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Literary and Translation Perspectives on *Honglouloumeng*

Riccardo Moratto, Kanglong Liu and Di-kai Chao

As duly argued by Susan Chan Egan and Pai Hsien-Yung (2021, xv),

[i]t would be difficult to overstate the importance of *The Story of the Stone*, also known as *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglouloumeng*), in the Chinese cultural canon. The book is *Paradise Lost*, *War and Peace*, *In Search of Lost Time*, and *Pride and Prejudice* all rolled into one.

Indeed, anyone with some knowledge of Chinese literature must have heard about *Honglouloumeng*. As a novel that tops the list of the “Four Classic Chinese Novels,”¹ *Honglouloumeng* has an unrivaled dominance in Chinese literature because of its unparalleled literariness and thought-provokingness. As the famous Redologist Zhou Ruchang 周汝昌 puts it,

Honglouloumeng is one of the most unique cultural novels of our Chinese nation throughout the ages. [...] Of all the important Chinese novels of the Ming and Qing dynasties, there is no other novel with such an amazingly broad and deep cultural connotation as *Honglouloumeng*.²
(Zhou 2009, 4, our translation)

Another famous Redologist Pai Hsien-Yung 白先勇 also stated that “*Honglouloumeng* is supposed to be a compulsory literary classic for university humanities education: first of all, it is the greatest novel of Chinese literature, and if literature is the deepest projection of a nation’s mind, then *Honglouloumeng* should occupy a pivotal position in the composition of our national psyche”³ (Pai 2016, 7, our translation). Despite the fact that *Honglouloumeng* was written some 200 years ago, the novel is still relevant to the current time with many of its themes. These themes can be reflected in many of the alternative names of the novel, also reflected in the current edited book in which different authors have used different English titles, including 石頭記 *Shitou ji* (The Story of the Stone), 情僧錄 *Qing seng lu* (A Record of the Passionate Monk), 風月寶鑑 *Fengyue baojian* (Precious Mirror for the Romantic), 紅樓夢 *Honglouloumeng* (A Dream of Red Mansions), 金陵十二釵 *Jinling shi'er chai* (Twelve “Golden Hairpins” of Jinling), just to mention a

few. From all these book titles, one can have a general idea of the grandeur and intricacy of the novel's structure.

The novel with its diverse literary, cultural, and social themes has been an object of research in various fields of humanities including literary studies and translation studies for more than a century. As a monumental piece of literature that has made a significant impact on modern Chinese literature and language, its influence has been felt not only in China but also around the world. As of today, the novel has been translated into more than 20 languages (Fan and Minford 2017, 374), including major languages in the world such as English, French, Spanish, and Italian, which shows its profound influence on world literature. This line of research has continued to grow and inspire continuous inquiries with renewed perspectives and improved methods. The goal of this volume is to provide a platform for scholars to share their recent research findings on *Honglouloumeng* studies using literary and translation perspectives. The narrative, socio-cultural, feminist, and digital humanities approaches to re-examining the novel and its translations are the highlights of this book.

There are different approaches to Redology, meaning “the study of *Honglouloumeng*.” As Professor Ou mentions in the Foreword of this volume, since its publication, Redology has been divided into three stages, each of which has influenced the interpretation of the novel. In Sinology, it is traditionally customary to divide the study of “Red” into two major categories, figurism, and autobiographical, with the latter taking the lion's share. However, regardless of the school of thought, neither approach necessarily confronts *Honglouloumeng* as a fictional text, with its fictional nature and textual openness.⁴

As argued by Damrosch (2004, 4), world literature refers to the “[...] literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language.” The literary nature of *Honglouloumeng* is undoubtedly an asset to world literature, and the worldness of *Honglouloumeng*'s text has allowed the novel to continue to communicate and dialogue with readers from all over the world at the linguistic, literary, and ideological levels.

As the first international volume focusing on *Honglouloumeng* research by placing a special focus on literary and translation perspectives, this edited volume aims to present a fresh look at the novel and its place in comparative literature by bringing together a diverse range of voices from various fields of scholarship. It is believed that such an interdisciplinary perspective will help uncover many facets of the novel that might otherwise remain hidden using the traditional textual approaches. As the first edited volume exclusively devoted to *Honglouloumeng* research, we hope that this book will contribute to a better understanding of the novel and its impact on both literary and translation studies in China and the West.

