



A Study on the English Translation of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Food Culture in a Dream of Red Mansions Based on Big Data: Take Yang's Translation as an Example

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Abstract. In "A Dream of Red Mansions," there are extensive descriptions of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) dietary practices for health preservation. The TCM formulations mentioned encompass decoctions, pastes, pills, powders, and elixirs. Utilizing big data analysis technology, the research team focused on Yang's translation to evaluate the translator's comprehension and representation of the original TCM content. The study assessed whether the translator achieved cultural and semantic equivalence with the source text during the translation process. The research team analyzed the translation strategies, structural approaches, overseas reception, and identified shortcomings, highlighting instances of cultural misinterpretation and evaluating the overall translation effectiveness. This study aims to provide a reference for further research on the English translation of TCM food culture in "A Dream of Red Mansions."

Keywords: TCM and Food Culture; English Translation of "A Dream of Red Mansions"; Big Data Analysis

1 Introduction

Both classical Chinese literature and TCM are integral components of Chinese culture. Medical literature represents the symbiotic evolution and mutual enrichment between ancient Chinese literary traditions and traditional medical practices. TCM has not only furnished abundant material for the creation of classical literature but also expanded the thematic scope of classical works. Through the lens of TCM, classical Chinese literature advances plot development, deepens character portrayal, and elucidates thematic elements. Beyond merely documenting traditional Chinese medical knowledge and practitioners, it endeavors to convey the philosophical underpinnings and modes of thought inherent in TCM, presenting it as a distinctive cultural phenomenon to readers. Consequently, while appreciating these literary works, readers can simultaneously gain insights into TCM and experience the profound richness of Chinese culture.

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In the book "Terms of Chinese Medicine," eating and nourishing is defined as "the practice of selecting appropriate food to maintain health." "A Dream of Red Mansions" extensively covers TCM dietary therapy and health care. Cao Xueqin, the author, demonstrates a profound understanding of TCM dietary principles, which is reflected in his characters' meticulous attention to diet and health care in their daily lives, adhering to fundamental TCM principles [1]. Firstly, the residents of the Jia household follow the four-season health regimen: promoting growth in spring, nurturing in summer, harvesting in autumn, and storing in winter. For instance, during summer, they consume "small lotus leaf soup" to invigorate vitality, while venison is consumed in winter for its Yin-nourishing and blood-enriching properties. This dietary practice respects natural laws and aligns with seasonal changes. Furthermore, as a wealthy family, the Jia household prioritizes dietary supplements over medicinal ones, emphasizing fortifying the body through food rather than relying solely on medication. The author devotes substantial space to depicting food culture, referencing nearly 200 kinds of food. The Jia family, with Lady Jia as a prime example, comprehends the TCM principle of the unity of medicine and food, and adjusts their diet and daily habits in accordance with environmental variations.[2]. Furthermore, the book frequently references Yin-Yang and the Five Elements theory. In Chapter 51, Shi Xiangyun and the maid Cui Wei engage in an insightful discussion about Yin-Yang theory. The Jia household integrates these concepts into their daily lives and dietary practices, emphasizing balance and mutual reinforcement between Yin-Yang and the Five Elements. Lastly, the Jia household advocates for moderate eating, often described as "light diet," with even the young ladies exercising restraint during meals, as observed through Grandma Liu's commentary.

A Dream of Red Mansions is not only a repository of literary and artistic treasures but also an invaluable compendium of TCM (TCM) culture. The novel meticulously details Qing Dynasty TCM practices, encompassing aspects such as diseases, herbal medicines, prescriptions, pulse diagnosis, medicinal diets, and health preservation. These depictions significantly contribute to the development of the narrative, the shaping of character personalities, and the manifestation of their fates. They reflect the author's philosophical insights and his masterful integration of TCM with literature. An analysis of the English translation of "A Dream of Red Mansions," particularly focusing on its food and health elements grounded in Chinese nutritional culture, can effectively promote traditional Chinese health practices and enhance cultural soft power.

