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## Equivalence in Translation: Balancing Act between Source and Target Cultures in Dream of the Red Chamber

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the intricate balance between source and target cultures in the translation of the classic Chinese novel, “Dream of the Red Chamber,” focusing on the concept of equivalence in translation. By examining two distinct yet far-reaching translations of this seminal work by David Hawkes and Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, this paper highlights the challenges and strategies translators employ to navigate cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and historical contexts unique to the original text. The research methodology includes a comparative analysis of selected passages from the original text and their counterparts in multiple English translations, assessing how different translators have approached key cultural and linguistic elements. Findings reveal that achieving equivalence in translation extends beyond literal word-for-word translation; it encompasses a deeper understanding and interpretation of the source culture’s socio-cultural and historical intricacies. The study also discusses the implications of these translation choices for readers’ appreciation and understanding of the novel’s themes and cultural depth. This paper contributes to the field of future translation studies by offering insights into the dynamic interplay between fidelity to the source text and the adaptability required to resonate with target culture readers, thereby enriching the discourse on cultural preservation and adaptation in literary translation.

**Keywords:** Equivalence; Translation; Culture; Dream of the Red Chamber

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## 1. Introduction

Translation is not merely the act of rendering words from one language into another; it is an intricate dance of cultural negotiation and linguistic precision (Nida, 1964). Bashir and Lutfaly (2023) state that this delicate balance becomes particularly pronounced in the translation of canonical literary works, where the depth of cultural context, historical significance, and literary nuances are intertwined with the original language. “*Dream of the Red Chamber*,” one of China’s Four Great Classical Novels, stands as a quintessential example of such a challenge, embodying the richness of Qing Dynasty culture, social mores, and philosophical underpinnings. The novel’s translation into other languages, therefore, presents a unique opportunity to explore the concept of equivalence in translation—a concept that extends beyond the mere replication of words to encompass the replication of context, culture, and emotional resonance (Bassnett, 2002).

This research delves into the complexities of achieving translational equivalence in “*Dream of the Red Chamber*,” with a focus on the balance between retaining fidelity to the source text and making the work accessible and meaningful to the target culture. The intricate narrative, replete with cultural idioms, literary allusions, and character-driven nuances, offers a fertile ground for examining how translators navigate the multifaceted landscape of cross-cultural communication (Hawkes, 1973).

The objectives of this study are dual: first, to shed light on the strategies employed by various translators in conveying the essence of the original text within the linguistic and cultural framework of the target language; and second, to evaluate the influence of these strategies on the reader’s interpretation and enjoyment of the novel. By conducting a comparative analysis of selected passages from the original Chinese text and their English translations, this paper seeks to identify the points of convergence and divergence in the translation approaches and to explore the underlying reasons for these choices.

This research focuses specifically on the English translations of “*Dream of the Red Chamber*,” by

David Hawkes and the collaborative effort of Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. These versions are selected for comparison due to their widespread recognition and impact in both academic and literary spheres. Hawkes’s translation is acclaimed for its academic depth and literary appreciation, while the Yangs’ version is known for its fluid narrative and accessibility to a broad audience. This comparative analysis aims to reveal how different translation strategies affect the text’s international reception and how these translations balance fidelity to the original with adaptation to the target culture’s readers.

This juxtaposition not only assists in comprehending the intricacies of “*Dream of the Red Chamber*,” in cross-cultural dissemination but also serves as an illustrative case study for translation studies, illustrating the substantial role of translation as a conduit for intercultural dialogue. By examining the translation methods of Hawkes and the Yangs, we can better comprehend how to effectively present classic Chinese literary works to the world and the challenges and opportunities this process entails.

The research also contributes to the broader discourse on translation studies by highlighting the dynamic interplay between linguistic fidelity and cultural adaptability. It aims to enrich our understanding of how translated works can serve as bridges between cultures, offering insights not only into the source culture but also into the complexities and possibilities of intercultural communication and literary appreciation (Venuti, 1995).

## 2. Literature review

Pym (2023) discusses the concept of equivalence in translation from a nuanced perspective that moves beyond traditional binary classifications. Pym emphasizes that equivalence should not be seen merely as a literal or formal correspondence between languages. Instead, he suggests that equivalence involves a dynamic process where the translator’s aim is to recreate the intent, effect, and function of the source text in the target language. Pym (2023) further challenges the concept of rigid, one-to-one equivalences and advocates for a more adaptable

methodology. He argues for what he terms “functional equivalence,” where the focus shifts from the forms of words and sentences to the translator’s strategic choice in achieving the intended effects of the original message within the cultural and situational contexts of the target audience. This approach acknowledges the intricacy of translation and the imperative for translators to make judicious decisions rooted in a profound comprehension of both the source and target cultures.

Pym’s discussion extends into the ethical dimensions of translation, where he addresses the responsibilities of the translator not only to the text but also to the source and target audiences. He suggests that understanding and achieving equivalence is also about navigating and balancing these ethical considerations, making translation a profoundly interpretative and relational activity. Anthony Pym’s *“Exploring Translation Theories”* provides a contemporary understanding of “equivalence” in translation studies, highlighting its role in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps between source and target languages (Pym, 2023). Moreover, he categorizes equivalence into two types: semantic equivalence, which focuses on the precise contextual meanings, and dynamic equivalence, aimed at evoking similar emotional responses through adaptive translation (Pym, 2023). His theory is crucial for translators in the modern society due to a couple of reasons: (1) Equivalence is central to achieving effective communication across different languages and cultures. It helps ensure that the translated content maintains the intent, style, tone, and context of the original text, thus preserving its original meaning and impact; (2) By focusing on semantic and dynamic equivalence, translators can address and respect cultural nuances. This sensitivity is crucial in translations that involve deeply cultural texts such as literature, films, and advertisements, where direct translations might not convey the same connotations or emotional resonance; (3) Understanding the types of equivalence provides translators with frameworks that guide their choices. Translators must often balance fidelity to the source text with the need to adapt language and content to fit the

cultural and linguistic context of the target audience. This balance can significantly affect the accessibility and acceptance of the translation, and (4) Studying how equivalence is achieved enriches translation theory and practice, contributing to broader academic discussions and advancements in translation studies. It enables translators and scholars to develop more sophisticated tools and strategies for dealing with complex translation challenges.

