

Original Paper

A Study of Cultural and Philosophical Resources in *The Gay Genius* from the Perspective of Multisource Transwriting

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Abstract

This paper takes Lin Yutang's The Gay Genius as the research object, based on the theory of multisource transwriting, and explores the translation and rewriting practice of multiple strands of Chinese philosophical and cultural traditions in the portrayal of Su Shi. By analyzing the relationship between "translation" (the transformation based on Su Shi's original text) and "rewriting" (the translator's creative supplementation) in the book, it is found that Lin Yutang adopts a strategy of translation and rewriting integration and creative interpretation. He not only retains the core of the text through literal translation, but also realizes cross-cultural transmission through "rewriting" behaviors such as cultural adaptation and image reconstruction. The research shows that this interactive translation and rewriting is not only faithful to the phased characteristics of Su Shi's thought, but also successfully shapes a Su Shi image with both cultural depth and dissemination power through the creative play of the translator's subjectivity, providing a typical example for the cross-contextual interpretation of traditional Chinese spirit.

Keywords

cultural and philosophical resources, hermeneutics, multisource transwriting theory, translation and writing relations

1. Introduction

The Gay Genius: The Life and Times of Su Tungpo (hereinafter referred to as *The Gay Genius*), known in Chinese as 《苏东坡传》, is a work written directly in English by Lin Yutang. In the English version, some quotations are not based on a single source text, and since the language used for the transwriting is English and the scope of the multisource transwriting is non-native, so *The Gay Genius* can be regarded as a work of multisource transwriting.

Current domestic discussions on *The Gay Genius* focus on the following perspectives. First, starting from the portrayal of Su Shi, analyzing the strategies Lin Yutang employed in shaping his image (Pan Jianwei, 2010; Xu Hua, 2021). Second, from a cross-cultural perspective, exploring Lin Yutang's efforts to meet the expectations of foreign readers (Xu Wenhui, 2022; Zhou Huimin, 2024). Third, from a translation studies perspective, these studies examine translation issues in Lin Yutang's rendering of Su Shi's ci poetry in *The Gay Genius* or its Chinese translation (Shi Jiangang, Shao Bin, 2016; Teng Wenna, 2020). Since the 21st century, as research on Lin Yutang's *The Life of Su Dongpo* 《苏东坡传》 has become more refined, the perspectives adopted have gradually become more innovative. In 2000, Xiao Qingwei examined Lin Yutang's perspective on Su Dongpo from the perspective of Reception Aesthetics (cited in Xu Hua, 2021, p. 224) in his paper, *On the Documentary Orientation of Lin Yutang's The Life of Su Dongpo*. Meanwhile, other studies have focused on how Lin Yutang shaped the image of Su Shi within the context of both Chinese and Western cultures (Pan Jianwei, 2010). As in the field of multisource transwriting, some researchers also explore the translator's behavior. Hui Lingyu (2024) combined the theories of multisource transwriting and embodied-cognitive translology to examine Lin Yutang's multisource transwriting practices in *The Gay Genius*, analyzing his transwriting behavior from the dual dimensions of "interactive experience" and "cognitive processing".

Existing scholarship on *The Gay Genius* has pursued several lines of inquiry. Some studies examine Lin Yutang's strategies in shaping Su Shi's image. Others approach the work from a cross-cultural perspective, looking at how Lin met the expectations of foreign readers. A third group takes up translational issues in Lin's rendering of Su's ci poetry or in the Chinese version of this book. These contributions are valuable. Yet most of them treat Lin's practice as a matter of translation strategy. But the fragmented nature of the source material itself is seldom interrogated. We can find that, in *The Gay Genius*, there are multiple texts from the author's personal knowledge, which fit within Liu Xiaofeng's (2023) definition of multisource transwriting. They are scattered in different chapters of the book in a non-linear way. Although it may be hard to tell the definite source, the original readers can still recognize them due to the same cultural background. We suspect that a closer look at how Lin selects, transforms, and arranges his sources may tell us more about the book's inner logic.

