contact with respondents to the questionnaire will be done using forums, chat groups, in-site letters and emails as they are users of these online literary forums. *(this box should expand as you type)*

	Information for participants:	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**

13	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	☒	☐	☐
14	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	☒	☐	☐
15	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	☒	☐	☐
16	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	☐	☐	☒
17	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	☐	☐	☒
18	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	☒	☐	☐
19	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	☒	☐	☐
20	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	☒	☐	☐
21	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation, in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken?	☒	☐	☐
22	If NO to any of above questions, please give an explanation			
	(this box should expand as you type)			

	Information for participants:	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**
24	Will participants be paid?	☐	☒	☐
25	Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	☐	☒	☐
26	Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	☐	☒	☐
27	Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	☐	☒	☐
28	If YES to any question, please provide full details			
	(this box should expand as you type)			

SECTION H: Anticipated Risks

	Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them. If you have completed a full risk assessment (for example as required by a laboratory, or external research collaborator) you may append that to this form.		
1	**Full risk assessment completed and appended?**	**Yes**	☐
		No	☒
2	**Risks to participants** For example: sector-specific health & safety, emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information		
	Risk to participants: Emotional distress *(this box should expand as you type)*	*How you will mitigate the risk to participants:* Participants will not be compelled in any way to take part in the study or answer questions. If for any reason participants were to become emotional during the study process, I would stop and give them time to settle and if need be,	

		reschedule the research activity with their consent. I would also contact, with participants' consent, emotional distress organizations such as Samaritans, Mind or Shout Crisis Text Line in the UK. *(this box should expand as you type)*
3	If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities	
	At the beginning of the interview, I will inform participants of the possible existence of some questions which may seem upsetting to them. They can refuse to answer the questions and withdraw from the research activity at any time. *(this box should expand as you type)*	
4	**Risks to the investigator** For example: personal health & safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest	
	Risk to the investigator: 1. Not being aware of my own bias Due to the different cultural backgrounds between me and the participants, my personal bias may affect the research results in this research activity 2. Not enough outcome the questionnaire or interview may not produce enough results *(this box should expand as you type)*	*How you will mitigate the risk to the investigator:* 1. I will learn more about Western culture and society before conducting interviews and questionnaires to understand my own biases and be well prepared for cross-cultural communication so that I can be as neutral and unbiased as possible in my questioning and information gathering. 2. Prepare well in advance by contacting more readers and translators. *(this box should expand as you type)*
5	**University/institutional risks** For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection	
	Risk to the University: If I fail to carry out the research activities successfully, I will not be able to collect key data in my thesis, and then, I will not be able to complete the thesis and graduate successfully. *(this box should expand as you type)*	*How you will mitigate the risk to the University:* I will develop an implementation plan for the research activities, familiarize myself with the relevant processes and prepare the relevant materials required for the research activities in advance. In conducting research activities, I will complete each task in strict accordance with the time frame to ensure the smooth running of the research activities. *(this box should expand as you type)*
6	**Environmental risks** For example: accidental spillage of pollutants, damage to local ecosystems	
	Risk to the environment: Because all my questionnaires and interviews are done online, there is no risk to the environment *(this box should expand as you type)*	*How you will mitigate the risk to environment:* *(this box should expand as you type)*

	Disclosure and Barring Service

	If the research activity involves children or vulnerable adults, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate must be obtained before any contact with such participants.	YES	NO	N/A
7	Does your research require you to hold a current DBS Certificate?	☐	☒	☐
8	If YES, please give the certificate number. If the certificate number is not available please write "Pending"; in this case any ethical approval will be subject to providing the appropriate certificate number.			

SECTION I: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

1	**Feedback** What de-briefing and feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when?
	After the interview, I will send the interview notes I have recorded back to the interviewees to ensure that they understand every part of the interview notes and ensure the accuracy of the interview notes. With the completion of the research, a short report, on an A4 sheet, outlining the main findings of the study will be presented to participants. The whole research report, the dissertation, will also be available to participants for consultation and approval at the end of the study. *(this box should expand as you type)*
2	**Informed consent** Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before data collection begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded in accordance with prevailing data protection legislation.
	The sampling process of this study is determined by online readers' reviews of the two novels being studied. Prior to their taking part in the research, the online readers and the English translators of the two novels will be contacted and sent a letter seeking their participation in the research and detailing the research protocol with regard to privacy, confidentiality, harm, the right to withdraw from the study and so on for their informed consent. In this research activity, I will respect the interests and needs of the research participants and choose methods of collecting, analysing and presenting the data that are ethical and comply with relevant laws and regulations. I will make it clear to the interviewees that the purpose of the interview is for academic purposes only and that the interview data will be stored and quoted with the permission of the interviewees. The interviews will not involve sensitive issues such as personal privacy, politics and religion and I will avoid using the interviewees' real names when quoting relevant information. *(this box should expand as you type)*
3	**Confidentiality / Anonymity** Set out how anonymity of participants and confidentiality will be ensured in any outputs. If anonymity is not being offered, explain why this is the case.
	Participants' names will not be used in the questionnaire and interview. Instead, they will be anonymised to pseudonyms or attributed codes. For instance, M1 (for male 1) and F1 (for female 1). Also, participants will be made aware that information provided during the interview or in the questionnaire that is likely to identify them will be redacted prior to the submission of the thesis. *(this box should expand as you type)*

SECTION J: Data Protection and Storage

	Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 "GDPR" and the Data Protection Act 2018 "DPA")?	YES	NO

1	***"Personal data"*** *means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person. Any video or audio recordings of participants is considered to be personal data.*	X	
	If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
2	Names, profession, email addresses, nationality *(this box should expand as you type)*		
	Does it involve special category data (as defined by the GDPR)?	**YES**	**NO**
3	***"Special category data"*** *means sensitive personal data consisting of information as to the data subjects' –* *(a) racial or ethnic origin,* *(b) political opinions,* *(c) religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature,* *(d) membership of a trade union (within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992),* *(e) physical or mental health or condition,* *(f) sexual life,* *(g) genetics,* *(h) biometric data (as used for ID purposes),*	☐	X
	If YES, provide a description of the special category data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
4	*(this box should expand as you type)*		

	Will data from the research activity (collected data, drafts of the thesis, or materials for publication) be stored in any of the following ways?	**YES**	**NO**
5	Manual files (i.e. in paper form)?	☒	☐
6	University computers?	☐	☒
7	Private company computers?	☐	☒
8	Home or other personal computers?	☐	☒
9	Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	☒	☐
10	"Cloud" storage or websites?	☒	☐
11	Other – specify:	☐	☒
12	For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure the security of the data collected, data confidentiality, including details of backup procedures, password protection, encryption, anonymisation and pseudonymisation:		
	The data will be stored in my personal computer with password protection and backed up in my mobile HDD with password protection in addition to UWTSD OneDrive. *(this box should expand as you type)*		

	Data Protection		
	Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	**YES**	**NO**
13	Electronic transfer of data in any form?	☒	☐

14	Sharing of data with others at the University outside of the immediate research team?	☐	☒
15	Sharing of data with other organisations?	☐	☒
16	Export of data outside the UK or importing of data from outside the UK?	☒	☐
17	Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	☐	☒
18	Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	☐	☒
19	Use of data management system?	☐	☒
20	Data archiving?	☐	☒
21	If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Data Protection Act (2018) (and any international equivalents, where appropriate):		
	13.Transfer data from my personal computer to my personal HDD with password protection. 16 As I am in China and my supervisory team is in the UK, we are exporting and importing data potentially via UWTSD email and I upload data from China onto the UWTSD OneDrive. *(this box should expand as you type)*		
22	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:		
	Student and supervisory team *(this box should expand as you type)*		
23	List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the research activity:		
	Student *(this box should expand as you type)*		
24	Give details of data storage arrangements, including security measures in place to protect the data, where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form. Will data be archived – if so how and if not why not.		
	The data will be stored in my personal computer and personal HDD with password protection for at least 5 years in digital form. *(this box should expand as you type)*		
25	Please indicate if your data will be stored in the UWTSD Research Data Repository (see https://researchdata.uwtsd.ac.uk/). If so please explain. (*Most relevant to academic staff)*		
	no *(this box should expand as you type)*		
26	Confirm that you have read the UWTSD guidance on data management (see https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/)	**YES**	☒
27	Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding	**YES**	☒

SECTION K: Declaration

	The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants. In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice which is published on the website: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/		
1	**Signature of applicant:**	Wei Huang	**Date:** 07/06/2022

For STUDENT Submissions:

2	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Genevoix Nana, Sarah Reynolds	**Date:** 07/06/2022
3	Signature:	Genevoix Nana, Sarah Reynolds	

For STAFF Submissions:

4	Academic Director/ Assistant Dean:		**Date:**
5	Signature:		

Checklist: Please complete the checklist below to ensure that you have completed the form according to the guidelines and attached any required documentation:

☒	I have read the guidance notes supplied before completing the form.
☒	I have completed **ALL RELEVANT** sections of the form in full.
☒	I confirm that the research activity has received approval in principle
☐	I have attached a copy of final/interim approval from external organisation (**where appropriate**)
☐	I have attached a full risk assessment (where appropriate) *ONLY TICK IF YOU HAVE **ATTACHED A FULL RISK ASSESSMENT***
☒	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice.
☒	I understand that before commencing data collection all documents aimed at respondents (including information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules etc.) must be confirmed by the DoS/Supervisor, module tutor or Academic Director.

RESEARCH STUDENTS AND STAFF ONLY
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Appendix B: Glossary

1. Xianxia(仙侠) is a genre of Chinese fantasy fiction that incorporates Daoist principles, the concept of immortality, magical cultivation, and a world populated by immortals, demons, and spirit beasts, typically emphasising a character's spiritual ascent through disciplined practice.

2. Xuanhuan(玄幻), often translated as "mysterious fantasy", is a broader fantasy category that blends elements of Chinese mythology with imaginative or foreign settings, without being strictly bound to Daoist ideology or the pursuit of immortality, distinguishing it from Xianxia.