To facilitate reading, the abstracts of the authors will be presented below as summary to each chapter. In Chapter 1, Jianwen Liu argues that academic

inquiry into the portrayal of *Honglouloumeng* characters has been conducted by literary scholars and critics for decades. Among the numerous characters in this Chinese classic, Wang Xifeng 王熙鳳, one of the well-known Twelve Beauties of Jinling, has been one of the most-discussed objects in previous studies. Compared to the monolithic amount of research that delves into the sculpture of the character formed through personality traits or the storyline associated with such a character's fate from pure literary perspectives, relatively little academic discussion has covered critical gender perspectives of this prominent character. This chapter will make such an attempt by investigating the characterization of Wang Xifeng from the perspective of androgyny, a fundamentally important concept in gender studies. This chapter will first review major scholarly discussions on androgyny related to feminist literary criticism, then introduce Bem's theory on androgyny as the theoretical framework, and finally examine the representation of androgyny in Wang Xifeng by studying the character's gender role behavior, personality traits, and managerial competence displayed in the story.

In Chapter 2, Louise Edwards argues that in the 18th century, male bodies were a legitimate human form upon which to display beautiful clothing and accessories. Moreover, an elaborately decorated male body connoted power, high status, and strength—superior masculinity was a decorative performance. The author builds this argument through an analysis of the descriptions of clothing, dress, accessories, and fabric. Through Cao Xueqin's 曹雪芹 novel we see that masculine bodies were the preferred aesthetic form. His detailed descriptions of clothing, dress, and accessories are not focused on the many young women who populate the novel—rather, the reader's aesthetic eye is invited to roam primarily over the male protagonist, Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉, and two masculine female figures, Wang Xifeng and Shi Xiangyun 史湘雲. All three of these characters are known for their rejection of strict gender-sex norms and for the fluidity of their expressions of *yin* 陰 (female essence, subordinate, passive, and shaded) and *yang* 陽 (male essence, dominant, active, and bright). The author shows that Cao's particular attention to the beauty of their dress serves to amplify their masculinity in this interplay of *yin* and *yang*. Although the novel focuses primarily on the lives of women, the descriptions of clothing focus primarily on characters manifesting *yang* attributes.

In Chapter 3, Martin Woesler argues that *The Red Chamber Dreams* (this is the title under which the first excerpts of this novel were published in Great Britain in 1819), displays (in its contents) interculturality, both the mixture of Manchu and Han culture as well as the impact of foreign culture in late Qing China. Time in the novel was claimed to be timeless, and the culture displayed in this novel is not genuinely Manchu or Han Chinese. Instead, the author, Cao Xueqin, draws a picture of a Chinese culture which has successfully integrated Manchu, Han, and foreign cultures into Qing Chinese culture. Cao Xueqin often plays with the cultural elements of both Manchu and Han by mixing them, which was easily recognized by

the readers of his time. This chapter shows that the integration of the best cultural achievements serves the development of individual personalities and the growing of humanism with examples from this novel of the integration of foreign cultures, foreigners, and foreign objects such as watches, clocks, glass, etc. into everyday family life, and the combination of Han and Manchu traditions in clothing, which serve the characterization of the social status, personalities, and moods of the characters. Both Cao Xueqin and, even more, his protagonist Jia Baoyu are early humanists, universalists, and world citizens. The novel *Red Chamber Dreams* functions worldwide and has a global impact. It is a complex showroom of diverse aspects of Chinese culture (in its integration of Han and Manchu elements), and foreign cultural elements, and is the embodiment and essence of Chinese culture. It is unique in its cultural integration. It shares humanism with other world literature novels. Therefore, it should be honored as an item of “World Documentary Heritage.”

