



## Shamanistic Religious Narratives in English Translation: A Study of Evenki Shamanic Elements in Bruce Humes's Translation of *The Last Quarter of the Moon*

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### Abstract

*The Last Quarter of the Moon* is a classic work of contemporary Chinese ethnic minority literature. It chronicles the century-long migration history of the Evenki hunting tribe and richly incorporates the religious narratives of Evenki shamanism. Its English translation has gained wide recognition overseas; however, current research lacks a specialized investigation into how these shamanistic religious narratives have been rendered in English. The present study focuses on Humes's English translation of *The Last Quarter of the Moon*. Through comparative textual analysis, it examines the translator's strategies from three dimensions: deity names, sacrificial rituals, and cosmology. The findings show that Humes adopted different translation strategies depending on the type of religious elements. For shamanistic deity names, he combined transliteration with annotation or literal translation to preserve local cultural symbols. For ritual and religious object descriptions, he used cultural addition and semantic explicitation to address overseas readers' cognitive gaps. For metaphors that embody Evenki shamanistic cosmology and views of life and death, he avoided assimilating them into western religious imagery, retaining the original metaphorical expressions. Taken together, these strategies balance cultural authenticity with reader acceptability, accurately conveying the essence of Evenki shamanism while offering a reference for translating ethnic religious literature into English.

**Keywords:** Shamanism, Evenki, *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, Religious Narrative, Translation

### 1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of the continuous deepening of Chinese minority literature's external dissemination, religious narratives rooted in local beliefs have increasingly become a key vehicle for cultural exchange between China and the West. Chi Zijian's novel *The Last Quarter of the Moon* focuses on the century-long transformations of the Evenki hunting community in the Greater Khingan Mountains. It presents the ethnic beliefs centered on shamanism, ranging from the worship of natural deities, various sacrificial and healing rituals, to the animistic cosmology, and is regarded as a notable text of Chinese shamanic culture. The English translation of this novel, was translated by Bruce Humes and first published by the British Harvill Secker in 2013. Since its publication, the translation has received favorable reception, achieving a rating of 4.2 out of 5 on the Amazon platform, and has become an important resource for international readers seeking to understand the shamanic culture of China's ethnic minorities.

The English translation of shamanistic narratives in *The Last Quarter of the Moon* is essentially a cross cultural translation practice of minority religious culture. As a cultural intermediary, the translator must transform shamanistic elements rooted in the hunting civilization of northern China into religious narratives that western readers can understand. This process involves not only linguistic transformation but also adaptation and reconstruction of religious and cognitive frameworks.

Given the significance of this translation practice, it is striking that a review of the current research landscape reveals that while studies on *The Last Quarter of the Moon* have produced considerable achievements, a systematic examination of the English translation of its shamanistic religious narratives remains conspicuously absent.

Studies on *The Last Quarter of the Moon* conducted in China have yielded abundant results, but most tend to focus on literary aesthetics and broad cultural analyses, with few discussions centered on shamanic belief. On the one hand, the majority of studies emphasized ecological writing, Evenki culture, and narrative techniques (Deng 2012; Zheng and Zhang 2017; Guo 2018; Zang 2021; Kang 2022; Shi and Zhou 2025) [5, 34, 10, 27, 13, 22]. These studies were mostly analyzed from a purely literary perspective, often treating shamanic culture merely as an auxiliary element that enhances the story, without recognizing that the shamanistic religious narrative runs through the entire book as its spiritual backbone. On the other hand, some studies that do involve shamanism largely remain at the level of descriptive content analysis (Zhang and Luo 2009; Xiu 2013; Li 2015) [30, 26, 15] and fail to explore the religious connotations, ritual functions, or cosmology of shamanism.

With the rise of research on external dissemination, English translation studies on *The Last Quarter of the Moon* have witnessed a notable upsurge in China. Current research mainly focuses on three aspects. First, drawing on ecological translation theory and embodied-cognitive translology, some studies have explored the English translation strategies for natural imagery and ecological narratives in the novel (Huang and Li 2023; Wang 2023; Cheng 2023; Lian and Yu 2026; Zhao and Liu 2026) [12, 24, 16, 31]. Second, several investigations have examined the translator's strategies and methods for rendering folkloric terms, defamiliarization devices, and metaphorical expressions (Pan and Xiao 2019; He 2020; Zou 2021; Chen 2023; Ma and Li 2025) [21, 11, 35, 2, 18]. Third, other research has addressed translator subjectivity, overseas translation and dissemination, and comparisons with machine translation (Wang and Hu 2015; Song 2024; Lu and Zhang 2024; Gao 2024; Zheng 2025) [25, 23, 17, 9, 33]. While these studies have contributed valuable insights into the translation of natural imagery, folkloric elements, and literary devices, they have rarely engaged with the novel's shamanistic religious narratives. In particular, no systematic effort has yet been made to explore the interlingual translation of its shamanic culture from the three key dimensions of shamanic deity names, sacrificial rituals, and cosmology.

