Analyzing English Translation Studies of the Classic Chinese Novel *Jin Ping Mei*: A Critical Review and Reflection

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Abstract

This review examines 103 English translation studies on the ancient Chinese novel *Jin Ping Mei* (*JPM*) by utilizing multiple academic databases as data sources. The review is grounded in five elements generated from Lasswell's model of communication: medio-translation subject, medio-ranslation content, medio-translation channel, medio-translation audience, and medio-translation effect, to conduct a comprehensive analysis and provide a thorough understanding of the current state of study on *JPM*'s English translation. The review summarizes the gaps in each dimension, scrutinizes the research themes of the English translation, and identifies the limitations in the current study on *JPM*'s English translation. It finds that despite the increasing interest in *JPM*'s English translation, the research on the subject is still in its early stages, with a limited number of publications and a lack of sustained commitment from researchers. Existing studies predominantly focus on medio-translation content, particularly studying strategies based on specific translated texts. However, this concentration results in gaps within the medio-translation model, hampering insights for the retranslation of *JPM*. The review also identifies centralization as a standard research corpus and methodology trend. The former predominantly centers on the translations by Roy and Egerton, while the latter leans heavily towards qualitative research methods grounded in linguistic intuition. Therefore, the study recommends breaking away from this centralization and fostering a more comprehensive and diverse exploration to advance future study on *JPM* English translation.

Keywords: *Jin Ping Mei*, English translation, Lasswell's model of communication, Systematic review

1. Introduction

1.1 Jin Ping Mei and its English Translations

Jin Ping Mei (*Plum in the Golden Vase*, 金瓶梅, hereafter *JPM*), a sixteenth-century Chinese masterpiece, is a significant milestone in Chinese literature as it stands as the inaugural lengthy novel authored by a solitary literati (Li & Hu, 2018). Prior to the emergence of *JPM*, the extensive body of Chinese literature predominantly drew inspiration from historical events or mythological and legendary accounts (Li, 2005). However, *JPM* deviated from this conventional practice by using characters drawn from actual society and the everyday experiences of families as the focal point of its narratives (Li, 2005). This departure contributed to the advancement of a more realistic approach in Chinese literature, facilitating crucial exploration and groundwork for the creation of many great works like *Hong Lou Meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*, 红楼梦) (Schonebaum, 2022).

Since introducing the *Panda Book Series* in 1981, China has consistently initiated new Chinese literature translation programs every few years. However, the value of Chinese literature in translation has not been universally recognized (Liu, 2023), highlighting a persistent challenge in Chinese literature translation: Some literature exported from China may only sometimes resonate with the expectations of target language readers.

Nevertheless, there has been a notable shift in recent years, especially in the realm of Chinese online literature, exemplified by the popularity of Wuxia (Martial Arts) and Xiuxian (Cultivation) works such as *Pan Long* (*Coiling Dragon*, 盘龙). This genre has gained significant traction among foreign readers, with the foreign market for Chinese online literature surpassing 3 billion yuan (421.7 million U.S. dollars) in 2022. This trend indicates a growing interest among foreign readers in engaging with the cultural elements embedded in Chinese literature. Reading Literature opens the door of sharing experiences (Medina, 2007), and foreign readers may only have felt compelled to seek translations from other countries if these works offered unique insights or experiences not readily available in their language environments. It is imperative to acknowledge that individuals inclined towards engaging with literary translations constitute a finite demographic as "they are risk takers, they are curious and knowledgeable about other cultures" (McDougall, 2007).

In such a context, *JPM* is envisioned as a potential literary bridge across the cultural divide between China and the world, poised to become a work of world literature. First, *JPM* explores life through a narrative that unfolds from lust and death, a classic motif shared by Eastern and Western literature. Additionally, *JPM*'s extensive coverage of political, economic, historical, philosophical, artistic, cultural, and academic realms underscores the breadth and depth of national culture. This multifaceted exploration holds irreplaceable value and significance for the present generation in understanding, recognizing, inheriting, and contributing to Chinese culture.