3. Romance(言情) is a narrative genre centered on the emotional and relational development between characters, typically focusing on themes of love, intimacy, and personal growth, often structured around romantic conflict and resolution.

4. Time-travel(穿越): A genre where protagonists are transported to different historical periods, often altering events or influencing famous figures.

5. Rebirth(重生): A narrative theme where characters are reborn—either in their own bodies or others'—usually to seek revenge, correct past regrets, or pursue a better fate.

6. Science fiction(科幻): Stories set in speculative futures or alternate realities, often involving advanced technology, space travel, or parallel worlds.

7. Campus(校园): Novels focusing on school or university life, exploring youth, romance, friendship, and academic challenges.

8. Urban(都市): Set in contemporary city environments, these stories typically revolve around career, relationships, personal ambition, and modern lifestyle struggles.

9. Cultivation (修炼 xiūliàn) (修真 xiūzhēn) (修行 xiūxíng) (修仙 xiūxiān) - the process of improving health, increasing longevity, and growing powerful. This is accomplished by cultivating Qi and training in martial and mystical arts. In many of these novels, the ultimate goal of cultivation is to become an Immortal or attain godhood.

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11. Zhanghui novels(志怪小说) are traditional Chinese chapter-based narratives characterised by a serialized structure, colloquial language, and chapter headings that summarize and foreshadow the content, commonly seen in works like Romance of the *Three Kingdoms* and *Journey to the West.*

12. Tang chuanqi (唐传奇) refers to a genre of classical Chinese short stories that flourished during the Tang and Five Dynasties period, characterised by elaborate plots, vivid characters, and a blend of romantic, historical, and supernatural themes; its narrative richness and imaginative scope provided important literary precedents for the development of Xianxia novel.

13. Huaben novels(话本小说) are a type of Chinese storytelling tradition from the Song Dynasty, typically performed by storytellers, characterized by their use of vernacular language and simple, engaging narratives that were accessible to a wide audience.

14. Chapter-based novels (章回小说): A traditional Chinese narrative form structured in discrete, titled chapters (章) and episodic returns (回), often featuring suspenseful endings and moral commentary to sustain reader interest across instalments.

15. Sword immortal (剑仙)，in Xianxia novels, refers to a swordsman who attains divinity through cultivation.

16. The Reliance Sect(靠山宗) in ISSH is a small, declining cultivation sect where Meng Hao begins his journey, serving as the starting point for his growth in the vast cultivation world.

17. Yi (义), In Xianxia novel, refers to a moral code of righteousness that compels individuals to act with honour, loyalty, and self-sacrifice, often in defiance of personal interest.

18. pirit Stream Sect(灵溪宗) in AWE is a renowned cultivation sect that serves as the starting point of Bai Xiaochun's comedic and adventurous journey, providing a foundation for his growth and development in the cultivation world.

19. In AWE, the "Eternal Origin"(永恒本源) is the primordial, unchanging energy that forms the basis of all cultivation and immortality, enabling Bai Xiaochun to harness remarkable power while remaining emotionally connected to the mortal world

20. 情(qing), in Xia culture denotes profound emotional sincerity, encompassing empathy, affection, and heartfelt devotion. It often motivates characters to act selflessly in defence of

others, bridging personal feeling with moral commitment.

21. youxia (游侠) is a wandering knight-errant in Chinese culture who upholds justice and righteousness through personal action, often outside the bounds of official authority.

22. Sealing the heavens(封天), In ISSH, symbolises the protagonist Meng Hao's defiance of cosmic order, his struggle to transcend fate, and his ultimate aspiration to control his own destiny.

23. Chushi (出世) refers to the act of withdrawing from worldly affairs in pursuit of spiritual enlightenment, often associated with detachment, transcendence, or a reclusive life beyond secular concerns.

24. 师徒(shitu), in Xianxia novels, implies lifelong bonds of daoist mentorship, arcane knowledge transfer, and shared destiny in immortal pursuits.

25. 师父(shifu), in Xianxia novels, is a cultivation mentor who transmits arcane arts with paternal authority, bearing karmic responsibility for the disciple's path; 师兄(Shixiong) is a brother-in-training who entered the sect earlier, offering guidance while competing for the master's favor.

26. 国俗词语 (guo su ci yu), a term coined by Chinese scholars, is equivalent to the concept of CLWs, referring to lexical units with distinctive national characteristics that encapsulate specific cultural information related to a nation's politics, history, customs, and cultural heritage, serving as direct or indirect reflections of its unique cultural identity.

27. "道" (Dao) is a culturally loaded word that encapsulates the philosophical and religious essence of Taoism, which is deeply intertwined with the pursuit of immortality and the cosmic order. It signifies not only the path to enlightenment but also the underlying principles that govern the natural world and the human conduct within it. "道" in these novels often represents the ultimate goal of cultivation and the moral framework that guides the protagonists' actions and spiritual development

28. 爷 (ye) in Chinese can refer to one's grandfather, but it is also used as a term of respect for someone, similar to "sir" or "master", often conveying deference.

29. "儒道礼乐仁义" refers to key values in Confucianism, where 礼 (ritual) represents social norms, 乐 (music) symbolises the cultivation of inner peace, 仁 (benevolence) emphasises harmony in human relationships, and 义 (righteousness) highlights moral duty and justice, all working together to create a harmonious and well-ordered society.

30. 鲲鹏(kun peng) is a mythical creature from Chinese mythology, described in Zhuangzi as a giant fish that transforms into an enormous bird, symbolising boundless freedom and immense potential.

31. 应龙(ying long) is a mythical winged dragon in Chinese mythology, known as a rain deity and a servant of the Yellow Emperor, symbolising strength and the ability to control water and weather.

32. Zimu Sword (子母剑): A paired weapon consisting of a larger "mother" sword and a smaller "child" sword, often used together in coordinated combat for versatility and deception.

33. 神识(Shen shi),A spiritual or mental ability in Xianxia novel that allows cultivators to perceive, scan, or communicate across distances beyond physical sight, often used for detecting danger, exploring surroundings, or probing others' cultivation levels.

34. 师兄(Shixiong) refers to an elder male fellow apprentice, and 师姐 (Shijie) denotes an elder female fellow apprentice.

35. 小生 (xiaosheng) refers to a young man or oneself in a humble manner, 某 (mou) is a pronoun used to refer to oneself in a modest way, and 老夫 (laofu) denotes an elderly man or oneself as an old man; these are all modest forms of self-reference used by people of different statuses in ancient China.

36. 妖 (Yao) refers to a supernatural being or spirit in Chinese mythology, often with a connotation of mischief or malevolence, while 仙人 (Xianren) denotes an immortal being or a transcendent individual who has achieved spiritual enlightenment and longevity in Chinese folklore.

37. Yin and Yang and the Five Elements(阴阳五行) are foundational concepts in Chinese philosophy, where Yin and Yang represent opposing yet complementary forces, and the Five Elements—Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water—symbolise the dynamic interactions and cycles that govern the natural world and human life.

38. 一息的时间 (yixi de shijian) refers to the brief period equivalent to the duration of a single breath, symbolizing a fleeting moment in time. "一盏茶的时间" (yizhan cha de shijian) denotes the time it takes to brew and sip a cup of tea, representing a short, leisurely interval. "一炷香的时间" (yizhu xiang de shijian) signifies the span of time an incense stick burns, which is traditionally used to measure a longer, more contemplative period.

39. "一念成沧海，一念化桑田" is a traditional Chinese saying that illustrates the transformative power of thought or intention, suggesting that a single idea or decision can bring about profound and sweeping changes, akin to turning oceans into fields or vice versa.

40. "不死金刚" refers to an indestructible and immortal entity, often symbolizing ultimate resilience, strength, and invincibility, commonly used in Chinese culture to describe something or someone that cannot be defeated or destroyed.

41. 长老 (Zhanglao). a high-ranking figure overseeing sect administration or discipline.

42. 外门弟子(Waimen Dizi), a junior member in a sect's peripheral branch

43. 金丹 (Jindan), Daoist concept representing the pinnacle of spiritual-physical refinement.

44. 心魔 (Xinmo), internalised psychological or supernatural obstacles in cultivation.

45. 玄武龟 (Xuan Wu Turtle): In Chinese mythology and Daoist cosmology, Xuan Wu is a divine beast depicted as a black tortoise entwined with a snake, symbolising the northern direction, water element, and longevity. It is also revered as a guardian deity in Daoist tradition. (Translator's note: No official English translation exists; this is my own rendering of the original concept.)

46. 丹药(dan yao)refers to alchemical elixirs or medicinal pellets refined by cultivators to enhance their spiritual power, heal injuries, or advance in cultivation.

47. 前辈 (qian bei) refers, in Xianxia novels, to a respected senior or elder, often someone with higher cultivation, age, or status, whom younger cultivators show deference to.

Appendix C: Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Wei Huang

Interviewee: Jeremy Bai (Deathblade)

Interview Time: July 9, 2024, 13:00 (San Diego Time, USA)

Interview Location: Zoom, Online

Wei Huang: Hello! Shall we begin?

Jeremy Bai: Yeah, let's do it.

Wei Huang: Certainly, thanks again for agreeing to do this interview. You are one of the most experienced and respected translators of Chinese novels on various platforms. Your translations, such as *Seven Killers*, *I Shall Seal the Heavens*, and *A Will Eternal*, have been very well received by readers. Many describe you as a top senior translator. You are excellent at bridging the gap between Western and Eastern cultures. So, it's my great honor to speak with you.

Jeremy Bai: Yeah.

Wei Huang: From your YouTube channel, I learned that you're interested in Chinese culture, particularly influenced by *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.* What led you to start translating novels? You began with *Seven Killers*, and then translated *I Shall Seal the Heavens*, making you one of the earliest translators on the platform. Could you briefly talk about your translation career? For instance, how many years have you been a translator?

