



A Comparison of Translation Strategies: Hawkes' and the Yangs' Translations of Honglou meng

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Abstract

Honglou meng, the eighteenth-century Chinese novel by Cao Xueqin, stands as one of the greatest achievements in world literature. Its translation into English has produced two major complete versions: David Hawkes and John Minford's *The Story of the Stone* (1973–1986) and Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang's *A Dream of Red Mansions* (1978–1980). These two translations embody fundamentally different translation philosophies. Drawing on Lawrence Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization as the primary theoretical framework and supported by Eugene Nida's equivalence theory and Peter Newmark's translation procedures, this paper undertakes a systematic comparative analysis of the two versions across four key textual dimensions: culture-specific items, names and appellations, poetic discourse, and religious and philosophical terminology. The analysis reveals that the Hawkes-Minford version consistently adopts a domesticating strategy, rendering Chinese cultural elements into familiar English forms to maximize readability for the Anglophone reader. In contrast, the Yangs' version follows a predominantly foreignizing approach, preserving the strangeness of the source text and requiring greater cultural effort from its audience. Neither strategy is inherently superior; rather, each serves different readerships and reflects distinct historical and ideological contexts. The paper concludes by arguing that the coexistence of these two approaches enriches the English-language reception of Honglou meng and offers enduring insights for the translation of classical Chinese literature.

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1. Introduction

Cao Xueqin's Honglou meng (红楼梦), composed in the mid-eighteenth century during the Qing dynasty, is universally acknowledged as the pinnacle of classical Chinese fiction. Encyclopedic in scope, the novel depicts the decline of the aristocratic Jia family while weaving together a complex love tragedy, a rich tapestry of social life, and profound philosophical and religious meditations. For the English-speaking world, access to this masterpiece has been mediated principally through two complete translations: *The Story of the Stone* by David Hawkes (volumes 1–3) and John Minford (volumes 4–5), published by Penguin Books between 1973 and 1986, and *A Dream of Red Mansions* by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, published by the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing between 1978 and 1980.

The coexistence of these two translations presents a rare opportunity for translation scholars. Rarely does a literary work of this magnitude receive two complete, high-quality English translations produced within the same decade yet animated by such

contrasting principles. Hawkes, a British sinologist writing for a commercial publisher, explicitly sought to bring the novel alive for the Western reader, declaring in his introduction that he aimed to convey "the whole of the novel" as "a complete and living experience" (Cao, 1973, p. 46) ^[2]. The Yangs, working under the auspices of a state publishing house in the late Maoist period, pursued fidelity to the original Chinese text as their guiding principle (Cao, 1978). It is also significant that the two translations are based on different source manuscripts: Hawkes's draws on the Gengchen manuscript (庚辰本), while the Yangs' follows the Jiaxu manuscript (甲戌本). These manuscript traditions contain variant readings and divergent characterizations, and some discrepancies between the translations arise not from different strategies but from different source texts.

The publication histories of the two translations illuminate their divergent orientations. Hawkes resigned his chair in Chinese at Oxford University in 1971 to devote himself full-time to the translation. Penguin Books commissioned the work for its Penguin Classics series, which had established itself as the preeminent vehicle for bringing world literature to Anglophone readers. The Penguin imprimatur signaled that *Honglou meng* was being positioned within a canon of universal literary masterpieces, alongside Homer, Dante, and Tolstoy. Hawkes produced a translation designed to stand on its own as English literature, complete with a critical introduction, genealogical charts, and footnotes addressed to the general reader.

The Yangs' translation emerged from a very different institutional context. Yang Hsien-yi, educated at Oxford and married to Gladys Tayler, returned to China in 1940 and spent decades as a translator for the state-run Foreign Languages Press, whose mandate was to introduce Chinese culture to the world. Its translation program—encompassing classical novels, poetry, and philosophy—was an instrument of cultural diplomacy during a period when China was largely isolated from the West. The Yangs' translation thus belongs to a tradition of state-sponsored cultural export in which fidelity to the source text was valued above accessibility. The translation was published with minimal apparatus: brief introductions, sparse footnotes, and no concessions to the Western reader's unfamiliarity with Chinese customs or literary conventions.

