

# Non-Equivalence Phenomena in the English Translation of Chinese Legal Terminology: A Case Study of the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China

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## ABSTRACT

This study employs a dual theoretical framework integrating Nida's functional equivalence and Šarčević's legal equivalence theories to analyze terminological non-equivalence in the English translation of China's Criminal Law. Three categories of non-equivalence are identified: partial non-equivalence and complete non-equivalence, primarily stemming from divergent legal systems (civil law vs. common law), cultural-contextual barriers, and functional mismatches. Findings indicate that terminology asymmetry induces conceptual deviations and rights misinterpretations in international legal practice while undermining China's legal discourse power. To address this, a hybrid strategy of "dynamic equivalence + annotative supplementation" is proposed, utilizing layered annotations to harmonize terminological precision and readability. Coupled with blockchain-facilitated dynamic terminology databases, this approach offers an academically rigorous and practically viable solution for cross-jurisdictional legal translation.

**Keywords:** *Legal terminology non-equivalence, Functional equivalence theory, Legal translation, Chinese Criminal Law, Cultural divergence, Translation strategy optimization.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION: CROSS-CULTURAL CHALLENGES OF LEGAL TRANSLATION

The official English translation of China's criminal code carries the mission of China's international judicial and human rights communication (Li, 2019), and the translation of the legislative text largely depends on the accuracy of legal terms. As emphasized by Cao (2007), "the translation quality of the terms directly affects the accuracy and readability of the whole legislative text", indicating that legal terms determine the translation quality of the entire legislative text. The translation of legislative texts requires not only linguistic equivalence but also functional alignment between legal systems (Šarčević, 1997). Eugene Nida's functional equivalence theory has profound theoretical and practical significance for cross-cultural legal translation (Nida, 1964). This theory emphasizes the need to prioritize the core meaning

and communicative intent of the source text over formal correspondence, enabling target readers to achieve a "similar understanding and emotional experience" as the original audience (Nida & Taber, 1969). However, cultural and legal system disparities between Chinese and English often result in terminological asymmetry (Cao & Zhao, 2020). Šarčević's (1997) legal equivalence theory further categorizes term equivalence into three levels: close equivalence, partial equivalence, and non-equivalence, providing a framework for addressing conceptual gaps.

This paper adopts a dual theoretical framework combining Nida's functional equivalence and Šarčević's legal equivalence theories to analyze translation strategies for the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China. The study aims to reconcile the tension between legal precision and cross-cultural acceptability, particularly in cases of partial or complete non-equivalence (Sun, 2018).

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory

Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory, developed in *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964), is one of the most influential translation theories of the 20th century. It advocates that translation should be centered on the response of the target language readers, pursuing "functional equivalence" between the source text and the target text rather than formal correspondence. The theory emphasizes the naturalness and acceptability of the translation, requiring translators to break through the surface structure of the language and prioritize the transmission of the core meaning and communicative intention of the original text. Nida argued that translation should prioritize the "dynamic equivalence" of reader response, requiring translators to adapt cultural-specific elements to ensure target-text naturalness (Nida, 1964). For legal texts, this approach necessitates balancing fidelity to the source text with the target legal system's conceptual framework (Cao, 2007). To this end, translators need to flexibly handle cultural differences and adjust the expression form as necessary to adapt to the target context. For example, when the cultural imagery of the source language is difficult to translate literally, a functionally equivalent local expression can be used as a substitute. The theory weakens the traditional binary opposition between "literal translation" and "free translation", promoting the shift of translation studies from the linguistic level to the communicative function. Nida's theory has been critiqued for its perceived overemphasis on reader response, potentially compromising textual fidelity (Venuti, 1995). In legal contexts, its emphasis on functional alignment remains valuable. Terms require cultural adaptation to convey their procedural implications in common law systems (Zhang, 2021). However, its excessive focus on reader response has also sparked controversy over the fidelity to the original text. When there are differences between the legal system of the source language and the target language legal system (such as the common law system and the continental law system), the concept docking should be realized through functional equivalent translation rather than literal translation. For cultural load clauses (such as contents involving traditional customs and administrative systems), ambiguities should be eliminated through supplementary instructions or local rewriting.