Jeremy Bai: Sure. Well, you kind of mentioned how I got started at SPCNet. That would have been in, I believe, 2012, if I remember correctly, when I started doing *Seven Killers*. That was just for fun. And then, after that, I consistently did translating, either for fun as fan translations, or going into online literature translations. Ever since then, I've taken some breaks here and there to do other things, but starting in 2012, so I guess at this point, that's about 12 years. Assuming 2012 is the right date.

Wei Huang: Wow, it's quite a long time. Your translations are very professional. I'm wondering, what's your educational background, or what's your specialisation?

Jeremy Bai: So, I am not educated in translating at all. I never went to school or anything to learn how to translate, and I also did not go to school to learn Chinese. I'm basically

self-taught in Mandarin. My background is kind of strange compared to most people. I started out doing real estate with a family company. I went from there to study art, got a degree in art and animation, which led to a career in the games industry for a while. Then I ended up going to China, where I started as a teacher before getting into translating.

The one thing that probably helped me to reach a level of professionalism in translating is the fact that I was always interested in writing. I've heard a lot of translators say that you need to be a good writer to be a good translator, which I agree with. I was very interested in writing going back to my high school days. Again, I didn't go to school for it, but I was self-taught in writing as well. So, I knew a lot about conventions of English literature, and I've always been a very avid reader. Though I don't have the educational background, I do have a lot that led up to me getting into it. I had even written books and stories, short stories, and nonfiction that had been published throughout the years before getting into translating. So, it's not as though I just showed up one day and started translating out of nowhere.

Wei Huang: Because you have created so many excellent works, I think maybe your experience of being in China helped you have a better understanding of Chinese culture?

Jeremy Bai: Yeah, definitely. Long before I got into translating, like you mentioned in the introduction, one of the big reasons why I ended up going down this path of learning Chinese was because of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Before that movie, I had never heard of Wuxia. After the movie came out, I started looking up information online and learned about the genre. I went to watch every movie and TV show that I could get my hands on in America at the time. Remember, this was in the early 2000s, so you couldn't just go and watch that stuff online. I had to go to the local video rental place to find these Chinese movies. I also went online to SPCNet to read translations. At that time, there were almost no official translations, even now there are still not very many of the classic novels. In any case, I got super interested, and then I traveled to China a few times, which was very inspiring. Living in China, being immersed in the language and culture definitely helps a lot.

Wei Huang: Got it. Among the Chinese novels, why did you choose to translate Er Gen's novel in the first place?

Jeremy Bai: It was really just a coincidence, to be honest with you. I had at that time been

translating for about two or three years, and I had done several different Gulong novels and one novel by a Taiwanese author named Jiu Badao. At that time, RWX, who is the founder of Wuxiaworld, had just started the site. He asked if he could host my Wuxia translations there, and I said yes. He then asked if I would be interested in starting a new translation on his site. At that time, he was translating *Coiling Dragon* and *Stellar Transformations*, which were very popular. He asked if I would be willing to do it, and I said yes. I asked him what he would recommend, and he suggested *I Shall Seal the Heavens* because nobody was translating it, and it was very popular on the charts. That's how I started.

Wei Huang: That's a brilliant work. What's your purpose in translating Wuxia or Xianxia novels? Do you have a goal of cross-cultural communication?

Jeremy Bai: Yeah, I mean, like I said, I originally started translating to improve my language ability. However, for many years I was really obsessed with Wuxia and Xianxia. I really like it and wish more people could be interested in it. One thing that always frustrated me was that most translations, especially fan translations, had very low quality. Many native English speakers wouldn't read them because the quality of the English writing was so low compared to published fantasy and science fiction in English. That always bothered me. I wished people could read these stories and enjoy them without the language barrier. That's one reason why I do it - to bring these stories to English-speaking readerss. It's also a great way to teach people about other cultures. I learned a lot about Chinese history from reading Jin Yong's novels. His novels are set in different dynasties, which got me interested in those periods. In my translations, I take a lot of time to put footnotes to explain historical and cultural aspects, and I get a lot of appreciation from readers for that.

Wei Huang: Between Gu Long and Jin Yong, who is your favorite author?

Jeremy Bai: most of Jin Yong's novels are set in Qing Dynasty or Song Dynasty. I'm not saying that his novels are history, but reading that got me interested in those things. And then I started studying it on my own. And so in my translations, I've taken a lot of time to put footnotes in to explain things about history and culture, and I get a lot of comments from my readers, you know, expressing appreciation for that, and and being able to learn a lot about a culture that otherwise they wouldn't really have much way to learn about. As a whole, between those two, I like Gu Long better. Jin Yong's stuff is really cool, but Gu

Long's work has more fantastic elements. It's more dreamy, emotional, and focuses more on love and friendship. His characters are often mysterious and memorable, established in just a few sentences. While I've read a little bit of other novelists, I'd say Gu Long is my favorite between those two.

Wei Huang: You mentioned on your YouTube channel that Wuxia is different from Xianxia. Xia culture has a long history in China, and Xianxia culture is greatly influenced by Wuxia, Western fantasy, and popular gaming culture. What aspect of Xia culture attracts you the most?

Jeremy Bai: I've always been interested in historical things, whether medieval Europe, China, or Japan. Wuxia tends to be something that, although not real, seems like it could be real. You can imagine an ancient China with wandering martial artists carrying out justice, similar to stories about King Arthur or Robin Hood. Wuxia mixes fiction and reality to create something intriguing. I also like the concept of the chivalrous, wandering hero. Novels like *Water Margin* have elements similar to Wuxia, with individual adventures and justice. For me, it's the personal element of the individual hero that appeals to me. So wish our culture has, I think, more Chinese traditional culture elements.

Wei Huang: When translating *Seven Killers*, which is a traditional Wuxia novel, and *I Shall Seal the Heavens*, which one do you find more difficult?

Jeremy Bai: Well, if we're talking about just those two specific ones, I would say they are very similar. In terms of translating a group of 2,000 to 3,000 Chinese characters, basically a chapter, they are very similar. Gu Long and Er Gen, the two authors, have a similar writing style that I'm comfortable with.

Even though I've been studying Chinese for a long time and have translated a lot, there is a limit to my ability. For instance, I would hesitate to try to read a Jin Yong novel because the level of Chinese is more complicated and harder. Jin Yong uses a lot more old-style Chinese. Not to say that Gu Long or Er Gen don't do that—they have poems and songs—but in terms of the level of Chinese, if I were to use English writing standards, I would say they are probably like 6th or 7th-grade level. Jin Yong's writing is more like 11th or 12th grade, or even college level.

In terms of the actual words and stuff, they're the same. However, there's a huge difference between those two in that *Seven Killers* is seven chapters long, while Er Gen's novels are

over a thousand chapters long. The difficulty with Er Gen, or any online literature, is handling the extensive length and complexity over time. Er Gen likes to foreshadow things. He might write about something in Chapter One and not explain it until Chapter 500. So, in that sense, online literature is much harder to translate.

For example, when I started translating *I Shall Seal the Heavens* or *A Will Eternal*, Er Gen had written about 400 or 500 chapters. That means when I find stuff in the early chapters, I have to search through all the chapters to see if it comes up later, if it's important, if there's any wordplay, or if it has a secret meaning. Many of his names almost always have some secret meaning that you don't find out about until later. I have to research ahead of time to understand that.

Right now, I'm in a situation where I've almost caught up with Er Gen. I'm only about a hundred chapters behind him. Now it's the opposite situation. He's making up stuff as he goes, and I have no way to check. I have to guess his meanings, and if I'm wrong, everyone will know about it later because I'm releasing the chapters publicly. So, the online literature is more difficult because of that, not necessarily the linguistic elements.

Wei Huang: Rich Chinese cultural elements build the cultural atmosphere of Xianxia novels. Do you think what attracts readers to Xianxia novels includes exoticism?

Jeremy Bai: Yeah, to an extent. It's definitely a very different experience, at least that was something that I liked. However, I think that exoticism has a limited effect because that initial novelty doesn't last forever. There are a lot of readers who get into it and keep reading for a really long time, so there's definitely more to it than just the exotic element.

In the beginning, that's definitely one thing that gets people interested because these novels, whether Xianxia or Wuxia, are very different from Western fantasy. Other elements include the uniqueness of online literature. The cultivation world is much more ruthless and dog-eat-dog compared to Western sensibilities. There's a lot of moral ambiguity; the good guys are not necessarily all good, and the bad guys are not all bad. This moral complexity makes the stories more exciting than most Western literature, which is probably another element that attracts readers.

Wei Huang: So, I noticed you mentioned in one of your YouTube videos that "YouTube is already dead." It's a very unexpected statement, but I think you're right. Do you think Xianxia novels are more appealing to English readers than traditional Wuxia novels?

Jeremy Bai: For now, yeah, absolutely. There's no question about it. I'm not necessarily happy about that, though. While I love the Xianxia stuff, I really do like Wuxia a lot, and I feel like it's a bit more respectable than online Xianxia novel.

In terms of popularity, there are probably a lot more people who are familiar with Wuxia. If you went to something like San Diego Comic-Con and asked people if they've heard of Wuxia, I bet more people would have heard of it compared to Xianxia. I mean, Wuxia is even in the Dungeons and Dragons core rulebook. However, in terms of the size of the audience and the audience willing to pay money, Xianxia is way ahead of Wuxia. Sites like Wuxiaworld have enough paying customers to support many full-time translators, which shows the level of support from readers.

Wei Huang: Do you think the fantasy elements in Xianxia novels are a reason for their appeal to English-speaking readers?

Jeremy Bai: I think that has something to do with it, but it's not the only reason. The fantasy elements are probably one reason among many why Xianxia is more popular than Wuxia. In China today, Xianxia novels are more exciting and take readers to a different world even more than Wuxia does. Xianxia novels might also be influenced by Western fantasy novels, making them more familiar to Western popular culture.

Wei Huang: That makes sense. You mentioned earlier that Gu Long was a big fan of Western literature, and his novels have some Western influences.