The theoretical framework for analyzing these divergent approaches has been most influentially articulated by Lawrence Venuti in *The Translator's Invisibility* (2008), where he draws a sharp distinction between domestication—a translation strategy that minimizes the foreignness of the source text to produce a fluent, transparent target text—and foreignization—a strategy that deliberately retains markers of the source culture, registering "the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text" (Venuti, 2008, p. 15). Venuti's framework is complemented by Eugene Nida's (1964) ^[7] foundational distinction between formal equivalence, which prioritizes fidelity to the form and content of the source message, and dynamic equivalence, which seeks to produce in the target reader a response equivalent to that of the source reader. Peter Newmark's (1988) ^[6] translation procedures, particularly his distinction between semantic and communicative translation, offer further analytical precision. This paper undertakes a systematic comparison of the Hawkes-Minford and Yang versions of *Honglou meng* through the lens of domestication and foreignization. The

analysis focuses on four textual domains that pose distinctive challenges to the translator: culture-specific items, names and appellations, poetic discourse, and religious and philosophical terminology. Through close comparative reading of representative passages from each domain, the paper demonstrates how the two versions instantiate radically different translation philosophies and assesses the implications of these differences for the cross-cultural transmission of Chinese literary heritage.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1. Domestication, Foreignization, and Equivalence

The opposition between domesticating and foreignizing translation has shaped translation theory since Friedrich Schleiermacher's nineteenth-century lecture on the two methods of translating, but it received its most influential modern formulation in Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility* (2008). Venuti argues that the Anglo-American translation tradition has been dominated by domestication, which produces translations so fluent and transparent that the translator's labor is rendered invisible and the text is read as though it were originally written in English. This fluency, Venuti contends, is not a neutral aesthetic choice but an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values. Foreignizing translation, by contrast, "entails choosing a foreign text and developing a translation method along lines which are excluded by dominant cultural values in the target language" (Venuti, 2008, p. 190). It is a form of resistance against the hegemonic assimilation of cultural difference.

Venuti's project is explicitly political. He argues that the dominance of domesticating translation in the Anglo-American world reflects an imbalance of cultural power in which English-language culture absorbs foreign texts by stripping them of their difference. Foreignizing translation, for Venuti, is a strategic intervention, a way of "sending the reader abroad" rather than "bringing the author back home". This political dimension is directly relevant to *Honglou meng*, a novel universally acknowledged as a masterpiece yet rarely accorded the centrality that its scale would seem to demand. How it is translated is thus one of cultural representation and the terms on which Chinese literature enters world literature.

Venuti's binary has been criticized for its rigidity, and subsequent scholarship has refined it. Yet for the analysis of two translations as programmatically divergent as the Hawkes-Minford and Yang versions of *Honglou meng*, the domestication-foreignization axis remains an indispensable heuristic. It captures a real and consequential difference in how the two translation projects approach the task of cultural mediation.

Eugene Nida's (1964) ^[7] concepts of formal and dynamic equivalence provide a complementary analytical vocabulary. Formal equivalence "focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content", striving for a close correspondence between source and target linguistic structures. Dynamic equivalence, by contrast, aims at "complete naturalness of expression" so that the target reader responds to the translated text in a manner substantially similar to the original reader's response (Nida, 1964, p. 159). Nida's framework helps illuminate why Hawkes and the Yangs make the specific lexical and syntactic choices they do.

Peter Newmark's (1988) ^[6] *A Textbook of Translation* supplies a set of finely discriminated translation

procedures—including transference, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, and componential analysis—that permit a more granular description of how the two versions handle particular translation problems. Newmark's distinction between semantic translation, which remains within the source culture and attends to the author's exact contextual meaning, and communicative translation, which addresses itself solely to the target readership and produces a text that conforms to target-language conventions, maps closely onto the Yangs' and Hawkes's respective approaches. Susan Bassnett's (2013) ^[1] cultural turn in translation studies, with its insistence that translation is never a purely linguistic operation but always a form of cultural negotiation, frames the broader significance of the comparison undertaken here.

2.2. Scholarship on Translating *Honglou meng*

The translation of *Honglou meng* has attracted sustained scholarly attention. Laurence Wong's monograph *Dreaming across Languages and Cultures* (2014) provides the most comprehensive study of the literary translations of the novel, examining how translators have grappled with its generic hybridity, polyphonic narrative structure, and dense intertextuality. Wong's analysis demonstrates that the novel's formal complexity—its blending of vernacular and classical registers, its embedded poetic genres, its intricate system of allusion—makes it an extreme test case for any theory of literary translation.

