

# Comparative Studies on English Translation of the Four Main Characters' Titles in "Xiyouji"

Lulu Deng<sup>1,2</sup>, Muhammad Alif Redzuan Abdullah<sup>1</sup> & Ling Yann Wong<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup> Foreign Language College, Xiangnan University, Chenzhou, Hunan, China

Correspondence: Muhammad Alif Redzuan Abdullah, Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia. E-mail: muhammadalif@upm.edu.my

Received: November 8, 2023

Accepted: April 16, 2024

Online Published: May 17, 2024

doi:10.5430/wjel.v14n5p33

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n5p33>

## Abstract

The study aims to compare Anthony C. Yu's and W. J. F. Jenner's translations of the four main characters' titles in "Xiyouji." By categorizing the main characters' titles using a statistical methodology and determining what the characters' personalities are embodied in the main titles, the study analyzes which translation is more appropriate from the perspective of cultural communication. The most frequently used titles for "孙悟空(Sun Wukong)" are "(孙)行者(Pilgrim/Money)" and "(齐天)大圣(Great Sage)," accounting for 48% and 14% of his 119 titles. For "唐玄奘(Tang Xuanzang)," the predominant titles are "师父(Master)" and "三藏(Sanzang/Tripitaka)," making up 40% and 25% of his 17 titles. "猪八戒(Zhu Wuneng)" is most commonly called "(猪)八戒(Eight Rules/Pig)" and "呆子(Idiot)," constituting 73% and 18% of his 11 titles. As for "沙悟净(Sha Wujing)," the prevalent titles are "沙和尚(Sha Monk)" and "悟净(Wujing)," encompassing 90% and 7% of his seven titles. Whether Sun Wukong's justice, braveness and supernatural ability and his role as the crisis solver of the pilgrimage, Tang Sanzang's wisdom, leadership and enlightenment and role as the leader, Zhu Wuneng's transgressive nature and role as the rule breaker or Sha Wujing's devoutness and role as the follower, their titles reflect their personalities and positions in the narrative. By comparing Yu's and Jenner's translations of these titles, the paper observes that Yu's translation conveys the implied meanings. In contrast, Jenner's translation is straightforward and simplified. Yu's translation is more beneficial for the target language readers to understand Chinese Culture.

**Keywords:** Xiyouji; four main characters' titles; comparative translation studies; cultural communication

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduce the Problem

"Xiyouji," known as "The Journey to the West," "Journey to the West," or "Monkey King" in English, is a timeless classic that significantly reflects Chinese culture. This epic novel, attributed to the Ming Dynasty scholar Wu Cheng'en, has inspired the imaginations of generations within and beyond China. The novel's four main characters, such as "孙悟空(Sun Wukong)," "唐玄奘(Tang Xuanzang)," "猪八戒(Zhu Wuneng)," and "沙悟净(Sha Wujing)," have become cultural icons, with their images deeply ingrained in the hearts of the Chinese people. Intriguingly, these main characters have multiple titles, each conveying different aspects of their personalities. While previous studies may have delved into characters' titles from different perspectives, the study is a comparative translation study of the four main characters' frequently used titles by Anthony C. Yu (hereinafter referred to as Yu) and W. J. F. Jenner (hereinafter referred to as Jenner) from the perspective of cultural communication. The study applies a statistical method to collect the most commonly used titles and analyze the implied cultural meanings in these titles. By comparing the two English-translated versions, the study analyzes which translation corresponds more closely to the implied cultural meaning in titles.

### 1.2 Explore the Importance of the Problem

Yu's and Jenner's translations are complete English versions, significantly influencing Westerners. The comparison of their translations can help Western readers tell which translation corresponds more closely to the original titles. Secondly, this study categorizes the titles using a pioneering statistical methodology. Additionally, the study seeks to uncover the main characters' primary characteristics and traits embodied in the most frequently used titles, which are the base for comparing the translations. Moreover, this study offers insights to translators, scholars, and readers, emphasizing the importance of rendering implied meaning in titles, which play a pivotal role in cultural communication. The findings have practical implications for future translations of literary classics, encouraging translators to consider titles' cultural and character-related nuances.

### 1.3 Describe Relevant Scholarship

"Xiyouji," a legendary tale, has entertained readers and viewers since it first appeared in 16th-century China. Widely believed to be one of

the greatest novels ever written in China, “Xiyouji” has been translated into different languages and spread worldwide. As early as 1758 (the 23rd year of Emperor Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty), the famous Japanese novelist Weize Nishida began to translate this novel (Wang, 2019), and its translation reached a climax in the 1980s. By the end of 2015, there were 64 English versions of this novel, of which the translation “Monkey” by Sinologist Arthur Waley in 1942 was the most influential and was reprinted 22 times by different publishers (Wang, 2017). Nevertheless, among all the English versions, there are only two complete versions: those by Yu and Jenner. As the main characters’ titles are numerous and dispersed discretely, the analysis of the complete versions can be more representative and comprehensive. Scholars have conducted case studies on Yu’s translation, including Tian (2011), Sun (2013), and Zhang (2012). Similarly, others have focused on Jenner’s translation, as demonstrated by He (2020). Additionally, comparative studies have been undertaken on Jenner’s and Yu’s translations, as evidenced by Feng (2022). Furthermore, some scholars have engaged in comparative studies across various translated versions, as indicated by Zhu (2021).

