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Crafting Linguistic Labyrinths: Wordplay in David Tod Roy's Thick Translation of *Jin Ping Mei*

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Abstract

Jin Ping Mei, a novel vividly portraying the daily lives of common people, is characterized by various forms of wordplay deeply rooted in Chinese linguistic and cultural contexts. This paper scrutinizes David Tod Roy's English translation of Jin Ping Mei, titled "The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei", which adeptly captures the linguistic and cultural nuances of the original while crystalizing his extensive research through the strategy of thick translation. Through a detailed analysis of Roy's treatment of wordplay in Jin Ping Mei, this study delves into the efficacy of thick translation as a pivotal approach in preserving and conveying the authentic rhetorical features of the novel. It is discerned that the paratextual elements within Roy's translation play a crucial role in both the comprehension and preservation of wordplay as integral rhetorical elements of the original text. This not only ensures the readability and aesthetic appeal of the translation per se but also enhances its fidelity in conveying the linguistic and cultural authenticity of the source material.

Keywords

Jin Ping Mei, David Tod Roy, thick translation, wordplay

1. Introduction

Jin Ping Mei, celebrated as a "marvelous book of the first rank", stands as an iconic pillar of Chinese literature, encapsulating the breadth and depth of China's linguistic and cultural richness. At the center of its brilliance lies an intricate narrative tapestry of diverse and numerous forms of wordplay, which enhances its artistic allure and cultural resonance. Nonetheless, the translation of wordplay across linguistic and cultural boundaries poses a formidable challenge in the realm of translation and translation studies. How wordplay is treated in translation directly influences readers' evaluation of the translated text and their perception of the original. David Tod Roy's English translation of *Jin Ping Mei*,

titled "The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei", stands as a remarkable testament to the complexities as well as potential inherent in this endeavor. In this study, I undertake a close examination of Roy's adept handling of wordplay in his translation of *Jin Ping Mei*, seeking to address several key questions: (1) what are the inherent challenges in translating wordplay between Chinese and English? (2) what role does the strategy of thick translation play in Roy's approach to rendering wordplay? (3) how effectively does his translation perform in capturing the essence of wordplay? and (4) does Roy's practice offer insights into the broader challenges and strategies involved in translating wordplay across languages?

2. "Translate Everything": Roy's Thick Translation in Rendering *Jin Ping Mei*

Roy was originally a professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago, where he primarily focused on teaching, researching, and translating *Jin Ping Mei*, which makes him a scholar-translator. To ensure the completion of the translation within his lifetime, he took the bold step of applying for early retirement and devoted himself entirely to the translation project. Based on *Jin Ping Mei Ci Hua* published by Daan Kabushiki Kaisha of Japan in 1963, Roy's translation, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei*, was successively published in five volumes by Princeton University Press in 1993, 2001, 2006, 2011, and 2013, with each volume comprising of 20 chapters.

Roy holds *Jin Ping Mei* in extremely high regard. In his Introduction to the translation in the first volume, he states,

> This work is a landmark in the development of narrative art, not only from a specifically Chinese perspective, but in a world-historical context. With the possible exceptions of *The Tale of Genji* (1010) and *Don Quixote* (1615), neither of which it resembles, but with both of which it can bear comparison, there is no earlier work of prose fiction of equal sophistication in world literature. (Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng (LX hereafter), 1993, pp. xvii-xviii)

The admiration for this work has determined his principle of "translate everything". However, it "is replete with such rich intertextuality, so many internal and external allusions, resonances, and patterns of incremental repetition or replication, as to make it difficult, if not impossible, to apprehend fully on first reading" (ibid., p. xix). In the absence of the Chinese linguistic and cultural background in English, it is impractical to "render all such passages in exactly the same way whenever they occur or recur" (ibid., p. xlviii). While thick translation is capable of constructing the linguistic and cultural context of the original for the translated text, making it a corollary move for him to achieve his goal.

Thick translation, proposed by K. A. Appiah, refers to the location of a text in a culturally and linguistically rich context by means of annotations and its accompanying glosses so as to facilitate a deeper understanding of the original work and a profound respect for the source culture among TL readers (Appiah, 1993). As a form of academic translation, thick translation is often undertaken by

scholar-translators who possess "extensive knowledge directly or indirectly related to the text" (Xu, 2014) and whose research and translation, more often than not, offer mutual support and complement to each other. It is built upon rigorous and meticulous research, "suitable for cultural classics, academic works and a few literary works that contain rich cultural information, and its recipients are foreign readers and researchers interested in the original text and the culture behind it" (Wang &Yang, 2012). Thick translation is primarily characterized the use of paratexts, which, in addition to the annotations mentioned by Appiah (which can be subdivided into footnotes, endnotes, interlinear notes, two-line mini-notes, and in-text integral notes...), also include prefaces, epilogues, dedications, postscripts, appendices, glossaries, and acknowledgments etc. (Zhou & Qiang, 2016).

