

# Reimagining Translation Education: Fostering Student Engagement With AI Technologies in Cultural Translation Assessment

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**Abstract**—This study challenges the “either-or” dichotomy in attitudes toward AI translation and explores strategies to foster critical engagement with AI tools among students enrolled in translation modules. Drawing on questionnaire responses from students at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, the research investigates the issue: learners' experiences with AI-integrated assessment practices and pathways to harmonizing AI translation with pedagogical goals. Findings indicate that while students recognize AI's efficacy in generating coherent outputs for standardized text types (e.g., technical or informational content), they emphasize the irreplaceable role of human intervention in culture- and literature-specific translations. Participants highlight the necessity of translators' subjective creativity to preserve aesthetic nuances and contextual implications, particularly when conveying source-text subtleties. The study further identifies systemic implications for translation education: as AI models advance, curriculum design, assessment frameworks, and institutional policies must evolve holistically to meaningfully integrate AI tools. A systematic-thinking approach is proposed, advocating coordinated efforts across programmatic, departmental, and national regulatory levels to redefine learning outcomes, adapt syllabi, and develop future assessments that ethically leverage AI's capabilities without undermining translational artistry.

**Index Terms**—translation education, AI, assessment, pedagogy

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the age of AI, translation students face the challenge that whether human translation would be replaced by AI translation. This challenge has been heatedly debated in the field of Translation Studies and there is an opposition of attitudes towards it. On the one hand, there is scholarship subscribing to the view that AI translation will replace human translators (Grace et al., 2018; Zouhar et al., 2021; Trivedi et al., 2023). This stance is reinforced by the reality that many professional translators are losing their jobs in the market due to advanced development of AI translation. The displacement of professional translators is evidenced through instances such as a 20%-50% decline on freelance demand in the so-called “substitutable skills” like translation and writing (Teutloff et al., 2025), the changing profile of work and labour in China caused by the flourish of workplace AI (Sun, 2024), and more than half of the jobs in China could be put at risk by AI (South China Morning Post, 2023). On the other hand, some scholars adhere to the view that AI translation cannot replace human translators (Valdeón, 2023; Wang, 2023a; Robinson, 2023). This view is particularly applied to literary and cultural translation contexts where nuances and implications of the humanistic and aesthetic elements of the source and target texts are better grasped by humans than by machines. These contrastive opinions on, and approaches to, AI translation would exert negative effects on learning and assessment. For students who hold that human translation will be replaced by AI translation, they would be passive learners on translation knowledge and theories which might lead to failing modules. Worse still, they would possibly use AI translation to produce their coursework for assessment, and this is likely to cause academic integrity misconduct. For those who think AI translation cannot replace human translation, they would possibly ignore the issue of AI translation and become disadvantaged in the know-how of the frontiers of AI and translation technology and therefore be disadvantaged in job market after graduation. In short, these opposing opinions sit at opposite ends of the spectrum and form an “either-or” attitude towards AI translation. Such an attitude is problematic because it prevents students from acquiring a nuanced comprehension of AI translation systems and obstructs an incorporation of these technologies into their educational and evaluative processes, thereby restricting the potential enhancement of their academic development. Subsequently, questions emerge regarding the existence of alternatives capable of transcending the dichotomous approach to assessment and, if such alternatives exist, the methodologies for their implementation. Prior to delineating the proposed interventions, it is imperative to substantiate them through a review of pertinent literature.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

With the advent of translation technologies in the field of Translation Studies since 1990s, there has been a surge in research on how machine and computational translation can improve human translator's accuracy, efficiency and consistency in translating texts. Prominent studies include the impact of translation memory system on its alignment with

source- and target- text sentences (Heyn, 1998; Dragsted, 2004), translation problems caused by ambiguities in the source text (Ćulo et al., 2014), machine translation and post-editing (Carl & Kay, 2011), translation technology and risk management (Canfora & Ottmann, 2015), and modelling translation tasks and strategies (Jensen et al., 2009). These studies have laid solid groundwork for the recent emergence of Artificial intelligence in Translation Studies. As this is a newly emerged area, scholarship is not gigantic and mainly include aspects of the characteristics of AI in Translation Studies (for example Fan & Wang, 2023), challenges and strategies of AI in the field (Shrivastava et al., 2023), and the role of AI in advancing the field (Khasawneh & Al-Amrat, 2023).

