

Challenges on Translating the Elements of Traditional Chinese Medicine in *Hong Lou Meng*

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the challenges associated with translating elements of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) within the context of *Hong Lou Meng*. Building upon the identified challenges, the study delved into solutions aimed at employing effective strategies in the translation of diverse Traditional Chinese Medicine. This study employed a qualitative method to investigate the translation of TCM terms in the English version translated by Hawkes and Minford (2014) from the perspective of translation aesthetics. The study carefully chose representative examples from different facets of TCM in the source text, encompassing TCM theories, disease diagnosis and syndromes, and terminologies and formulas. The translated content was juxtaposed with the source text to scrutinize the translation methods employed in the translation. Based on this analysis, the study assessed both the achievements and shortcomings in translating various TCM terms from the perspective of translation aesthetics. Ultimately, the study consolidated solutions and compensation methods on how to retain the aesthetic and cultural value of Chinese medicine elements in the translation of classical literature. The study findings indicate that the challenges of translating TCM lie in conveying the difficult TCM theories, the recreation of the strict and beautiful language structures in disease diagnosis and syndromes, and the accurate reproduction of TCM terminologies. It shows that to overcome the challenges, translators should adopt various methods flexibly, such as annotating the TCM theories, recreating the content using similar sentence structures by adopting domestication plus transliteration, or foreignization plus annotation to translate Chinese medicine terminologies and formulas.

Contribution/Originality: The main contribution of this article lies in that it points out the challenges of translating TCM from three concrete aspects and offers corresponding solutions, which is a valuable reference for future study.

1. Introduction

The culture of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is the representative of the excellent traditional culture. Its interpretation represents and embodies the pace of Chinese culture going out. The Chinese government attaches great importance to the dissemination and promotion of traditional Chinese culture in the international arena, and emphasizes the status and influence of traditional culture in enhancing the comprehensive strength of the country. The language of TCM contains rich words with Chinese cultural characteristics, and different translators have different emphasis on original text understanding, translation style, phrasing habits and translation skills.

TCM has endured for centuries not only because its techniques produce tangible results, but because it embodies a coherent philosophy that integrates many aspects of human life (Beinfeld, & Korngold, 2013). *Hong Lou Meng* stands as one of the four great masterpieces in Chinese literature, garnering immense recognition in the history of world literature. Furthermore, TCM is distinguished by its rich Chinese characteristics, presenting significant differences from Western medicine (Li, 2021). Therefore, study on the translation of TCM in *Hong Lou Meng* holds crucial theoretical and practical significance, not only enhancing the comprehension and appreciation of *Hong Lou Meng* itself, but also aiding readers in gaining a deeper understanding of Chinese medicine.

Traditional Chinese medicine is an important part of China's unique culture and an important component of ancient Chinese culture and people's life. Deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture, the language of TCM is generally concise and comprehensive, with rich cultural connotations (Yang, 2015). Thus, how to disseminate the content of TCM accurately and unambiguously has been a key issue faced by translators. At the same time, the culture of TCM is a representative of Chinese national culture and has more value for historical research. Therefore, the study of its English translation is very important in helping China's TCM culture to "go out" (Xie, 2023).

One important purpose of translating TCM terminology is to convey information and spread Chinese culture. Therefore, the translation of TCM terminology is of great significance to effective cross-cultural communication. However, in cross-cultural communication, it can be exceedingly difficult and challenging to make Chinese terminology understandable to the target readers (Liu, 2015). British translator of TCM Nigel Wiseman once pointed out that Chinese medicine was difficult to translate, and not many people were able, or even willing, to do this work of translating TCM (Liu, 2015). Due to the profound cultural connotation of TCM terminology, mis-translation can be presented to the target readers if the translator cannot really understand the cultural phenomenon.