Jeremy Bai: Yes, absolutely. Gu Long's novels and movies often have Western influences. For instance, in the movie *The Last Hurrah for Chivalry*, the main character wears a poncho, which is a traditional Mexican garment popularized by spaghetti Western movies. The character even wields his weapon in a way similar to Western gunslingers. There's definitely crossover between the two genres. Wild West movies and Wuxia movies are very similar in many ways. They both feature a world of wandering heroes, whether it's cowboys in the Wild West or swordsmen in ancient China.

Wei Huang: As a Western translator of Chinese Xianxia or Wuxia novels, do you think it's important to be passionate about the culture?

Jeremy Bai: I think it is important. Since you mentioned this interview is confidential, I'll share something. It makes me sad that nowadays, most translators on sites like Wuxiaworld are not necessarily passionate about the culture. For many of them, it's just a

job to make money while in college. That's fine, but I believe being passionate about it is crucial. I spent years translating just to improve my language skills and share these stories with English-speaking readers, not for money. Now, I can make money from it, which is great, but I believe the quality of the translation reflects the passion behind it. If you're not passionate, you can't convey the same excitement and depth that the original readers experience.

Wei Huang: So, you have translated many outstanding works. As an excellent translator of Chinese web novels, I would like to ask you about some translation strategies you employ.

Jeremy Bai: Sure.

Wei Huang: When faced with cultural differences between China and the West, do you employ certain strategies to reconcile these differences during the translation process? How do you handle untranslatable terms or concepts?

Jeremy Bai: For one thing, I very rarely change things. Some translators might do that, but I usually don't. Occasionally, there are things that are really culturally insensitive to English-speaking readerss, and in those rare cases, I might make some changes. Even then, I usually include a footnote to explain. But again, that's very rare. For everything else, I try to convey it as accurately as possible in the actual translation. If it's not possible, I use footnotes.

I'm pretty known for my footnotes, and I'm not afraid to use them. People can always skip the footnotes if they want, but most readers seem to enjoy them. Sometimes, there are things that are just impossible to convey without extra context. For example, in one of the recent chapters I released of *Beyond the Timescape*, there's a scene where the main character goes to a banquet.

At the banquet, the other attendees, who are not exactly friends but not enemies either, all line up to toast him. As a Chinese person, you've probably seen this at a wedding or another event where people toast someone in a row, trying to get them drunk. This doesn't happen in Western culture, so without providing extra context, English-speaking readers wouldn't understand what's going on. In the scene, the host stops the toasting before it can get the main character drunk. Without a footnote explaining the drinking culture and the significance of such toasts, this would go completely over the heads of the readers.

So, I try to include these details so readers can learn about the culture. I think that's an important part of it.

Wei Huang: Yes, I think adding those footnotes and providing extra context is very helpful. It enriches the reading experience and helps bridge the cultural gap. Your approach makes the stories more accessible and enjoyable for English-speaking readers.

Wei Huang: So, do you think it's necessary for English readers to have a background in Chinese traditional culture? Like you said, they might need to learn some footnotes or glossary terms.

Jeremy Bai: I don't think it's necessary. I was one of the people who just started reading and enjoyed the stories because of the characters and the plot. Looking back, some novels I read, like *Smiling, Proud Wanderer* (one of the Wuxia novels), had a lot of footnotes from the translator, so I learned a lot from those. Other translations didn't have any footnotes, and I still enjoyed them.

Readers who are interested in the cultural aspects can ask questions, Google things, or find information on YouTube. They'll learn a lot on their own. It definitely helps, but I think the good stories are enjoyable regardless of whether you understand every single cultural nuance. Readers will learn as they go along about many of these things.

Wei Huang: Yes, just like readers of *Harry Potter* learned about the magical world as they read. They didn't need to know everything from the start.

Jeremy Bai: Exactly.

Wei Huang: I have a question, because, like in the *I Shall Seal the Heavens,you* translate the "大约十息的时间" as the span of the 10 breaths. That's a paraphrase translation. And you translate "两柱香" as 2 hours. It's a substitution. So, Why do you choose the different translation mode to translate these culturally loaded words?

Jeremy Bai: Um, basically just by intuition. To be honest with you, what I think makes sense for the reader, and what they will understand. For instance, when it comes to the times and distances, and you know, to be honest, even now, I look back and I question, especially with I Shall Seal the Heavens, because I Shall Seal the Heavens was very early on in my career. I've changed a lot since then about some of my viewpoints on these different things, and if I could go back and sort of try to standardize everything, I wouldn't

necessarily be opposed to it. For example, the time measurement he uses most often is "时辰" which is 2 hours, and I usually translate it as 2 hours.

Jeremy Bai: You know, readers are smart. If you introduce a term and explain it to them, they'll learn it pretty quickly, so it's totally possible that I could go back in time and start over and just say, "Oh, he was gone for 一个时辰" and then transliterate it. The reason I don't like transliterating is because, well, number one, that's not translating. And I'm a translator. So I want to translate it. But at a certain point, you have to figure out where is the line between when it's okay to translate stuff, and when it's not. Because otherwise, why don't we just translate everything. You know, the main character walked 一个时辰 to the 公交车. And then he got onto the 公交车. Well, like, what's the point if we're just going to transliterate everything.

Jeremy Bai: And then, on top of all that, there is not just the ideal about transliterating versus translation, but also the practicality of it. One thing I can also tell you is that let's say I used 时辰. And I just transliterated it as shichen. And then I put a footnote and said, "Just so you know, a 时辰 is 2 hours." Well, the unfortunate thing is that a lot of people are not going to read that footnote, that's just the reality of it. So unless I put it in the text itself, such as the first time it appeared, "he rested for one 时辰" and then in parentheses, "时辰 is 2 hours." But then, even then, I promise you, there's going to be people who aren't paying attention to it. So for many of those things, I convert it into times or distances, or whatever it is, just so that when the reader is reading it's easy for them to read. My translation philosophy, if I was going to boil it down into what I think is the most important, especially for things like Wuxia and online literature, is I feel that as much as possible, the goal of the translator should be to help the Western reader to experience the same, to have the same reading experience as the Chinese reader. Same emotions, same smoothness of reading. And so when the Chinese reader is reading it, they don't get confused when it's talking about whatever. The 时辰 or the 2 hours. Incense sticks, or whatever it is. But the English-speaking readers, when they come across that stuff, it's going to be confusing. It's going to take them out of the story. So again, I never spelled out my standard for exactly when to do it this way or the other. I mostly just did it on instinct based on what I thought readers would have the best reading experience.

Wei Huang: Yeah. So it's very difficult to balance this, just bridging the gap of the Western and the Eastern cultures and the understanding of readers.

Wei Huang: Online literature often features colloquial language, while Xianxia novels like I Shall Seal the Heavens have elements of classical Chinese language. Did you deliberately adjust the language style in your translation to match the language characteristics of Xianxia novels?

Wei Huang: Have you?

Jeremy Bai: Try to. Yeah, because the thing about us, at least with Er Gen novels, is he actually also mixes in a lot of modern stuff. He mixes internet slang into his dialogue. For example, in *I Shall Seal the Heavens*, he had this character, the parrot, who would come up with catchy songs sometimes. Many of those songs were based on popular songs of the time. Like, for example, one of them is Little Apple song (a modern Chinese pop song), that song is in *I Shall Seal the Heavens*, except he changed a couple of things.

Wei Huang: Yeah.

Jeremy Bai: So, to get to your question, I do try to change it based on that. Most of the time in the Er Gen novels, when he uses that ancient style of Chinese, it's almost always in ancient documents or when the Emperor is giving an edict, or something like that. He usually doesn't have just random people talking like that. So it's not a lot. But when I do come to those parts, I try to adjust the language so that it sounds old, like Shakespearean English. I've done a lot of research into how to use Shakespearean English properly, such as "thou", "thee", "hath", and those kinds of things. There are specific ways to use it, and so I don't just try to make it up randomly. I try to conform my old or middle English to the proper way to do it, in an attempt to convey that same sort of feeling.

Wei Huang: Yeah.

Wei Huang: Another question, do reader feedback affect your translation strategies? Do you consciously adapt your translation strategy to your readers' expectations?

Jeremy Bai: Not very much. A little bit. There have been occasional times throughout the years where I have changed something based on reader feedback, but it's very rare. Very early on, there were a few times when I did a poll and let the readers pick which option they wanted for a translation. But after all these years, for the most part, I don't feel the

need to do that because I feel like I've translated enough that I kind of understand what the audience expects and what they will think is cool, basically.

Wei Huang: Ok, then what is your attitude towards AI translation? And would you consider using AI to assist in your translation in the future?

Jeremy Bai: In terms of AI, I take a sort of practical approach to it. I think that it's inevitable that it's just going to become more and more part of the translation process. I'm not opposed to using it as an assistant. I think that in a lot of ways it could be very helpful. Right now, I don't. Everything I do is by hand. I mean, the thing is, I do use Google Translate, not to translate for me, but like, for example, if I run into something that's difficult for me or I don't understand or is confusing, I'll put it into Google Translate just to see what happens, and a lot of times what happens is I miss a character here or something, and then I see it in Google Translate, and I'm like, "Oh, my God! How did I not realize that?" And then I can go back and adjust my original choices. In any case, I think that AI is coming. It's a long way from being able to truly handle Chinese translation in a way that sounds really good, especially considering how long these web novels are. There needs to be a level of continuity that I don't know how AI could handle or when it will be able to. We'll see. Is it gonna be in 5 years? Maybe less, maybe more. I'm not really sure, but it's coming. There's no way translators can get around it. So yeah, some translators are gonna have to learn how to work with it.

Wei Huang: Okay. So another question is about your translation strategies. You just mentioned you place a strong emphasis on implicit connections between sentences and paragraphs. You mentioned in a YouTube video that there are many disorderly punctuation issues, resulting in a relatively loose writing style. Does this pose any challenges for your translation work, and how do you handle it?