Roy's translation of *Jin Ping Mei* is an impressive feat of scholarship, reflecting his dedication to the principle of "translate everything". In addition to the entire main text, he has translated all paratexts, including prefaces, epilogues, lyrics in front, and chapter catalogs, and has made personal additions. The Introduction, spanning 32 pages, provides a comprehensive overview of the content and versions of the work, analyzes its structure and narrative techniques, evaluates its essence and literary status, investigates the identity of the author, LX, delineates the novel's connections with the philosophy of Xunzi, a philosopher in ancient China, and conveys the translator's own philosophy of translation, etc. The Cast of Characters, exceeding 50 pages, lists all the characters (including different appellations for the same character) in alphabetical order and provides detailed or concise introductions. Of particular note are is the 5356 endnotes spread across the five volumes, which showcase Roy's decades of teaching and academic research. These notes provide answers for tough questions, explanations for allusions, and sources for expressions, and so forth. Additionally, there are 200 illustrations from the "*xiuxiang*" edition, another version of *Jin Ping Mei* alongside the "*ci hua*" edition, which are not present in the original, along with a list of illustrations, acknowledgments, appendices, bibliography, and index.

Roy's thick translation bridges the cultural gap between Chinese and English and makes it possible for English readers to gain a deep understanding of *Jin Ping Mei* and other Chinese literary classics. Volpp (n.d.) commented,

> Generations of readers will be grateful for Roy's monumental translation of the Chin P'ing Mei. The capstone in a distinguished career, this translation is a heroic and magnanimous act of scholarship. The encyclopedic annotation, which sets standards seldom matched by translation from any language, will be indispensable not only to the general reader but to scholars of this work.

3. Linguistic Features of English and Chinese and their Wordplay

Wordplay, as the term suggests, refers to the use of words to create playful effects. There are several ways of interpretation towards it, including (1) games with words as materials, such as drinking games

and character riddles in Chinese culture, and crosswords in English; (2) a sharp criticism of such expressions as evasion from the crucial point or intentional digression, which use is commonly found in Chinese; (3) the creative and playful use of words *per se*, etc. For the purposes of this paper, we shall focus on the third sense.

The English language is a complex system of communication that relies on a set of 26 letters, and the phonemes represented by these letters are arranged and combined in accordance to certain rules to form words. In an alphabetic writing system, the form and meaning of English words are directly related to their pronunciation. The pronunciation directly corresponds to the meaning, with the written text serving as a "sign of a sign"; in the meantime, the pronunciation determines the written form of the word, leading to a certain degree of unity between the two (Yang, 2012, p. 79). As such, wordplay in English is often based on pronunciation, despite the various linguistic features to be exploited to create one, such as phonological, graphological, lexical, morphological, and syntactic structures of English (Delabastita, 1996, p. 130). Let me exemplify this with puns.

Puns are probably the most favored form of wordplay in English, as evidenced by some definitions of "wordplay" in English. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, for instance, defines it as "the clever or amusing use of words, especially involving a word that has two meanings or different words that sound the same" (Hornby, 1995, p. 1375), *vis-à-vis* the definition for "pun": "the humorous use of a word that has two meanings, or of different words that sound the same; a play on words" (ibid., p. 940). It reflects the fact that puns occupy a considerable proportion of English wordplay, which proportion is such that some scholars, such as Delabastita (1993; 1996), even directly equate wordplay with puns. Puns in English primarily consist of two kinds: homophonic and homographic puns, with the former achieved through different words of the same/similar sound, and the latter through the same word with different meanings (Fan, 2017, pp. 375-379). However, as the written text is merely a "sign of a sign", "the same word with different meanings" can be paraphrased into "the different meanings in question are articulated through the same sound"—at the end of the day, homographic puns turn out to be a form of homophonic puns, a sharp curve from meaning to pronunciation. Apart from puns, English features other kinds of wordplay, such as palindromes and acrostics that exploit morphological features of English, which, after all, are not as commonly observed as puns.

The Chinese language boasts a vast and stable system of characters, each with its own unique form and meaning. In an ideographic writing system, Chinese characters in their own rights, *vis-à-vis* pronunciation in English, serve as units of meaning, while their pronunciation is straightforwardly given rather than spellable in light of their forms (Li, 2021, p. 123), which results in a large number of homophones, near-homophones, and polyphones. Morphologically, Chinese characters can be divided into single-component and multi-component characters, with the latter consisting of multiple single-component parts, such as "瓶" (vase) of "并" (combine) and "瓦" (tile). Sometimes, two

characters with similar forms have vastly different pronunciations, such as "金" (jīn) and "全" (quán); while two characters with the same pronunciation can have completely different forms, such as "梅" (méi) and "没" (méi). As a paratactic language, Chinese is less restricted by grammatical norms (Lian, 2019, pp. 78-84), which allows great flexibility in the combination of characters and meanings. The vast library of characters and the natural flexibility of Chinese offer convenience for creating wordplay, hence a long tradition of playing on words. Various forms of wordplay have been created by taking full advantage of the characteristics of sounds, forms and meanings of characters, such as puns, palindromes, acrostics, *the lianbian* (use of a sequence of characters with the same side, such as in "波涛汹涌" with a shared "氵"), character splitting and the *xiehouyu* (the last two will be covered later), among others. And character transformation, with addition or subtraction of strokes, separation or combination of components involved, is considered as the most common type in the creation of wordplay in Chinese (Liu, 1994, p. 121).