The translations of *JPM* have been in existence for a considerable period. English stands out as the most widely spoken language globally, serving as the primary conduit for disseminating literary works. Currently, there are four abridged translations and three complete translations of *JPM*, and their specific details are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. The English translations of *JPM*

Translator	Title of Translation	Year	Publisher	Abridged/Complete
Chu Tsui-Jen	*The Adventures of Hsi Men Ching*	1927	The Library of Facetious Lore	Abridged translation
Bernard Miall	*Chin Ping Mei: The Adventurous History of Hsi Men and His Six Wives*	1939	John Lane Press	Abridged translation
Clement Egerton	*The Golden Lotus*	1939	Routledge & Kegan Paul	Complete translation
Samuel Barker & Kwan Shan-mei	*Don Juan of China: an Amour from the Chin P'ing Mei*	1960	Tuttle Publishing	Abridged translation
Chai Chu & Winbery Chai	*Chin P'ing Mei* (included in *A Treasury of Chinese Literature*)	1965	Appleton-Century Crofts	Abridged translation
David Tod Roy	*The Plum in the Golden Vase* (5 Volumes)	1993-2013	Princeton University Press	Complete translation
Eugene Ying	*Plum Blossoms in a Golden Vase* (5 Volumes)	2018	Self-published	Complete translation

The most recent English translation of *JPM* is a 2018 translation by Eugene Ying, characterized more as a reader's tribute than a formal translation campaign. Notably, the translator, Eugene Ying, possesses an engineering background with no prior experience in language or translation. Moreover, this translation, though available for purchase, was self-released by the translator himself without the endorsement of an official publisher. As of January 1st, 2023, there were no reviews on Amazon, the world's largest e-commerce platform, indicating limited readership engagement of Ying's translation. Therefore, the translations of *JPM* that have garnered some impact trace back to David Tod Roy's five volumes of *The Plum in the Golden Vase* completed between 1993 and 2013. Given that Roy's translations have been in circulation for two decades since the first volume's publication in 1993, it is pertinent to acknowledge the potential evolution in linguistic preferences and expectations among target language readers during this period. Considering *JPM*'s potential role as a bridge for Chinese literature to reach a global audience, there arises a necessity for recognizing the potential shifts in reader expectations over the past two decades and retranslating *JPM* to ensure the adaptability of *JPM* to the current linguistic landscape.

Almost a century has passed since the release of the first English translation of *JPM* in 1927. During this extended period, scholars in translation studies (TS) have focused on the various English translations of *JPM*. Recognizing that the results of translation studies can contribute to improving and progressing translation practice, by doing so, ultimately facilitating the creation of more comprehensive reference materials essential for retranslating *JPM*. In this context, the research questions guiding this inquiry are as follows.

1）What is the current research trajectory concerning the English translation of *JPM*?

2）What are the primary research themes and gaps in the English translation of *JPM*?

3）What strategies and avenues can be explored to enhance future research on the English translation of *JPM* further?

1.2 Theoritical Framework

When composing a review, a solid framework is essential for integrating literature from different studies and categorizing them under related concepts or themes, aiding readers in comprehending the main ideas and trends in a field (Schirmer, 2018).

As in TS, the core issues and critical research perspectives have been transformed in line with the cultural turn. Translators serve is now viewed as cultural mediator within a broader social context (Kardiansyah & Salam, 2020), and the interactions and mutual influences of translation on society are being explored. As a result, medio-translatology has emerged as a new research paradigm, focusing on the communicative characteristics of translation as a medium for transmitting information that seeks to understand "what a translation does, and how a translation stimulates and influences target readers—as well as writers—in the recipient context" (Xiong, 2023: V). Extensive research has shed light on the communicative characteristics of translation, aligning it with the process-oriented and social nature of communication studies (Newmark, 2003; House & Loenhoff, 2016; Lee & Wang, 2022). Accordingly, translation is now conceptualized as a manifestation of "social communication accompanied by linguistic alteration" (Yin & Yu, 2020). Thus, certain concepts from communication studies can help us better understand TS and the role of translation in society.

Based on this premise, the present review draws upon communication theory to augment its framing. Lasswell (1948) is the pioneer in introducing the communication process model. He presented the 5W model, outlining the fundamental elements of the communication process—namely, who communicates what through which channel to whom, and with what effect. Building upon this framework, the field of communication research evolved, giving rise to five pivotal disciplines: control research, content research, media research, audience research, and effect research.
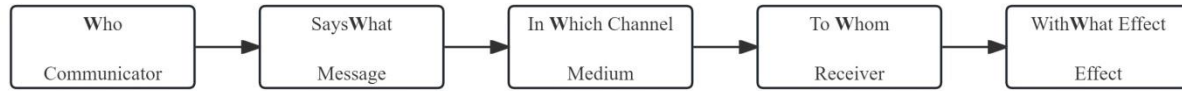

Figure 1. Lasswell's model of communication

Lasswell's communication model has offered valuable insights for TS, especially considering the parallels between medio-translatology and communication, as discussed earlier. Bao (2014) regards translation activities as forms of communication behavior. She uses Lasswell's five fundamental elements to explain translation communication activities, renaming these elements by integrating concepts from TS. This approach introduces five essential elements of medio-translatology: medio-translation subject (who translates), medio-translation content (what is translated), medio-translation channel (how the translation is disseminated), medio-translation audience (to whom the translation is disseminated), and medio-translation effect (the translation's acceptance).