Jeremy Bai: Yeah, of course, I mean, it can be very, very frustrating because Chinese culture is high context, and the language is the same. So a lot of stuff gets said without saying it. What I try to do is, like I was telling you before, I want the reading experience to be as smooth as possible for the readers. My translation does not correspond directly to the sentence or sometimes even the paragraph of the Chinese. I move things around. When I say "add", what I mean is, a lot of times in Chinese culture, a character will say something, and it's obvious what they're talking about, even when nobody has said it or it hasn't shown

up in the context of the narrative. Chinese readers get it. I get it when I'm reading Chinese. But then, as I think about it, I realize that it's confusing to someone reading it in English. So I will take, for instance, a subject of a sentence that's not stated outright by the speaker in Chinese and add that sometimes to the dialogue or to another part, just to make sure it makes sense. If you ever take my translation and compare it line by line to the Chinese, you will find that I do that not just on the sentence level, but even on the entire structure of a chapter. For example, one thing that's really common—not sure if it's just the author I translate, but I think it's common in all Chinese literature—is to put the dialogue attribution at the end of a body of dialogue. In English writing, for fiction, you put the dialogue attribution at the very beginning. It's important because, for one thing, you know who's talking. In the original Chinese, a lot of times, you don't know who's talking until you get to the end. So, I'll skip to the end, find out who's talking, then go back to the beginning and read it. In any case, when I do it in English, I move the dialogue attribution all the way to the beginning. Sometimes I'll even put paragraphs in and out of order. Another thing I've realized over the years of translating is that on the online literature side, the authors essentially get paid by their word count. They have to have a certain number of Chinese characters to get paid. Everybody knows this, and everybody talks about it. "Oh yeah, the authors add filler content to reach the goal." But what I've come to realize, at least with my author, is that he will oftentimes write the chapter, finish it, and then see how much extra he has to add. Then he goes back and adds that stuff in. The problem is, a lot of times when he does that, he'll add a thought that interrupts other thoughts in his own narrative, and he probably doesn't realize it because I've done the same thing as a writer. If I have a goal to write 2,000 words, and I'm at 1,800 words, I'll go back and start adding some things here and there. I understand it, but that can make things even more confusing because you're talking about this one thing, and then there's a random thought about something else right in the middle. So that's another element that plays into it. In the end, to answer your question, I do adjust it in order to make it the best reading experience possible for the reader.

Wei Huang: Okay, that's good. Thank you for your detailed answers. This gave me a deeper understanding of your translation strategies. And now I would like to talk to you about the topic of creation in translation. Because many scholars believe that translation is

an imperfect science, while others see it as a creative treason. When translators introduce an original work into a new receptive environment, loss, addition, and transformation of information are inevitable, and the translators reshape the cultural context of their original text through translation before conveying it to the readers. Therefore, I'm wondering, do you think modifying the original text in translation is inevitable?

Jeremy Bai: Well, maybe you're not gonna like this answer, but I think it depends. It depends on the goal of the translation, and I think a perfect example of this is the Bible. You know, there's many translations of the Bible, and there's different kinds that have different purposes. Like there's one you might have heard about, it's called the Living Bible. And that is a plain English Bible that reads like you're reading something that somebody wrote in English. It sounds really good. But then you can get other Bibles that are very direct line-by-line translations of every single word. And when you read that, you're not going to feel the same thing as when you read something that sounds familiar to you, but you might get better information from that. So really, what is the goal that you're going for? In my opinion, for what I'm translating, which right now is online literature, I don't think… Like I was saying before, the point of it is that the readers are supposed to be having fun. That's the most important thing. In fact, the author himself, Er Gen, has told this to me. In the example of the Little Apple song I told you about, he asked me how I handled it, and I told him, "Well, nobody really knows what that song is in America. So I just translated it, and then I put a footnote to explain." And you know what he said? He was like, "Well, why didn't you just change it to a popular English song?"

Jeremy Bai: And I was like, "Oh, yeah, I didn't really think to do that." And as the author, that was what he wanted. We kind of talked about this a little, and he basically said, if there's a joke or a cultural reference, a song, or something that the readers in the Western world are not going to understand, just change it to something that they will understand, that's funny to them, or fun. Which I actually don't do that often because I'm hesitant to do that unless it's absolutely necessary. The cultural part is important. I've introduced a lot of people to that Little Apple song because of that novel, which I think is kind of cool. It's a balance. Everything's a balance. There's not one right answer to it. Just to address something else you said, part of what you're saying with those quotes essentially comes

down to things being lost in translation because you can't translate everything. I totally agree with that. I see that all the time, almost on a daily basis. I see things where I have to pick between translating this more literally or figuratively. A lot of times you just cannot include everything. So from my perspective, I have to ask myself, is it really important? If I leave this little bit out or don't put a footnote, is it going to damage the story, the characters, the intent of the author? And occasionally I will leave it out if I think it's not important, or sometimes I'll put a footnote. It's kind of an intuition.

Wei Huang: Okay, that's great. That's good for your translations to consider the differences in understanding of readers. Have you encountered parts of the original text that you didn't understand? If so, how do you handle it?

Jeremy Bai: Yeah, that happens like every single day, which is kind of sad because I've been studying Chinese now since about 2007. So almost 15 years. And I've translated 15 million characters, and yet still, almost every single day there are things I don't understand. When that happens, there's two levels of it. One is something that I don't understand that I have to look up. I wouldn't quite put that into the category of not understanding; it's more like, I don't understand it at first, and then I have to look it up. I use Pleco. I'm guessing you probably know that dictionary app. It has something like 25 Chinese dictionaries. I have Buddhist dictionaries, medical dictionaries. So between all of that, I'm able to find most words that I don't know, but not always. My next step after that is, I go to Baidu, and I'll look up the Baidu Wiki to try to find an explanation. If none of that works, then I ask my wife. I message her either online or I'll just go to her in person and ask for her help. Usually, by the time I get to that point, it's either one of two things. Number one, it is some kind of online slang term that I'm not familiar with, and she usually knows most of those because she's on WeChat all the time. It's either that or it is something like ancient style Chinese or Buddhist or Daoist things. In those cases, sometimes she doesn't even know what it is, and I have to go even deeper onto the internet to try to figure out what exactly I'm looking at.

Wei Huang: That's a good solution. So as the author of *Legends of Ogre Gate*, how has the transition from translator to author impacted your writing?

Jeremy Bai: Yeah, there definitely is an impact. I've gone back and forth over the years. Like I mentioned earlier, I was a writer before becoming a translator, not as a living, but I

have had stuff published and whatnot. So it's not as though I started translating first and then jumped to writing. It's kind of gone back and forth. But what I found after doing translating for years and then going into writing, it was challenging. I was always worried that I was letting things about Chinese sentence structure and narrative structure influence my writing in a negative way. For example, the thing we were talking about earlier with the implicit language. I got so used to doing it in the Chinese way that I was always worried about having that influence my Western writing. That said, that's why you have readers and editors to help you. You can get alpha readers, beta readers, and editors, and they tend to catch those things. But then there's also the linguistic aspect. I have many times run into situations where I coined a term that doesn't really make much sense, that it's not really something a native speaker of English would say. But I use it because it's practical and it makes sense. Then I keep using it over and over again, and it sounds normal to me, and I don't even think about it. Then I put it into my own original writing, and it does sound really weird. It's one thing to have an unusual word configuration in a translation because people are expecting there to be things that aren't from that language. But when you have those kinds of things in something that's supposed to be just an original English novel, then it can be problematic. So that's one of the biggest challenges that I have to face: getting my mindset out of thinking in Chinese and back into thinking in English primarily, which can be a little bit of a challenge sometimes.

Wei Huang: Cool. So why did you choose not to write in the Xianxia genre, which you have translated more frequently?

Jeremy Bai: Well, the reason is that *Legends of Ogre Gate* is based on a game called Wandering Heroes of Ogre Gate, and I was playing that game, and I was friends with the designer. We later went on to make another game called Righteous Blood, Ruthless Blades. But in any case, I wanted to do a novelization of that game because I wanted, for the same reason as doing the translating, to introduce more people to it and hope that more people would get interested in that kind of stuff. In the end, *Legends of Ogre Gate* actually starts to change into more like Xianxia, sort of like the characters are getting close to becoming immortals. And in the game Wandering Heroes of Ogre Gate, the characters can eventually become immortal, so it has a whole section that goes off into Xianxia. Originally, I wanted to keep writing the story and take those characters and have them go into the immortal

world. It basically didn't work out because I didn't have the time to do that. Maybe one day I'll go back to do that.

Jeremy Bai: And then to answer your other question more broadly, I have had other times when I thought about it. I do have another entire original novel series called *The Sun's Blood*, and that is not cultivation, but it's a lot more like Xianxia cultivation than it is Wuxia. So there's internal energy, and they become immortal, that kind of thing. But the reason I didn't ever do a full, pure Xianxia novel is because no matter how much I've studied Chinese, and no matter how much I've translated Chinese, I am hesitant to try to create an original work that's actually supposed to be a Chinese genre. It's like the saying "中国文化博大精深" . No matter how much I know about it and stuff, I'm not Chinese, and I don't have all of the linguistic and cultural background that goes into that. So for many years, I held back because of that. I just didn't feel like I qualified to do that. I felt like whatever I wrote would be a Western imitation of Xianxia, so I didn't want to create a Western imitation and then call it Xianxia. And that's why my original *The Sun's Blood* actually takes place in China. The setting is Beijing a thousand years in the future, and people can become immortals and stuff like that. So I did it, but I didn't call it Xianxia because it's not Xianxia, and it's too much of a Western version, I think.

Wei Huang: Yeah, that's it. You have done well in this because I think this novel series has high cultural context, and I think this is higher than the average levels of the genre available.

Jeremy Bai: Well, thank you.

Wei Huang: OK, so before we conclude, could you share your future plans? Are there any upcoming projects or novels you are particularly excited about?