As the quintessence of Chinese culture, the scientific value and important position TCM culture in the medical world have been recognized by the world. According to Shu (2018), the translation of TCM belongs to scientific and technological translation, because its purpose is to convey the scientific knowledge of ancient Chinese medicine to the readers rather than literary knowledge. TCM can also be regarded as a science of summary, induction and syndrome differentiation, which attaches great importance to adjusting the dynamic energy of the human body to return to its normal state of balance (Yang, 2015). In contrast, western medicine belongs to modern experimental science, paying attention to facts and experimental results (Yang, 2015).

Chinese medicine is, after all, a medical discipline, and when translating, in addition to proficiency in the language, the translator is also required to have considerable knowledge of Chinese medicine and cultural literacy, so as to convey as accurately as possible the information on Chinese medicine culture contained in the source language. In the field of TCM translation, the strategies of domestication and foreignization have been discussed for a long time. Li (2019), in discussing the principles of TCM translation, has proposed that TCM translation should be "thinly textual and medical, and based on the reality of the Chinese", He argues that TCM translation is different from literary translation, and that the foreignization strategy should be adopted in order to translate the medical information carried in the original text. On the other hand, some scholars believe that in TCM translation the foreignization strategy should be used step by step and adopted more when the basic concepts of TCM are recognized and accepted in the West (Li et al., 2020). In this case, it is easier for the target readers to accept. Scholars have also realized the importance of cultural connotations in the foreign translation of TCM for cultural dissemination (Wang, 2020). However, little research has been done on the culture of TCM as presented in *Hong Lou Meng* (Xie, 2023). As a model rich in elements of TCM, it is not easy for the target readers to understand the content of TCM in *Hong Lou Meng* (Yang, 2015).

According to the statistics (Lu, 2020), *Hong Lou Meng* involves as many as 291 Chinese medicine-related knowledge, such as the basic principles of TCM, clinical diagnosis and the appropriate treatment methods, disease syndromes, herbal prescription therapies, and health care, amounting to more than 50,000 words. And the whole description of TCM can be divided into the various parts, including 161 TCM terminologies, 114 disease syndromes, 125 types of traditional Chinese medicines, and 45 formulas of creams, pills, dans, powders, ingots, beverages, and soups (Lu, 2020). There are more than 10 references to imperial physicians, imperial doctors, and wandering doctors, and 13 complete cases of Chinese medicine, internal medicine, surgery, gynecology, pediatrics, and ophthalmology (Lu, 2020).

In light of the research background and identified issues, the research objectives emerge.:

- i. To investigate the challenges in translating Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in *Hong Lou Meng*.
- ii. To delve into the solutions to overcome challenges in translating Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) based on translation aesthetics theory.

In alignment with the research objectives, the research questions are enumerated as follows:

- i. What are the challenges in translating Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in *Hong Lou Meng*?
- ii. What are the solutions to overcome challenges in translating Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) based on translation aesthetics theory?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Translation aesthetics theory

The concept of translation aesthetics was initially introduced by Lin Yutang, who proposed that "translation is a form of art" and outlined the theory of translation aesthetic subject, aesthetic object, translation aesthetic standard, and aesthetic mental program (Wang, 2009). Translation aesthetics emphasizes the significance of aesthetic

sensibility in playing a pivotal role in translation. It also underscores the guiding influence of aesthetic judgment and comprehension in the translation process, embodying a blend of theoretical depth and practical applicability (Lu, 2020). Following this, scholars and experts have delved deeper into the analysis of this perspective, contributing to the gradual maturation of the theory of translation aesthetics.

In 2005, Liu (2005) consolidated findings from prior research. He delves into various aspects, including the scope and tasks of translation aesthetics, the aesthetic subject and object of translation, as well as the general principles governing aesthetic experiences in translation and the aesthetic standards applied (Li, 2013). In the evolving comprehension of aesthetic theory, such as “Aesthetics is an inherent aspect of translation that cannot be disregarded” by Zhu Guangqian, “Emphasizing the resemblance of spirit rather than the resemblance of form” by Fu Lei, it is commonly acknowledged that the fusion of translation science and aesthetics should be rooted in the principles of translation science while steering translation practice through the application of aesthetic theory (Lu, 2020). Translators, in transforming content from the original language to the translated language, must carefully consider the aesthetic values of diverse language audiences. The goal is to maximize the preservation and, where possible, the replication of the aesthetic essence found in literary works.