Similar to the relative scarcity of research on AI in Translation Studies, studies on the application of AI in translation teaching and assessment are relatively few and far between. These include the necessity to explore principled approaches in the application of AI in translation teaching (Liu & Afzaal, 2021), the positive promoting effect of AI on improving students' translation efficiency (Yu, 2024), the influence of AI in developing translator's key competencies (Wang, 2023b), and AI-assisted app design and training for translation education (Bakhov et al., 2024). These studies mainly concern translation teaching and learning, and assessment is not their concern. To date, only one research remotely relates to the application of AI in translation assessment, namely, whether automated machine translation evaluation metrics can be used to assess students' interpretation in the language learning classroom (Han & Lu, 2021). But the focus of this study is language learning, not translation, although it centres around students' interpretation assessment and evaluation. In short, there is a gap existing in the application of AI in translation assessment, especially the assessment of cultural translation texts, where the "AI vs. Human" axis becomes a visible site of contestation and conflict.

This gap makes this action innovative in several ways. First, while the existing research concern translation teaching or interpretation assessment, this study focusses on the assessment of a module on cultural translation, which provides an opportunity to target areas where AI may be weaker than human, such as the nuances and implications of cultural references, the literary allusions of the source text, and the rich historical translation associations bearing fingerprints of human civilization. Second, this study was carried out in a transnational education context at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, a Sino-British joint venture, where the future actions for change and development of practices in higher education can go beyond the national concern and reach to a wider international community. Third, previous studies focus on the functional aspect of the usage of AI in teaching translation, but this research places its emphasis on cultivating students' critical thinking ability on AI translation. In this way, it brings the focus of the application of AI to translation teaching and assessment out of the functional realm and into the spiritual realm of students' criticality.

Based on the above review of literature and demonstration of the novelty of this action, this article will use Kolb's model for the learning cycle (Kolb, 1984) to guide the action and explain its necessity and rationale. Kolb's model has four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. This report will not automatically follow these four stages and separate its body into four sections. Instead, it will show how the author of this article carries out each stage in accordance with the arrangement of this project. For instance, concrete experience and reflective observation are partly conducted in introduction and partly in discussion; abstract conceptualisation is made in formulating research questions and critical reflection following results; and active experimentation is carried out in methodology and result analysis. Furthermore, to complement Kolb's learning model, Brookfield's four lenses model (Brookfield, 1995) – the lenses of autobiographical, students, colleagues and literature – will be applied in sections like discussion, in conjunction with justification for future development and improvement. The purpose of incorporating these two learning models into the action is to offer a theoretical base for validating the efficacy of their application into this action.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. *Research Questions*

In order to address the problem of how translation students can meaningfully engage with AI translation in their assessment and learning, the intervention is to design coursework for the module TRI207 Cultural Translation that incorporate AI translation. The aim of the intervention is to facilitate students to become critical thinkers (as alluded above) on the question of AI translation, and to find an effective way to engage with AI translation in learning. Accordingly, research questions are established to fully mirror and serve the purposes of this research:

- (a) How did the students experience the engagement with AI translation in the assessment?  
[The question aligns with the action's purposes 1-3, as stated in the next section]
- (b) How to form a meaningful relationship between students' assessment, learning and the use of AI translation?  
[The question aligns with the action's purpose 4, as stated in the next section]

#### B. *Participants and Instruments*

All 40 students enrolled in this module were invited to respond to the questionnaire. The intervention focusses on incorporating AI translation into coursework for the module that the author of this article taught: TRI207 Cultural Translation. In the coursework, students are required to compare their English translation of a Chinese cultural text (as source text) with the AI translation (Bing AI Copilot is used) and model translation (published by the official website where the Chinese cultural text is extracted). The source text combines 3 short introductory texts on Suzhou tourism

including the Tiger Hill, the Canglang Pavillion, and the Lingering Garden. By using these heavily culturally loaded texts, the intent is to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of AI translation and to foster students' sophisticated, rather than one-sided, thinking about AI translation. They are then asked to produce a recorded translation commentary on their own translation of the source text and their reflection on the comparison and contrast between their translation, AI translation, and model translation. Standards and criteria for comparison and contrast are provided in the assessment paper, with basic and skill-related standards of "accuracy", "fluency" and "aesthetic beauty", and advanced and theory-oriented standards of "foreignization", "domestication", "rewriting", "adaptation" etc. The purposes of this action are set as follows:

- (a) enable students to get a fuller understanding of AI translation, rather than sticking to the "either-or" attitude;
- (b) make students realize the differences between their own translation, model translation and AI translation through comparison and contrast;
- (c) drive students to think the strengths and weaknesses of AI translation;
- (d) inspire students to seek a useful way to engage with AI in their learning.

This research used mixed methods of the review of students' translation commentary and a questionnaire that the author designed. Accordingly, the data comes from two channels. The first is students' comments on AI translation in their coursework, and their comparison and contrast between AI translation, model translation and their own translation. The second is a questionnaire which includes two main questions:

- (a) How do you think of the AI translation used in CW1, compared with your translation and the official model translation? For example, what are its strengths and weaknesses?
- (b) Do you think the incorporation of AI into assessments in this way useful to your study? Why or why not?

Each question has sub-questions. For question one, sub-questions concern students' general understanding of AI translation, and their identification of the strengths and weaknesses of AI translation compared with their own translation and model translation. For question two, sub-questions include whether AI translation incorporated in assessment in this way is useful for students' learning, and what exactly in this way of involving AI in assessment makes students think it's helpful to their study.

### C. Data Collection Procedures

After obtaining the ethical approval from the university, the author of this article sent the questionnaire through email to each student. Bearing Dornyei's (2003) reminder of the effectiveness of pedagogic research using questionnaire, the author sent the questionnaire together with her feedback to students' coursework, and the intent is to provide a base (the feedback) for students to reflect upon the questions on the questionnaire and to offset the risks of ambiguous and invalid responses. However, the author was fully aware of the possible wrong impression made on the part of the students that their response to the questionnaire is related to their mark received on the coursework. To avoid such perceptions, the author explicitly told students in class that their response to the questionnaire would not affect the marks awarded for their coursework, even though both the feedback and the questionnaire were sent to them together via email. Furthermore, in the questionnaire, the author provided a footnote to reassure students that their participation in the questionnaire is unrelated to their marks awarded. And students' privacy and confidentiality are clearly stated on the questionnaire, to align with the ethics protocol.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Results

Of the 40 students enrolled in the module and invited to participate in the survey, 24 answered the questionnaire completely (60% response rate). Below are results of students' response to the two main questions on the questionnaire, coupled with a few translation examples extracted from their translation commentary that can support the response.

#### *RQ 1: Students' experience of the engagement with AI translation in the assessment*

For question one's first sub-question on students general understanding of AI translation, the response shows that in the eyes of students AI translation has two definitive features: 1) it is faster than human translation and 2) it can handle translation at a larger scale than human can do in the same amount of time. Here displays corroborative students' claims:

- "AI translation is low-time consuming, much efficient than human translator"
- "increase the speed of translation"
- "Fast, convenient, and basically accurate"
- "it can handle translation tasks quickly and at scale, and it is the least expensive way for people to understand the content."

Building on the previous sub-question regarding students' general understanding of AI translation, the second sub-question asks them to identify the strengths and weaknesses of AI translation. For the strengths of AI translation, students' response focuses on three aspects: accuracy, expressiveness and fluency, and its ability to consider the reception of information through effective formatting. Below shows some notable comments:

- (a) For accuracy  
"accuracy in understanding the meaning of the source text".

- (b) For expressiveness and fluency  
 “Expressiveness of the target text. Sometimes it is more understandable. [An example is extracted from the candidate’s commentary] In the first paragraph, it translates 独树一帜 as ‘stand out’. I think it is suitable for foreigners to understand.”  
 “AI translation is straightforward and simple”.  
 “fluency in writing the target text”.
- (c) For the ability to consider the reception of information through effective formatting  
 “it used a list for translating different section of the lingering garden (留园). It is beneficial for the tourists on visual.”