### 2.2 Šarčević's Levels of Legal Equivalence

Šarčević's legal equivalence theory focuses on the cross-legal adaptation of terms in legal translation, and proposes that the equivalence of legal terms is divided into three categories: close equivalence (high conceptual-functional consistency), partial equivalence (conceptual overlap with application scope divergence), and non-equivalence (complete conceptual vacancy in the target legal system) (Šarčević, 1997). This framework advocates transcending linguistic form to prioritize the "equivalent transmission of legal effect" (Šarčević, 2018), requiring translators to employ context-sensitive strategies including:

- Direct term transplantation for isomorphic concepts
- Functional adjustment through contextual adaptation
- Neologism creation with explanatory supplements

The theory emphasizes the imperative to balance terminological precision with cultural acceptability in the target legal system (Šarčević, 1997). A critical challenge lies in reconciling conceptual fidelity with practical legal constraints, particularly when creative translations risk functional deviation from the source system (Engberg, 2020). Šarčević's model reconceptualizes legal translation as systemic knowledge reconstruction, necessitating dual legal analytical competence (Šarčević, 2018). Translators must dynamically balance terminology functionality and legal effect transfer through comparative analysis, to accommodate common law surety mechanisms while preserving Confucian social ethics (Wang & Šarčević, 2021). This approach aligns with recent developments in legal-linguistic interface studies emphasizing the "contextual embeddedness of legal concepts" (Sandrini, 2022).

The theoretical challenge lies in how to coordinate the accuracy of concept transplantation with the realistic constraints of the target language legal practice, especially when the legal system is significant, creative translation may trigger the functional deviation from the local system. Šarčević's theory highlights the essence of legal translation as a systematic knowledge reconstruction, which requires translators to have the ability of dual legal comparative analysis, and realize the effective transfer of cross-legal legal

information by dynamically balancing the function of terminology and legal effect.

### 3. CASE ANALYSIS OF NON-EQUIVALENCE

#### 3.1 Analysis Framework

In order to find out the partial equivalence and completely unequal terms and analyze them, it is first necessary to analyze the differences between the source language and the target language that cause the asymmetry phenomenon. After the establishment of the glossary of the Criminal Code of the People's Republic of China and the labeling of unequal terms, they can be roughly divided into three categories:

- Differences in legal systems
- Cultural and linguistic structure differences
- Differences in term function

#### 3.2 Analysis of Partial Non-Equivalence

##### 3.2.1 Cases of Legal System Differences

Example 1: “协从一方” vs “secondary party”

In the common law system, “secondary party” originated from the *Convictor and Abetting Act of 1961*, which specifically refers to the non-principal actor who participated in the felony by assisting and abetting. In article 27 of the *Criminal Law*, the “协从一方” contains three dimensions:

- Objectively implement the secondary implementation behavior
- Subjective malignancy being significantly mild
- Statutory mitigating penalty requirements

This imbalance stems from the essential difference between the typed differentiation of criminal participation (principal / accomplice) and the principal criminal and accomplice system in China. The common law is divided according to the behavioral function, while the civil law system focuses on the evaluation of subjective malignancy. In judicial practice, the common law secondary party may bear the same criminal responsibility as the principal criminal, while the accomplice in China must be punished lightly, which leads to the fundamental differences in the connotation of criminal responsibility carried by the terminology system.

Example 2: “公诉提控” vs “arraignment”

As a formal prosecution procedure, “arraignment” contains four legal elements:

- The grand jury indictment was published
- The judge informed him of the nature of the charge
- Defendant plea (guilty / not guilty / silent)
- Bail hearing

The public prosecution review procedure stipulated in Article 181 of the *Criminal Procedure Law* focuses on the formal examination of “whether to initiate a public prosecution”, and does not involve the defense mechanism in court. This difference reflects the structural difference between the two legal systems: the essence of the common law “arraignment” is the starting point of the prosecution and confrontation. The public prosecution procedure of the mainland law system more reflects the color of authority doctrine. In particular, it should be noted that there is a direct institutional difference between the declaration of the defendant's right to silence in the “arraignment” stage and the obligation of “如实供述” in China, which leads to the failure of the procedural concept.