In Chapter 4, Li-chuan Ou argues that throughout the research history of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, though character analyses are in the majority, the interpretations of male characters in the book are still limited, shallow, and biased. This defect is particularly noted in the studies on the male protagonist, a growing teenager, who guides the narrative perspective and presents an unfledged temperament and disposition. Researchers are so deeply trapped in the current research perspective, which is dominated by modern ideologies, that they often understand and interpret the character through the lens of isolated and *laissez-faire* individualism and therefore ignore or even deny the importance of growth and education. The distorted perspective also leads to misinterpretations of the meaning and value of other senior male characters. Even when the topic of “growth” is introduced into character analysis, the male characters who have grown out of childhood or adolescence are simply subject to negative criticism in most cases. In fact, the novelist examines various life issues in depth, understands and respects the meaning and value of different people at their different stages, and unfolds a profound, complex, and polyphonic world in the book. The same is true of the shaping of male characters. They are not meant to serve as the opposite of maiden worship which centers around females or youth. In the family narrative, which is the grand context for and superior to the worship of girls, the growth of men is actually far more significant, with “becoming a father” as their ultimate value. Ou has pointed out in her previous research that the existence of Jia Zheng 賈政 in the book is to embody the naming, functions, and shaping of the “father,” completely presenting the process and significance of a male growing from a boy to a man and to a father. Therefore, the novelist intentionally took the word “Zheng” (政), which literally means politics, as his name, because it not only complies with the moral standard for traditional gentlemen as “Zheng” (政) sounds the same as “Zheng” (正), which means righteousness but also implies the Confucian teaching that practicing filial piety and brotherhood at home is

just as engaging as in politics outside. Based on this preliminary research, a further study can be conducted on the special settings of the important heirs in traditional extended families, including the design of Jia Zheng being the second child among family peers, in order to figure out the deep implications. This chapter focuses on the phenomenon of Jia Zheng being called “Second Master,” and then further extends to the deep meaning implied by all those who have the title of “Second Master” in the book.

In Chapter 5, Barbara Bisetto argues that Ming-Qing fiction witnessed a profound change in the representation of the father figure. Alongside the image of the strict (*yan fu* 嚴父) and benevolent father, responsible for the moral upbringing of his son in the Confucian socio-ethical system, there emerged figures of evil or weak fathers, unable to fully assume the duties and responsibilities of their role. This chapter represents a preliminary attempt to provide a more nuanced analysis of the character of Jia Zheng, the strict father of Jia Baoyu in the novel *Honglouloumeng*. After briefly introducing the broader coordinates of the discourse on characterization in contemporary narrative theory, the author sets out to analyze three episodes related to Jia Zheng’s first presentation in the novel and his relationship with Baoyu, strained between cultural and personal expectations and frustrations. There emerges the figure of a complex character caught in the mixture of conflicting duties, responsibilities, personal dispositions, and emotions, who confirms the trend in late imperial fiction to problematize the paternal figure by showing the complexity of the human dimension that lies beneath the normative socio-ethical roles.

In Chapter 6, Qian Cui argues that subjectivity is a Western concept revitalized in the Chinese literary field in the 1980s. The excessive pursuit of subjectivity and the inflation of the human self caused environmental deterioration and estrangement of human relationships, which exposed the limitations and disadvantages of the concept of subjectivity that upheld individual liberty and freedom as the foremost pursuit. In response to this circumstance, Chunshi Yang proposed his theory of aesthetic intersubjectivity by drawing together views on intersubjective communications in both Western theories and traditional Chinese thought. According to Yang, subjectivity is defined as the subject’s relationship with the world, which exhibits varied patterns; intersubjectivity is defined as the intersubjective exchange and connectivity between subjects, which are not limited to human beings but also the world and other beings that are transcended into subjects in aesthetic experiences. The concept of subjectivity and intersubjectivity theorized by Yang offers a new approach for textual analysis that can reveal non-anthropocentric subjectivities and worldviews in *Honglouloumeng*, which have not yet been explored in previous research. The author’s analysis of *Honglouloumeng* examines both subjectivity and the world in their multiplicity, and focuses on how subject (trans)formations take place as a result of intersubjective interactions, exchanges, and clashes of worldviews. The author unravels three models of subjectivity represented by Baochai 寶釵, Daiyu 黛玉,

and Baoyu by discerning three different models of relations with the world: Baochai representing the Neo-Confucian ideal, Daiyu representing the Buddhist-Daoist ideal, and Baoyu representing the lyrical ideal. These models of subjectivity are not only distinctive from each other but also entangled and interdependent.

