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Translating wuxia for global players: cultural concepts, game systems and player reception in Where Winds Meet

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Abstract

Video games create distinctive conditions for cultural translation because cultural concepts are translated linguistically while their meanings are also enacted through game systems. This study examines how wuxia concepts move from Chinese game text into English localization and player discourse in Where Winds Meet. Drawing on 63,321 English-language Steam reviews, it focuses on five concepts, Wuxia, Jianghu, Qinggong/Lightness Skill, Sect, and Qi. After contextual verification, 1,125 concept-review pairs were coded for six dimensions of reception. The five concepts show markedly different reception patterns, with Wuxia functioning mainly as a genre and aesthetic label, Jianghu serving primarily as a label for a social world but rarely being explicitly explained, Qinggong understood largely through movement, Sect through institutional relations, and Qi through combat mechanics. These findings suggest that lexical reuse, functional understanding, and cultural interpretation do not necessarily coincide. Game systems may therefore contribute to the meaning-making process by making cultural concepts playable, institutionally structured, or mechanically legible. Wuxia translation in interactive media can thus be understood as involving linguistic localization, systemic realization, and player recontextualization.

1. Introduction

Translation does more than move meanings between languages. It also places cultural meanings within new media environments. In literary and audiovisual translation, culturally embedded concepts are primarily encountered through language, narrative, image, and sound. Video games add another dimension because players engage with such concepts through action. A cultural concept may therefore be localized linguistically while also being realized through movement, institutional structures, or mechanics that players repeatedly encounter and engage with. In interactive media, cultural translation concerns not only how a concept is named in another language, but also how it becomes available to players as something that can be encountered, used, and experienced.

Wuxia provides a particularly productive case for examining this process. Rather than a collection of discrete “Chinese elements”, wuxia is organized through interconnected concepts involving jianghu, martial identity, sect affiliation, bodily techniques, cultivation practices, and ethical relations. In literary wuxia, these meanings are constructed largely through narrative, description, and characterization. Games can additionally instantiate these meanings through interactive systems, giving cultural concepts concrete forms in play. Qinggong may become the ability to run across water, scale walls, or move through the air. Sect affiliation may involve entry requirements, ranks, rules, and recurring tasks. Qi may function as a combat resource, while jianghu can be experienced through exploration, social relations, and encounters within the game world. In this sense, wuxia concepts are not merely represented in games but enacted through the systems and actions that structure play.

Existing research has addressed different parts of this problem. Translation studies have long emphasized that culturally embedded expressions cannot be reduced to direct lexical substitution. The cultural turn in translation studies highlighted that translation involves the negotiation of cultural meanings, identities, and power relations rather than the transfer of linguistic forms alone (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990; Venuti, 1995, 1998; Tymoczko, 2007). Studies of wuxia translation have similarly shown that martial arts fiction requires

attention to genre conventions, cultural positioning, and the relational meanings embedded in concepts rather than isolated words (Mok, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Luo, 2017; Ni, 2025). Game localization research has extended this discussion by demonstrating that translation in digital games takes place within multimodal and interactive environments. Games are not only texts to be translated but also systems experienced through rules, interfaces, and player actions (Mangiron & O'Hagan, 2006; O'Hagan, 2007; Bernal-Merino, 2015; Pettini, 2022). Recent studies have further examined localization as a process shaped by technology, gameplay, and user experience (Mangiron, 2018; Deckert et al., 2024).

What remains less well understood is what happens after a cultural concept has entered the localized game. Research on wuxia translation has largely focused on how cultural meanings are rendered, while game localization studies have examined the relationship between translation and interactive experience, and reception studies have often concentrated on overall localization quality or particular translated items. Less attention has been paid to the full trajectory from source-language cultural concept to official localization and then to player discourse. This matters because the presence of a translated term does not in itself reveal how it is received. Players may routinely use wuxia or jianghu without explicitly defining them. Conversely, they may have only limited knowledge of a concept's broader cultural history while understanding very clearly how it functions in the game. Lexical uptake, conceptual recognition, functional understanding, and cultural interpretation therefore need to be treated as related but distinct dimensions.

This article examines that trajectory through **Where Winds Meet**, an open-world wuxia game, by bringing Chinese and English game texts into dialogue with English-language Steam reviews. It focuses on five concepts that occupy different positions within the wuxia conceptual system and are realized differently in play. Wuxia operates largely as a genre and cultural category, Jianghu as a social and imagined world, Qinggong/Lightness Skill as an embodied technique, Sect as an institutional form, and Qi at the intersection of cultivation discourse and combat mechanics. Their differences make it possible to compare how linguistic form and game-system realization are associated with different patterns of reception. The study addresses three questions.

RQ1. How are core wuxia cultural concepts rendered in the English localization of **Where Winds Meet**?

RQ2. How are these localized concepts recognized, interpreted, evaluated, compared, and reused in English-language Steam reviews?

RQ3. How are different localization forms and their playable, institutional, and mechanical realizations associated with different patterns of player reception?