Eugene Eoyang's *The Transparent Eye* (1993) ^[4] situates the translation of Chinese literature within the broader framework of comparative poetics and East-West literary relations. Eoyang argues that the reception of Chinese literature in English has been shaped by deep-seated assumptions about cultural hierarchy and literary value, and that translations of works such as *Honglou meng* both reflect and challenge these assumptions. André Lefevere's (1992) ^[5] concept of translation as rewriting, embedded within specific ideological and poetological constraints, illuminates the institutional contexts that shaped the two translation projects. The Yangs, working for a state publishing house during a period when translation was explicitly understood as an instrument of cultural diplomacy, operated under constraints quite different from those facing Hawkes, a freelance scholar publishing with a major commercial house. Gideon Toury's (2012) descriptive approach, with its focus on norms and the translation's position within the target literary polysystem, offers a framework for understanding how the two versions have functioned differently within the English-language literary field.

It is worth noting that the scholarly literature on *Honglou meng* translation has tended to favor close reading of selected passages over systematic, large-scale comparison. Wong (2014), for instance, devotes chapters to the translation of poetry, of dialogue, of names, and of narrative structure, but does not attempt to quantify the distribution of translation strategies across the entire text. This preference for qualitative over quantitative methods reflects the broader state of the field and the difficulty of reducing literary translation decisions to countable units. The present paper follows this qualitative tradition while aiming for systematic coverage of representative textual domains.

David Hawkes himself was a formidable scholar of *Honglou meng* as well as its translator, and his introductory essays to each volume of *The Story of the Stone* constitute an important

body of paratextual commentary on the challenges of translating the novel. He reflects candidly on his decisions: his choice to render the novel's title as *The Story of the Stone* rather than a literal translation, his substitution of a quasi-biblical "Holy Name" for the Daoist-Buddhist term "空空道人", and his decision to Anglicize many of the servants' names while retaining the masters' names in romanized form. These paratexts offer invaluable insight into the domesticating translator's thought process.

3. Comparative Analysis

3.1. Culture-Specific Items

Culture-specific items—words and expressions denoting objects, practices, or concepts without readily available equivalents in the target culture—constitute one of the most challenging categories for the translator of a classical Chinese novel. Newmark (1988, p. 95) ^[6] defines such items as those "associated with a particular language, culture, and community" that pose "a translation problem due to the cultural gap or distance between source and target languages". *Honglou meng* is saturated with culture-specific items of every kind: material artefacts of Qing-dynasty daily life, items of dress, food, architecture, domestic ritual, games, medicine, and social institutions.

The vocabulary of social institutions offers revealing contrasts. In the poetry club episode, Li Wan chides Wang Xi-feng for her reluctance to fund the young ladies' literary activities. The original reads: "这会子他们起诗社·能用几个钱·你就不管了?" Hawkes renders "诗社" (poetry

society) as "a poetry dub", a colloquial British term evoking a casual, amateur association. The Yangs translate it as "this poetry club", a neutral standard-English rendering. Hawkes's "dub" domesticates the refined literary gatherings of an eighteenth-century Chinese aristocratic household into the idiom of an English social club, making the practice familiar while erasing its cultural specificity. The Yangs' "poetry club" allows the reader to sense that something culturally distinct is being described.

A representative example appears in Chapter 3, when Dai-yu first arrives at the Rong-guo mansion and is served tea. The original text mentions "盖碗" (gaiwan), a lidded teacup. Hawkes renders this as "covered cups", a transparent descriptive equivalent that domesticates the item by making its function immediately clear to the English reader. The Yangs, however, use the romanized form "gaiwan" without annotation, preserving the foreign word and obliging the reader to infer its meaning from context or consult external resources. Newmark (1988) ^[6] classifies Hawkes's procedure as a "descriptive equivalent" and the Yangs' as "transference", and the contrast exemplifies the domestication-foreignization spectrum with textbook clarity. A more elaborate instance concerns the term "炕" (kang), the heated brick bed characteristic of northern Chinese domestic architecture. In Chapter 6, when Grannie Liu visits the Wang family, the kang features centrally in the description of the room. Hawkes translates this as "the kang", italicizing the word to signal its foreignness, and provides a brief explanatory gloss in his introduction: "a brick bed with a hollow interior through which the flue of the stove passes, keeping it warm in winter". The Yangs also use "kang" but provide no annotation, assuming either that the well-disposed reader will research the term or that the context will suffice.

