

# **A Study on Cultural Default and Compensation Strategies —— A Comparative Analysis Based on the English Translation of Poems and Allusions in *A Dream of Red Mansions***

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## **Abstract**

Cultural default is a pivotal issue in literary translation, particularly prominent in the translation of classic Chinese literary works. From the perspective of translation theory, this paper takes the English translation of poems and allusions in *A Dream of Red Mansions* as the research starting point to explore the causes of cultural default and its corresponding compensation strategies. The study finds that the absence of cultural elements at linguistic, cultural and aesthetic levels poses challenges to the accuracy and readability of translated texts. To this end, this paper proposes compensation strategies such as the combination of literal and free translation, the addition of annotations and interpretations, and cultural substitution and transformation, aiming to provide references for translation practice through theoretical construction. These strategies not only help improve the quality of translations but also promote the cross-cultural communication of culture. The study further points out that compensation strategies for cultural default should be flexibly adjusted according to cultural differences to achieve the dual goals of translation: faithfulness to the original text and adaptation to the target culture. Through theoretical analysis and case comparison, this paper offers a new perspective for translation research and emphasizes the importance of cultural elements in the translation process and the necessity of corresponding compensation strategies.

## **Keywords**

English translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, cultural default, compensation strategies, poems and allusions, translation quality

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## **1. Introduction**

As the pinnacle of classic Chinese literature, *A Dream of Red Mansions* is hailed as “an encyclopedia of Chinese feudal society” for its vivid character portrayal, intricate plot design and profound social criticism. The historical, cultural, philosophical and social information it contains often encounters the problem of cultural default in the translation process—the absence of corresponding expressions of the original cultural elements in the translated text leads to the disconnection of information transmission or misunderstanding by readers, which stems from the cognitive differences of different cultural backgrounds. As an intertextual text,

the poems and allusions in *A Dream of Red Mansions* have obvious textual dependence. According to Kristeva's intertextuality theory, most of its poetic creations draw on previous classics, and the use of allusions relies on the background of traditional Chinese culture to reveal their profound meanings. This places translators not only with the challenge of language conversion but also the need to resolve the information disconnection caused by cultural default [1]. The Gestalt image reconstruction theory points out that successful literary translation needs to reconstruct the holistic image characteristics in the target culture, and the conflict between the combination of Chinese poetic images and the expression habits of the target language further exacerbates the risk of cultural default [2].

Compensation strategies for cultural default are of great practical significance for improving translation quality. The transformation of poetic concepts presented in Yang Hsien-yi's English translation of the poems in *A Dream of Red Mansions* reveals the complex considerations of translators in balancing faithfulness and readability; Borges' quotation of the plots of *A Dream of Red Mansions* in his creations also confirms the role of compensation strategies in promoting cross-cultural dialogue. Current research mostly focuses on the analysis of a single translation version or the reproduction of local images, and the theoretical framework for systematically exploring compensation strategies for cultural default is still insufficient. By comparing different English translation versions and combining intertextuality theory with the Gestalt image reconstruction method, a more operable path for cultural default compensation can be provided. This is of great value for improving the acceptability of translations, providing references for the translation of other culture-loaded texts, and promoting the international communication of classic Chinese literature.

Scholars at home and abroad have conducted research on the English translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions* with different focuses, but there are obvious limitations in all studies. Foreign research started early, focusing on translation strategies, quality evaluation and the transmission of cultural elements. Comparing Yang Hsien-yi's and David Hawkes' translations reveals the differences in their handling of poetic artistic conception, but fails to form a systematic discussion on the compensation for cultural default, and the research on the compensation methods for information loss in the translation of solar term allusions, Confucian cultural elements and other aspects is insufficient [3]. Domestic research has developed rapidly, also covering translation strategies, cultural transmission and quality evaluation, and has recognized the key role of cultural default, carrying out special research on the reproduction of poetic images. However, it still remains at the theoretical analysis level, lacking empirical research on specific compensation strategies and failing to form a complete compensation strategy system. In particular, the problem of balancing the retention of cultural information and the improvement of readability in the translation of poems and allusions needs to be solved urgently [4]. In view of these research deficiencies, this paper adopts an interdisciplinary perspective, integrates the methods of literature review, textual analysis and comparative analysis, systematically sorts out the relevant theoretical context and practical achievements, focuses on typical texts such as the Jinling Twelve Beauties' judgment poems, compares the translation approaches of Hawkes, Yang Hsien-yi and other versions, and reveals the differences in the handling of cultural default by different translation paradigms.

