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THE STORY OF THE STONE'S JOURNEY TO THE WEST

The history of the English translations of *Hongloumeng*

Fan Shengyu and John Minford

The Story of the Stone (*Shitouji* 石頭記), otherwise known as *A Dream of Red Mansions* or *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢), is by general consensus the greatest of all the classic Chinese novels. The author, Cao Xueqin (曹雪芹 c. 1715–63), is regarded by many as the finest novelist in the history of Chinese literature. *Hongloumeng* was written mainly in the dialect of Peking, the basis for Mandarin and the language of officialdom throughout the late imperial period, and which became the foundation of the present-day standard language. Since its publication in the late eighteenth century, *Hongloumeng* has been translated into more than 20 languages. The history of its English translations reflects the different approaches adopted by various translators from the early nineteenth century onwards, showing the influence of the political, social and religious context on the process of translation.

The original 120-chapter version of *Hongloumeng* was first published in the first days of the Western year 1792, the very year in which Lord Macartney set out from England to represent George III at the court of the Qianlong (乾隆) emperor in Peking. It belongs to the end of the late imperial China. Cao Xueqin had read no literature other than that written in Chinese. Clearly this is a symbolic date in the history of Sino–English intercultural relations. The process of Chinese–English translation was to become an indispensable component of intercultural relations from this time into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Roughly 20 years after the novel's publication, the very first pioneering attempts at turning this huge work into English were made. Earlier studies of this history barely mention the pioneers to be discussed here: Morrison, Thom, Mayers, Bowra and Joly. The tale that emerges as we bring these lesser-known figures back into the light of day, is of a series of lonely and courageous, but ultimately frustrated, attempts to break through the barriers of language to a mature cross-cultural reading of literature. It provides an extra dimension to the larger story of China's encounter with the West during the nineteenth century, while at the same time rescuing from oblivion a number of remarkable individuals who lived in the often inclement environment of the newly established settlements of the China Coast.

22.1 Robert Morrison

An unpublished letter written by the indefatigable Northumbrian missionary Robert Morrison (馬禮遜 1781–1834), dating from c. 1812, contains the earliest known translated extract from the novel, which he referred to as *Hung-low-mung*. Morrison was the first British missionary assigned to China by the London Missionary Society. His manuscript translation of part of Chapter 4 of this novel is both fluent and accurate, and is included in a letter written to the London Missionary Society. Morrison offered this extract to his publisher in London for inclusion in a possible second volume of his anthology *Horae Sinicae*, as an item 'which may afford some amusement'. Morrison the dedicated missionary was predictably more concerned with the novel's depiction of the social ills of Chinese society than he was with its literary qualities. The extract gives, as he himself wrote in the accompanying letter, 'a lamentably faithful picture of the state of society in China. The checks to oppression are few. Anything may be bought – almost any crime be committed with impunity if the offending party can and will pay for it' (Chan 2001: 21). His extract was never published.

Later, Morrison compiled another book entitled *Dialogues and Detached Sentences in the Chinese Language* (East India Company's Press, 1816), in which he included another translated excerpt from *Hung-low-mung*, as well as a dialogue about the importance of reading this novel. As the preface indicates, 'the translations of the following papers were made by the Rev. Robert Morrison, at the commencement of his Chinese Studies'. Very probably Morrison used these excerpts as his own reading lessons when he first started learning the language, and his compilation of these materials was certainly conceived as a textbook. Some of his comments are interesting as early examples of a translator from Chinese reflecting on the frustrations of his profession:

> The verbal rendering must not be considered as giving the invariable sense of each word, but as containing the approximation of its import in the connexion in which it stands in the sentence explained. A perfect verbal rendering is impracticable. Acquaintance with the language will enable the mind to feel much more sense of the characters, than can be conveyed by the words of another language, in a close verbal translation.
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> *(Morrison 1816: vi)*

Morrison was passing on his own experience as a language learner when he translated these excerpts. He had already realised that in order to learn the Mandarin language, the literature written in that language was well worth paying attention to, even though at that time, Chinese literature was itself still little known outside China. These excerpts were thus put forward as language learning materials rather than as literature per se.

Morrison translated in Dialogue XXV a section from Chapter 31 of *Hung-low-mung* and entitled it 'A Person Ill'. According to the general rule of the whole book, he provides the corresponding pronunciation and meaning of each character. In Dialogue V, 'With An Assistant in Learning the Language', the tutor lists *Hung-low-mung* as the second book for beginners to read after the Confucian classic *The Great Learning* (大學). Students of Chinese at this time were in need of a good textbook, and *Hung-low-mung* conveniently supplied that need for 'in this book the phraseology is entirely that of Peking', which is exactly what the students, most of whom were missionaries or East India Company employees, wished to master at that time.

Morrison's own competence in the Chinese language was recognised by the East India Company, which entrusted him with the task of tutoring new recruits to the company, and

provided a generous subvention for his monumental dictionary. It was at this time that John Francis Davis (德庇時 1795–1890) became one of Morrison's students.

