

---

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Translation of Earthliness: An Exploration of Translation Dislocation of Folk Language in *Chin P'ing Mei* in Late Ming Dynasty within the Framework of Aesthetic Reception

**Lin Xiaomeng**

School of Foreign Studies, Nankai University, Tianjin, 300071, China

**Corresponding Author:** Lin Xiaomeng, **E-mail:** 13110928657@163.com

---

**ABSTRACT**

As the first full-length satiric novel, *Jin Ping Mei* (*Chin P'ing Mei*), written by Lanling Xiaoxiao Sheng at the end of the Ming Dynasty, elaborates the social and worldly affairs comprehensively through vivid language and skillful usage of literary devices. Due to the richness of the folk language for the language forms, and the differences and great colloquial and regional characteristics to the Western readers in the geographical and time facets, for the purpose of reception in the target culture, the translator gives adjustment or modification to folk languages forms like dialect, slang, idiom, and proverbs, etc., which engenders certain translation dislocation to some extent. Through qualitative and comparative analyses, this paper aims to offer a preliminary exploration of the basic paradigm, causes, and construction process of the translation dislocation of the folk language in those two English translation versions of *Jin Ping Mei* from the four dimensions of readers' expectation horizons, aesthetic distance, integration of horizons, and the construction of respond-inviting structures under the perspective of aesthetic reception theory, so as to provide an avenue for English readers to delve into the peculiar translation dislocation of the folk language in the translation of Chinese classical works.

**KEYWORDS**

The Golden Lotus, The Plum in the Golden Vase, Aesthetic Reception, Folk Language, Translation Dislocation.

**ARTICLE INFORMATION**

**ACCEPTED:** 01 October 2024

**PUBLISHED:** 19 October 2024

**DOI:** 10.32996/ijllt.2024.7.10.25

---

### 1. Introduction

*Chin P'ing Mei* (also known as *The Plum in the Golden Vase* or *The Golden Lotus*), written by Lanling Xiaoxiao Sheng during the reign of Emperor Longqing and Wanli in the Ming Dynasty, is regarded as the first full-length novel of social and worldly affairs in China, owning widespread recognition for its vivid folk Chinese language and implicitly harsh criticism in ancient China. It provides a panorama into the multi-faceted social phenomenon, the corruption and darkness of the late Ming Dynasty, and the good and evil of human nature. At present, the English translations generally accepted by the academic community are *The Golden Lotus*, published by British scholar Clement Egerton in 1939, and *The Plum in the Vase* (or *Chin P'ing Mei*),<sup>1</sup> a five-volume English translation published by American scholar David Tod Roy (1933-2016) between 1993 and 2013. Prior to American Sinologist David Tod Roy's translation publication before 1993, Egerton's version had been considered the most authoritative, widely circulated, and received English translation, also the earliest and most complete English translation in the West, while David Tod's version also garnered comparable attention and recognition for its widely circulated scope, volume and influence since its debut in the English world. The prodigious volume and meticulous quality endow them with highly acknowledged status in the academic community.

---

<sup>1</sup> Reference of this book in the following part will adopt *Chin P'ing Mei* as the unified term.

Articles delving into the phenomenon of dislocation that occurred in English translation from the perspective of aesthetic reception carried by folklore language are still rare. Therefore, this paper takes the English translations by Clement and David Tod as objects and dissects the dislocation that occurred in the folk language translation of the two English versions for its aesthetic reception as a potential aim or a demonstrative effect to examine and make suggestions for this scenario.

## 2. Translation of *Chin P'ing Mei* and Literature Review of Aesthetic Reception Theory

The early translation scenario of *Chin P'ing Mei* into the English world was inaugurated as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To articulate; initially, one of its introduction channels to the West was predominated by fragmentary excerpts, such as sequels serialized in newspapers, magazines, and journals; the other one was through an entire book, i.e., a collection of essays in one volume. The first English version of *Chin P'ing Mei: The Adventurous History of Hsi-men Ching and His Six Wives* (Huang, 1989: 78), which appeared in abridged form in one volume only; this was followed by Clement Egerton's full-length translation using the Chinese version of *Jin Ping Mei Cihua* as its source and David Tod Roy's thick translation of masterwork termed as *The Golden Plum in the Vase*.

As for Clement and David Tod's English version, distinctive features are available to penetrate into the expressive preference. Clement's translation is based on the original version of *Chin P'ing Mei Cihua*<sup>2</sup>, which is less comprehensive and exhaustive than the well-preserved critique edition of *Chin P'ing Mei*<sup>3</sup> that preserves the all-embracing affluent paratext like embedded poems, citations, excerpts from documents, and so on (Huang, 1989:78). This version, except for some deviations from the original text (Clement's version deleted a large number of poems, lyrics, songs and some cryptic phrases, and several "mistranslations" of sentence breaks, quantities, idioms, proverbs, etc. (Hang, 2011: 167)), which detract from the integrity of the translation), on the whole, is faithful to the original text and vernacular tone of South Shandong Province folk customs with smooth and natural English reproduction. In dealing with the vulgar and erotic delineation, Clement made modifications such as moderate amplification and deletion in amoral, obscene diction, taking the cognitive model of English readers and the intercultural gap into account. His translation took five years and consisted of four volumes, but due to the limitations of the time and traditional public consciousness, the obscene portions had to be transmuted into Latin in its publication debut in 1939. David Tod's version is comparatively more rigorous and full-bodied without any abridgment, and multiple notes have been added in each chapter to further enrich the textual integrity, which is a typical philological or thick translation. He pursues the principle of "every word needs translation" (Pan, 2014:204), where all the dialogues, asides, poems, canonical chapters, textual notes, preface, etc., are faithful to the original form and meaning. His *The Plum in the Golden Vase* took 20 years to come out in five separate volumes, each of which was rationally divided and named by him according to the theme and length: Volume 1 is nominated as "Gathering," Volume 2 "Rivals," Volume 3 "Aphrodisiacs," Volume 4 "Climax," and Volume 5 "Dissolution" (Decadence), in line with the ups and downs of the novel's storyline; from the inception of the story to the climax then to the denouement, a mature narrative structure is portrayed aesthetically. Each volume consists of more than 800 pages, totaling nearly 7,000 pages. There may be few translators in the world paralleling him in contribution to such a prodigious, monumental, and magnificent undertaking.

