

RECEPTION AESTHETICS IN ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF POETRY FROM HONG LOU MENG: A CASE STUDY OF "ZANG HUA CI"

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ABSTRACT

Chinese classical poetry is a valuable cultural asset, and effectively conveying the aesthetic effect of classical poetry in cultural exchange is crucial to the dissemination of Chinese poetic culture. The effect of the Western transmission of this classic work may be seen through the lens of receptive aesthetics. In order to investigate the reasons for their construction and how the translators' translation tactics affect the readers' reception, this study examines two English translations of Hong Lou Meng's "Zang Hua Ci," namely Yang Hsien-Yi's and Hawkes'. The study finds that the translations, though not perfect, do their best to fit the readers' expectation vision of the era, which enables the integration of the translator and the author, the target readers and the vision of the translation. To a certain extent, this is a good way to achieve the purpose of cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Hong Lou Meng, "Zang Hua Ci", Reception Aesthetics, Poetry Translation.

1. Introduction

Hong Lou Meng (HLM hereafter) stands as one of China's Four Great Masterpieces, revered as the epitome of Chinese classical fiction, boasting a wealth of linguistic and cultural intricacies. Describing in detail the social milieu of this aristocratic household, the author presents a vivid panorama of everyday life and mirrors the progressive enfeeblement of feudal society. Therefore, it has helped foreign learners to spread it not only in Chinese culture but also in foreign cultures through its translation.

Since 1830, nine English translations of HLM have been produced, which has become unique scenery in the history of English translation of Chinese literature. Among the many translations of HLM, Yang Hsien-Yi and Gladys's *A Dream of Red Mansions* in 1978 and David Hawkes' *The Story of the Stone* between 1973 and 1977 are commonly admitted to the best ones. These two translators also contributed to the dissemination of HLM in foreign countries through their translations.

The poetry in almost every chapter of HLM is unique in the novel, for the purpose of not only enriching the text, but also covering

the text with a veil of mystery. It appears to pave the way for the character and destiny of each character in the article. "Zang Hua Ci" is a poem made by Lin Daiyu on her own life and sadness about her fate, a poem that has been passed down for thousands of years. Poetry has been a difficult part of Chinese literature, but in HLM poetry is the key to help readers understand the entire novel. What's more, as Wu Shichang claimed, "Cao Xueqin instilled his poems into the novel to raise the quality of his prose". The poems are very difficult for people who grow up in China to understand, and for foreign readers it is like reading a book from heaven, so it is very important to be able to translate the poems well. There are many beautiful poems in HLM, and here I will just take Lin Daiyu's "Zang Hua Ci" as a representative of them to study and analyze.

As HLM has always been a hotspot to study, and academic research on the English translation of HLM has never stopped. Accordingly, poems in HLM have also called great attention from translators. According to the author's examination, the current research on the English translation of the poems of HLM is mainly manifested at the comparison of the

translation versions, translator studies, and multi-dimensional view of the English translation of the poems, which provide references for exploring the English translation strategies of the poems of HLM.

Comparative studies of translations focus on imagery, cultural content, and empathy. In his master's thesis, Lei Yuanjie pointed out that translators should try to preserve the artistic effects and stylistic features of the imagery in the translation of the poems of HLM. Zhong Shuneng, in *Translation of Cultural Information in the Poems of "Hong Lou Meng"*, pointed out that the translation of the poems of HLM should be based on alienation. In her master's thesis, Li Shan made an empirically descriptive study of the two English translations of verses in HLM as cases in point, basing on the cross-cultural construction of poetic meanings in translation process, Skopos theory and rewriting theory from the ideological perspective. Chen Kepei, in *The Translator's Cultural Consciousness and the Recreation of the Translation—On David Hawkes' Translation of a Group of Poems from Dream of the Red Chamber*, he pointed out that it is Hawkes' understanding of ancient Chinese poetry and his in-depth knowledge of Chinese and Western culture that have allowed readers to see many vivid and appropriate translations of poems.

The translators' studies are mainly reflected in Hawkes and Bonsall. In *A Study of Poetic Rhyming Strategies in Hawkes' English Translation of "Hong Lou Meng"*, Feng Quangong explores the poetic rhyming strategies of Hawkes' poems of HLM in terms of finding rhyme according to meaning, setting meaning due to rhyme, and creating rhyme by changing the mood. Yang Anwen[9] analyzed the Bonsall's translation of Xiangling's poems in *The Translation of Poetry in Bonsall's Translation of "Hong Lou Meng"—A Case Study of Xiangling's Three Poems*, which deepens readers' understanding of Bonsall's translation style.