Scholarship outside China on *The Last Quarter of the Moon* falls mainly into four categories. First, from the perspective of ecological feminism, some studies compared this work with Native American literature to explore the interdependent relationship between ethnic women and nature (Du 2018) [6]. Second, based on ecological aesthetics theory, others investigated the eastern ecological wisdom and poetic construction embedded in the novel (Zhang 2022; Zeng 2022) [29, 28]. Third, drawing on ethnography and semiotics, some scholars explored the ethnic spiritual connotations carried by shamanic beliefs and rock art symbols (Li 2022; Chen 2026) [14, 1]. Fourth, on the basis of this novel, comparative studies examined literary works from Russia and Canada to extract the shared traditional ecological concepts

of the Evenki and other Arctic indigenous peoples (Mu and Ma 2024) [20]. Looking at the existing international research, these studies mostly concentrate on textual theoretical interpretation and intertextual comparison, with few studies systematically examining the English translation of Chinese shamanistic religious narratives from the perspectives of shaman deity names, sacrificial rituals, and cosmology.

As evidenced by the above review, a specialized study of the English translation of shamanistic religious narratives in *The Last Quarter of the Moon* remains conspicuously absent. The present study builds on this research background, with its academic significance lying in two aspects. First, focusing on Humes's English translation, it constructs a complete analytical framework of religious element composition, translation strategy selection, and transmission effect, thereby enriching the research paradigm for intercultural translation practice of minority religious literature. Second, through empirical textual comparison, it reveals the translator's English rendering process for shamanistic deity names, sacrificial rituals, and cosmology, providing an operational reference for the English translation practice of similar indigenous ethnic religious texts.

Accordingly, this paper raises two research questions. First, what are the core components and religious narrative functions of shamanistic elements in *The Last Quarter of the Moon*? Second, what translation strategies did Humes adopt in the English translation, and how did these strategies affect the retention, loss, and reconstruction of the religious connotations of shamanism in the three dimensions of deity names, ritual practice, and cosmology? To address the research questions raised above, this paper adopts a textual analytical approach, using the original novel as the reference. Through semantic comparison, contextual tracing, and cultural contrast, it identifies and summarizes Humes's translation strategies for the shamanistic elements in the English version, and evaluates both the preservation of shamanistic religious connotations and the intercultural effectiveness of the translation.

## 2. Shamanic Elements and Their Religious Narrative Functions in *The Last Quarter of the Moon*

"Shamanism in the strict sense is pre-eminently a religious phenomenon of Siberia and Central Asia" (Eliade 2004, p. 3) [7]. This tradition is characterized by an animistic cosmology, the central role of shamans as intermediaries between humans and deities, ritual practices such as sacrifice, healing, and divination, as well as religious ethics deeply tied to the community's survival mode (Fu 1990; Zhao 2011) [8, 32]. However, given the textual focus of this study on *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, it should be noted that the classification of Chinese shamanistic elements in this article, namely the division into the deity system, ritual practices, and cosmology, is based on the textual characteristics of *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, rather than a redefinition of shamanism itself.

In this study, the religious narrative refers to the novel's integration of shamanic deities, sacrificial rituals, and cosmology. Regarding the deity names, the shamanism in the novel centers on the worship of natural deities, ancestral deities, and totem deities, reflecting the survival wisdom of hunting tribes and their symbiosis with nature. First, natural deities include the mountain god "Bainacha" (白那查), the