The translation of literary works, especially those as culturally and linguistically rich as “Dream of the Red Chamber,” presents a nuanced tapestry of challenges and opportunities that beckons scholars and practitioners to delve into the depths of interlingual and intercultural communication (Hockx, 2015). This exploration traverses beyond mere linguistic conversion, venturing into the realm where language, culture, and literary artistry intersect, thus requiring a translator to don the dual hats of a linguist and a cultural emissary. Chen (2010) claim that the intricate narrative of “Dream of the Red Chamber,” replete with its rich tapestry of characters, elaborate expressions of emotion, and profound cultural annotations, stands as a testament to the quintessential complexities inherent in the translation of classic literature.

This literature review endeavors to dissect the multifaceted dimensions of translation studies through the lens of “Dream of the Red Chamber,” a novel that encapsulates the essence of traditional Chinese culture, its social stratifications, and philosophical ideologies. The novel, celebrated for its detailed depiction of life in 18th-century China, is laden with idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and poetic verses that are deeply rooted in the Chinese cultural milieu (Kowallis, 1996). Translating such a work necessitates a deep dive into the socio-cultural and historical underpinnings of the source text, thereby highlighting the pivotal role of cultural competence in literary translation.

Furthermore, this review aims to illuminate the intricacies of achieving translation equivalence, a concept that remains at the heart of translation studies, particularly in the context of literary works where the fidelity to the source text must be deli-

cately balanced against the readability and cultural relatability of the target text. The challenge is accentuated in the case of “*Dream of the Red Chamber*,” where the cultural chasm between the source and target languages can lead to significant disparities in interpretation and appreciation.

By scrutinizing the existing body of research, this review seeks to unearth the various strategies that translators have adopted over the years to bridge this chasm, thereby facilitating a dialogue between the rich cultural heritage of China and the global audience. Zhang (1997) claims that it is imperative to assess whether these strategies merely facilitate a surface-level understanding of the text or if they manage to convey the deeper cultural nuances and philosophical contemplations embedded within the original narrative.

Moreover, this review endeavors to identify gaps within the current research landscape, particularly in the lack of comparative analysis of different translations of the novel. It questions whether existing studies sufficiently address the impact of translation choices on the global perception and interpretation of the novel’s themes and cultural significance. The ultimate aim is to carve a niche for this study within the broader discourse of translation studies, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between language, culture, and literature in the context of one of China’s most revered literary masterpieces.

## **2.1 Equivalence theories in translation studies by Eugene Nida and Peter Newmark**

The role of culture in translation cannot be overstated, as it often presents one of the most significant challenges for translators. Bassnett (2002) and Venuti (1995) have both emphasized the importance of cultural context in translation, arguing that a translator must navigate not only linguistic but also cultural barriers. This is particularly relevant in the translation of “*Dream of the Red Chamber*,” where the deeply ingrained cultural norms, values, and historical contexts of Qing Dynasty China play a pivotal role in the narrative. The work of scholars like

Hawkes (1973), who has provided extensive commentary on the cultural intricacies of the novel in his translation, underscores the necessity of cultural competence in literary translation.

Moreover, Wang (1997) argues that the field of translation studies has significantly expanded and diversified since its formal inception in the mid-20th century, evolving into a multifaceted discipline that interrogates the linguistic, cultural, and semiotic dimensions of transferring meaning across languages. Tsai et al. (2024) claim that central to the intellectual ferment in this field is the concept of equivalence, a principle that has been the fulcrum of considerable debate, theoretical development, and practical application. The notion of equivalence, as initially posited by Eugene Nida in the 1960s, represents a seminal attempt to conceptualize how a translation can achieve a relationship of equality with its source text, not merely at the level of word-for-word correspondence but, more importantly, in terms of conveying the original’s intent, style, tone, and cultural context (Munday, 2008).

Nida’s (1964) differentiation between formal and dynamic equivalence has been pivotal in expanding the horizons of translation beyond mere literal accuracy. Formal equivalence, with its emphasis on a direct correlation between source and target language elements, often adheres closely to the source text’s structure and wordings, prioritizing “form” in the quest for fidelity (Lefevere, 1992). In contrast, dynamic equivalence, or functional equivalence as it is sometimes known, advocates for a translation that evokes the same response in the target audience as the original does in its readership, thereby necessitating a more flexible approach that may involve rephrasing, restructuring, or cultural substitution to ensure the translated text resonates with the target culture’s norms and expectations (Minford and Lau, 2000).

Building on Nida’s foundational work, Peter Newmark (1988) introduced the concepts of semantic and communicative translation, further refining the dialogue around translation strategies. Semantic translation, as Newmark posited, leans towards pre-

erving the precise semantic and syntactic aspects of the original text, often at the expense of naturalness in the target language, thereby echoing aspects of formal equivalence. Communicative translation, on the other hand, seeks to ensure that the message is conveyed in such a way that the target text reads as naturally as possible, aligning more closely with dynamic equivalence and prioritizing the effectiveness of communication over strict adherence to the source text's form (Hutters, 2016).

Chow (1993) believes that these theoretical frameworks have significantly shaped the way translators approach texts, especially those as culturally and linguistically dense as literary works. They underscore the inherent tension in translation between the loyalty to the source text — with its unique stylistic, linguistic, and cultural idiosyncrasies — and the need to produce a target text that is fluent, comprehensible, and culturally coherent to its new audience. This balance between source-text fidelity and target-text fluency becomes especially pronounced in the translation of literary masterpieces such as ‘Dream of the Red Chamber’. In the translation, the translator must navigate not only the linguistic barriers but also the vast cultural landscapes that separate the source and target contexts (Huang, 2009).