Jeremy Bai: Yeah, so here's something I haven't actually told very many people. I'll tell you since we've gone through this interview. But I'm actually probably gonna retire from translating. I am actually in graduate school right now. I'm getting a master's degree in education. I was a teacher in China for many years, and I didn't ever get certified to teach in America. So I'm getting a master's degree, and I'm gonna get a teacher certificate, and I will probably go into education. Then I will keep translating, but for fun instead of as a living. The reason for that actually relates somewhat to the question you asked earlier about AI. That's not the only reason, but AI has been developing so rapidly in the past year

or two that it makes me a little nervous. I know that the companies are all looking into AI. It's not like I'm scared about it, and like I told you before, I would even use it. But I'm very nervous about the stability of the industry. Not translating in general, but the online literature Xianxia translation is so niche, it's such a small genre, that I feel it's… If they go heavy in on AI, I'm talking about Wuxiaworld, Qidian, or Webnovel, whatever. If they really go heavy all in on it, then the jobs for translators are gonna be much harder to get. Another problem is that I'm American. I live in California, which is like the worst state in the United States in terms of being expensive. It's like the most expensive state. So my rates as a translator are much higher. If you're in charge of Wuxiaworld, and you can hire me and pay the most money of almost any translator, or hire a college student in Indonesia who speaks English basically as a native language but will charge one-quarter of the price, of course, they're gonna go with the translator from wherever, Indonesia, Singapore, or whatever it is. So because of some of those factors, I'm nervous about the stability of translating, and I don't want to… Like, I have kids, you know, I need to send my kids to college and stuff. So to answer your question, I'm probably after this big Xianxia, I'm gonna go back to simply translating shorter Wuxia stuff that is fun and interesting. I think that the Wuxia library has many, many Wuxia novels that have not been translated. Last year, or the year before, I did one called Blood that was just for fun. I gave it away to everybody for free. I'll probably go back and do some things like that, just to get things that nobody has read before in English and get them out into English.

Wei Huang: Okay, I'm very much looking forward to it.

Jeremy Bai: Cool.

Wei Huang: Yeah, thank you. So will you come back to China again?

Jeremy Bai: That's a good question. Yes, we definitely will come back to China. We were gone for about six years, and we have a house there. We have been thinking about whether we want to sell the house or something. When we went back, there was a lot of emotion going back to our house because that's where our son was born and everything. We decided we don't want to sell the house. We want to keep it there. We want it to be there to go back to. So we will definitely go back to China. We're talking about 2025, like a year and a half. The problem is my wife and my kids are both in school, so it's not easy to get time that we can all go back. But we'll definitely be going back for sure.

Wei Huang: Okay, great. I live in Chengdu. So if you come to Chengdu, send me an email, and I can take you to visit the famous places.

Jeremy Bai: Okay, I'll definitely do that.

Wei Huang: Thank you. Okay, to wrap up this interview, I would like again to express my heartfelt thanks for your time and your detailed responses. You have provided valuable perspectives on the translation of Chinese and the cultural elements involved. Additionally, I would like to thank you for your significant contribution to spreading Chinese culture and exchanging our culture with English-speaking readers. Thank you once again for sharing your expertise and experiences with me.

Jeremy Bai: It was my pleasure. Thank you so much.

Wei Huang: Okay, so just keep in touch. If you can, just send me an email if you come to Chengdu.

Jeremy Bai: Okay, will do. Good luck with everything.

Wei Huang: Thank you very much. Goodbye.

Jeremy Bai: Goodbye.

Appendix D: Survey on ISSH and Xia culture

Information Sheet

Before You Begin: Thank you for participating in this survey! We aim to gather insights on how readers experience the novel "I Shall Seal the Heavens", readers' opinions on its translation, and readers' understanding of Xia culture. This survey should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Your participation will help improve the translation and dissemination of these novels and further our understanding of how readers engage with Chinese culture through literature. Please note the following: 1.This survey is anonymous: The data collected will be used solely for research purposes, and we guarantee that your privacy will be protected. None of your personal information will be disclosed. 2.We ask that you provide honest responses: The success of this study relies on your genuine input. Your honest opinions and experiences are essential to ensuring accurate and meaningful results. 3. As a precaution, the survey's introductory page advised that participants should be 18 or older (or else have parental permission to participate). 4. You may skip any question or discontinue the survey at any time without penalty. Submission of the completed questionnaire will be regarded as your informed consent to participate. Once again, thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts. We appreciate your contribution!

Part 1: Demographics and General Information

Q0 How far have you read in I Shall Seal the Heavens?

- ○ I've just started reading the novel (Chapters 1-50) (1)
- ○ I've read more than 50 chapters but haven't finished the novel.(Please specify the approximate range of chapters you've read, e.g., Chapters 51-200) (2)
- ○ I've finished the entire novel(Chapter 1614) (3)
- ○ No, I haven't read this novel. (4)

Q1 What is your gender?

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Non-binary (3)
- ○ Prefer not to say (4)

Q2 What is your age group?

- ○ Under 18 (1)
- ○ 18-24 (2)
- ○ 25-34 (3)
- ○ 35-44 (4)
- ○ 35-44 (5)
- ○ 55+ (6)

Q3 What is your nationality?

_____

Q4 What is your first language?

- English (1)
- Chinese (2)
- Spanish (3)
- French (4)
- German (5)
- Other (please specify): (6)

_____

Q5 What is your highest level of education?

- High School or below (1)
- Bachelor's Degree (2)
- Master's Degree (3)
- Doctorate or Professional Degree (4)

Q6 Before reading "I Shall Seal the Heavens", how familiar were you with Chinese Xia culture?

- I was not familiar with it at all. (1)
- I had heard of it but didn't know much about it. (2)
- I had a basic understanding of Xia culture. (3)
- I was quite familiar with Xia culture. (4)
- I am very knowledgeable about Xia culture. (5)

Q7 Before reading "I Shall Seal the Heavens", had you previously read Wuxia novels (Stories of martial arts heroes in ancient China, like "Seven killers") or Xianxia novels (Wuxia novels with high fantasy elements such as cultivation in ancient China, like "Jade Dynasty")?

- ○ Yes, Wuxia novels (1)
- ○ Yes, Xianxia novels (2)
- ○ No, this was my first Xianxia novel (3)

Q8 How frequently do you read translated Chinese Wuxia or Xianxia novels?

- ○ Regularly (more than one novel per month) (1)
- ○ Occasionally (one novel every few months) (2)
- ○ Infrequently (a few novels per year) (3)
- ○ I have read a few, but not consistently (4)
- ○ I have never read any translated Chinese Wuxia or Xianxia novels (5)

Q9 Have you ever used a glossary or guide to help you understand Xia culture terminology in "I Shall Seal the Heavens"?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ I didn't know such a glossary existed (3)

Q10 How did you first come across "I Shall Seal the Heavens"?

- ○ Recommendations from friends (1)
- ○ Social media or online communities (2)
- ○ Translation platforms (such as: Wuxiaworld, Webnovel) (3)
- ○ Other: (4) _____

Q11 What was your main reason for reading "I Shall Seal the Heavens" ?(Choose the option that best describes your purpose)

- ○ For entertainment and enjoyment. (1)
- ○ Out of curiosity about Chinese fantasy and culture. (2)
- ○ Recommended by friends or community. (3)
- ○ To explore a new genre of fiction. (4)
- ○ Other (please specify): (5)

_____

Q12 What were your expectations before reading "I Shall Seal the Heavens"?

- ○ To be entertained by an engaging story. (1)
- ○ To experience unique fantasy elements and adventures. (2)
- ○ To learn about Chinese culture or worldview. (3)
- ○ To enjoy well-developed characters and relationships. (4)
- ○ Other (please specify): (5)

_____

Part 2: Novel Evaluation

Q13 How would you rate "I Shall Seal the Heavens"?

- ○ Excellent (1)
- ○ Very Good (2)
- ○ Good (3)
- ○ Average (4)
- ○ Below Average (5)
- ○ Poor (6)
- ○ Other (please specify): (7)

_____

Q14 What aspect(s) of the novel did you enjoy the most? (Select up to 3)

- [ ] Character development (1)
- [ ] World-building and setting (2)
- [ ] The cultivation and martial arts system (3)
- [ ] The plot twists and story progression (4)
- [ ] Humor and light-hearted moments (5)
- [ ] Other: (6) _____
- [ ] Please expand on the reasons for your choices: (7) _____

Q15 After reading "I Shall Seal the Heavens", do you feel more interested in reading other Xianxia novels?

- ○ Yes, definitely-I'm excited to explore more Xianxia stories. (1)
- ○ Yes, somewhat-I might read more Xianxia novels if I find good recommendations. (2)
- ○ Neutral-I don't have strong feelings about reading more Xianxia novels. (3)
- ○ No, not really-I didn't find the genre engaging enough to continue. (4)
- ○ No, definitely not-I'm not interested in exploring Xianxia novels further. (5)

Part 3: Translation Evaluation

Q16 How well do you think the translation of "I Shall Seal the Heavens" conveyed the story and its characters?

- ○ Very well-The story and characters were easy to follow and enjoyable. (1)
- ○ Quite well-I could follow the story and characters, but there were minor issues. (2)
- ○ Somewhat well-I understood most of the story and characters, but there were some confusing parts. (3)
- ○ Not very well-I had difficulty understanding the story and characters due to the translation. (4)
- ○ Not well at all-It was very hard to follow the story and characters. (5)

Q17 Do you pay close attention to the translation annotations in the novel?

- ○ Yes, I read them carefully and find them helpful. (1)
- ○ Yes, but I only skim through them occasionally. (2)
- ○ No, I tend to ignore the annotations. (3)
- ○ No, I tend to ignore the annotations. (4)
- ○ Other: (5) _____

Q18 How did you feel about the use of footnotes in the translation of "I Shall Seal the Heavens"?