Wordplay is usually language-specific, built upon the poetics of the language in which it is created, which vary according to the differences in such factors as language conventions, cultural background, and social milieu. Given the significant linguistic and sociocultural differences between English and Chinese, even though there are certain wordplay parallels between the two languages, it does not necessarily follow that they may be seamlessly interchanged. As Delabastita (1994) has put it,

> The semantic and pragmatic effects of source text wordplay find their origin in particular structural characteristics of the source language for which the target language more often than not fails to produce a counterpart, such as the existence of certain homophones, near-homophones, polysemic clusters, idioms or grammatical rules. (p. 223)

Wordplay serves as a vivid demonstration of the formal art of a language. Quoting Cao (2004), "Wordplay is a way of expression that takes communication as its secondary function while regarding the interest-oriented process of exploiting the forms, pronunciations, or meanings of characters as the primary" (p. 78). Wordplay tends to convey simple meanings in sophisticated forms, and as far as the workload and hence the purpose are concerned, its form surpasses the semantic and ideological content. Ironically, nevertheless, it is the playful form emphasized in wordplay that makes it difficult to translate. This probably explains why some researchers assert the untranslatability of wordplay (Tian, 2007; Li, 2009; He, 2012, p. 18). Drawing from Catford (1965), "untranslatability occurs when it is impossible to build functionally relevant features of the situation into the contextual meaning of the TL text" (p. 94). In the case of wordplay, "functionally relevant features" refer mainly to the formal features of the language in which the original text is written. Wordplay is created based on the full mobilization of the intrinsic features of the language used, and once beyond the formal elasticity of another language, it becomes hardly likely to reproduce. And this unlikelihood deteriorates to an exaggerating extreme in the translation between English and Chinese. Nonetheless, the translation of wordplay can be fulfilled to some extent in a functional approach if the translator takes a relatively tolerant view of faithfulness,

i.e. to be faithful to the function or effect of wordplay instead of to its lexical and formal features. In this regard, Delabastita (1996, p. 134) has provided a comprehensive summary of translation techniques of wordplay, including: (1) pun to pun; (2) pun to non-pun; (3) pun to related rhetorical device; (4) pun to zero; (5) pun ST to pun TT; (6) non-pun to pun; (7) zero to pun; and (8) editorial techniques. And these techniques can be combined in different ways in translation practice.

The role of communication as a secondary status in wordplay, however, does not diminish the importance of communicativeness. Wordplay, as often as not, does not exist in isolation but rather relies on a specific context to convey a particular meaning. The context "encompasses both the linguistic aspect, such as the words proceeding or following the speech or text, as well as the non-linguistic aspect, with time, place, occasion, era, interlocutors, and the social, cultural, natural, and linguistic environments involved" (Peng, 1998, p. 5). Speakers/writers generate meaning based on the current linguistic context against the background of the non-linguistic context and present it in a playful form, thus giving rise to wordplay. However, the consummation of the life journey of wordplay depends on the listener/reader understanding the meaning and grasping where the "play" lies in wordplay. For that reason, wordplay can be seen as a product that combines meaning and interest, communication and art. To achieve a full understanding of this meaning and to facilitate communication, the listener and the speaker must share the same linguistic and sociocultural knowledge, and their thinking needs to be synchronized to a certain extent. This, however, is not always easy to achieve in interlingual and intercultural communication. As a result, translators often turn to paratexts for assistance in their translation, in response to the joint requirement raised by both the form and the understanding mechanism of wordplay.

4. Wordplay in Thick Translation in *Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei*

Jin Ping Mei focuses on the daily life of Ximen Qing's family, encompassing a range of cultural and folkloric aspects such as clothing, food, housing, transportation, etiquette, banquets, entertainment, ceremonies, and so forth. The novel as an epitome of the era and society that the author sought to represent, its language is described as "rich and complex, incorporating local dialects, colloquial expressions, proverbs, *xiehouyu*, witty remarks, court reports, and Buddhist scriptures, thereby creating a colorful linguistic world" (Hong, 2005). The author's conscious use of language is evident through the numerous and diverse forms of wordplay used throughout the novel, which not only adds to its charm and appeal, but also "reflects the trend of its day to seek enjoyment in punning and other forms of wordplay" (Zhang, 2022, p. 104). However, the unique linguistic features and cultural richness of wordplay pose significant challenges for translators, leading many to rely on paratexts and simplify the translation of wordplay. In this regard, Roy's translation is noteworthy for its use of paratexts, prominently including the Introduction, Cast of Characters, and Notes, in demonstrating the complexity of wordplay and its translation process.

4.1 Reconstructing the Polysemous Title: Introduction as a Catalyst

The title of a literary work is an integral component that not only necessitates a contextual understanding of the entire work but also possesses independent aesthetic value. It serves as a crucial instrument for reflecting the appeal and connotation of the work and plays a significant role in generating reader expectations and attracting them to explore the book further. "Jin Ping Mei", which translates to "Gold Vase Plum", is a polysemous wordplay and the first of its kind in the novel. In the preface written by Dongwu Nongzhuke, or the Pearl-juggler of Eastern Wu, he says,

> many women play a role in the story, but the fact that the author chose to emphasize only the names of P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, and Ch'un-mei by including them in his title is an instance of the type of historiography exemplified by the T'ao-wu of the State of Ch'u. (LX, 1993, p. 6)

