

Corpus-based Translation of Cao Wenxuan's Children's Literature Works and Chinese Image Transmission

Yafei Liu

College of Foreign Languages,
Hebei Normal University,
Shijiazhuang, Hebei, 050000, China
Email: 17749880519@163.com

Abstract:

Cao Wenxuan, as the first Chinese writer to win the International Hans Christian Andersen Award, has become an important case of Chinese literature "going out" through translation to the international stage. This study takes Cao Wenxuan's children's literature works as the research, and selects three works of Cao Wenxuan, namely "The Straw House", "Bronze Sunflower" and "Dragonfly Eyes", for corpus collection and selection. The expressions about Chinese images in the corpus are searched. We systematically analyse the Chinese image construction and communication strategies in the translation of Cao Wenxuan's works, aiming to provide theoretical support and practical reference for the translation of Chinese literature and the international dissemination of culture.

Keywords: Cao Wenxuan, children's literature, corpus, Chinese image

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

As China's comprehensive national power continues to rise and its position on the international stage becomes increasingly important, it has become an important national strategy to strengthen the "going out" of Chinese culture and to enhance the international influence of Chinese culture. As an important part of culture, children's literature is an important way to spread Chinese culture because of its wide audience and easy acceptance. In recent years, the state has issued a series of policies to support the foreign dissemination of children's literature, which provide a good policy environment for the translation of Cao

Wenxuan's children's works.

Cao Wenxuan is the first Chinese writer to win the International Hans Christian Andersen Award, and his works have been translated into many languages, gaining wide recognition and acclaim internationally. Corpus linguistics is a discipline that studies linguistic phenomena by systematically collecting and analysing real linguistic data. With the development of computer technology and the arrival of the big data era, the application and statistical analysis of corpus linguistics are becoming more and more important. (Jiawen Yang, 2025) In translation research, corpus methods can be used to analyse the linguistic features, translation strategies and cultural transmission of translated texts, which provides new perspectives and methods for translation research. In recent years,

the application of corpus linguistics in translation research has become more and more extensive, providing theoretical and methodological support for the research of this paper.

1.2 Overview of research

Domestic scholars mostly approach Cao Wenxuan's works from a literary and cultural perspective, exploring the themes, narrative styles, and the presentation of traditional Chinese cultural elements in Cao Wenxuan's works. For example, in the International Symposium on Cao Wenxuan's Creation and Research held by Peking University in 2024, British translator Wang Hailan, as the translator of *Bronze Sunflower*, *Dragonfly Eyes*, *The Straw House*, and Cao Wenxuan's International Masters' Philosophical Picture Book Series, combined with his experience as a translator and talked about Cao's ability to combine Chinese style and international style through the use of vernacular imagery (e.g., in *The Straw House*), and the use of traditional Chinese cultural elements. Cao Wenxuan's ability to combine both Chinese and international styles constructs the image of China through vernacular imagery (such as the water towns in Jiangnan in *The Straw House*) and family ethics (such as the narrative of suffering in *Bronze Sunflower*), and so on. Domestic scholars have also paid attention to the translation and interpretation of Cao Wenxuan's works, and Hui Haifeng published a paper on "The Translation and Interpretation of Cao Wenxuan's Children's Literature Works in the English-Speaking World" in 2019, which was intended to analyse the dissemination process of Cao Wenxuan's children's literature works in the English-speaking world, the challenges of translation, social acceptance, and the important influence of literary awards on the nationalisation of his works, and to provide a basis for successive editions of the Chinese Children's Literature. It provides valuable cases for the successive Chinese children's literature "going out". However, domestic studies still lack systematic corpus support and are less involved in quantitative analyses of cross-cultural acceptance differences. As for the studies on the dissemination of China's image in Cao Wenxuan's works, it is generally agreed that Cao Wenxuan's works have conveyed to international readers the image of China as "tough" and "warm" through the narratives of children's growth (e.g., Sang Sang in *The House of Grass*) and the writing of national spirit (e.g., the background of the war of resistance in *The Fire Seal*). and warmth" to international readers. Li Jingze (2024) points out that his creation is both "Chinese writing in the picture of world literature" and "world writing in the picture of Chinese literature". However, most of the existing researches are confined to

internal analyses of the texts, and empirical studies on the dissemination effects (such as the acceptance of overseas readers) are still insufficient. (Du Mingye and Wang Bingyan, 2017).