The title and image translation studies of “Xiyouji” began in China in the early 20th Century. At that phase, the studies focused on Sun Wukong’s prototype and titles, including three main propositions: native, imported and mixed. The native proposition believes Sun Wukong’s image originated from a water demon titled “Wuzhiqi,” written in “Legends of the Tang Dynasty.” The representatives are Lu (1909 & 1923), Wu (1958), Liu (1981), Xiao (1983), and Li (1986). Shahar (1992) claims Sun Wukong’s prototype is the monkeys in Lingyin Monastery, Feilai Mountain, Hangchow, China. The imported proposition proposes that the prototype of Sun Wukong is the divine monkey “Hanuman” from the ancient Indian epic “Ramayana.” The scholars who support this proposition are Hu (1923), Chen and Lian (1986), Ji (1999), and Zhao (2008). The mixed proposition states that combining native and imported propositions influences Sun Wukong’s prototype. The supporters are Cai (1981), Xiao (1982), and Pan (2021).

Chinese scholars’ translation studies on “Xiyouji” in the CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) database started in 1997 and gradually increased in 2017. According to the CNKI database, at the beginning of 2024, there are 291 papers with the topics “西游记翻译研究 (translation studies on ‘Xiyouji’)” in total, including 142 journal papers, 122 master’s theses, and 20 doctoral dissertations, seven conference papers. Among all the studies, characters’ titles and images account for 7.2%, with 21 papers, theses, and dissertations. These studies encompass three main categories.

The first focuses on comparative studies. Sun (2009) examines the translation of Taoist gods’ appellations in “Xiyouji,” identifying cultural misreading in English versions. It concludes that Yu’s and Jenner’s translations prioritize foreignization, preserving cultural heterogeneity. Zhang (2010) analyzes character name translations in “Xi You Ji,” comparing Jenner’s and Yu’s translation strategies and qualities. Du (2019) explores the transformation of mythological perspectives during translation, influenced by strategies such as manipulation and domestication. Zhang (2021) delves into minor demons’ names, finding Yu’s and Jenner’s translations prioritize “preservation,” with Yu exhibiting a stronger “truth-seeking” tendency.

The second type involves the application of a theory. Bao (2014) applies “Eco-translatology” to analyze Anthony Yu’s translation, highlighting the translator’s active role and flexible methods. Xie and Zhao (2023) examine the English-dubbed version of “Journey to the West” produced by CCTV, discussing character appellations from the perspectives of domestication and foreignization. Jia and Tao (2017) examine Waley’s translation of the character Sun Wukong based on manipulation theory and explore how the figure undergoes reshaping in the translation process.

The third category centres on cultural communication. Qiu (2022) emphasizes the poetic and whimsical names of “non-human” characters in “Xiyouji,” with Jenner’s English translation successfully conveying these elements to Western readers. Zhang and Lan (2018) explain that in the Japanese translation of “Xiyouji,” the name of the main character, Zhu Bajie, has undergone an evolution from “猪(pig)” to “豚 (swine/boar).” Japanese researchers have studied the formation of Zhu Bajie’s image, and portrayals of Zhu Bajie in films and television vary. The different representations of Zhu Bajie express the Japanese people’s acceptance, interpretation, and reshaping of “Xiyouji” and the character Zhu Bajie. Dai and Zhu (2020) analyze Sun Wukong’s titles in the English translation of “Journey to the West.” Sun Wukong undergoes a transformative journey from “Monkey King” to “The Victorious Fighting Buddha” throughout the narrative. The variations in addressing him involve different perspectives, such as appellations, honorifics, derogatory terms, self-references, third-person references, formal names, and informal names. Dai and Zhu (2020) focus on categorizing and translating these diverse forms of addressing Sun Wukong at different stages, aiming to provide insights into effective translation strategies.