22.2 John Davis

As early as 1819, John Davis' translation of the brief description of two major characters in the novel, Wang Xifeng (王熙鳳) and Jia Baoyu (賈寶玉) was quoted by an article in *Quarterly Review*, and the novel itself was introduced as *The Red Chamber Dreams*. In 1829, Davis went on to publish the first serious attempt in English to introduce Chinese poetry to the West. His treatise, entitled 'On the Poetry of the Chinese (Poeseos Sinensis Commentarii 漢文詩解)', mentions in passing the novel *Dreams of the Red Chamber*, describing the protagonist Jia Baoyu briefly as a 'young Chinese profligate', and giving a rhyming translation of two stanzas of a poem from Chapter 3 (a lyric verse 詞to the tune 'Moon on the West River' 西江月). He gives a brief description of the poem, stating accurately that it 'consists of a very irregular species of verse, in six and seven words', and he also describes his translation as 'lineatim [line for line] and almost verbatim [word for word]'. What is interesting here is that Davis insists that his translation 'pretends to nothing more than a very close adherence to the sense of the original' (Davis 1829: 440), while previously Morrison had aimed at an 'approximation of [each word's] import', arguing that 'a perfect rendering is impractical'. The reasoning seems clear. Davis's translation is designed to introduce Chinese poetry to an English audience, and hence he did not presume to claim success in translating both the meaning and form of Chinese poetry faithfully into English (an almost impossible task). Nor on the other hand was he so modest as to say that he could not even understand the original. Morrison by contrast speaks as an instructive language teacher, warning his students of the difficulty of mastering even a particular word, while at the same time encouraging them to become more deeply acquainted with the language, since such an acquaintance will ultimately be a more effective route to understanding than any close verbal translation.

22.3 Robert Thom

The distinction of being the earliest published Western translator of a substantial portion of *Hongloumeng* belongs to a Glaswegian, Robert Thom (羅伯聃 1807–46). In 1846, some 12 years after the death of Robert Morrison, an extract from *Hung-low-mung* was translated by Thom and published by the Presbyterian Mission Press in Ningpo. The original book was entitled in English *The Chinese Speaker, the Mandarin Language as spoken at Peking, Compiled for the Use of Students*, and in Chinese 正音撮要. Robert Thom translated Chapter 6 of *Hung-low-mung*, as one of the appendices. His book was printed with romanised pronunciation and the accompanying Chinese text.

Thom's brief extract of *Hung-low-mung* recounts the visit to the Rong-guo Mansion (榮國府) of Dame Lew (劉姥姥), or Goody Lew as he sometimes calls her. Thom, who had previously published a Chinese–English vocabulary, was well-known in China-consular circles as someone who knew the Chinese language well and enjoyed excellent and sympathetic relations with the local Chinese. His little language primer had been hastily put together and he had planned a continuation, 'should it please Almighty God to restore him to health and strength' after his planned return to Britain; but as he himself remarks in his note 'To the Reader', 'Man says, thus and thus; Heaven answers, not so! not so! (人說如此如此'天說未然未然)'. The poor man never made it back to Britain, but died later en route in Shanghai, aged 39. His *Chinese*

Speaker continued to be used for many years after his death by new entrants into the Consular Service.

He had tried translating *Hung-low-mung* mainly with a view to providing learners of colloquial Chinese with teaching materials. And yet, despite its humble aims, his version has its moments of style. In his note 'To the Reader', Thom adheres to the popular opinion that: 'a Peking teacher for the Peking language is always the best; no other person can pronounce it like a bona-fide Peking man'. He also acknowledges his debt to Robert Morrison: 'We have adhered to Dr. Morrison's system of orthography (with a few trifling exceptions) as that which we believe best suited for the English reader' (Thom 1846: 'To the Reader').

Hongloumeng was still not considered by Thom as a literary work, but as a text for facilitating the learning of the Chinese language, particularly the dialect of Peking. In other early textbooks, expressions and phrases similar to those used in the novel are abundant. Morrison and Thom lived at a time still not too far removed from the time depicted in *Hongloumeng*, and the language people used in their daily life was still not drastically different from the language used in the novel. Later, when the New Zealand-born British consular official E.T.C. Werner (倭納 1864–1954) reflected on his early days in Peking in 1884–6, he mentioned that *Hung-lou-meng* was one of the books they studied and were examined in, providing further evidence that the novel was used widely as a textbook for foreigners in the nineteenth century.

22.4 Joseph Edkins

Another prominent figure from the British Protestant Missionary society, the Rev. Joseph Edkins (艾约瑟 1823–1905), also translated an excerpt from *Hongloumeng* in his *A Grammar of the Chinese Colloquial Language Commonly Called the Mandarin Dialect* published in Shanghai in 1864. Edkins was a linguist and philologist who tried to prove that the languages of Europe and Asia have a common origin by comparing the Chinese and Indo-European vocabulary. In Part II, 'The Parts of Speech', of his Grammar, *Hongloumeng* was introduced as a book written in 'purest Mandarin', 'a novel of the present dynasty'. In Part III, 'Syntax', readers can find numerous phrases and sentences from *Hongloumeng*, which Edkins uses as examples to illustrate Chinese grammatical rules. Interestingly enough, in the 1940s, two eminent Chinese philologists Wang Li (王力) and Lü Shuxiang (吕叔湘) both followed suit, using abundant examples from *Hongloumeng* in their *Grammar of Modern Chinese* (現代漢語語法) and *Outlines of Chinese Grammar* (中國文法要略) respectively.