In Chapter 7, Fan Jiang focuses on the anthologization of *Honglouloumeng* in literary histories, introductions, anthologies, and textbooks in the Anglo-American context during the 1960s, exploring how the compilers' selection among diverse English translations of the Chinese novel reveals intended readers' expectation and influences the future mode employed for the translation of Chinese classics in the following decades. The findings of this article may partly explain the upsurge of academic translations of Chinese classics in the 1970s and the unpopularity of the English translation of *Honglouloumeng* published by Foreign Language Press in the English-speaking world.

In Chapter 8, Jie Deng argues that *Honglouloumeng* is a masterpiece of Chinese literature and has been translated and retranslated from time to time. The version entitled *The Story of the Stone*, rendered by David Hawkes and John Minford, has gained high prestige in Academia. The publication of the version is not just the translators' endeavor, but involves a number of agents who participate in the project and exert their power over the translation through various interventions. This chapter delves into the invisible practices behind the publication, puts agents on the spot, and examines their roles and influences on how the translation is presented to Anglophone readers. To investigate these activities in the production process, this study explores the interactions between agents by drawing upon the primary sources collected from the Penguin Archive. These sources offer crucial access to the working conditions and practices in procedure and shed light on the role of agents, thus creating a "microhistory of translation and translators." (Munday 2014, 64). Adopting a sociological approach, the study of *The Story of the Stone* also sheds light on the identity of the agents and the power play in the process.

In Chapter 9, Shuyin Zhang argues that the English translations of the classic Chinese novel *Honglouloumeng* have generated significant scholarly interest in the field of Translation Studies. Much of this attention has focused on the only two complete and unabridged translations: *A Dream of Red Mansions* by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang and *The Story of the Stone* by David Hawkes and John Minford. Previous research has focused on the translations rather than the translators themselves, resulting in a purely textual analysis, leaving the paratext—a "threshold" through which readers access the translations,—underexplored. Only in recent years have translators begun to move gradually from the background to a more central role. Paratexts that reveal the presence of the translator are rich resources for discovering the translator's identity. This chapter deals with the intersection that exists between the paratexts and the translators' identities. It draws on

Gérard Genette's theory in which paratext acts as the theoretical framework for reviewing the long-forgotten paratextual materials of these two renowned translations. By extrapolating the translators' identities in a holistic paratextual comparison, this study intends to prompt further inquiry into the appreciation of the translations of this classic piece of literature while opening up new perspectives in the field of literary translation studies and translator studies.

In Chapter 10, Ping Li and Dongli Lu argue that since Li (2014) made an initial study of Lin Yutang's abridged translation of *Dream of the Red Chamber* in his English works, Lin's translation has aroused some scholarly attention. Based on Lin Yutang's English manuscript of *Dream of the Red Chamber* and his private letters on it, this chapter traces Lin's translation process and explains with examples how Lin edited the book and translated it by resorting to explication strategies. The study provides new ideas for the research of *Dream of the Red Chamber* and Lin Yutang.

In Chapter 11, Chunming Wu argues that translation, particularly literary translation, is a rewriting process constrained by various socio-cultural factors, among which poetics is a dominant one. This chapter investigates how two heterogeneous poetics, i.e., telling-orientedness versus showing-orientedness, adopted in two English translations of *Honglouloumeng*, i.e., one translated by David Hawkes and John Minford, and the other by Yang Xianyi and his wife Gladys Yang, shaped the textual make-up and verbal formulation of the target texts. The current study attempts to elaborate these two approaches by using the speech presentations (SP) of the novel's heroine Lin Dai-yu. To this end, the author compiled a corpus of Dai-yu's SP in the source text with its two corresponding English translations. Using an integrated method combining systemic functional linguistics, stylistics, and narratology, the author found that the narrative mode of *Honglouloumeng* as a traditional Chinese literary classic was telling-oriented. In terms of the two translations, the Yangs translated Dai-yu's SP more literally and their version is more telling-oriented, whereas Hawkes adapted most of Dai-yu's SP to conform to the literary norms of modern English fiction writing characterized by showing-orientedness. The contrast of narrative modes adopted in the two translations can be explained by the different *skopoi* of the respective translators: Hawkes translated *HLM* with an aim to share the pleasure of the novel with the target readers whereas the Yangs translated it in order to promote China's national image.