By contrast, students identified six categories of weakness in AI translation. The following pie chart illustrates these categories and their distribution.

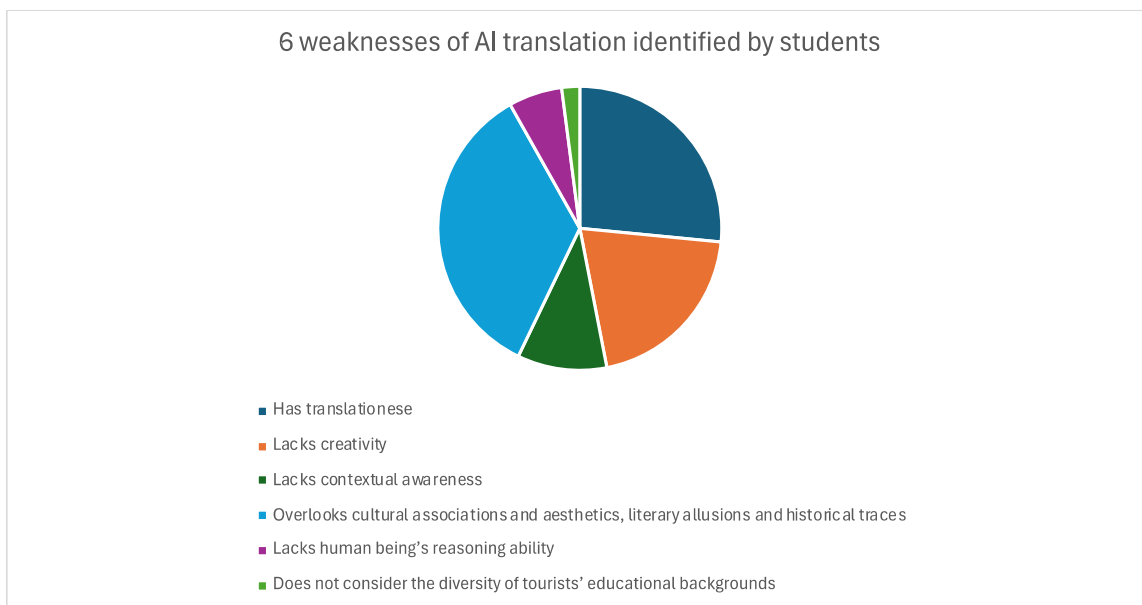


Figure 1. Six Categories of Weaknesses of AI Translation Identified by Students

According to the pie chart, out of the twenty-four respondents, seventeen hold the view that AI overlooks cultural associations and aesthetics, constituting the biggest percentage of the chart. Thirteen recognise that AI has translationese, and ten think that AI lacks creativity in translation. The other three weaknesses that possess less percentage are the opinions that AI translation lacks contextual awareness and human being’s reasoning ability and does not consider the diversity of tourists’ educational backgrounds.

*RQ 2: Forming a meaningful relationship between students’ assessment, learning and the use of AI translation*

For question two, its first sub-question asks whether incorporating AI translation into assessment is useful for students’ learning. Of the twenty-four respondents, the majority (twenty-three) rated the incorporation of AI in assessment as either “useful” (six) or “very useful” (seventeen), while one respondent rated it as “useful to some extent”, as shown in the Figure 2.