In contrast to traditional translation research, which typically focuses on the conversion of the original text into the translated text, Bao (2014)'s categorization assigns significance to each element, delineating a pivotal aspect of the translation process. This comprehensive framework operates on multiple levels, offering researchers and translation practitioners a robust tool to grasp the intricate nature of translation, which has been applied by Li & Yao (2019), Huang (2021) and many others.
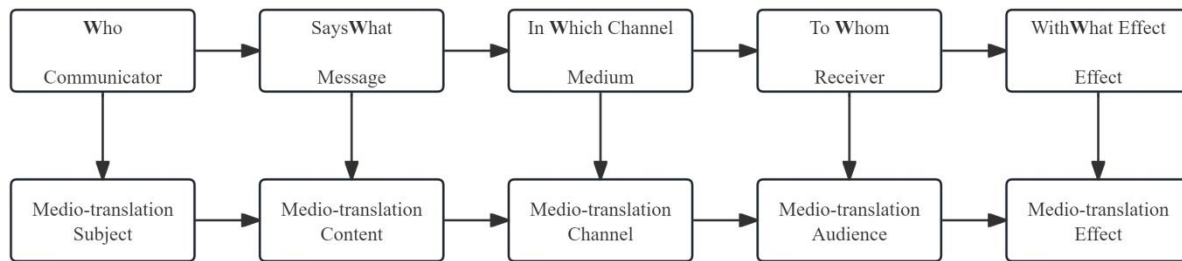

Figure 2. Medio-Translation model based on Lasswell's model of communication

To ensure a more lucid presentation of current *JPM* English translation study, the themes of all collected studies will be categorized and organized based on Bao (2014)'s medio-translation model. This model offers a structured framework that enables a systematic exploration of different facets of *JPM* English translation. By utilizing this approach, a more in-depth analysis of prevalent themes and potential research gaps can be conducted, contributing to a clearer understanding of the field.

2. Methods

2.1 Data Collection

A thorough search for relevant studies was conducted to assess the current status and identify gaps in research on the English translation of *JPM*. To ensure inclusivity, multiple reputable databases were employed, including Scopus, Web of Science (WOS), Google Scholar, and the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). Scopus and WOS were selected due to their extensive coverage across diverse academic disciplines, making them widely utilized by scholars globally for evaluating research output and analyzing trends. These databases are recognized for their ability to provide a comprehensive overview of scholarly activities. To capture additional research beyond the scope of Scopus and WOS, Google Scholar was incorporated as a supplementary search tool. Google Scholar is known for its inclusivity, encompassing a broad spectrum of academic sources, including dissertations and materials that might not be indexed in more traditional databases. Considering that *JPM* is a Chinese-language literary work, indicating a potential emphasis on Chinese-language research, the search strategy included using CNKI. CNKI stands as the most extensive academic resource base in China, offering comprehensive access to various forms of literature in Chinese.

In the search, a Topic-based methodology was applied, concurrently exploring title, abstract, author keywords, and Keywords Plus to comprehensively identify studies associated with the English translation of JPM. Search phrases included combinations of "*Jin Ping Mei*/ 金瓶梅" in conjunction with "Translation/翻译", "English/英语", and "English Translation/英译". After excluding non-research materials, such as reviews and newsletters, 103 studies were retained in the dataset until January 1st, 2024, with 75 presented in Chinese and 28 in English. The scholarly formats included journal articles, conference papers, monographs, book chapters, and dissertations.

2.2 Data Analysis

The limited availability of studies posed a challenge to understanding the differences between Chinese and international research systems of the English translation study of *JPM*. Consequently, all publications were treated as unified entities without categorizing them according to their publication language.

To answer the first research question, an analysis was conducted to tally the number of English translation studies related to *JPM* over the years. The authors' contributions were also evaluated to identify overarching trends and assess their dedication to English translation studies on *JPM*.

Following this, three researchers manually reviewed all the collected studies. Researchers A and B individually evaluated each study, recording details such as research topics, methodologies, and data sources. The studies were then classified into thematic groups, including medio-translation subject, medio-translation content, medio-translation channel, medio-translation audience, and medio-translation effect. Any discrepancies in the classifications by Researchers A and B were addressed through adjudication by Researcher C. After the categorization was complete, the findings were summarized and discussed in relation to the significance of translation communication to address the second research question.