According to ProQuest, a well-known international academic database, there are nine articles and theses related to translation studies of “The Journey to the West” by the end of 2023, among which three are image and title studies, such as the character Lady White Bone (Wu, 2023), animating Sun Wukong (Ayers, 2022) and reconfiguring the image of Su Wukong through the dubbed versions of “Monkey King: Hero is Back” (Liang, 2022). Wu (2023) examines the creation and evolution of a gendered skeleton monster associated with the dead body, particularly in the context of skeleton fantasy. It analyzes its roots in “zhiguai” (“志怪” in Chinese) short stories and Buddhist practices like “White Bone Contemplation” (baigu guan 白骨观), which, in turn, leads to the notion of “beauty is white bone” (meiren baigu 美人白骨), a highly gendered rendering of the Buddhist notion “form is void” (se ji shi kong 色即是空), exploring the enduring fascination with this character and its portrayal of women as threats in various traditions. Ayers (2022) deconstructs the intersection of Maoist-era<sup>1</sup> propaganda and Chinese folk-art traditions, focusing on the symbolic transformation of Sun Wukong in Wan Laiming’s 1964 animated film “Havoc in Heaven.” It analyzes the role of artists at the Shanghai Animation Film Studio, arguing that the lack of direct party intervention and emphasis on nationalized Chinese animation led to a productive environment. Liang (2022) examines the transformation of a Chinese heroic legend for Western audiences through English-dubbed versions of the film “Monkey King: Hero is

Back (2015).” It explores translation strategies, employing macro and micro-level theories, and identifies target-audience-oriented practices, emphasizing standard language over dynamic adaptation in Chinese dubbing.

Previous research in translation has explored various aspects of character titles and images in “Xiyouji” from diverse perspectives, such as comparative analysis, cultural communication, and translation strategy assessment. However, statistical data suggests that studies on character titles and images in “Xiyouji” are more inadequate than in other translation aspects. While some comparative studies have been conducted on Jenner’s and Yu’s translations, there is a gap in analyzing character titles and images combining comparative study and cultural communication. Additionally, there is a need for more articles utilizing quantitative methods to analyze character titles and images adequately. Furthermore, the studies on character titles and images could be comprehensive, especially regarding Tang Xuanzang and Sha Wujing. The comparative translation studies on the titles and images of the four main characters in Jenner’s and Yu’s translations, based on statistics and from the perspective of cultural communication, will help to fill all these gaps and contribute to further translation studies on titles and images.

#### *1.4 State Hypotheses and Their Correspondence to Research Design*

The study categorizes the titles of the four main characters using statistical methodology, identifying the most frequently used titles based on data analysis. By analyzing these most frequently used titles, the study aims to reveal the core personalities of four main characters. It then compares the translations of these titles by Anthony C. Yu and W. J. F. Jenner from a cultural communication perspective to gain deeper insights. The paper notes that Yu’s translation effectively conveys implied meanings, whereas Jenner’s is more direct and simplified. Yu’s translation provides the target language readers a deeper understanding of Chinese culture, making it more advantageous.

## **2. Material Studied**

### *2.1 “Xiyouji” and Its Two Complete English Translations*

The primary source material for this study is the original Chinese text “Xiyouji” and its two complete English-translated versions by Yu and Jenner.

#### *2.1.1 Wu Cheng’en and “Xiyouji”*

Wu Cheng’en, also known as Ruzhong, lived during China’s Ming Dynasty (early 1500s). While holding various roles, such as novelist, poet, and political official, his true passions were art, calligraphy, and writing. Despite poverty, he dedicated much time to a solitary lifestyle. Wu Cheng’en is renowned as the original author of “Xiyouji,” considered one of China’s four greatest classic novels<sup>ii</sup>. Initially published anonymously in 1592 due to societal perceptions, it took centuries for scholars to recognize Wu Cheng’en as the probable author. His use of local vernacular and the rebellious spirit in his writings led scholars to conclude that he is the authentic author.

#### *2.1.2 Anthony C. Yu and “The Journey to the West”*

Anthony C. Yu (1938-2015), born in Hong Kong, studied at Fuller Theological Seminary and received his PhD at the University of Chicago. “The Journey to the West,” published in 1983 and revised in 2012 and 2016, is the first complete English translation of the classic Chinese novel “Xiyouji.” He was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2000 for his religion and literature research across East and West. He was a distinguished Carl Darling Buck Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago in Humanities, Religion, Literature, Comparative Literature, East Asian Languages, and Social Thought.

#### *2.1.3 W. J. F. Jenner and “Journey to the West”*

W. J. F. Jenner (1940-) is an English sinologist and translator focusing on Chinese history, culture, and literature. Jenner pursued sinology studies at the University of Oxford and worked as a translator at Foreign Languages Press in Beijing. Commencing the translation of “Journey to the West” in 1963, he released the initial edition in 1986 and a subsequent edition in 1990. This comprehensive three-volume translation is based on the 1955 Chinese edition of “Xiyouji,” comprising 100 chapters published by Beijing People’s Literature Publishing House.

Yu’s and Jenner’s translations are renowned for their meticulous and faithful rendition of the original Chinese text. The two complete translations provide a comprehensive and authentic representation of the novel, making them ideal subjects for comparing the translation of the four main characters’ titles.