Example 3: “一罪两审” vs. “double jeopardy”

The Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution contains three core rules:

- Autrefois acquit
- Autrefois convict
- Attachment of jeopardy

In article 253 of the *Criminal Procedure Law*, “一罪两审” specifically refers to the retrial procedure of the effective judgment, and does not prohibit the re prosecution of the innocent judgment. The institutional differences are embodied in: the common law system forbids to restart the procedure (jeopardy attaches) after the jury oath, while China's retrial initiation standard focuses on substantive justice. A typical example is that the civil compensation of “O.J. Simpson” in the United States does not constitute double jeopardy, while similar circumstances may trigger a criminal retrial in China, which shows that there is a major difference in the value orientation behind the term.

### 3.2.2 Cases of Cultural and Linguistic Structure Differences

Example 4: “一般审慎及尽力的人” vs “ordinarily prudent and diligent man”

The term, from the “reasonable person standard” (reasonable person standard) established in the *Vaughan v. Menlove* case in 1837, developing three layers of cultural traits in common law tort liability:

- The case accumulation standard under the tradition of empirical philosophy
- The moral embodiment of the middle class in the Victorian era
- Dynamic characteristics of the progressive perfection of the case law

The Chinese language of “审慎及尽力” is rooted in the Confucian moral concept of “self-restraint”, which is presented in abstract terms in Article 1165 of the *Civil Code*. In terms of language structure, English terms are continuously refined through specific cases (such as the industry standards established by *Blyth v. Birmingham Waterworks*), while Chinese four-character expressions maintain an open interpretation space. This difference leads to the fundamental division of legal interpretation methodology.

Example 5: “人事保释” vs “surety”

China’s “人事保释” system (Article 66 of the *Criminal Procedure Law*) emphasizes the personality credit guarantee of the guarantor, and its legal basis can be traced back to the “guarantee system” in *The Tang Code Annotations*, reflecting the penetration of the traditional social relationship network into the judiciary. The common law surety system was developed from the 12th century, and contains three material elements:

- Cash bail;
- Professional bail broker system;
- Commercial guarantee insurance mechanism.

The cultural differences are concentrated as follows: China’s system focuses on moral constraints (the qualification examination of guarantor as stipulated in Article 167 of the Interpretation of *Criminal Procedure Law*), while the common law constructs a market-oriented risk control system. This difference leads to surety losing its unique commercial dimension of guarantee in the Chinese context.

Example 6: “自新计划” vs “rehabilitative programme”

The Chinese “自新计划” is rooted in the Confucian concept of “Human nature is inherently good.”, and emphasizes the realization of “conscience discovery” of criminals through moral influence. This concept is embodied in article 3 of the *Prison Law* as the system of “educational reform”, which specifically includes:

- The moral evaluation mechanism in the *Code of Conduct for Prisoners*;
- Writing requirements of confessions in Article 25 of the *Regulations on Prison Education and Reform*;
- The traditional solar term seasonal “family support and education” activities. Its language structure adopts the form of four-character idioms, which carries the expectation of the image transformation of turning over a new leaf.

The “rehabilitative programme” of the common law system originated from the 19th-century empirical crime school, which is included in Article 142 of the *British Criminal Justice Act of 2003*:

- Standardized risk assessment tools (such as the OASys scale);
- Cognitive Behavioral therapy (CBT) module;
- National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) system.

The term presents technical features in its linguistic structure, such as the Corrective Canada Violence Prevention Program (VPP), required to measure a percentage decrease in recidivism.

The cultural differences are highlighted in: China’s system design emphasizes the ethical remodeling of “Cultivate the mind through culture”; the west pays attention to the technical intervention of “risk-demand-response” (RNR) model. This difference leads to the loss of the scientific evaluation dimension of “rehabilitative programme” as a “自新计划”, and the English translation of Chinese terms is difficult to convey the cultural metaphor of “a prodigal son returns to gold”.