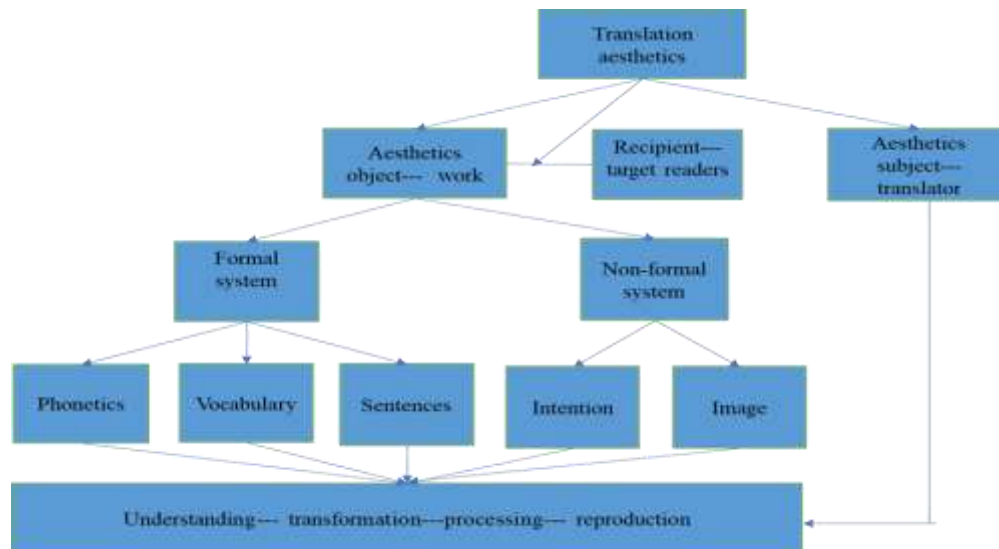
According to Liu (2005), translation aesthetics is concerned with an examination of the aesthetic object--- the work to be translated, the aesthetic subject--- the translator, and the interplay between the aesthetic object and the recipient in translation. The meaning of a work emerges from the interplay between the aesthetic subject, namely the translator, and the receiver's experience, rendering it subjective and contingent. The dialogue between the reader and the aesthetic object forms the basis for understanding the work. The aesthetics of the translated aesthetic object--- the work, comprises two components: the formal system and the non-formal system. The formal system includes three levels of phonetics, vocabulary, and sentences, while the non-formal system involves intention and image.

Figure 1 shows the overall relationships of the factors in translation aesthetics, from which it can be seen that the aesthetic theory focuses on producing both the micro and macro factors in translation. thus, translators have to fully understand both the surface meaning and the underlying information to convey the source text to the target readers.

To truly manifest the value of translation and align with the aesthetic expectations of readers, the translator must, throughout the translation process, attend to the aesthetic preferences of the audience (Lu, 2020). This involves carefully considering the emotional aspects of the readers and ensuring that, while reproducing the original text faithfully, there is also a judicious application of subjective interpretation (Lu, 2020). This approach aims to enhance the audience's comprehension of the translated text.

Descriptive words and phrases related to pathology analysis, herb names, and Chinese medicine treatment hold functional significance. However, in *Hong Lou Meng*, the cultural words and phrases of Chinese medicine stand out, distinguishing them from ordinary medical texts and imbuing them with aesthetic value (Ni, 2021). Consequently, the words and phrases of Chinese medicine culture in *Hong Lou Meng* possess a dual value, serving both functional and aesthetic purposes.