## **2. Cultural Default Phenomena in A Dream of Red Mansions**

As a great literary work bearing the genetic code of traditional Chinese culture, the dense cultural symbols in its textual system often produce cultural default due to the cognitive blank of the target context in cross-linguistic communication. Such default exists not only in the profound implications of poems and allusions but also permeates the cultural texture of daily narration, ultimately exerting a multi-dimensional impact on the cross-cultural interpretation of the text.

### **2.1 Cultural Default in Poems and Allusions**

The poems and allusions in *A Dream of Red Mansions* construct a meaning system highly dependent on the Chinese cultural context, and the cultural default in their translation presents a multi-level break from linguistic symbols to cultural logic. The linguistic default stems from the untranslatability of culture-specific vocabulary. For example, "the Twelve Jinling Ladies" not only refers to a specific group of women but also implies the historical metaphor of "Jinling" as a symbol of the rise and fall of dynasties and the gender ethics carried by "Chai (hairpin)". Hawkes' literal translation of "Twelve Beauties of Jinling" retains the superficial

reference but dissolves the deep semantic meaning of “Chai” as a symbol of “female virtue” in the patriarchal system [5]. Essentially, such lexical default is a dislocation of cultural cognitive frameworks, making it difficult for target readers to perceive the social structure coding behind the appellation through the translated text.

The default in the translation of allusions involves a more complex network of cultural knowledge. “The Wood-Stone Pledge” is rooted in the Chinese folk belief in reincarnation of the “Three-Life Stone” and the Confucian distinction between righteousness and profit. Yang Hsien-yi translated it as “predestined wood-stone union”. Although the connotation of fatalism is compensated by “predestined”, the philosophical opposition between “wood” (Daiyu) and “stone” (Baoyu) which metaphorize “disposition” and “rites and etiquette” cannot be conveyed [6]. The default of the mythological system is more prominent. The character “Si (department)” in “the Department of ill-fated Ladies” in the “Illusory Land of Great Void” is not only associated with the Taoist belief in the God of Fate but also echoes the power structure of the feudal bureaucratic system. Hawkes’ “Registry of Fated Misery” simulates the characteristics of administrative institutions through “Registry” but weakens the cosmic outlook of “the interaction between heaven and man” contained in “Si” [7]. The default of historical allusions is more likely to cause the break of narrative logic. The integration of “royal etiquette” and “family etiquette” in “Imperial Consort Yuan’s Visit to Her Family” has no corresponding reference in the Western monarchy and family system, resulting in the difficulty of the translated text in presenting the infiltration and checks and balances of “monarchical power” on “clan power” behind the “family visit” [8].

## 2.2 Default of Other Cultural Elements

The cultural default in *A Dream of Red Mansions* goes far beyond the scope of poems and allusions, forming a more extensive meaning break in the dimensions of character naming, material culture and social systems. The default in character naming is reflected in the loss of cultural metaphors. The character “Bao (treasure)” in “Jia Baoyu” not only refers to the preciousness of jade but also implies the irony of “fair without, foul within”; “Yu (jade)” is associated with the Confucian moral norm of “a gentleman compares his virtue to jade” and the Buddhist concept of the emptiness of “jade breaking” [9]. Hawkes translated “Baoyu” as “Pao-yu” and added annotations to explain the symbol of jade, but failed to convey the contradictory unity between the identity of “noble young master” and the spirit of “rebel” in the name. The default in female names is more subtle. “Dai (black pigment)” in “Lin Daiyu” not only refers to the image of eyebrow makeup but also metaphorizes “Dai Mountain” (a geographical symbol of Daiyu’s ancestral home “Gusu”). This intertextuality between “name” and “place” is often simplified to a mere personal name identifier in the translated text [10].