### *2.2 Area Descriptions*

The area of the study is limited to the titles of the four main characters, namely “孙悟空,” “唐玄藏,” “猪悟能,” and “沙悟净,” and their translations in the two complete English versions by Yu and Jenner. For the translation of the titles, every title has corresponding translations in the two English versions. The study highlights the cultural interpretations implied in the four main characters’ commonly used titles and compares Yu’s and Jenner’s translations based on the cultural interpretations.

## **3. Methods**

### *3.1 Data Collection*

A systematic approach was followed to collect data to undertake this study. Wu Cheng’en’s original text is the primary source for the titles associated with the four main characters. The titles are extracted and statistically collected. The most commonly used titles for each main

character are summarized and highlighted. The translations of the corresponding titles are found in Yu’s edition of “The Journey to the West” and Jenner’s version of “Journey to the West.”

3.2 Categorization and Statistical Analysis

The collected titles were subjected to a comprehensive categorization process. Each main character’s title was assessed and grouped based on total frequency, total titles and the proportion of each title in its corresponding total frequency. A statistical methodology was employed to quantify and analyze the frequency of each title’s occurrence, thus providing insights into the distinct traits of each character. Yu’s translation of the titles is displayed in parentheses to help better understand the Chinese titles. The data is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The categorization and statistics of the titles of the four main characters in “Xiyouji ”

Main characters	Total frequency	Titles	The proportion of each main title
孙悟空(Sun Wukong)	8777	119	行者(Pilgrim, 48%), 大圣(Great Sage, 14%), (泼/野)猴(王/头)(Monkey/Ape, 9%), 老孙(Old Monkey, 7%), 徒弟(Disciple, 7%), 悟空(Wukong, 6%), 猴哥(Elder Brother, 5%), 和尚(Monk, 1%), other titles (3%)
唐玄奘(Tang Xuanzang)	3912	17	师父(Master, 40%), 唐僧(Tang Monk, 25%), 和尚(Priest, 22%), 长老(Elder, 4%), 三藏(Tripitaka, 3%), 玄奘(Xuanzang, 2%), 御弟(Royal Brother, 2%), other titles (2%)
猪八戒(Zhu Wuneng)	2407	11	八戒(Eight Rules, 73%), 呆子(Idiot, 18%), 老猪(Old Hog, 4%), 悟能(Wuneng, 3%), 天蓬元帅(The Water God of the Heavenly Reeds, 1%), 夯货(Overstuffed Coolie, 1%), other titles (0.001%)
沙悟净 (Sha Wujing)	977	7	沙和尚/沙僧 (Sha Monk, 90%), 悟净 (Wujing, 7%), 卷帘将军(Curtain-Raising Captain, 2%), 老沙(Old Sha, 0.8%), other titles (0.2%)

Statistical analysis reveals that Sun Wukong is predominantly associated with the titles “行者” and “大圣,” which together make up 62% of the whole titles. These titles reflect his responsibility, judiciousness, and sense of justice. The prominence of “行者” signifies his role in the journey, taking responsibility for the safety of his companions. “大圣” highlights his wisdom and judiciousness in dealing with various challenges. In general, Sun Wukong is the crisis solver of the pilgrimage. Tang Monk is predominantly referred to as “师父,” a title that encompasses his leadership role in the journey. This title signifies his primary characteristics of leadership and routinism. The frequency of “师父” is exceptionally high, representing his central role in guiding the pilgrimage to retrieve Buddhist scriptures. Zhu Wuneng is overwhelmingly associated with the title “八戒.” This title reflects his propensity for breaking rules, a central aspect of his character. The high frequency of this title emphasizes his transgressive nature in the journey. Sha Wujing is predominantly addressed as “沙和尚,” a title that signifies his commitment to following the rules. This title reflects his primary characteristic of adhering to Buddhist precepts, and the high proportion of this title underscores his disciplined and rule-abiding nature.

4. Results

The titles of the four main characters in “Xiyouji” carry profound cultural and symbolic meanings that contribute significantly to the character’s portrayal and cultural communication. Each character has numerous titles. It indicates that when communicating with different characters and language contexts, the same character can have different appellations. These differences can reflect cultural elements such as seniority sense, including 师父(master)—徒弟(disciple); 师兄(elder brother)—师弟(younger brother); commendatory senses, involving (i) complimentary sense—行者(pilgrim); (ii) derogatory sense—泼猴(Monkey/Ape); 老猪(Old Hog); (iii) element of religion, like “三藏(Tripitaka).” Yu’s and Jenner’s translations of these titles are compared from the perspective of cultural communication.