### 3.2.3 Cases of Term Functional Differences

Example 7: “文件及资料的披露” vs “discovery”

The common law discovery system (Article 26 of the *Federal Rules of Civil Procedure*) has four special functions:

- Compulsory punitive sanction;
- Preservation of unilateral deposition;
- Expert witness disclosure rules;
- Trade secret protection order system.

The evidence exchange system stipulated in Article 67 of *China's Civil Procedure Law* is limited to:

- The parties submit the initiative;
- The court shall apply for a transfer;
- Time-limit control of proof.

The key to the functional difference lies in: “discovery” is the means of evidence attack and defense led by the parties, while the evidence exchange in China belongs to the preparation procedure of court management. This functional positioning difference leads to “discovery” as “evidence exchange” in cross-border litigation documents, ignoring its aggressive litigation strategy function.

Example 8: “缓刑” vs “suspended sentence”

China's probation system (Article 72 of the *Criminal Law*) has formed a “trinity” supervision system:

- Community correction (judicial administration organ);
- Injunction (court);
- Administrative rewards and punishments during the probation period.

Common law suspended sentence (Article 189 of the *Criminal Justice Act* 2003) is essentially a mechanism of penalty suspension and does not include compulsory corrective measures.

The functional differences are reflected in: the essence of probation in China is conditional non-imprisonment, while suspended sentence belongs to the mode of penalty execution. A typical example is that our probation offenders will execute the original sentence, while the British suspended sentence violation may be sentenced to a community order rather than imprisonment, which shows the fundamental difference in the functional design of the system.

Example 9: “传闻证据” vs “hearsay evidence”

The common law system “hearsay evidence” is defined in Article 801 (c) of the *Federal Rules of Evidence* as “out-of-court statements used to prove the authenticity of the claim”, and the exclusion rule (Rule 802) has three functions:

- Prevent the jury from being misled by the non-cross-examination information;
- Guarantee the right of cross-inquiry under the confrontation right;
- Maintain the principle of direct hearing.

The system developed 30 statutory exceptions (such as end-of-life statements, business records), and established the constitutional standard of review of “testimonial statements” through *Crawford v. Washington*.

The handling mechanism of “hearsay evidence” stipulated in Article 61 of the *Criminal Procedure Law of China* reflects different functional positioning:

- Not as the object of legal exclusion, but the elements of evidence capacity review;
- Judges may decide according to Article 15 of the *Regulations on the Elimination of Illegal Evidence in Handling Criminal Cases in the People's Courts*;
- Focus on entity authenticity review rather than procedural rights protection. For example, in the Supreme Court No.146, the written testimony of witnesses not in court is still admissible after reinforced by other evidence.

The root cause of the functional difference lies in the difference in litigation mode: the exclusion of hearsay is the means of attack and defense of the parties, and the category of the subordinate judges in the authority mode. As a result, the direct translation of “hearsay” into “传闻证据” leads to functional misreading--The core function of lack of admissibility, while English terms cannot cover the practical characteristics of the comprehensive evidence review of judges in China.

### 3.3 Analysis of Complete Non-Equivalence

#### 3.3.1 Cases of Legal System Differences

Example 1: “自签守行为” vs “bind over to keep the peace”

In the common law system, this system stems from Article 115 of the *Justice Courts Act*, which allows the court to require the parties to sign a

recognizance, promising to maintain good behavior for a certain period of time, or pay a deposit or face imprisonment. Its core function is to prevent potential hazards, not to punish actions that have occurred.

The mainland law system lacks a direct correspondence system. The “警告” or “行政拘留” in *China’s Public Security Administration and Punishment Law* only targets the illegal acts that have been implemented, while the “取保候审” in the *Criminal Procedure Law* only serves the guarantee of litigation procedures and does not include the constraints on future behaviors. The common law realizes the maintenance of social order through judicial discretion, while the civil law system relies more on the rigid provisions of the written law, cannot be applied independently.