Finally, using the insights gained from the previous analyses, including the trends, classifications, research methods, and data sources, the study synthesized the current state and identified focuses in translation studies on the English translation of *JPM*. This synthesis explored potential future research directions, addressing the third research question.

3. Results

3.1 Overview of Current Research Status

Examining the quantity of studies produced within a specific research field is valuable for comprehending the fluctuations and progressions in academic or societal interests over time. In this investigation, a quantitative analysis was performed by tallying the quantity of publications across 103 studies pertaining to the English translation of *JPM*. The data was then utilized to construct a line graph that visually depicts the shift in the number of publications throughout the years.
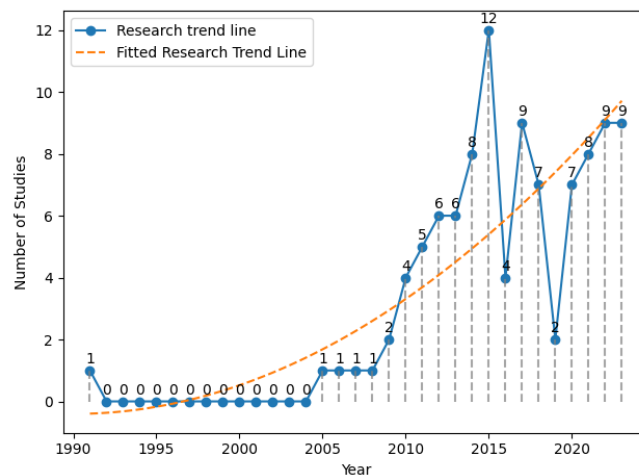

Figure 3. An Overview of Studies on the English Translation of *JPM*

Translating a book typically begins with the translation of its title. Hence, the examination of *JPM*'s English translation can be traced back to the work of Zhang & Wang (1991). The authors thoroughly explored the intricacies of *JPM*'s title and concluded that a phonetic translation approach is the most appropriate method for rendering it in English. However, it was only in 2005 that the study of *JPM*'s English translation opened up a new chapter. Subsequently, the scholarly exploration of this subject experienced gradual development. In 2013, the final volume of *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, which David Tod Roy translated after a 30-year effort, was released. Roy's translation work has received widespread acclaim from the scholarly community, as evidenced by numerous positive reviews. According to Radford (2012), Roy's translation provides a unique perspective on the fall of a far bleaker house than anything contrived by Dickens. Similarly, Lo (2013) describes the translated novel as a masterwork of Chinese fiction and praises the impressive and scholarly nature of Roy's translation. As a result of this acclaim, there has been a growing interest from the public in Roy's work, elevating it to a focal point for further academic investigation. Between 2013 and 2015, approximately 25% of all research in this domain was dedicated to studying *JPM*'s English translation, with 26 studies presented during this period. After 2015, the study of *JPM*'s English translation entered a stable development phase characterized by minor fluctuations.

Based on the fluctuating trends observed in the quantity of studies on *JPM*'s English translation, it can be inferred that the growth or decline in these studies has not followed a simple linear pattern over the past three decades. Therefore, instead of using the commonly employed linear regression, this study employs quadratic polynomial regression to predict future development of *JPM* English translation

studies. The quadratic polynomial model includes a quadratic term that enables the curve to exhibit an upward or downward bend, thus better capturing the complex curvilinear relationship and explaining the trends in the data. The goodness of fit was evaluated using the R-squared metric as the coefficient of determination. The results revealed that the R-squared value for the current fit was approximately 0.7317. With R-squared values ranging from 0 to 1, this indicates a robust fit, suggesting that the model explains over 73% of the variability in the data. Consequently, based on the fitted curves illustrated in Figure 1, it is hypothesized that, despite fluctuations in the number of publications of *JPM* English Translation Studies over the years, an overarching pattern of steady growth exists, with a projected upward momentum in the future.