2 Database Establishment and Analysis

2.1 Method

2.1.1. Selection of Translation.

Since 1830, there have been sixteen English translations of "A Dream of Red Mansions." Among these, Yang's translation best preserves the original form and the nuances of health culture. Therefore, this study selects Yang's version for analysis. The research team identified and annotated nearly 300 instances of medical and health knowledge within the text, accumulating a corpus of over 50,000 words. This corpus

includes 161 medical terms, 114 types of cases, 13 instances of TCM, 45 prescriptions, and 125 types of TCM herbs listing in Table 1 Paragraph-example .

Table 1. Paragraph-example

Classified	sentences	translated by Yang
it's must eat for one's health	Bao-chai nodded. "Exactly! You know the old saying: 'He that eats shall live'? What you ordinarily eat, when you're not ill, doesn't seem to nourish you or build up your resistance. That's one of your troubles. said Bao-chai."... I think the first, most important thing to do is to calm your liver and strengthen your stomach a bit. If you could reduce the inflamed, over-active state of your liver so that it was no longer harming the earthy humour of your spleen, your stomach would begin functioning normally again and then the food you ate could begin to nourish you properly. First thing every morning you ought to take an ounce of the best quality bird's nest and five drams of sugar-candy and heat them up in a silver skillet until they make a sort of syrup. If you were to take that regularly, it would do you more good than medicine. There's nothing like it for building you up if you have low vitality	That's true." Pao -chai nodded. "The ancients said, Food is life, yet what you normally eat doesn't give you energy or strength, and that's a bad sign said Pao-chai. "... the first essential is to calm your liver and improve your digestion. Once the fire in your liver is quelled so that it can't overcome the 'earth' element your digestion will be better and you'll be able to assimilate your food. When you get up each morning, you should take an ounce of the best quality bird's-nest into a gruel with half an ounce of crystal sugar in a silver pot. Taken regularly, this is a better tonic than any medicine."
it's food and medicine come from the same source		
advocate a vegetarian diet	"Our Feng has been telling me that you've brought a lot of fruit and vegetables with you," said Grandmother Jia. "... I'm so looking forward to some nice, fresh farm vegetables ..."	"Just now His-feng told me you've brought us a lot of pumpkins and vegetables," the Lady Dowager went on. "... I've been longing for some freshly picked things of this kind ..."

Yang's translation of "food is life" is a faithful reproduction of He who eats shall live. nourish you or build up your resistance has a higher cultural load, and Yang's translation of give you energy or strength is a fuzzy translation. earth element, earthy humour Yang's treatment of the cultural concept of "stomach belongs to the earth" directly translates the word "earth element". Yang's translation of giving you energy or strength is a fuzzy translation. earth element, earthy humour Yang's translation of the cultural concept of "stomach belongs to the earth" directly translates the word "earth", which has a high cultural load. This kind of cultural load is high, and it is more convenient for foreign readers to understand and accept it, and for Chinese culture to spread, by adding appropriate translations or annotations to supplement the explanations.

2.1.2. Analysis of Text Translation Strategies.

Based on years of research, Chen Min's research team has put forward seven principles: Correspondence: The meaning of translated terms should align with the original Chinese words and conform to the connotations of TCM. Systematicity: Ensure the integrity of the conceptual system in the discipline of TCM. Homogeneity: A single concept should be consistently translated using the same term. Simplicity: Translated names should be concise, avoiding overly lengthy dictionary-style explanations. Back-translatibility: The structure of translated terms should be similar or close to that of the original Chinese terms. Ethnicity: Retain the characteristic elements of TCM in the translated terms. Conventionality: Prevailing or commonly used translations may be adopted even if they do not fully comply with the aforementioned principles. [3].