The multidimensional view of poetry translation is reflected in the perspectives of linguistics and Western translation theory. Xiao Jiayan and Li Hengwei in *The Alienation of*

Poetic Metaphors and Poetic Themes—A Cognitive Linguistic Study of the English Translation of the Poetry of "Hong Lou Meng" argued that the conceptual metaphors of poetic themes should be dominated by alienation strategies in translation. Liang Jinzhu and Luo Jiain in *Analysis of the Translation Strategies of Yang and Huo Translations of the Poetry of "Hong Lou Meng" from the Perspective of Purpose Theory* pointed out that the purpose of translation is the main reason for the difference in styles between Yang and Huo translations.

The poetry translation of HLM into English has been analyzed by many a versatile expert, yet there is a lack of attention to the aesthetic effects of the English translation of poems in HLM in the academic world, which is not conducive to the true presentation of the literary charm and poetic value of the poems of HLM. Despite the fact that some academics have authored dissertations on the reception aesthetics of poems translated into English in HLM, little attention has been paid to the Lin Daiyu's "Zang Hua Ci". In *A Comparative Reading and Appreciation of the Two English Translations of "Zang Hua Ci" in "Hong Lou Meng"*, Liu Xiaoshan did compare the two English translations of "Zang Hua Ci" in terms of the aesthetic effects, but this study is committed to transplanted Chinese theories, that is, Xu Yuanchong's theory of Three Beauties, instead of the core theories of this approach to literary. Therefore, based on the perspective of reception aesthetics, this paper borrows relevant concepts and takes the translation of Yang Hsien-Yi and his wife and the translation of Hawkes as reference to explore Lin Daiyu's "Zang Hua Ci", in order to provide suggestions for representing its aesthetic value and literary charm.

Reception Aesthetics and Poetry Translation

"The most recent development of hermeneutics in Germany is known as 'reception aesthetics' or 'reception theory'". Based on phenomenology and hermeneutic, reception aesthetics is a literary theory put forward by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, which differs from other literary theories with its special focus on readers rather than on texts. Examining both the author and the

reader, it focuses on how reader agency is imposed on the work and how it affects its reception.

As one of the two most famous scholars who advocate reception aesthetics, Hans Robert Jauss was primarily influenced by Heidegger and Gadamer's hermeneutics, with Gadamer providing key notions such as "horizon of expectations" and "effects history". Just as Paul de Man in his preface to the English Version of *towards an Aesthetics of Reception* (1987) stated: "Reception Aesthetics is the literary hermeneutics. While the other representative figure, Wolfgang Iser profited greatly from Romain Ingarden's phenomenology, whose essential notions such as "indeterminacies" and "concretization" was immediately transposed into reception aesthetics, particularly Iser's theory.

One important principle of this theory is "the readers' horizon of expectation". Jauss holds that "it is only when readers' expecting vision coordinates with the texts that reception and understanding occurs". In other words, it can be succinctly defined as the reader's anticipated understanding of a text based on their pre-existing knowledge. By "readers' expecting vision", we are referring to people's value, philosophy, morality, taste and ability of understanding. Jauss further classifies the horizon of expectation into two categories: "directional expectation" and "creative expectation." The former reflects a reader's habitual inclination towards seeking the familiar and routine, while the latter signifies a desire to explore something entirely new and distinct from clichés. Readers typically embark on the act of reading with specific expectations in mind. Simultaneously, no literary work exists in complete isolation; it inevitably triggers the reader's memory, immerses them in a particular emotional atmosphere, and communicates expectations through signals and hints. Throughout this dynamic process, the reader's expectations undergo identification, modification, transformation, and ultimately, self-elevation. In essence, literary reception can be viewed as a nuanced journey wherein readers actively construct, alter, adapt, and reconstruct their horizons of

expectation. It is a process of continual interaction between the text and the reader, shaping and reshaping the reader's interpretive framework as they navigate the intricacies of the narrative.