For authors contribution, the top five researchers in the field of *JPM* English translation studies have been identified, who have each published more than five times. The findings are illustrated in Figure 2, with nodes representing the years of their publications and numbers within the nodes indicating the volume of publications for that particular year. Obviously, apart from Lintao Qi, prolific researchers tend to concentrate their attention on the English translation of *JPM* within a specific time frame, ultimately resulting in fewer sustained, long-term outputs. When considering authors with fewer publications, their involvement in English translation research on *JPM* is sporadic: After contributing one or two papers, many authors discontinue their engagement in this field. This pattern may contribute to some relatively superficial English translation research on *JPM*, as comprehensive and in-depth research often arises from sustained, long-term scholarly endeavors.
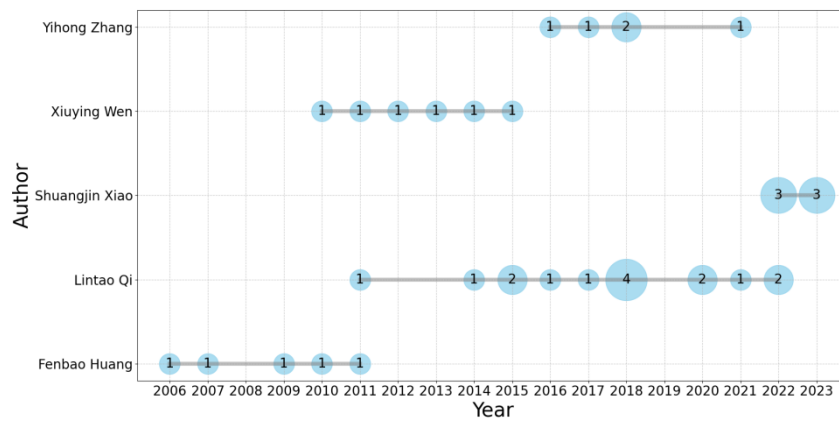

Figure 4. Author-wise publication trends over time

Notably, Lintao Qi, a researcher affiliated with Monash University, has emerged as the most prolific researcher in studies of *JPM*'s English translation, according to Figure 3. Since 2011, Qi has been unwaveringly committed to this field, continuously engaging in research endeavors. He has published over ten journal papers and completed both his master's and doctoral dissertations, which comprehensively examine the similarities and distinctions between the translations of Roy and Egerton and the translation environment in which they were produced. Additionally, he has authored the sole monograph exclusively devoted to studying English translations of *JPM*, *Jin Ping Mei English Translations*: *Texts, Paratexts, and Contexts*, published by Routledge in 2018, encompassing Qi's doctoral dissertation and prior research.

Comparatively, the study of *JPM* in the broader context of English translation research on Chinese classical literature is notably limited and needs to catch up. For instance, as per statistics by Ran et al. (2016), even from 1975 to 2015, China produced 2,583 research papers on the English translation of *Hong Lou Meng*, with substantial quantity and diversity surpassing that of *JPM*. Therefore, it remains nascent despite a history of English translation studies on *JPM*. The volume of literature published is relatively small, and there is ample room for further exploration and development in the field of English translation studies of *JPM* to bring it more in line with the depth and breadth of research in similar areas.

3.2 Research Topic Analysis

Following the classification of research topics on the English translation of *JPM* based on the five translation elements outlined by Bao (2014), the findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Classification of studies on the English translation of *JPM*

Medio-Translation Element	Number
Medio-translation subject	8
Medio-ranslation content	88
Medio-translation channel	6
Medio-translation audience	0
Medio-translation effect	1
Total	103

Based on the classification results, it becomes evident that the current body of research on the English translation of *JPM* primarily centers on the medio-translation content. While certain studies address the medio-translation subject, there is a noticeable dearth of attention devoted to the medio-translation channel, effect, audience. In this section, each medio-translation element will be examined, offering a comprehensive review of pertinent studies in the context of English translation for *JPM*.

The medio-translation subject, or the translator, is widely acknowledged as the central figure in the translation process and occupies a pivotal and dynamic role. Current research on the English translation of *JPM* has predominantly focused on two translators, Egerton and Roy, and encompasses eight studies. Of particular significance is the study of translator subjectivity derived from translation analysis, which has made a valuable contribution to this field of inquiry. Ye (2015) is an example of a scholar who examines the representation of the human body, genitalia, and sexual behavior in Roy's and Egerton's translations and makes comparisons based on distinct levels of subjectivity, such as activeness, passivity, and self-interpretation. However, Ye's analysis overlooks a crucial aspect. Specifically, Egerton's translation, *The Golden Lotus*, which deals with the depiction of sex, was initially translated into Latin in the first edition and subsequently into English in later editions, which was not the work of Egerton himself; instead, it was commissioned by the publisher and executed by an unidentified separate translator (Qi, 2018). Consequently, Ye's conclusion may need more accuracy due to this oversight. It is important to note that examining a translator's subjectivity solely through the translation itself, without considering the translator's biography in the context of the history of translation, the publication history, and the linguistic environment, can lead to biased conclusions, which is a common issue observed in Ye's and other researchers' studies on the translators of the English translation of *JPM*. Furthermore, there are several intriguing aspects to consider in studying translators involved in the English translation of *JPM*. Notably, the obscured role of co-translator Lao She in Egerton's translation and the distinctive identity of Chu Tsui-Jen, an overseas Chinese diasporic translator, present compelling opportunities for in-depth exploration as promising research themes. From a research perspective, it is essential to place the translator within the receiving culture, elucidating their position and role within this cultural context, and examine the translator's identity and function.