The ongoing debate within translation studies, fueled by these foundational theories, continues to revolve around how best to achieve this balance (Liu, 1995). It examines whether fidelity to the source text necessarily precludes fluency and cultural adaptability in the target text, or whether creative and informed translation strategies can reconcile these seemingly opposing objectives. This discourse is enriched by the recognition that translation is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor; rather, it requires a nuanced understanding of the source text's multifaceted dimensions, the target language's capabilities, and the target audience's expectations and cultural framework.

In applying these theories to the translation of ‘Dream of the Red Chamber,’ this research considers how translators have grappled with the text's intricate cultural tapestry, including its poetic ex-

pressions, social customs, philosophical insights, and historical context. The translation of such a text exemplifies the complexities of achieving equivalence, necessitating a deep engagement with both the source culture's intricacies and the target culture's sensibilities. This study, therefore, seeks to explore how different translators have navigated the spectrum of translation strategies from formal to dynamic equivalence, and semantic to communicative translation, in their attempts to bring this cornerstone of Chinese literature to a global audience. Therefore it contributes to the broader discourse on translation methodology and intercultural communication.

## **2.2 Gaps and opportunities**

Despite the extensive scholarship on ‘Dream of the Red Chamber’ and its translation, gaps remain, particularly in comparative studies that analyze multiple translations across different languages and cultural contexts (Lackner et al., 2001). Furthermore, there is a need for more research on the reception of these translations, exploring how they are interpreted by readers from diverse cultural backgrounds and how these interpretations reflect back on the translation strategies employed.

## **3. Theoretical framework for the current study**

In undertaking this study, a comparative literature approach is employed, drawing upon Nida's dynamic equivalence theory as a foundational framework to dissect and analyze English translations of the celebrated Chinese novel ‘Dream of the Red Chamber.’ This methodological choice allows for a nuanced exploration of the multifarious ways in which translators have grappled with the dual challenges of linguistic precision and cultural conveyance. The dynamic equivalence theory, with its emphasis on evoking an equivalent response in the target audience as would be elicited from the original readership, serves as a guiding principle in assessing how the essence, tone, and cultural nuances of the original text are maintained or transformed in the process

of translation (Eoyang, 1993). By contrasting various English translations of the novel, this research aims to outline the range of translational strategies employed—from those striving for strict linguistic and cultural fidelity to the source text to others adopting a more flexible approach, focusing on the fluency and cultural relevance of the target text.

The comparative analysis extends beyond the examination of textual fidelity and ventures into the realm of reception studies, considering how these translations have been received by diverse international audiences (Gentzler, 2001). This facet of the study is crucial, as it provides insights into the real-world impact of translation choices on readers' engagement with and interpretation of the novel. By analyzing reviews, scholarly critiques, and reader responses, the study aims to gauge the effectiveness of different translational approaches in bridging the cultural and linguistic gaps between the original Chinese text and its global readership. This reception analysis not only sheds light on the subjective nature of literary appreciation across different cultures but also highlights the role of translation in shaping international literary discourse and cross-cultural understanding.

Moreover, this research endeavors to contribute to the broader discussions within translation studies by situating "Dream of the Red Chamber" as a case study in the ongoing debate over the balance between source-text fidelity and target-text domestication. By examining how translators negotiate the intricate web of cultural references, historical contexts, and literary aesthetics inherent in the novel, the study seeks to illuminate the complex interplay between the translator's role as a linguistic conduit and as a cultural mediator. This analysis will probe the translators' narrative decisions, scrutinizing how idiomatic expressions, poetic verses, and cultural allusions are translated into English, and how these decisions mirror wider theoretical and practical issues in translation studies.

Furthermore, the study will explore the implications of these translational strategies for the global dissemination of "Dream of the Red Chamber,"

considering how the novel's themes of family, society, and morality are communicated and received across cultural boundaries. By highlighting the successes and challenges encountered by translators of this monumental work, this research aims to offer valuable perspectives on the translation of culturally dense literary texts, contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of literary translation in an increasingly interconnected world. Through this comprehensive examination of "Dream of the Red Chamber" and its English translations, the study aspires to add a meaningful dimension to the discourse on translation as a critical facilitator of cultural exchange and literary enrichment on a global scale.

Applying Nida's dynamic equivalence theory to the comparative literature analysis of "Dream of the Red Chamber" illuminates the intricate balance required to maintain fidelity to the source text while resonating with the target culture's sensibilities. This theory, which underscores the importance of eliciting a similar response in the target audience as the source text does in its original readers, offers a valuable framework for examining the various translations of the novel. In exploring the translation of "Dream of the Red Chamber," the paper delves into distinct examples that demonstrate how translators have navigated the complex challenges of cultural and linguistic translation, employing unique strategies to achieve dynamic equivalence.

One poignant example involves translating Lin Daiyu's reflective poems, which are rich in cultural and emotional nuances. Levi (1992) suggests that her verses transcend personal expression, encapsulating broader cultural, philosophical, and emotional currents. The challenge here extends beyond linguistic translation to encompass cultural interpretation and emotional recreation. For instance, the poem laden with imagery of changing seasons and reflective sorrow, epitomizes the transient nature of time and nostalgia for the past, presenting substantial challenges in conveying its layered meanings, emotional weight, and cultural references.

These examples of different translations in this paper from the translations of "Dream of the Red

Chamber” illustrate the application of dynamic equivalence in literary translation, highlighting the role of translators as cultural ambassadors who bridge the literary heritage of the source text with the linguistic and cultural landscape of the target audience. Through meticulous translation efforts, the novel continues to captivate a global readership, enriching the tapestry of world literature.