tree god(树神), the fire god(火神), the river god(河神), and others. The novel explicitly states: “When a hunter is hunting and sees Bainacha carved on a tree, he must not only respectfully make offerings of tobacco and baijiu to it, he should also lay down his rifle and remove the bullets, and kowtow to pray for the Mountain Spirit’s protection.” (猎人行猎时·看见刻有“白那查”山神的树·不但要给他敬奉烟和酒·还要摘枪卸弹·跪下磕头·企求山神保佑。) (Chi 2005, p. 32) [3]. These deities are directly related to hunting activities and constitute a practical form of nature worship. Second, Malu serves as the ancestral deity of the Evenki (Fu 1990, p.71) [8]. As the novel states: “Our gods are collectively called ‘Malu’”(我们的神统称为“玛鲁”) (Chi 2005, p. 6) [3]. It serves as the core spiritual symbol that sustains ethnic identity. Third, totem deities are also an indispensable category within the Evenki shamanic pantheon. The tribe regards the bear as a spiritual being, and after hunting they need to hold a bear sacrifice ceremony to express reverence and gratitude. The novel states: “We worship the bear, so when we eat it, we should ‘ah-ah-ah’ call out for a moment, hoping that the bear’s spirit knows that it is not humans who eat their meat, but the crow” (我们崇拜熊·所以吃它的时候要像乌鸦一样“呀呀呀”地叫上一刻, 想让熊的魂灵知道·不是人要吃它们的肉·而是乌鸦·) (Chi 2005, p. 5) [3]. These deities are not abstract entities. Rather, they are closely intertwined with hunting production and daily life, such that religious beliefs and secular existence become inseparable (Meng 2000) [19].

In terms of ritual practices, shamanic rituals in the novel run through key moments of the Evenki life, including hunting, healing, and funerary rites for guiding the soul. Grounded in an animistic worldview, they form a coherent ritual structure, mainly involving religious narratives such as the Malu sacrifice, bear sacrifice, healing ceremonies, and funeral rites. The first category concerns Malu sacrifice and the bear sacrifice. Malu, as the ancestral deity of the tribe, is believed to gather avian and animal spirits. Whenever an epidemic breaks out or before a hunting, the Evenki people set up offerings and pray to Malu for the prosperity of reindeer and a successful hunt (Chi 2005, pp.122-127) [3]. The bear sacrifice originates from bear totem worship. After a bear is killed, its bones cannot be disposed of casually; they must be ritually sacrificed by the shaman in a wind burial ceremony, through which the spiritual guilt of killing is alleviated (Chi 2005, pp.101-102) [3]. The second category is healing rituals, which integrate shamanic dancing, divination, and local herbal medicine. Influenced by the belief in the soul, the Evenki believe that illness is often caused by the soul’s separation. In *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, the shaman often uses the Umai ritual to summon the lost souls of children, achieving physical and mental treatment through spiritual ceremonies (Chi 2005, p. 6) [3]. The third category comprises funeral rituals, which include a dedicated ceremony for sending the soul to the afterlife. Relying on the view of the three cosmic realms, the shaman recites scriptures to lead the way and escorts the soul to the upper realm where

ancestral spirits reside. The funeral rites for ordinary tribe members differ from those for the shaman, and the sending-off process for a shaman’s death is more complicated (Chi 2005) [3]. These rituals are far from mere formalities; they serve both practical and spiritual purposes. On a practical level, they regulate the boundaries of resource extraction from the mountains and forests and constrain the tribe’s productive behavior. On a spiritual level, they carry ethnic ethical norms, indigenous medical wisdom, and unique views of life and death, transforming abstract shamanic rituals into collective memory passed down through generations. Thus, they become an indispensable part of Evenki shamanic culture (Fu 1990; Meng 2000; Zhao 2011) [8, 19, 32].

In terms of cosmology, Shamanism is fundamentally rooted in animism, the belief that all things are imbued with spirit. It interprets natural phenomena and the features of the landscape as manifestations of divine beings: the sky is embodied in a sky deity, the earth in an earth deity, and phenomena such as wind, thunder, mountains, and rivers each have their own spirits (Zhao 2011, pp. 37–38) [32]. Based on this pantheistic worldview, shamanic belief constructs a three realm cosmology consisting of the upper, middle, and lower worlds, an integrated paradigm in which humans, deities, animals, and plants are interrelated and symbiotic (Fu 1990, p. 26) [8]. From the aforesaid worldview, multiple layers of social practice norms are derived. First, there are natural symbiotic hunting taboos that emphasize restraint and resource protection, regulating hunting activities in the face of survival crises. Second, there is the obligation to adhere to sacrificial rituals out of reverence for the gods, maintaining the connection between humans and deities. Third, there are ethical norms of resource sharing and mutual assistance adapted to the northern hunting survival mode, which sustain the ethnic group’s continuation. Ultimately, these integrate into a complex survival system that deeply binds faith, moral norms, and hunting production (Fu 1990, pp. 29–48) [8].