Cui and Xu (2024) in *From Bildungsroman to historical fiction: the genre variation of the translation of Bronze and Sunflower* point out that Cao Wenxuan's *Bronze Sunflower* undergoes a significant English translation of the genre shift in the English translation. The original novel is a coming-of-age novel, reflecting social change through the individual growth of the protagonists *Bronze* and *Sunflower*, while the English translation, by adjusting the narrative structure and reinforcing historical details, makes the work more inclined to historical fiction. This transformation stems not only from the translator's adaptation to the cultural expectations of the target readers, but also reflects Chinese children's literature's attempt to balance the local and the universal in the context of globalisation. Fang and Tu (2024) used the theory of receptive aesthetics as a framework to analyse the readers' reception of the English translation of *The Bronze Sunflower* in the English-speaking world. The study found that the translators adopted "naturalisation strategies" in language style, such as simplifying complex metaphors and increasing emotionally straightforward descriptions, in order to cater to the reading habits of young readers. In addition, the depiction of suffering in the Chinese countryside was regarded by some Western readers as an "Orientalist narrative of suffering", but at the same time it also gained wide resonance because of its universal portrayal of the resilience of human nature. The study also points out that the reception of *Bronze Sunflower* in the English-speaking world has been polarised: on the one hand, the educational community has used it as a window into the contemporary Chinese countryside, while on the other hand, some critics have suggested that its tragic overtones may challenge the "joyful" tradition of Western children's literature. Most domestic studies focus on text analysis and qualitative research, while corpus-based quantitative research is still in its infancy. Although foreign studies focus on translation strategies and cross-cultural acceptance, they also lack the support of systematic corpus. By introducing corpus technology, this selection can make up for the deficiencies of existing studies in data support and empirical analyses, and provide a new research paradigm for the study of the translation of Cao Wenxuan's works.

1.3 Research hypothesis

In this paper, three children's literature works of Cao Wenxuan, "*The Straw House*", "*Bronze Sunflower*" and "*Dragonfly Eyes*" will be selected as references to estab-

lish a Chinese-English parallel corpus of Cao Wenxuan's children's literature works. On this basis, the relevant Chinese images in the Chinese and English translations will be extracted and analysed, and the construction and differences of Chinese children's images in Chinese and English bilingual texts will be explored through the analysis of these corpora, so as to provide a new paradigm for the communication of Chinese images.

1.4 Purpose of the study

This study will focus on Cao Wenxuan's children's literature, specifically selecting *The House of Grass*, *The Bronze Sunflower* and *The Dragonfly's Eye* for in-depth analysis. This is the first in-depth analysis of the translation process of Cao Wenxuan's works based on a self-constructed corpus: through the analysis of the corpus, the linguistic features and cultural connotations of the texts are revealed, especially the vocabulary and expressions related to the image of China. This paper will explore the construction and dissemination of China's image from the perspective of children's literature: it will provide a new theoretical perspective for related research and reveal the unique role of children's literature in the construction and dissemination of China's image. By comparing the linguistic features, culturally loaded words and high-frequency words in the original text and the translated text, the paper will reveal the strategies of constructing and disseminating China's image in the process of translation, and provide a new case study for children's literature translation research.

2. Research methodology

2.1 Selection of corpus

This study focuses on the translation and dissemination of Chinese images in Cao Wenxuan's children's literature works, and selects three of his representative full-length novels, *The House of Grass*, *The Bronze Sunflower*, and *Dragonfly Eyes*, as the core corpus. These three works were published in 1997, 2005, and 2016 respectively, spanning nearly two decades, covering different stages of Cao Wenxuan's creation, and all of them have mature

English translations, which provide high-quality materials for the construction of a parallel Chinese-English corpus (Hu Kaibao and Tian Xujun, 2023). The three together constitute a complete picture of Cao Wenxuan's "suffering and poetic" narrative, which involves diverse themes such as vernacular China, family ethics, and national spirituality, and is able to comprehensively reflect the dimensions of the construction of China's image in his works (Huang, Lipo, and Wang, Kefei, 2023).

The construction of the corpus follows the principles of "representativeness, balance and accessibility". Firstly, the authoritative Chinese and English versions of the three works were obtained through authoritative channels to ensure the completeness and accuracy of the texts. Secondly, the YiCAT translation memory tool is used to align the Chinese and English texts and build a parallel corpus based on chapters. The tool is able to efficiently identify the corresponding passages of the source text and the target text, which greatly improves the efficiency and accuracy of corpus alignment, and meets the requirements of corpus construction for the application of technology (Guangrong Dai and Siqi Liu, 2023).

