

Exploring the Effect of ChatGPT on the Translation of Poetry in Literary Works: A Case Study of the David Hawkes Translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions*

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Abstract:

This study delves into the impact of ChatGPT on poetry translation, with a special focus on David Hawkes' rendition of *A Dream of Red Mansions*. It meticulously scrutinizes three pivotal aspects, as put forward by Yan Fu in his work *On Evolution*: fidelity with precision, smoothness, clarity, and the fusion of form and essence. A comparative analysis between Hawkes' translation and ChatGPT's output elucidates notable disparities in faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance. While Hawkes's outcome adeptly showcases a nuanced grasp of the original text's mood and imagery, ChatGPT's version falls short in depth and poetic eloquence. Additionally, this research not only endeavors to shed light on the intricate interplays between conventional translation methodologies and technology that transforms by leaps and bounds, uncovering practical implications for translators and researchers, but also serves to explain both the challenges and potentials presented by AI in poetry translation, underscoring the indispensable role of human ingenuity and cultural understanding in attaining elegant and expressive translations. Furthermore, it highlights the ongoing relevance of preserving the literary essence, conveying the intended meaning accurately, and acknowledging the necessity for innovation and adaptation in the translation process. By rigorously examining these aspects, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the intersection of technology and literary translation, which inspires further inquiry and debate within the scholarly community, paving the way for the ever-evolving progress of translation studies.

Keywords: ChatGPT; David Hawkes; *A Dream of Red Mansions*;

1. Introduction

Literary translation, especially poetry, demands a delicate balance between staying true to the original text and infusing it with expressive interpretation. The rise of AI-driven translation tools like ChatGPT has sparked increasing interest in their significance on translation. This study focuses on ChatGPT's influence on poetry translation, selecting David Hawkes' version of *A Dream of Red Mansions* as a case study. By examining the key translation guidelines Yan Fu proposed, „faithfulness, smoothness, and elegance,“ this research aims to cast light upon the strengths and limitations of AI-assisted translation in capturing the prescription aspects of poetic language and cultural subtleties. Through this exploration, the study aspires to deepen our understanding of the complexities of literary translation in the digital age.

2. Analysis

2.1 Delicacy in Diction: Fidelity with Precision

As its name implies, „faithfulness“ in translation calls for fidelity to the original text, which encompasses faithful rendering of content and adherence to sentence structures and linguistic nuances. However, it is not a mechanical process. Instead of conveying the true essence, a word-for-word translation may give rise to stiffness and obscurity in the translated text.

Drawing from Yan Fu's discourse on „faithfulness“ in *On Evolution*, it is acknowledged that „faithfulness“ does not equate to sole accuracy or conformity to the form of the original text; rather, it represents a moral touchstone that requires translators to uphold the truth of the original text and be honest and non-deceptive to the readers. Essentially, „faithfulness“ signifies that the translated meaning should not contradict the original text, demanding ac-

curacy without deviation or omission. This necessitates translators to strive to grasp the meaning and intent of the original text and transform it into precise linguistic expressions, ensuring that readers can accurately comprehend the content.

Example1: 粉面含春威不露，丹唇未启笑先闻。

David Hawkes: The ever-smiling summer face of hidden thunders showed no trace; the ever-bubbling laughter started almost before the lips were parted.

ChatGPT: The delicate blush hints at the arrival of spring, yet modestly veiled.

Before the cherry lips part, laughter's fragrance wafts in advance.

As exemplified in Example 1, which portrays the exterior and character of Wang Xifeng, specific imagery is retained, such as „spring.“ This imagery stems from China's geographical location and climatic characteristics, where spring is traditionally associated with warmth and beauty. ChatGPT used „spring“ to describe Wang Xifeng's complexion as well, symbolizing her rosy cheeks and eliciting a sense of charm. However, being born in London, England, Hawkes was deeply affected by distinct geographical and climatic factors, where spring may not hold the same intention. Instead, summer might be the most pleasant season, as Shakespeare compared his beloved to a summer's day in his sonnets. Therefore, Hawkes replaced the imagery of „spring“ with „summer.“ This illustrates that while Hawkes' translation may not be „faithful“ to the linguistic form of the original text, it remains „faithful“ to its underlying meaning. If complete fidelity is given to the original textual form, it would inevitably betray the essence of the original text.