About how to discover the logic, Lin Yutang's preface offers a useful starting point. Su Dongpo was a well-known and widely respected figure who was familiar to both children and adults in China. Lin uses many words to describe Su's personality, "yet that might miss the sum total of what made up of him" (Lin Yutang, 1948, p. IV). We find it woven into Su's official conduct, his personal relationships, and his philosophical reflections. No matter at the peak or the bottom, he can retrieve wisdom and power from these Chinese cultural and philosophical resources. Therefore, the task of this research is to trace how each teaching surfaces in specific passages and how Lin links life experiences of Su Shi with them. To do this, we adopt a hermeneutic framework. Hermeneutics attends to the interpreter's active role in constructing meaning, and this orientation suits our purpose. It allows us to examine the boundary between translation and rewriting. Translation here means the straightforward transfer of content from

Su's original writings. Rewriting refers to Lin's interpretive additions, cultural adjustments, and image-building. The distinction is not always obvious to discover, but it gives us a workable angle for analyzing Lin's choices. We also want to understand how these choices shape the image of Su Shi that Lin ultimately presents to his Western readers. Through detailed analysis in these dimensions, we hope that this approach will clarify the transwriting strategies applied in *The Gay Genius*.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Overview of Hermeneutic Theory

Hermeneutics was originally a method for interpreting religious and literary texts. In translation, it helps us to rethink misunderstandings that arise from linguistic or cultural differences. Friedrich Schleiermacher later expanded the approach. He argued that interpretation should also consider the author's state of mind and the historical context. With these additions, hermeneutics gained influence across many academic fields (Li Jiayi & Wan Hongfang, 2024, p. 116). For our purposes, it offers a practical tool. It directs our attention to how Lin Yutang, as an interpreter, actively constructs meaning rather than simply transmitting it.

In the process of understanding, translating, and interpreting a work, the following procedure is followed: George Steiner proposed a famous theory in four steps—trust, aggression, import, and compensation. Firstly, the translator should have full trust in the value of the source text and understand that it is based on the author's creative intention. Secondly, the translator must engage deeply with the source text. Only in this way can this approach help them grasp its cultural connotations and semantic structure. Thirdly, the translator renders the meaning and form of the source text into the target language. Finally, the translator compensates for the semantic and stylistic losses incurred during translation, so as to achieve a relative balance between the source and target languages. (Li Jiayi & Wan Hongfang, 2024, p. 116).

2.2 Overview of the Theory of Multisource Translation

What is the definition of translation? Translation, as a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural activity, has been defined in many ways throughout history. A notable example in early Chinese theory is Zhi Qian's principle in his *Preface to the Dhammapada*, which advocates "adhering to the original meaning without adding ornamentation." Yan Fu's translation criteria of "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance" have become important standards that China continues to follow today. In overseas studies, Jakobson (2012, p. 127) categorizes translation into three types from a linguistic perspective. Among all of them, interlingual translation represents the broadest category. From the examples above, it is evident that historically, both Eastern and Western definitions of translation have conventionally been understood to fall within the realm of "single text-based" translation. However, this traditional conceptual framework cannot fully account for the entire scope of translation. Wang Hongyin (2015, p. 6) proposed the concept of "cross-language writing" and argued that such texts contain a large number of explicit and implicit elements. Explicit elements refer to quotations with clear sources, whereas implicit elements lack explicit sources. They are products of the translator's mental processing, and local readers, who are masters of

local cultural background, can clearly identify them belonging to local culture, no matter whether such texts fall under the category of implicit elements. In his book *The Gay Genius*, Lin Yutang used a large number of fragmented source texts and mental texts when introducing Su Dongpo and related historical figures. These contents were directly written about local Chinese culture in English. Therefore, *The Gay Genius* can be classified as a work of multisource transwriting.

Multisource transwriting breaks away from the default “single-source” mindset regarding translation sources from the academic field, linking the activities of translation and writing, and expanding the concept of source material to include “multiple sources” and “fragmented sources”. (Liu Xiaofeng, 2023) The writing idea of *The Gay Genius* exactly fits into this range. Lin Yutang cites multiple collections of Su Dongpo’s poetry, records of literary discussions, and biographical texts in his bibliography. With Dongpo as the narrative center, he presents a literary giant whose character embodies from the cultural and philosophical traditions.

