

Original Paper

An Analysis of Jia Tanchun's "Three Talents" Character Image in the English Translation of *Dream of the Red Mansions*— Based on David Hawkes's and Yang Xianyi's Versions

Jinyan Gu¹

¹ School of English Studies, Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an, China

Received: February 15, 2024

Accepted: March 1, 2024

Online Published: March 18, 2024

doi:10.22158/elsr.v5n1p147

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/elsr.v5n1p147>

Abstract

The current study aims to analyze the characterization of Jia Tanchun in English versions of Dream of the Red Chamber translated by David Hawkes and Yang Xianyi. As an important character in Dream of the Red Chamber, Jia Tanchun's image may differ in different English translations. By comparing and analyzing the translations of the two versions, this study reveals the ways in which different translations portray the character of Jia Tanchun and the cultural factors involved. By analyzing the translated texts about Jia Tanchun in the two versions, the current study finds that in Hawkes's translation, the image of Jia Tanchun is endowed with a kind of wisdom, calmness and thoughtfulness, while Yang Xianyi's translation highlights Jia Tanchun's boldness, passion and adventurousness more. This may stem from the differences in the translators' understanding of the original image of Jia Tanchun, as well as the influence of translation style and cultural background. In the process of translation, the characterization of Jia Tanchun's "three talents" has attracted much attention. Based on the two versions, this study analyzes Jia Tanchun's talents in management, learning and handling. The characterization of Jia Tanchun's "three talents" is comprehensively presented in Hawkes's and Yang Xianyi's translations. Additionally, this study provides a new perspective for the translation of Dream of the Red Chamber and calls on translators to emphasize the shaping and expression of the characters in the process of translation and convey the rich connotation of the original. Meanwhile, readers should also keep an open and comparative mind when reading different translations to understand the work from multiple perspectives.

Keywords

Dream of the Red Chamber, Jia Tanchun, English translation, characterization

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Dream of the Red Chamber is a precious treasure in the history of ancient Chinese literature and is widely regarded as one of the classics of world literature. With the growing interest in Chinese literature worldwide, the attention of western readers to *Dream of the Red Chamber* is also increasing. However, due to linguistic and cultural differences, the challenge of accurately translating this cultural treasure into other languages is enormous. Especially in the English-speaking world, translators' efforts have yielded mixed results. Jia Tanchun is a key character role in the book, and her portrayal demonstrates the complex and rich characterization of the work. However, different English translations tend to present slightly different images of Jia Tanchun. Therefore, this study aims to take the English translations of *Dream of the Red Chamber* translated by Hawkes and Yang Xianyi as an example to analyze the ways of portraying Jia Tanchun's character and translation strategies in different translations. In this era of globalization, the importance of cross-cultural communication and literary translation is becoming more and more prominent. By deeply analyzing the interpretation of Jia Tanchun's image by different translators, we can reveal the ways of characterization in different cultural contexts. This can not only expand our understanding of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, but also be of great significance to the study of cross-cultural communication and literary translation. The study of the characterization of Jia Tanchun focuses on the choices and expressions of different translators in the translation process, as well as the differences in the translators' understanding of the image of Jia Tanchun in the original text. By comparing the translations of different versions, we can explore in depth the influence of translation on the interpretation of the characterization, and at the same time, we can also understand the cultural factors and concepts behind different translations. This will provide new perspectives for us to better understand and appreciate the value and influence of *Dream of the Red Chamber* in the international arena. To sum up, this study takes the English translations of *Dream of the Red Chamber* translated by Hawkes and Yang Xianyi as an example in the context of globalization, aiming to explore the ways in which the character of Jia Tanchun is portrayed in different English translations. This is of great practical and theoretical significance for expanding our understanding of the work and delving into cross-cultural translation and literary studies.

1.2 Significance of the Study

(1) Revealing the differences in the presentation of Jia Tanchun's image in different English translations: Jia Tanchun, as a character in *Dream of the Red Chamber* rich in talent, managerial ability, scholarly cultivation and ability to handle affairs, may have a different image in different English translations. Studying the variations of Jia Tanchun's image can reveal the translators' tendency to select and present specific features, and understand the translators' interpretation of the character's image in *A Dream of Red Mansions* and the translation's target audience's frame of reference.

(2) Exploring the interaction between translation strategies and target cultures: Translation is a process of linguistic and cultural transformation, and how Jia Tanchun's image of "three talents" is transformed

in the English translation is a question worth exploring. Studying the translation strategies and techniques of different translators can provide insight into the importance and choice of the author's image in cross-cultural translation. In addition, translation strategies can also reflect the target culture's perception of the characteristics of the image and the translator's understanding of the target readers.