Another important principle of reception aesthetics is the "indeterminacy" in response-inviting structure. According to Iser, the "response-inviting structure" refers to the "indeterminacy caused by the blank and negation of the work of art". In other words, crafted with elements of "indeterminacy" and "blank," the composition possesses the unique ability to engage the reader in an interactive process. Some sentences in literature use descriptive language and therefore contain undefined spaces of meaning that are beyond words. The work is actually made up of "gaps" where the reader must supply a missing connection, and is full of "indeterminacies", elements which depend for their effect upon the reader's interpretation, and which can be interpreted in a number of different, perhaps mutually conflicting ways. Reading literature is an active, creative process that gives life to the text. By prompting readers to delve into the text, it encourages them to actively construct meaning, fostering a dynamic exchange between the reader and the written words. In the process of reading, the blanks and indeterminacies do not require completion but rather demand a thoughtful combination. They serve as the unseen joints within the text, connecting the schemata in such a way that an imaginary construct is formed. The existence of these gaps calls upon readers to engage with the indeterminacies, filling in the blanks and, in doing so, expanding their previous horizons. The structure, designed to elicit responses, becomes a catalyst for the self-translator, empowering them to unleash their imagination within a vast and open intellectual space.

The third one is aesthetic distance, which is raised by Jauss. According to Jauss, it is "the reception of a new literary work that leads to the change of reader's horizons through negating the familiar or similar experiences or through describing new experiences to the level of consciousness". It describes how a viewer's conscious reality and the imaginary world

portrayed in a piece of art separate. Varied literary works have varied “aesthetic distances,” and maintaining an appropriate aesthetic distance is crucial to the work’s success and should be taken into account by the author while crafting a piece. The attainment of a close aesthetic distance occurs when a reader becomes fully immersed in the text’s world, signifying the author’s success. As a primary pivot around which the dynamics of the text-reader connection revolve, the distance between the reader and the text is crucial in promoting mutual interaction between the two. To ensure that the translated text preserves the original text’s artistic character, the translator must carefully anticipate the expectations of the target readers. Aesthetic appreciation varies among individuals with different social experiences and cultural backgrounds, influencing their interpretation of a literary work. Consequently, the translator must thoroughly consider the aesthetic preferences of the target readers.

The artistic qualities of translation have received more attention as translatology has grown. Prof. Zheng points out that “When readers read literary works, it is more important to generate strong emotional activities and get aesthetic pleasure. This special characteristic of literary works requires that literary translation can provide readers with an aesthetic object equal to the aesthetic effect of the original text, so that readers of the translated text can realize the aesthetic value of the work through their own knowledge and experience”. Aesthetics is especially important in poetry translation. In actuality, the acceptance and appreciation of the poetry by readers of the Target Text (TT hereafter) determines whether or not a translation is effective. Accordingly, the reader-centered Reception Aesthetics Theory has drawn our attention to the subjectivity in literary translation. As early as the mid-1980s, Yang Wuneng (qtd. in Xu Jun, 2000: 2227-228)[17] reinterpreted the translation process in terms of hermeneutics and reception aesthetics, and pointed out the shortcomings of the traditional translation model of “original→translator→translation”. He

established a translation model unique to literary translation: writer→original→translator→translation→reader, in which the translator is undoubtedly in the central or pivotal position and plays the most active role. In the translation of Chinese canonical poems, the translator’s subjectivity comes into play more obviously.

A Brief Introduction of “Zang hua Ci”

“Zang Hua Ci”, a renowned poem in the classic Chinese novel HLM, emerges with an exquisite and masterful style in the 27th chapter. Comprising a total of 52 lines and spanning 361 words, this poetic composition is a literary gem. The poem develops in three separate sections, each of which adds to the depth of its themes. The initial segment delves into the poet’s introspective melancholy during the spring season, setting the emotional tone for the entire work. Subsequently, the second part vividly captures the poet’s distress, intensified by the metaphor of fallen flowers. The final part poignantly draws parallels between the poet and the fallen blossoms, crafting an elegy that reflects on the tragic trajectory of the poet’s life.

Among the various poems attributed to Lin Daiyu in HLM, “Zang Hua Ci” stands unparalleled. Not only is it Lin Daiyu’s lengthiest poetic creation, but it also serves as the guiding force for the thematic undercurrents in her other compositions. Esteemed since its inception, this poem stands out as one of the most impressive literary works within the novel, showcasing consummate craftsmanship and superb artistic values. “Zang Hua Ci” is not merely an artistic endeavor; it serves as a representative expression of Lin Daiyu’s profound grief and sorrow. The pervasive feelings of sadness and lamentation throughout the poem contribute to its enduring impact. Cao Xueqin, the author of HLM, strategically utilizes this poem to shape the image of the heroine, Lin Daiyu, aiming to reveal and emphasize her distinctive characteristics within the narrative.