Along with an immense pool of folk language, these two English translations serve as carriers of traditional Chinese culture, in which the rich and all-encompassing state of life of citizens in the Ming Dynasty in China over a period of time and dissemination of human culture over a vivid form deserves a linguistic-translational-cultural interdisciplinary study. Nowadays, it's with primary significance to examine the reading and acceptance of the language used by the masses in written texts for Western readers so as to provide a richer reference for the translation of Oriental folklore language in the English-speaking world in an actively culture communication era.

The theoretical framework drawn upon here is aesthetics reception, whose high interpretability in light of literary texts is widely referred to in literary criticism. As a typical, meaningful literary work, the translation of *Chin P'ing Mei* undoubtedly deserves research necessity for its literary devices and the aesthetic representation that occurred in translation. In either the translation by Clement Egerton or the one by David Tod Roy, it can be found that the dislocation within the effortful treatment of translation exists in varying degrees, whether it is for some Western readers-oriented aim or incidental aesthetic reception effect. Reception theory (also known as aesthetic reception) derived from the late phenomenological theory of literature and Gadamer's modern philosophical hermeneutics (Ren, 2022:110). In the 1960s and 1970s, German scholars Hans Robert Jauss (1921-1997) and Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007) shifted the perspective of literary criticism from formalist literary theory to the analysis of the reader's reception process as the focus. Pertaining analysis underscores the reader's active initiative and creativity in reading; thereby, a dominant identity is established in the relationship between the author and the work. The pivotal principle holds that a "living work" arises

<sup>2</sup> The Chinese is "金瓶梅词话". This version is the original form of *Chin P'ing Mei* since its first debut.

<sup>3</sup> The Chinese is "金瓶梅批评本". The critique version of *Chin P'ing Mei*, also known as the Chongzhen version of *Chin P'ing Mei* (the carved version in the reign of Chongzhen Emperor in the Ming Dynasty), or Embroidered image (Zhang Ping) version. This version has 200 woodcut illustrations, thereby called the embroidery-image version, is later polished and processed by the literati. The text is standardized with a strong literary flavor, but the early simple style has been affected for its homiletic color.

in the process of encounter and communication between the reader and the text as the product of co-creativity between the reader and the author (Jauss, 1987:56) . The meaning of a text is not derived spontaneously, but is shaped by the constant interaction, imagination, participation between the reader and the text. Prior to or during the reading process, due to time change, spatial influence, and cultural default, the reader's horizon of expectation will also change and be repaired, changed, or expanded.

As for the text itself, the "uncertainty of meaning" and "meaning gap" embedded in the language of the text constitute the "inviting-response structure" of the work, inviting the reader to actively interpret the text in the "horizon of expectation (Horizon)" where the old horizon and new experience can be fused. Thus, the reader's original horizon of expectation will be unconsciously transformed and adjusted, contrasted with the previous aesthetic experience, and corroborated with the new experience. The gap between the original experience and the new one is called "Mental Distance in Aesthetic Activity" (Zhu, 2004:73). Its existence is the driving force that stimulates the reader's curiosity and in-depth reading, prompting the reader to seek deeper into the work in order to achieve "Fusion of Horizons"(Jauss, 1987:56).

This paper intends to explain the translation dislocation in the English translation by Clement and David Tod under the guidance of aesthetic reception, respectively, in terms of readers' expectation of horizon and vision fusion, the aesthetic distance, the formation and adjustment of textual gaps and inviting-response structure to provide a perspective of defense for the better acceptance of the ancient Chinese folklore literature in the Western translations.

### **3. Case Analysis: Delving into Translation Dislocation of Folk Language in *Chin P'ing Mei***

#### **3.1 A General Review of Translation Dislocation in *Chin P'ing Mei***

In *Chin P'ing Mei*, a picture of the social reality that encompasses the dark politics of the end periods of ancient feudal China is drawn. Wu Han, a Chinese expert on Ming history, underscores the highly academic value of this masterpiece: "*Chin P'ing Mei* reflects politics, economy, culture, customs, etc., is a social history of the late Ming Dynasty."(Wu, 1988: 44).

Imperativeness lies in the clarification of the concept of "folk" language in the Chinese cultural context. Linguistic folklore refers to a broader discipline in that a folklore study concentrates on the repertoire of idioms developed in a given cultural environment and the habits of expression and behaviour relating to society and humanities studies. Folk language, as a hyponymic field in linguistic folklore, is an informal language widely used by the masses, and the habits of expression and behaviors are closely related to it in the context of living culture. Folk language is the most active and colorful language symbols in the speech communication of language groups in a specific historical period and a particular region, with routine and concise idioms and phrases as the main components, such as colloquial idioms, proverbs, aphorisms, customary phrases, idioms, catchword, cryptic phrases, jargons, local dialects, jokes, and other vulgar words, taboos, slang, and folk secret language, etc. (Qu, 2004: 67). Here the narrow concept of the linguistics in the folk is underlined. Folklore linguistics is an emerging humanities discipline which directly born from the combination of linguistics and folklore, forming a broader scientific perspective and research field through interdiscipline (Qu, 2015:56-57). Therefore, it is significance to study multifarious folk languages when confronting dynamic equivalence in interlingual translation. Folk diction used by figures in *Chin P'ing Mei* is informal, passed down in the neighborhoods and wells, wanton and casual, with a strong marketplace atmosphere, reflecting different character images and sentiments mainly in the society of Shandong region at that time. To recapitulate, the discussion scope of folk language engaged here mainly encompasses four major aspects:

1. Dialectal slang. The dialectal slang in *Chin P'ing Mei* is mainly Shandong dialect, intermixed with Beijing, Hebei, and Henan dialects (Central Plains Mandarin). With distinctive local characteristics, many of them are still used in the folklore as a lingual inheritance based on regionality. The Shandong dialect, with a high degree of recognition, is the most prominent corpus reflecting the folk customs of the South of Shandong Province at the end of the Ming Dynasty. For example, 蹶里斜(dielixie) (describes walking or carrying things in a shaky, unsteady manner), 气不愤(qibufen)(with the extreme wrath), 话头(huatou) (the narrative thread of a discourse), 倒醮(daoqiao)( to ruminate), 碎稠稠的(suichouchou de) (very thick), 旋风腿(xuanfeng tui) (describe running quickly), 毛乍乍(maozhazha) (express the state of fear or panic) " and so on. (Xie 2014). In addition, there are also Wu dialects (for example, frogs are called "field fowls", and food staff are called "life" by shopkeepers); Jianghuai dialects: for example, 合气Heiqi also known as sulk 斗气( hold a grudge with someone or the occurrence of verbal disputes between each other), 倒运daoyun (be in band luck), 掉嘴(diaozui) (fight for food), etc.