Both versions resort to transference for this item, but Hawkes supplements it with paratextual domestication, bringing the reader into the foreign culture through explanation, while the Yangs leave the foreign object standing unmediated in the text.

Food provides another rich domain for comparison. The novel's famous banquet scenes are catalogs of culinary specificity. In Chapter 41, Grannie Liu eats "茄鲞" (qixiang), a complex dish of dried eggplant prepared with chicken fat and numerous seasonings. Hawkes renders this as "dried aubergine", obscuring the elaborate preparation but making the item instantly recognizable. The Yangs translate more literally as "fried egg-plant", which, while closer to the Chinese, loses the specificity of the dish's elaborate production. Neither version fully conveys the cultural richness of the original, but Hawkes's choice prioritizes immediate readability, while the Yangs' prioritizes lexical fidelity.

Kinship terminology presents another revealing test case. The Chinese family system encoded in *Honglou meng* is extraordinarily complex, with distinct terms for elder and younger siblings, paternal and maternal relatives, and affinal relations of every degree. In Chapter 3, when Dai-yu first meets her maternal grandmother, the Dowager, the network of kin terms used by the assembled characters constitutes a miniature ethnography of Qing aristocratic family structure. Hawkes simplifies this system, using English kin terms—"Aunt", "Uncle", "Cousin"—that flatten the Chinese distinctions. The Yangs retain the full specificity of the original terms, frequently using transliterations such as "jiu mu" (舅母, maternal uncle's wife) and "biao sao" (表嫂, elder male cousin's wife), supplemented by contextual explanation. Hawkes's simplification makes the social world of the novel more immediately navigable for the English reader; the Yangs' retention of distinctions makes it more authentic but significantly harder to parse.

3.2. Names and Appellations

The translation of names in *Honglou meng* poses the most formidable challenge in the entire novel. Chinese personal names in the novel are not arbitrary labels but dense semantic clusters: they encode character, fate, social relationship, and often participate in elaborate networks of homophonic and allusive meaning. The names of the twelve principal female characters in the "Jinling Twelve Beauties" register, for instance, form a system of symbolic correspondences that no translation can fully reproduce.

Hawkes's approach to names is systematic and programmatic. He distinguishes between several categories of characters and applies different strategies to each. For the principal aristocratic characters, he uses romanized forms—Bao-yu, Dai-yu, Bao-chai—often simplified from standard pinyin orthography to make them more pronounceable for the English reader. For the servants and maids, however, he substitutes English semantic equivalents: Aroma (袭人, Xiren, literally "assails men" but implying a pervasive fragrance), Skybright (晴雯, Qingwen, "clear/sunny cloud patterns"), and Patience (平儿, Ping'er, a diminutive meaning "peace"). For religious figures, he similarly uses English equivalents: Vanitas (空空道人, the Taoist Void), Impervioso (茫茫大士, the Vast Buddhist Monk), and Mysterioso (渺渺真人, the Ethereal Daoist).

The Yangs adopt a starkly different strategy. They romanize virtually all names without semantic translation, regardless of the character's social status. Thus, the maid Xiren remains Xiren (or Hsi-jen in their Wade-Giles system), not Aroma. The religious figures are rendered descriptively: the Taoist Void becomes "the Taoist of the Void" and "茫茫大士" becomes "the Buddhist of Infinite Space". The Yangs' approach preserves the Chinese sound-world of the novel but sacrifices the semantic richness that Hawkes partially recuperates through his domesticating equivalents.

The consequences of these divergent strategies are profound. When an English reader of Hawkes encounters the name "Aroma", the sensory connotation is immediately available, and Hawkes can exploit this in his translation of passages where the character's name is thematically significant. When Xiren is rebuked by her mistress, the irony can be rendered through the English name: "Aroma, indeed! A fine smell you are!" The Yangs, unable to exploit the semantic content of "Xiren" for the English reader, must either ignore the wordplay or resort to explanatory circumlocution. Hawkes's strategy, however, comes at a cost: the substitution of English for Chinese names severs the text from its linguistic origins and creates a hybrid fictional world in which masters bear Chinese names and servants bear English ones—a hierarchy that, as some critics have noted, inadvertently reproduces social distinctions in the target text.