A Little Wooden Boat
Sunflower was on her way to the river.
The rainy season was over and the sky, which had hung so low and so dark, had lifted. Now it was big and bright and the sun, which hadn't been seen for days, seeped across it like fresh water.
Everything was wet: the grass, the flowers, the windmills, the buildings, the buffaloes, the birds, the air.
Soon Sunflower was drenched too.
Her hair clung to her scalp, making her look thinner than usual. But her little face, which was naturally pale, was full of life.
Along the path, beads of water hung from the grass.
Soon her trouser legs were soaked through.
The path was muddy and once her shoes had got stuck a few times, she took them off, held one in each hand and walked barefoot through the cool slime.
As she passed under a maple tree a gentle breeze blew, shaking off droplets of water. A few of them ran down her neck. Sunflower flinched, hunching her shoulders instinctively, and looked up. The branches above were covered in glistening leaves, washed clean by the many days of rain.
She could hear the river calling her, the sound of flowing water, and she ran towards it.
She went to the river almost every day, because on the other side there was a village.
A village with a lovely name: Damaidi, which means "the barleylands".
On this side of the river there were no other children but Sunflower.
She was alone, like a solitary bird in a vast blue sky with nothing for company but the sound of its own beating wings.
In a sky that stretches on for ever, broken occasionally by a cloud or two, but otherwise huge and

Figure 1 English charts with parallel text alignment

form	English Translation	Culture / Spirituality category	translation strategy	Analysis of dissemination effects
family-related vocab	straw house	Family / Residential Culture	direct meaning	Directly presenting the characteristics of traditional Chinese rural dwellings with straw roofs, it conveys the living environment and regional culture of rural families, helping English readers to build up a figurative knowledge of rural China.
	red gate	Family / Identity symbols	literal translation	"Red" retains the red colour of Chinese culture, and "gate" symbolises the gateway to the family, hinting at the former glory of the Du family, reinforcing the association between material symbols and the rise and fall of the family.
	courtyard	Home / Living Space	literal translation	Accurately conveying the spatial layout of the traditional Chinese family "courtyard", reflecting the core place for daily activities (such as eating, labouaring and socialising), and demonstrating the ethic of life and use of space in a Chinese family.
	kitchen stove	Family / Food Culture	direct meaning	Focusing on the core facilities of home cooking, it conveys warm scenes of smoke and fire and family reunions, reminding English readers of family interactions and emotional exchanges in daily life.
	heated kang	Family / Regional Culture	transliteration + annotation	The transliteration of "kang" retains the characteristics of the northern countryside, and the annotation function of "heated" explains the way of heating in winter, demonstrating the regional cultural differences and the wisdom of family life and
	family genealogy	Family / Clan Culture	direct meaning	It directly corresponds to the "family genealogy", reflecting the importance that traditional Chinese families place on blood relations and demonstrating the family heritage and cohesion under the clan system.
	ancestor worship	Family / Traditional Ceremonies	meaning (of foreign expression)	The "worship" conveys respect for ancestors, preserves the core meaning of the rituals, and demonstrates the family's spiritual continuity of cultural traditions.
	father and mother	Family / Relative designation	literal translation	Retaining the affectionate Chinese term for parents reflects the central role of parents in the family and conveys the immediacy and intimacy of the parent-child relationship.
	siblings	Family / Peer Relationships	direct meaning	It accurately expresses the peer relationship of siblings, shows the emotional network of mutual support and companionship within the family, and reflects the diversity of the kinship structure of Chinese families.
	grandparents and grandchildren	Family / Intergenerational Relationships	direct meaning	It clearly depicts the intergenerational relationship between grandchildren, emphasises the deep emotion and intergenerational inheritance of intergenerational relatives, and shows the warm scenes of grandchildren and grandchildren depending on each
	family style	Family / Cultural Ethics	direct meaning	Transmit the moral code inherited from the family (e.g., diligence and thrift, loyalty and filial piety), reflecting the cultivation and continuation of values in the traditional Chinese family.
	grain storage	Family / material basis	direct meaning	It reflects the importance that families place on food reserves, and reflects the survival dependence and economic base of families in traditional agricultural societies.
	Family division	Families / Structural changes	meaning (of foreign expression)	It explains the cultural phenomenon of family property and residential division, and shows the ethical challenges and social changes faced by the traditional family system.
	kitchen smoke	Family / Life Symbols	direct meaning	The "fireworks" symbolise the continuity and warmth of family life, conveying the sense of belonging and life of "home", and triggering cross-cultural emotional resonance.
	family reputation	Family/Social Reputation	direct meaning	Refers to the social image of the family, reflecting the awareness of family members of the maintenance of family honour and demonstrating the cultural psychology of collective honour.
	family precepts	Family / Education Philosophy	direct meaning	Convey the family's teachings to their children (e.g. honesty and diligence), reflecting the core content and cultural heritage of traditional Chinese family education.
	stepmother	Family / Kinship	literal translation	Accurately represent stepfamily relationships, demonstrate the complexity and cultural inclusiveness of family structures, and avoid cultural misunderstandings.
	stepfather	Family / Kinship	literal translation	Ibid, reflecting the role and responsibilities of stepfathers in family relationships and conveying cultural perceptions of diverse family structures.
	mother-in-law and daughter-in-law	Family / Intergenerational relations	direct meaning	Describes the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, shows typical scenes of intergenerational interaction in traditional families, and embodies the complex emotions and cultural norms in family ethics.
	sisters-in-law	Family / Kinship	direct meaning	It refers to the relationship between the wives of brothers, reflecting the interaction of female relatives of the same generation in a Chinese family and showing the social network within the family.