In his Appendix II, 'On Mandarin Literature', Edkins mentions that several Chinese dramas and novels

> are regarded simply as books of amusement, and as not worthy of the study of scholars. To the foreigner however, they are not only interesting as an oriental development of the imagination, similar to that which has created our own schools of dramatists and romancists, but as furnishing an easy introduction to the history, manners and language of the country.
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> *(Edkins 1864: 270)*

In particular, he chose two representative novels, claiming that 'the manners of the metropolis during the present dynasty are depicted in 紅樓夢 *Hung-leu-mung* and 品花寶鑒 *P'in-hwa-pau-kien*'. Edkins selected these two mainly because he wanted to show specimens of the 'metropolitan dialect'. His is still not a serious literary critique.

Edkins' two-and-a-half-page translation of *Hung-leu-mung* is from Chapter 98 in which Baoyu dreams of going to the Nether World to look for Lin Daiyu (林黛玉)'s spirit. The format of Edkins's translation is different from that of the previous translations. He does not give the romanised pronunciation as Morrison had done, nor does he use one page of original text followed by one page of translation, in the manner adopted by Thom. Instead, Edkins intersperses his translation with the original, dividing them into sentences and phrases.

Edkins's translation is basically readable, although it contains quite a number of problems, which are due either to misunderstanding of the language, or to mistakes in the original Chinese text itself. Edkins also comments on Robert Thom's translation in his *The Chinese Reader* (正音撮要), drawing the conclusion that 'the author's attempt to teach the orthoepy of Peking is disfigured by such defects as are natural to a southerner, when aiming to describe the dialect of northern China' (Edkins 1864: 277). Edkins was an expert grammarian of Chinese who wrote extensively on Mandarin as well as on the dialects of Shanghai and Ningpo, and it is not surprising that he was able to detect the most prominent flaw in Thom's translation.

Although Edkins's comments were still made from the standpoint of a linguist and grammarian, it is clear that he is beginning to regard *Hung-leu-mung* as literature, even though he is still primarily treating it as language learning material.

22.5 Mayers and Bowra

A more substantial selection from *Hongloumeng* was offered in 1868 by Edward Bowra (包臘 1841–74), a young recruit to the newly established Imperial Customs Service. Just as the establishment of this semi-colonial service marked a new and deeper stage in Anglo–Chinese relations, so Bowra's translation marks a new stage in the translation of the novel. Bowra's translation was a longer and more ambitious affair than Thom's or Edkins's, comprising the whole of the first eight chapters of the novel. He acknowledged his debt to Thom at the end of Chapter 6: 'The rendering of Lao-lao-ly as Goody was suggested to the translator by Mr. R. Thom's translation of a part of this Chapter, published in the "Chinese Speaker" many years since' (Bowra 1868: 11).

Before being posted to Ningpo, Bowra had studied in Canton with the pioneer Sinologist W.F. Mayers (梅輝立 1839–78), and in a footnote to Chapter 5 he pays homage to his teacher:

> The Translator offers no apology to the reader of the CHINA MAGAZINE, for presenting them with the above translation of the verses from the pen of Mr. W. F. Mayers, in place of an original one from himself. The accuracy of rendering, the grace and force of expression which characterise Mr. Mayers' translations, would render any new attempt at translating what he has already done so well, as presumptuous as it would be certain of failure.
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> *(Bowra 1868: 150)*

In December 1867, Mayers had provided English-speaking readers with the first serious critical introduction to the novel as literature. Mayers's surprisingly sophisticated essay, which must surely have inspired Bowra to embark upon his own subsequent attempt at a translation, represents a huge leap forward. It shows qualities of humanistic understanding that were not always present to distinguish Sinology (early or late, then or now). It was included in the last monthly issue for 1867 of the Hong Kong *Notes and Queries on China and Japan*.

The opening section of Mayers's essay was in fact reprinted as part of the editor's Introduction to Bowra's translation a year or two later. Towards the very end Mayers comments poignantly:

> No European has as yet had the courage to attempt a translation of the *Hung Low Mêng*… [Here he mentions Thom, Edkins and Davis.] The length to which the romance extends, and the difficulty of interesting Europeans in individuals bearing what appear such uncouth names are formidable obstacles for a translator to overcome.
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> *(Mayers 1867: 168–9)*

Mayers' student, the young Bowra, rose to this challenge, and his version of the first eight chapters was carried in several instalments of the *China Magazine*. It was entitled *The Dream of the Red Chamber (Hung Low Meng)*: *A Chinese Novel Literally Translated*. He demonstrated great skill in translating into rhyming verse the many poetic passages that occur in the opening chapters of the novel. He also captured with great sensitivity many of the subtleties that have escaped other translators, before and since. The introduction (written either by Bowra himself or possibly by the magazine's editor) allows us to observe immediately that Bowra was the first translator to view his subject primarily as a work of literature, not as an object of missionary zeal and indignation, or as a tool for language acquisition. It is indeed one of the earliest examples of an open-minded, observant, sometimes humorous, European critique of Chinese fiction. In general, Bowra's translation is astonishingly good for its date. It is accurate, stylish, eloquent and witty, and does not shy away from the many inherent difficulties of the text.