3. Manifestations of Cultural and Philosophical Resources in The Gay Genius

Representing the essence of China’s native cultural evolution, the cultural and philosophical resources carry nuances that cannot be fully grasped outside the linguistic frame of Chinese. Consequently, native speakers, shaped by their cultural and linguistic environment, naturally perceive subtle distinctions in usage that outsiders may miss. The handling of culturally specific expressions in the original English text is worth close examination. Such an analysis is not only crucial for Sino-English communication studies. It also serves as a useful starting point for studying multisource transwriting. (Liu Xiaofeng, 2023).

As mentioned by Lin Yutang in the preface, it is a natural disposition that the whole life of Su Dongpo shone through. He embodied the wisdom from Chinese cultural and philosophical resources in his official administration and state affairs, how he treated others, and his philosophical approach to life. His worldview was eclectic, and these life principles ultimately shaped him into an incurable and unflappable optimist. In his youth, while serving in official posts, Su Shi was deeply influenced by Confucian thought and cared deeply for the common people. After being affected by the Wutai Poetry Case, he gradually turned to Buddhism and Daoism to alleviate his inner distress (Wang Shuizhao, 1984, pp. 8-9).

Throughout his life, Su Dongpo held official posts in several places, including Mizhou, Xuzhou, and Huzhou, and his official career was in every respect an embodiment of the ideal that a virtuous minister governs in a golden age.

First, regarding the relationship between ruler and subject. In his *Ten-Thousand-Word Memorial to Emperor Shenzong*, Su Dongpo raised two important points: first, Mencius’s doctrine that sovereign power is bestowed by the people; and second, that those in power should be able to tolerate differing opinions. As Su Dongpo noted in this memorial:

Example 1:

Original Text: “故天下归往谓之王，人各有心谓之独夫。由此观之，人主之所恃者，人心而已。”“若使言无不同，意无不合，更唱叠和，何者非贤。万一有小人其其间，则人主何缘知觉？” (Lin Yutang, 2018, p. 108)

Target Text: But the line of division, determining whether the people go with the ruler or against him, is extremely tenuous. He who can command the support of millions becomes a king, while he who alienates their support of the millions becomes a solitary private individual. The basis of the ruler's power lies, therefore, entirely in the support of the people in their hearts (Lin Yutang, 1948, p. 105).

Lin Yutang translated “天下归往谓之王” as “He who is able to command the support of millions becomes a king,” accurately conveying that royal authority derives from the will of the people. From an academic perspective, this people-based thought shares the same origin and roots as Xunzi's idea that “water can support a boat, but it can also capsize it.” By borrowing the relationship between water and a boat to symbolize the relationship between the ruler and the people, it evokes associations with this concrete metaphor for Chinese readers.

Second, in the realm of family ethics. Su Dongpo treated his wife with sincere and deep affection and put the principle of filial piety into practice through concrete actions. His conduct was deeply aligned with the values of “cultivating oneself and putting one's household in order.”

In his marriage, Su Dongpo cherished his wife, Wang Fu. After her untimely death, he not only obeyed his father's wishes and had her buried beside his mother's grave, but also composed a piece of renowned ci in her memory, titled “Jiang Cheng Zi: Recording My Dream on the Night of the Twentieth Day of the First Month of the Year Yimao (《江城子·乙卯正月二十日夜记梦》)” on the tenth anniversary of her death:

Example 2:

Original Text: 纵使相逢应不识，尘满面，鬓如霜。……相顾无言，惟有泪千行。

Target Text:

And even if we did meet
How would you greet
My weathered face, my hair a frosty white?
...
We looked at each other in silence,
With misty eyes beneath the candle-light (Lin Yutang, 1948, p. 66).

Now we can compare the translation with the original text. There are three noteworthy differences.

The first involves sentence structure. In the original, Su Shi uses a declarative tone. He is speculating about his wife's inability to recognize him. This type of tone suggests that it is hard for his wife to recognize his aged and haggard appearance upon their reunion. The mood is melancholic, even resigned. In translation, Lin Yutang turns it into a question. Although the shift is subtle, it's very telling. The interrogative form brings out the poet's anxiety more directly. The worry is no longer just stated. It is voiced, as if in real time. A second difference lies in the wording. If we adopt a literal translation, the

original line “尘满面，鬓如霜” will be translated into “dust covers my face, my temples are like frost.” Lin chose an ingenious word, “weathered”, which inherently conveys the sense of having endured the hardships of life. What’s more, compared to the original, it forms a more tightly connected intertextual relationship with the second half of the line. Thirdly, Lin Yutang tactfully used imagery, which bridges the association with a famous poem. He adds “candlelight” to the scene. The original has no such detail, but the addition creates a fitting atmosphere. The dim light, the tearful gaze, the wordless encounter. For a Chinese reader, this naturally brings to mind Li Shangyin’s famous line: “蜡炬成灰泪始干”, which means the candle burns to ashes, and tears dry only at the end. Lin does not cite it explicitly. He placed a hook to let readers explore by themselves.