Table 1. Sun Wukong’s main titles and their translations by Yu and Jenner

The titles	Yu’s translation	Jenner’s translation
行者	Pilgrim	Monkey/Brother Monkey
大圣	Great Sage	The Great Sage
(泼/野)猴(王/头)/猢狲	(Brazen/wrenched) Ape	Ape
老孙	Old Monkey	I
徒弟	Disciple	Disciple
悟空	Wukong	Monkey
猴哥/哥/师兄	Elder Brother	Brother Monkey
和尚	Monk	Priest
弼马温	BanHorsePlague	Protector of the Horse
美猴王	The Handsome Monkey King	The Handsome Monkey King
老贼	Old Burglar	Old Thief
斗战胜佛	The Buddha Victorious in Strife	The Victorious Fighting Buddha

Generally speaking, Yu’s and Jenner’s translations are similar for the titles of “大圣,” “(泼/野)猴(王/头...)/猢狲,” “徒弟,” “美猴王,” “猴哥/哥/师兄,” “老贼,” and “斗战胜佛.” The title “大圣” reflects Sun Wukong’s remarkable transformation from a mere monkey to a revered, formidable figure with godly attributes. In traditional Chinese culture, “圣” symbolizes wisdom, knowledge, and extraordinary abilities. Sun Wukong’s journey in the novel is not just a physical one but also a quest for self-improvement and enlightenment. The translation “Great Sage” represents his attainment of these higher qualities and his embodiment of the ancient Chinese ideal of sagehood. “(泼/野)猴(王/头)/猢狲” are

used to scold Sun Wukong when he is showing extreme or uncontrolled anger, aggression, or agitation. So, the word “Ape” is appropriate. In Yu’s translation, more adjectives are added before “Ape,” which makes the scolding words more concrete. For the translation of “徒弟” and “美猴王,” Yu’s and Jenner’s translations are the same. “猴哥/哥/师兄” are the titles called by the other disciples of Tang Xuanzang, which means Sun Wukong is the eldest and most competent among the disciples. In this sense, both Yu’s and Jenner’s translations express the brotherhood of the relationship. “老贼” means a person stealing other’s property frequently. Both “burglar” and “thief” engage in criminal activity involving the unlawful taking of property; the key distinction lies in the method of entry: burglars typically break into buildings to commit theft, whereas thieves may steal property from various locations through different means. In this context, as Sun Wukong steal property from various locations through different means, Jenner’s translation is more appropriate. “斗战胜佛” is the title conferred upon Sun Wukong after obtaining the Buddhist scriptures. The title signifies his combative nature, impulsiveness and invincible fighting ability. Yu’s translation renders it as “The Buddha Victorious in Strife,” while Jenner’s translation renders it as “The Victorious Fighting Buddha.” Both of the translations capture the essence of Sun Wukong’s character as both triumphant and confrontational.

The title “行者” in Chinese has two meanings: one is “pedestrians,” and the other is “Buddhist lay disciples or wandering monks.” In the context of “Xiyouji,” “行者” signifies Sun Wukong’s transformation from a mischievous, rebellious monkey to a disciplined and devoted follower of Tang Xuanzang on their pilgrimage to retrieve Buddhist scriptures. This transformation mirrors a traditional Buddhist journey, where a practitioner embarks on a pilgrimage to gain enlightenment and spiritual growth. Therefore, compared with “Monkey/Brother Monkey”, the translation “Pilgrim” can better convey the implied meaning of “行者.” “老” is used to describe a person who is old or respectable, and “孙” is the surname of Sun Wukong. “老孙” means Sun Wukong is old, respectable and in a high position, which is a self-reference. Compared with the pronoun “I,” “Old Monkey” can better express Sun Wukong’s arrogance. “悟空” is the Dharma name of Sun Wukong, which can be translated as “Wukong” as transliteration or “Monkey” as liberal translation. However, “Wukong” is more solemn and dignified than “Monkey.” “和尚” is a follower of Buddhism, so “Monk” is more appropriate than “Priest” in the context because Sun Wukong is a Buddhist, not a Christian. “弼马温” is an official position to prevent horses from getting plague and “温” refers to “瘟 (plague)” in the context. So, “BanHorsePlague” is more appropriate and concrete than “Protector of the Horse.”

From the perspective of cultural communication, the terms “pilgrim,” “monk,” and “Wukong” more effectively reflect Sun Wukong’s Buddhist identity because they are closely associated with Buddhism. Firstly, the term “pilgrim” is commonly used in Buddhism to refer to someone who undertakes a journey to sacred sites for worship, prayer, or spiritual practice. In “Xiyouji,” Sun Wukong embarks on a pilgrimage to the Western Paradise to obtain Buddhist scriptures and spread the teachings of Buddhism. Referring to Sun Wukong as a “pilgrim” highlights his Buddhist beliefs and actions. Secondly, the term “monk” refers to a person who devotes themselves to religious practice, study, and propagation of Buddhist teachings. In contrast, Sun Wukong is not a traditional monk in the story but operates within a Buddhist cultural context. Their mission is to retrieve Buddhist scriptures and bring them back to the Tang Dynasty, aligning with the traditional role of monks. Therefore, referring to Sun Wukong as a “monk” also underscores his role and status within Buddhist belief. Thirdly, the cultural meaning of “Wukong” is related to the central teachings of Buddhism. Wukong is the combination of the Chinese characters “悟(Wu)” and “空(Kong).” The central teachings of Buddhism emphasize enlightenment (悟) and the thought “一切皆空” with the meaning of “all is vanity.” In summary, “pilgrim,” “monk,” and “Wukong” effectively emphasize Sun Wukong’s Buddhist identity as these terms are closely associated with Buddhist culture and accurately convey his role and beliefs in the story.