The poem brims with vivid and distinctive imagery, portraying scenes of misery through powerful yet melancholic tones. This conveys Daiyu’s sensitive nature, internal

struggles, and nuanced psychological nuances in a meaningful way. It also reveals her existential fears and deep perplexity about life, which materializes in the complex conflict between love and hatred, life and death. A notable feature is the personification of flowers, intricately entwined with the poet's fate, culminating in a compelling indictment of nature's destructive forces against flowers and a poignant condemnation of the dark societal evils that claim human lives. The poem weaves the poet's fate, thoughts, and feelings into the scenery, revealing the human experience under the surface of what appears to be a description of flowers. This results in a rich and vivid creative vision that has a strong appeal.

The poem as a whole presents Lin Daiyu's life philosophy and ideals in a genuine manner. There's a general discontent among the melancholic, a spirit that won't give up to destiny. In a way, burying the fallen petals becomes a sign of love and acceptance of the harsh facts of life. Every phrase is inextricably linked to the heroine's destiny and traits, making it unique in literary contexts from antiquity to the present. In essence, the poem meticulously captures Daiyu's bitter tears and the profound sorrow embedded in her life. It is no wonder that subsequent generations proclaim: without "Zang Hua Ci", there is no Lin Daiyu.

A comparative Analysis of Readers' Expectation Horizons

The readers' "horizon of expectation" refers to the readers' need and ability to appreciate literary works based on their existing experience, taste, and ability, which is articulated as a possible standard of aesthetic quality. In the specific reading process, this vision of expectation is constantly changing, correctable, or reshaped. This poem contains many a noun unique to Chinese culture, and these culturally specific words are not within the scope of Western readers' expectations. Therefore, Western readers with different aesthetic expectations will have different fusion of horizons when reading different English translations of "Zang Hua Ci". In the following, I will try to analyze several cases of translations

of Chinese culture-specific words from this poem.

Source text: (Extracted from "Zang Hua Ci")

花谢花飞花满天, 红消香断有谁怜?

TT1:

*As blossoms fade and fly across the sky,
Who pities the faded red, the scent that has
been?*

TT2:

*The blossoms fade and falling fill the air,
Of fragrance and bright hues bereft and
bare?*

The poem's first line establishes the emotional tone for the whole poem by painting an image of fading petals filling the air in front of readers' eyes. In this sentence, for the translation of the phrase Hongxiaoxiangduan (红消香断), Yang Hsien-Yi translated it as "the faded red, the scent that has been", Hawkes treated it as "fragrance and bright hues bereft and bare". The color red is more often seen as an ominous sign in Western culture, "because the English cultural concept of 'red' has connotations such as 'dangerous, radical, effusive blood, violence, and eroticism', which is probably related to the fact that the ancestors of Europeans were nomadic tribes, and red always evokes the associations of the slaughter". However, in Chinese culture, the "red" means the most beautiful color of flowers and is always the metaphor of young women. Therefore, the blossoming and withering of flowers are also often used as a metaphor pointing the fate of women, and in this poem, this metaphor is particularly obvious. However, Western readers, because of their cultural backgrounds, do not read with an aesthetic experience and a vision of expectation that includes such a Chinese metaphor, and therefore do not clearly understand the cultural connotations of the color "red" in this poem. In addition, Western readers may misunderstand the "faded red". But Hawkes, in his translation, adopted the paraphrase method, directly presenting the symbolic meaning of the red, i.e., "the bright colors of flowers". His translation "fragrance and hues bereft and bare" better matches the experience of Western readers and fits their expectation horizon, so that they may grasp the meaning of the original text with little effort.

The following is another example.

Source text: (Extracted from "Zang Hua Ci")
游丝软系飘春榭，落絮轻沾扑绣帘。

TT1:
Softly the gossamer floats over spring pavilions,
Gently the willow fluff wafts to the embroidered screen.

TT2:
Floss drifts and flutters round the Maiden's bower,
Or softly strikes against her curtained door.