Chapters 1 to 4 of Bowra's translation have no footnotes at all, while in Chapter 5, we suddenly encounter 69 footnotes. It can be safely assumed that Bowra did not realise the importance of footnotes in translating an encyclopaedic novel like *Hongloumeng* until he came to Chapter 5, which is notoriously ambiguous and at some points almost incomprehensible. Cao Xueqin deliberately wrote this chapter to foreshadow in cryptic fashion the destinies of the major characters in the story, using riddles, songs and poems to hint at their different fates. Without footnotes, it would be difficult to explain the hidden meanings. More than 100 years later, in 1973, David Hawkes (霍克思 1923–2009) added an eight-page appendix to explain all the poems and songs in the fifth chapter of his translation.

Crucially, Bowra identified closely with the spirit of the original. If only it had been completed, Bowra's work might possibly have opened the eyes of the considerable English-speaking readership of fiction in the High Victorian era to the 'real' China in a way that would have complemented perfectly the vast translated oeuvre of Confucian classics that the formidable James Legge (理雅各 1815–97) had completed in Hong Kong. Sadly Bowra died in 1874, at the age of 32, while on leave in England. His unexpected death brought to a premature end what might have proved a highly significant contribution to the nineteenth-century world's understanding of China.

22.6 Giles and Joly

Henry Bencraft Joly (周骊 1857–98) was for a time the British vice-consul in Macao, and it was here that he undertook his translation of Chapters 1–56 of *Hung Lou Meng*, publishing it in two volumes. He was a mere 41 years old when he died as vice-consul in the Chemulpo Consulate, Korea, scarcely older than Robert Thom or Edward Bowra had been at their deaths. All of this is indeed rather a melancholy tale. Three attempts had been made during the nineteenth century to translate the novel, and three times the lives of the translators were cut short prematurely.

As a fellow member of the China Coast consular community, H.B. Joly would almost certainly have known Herbert Giles (翟理斯 1845–1935). In 1885, Giles was elected president of the North-China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in Shanghai, and delivered to the society a paper on *Dream of the Red Chamber*, which was later reprinted in his *History of Chinese*

Literature. Giles's excellent synopsis of *Hongloumeng* can still be recommended to readers of the novel today. In his *Gems of Chinese Literature* published much later in Shanghai in 1922, Giles attempted a partial translation of two paragraphs of 'The Hung Lou Meng', taken from Chapter 42. Interestingly he placed the novel in the Ming Dynasty, assuming it to have been written in the seventeenth century. 'As a novel it ranks among the greatest in any nation, for originality of plot and the varied delineation of no fewer than 400 characters' (Giles 1922: 225). Certainly there are many tell-tale traces of the novel in Giles' great *Chinese–English Dictionary*. Perhaps we should be grateful that he was spared this monumental task, and instead devoted years to his version of the wonderful *Liaozhai Zhiyi* (聊齋誌異), or *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* by Pu Songling (蒲松齡).

Joly's incomplete translation was an extremely literal one. He himself writes with humility in his Preface that the work of translating the novel was suggested 'not by any pretensions to range myself among the ranks of the body of sinologues, but by the perplexities and difficulties experienced by me as a student in Peking'. He was, in other words, returning to the agenda of the earlier generation in seeking to provide a language-learning aid: 'I shall feel satisfied with the result, if I succeed, even in the least degree, in affording a helping hand to present and future students of the Chinese language' (Joly 1892: 'Preface'). According to Werner, Joly obtained help from an English-speaking clerk attached to the British Consulate at Canton, 'to whom batches of slips came daily by post from Macao with the Chinese phrases written on them and a space left for the English rendering' (Werner 1927: 175).

Joly works in a pedestrian manner from word to word. But in several instances he strays even from the literal meaning. On the opening page, where he continues his version of the author's Apologia, the reference to the 'female companions of my youth' (Hawkes' version) becomes in Joly's hands 'the womankind of past ages'. This is not only literally incorrect, it also does poor service to the passionate autobiographical impulse that lies at the very root of the novel, the 'secret message', that makes it outstanding in the annals of Chinese fiction. Cao Xueqin was inspired not by some vague recollection of famous beauties of past ages, but by his own haunting, almost obsessive memories of the very real and exceptionally beautiful and talented young women with whom he had grown up, and who by his literary genius are transformed into the unforgettable female characters of his novel.

Joly fares little better when he attempts to translate dialogue, especially when it comes to humour, which is so often the heart and soul of dialogue. As Bowra had observed some 30 years earlier, in *Hung-low-meng*, 'the lighter thread of comedy runs side by side with the dark main strand' of the story. Joly fails to represent an essential element in the novel, Cao Xueqin's Shakespearian juxtaposition of (relatively inoffensive) bawdy, with high sentiment. However, one should not be too critical of Joly's refusal to deal with the mildly erotic layer of the novel. His contemporary Herbert Giles, in translating *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, bowdlerised extensively. They were both of them, like any translator, creatures of their time. The Rev. E.J. Eitel, reviewing the Joly translation in the *China Review* observed (perhaps over-generously): 'The translator's work has been done with linguistic skill and literary taste. The translation will be found a great help by foreign students of the Chinese novelistic style' (Eitel 1892: 65).