The article makes three contributions. Empirically, it links bilingual game text with large-scale, naturally occurring player discourse, allowing cultural concepts to be traced from localization into use. Analytically, it distinguishes recognition, interpretation, evaluation, comparison, misunderstanding, and reuse rather than treating reception as a single measure of understanding. More broadly, it brings game systems into the analysis of cultural translation. Movements, institutional structures, and mechanics can shape what localized concepts come to mean in practice, sometimes extending the meanings made available through linguistic localization and sometimes narrowing or reorganizing cultural meaning. The focus, then, is not simply on how

wuxia is translated, but on what happens to wuxia concepts once they become part of an interactive and player-mediated environment.

2. Literature review

Research on wuxia translation has long shown that culturally embedded expressions cannot be treated as isolated lexical problems. More broadly, translation studies have moved away from viewing translation as a search for linguistic equivalence and increasingly examined translation as a cultural process involving negotiation, representation, and transformation (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990; Venuti, 1995, 1998; Tymoczko, 2007). Within this broader perspective, Mok (2001a, 2001b) demonstrated that the translation of martial arts fiction is shaped not only by linguistic choices but also by genre conventions, target-culture expectations, and the position of wuxia within the receiving literary system. Luo (2017), in examining the English translation of **The Book and the Sword**, likewise connected translational choices with cultural positioning and identity representation. More recent work has moved further from isolated lexical difficulties toward the cultural relations in which such expressions are embedded. Ni's (2025) study of jianghu in Legends of the Condor Heroes, for example, shows how the concept is bound up with identity, spatial imagination, and cultural difference.

This is why the present study uses cultural concepts rather than culture-specific items as its primary analytical term. Research on culture-specific items has provided useful tools for identifying culturally marked expressions and examining whether they are retained, replaced, explained, or adapted in translation. Yet the concepts examined here are not culturally specific merely because they lack simple English equivalents. Wuxia, Jianghu, Qinggong, Sect, and Qi occupy different but connected positions within a larger conceptual world. They relate respectively to genre, social space, embodied practice, institutional affiliation, and cultivation, and their meanings are partly produced through relations with one another. Treating them as cultural concepts therefore draws attention to how meanings are organized across different representational resources rather than only to how individual source-language expressions are rendered. This perspective is consistent with multimodal approaches to communication, which view meaning as distributed across multiple modes rather than confined to verbal language alone (Kress, 2010; Jewitt, 2014).

The distinction between cultural concepts and culture-specific items becomes especially important in interactive media. Culture-specific items have commonly been examined in relation to strategies such as retention, substitution, explicitation, and adaptation (Aixelá, 1996). Such categories remain useful for describing how culturally marked expressions are rendered, but they do not fully capture what happens when the meaning of an expression depends on a wider network of practices and relations. Jianghu, for instance, is not culturally specific only because it lacks a straightforward English equivalent. Its meaning is also tied to mobility, social belonging, interpersonal obligation, moral positioning, and a particular imagination of the social world. Qi likewise cannot be reduced to a lexical problem when it connects ideas of cultivation and bodily practice with the functional logic assigned to it in the game. Approaching these expressions as cultural concepts shifts the analytical focus from whether individual terms have been retained or adapted to how their meanings are reorganized when they enter a different linguistic and medial environment.

The move from literary text to digital game changes the conditions under which such concepts are encountered. Unlike conventional texts, games are experienced through interaction between fictional worlds and rule-based systems (Aarseth, 1997; Juul, 2005). Games organize player action through rules and mechanics (Sicart, 2008), while procedural structures can themselves carry expressive force (Bogost, 2007). Game localization research has consistently emphasized that games are multimodal, nonlinear, and interactive products whose translation cannot be separated from technical constraints and player experience (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013; Bernal-Merino, 2015; Pettini, 2022). This is particularly important for wuxia because Qinggong, which in a novel is largely constructed through description and narrative imagination, can in a game be performed through wall-running, water-running, aerial movement, and traversal. A Sect can be encountered not only as a translated noun but through entry requirements, ranks, rules, tasks, and membership practices. Qi can become a visible and manipulable combat resource. Cao et al. (2025) likewise show that the construction of wuxia identity in games involves both textual content and gameplay, while Zhang et al. (2025) demonstrate that the English localization of **Tale of Wuxia** operates across linguistic, cultural, and technical dimensions. Cultural meaning in games is therefore distributed across language and system design rather than carried by verbal translation alone.

This difference is not simply a matter of games offering more contextual information than literary texts. Interaction changes the form in which cultural meaning becomes available. A player may encounter a concept repeatedly as an action, rule, constraint, reward structure, or social relationship before ever articulating its cultural significance. Meaning can therefore emerge through procedural familiarity as well as verbal explanation. For translation research, this makes it necessary to distinguish between what the localized text says about a concept and what the game enables players to learn about it through repeated participation.

This medium specificity also complicates the relationship between translation and understanding. A culturally marked term may remain relatively opaque at the lexical level while becoming functionally clear through repeated play. Conversely, an apparently transparent English equivalent may make a game system easy to understand without conveying the wider cultural relations of the source concept. Game systems can therefore do more than provide context for translation. They can foreground certain meanings, suppress others, and reorganize a concept around the actions and rules that the player repeatedly encounters. For cultural translation in games, the relevant question is not simply whether a lexical choice is accurate or accessible, but how linguistic localization interacts with playable, institutional, and mechanical realization.