Since then, the three characters of "Jin Ping Mei" have come to be widely accepted as symbols representing the names of the novel's three main female characters, namely Pan Jinlian's "Jin", Li Ping'er's "Ping", and Pang Chunmei's "Mei". At the same time, the title itself presents a vivid image of a plum blossom inserted in a golden vase, which has been the subject of many different scholarly interpretations. Some researchers believe that the "Jin Ping" (golden vase) is a symbol of wealth, while "Mei" represents women who become attached to wealth and lose their natural character, vitality, and freedom (Dong, 1999). Others argue that this image corresponds to such descriptions as "blossoms are displayed in golden vases" (LX, 1993, p. 196; 2001, p. 232), "vases are studded with red blossoms" (LX, 2001, p. 204), and "Inserted into silver vases, several sprigs of plum blossoms are displayed" (ibid., p. 459) that appear repeatedly in the novel, reflecting the extravagant lifestyle of the wealthy (Hu, 2014). There are also interpretations of the title as a metaphor for sexuality. For instance, some believe that the plum blossom inserted in a golden vase represents sexual intercourse between men and women (ibid.). Alternatively, some have suggested that "Mei" refers to plums instead of plum blossoms, and that the title refers to the sexual game known as "pitching into the fleshly pot", to wit Ximen Qing pitching plums at Pan Jinlian's vagina, which is described in the 27th chapter of the novel (Carlitz, 1981). These interpretations offer insights into the novel's themes and motifs, demonstrating the rich complexity of this classic work of Chinese literature.

The introduction of a translated work serves as a crucial tool for the translator to express their comprehension of the original text and philosophy of translation, and guide readers to better understand the work. As a sophisticated researcher of *Jin Ping Mei*, Roy has conducted extensive research on the polysemy of the title and its extraction of characters from the names of the three women. In his Introduction, he points out, "The title itself is a multiple pun that gives some indication of the intricacy as well as the ambiguity of the work it designates" (LX, 1993, p. xvii). He then elaborates on the principle of title creation and provides a paragraph of in-depth interpretation of the title written by Zhang Zhupo. Regarding the sexual metaphor in the title, he creatively proposes that "金瓶梅" (Jīn P ńng Mǎ) is a homophonic pun of "進牝魅" (jìn pìn mèi), which means "The Glamour of Entering the

Vagina", highlighting Ximen Qing's indulgence in lust and debauchery (ibid., p. xvii).

The two interpretations provided in Roy's Introduction represent two main types of interpretations in the field of *Jin Ping Mei* studies. The first involves extracting characters from names for the title, while the second centers around various homophonic or extended interpretations of the image of "plum in the golden vase", which provide support for the reconstruction of the polysemous nature of the original title. The title of the translated text, "The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei", has a dual structure. The main title presents a semantic translation of the image of "plum in the golden vase", creating foundation for a range of interpretive approaches based on this scene. At the same time, the transliterated subtitle to some extent reproduces the extraction of words from names for the title insomuch as the translator primarily applies transliteration to character names. While the two interpretations offered by Roy may not exhaust the interpretive potential of the original title, they do suggest that the title contains profound connotations, leaving ample space for readers to interpret on their own.

The absence of the equivalent of "*ci hua*" in the title of the translation is worth extra attention, seeing that Roy takes *Jin Ping Mei Ci Hua* as the source text. "*Ci hua*" refers to a form of art that collects and compiles stories performed by storytellers. It is important to note that there are significant differences between the "*ci hua*" edition and the "*xiuxiang*" edition in terms of title, chapter, content, language style, aesthetic effect, ideological orientation, and so on. As such, "*ci hua*" can be considered as a direct identifier to distinguish between the two editions and thus should not be easily discarded. Then why "*ci hua*" is missing from the translation? The answer to this question can also be inferred in Roy's Introduction. He states in it that the "*ci hua*" edition is "the earliest, and the closest to the work of the original author, and that his innovative rhetorical techniques are best represented by that version of the text" (LX, 1993, p. xxi), for which he selected and translated the "*ci hua*" edition. He further asserts, "It is the desire to demonstrate this complexity, and to preserve, to the extent possible, the innovative rhetorical features of the most authentic edition, that has led me to undertake this new annotated translation" (ibid., p. xlii). Despite the fact that the wordplay of the title does not exclusively belong to the "*ci hua*" edition, it is a manifestation of the special rhetorical techniques of the novel *per se*. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that in translating the title, the reconstruction of the wordplay was also taken into consideration, and it might even be the focus. Meanwhile, "*ci hua*", as a symbol of the novel's artistic form, does not participate in the construction of the wordplay of the title, and thus is not involved in the interpretation of its connotations. Hence, the absence of "*ci hua*" may not be simply a "translative pretermission" (Hu, 2014) but rather serves the reconstruction of the wordplay, in case redundant elements dilute the rhetorical features and cause confusion in the understanding of the title.

4.2 Focusing on Punning Names: Introduction as a Guide, Cast of Characters as Assistance

Naming is considered to be the simplest and most direct form of characterization, wherein each appellation serves as a means to vivify, animate and individuate the character (Wellek & Warren, 1956,

p. 219). In fictional works such as novels, the names of characters are often used to imply specific narrative designs related to their identities, personalities, or fates. These meaningful literary names are often planted with wordplay (Manini, 1996), a common approach being to give them puns. Puns are a rhetorical device that uses phonetic, semantic, or other means in a specific linguistic context to make an expression have double meanings, which, as has been mentioned, can be categorized into homophonic and homographic puns. In Chinese literary works, homophonic puns are a major way of character naming.