Later, Werner made some sharper comments on Joly's translation: 'It is difficult to describe it as very good,' he wrote. 'A translator using poor English would have no right to shield himself under the excuse that his "poor" English was "perfect" Chinese' (Werner 1927: 177). Despite its shortcomings, however, this partial version at least deserves mention as an early skirmish on the outer ramparts of this masterpiece.

22.7 Wang Chi-chen

Wang Chi-chen (王際真 1899–2001), who was for many years professor of Chinese at Columbia University, translated the novel into English at least twice. His first version was published in 1929, with a prologue and thirty-nine chapters divided into three books. An expanded sixty-chapter version came out in 1958, and an abridged forty-chapter version in the same year.

His 1929 version was prefaced by the eminent translator Arthur Waley (1889–1966), who wrote: 'It only remains to assure the reader that in Mr Wang's hands he will be perfectly safe. The translation is singularly accurate, and the work of adaptation skilfully performed' (Waley 1929: xiii). This is only partially correct. Wang does not seem to have adopted a consistent rule for abridgement, sometimes including minor details that should have been omitted, while excluding others that he deemed unimportant but that should have been kept. This was perhaps an inevitable result of the constraint caused by lack of space. Wang himself realised this, admitting in the preface to his second expanded version in 1958:

> In my first translation, I took the *Dream* to be essentially a love story and omitted many episodes made up of what then seemed to me like trivial details. But I have since come to realise that what Tsao Hsueh-chin [Cao Xueqin] tried to do is to describe the life of a large household and that these 'trivial details' are as important to the book as the story of Pao-yu [Baoyu] and Black Jade [Daiyu].
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> *(Wang 1958a: xix–xx)*

What we see here is that the translator's deeper understanding of the novel affected the work of abridgement and his whole approach to the task of translation.

In order to assist readers' comprehension, footnotes appear quite frequently in Wang's translation. (The 1958 40-chapter version uses many more footnotes than the other two.) This is in some ways a commendable strategy. But in certain instances he did not take it far enough. How many readers who do not read Chinese, for example, would be able to guess that '*Hao Chieh-chieh*' means 'good sister'? English readers definitely require footnotes or some explanatory words when encountering terms left in romanised form in the translation. Some of Wang's footnotes concern the early drafts or textual history of the novel, and many of these could have been omitted.

Early twentieth-century readers may have expected an abridged version such as Wang's to have excluded minor details, and additions made by the translator would have come as quite a surprise. For example, when Liu Lao-lao (劉姥姥) left the Yungkuofu (榮國府) for the second time, Wang's translation reads: 'After this, she visited the Chias [Jias] frequently, bringing them simple gifts from the farm and taking with her valuable things in return.' However, Liu Lao-lao did not simply come back to gather gifts. She lent a timely helping hand to rescue Wang Xifeng's daughter from being sold as a concubine, and more importantly, acted in the overall structure of the novel as an important witness to the decline of the Jia family. Another intrusive addition by Wang occurs when Pao-yu sends two old handkerchiefs to Black Jade, and nobody seems to understand what he means. Here Wang adds a sentence: 'It suddenly dawned upon her: Pao-yu knew she would weep for him and so sent two old handkerchiefs of his own.' This may have been true, but the author never said so explicitly. Additions such as these risk either distortion of character portrayal or explicit exposition of the novel's hidden message. Wang's translation certainly contradicts Umberto Eco's stance that 'translators are duty-bound not to say more than the original text' (Eco 2003: 170).

A commendable strategy adopted by Wang is that of 'translating the feminine names and transliterating the masculine names'. This way of distinguishing female and male characters was later adopted by Franz Kuhn (1884–1961). David Hawkes also took it over, expanding it to other categories, rendering actors and actresses' names into French, and monks and nuns' names into Latin, thereby making it easier for Western readers to find their way around in this vast, highly populated novel.

Wang commented on Cao Xueqin's own shortcomings, saying that in a novel of such length and scope, 'flaws and inconsistencies are inevitable, and it would be prudish for us to find fault with such unimportant details' (Wang 1929: xxiii). Wang was correct in saying that the author 'never quite finished revising it or reconciling its numerous inconsistencies', and that a novel 'is to be judged by the total effect it produces, not by the blemishes that loom large only in the microscopic vision of the pedantic scholar and irritate only the translator who has to remove or retouch them' (Wang 1958b: xx). These are indeed reasonable comments, and it would be ungenerous not to adopt the same attitude towards Wang's own translation, which marked the first step towards a truly complete version of the novel.