The growing user-oriented strand of game translation research provides a basis for examining this interaction from the player side. Reception-oriented approaches have increasingly shifted attention from translated products themselves to the ways audiences experience, interpret, and respond to translated media (Di Giovanni & Gambier, 2018). In game localization, this shift has been accompanied by growing interest in players' perceptions of localized content and in the factors that shape their responses to translation choices (Fernández-Costales, 2016; Deckert & Hejduk, 2022). More broadly, media studies have challenged the view of audiences as passive recipients and emphasized their role in interpreting, modifying, and circulating media meanings (Jenkins, 2006). Deckert et al. (2024) place users and user experience at the centre of Game Translation User Research, shifting attention from translated products alone to how those products are actually encountered. Hsu and O'Hagan (2025) show that Steam reviews can provide naturally occurring evidence of localization experience, complementing experimental and interview-based approaches.

Robertson (2025), in a reception study of **Black Myth: Wukong**, further connects the translation of culturally specific game content with player responses, illustrating how cultural retention and accessibility can be experienced in different ways.

What remains less developed is a continuous account of how a set of culturally related concepts moves from the source-language game, through official localization, into player discourse. Existing work has established the cultural density of wuxia concepts, the interactive conditions of game localization, and the value of player-centred reception research. These strands have rarely been brought together to ask how different kinds of concepts are taken up after localization and whether lexical uptake, functional understanding, evaluation, comparison, and reuse follow the same pattern. The present study addresses this gap by tracing five wuxia concepts across bilingual game text and English-language Steam reviews, with particular attention to the role of game systems in shaping how localized concepts become meaningful in player use.

3. Methods

3.1 Research design and data

The study followed three stages. It first identified wuxia cultural concepts in the Chinese game text, then examined their English localization, and finally traced their reception in English-language player reviews. Two datasets were used: the Chinese and English localization files of **Where Winds Meet** and a corpus of Steam reviews.

The localization corpus was constructed from publicly accessible community-extracted resource files, translation_cn.tsv and translation_en.tsv. These files contain dialogue, quest text, interface strings, item descriptions, skill descriptions, and other system-related content. The Chinese file contains approximately 1.20 million records and the English file approximately 0.80 million. Matching by text ID produced 651,749 provisional Chinese-English pairs. These ID matches were used for retrieval and comparison rather than treated as guaranteed one-to-one translation equivalents. Differences between language versions may result from asynchronous updates, additions, deletions, or changes to game resources, so all focal concepts and illustrative examples were checked manually in context before analysis.

Player reception was examined through English-language Steam reviews of **Where Winds Meet** (AppID 3564740). Reviews were collected on 7 September 2026 through Steam's structured review endpoint. The query was restricted to English, while review type and purchase type were left unrestricted. Reviews were retrieved using the recent filter in batches of 100 through cursor-based pagination until no new reviews were returned. Duplicate records were removed by review ID only. Metadata including posting time, recommendation status, helpful votes, comment count, and playtime were retained for auditing and sampling.

The initial collection contained 63,520 unique English-language reviews. After removing 199 empty or whitespace-only entries, 63,321 valid reviews remained. Short reviews, reviews with limited playtime, negative reviews, and identical texts posted under different review IDs were retained. The aim was to preserve the naturally occurring distribution of discourse on the platform rather than impose a minimum length or engagement threshold. The resulting corpus represents a fixed snapshot of English-language reviews returned by the Steam review endpoint as of 7 September 2026.

Steam reviews were used because they provide naturally occurring player discourse rather than responses elicited specifically for research. They record what players themselves choose to mention, explain, compare, praise, criticize, or reuse after encountering the localized game. This makes them particularly suitable for examining the discursive uptake of cultural concepts outside an experimental setting. At the same time, reviews cannot provide direct access to players' internal knowledge, cultural competence, or cognitive processes. The analysis therefore concerns what becomes observable in player discourse rather than what individual players may privately know or understand.

This distinction is important for the interpretation of the coding results. A low rate of explicit Interpretation, for example, cannot be taken to mean that players lack understanding of a concept, just as frequent Reuse cannot by itself demonstrate detailed cultural knowledge. The review corpus is used here to examine how localized wuxia concepts are publicly recognized, articulated, evaluated, compared, and circulated. Claims about reception are therefore limited to these observable forms of engagement.

3.2 Identifying wuxia cultural concepts

Concept identification began with the Chinese localization corpus. Wuxia was treated not as a collection of isolated cultural terms but as a conceptual system involving genre, social space, embodied practice, institutional relations, cultivation, and ethical orientation. Candidate concepts were selected according to three criteria. They needed to have a recognizable association with wuxia culture, perform a meaningful role in the game text, world, or mechanics, and be sufficiently traceable across Chinese text, English localization, and player reviews.

Frequency searches, contextual inspection, and consolidation of translation variants produced a working inventory of 30 cultural concepts. For each concept, the main English localization forms and the corresponding Steam review search forms were recorded. The inventory was designed for corpus retrieval rather than as an exhaustive taxonomy of wuxia culture. The full inventory, together with major English localization forms and review search terms, is provided in Supplementary Table S1.