In sharp contrast to other aspects, the study of medio-translation content stands out as the most vibrant domain within the English translation research of *JPM*, with a total of 88 studies. Given the exceptional linguistic artistry of *JPM*, research into medio-translation content predominantly revolves around the multifaceted expression of Chinese rhetoric, such as metaphor (Xiao, 2022), puns (Shi, 2021), and Swearing and Vulgarities (Xiao, 2023). Furthermore, *JPM*, often described as an encyclopedia of life in Ming Dynasty China, has led to the examination of various cultural elements within the medio-translation content, medio-translation content, including aspects like divination (Tang & Bao, 2018), tea-drinking (Zhang, 2018), clothing (Li & Li, 2022) and hairstyle (Liu & Yan, 2023). Researchers have refined many different translation strategies for *JPM* medio-translation content in these studies. Jääskeläinen (1993) defines translation strategy as "the best way that a translator thinks he or she can achieve a given goal in translation practice". Within this definition, she introduces a crucial distinction between local and global translation strategies. The local translation strategy pertains to the possible manipulations within a specific translation instance, resembling specific translation methods. On the other hand, the global strategy extends its influence over the entire translation task. This differentiation underscores the pivotal role of the global strategy as a guiding principle for the entire translation activity. Researchers often propose the local translation strategy in the studies on medio-translation content of *JPM*. For instance, Tang & Bao (2018), using feminism as a theoretical basis, propose that Roy employs both translation methods of augmentation and hijacking to exalt the female figures involved in the plot during divination episodes. However, a notable omission in the researcher's analysis is the extent to which the translator utilizes these translation methods in episodes beyond those related to divination. Consequently, the localized nature of such translation studies may limit their utility in guiding a comprehensive retranslation of JPM in the future, as they may not offer a holistic perspective on the translation process. It advocates for a macro-translation analysis of different English translations of *JPM* from a stylistic perspective to address this limitation and facilitate a more encompassing understanding. Such an analysis aims to explore different translators' embodiments of *JPM*. Such an analysis explores different translators' embodied styles throughout the text, allowing for deductions regarding the overall approach and strategy employed in the translation process. Such an analysis explores different translators' embodied styles throughout the text, allowing for deductions regarding the overall approach and strategy employed in the translation process. Critiquing the macro-translation style permits an evaluation of the overarching techniques applied, providing a comprehensive perspective on translation strategy.

As for the medio-translation audience of the English translation of *JPM*, no study has yet discussed it. The audience for literary translations occupies a dual role, acting as both recipients and disseminators of the translated text. Regardless of whether the primary objective of a translation is financial gain or cultural dissemination, engaging as many target readers as possible is crucial, which means that a translation should meet the expectations of target readers. Readers can be classified into several groups, such as general readers, bilingual readers, and professional critics, and their level of familiarity with the source language culture can significantly affect their expectations and acceptance of the translated text. Therefore, it is imperative to ascertain the characteristics of the readership for various English translations of *JPM*. Researchers can employ questionnaires or interviews to investigate readers and potential readers of these translations.

Furthermore, the current studies on the English translation of *JPM* also exhibits a noticeable gap in terms of medio-translation channels. medio-translation channels encompass a spectrum of media organizations and information carriers responsible for disseminating content to the intended readership. Traditional channels include newspapers, magazines, publishers, agents, book fairs, new media, and more. The publication, distribution, and promotion of books rely on the synergistic operation of various medio-translation channels. Qi (2021), for

example, examines s the translation of sexuality in the context of Anglo-American literary censorship in the twentieth century, a context in which publishers' approach to *JPM* translations and propaganda made treatment of *JPM* has undergone a dynamic interactions between literary translation activities and the evolving socio-historical contexts. Transformations in censorship and shifts in the means of dissemination have gradually steered the English translation of *JPM* away from early commodification, vulgarization, and politicization, guiding it toward the realms of academia and literature. And in the current digital age, the dissemination of English translations of *JPM* may also have more In the digital era, the dissemination of *JPM* English translations may also have more channels, firstly, the translations are no longer single paper-based, but may become e-books or audiobooks, which makes the promotion and dissemination of the medio-translation channel may be changed; at the same time, in addition to the traditional medio-translation channel mentioned above, the translations may also be secondary creations based on text, pictures, and videos, which are disseminated in a variety of online channels. light of these developments, future research endeavors may Scraping Websites with Python and R for massive amounts of relevant data, to analyze relevant dissemination data comprehensively. comprehensively.