2. Folk proverbs. For example: "If you are not strong, you will not be able to live long," "If you take off your shoes and socks tonight, you will not be able to wear them tomorrow" <sup>4</sup>(meaning that you can not predict what will happen in the future); "A lot of boats

---

<sup>4</sup> Chinese is "今晚脱了鞋和袜, 未审明朝穿不穿"

do not hinder the harbor, and a lot of cars do not hinder the road"<sup>5</sup> (as a metaphor for not getting in the way); "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," and so on.

3. Idioms: "no meat, no veg"<sup>6</sup> (meaning that the level is neither high nor low); "an angry man does not strike a smiling face"<sup>7</sup> (meaning that one does not bully those who show kindness), "lips do not leave one's cheeks"<sup>8</sup> (the relationship is close and one is often together), "sucking carbuncles and licking hemorrhoids"<sup>9</sup> (alluding to the despicable behavior of fawning over the rich and powerful), and other idioms that are both classical and folkloric.

4. Chinese two-part allegorical sayings: "A mouse in the clouds - a born rat"<sup>10</sup> (this sentence refers to the nature of a thing or a person); "A goat's horns against the south wall - the older, the more spicy"<sup>11</sup> (take advantage of one's seniority); "We don't eat toad's meat - we are all fellows on the earth"<sup>12</sup> (don't be a cannibal on fellows) "Dongjingli bricks - stinky and hard."<sup>13</sup> (describing a person's bad behavior), and other witticism phrases mixed with local colloquial dialect.

It is observed that both translations under scrutiny exhibit varying degrees of dislocation, manifesting in both form and semantic content, attributable to the translators' efforts to cater to the acceptability of the English readership. Unlike the misrepresentation that commonly exists in cross-cultural studies, such as temporal, spatial, cultural, and identity misrepresentation, translation dislocation discussed here is limited to linguistic equivalence reproduction. As for semantic meaning, the British linguist G. Leech summarized three major types of semantic meaning, namely, conceptual meaning (referring to denotative meaning), associative meaning (encompassing connotative, social, emotional, collocational, and reflective meanings), and thematic meaning. Collectively, these elements contribute to the holistic interpretation of a sentence or discourse (Leech, 1987:32). Conceptual meaning is the relationship between referent and denotation and refers to the logical, cognitive, and extrapolated content between linguistic symbols and their material entities. Linguistic meaning is the relationship between linguistic symbols and their users, including expressive, social, and associative meanings, which are subject to contextual and socio-cultural constraints. Thematic meaning is the relationship between sentence components and sentence components or between sentences and sentences, which determines the focal point of expression in the text as articulation, coherence, and pragmatic effect. A translation that aspires to fidelity must navigate the complex balance among conceptual, pragmatic, and thematic meanings. However, the fulfillment of such a balance is often impeded by a multitude of translation constraints, including the translation's purpose, quality, the target readership's pre-existing knowledge, publication demands, ideological considerations, and so on; therefore, it is difficult for full equivalence to be achieved between the translated text and the source one, but only approximation, i.e., dislocation in translation will arise in varying degrees. In addition, there are also mismatches in language structure, rhetorical form, textual coherence, and other cases. Related stepwise particularization will be given in a subsequent section.

### 3.2 Folk Language Translation Dislocation Phenomenon Analysis

An in-depth lucubration of the reasons for the emergence of translation dislocation in this masterpiece is conducive to probing into translation strategies and techniques to render the maximal faithful English version. On the one hand, there are a plethora of considerations for diminishing the defamiliarization of certain peculiar Chinese folk linguistic forms, accommodating the cultural background of target readers, and conciliating the cultural discrepancy between the West and East, etc. The original text, replete with frequent and explicit sexual connotations, boasts some words and language characterized as obscenity vulgarity; part of the depiction of men and women's love affairs is erotic and straightforwardly lewd, with inevitably loss of elegance. Some erotic narratives, often conveyed through metaphorical and allusive language, are deliberately explicit and undisguised, which inevitably compromises the aesthetic refinement of the original text. Therefore, the translators had to intentionally adjust the form of expression of the conceptual meaning, manipulating the semantic expression to purposely re-construct or attenuate the ill-suited connotation of original phrases (Li, 1992:33).

Despite its colloquial style with lucidity, *Chin P'ing Mei* is steeped in dialectal diversity, pregnant with vernacular and regional idioms, enigmatic sayings, and specialized jargon represented by local riddles or slangs. Being obscure in meaning or irregularly structured in line with the corresponding phonetic nature, those lingual elements pose a significant interpretive challenge. Western

<sup>5</sup> Chinese is "舡多不碍港，车多不碍路"

<sup>6</sup> Chinese is "不荤不素"

<sup>7</sup> Chinese is "嗔拳不打笑面"

<sup>8</sup> Chinese is "唇不离腮"

<sup>9</sup> Chinese is "吮痂舐痔"

<sup>10</sup> Chinese is "云端里老鼠——天生的耗"

<sup>11</sup> Chinese is "羊角葱靠南墙——越发老辣"

<sup>12</sup> Chinese is "促织不吃癞蛤蟆肉——都是一锹土上人"

<sup>13</sup> Chinese is "东净里砖儿——又臭又硬。"

readers their linguistic abilities have to struggle to apprehend the whimsical and inventive aspects of these phrases' formation and phonetics. Under such cases, translators must prioritize semantic clarity over formal fidelity to adapt the English linguistic structure to effectively convey the original's intent, whereby possibilities of structural mismatch or meaning modification in the English version are elicited.