In a nutshell, „faithfulness“ does not entail a literal word-for-word translation or superficial textual conversion. Instead, it involves revealing the hidden meanings of the original work; otherwise, it risks becoming rigid and unyielding, failing to resonate with the readership. As Yan Fu argued, “To focus solely on fidelity without achieving comprehension is not a translation at all.” (顾信矣不达，虽译犹不译也) [1].

2.2 From Complexity to Simplicity: Smooth and Clear

The nature of “expressiveness” lies in ensuring that the translated text flows smoothly, which incorporates staying committed to linguistic norms and extending ideas naturally and conversationally. Fu Lei remarked that an ideal translation reads as if originally written in the target language [2]. The criterion for “expressiveness” in translation can be understood as clarity and fluency, focusing on conveying the intended meaning while aligning with the target language's linguistic conventions and thought

patterns [3].

Nevertheless, English and Chinese belong to various language families, resulting in major discrepancies in vocabulary and syntactic structures. Taking the translation process from English to Chinese as an instance, under the guidance of “expressiveness,” the Chinese translation should be clear and understandable, complying with the cognitive processes and linguistic standards of Chinese speakers. Thus, the translation should be readable and avoid convoluted or awkward language.

Example2: 圃露庭霜何寂寞，鸿归蛩病可相思。

David Hawkes: The geese return, the crickets mourn his fate.

ChatGPT: The garden dew and courtyard frost in solitude lay, as geese return, the ailing cicadas pine away.

This poem serves as an outlet for the author's sensations through the voice of Lin Daiyu, evoking a subtle sense of melancholy. The imagery here depicts the autumn scenery, adopting “dew” and “frost” to convey the isolation and loneliness that set the overall tone for the translation. The two images in this line, “wild geese returning” and “crickets in distress,” carry extensive implications. The former intends the departure of the wild geese as deep autumn sets in, laying out their gradual absence from the scene, while the latter embodies the solitary chirping of crickets amidst the chilly frost in the garden. Both images express the desolation and sorrow of autumn. However, these expressions are not common in Western literature. Hawkes' translation effectively captures the connotation of “mourn,” denoting a shift in intention from the chrysanthemum to the cricket, lamenting its fate. However, ChatGPT's translation appears relatively flat, lacking a deeper understanding of the original poem's mood and poetic demonstration, failing to extend the seasonal change and life's aging implied by “wild geese returning” and “crickets in distress,” as well as the implicit sentiment of longing for eternal happiness.

To sum up, achieving “expressiveness” in translation involves presenting the ideas smoothly and naturally in the target language, ensuring the translated text is accessible and engaging to the target audience while dutifully imparting the original meaning [4].

2.3 Fusion of Form and Essence: Artistry Unmatched

Certainly, “elegance” refers to the translated text possessing a literary quality, closely resembling the realm and spirit of the original work, imbued with literary aestheticism. Yan Fu placed the standard of “elegance” at the end, not only indicating that translation should pursue “elegance” on the foundation of “faithfulness” and “expressiveness” but also emphasizing that “elegance” is a

relatively challenging destination to achieve in the translation process. This concept resonates with Qian Zhongshu’s notion of “reincarnation.” The standard of elegance particularly applies to literary translation, where prose and poetry often aim for elegance, seeking a harmonious unity in both languages [5].

Additionally, it’s worth noting that “elegance” does not solely represent “elegant language and translation” but reflects translation by the stylistic nuances of the original work without merely pursuing flowery language. “Ele-

gance” stands for the highest target in translation, the ultimate aspiration translators pursue. The norm of elegance necessitates translators to possess profound humanistic literacy, literary accumulation, cultural background, abundant life experiences, intense emotional insights, and profound contemplations on life.

Example3: 陋室空堂，当年笏满床，衰草枯杨，曾为歌舞场。蛛丝儿结满雕梁，绿纱今又糊在蓬窗上。... 甚荒唐，到头来都是为他人作嫁衣裳！（《好了歌注》节选）

Table 1. The Comparison between David Hawkes and ChatGPT

in Translation on an Excerpt from Won-Done Song

David Hawkes	ChatGPT
<p>Men all know that salvation should be won. But with ambition, won’t have done, have done. Where are the famous ones of days gone by? In grassy graves, they lie now, everyone. Men all know that salvation should be won. But with their riches, won’t have done, have done. Each day, they grumble they’ve not made enough. When they’ve enough, it’s goodnight, everyone! ...</p> <p>Men all know that salvation should be won. But with their children won’t have done, have done. Yet though of parents fond there is no lack. Of grateful children saw I ne’er a one.</p>	<p>The humble chamber stands vacant, once filled with the splendor of court officials’ tablets lining the beds. Now, it is overrun with withered grass and dead poplars, a stark contrast to its former days as a venue for singing and dancing.</p> <p>Cobwebs hang freely from the intricate carvings of the beams, and green gauze is pasted anew on the tattered windows.</p> <p>How absurd it seems, in the end, to realize that all our efforts are merely sewing wedding dresses for others. ...</p> <p>This chamber, once a bustling scene of grandeur, now stands as a silent witness to the vanity of worldly pursuits.</p>