In this sentence, Chunxie (春榭) is a culturally specific word found in ancient Chinese texts. Xie (榭) is a kind of house built on a platform in ancient China. Hsien-Yi translated it as "spring pavilions", which means pavilions in spring. It shows that the season in the poem is spring; however, it is difficult for western readers to understand because in the whole poem there is no obvious imagery of "pavilion" but the poet's room. He misled the readers of the target language. Therefore, Yang's translation doesn't integrate the expectations of the author, the reader and the translator at this level. On the contrary, Hawkes translated Chunxie (春榭) as "the Maiden's bower", which confined the place into the maiden's area. Although, the translation of Xie into bower is not very accurate, but it is easier for Western readers to understand. He didn't deliberately pursue a superficial equivalence between the original text and its meaning, but tried to reflect the deeper meaning of the original text. Hawkes fully integrated the vision of the author, the translator and the reader, and tried his best to present a perfect superimposition of vision to enhance the aesthetics of the translation. In addition, the word Xiulian (绣帘) in the original text refers to a portiere embroidered with flowers. Yang Hsien-Yi used the word "embroidered screen" while Hawkes used the word "curtained door". Regarding fidelity to the original text, Yang's translation reproduces the art of embroidery in traditional Chinese culture and the ancients' preference to decorate their houses with embroidery, but mistaking the portiere for a screen is something of a misnomer. In contrast, Hawkes' translation is

more faithful to the original text, but fails to represent the Chinese embroidery culture.

The third example is the following verse.
Source text: (Extracted from "Zang Hua Ci")
三月香巢已垒成，梁间燕子太无情！

TT1:
By the third month the scented nests are built,
But the swallows on the beam are heartless all;
Hard to detain, the soul of blossom or birds,
For blossoms have no assurance, birds no words.

TT2:
This spring the heartless swallow built his nest
Beneath the eaves of mud with flowers compressed.

Daiyu scolded the ruthless swallows for leaving the freshly constructed nests so quickly and not realizing that the room would be empty and the nests might not exist by the time they returned the next year. Again, there is a cultural word specific to Chinese culture that is Xiangchao (香巢). It originally means the dwelling place of beautiful women. However, in this sentence, it actually means the nest built by the swallows with the fallen flowers. Yang Hsien-Yi treated the translation of this word as "scented nests", a word-by-word translation into English. Without the exact knowledge of the poem and Chinese culture, readers won't understand why the nest is fragrant through reading such a translation. However, Hawkes translated it as "nest...with flowers compressed" without a literal translation. Such a translation explains the reason for Western readers why the poet herself described the swallow's nest is of fragrance and why the poet regarded swallows heartless. Hawkes considered the cultural background of target readers and made the more appropriate translation, which corresponds with the expectation of readers and shows the aesthetic effects of the original texts.

From the above examples, it can be seen that the two translations have adopted different strategies and present their own styles. But regardless of the differences, both two translators did their best to satisfy the

readers' horizons of expectation and fill the gap in their reading.

The Concretization of the Indeterminacies

Some of the contents of ancient canonical works and some ancient words often have multiple interpretations, which involves what Isser calls "blank" and "indeterminacy" of the text. In dealing with these indeterminacies, the readers fill the gaps of the texts creatively with their expectation system and aesthetic distance. The readers here, in the case of the translation, are also the translators. The readers' reading task is to overlap the present vision and merge it with the past vision, thus forming a new vision and completing the process of text comprehension. The understanding of certain contents and vocabulary in "Zang Hua Ci" varies, so the author tries to give a few examples to analyze the uncertainty and the gap filling in the translations.

Source text: (Extracted from "Zang Hua Ci")

桃李明年能再发，明年闺中知有谁？

TT1:

Next year the peach and plum will bloom again, But her chamber may stand empty on that day. [19]

TT2:

Next year, when peach and plum-tree bloom again,
Which of your sweet companions will remain?

This marks Daiyu's inaugural comparison of herself and women to ephemeral flowers. However, she astutely notes the distinction that while humans have only one life, flowers have the potential to bloom anew in the coming years. The line "明年闺中知有谁" is a straightforward expression that should leave no room for gaps or ambiguity in understanding. Unfortunately, in Hawkes' translation, this simplicity is compromised by the introduction of "which of your sweet companions remain?" This addition introduces ambiguity, as the phrase "your sweet companions" can be interpreted in two distinct ways: either as Daiyu's close, unmarried girlfriends or as other flowers beside peach and plum. Regrettably, Hawkes deviates from the original meaning in the target text. Conversely, Yang Hsien-Yi's translation, "but her chamber

may stand empty on that day," though not a literal rendering, accurately conveys the essence of the source text. This translation remains faithful to the original meaning, offering readers a clearer understanding of Daiyu's sentiments.