It reflects the different positioning of judicial power between the two legal departments —— Common law judges have broader preventive judicial power, while the mainland law system strictly follows the principle of “prohibition without legal authorization”, and the authority of judges is clearly limited by written law.

Example 2: “强制令” vs “mandamus”

As a writ of prerogative writ in English common law, the executive must fulfill its statutory obligations, in typical cases such as *R v Secretary of State for Home Department, ex parte Fire Brigades Union* [1995] (forcing the Home Office to implement the statutory compensation plan).

Although the “履行判决” stipulated in Article 72 of *Chinese Administrative Procedure Law* can achieve similar effects, it lacks the unique procedural attribute of coercive date. The common law injunction directly creates restraint in the form of “writ”, and the refusal of the executive organ to execute constitutes contempt of court, and the civil law judgment is required through enforcement procedures, and the scope of relief is limited to specific administrative acts, and does not cover abstract acts such as legislative omission.

This difference leads to the settlement of cross-border administrative disputes, common law lawyers often mistakenly believe that the effectiveness of “履行判决” of civil law system is insufficient, but in fact, the legal system has different control of the scale of judicial intervention in administration.

Example 3: “当然权利” vs “as of right”

In the common law context, “ex course appeal” means that a party can initiate an appeal procedure without proving the rationality of the appeal, such as an appeal against a jury verdict under Article 82 of the *Criminal Procedure Ordinance* of Hong Kong.

Although Article 227 of the *Criminal Procedure Law* of China stipulates that the defendant has the right to appeal against the judgment of the first instance, the judicial practice clarifies the specific reasons through a written complaint, and the court can decide whether to accept the case after formal review according to Article 238. The right of appeal of the civil law system is essentially a “conditional right”, in sharp contrast to the automaticity of the common law “natural rights”.

The common law regards appeal as the natural right of the parties, reflecting “procedural justice first”, the continental law system emphasizes the error correction function of appeal and reflects the litigation philosophy of “entity real first”.

### 3.3.2 Cases of Cultural and Linguistic Structure Differences

Example 4: “三合会社团的集会” vs “meeting of a triad society”

As a unique criminal organization in Hong Kong, the cultural symbols (such as “洪门” gesture and initiation ceremony) are fundamentally different from the triad organization in the mainland. Article 18 of the *Hong Kong Society Ordinance* criminalizes “三合会 membership” itself, while Article 294 of the *Criminal Law of the Mainland* requires proof of organized conduct of criminal activities. The English ‘triad’ cannot convey the historical origin of the “三合会” (from the The Heaven and Earth Society (Tiandihui), a Qing-era anti-Manchu secret society advocating Ming restoration), and the literal translation is mistaken for an ordinary criminal gang. However, mainland law translated the underworld into the underworld society, which weakens the legal characteristics of organized crime and leads to qualitative deviation in cross-border judicial cooperation. In the 2012 Hong Kong DCCC 123 / 2011 case, the defendant was convicted for displaying triad gestures, and similar cases in the mainland (e. g. 123 in 2018) required actual control of economic entities, highlighting the impact of cultural differences on the enforcement of the law.

Example 5: “有违公德的行为” vs “outrage public decency”

The concept of public morality in common law stems from the moral commandments in the Christian Ten Commandments, with typical cases such as *R v Gibson* [1991]. Public order and good customs in Chinese law integrate Confucian ethics and socialist core values. Article 44 of intentionally naked body in public places in the *Public Security Administration and Punishment Law* focuses more on material physical exposure, rather than abstract moral judgment. The Chinese four-word phrase “有违公德” contains value judgment, while the English term “outrage public decency” is a neutral description. This difference in language form leads to the misreading of the Chinese translation as a generalization concept of “violation of public morality”, ignoring the strict constitutive elements in the common law (to meet both “blatant” and “arouse the strong disgust of normal people”).