A concrete example from the poetry club chapters illustrates the practical consequences. When Wang Xi-feng jokingly accuses her visitors of coming to avenge her maid, the original text names the maid "平儿" (Ping'er). Hawkes renders the line as "it was revenge for Patience", while the Yangs write "simply to avenge Pinger". The Hawkes version makes the name immediately meaningful to the English reader: "Patience" evokes a personality trait that colors the reader's perception of the character. The Yangs' "Pinger" preserves the sound of the Chinese name but conveys no semantic information beyond what the narrative context supplies. The difference is emblematic: Hawkes's domesticating choice gives the reader immediate access to characterological meaning but at the cost of cultural authenticity; the Yangs' foreignizing choice preserves authenticity but requires the reader to build understanding gradually through context.

3.3. Poetry and Verse

Honglou meng contains an estimated two hundred and twenty poems, songs, couplets, and riddles, distributed across every chapter and embedded at every level of the narrative: as inscriptions on architecture, as character compositions, as prophetic dream-visions, and as chapter-heading couplets. The poetry is not decorative but functionally integral to the novel's narrative structure, serving as a vehicle for characterization, foreshadowing, and thematic commentary. Translating this poetry requires not only linguistic competence but also a theory of poetic equivalence.

Hawkes's treatment of the novel's verse is perhaps the most

virtuosic feature of his translation. He consistently renders Chinese regulated verse (律诗) into English rhymed couplets or quatrains in iambic pentameter, drawing on the resources of the English poetic tradition from Pope to Tennyson. His versions read as accomplished English poems in their own right. Consider his rendering of the couplet inscribed at the

entrance to the Land of Illusion in Chapter 5:

*When truth is false and false is true,
What is there left for us to do?*

The original reads:

假作真时真亦假·无为有处有还无。

Hawkes's version achieves formal elegance and aphoristic compression at the cost of philosophical specificity: the Daoist paradox of being and non-being (有无) is reduced to a simpler opposition between truth and falsehood. The cultural-philosophical resonance of the original is domesticated into a proverb-like English couplet.

The Yangs translate the same couplet much more literally:

*When false is taken for true, true becomes false;
If non-being turns into being, being becomes non-being.*

The Yangs' version is prosier and less memorable as English verse, but it preserves the philosophical terminology—being (有) and non-being (无)—that is central to the novel's Daoist metaphysics. Where Hawkes gives the English reader a polished English poem, the Yangs give a semantic key to the Chinese original, and these represent two fundamentally different conceptions of what a translation of poetry should accomplish.

The songs of the Twelve Beauties in Chapter 5 present even greater challenges, for they are acrostic poems whose visual form participates in the production of meaning. The character's name is often embedded in the poem through various devices: homophony, character decomposition, or allusion. Hawkes transforms these into English verse that preserves the general sense and mood but abandons the formal acrostic structure. The Yangs attempt to preserve more of the literal meaning and a sense of the formal patterning, but their versions are significantly harder to read as poetry. In both cases, significant loss is inevitable: "No translation of a poem", as Lefevere (1992, p. 10) ^[5] observes, "can ever hope to reproduce all the features of the original".

3.4. Religious and Philosophical Terminology

The intellectual universe of Honglou meng is a syncretic blend of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, and the novel's philosophical vocabulary poses distinctive translation problems. The stone that begins the narrative is a leftover from the goddess Nüwa's repair of the heavens, a myth that fuses Daoist cosmology with Buddhist notions of karmic debt. The narrative frame involves a Buddhist monk and a Daoist priest who carry the stone into the world of human desire and suffering, and the novel's conclusion affirms a Buddhist vision of ultimate emptiness (空, kong).

The translation of these religious terms reveals the most extreme divergence between the two versions. Hawkes systematically substitutes Christian or quasi-Christian terminology for Buddhist and Daoist concepts. The term "仙" (xian, a Daoist immortal or transcendent being) becomes "saint" or "holy man". The "空空道人" becomes "Vanitas", a name drawn from the Latin of Ecclesiastes ("Vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas"), a move that inscribes the novel's Buddhist themes within a Judeo-Christian frame of reference. "阿弥陀佛" (Amitabha Buddha, an invocation), ubiquitous in the speech of the novel's characters, becomes "Holy Name" or "Blessed Name of the Lord", a domestication so thoroughgoing that the Buddhist origins of the expression are entirely effaced.