However, from the perspective of word formation, the translation of the title “老+surnames” into “Old+surname” is a mistranslation. The prefix “老” is placed before surnames and nouns to transform single morphemes into disyllables. For example, “老孙” is formed by the prefix “老” + the surname “孙” (Sun); “老贼” is formed by the prefix “老” + the noun “贼” (thief). In Chinese, the prefix “老” is significantly weakened and has no practical meaning; it is merely a form of endearment (Yuan, 2016). In the translations, the prefix “老+surnames” is translated as “Old+surnames,” which can easily make the target readers think that the main characters are too old to accomplish the task. However, the translations convey the terms “老贼” to “Old Burglar” and “Old Thief,” “老孙” to “Old Sun,” “老猪” to “Old Zhu,” and “老沙” to “Old Sha,” which are inappropriate. The translation of these terms indicates that the translators have little consideration of Chinese grammar.

In conclusion, for the titles’ translations of Sun Wukong, most of Yu’s and Jenner’s translations are similar or the same. However, for the translation of “行者,” “悟空,” and “和尚,” Yu’s translation corresponds more closely to the cultural meaning of these titles and is helpful for Western readers to comprehend the Chinese culture implied in these titles.

Table 2. Tang Xuanzang’s main titles and their translations by Yu and Jenner

The titles	Yu’s translation	Jenner’s translation
师父	Master	Master
唐僧	The Tang Monk	The Tang Priest
和尚	Priest	Monk
(唐)长老	The Elder (Tang)	The (Tang) Priest
三藏	Tripitaka	Sanzang
玄奘	Xuanzang	Xuanzang
御弟	Royal Brother	The Imperial Younger Brother
唐老爷	Venerable Father Tang	Lord Tang
金蝉子	Gold Cicada	Golden Cicada
旃檀功德佛	The Buddha of Candana Merit	The Candana-punya Buddha

The title “师父” reflects Tang Xuanzang’s central role as the pilgrimage leader to retrieve Buddhist scriptures. In Chinese culture, the concept of a “master” is highly respected and carries rich connotations. It represents a figure of authority, wisdom, and guidance, which is particularly significant in a religious and spiritual journey. The translation “Master,” embodies his religious authority and moral and ethical leadership. The titles “唐僧,” “和尚,” “(唐)长老,” “玄奘,” “金蝉子,” and “旃檀功德佛” are used to express the status of Tang Xuanzang as a Buddhist. In both Yu’s and Jenner’s translations, “Priest” and “Monk” are used alternately to express the believer in Buddhism. “长老” refers to older or more experienced individuals who hold authoritative positions within a society, religion, culture, or organization. For the translation of “(唐)长老,” Yu emphasizes that Tang Xuanzang holds a higher status in his society and possesses authority, while Jenner highlights Tang Xuanzang’s status as a priest. Thus, Yu’s translation corresponds more closely to the source title. For “玄奘,” both Yu and Jenner applied transliteration. “金蝉子” is the second disciple of Tathagata, also the previous identity of Tang Xuanzang. For the translation of “Gold Cicada” and “Golden Cicada,” the latter is more formal. “旃檀功德佛” is the title granted to Tang Xuanzang after obtaining the Buddhist scriptures. “Candana-punya” is Sanskrit, which means “Sandalwood” and “Merit.” Yu’s translation combines Sanskrit with English, while Jenner’s translation applies Sanskrit. In general, both translations correctly convey the original meaning.

The title “三藏” is a direct reference to the Buddhist canon, which is categorized into three baskets or “Tripitaka” – the Vinaya Pitaka (rules for monastic discipline), the Sutra Pitaka (Buddhist doctrines), and the Abhidharma Pitaka (philosophical and metaphysical analysis). Tang Xuanzang’s title as “Tripitaka” emphasizes his role as the bearer of these sacred scriptures. In Chinese culture, “Tripitaka” symbolizes wisdom, enlightenment, and profound knowledge. Thus, compared with transliteration as “Sanzang,” “Tripitaka” conveys implied meaning in the title. “御弟” means the younger brother of the imperial. So, the translation of “The Imperial Younger Brother” is more concrete than “Royal Brother.” The term “老爷” typically refers to men with status and power in feudal society. Thus, “Venerable Father Tang” and “Lord Tang” have the same meaning, which is to show respect for Tang Xuanzang.