Figure 1: The overall relationships of the factors in translation aesthetics



Source: adapted from [Liu \(2005\)](#)

2.2. Previous studies on Traditional Chinese Medicine

Having always maintained its own unique system, the translation of TCM belongs to the field of science and technology, but it is a little different from scientific and technological translation in the general sense ([Chen, 2014](#)) and influenced by literary translation. With regard to the principles of translation in TCM, many scholars have discussed in depth from the theoretical point of view. [Zhao et al. \(2021\)](#) put forward that translators should appropriately use the strategy of foreignization so as to preserve the cultural connotation of the source language. But at the same time, taking into account the reading experience of the target readers, the strategy of domestication can be adopted as a supplement to solve the problem of misinterpretation caused by cultural defaults. [Fang \(2014\)](#) suggests that it is important to apply both domestication and foreignization to the specific translation practice of TCM. Based on analyzing the translation of TCM, [Zhao and Luo \(2019\)](#) point out that an excellent translation of TCM is one that conveys as much of the original's ideological model as possible, while preserving the beauty of the original's style. Therefore, when dealing with cultural differences, it is necessary to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of adopting different translation strategies to help the target readers truly understand the source culture.

As a masterpiece that contains abundant elements of TCM, the translation of TCM in *Hong Lou Meng* has been studied from many aspects. [Liu \(2015\)](#) analyzes the translation by [Hawkes and Minford \(2014\)](#) and points out that the translators mainly adopted the translation methods of transliteration, literal translation, and annotation. These translation methods were utilized out of consideration of the cognitive ability and acceptance of the target readers, and many of the difficult medical terms were elucidated, which also enabled the readers to better understand the culture of Chinese medicine.

Previous studies predominantly concentrated on the translation strategies employed by translators or compared the translation methods of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) across various versions of *Hong Lou Meng*. However, limited attention has been given to identifying the challenges associated with translating TCM and proposing corresponding solutions to address these challenges. Therefore, a comprehensive examination of the

challenges and potential solutions in translating Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) within *Hong Lou Meng* is essential, serving as a valuable reference for future endeavors in TCM translation.

3. Methodology

This research employed a qualitative method to examine the challenges associated with translating Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), using *Hong Lou Meng* as a case study. Based on the challenges in translating Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) through detailed data analysis from the perspective of translation aesthetics theory, this study aims to ultimately seek effective solutions. Anney asserted that basic interpretive qualitative research involves generating descriptive statements to enhance comprehension of a study through the analysis of data collected through various methods (Amir & Muhammad, 2023). It is also emphasized that through qualitative research, researchers can delve into the meanings and interpretations (Crossman, 2020). The data samples will be the typical representatives of various aspects of TCM. The overall process will be conducted in four steps. Initially, the elements of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) related to disease syndromes, diagnosis and treatment, as well as prescriptions, are identified in the source text of *Hong Lou Meng*. Subsequently, the corresponding translation by Hawkes and Minford (2014) is examined. The translation of TCM is then analyzed through the lens of translation aesthetics to identify challenges in the translation process. Drawing on these challenges, viable solutions will be proposed to enhance the translation of TCM.

4. Results and Discussion

In the analysis, the study will discuss the translation from three aspects of TCM, including TCM theory, disease diagnosis and syndromes, as well as medicine terminologies and formulas in *Hong Lou Meng*.

4.1 Translation of TCM theory

The fundamental principles of Chinese medicine are rooted in classical Chinese philosophical thought, encompassing the principles of yin and yang, Five Elements, etc (Lu, 2020). Chinese medicine posits that humanity and nature form an interconnected whole, with the concept of the "unity of heaven and mankind" threading through the foundational principles of Chinese medicine.