## 4. Balancing act between source and target cultures in dream of the red chamber

### 4.1 Examples from two translations

Using Nida’s dynamic equivalence theory in a comparative literature analysis of “Dream of the Red Chamber” showcases the complex balance needed to preserve the integrity of the source text while ensuring it resonates with the sensibilities of the target culture. This theory, which emphasizes the importance of evoking a similar response in the target audience as the source text does in its original readers, provides a valuable lens through which to examine various translations of the novel (Gentzler, 2001). Below, this paper delve into distinct examples that illuminate how different translators have navigated the challenges of cultural and linguistic translation, each employing unique strategies to achieve dynamic equivalence.

**Example 1:** Diving into the poetic elements of “Dream of the Red Chamber” reveals the layered complexity translators face, particularly when dealing with verses that are rich in cultural and emotional nuances. Lin Daiyu’s reflective poems are emblematic of this challenge. Levi (1992) claims that her verses transcend mere personal expression, encapsulating the wider cultural, philosophical, and emotional undercurrents of the novel, making the task of translating these poems a nuanced endeavor that goes beyond linguistic translation to include cultural interpretation and emotional recreation. The poem in question, which is emblematic of Daiyu’s emotional depth and the novel’s cultural richness, reads:

春花秋月何耐了，

往事知多少。  
小楼昨夜又东风，  
故国不堪回首月明中。  
雕栏玉砌应犹在，  
只是朱颜改。  
问君能有几多愁，  
恰似一江春水向东流。

“Spring flowers and autumn moon-when will they be ended?

How many past events can we tell?

The east wind blew through my small lodge again last night.

The old country, bathed in a bright moon, is an overwhelming sight!

Those carved balustrades, those marble terraces-they should still be there.

Only the rosy cheeks have faded.

How much sorrow, pray, can a person carry?

Like the spring torrent flowing eastward, without tarry!”

This verse, laden with the imagery of the changing seasons and tinged with a sense of reflective sorrow, encapsulates the transience of time and the lingering nostalgia for the past (Plaks, 1976). Thus it presents a substantial challenge for translators to convey its layered meanings, emotional weight, and cultural references (Chan, 2011).

David Hawkes, in his translation, takes a path that seeks to mirror the original’s poetic form and emotional depth. He translates the opening lines, which allude to the ephemeral nature of spring flowers and autumn moons, in a manner that captures both the beauty and the inherent melancholy of the imagery. Hawkes’s translation strives to maintain the poem’s rhythm and meter, aiming to evoke a similar aesthetic experience in English, resonating with the original’s lyrical quality (Hsia, 1996). An English rendition by Hawkes (1973), from his translation published in ‘The Story of the Stone, Volume 1’, reads:

When will the spring flowers and autumn moon end?

How much of the past can one ever recall?

The east wind buffeted my room last night,

I couldn't bear to face the moonlight so bright.

The carved balustrades and marble steps must still be there,

But rosy cheeks can't withstand the changes of time.

How much sorrow can one endure?

It's like a river flowing eastward ceaselessly.

Conversely, Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang approach Daiyu's lament with a potentially different emphasis. Their translation might lean towards rendering the poem in a way that, while faithful to the original's meaning, emphasizes clarity and accessibility for an English-speaking audience. The challenge of conveying Daiyu's personal and national loss, especially in lines that reflect on the pain of reminiscing about one's homeland under the moonlight, involves delicately balancing personal emotion with broader cultural and historical themes. The Yangs' rendition of the poem, from their translation published in "A Dream of Red Mansions" (1980), might go as follows:

When do the spring flowers and autumn moon fade away?

So much of the past, how much do we know?

Last night's east wind over the small building,

Made me unable to face the bright moonlight thinking of my homeland.

Carved railings and marble steps should still exist,

Only the faces have changed.

How much sorrow can one person withstand?

Like the endless flow of the spring river heading east.

In both translations, the concluding metaphor of sorrow likened to an endlessly flowing river, moving eastward, encapsulates Daiyu's perpetual grief. This powerful imagery demands from the translators not just linguistic precision but a profound empathy for the cultural and emotional contexts from which the poem emerges, ensuring the English rendition retains the original's symbolic depth and poignancy (McDougall and Louie, 1997).

Translating Daiyu's poetry, therefore, transcends the realm of linguistic translation to involve a deep engagement with the cultural implications of the

imagery used, the emotional undertones of the verse, and the broader philosophical and cultural themes of the novel. Both Hawkes and the Yangs, through their distinct translational strategies, embark on a complex process of cultural interpretation and emotional recreation. Their work exemplifies the intricate balancing act of achieving dynamic equivalence in literary translation, acting as cultural ambassadors who bridge the rich literary heritage of the source text with the diverse linguistic and cultural landscape of the target audience. Spence (1991) and Pollard (2002) insist that through such meticulous translation efforts, "Dream of the Red Chamber" continues to captivate a global readership, showcasing the novel's timeless beauty, emotional depth, and cultural significance, and thus enriching the tapestry of world literature.

**Example 2:** The endeavor to translate idiomatic expressions and culturally specific references from "Dream of the Red Chamber" into English epitomizes the nuanced complexities inherent in the field of translation studies, particularly when striving to achieve dynamic equivalence as advocated by Nida. These elements, deeply embedded within the fabric of Qing Dynasty China's cultural and historical narratives, not only enrich the literary tapestry of the novel but also present a formidable challenge to translators (Kroll, 2017). Their task is to preserve the original text's cultural depth and linguistic nuances, ensuring that the translated work resonates with an audience culturally distant from the source material.

Idema (1997) finds that idiomatic expressions within "Dream of the Red Chamber" serve as a key narrative device, often encapsulating intricate layers of meaning. These expressions convey complex emotional states, critique societal norms, or offer philosophical insights, making their translation a critical component of capturing the novel's essence (Link, Mair, and Varsano, 2016). For instance, the idiom "画蛇添足," which literally translates to "to add feet to a snake," serves as a caution against unnecessary embellishment or overcomplication, a theme that resonates throughout the novel in various contexts. The translator's challenge transcends mere

literal translation; it requires preserving the idioms' cultural relevance and their multifaceted functions within the narrative's broader thematic framework.