Moreover, the antiquity in the time of this masterpiece causes impediments to scholarly investigation and reader comprehension. With the aim of transmitting literary aesthetic nuances of the original text and coherence of semantics wholly, English translators often engage in creative liberties such as supplementation, omission, rephrasing, or the crafting of new translations in their quest to re-contextualize the exotic culture for the purpose of facilitating readability of the work and to be faithful to the original. Due to the vastly different intrinsic knowledge backgrounds, translators, either Clement Egerton or David Tod Roy, inevitably have a skewed interpretation, resulting in divergences or a failure to accurately replicate the aesthetic texture or the response-inviting structure of the original text, whereby dissonance between the source and its English renditions exist.

### **3.2.1 Translation of idioms**

Different from the definition of the idiom by Western scholars, which is " a string of words whose meaning is different from the meaning conveyed by the individual words" (Larson, 1984: 20) or " carries certain emotive connotations not expressed in the other lexical items" (Larson, 1984:142), Chinese idiom is a fixed short language form derived from the long history of allusion, ancient classics, writings or oral stories, etc., Besides, in western philology the idiom is a broader term covering colloquialism, slang, proverbs, phrasal verbs and allusions (Adelina & Dastjerd, 2011:881), while its counterpart in Chinese civilization is a narrow one, which is featured with compact structure in even numbers, incisive meaning, and strict word order. With four characters predominated mostly, Chinese idioms are also presented by six or eight characters sometimes, which can not be replaced, amplified, or subtracted in composition (Wen, 1985:45). It has a harmonious sound, which makes it catchy and easy to memorize. Since the author was a literai, idioms in *Chin P'ing Mei* are mostly anciently obscure and misconstruable in meaning, voluminous and multifarious in diction, which is difficult to grasp the accurate meaning in the translation process. For example, some idioms have similar language writing forms or syllabic rhythms, some have intertextual relationships, and some involve obscure diction. Besides, there are also many idioms that imply derivative or metaphorical meaning, complemented by exaggerations and figurative effects.

The ideal treatment to this challenge is suggested to prioritize the cultural information contained over the semantic, structural, and rhetorical features of Chinese idioms, which are to be transplanted to a certain extent (Adelina & Dastjerd, 2011:880). Nevertheless, due to the intrinsic differences between Chinese and English, it is difficult to transplant all core connotations of original idioms into the target context; thereby, some translational trade-off is aroused according to the actual situation, where either the symmetrical form is preferentially rendered, or the core meaning is foregrounded, or the combination of form and meaning reproduced is modified or replaced by a counterpart in English, to cater to the expectation of horizon presenting different translations that deviate from the original. As scholars Fernando and Flavell express, "There is a strong unconscious urge in most translators to search hard for an idiom in the receptor language, however inappropriate it may be" (1981,82). To further illustrate, some typical cases below are to exemplify:

#### **Example 1:**

小厮被春鸿骂的狗血淋头 (gouxue lintou) (the 77<sup>th</sup> chapter)

Clement's translation: ...will get a good cursing from her... (Egerton, 2011:172)

David Tod's translation : *The page boys were frequently cursed by Ch'un -mei till they looked as though : Their heads had been been sprayed with dog's blood.* (Roy, 1993: 5265)

#### **Example2:**

比翼成连理 (biyi cheng lianli) ( the 73<sup>th</sup> chapter)

Clement's translation : *of lovebirds* (Egerton, 2011: 1018)

David Tod's translation : *like love birds, flying wing to wing; Or trees with intertwining branches.* (Roy, 1993: 4997)

#### **Example3:**

四大皆空 (si da jie kong) ( the 65<sup>th</sup> chapter)

Clement's translation : *All things, in very truth, are but illusion.* (Egerton, 2011:)

David Tod's translation : *Four elements are all illusory.* (Roy, 1993: 5628)

**Example 4:**

眠花卧柳(mian hua wo liu) ( the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter)

Clement's translation : *Strumpets and bawdy-houses are the only interest he has in life. (Egerton, 2011:134)*

David Tod's translation : *Sleeping among the flowers and lolling beneath the willows. (Roy, 1993: 244)*

Example 1 typifies cases in some particular Chinese characters or images that carry multiple mental associations or culturally specific references: the conspicuous term "狗血喷头" signifies vivid expressivity with imagery and metaphor. In the Chinese culture context, dogs are one of *wu chu* (five domestic livestock) belonging to the earth, referring to querulousness in *wu xing* (the five elements), which share a close relation to feng shui in Chinese culture. The phrase is likened to a dog's blood, i.e., hyperbolic metaphorical rhetoric describes the meanness and ferocity of the insults. Obviously, the association of imagery of "dog" with a curse in this Chinese context is not arbitrary but with profound culturally cognitive reference and derivative criticism. Based on the given horizon of expectation, it is difficult for English readers to understand the meaning or respond to such discourse through prior experience if a facile interpretation is concluded, which depicts the horrible scene in which "dog's blood was poured on the head." To consummate the reception chain between the text and readers, interpretative techniques are adopted in Clement's translation, which directly seizes the cultural expressive meaning of the idiom in the deeper connotative structure rather than rendering it on the denotative structure. This translation method makes up for the semantic gap in the cultural part, but the strong ironic color of the original is undermined, being dislocated from a strong disparaging tone and slightly inferior rhetoric. In contrast, David Tod's employment of foreignization reproduced aesthetic distance for the imagery of "狗血(gou xie)" better restores the rhetoric in the original text. Meanwhile, as for connotative cultural meaning, words carries the deep meaning as a *curse* and, *as though* in the former context, integrates the reading horizon of the target readers, taking into account both the denotative and pragmatic meanings of the idiom.