Ancient philosophers utilized the principles of yin and yang, within the context of the five elements, to observe and explain nature, employing them in the quest for natural laws. The doctrine of the Five Elements regards gold, wood, water, fire, and earth as fundamental substances integral to the composition of the material world. It classifies all substances into five categories, illustrating their interdependence and mutual constraint, thus forming the basis of the material world (Yuan, 2006). Subsequently, ancient Chinese medical practitioners incorporated the philosophical theories of Yin-Yang and Five Elements into the realm of medicine, seamlessly integrating them into long-term practical applications. They employed Yin-Yang and Five Elements to delineate the organizational structure of the human body, summarize its physiological functions, elucidate pathological changes, and guide the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of illnesses. This integration gave rise to the distinctive doctrine of Yin-Yang and Five Elements in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

Example 1:

“其左寸沉数者，乃心气虚而生火；左关沉伏者，乃肝家气滞血亏。右寸细而无力者，乃肺经气分太虚；右关濡而无神者，乃脾土被肝木克制” (Cao, 2019)

“Now, a rapid lower left-hand distal pulse means that a malfunction of the controlling humour of the heart is causing it to generate too much fire; and the strong lower median pulse means that the liver's humour is blocked, giving rise to a deficiency of blood. A thin, weak distal pulse on the right side indicates a gross deficiency of humour in the lungs; and a faint right median pulse lacking in vitality shows that the earth of the spleen is being subdued by the woody element of the liver.” (Hawkes & Minford, 2014)

According to Chinese philosophy (Lu, 2020), *qi* is the most fundamental and subtle substance that constitutes the human body and supports life activities. It serves as the fundamental energy that sustains vital life functions. Chinese medicine posits the existence of a balancing force within the human body, and the onset of illnesses is often attributed to an imbalance in this equilibrium (Lu, 2020). In Chinese medicine, the onset of diseases is attributed to the presence of evil *qi* as a crucial condition, while the lack of positive *qi* serves as an internal factor for disease manifestation. Here, evil *qi* and positive *qi* denote diverse disease-causing factors and a category of subtle substances in the human body responsible for resisting disease and dispelling evil *qi*, respectively (Lu, 2020). Given the manifold ways in which evil *qi* can induce diseases and the dynamic nature of positive *qi* in the human body, the spectrum of diseases is inherently diverse.

In the translation, the word ‘气’ in ‘心气’, ‘肝气’ and ‘肺气’ was translated as humour. But humour refers to the state of people's feelings or mind at a particular time, which is different from *qi* in TCM to some extent. A more suitable translation approach involves transliteration of *qi*, a type of imitation in intercultural communication according to translation aesthetics theory.

Example 2:

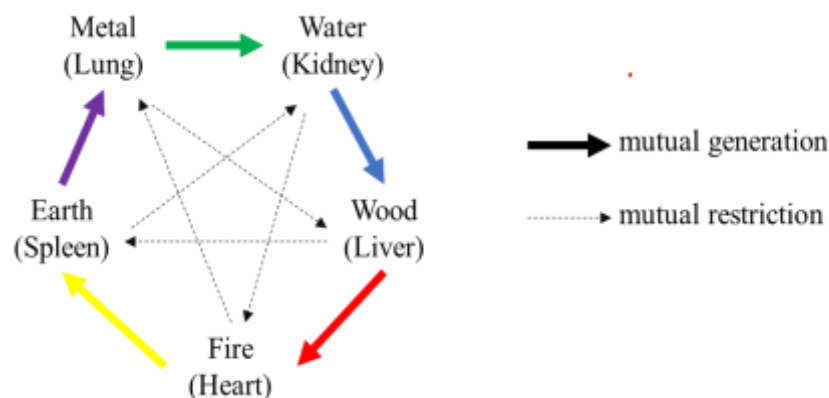
“木气不能疏达，势必上侵脾土，饮食无味；甚至胜所不胜，肺金定受其殃” (Cao, 2019)

“The hepatic humour, unable to disperse naturally, has encroached upwards on the spleen (Earth), with consequent loss of appetite. The extreme distemper has also caused a reversal of the elemental sequence, and the lungs (Metal) have certainly been damaged.” (Hawkes & Minford, 2014)

Chinese medicine frequently employs the concept of the Five Elements to correspond to the five organs, namely Heart to Fire, Liver to Wood, Spleen to Earth, Lung to Metal, and Kidney to Water (Huang & Guo, 2015).