In *Jin Ping Mei*, the development of the story revolves around the needs of characters' personalities and the destinations of their fates (Wei, 2000). The intricate web of relationships woven around Ximen Qing vividly portrays the dark and sordid aspects of human nature through the depiction of people's emotions and lives. The author employs double-meaning names for many of the characters, implying their personalities and satirizing their vices. In this regard, Roy provides a few examples in his Introduction: "Ying Po-ch üeh", which implies "Sure to Sponge", "Wu Tien-en" "Devoid of Kindness", "Chang Shih-chieh" "Forever Borrowing", and "Wen Pi-ku" "Language Always Archaic" (LX, 1993, p. xxviii). Furthermore, he points out that the name of "蔡京" (Cài Jīng; Ts'ai Ching), a corrupt prime minister, puns with "财" (cái, money) and "精" (jīng, semen), symbolizing Ximen Qing's greedy for money and sex, aiming to "call attention to the dangers of excess and immoderation in all spheres of human activity" (ibid., p. xxxix). The use of homophonic puns in character names not only serves as an important source of amusement in the novel but also embodies the purposes and essence of the novel and the author himself. Although only a few brief examples are offered in the Introduction, it provides a useful guide reminding readers of the connotations hidden in the characters' names.

Roy adopts a hybrid method that involves both transliteration and semantic interpretation to tackle the issue of double-meaning names. Allow me to provide an illustration of this by referring to the obscure transliterations raised in the previous paragraph that may have caused perplexity:

Table 1. Punning Names for Illustration

Chinese name	Punning form	Connotation	Transliteration	Semantic rendition
應伯爵	硬白嚼	Sure to Sponge	Ying Po-ch üeh	Sponger Ying
(Y ìng B ó-ju é)	(Y ìng B ó-ju é)			
吳典恩	無點恩	Devoid of kindness	Wu Tien-en	Heartless Wu
(W ú Diǎn-ēn)	(Wú Diǎn-ēn)			
常時節	常時借	Forever borrowing	Chang Shih-chieh	Cadger Chang
(Ch áng Sh í-ji é)	(Ch áng Sh í-ji è)			
溫必古	文必古	Language always archaic	Wen Pi-ku	Pedant Wen
(Wēn B ì-gǔ)	(W én B ì-gǔ)			

In the fraternal group of ten men, Ying Bojue had the most frequent contact with Ximen Qing, and this contact allowed him to ingratiate himself with and take advantage of Ximen Qing. He hitchhiked and ran after pleasure with Ximen Qing, which made him a complete sponger. Wu Dianen benefited from Ximen Qing, not only obtaining an official position through Cai Jing but also receiving one hundred taels of silver from Ximen Qing. However, after Ximen Qing's death, he displayed a heartless betrayal of kindness by accusing Ximen Qing's wife, Wu Yueniang, of having an affair with a servant. Chang Shijie, who came from a poor family, had to rely on others to help him make ends meet. In destitution, he was unable to raise his head in front of his wife, but soon after borrowing money, he became full of arrogance, interpreting to the extreme the shamelessness of a cadger. Wen Bigu, a failed scholar, was invited by Ximen Qing to be a guest of honor in his home and was responsible for writing documents. In an archaic way of speech, he exuded an air of pedantry among Ximen Qing and other vulgar individuals.

The novel conceals the personalities of its characters within their respective names through homophonic puns. It is particularly effective for Chinese readers who can appreciate the wordplay as they navigate the plot, while for English readers who lack knowledge of the Chinese language, it may not make sense. To address this issue, it is a must for Roy to find a way to present the naming wordplay in the translation as per his philosophy of translation, which involves capturing the rhetorical features of the original. It leads him to the provision of a succinct semantic rendering of the characters' personalities through their new names, which not only facilitates the understanding of the characters and storylines for English readers but also, in a way, creates homographic puns that serve as compensation for the lost homophonic puns.

In the translation, the punning names are mostly found in the form of transliteration, and less often in semantic rendering, except for their debuts or when their connotations are highly relevant to the context. However, the novel boasts a vast array of characters with full names, along with various aliases or nicknames. For instance, Pan Jinlian was sometimes addressed as "Wu Niang" (the Fifth Lady, for she was Ximen Qing's fifth wife), "Liu Jie" (Sister Six, for she was the sixth sibling in her generation of the family), or "Pan Liu'er" (Pan the Sixth), among others. Even for Chinese readers, it can be challenging to keep track of such a large cast, let alone for English readers, for whom, moreover, the transliterated names are nothing but some meaningless sounds, adding an even heavier burden to their memory. Hence, once readers lose track of the connection between a semantically rendered name and its owner who most of the time comes on in a transliterated name amid the plethora of characters and appellations, the translation fails to achieve the humorous or ironic effect in that the intended effect "created by the link between their names and behaviors can be best achieved only through recurrent reinforcement" (Qi, 2018, p. 152). In this regard, Roy's Cast of Characters serves as a reference. It contains a comprehensive list of all characters alphabetically by name and other appellations, within which entries for appellations direct readers to those for transliterated names, and the latter summarizes

the various appellations of characters and provides their introductions.