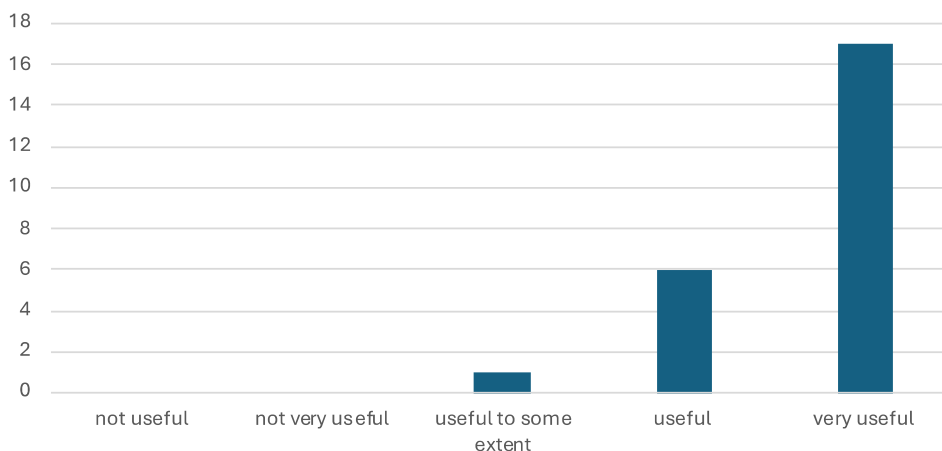


Figure 2. Student Rating of Pedagogic Usefulness of Incorporating AI Translation in Assessment

The second sub-question asks students what aspects of incorporating AI into assessment make it helpful to their studies. Students identified five areas of usefulness. First, AI translation can serve as comparative material to model translation. Second, it can assist with background research by providing introductory material. Third, AI translation can function as reference to help students optimize their own translations. Fourth, it acts as a stepping stone, enabling students to produce translations that are more creative and flexible than those generated by AI. Finally, AI translation serves as a warning, prompting students to avoid making similar mistakes as those made by AI systems.

While students' identification of the first three ways aligns with the author's expectation regarding the positive impact of AI translation on learning, the last two areas – AI as a stepping stone and as a warning – were unanticipated. For the author in her capacity of an educator, these answers demonstrate students' critical thinking and original analysis of the sophistication of AI translation within assessment. This indicates a fuller and more engaged approach to AI translation than previously observed.

In short, the results of the action reveal several key points. First, students have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of AI translation. Second, they recognize how AI can be useful for their studies. Third, their understanding of AI translation has become more comprehensive. Finally, students are likely to recognize that while AI cannot fully replace human translation, it also cannot be ignored, as it is useful for certain types of translation tasks.

### B. Discussion

The most obvious benefit of empowering students to engage with AI translation in assessment is the development of the concept of their "critical thinking on translation technology" (Li et al., 2023, p. 1246). As students' responses to the weaknesses of AI translation and its strengths in helping with their studies have proven, the nature of this research encouraged students to critically reflect on their experience of engaging with AI translation. This opportunity of comparison and contrast also enabled them to proactively and responsibly think through the following questions: how they translated; how they interacted with the AI translation and the model translation; what translations traps they should have avoided; how they can make better translation decisions for future practices.

From the author's perspective, the development of students' critical thinking on translation technology was already evident as they engaged with both their own translations and those produced by AI. The manifestations of students' criticality are fourfold. First, students' response to the questionnaire shows a paradox of AI translation as detected by them, that is, AI translation's use of list formatting of travel information on the one hand (indicating its ability to consider the efficiency of the reception of information for tourists), and its use of over complicated terminologies on the other hand (indicating its ignorance of the diverse education background of the tourists). This paradox provides a critical perspective for students in getting a richer and deeper understanding of AI translation, as it challenges their black-and-white thinking of "AI is good vs. AI is bad". Rather, it proves that AI translation is complicated and as its users – us – should cultivate sophisticated thinking to accommodate this characteristic of complicatedness. Second, students understand that the ideal way to engage with AI translation is neither to completely copy it nor to utterly overthrow it (mirroring the "either-or attitude" shown in the beginning), but to use it as reference to create their own creative translation. This signifies an optimal mode of thinking that enables students to take advantage of AI translation without being dominated by it. Third, students become aware that they can avoid making similar mistakes as AI does, as they refer to AI as "a stepping stone" in the questionnaire. This indicates that students can critically anticipate potential errors and avoid them in their own translations. Fourth, students consider AI translation as a bridge between their translation and model translation, and think AI translation can act as what McGray (2003, p. 103) terms as a "buffer zone" in the form of a "habitat" where they can better understand the gap between their translation and model translation. This demonstrates that students treat AI

translation as a meaningful tool that can truly support their learning, showing again a responsible, critical, and analytical manner to engage with AI translation.