Figure 2 showcases the overall relations between the Five Elements and the five organs in Chinese philosophy. It presents the generation and restriction relationships among the factors.

Figure 2: Relations between elements of the Five Elements



Source: adapted from [Huang and Guo \(2015\)](#)

In the first context, 脾土 and 肝木 were translated as the earth of the spleen and the woody element of the liver, which can cause much confusion to the target readers. Without clarification, readers with limited knowledge of Chinese medicine might misconstrue the concept, assuming there is earth in the spleen, and wood in the liver. This could potentially raise doubts about the scientific basis of Chinese medicine.

In the second context, the relationships between the Five Elements and the five viscera were not explicitly elucidated. The presentation only featured the corresponding elements following the viscera. This lack of clarity could potentially confuse readers and impede their understanding.

When translating Chinese medicine theories, the challenge lies in effectively conveying the overall connections between yin-yang and the Five Elements from the source text to help target readers understand the relationships between various factors. The Five Elements are intricately linked with the five viscera, and neglecting either element could pose challenges for target readers or result in the loss of the source culture. Therefore, apart from the literal translation of the Five Elements, explanations should be provided. This not only elucidates the doctrine of the Five Elements using the five viscera but also allows readers of the translated text to grasp information about the content while gaining insights into Chinese culture. This approach aims to facilitate readers in understanding and contemplating the text more effectively.

4.2 Disease diagnosis and syndromes

The technical terms in disease diagnosis and the description of syndromes are often concise yet intricate. The information often poses a challenge for Chinese readers and is even more challenging for foreign readers. The translator's comprehension of the original text is paramount, as only when the translator fully grasps the meaning of the original text can they accurately convey the message to the translated readers.

Example 3:

“心气虚而生火者，应现经期不调，夜间不寐。肝家血亏气滞者，必然肋下疼胀，月信过期，心中发热。肺经气分太虚者，头目不时眩晕，寅卯间必然自汗，如坐舟中。脾土被肝木克制者，必然不思饮食，精神倦怠，四肢酸软” ([Cao, 2019](#))

If the heart is generating fire, the symptoms should be irregularity of the menses and insomnia. A deficiency of blood and blockage of humour in the liver would result in pain and congestion under the ribs, delay of the menses beyond their term, and burning sensations in the heart. A deficiency of humour in the lungs would give rise to sudden attacks of giddiness, sweating at five or six in the morning, and a sinking feeling rather like the feeling you get in a pitching boat. And if the earth of the spleen is being subdued by the wood of the liver, she would undoubtedly experience loss of appetite, lassitude, and general enfeeblement of the whole body. (Hawkes & Minford, 2014)

Upon careful analysis, it is discovered that this source passage is composed of a series of intricately arranged sentences. The original text flows seamlessly from pulse diagnosis to etiology, and then to the analysis of symptoms. The original text is presented in a tidy and well-organized language, demonstrating a strong linguistic artistry that captivates the reader and allows for a smooth reading experience. From the perspective of translation aesthetics theory, the obstacle for translating the concise diagnosis lie in reproducing the beautiful sentence structures without losing the source culture. In the translation, the translator has made every effort to maintain the authentic essence of Chinese medicine culture while also enhancing the comprehension and appreciation of readers. By faithfully reproducing the aesthetics of the original work, the translator also used the parallelism of 'A deficiency of' to achieve the utmost in preserving the aesthetic quality of the original text. The following illustration depicts the translation of the contextual elements in its entirety.

Table 1 presents the source terms of the TCM disease syndromes and their corresponding translation. It shows that the translators used various techniques to reproduce both the meaning and philosophy of the source text, which provides the target readers a clear view of TCM in the source text.