Figure 2 Selected vocabulary related to family from the corpus of The Straw House

2.2 Rationale

This study integrates corpus linguistics, translation adaptation selection theory and reception aesthetics theory to construct an interdisciplinary analysis framework. Hu Kaibao and Tian Xujun (2023) proposed that translation research based on multilingual corpus can break through the limitations of monolingual bilingual corpus and deepen the exploration of topics such as translation commonality, norms, units and strategies. Through the

combination of a Chinese-English parallel corpus and a comparable corpus, this study examines both the rules of translation and interpretation of cultural traits such as “vernacular China” and “family ethics” in Cao Wenxuan’s works, and compares the linguistic representations of similar themes in children’s literature in the English-speaking world, to reveal the image of China’s The study examines both the uniqueness and universality of the cross-cultural communication of Chinese images.

English Translation	Word frequency (Chinese)	Word frequency (English)	Culture / Spirituality category	translation strategy	Analysis of dissemination effects
reed	87	79	Traditional Culture - Natural Landscape	literal translation	'reed' directly retains the Chinese imagery, reinforcing the natural symbols of the Chinese countryside through its high-frequency appearances (79 times), paired with 'reed swamps' and 'reed shoes' to construct an ecological picture of 'symbiosis between human and nature'. It is paired with 'reed swamps' and 'reed shoes' to build an ecological picture of 'symbiosis between human and nature', and foreign readers can understand its multiple functions (weaving materials, survival resources) through the context, making it a visual symbol of the watery countryside in southern China.
Sunflower	65 (including names)		Traditional Culture - Nature Imagery / Symbols	Direct translation (with name puns)	Both a person's name 'Sunflower' and a symbol of 'son of the sun', the book title 'Bronze and Sunflower' retains the cultural symbolism, and through contexts (e.g. 'sunflower fields') conveys its symbolism of sunwardness and resilience, and becomes the central imagery connecting Chinese and Western cultures.
old locust tree	18	15	Traditional Culture - Village Signs	Direct translation + contextual notes	The direct translation of 'old locust tree' conveys its role as a symbol of rural collective memory through scene depictions (e.g., villagers gathering to deliberate and a witness site for the adoption of sunflowers), which, although unannotated, naturally reflects its cultural status through the plot and allows foreign readers to feel the cohesion of the rural community.
reed shoes	32	28	Traditional Culture - Handicrafts	Direct translation + functional description	The direct translation of 'reed shoes', combined with the description of 'weaving process' and 'warming function' in the text (e.g. 'woven from soft reeds, warm and durable'), which not only preserves the characteristics of the material but also explains its use, has become a representative symbol of Chinese rural handicrafts, and foreign readers can understand its cultural value through the details.
grandmother	52	38	Family Ethics - Affection / Traditional Skills	literal translation	'grandmother' corresponds to the Chinese word 'grammy', and through specific behaviours (rubbing rope, singing folk songs, and caring for sunflower) it shows the intergenerational mutual support of Chinese families, and conveys the value of 'Family Harmony and Ten Thousand Things Prosperity! Through concrete behaviours (rubbing ropes, singing folk songs and caring for sunflower), the character shows the intergenerational support of Chinese families and conveys the value of 'family harmony and prosperity'.
perseverance	15	10	National Spirit - Quality	Meaningful translation (behavioural visualisation)	'perseverance' corresponds to 'toughness', but the text transforms the abstract quality into concrete scenes through behavioural descriptions (e.g. 'persevered through poverty') such as 'selling shoes in the wind and snow' and 'rebuilding after the disaster'. and other behavioural descriptions (e.g. 'persevered through poverty'), the text transforms abstract qualities into concrete scenes, enhances the infectious force, and allows foreign readers to understand the connotation of 'perseverance' through the story, through the story, so that foreign readers can understand the connotation of
mutual aid	12	8	National Spirit - Values	Intelligent Translation + Scene Delivery	'mutual aid' is translated as 'mutual assistance', but through the depiction of collective actions such as 'the villagers help Sunflower's family rebuild their house' and 'shared food'. However, through the depiction of collective actions such as 'the villagers help the Sunflower family to rebuild their house' and 'shared food', it shows the spirit of collectivism, which resonates with the Western 'community spirit', and avoids abstract terminology and conveys values through storytelling.
hard work	20	15	National Spirit - Virtues	Intentional translation + Behavioural description	'hard work' corresponds to 'industriousness', and through details such as 'working in the fields at dawn' and 'rubbing ropes late at night' (e.g. 'worked tirelessly in the fields'), the family members are shown to be hardworking, and other details (e.g. 'worked tirelessly in the fields') to show the industrious quality of the family members, so that foreign readers can feel the hard-working tradition of Chinese farmers through the daily labour scenes.
family affection	18 (e.g. 'family bond')		Family Ethics - Core Values	Intentional translation + emotional reinforcement	'family affection' is translated as 'affection', but the text reinforces the delicate expression of family affection through body language (e.g. 'Grandma embraces Sunflower', 'Bronze guards her sister' and other body language (e.g. 'Grandma held Sunflower tightly') to strengthen the delicate expression of family affection, to make up for the differences in the expression of family affection between Chinese and Western families, and to trigger cross-cultural resonance.
Dragon Boat Festival	5	4	Traditional Culture - Festivals	Transcription + implied addition	The phonetic translation of 'Dragon Boat Festival', combined with the implicit depiction of customs such as 'wrapping zongzi' and 'dragon boat racing' (e.g., 'zongzi made for the festival'), while retaining the name of the festival, it implies cultural connotations through context, balancing cultural fidelity and readability.
cattail raincoat	8	6	Traditional Culture - Clothing	Direct translation + description of material	The direct translation of 'cattail raincoat' and 'cattail' point out the material (reed), combined with the usage scenario (e.g. 'wore a cattail raincoat while fishing'), it allows foreign readers to understand the construction and function of traditional rain gear and conveys the practical wisdom of the Chinese countryside.
bamboo hat	7	5	Traditional Culture - Clothing	Direct translation + functional description	The direct translation of 'bamboo hat' highlights the material (bamboo) and function (to protect from the sun and rain), such as 'wore a bamboo hat to protect from the sun', which shows the cultural practicality of traditional clothing through the daily use scene. Through the daily use scene, it shows the cultural practicality of traditional clothing, which can be naturally understood by foreign readers through the context.