The following is another example.

Source text: (Extracted from "Zang Hua Ci")

昨夜庭外悲歌发，知是花魂与鸟魂？

花魂鸟魂总难留，鸟自无言花自羞。

TT1:

Last night from the courtyard floated a sad song---

Was it the soul of blossom, the soul of birds?

Hard to detain, the soul of blossom or birds,
For blossoms have no assurance, birds no words.

TT2:

Last night, outside, a mournful sound was heard:

The spirits of the flowers and of the bird.

But neither bird nor flowers would long delay,

Bird lacking speech, and flowers too shy to stay.

After burying the fallen flowers, Lin Daiyu came back her room and heard a mournful song that may out of flowers or birds. Daiyu personified these natural things and projected herself onto these short-living beings. In this line, there is uncertain information, Hun (魂), readers' understanding of which depends on the translators' understanding. The translators used two different words to translate this Chinese word, and spirit and soul are respectively used. Although the terms can be used interchangeably in certain contexts, the former frequently refers to the aspect of a person's identity that includes their character, thoughts, and feelings. In Chinese culture, the body and soul are two parts of a man, and body may be destroyed one day but the soul is everlasting. It is thought that a person's soul lives on after their body passes away; both translators provide an explanation of this in their versions. Furthermore, Buddhism in China maintains that all living things, including plants and animals, have souls. Therefore, in the original passage, souls are bestowed upon flowers and birds. The word choice will lead readers to believe that all plants and animals

are born into this planet and continue to travel around it after they pass away. From this, readers are presented with a lonely and hopeless sight. Furthermore, this word's selection accurately captures the condition of the fallen flowers and birds, making it a highly true translation to the original text. Hawkes, though, uses the word spirit. In addition, it is believed that a person's spirit, or nonphysical aspect, lives on after death. As for this, it is evident that the terms soul and spirit have the same meaning, but in western religious culture, "spirit" is frequently used to refer to a ghost or other supernatural person. And in the Christian doctrine, the spirit and the soul are two separate parts. A whole person is composed of spirit, soul and body. Therefore, the "spirit" in Christianity refers mainly to fleshless spiritual beings such as God, angels, demons or evil spirits and flesh and blood, and the "soul" is the expression of human wisdom, vitality, and other. The "soul" is the manifestation of life, such as intelligence and vitality, and exists only when a person is alive. According to Hawkes' translation of next verse, he thought that Hun(魂) refers to bird or flowers themselves.

Furthermore, the meaning encapsulated in the phrase "鸟自无言花自羞" remains elusive and challenging to decipher. According to Yang Hsien-Yi, this ambiguity contributes to the difficulty in apprehending the "soul of blossom or birds," rendering them resistant to capture. Consequently, Yang translated the sentence as "For blossoms have no assurance, birds no words," employing the logical connection of the word "for" to establish a causal link with the preceding sentence. On the contrary, Hawkes envisioned a scenario where Daiyu directly queries birds and flowers about their reluctance to "long delay," only to be met with their silent and bashful demeanor. In light of this interpretation, Hawkes renders the sentence as "Bird lacking speech, and flowers too shy to stay," offering a descriptive account of how flowers and birds respond to Daiyu's inquiry.

Another example is the last two sentences of this poem.

Source text: (Extracted from "Zang Hua Ci")

试看春残花渐落，便是红颜老死时。

一朝春尽红颜老，花落人亡两不知！

TT1:

See, when spring draws to a close and flowers fall,

This is the season when beauty must ebb and fade;

The day that spring takes wing and beauty fades

Who will care for the fallen blossom or dead maid?

TT2:

As petals drop and spring begins to fail,

The bloom of youth, too, sickens and turns pale.

One day, when spring has gone and youth has fled,

The Maiden and the flowers will both be dead.

The thirteenth stanza ends the whole poem and highlights the theme as well. Rich emotive words such as Chuncan (春残), Hualuo (花落), Hongyan (红颜), Laosi (老死), and Renwang (人亡) drive the poem to its peak. Here, Hongyan is a pun. The bloom of youth and beauty are selected in turn. Hongyan in Chinese is usually used to refer to beautiful women. Yang Hsien-Yi adopted the original meaning of this word and directly translated into beauties. Yang's translation shows his understanding of this word. In his opinion, the beauty is also Daiyu herself, so the singular form is his translation. However, Hawkes believed that Hongyan here is not only confined to a single person, but has more universal meaning. He creatively took the season, spring, during which flowers blossom and wick, be equivalent to people's youth. This translation makes western readers have such an imagination: the scene of passing spring made the young poet become more mournful for her youth that is fading away. These translations show readers that the same words can be interpreted differently, allowing for a range of ambiguities. And, this inclusiveness has led to a pluralistic approach to the study of "Zang Hua Ci".