Based on these seven principles to analyze the English translation of *Dream of the Red Chamber's Chinese Medicine Food and Nutrition Culture*, Yang's translation version utilizes the translation compensation strategy when dealing with cultural defaults [4]. ① Extra-textual entrainment is also known as the annotation method, which is essentially a combination of direct translation or phonetic translation with extra-textual entrainment. The advantage of this method is that it does not destroy the context of the original text, it can supplement the content of cultural defaults well, and the extra-textual annotation is not limited by space. ② Explicit in-text, supplementing the default content through in-text Italian translation or a combination of direct translation and Italian translation. This method can help readers understand the default content, but the length of the article will be affected by the in-text interpretation and the expression of the article. For example, the cultural default in the original text is the invisible implicit compensation and then converted into explicit straightforward. ③ Naturalization, for the two cultures in common content with the translation of the same or similar content in the culture to replace the default content in the original. This can be a good way to supplement the default content for foreign readers but the number of such content is limited. ④ Deleting and not translating some unimportant default contents in the text. In this way, although this part of the cultural content can not be transmitted to the readers, it will not affect the readers' understanding of the whole text. ⑤ Hard translation, according to the literal meaning of the original text without any compensation or explanation for the cultural defaults that affect the coherence of the reading. These methods are commonly used in the translation industry to compensate for cultural omissions and have their own advantages and disadvantages, of which the more popular is the method of extra-textual notes.

2.2 Experiment

2.2.1. Analysis of English-Chinese Translation Forms.

The descriptive words and phrases such as pathology analysis, herb names, and Chinese medical treatment have functional value, but the cultural words and phrases of Chinese medicine in *Dream of Red Mansions* are obviously differentiated from ordinary medical texts by Cao Xueqin's writing, and have aesthetic value [5]. As a result, the words and phrases of Chinese medicine culture in *Dream of Red Mansions* also have functional and aesthetic "double value", and there are some binomial and rela-

tively compatible aesthetic principles in traditional Chinese aesthetics, such as "virtual" and "real", "virtual" and "real". For example, "virtual" and "real" are the opposite of "virtual"; "virtual" refers to "deflation, minimisation and abstraction"; "real" is the opposite of "virtual"; and "real" is the opposite of "virtual". "Real" is the opposite of "false"; "put" and "collect", "put" in translation aesthetics refers to the fact that the translator is not restricted by the style and structure of the original language, but uses the translated language to reinterpret on the basis of the semantics of the original language. In the aesthetics of translation, 'freeing' means that the translator is not limited by the form and structure of the original sentence, and reinterprets the translation on the basis of the semantics of the original language, which often makes the structure of the translated text more complicated; on the other hand, 'retracting' means that the translator makes the translated sentences more compact and shorter than the original text when translating. The four-letter words in the text are selected to analyse the form of Chinese-English translation, see Table 2 Chinese-English Translation Forms.

Table 2. Chinese-English Translation Forms

Proto-language feature	Active	Subject	Passive	Voiding	Quasi - Virtualisation	Noun disposition	Partitive	Definition	Omit	Total
verb-object construction	950	905	267	97	47	109	46	19	107	2704
parallel structure	721	475	169	72	36	35	23	4	32	1682
subject-predicate construction	138	173	87	15	19	14	6	3	18	477
bias structure		117	52	10	12	17	6	2	14	402

Neutral and positive semantics are more likely to be translated into vanitized forms, while positive semantics are more likely to be translated into vanitized-like forms. This is because vanitized nouns in Chinese are mostly used to express the attitudes of solving difficulties with concerted efforts, taking the initiative to take responsibility, and making prudent and serious judgments, and the latter is often accompanied by the nouns of positively acquired events, such as "get", so the vanitized verbs in Chinese mostly express positive and neutral semantics. Therefore, Chinese vanitized verbs mostly express positive and neutral semantics, so the translation of positive and neutral semantics into "Voiding" and "Quasi - Virtualisation" is in line with the usage habits of modern Chinese. In addition, Chinese active and receptive subject constructions are used to describe events and actions without strict semantic restrictions, so passive constructions with different semantic tendencies can be translated into active and receptive subject constructions.

2.2.2. Analysis of Overseas Readers' Book Reviews of the English Translation.

According to the type of reader and the medium of book review, this paper divides the readers' book reviews of Yang's translation of Dream of Red Mansions into two categories: expert book reviews and popular book reviews. Expert readers are mostly professional scholars in the relevant fields, who have higher demands on the academic and linguistic rigour of the book contents, and the book reviews are published in aca-

ademic newspapers and journals, which enhances the readers' recognition and social influence. Popular readers are mostly book buyers, and they have higher demands on the readability of books. The book reviews of popular readers on the Internet are anonymous and extensive, reflecting the readers' demand for multidimensional cognition, and the views of book reviews directly affect other readers' willingness to buy and interest in reading.