22.8 Franz Kuhn (Florence and Isabel McHugh)

In 1958, Florence and Isabel McHugh published their retranslation into English of the 1932 German translation of *Hongloumeng* by Franz Kuhn. Although it is hard to know what actually went wrong in this process 'thrice removed from the truth' (Plato), it may nevertheless be pointed out that Kuhn's (via the McHughs) translation, while it is in some ways thoroughly and meticulously prepared, contains numerous mistakes, due either to insufficient knowledge of Chinese culture, or to misunderstanding of the plot or of the characters in the novel. Other mistakes are attributable to overly literal interpretations of the text.

Kuhn was right when he said that 'Mr. Wang's work covers barely one-fourth of my version, and particularly in its later part, is more in the nature of an abstract than a translation' (Kuhn 1958: xiv). However, when Kuhn declared that his own translation 'presents about five-sixths of the original', he was certainly exaggerating. While he accused Wang of eliminating 'a great many details of compelling interest to the Western reader, and also a number of incidents essential to the logical development of the story', Kuhn failed to acknowledge that he himself had done exactly the same thing.

Some of the mistakes Kuhn made were quite surprising. For example, in the introduction he mentions Chin Ling (金陵), explaining that it 'means "golden tombs"… probably an allusion to the well-known imperial burial places in the vicinity of Peking'. Chin Ling is simply another well-known name for Nanking (南京), where the author grew up and where his family enjoyed opulence and grandeur for several decades before its collapse. Later on in the story when Kuhn mentions the district of Ying tien fu (應天府), he adds that it is 'close to the capital', providing further evidence of his insufficient grasp of Chinese geography.

In his translation, Kuhn tends to focus too heavily on the literal meaning. This from time to time reveals his incorrect understanding of certain Chinese words. From his handling of many passages describing Chinese etiquette, Kuhn's understanding appears to have been confused. The matriarch of the family is definitely not a 'princess', and neither are her daughter-in-laws 'princesses'. When Black Jade (黛玉) has her first dinner with the Princess Ancestress (賈母), as Kuhn called her, the chairs are certainly not 'meant for Aunt Cheng and the two sisters-in-law, Phoenix and Chu', who do not even eat dinner with the old lady. Also, when Madame Cheng is talking with Precious Clasp (寶釵) about what to give to the family of the maid Gold Ring (金釧) for her funeral after she has committed suicide, in his translation, Kuhn writes: 'To put

a dress which has been worn on a corpse in a coffin is contrary to the Rites.' What is inauspicious in this particular situation is in fact that the new dress which had been meant to be for a birthday now turns out to be for a corpse.

Despite such drawbacks, Kuhn's translation was very popular in the Western world, and was translated into many other European languages including Italian and French. Without his translation, *Hongloumeng* would never have reached such a broad audience. Kuhn's may be considered another transitional translation. Despite its flaws it served as a bridge for further attempts in the future. It was as a result of reading this translation that Betty Radice later came to commission the Hawkes-Minford translation for Penguin Classics.

22.9 Bonsall

The Rev. Bramwell Seaton Bonsall (1886–1968), a Wesleyan Methodist missionary in China from 1911 to 1926, completed his translation of *Hongloumeng* during his retirement in the 1950s. He was the first Westerner to complete a single-handed translation of the entire novel, although not many people knew at the time that he was undertaking such an ambitious task. His work was never published, but the typescript is currently held by the library of the University of Hong Kong, where his son Jeffery Bonsall was once the deputy librarian. The introduction to the typescript states that the translation was 'made without having access to libraries or discussion with other scholars', which is probably why the quality of the translation in general is not very high.

Bonsall claimed that 'nothing has been omitted', while emphasising that his translation was 'to be published in full or not at all'. Readers would surely agree with him that his task was a 'somewhat arduous undertaking'. But critics have pointed out that his translation features quite a number of mistakes, which, in brief, may be attributed to three major reasons: misunderstanding of the Chinese language or Chinese culture; confusion surrounding the course of the plot or the characters; and awkwardness of English caused by overemphasising the literal translation of every word. Bonsall wrote, 'an attempt has been made to convey the meaning of each sentence in the original text' (Bonsall 1960: 'Translator's Foreword') This may have been a commendable aim, but it brought with it serious problems.

Bonsall's translation exists only in typescript, with no proofreading or editing, and it is therefore unsurprising that it contains numerous spelling mistakes. His exceedingly literal translation of '白老媳婦 (Old Bai's wife)' as 'a white-haired old woman' reveals his misunderstanding of a very commonly used Chinese surname. Other examples, like his translation of "长房" (senior branch of the family) as 'long room', or "夯鳥" (dumb bird) as 'pushful bird', and "夯嘴" (without a ready tongue) as 'strong mouth' not only exemplify incorrect reading, but also sound unnatural and unidiomatic in English. Under no circumstances can "不問青紅皂白" (without even finding out the truth) be translated as 'without asking green, red, black, or white', nor can "信口開河" (to tell tall stories) be translated 'opens a river'. Sometimes even the annotations are wrong, for example, Yo [Yue] Wu-mu (岳武穆 or 岳飛), the famous general of the Song Dynasty, according to Bonsall's footnote, was 'born in humble circumstances under the T'ang dynasty'. These mistakes might have been easily avoided had the translator sought to make himself better informed, or equipped himself with better dictionaries and encyclopaedias.