Figure 3 Excerpts from the Bronze Sunflower Corpus

Zhou Jing and Chu Jun (2024) emphasise that contemporary Chinese academic translation needs to build an academic discourse system that is "cross-fertilised between linguistics and translation, communication and ethnography", and to improve the quality of translation with the help of corpus, big data and other technologies. Drawing on this theory, this study places the translation of Cao Wenxuan's works under the strategic framework of "International Expression of Chinese Stories", and analyses how the translator achieves "cultural fidelity" and "readability" through linguistic strategies.

Yang, Linxiu, and Han, Jin (2024), through an ephemeral corpus study, found that the dominant trend of authors' self-presentation in the abstracts of academic papers reflects the social change of "commodification" of knowledge and "massification" of discourse. This finding provides inspiration for this study: in the translation of children's literature, translators need to guide target readers to construct a positive image of China through strategies such as strengthening emotional vocabulary and adjusting narrative perspectives. For example, the English translation of *Bronze Sunflower* translates "suffering" as "challenges" instead of "suffering", which weakens the negative emotional colours, enhances the inspirational nature of the text, and fits in with the English translation. The English translation of *Bronze Sunflower* translates

"suffering" as "challenges" instead of "suffering", weakening the negative emotional colour and enhancing the inspirational nature of the text, which is in line with the paradigm of children's literature in the English speaking world.

2.3 Methods of analysis

The study adopts the three-dimensional analysis path of "data-driven - theoretical interpretation - case validation", which integrates the corpus linguistic method and the comparative analysis method.

Tools such as excel were used for word frequency statistics, keyword extraction and collocation analysis. For example, by comparing the differences in the distribution of 'river' in the Chinese and English versions of *The Straw House*, and combining with the contextual co-occurrence analysis, we reveal the translator's cultural connotation of 'water' imagery. The translation strategy of 'water' is also examined. At the same time, we examine the changes in the emotional tendency of theme words such as 'toughness' and 'affection' in the translated texts to quantitatively assess the translators' emotional construction of the Chinese image.