- ○ Very helpful-They clarified important terms and cultural elements. (1)
- ○ Somewhat helpful-They were useful for understanding specific parts but were not always necessary. (2)
- ○ Neutral-I could take them or leave them; they didn't make much difference. (3)
- ○ Distracting-They broke the flow of the story, and I preferred reading without them. (4)
- ○ Unhelpful-I found them confusing or unnecessary. (5)

Q19 Which translation of "气" do you prefer in the context of the novel?
(Note: "气" refers to the vital energy or life force in traditional Chinese philosophy and practices).

- ○ Qi (Transliteration) (1)
- ○ Air or Breath (Literal Translation) (2)
- ○ Vital Energy (Free Translation) (3)
- ○ Life Force (Interpretative Translation) (4)
- ○ None of the above / Other: (5)

_____

Q20 Which translation of "筑基" do you prefer in the context of the novel?
(Note: "筑基" refers to the foundational stage in the cultivation process, where a practitioner establishes their inner strength and abilities).

- ○ Zhuji (Transliteration) (1)
- ○ Foundation (Literal Translation) (2)
- ○ Establishing the Foundation (Free Translation) (3)
- ○ Laying the Foundation (Interpretative Translation) (4)
- ○ None of the above / Other: (5)

_____

Q21 Which translation of "一炷香" do you prefer in the context of the novel?
(Note: "一炷香" refers to a traditional measure of time based on how long it takes for a stick of incense to burn).

- ○ Yizhu Xiang (Transliteration) (1)
- ○ The Space of time it takes an incense stick to burn (Literal Translation) (2)
- ○ A Moment of Incense (Free Translation) (3)
- ○ An Incense Offering (Interpretative Translation) (4)
- ○ Half an hour(Adaptation) (5)
- ○ None of the above / Other: (6)

_____

Q22 Which translation of "师姐" do you prefer in the context of the novel?(Note: "师姐" literally means "senior martial sister", a term used in martial arts or cultivation settings to refer to a female senior disciple in the same sect. It reflects both hierarchy and camaraderie.)

- ○ Shijie (Transliteration) (1)
- ○ Senior Martial Sister (Literal Translation) (2)
- ○ Elder Sister (Free Translation) (3)
- ○ Sister Mentor (Interpretative Translation) (4)
- ○ None of the above / Other: (5)

_____

Q23 Overall, how do you prefer the translation of terms related to Xia culture and cultivation (like "Foundation" "Qi" or "Immortal Ascension")?

- ○ Transliteration (e.g., "Qi" for 气) (1)
- ○ Literal Translation (e.g., "Foundation" for 筑基) (2)
- ○ Free Translation (e.g., "Life Energy" for "气") (3)
- ○ Adaptation (e.g., "Half an hour" for "一炷香") (4)
- ○ Annotation (e.g., adding explanations for terms) (5)
- ○ A mix of approaches-It depends on the context; sometimes transliteration works, and sometimes a translated meaning is better. (6)
- ○ Other (please specify): (7)

_____

- ○ Please justify/explain your selection: (8)

_____

Q24 Are you okay with the translator making adaptations due to cultural differences, such as simplifying or omitting certain passages?

- ○ Yes, definitely-I think it's necessary to adapt certain parts to make the story more accessible. (1)
- ○ Yes, somewhat-Minor adaptations are acceptable if they help with understanding, but key elements should stay intact. (2)
- ○ Neutral-I don't have a strong opinion about it. (3)
- ○ No, not really-I prefer the story to stay as close to the original as possible, with minimal changes. (4)
- ○ No, definitely not-I want the full story as the original author intended, even if it's harder to understand. (5)

Q25 Did the translation of this novel give you a sense of the unique aspects of Chinese culture?

- ○ Yes, very much-I felt a strong connection to the unique cultural elements throughout the story. (1)
- ○ Yes, somewhat-I noticed some cultural aspects that intrigued me. (2)
- ○ Neutral-I didn't really feel a strong sense of Chinese culture from the translation. (3)
- ○ No, not really-The translation didn't convey much of the cultural uniqueness. (4)
- ○ No, not at all-I felt disconnected from the cultural context in the novel. (5)

Part 4: Understanding and Engagement with Xia culture

Q26 After reading "I Shall Seal the Heavens", has your interest in Chinese traditional culture:

- ○ Increased significantly (1)
- ○ Increased somewhat (2)
- ○ Remained the same (3)
- ○ Decreased somewhat (4)
- ○ Decreased significantly (5)

Q27 In your own words, how would you describe the key elements of Xia culture that you perceived in this novel?

_____

Q28 While reading the novel, did you encounter any expressions or phrases that negatively affected your reading experience？

_____

Part 5: Plot and Cultural Comprehension

Q29 Which elements of Xia culture did you find most difficult to understand in I Shall Seal the Heavens (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Martial arts and cultivation system (1)
- ☐ Power structures (e.g., sects, clans) (2)
- ☐ Character motivations based on Chinese values (3)
- ☐ Use of Chinese mythology or historical references (4)
- ☐ None of the above / Other: (5)

_____

Q30 Which storyline or plot point in I Shall Seal the Heavens was hardest to follow due to cultural or translation issues?

- ○ Power struggles (1)
- ○ Martial techniques and cultivation methods (2)
- ○ Philosophical or spiritual beliefs (3)
- ○ None of the above / Other: (4)

_____

Part 6: Final Evaluation

Q31 Would you recommend "I Shall Seal the Heavens" to someone unfamiliar with Xia culture or Chinese novels?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ Maybe (3)
- ○ Please /explain your selection: (4)

_____

Q32 How likely are you to continue reading other Xianxia or Wuxia novels based on your experience with this novel?

- ○ Very likely (1)
- ○ Somewhat likely (2)
- ○ Not sure (3)
- ○ Unlikely (4)
- ○ Please explain your selection: (5)

_____

Q33 Overall, how satisfied are you with "I Shall Seal the Heavens"?

- ○ Very satisfied (1)
- ○ Satisfied (2)
- ○ Neutral (3)
- ○ Dissatisfied (4)
- ○ Very dissatisfied (5)
- ○ Please explain your selection: (6)

_____

Q34 How would you evaluate the English language translation of "I Shall Seal the Heavens"? (Consider aspects such as clarity, readability, and so on).

_____

Q35 What aspects of the English language translation do you believe could be improved? (Please share your thoughts and suggestions).

_____

Q36 If you have read both I Shall Seal the Heavens and A Will Eternal, which book did you find to be more readable and easy to follow?
(Please consider factors such as sentence structure, vocabulary, and overall narrative flow.).

- ○ I Shall Seal the Heavens (1)
- ○ A Will Eternal (2)
- ○ Both were equally readable and easy to follow (3)
- ○ Neither was particularly readable or easy to follow (4)
- ○ Not applicable (5)

Thank you for your valuable time and insights! Your feedback will contribute to understanding how Chinese web novels and Xia culture are perceived internationally. We greatly appreciate your participation!

Appendix E: Survey on AWE and Xia culture

Before You Begin: Thank you for participating in this survey! We aim to gather insights on how readers experience the novel "A Will Eternal", readers' opinions on its translation, and readers' understanding of Xia culture. This survey should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Your participation will help improve the translation and dissemination of these novels and further our understanding of how readers engage with Chinese culture through literature. Please note the following: 1.This survey is anonymous: The data collected will be used solely for research purposes, and we guarantee that your privacy will be protected. None of your personal information will be disclosed. 2.We ask that you provide honest responses: The success of this study relies on your genuine input. Your honest opinions and experiences are essential to ensuring accurate and meaningful results. 3. As a precaution, the survey's introductory page advised that participants should be 18 or older (or else have parental permission to participate). 4. You may skip any question or discontinue the survey at any time without penalty. Submission of the completed questionnaire will be regarded as your informed consent to participate. Once again, thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts. Once again, thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts. We appreciate your contribution!

Part 1: Demographics and General Information

Q0 How far have you read in "A Will Eternal"?

- ○ I've just started reading the novel (Chapters 1-50) (1)
- ○ I've read more than 50 chapters but haven't finished the novel.(Please specify the approximate range of chapters you've read, e.g., Chapters 51-200) (2) _____
- ○ I've finished the entire novel (3)
- ○ No, I haven't read this novel. (4)

Q1 What is your gender?

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Non-binary (3)
- ○ Prefer not to say (4)

Q2 What is your age group?

- ○ Under 18 (1)
- ○ 18-24 (2)
- ○ 25-34 (3)
- ○ 35-44 (4)
- ○ 35-44 (5)
- ○ 55+ (6)

Q3 What is your nationality?

_____

Q4 What is your first language?

- English (1)
- Chinese (2)
- Spanish (3)
- French (4)
- German (5)
- Other (please specify): (6)

_____

Q5 What is your highest level of education?

- High School or below (1)
- Bachelor's Degree (2)
- Master's Degree (3)
- Doctorate or Professional Degree (4)

Q6 Before reading "A Will Eternal", how familiar were you with Chinese Xia culture?

- I was not familiar with it at all. (1)
- I had heard of it but didn't know much about it. (2)
- I had a basic understanding of Chinese traditional culture. (3)
- I was quite familiar with Xia culture. (4)
- I am very knowledgeable about Xia culture. (5)

Q7 Before reading "A Will Eternal", had you previously read Wuxia novels (Stories of martial arts heroes in ancient China, like "Seven killers") or Xianxia novels (Wuxia novels with high fantasy elements such as cultivation in ancient China, like "Jade Dynasty")?

- ○ Yes, Wuxia novels (1)
- ○ Yes, Xianxia novels (2)
- ○ No, this was my first Xianxia novel (3)

Q8 How frequently do you read translated Chinese Wuxia or Xianxia novels?

- ○ Regularly (more than one novel per month) (1)
- ○ Occasionally (one novel every few months) (2)
- ○ Infrequently (a few novels per year) (3)
- ○ I have read a few, but not consistently (4)
- ○ I have never read any translated Chinese Wuxia or Xianxia novels (5)

Q9 Have you ever used a glossary or guide to help you understand Xia culture terminology in "A Will Eternal"?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ I didn't know such a glossary existed (3)

Q10 How did you first come across "A Will Eternal"?