As far as the punning names are concerned, the Cast of Characters provides entries for both transliterated and semantically rendered names, with the latter directing to the former. This allows English readers to quickly match either name to the other whenever they need and find the connection between the characters' names and the plot. In this way, the memory and comprehension burden on English readers can be reduced, allowing them to not only grasp the characters' identities and personalities but also understand the author's narrative intentions and artistic nuances. Therefore, the Cast of Characters serves as an important tool for English readers to grasp the double meanings of character names, understand the complicated character relationships and plot, and thereby fully comprehend and appreciate the essence of the novel.

4.3 Maintaining the Authenticity: Notes as Compensation

Annotation serves as a bridge connecting the author, the translator, and readers in the translation of classic literature. With such functions as semantic clarification, cultural interpretation, comparative reference, and communication with readers, it is the most commonly applied means of compensation in translation (Zhang, 2020). Since the 19th century, sinologists have been using annotations to explain Chinese culture in their translations of Chinese classical works. However, wordplay and annotation have been engaging in mutual game of "hide-and-seek" for quite a long time. When translators are at their wit's end with wordplay, some of them tend to resort to annotation to explain its mechanism, leaving it untranslated. While those who advocate for replacing the original wordplay with an equivalent one tend to do so silently, with little explanation of the changes in that copious translator's notes, as is put by Pusch, defeats the translated text of readability (Flotow, 2014, p. 52).

For example, David Hawkes states in his Introduction to the translation of *Hong Lou Meng*, "My one abiding principle has been to translate *everything*—even puns" (Cao, 2012a, p. 38). Despite his occasional explanations for puns through annotation, he rejects annotation, as a matter of fact, contending "reading a heavily annotated novel would seem to me rather like trying to play tennis in chains" (Cao, 2012b, p. 18). On this account, he prefers to naturalize puns into the translation quietly, sometimes even eliminating irrelevant puns to facilitate English readers' comprehension of the work (Wang & Wang, 2004). While this approach ensures the completeness of the reading process, it deprives English readers of the opportunity to comprehend the authenticity of the original and access authentic Chinese wordplay.

Hawkes's principle of "translate everything" has inspired Roy to adopt the same approach (LX, 1993, p. xlviii). However, he deviates from Hawkes's strategy in the use of annotations. In the main text, Roy likewise often substitutes original wordplay with his own creations, but he remains transparent in his approach by providing notes for most, if not all, instances of wordplay, regardless of whether they are successfully translated or not. This allows English readers to access the authentic, at least in a conceptual way, Chinese wordplay and gain a deeper insight into the nature of the original.

Roy believes that to fully appreciate an artistically complex sixteenth-century Chinese novel as *Jin Ping Mei*, extensive annotation is indispensable (ibid., p. xlvii). For him, annotation is not merely a last resort when rendering seems strenuous, but rather a necessary means of presenting the artistic features of the original. He categorizes his annotations broadly into source notes and informative notes. The former traces the sources of expressions such as idioms, colloquialisms, allusions, and proverbs, exploring their intertextual connections with previous literary works and documents; while the latter assists readers in overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers, thus achieving a better understanding of the novel (Qi, 2018, p. 125). Both types are crucial avenues for preserving the authenticity of Chinese wordplay. For one thing, it is a representation of Chinese rhetoric rooted in Chinese language and culture, and English readers can hardly make a full understanding of its connotation without notes. For another, wordplay has a widespread and longstanding tradition of use in Chinese. Tracing it back through annotation not only gives "readers some notion of the rich intertextuality of this novel and of the extraordinary breadth of the author's erudition" (LX, 1993, p. xlvii), but also reveals the cultural thickness of the novel and constructs a rich cultural context for English readers to immerse themselves in authentic Chinese culture. The following discussion will illustrate the essential role of annotation in preserving the authenticity of original wordplay. Given its great diversity and quantity, only two kinds of wordplay, namely the *xiehouyu* and character splitting, will be discussed as examples.

4.3.1 The *xiehouyu*

The *xiehouyu* is a type of expression composed of a metaphor and a postposed explanation, which may either appear in the complete form or in a truncated form where the former metaphor alone is provided, requiring the listener to infer the meaning (Huang, 1995, pp. 308-311). Due to its resemblance, especially in the case of a truncated one, to riddles, successful communication necessitates shared linguistic and cultural knowledge as well as life experience between the interlocutors. The *xiehouyu* exhibits distinct characteristics of the times, the nation, and life in both form and content. However, the experiential asymmetry of the Chinese and English worlds poses a challenge for rendering this kind of expression with a unique structure and content deeply rooted in the folk life of China. As in:

> ST: (孟玉樓) 戲道。五丫頭。你好人兒。今日是你個馹馬畜。把客人丟在這裡。你躲房裡去了。你可成人養的。 (LX, 1963a, p. 331）
>
> TT: She proceeded to josh her, saying, "A fine wench you are, Slave Five. You're the one who was you know what 'under a lucky star' this very day, yet you've abandoned your guest and run off to hide in your room. And you call yourself a human being!" (LX, 1993, p. 291)
>
> Note: This is an example of the type of Chinese wordplay called *hsieh-hou yü*. See chapter 5, note 28. There is a four-character expression, probably from a children's primer, that means "donkeys and horses are animals". The word for "animals", ch'u-sheng, is a synonym compound, the second character of which puns with the word sheng, which means "birth". What the Chinese text actually says is "Today is your 'donkeys and horses are ani-'", and since the omitted second

half of the word for “animal”, which puns with the word “birth”, would immediately come to mind, what the cryptic statement actually means is “Today is your birthday”. Since the expression “born under a lucky star” is a cliché in English, I have used a truncated version of it to suggest something of the complexity of the Chinese original. (ibid., p. 518)