The Yangs, working from a Marxist-influenced Chinese institutional context that regarded religion with suspicion, nevertheless preserve Buddhist and Daoist terminology more faithfully than Hawkes. They use "immortal" for "仙", "Buddha" for "佛", and "the Reverend Void" for "空空道人". Their approach is foreignizing in Venuti's sense: it preserves the cultural specificity of the source text's religious vocabulary and requires the English reader to engage with a genuinely foreign conceptual system.

The most consequential instance of religious domestication in Hawkes concerns the novel's governing concept of "情" (qing). Qing is a complex term that encompasses romantic love, erotic desire, sentiment, passion, and a quasi-Buddhist attachment to the phenomenal world. Hawkes consistently translates it as "love", a domestication that makes the term familiar but loses its philosophical density. The Yangs vary their translation according to context—"love", "passion", "sentiment"—but do not attempt a single consistent rendering. The loss is significant because qing functions as a thematic keystone: the novel's hero, Jia Bao-yu, is defined by his excessive qing, and the novel's central tension between qing (attachment) and kong (emptiness) mirrors the Buddhist path from illusion to enlightenment. As Wong (2014, p. 112) notes, "the conceptual pairing of qing and kong is the philosophical axis on which the entire novel turns".

A final illuminating example concerns the Chinese concept of "缘" (yuan), often translated as "fate", "destiny", or "predestined affinity". Yuan is a Buddhist concept denoting the karmic connection between individuals, and it pervades the novel's treatment of the love between Bao-yu and Dai-yu, who are said to have a "木石前缘" (a predestined bond of wood and stone from a former existence). Hawkes renders yuan consistently as "fate" and the wood-stone bond as a "predestined attachment", terms that are conceptually available within a Western framework. The Yangs use "predestined relationship" and "predestined bond", preserving something of the Buddhist resonance but without the conceptual specificity of the original term. Neither translation fully captures the richness of yuan, which combines elements of fate, affinity, causation, and emotional connection in a way that has no Western equivalent. This example illustrates the ultimate limit of both domesticating and foreignizing strategies: some concepts are so deeply embedded in a particular cultural and philosophical tradition that no translation strategy can fully convey them. In such cases, the best a translator can do is to provide a partial approximation and trust that cumulative context will deepen the reader's understanding over the course of the novel.

4. Discussion

The comparative analysis above reveals that the Hawkes-Minford and Yang versions of Honglou meng represent not merely different translations but fundamentally different conceptions of what translation should accomplish. Hawkes, by his own account, sought to create "a complete and living experience" for the English reader (Cao, 1973, p. 46) ^[1]. His translation is animated by what Nida (1964) ^[7] would call dynamic equivalence: it strives to produce in the Anglophone reader an aesthetic and emotional response analogous to that of the Chinese reader. To achieve this, Hawkes willingly sacrifices formal and semantic fidelity at every level—from

the title of the novel itself to the names of its characters, the texture of its poetry, and the vocabulary of its religious worldview. His is a translation of maximum readability, a text that can be picked up by any educated English reader and enjoyed as a novel in the familiar tradition of the great European nineteenth-century fictions.

The Yangs' translation proceeds from an antithetical premise. As state-employed translators working in the late 1970s, they were tasked with producing a version that would represent Chinese culture accurately to a foreign audience. Their translation prioritizes formal equivalence: it hews closely to the structures, lexicon, and cultural references of the source text, even when this produces an English text that is less fluent, less idiomatic, and arguably less pleasurable to read. The Yangs preserve the novel's Chineseness at the cost of some of its literary effectiveness in English.

The theoretical implications of this comparison extend beyond the case of *Honglou meng*. Venuti's (2008) advocacy for foreignizing translation as an ethical imperative—a means of resisting the ethnocentric violence of domestication—finds partial support in the Yangs' version, which indeed preserves more of the source culture's specificity. Yet the Yangs' version also illustrates the limitations of foreignization as an unqualified good. A foreignizing translation that is too forbidding may simply not be read, and an unread translation effects no cultural transmission at all. The Yangs' *A Dream of Red Mansions* has never achieved the readership of Hawkes's *The Story of the Stone* in the English-speaking world, and it is the latter that has entered the Penguin Classics canon and become the standard text for university courses in world literature.