Search procedures were adjusted to the ambiguity of individual expressions. Relatively distinctive forms such as wuxia, qinggong, meridian, and Tai Chi were searched using strict matching. More general English expressions such as hero, master, martial arts, move, and justice were treated only as candidate hits and required contextual verification because they can correspond to several Chinese expressions or occur without a wuxia-specific meaning. Concepts with both distinctive and broad English forms, such as Jianghu/martial world, were tracked separately rather than reverse-mapped automatically from an English word to a single Chinese concept.

Using the strict concept criteria, 4,532 of the 63,321 valid reviews contained at least one identifiable wuxia concept, representing 7.16% of the review corpus. Five concepts were selected for detailed analysis on the basis of cultural relevance, contrast in game function, traceability in English, and sufficient review evidence. Wuxia represents a genre and cultural category, Jianghu a social and imagined world, Qinggong/Lightness Skill an embodied technique, Sect an institutional form, and Qi a concept situated between cultivation discourse and combat mechanics. For analytical convenience, Sect is used as the label for the □□/□□ concept

cluster because it is the dominant English localization in the game. Their functional differences make them suitable for comparing how linguistic localization and game-system realization relate to reception.

3.3 Sampling and unit of analysis

The five focal concepts occurred at substantially different frequencies. Wuxia appeared in 2,633 reviews and was therefore sampled. A proportionally stratified random sample of 300 reviews was drawn to preserve the recommendation-status distribution of the Wuxia candidate pool, comprising 277 Recommended and 23 Not Recommended reviews. The target sample size of 300 was set before formal coding to balance coverage of the substantially larger Wuxia pool with the feasibility of detailed manual coding. A fixed random seed of 20260907 was used for reproducibility. Jianghu, Qinggong/Lightness Skill, Sect, and Qi had substantially smaller retrieved candidate pools, and all retrieved candidates were therefore coded.

The five concept samples entering formal coding initially comprised 1,131 concept-review pairs. Contextual checking of the 71 Qi candidates identified six false or irrelevant matches, including pinyin homographs, personal names, and unrelated copied material. These were excluded, leaving 1,125 valid units for analysis. Table 1 summarizes the sampling procedures and the number of valid units for each focal concept.

Table 1
Sampling and coding of the five focal concepts

Concept	Candidate reviews	Entering formal coding	Valid units	Sampling procedure
Wuxia	2,633	300	300	Proportionally stratified random sample
Jianghu	291	291	291	All retrieved candidates coded
Qinggong/Lightness Skill	81	81	81	All retrieved candidates coded
Sect	388	388	388	All retrieved candidates coded
Qi	71	71	65	All retrieved candidates coded; contextual verification
Total	—	1,131	1,125	—

The unit of analysis was the concept-review pair rather than the review as a whole. A single review could mention more than one focal concept, and the same player could understand or evaluate those concepts differently. Coding at the concept-review level therefore reduced the risk of transferring evidence relating to one concept to another concept appearing in the same review.

Before formal coding, 100 calibration cases were selected purposively, with 20 cases drawn from each focal concept. The calibration set included cases with explicit explanation, evaluation, comparison, and difficult boundary decisions. It was used to refine category definitions and decision rules rather than to estimate prevalence. Two rounds of calibration were completed before the final codebook was fixed.

3.4 Coding player reception

Player reception was treated as multidimensional rather than reduced to positive or negative sentiment. Six binary dimensions were coded independently and could co-occur within the same concept-review pair. Recognition was coded when the review treated the target expression as a meaningful genre, social world, technique, institution, or mechanic rather than merely containing the relevant word form. Interpretation required some explicit indication of what the concept was, what it did, or how it operated. Evaluation captured an explicit stance toward the concept, its localization, or its realization in the game. It was not inferred from the review's overall Recommended or Not Recommended status. Comparison was coded when the concept was explicitly related to another cultural concept, game, genre, or mechanic. Misunderstanding was reserved for cases showing clear evidence of inaccurate equivalence, misclassification, or cultural misinterpretation. Reuse recorded whether the player actively incorporated the cultural term or its localized form into their own discourse.

Interpretive cases were further classified according to the main source of meaning as cultural-semantic, playable-functional, institutional-functional, mechanic-functional, or hybrid. A review explaining Qinggong through wall-running or water-running, for example, was coded as playable-functional interpretation. Descriptions of Sect through membership, rules, and ranks were coded as institutional-functional, while explanations of Qi through depletion, breaking, or regeneration were coded as mechanic-functional.

Recognition and Reuse were kept analytically separate. Reuse indicates that an expression has entered player discourse, whereas Recognition requires contextual evidence that the expression is being used as a meaningful concept. Similarly, unfamiliarity, simplification, analogy, or negative evaluation alone did not qualify as Misunderstanding. The conservative threshold was intended to avoid treating partial knowledge or functional comparison as evidence of cultural error. Because the candidate pools were retrieved through concept-related lexical forms, Reuse rates are conditional on concept-linked reviews and should not be interpreted as the prevalence of reuse in the full Steam corpus. Reuse was retained as an analytical category to distinguish active incorporation of a term into player discourse from quotation, interface reproduction, or incidental occurrence. More generally, percentages across the five concepts are used descriptively to characterize reception within each concept-linked sample rather than as directly comparable population prevalence estimates, because the concepts differ in retrieval forms, frequency, and sampling procedure.