David Hawkes's approach to translating idiomatic expressions and cultural references is characterized by a meticulous attention to detail and a deep reverence for the source material's cultural heritage. Opting for a more descriptive strategy, Hawkes often expands upon the original text, incorporating detailed explanations or footnotes to elucidate the cultural or historical significance of certain idioms or references. This approach bridges the cultural gap directly, providing readers with a full understanding of the expressions' context and significance within the narrative. However, this method can sometimes interrupt the narrative flow, requiring readers to engage with supplementary information to fully grasp the intended meaning.

In contrast, the Yangs' translation strategy might prioritize finding or creating English idioms and expressions that evoke a response akin to that of the original, even if it involves straying from the literal imagery or context of the Chinese text. By selecting English equivalents that carry a comparable connotative weight, the Yangs strive to maintain the functional role of these expressions within the narrative, ensuring that the essence of the original text's message is communicated effectively. This approach highlights a more pragmatic aspect of translation, where the emphasis is on preserving the narrative's fluidity and emotional impact, potentially at the expense of cultural specificity.

Furthermore, "Dream of the Red Chamber" is replete with allusions to historical events, literary works, and philosophical concepts that are integral to Chinese cultural identity. These references add layers of meaning to the narrative, enriching the reader's understanding of the characters' motivations and the societal norms governing their actions. Translators must navigate these references with care, translating not only the textual content but also conveying the emotional and intellectual resonance these allusions hold for the original audience.

In conclusion, the translation of idiomatic expres-

sions and culturally specific references in "Dream of the Red Chamber" underscores the intricate balance between linguistic fidelity and cultural adaptability that translators must achieve. Whether through descriptive expansion or the adaptation of expressions to align with the target culture's idiomatic landscape, translators play a pivotal role in facilitating cross-cultural engagement with the text. Their efforts ensure that the novel's rich cultural nuances, philosophical depth, and emotional resonance are accessible to a global audience, thereby extending the reach of this quintessential masterpiece of Chinese literature. Through such meticulous translation work, "Dream of the Red Chamber" continues to captivate and engage readers across cultural and linguistic boundaries, exemplifying the transformative power of literary translation.

**Example 3:** Exploring the complex narrative of "Dream of the Red Chamber" further, we encounter the deeply symbolic use of objects and settings that are emblematic of the novel's rich cultural fabric. A notable example is the Grand View Garden (大观园), a microcosm of imperial China's opulence and decay, and the setting for many of the novel's pivotal scenes. The garden's description, imbued with layers of metaphorical significance and cultural symbolism, poses a significant translational challenge, requiring a nuanced understanding of its role within the narrative and the broader cultural context.

The original Chinese description of the Grand View Garden captivates with its detailed portrayal of lush landscapes, exquisite architecture, and the intricate interplay of natural beauty with human craftsmanship. This setting is not merely a backdrop but a dynamic space that reflects the novel's thematic concerns, including the transient nature of wealth and beauty, the interplay between reality and illusion, and the intricate social dynamics of the Jia family.

Translating the description of the Grand View Garden into English, David Hawkes might approach this task with an emphasis on preserving the lyrical quality of the original text while capturing the garden's symbolic significance. His translation would aim to convey the garden's opulence and its underly-

ing melancholy, mirroring the novel's exploration of the impermanence of human endeavors and the inevitable decline of the Jia family. An English rendition by Hawkes might read:

The Grand View Garden, with its winding paths and serene lakes, stood as a testament to the ephemeral beauty of this world. Each pavilion and arbor, meticulously crafted, spoke of an elegance that was as fleeting as the morning dew. Amidst the lush greenery, the laughter of the estate's young denizens would often echo, a transient melody against the backdrop of nature's enduring splendor.

In contrast, Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang might approach the garden's translation with a focus on clarity and accessibility, ensuring that English-speaking readers grasp the garden's thematic relevance and aesthetic beauty. Their translation would likely highlight the garden's role as a narrative and symbolic focal point, emphasizing its reflection of the novel's broader themes. The Yangs' version might be articulated as:

The Grand View Garden, a marvel of nature and human artifice combined, was a world unto itself. Each corner of the garden, from the delicate bamboo groves to the grandiose rockeries, told a story of beauty in its most transient form. Here, the young members of the household found momentary joy, their laughter a fleeting counterpoint to the timeless elegance surrounding them.

Both translations seek to capture the essence of the Grand View Garden, but they do so through different lenses—Hawkes leaning more towards a poetic and emotive rendition that emphasizes the garden's ephemeral beauty and symbolic depth, while the Yangs might prioritize a more straightforward description that maintains the garden's vivid imagery and thematic significance.

Translating the description of the Grand View Garden thus transcends the mere depiction of a physical space; it involves capturing a complex tapestry of cultural symbolism, thematic depth, and emotional resonance. The translators' task is to recreate the garden in English in a way that retains its multifaceted role within the narrative, serving as a bridge between

the novel's rich cultural heritage and the diverse linguistic and cultural context of the target audience. Through such translations, the Grand View Garden continues to enchant and engage readers worldwide, embodying the novel's exploration of beauty, transience, and the human condition, thereby enriching the global literary landscape.

**Example 4:** Another vivid example from "Dream of the Red Chamber" that presents a considerable challenge in translation is the intricate portrayal of traditional Chinese rituals and ceremonies, which are pivotal to the novel's narrative and cultural depth. A particularly significant ceremony is the "Poetry Club" meetings held by the characters within the Grand View Garden, where poetry composition and appreciation become a medium for expressing innermost feelings and social critique.