Regarding cultural communication, Yu’s and Jenner’s translations reflect Chinese sworn brotherhood culture in the translation of “御弟.” In the narrative of “Xiyouji,” Xuanzang and the Emperor of the Tang dynasty, Li Shimin (李世民), had sworn loyalty to become blood brothers in the thirteenth year of the Zhenguan period. Therefore, the cultural meaning of both translations contained “royalty” and “imperial” meanings. However, for the translation of “三藏,” Yu’s translation of “Tripitaka” embodies Chinese culture’s historical and literary traditions, particularly within Buddhist culture and literature.

In brief, when translating Tang Sanzang’s titles, Yu’s and Jenner’s translations mostly align or overlap. However, in rendering “三藏,” Yu’s translation conveys the implied meaning, while Jenner’s translation failed.

Table 3. Zhu Wuneng’s main titles and their translations by Yu and Jenner

The titles	Yu’s translation	Jenner’s translation
八戒	Eight Rules	Pig/Bajie
呆子	Idiot	Idiot
老猪	Old Hog	Me/I
悟能	Wuneng (Awaken to Power)	Wuneng (Awake to Power)
天蓬元帅	The Water God of the Heavenly Reeds	Marshal Tian Peng
夯货	Overstuffed/Stupid Coolie	Moron
和尚	Monk	Monk
净坛使者	Janitor of the Altars	The Altar Cleanser

For the titles “呆子,” “悟能,” and “和尚,” Yu’s and Jenner’s translations are precisely the same. “净坛使者” is the person who cleans the Altar. Thus, the translations of “Janitor of the Altars” and “The Altar Cleanser” are similar.

The title “八戒” is intrinsically tied to the character Zhu Wuneng, characterized by his propensity for rule-breaking and indulgence. The number “八(eight)” is considered highly auspicious in Chinese culture and is often associated with balance, completeness, and prosperity. “戒” means rules and disciplines. However, in Zhu Wuneng’s case, the title “八戒” ironically reflects his transgressive nature. He disregards rules, indulges in his desires, and defies the disciplined and ethical lifestyle promoted by traditional Chinese values. Thus, the translation “Eight Rules” conveys the implied meaning in the title, while the liberal translation “Pig” and transliteration “Bajie” can not convey the cultural connotation in the title. “天蓬元帅” originally served as the marshal in charge of the eighty thousand water troops of the Tianhe River, holding a very high position in the celestial court. Due to his violation of heavenly rules, he was demoted by the Jade Emperor to the mortal realm, where he reincarnated as Zhu Wuneng. Yu’s translation of “The Water God of the Heavenly Reeds” conveys the title’s position and responsibility. In contrast, Jenner’s translation of “Marshal Tian Peng”, combining literal translation and transliteration, does not have this function. “夯货” refers to a gluttonous, lazy, brainless, and annoying person, which is used to scold Zhu Wuneng by Sun Wukong or Tang Xuanzang. Thus, compared with “Moron,” Yu’s translation is more appropriate.

From the aspect of cultural communication, “Eight Rules” directly conveys the meanings of the numbers “eight” and “rules,” making it easier for readers to grasp the significance of “八戒.” This direct transfer can assist readers in quickly understanding the essential characteristics and role of the character, thereby enhancing the efficiency of cross-cultural communication. Additionally, “Eight Rules” may spark greater interest in the character as it is associated with Buddhist doctrines. This association could prompt readers to contemplate and explore the Buddhist cultural and moral concepts underlying the character. In Buddhism, greed and desire are considered one of the root causes of suffering and reincarnation. The title “Eight Rules” implies his journey of overcoming gluttony, indulgence, and laziness, gradually reforming himself, and seeking liberation, which can be understood as a Buddhist doctrine for practitioners to overcome desires and purify the mind.

Focusing on translating Zhu Wunen’s titles, Yu’s and Jenner’s translations largely coincide. However, for “八戒,” “天蓬元帅,” and “夯货,” Yu’s translations better capture the cultural connotations in these titles.

Table 4. Sha Wujing’s main titles and their translations by Yu and Jenner

The titles	Yu’s translation	Jenner’s translation
沙和尚/沙僧	Sha Monk	Friar Sha
悟净	Wujing	Wujing/Friar Sha
卷帘将军	The Curtain-Raising Captain	The Curtain-lifting General
老沙	Old Sha	Me/I
八宝金身罗汉	Golden-Bodied Archat	The Golden Arhat

The title “沙和尚/沙僧” primarily signifies Sha Wujing’s role as a disciplined and devout follower of Buddhism. In Chinese culture, the term “和尚/僧” holds a profound place. They are revered figures who dedicate their lives to religious and spiritual pursuits, living by strict rules and principles, often in monastic communities. “沙” is the surname, which demonstrates he was born in a sandy river. “Friar” mainly refers to (Catholic) Franciscan Friar, which is different from the meaning of “和尚/僧.” Thus, “Sha Monk” is more appropriate than “Friar Sha.”