(3) Providing reference for comparative literature research: *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a masterpiece of Chinese literature, which has had a profound impact on world literature. The study of the English translation of Jia Tanchun's image contributes to the further development of the field of comparative literature research. By comparing the differences of Jia Tanchun's image in different English translations, the unique charm of Chinese literary image in the process of acceptance and transformation of Western literature can be explored in depth, which reveals the way of presenting and effect of literary image in cross-cultural communication.

In conclusion, this dissertation studies the presentation of Jia Tanchun's "three talents" in the English translation of *Dream of Red Mansions*, which is of great value to the fields of literary translation, cultural transformation and comparative literary studies. Through this study, we can gain a deeper understanding of the evolution of Jia Tanchun's image and the choice of translation strategies, and provide new perspectives for the understanding of literary images in cross-cultural communication.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

(1) Analyzing the focus of different translations on Jia Tanchun's image: By comparing and analyzing the translations of Hawkes and Yang Xianyi, the researcher can reveal the focus of the two translators on Jia Tanchun's image. Different translations may differ in their expressions of Jia Tanchun's "talent", "talent in management", "talent in learning", and "talent in handling affairs". There are differences in the expression of "talent", "talent in management", "talent in learning" and "talent in handling affairs". By analyzing these differences, we can gain a deeper understanding of the translators' understanding of Jia Tanchun's portrayal and transformation strategies, as well as the portrayal of the character in different translations.

(2) Revealing the influence of translation on the communication of literary characterization: Translation is a process of cross-cultural communication, in which the characterization of the original work is reproduced in the translation through linguistic transformation and cultural transfer. Studying different translators' choice and portrayal of Jia Tanchun's "three talents" can explore the importance of translation in literature and analyze the impact of the translation process on the communication of character image, thus broadening our understanding of literary translation.

(3) Providing readers with a multi-dimensional understanding of Jia Tanchun's image: Jia Tanchun is one of the most popular characters in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and his attribute of "three talents" plays an important role in the novel. The study of Jia Tanchun's image in different English translations can provide readers with a multi-dimensional understanding. Through this study, readers can gain an in-depth understanding of Jia Tanchun's talents, managerial skills, academic cultivation, and ability to handle affairs, and reflect on the presentation and interpretation of these attributes in different translations.

In conclusion, this study can analyze the focus of different translations on the image of Jia Tanchun, reveal the impact of translation on image communication, and provide readers with a multi-dimensional understanding of Jia Tanchun's image.

2. Literature Review

In analyzing Jia Tanchun's image, scholars have explored it from different perspectives. Zhao Xiaomei (2017) analyzes Jia Tanchun's character, ability and talent, describing her as a “玫瑰” of ice and jade, shrewdness and ambition, and unassuming. Lu et al. (2014), on the other hand, start from the tragedy of Jia Tanchun's life and discuss the reasons behind the tragedy, including the pressure of the real social environment, the collapse of the family's destiny, and the entanglement of the weak personal starting point and lofty ambitions. With the emergence of different versions of translations, scholars have begun to compare and analyze the differences between the translations and the original from the perspective of the translations. Among them, some scholars take Hawkes's translation as a research object to explore its cognitive strategies in reshaping the female characters. In the original text, Jia Tanchun is praised as “敏” for her resourcefulness and cleverness, demonstrating the trait of resourcefulness and competence. Although she treats her birth mother, Aunt Zhao, with harsh words, she is essentially a noble lady, gentle and refined, and treats Aunt Zhao with respect and courtesy in her daily life. However, in Hawkes' translation, Jia Tanchun's shrewd majesty as an administrator is further emphasized. Her treatment of Aunt Zhao also becomes more sensitive and caustic. At the same time, her aristocratic qualities of elegance and propriety are weakened, transforming her from a politically minded lady to a purely shrewd administrator. This change had an impact on the portrayal of Jia Tanchun, thus giving her a slightly different image from the original in Hawkes's translation.

For the study of the English translation of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, scholars have approached it from different perspectives, including the translation of the language of the opera, translation strategies, translation of peculiar nouns, the narrative function of imagery, and cognitive translation studies. However, there have been fewer explorations of Jia Tanchun's image in translation so far. Therefore, this paper takes two translations by Hawkes and Yang Xianyi as examples to explore the portrayal of Jia Tanchun's image in the translations and the originals, supplementing the research gaps in this field.

3. The Image of “Three Talents”—“Talent in Management”, “Talent in Learning”, and “Talent in Handling Affairs”

3.1 Talent in Management

In the translation of the title “敏探春兴利除宿弊” of the 56th chapter, Hawkes uses the word “resourceful” to describe “敏”. The choice of word is very accurate because “resourceful” means that “敏” appears to be very adaptable and resourceful, and she is able to flexibly utilize her skills and resources to solve problems. Such an adjective makes this image more vivid, and it also conveys her ingenuity in trying to solve the problems of the Jia Mansion. On the other hand, Yang chooses “clever” to translate “敏”.