In chapter 14, Meng Yulou employed the phrase, “驴馬畜”, to ridicule Pan Jinlian for arriving late from her room during the birthday banquet. The original phrase should have been “驴馬畜生” (donkeys and horses are animals), with the omitted character “生” sharing the same sound and character with the “生” in “生日” (birthday). It is an instance of homophonic *xiehouyu*, a subcategory of *xiehouyu*, whose connotation is revealed through the homophonic pun of the keyword(s) in the latter part instead of relying on the inherent connection between the metaphor and explanation (Huang, 1995, p. 310). Nevertheless, as the English word “animal” for “畜生” cannot establish a phonetic or semantic connection with “birthday” for “生日”, it is impractical to replicate the original wordplay in the translation. To preserve the rhetorical complexity of the original, Roy demonstrates creativity by devising a new wordplay in English and provides an explanation in an informative note, in which he points out its form of the *xiehouyu*, elaborates in detail on its mechanism, and then goes on to explain how he creates a new wordplay by transforming the English phrase. His creative translation, with the omitted “born” serving as the answer to the riddle, “you know what under a lucky star”, to some extent imitates the artistic form of the original and provides an adequate presentation of its rhetorical feature. Additionally, it ensures the coherence and readability of the translated text by the conveyance of the contextual meaning of the original. Moreover, the explanation of the original *xiehouyu* provided by the note allows English readers to recognize the real appearance of the original wordplay, thereby gaining a glimpse of the authentic way of Chinese humor.

4.3.2 Character Splitting

Character splitting refers to “splitting or reducing strokes or sides of characters based on their structural features so as to cause changes in the form and generate new meanings” (Huang, 1995, p. 282). As a long-standing rhetorical device, it is often used to increase the playfulness and aesthetic appeal of linguistic expressions. Its use can be observed in various forms, ranging from drinking games and riddles to poetry and prose. *Jin Ping Mei Ci Hua* “displays an unprecedented interest in breaking apart and reassembling the components of words” (Kelly, 2021), such as in chapter 2 with “貝戎” (賊), chapter 4 with “色系子女” (絶好), chapter 16 with “十八子” (李), chapter 42 with “女又十撇(丿)” (奴才), and chapter 83 with “木邊之目，田下之心” (相思). However, due to the uniqueness of this wordplay to the Chinese language, it cannot be transplanted into English, and the translator must seek alternative ways. As in:

ST: 閒常也會做牽頭。做馬伯六。也會針灸看病。也會做貝戎兒。（LX, 1963a, p. 61）

TT: When the occasion arises I dabble in pandering and procuring. I can also perform acupuncture, moxabustion [as original], and other medical services. And, lastly, I treat the ‘proper

> tea' of every customer as though they were my own. (LX, 1993, p. 60)
>
> Note: The Chinese text here splits the character for "thief" into its left and right components, which are then used as a slang term for the same word. I have tried to suggest this by punning "proper tea" for "property". (ibid., p. 479)

In the second chapter, Dame Wang boasted about her abilities to Ximen Qing. The juxtaposition of the two characters, "貝戎", appears to be incongruous and meaningless. The expression is derived from the disassembly of "賊" (thief), indicating that she engaged herself in thievery which, however, was not a commendable pursuit, so the character was split to avoid direct reference to it (Wu, 2002). In practice, it is not inherently inimitable in English, for instance, by putting it simply as "T-H-I-E-F". But Roy considers the matter more deeply.

The sentence is translated as "I treat the 'proper tea' of every customer as though they were my own". Dame Wang ran a teahouse next to the Wu family, so the use of the word "tea" aligns with her identity. Moreover, "proper tea" puns with "property", implying that she regarded the customers' belongings as her own, the behavior of a thief exactly. Therefore, the translation not only conveys the original communicative intent but also introduces a new pun that retains a sense of playfulness. Furthermore, to pun with "property" with the two-word phrase "proper tea" can also be considered as a kind of splitting. With such a formally and communicatively efficient translation, other translators, such as Hawkes, might have chosen to remain silent, which would have posed no obstacle to the integrity and autonomy of the translation, nor have interrupted the reading process. Roy, on the contrary, has supplemented it with an explanatory note about the original wordplay, which contributes to the readers' appreciation of the work, conveys the real appearance of the original, and enhances the scholarly value of the translation.

Linguistic and cultural exclusiveness of wordplay, nonetheless, has determined that its translation will not always be so smooth. In chapter 83, due to the exposure of her illicit love affair, Pan Jinlian was unable to meet with her lover, and her heart was affected by "木邊之目，田下之心" (LX, 1963b, p. 50), signifying "相思" (yearning for one's loved one) whose formation is as what Roy's translation says, "The eye alongside the wood, and The heart beneath the field" (LX, 2013, p. 43). While this translation remains much too faithful to the original, it fails to convey its connotation to an English-speaking audience. Given his demonstrated ingenuity in other aspects of the translation, it seems unlikely that he was unaware of peculiarity of his translation. It is possible, then, that he chose to preserve the original rhetorical feature at the expense of reader comprehension. When discussing the intertextuality of the novel in the Introduction, he says,