The default of material culture presents as the dissipation of symbolic functions. The “horse-hoof sleeve” in the description of costumes is not only a characteristic of Manchu costumes but also symbolizes the duality of “submission” and “dignity”. Translating it as “horse-hoof sleeves” only retains the morphological information and loses the power relationship reflected in the transformation between “court dress” and “everyday dress” [11]. The cultural elements of architectural layout are more difficult to translate. The bamboo forest of “the Bamboo Lodge” not only echoes Daiyu’s “aloof and arrogant” character but also aligns with the hermit spirit of the “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove”. Hawkes’ translation of it as “Bamboo Lodge” points out the object but weakens the connection between bamboo and the moral integrity of literati [12]. “Qin Fang (seeping fragrance)” in the plaque of “Qin Fang Sluice” in the Grand View Garden not only refers to the scenery of flowing water and floral fragrance but also metaphorizes the transience of “youthful beauty”. This integration of “scenery” and “emotion” is often simplified to the literal conversion of “Fragrance-Floating Sluice” in the translated text.

## 2.3 Impacts of Cultural Default

The negative impacts of cultural default on the English translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions* present a chain reaction from text comprehension to cultural communication, and its destructive power intensifies with the deepening of the default level. At the semantic level, cultural default directly leads to the systematic loss of text information, reducing the translated text to a fragmented plot retelling. In the judgment poem of “the Twelve Jinling Ladies”, “The jade belt hangs in the forest”, “jade belt” not only refers to an ornament but also symbolizes the identity of “nobility” and the image of “bondage”. If it is only translated as “jade belt”,

target readers will not be able to understand its connection with Daiyu's identity as a "noble young lady" and her fate of being "shackled by rites and etiquette". The philosophy of "truth and falsehood" in the "Illusory Land of Great Void" is often simplified to the dual opposition of "reality and dream" due to the default of Buddhist concepts such as "emptiness" and "form", dissolving the dialectical thinking of the original work that "when false is taken as true, true becomes false". Such semantic loss not only reduces the literary depth of the translated text but also deprives the text of its cognitive value as a "cultural specimen", leading Western readers to misread *A Dream of Red Mansions* as a mere "family novel".

The cumulative effect of cultural default will form a "barrier effect" in cross-cultural communication, hindering the transmission of deep cultural values. The literati gathering of the "Begonia Poetry Club", behind its creation rules of "rhyme restriction" and "antiphony", is the Chinese literati's social tradition of "making friends through poetry" and the way of thinking of "bi and xing (metaphor and symbol)". If these poetic norms are omitted in translation, readers will not be able to understand the significance of "artistic practice" reflected in Xiangling's learning of poetry. The complex making method of "eggplant with mince" in food culture not only shows the luxury of noble life but also implies the paradox of frugality of "making the best of everything". Simplified translation will reduce it to a mere description of "dish" and lose the critical connotation of the hypocrisy of the feudal aristocracy. The most typical example is the revelation of the relationship between the four great families by the "Protective Official Talisman". Due to the default of knowledge about the clan system, Hawkes' translation simplifies its function to "unspoken rules in officialdom", leading readers to fail to understand the political ecology of "clan alliance" behind Jia Yucun's "bending the law for personal gain". Such a break in cultural information has made the communication of *A Dream of Red Mansions* in the English-speaking world stay at the plot level for a long time, making it difficult to achieve a leap from literary reading to cultural cognition.

### 3. A Study on Compensation Strategies

The compensation for cultural default is not the choice of a single strategy but a strategic system composed of the dialectical coordination of literal and free translation, the hierarchical cooperation of annotations and interpretations, and the flexible application of cultural substitution and transformation. These strategies target different types of cultural default and form a three-dimensional compensation network from linguistic form to cultural connotation.

#### 3.1 Combination of Literal and Free Translation

The dynamic balance between literal and free translation is a fundamental strategy to deal with cultural default in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, whose core lies in selecting the appropriate conversion method according to the translatability of cultural elements. Literal translation provides target readers with the opportunity to contact heterogeneous cultures by retaining the formal characteristics of source language symbols, which is especially suitable for elements with independent cultural identifiers that do not require in-depth interpretation. When translating "the Crimson Pearl Fairy Herb", Yang Hsien-yi adopted the composite strategy of "The Crimson Pearl Herb": "Crimson" and "Pearl" literally translate the color and object, and "Herb" supplements the plant attribute, which not only maintains the uniqueness of the mythological image but also lowers the understanding threshold through the correspondence of core vocabulary [13]. This mode of "transliteration and literal translation" is also effective in the translation of "the Illusory Land of Great Void" (The Illusory Realm of Great Void) — "Illusory Realm" retains the philosophical meaning of "illusory land", and "Great Void" literally translates the Taoist connotation of "Taixu", making abstract concepts obtain perceptible linguistic forms.