Although it can also convey the meaning of cleverness, it's a bit bland compared to "resourceful", which emphasizes more on resourcefulness and less on her adaptability and creative thinking in the face of adversity. In the 74th chapter, Hawkes uses the words "hard mistress", "obstructive", and "affordably" to emphasize Tantun's composure and calmness when facing the big right and wrong. Among them, "hard mistress" and "brand chief" in Yang's translation highlight Tanshun's firm and upright character, as if in the face of a crisis, she is still able to hold fast to her principles and does not allow her maids to be intruded upon. not to allow her maids to be intruded upon.

Hawkes uses the expression "The beast with a thousand legs is a long time dying." to convey Tantun's metaphor of the gradual decline of the Jia Mansion. This shows the process of Jia Manison's decline more vividly because it emphasizes the phrase "a long time dying", implying that although the "千足之虫" has been dealt a fatal blow, it will still take a long time for it to finally collapse. This expression helps readers to better understand the slow and continuous process of Jia Mansion's decline. On the other hand, Yang's "A centipede even when dead won't fall to the ground." conveys the similar meaning. Although Yang uses "dead", the phrase "won't fall to the ground" indicates that even though this "千足虫" has died, it still hasn't completely collapsed. This can also be interpreted to mean that the Jaia Manison still maintains a certain amount of residual power its decline, or that the process of its downfall is slow and long-lasting. Overall, both Hawkes's and Yang's translations reflect Tanchun's understanding of the state of the Jia Mansion and her talent for stewardship and governance. And while their subtle differences lie in the way they portray the process of the Jia Manison's decline, both cut to the heart of what Tanchun is expressing.

3.2 Talent in Learning

Tanchun demonstrates excellent academic and intellectual abilities in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Her use of language and her choice of terms of address show her keen insight and precise judgment of interpersonal relationships. For example, in her relationship with Aunt Zhao, Tantun does not have any affectionate feelings, so she habitually uses the word "you" to translate "姨娘", which makes Tantun's sensitive, self-respecting and self-reliant image more prominent. In other translations, the translator uses the word "madam", which is more formal, but fails to express the true feelings of Tantun's heart. There are more examples such as Hawkes' use of "Lady Wang" and "Zhao guoji", "mother's brother" to translate "太太", and "舅舅". On the other hand, Yang uses "mistress" and "uncle". Therefore, from the translation of predicates, it is easy to see that Hawkes' translation pays more attention to the context and background, while Yang's translation is closer to the text. From the differences in the translation of titles, we conclude that Tanshun has a strong sensitivity in character relationships, and this slightly contemptuous diction precisely subtracts from her image as a lady of the house and reinforces her own status as a commoner. In addition, in the dialogues in which Tantun commissions Bao Yu to buy something, moreover, in Tantun's exchanges with other characters, her elegance and thoughtfulness are also shown. For example, in the dialog of entrusting Bao Yu to buy something, Tanchun uses the phrase "朴而不俗，直而不拙者" to describe the desired item. This phrase reflects her unique insight into

aesthetic taste. One translator translates it directly as “some things which are simple without being vulgar, and genuine instead of artificial”, while another chooses “The interesting things and the ones that are in good taste”, both of which have their own characteristics. However, Hawkes takes a more creative and personal approach to the translation, translating “simple without being vulgar” as “有趣的, interesting,” which more accurately conveys the meaning of what Tanchun is saying.

In the chapter describing Tanchun, the best example of her talent is the letter Tanchun writes to Bao Yu to form a poetry club (37 Chapter). She skillfully employs several allusions, such as “采薪之患”, “莲社”, “东山”, “棹雪”, “扫花”, and so on, to demonstrate her talent. The two translators have their own focus in translating these allusions, Yang adopts the literal meaning of the words, while Hawkes pays more attention to expressing the meaning of the context. For example, “I caught a chill in the dew” is used by Yang to represent physical discomfort, while Hawkes uses “I was lamentably indisposed”. In addition, Hawkes chooses to use “poetry clubs” to translate “莲社”, while Yang uses “Lotus society”. In translating “棹雪”, Hawkes used “rhyme” while Yang chose “condescend”. These choices make the translation closer to the original text and more vividly reproduce Tanchun’s talent and social skills.