- ○ Recommendations from friends (1)
- ○ Social media or online communities (2)
- ○ Translation platforms (such as: Wuxiaworld, Webnovel) (3)
- ○ Other: (4) _____

Q11 What was your main reason for reading "A Will Eternal"?(Choose the option that best describes your purpose)

- ○ For entertainment and enjoyment. (1)
- ○ Out of curiosity about Chinese fantasy and culture. (2)
- ○ Recommended by friends or community. (3)
- ○ To explore a new genre of fiction. (4)
- ○ Other (please specify): (5)

_____

Q12 What were your expectations before reading "A Will Eternal"?

- ○ To be entertained by an engaging story. (1)
- ○ To experience unique fantasy elements and adventures. (2)
- ○ To learn about Chinese culture or worldview. (3)
- ○ To enjoy well-developed characters and relationships. (4)
- ○ Other (please specify): (5)

_____

Part 2: Novel Evaluation

Q13 How would you rate "A Will Eternal"?

- ○ Excellent (1)
- ○ Very Good (2)
- ○ Good (3)
- ○ Average (4)
- ○ Below Average (5)
- ○ Poor (6)
- ○ Other (please specify): (7) _____

Q14 What aspect(s) of the novel did you enjoy the most? (Select up to 3)

- ☐ Character development (1)
- ☐ World-building and setting (2)
- ☐ The cultivation and martial arts system (3)
- ☐ The plot twists and story progression (4)
- ☐ Humor and light-hearted moments (5)
- ☐ Other: (6) _____
- ☐ Please expand on the reasons for your choices: (7) _____

Q15 After reading "A Will Eternal", do you feel more interested in reading other Xianxia novels?

- ○ Yes, definitely-I'm excited to explore more Xianxia stories. (1)
- ○ Yes, somewhat-I might read more Xianxia novels if I find good recommendations. (2)
- ○ Neutral-I don't have strong feelings about reading more Xianxia novels. (3)
- ○ No, not really-I didn't find the genre engaging enough to continue. (4)
- ○ No, definitely not-I'm not interested in exploring Xianxia novels further. (5)

Part 3: Translation Evaluation

Q16 How well do you think the translation of "A Will Eternal" conveyed the story and its characters?

- ○ Very well-The story and characters were easy to follow and enjoyable. (1)
- ○ Quite well-I could follow the story and characters, but there were minor issues. (2)
- ○ Somewhat well-I understood most of the story and characters, but there were some confusing parts. (3)
- ○ Not very well-I had difficulty understanding the story and characters due to the translation. (4)
- ○ Not well at all-It was very hard to follow the story and characters. (5)

Q17 Do you pay close attention to the translation annotations in the novel?

- ○ Yes, I read them carefully and find them helpful. (1)
- ○ Yes, but I only skim through them occasionally. (2)
- ○ No, I tend to ignore the annotations. (3)
- ○ No, I tend to ignore the annotations. (4)
- ○ Other: (5) _____

Q18 How did you feel about the use of footnotes in the translation of "A Will Eternal"?

- ○ Very helpful-They clarified important terms and cultural elements. (1)
- ○ Somewhat helpful-They were useful for understanding specific parts but were not always necessary. (2)
- ○ Neutral-I could take them or leave them; they didn't make much difference. (3)
- ○ Distracting-They broke the flow of the story, and I preferred reading without them. (4)
- ○ Unhelpful-I found them confusing or unnecessary. (5)

Q19 Which translation of "气" do you prefer in the context of the novel?
(Note: "气" refers to the vital energy or life force in traditional Chinese philosophy and practices).

- ○ Qi (Transliteration) (1)
- ○ Air or Breath (Literal Translation) (2)
- ○ Vital Energy (Free Translation) (3)
- ○ Life Force (Interpretative Translation) (4)
- ○ None of the above / Other: (5) _____

Q20 Which translation of "筑基" do you prefer in the context of the novel?

(Note: "筑基" refers to the foundational stage in the cultivation process, where a practitioner establishes their inner strength and abilities).

- ○ Zhuji (Transliteration) (1)
- ○ Foundation (Literal Translation) (2)
- ○ Establishing the Foundation (Free Translation) (3)
- ○ Laying the Foundation (Interpretative Translation) (4)
- ○ None of the above / Other: (5)

_____

Q21 Which translation of "一炷香" do you prefer in the context of the novel?

(Note: "一炷香" refers to a traditional measure of time based on how long it takes for a stick of incense to burn).

- ○ Yizhu Xiang (Transliteration) (1)
- ○ The Space of time it takes an incense stick to burn (Literal Translation) (2)
- ○ A Moment of Incense (Free Translation) (3)
- ○ An Incense Offering (Interpretative Translation) (4)
- ○ Half an hour(Adaptation) (5)
- ○ None of the above / Other: (6)

_____

Q22 Which translation of "师姐" do you prefer in the context of the novel?(Note: "师姐" literally means "senior martial sister", a term used in martial arts or cultivation settings to refer to a female senior disciple in the same sect. It reflects both hierarchy and camaraderie.)

- ○ Shijie (Transliteration) (1)
- ○ Senior Martial Sister (Literal Translation) (2)
- ○ Elder Sister (Free Translation) (3)
- ○ Sister Mentor (Interpretative Translation) (5)
- ○ None of the above / Other: (6)

_____

Q23 Overall, how do you prefer the translation of terms related to Xia culture and cultivation (like "Foundation" "Qi" or "Immortal Ascension")?

- ○ Transliteration (e.g., "Qi" for 气) (1)
- ○ Literal Translation (e.g., "Foundation" for 筑基) (2)
- ○ Free Translation (e.g., "Life Energy" for "气") (3)
- ○ Adaptation (e.g., "Half an hour" for "一炷香") (4)
- ○ Annotation (e.g., adding explanations for terms) (5)
- ○ A mix of approaches-It depends on the context; sometimes transliteration works, and sometimes a translated meaning is better. (6)
- ○ Other (please specify): (7)

_____

- ○ Please justify/explain your selection: (8)

_____

Q24 Are you okay with the translator making adaptations due to cultural differences, such as simplifying or omitting certain passages?

- ○ Yes, definitely-I think it's necessary to adapt certain parts to make the story more accessible. (1)
- ○ Yes, somewhat-Minor adaptations are acceptable if they help with understanding, but key elements should stay intact. (2)
- ○ Neutral-I don't have a strong opinion about it. (3)
- ○ No, not really-I prefer the story to stay as close to the original as possible, with minimal changes. (4)
- ○ No, definitely not-I want the full story as the original author intended, even if it's harder to understand. (5)

Q25 Did the translation of this novel give you a sense of the unique aspects of Chinese culture?

- ○ Yes, very much-I felt a strong connection to the unique cultural elements throughout the story. (1)
- ○ Yes, somewhat-I noticed some cultural aspects that intrigued me. (2)
- ○ Neutral-I didn't really feel a strong sense of Chinese culture from the translation. (3)
- ○ No, not really-The translation didn't convey much of the cultural uniqueness. (4)
- ○ No, not at all-I felt disconnected from the cultural context in the novel. (5)

Start 4: Understanding and Engagement with Xia culture

Q26 After reading "A Will Eternal", has your interest in Chinese traditional culture:

- ○ Increased significantly (1)
- ○ Increased somewhat (2)
- ○ Remained the same (3)
- ○ Decreased somewhat (4)
- ○ Decreased significantly (5)

Q27 In your own words, how would you describe the key elements of Xia culture that you perceived in this novel?

_____

Q28 While reading the novel, did you encounter any expressions or phrases that negatively affected your reading experience?

_____

Part 5: Plot and Cultural Comprehension

Q29 Which elements of Xia culture did you find most difficult to understand in "A Will Eternal"(Select all that apply)

- ☐ Martial arts and cultivation system (1)
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- ☐ Character motivations based on Chinese values (3)
- ☐ Use of Chinese mythology or historical references (4)
- ☐ None of the above / Other: (5) _____

Q30 Which storyline or plot point in "A Will Eternal" was hardest to follow due to cultural or translation issues?

- ○ Power struggles (1)
- ○ Martial techniques and cultivation methods (2)
- ○ Philosophical or spiritual beliefs (3)
- ○ None of the above / Other: (4) _____

Part 6: Final Evaluation

Q31 Would you recommend "A Will Eternal" to someone unfamiliar with Xia culture or Chinese novels?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ Maybe (3)
- ○ Please /explain your selection: (4)

_____

Q32 How likely are you to continue reading other Xianxia or Wuxia novels based on your experience with this novel?

- ○ Very likely (1)
- ○ Somewhat likely (2)
- ○ Not sure (3)
- ○ Unlikely (4)
- ○ Please explain your selection: (5)

_____

Q33 Overall, how satisfied are you with "A Will Eternal"?

- ○ Very satisfied (1)
- ○ Satisfied (2)
- ○ Neutral (3)
- ○ Dissatisfied (4)
- ○ Very dissatisfied (5)
- ○ Please explain your selection: (6)

_____

Q34 How would you evaluate the English language translation of "A Will Eternal"? (Consider aspects such as clarity, readability, and so on).

_____

Q35 What aspects of the English language translation do you believe could be improved? (Please share your thoughts and suggestions).

_____

Q36 If you have read both I Shall Seal the Heavens and A Will Eternal, which book did you find to be more readable and easy to follow?
(Please consider factors such as sentence structure, vocabulary, and overall narrative flow.).

- ○ I Shall Seal the Heavens (1)
- ○ A Will Eternal (2)
- ○ Both were equally readable and easy to follow (3)
- ○ Neither was particularly readable or easy to follow (4)
- ○ Not applicable (5)

Thank you for your valuable time and insights! Your feedback will contribute to understanding how Chinese online novels and Xia culture are perceived internationally. We greatly appreciate your participation!