Free translation realizes cross-cultural meaning equivalence by deconstructing the deep semantic meaning of culture-loaded items, which is suitable for compound default involving social systems and values. Hawkes translated "the Twelve Jinling Ladies" as "Twelve Golden Skies". Although he did not literally translate the geographical attribute of "Jinling", he echoed the core metaphor of "the Golden and Jade Marriage" in the original work with "Golden", and implied the starry sky-like interweaving of the fates of the twelve women with the grand image of "Skies" [14]. This creative transformation is more obvious in dealing with the imperial examination system. Translating "passing the imperial examination as a Jinshi" as "success in the civil service examinations" supplements the institutional attribute through "civil service", enabling Western

readers to understand the functional essence of its “official selection mechanism” rather than just staying at the superficial reference of “scholar”.

The integration of the two strategies needs to be based on an accurate judgment of the cultural default level. For artistic conception poems such as “A crane’s shadow crosses the cold pond”, Yang Hsien-yi adopted the literal translation of “cold pond” to retain the bleak atmosphere, and freely translated “a crane’s shadow crosses” as “the crane’s shadow glides by” — the dynamic sense of “glides” not only compensates for the action connotation of “crosses” but also maintains the hazy beauty of poetry. In folk scenes such as “dividing the lamp for the family division ritual”, the literal translation of “sharing the lamp” is retained as a cultural symbol, and the symbolic meaning of the family division ritual is supplemented by the free translation of “family division ritual”, forming a double compensation of symbol retention and meaning interpretation [15]. The key of this dialectical strategy is to neither cause cultural barriers due to the pursuit of formal faithfulness nor dissolve the heterogeneity of the original work due to accommodation to the target culture, and ultimately establish a dynamic balance between acceptability and cultural fidelity.

### 3.2 Addition of Annotations and Interpretations

As an extra-textual compensation method, annotations and interpretations build a cognitive bridge between target readers and source culture by supplementing cultural background information, and their application must follow the principles of necessity and hierarchy. Annotations focus on immediate knowledge supplementation, suitable for the superficial reference default of cultural symbols. Hawkes added a footnote after “the Twelve Jinling Ladies”: “Refers to twelve noble ladies in the Jia clan, their fates foreshadowed in poetic prophecies”, which not only clarifies the group attribute but also points out the narrative function of “judgment poem prophecy”, avoiding readers from misunderstanding it as an ordinary female group. For the court etiquette involved in “Imperial Consort Yuan’s Visit to Her Family”, Yang Hsien-yi adopted the literal translation of “Imperial Consort Yuan’s visit to her family”, supplemented by annotations explaining that “family visit” is a special etiquette for imperial concubines to return to their natal families in the Qing Dynasty and its connection with “filial piety” and “imperial power” [16]. This mode of concise main text and complete footnotes not only ensures the fluency of the translated text but also provides in-depth information for readers in need.

Interpretation focuses on the systematic exploration of cultural connotation, suitable for the deep default of aesthetic artistic conception and philosophical thought. The translation of “Pure by nature, to purity return” in “The Burial of Flowers” not only requires the literal translation of “Pure by nature, to purity return” but also needs to interpret its triple cultural logic: the Buddhist concept of reincarnation (from dust to dust), the Confucian moral concept of “preserving one’s purity”, and Daiyu’s life consciousness of “comparing herself to flowers” [17]. When dealing with “the Romance of the Mirror”, Hawkes adopted a hierarchical interpretation strategy: first explained the artifact attribute of “a magic mirror that reveals truth through illusion” with a footnote, and then interpreted its dual functions as a “symbol of power supervision” (reflecting the corruption of the Jia clan) and a “tool of fate warning” (foreshadowing the rise and fall of the family) in the translation preface, enabling Western readers to understand the cultural metaphor of this Taoist artifact.