3.5 Reliability, qualitative evidence, and ethics

Inter-coder reliability was assessed using a stratified random sample of 226 concept-review pairs, approximately 20% of the 1,131 initial coding units. The sample comprised 60 Wuxia cases, 58 Jianghu cases, 16 Qinggong cases, 78 Sect cases, and 14 Qi cases. One Qi case was subsequently excluded as an irrelevant lexical match, leaving 225 valid cases for the reliability assessment. A second human coder independently coded these cases using the same operational definitions and coding criteria, without access to the first coder's decisions. Agreement was assessed separately for each of the six binary reception dimensions.

Percent agreement for Recognition, Interpretation, Evaluation, Comparison, Misunderstanding, and Reuse was 74.67%, 73.78%, 59.11%, 88.00%, 100.00%, and 96.00%, respectively. The corresponding Cohen's kappa values were 0.076, 0.315, 0.194, 0.382, not computable, and 0.000. Kappa could not be calculated for Misunderstanding because neither coder identified a positive case. For Reuse, the high percentage agreement alongside a kappa of zero reflected the extreme imbalance in category prevalence. The results revealed

varying levels of agreement across the six dimensions, particularly for Recognition, Interpretation, and Evaluation. Accordingly, the descriptive findings are interpreted cautiously and considered alongside the qualitative evidence.

Quantitative coding was supplemented by representative review excerpts. Examples were selected for conceptual clarity, typicality of the reception pattern, variation in evaluation, and their ability to illustrate interpretation or comparison. Helpful-vote counts were not used as the sole criterion for selection. Quotations are reported anonymously, and usernames are not included. Although the review corpus was restricted to English-language posts, review language was not used to infer nationality, ethnicity, first language, or cultural identity.

4. Results

4.1 English localization forms and overall reception patterns

The five focal concepts were rendered differently in the English localization. Wuxia was largely retained through the romanized borrowing wuxia. Jianghu appeared both as the romanized form Jianghu and as martial world, while Qinggong was represented by both qinggong and Lightness Skill. “□□”, together with some instances of “□□”, was mainly localized as Sect. Qi was likewise retained primarily through the romanized form qi. The five cases therefore include romanized borrowing, the coexistence of borrowing and explanatory rendering, and target-language lexical equivalents. Table 2 presents the reception patterns across the five focal concepts.

Table 2
Reception patterns across the five focal concepts

Concept	Recognition	Interpretation	Evaluation	Comparison	Misunderstanding	Reuse
Wuxia (n = 300)	300 (100.0%)	1 (0.3%)	153 (51.0%)	46 (15.3%)	0	300 (100.0%)
Jianghu (n = 291)	146 (50.2%)	10 (3.4%)	79 (27.1%)	27 (9.3%)	0	290 (99.7%)
Qinggong (n = 81)	59 (72.8%)	44 (54.3%)	50 (61.7%)	8 (9.9%)	0	81 (100.0%)
Sect (n = 388)	328 (84.5%)	160 (41.2%)	105 (27.1%)	50 (12.9%)	0	388 (100.0%)
Qi (n = 65)	57 (87.7%)	8 (12.3%)	14 (21.5%)	10 (15.4%)	0	65 (100.0%)

Note. Percentages refer to valid concept-review pairs within each focal concept-linked sample and should not be interpreted as prevalence estimates for the full corpus of 63,321 reviews. Because the samples differed in retrieval forms, frequency, and sampling procedure, cross-concept percentages are interpreted descriptively

rather than as directly comparable prevalence estimates. Given the variation in agreement across coding dimensions, these descriptive results are interpreted cautiously and considered alongside the qualitative evidence.

Reuse was high across all five concept-linked samples and is treated primarily as a descriptive indicator of active incorporation into player discourse. The more informative cross-concept variation lies in Recognition and Interpretation, particularly the latter, which differed substantially across the five concepts. These descriptive differences suggest that localization form alone may not fully account for the observed reception patterns. The qualitative evidence also points to the relevance of how cultural concepts are realized and encountered through gameplay.

4.2 From localized terms to player discourse

Wuxia and Jianghu

Wuxia showed the clearest pattern of genre labeling. Among the 300 coded cases, both Recognition and Reuse reached 100%, Evaluation 51.0%, and Comparison 15.3%, while Interpretation appeared in only one case. Players rarely defined wuxia, but routinely used expressions such as “wuxia game”, “Wuxia aesthetic”, and “wuxia simulator” to classify the game, describe its style, and position their expectations.

One review stated that “we rarely get a wuxia game and a good one at that”, while another described the game as “anchored in Chinese history and Wuxia aesthetic”. A third wrote that “This game almost feels like a wuxia simulator sometimes.” In these comments, wuxia functions directly as a classificatory term. Its use does not depend on repeated explanation, even though its broader cultural meaning remains largely implicit.