From the perspective of religious narrative functions, the shamanic elements in the novel primarily serve three functions. First, they provide the spiritual connotation of ethnic identity. The shaman, as the spiritual leader of the ethnic group, not only assumes religious duties but also plays a decision-making role in ethnic conflicts and survival crises, becoming a symbol of the group’s spirit. Second, shamanic elements serve as a cultural carrier of survival wisdom. They carry the ecological wisdom of the Evenki people and their harmonious coexistence with nature. The animistic worldview transforms into hunting taboos and resource conservation survival strategies, ensuring the sustainable use of forest resources. Sacrificial rituals become an important way to regulate ethnic relations and alleviate survival anxiety. Third, they construct a unique narrative of life and death. Through shamanic elements, the novel conveys the death narrative that death is not the end but the return of the soul to the divine world. This view enables the Evenki people to face death calmly, and the funeral ceremony becomes a bridge connecting the two worlds of life and death, maintaining the ethnic group’s cultural inheritance and collective memory. Therefore, understanding the narrative functions of these shamanic elements is a prerequisite for analyzing their cross-cultural translation strategies.

### 3. Analysis of the Translation Strategies for Shamanic Religious Narratives in Bruce Humes's English Translation

In light of the above analysis of shamanic deities, ritual practices, and cosmology in *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, shamanistic religious narratives permeate the entire work. They constitute not only the novel's core narrative but also the most challenging culture-loaded component in the English translation process. In rendering the abundant religious narratives that embody the unique beliefs, hunting culture, and ecological ethos of ethnic minorities, the translator, Bruce Humes, adopts diversified translation strategies tailored to different types of shamanic cultural elements. These include the integrated use of "transliteration plus annotation," "transliteration plus literal translation," "cultural addition," "semantic explicitation," and "metaphorical retention". Far from being a random collection of techniques, these strategies represent a rational balance struck by the translator between fidelity to the source text and readability for the target audience. This approach both preserves religious connotations of shamanism and effectively alleviates the cognitive barriers faced by English readers.

#### 3.1. Translating Deity Names: A Combined Strategy of Transliteration and Literal Translation

The novel presents a wide range of Evenki deity names, which serve as crucial carriers of indigenous culture and constitute major translation difficulties. To address these diverse names, the translator adopted differentiated translation strategies based on deity categories. These strategies effectively eliminate cultural symbol loss and semantic deviation, preserve the uniqueness of minority culture, and conform to the cognitive expectations of English readers. Typical examples are analyzed in detail as follows.

##### Example 1

Source Text: 但路过参天大树的时候·林克就不敢打口哨了·他怕惊扰了山神“白那查”(Chi 2005, p. 32) [3].

Target Text: But when we passed by the tree that touched the skies, Linke didn't dare keep whistling, fearful he would disturb Bainacha, the Mountain Spirit. (Chi 2013, p. 50) [4].

As a unique mountain guardian deity worshipped by Evenki hunters, Bainacha occupies a pivotal position in the ethnic group's forest belief. No equivalent counterpart can be found in western mythology or religious systems, which makes it a culturally specific term. The translator adopted a combined strategy of transliteration plus literal translation for this unique deity. The term "Bainacha"(白那查) is transliterated directly to retain its original ethnic cultural connotation, while the appositive "the Mountain Spirit" is supplemented to clarify the deity's attribute. This strategy maintains the authenticity of Evenki culture and removes reading obstacles for target readers, enabling them to understand the implication of this indigenous deity.

##### Example 2

Source Text: 用白桦木做成的雀形的保护小孩的“乌麦神”，用落叶松的弯枝做成的保护驯鹿的“阿隆神”和“熊神”。(Chi 2005, p. 84) [3]

Target Text: A sparrow-shaped Umai Spirit of white birch, which looks after young children; a Bear Spirit; and an Along Spirit of curved larch branches, which protects our reindeer.

(Chi 2013, p. 134) [4].