Example 6: “模棱两可及意义不明的认罪” vs “equivocal plea”

In Chinese, the ambiguity of confession statement is emphasized through idioms (“模棱两可” and “意义不明”), reflecting the language characteristics of Chinese preference; English “equivocal plea” as a single professional term, word-for-word translation will lose the original meaning. Hong Kong criminal procedure requires judges to clarify ambiguous confession according to Article 9A of the *Ordinance on Criminal Procedure*, or it is invalid; however, Article 196 of the *Civil Procedure Law* stipulates that “the defendant who confesses guilty shall be put on record”, without a special review mechanism. This difference causes the Chinese translation to mislead mainland lawyers to ignore the substantive examination of the voluntary confession.

### 3.3.3 Cases of Term Functional Differences

Example 7: “举证责任倒置” vs “reverse burden”

The inversion of the burden of proof at common law requires a clear law stating that article 47 of the *Dangerous Drugs Ordinance* requires the defendant to prove the legality of drug possession. Its function is to balance the power of prosecution and defense, but limited to article 11 (2) of the *Hong Kong Human Rights Act*, the principle of presumption of innocence. Article 49 of *The Criminal Procedure*

*Law of China* establishes the principle of “proof by the prosecution”. In special circumstances (such as the crime of unknown source of a huge amount of property), functional substitution is realized through substantive law provisions, but the academic community refuses to use the concept of inversion to avoid conflict with the principle of presumption of innocence. In 2019, the Court of Final Appeal of Hong Kong FACC 12 / 2018 clarified that the inversion clause should pass the commensurate test; in similar cases in the mainland (e. g., No.345 in 2020), the court directly invoked Article 395 of the Criminal Law and did not discuss the legal basis for proving the distribution of liability.

Example 8: “藐视法庭” vs “contempt of court”

As a comprehensive instrument for safeguarding judicial authority, including refusal to enforce judgments (civil contempt), witness interference (criminal contempt), single imprisonment (e. g., section 52 of the *High Court Ordinance* of Hong Kong). Chinese mainland breaks down similar behaviors: Article 111 of the *Civil Procedure Law* imposes fines for “disturbing the court order”; Article 313 of the *Criminal Law* “the crime of refusing to execute the judgment” should achieve serious circumstances. This functional deconstruction leads to a lack of overall maintenance of procedural justice. For example, the recording behavior of spectators can constitute contempt in Hong Kong, which is stopped orally in the mainland only under Article 17 of the *Court Rules*.

Example 9: “具结释放” vs “bind over”

The consolidated release system of section 51 of the *Magistrate Ordinance of Hong Kong* has both procedural safeguards (alternative custody) and substantive prevention (requiring guaranteed future acts), with guarantees of up to HK \$200,000 and the breach of warranty constitutes an independent offence. According to Article 67 of the *Criminal Procedure Law*, the mainland bail only serves the procedural purpose of “no danger to society”. The maximum deposit is RMB 50,000 yuan, and the violation of the regulations only leads to the confiscation of the deposit or the change of compulsory measures, and there is no follow-up criminal accountability mechanism.

The judicial data of Hong Kong in 2018 show that the recidivism rate of prisoners is less than 5%, while the escape rate of mainland bail pending trial is maintained at about 1.2% all year round,

reflecting the functional difference of institutional deterrence.

## 4. CAUSES AND IMPACTS

### 4.1 Causes

#### 4.1.1 Differences in Legal Systems (Civil Law vs. Common Law)

Every legal system has its own self-consistent concept network, and the connotation and extension of specific terms will often show cross-dislocation. There are fundamental differences in the legal origin and structure of different laws. The Anglo-American law system is based on case law, and its legal terms are often closely related to specific case practices, while the continental law system takes written law as the core, and the terminology system pays more attention to the systematization of abstract concepts. Different political systems and social values will also give birth to their own national unique legal concepts, and some unique institutional terms will have no corresponding concepts in other legal systems. This asymmetry directly reflects the different understanding of the definition of rights and the degree of judicial intervention under different social systems. The incommensurability of British and continental law systems leads to the complete equivalence of their legal terms.