Apart from Table 1, Hawkes imitated the structure of English poetry with its four-beat iambic meter, where every two lines rhyme with a varied rhyme scheme, primarily utilizing a method of paraphrase translation. Classical Chinese poetry underscores the “three beauties”: phonetic, semantic, and formal beauty [6]. From the perspective of sound beauty, Hawkes’ translation focuses more on rhyme, with rhyming pairs every two lines, creating a rhythmic and melodic sense when read aloud. However, ChatGPT, constrained by the original text’s words, form, and content, is deficient in its translation’s poetic beauty of sound. Moreover, Hawkes endeavored to match the original’s end rhyme effect and showcased variation in the translation, leading to a well-structured and harmonious rendition. Yan Fu’s tripartite principle serves as a beacon for translators, reminding them of the intricate balance between remaining faithful to the original text, conveying its intended meaning effectively, and infusing the translation with literary elegance. Adhering to these principles ensures that translations resonate authentically with the source text while captivating readers in the target language.

A Dream of Red Mansions, representing the pinnacle of

classical Chinese literature, holds profound significance for studying its English translations, especially concerning its classical poetry translations, which serve as invaluable references for rendering classical Chinese poetry into English. David Hawkes’ approach, tailored to accommodate readers’ reception and Western aesthetic preferences, often employs strategies such as domestication and paraphrasing or opts for equivalence translations rooted in the target language. Consequently, his translations exhibit greater aesthetic appeal and rhythmic beauty but inevitably lose some of the original essence of Chinese culture. Therefore, in the translation process of classical Chinese poetry, it is imperative to seamlessly integrate traditional Chinese cultural elements with the readers’ receptivity, necessitating further exploration and contemplation [7]. Unfortunately, under this circumstance, ChatGPT has poor translation ability in cohesive devices, far from deeply connecting the logical relationship between sentences, and fails to have the intelligence and flexibility of Hawkes’ translation at a cohesive level. The language translation structure is translated according to the Chinese order, which does not conform to the habit of English language expression. Due to inadequate use of cohesive means, weak connection of

logical relations within sentences, and loss of hierarchy within sentences, the readability of the target language reader needs to be improved [8]. To sum up, “elegance” in translation covers capturing the literary essence of the original work, achieving a harmonious fusion of styles and sentiments across languages, and reflecting the translator’s deep cultural understanding and personal insights.

3. Conclusion

In general, this study utilizes David Hawkes’s masterpiece *A Dream of Red Mansions* as a case study to explore the impact of AI-driven translation tools on poetry translation. By analyzing fidelity, fluency, and elegance in translation, the paper sets forth the strengths and limitations of AI-enabled translation in capturing poetic expression and cultural nuances.[9] While AI translation tools offer convenience and efficiency, they often lack human translation’s depth and artistic essence. Human translators possess a unique ability to navigate the complexities and subtleties of different cultures within literary texts, enriching the creative and intuitive aspects of the translation process. However, AI tools can serve as valuable aids to assist translators with initial tasks and streamline workflows.

Furthermore, this study emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement and adaptation throughout the translation process, regardless of which tools are employed. It highlights that translators must be vigilant when utilizing technological advances while preserving the original text’s integrity and cultural context [10]. Moreover, this study underscores how human intelligence is key in infusing emotional depth and aesthetic appeal into translations. It demonstrates that although AI can expedite certain aspects of translation work, human intuition and empathy remain crucial for effectively capturing a literary work’s essence. Ultimately, integrating AI technology with human expertise offers promising prospects for enhancing accessibility and enriching translated literary works.

Last, it is critical to fully recognize the complementary re-

lationship between AI technology and human translational expertise. By leveraging both resources effectively, it can be optimized so that the overall translation process can achieve greater accuracy, expressiveness, and cultural resonance simultaneously [11]. As we progress further into the evolving field of literary translation in the digital age, maintaining this delicate balance is critical to fostering innovation and preserving the essence of human creativity and cultural understanding.

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