"Umai" (乌麦) and "Along" (阿隆) are two indispensable guardian spirits in Evenki shamanism, representing the indigenous spiritual culture nurtured by the hunting civilization. Instead of replacing the two deities with analogous western religious images through domestication, the translator applied the strategy of transliteration plus literal translation and rendered them as "Umai Spirit" and "Along Spirit". Such a translation version reserves cultural symbols of Evenki deities and avoids cultural invasion. It also allows English readers to distinguish indigenous Evenki spiritual traditions from mainstream western religions, facilitating the cross-cultural dissemination of marginalized minority culture.

##### Example 3

Source Text: 尼都萨满 (Chi 2005, p. 5) [3].

Target Text: Nidu the Shaman (Chi 2013, p. 7) [4].

The phrase “尼都萨满” refers to the identity of a pivotal shaman in the novel. Given that “shaman” is widely recognized as an international religious term with a well-established meaning, no additional explanatory notes are needed. The translator transliterated the personal name “尼都” as “Nidu” and followed it with the generic term “shaman”. This approach strikes a balance between preserving cultural distinctiveness and ensuring readability, retaining the specificity of Evenki naming conventions while easing the reader's comprehension burden.

##### Example 4

Source Text: 火神 (Chi 2005, p. 23) [3].

Target Text: The Fire Spirit (Chi 2013, p. 36) [4].

Unlike the deities discussed above, the fire god(火神) is a universal natural deity shared by multiple ethnic groups. For this category, the translator adopted literal translation, rendering it as “Fire Spirit” rather than the prevalent western expression “Fire God”. This deliberate avoidance of the word “god” effectively distinguishes Evenki animistic nature deities from the personal God of Christianity. In sum, the translator tailored translation methods to different deity types: deities specific to the Evenki are rendered through transliteration and literal translation, while universal natural deities are translated literally. This differentiated approach accurately conveys the religious and cultural connotations embedded in Evenki deity names.

#### 3.2. Translating Ritual Narratives: The Integrated Use of Semantic Explicitation and Cultural Addition

Shamanic rituals including sacrificial activities and spirit summoning carry distinctive religious connotations and folkloric elements of the Evenki people. Pure literal translation often results in inherent cultural vacancies, preventing target readers from recognizing the religious nature behind ritual behaviors. To solve such translation difficulties, the translator adopts two complementary translation strategies: semantic explicitation and cultural addition. The former externalizes covert religious implications to emphasize the sacred attributes and practical functions of shamanic rituals, while the latter supplements appropriate cultural explanations on the premise of textual fidelity to bridge cross cultural cognitive gaps. These two methods jointly assist English readers in comprehending Evenki folk customs and embedded shamanistic beliefs. Two

representative examples are demonstrated as follows.

#### Example 5

Source Text: 我见他把神衣、神帽、神裤、神裙、披肩裹在一起，用一块藏蓝色的布包起来，然后又把神鼓和狗腿做的鼓槌装到一个皮口袋中 (Chi 2005, p. 35).

Target Text: I watched him gather the Spirit Robe, Spirit Headdress, Spirit Trousers, Spirit Skirt and Spirit Cape, wrap them in a Tibetan-blue cloth, and place them together with the Spirit Drumstick, made from a roe-deer leg, in a leather bag (Chi 2013, p. 54) <sup>[4]</sup>.

The source text depicts the preparations for the spirit summoning ritual hosted by the shaman. The full set of ritual costumes and instruments symbolizes the shaman's unique social identity and serves as indispensable implements for conducting spirit summoning, sacrifice, and exorcism ceremonies in Evenki shamanism, all of which are endowed with religious significance. In this instance, the translator primarily employed the semantic explicitation strategy. Instead of adopting generic words such as "clothes" and "hat" to translate "衣" and "帽" respectively, the translator selected religious words including "Robe" and "Headdress" to draw a clear distinction between ordinary garments and sacred ritual accessories. Although the religious symbolism of these items is readily understood by native readers familiar with shamanic culture, it remains ambiguous for western readers without relevant cultural background. Semantic explicitation effectively fills the information gap and eliminates potential cultural misunderstanding. Additionally, this translation strategy integrates scattered descriptions of costumes into a complete religious narrative. It enhances textual coherence and reading immersion, highlights the religious narrative running through the whole novel, and optimizes the presentation of Evenki ritual culture for overseas audiences.