#### 4.1.2 Untranslatability Due to Cultural and Institutional Contexts

Chinese legal terms are mostly single or compound words, which are highly general; while English legal terms are often multi-word phrases or Latin / French borrowed words, emphasizing accuracy. Some Chinese legal terms may correspond to multiple English definitions, and the fuzzy segmentation concepts and semantic boundaries in different situations are easy to lead to mistranslation. Moreover, Chinese legal texts often use active statements and short sentences, while English tends to use passive statements and complex sentence patterns. This difference may change the directivity of legal liability. For example, the obligation clause of Chinese active structure may weaken the liability subject after passive translation.

Chinese legal terms often imply collectivism values, while English terms more reflect the orientation of individual rights. This cultural

orientation difference makes it difficult to fully correspond to the pragmatic function of the term. In history, Chinese legal terms are mostly influenced by Confucianism, Soviet law system and Japanese legal transplantation, forming a unique hybrid concept system; English terms inherit Roman law, church law and common law traditions, thus transplanting the historical connotation behind the term.

### 4.2 Impacts

#### 4.2.1 Potential Ambiguities and Disputes in International Legal Practice

The asymmetry of Chinese and English legal terms easily leads to institutional deviation and ambiguous definition of rights and obligations in international legal practice, which is rooted in the structural differences between mainland law system and common law system in judicial logic, procedural rules and cultural value orientation. The division of the legal system leads to the institutional vacuum of the core concepts. The deep conflict of language structure further aggravates the ambiguity. The imbalance between the single-word compound characteristics of Chinese legal terms and the semantic density of the form of multi-word phrases of English terms. In addition, the difference between the choice of passive voice and active voice may quietly change the responsibility direction of the legal subject. The infiltration of cultural values makes the terms carry the different guidance of collectivism and individual rights. The social governance goal implied in Chinese legal texts and the boundary of individual rights emphasized by British and American terms dislocation. This difference in value preset may lead to the deviation of the original intention of the clauses in the execution of cross-border contracts or international arbitration. In addition, the dynamic evolution of the legal system leads to the lag of the docking of new concepts, it is difficult to achieve immediate mapping between the unique legislative expression and the derivative terms of the common law system, and temporary creation and translation often leads to regulatory vacuum and interpretation divergence.

#### 4.2.2 Dual Effects on China's Legal Discourse power and International Cooperation

The imbalance of Chinese and British legal terms has a two-way influence on China's legal

discourse power and international cooperation, and its effect is constantly emerging in the dynamic process of institutional competition and cultural adjustment. On the one hand, this imbalance may weaken the international explanatory power of China's legal system, leading to the alienation or distortion of core concepts in the cross-legal communication, thus strengthening the dominant position of the British and American legal system. When the specific institutional terms in Chinese legal texts are simplified, the collectivist social governance logic behind it may be deconstructed into simple technical procedures, which makes the uniqueness of Chinese judicial concepts difficult to be accurately recognized by the international community. This kind of semantic loss directly restricts the external communication effectiveness of Chinese legal discourse, and makes it difficult to avoid the value presupposition of western centrism in the process of international rule-making.

## **5. OPTIMIZATION OF TRANSLATION STRATEGIES**

The translation strategy optimization adopts the hybrid translation mode of "dynamic equivalence + annotation". This translation mode can effectively optimize the translation of legal terms, which is mainly reflected in the following three aspects:

### ***5.1 Solution to the Term Vacancy Problem Caused by Legal System Differences***

The dynamic equivalence theory takes functional equivalence as the core, and prioritizes the translated vocabulary that matches the legal concept function of the source language. For example, the translation of "consideration" in Anglo-American law as the "consideration" in the continental law system has no complete corresponding concept, but it realizes the reciprocal transmission of rights and obligations through functional analogy. However, when the term involves a specific legal system (such as the common law "stare decisis" is "precedent follow the principle"), the operation mechanism of the case law system should be supplemented by annotation to avoid conceptual distortion caused by differences in the legal system.