The medio-translation effect is another aspect of *JPM*'s English translation research that has yet to be explored. As a means of cultural dissemination, literary translation relies on its ability to reach and influence the target audience. Failing to achieve this purpose compromises the act of translation, rendering it meaningless (Bao, 2014). Despite the importance of the medio-translation effect, only one study by Hu (2020) has investigated this aspect. Hu conducted textual analysis of book reviews from various media outlets for Roy's translation of *JPM*, including elite media, mass media, academic outlets, and online platforms. The findings showed that English-speaking readers perceived Roy's translation as academically valuable, emphasizing its high fidelity and accuracy. Other studies, such as Pan (2012), have assumed the medio-translation effect of *JPM*'s English translation as given, stating that "the English translation of *JPM* promotes English readers' understanding and acceptance of classical Chinese literature". However, such claims generally lack empirical evidence. In reality, evaluating the medio-translation effect can encompass multiple facets, including book sales, library acquisitions, participation in book fairs, awards received by translated works, and promotional efforts in the media.

4. Discussion

In Lasswell's communication model, the absence of any single component leads to the failure of information dissemination. This phenomenon is also reflected in the medio-translation model proposed by Bao (2014), which follows Lasswell's principles. Ideally, in medio-translation, the translator is responsible for translating the original text and generating the translated content. The translated content is then conveyed to the target readers through specific channels to achieve the anticipated effect. However, the analysis on research topics of studies on *JPM* English translation indicates a obvious centralization, which is not a favorable trend. From the discussion in 3.2 it follows that most of these studies focus heavily on the medio-translation content and subject. This implies a focus on the initial stages of the translational communication chain, limiting exploration to the textual aspects of translation and overlooking its social attributes as a form of outward information dissemination. Furthermore, there needs to be more exploration of the later stages of the translational communication chain, including the channel, audience, and effect. This oversight means that the actual process and results to be adequately considered, and the research may need more practical applicability. Therefore, future research on *JPM* English translation should focus on other components in the translational communication chain instead of overly emphasizing the medio-translation content and subject. This shift is necessary to extract knowledge from past experiences and provide nuanced and valuable insights into the re-translation and dissemination of *JPM*.

Simultaneously, statistical analysis reveals that centralization is evident in both the research data and research methodology employed in existing studies on *JPM* English translation. In term of research data, *JPM* has been translated into English in three complete translations, four abridged translations, and a comic strip compilation. However, according to the statistics in this study during data analysis, extant research has predominantly concentrated on the translations by Roy and Egerton, with only cursory references to the other translations when reviewing the historical context of translating *JPM*. Nonetheless, these understudied translations possess unique characteristics: Ying's translation stands as an amateur translator's homage to Chinese culture; Chu Tsui-Jen's translation aims for a moralizing effect; Miall's translation emphasizes disseminating Chinese literature and art to an educated public; and the English comic strip adaptation of *JPM* by Samuel Barker and Kwan Shan-mei illustrates the multimodal interaction between text and illustration. These various translations can serve as valuable case studies or be interconnected, forming a transient exploration of the translation endeavors related to *JPM*. Furthermore, the dissemination of *JPM* in English-speaking regions has encountered substantial resistance due to its explicit erotic content (Qi, 2015). Consequently, numerous English derivatives of *JPM* with vastly differing content have emerged. For instance, Miall's translation has been utilized as a foundation for rewriting, transforming it into purely erotic literature by several publishers. This feature of the English translations of *JPM* vividly portrays the intricate tapestry of translation activities generated by the interplay between agents, translators, publishers, and readers. It provides a rich material source for examining the dynamic relationship between translation and the broader realms of society, culture, and history.