Table 1: Translation of disease syndromes

Source Text	Target Text
经期不调，夜间不寐	irregularity of the menses and insomnia
肋下疼痛	pain and congestion under the ribs
月信过期	delay of the menses beyond their term
头目不时眩晕	sudden attacks of giddiness
自汗	sweating
不思饮食	loss of appetite
精神倦怠	lassitude
四肢酸软	general enfeeblement of the whole body

4.3 Medicine terminologies and formulas

Chinese medicine is a traditional substance utilized by the Chinese people for the treatment, prevention, diagnosis of diseases, as well as rehabilitation and health care. Chinese medicine is a broad term encompassing traditional medicines in China. It includes various categories such as botanicals, animal medicines, mineral medicines, etc., among which botanicals are the most significant (Lu, 2020).

Example 4:

宝玉道：“我知道那些丸药，不过叫他吃什么人参养荣丸。”王夫人道：“不是。”宝玉又道：“八珍益母丸？左归？右归？再不，就是麦味地黄丸。”王夫人道：“都不是。我只记得有个‘金刚’两个字的。”宝玉扎手笑道：“从来没听见有个什么‘金刚丸’。若有了‘金刚丸’，自然有‘菩萨散’了！”说的满屋里人都笑了。宝钗抿嘴笑道：“想是天王补心丹。” (Cao, 2019)

‘I know the names of most of those pills,’ said Bao-yu. ‘I expect he wanted her to take Ginseng Tonic Pills.’ ‘No, that wasn’t it,’ said Lady Wang. ‘Eight Gem Motherwort Pills?’ said Bao-yu. ‘Zhang’s Dextrals? Zhang’s Sinistrals? If it wasn’t any of them, it was probably Dr Cui’s Adenophora Kidney Pills.’ ‘No,’ said Lady Wang, ‘it was none of those. All I can remember is that there was a “Vajra” in it.’ Bao-yu gave a hoot and clapped his hands: ‘I’ve never heard of “Vajra Pills”. If there are “Vajra Pills”, I suppose there must be “Buddha Bolus”!’ The others all laughed. Bao-chai looked at him mockingly. ‘I should think it was probably “The Deva-king Cardiac Elixir Pills”,’ she said. (Hawkes & Minford, 2014)

Chinese medicines are commonly presented in various forms such as pills, powders, etc. Distinct dosage forms exert different effects in the treatment of diseases. Each dosage form has specific emphases and can serve different functions in the treatment process. The challenge in translating Chinese medicine terminology lies in effectively conveying both the literal names and the implied functions encapsulated within those names. In this context, apart from "Vajra Pills" and "Buddha Bolus", these proprietary Chinese medicines are real and not fictional names created for the storyline. The translation of 人参养荣丸, 八珍益母丸 and 麦味地黄丸 not only lists the primary ingredients of the medicine but also retains the therapeutic effects embedded in the original text. The translation aimed to replicate the impact of the medicinal terminology for the target readers, mirroring the aesthetic effect conveyed in the source text. The following figure illustrates the translation of Chinese medicine names.

Table 2 presents eight types of Chinese medicine names and their translation. In the translation, the translator managed to reproduce both the function and aesthetics of the medicine names.

Table 2: Translation of the names of Chinese medicine

Source Text	Target Text
人参养荣丸	Ginseng Tonic Pills

八珍益母丸	Eight Gem Motherwort Pills
左归	Zhang's Dextrals
右归	Zhang's Sinistrals
麦味地黄丸	Adenophora Kidney Pills
金刚丸	Vajra Pills
菩萨散	Buddha Bolus
天王补心丹	The Deva-king Cardiac Elixir Pills

Example 5:

“要春天开的白牡丹花蕊十二两，夏天开的白荷花蕊十二两，秋天的白芙蓉蕊十二两，冬天的白梅花蕊十二两。将这四样花蕊，于次年春分这日晒干，和在药末子一处，一齐研好。又要雨水这日的雨水十二钱...” (Cao, 2019)