Another idiom "比翼连理" in Example 2, is heavily allusion-loaded, which embodies the tragic affective narrative of Jiao Zhongqing and his wife Liu Lanzhi in a long Chinese renowned poem as "Peacock Flying Southeast," and of Emperor Tang Xuanzong and his concubine Yang Yuhuan in a long classic rhymed poem as "A Song of Everlasting Sorrow." The challenge lies in how to integrate the allusive symbolism in English readers' given horizon and to elicit their cognitive empathy with deeper connotation in the formation of the response-inviting structure. Clement's version conveys literally only in *biyi(niao)*; although such conveyance is basically in line with the horizon of expectation since that English readers are able to grasp the symbolism of love in "love birds", this version dealt only one of the two allusions, which caused certain meaning hiatus in the dislocation in expression entirety, undermining the amalgamative aesthetics effect of those similar affective allusions to some extent. In contrast, David Tod's version is evaluated as more balanced in both structure rendered and aesthetic distance, eluding the semantic structure dislocation corresponding to the basic quests of aesthetic reception. He firstly explains the historical allusion behind the word by adding notes in the translation and then delivers a symmetrical, literal interpretation in translation so that a comprehensive interpretive field with reading horizon integration on the basis of "love birds" is available for readers to interact with the text, to constantly imagine the underlying process of these allusions, then to enrich, to interpret differentially. Such examples in the original text are quite prevalent, where the treatment paths of two translators are instructive in terms of reader-oriented aesthetic reception.

As for Example 3 and Example 4, idioms are composed of characters in specific cultural context, such as *si da* (the four great elements) is a Buddhist term used metonymically to incarnate all things in the world by combining the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. While the imagery of "flower" and "willow" also holds a particularly metaphorical reference to flirting, flippancy in affection or dalliance in China culture, such as "寻花问柳 xun hua wen liu"<sup>14</sup> "花前月下 hua qian yue xia," etc. It holds a close association with affection flirtation in most cases. The juncture in reproducing this underlying culture connotation situates in scaffolding a corresponding response-inviting structure that is similar to the symmetrical original one while remaining the possibility to interpret the cognitive linkage to recontextualize those culture-loaded imageries for English readers. Clement's translation is colored with distinct interpretative translation devices but sacrificed the cost of Buddhist cultural connotations and metaphorical meanings same as the Chinese original one, eclipsing foreign flavor carried by Buddhist terms; although the production of meaning is a commendable one, the response-inviting structure is bridged manually for readers. Such treatment led to a lopsided emphasis on the connotation rather than its carrier word, i.e., a dislocation in the relationship between the form and the meaning. While David Tod's translation is literal, with the addition of annotations and related words in the context; however, this way tends to increase the intensity of information processing when reading the translation, which is a little cumbersome and consequently, the difficulty for reception also increased.

### 3.2.2 Translation of proverbs

<sup>14</sup> In Chinese, "寻花问柳" (xunhua wenliu) refers to seek worldly pleasure in bordello and indulge in doing this.

Proverbs are based on the generalization and summary of people's daily life experience, more popular and prevalent in a wider spectrum of social stratum and circulation scope. The majority of them are composed of colloquial, simple, and plain phrases or rhyming couplets, often with diverse rhetorical devices such as couplets, metonymy, puns, and exaggeration, etc. (Li,1992:35). Derived from civilian livelihood, proverbs in *Chin P'ing Mei* with simplicity and plainness but rich meaning and vivid images. Its related cognitive schemata is long-fixed throughout history, which cannot be neglected when they confront aesthetic reception by the target readers in translation.

**Example 1:**

莫教襄王劳望眼，巫山自送云雨来( mo jiao xiangwang lao wang yan,wushan zi song yunyu lai) ( the 23<sup>th</sup> chapter)

Clement's translation : *Omitted*

Dvaid Tod's translation : *There is no need for King Hsiang to wear out his longing eyes; The Goddess of Witch's Mountain delivers the clouds and rain herself. (Roy, 1993: 374)*

**Example 2:**

情人眼里出西施(qingren yanli chu xishi) ( the 37<sup>th</sup> chapter)

Clement's translation : *Beauty springeth from the lover's eyes. (Egerton, 2011:532 )*

Dvaid Tod's translation : *In one's lover's eyes, one appears like a veritable Hsi-shih. (Roy, 1993:672 )*

**Example 3:**

画虎画皮难画骨，知人知面不知心 (hua hu hua pi nan hua gu, zhi ren zhi mian bu zhi xin.) (the 80<sup>th</sup> chapter)

Clement's translation: *With friends, it is only too possible to know the face and to know nothing about the heart, just as an artist may paint the outside of a tiger but must leave the bones unseen. (Egerton, 2011: 492)*

Dvaid Tod's translation : *In painting a tiger, you can paint the skin,  
but you can't paint the bones;  
In knowing people, you can know their faces,  
but you can't know their hearts. (Roy, 1993: 5476)*

In the translation of proverbs, Clement's version, with the purpose of maximal English readers' reception, uses a combination of translation methods such as literal translation, paraphrase, and omission. Words used are concise, habitually-used and authentic, familiar to the English readers in conformity with their given horizon of expectation; however, there are also insufficiencies represented by emergencies of dislocation in translation. For instance, the term "西施(Xishi)"<sup>15</sup> was translated as beauty in Example 2, which is basically connotation-oriented, but the denotative meaning was erased for the lack of interpretation of the cultural icon "Xishi." According to the British linguist G. Leech's *Semantics (1987)*, as one of the three categories in semantics, conceptual meaning (referring to denotative meaning) denotes the relationship between referent and denotation, referring to the logical, cognitive, and epistemic content between linguistic symbols and their material entities. Primarily, equivalence of conceptual meaning should be ensured, at least in interlingual translation. In the strict sense, beauty ≠ Xishi in all-round dimensions. In this case, such paraphrase unquestionably ensures the smoothness of reading and facilitates the reader's immersion into the text, but also eliminated the aesthetic distance between "Xishi" and western readers, which dislocated the cultural equivalence for semantic expansion as substituting "Xishi" as a hyponym for "beauty" as a hypernym. Apart from that, the word "springeth" is very dynamic, which dynamizes the meaning of "出" in the original text and improves aesthetic expressiveness. In contrast, David Tod utilised the literal translation as a simile and added an additional note on the cultural figure "Xishi," which is enough to reproduce the rhetorical features of this prevalently circulated Chinese proverb in English. In the lens of aesthetic reception, this version holds certain explication for this cultural icon, which is conducive to the shift of horizons in readers between two cultural contexts.