Also, Wang Fu’s burial location is worth noting. After marrying Su Dongpo, she left her own family and became part of the Su household. When she died, Su Dongpo had her buried beside his mother’s grave. In this way, Su Dongpo completed his father’s wishes. He was also observing a conventional ritual that younger family members are laid to rest near their elders. This arrangement carries a traditional Chinese implication. The husband is the guiding principle for the wife. Zhu Xi, a well-known ancient scholar, put it plainly: “A wife follows her husband because she regards him as heaven.” The burial practice may be read as an enactment of this ethical view.

We now turn to another dimension of cultural thought. It concerns personal cultivation. Su Dongpo left this observation:

Example 3:

Original Text: 处贫贱易，处富贵难。安劳苦易，安闲散难。忍痛易，忍痒难。人能安闲散，耐富贵，忍痒，真有道之士也。 (Lin Yutang, 2018, p. 116)

Target Text: It is easier to stand poverty than success, easier to stand hard work than leisure, and easier to stand a pain than an itch. If a man can take success well, be happy in leisure, and stand an itch, he must indeed be a man of great principles (Lin Yutang, 1948, p. 115).

It is obvious that Su Dongpo gives several groups of concepts and makes a contrast between them, trying to get a definition of “a man of great principles.” And we can find echoes in these Confucian classics. In *The Analects: Xue Er* (《论语·学而》), Confucius proposed, “Be content with poverty and find joy in it; be wealthy and uphold propriety.” In *the Analects*, Confucius praises his student Yan Hui. He notes that Yan Hui lives on a meager meal of rice and a gourd of water in a shabby lane. Others could not bear such hardship. Yet Yan Hui never loses his joy. This is the mindset of embracing poverty and finding contentment in it. Lin Yutang’s translation keeps the comparative structure intact. With such a strategy, the parallel structure of the original comes through without difficulty. It also contains similar reflections on a measured attitude toward wealth and honor. One line says a rich man should be “Rich, yet a student of ritual” (Waley’s translation, 1938, p. 11). Another observes that “wealth and honor cannot corrupt one” (Legge’s translation, 1895, p. 270). What these passages reflect is a wariness of pride and extravagance. Excessive wealth tends to breed moral decay. This view seems to resonate with Su Dongpo’s notion of

“耐富贵”, which is well captured in English as “take success well”. This English wording suggests a composed, unshaken attitude no matter in prosperity or in poverty.

In his transwriting, based on views of wealth and poverty, Lin Yutang translated “有道之士” as “a man of great principle”. The abstract “Dao” becomes “principle” in his translation, a move that serves a clear purpose. Western readers may find “principle” more familiar than a culturally foreign term like “Dao”. He is trying to preserve the moral trait of Su Dongpo’s language while making it accessible to an audience who is not familiar with the Chinese tradition.

Su Shi frequently used classical allusions in his poetry in concise wording. Among his works, many condensed images show the spirit of Chinese philosophical resources. One example occurs during his boat trips through Sichuan to the capital. Su Shi passed a place said to be the residence of a Daoist priest before his ascension into the heavens in broad daylight. Legend has it that a white deer accompanied him there. Lin Yutang remarked that this poem sufficiently demonstrates Dongpo’s transcendent spirit and traits, which means treating fame and fortune with a detached mind.

Example 4:

Original Text: 日月何促促, 尘世苦局束。仙子去无踪, 故山遗白鹿。(Lin Yutang, 2018, pp. 46-47)

Target Text:

The unremitting wheels of time turn round,

And we to this terrestrial life are bound.