“You have to take twelve ounces of stamens of the spring-flowering white tree-peony, twelve ounces of stamens of the summer-flowering whitewater-lily, and twelve ounces of stamens of the autumn-flowering white lotus, and twelve ounces of stamens of the winter-flowering plum and dry them all in the sun on the day of the spring equinox of the year immediately following the year you picked them in. then you have to mix them with the powder I told you about and pound them all up together in a mortar. Then you must take twelve drams of rain water that fell on the Rain Days in the second month...” (Hawkes & Minford, 2014)

The original formula exudes a poetic rhythm, showcasing the distinct characteristics of the Chinese language through the use of couplets. Couplet composition is a unique feature of Chinese culture, intricately connected to the aesthetic preferences and linguistic creativity of Chinese people. The challenge in translating the formulas lies in capturing the couplet styles of the source text. The translators consistently employ a matching sentence pattern and appropriate vocabulary to faithfully replicate the couplet structure in the translated text. This approach not only captures the beauty of the form but also mirrors the aesthetic essence of the original content, providing an accurate portrayal of the medicinal-making process as depicted in the source text.

4.4 Challenges and solutions

The foundations of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) are deeply rooted in Chinese culture, and it is expected that no direct equivalents may exist in the translation process. The challenge for translators lies in determining how to appropriately convey TCM in a different cultural and linguistic context. The main challenges of translating TCM lies in three aspects. First, the translator faces the challenge of elucidating intricate Chinese medicine theories to the target readers, including the relationships between the Five Elements and the five viscera. Second, given that the language used in disease diagnosis and syndromes is often succinct yet intricate, reproducing the distinctive characteristics and aesthetic essence of the source language poses an additional consideration for the

translator. Third, accurately and vividly conveying the nuances of medicine terminology presents yet another challenge in the translation process.

When translating Chinese medicine theories, it is essential to provide illustrations of the relationships between various elements, demonstrating a commitment to both the source text and the understanding of the target readers. Understanding the Chinese medicine theories necessitates elucidating the relationship between the Five Elements and the five viscera. For terms unique to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), such as *qi*, a transliteration method coupled with annotations proves effective in conveying the core information of the source text. In translating disease diagnosis and syndromes, characterized by strict and symmetrical sentence structures, the recreation of content using similar couplets or sentence structures is necessary, prioritizing the faithful transmission of the original meaning. In terms of Chinese medicine terminologies and formulas, the translation is best achieved through domestication plus transliteration, or foreignization plus annotation. This approach not only elucidates the meaning clearly but also effectively conveys the distinctive culture of Chinese medicine, which can be aptly described as a strategy that accomplishes two goals at once.

Given that a substantial portion of the content is expressed in typical Chinese medical language, often densely packed and occasionally requiring careful dissection, it becomes imperative for the translator to delve deep into the words, analyzing their nuances meticulously for accurate translation. This demands the translator to be exceptionally meticulous and diligent, ensuring clarity in understanding the content and selecting the appropriate translation method to accurately convey it to the readers. As a mediator between two distinct cultures, the translator bears the crucial responsibility of facilitating cultural exchange. Chinese medicine culture constitutes a vital component of traditional Chinese culture, and the accurate and fitting translation of Chinese medicine culture holds significant importance in promoting Chinese-foreign cultural exchanges.

5. Conclusion

Since source readers may encounter difficulty comprehending the theories and terminologies embedded in TCM, translating Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has consistently posed a challenge for translators. Translators bear the responsibility of conveying the cultural nuances of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) to readers, while also respecting the understanding and acceptance levels of the target audience. Recognizing the challenges, they should adeptly employ various methods to accurately and gracefully convey the source information to the target readers. The TCM content in *Hong Lou Meng* spans across diverse aspects of TCM culture, offering an excellent opportunity for in-depth analysis of the challenges translators might face. The challenges and solutions pertaining to the three aspects of TCM can serve as a model for translators, guiding them in handling the translation of TCM effectively.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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