In Example 1, Clement's translation, as his precedents, interpreted the core meaning rather than considering the literal one. From the reader's standpoint, such treatment greatly facilitates construing what the proverb indicates without reproducing allusion-related term "King Xiang," "Chu Nv," and "Wushan Yunyu"<sup>16</sup>, but is not conducive to forming interactive and new reading horizons

---

<sup>15</sup> Xishi, also known as Xizi. Ancient Chinese figure of the Spring and Autumn period, together with Wang Zhaojun, Diaochan and Yang Yuhuan, known as the 'Four Beauties' of ancient China.

<sup>16</sup> This allusion originates from the poet Song Yu's (B.C. 298-B.C. 222) 'Gao Tang Fu' and 'Goddess Fu' in the State of Chu during the Warring States period in ancient China. According to legend, when King Huai of Chu (another assertion is King Xiang of Chu) was visiting Wushan, he dreamt of meeting Yao Ji, the goddess of Wushan, who consorted to him and sought intercourse with him. When parting, the goddess told King Huai that she would turn into clouds in the morning and rain in the evening, and was often found near the balcony. Later, King Xiang of Chu also dreamed of the goddess, but did not have further love affairs with her as his father did. This allusion was later used as a metaphor for love between a man and a woman, especially romantic feelings with mystical overtones.

for English readers. However, the translation by David Tod can be regarded as an achievement of better reception with aesthetic value in his treatment of the proverb: as for the original form of the proverb with a neat pairing, such as in Example 3, it is obvious that his version is preoccupied with the reciprocity of corresponding transmission of both the form and meaning, which reproduced the repetition of characters by replicating words as "paint" and "know" in the translated text, in contrast to Clement's translation that the meaning overrides the form as a dislocation in equivalence to some extent. However, in this case, since the core meaning is conveyed completely, both two translations share an equi-functional role in corresponding with the reader's horizon of expectation by comparing the "painting of tiger and its bone" to "knowing a friend and his/her heart."

### 3.2.3 Translation of slang

Slang refers to the folk informal, colloquial utterances without stable or consistent structure; the length of the words varies, and most of them are mixed with dialects, used by the people of a certain region in their daily life, with strong regionality, vulgarity, and living color. *Chin P'ing Mei* can be regarded as a treasure trove of slang in the late Ming Dynasty, where intermingled slang and dialects are spread all over the north and south. Due to its heavy dialectal phonological diversities and lack of formalization and norms, the miscellaneous lively slang poses a high request for reproducing the phonetic vividness while avoiding ambiguity of its translation. When target readers read slang, the prospective horizon should be linked to Oriental people's daily language habits commonly used in the popular folklore, and secondly, the uncertainty of meaning in different contexts through translation should be clarified for better reception so as to stimulate expectation of reading and communicating with the masses' civilization of ancient China and to interpret actively in the meaning blankness in the response-inviting structure on their initiative.

#### Example 1:

郑爱香儿道：“不要理这望江南巴山虎儿，汗东山斜纹布！”<sup>17</sup>(wangjiangnan bashan hur, handongshan xiewenbu!) (the 32<sup>th</sup> chapter)

Clement's translation: "Don't worry about that looking-towards-Jiang-nan tiger from the Ba Mountain, be-shitten pants from the Eastern hills." (Egerton, 2011:458)

David Tod's translation: "...said Cheng Ai-hsiang. "To cite a few familiar phrase, he's just a :

'Cock' a doodle doo,

Hold' onto your hat;

Who's:

A 'dillar,' a ten o'clock scholar,

Yes,' my darling daughter." (Roy, 1993:256)

#### Example 2:

...就疼得你心里格地地的。<sup>18</sup>(jiu tengde ni zhe xinli gedidi de) (the 73<sup>th</sup> chapter)

Clement's translation: *Whenever her name is mentioned, you are upset.* (Egerton, 2011: 1082)

David Tod's translation: *Whenever the thought of her comes up, it causes your heart to start thumping away.* (Roy, 1993: 5023)

#### Example 3:

疖子终要出脓。<sup>19</sup>(jiezi zhongyao chu nong) (the 67<sup>th</sup> chapter)

Clement's translation: *This business must be settled, and the only thing to do with a wart is to cut it.* (Egerton, 2011: 1017)

David Tod's translation: *If this boil is not lanced, it will ooze pus.* (Roy, 1993:4812)

The most salient feature of slang is its informal linguistic form and random combination of morphemes, which makes it difficult to convey the sense of fun and worldliness in the original context in translation. How to maximize the linguistic form and pragmatic meaning to enter readers' expectations is a difficult task. Both onomatopoeia and ideograms are indispensable parts of slang in the text. To further elaborate on the possibility of dislocation in translation, the above-mentioned instances are guiding. Example 1, in essence, is a kind of acrostic argot. "Wang(watch) bashan(Pa mountain)" is partially homophonous with "wangba"(refer to a

<sup>17</sup> This sentence comes from Miss Zheng's reply to the earl's offense against her at the banquet, so she quoted a quote to angrily reprimand it, which was intended to ridicule the earl's madness, stupidity, and shame.

<sup>18</sup> What is indicated here is that Jin Lian blamed Ximen Qing for not holding each other as soon as possible in front of a series of concubines and guests, in order to describe the feeling of guilt and palpitations in her heart.