Jianghu displayed a similar gap between use and explanation, but its discourse function was different. Of the 291 valid cases, Reuse reached 99.7%, Recognition 50.2%, and Interpretation only 3.4%. A small number of players explicitly glossed Jianghu as “martial underworld” or “the world of rivers and lakes”, but most used it without definition. Comments such as “Living my Jianghu dream through this game < 3” and “one of best and highest quality Jianghu/Murim Sim” treat Jianghu as a social and experiential world rather than as a lexical item requiring explanation.

The surrounding vocabulary further clarifies this discourse function, as terms such as “world”, “dream”, “lore”, and “setting” repeatedly positioned Jianghu as a space of experience and social life. Unlike Wuxia, which primarily functioned as a genre category, Jianghu drew much of its meaning from the game world, character relations, and narrative setting. Similar borrowing strategies therefore led to different forms of uptake in player discourse.

4.3 Meaning through movement and institutional structure

Qinggong and Sect

Qinggong/Lightness Skill differed markedly from Wuxia and Jianghu in the amount of explicit interpretation it generated. Of the 81 valid cases, Recognition reached 72.8%, Interpretation 54.3%, Evaluation 61.7%, and Reuse 100%. Most interpretive comments did not define Qinggong in abstract cultural terms but instead described what players could do with it.

Players repeatedly referred to “parkour”, “running across water”, “wall-running”, “gliding”, and “flying”. One review described it as “Your parkour (Lightness skill) is far more powerful than any mount.” Another referred to “absolute freedom through the Qinggong system (martial arts lightness skill)”, while a third praised “qinggong wall-running across stunning ancient China landscapes”. These comments show that the concept was often interpreted through movement itself. The localized terms supplied a name, while gameplay supplied the functional content.

Sect produced a different but equally clear pattern. Among 388 valid cases, Recognition reached 84.5%, Interpretation 41.2%, and Reuse 100%. Players typically explained Sect through entry conditions, membership, rules, tasks, ranks, and rewards. One review called it “A very unique system where each sect has its own personality.” Another explained that players could “join a sect as a solo-mode player” and explicitly distinguished it from “a guild which is the multiplayer thing”. A third noted that some sects require players to “live by their morals and creed to gain entry, retain membership and climb in rank.”

These descriptions contain more relational information than the English word Sect alone provides. Players encounter the concept through a structured system of affiliation and obligation. Interpretation and evaluation also remained distinct, as a player could understand the system clearly and still judge that “The sects are boring at best, and stupid at worst.” Qinggong and Sect therefore show two different routes to functional interpretation, one through embodied movement and the other through institutional participation.

4.4 From cultural concept to game mechanic

Qi and cross-concept comparison

Qi showed the strongest tendency toward mechanical reinterpretation. Of the 71 initial candidates, 65 remained after contextual verification. Recognition reached 87.7%, Reuse 100%, Interpretation 12.3%, and Comparison 15.4%. Players frequently used expressions such as “Qi bar”, “Qi damage”, “break Qi”, “deplete Qi”, and “regenerate Qi”, placing the term directly within combat discourse.

One review explained that “deflections drain the boss’ ‘QI bar’, consider it like a shield, and when it goes to 0 the boss is stunned”. Another used “Qi (Poise)” to connect the mechanic with an already familiar action-game concept. In these cases, players could understand how Qi worked in combat without first articulating its broader cultural background.

These mechanical uses did not entirely displace Qi’s cultural associations, as some reviews linked Qi to “classic martial art theory” or “internal strength”, while one player complained that “Concepts like qi, the existence of sects, the idea of cultivation... are never explained.” Qi therefore occupied two levels at once. The culturally marked term remained visible, while its practical meaning was reorganized around a combat system.

Across the five concepts, distinct reception patterns emerged. Wuxia functioned mainly as a genre label, Jianghu through social-world and narrative associations, Qinggong through movement, Sect through institutional relations, and Qi through combat mechanics. The clearest cross-concept variation concerned Recognition and, especially, Interpretation, which ranged from 0.3% for Wuxia to 54.3% for Qinggong. Reuse remained high across all five concept-linked samples, but because review retrieval was lexically conditioned,

these rates are treated descriptively rather than as directly comparable prevalence estimates. The findings therefore distinguish the incorporation of localized terms into player discourse from the extent to which their meanings are explicitly articulated.

No case met the conservative threshold for Misunderstanding. This finding does not indicate the absence of cultural misunderstanding. It only shows that simplification, functional analogy, or incomplete explanation did not in themselves provide sufficient textual evidence to classify a review as a clear case of misunderstanding.

5. Discussion

5.1 Cultural translation beyond linguistic equivalence

The findings extend cultural approaches to translation by showing that, in interactive media, culturally embedded meaning is distributed across linguistic and representational resources as well as systems of action and participation. This argument builds on translation scholarship that has long questioned models based solely on equivalence and emphasized translation as cultural negotiation (Venuti, 1995; Tymoczko, 2007). Games add a further complication because the translated expression is only one part of a larger semiotic environment. A concept enters a new cultural space through its name, but also through the actions, rules, and experiences associated with it.