This intervention has prompted the author to critically reflect on its implications for future professional practice and ongoing career development as a cultural translation educator and scholar in face of evolving AI. The reflections focus on three areas: the assessment design, the incorporation of AI in classroom learning, and the re-conceptualization of the relationship between human and AI in the research field of Translation Studies. The lenses of autobiographical, students and literature within Brookfield's four lenses learning model will be applied. First, the assessment design of the way that AI was incorporated could be improved. In retrospect, a drawback in the design of this assessment is detected. Based on the collected questionnaires, some of the students' comments on AI translation are overly broad and general, without specific examples. Its negative effect was allowing for a simplistic and one-dimensional way of thinking, the very mode of thinking that this action tends to combat. Restrictions should be set on students' answers, for example, by clearly telling them whatever they say on the questionnaire, they should provide at least one example. Alternatively, students could be told to use their other experience of translation (and/or interpreting) to substantiate their claims. Otherwise, these claims run the risk of becoming ungrounded assertions. The reason for the lack of restrictions may be the strict adherence to the education principle of ensuring the "academic freedom for students" (Lee, 2006, p. 200). According to this principle, teachers should not interfere too much with students when they address problems occurring in class or set regulations on what steps students should follow. The author fully concurred with this principle and abided by it in this assessment design, as it attests to an ultimate respect for individual learners and their diverse needs and interests. Therefore, the instructions given to students regarding their comments on AI were not prescriptive. However, this approach had negative consequences, as noted above: students' ideas may be judged as "ungrounded claims", potentially undermining the validity of their opinions. Rather, providing specific instructions requiring the use of examples would be more effective in guiding students to produce well-supported opinions. This line of thinking prompts the author to question her own assumptions about how students should reflect on their engagement with AI, and inspires her to consider changes for the future. Furthermore, as time progresses, a more in-depth engagement with AI translation in assessment could be developed. However, this is a topic in its own right.

Second, the exploration of further incorporation of AI in classroom learning becomes an immediate concern for pedagogic development. Contrasting to the first reflection, this is a positive takeaway from students' response to the questionnaire, as they confirm that AI elements are not only helpful in assessment, but could be useful in classroom learning. In other words, they would like AI elements to be more integrated in the overall syllabus and tutorial activities within the structure of the module. Upon reflection, what makes this point particularly interesting is that it defies the author's expectation to some extent, leaving her uncertain about whether to adopt it. For the author did not think there should be elements in class other than those included in the learning outcomes. Yet this is, of course, her assumption. After several rounds of reflection, the author decided to confront and question this assumption. The reason for the assumption may be that the author strictly complies with what Biggs and Tang (2011, p. 97) term "constructive alignment" between learning activities, outcomes and assessments, and tend to exclude things that are not assessed in the learning outcomes from classroom. And this is a deeply seated belief in the teaching philosophy of the author. And the author always deems it one of her strengths to strictly adhere to this principle. However, the author realizes that a strength can also become a pitfall, since in this context the principle is old, but the situation is new. Confronting this new situation of AI translation, the author must adapt to the new reality of the challenges posed by AI to students and find a way for them to cope with these challenges. Thus, the author decided to change her mindset through actively seeking ways to incorporate AI in module delivery of cultural translation. The author intends to implement the following four actions in the next iteration of the course, First, at the stage of preparing for class, students will be encouraged to use AI for background research and information gathering, such as searching for a particular historical event on cultural translation. Second, at the stage of conducting cultural translation tasks, students will be given an AI translation and asked to make a translation commentary on it. The purpose is to further engage students with AI translation and foster a deeper understanding of its weaknesses and the underlying reasons for these shortcomings. Third, at the stage of providing model translations, the author will provide AI translations as comparative material, enabling students to distinguish the creative and aesthetic elements present in human translations from the relative absence of such features in AI-generated output. Fourth, at the stage of setting up module page on the university's virtual learning platform, the author will devise an "AI tutor". Drawing on students' feedback regarding the use of AI for "seeking definitions of cultural concepts" and "searching for theories and unfamiliar knowledge", introducing an "AI tutor" would address this specific need and provide a more tailored and efficient learning experience for students.