<sup>19</sup> Boils: abscesses. This sentence is a simile, referring that the problem will not be able to drag on, and it will have to be completely solved in the end. This is a figurative usage. In this context Wang Sanguan caused trouble, and hurriedly pleaded everywhere to ask for help from the Lin family. If the matter is not properly resolved, Wang Sanguan'er and other people will make it difficult for the situation to settle.



bastard, bitch), while "han" Xie" and "bu" (be-shitten and sweating clothes)" harmonically homophonic with "hanxie" in Shandong vernacular, These two phrases synthesized as "Wang Ba Han Xie" in slang as an offensive, contemptuous insult. According to *Compilation and Explanation of Vernacular Expression in Chin P'ing Mei*: " Han xie" refers to a person sweating profusely when he has a high fever and babbling nonsense." (Li, 1992: 50). Under such circumstances, owing to inherent differences between Chinese and English, the expressive acrostic form by semantic meaning under the premise of abiding by the normal syntactic rules in English is hard to reproduce, which is quite difficult for the translator. Clement made certain modification and sacrifice in translation by prioritizing literal information over form, thereby English readers is provided with a partially faithful translation but with inadequacy. The omission of the acrostic implicitness in the original text has weakened the aesthetic wonder of the Chinese, eroding the construction of aesthetic distance. In this sense, Clement's choice is worth recognition but caused formal dislocation in this process. As for David Tod's version, although a literal translation has been adopted in the text to avoid overly vulgar literal conveyance, an additional note is appended at the end of the text:

*I have tried to render something of the effect of this example of wordplay by choosing four familiar English phrases, the first words of which, cock " and "dillar " yes " sound something like "cuckold " and "delirious. " (Roy, 2001: 256)*

Words as "cuckold" and "delirious" are chosen to imitate the semantic pun in the original, and alliteration forms between "doodle," "doo," and "dillar" "daughter," mapping the acrostic expression in the Chinese original, which conforms to the readers' expectation of the horizon, further pushes the readers to form a new experience and reading horizon; thereby, translation dislocation is sidestepped maximally, which can be recognized as an ingeniously successful attempt.

In Example 2, the word "格地地" represents a category of Chinese slang in the form of ABB, which describes a person's heart thumping rapidly with anxiety, fear, and loss, which is a frequently used colloquial form as ABB to dynamically refine a state. "Thump" in David Tod's version indisputably resonates with both the lively state and the meaning signified, which reproduces this action more vividly and creates room for readers to interact with the inviting structure that evoke them to define its intensity, applied contexts, and so on. However, Clement's paraphrase is relatively inferior either in correspondence to the horizon of expectation or recapture the artistic charm of a specific vernacular slang style. Preference of "upset," technically speaking, staticized the expressiveness translation of dynamic, vicarious action "格地地"(gedidi), and the communicative power is mismatched compared with the expectant response.

Penetration of the role of textual semantic coherence on the aesthetic reception efficacy by two translators is available in Example 3. David Tod's translation adopts the literal translation in order to keep the consistence of the original aesthetic synaesthesia rendered in readers to achieve an analogous aesthetic distance for English readers. However, this version lacks explanatory notes, which caused an abrupt context vacancy here and inferior fluency. Contrarily, the semantic coherence in David's translation is much higher to sustain a cohesive horizon of expectation for target readers, but a relative semantic dislocation occurs for the choice of "boil" unparalleled with the source imagery. Here, a suggestion is offered that if we want to balance considerations of aesthetic distance and convenience of horizon integration, the translation of this colloquialism can be balanced by adding the simile conjunction *like* after Clement's translation, then supplementing David's translation after it, which is conspicuous and obfuscation can be avoided.

### **3.2.4 Translation of Chinese two-part allegorical sayings**

*Xiehouyu* (Chinese two-part allegorical sayings) equates to witticism replete with buffoonery created by laboring people in daily life, characterized by brevity, humor, and popularity and being contextually adaptable. Structurally, it consists of two segments: the first part plays the role of "introduction," akin to the enigmatic face of the riddle, while the subsequent part functions as "revelation," like the answer of the riddle, carrying the pivotal semantic meaning. With witty, fun medium, it naturally expresses irony or inspiration via a variety of literary devices as an analogy, pun, palindromes, homophone, association, metonymy, synecdoche, etc. It is undeniable that this linguistic form plays an indispensable role in highly demotic expressiveness in *Chin P'ing Mei*. As evaluated by Chinese scholar Meng Xianzhang: "Among the ancient Chinese novels, the one that utilizes the largest number of *xiehouyu* and has the highest artistic effect is none other than *Chin P'ing Mei*"(1999:25). Furthermore, its structure is usually intricately related to the habits of language use and ideological content deeply rooted in the national culture and daily life, and even the structure of is a part of semantic meaning conveyed in many instances. Therefore, the key in translation is how to make this kind of witticism with peculiar structure and exotic flavor prevalent in grass-root Chinese mass class to be reproduced for foreign readers with the equivalent reading experience, and it's also essential to create the appropriate aesthetic distance in readers' reception, ensuring that the translated work resonates with the target audience while maintaining the integrity of the original artistic intent. Some typical excerpts are as cases to dissect:

**Example 1:**

网巾圈儿——打靠后。(wangjin quanr-- da kao hou) (the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter)

Clement's translation: ...*cast me aside like a woman's hair-net that is no more needed.* (Egerton, 2011: 115)

David Tod's translation: ... *put me in the position of: The rings that hold your hainet in place: always at the back of your head.* (Roy, 1993:109)

**Example 2:**

羊角葱靠南墙——老辣已定。(yangjiao cong kao nanqiang--yuefa laola le) (the 85<sup>th</sup> chapter)

Clement's translation : *like one of those ram' s-horn onions which is planted against a southern wall and grows hotter and hotter.* (Egerton, 2011:1212)

David Tod's translation : *The ram shorn scallion that grows by the southern wall; the longer it stays there, the hotter it gets.* (Roy, 1993: 6094)

**Example 3:**

得了些颜色，就开起了染坊。(dele xie yanse, jiu kaiqile ranfang) (the 58<sup>th</sup> chapter)

Clement's translation : *To scrape a little color together and is all agog to start a dye-works.* (Egerton, 2011: 816)

David Tod's translation: *Having obtained some pigments, you're ready to start up a dyer's establishment.* (Roy, 1993: 1988)

To view comprehensively, both two versions favour literal translation when dealing with Chinese two-part allegorical says with ideally resilient expressive effect, but vary in stratified demonstration efficiency in terms of the depth of promoting horizon integration and the degree of completion in construction of aesthetic distances. For example, in Example 1, the former translation is directly converted into metaphorical rhetoric by adding the metaphorical indicator "like," fusing the two parts into a complex sentence hypotactically, which is semantically and formally more familiar to English readers and bridges the gap between their given reading experience and the text. It is convenient to accept, nevertheless sacrifices the pause and suspense between the first and last parts made by a dash in Chinese, thus creating a certain dislocation in form. While David's translation style pays great attention to this thorny crux. The dash contributing to suspense was supplanted by a colon or a semicolon to maximize the reproduction of the formal characteristics of brief semantic hiatus in Chinese. For English readers, the structure mediated by dash linking the first and second clauses tends to evoke an implicit rupture for overall meaning as a 'gap' for them. David Tod's translation fills this gap, facilitates readers' acceptance, and does not yet cause a large translation dislocation. Examples 2 and 3 show a similar process of translation construction, from which we can get a glimpse of their translation styles in this special folk linguistic form.