This relational view is particularly important for wuxia, where many concepts derive their meanings from networks of relations rather than from isolated definitions. Jianghu, for example, is not simply a term referring to a particular place, while Qi is not merely a name for an internal force. Their meanings emerge from connections among social identity, bodily practice, moral order, and cultivation. When these concepts enter a game, some of these relations are preserved through narrative and terminology, while others are reorganized through interactive structures.

This suggests that the object of cultural translation in interactive media is not simply a word, but a configuration of meanings that may be distributed across multiple layers of the game. Localization provides the linguistic entry point, but the game environment shapes which dimensions of a concept become most readily available through play. Translation in games is therefore less a movement between equivalent expressions than a process of reorganizing cultural relations within a new experiential framework.

Even within approaches that treat translation as cultural negotiation rather than simple equivalence, interactive media complicate where translated meaning is located. Some dimensions of a localized concept become salient through implementation and use, including mechanics, interfaces, repeated player actions, and community discourse. These associations are not fully specified by the source expression or by the translator’s lexical choice. The source concept remains relevant, but the localized concept develops within a new semiotic environment rather than functioning as a fixed package of meaning transferred intact from one language to another.

The analytical object therefore shifts from equivalence between two lexical forms to the trajectory of a concept across forms of representation and use. For culturally dense concepts such as those associated with wuxia, this trajectory may include linguistic retention, partial semantic explanation, procedural realization, and

subsequent reinterpretation by players. Translation can then be studied not only as a relation between source and target texts, but also as a process through which cultural meanings are redistributed across text, system, and practice.

Such a perspective also extends previous discussions of game localization. Existing localization research has emphasized the importance of multimodality and player experience, while game studies have likewise treated rules and procedures as meaningful structures rather than merely technical components (Juul, 2005; Bogost, 2007). Culturally embedded concepts therefore require attention to how different elements of a game jointly produce meaning. A translated term may preserve cultural visibility, while gameplay shapes how that visibility becomes meaningful for players. Language and gameplay experience are therefore jointly involved in how localized concepts become meaningful to players.

5.2 Playability as a mode of cultural mediation

One implication of the findings is that games provide a distinctive mode of cultural mediation through play. Where literary translation typically relies on verbal and contextual resources, games can additionally communicate cultural meanings through repeated interaction. Players do not only read about a concept; they encounter its consequences through rules, feedback, and embodied action.

This does not mean that gameplay automatically produces deeper cultural understanding. Rather, playability selectively highlights certain dimensions of a concept. A mechanic can make one aspect immediately accessible while leaving other meanings less visible. For example, a cultivation-related concept may become understandable as a combat resource, while its philosophical or historical associations remain largely outside the player's immediate experience. Similarly, an organizational concept may become recognizable through membership structures without fully conveying the cultural assumptions underlying traditional martial communities.

The findings are consistent with a form of procedural familiarity that does not depend on explicit cultural interpretation. Players may know what a concept enables them to do, when it becomes relevant, and how it relates to other game systems without verbalizing its broader cultural history or conceptual tradition. Such familiarity remains analytically meaningful even when incomplete: knowing how a culturally embedded concept operates within a fictional world is a form of situated understanding. Yet repeated encounters with a concept as a gauge, ability, affiliation system, or movement technique may foreground its functional meanings over other cultural associations. Playability thus facilitates access to unfamiliar concepts while shaping which dimensions of their meanings become most salient to players.

The significance of game systems, therefore, lies not simply in making unfamiliar concepts easier to understand. They may foreground certain forms of understanding within the player experience. A concept localized within an interactive environment is shaped by the affordances of that environment. What can be performed, measured, upgraded, or repeated may become more immediately salient than meanings that depend on historical knowledge or abstract cultural reflection.

This raises an important issue for the localization of culturally rich media. Accessibility and cultural depth should not be treated as opposing goals, but neither should they be assumed to develop automatically together. A localization may allow players to participate in a cultural system without requiring complete prior

knowledge of its origins. At the same time, researchers should avoid equating gameplay with complete cultural comprehension. Interactive media create new pathways to meaning, but these pathways are selective. The distinction between accessibility and depth is therefore better understood as a question of sequencing and emphasis than as a simple opposition. A concept may become accessible through play without losing the possibility of later cultural elaboration. The more relevant issue is whether the localized game leaves enough semantic space for further interpretation, or whether mechanical realization becomes so dominant that alternative meanings are difficult to recover.

5.3 Players as post-localization meaning makers

The findings further suggest that localization does not represent the endpoint of cultural translation. Once a concept enters player discourse around a localized game, it may continue to be recontextualized through use, comparison, and analogy. The reviews examined here show localized concepts being incorporated into existing cultural and gaming frameworks rather than simply repeated in the form provided by developers.

This process differs from professional translation, but it nevertheless contributes to cultural meaning-making. When players compare unfamiliar concepts with familiar ones, they create interpretive bridges between cultural systems. Such comparisons may simplify certain aspects of the original concept, but they also make cross-cultural engagement possible. A concept that remains entirely unfamiliar may have limited circulation, whereas a concept that can be connected to existing knowledge can become part of a new discourse community.