The coordination of annotations and interpretations is particularly crucial in compound cultural default. For the philosophical proposition of “When false is taken as true, true becomes false”, Yang Hsien-yi literally translated it as “When false is taken as true, true becomes false”, and at the same time linked the thought of “indistinction between right and wrong” in *Zhuangzi · On the Equality of All Things* through interpretation, revealing Cao Xueqin’s literary interpretation of the “dialectics of truth and falsehood”. This structure of literal translation in the text and interpretation outside the text not only retains the poetic tension of the original text but also provides theoretical support for in-depth interpretation. The application of the strategy needs to grasp the balance of “degree”: for festival scenes such as “the Lantern Festival Feast”, a concise annotation of “Lantern Festival, a time for family reunion” is sufficient; for the “rhyme restriction” rules of the “Begonia Poetry Club”, it is necessary to interpret the literati’s refined taste and social etiquette behind the “rhyme restriction” to avoid excessive simplification or redundancy of cultural information.

### 3.3 Cultural Substitution and Transformation

Cultural substitution and transformation solve the untranslatability of cultural symbols by constructing meaning associations within the cognitive framework of the target culture, and the difference between the two is reflected in the depth of symbol replacement and context reconstruction. Cultural substitution focuses on functional equivalence at the artifact level, suitable for cultural elements with similar attributes but different forms. When translating “a bright red brocade jacket embroidered with golden butterflies flitting among flowers”, Yang Hsien-yi translated “brocade jacket” as “silk gown”. Although he did not literally translate the material characteristic of “brocade”, he retained its luxurious attribute with “silk”; “golden butterflies flitting among flowers” was simplified to “embroidered with butterflies”, conveying the decorative function of the costume through the technological commonality of “embroidery” [18]. This strategy is also effective in architectural description. “The Flower Pendant Gate” is translated as “painted gate”, replacing the morphological details of “flower pendant” with “painted” to retain its spatial function as a courtyard divider and decorative attribute. The key of substitution is to retain the core function of cultural elements — “horse-hoof sleeve” is translated as “cuffed sleeves”, although the morphological metaphor of “horse-hoof” is lost, its practical value of keeping warm and etiquette is conveyed through “cuffed”.

Cultural transformation involves the context reconstruction of abstract concepts, suitable for the deep default of values and philosophical thoughts. Hawkes translated “the Lantern Festival Feast” as “Feast of Lanterns”, linking the cultural cognition of Western “celebration dinner” through “Feast”, and at the same time retaining the core image of “Lanterns”, making the connotation of “reunion” of the festival obtain cross-cultural resonance. In handling the image of “The cold moon buries the flower soul”, Gladys Yang replaced “cold moon” with “pale moon”. “Pale” not only retains the bleak feeling of the moonlight but also conforms to the tradition of “the moon symbolizes melancholy” in Western literature, realizing emotional equivalence through the image inventory of the target culture [19]. This transformation is more systematic in the translation of the imperial examination system. Translating “Juren (successful candidates in the provincial imperial examination)” as “scholar-official candidate” supplements the selection attribute of the “imperial examination” through “candidate”, enabling Western readers to understand its institutional connection with the “civil service”.

The dynamic coordination of substitution and transformation forms a complete compensation chain. When translating “the Cold Fragrance Pill”, Yang Hsien-yi first replaced its medicinal attribute with “fragrant pill” (substitution), and then explained its unique craft of “collecting flower stamens of four seasons for preparation” through annotations, interpreting its herbal philosophy of “complying with the time of heaven” (transformation). The selection of strategies should be based on the “heterogeneity degree” of cultural elements: surface elements such as artifacts and costumes can be given priority to substitution, such as translating “kiln transformation” as “color-changing glaze” (retaining the core characteristic of “glaze color change”); deep elements such as values and aesthetic paradigms need transformation, such as translating “moral integrity” as “moral integrity” (linking the Western concept of “moral integrity”). This hierarchical strategy not only avoids the understanding obstacles caused by cultural heterogeneity but also retains the cultural uniqueness of *A Dream of Red Mansions* through creative transformation, providing an operable solution to the problem of fidelity and acceptability in cross-cultural translation.

## 4. Comparative Analysis and Practical Application

The differences in compensation strategies for cultural default in different translation versions are essentially the choices of translators in balancing “cultural fidelity” and “reader acceptance”. By systematically comparing the strategic orientations of representative English translation versions of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, we can not only reveal the regular characteristics of compensation practice but also provide an operable path reference for the translation of culture-loaded texts.