The fairy went to his celestial home,

And left his deer upon the sainted mound. (Lin Yutang, 1948, p. 41)

The poem offers a glimpse of Dongpo’s transcendent disposition. We can see it in his stance toward the mundane, in his longing for an otherworldly realm, and in the image of the solitary white deer. The opening lines register a complaint that time moves too fast, and worldly life feels cramped and oppressive. This sentiment seeks release from social conventions and a return to nature’s spontaneous order. According to the author’s speculation, in Lin’s rendering, “And we to this terrestrial life are bound” accurately captures that sense of being fettered to worldly standards.

The ascension of the fairy reminds readers of a classic Chinese image. In that tradition, an immortal sheds the mortal body and rises into the sky in broad daylight, a gesture that conveys spiritual liberation from physical constraints. Yet Lin’s translation specifies the destination as “went to his celestial home,” which fits the English writing traditions to explicate abstract things. In this way, it sets up a clear contrast with the earlier wording “terrestrial life.”

The white deer is not a casual detail accidentally mentioned in this poem. In traditional Chinese culture, it carries layered meaning. Deer, which dwell in mountains and forests, far from human society, live in a way that reflects the ideal of following nature. After the immortal departs, the deer remains behind to guard the mountain. It becomes a symbol of the natural realm, still intact, untouched by worldly corruption. Lin’s choice of “the sainted mound” for “故山” brings out the sacred quality of the place. It renders the mountain not as mere geography but as a site imbued with the quality of being transcendent.

Su Dongpo's satirical poems contain numerous citations from Zhuangzi. Through these allusions, he subtly criticized the powerful for their clinging to titles and ranks, as well as the petty-mindedness of those vying for power.

Example 5:

Original Text: 相夸绶若若，犹诵麦青青。腐鼠何劳吓，高鸿本自冥 (Lin Yutang, 2018, p. 174)。

Target Text: They show off their flowing belts to each other,

And sing of the wheat's shining green.

Thanks for your exhibition of rotten mice,

But the high-flying crane dives into the clouds. (Lin Yutang, 1948, p. 177).

Lin Yutang explains the allusion in this poem in the afterword. The phrase “麦青青” refers back to a passage in *Zhuangzi*, which itself quotes *the Book of Songs* (《诗经》), “The green wheat grows on the hillsides. If one does not give generously in life, why should one hold a pearl in one's mouth after death?” The image in the lines is quite plain. The green wheat grows on the hillsides. People who hoard wealth and refuse to give will end up in the earth, just like the green wheat. A pearl in the mouth at burial does not change that outcome. Such cultural imagery is closely linked to the central theme conveyed by the classical text. Lin spells out this connection for his English readers, helping them see past the surface image and grasp what the allusion actually says. In Zhuangzi's view, official titles and status were like a “rotten mouse”. His own aspirations were noble and untainted, away from the strife over others' positions of power. By employing this allusion in his poem, Su Dongpo expressed the same state of mind.

Yin and yang, concepts which originate from *Laozi*, are widely discussed and provide later generations with a deeper understanding of the dialectical unity of all things. “All things bear yin and embrace yang; the harmonious interplay of these forces brings balance.” (Laozi, 2015: Chapter 42) Coincidentally, the theory of the Five Elements also has similarities with Laozi's concept of yin and yang. The Five Elements emphasize mutual generation and restriction, which embody dialectical thought in Chinese philosophical thought. In *The Gay Genius*, Lin Yutang links Su Dongpo's destiny and temperament to the Five Elements. This way can connect his upright and passionate personalities with the theory of yin and yang.

Example 6:

Target Text:

I am almost tempted to say that the spirit of Su Tungpo represents the Element of Fire, for all his life he was fighting floods and drought and drought...in simple words, his temperament and his whole life were like a leaping flame, giving life and warmth wherever it went and also destroying certain things on its way (Lin Yutang, 1948, pp. 58-59).

This passage is part of Lin Yutang's “writing.” By using the physical property of “fire”, he succinctly summarizes Su Dongpo's political achievements, life, and character traits. At the same time, he subtly implies that, due to the nature of fire, Dongpo also possesses a certain destructive power capable of bringing about ruin. That's a point that leads into the subsequent story of Dongpo's debate and confrontation with demons.