#### Example 6

Source Text: 我们的神统称为“玛鲁”，它们被装在一个圆形皮口袋里，供奉在希楞柱入口正对面 (Chi 2005, p. 6)

<sup>[3]</sup>. Target Text: our Clan Spirits Malu. They were packed inside a leather bag and the shrine was directly opposite the entrance (Chi 2013, p. 9) <sup>[4]</sup>.

This excerpt portrays the daily worship ritual for the Malu deity, the core totem and spiritual pillar of the Evenki people. They would hold regular worship activities for Malu before and after hunting. Through these statues, the deity was regarded as the embodiment of inherited shamanistic beliefs and collective ethnic spirituality. For the culture-loaded term “玛鲁”，the translator combined transliteration and cultural addition strategies. On the one hand, the term “玛鲁” was transliterated as “Malu” to preserve the distinctive proper noun of Evenki culture and maintain the original form of source culture symbols. On the other hand, the supplementary modifier “our Clan Spirits” clarifies that Malu is not an ordinary deity but a guardian spirit of the clan, thereby supplementing the missing belief background for target readers. Furthermore, the translator selected the religiously specific term “shrine” to make explicit the deity's place of enshrinement implied in the original text, thereby reinforcing the sacrificial nature and highlighting the religious act of worship. To conclude, through cultural addition and semantic explicitation, the translator presents the sacrificial scene with its ethnic characteristics while clarifying for western readers

that it is not merely an arrangement of objects but a tribal religious ceremony. The dual strategies narrow cross cultural cognitive differences, preserve the uniqueness of Evenki rituals, and accurately interpret the intrinsic ritual connotations, realizing the effective cross-cultural transmission of shamanic folk beliefs.

### 3.3. Translation of Cosmology: Metaphor Retention Strategy

The shamanistic cosmology, centered on animism, constructs a worldview of symbiosis between heaven and humanity, from which derive an ethic of natural coexistence and a unique view of life and death. The translator adopted a consistent metaphor retention strategy for the spiritual metaphors built upon personification in the source text, preserving the original symbols without replacing them with western religious terms. Examples are provided below.

#### Example 7:

Source Text: “如果把我们的生活着的额尔古纳河右岸比喻为一个顶天立地的巨人，那么那些大大小小的河流就是巨人身上纵横交织的血管，而它的骨骼，则是由众多山峦构成” (Chi 2005, p. 131) <sup>[3]</sup>.

Target Text: “If the Right Bank of the Argun where we live is a giant rooted in the earth and holding up the skies, then those water-ways of all sizes are blood vessels criss-crossing his body, and mountain ranges form his skeleton” (Chi 2013, p. 213) <sup>[4]</sup>.

The original author personified the Right Bank of the Argun (额尔古纳河右岸) as a giant, using human body structures to metaphorically refer to mountains and rivers, thereby subtly dissolving the boundary between humans and nature. This metaphor directly reflects the distinctive Evenki shamanistic worldview: the earth is not a resource to be exploited at will, but a living, organic entity capable of coexisting with human. This embodies the core shamanistic ideas of animism and the unity of heaven and humanity.

Given that this metaphor carries the Evenki shamanistic worldview, the translator adopted a metaphor retention strategy. A comparison with the source text shows that the translator reproduced the three metaphors “giant” (巨人), “blood vessels” (血管), and “skeleton” (骨骼) by using their direct English equivalents. No arbitrary substitution of rhetorical images is made, nor are western mythological or religious figures introduced. The original rhetoric is fully reproduced. This metaphor retaining approach effectively avoids cultural loss and fully preserves the unique ethic of natural coexistence and spiritual beliefs inherent in shamanism. Moreover, the translator does not weaken or erase the foreign cultural traits of the original text simply to accommodate target readers' habits or cater to the target language culture. Consequently, the shamanistic cosmology hidden behind the metaphor is accurately conveyed, helping overseas readers deeply understand the Evenki people's reverence for nature and their dependence on it.