#### 4. Result and Conclusion

It is said that "poetry is not exegetical" in Chinese, which is also true that translation is difficult to finalize. Admittedly, in order to be as favorable as possible to the readers' reception and the horizon of expectation, both two translations of *Chin P'ing Mei*, for the convenience of Western readers with a lack of corresponding culture knowledge, deviation or dislocation compared with the source text is ineluctable. On the one hand, from the angle of the Chinese source text as a benchmark, problematic situations can be summarized as follows: The deviation from the formal structure of folklore languages and the deviation from the metaphorical, historical, and allusive connotations of Chinese culture leads to semantic deficiencies, which are not conducive to bridging the readers' cultural expectations of original Chinese canon, even lead them to misapprehend the textual significance of some crucial lingual components. Such distortion in varying aspects may obfuscate formulating horizons in texts and lose vernacular flavor and humorous, vivid images, whereby its context-dependent ironic style and intense expressivity are less aesthetically articulated. On the other hand, from the angle of maximal reception in target readership as a benchmark, demanding situations can be concluded as below: somewhat emphatic insistence on literal translation for referentiality is preferred in order to preserve the linguistic characteristics of the original and facilitate the formation of new comprehension meme, but it also prevents the readers from interacting with and then innovating the article. Thus, the "blank" space with interpretability for readers' initiative is hampered, which is the key to an active reception process in a response-inviting structure.

To recapitulate, on the whole, as for folklore terms, generally naturalized and more flexible, Clement's version hinges on the meaning interpretation, aiming at facilitating English readers' oriented horizon of expectation, better bridging the meaning gap caused by cultural barriers and strong metaphorization of Chinese. The structure of the translated text is not constrained by the original, which is appropriately added and deleted. Despite a slight lack of fidelity, the smoothness of discourse caters to readers to read in harmony so that their expectations of the horizon and the text will interact and integrate to boost new vitality and consummation for the text. In comparison, David Tod's version focuses on literal translation and can be regarded as a fully

informational presentation. Nonetheless, the strategy of foreignization is prone to lose the charm of the original China-specific expression in some cases, hard to attain a "sublimation" state or to mobilise the reader's imagination and textual participation as defined in basic principles in aesthetic reception by H.R. Jauss. His over-endeavor in filling the gaps in readers' horizons and that of the text will weaken the dynamic attraction of the discursive response-inviting structure embraced by the folklore language.

It is inspired that translators should carefully render the translation based on target readers' cognitive schemas and horizon of expectations, sustain and deliver the potentiality of the response-inviting structure, thereby striking a balance between different translation orientations, so as to offer readers a deeper understanding of the energetic ordinary life in ancient China through folklore language translation.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Publisher's Note:** All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

## References

- [1] Adelnia, A. & Dastjerdi, H. V. (2011). Translation of Idioms: A Challenging Task for Translators. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 1(7), p. 879-883.
- [2] Egerton, C. (2011). *The Golden Lotus*. Singapore: Tuttle Publishing.
- [3] Fernando, C. and Flavell, R. (1981). *On Idiom: Critical View and Perspectives (Exeter Linguistic Studies)*, University of Exeter.
- [4] Hu, L.Y. (2014). Gao Shan Yang Zhi: English Translation of 'Jin Ping Mei Ci Hua' Zhi Yan. *Journal of Luoyang Normal University*,(09), p.32-45.
- [5] Huang, L. (1989). *A Diachronic Research on Chin P'ing Mei*. Liaoning: Liaoning People's Publishing House, p. 78.
- [6] Huang, W. Z. (2011). Research and Translation of Chin P'ing Mei in the English-speaking World. *Liyun Journal (Literature)*, (02), 167-175.
- [7] Xie, J.J. (2014). Explanation of Binzhou Dialect and Slang in 'Jin Ping Mei Ci Hua.'" *Cultural Studies Journal* (04), p. 173-176.
- [8] Li, S. (1992). *Glossary of Dialect and Slang in 'Chin P'ing Mei'*. Beijing Normal University Press, p. 33-35.
- [9] Larson, M.L. (1984). *Meaning Based Translation: A Guide to Cross Language Equivalence*. London and New York: University Press of America.
- [10] Pan, J.J. (2021). *Translation and Research on Chin P'ing Mei by David Tod Roy*. (Doctoral Dissertation, Liaoning University)." Doctoral. doi:10.27209/d.cnki.glniu.2021.002187.
- [11] Qu, Y.B. (2004). *Folk Linguistics*. Liaoning: Liaoning Education Press, p.67.
- [12] Qu, Y.B. (2015). *Folk Language and Social Life: The Collected Works of Qu Yanbin*. Elephant Press, p. 56-57.
- [13] Ren, W.D. (2022). "Key Terms in Western Literary Theory: Aesthetic Reception." *Foreign Literature* (04), p.108-118.
- [14] Roy, T.D. (1993). *The Plum in the Golden Vase*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- [15] Roy, D. T. (Ed.). (2001). *The Plum in the Golden Vase Or, Chin P'ing Mei: Volume Two: The Rivals*. Princeton University Press.
- [16] Wen D.Z (1985). *Proverbs*. Commercial Press, p. 45.
- [17] Wu, H. (1988). *Wu Han's Collected Works-Vol.2-History*. Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, p.44.
- [18] Jauss, H.R. (1987). *Reception Aesthetics and Theory of Reception*. Liaoning: Liaoning People's Publishing House, 56.
- [19] Zhu, L.Y. (2004). *Introduction to Reception Aesthetics*. Anhui Education Press, 70.