In his later years, affected by the Wutai Poetry Case and the political strife between the New and Old Factions, Su Dongpo was demoted to Youzhou, where he served as Deputy Commander of the Local Militia, largely a sinecure. This assignment stripped him of any real authority over the people, reducing him to the status of a farmer in the fields. While in Huangzhou, he began to reflect on the reasons his impetuous nature had led to his setbacks and turned to self-cultivation. In the book III, “Maturity,” of *The Gay Genius*, it contains several chapters directly linked to chasing inner peace, such as Chapter 17, “Yoga and Alchemy.” In pursuit of inner peace, Dongpo began to achieve both physical longevity and spiritual tranquility.

And there he recorded some of his devout spiritual practice in *The Record of Anguo Temple* (《安国寺记》).

Example 7:

Target Text: Every one or two days I would go there, burn incense, and sit in quiet meditation. There I learned to forget all distinctions between the self and the non-self, and my mind was cleared of incumbrances (Lin Yutang, 1948, p. 184).

Lin Yutang translated the concept of “wu (物)” as “non-self,” reflecting the dialectical relationship between “non-self” and “self.” The tradition holds that enlightenment comes through meditation. The so-called “emptiness” does not refer to absolute nothingness, but rather to the fact that all things lack a permanent, independent, or autonomous essential nature and exist in a state of constant change. From this perspective, Su Dongpo’s statement that “things and the self are forgotten, and body and mind are emptied” reflects his deep engagement with this philosophical tradition and his aspiration toward inner clarity.

Su Dongpo not only attained enlightenment through philosophical practices for his own spiritual cultivation but also taught these principles to others.

On one occasion, while visiting a temple with his monk friend Foyin, they accidentally discovered a prayer inscription. Yet the content was a little malicious. It warned that if anyone sought to harm others by invoking the divine power of Guanyin Bodhisattva through incantations or poison, they would only bring such harm back to themselves. However, Su Dongpo believed that it strongly breached the original intention to be a good man, so he revised it to the following text. The reliability of this legend is unknown, but we can conjecture Su’s tendencies to compassion.

Example 9:

Target Text: May both the users of poison,
And the intended victims be spared (Lin Yutang, 1948, p. 135).

During his tenure in Huangzhou, he wrote a letter to the Prefect of Wuchang. The letter conveys his deep sorrow over the barbaric custom of drowning newborn infants in his region. He wrote:

Example 10:

Target Text: Buddhism teaches against the taking of lives, and among these killing of animals that suckle their young and that reproduce by hatching is considered a most grave offence (Lin Yutang, 1948, p. 196).

This passage echoes a traditional saying: “Saving a life is better than building a seven-story pagoda.” Building a seven-story pagoda is considered a highly meritorious act, yet saving a life is regarded as an even nobler deed. This underlying idea is a deep reverence for life itself, which is a value that finds expression across many Chinese cultural traditions. Because respecting and saving lives is also a form of kind practice. Affected by this notion, Su Dongpo organized like-minded people and raised funds to support poor pregnant women, encouraging them to keep their infants rather than abandon them.

4. Multisource Transwriting Strategies of the Cultural and Philosophical Resources from *The Gay Genius*

This chapter examines how Lin Yutang navigates these cultural and philosophical traditions in his portrayal of Su Shi. We focus on three aspects: his selection of source texts, his interpretive strategies, and his handling of translation versus rewriting. The analysis in Part Three points to two recurring approaches in Lin’s practice. One is to draw directly on passages from Su’s own writings that engage with major Chinese intellectual traditions. The other is to supplement these passages with allusions or quotations from the classics, often informed by Su’s life circumstances and personal temperament.

4.1 Understanding and Interpretation Based on Hermeneutics Approach

Lin Yutang was born into a Christian family. His father was a church pastor. This background gave him early exposure to Western cultural learning. Then Lin Yutang developed exceptional proficiency in both Chinese and English, which laid a solid foundation for his ability to translate freely between Chinese and English. As Lin Yutang described himself: “Being excellent in the cultures of East and West, he writes about all the world has to offer. He loves his homeland but is not confined by its past, and enjoys life without being trapped by its conventions.” (Xu Hua, 2021, pp. 223-224).