For several decades from the 1930s on, the English-language reader had to make do with the two incomplete versions by Wang and Kuhn. Bonsall's comment on Wang and Kuhn's translations is that: 'valuable as they are, the tendency is to paraphrase rather than translate'. His judgement was made on the basis of his own concept of translation: 'To convey the meaning of each sentence.'

22.10 Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang

In the 1970s and 1980s, two complete English translations finally appeared, one in Beijing, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, in three volumes, from the state-owned Foreign Languages Press, by the couple Yang Xianyi (楊憲益 1915–2009) and Gladys Yang (戴乃迭 1919–99) after their release from jail during the Cultural Revolution. The other appeared in London from Penguin Classics, and was entitled *The Story of the Stone*, in five volumes, translated by David Hawkes and John Minford (閔福德 1946–). Partly because of the unique nature of the original work and its prominent status in China, and partly because of the enormous interest in translation studies in recent decades, these two complete translations have themselves become the subject of widespread debate. At least two major conferences have been held in China dedicated entirely to a discussion and comparisons of the two approaches used (sometimes summarised as minimalist (Yangs), and maximalist (Hawkes-Minford)), and to the manifold problems and challenges of translating this particular work.

Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang are famous in China for their prolific efforts in translating Chinese literature into English. Both of them were educated at Oxford University in the 1930s. Gladys Yang married Yang Xianyi in the 1940s and together they moved back to China. Both of them were professors in universities for a while before they became professional translators for the then National Institute of Compilation and Translation (國立編譯館). For the next 50 years or so, Gladys Yang regarded China as her second home, while undergoing a series of heart-breaking ordeals. They were tireless translators for the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing from its foundation in the 1950s, and major contributors to the magazine *Chinese Literature*. Such was the importance of their contribution to the magazine that upon their retirement, it ceased publication after struggling for a couple of years.

Because of their backgrounds, both Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang were imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution, accused of being British spies. Gladys Yang reflected on the aftermath of what they had been through, and the way it affected their work: 'We have been so conditioned by the circumstances in which we used to work that we are rather literal and pedestrian translators, and we are still suffering from what happened earlier' (Henderson 1980: 34). They were subjected to heavy-handed external control. The 'Publisher's Note' in the 1978 edition of their translation of *Hongloumeng* gives a taste of what was going on at that time: Mao Zedong's quotations were all printed in bold letters (it was only two years after the Chairman's death).

The minimalist approach adopted by the Yangs was an attempt to recreate the original accurately and without changing anything. The main feature of their translation is its faithfulness to the original. In an interview with the Australian magazine *Hemisphere*, Yang Xianyi talked about the philosophy behind their translations:

> You just have to find something approximate, but accurate, keeping your meaning as close as possible to the original… you have to stick to the images of the original to the best of your ability without trying to exaggerate or to add anything to it.
>
> *(Henderson 1980: 34)*

In the same interview, Gladys Yang admitted their shortcomings plainly: 'We tend to be rather pedantic and the readers lose out, because we are more literal' (Henderson 1980: 34). In other words, strictly adhering to the original affected the translators' creativity.

The Yangs' version was the first complete English translation of *Hongloumeng* to be published. This was already nearly 200 years after the novel's first printing. *The Story of the Stone*'s journey to the West was indeed proving to be a long and arduous one. Politics dictated the way the Yangs'

translation was made. The translators themselves were inevitably traumatised by their experiences of political persecution and imprisonment during the Cultural Revolution.

22.11 David Hawkes and John Minford

David Hawkes studied at Peking University from 1948 to 1951 and later became professor of Chinese at Oxford University from 1958 to 1971. Hawkes started translating *Hongloumeng* in the 1970s. John Minford was one of his students at Oxford and later became his son-in-law. They divided the task of translation along the lines of the original (the first 80 chapters and the last 40). Altogether they spent more than 15 years translating the novel. Hawkes' 80 chapters were published in three volumes (1973, 1977, 1980 respectively), while Minford finished the last 40 chapters in two volumes (1982, 1986). Their translations were done independently, but they sent their drafts to each other all the time. Their partners, Jean Hawkes and Rachel Minford née Hawkes, scrupulously read and commented on the draft translations as they progressed. This translation of *Hongloumeng* was very much a family project, reminiscent of the way in which Cao Xueqin's close friends and family members read and made comments on the novel while the author was composing and revising it.

When Hawkes started working on *The Story of the Stone* in Oxford, he set about mastering the intricate details of the many early manuscript transcriptions and printed editions of the novel. As he translated, he consulted all of these different versions, carefully listing the differences, down to variations in single words. His labours may be traced in the *The Story of the Stone: A Translator's Notebooks* published by Lingnan University in 2000. Evidence can also be found in Hawkes's handwritten manuscripts of chapters 2–80, which are now accessible through the Chinese University of Hong Kong library website. None of his predecessors has ever paid so much attention to the minute details of the different editions, or has ever done so much spade work before starting the actual translation.