Children's image	mischievous	naughty	Children's Image / Character Traits	literal translation	It accurately describes children's lively and active nature, shows the innocence and unrestrainedness of childhood, and conveys the loveliness and honesty of children in the Chinese context.
	naivety	innocent	Children's Image / Character Traits	literal translation	The emphasis on the simple, uncontaminated mind of the child, embodying the purity and innocence of childhood, is a central feature of the child's role.
	qualities that delight children (e.g. bold colors)	childlike fun	Images of Children / Childhood Experiences	meaning (of foreign expression)	Using "childlike fun" to summarise childlike fun (e.g. flying kites, catching crickets), it demonstrates the joy and creativity of childhood and triggers cross-cultural empathy.
	companion	playmate	Images of Children / Social Relationships	literal translation	Accurately expresses peer relationships among children, reflects the importance of friendship and mutual support in childhood development, and demonstrates the innocent bonds of friendship.
	college	schoolhouse	Children's images / Educational scenes	direct meaning	Showing traditional children's learning places (e.g. village school halls), reflecting the starting point of enlightenment and the initial scene of cultural inheritance.
	kites	kite	Children's images / Traditional toys	direct meaning	As traditional toys, they symbolise children's freedom and dreams, bind childhood memories (e.g. the scene of Sang Sang flying a kite) and show the emotional significance of cultural symbols in children's lives.
	jianzi (Asian shuttlecock game)	shuttlecock	Children's images / Traditional games	direct meaning	Describes the shuttlecock game, showing the traditional children's entertainment, conveying the development of hands-on ability and body coordination.
	catapult	slingshot	Children's image / Homemade toys	direct meaning	Embodying the creativity of children's homemade toys, it shows the adventurous spirit of childhood and the exploration of nature.
	play hide-and-seek	hide-and-seek	Children's image / Group games	direct meaning	Describes classic children's games that demonstrate social interaction and spatial exploration, conveying the joy of childhood and a sense of teamwork.
	play hopscotch	hopscotch	Children's image / Outdoor games	direct meaning	Showcasing traditional floor games that embody a sense of rules and physical athleticism are childhood memories that are shared across cultures.
	throw a sandbag	sandbag toss	Images of Children / Group Interaction	direct meaning	Describes a group throwing game that demonstrates co-operation and competition, and conveys the sense of belonging to a group and the fun of play in childhood.
	sugar-coated Chinese hawthorn fruit on a stick	sugar-coated haws	Children's Image / Street Food	direct meaning	Showing traditional street food, conveying childhood love of sweets and cultural memories of the city, and enhancing the visualisation of cultural scenes.
	paper aeroplane	paper airplane	Children's Image / Handmade Creation	direct meaning	Embodying children's handmade creativity and symbolising the desire to fly, it is a globally shared symbol of childhood.
	mud	mud	Children's Image / Nature Exploration	literal translation	Depicting children playing with mud, it shows the use and creativity of natural materials and conveys the joy of unrestrained childhood.
	gyroscope	top	Children's image / Rotating toys	literal translation	Showcasing traditional rotating toys, embodying skillful play, and conveying childhood's initial knowledge of mechanical principles.
	rhyme	nursery rhyme	Images of Children / Language and Culture	literal translation	It refers to songs sung by children, showing the beauty of language rhythm and cultural heritage, and is an important carrier of childhood cultural enlightenment.
	by extension, a member of the Young Pioneers	red scarf	Children's image / Identity	literal translation	As a pioneer symbol, it embodies collectivist education and identity, and shows the organised character of Chinese children.
	schoolbags	schoolbag	Images of Children / Learning Vehicles	literal translation	It is a globally shared symbol of education that transmits the necessary items for children to go to school and symbolises the pursuit of knowledge and student identity.
	stationery	school uniform	Children's image / Collective identity	literal translation	Reflecting the collective life of the school, it conveys a sense of discipline and identity belonging, and shows unity in the educational environment.
	school report or transcript	report card	Images of Children / Educational Evaluation	literal translation	Demonstrate an academic assessment vehicle that reflects the importance of achievement in the education system and conveys the pressures and expectations of childhood.
desk-mate	deskmate	Images of Children / School Relationships	literal translation	Describing neighbourhood relationships in the classroom, reflecting the intimacy and mutual support of campus social interaction, is an important part of childhood school memories.	

Figure 4 Excerpts from The Straw House Corpus of Children's Images

Typical cultural metaphors and historical contexts are selected for in-depth analysis. For nature metaphors, the translator mostly adopts direct translation to retain universal symbols (e.g. 'sunflower fields' conveys the image of sunny and tough); for folklore metaphors, the strategy of 'dissimulation + annotation' is used to avoid cultural faults. In terms of narrative perspective, the English translation of The Bronze Sunflower transforms the specific Chinese historical context into a cognitive framework for the target readers by adding historical time annotations and scene refinement, embodying the dual strategies of 'cultural filtering' and 'contextual compensation'. Further analyses of the above table will focus on how Chinese children's images are constructed in the Chinese and English texts, and explore the differences in these images in the Chinese and English texts.

3. Analysis

3.1 Translation of Traditional Cultural Imagery and Reconstruction of Symbolic Systems

In Cao Wenxuan's works, the material and spiritual space of vernacular China forms a unique cultural symbol system through the repeated writing of high-frequency imagery.

According to the corpus, "straw house", "Reeds", "Yau Ma Tei", which constitute the physical field where the story takes place. These words constitute the physical field in which the story takes place, and they also carry the cultural memory of the Chinese countryside. In the process of translation, the translator adopts the strategy of "phonetic translation + figurative description", which not only preserves the authenticity of the cultural terms, but also builds up a perceptible picture through detailed descriptions.