Lin Yutang and Su Dongpo share a striking similarity in temperament. Both are known for their optimism about fate and their relish for life. This personal affinity may have allowed Lin to approach Su’s works with the sympathy of a kindred spirit, rather than unconcerned detachment. In this way, his interpretations are more fluid and natural instead of rigidly academic. Guo Yirong (2016) noted in her master’s thesis, “In the biography, Su Dongpo combines Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism as one, which precisely reflects Lin Yutang’s yearning for an ideal worldview.” Throughout the book, the concept of “humanism” recurs with high frequency. Lin seems to use the multiple dimensions of Su’s character to suggest to his Western readers a common human aspiration toward peace and beauty.

On the one hand, Lin Yutang’s translation and rewriting show clear traces of Western cultural influences. In Chapter 17, he draws a comparison between Chinese meditation and Indian yoga, a concept which is much more familiar to Westerners. A similar strategy appears when discussing “external elixir” practices. Lin Yutang draws analogies to European alchemy and explains the ingredients using internationally recognized chemical terms, such as mercury and mercury sulfide. The approach works because it frames these traditions as forms of spiritual practice, making them understandable to a Western audience. But it does not go so far as to distort the original meaning through over-domestication.

Lin Yutang also focused on conveying elements of Chinese culture during the translation and writing process. Throughout the biography, he incorporated Su's poetry, prose, notes, and letters, and enriched the narrative with anecdotes. When dealing with episodes from Su's life that involve culturally specific references, Lin tends to keep them rather than translate them away. His priority is to convey the meaning, not to erase what is culturally distinctive.

Lin Yutang's Su Dongpo is a figure of considerable complexity. The interpretation carries the philosophical weight of Chinese traditional culture, yet his spirit is also one of freedom and optimism. As it turned out, this combination appealed to Western readers. Through their encounter with Dongpo in the book, Western readers also gained a deeper appreciation of the traditional Chinese spiritual heritage.

4.2 *The Relationship Between "Translation" and "Rewriting" and Its Specific Manifestations*

From the analysis of the dimensions in Chapter Three, it is obvious that Lin Yutang varied his treatment of the source material. He handles a passage depending on the traits of the source material and the phases of Su Shi's intellectual development. Here, the author categorizes his transwriting strategies into two aspects.

One strategy can be described as a fusion of translation and rewriting. For instance, in presenting the materials, sometimes Lin tends to produce something closer to conventional translation, though not without interpretive additions. Consider his handling of the passage from *The Record of Anguo Temple*, he renders the core phrase "forget all distinctions between the self and the non-self" literally, thus preserving its textual kernel. But he also adds a clause to explain further. This addition is small, but it matters. It gives the abstract notion of "emptiness" a more concrete, more accessible shape. This is one of the typical examples in Lin's method. He translates, but he also supplements. It is not because he is unfaithful to the original, but because he is writing for readers who lack the relevant philosophical context. The second strategy is more radical. It involves creative interpretation rather than translation proper. His handling of unique Chinese philosophical elements is noticeably different. Lin moves beyond any single source text and introduces the "element of Fire". This is a striking example of image reconstruction from fragmented materials, and also a hallmark of multisource transwriting. He weaves together disparate biographical details: Su's practical efforts in flood control, his resilience in adversity, his passionate temperament. These are anchored in the Five Elements framework, and from them Lin distills the image of a "fire" personality. This is interpretive reconstruction, not translation in the usual sense. And it is telling that he chooses this route for this type of material. The passages are rendered with relative restraint because they are anchored in specific texts. By contrast, the sensibility that throughout Su's life and character is not tied to any single passage. Lin seems to feel that a synthetic image captures it better than any single quote could.

What is notable is that Lin's strategy is never arbitrary. He adapts to the material. Passages that contain complicated resources call for literalism and supplementation. The abstract and lengthy sentences call for condensation and reinvention. He is flexible, and that flexibility allows him to present a Su Dongpo who is grounded in history yet accessible to English readers.

5. Conclusion

Su Shi's intellectual development drew upon multiple Chinese traditions, leaving the deepest mark on his character. Lin Yutang recognized this complexity and built *The Gay Genius* as a biographical narrative that interweaves fact and interpretation. What is striking about Lin's practice is not merely that he translated, but how he handled passages that had no clear source. Two strategies recur in the book: one is a fusion of translation and rewriting, the other a more radical creative interpretation. I would argue that both are informed by Lin's bicultural perspective and his personal identification with Su Shi. The choice of sources, moreover, is not random. It is guided by the book's chronological structure, which follows Su Shi's evolving responses to adversity, office, and exile.

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