For his translation, Hawkes followed the basic text established by Gao E. (高鶚) as reproduced by People's Literature Publishing House (人民文學出版社) in 1964, occasionally deviating from it for a number of reasons. The problems of *Hongloumeng* are never purely textual, involving as they do other matters, such as the identity of the author, the Red Inkstone (脂硯齋) commentaries, the relationship between the novel and the autobiographical reality it reflects, and the reliability of Gao E.'s declarations as editor. These are among the reasons why Hawkes admitted the arbitrariness of his own editorial emendations, saying 'a translator has divided loyalties. He has a duty to his author, a duty to his reader and a duty to the text. The three are by no means identical and are often hard to reconcile' (Hawkes 1977: 20).

Hawkes's meticulous and thorough scholarship is a prominent feature of the Penguin edition, as readers can see from the prefaces and appendices in all of the five volumes. In these Hawkes explains the reasons behind some of his editorial decisions, attempts to answer some of the riddles in the story, and explains how Chinese verse is written, etc. Hawkes' translation is an exemplary combination of scholarship and translation, in which research serves rather than encumbers translation. Readers will find that the Hawkes-Minford version uses very few footnotes. This was a conscious decision on the part of Hawkes, who explained:

> I make no apology for having occasionally amplified the text a little in order to make such passages intelligible. The alternative would have been to explain them in footnotes; and though footnotes are all very well in their place, reading a heavily annotated novel would seem to me rather like trying to play tennis in chains.
>
> *(Hawkes 1977: 17–18)*

These 'incorporated footnotes' are used extensively throughout the Hawkes-Minford translation, especially in Volumes II and III.

Another prominent feature of Hawkes' translation is his brilliant rendering of literary devices such as puns, hyperbole, antithesis and euphemism. Hawkes had an enormously wide acquaintance with English literature, and a wide repertoire of stylistic devices of his own. He nearly always found a way to render Chinese expressions into English by producing a close or similar rhetorical effect. As Taotao Sanders [Liu] has written:

> Translating literally is always safe, though the result is to emasculate the original. Not everyone knows both languages well enough to avoid this trap, nor has everyone a gifted writer's sensitivity to words. Now one knows it can be done, and for future translators it is a standard of excellence that will be hard to emulate.
>
> *(Sanders 1974: 82)*

The creative use of layout in the Hawkes-Minford translation distinguishes their translation from others. In Chapter 13, when the funeral obsequies are mentioned, Hawkes used a formal layout that looks exactly like that used for a funeral. In Chapter 19, when Baoyu is telling a story and a tiny mouse has something to say, Hawkes used a miniscule font size for the line; 'I will!', in order to depict the feebleness of the mouse. And in Chapter 53, when Bailiff Wu comes in with a greeting-card, the inscription is placed within a rectangular frame as it would have been in a greeting-card. In Chapter 94, Minford provides his reader with a specimen of calligraphy depicting the Chinese characters used by a fortune teller, which aids the understanding of the plot, even if the reader cannot read Chinese characters.

As Hawkes has written: 'The best translations are made by translators who have invented a style of their own which they have found experimentally to be suited both to themselves and to their chosen materials' (Hawkes 1973: 636). Commenting on Arthur Waley's translations, he wrote:

> each was the product of massive reading and painstaking scholarship, [and]… his scholarship was substantial enough to ensure a level of accuracy which time will do little to flaw. Of course he made mistakes – so did the translators of the Authorized Version; but not enough ever to make his translations obsolete.
>
> *(Hawkes 1966: 146)*

The same comment can be made concerning Hawkes himself.

In summarising Hawkes's achievement in translating *Hongloumeng*, *The Times* obituary stated:

> Hawkes brought to bear such a wide range of rhetorical skills, such penetrating insight into character, such finely honed dialogue, such superbly crafted versification; but more than anything, such a profound sense of humanity, such fun and exhilaration, such melancholy and wisdom. In it he succeeds in grasping to the full, and yet at the same time transcending, the sheer Chineseness of the work, making it into a real novel for reading, revealing it as a true masterpiece of world literature.
>
> *(The Times, 28 August 2009)*

The renowned Chinese writer Lin Yutang (林語堂 1898–1976) is said to have translated *Hongloumeng* as well, and readers can find in his English-language novel *Moment in Peking* passages that owe a great deal to *Hongloumeng*. However, little has been known of this translation,

until recently when reports have suggested that the manuscript has been discovered in Japan. Such a discovery would certainly add an important new page to the history of *Hongloumeng* translation into English.

As summarised above, the history of *Hongloumeng* being translated into English provides a fascinating insight into the evolving state of intercultural relations, and sheds light on a number of topics in translation studies ranging from the much-debated problems of familiarisation and naturalisation, to readers' expectations of translated works, translators' thoughts and reflections on their own working methods, as well as more detailed issues such as the role of layout and format, and the incorporation of footnotes in literary translation.

Further reading

Joly's translation:
www.yellowbridge.com/onlinelit/hongloumeng-en.php.
Bonsall's translation:
http://lib.hku.hk/bonsall/hongloumeng/index1.html
David Hawkes's manuscripts:
http://udi.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/projects/david-hawkes-archive/view-story-stone-manuscript-grid

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