The third area for reflection and future action falls in the author's capacity as a researcher. The key point lies in her re-conceptualisation of the relationship between human and AI in the research field of Translation Studies. From this intervention the author sees that its findings can be further examined from the perspective of scholarship about the impact of AI on Translation Studies. The proposal of a "human-AI partnership" for professional translators has been made since 2018 (Zong, 2018; Li & Chen, 2019; Wang, 2023c), emphasising the positive aspects that AI can provide to human translators, such as high accuracy, large quantity of translation tasks completed in a short period of time, and its fast speed in grasping new terminologies in specialized translations such as medical translation, legal translation and technical translation. The author concurs with these scholars' promotion of the aspects of convenient use of AI translation for human,

as some of these qualities are also observed by students. However, this so-called “human-AI partnership” would perhaps be a utopia that is idealized and romanticized by the good wishes of scholars, but in fact never really exists. From the author’s perspective, this view is less accurate, as it focuses solely on the benefits that AI brings to human translators while inevitably neglecting its negative impacts. This perspective also overlooks the need to seek measures to counteract these adverse effects. The comments provided by students in the questionnaires offer a means of challenging and balancing this idealized view. Rather than adopting the “human-AI partnership” model, this project suggests a more nuanced approach: the “human as critical thinkers on AI” model. The purpose is for human translators to produce original translations as independent and critical thinkers, drawing on their critical engagement with AI translation. In other words, rather than promoting passivity in translators who simply accept the advantages offered by AI translation, this project advocates for cultivating proactive translators who can distinguish between the contributions of AI and those of humans. Such translators are encouraged to produce their own translations grounded in subjectivity, individuality, and critical engagement—exemplified by one student’s comment about striving to “create a more flexible, freer translation than AI does”.

## V. CONCLUSION

This project explored the integration of AI translation tools into assessment practices for translation students, specifically within the context of cultural translation. The findings, implications, and recommendations for future research are outlined below.

### A. Findings

The study reveals that students recognize AI translation’s competence in handling certain text types but perceive significant limitations for culture- and literary-specific texts. These texts demand human creativity to convey aesthetic value, nuanced meanings, and implied subtext in the target language. Students affirmed that translator subjectivity and intervention remain vital in these contexts. Furthermore, the project successfully addressed its core questions regarding student engagement with AI tools in assessment and the development of meaningful relationships between AI use, student learning, and assessment design.

### B. Implications

The intervention highlights two critical implications. First, the rapid advancement of AI necessitates a fundamental re-evaluation of how translation programs incorporate these tools. This extends beyond individual modules and requires coordinated action at the program, school, and university levels, aligned with national regulations governing AI use. Second, adapting to the AI era demands a systematic-thinking approach. Effective integration will involve holistic program modifications, curriculum development, syllabus redesign, and, crucially, the development of reformed assessment strategies that meaningfully incorporate AI capabilities.

### C. Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the implications of this research, three key avenues for future research are proposed. First, AI-featured assessment models could be further developed. Future research could prioritise the design, implementation, and evaluation of specific assessment models that meaningfully integrate AI translation tools. These models should move beyond using AI as a simple substitute for human translators. Instead, they should be explicitly designed to foster students’ higher-order skills, such as critical evaluation of AI output, sophisticated post-editing strategies, and the production of self-reflective commentaries analyzing their interaction with AI. Second, following the “human as critical thinkers on AI” model proposed by this research, future research should explore the negotiation processes in assessing human-AI collaboration itself. Guided by the imperative to cultivate critical thinking about AI, this type of research would investigate the dynamics of human-AI interaction during assessment, specifically examining the negotiation processes and human decision-making involved. Rather than focusing solely on the effectiveness of the collaboration, it would examine the inherent tensions that arise and how humans navigate and resolve these conflicts. Specifically, it would investigate how students critically engage with AI-generated translations within assessment tasks, focusing on developing and assessing their abilities in cultural sensitivity, creative adaptation, and nuanced interpretation during this collaborative process. Third, research could revolve around the processes, challenges, and best practices for institutions navigating the complex interplay of pedagogical innovation, curriculum reform, and evolving national/institutional AI policies within translation education.

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