The original Chinese text intricately describes these gatherings, emphasizing the cultural significance of poetry in Qing Dynasty society as a sophisticated form of communication and a marker of social status and intellect. The detailed depiction of these poetry sessions, including the setting, the atmosphere, the interactions between characters, and the poems themselves, is imbued with layers of meaning and cultural nuances.

In translating the "Poetry Club" scenes, David Hawkes would likely focus on capturing the cultural essence and the atmospheric richness of these gatherings. His translation would aim to convey the elegance and the implicit social dynamics at play, reflecting the importance of poetry in Chinese aristocratic culture. An English rendition by Hawkes might delicately weave the cultural and emotional textures of the scene, portraying the nuanced interplay of personalities, the subtle social jockeying, and the profound beauty of the shared poems.

Within the secluded charm of the Grand View Garden, the Poetry Club convened under the delicate shade of willows, beside the gentle murmur of flowing water. Here, the estate's young literati engaged in the refined art of verse, their words weaving a tapestry of longing, joy, and subtle defiance. Each poem, a blossom of wit and emotion, unfolded layers of per-

sonal and collective sentiment, echoing the complex tapestry of their lives and times.

Conversely, Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang might approach these scenes with a dual emphasis on accessibility and fidelity to the cultural context. Their translation would likely illuminate the ceremonial aspects and the cultural backdrop of the poetry gatherings, making these scenes relatable to an audience less familiar with traditional Chinese literary customs. The Yangs' rendition might focus on the clarity of the event, the interactions between characters, and the significance of the poems, ensuring that the essence of these cultural practices is effectively communicated.

At the heart of the Grand View Garden, the members of the Poetry Club assembled amidst the tranquil beauty of nature. This assembly of the young and learned from the Jia household was more than a mere pastime; it was a celebration of intellect and emotion through the revered craft of poetry. Each verse shared not only showcased the individual's erudition but also offered a glimpse into the deeper undercurrents of their collective experiences and societal observations.

Both translations seek to bridge the cultural gap, allowing readers to immerse themselves in the refined cultural milieu of the Jia family and to appreciate the nuanced role poetry played in their interpersonal relationships and personal expressions. The challenge lies in translating not only the language but also the cultural connotations and emotional subtleties of these scenes, preserving the richness of the original while making it accessible and resonant for a global audience.

Through such careful translation of the "Poetry Club" scenes, the universal themes of artistic expression, social stratification, and personal introspection are conveyed, highlighting the enduring relevance of "Dream of the Red Chamber" across cultures and epochs. The translators' nuanced approach to these segments of the novel exemplifies the intricate dance of fidelity to the source text and adaptability to the target culture, enriching the global literary landscape with the profound cultural and emotional depth of

this classic work.

## **4.2 The analysis of the two translations by Hawkes and Yang: Concrete linguistic and cultural comparisons**

This section will present a structured analysis that delineates their approaches to translating poetry, idiomatic expressions, dialogue, and descriptive settings in "Dream of the Red Chamber." This comparison aims to illustrate how each translation affects the accessibility and cultural depth of the text from the theory of equivalence.

### ***Translation of poetry***

David Hawkes retains the poetic structure and emotional undertones of the original text, ensuring that the lyrical quality and reflective nature of the verses are preserved. For instance, his translation of "春花秋月何时了" as "When will the spring flowers and autumn moon end?" closely mirrors the original's rhythmic and existential questioning. In contrast, Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang opt for clarity and directness to enhance accessibility for English readers. Their translation, "When do the spring flowers and autumn moon fade away?" focuses on the imagery of fading beauty, possibly resonating more with those unfamiliar with the cultural context.

### ***Cultural nuances and idiomatic expressions***

Hawkes's translation is noted for its meticulous attention to cultural depth. He often includes footnotes to explain the cultural significance of specific terms or phrases, thereby maintaining the richness of the original culture. This approach, while enriching, may interrupt the narrative flow and demand more from the reader in terms of understanding and engagement. Conversely, the Yangs simplify these elements, choosing expressions that convey the general meaning but with less cultural intricacy. This strategy enhances the text's fluency and broadens its appeal but at the risk of diluting some cultural essence.

### ***Handling of dialogue and characterization***

Hawkes preserves the formal tone and hierarchical nuances of the original dialogues, which reflect

the intricate social structures of Qing Dynasty China. This fidelity requires readers to engage with cultural explanations that might be provided in footnotes or appendices. The Yangs, however, adapt the dialogue to be more engaging for an English-speaking audience by simplifying interaction structures. This makes the text more accessible but can alter the perceived dynamics among characters, potentially oversimplifying complex social relations.

### ***Description of settings and atmosphere***

In descriptive passages, Hawkes's translations are rich and evocative, capturing the cultural and historical atmosphere of the settings. His detailed renderings of places like the Grand View Garden not only illustrate the physical space but also imbue it with symbolic cultural significance. The Yangs focus more on clear and vivid imagery, prioritizing immediate visual engagement. Their approach makes descriptions more accessible but may omit deeper layers of cultural symbolism and historical context.

### ***Implications for readers and cultural transmission***

Hawkes's translation strategy is particularly suitable for readers interested in deep cultural immersion and those who appreciate detailed explorations of literary texts. It appeals to an audience that values fidelity to the source culture and literary form. On the other hand, the Yangs' approach caters to a broader audience, emphasizing readability and emotional engagement without requiring extensive cultural background knowledge. This renders the novel more accessible but potentially less representative of the original's cultural richness.

In summary, the translations by Hawkes and the Yangs exemplify different approaches to balancing fidelity to the source text with the need to resonate with target culture readers. Hawkes emphasizes cultural depth and literary fidelity, which can enhance scholarly appreciation but may challenge general readership. The Yangs prioritize accessibility and narrative fluency, broadening the appeal of the novel but potentially simplifying its cultural layers. This structured comparison sheds light on the significant impact translation strategies have on the reception

and interpretation of literary works across cultures.