> I have striven, to the extent possible, to render all such passages in exactly the same way whether they occur or recur. Occasionally this may produce a slight awkwardness in the English, but I hope that the reader will put up with this flaw in order to better appreciate one of the salient features of the text". (LX, 1993, p. xlviii)

Roy's approach suggests a belief in the relative fixity of the novel's artistic features and the dynamic nature of reader reception, which further suggests a foreignizing way of translation that "leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader towards him" (Schleiermacher, 2012, p. 49), rather than expecting the work to accommodate readers' preconceptions or preferences. Roy's decision to provide a detailed explanation in the note accompanying the translation may reflect his desire to dispel any confusion that his literal translation might cause among readers:

> Note: This is an example of the type of wordplay that involves the splitting of characters into their component parts. If the graph for "eye" is placed next to that for "wood", and the character for "heart" is placed under that for "field", the result is the two-character compound hsiang-ssu, which means "yearning for one's loved one". This example of wordplay occurs in the middle period vernacular story Wen-ching yüan-yang hui (The fatal rendezvous), in Ch'ing-p'ing shan-t'ang hua-pen, p. 163, l. 8; and recurs in the Chin P'ing Mei tz'u-hua, vol. 5, ch. 98, p. 10b, ll. 4-5. (LX, 2013, pp. 429-430)

Furthermore, according to Fu (1992), "the playful artistry of the novel is not an innate gift from heaven but an outcome of absorbing other previous artistic creations". In this context, wordplay serves as a demonstration of not only the novel's artistry alone but also the enduring vitality of Chinese literary works as a whole. And Roy's explanation of the wordplay's source in the note highlights the cultural depth of the novel, reflecting the richness and internal fluidity of Chinese literature and culture.

5. Conclusion

Wordplay is a literary device that explores the expressive potential of language and brings an element of fun to text. Its continuous inheritance and innovation not only highlight its unique appeal but also serve as an important source and concrete manifestation of the enduring vitality of the language to which it belongs.

The diverse and numerous forms of wordplay in *Jin Ping Mei* not only demonstrate its artistic style but also represent the crystallization of China's splendid language and culture. As a scholar who holds *Jin Ping Mei* in high esteem, Roy employs a strategy of thick translation and starts from the principle of conveying the rhetorical features of the original work and ensuring that English readers attain the same reading experience and aesthetic enjoyment as Chinese readers. For that reason, he attempts to translate wordplay with wordplay, either by reproducing the original wordplay or creating new wordplay, so as to preserve the playful and entertaining nature of the original. Yang (2008) thus commented, "The puns and various other kinds of wordplays that abound in the *Chin P'ing Mei* are so difficult to translate that I can't help 'slapping the table in amazement' each time I see evidence of Roy's masterful rendition of them".

This study has analyzed the functions of paratextual elements, specifically the Introduction, Cast of Characters, and Notes, in the rendition of wordplay in *Jin Ping Mei* under Roy's strategy of thick

translation. The Introduction, a compendium of Roy's decades-long research on *Jin Ping Mei*, serves as a catalyst for reconstructing and interpreting the polysemous title, while also providing guidance for deciphering the punning names of characters. Complementing this, the Cast of Characters helps readers in unravelling the double meanings embedded within names amid the complicated interplay of storylines and character relationships. Furthermore, through the meticulous Notes offering explanations and sources for original wordplay, Roy not only preserves the authenticity of the original wordplay but also cultivates a rich atmosphere steeped in the nuances of Chinese language and culture.

Literary translation faces an inherent resistance to thick translation. Despite the contributions of paratexts in conveying the connotations of the text, facilitating the understanding of readers, and enhancing the professionalism of the translation, the ultimate objective of literary translation remains the achievement of aesthetic excellence (Xu, 1992, p. 11). The pursuit of beauty, along with independent readability and artistic achievement, serves as a *sine qua non* for captivating and retaining readers. However, the use of extensive paratexts risks making the translation pedantic (Cao, 2013), which diminishes the appeal and undermines the foundation of a translated literary work. Concern has also been expressed that excessive annotations or heterogeneity in literary translation may make the translated text resemble a monotonous cultural encyclopedia to ordinary readers and a lackluster, semi-defamiliarized popular work to researchers (Liu, 2015).

Despite these challenges, Roy's translation strikes a delicate balance between extensive paratextual support and the preservation of the stylistic features of the original. For one thing, an intellectual platform for the Chinese language and culture is constructed on account of the proliferation of paratexts, which not only facilitates readers' understanding of the translation but also provides access to the authenticity, i.e., "the rich and colorful depth of the vernacular literary language" (Zhang, 2022, p. 107), of the original text and culture. For another, Roy's subjectivity and creativity of a native English speaker ensure a faithful yet aesthetically pleasing translation that maintains the stylistic features and playfulness of wordplay, thereby enhancing the readability and artistic merit of the translation *per se*. In this way, Roy's translation transcends mere linguistic conversion, offering readers an immersive journey into the vibrant world of *Jin Ping Mei* while mitigating any potential pedantic tone that could detract from its enjoyment.

Roy's translation of *Jin Ping Mei*, therefore, exemplifies creativity, aesthetics, and cultural dissemination in wordplay and even literary classic translation. By skillfully navigating the inherent difficulties of wordplay translation, it provides a model for future translators seeking to achieve both linguistic and aesthetic fidelity to an exotic source material.

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