3.3 Talent in Handling Affairs

In *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the description of the character Jia Tanchun not only utilizes rich expressions and actions, but also shapes her unique character image through the translation of these specific words. In particular, in the description of the demeanor and action of Tanchun’s laughing, the translators adopted different translation strategies, adding and subtracting some details, so as to show Tanchun’s different traits, namely, obedience and seriousness, in different occasions. In portraying Tanchun’s majestic image, the translators demonstrated Tanchun’s anger and determination through different word choices. For example, the words “登时沉下脸”, translated as “frown and fumed” (Yang) and “Tan-chun’s smile had vanished” (Hawkes). One translation of “脸白气噎; 抽抽咽咽”, Yang uses “Tan-chun’s face was white with anger. Nearly choking with sobs she demanded” while Hawkes writes “Tan-chun went white, and for a moment anger deprived her of her breath. When she regained it she broke into louder sobs”, which expresses Tan-chun’s inner feelings of anger. What’s more, when translating “益发动了气”, Yang uses “This only enraged Tanchun more” and Hawkes translates it to “This made Tan-chun really angry”.

In addition, in terms of action description, the translators chose different ways of expression to show Tanchun’s personality traits. For example, “Tossing her head” (Yang) and “Her chin went up defiantly” (Hawkes) emphasize Tanchun’s indifference and defiance respectively when translating “将头一扭”. The translation of “now powdering her face, smiled ironically at Pinger” (Yang) and “wiped the traces of tears from her face” (Hawkes) emphasize Tanchun’s indifference and defiance respectively when translating “一面匀脸, 一面冷笑”. By comparing the translations of these details, we can see that Hawkes’ translation emphasizes Tanchun’s decisiveness and determination. His translation adopts some auxiliary words, such as “deprive”, “broke” and “defiantly”, which emphasize Tanchun’s shrewdness, open-mindedness and unconventional boldness in the scene.

In the description of Jia Tanchun's character in the 37th and 55th chapters of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, many expressions and actions are used, and it is not difficult to see the characterization features of the character image by interpreting the translation of these specific words in the context of the time. In the translation of Tanchun's "笑道" gesture and action, both translators adopted both augmented and abbreviated translations, such as omitting "道" and using "chuckle", "smile", "laugh"; and omitting "笑" and using "said", "ask" or use different adjectives and adverbs to express, e.g. "pleasantly", "challengingly", "laughingly"; or emphasize the word "道" by using the phrase "call out". This way of speaking from "道" to "呼喊、召唤" also reflects Tanchun's two very different character traits of docility and seriousness on different occasions.

To summarize, through the detailed description of Tanchun in *Dream of Red Mansions*, especially the translation of expression and action description, we can see that Tanchun possesses distinctive talents in dealing with affairs. Her characterization shows a variety of features such as obedience, seriousness, anger and decisiveness in different occasions, which makes her one of the characters hard to be ignored in this classic work.

4. Conclusion

By analyzing the "three talents" of Jia Tanchun in the English translations of Hawkes and Yang Xianyi, we can see that Jia Tanchun, as a complex and multi-faceted character, has interwoven talents in management, learning and handling with affairs, which together constitute his rich and three-dimensional personality and image. This thesis is of great significance in understanding Jia Tanchun's image and in-depth study of the translation of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. It also helps readers to understand and appreciate the literary classic *Dream of the Red Chamber* more comprehensively.

References

- Cao, X. Q. (1973). *The Story of the Stone* (HAWKES D., Trans.). London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Cao, X. Q. (1978). *A Dream of Red Mansions* (YANG XI, YANG G, Trans.). Beijing: Foreign Languages Press.
- Liu, Z. Q., & Tian, L. (2009). Narrative Markers of *Dream of the Red Chamber* and Their English Translation I - A Corpus-Based Comparative Analysis. *Journal of Foreign Languages*, 1, 106-110.
- Liu, Z. Q., & Zhu, H. (2008). A study of idioms in *Dream of the Red Chamber* and their translation. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 6, 460-466.
- Liu, Z. Q., Tian, L., & Liu, C. P. (2008). The Creation of a Chinese-English Parallel Corpus of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Contemporary Linguistics*, 4, 329-339.
- Lu, C. P., & Du, Y. R. (2014). On the Image of Jia Tanchun and Its Tragedy in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Silk Road*, 6, 57-58.
- Yang, C. (2020). *David Hawkes' Reconstructing the Female Images in The Story of the Stone: A Case Study of Lin Daiyu, Xue Baochai, Jia Tanchun and Wang Xifeng from the Perspective of Cognitive*

Construal, Hunan University. Retrieved from
<https://link.cnki.net/doi/10.27135/d.cnki.ghudu.2020.001989doi:10.27135/d.cnki.ghudu.2020.001989>.

Zhao, X. M. (2017). An Analysis of Jia Tanchun's Image in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Literary Education*, 8, 48-49.

Zhu, L., & W, N. I. (2023). Exploring the English Translation of Yue Opera's *Dream of the Red Chamber* from the Musicality of Opera Language-A Case Study of a Multimodal Corpus. *Journal of Huaqiao University*, 4, 1006-1398.