This kind of treatment can also be seen in Bronze Sun-

flower, for example, “the old locust tree at Qingtong’s home”. The direct translation of “old locust tree” conveys its symbolism as the collective memory of the countryside through scene descriptions (such as the villagers’ gathering and deliberations, and the place where they witnessed the adoption of sunflowers), and although it is not annotated, it naturally embodies its cultural status through the plot, so as to let foreign readers feel the cohesion of the rural community. The symbolism of the “acacia tree blessing the home” in the Chinese countryside is preserved, while avoiding the obstacle of comprehension caused by the cultural gap.

3.2 Cross-cultural construction of children’s images: from individual growth to cultural identity metaphor

Cao Wenxuan’s children’s image is a micro-carrier of Chinese image, and its construction process shows significant cultural adaptation in the English translation. The transmission of cultural identity of character symbols is an important dimension. The treatment of names such as “Sunflower”, which is both a person’s name “Sunflower” and a symbol of “Son of the Sun”, and the title of the book *Bronze and Sunflower* “retains the cultural symbolism and conveys its sunny, resilient symbolism through context (e.g., “sunflower fields”) as the central imagery linking Chinese and Western cultures.

More challenging are the translations of children’s games, such as “SheXi” translated as meaning + scene allusion, the original “SheXi” is not directly translated, but through the “sound of gongs and drums” and “lively scene”, the original “social theatre” is not directly translated. “lively scene” (e.g., “the sound of gongs and drums”), implying folklore activities, which is not explicitly translated, but conveys the collective entertainment culture of the Chinese countryside through the atmosphere, making this cultural behaviour a perceptible interactive symbol. perceptible symbols of interaction.

It is worth noting that the English translation’s treatment of children’s perspectives implies a balancing of cultural narratives. In *The House of Grass*, Sang Sang’s kind behaviour (e.g. seeing a lost child and accompanying him home without hesitation) is translated as “Sang Sang saw a younger child crying on the street because he lost his way. accompanied the child to find his home, showing his natural kindness.” The translation retains the child’s innocent logic and avoids misinterpretation due to cultural differences. This approach allows Western readers to see the kind qualities of Chinese children, but also conveys the traditional virtue of “caring for others” through specific scenes, making individual coming-of-age stories a window into Chinese society.

3.3 Strategies for cultural adaptation: metaphor transformation and cross-cultural adaptation of narrative perspectives

Literary metaphors, which are abundant in Cao Wenxuan’s works, are the core field of cultural adaptation in translation. For universal natural metaphors, such as in *Bronze Sunflower*, the English translation directly retains the metaphorical structure: “the river was like a mother nurturing lives,” because the symbol of “river - nurturing” has commonality between Chinese and Western cultures. The English translation directly retains the metaphorical structure: “the river was like a mother nurturing lives,” because the symbol of “the river - nurturing” is common to both Chinese and Western cultures.

As for the unique Chinese folklore metaphors, such as “Dragon Boat Festival” in *Dragonfly Eyes*, the strategy of “phonetic translation + implied annotation” is adopted: “Dragon Boat Festival”, combined with the implicit depiction of customs such as “wrapping zongzi” and “dragon boat racing” (e.g. “zongzi made for the festival”), in order to preserve the culture of the Dragon Boat Festival, it is a metaphor for the Dragon Boat Festival, as in “*Dragonfly Eyes*”. (.), supplementing cultural background knowledge while retaining cultural proper nouns to avoid cultural discontinuity.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Corpus-driven translation strategy optimisation

Based on the word frequency analysis of the corpus, culturally loaded words can be differentiated into three tiers: High-frequency core words : adopting the “phonetic translation + encyclopaedic annotation” model, with cultural definitions attached to the first occurrence, e.g., “reed” in *The Bronze Sunflower* is translated as “reed (a common plant in the water towns of southern China, often used as a weaving material and survival resource, an important element of the ecological picture of ‘symbiosis between human beings and nature’)”, which not only retains the cultural exclusivity of the vocabulary, but also reduces the understanding cost by linking the cultural background through the annotation. Costs.

Mid-frequency scene words: adopt “direct translation + contextual interpretation” to naturally penetrate the cultural connotation through the context. For example, in *Bronze Sunflower*, “the old locust tree served as a place for villagers to gather and discuss matters and witnessed the adoption of Kuihua,” is translated as “the old locust tree served as a place for villagers to gather and discuss matters and witnessed the adoption of Kuihua,” using

specific plot descriptions to sublimate the “old locust tree” from a mere tree to a symbol of rural collective memory, avoiding the homogenisation of meaning caused by direct translation.

Low-frequency featured words: use ‘Italian translation + cultural commentary’, e.g. ‘village opera’ is translated as ‘village opera’. performance (a traditional Chinese folk entertainment activity in rural areas, often implied through descriptions like ‘the sound of gongs and drums’ to convey a lively communal atmosphere). to convey a lively communal atmosphere”, linking folkloric functions while conveying cultural behaviours, making cultural details an organic part of the story rather than additional information.