The expert book review corpus in this study was selected from Google Scholar and Sci-Hub; Google Scholar is an academic search engine, and Sci-Hub can help researchers download the full text of literature. The public book review corpus is selected from Amazon.com (www.amazon.com) and Goodreads (www.goodreads.com), the deadline for book review acquisition is 1 August 2024, excluding the reviews that cannot determine the identity of the readers due to the small number of words, the basic information of the readers of the book review of Dream of Red Mansions in English translation is as follows in Table 3 Basic information :

Table 3. Basic information

categorization	identities	Number
expert	Theory Learners	2
	Clinicians	1
	Academic researchers	3
	Translators	2
the general public	Patient	1
	Theory Learners	36
	Literature writing this	2
	Chinese medicine enthusiasts	1

According to the overall evaluation of readers, the status of readers' needs satisfaction can be categorized as satisfied (42 articles, 74%), partially satisfied (11 articles, 19%) and not satisfied (4 articles, 7%). Most of the readers' needs for TCM dietary culture were somewhat satisfied after reading the translated version of Dream of the Red Chamber. Compared with the expert book reviews, in addition to the concerns about the translation quality of the translated book and the identity of the translators, the popular readers also put forward their demands on the book's layout design and logistics services, and are very much looking forward to the publication and distribution of the English translations of the Chinese Medicine Food and Nutritional Culture canon.

2.2.3. Translation Problems.

As a work of literature, it is rare for a good translation to be able to convey the spirit and feelings when translated into a foreign language, and most foreign readers will not pay too much attention to the translation of Chinese medicine and food culture in addition to enjoying the plot of the novel. However, since Dream of the Red Chamber contains rich knowledge of TCM and unique Chinese food culture, and they play an important role in the development of the plot, characterisation and the manifestation of the characters' destinies, it is important to try to reflect the connotation of the source

language in the translation, especially in the translation of some commonly used phrases, so as to avoid ambiguity, and to enable readers to understand the true culture of Chinese medicine and food culture and its profound meaning. Yang Xianyi, as a famous Chinese translator, has a profound knowledge of Chinese and a deep understanding of his mother tongue, and his wife and co-translator is also British, which makes his translation more appropriate in terms of cultural communication and linguistic expression. He tries to reproduce the style of the original work, inviting readers of the translated language to make semantic associations to achieve the effect of actively approaching the culture of the source language. However, because the culture of Chinese medicine is so profound and deep, it is inevitable that the translator will have misinterpreted and mistranslated some parts of the text, for example, the translation of the words "porridge" and "soup" itself is questionable.

Translation of "congee" The bird's nest congee with rock sugar mentioned above is made from bird's nest and rice, flavoured with rock sugar. Yang's translation is "syrup", "a thick, sticky solution of sugar and water, often flavoured or medicinal", meaning "syrup, sugar juice; syrupy medicine". Yang's association makes some sense, as rock sugar bird's nest porridge is indeed sweet, the texture is thin, and bird's nest itself is a high-grade nutritional tonic and a valuable medicinal herb [6]. However, the translation as "syrup" is obviously inappropriate, and readers of the translation will mistakenly think that Daiyu is taking medicine rather than a nutritious diet. The author concludes that Yang's translation of "bird's nest" is probably due to the fact that bird's nest is a kind of high-grade tonic in TCM, and he tried his best to make it related to medicine when translating the word. Yang's translation of "gruel", as defined by Wechsler's Dictionary, is "a thin porridge", "a thin porridge (often made with oats and milk or water)". The author believes that "congee (broth or porridge made from rice)" or "rice porridge" is more appropriate, referring to rice porridge. Yang "likes to offer different words for translation depending on the context, without forcing the translation to be consistent", and he uses several different words to translate the various "porridges" that appear in the novel, such as "frumenty" (lapa congee, jujube japonica congee), "syrup" (ice-sugar bird's nest congee), "(Bi-Japonica congee, thin rice), "congee" (river rice porridge), "stew" (duck meat porridge), "milk" (milk-sugar round-grain rice porridge), "the difference in the choice of words may reflect the translator's interpretation of the different porridges in each context. The difference in the choice of words may reflect the translator's interpretation of the different porridges in each context". However, it is difficult to understand that foods of the same nature should have different names or even be derived from different things. Therefore, "when translating such foods, the translator must clearly understand the nature and characteristics of various foods and find the appropriate words to translate" and try his best to avoid the problem of inconsistency of expression. In the author's opinion, "porridge" is the subject word of the above-mentioned porridges and the others are additional words, so the same translation should be used.