The ambiguity in the last sentence arises from the term "两不知" in the source text. It is difficult to say with certainty whether it suggests that other individuals are unaware of both the flowers and Daiyu's death or if it

implies a mutual lack of awareness between Daiyu and the flowers regarding each other's demise. It is apparent that Yang Hsien-Yi interpreted it as the former, while Hawkes opted to omit this ambiguity, providing a partial translation. These cases serve as an illustration of how, in the presence of "blank" or indeterminacy, translators may choose to refrain from injecting their own interpretations and leave these gaps unfilled.

Adjusting the Aesthetic Distance

The aesthetic distance is created by the difference or detachment of the literary work's horizon from the reader's original horizon of expectations. By opening up the readers' expectations and expanding their creative range, this gap can be significantly reduced. As thus, the aesthetic detachment functions to subvert readers' directed expectations and cultivate an atmosphere that piques their imaginative expectations. In light of this, the translator must adeptly adjust the distance based on various contexts and circumstances, employing suitable strategies to address specific expressions. Under such circumstances, it becomes imperative to make necessary adjustments to restore the lost beauty and align with the aesthetic sensibilities of the target audience.

Source text: (Extracted from "Zang Hua Ci")

闺中女儿惜春暮，愁绪满怀无释处。

手把花锄出绣帘，忍踏落花来复去？

TT1:

A girl in her chamber mourns the passing of spring,

No relief from anxiety her poor heart knows;

*Hoe in hand she steps through her portal,
Loath to tread on the blossom as she comes
and goes.*

TT1:

*The Maid, grieved by these signs of spring's
decease,*

*Seeking some means her sorrow to express,
Has rake in hand into the garden gone,
Before the fallen flowers are trampled on.*

In the context of the growing cultural exchange between China and the West, numerous vocabulary items rich in cultural nuances lack direct equivalents. Within this framework, a distinctive Chinese term, "锄"

(chu), stands out, referring to a specialized agricultural tool imbued with cultural significance tailored to China's unique farming practices. The design and function of this tool are intricately linked to the historical and geographical nuances of Chinese agriculture. Regrettably, there exists no direct English equivalent for this term, posing a translation challenge for target readers who are predominantly English speakers. Noteworthy is the translation undertaken by Yang Hsien-Yi and Hawkes, both of whom chose domestication strategies to bridge the cultural gap for their target audience. They rendered "锄" as "hoe" and "rake," respectively. While these English terms represent common gardening tools in the Western world, they deviate slightly from the specificity of the Chinese tool. Hoes are typically employed for soil cultivation and weeding, whereas rakes are associated with gathering and leveling tasks in gardens, closely resembling the Chinese "耙." Despite not being perfect matches, hoes and rakes are as commonplace in Western gardening as "锄" is in China. In these translations, both Yang Hsien-Yi and Hawkes opted for domesticating strategies to minimize the unfamiliarity of the foreign text for their English-speaking readers. Notably, Hawkes made a subtle adjustment, transforming "闺中女儿" into "the Maid," a more concise rendering compared to Yang Hsien-Yi's "a girl in her chamber." This adjustment not only succinctly captures the essence of the original expression but also aligns more closely with the language preferences of the target readers. Such careful adjustment strikes a delicate balance, maintaining an aesthetic distance that neither exceeds the expectations of the target readers nor hinders their comprehension of the text.

The following is another example to satisfy the target readers' aesthetic appreciation.

Source text: (Extracted from "Zang Hua Ci")

花谢花飞花满天，红消香断有谁怜？

TT1:

*As blossoms fade and fly across the sky,
Who pities the faded red, the scent that has
been?*

TT2:

The blossoms fade and falling fill the air,

Of fragrance and bright hues bereft and bare?