Furthermore, the animistic cosmology of shamanism gives rise to a distinctive narrative of life and death, one in which death is not an end but a journey to the realm of the spirits. This worldview is vividly embodied in the Evenki legend of the blood river, a central theme that captures the Evenki unique view of the afterlife, moral judgment, and the fate of the soul. The following excerpt from the novel presents this

narrative in full:

Example 8:

Source Text: “我们祖先认为，人离开这个世界，是去了另一个世界了。那个世界比我们曾经生活过的世界要幸福。在去幸福世界的途中，要经过一条很深很深的血河，这条血河是考验死者生前行为和品德的地方。如果是一个善良的人来到这里，血河上自然就会浮现出一座桥来，让你平安渡过；如果是一个作恶多端的人来到这里，血河中就不会出现桥，而是跳出一块石头来。如果你对生前的不良行为有了悔改之意，就会从这块石头跳过去，否则，将会被血河淹没，灵魂彻底地消亡” (Chi 2005, p. 74) [3].

Target Text: “Our ancestors believe that when a human leaf this world she proceeds to another, happier one. On the way there, she must pass a very, very deep River of Blood where her previous actions and character undergo scrutiny. If a kind-hearted person arrives here, a bridge will emerge from the river, allowing her to pass safely; if a person who has committed wicked acts arrives here, a stone will leap out of the river. If she shows remorse for bad conduct in her former existence, she can step on the stone and jump across the river. Otherwise, she will be utterly submerged by the River of Blood and her soul will vanish” (Chi 2013, pp. 117–118) [4]. This passage is a representative soul crossing narrative in Evenki shamanistic culture. The “血河”(blood river) is conceived as a place that the souls of the dead must pass through, serving to judge the deceased’s virtue and determine the final destination of the soul. It fully reveals the unique Evenki concepts of life, death, and morality. In mainstream western religious contexts, people generally divide the afterlife into heaven and hell which are classic religious symbols within Christianity. Faced with the unique shamanistic metaphor of “血河” for soul crossing, the translator adhered to the metaphor retention strategy, directly rendering “血河” as River of Blood via literal translation. The original image is fully presented, deliberately avoiding Christian religious symbols such as heaven and hell, and refusing to apply cultural domestication to accommodate target readers’ cognitive habits. The translator preserves the metaphor in its original form, accurately conveying the Evenki shamanistic views of life, death, morality, and the soul which are distinct from western religious traditions.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study, based on Humes’s English translation of *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, examines the cross-cultural translation strategies and transmission effects of Evenki shamanistic elements, yielding several findings of both theoretical and practical value. First, the shamanistic elements in the novel are not scattered cultural details but form a complete religious narrative comprising three levels: deity names, ritual practices, and cosmology. Their functions are to sustain ethnic identity, transmit survival wisdom, and interpret the meaning of life and death.

This study provides a workable analytical framework, including religious element identification, translation

strategy, and transmission effect, for the cross-cultural encoding of minority religious literature, and validates the framework’s effectiveness through detailed textual analysis. Additionally, this study summarizes three translation principles.

First, fidelity to original meanings: for unique symbols and deity names specific to a minority religion, translators should prioritize the strategy of “transliteration plus literal translation” or “literal translation”, avoiding rewriting or substituting them with western religious or mythological counterparts, thereby preventing the loss of cultural distinctiveness.

Second, appropriate use of semantic explicitation and cultural addition: in ritual translation, translators may employ semantic explicitation to render implicit religious meanings explicit, and cultural addition to supply necessary background information. Together, these strategies fill cognitive gaps for foreign readers and help them understand the beliefs underlying ritual practices.

Third, preservation of images: for literary metaphors that embody religious cosmology or views, translators should avoid replacing the original cultural metaphors with western religious or foreign mythological images. Instead, they should retain the original metaphors in the target text, thereby preserving unique narratives of minority religions and preventing cultural distortion.

This study also has several limitations. First, the analysis of translation strategies is primarily based on textual comparison and lacks corroboration through translator interviews; consequently, the explanation of those strategies is to some extent subjective. Second, the study does not address the reception of the translation in the English-speaking world, so the conclusions remain to be further tested. Future research can be deepened in the following directions, including analyzing the influence of the translator’s translation philosophy on translation strategies and incorporating empirical data such as readers’ reception surveys to investigate the communicative effects of translation strategies.

In summary, the English translation of the shamanistic narrative in *The Last Quarter of the Moon* represents a case of cross-cultural encoding of minority religious culture. This case demonstrates that success in cross cultural religious translation does not lie in achieving an impossible “perfect equivalence”, but rather in finding a balance between fidelity and readability that suits a particular text, audience, and context. Through carefully selected translation strategies, cross cultural translation of minority religious literature can indeed facilitate deep understanding and genuine dialogue between different religious traditions without distorting the essence of the source culture.

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