“卷帘将军” was originally the General/Captain under the Jade Emperor in the Celestial Court. He accidentally broke a glass lamp and violated heavenly laws, resulting in his banishment from the celestial realm to the mortal world, where he caused havoc in the Flowing Sands River. For the translation of “卷帘将军,” Yu’s and Jenner’s translations are similar. “八宝金身罗汉” is the title granted to Sha Wujing after obtaining the Buddhist scriptures. The translation of “Golden-Bodied Archat” and “The Golden Arhat” convey the implied meaning in the title.

From the lens of cultural communication, “Sha Monk” conveys the character’s essential traits, allowing readers to understand that he is a monk immediately. It aids cross-cultural readers in quickly comprehending the character’s identity and background. “悟净 (Wujing)” is the Dharma name of the Sha Monk, which means “enlightenment (悟)” and “purity and flawlessness (净).” In Buddhist culture, “净” is often used to signify the purification of the mind and the spiritual state of practitioners. Therefore, “Wujing” implies his spiritual and mental purity, reflecting his identity as a practitioner in “Xiyouji.”

Yu’s and Jenner’s translations of the titles for Sha Wujing mostly overlap. Nevertheless, when it comes to translating “沙和尚/沙僧,” Yu’s interpretations stay more faithful to the original meaning and ensure that readers can accurately comprehend and appreciate its cultural connotations.

**5. Conclusion and Implication**

The study summarized the most frequently used titles of the four main characters in “Xiyouji,” analyzed their personalities based on their titles and compared their translations by Yu and Jenner. The most frequently used titles for “孙悟空(Sun Wukong)” are “(孙)行者 (Pilgrim/Money)” and “(齐天)大圣(Great Sage),” which reflect his justice, braveness and supernatural ability and his role as the crisis solver of the pilgrimage. For “唐玄奘 (Tang Xuanzang),” the predominant titles are “师父(Mater)” and “三藏(Sanzang/Tripitaka),” which symbolize Tang Xuanzang’s role as the leader and his wisdom, enlightenment, and profound Buddhist knowledge. 猪悟能(Zhu Wuneng)” is most commonly called “(猪)八戒(Eight Rules/Pig)” and “呆子(Idiot),” which demonstrate his transgressive nature. As for “沙悟净 (Sha Wujing),” the prevalent titles are “沙和尚 (Sha Monk)” and “悟净 (Wujing),” which show his devoutness. The translation of the four main characters’ titles in “Xiyouji” by Yu and Jenner reflects their understanding of these titles’ cultural and symbolic nuances. While both translators generally convey the essence of the original titles, there are subtle differences in their approaches and choices, reflecting their perspectives on cultural communication.

Yu’s translation tends to preserve the cultural context and nuances more closely, often opting for translations that convey deeper meanings and associations. For example, in the case of Sun Wukong’s titles, such as “行者,” Yu’s translations like “Pilgrim” capture the cultural connotations of the titles, emphasizing Sun Wukong’s transformation. On the other hand, Jenner’s translations prioritize clarity and simplicity, opting for more direct translations or transliterations. This approach may overlook the cultural connotations embedded in the titles. For instance, in translating Sun Wukong’s title—“行者,” Jenner chooses “Monkey” instead of “Pilgrim,” which may not fully convey the deeper cultural meaning of the title.

Both translators effectively convey the overall characterizations and roles of the main characters through their translations. Their titles of Sun Wukong, Tang Xuanzang, Zhu Wuneng and Sha Wujing reflect their personalities, positions, and transformations in the narrative. The choice between Yu’s and Jenner’s translations may depend on the reader’s preference for a more culturally nuanced approach versus a more transparent and straightforward rendition. However, from the perspective of cultural communication, Yu’s translation is more beneficial for the target language readers to understand Chinese Culture.

**Acknowledgments**

Not applicable.

**Authors contributions**

Dr. Deng, Dr. Alif and Dr. Wong were responsible for study design and revising. Dr. Deng was responsible for data collection. Dr. Deng drafted the manuscript and Dr. Wong revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. Dr. Deng made the largest contribution, while Dr. Alif and Dr. Wong contributed equally to the study.

**Funding**

Not applicable.

**Competing interests**

Not applicable.

**Informed consent**

Obtained.

**Ethics approval**

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

**Provenance and peer review**

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

**Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

**Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

**Open access**

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## Notes

Note 1. “Zhiguai” refers to literary works or records concerning strange, mystical, or supernatural phenomena in Chinese literature.

Note 2. The Maoist era, led by President Mao Zedong in China, was characterized by Communist ideology and radical socio-political changes.

Note 3. China's four greatest classic novels are “Journey to the West,” “The Dream of the Red Mansion,” “Outlaw of the Marsh,” and “Romance of the Three Kingdoms.”