Soup in Chinese medicine, also known as tonics, is the liquid soup that comes out of the drugs of a decoction of TCM. The translation of "soup" in medicinal soup and edible soup is different, usually it is "decoction" for medicinal use and "soup" for edible use, and the definition of "concoct" is "to make (a food or drink) by means of" in the

Weiss Dictionary. "The definition of "concoction" is "to make (a food or drink) by mixing different things together". concoction" means 'concoction, concoction'. Yang uses the word "broth", which is interpreted by Wechsler's Dictionary as "liquid in which meat, fish, cereal grains, or vegetables have been cooked", which means "to make (a food or drink) by mixing different things together". " , meaning "broth, soup containing meat (or vegetables) (especially soup in which barley or other grains have been cooked)", such as "beef broth" (beef broth). Yang's translation of "broth" is somewhat inappropriate in light of the ingredients of Jianlian red date soup. Regarding the ingredients of the soup, Yang's translation is also inaccurate, such as one of the ingredients of the "Healing Jealousy Soup", "Chenpi", "that is, tangerine peel, for the rue family of small evergreen trees of orange tree of the mature fruit of the rind", "its properties are pungent, pungent and bitter. "It is pungent, bitter and warm in nature, and enters the spleen and lung meridians. Because Chenpi is indeed bitter in nature, Yang's translation is "orange peel", meaning orange peel [7]. Chenpi should be translated as "sun-dried tangerine (mandarin) peel", which not only indicates the raw material of Chenpi, but also highlights its special preparation method, which is now widely accepted.

3 Conclusions

As a literary work, it is a rare good translation that can convey the spirit and feelings when it is translated into a foreign language, and most foreign readers will not pay too much attention to the translation of Chinese medicine and food culture in addition to enjoying the plot of the novel. However, since *Dream of the Red Chamber* contains rich knowledge of Chinese medicine and unique Chinese food culture, and they play an important role in the development of the plot, the characterisation of the characters and the manifestation of their destiny, the translation should try to reflect the connotation of the source language, especially in the translation of some commonly used terms, it should try to avoid ambiguity, so as to enable readers to understand the true culture of Chinese medicine and food culture and its profound meaning. Yang did not stick to a particular translation method of naturalisation or alienation, but dealt flexibly with the cultural phenomena of TCM. However, the translator has intentionally or unintentionally made a superficial treatment of certain contents of TCM food culture, and there are also some mistranslations, all of which may cause the translation to fail to faithfully convey the creative contents and intentions of the original author. In today's strategic situation of the globalisation of Chinese medicine culture, translators should strive to achieve the unity of "naturalisation of language and alienation of culture". Different translations represent some deep cultural differences, but the starting point of translation should be to respect the original, try to maintain the cultural characteristics of the source language and the charm of the original style, so as to enrich and broaden the cultural horizons of the readers of the translations, construct the cultural schema of nutrition and health of the recipients of the works, and let them appreciate the connotation and beauty of the culture of Chinese medicine. Previous work has established Yang Xianyi's translation as a foundational resource for TCM

dietary culture research, emphasizing corpus annotation, compensation strategies, and reader reception. However, gaps remain in addressing terminological consistency (e.g., standardizing “congee” and “decoction” translations) and integrating translation aesthetics (e.g., balancing “virtual-real” dynamics in TCM metaphors). Future research should prioritize cross-disciplinary collaboration between translation studies and TCM scholars to refine cultural preservation while enhancing global accessibility.

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