In Chapter 12, Kanglong Liu, Ho Ling Kwok, and Riccardo Moratto examine how two different translators of *Honglouloumeng*, i.e., David Hawkes (who translated the first 80 chapters, while John Minford translated the last 40 chapters) and Yang Xianyi (together with his wife Gladys Yang), used hedges and boosters to translate the fictional dialogues in this classic Chinese novel. As hedges and boosters are communicative strategies for modifying the illocutionary force of speech acts and showing the speaker's attitude to audience, they are highly relevant to fictional dialogues which exhibit

characters' interactions and speech acts. Since translation involves rendering a textual message across two cultures, the translator's interpretation of the original dialogues may alter characters' speech acts and characterizations. Based on a corpus compiled by extracting the fictional dialogues from the two *Honglouloumeng* translations, the study found that Hawkes used more hedges and boosters than the Yangs in translating the fictional dialogues. It is believed that the differences in translation styles can be attributed to the translators' language backgrounds, translation practices, and socio-cultural backgrounds. The findings also imply the differences in terms of the respective translator's awareness and approach to characterization building in the translated novel.

In Chapter 13, Libo Huang argues that verdict poems, which predict the destinies of the major characters in *Honglouloumeng*, play a significant role in the characterization of the Chinese classic novel. Theoretically, the personal profile of each character should remain consistent with the corresponding predictive verdict poem from the beginning to the end of the story. Besides, the major characters should differ from each other in personality. Linguistically, the characterization assumes certain semantic coherence between the verdict poems and the rest of the text. Based on a comparable corpus consisting of the two English translations of *Honglouloumeng*, this chapter attempts to carry out a comparative investigation into the representations of the major 12 girl characters between the two English versions. The focus is on the identification of each characterizing pattern in the two English translations. Corpus statistics are employed in the investigation and differences are to be interpreted from multiple perspectives.

In Chapter 14, Kan Wu and Dechao Li argue that as a text mining technique, topic modeling automatically extracts and classifies clusters of similar words from a corpus to infer potential topics in it. In the present study, this technique was used to analyze readers' reviews of two English translations of *Honglouloumeng* so as to find out how this Chinese classic has been received by English-speaking readers around the world. It is revealed that "translation quality," "editing and binding," and "marketing and pricing" are the three topics that have been most frequently discussed by English readers. Both practical and theoretical implications can be drawn from this study. Practically, the study demonstrates that a successful promotion of Chinese classics in the English-speaking world requires not only faithful translation strategies and effective multimodal designs but also a reasonable mechanism for pricing and marketing. Theoretically, by using topic modeling in mining translation data, the research showcases the applicability and potential for applying the method to corpus-based translation study and thus expands the field into new territories.

We believe that such an international, dynamic, and interdisciplinary exploration will provide valuable insights for anyone who wishes to have a better understanding of recent literary and translation insights into the study of *Honglouloumeng*. We also believe it is appropriate to take this very

opportunity to thank all the contributors of this volume for their dedication and their efforts to produce their best research and share it with the readers of the book.

Notes

- 1 The other three novels of the list are *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *Water Margin*.
- 2 The original Chinese text reads, “《紅樓夢》是我們中華民族的一部古往今來，絕無僅有的“文化小說”。從所有中國明清兩代重要小說來看，沒有哪一部能够像《紅樓夢》具有如此驚人廣博而深厚的文化內涵的了。”
- 3 The original Chinese text reads, “《紅樓夢》本來就應該是大學人文教育必讀的文學經典：首先，《紅樓夢》是中國文學最偉大的小說，如果說文學是一個民族心靈最深刻的投射，那麼《紅樓夢》在我們民族心靈構成中，應該占有舉足輕重的地位。”
- 4 See Yu Yingshi 余英時. *Honglouloumeng de liangge shijie* 紅樓夢的兩個世界 [Two Worlds in Dream of the Red Chamber] (Taipei: Linking Books, 1978); Anthony C. Yu, *Rereading the Stone: Desire and the Making of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

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