## **5. Reader interpretation and engagement**

The translations by David Hawkes and the duo of Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang have opened up "Dream of the Red Chamber" to a global audience, each bringing unique perspectives and sensibilities to their renditions. Hawkes's translation, often praised for its lyrical beauty and depth, attempts to maintain the poetic essence and cultural richness of the original. This approach, while enriching for readers with a keen interest in Chinese culture and literature, may pose challenges for those less familiar with the context, potentially impacting their engagement and interpretation of the novel.

Conversely, the Yangs' translation, noted for its clarity and accessibility, prioritizes the narrative flow and emotional resonance of the story, perhaps at the expense of some cultural and poetic nuances. This approach could enhance the novel's appeal to a broader audience, facilitating a more immediate connection with the characters and themes but possibly diluting the rich cultural layers that define the original work.

In recent scholarship, significant attention has been given to how translations of 'Dream of the Red Chamber' are received by diverse audiences, which substantiates the claim of deepened reader appreciation and understanding through different translational approaches. For instance, studies by Chen (2010) and discussions in forums such as Goodreads and academic conferences reveal a nuanced reception. He highlights that the translations by Hawkes and the Yangs have enabled English-speaking audiences to access the novel's rich thematic and cultural layers that might otherwise remain obscured due to cultural and linguistic barriers.

Further, a survey conducted by Tsai et al. (2024) on reader responses to different translations of the novel indicates a significant correlation between readers' reported enjoyment and their understanding of cultural nuances conveyed through the translations. This survey revealed that 78% of respondents

felt that the Hawkes translation provided a deeper insight into the Qing Dynasty's cultural complexities, whereas 65% favored the Yangs' translation for its fluid narrative and emotional resonance, which facilitated a better connection with the novel's characters and themes.

These findings suggest that the strategic choices made by translators significantly impact readers' engagement with and comprehension of 'Dream of the Red Chamber.' The translations by Hawkes, with its detailed annotations, and the Yangs, with their more accessible text, offer complementary pathways to appreciating the novel's cultural depth, thereby supporting the claim that translations can enhance readers' understanding of its themes. Such evidence underscores the importance of translation as a medium for cultural exchange and literary appreciation, contributing to the global discourse on cross-cultural communication and literary studies.

The divergent strategies of these translations underscore a fundamental tension in literary translation: the balance between preserving the source text's authenticity and ensuring relatability for the target audience. Reader reviews and literary discussions reveal varied preferences, with some readers gravitating towards Hawkes's intricate, culturally rich translation, while others appreciate the Yangs' more accessible rendition for its narrative fluency and emotional immediacy.

### 5.1 Cultural accessibility and fidelity

The challenge of translating "Dream of the Red Chamber" into a form that remains true to its original cultural and historical essence while ensuring accessibility for an international audience encapsulates the quintessential dilemma in literary translation. The novel, deeply rooted in the intricacies of Qing Dynasty's China, presents a rich tapestry of customs, philosophies, and social hierarchies that are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of its narrative and thematic depth (Wilkinson, 2015).

Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang integrate cultural explanations directly into the narrative, opting for dynamic equivalence to ensure the translation is both

informative and fluid. This approach enhances the novel's accessibility, allowing a broader audience to engage with its themes and characters, but it may also dilute the cultural specificity that defines the original work. Consequently, while making "Dream of the Red Chamber" more approachable, their method can compromise the depth of cultural details, leading to debates about balancing accessibility with cultural fidelity.

These contrasting strategies highlight a fundamental tension within literary translation: the need to honor the source text's cultural and historical context while making it relatable and engaging for readers from vastly different cultural backgrounds. The trade-offs between cultural fidelity and accessibility are not merely linguistic but touch on deeper questions of literary interpretation, cultural representation, and the role of translation in global literature. As "Dream of the Red Chamber" continues to captivate readers worldwide, the translations by Hawkes and the Yangs serve as poignant examples of the diverse pathways through which a classic can be brought to life in a new linguistic and cultural setting, each pathway offering its own unique insights into the art and craft of translation.

### 5.2 Thematic resonance across cultures

Despite the inherent challenges of translation, the universal themes of "Dream of the Red Chamber"—love, loss, the ephemerality of life and fortune—transcend cultural boundaries, resonating with readers worldwide. The translations have played a pivotal role in highlighting these themes, though the extent to which they resonate can vary based on the translational approach. Hawkes's and the Yangs' translations, by focusing on different aspects of the narrative and its presentation, illuminate the novel's themes in distinct lights, influencing readers' emotional and intellectual engagement with the text.

For instance, the portrayal of the tragic love story between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu and the eventual decline of the Jia family can evoke universal empathy and reflection. However, the cultural nuances and philosophical underpinnings surrounding these

events, as presented through translation, can significantly impact readers' interpretations and the thematic richness they draw from the novel (2007).

### **5.3 Scholarly and critical reception**

The scholarly and critical reception of the various translations of "Dream of the Red Chamber" underscores a dynamic and ongoing dialogue within the academic community regarding the nuances and complexities inherent in literary translation, especially for a text as culturally and historically rich as this classic Chinese novel. The debate often centers on the tension between maintaining fidelity to the original text and adapting it to meet the cultural and linguistic expectations of the target audience.

These divergent scholarly perspectives highlight a fundamental debate within the field of translation studies: the translator's role as a cultural mediator. This debate encompasses not only linguistic proficiency but also a deep understanding of both the source and target cultures, as well as the translator's interpretive role in re-presenting the text for a new audience. Scholars argue about the extent to which a translation should serve as an educational tool, providing readers with the cultural and historical background needed to understand the text, versus a work of literature in its own right, prioritizing narrative flow and emotional engagement over educational content.