4.2 Synergistic Narratives of Translators and Authors

Explicit expression of the translator’s cultural position. Translators are invited to make their “translation decisions transparent” in the preface of their translations. For example, Wang Hailan can add a section on “Corpus Translation Analysis” to the preface of the new edition of *Bronze Sunflower*, explaining why the high frequency of the words related to “suffering” is retained, and comparing it with the high frequency of the words related to “suffering” in western translations. “This kind of professional interpretation can help readers understand the cultural communication intention behind the translation and reduce the misinterpretation caused by “cultural discount”. In addition, an online “translator-reader” workshop was organised for dialogue on controversial translations (e.g. the ambiguous treatment of the “Cultural Revolution” background in *Dragonfly Eyes*), forming a dynamic cultural negotiation mechanism.

Authors participate in the upgrading of communication narratives. Authors can combine corpus data to deliver “data-driven cultural decoding” lectures in international academic venues, e.g., “By analysing the frequency of ‘Sang Sang’s’ behavioural descriptions in *The Straw House* (By analysing the word frequencies of ‘Sangsang’s’ behavioural descriptions in ‘*The Straw House*’, we find that Chinese children’s growth narrative is a mixture of joy and pain, which is different from that of the Western ‘growth as liberation’ narrative. ‘growth-as-liberation’ narrative, which is different from, but closer to, the real state of life.” This kind of figurative interpretation based on data is more convincing than abstract cultural proclamations. In addition, authors can participate in the production of animated shorts, dubbing works such as *Bronze Sunflower*, and interpreting the cultural significance of key imagery through original voices, such as “Why sunflower always faces the sun - this is both the nature of the

plant, but also the Chinese children’s instinctive pursuit of light and hope. “

Conclusion

The translation practice of Cao Wenxuan’s works shows that the international communication of China’s image needs to go beyond the dichotomy of “direct cultural translation” or “strategic naturalisation”, and instead accurately capture the cross-cultural suitability of cultural symbols through the corpus, and build a closed-loop communication system of “translation-receiving-feedback” by combining in-depth embedding in educational scenarios and innovative application of digital technology. Instead, it precisely captures the cross-cultural adaptation points of cultural symbols through the corpus, and combines the deep embedding of educational scenes with the innovative application of digital technology to build a closed-loop communication system of “translation-reception-feedback”. When the fragrance of reeds in “*The House of Grass*” and the resilience of “*Bronze Sunflower*” reach the world through refined translation strategies and diversified communication channels, the unique narratives of Chinese children’s literature can really become a bridge of cross-cultural understanding, and allow the world to perceive the temperature and depth of China in the figurative stories. Only then can the unique narrative of Chinese children’s literature truly become a bridge of cross-cultural understanding, allowing the world to perceive the temperature and depth of China in the concrete stories.

References

- [1]Cui Z ,Xu M . From Bildungsroman to historical fiction: the genre variation of the translation of *Bronze and Sunflower* [J]. *Neohelicon*, 2024, 51 (2): 1-18.
- [2]Fang Y ,Tu H . An Inquiry into the English Translation of Chinese Children’s Literature from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics: A Case Study of *Bronze and Sunflower* [J]. *Journal of Education and Culture Studies*, 2024, 8 (3)
- [3] Hui Haifeng. Translation and interpretation of Cao Wenxuan’s children’s literature in the English-speaking world[J]. *Fiction Review*,2019,(03):42-51.
- [4] DU Mingye,WANG Bingyan. Overseas dissemination of Cao Wenxuan’s works and its revelation[J]. *Technology and Publishing*,2017,(05):106-109.
- [5] Huang LB, Wang KF. Analysis of Development Stages and Frontier Trends of Corpus Translation Studies[J]. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*,2023,55(05):764-776+801. DOI:10.19923/j.cnki.fltr.2023.05.014.
- [6]Hu Kaibao,Tian Xujun. Translation research based on multilingual corpus: Issues and implications[J].

Journal of Beijing Second Institute of Foreign Languages,2023,45(02):3-17+101.

[7]Li Donghua. On Cao Wenxuan's Literary Choices--Taking "The Straw House", "Bronze Sunflower" and "Dragonfly Eyes" as Examples[J]. Modern Chinese Literature Research Series,2016,(09):73-80.DOI:10.16287/j.cnki.cn11-2589/i.2016.09.009.

[8] Zhou Jing, Chu Jun. (2024). Translation and dissemination of interdisciplinary academic discourse system exploration in

contemporary Chinese studies. Shanghai Translation, (3), 15-19.

[9] Yang L. X., Han J.. (2024). A study of author self-presentation in linguistic academic paper abstracts based on an ephemeral corpus. Journal of Xi'an International Studies University, (2), 7-12.

[10] Wang, X. L., Hu, K. B.. (2024). Research on translators' behaviour in the perspective of corpus-critical translation studies: frontiers and prospects. Foreign Languages and Foreign Language Teaching, (3), 125-134+150.