The player reception observed in this study therefore complicates a linear model in which meaning moves from source producer to target receiver and stops at localization. Player recontextualization shows why reuse should not be regarded as simple repetition of official terminology. Once a term enters player discourse, it participates in new patterns of association. Players combine it with genre labels, gameplay vocabulary, comparisons with other cultural traditions, and categories drawn from previous games. Through these uses, a localized concept may acquire new associations within player discourse that are not reducible to the wording of the localized text. Reception is therefore partly cumulative, as later encounters may be shaped by meanings already circulating among players. In this sense, players become participants in post-localization meaning-making.

For wuxia games seeking international circulation, the localization of culturally embedded concepts cannot be reduced to the familiar opposition between foreignization and domestication (Venuti, 1995, 1998). Retaining a romanized source term does not automatically preserve its cultural meaning, just as replacing or explaining it in English does not necessarily erase cultural difference. The effect of either choice depends on what happens around the term. A borrowed expression may become highly accessible when gameplay gives it a stable function, while a fluent English equivalent may remain culturally thin if little in the game develops its relational meaning. The relevant issue is therefore not whether cultural difference is simply preserved or reduced, but how linguistic visibility interacts with experiential accessibility.

Cultural concepts also need not become fully transparent on first encounter. Partial opacity can coexist with participation and may even leave room for further learning. What matters is whether players have enough linguistic, narrative, and systemic resources to incorporate the concept into their own understanding without

reducing it entirely to a familiar target-culture category. The present case suggests that the international circulation of wuxia through games is less a transfer of fixed cultural content than an ongoing process in which translation, game design, and player interpretation can contribute to the recontextualization of cultural concepts.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how wuxia cultural concepts move from Chinese game text into English localization and then into player discourse in **Where Winds Meet**. By linking bilingual game text with English-language Steam reviews, it showed that localized concepts do not follow a single path of reception. Some become stable labels, some gain meaning through world-building and social context, while others are understood primarily through movement, institutional participation, or game mechanics. These differences suggest that lexical uptake, functional understanding, and cultural interpretation should not be treated as equivalent outcomes. In interactive media, cultural meaning is shaped not only by the translated term itself but also by the systems through which players encounter and use it. The present case therefore shows how cultural translation in games can extend beyond linguistic transfer through the interaction of localization, game design, and player interpretation.

The study is limited by its focus on a single game, five focal concepts, and English-language Steam reviews, which cannot be used to infer players' nationality, first language, or broader cultural background. Platform reviews also capture only experiences that players choose to verbalize. A further limitation concerns the consistency of reception coding, as the independent coding assessment revealed substantial disagreement in several categories. The corresponding descriptive percentages should therefore be interpreted as exploratory indications of player discourse rather than precise measures of cultural understanding. Future research could compare wuxia, xianxia, and historically themed Chinese games across platforms and languages, and combine review data with interviews, experiments, or gameplay observation to examine more closely how linguistic form and system design shape cultural understanding. The broader implication is that culturally embedded concepts in games do not simply cross linguistic boundaries once and remain fixed. Their meanings continue to develop as they are played, interpreted, and reused. For game translation, this makes the relation between text, system, and player practice central to understanding how culture travels through interactive media.

Declarations

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Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are provided in the accompanying supplementary materials. Supplementary Table S1 contains the inventory of 30 wuxia cultural concepts, their English localization forms, and review search expressions. Supplementary Data S2 contains the original collection of 63,520 English-language Steam review records, while Supplementary Data S3 provides the cleaned corpus of 63,321 valid reviews. Supplementary Data S4 contains the coding records for the five focal concepts, comprising 1,131 initial concept-review pairs and 1,125 valid analytical units, together with the coding scheme and decision rules. Supplementary Data S5 provides the independent coding assessment, including the 226 initially selected cases, the 225 valid cases, and the corresponding agreement statistics. Supplementary Methods S6 documents the data collection, cleaning, sampling, and analytical procedures. The original game localization resources were obtained from community-extracted files of ***Where Winds Meet***. Where redistribution of these third-party source files is restricted, relevant source information and derived analytical records are provided for verification.

Author contributions

Lisong Wang contributed to the conceptualization of the study, methodological refinement, interpretation of the findings, supervision, and critical revision of the manuscript. **Wei Li** contributed to the conceptualization and design of the study, methodology, data curation, formal analysis, and preparation of the original manuscript. **Haozhe Li** contributed to the collection and organization of research materials and to corpus analysis. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Ethics declaration

This study used publicly available English-language user reviews posted on Steam. No direct interaction with users took place, and no private information was collected. Usernames and other directly identifying information were not included in the analysis or reporting, and all quoted material is presented anonymously.

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Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- SupplementaryTableS1WuxiaCulturalConcepts2.xlsx
- SupplementaryDataS2RawSteamReviews.csv
- SupplementaryDataS3CleanedSteamReviews.csv
- SupplementaryDataS4ConceptCoding.xlsx
- SupplementaryDataS5IntercoderReliability.xlsx
- SupplementaryMethodsS6DataDocumentation1.docx