In terms of research methodology, notably, most medio-translation content research studies have relied on qualitative analysis, particularly introspective analysis predicated on linguistic intuition. However, this approach is hampered by two significant shortcomings. Firstly, researchers often formulate conclusions based on preconceived notions rather than empirical evidence. Secondly, linguistic intuition may introduce bias, leading to findings that need to be more accurate or consistent. For example, Yan (2017) posits that Roy's translation of *JPM* primarily adheres to the Domestication strategy, yielding a faithful and expressive rendition of the source text. Conversely, Wang and Chen (2022) maintain that Roy employs Foreignization more frequently than Domestication in his translations. Although this

approach may engender cognitive resistance among readers, they contend that Roy offsets this potential drawback by meticulously considering the meaning within the context and including annotations. Even with studying the exact translation, the researchers reached opposing conclusions. In response to these concerns, there is a pressing need to promote and encourage the utilization of data-driven techniques in digital humanities. Digital humanities research leverages quantitative analysis to scrutinize the inherent characteristics of textual phenomena, representing a convergence of traditional humanities and social sciences with empirical methodologies. One example of this approach is Zhao's (2020) use of corpus methodology to analyze stylistic and register variations in Roy's translation. Zhao adopted a Multidimensional Analysis to explore the genre features of *JPM*'s two complete English translations by Egerton and Roy. Statistical analysis shows that Egerton's translation is an "Imaginative Narrative". At the same time, Roy's is a "General Narrative Exposition". Therefore, future research in the English translation of *JPM* should prioritize utilizing data-driven text analysis techniques, such as a multivariate synergistic approach, utilizing programming languages such as R, Python, and other emerging technological tools. Such an approach should encompass various aspects, including readability, affective tendencies, semantic transfers, textual correspondence rates, and mutual information in the co-presentation of the text, among others. Additionally, constructing a corpus comprising English translations of *JPM* from different periods can enable comparative analysis of the varying levels of explicitness and implicitness found in different English translations and identify patterns and trends in the evolution of English translations over time.

5. Conclusion

As a classic of Chinese literature, *JPM* has been translated into English for nearly a century, spawning a significant body of related studies. Using important academic databases such as WOS, Scopus, and CNKI as data sources, this study searched and collected 103 studies on the English translation of "Jin Ping Mei" between 1991 and 2023. These studies were categorized according to the elements of translation communication based on Lasswell's model of communication. Qualitative analysis was then employed to explore the research trajectory, research themes, and future directions of the field. For the current research trajectory, it reveals a gradual increase in academic interest in this field. However, the limited number of available studies indicates the necessity to expand the depth and breadth of research in this area. For the primary research themes, existing studies on the English translation of *JPM* have shown a significant focus, primarily on translations by Roy and Egerton. These studies predominantly delve into medio-translation content, with limited attention to the translation process. Elements such as medio-translation effects, channels, and audiences have been largely overlooked. The employed research methods are predominantly qualitative, relying on simple case studies. In contrast, the absence of quantitative and mixed research approaches may results in a lack of objectivity in the research findings in studies on the English translation of *JPM* .

Concurrently, the English translations of *JPM* remain constrained, and its enigmatic qualities have yet to be fully revealed to readers in the target language. As a result, it may undergo continuous revision over an extended period, primarily through translation activities. Consequently, for future researches, there is a pressing need to emphasize the multifaceted medio-translation elements involved in the translation process and to conduct research on *JPM*'s translation through various channels and mixed research methodologies to gain insights and experiences that can be applied to retranslation. By doing so, a comprehensive understanding of the literary, cultural, and historical richness that *JPM* encapsulates can be provided to English-speaking readers. Such efforts may eventually lead to *JPM*'s realization as a world literature capable of transcending linguistic and cultural boundaries.

This study acknowledges certain limitations. While the corpus of examined studies each presents a distinct research focus, a detailed analysis through the lens of the five medio-translation elements proposed by Bao (2014) indicates that some studies extend beyond their primary research concerns to address additional elements, albeit to varying extents. Nevertheless, this study opts for categorization primarily based on the principal research topics of each study. This approach may yield categorization outcomes that need more precision. Moreover, in reviewing a specific body of research, it is feasible to investigate the interconnections among the literature employing bibliometrics methodologies, such as topic mining and cluster analysis. Such methods offer valuable supplementary support to qualitative reviews. However, the limited volume of studies focusing on the English translation of *JPM* constrains the potential for conducting a comprehensive bibliometric analysis. This limitation may result in analyses disproportionately influenced by singular studies or subjective viewpoints, thereby introducing a notable degree of bias. Additionally, the paucity of studies may yield scant data on the interrelations among the literature, complicating the task of establishing precise correlation models or classification schemas. Consequently, it is anticipated that future research endeavors will employ bibliometric and qualitative analysis methods as they delve more comprehensively into the English translation of Jin Ping Mei. This dual approach promises to furnish a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the domain of English translation research about *JPM*.

China (22G153).

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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