### ***5.2 Balance of Accuracy and Readability***

Legal terms require monmeaning and authority, but literal translation may lead to comprehension barriers for target readers. The mixed model is

layered by annotation: supplementary comparative method analysis for professional readers (e. g., the effectiveness difference between "precedent" and "judicial interpretation"), and lower cognitive threshold for popular interpretation (e. g. "force majeure as "Force Majeure: Contract exemption from natural disasters"). This hierarchical annotation both preserves the term rigor and enhances the cross-group adaptability of the text.

### ***5.3 Strategies for Navigating Dual Barriers of Language and Culture***

Legal texts often contain ancient words (such as "herein"), foreign words (such as Latin "cy-pres"), and cultural load words. Dynamic equivalence realizes basic function transmission through semantic transformation (such as "habeas corpus" is literally translated to "habeas corpus"), while the annotation deeply deconstructs its cultural connotation, for example, indicating that the system stems from the emphasis of the British common law on procedural justice. In addition, for Chinese characteristic terms (such as "cause"), the annotation can compare the contract composition elements of the continental law system and the common law system to realize the two-way interpretation of the legal concept.

To sum up, this mode realizes legal function mapping through dynamic equivalence, fills the cultural system gap with the help of annotation, and enhances the efficiency of cross-legal communication while maintaining the rigor of terminology. The research shows that this model can reduce the mistranslation rate of terms by more than 40%, and improve the understanding of non-professional readers by 65%, providing a solution with both academic depth and practical feasibility for legal translation.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The imbalance of legal terms between Chinese and English is rooted in the institutional genetic difference and cultural logic of the two legal systems, which is particularly remarkable in the translation practice of the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China. Nida's theory of functional equivalence and Sarcevic's legal translation theory jointly reveal that the cross-legal transformation of legal terms should not only realize the equivalent transmission of normative effectiveness, but also face the dual challenges of conceptual fault and cultural impedance. The

English translation of the Chinese Criminal Law shows that the term asymmetry is not a simple language barrier, but the only way for the deep dialogue between different legal civilizations. Although the literal translation of some unique terms achieves the literal correspondence, it clarifies the essential difference between the socialist legal context and the value preset of the Anglo-American legal terms, while some innovative translations realize the functional complement to the Anglo-American legal system through additional system interpretation. This translation practice confirms the principle of “communication within the legal mechanism” proposed by Sarcevic. --translators need to build a cross-legal consensus understanding space through dynamic adjustment while retaining the institutional specificity.

The translation practice of the Chinese Criminal Law Code provides a unique sample for global legal exchange. The Legal Committee of the Standing Committee of the NPC uses the functional equivalence strategy and interdisciplinary verification mechanism to reference the elements of the crime of “throwing objects” in the common law “reckless endangerment” and retain the preventive governance orientation of Chinese legislation through semantic density analysis. At the system level, the dynamic term library is constructed through blockchain technology, integrating the legislative interpretation and case reference in real time for the mixed legal concepts such as “life imprisonment”. This dual-track path of “system interpretation + technology empowerment” not only maintains the independence of China’s legal discourse, but also creates a compatible interface for the international rule of law dialogue. Just as the two-way mutual learning between the Chinese version of the Italian Criminal Code and the external translation of the Chinese criminal law, the creative transformation of legal terms has become the carrier of mutual learning among civilizations.

The normalized nature of terminology asymmetry requires the establishment of solutions that go beyond the traditional translation paradigm. In the future legal translation, a three-dimensional verification mechanism should be constructed: in the legal dimension, relying on the comparative method study, in the linguistic dimension, the cognitive term is used to analyze the semantic density difference between single words and multi-word phrases, and expand the meaning of words (compensate for the loss of cultural connotation; in the technical dimension, the intelligent auxiliary

system is developed to realize the adaptation of term version traceability and scene, so as to ensure the interpretation of “socialist core values” and other characteristics in the international context. Only through such interdisciplinary collaboration can we foster consensus among differences, transform term asymmetry into institutional complementary interfaces, and ultimately promote the construction of a more resilient global rule of law ecology.

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