Conversely, Hawkes's domesticating translation demonstrates that extreme domestication can produce a text that, for all its elegance and readability, systematically erases cultural difference. When Buddhist monks become Christian saints and Daoist immortals become holy men, something essential to the novel's intellectual identity is lost. The reader of Hawkes encounters a *Honglou meng* that has been subtly reshaped to fit Western expectations of what a great novel should be, and this reshaping, however brilliantly executed, constitutes cultural appropriation.

The question of paratextual mediation is also instructive. Hawkes's translation is accompanied by extensive introductions, appendices, and footnotes explaining Chinese customs, allusions, and linguistic features. These paratexts bring the foreign within reach through explanation rather than substitution. The Yangs' translation provides minimal paratextual support: brief introductions, sparse footnotes, and the reader is left to navigate the text's cultural density unaided. Hawkes domesticates the text but educates the reader through paratext; the Yangs foreignize the text but provide little scaffolding. The ideal translation might combine Hawkes's extensive paratext with a version preserving more of the source text's cultural specificity.

The most productive perspective, as Toury (2012) suggests, may be to regard the two translations not as competitors but as complementary realizations of the source text's potential for meaning, each serving different readerships and different functions within the English-language literary polysystem. For the general reader seeking an immersive literary experience, Hawkes's version is clearly superior. For the scholar, the student of Chinese culture, or the reader who wishes to approach the text as a document of Chinese civilization rather than as a work of universal literature, the

Yangs' version offers access to dimensions of the original that Hawkes's domestication occludes.

This complementarity mirrors a broader dialectic in translation practice. As Bassnett (2013, p. 49) ^[1] argues, "the translator has to negotiate between the requirement of faithfulness to the source text and the requirement of acceptability in the target culture, and the history of translation theory can be read as a series of attempts to theorize this negotiation". The two English versions of *Honglou meng* embody the poles of this negotiation with unusual clarity, and their coexistence is a gift to readers and scholars alike.

5. Conclusion

This paper has compared the two complete English translations of Cao Xueqin's *Honglou meng*—David Hawkes and John Minford's *The Story of the Stone* and Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang's *A Dream of Red Mansions*—across four textual dimensions: culture-specific items, names and appellations, poetry and verse, and religious and philosophical terminology. The analysis has demonstrated that the Hawkes-Minford version consistently adopts a domesticating strategy, transforming Chinese cultural specificities into familiar English forms to maximize fluency and readability. The Yangs' version adopts a predominantly foreignizing strategy, preserving the lexical, formal, and cultural strangeness of the source text and requiring the English reader to meet the Chinese original on something closer to its own terms.

The comparison has drawn on Venuti's (2008) domestication-foreignization framework, Nida's (1964) ^[7] distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence, and Newmark's (1988) ^[6] translation procedures to provide theoretical grounding for the close textual analysis. It has also situated both translations within their respective historical and institutional contexts, drawing on Lefevere's (1992) ^[5] concept of translation as rewriting and Toury's (2012) descriptive translation studies to account for the different translational norms governing each project.

The enduring significance of this comparative study lies in what it reveals about the complexity of literary translation across widely separated cultural traditions. The translation of a work as culturally and linguistically dense as *Honglou meng* inevitably involves trade-offs that no single translation strategy can resolve. Every translation decision—the rendering of a name, the handling of a poem, the choice of a religious term—entails both gain and loss, and the losses are distributed differently across the two versions. The English reader who reads only one version will encounter a *Honglou meng* that is partially shaped by its translator's strategy, while the reader who consults both versions will glimpse something closer to the dense, polyvalent richness of the original.

For future scholarship, this comparison suggests productive directions. The growing availability of digital corpora and computational tools offers new possibilities for large-scale comparative study of the two versions, moving beyond the selective close reading that characterizes most existing scholarship. The question of readership reception—how actual readers respond to the two translation strategies—remains underexplored. As new translations of Chinese classical literature continue to appear, the questions raised by the two English versions of *Honglou meng*—about cultural fidelity, readability, and the ethics of translation—will remain urgently relevant.

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