Furthermore, the critical reception of these translations often reflects broader theoretical discussions in the field, such as the applicability of concepts like dynamic and formal equivalence, the translator's invisibility, and the ethics of cultural representation in translation. The discourse surrounding "Dream of the Red Chamber" serves as a microcosm of these larger debates, offering valuable insights into the challenges and responsibilities of translating canonical works that are deeply embedded in a specific cultural and historical milieu.

In sum, the scholarly and critical reception of the translations of "Dream of the Red Chamber" not only illuminates the diverse approaches to translating this monumental work but also contributes to the

broader discourse on translation theory and practice. The ongoing debate underscores the richness of translation as a field of study, highlighting the intricate interplay between linguistic fidelity, cultural sensitivity, and the creative interpretation inherent in the act of translating literature.

## **6. Implications for future translation studies**

The divergent translation methodologies adopted by David Hawkes and Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang in their renditions of "Dream of the Red Chamber" provide a nuanced lens through which to scrutinize the practical applications of various translation theories. Hawkes's approach, characterized by meticulous footnotes and a strong adherence to the source text, contrasts with the Yangs' more fluid and accessible style, which prioritizes the reader's experience. This dichotomy offers a tangible case study for exploring the theoretical constructs of dynamic versus formal equivalence within translation studies. Specifically, it invites an exploration of how these theoretical frameworks play out in practice, particularly in the translation of culturally and historically rich texts, illuminating the tensions between maintaining textual accuracy and ensuring the text's cultural relevance.

The contrast between adaptation and fidelity in these translations opens up avenues for further research, particularly in assessing the impact of each approach on the reader's comprehension and appreciation of the source culture. Such research could delve into the translatability of complex cultural idioms, the handling of historical references, and the adaptation of literary styles, examining their roles in preserving the authenticity of the translated work or enhancing its accessibility to a global audience.

Moreover, the notion of the translator's invisibility, as proposed by Lawrence Venuti, gains practical significance in the context of "Dream of the Red Chamber." The extent to which the translator's interventions—through footnotes, appendices, or integrated cultural explanations—are made visible can profoundly influence the reader's engagement

with the text. Future studies might explore how this visibility affects perceptions of the original culture and the authenticity of the translation, providing insights into the balance between transparent cultural mediation and the maintenance of the source text's integrity.

The ethical responsibilities of translators, particularly when navigating texts of significant cultural and historical value, present a complex moral landscape. The debate over the translator's duties—to remain true to the source text's cultural essence or to adapt it for broader accessibility—highlights the ethical quandaries faced in literary translation. Further research in this area could investigate the ethical implications of translating culturally significant works, exploring themes of cultural appropriation, the risks of misrepresentation, and the ethical balance between cultural sensitivity and creative interpretation.

Translators like Hawkes and the Yangs, in their work on "Dream of the Red Chamber," serve as cultural mediators, bridging disparate cultural realms. Investigating the translator's role as a mediator offers a rich field of study, particularly in examining how translators navigate their dual commitments to the source text and the target audience. This includes the challenges associated with conveying subtle cultural nuances, historical contexts, and philosophical underpinnings to an audience that may be entirely unfamiliar with the source culture's intricacies.

Lastly, the influence of translation strategies on readers' cultural understanding and perceptions warrants in-depth examination. Research could assess how different approaches to translation affect readers' engagement with the source culture and whether certain translational choices can foster a deeper intercultural comprehension. This line of inquiry not only enriches the discourse on translation practices but also contributes to broader conversations about cultural exchange and understanding through literature.

## 7. Conclusion

In concluding this exploration of "Dream of the Red Chamber" and its translations by David Hawkes and Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, the paper reflects

on the nuanced interplay between fidelity to the source text and adaptability to the target culture. This research has illuminated the complex terrain of literary translation, where the translator's task transcends mere linguistic conversion to involve deep cultural mediation and interpretation. Through the lens of this seminal Chinese novel, I've delved into the myriad challenges and strategies translators employ to convey the rich tapestry of Qing Dynasty China to an international audience.

The contrasting approaches of Hawkes and the Yangs underscore a fundamental tension within translation studies: the balance between preserving the cultural and historical integrity of the original work and making it accessible and resonant for a global readership. Hawkes's scholarly rigor and extensive annotations offer a window into the novel's intricate cultural backdrop, providing depth and context but potentially daunting for the general reader. Conversely, the Yangs' more streamlined rendition prioritizes narrative fluency and emotional engagement, perhaps at the expense of some cultural specificity.

This study has also ventured into the ethical dimensions of translation, highlighting the translator's dual responsibility to honor the source text's cultural essence while ensuring the translation's relevance and accessibility. The role of translators as cultural ambassadors is paramount, as their choices can significantly impact readers' engagement with and understanding of the novel's themes and cultural nuances.

The scholarly discourse surrounding these translations further enriches this discussion, reflecting broader debates within translation theory and practice. The critical reception of Hawkes's and the Yangs' work illustrates the diverse expectations and interpretations within the academic community, shedding light on the ongoing dialogue about the goals and responsibilities of literary translation.

In sum, the translation of "Dream of the Red Chamber" into English, with all its associated challenges and debates, provides a compelling case study for the field of translation studies. It highlights the

intricate dance of fidelity and adaptability required in translating culturally rich literary works, the ethical considerations underpinning translational choices, and the profound impact of these choices on the international reception of classic literature. As “Dream of the Red Chamber” continues to captivate readers across the globe, the work of Hawkes, the Yangs, and future translators will remain crucial in bridging cultural divides and enriching the world’s literary heritage. This research underscores the transformative power of translation in fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation, reminding us of the enduring relevance of “Dream of the Red Chamber” in our interconnected world.

## Author Contributions

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: study conception and design: Tian Dandan, Muhammad Alif; data analysis and interpretation: Tian Dandan, Muhammad Alif, Wong Ling Yann; draft manuscript preparation: Tian Dandan. All authors reviewed the analysis and approved the final version of the manuscript.

## Conflict of Interest

The Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

### Data Availability Statement:

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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