To faithfully replicate the aesthetic effect of the source text in the translated version, the translator must carefully anticipate the expectations of the target readers. Individuals with diverse social experiences and cultural backgrounds inherently possess varied aesthetic sensibilities when engaging with literary works. Consequently, the translator is tasked with meticulous attention to the aesthetic preferences of the target readers, ensuring a nuanced and resonant reproduction of the original text that aligns with their cultural and social contexts. In the aforementioned example, Cao Xueqin skillfully employs rhetorical devices to evoke a sense of beauty. However, Yang Hsien-Yi, in his translation, departs from preserving the beauty of sound rhyme, sacrificing fidelity to the original form. In contrast, Hawkes' rendition not only retains the rhyme but also incorporates alliteration to enhance the aesthetic experience for the target readers. Alliteration, involving the repetition of initial sounds in words, is a linguistic device that creates a distinctive impact. In Hawkes' version, a deliberate choice of alliterated words, such as the repetition of /f/ and /b/, is employed. This not only sustains the melodic beauty of the text but also deepens the impressions for the target readers. It can be asserted that Hawkes' innovative translation takes into account the aesthetic sensibilities of the readers, maintaining an ideal balance between their literary horizon and that of the source text.

2. Conclusion

In the 1960s and 1970s, based on Gadamer's hermeneutics and Ingarden's phenomenology, Jauss and Iser made a pioneering contribution to the birth of receptive aesthetics in Germany. Reception aesthetics later extended to Europe, the United States, Japan, the former USSR, and other nations, where it gained popularity and significant influence in the literary critique community. Unlike traditional text-centrism, it attaches great importance to the active role of the reader in the reading of a text and the degree of its reception. In translation activities, its anti-text-centeredness mainly refers to the

fact that "the center of translation studies has also shifted from the original 'author' and 'text' to the 'reader', and the translation activity will be a translation of the text. The translation activity takes readers' expectations and receptivity as important considerations". This shift in the perspective of reception aesthetics has not only set off a revolutionary paradigm in the field of literary studies and literary theory criticism, but also shone a light of reference in the translation field.

This thesis undertakes a preliminary investigation of the methods used in the translation of Chinese poetry into English and its reception in the English-speaking world by establishing a comparative framework influenced by Reception Aesthetics. It primarily examines the translation and reception tactics at each of the three vertical reception levels that H.R. Jauss proposed. The corpora used in this thesis are drawn from two English translations of HLM: Yang Hsien-Yi's *The Dream of Red Mansion* and David Hawkes' *The Story of the Stone*. The study starts by analyzing how well-received the two translated versions are in the English-speaking community in light of the expectations of the TT readers. Additionally, the two versions' translation techniques are identified in order to assess their advantages and disadvantages at each of the three previously described levels.

Through an analysis of these translations, it becomes evident that Yang Hsien-Yi and Hawkes employed distinct strategies in rendering Lin Daiyu's "Zang Hua Ci" into English, aiming to align with the aesthetic sensibilities of the target audience. Yang Hsien-Yi prefers to the literal translation while Hawkes is inclined to paraphrasing. Relatively speaking, Hawkes' translation mainly adopts the translation strategy of naturalization—the wording is more common and simple, the structure of the translation is somewhat different from the structure of the original text, and it is more in pursuit of understanding and fluency. Furthermore, Hawkes' translation excels in meeting Western readers' aesthetic preferences by skillfully managing aesthetic distance. His use of naturalization ensures a more accessible

language and structure, minimizing the gap between the reader and Lin Daiyu's "Zang Hua Ci". This approach not only enhances comprehension but also maintains the emotional nuances, creating a translation that resonates effectively with Western audiences. In a certain sense, Hawkes' translation facilitates a more seamless merging of the author's, the translator's, and the reader's horizons. By clarifying textual uncertainties, it effectively bridges potential gaps in the reader's understanding. This approach not only encourages a greater grasp of the original text but also allows readers to engage with the intricate cultural elements embedded within it. It aligns with the expectations of contemporary Western readers, promoting effective cross-cultural communication.

This outcome offers valuable insights for the international dissemination of Chinese culture. In future Chinese literary translations, it is advisable to prioritize strategies that enhance cultural resonance and aesthetic appeal for the target audience. Hawkes' emphasis on naturalization and careful management of aesthetic distance serves as a model. This approach fosters effective cross-cultural communication, facilitating a more profound understanding and appreciation of Chinese literature among global readers. By adopting such practices, Chinese literature can achieve greater accessibility and relevance on the international stage. Consequently, this advances the overarching objective of elevating and broadening the impact of China's abundant cultural legacy on a worldwide scale.

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