### 4.1 Comparative Analysis of Different Translation Versions

The compensation strategies for cultural default in Hawkes’ and Yang Hsien-yi’s translations present a distinct division between “reader-oriented” and “culture-oriented”, and their differences run through all levels from linguistic symbols to cultural logic.

In the handling of cultural symbols, Hawkes adopts a domestication strategy to eliminate cognitive obstacles, tending to replace heterogeneous elements with images perceivable by the target culture. He translated “the Twelve Jinling Ladies” as “Twelve Golden Skies”. Although he did not retain the geographical attribute of “Jinling”, he echoed the core metaphor of “the Golden and Jade Marriage” in the original work with “Golden”, and reconstructed the starry sky-like connection of the fates of the twelve women with the grand image of “Skies”, avoiding the superficial interpretation of “Chai” as “hair ornament” in Western culture. This strategy is more prominent in the translation of poetic images. For example, translating “Willow branches and poplar catkins bloom in their own fragrance” in “The Burial of Flowers” as “Willow branches and poplar catkins dance in the spring breeze”, replacing the static beauty of “bloom in their own fragrance” with the dynamic sense of “dance”, and conveying the core artistic conception of the rhythm of life through the image of “spring dance” familiar to Western readers.

Yang Hsien-yi adheres to a foreignization strategy and retains cultural authenticity through a composite mode of literal translation and annotations. When translating “Princess of Nan’an”, he adopted the transliteration of “Nan’an Tai Fei”, supplemented by a footnote explaining “the title of the mother of the emperor’s concubines in the Qing Dynasty and its special status in court etiquette”, which not only maintained the historical specificity of the appellation but also supplemented the institutional background through annotations. For such image-dense poems as “A crane’s shadow crosses the cold pond”, he literally translated it as “Cold pond where cranes cross their shadows”, and quoted the allusion of “Cranes sing in the deep marsh” in *The Book of Songs · Minor Odes* in the annotation to construct an intertextual network of cultural symbols, making the translated text a “cultural specimen” bearing the tradition of classic Chinese literature.

In the transmission of deep cultural logic, the division between the two strategies is more significant. Hawkes simplified “the Taiji Diagram” to “Yin-Yang symbol”, dissolving the Taoist cosmic outlook behind “Taiji” through the Western readers’ well-known concept of “Yin and Yang” to achieve functional equivalence; Yang Hsien-yi translated it as “Taiji diagram (the diagram of cosmic duality)”, which not only retains the cultural identifier of transliteration but also conveys the philosophical connotation of “Taiji generates two opposites” through the explanatory translation of “cosmic duality”. Such differences reflect the different focuses of translation ethics: Hawkes’ simplified compensation gives priority to readability and is suitable for the general readers; Yang Hsien-yi’s interpretive compensation takes cultural integrity as the core and is more in line with the needs of academic research.

The practice of the two translation versions shows that there is no absolutely optimal strategy for cultural default compensation, but it needs to be dynamically adjusted according to the translation purpose. For cultural communication, we can learn from Hawkes’ image reconstruction skills and simplify cultural details on the premise of retaining the emotional core; for academic inheritance, we can refer to Yang Hsien-yi’s annotation system and build a multi-level cultural information compensation network. The diversity of such strategies precisely provides a richer possible path for the cross-cultural interpretation of *A Dream of Red Mansions*.

## 4.2 Practical Application of Comparative Analysis

The differences in compensation strategies of different translation versions provide a reference operational framework for the translation practice of culture-loaded texts. Its core enlightenment is that the compensation for cultural default needs to establish a closed-loop system of “hierarchical evaluation — strategic adaptation — effect verification”, avoiding cultural distortion caused by blind domestication and acceptance obstacles caused by excessive foreignization.

The primary dimension of practical enlightenment is the dynamic adaptability of strategy selection. It can be seen from the comparison between Hawkes and Yang Hsien-yi that compensation strategies need to match the depth level of cultural default. For surface default such as “artifact symbols” (e.g., “cloisonne”, “red sandalwood”), Hawkes’ “functional equivalent replacement” (e.g., “cloisonné”, “rosewood”) can be adopted, and only the material attributes need to be retained; for middle-level default such as “institutional etiquette” (e.g., “ancestral temple sacrifice”, “imperial examination”), Yang Hsien-yi’s mode of “literal translation + annotations” needs to be learned to supplement the historical background; for deep default such as “values” (e.g., “filial piety”, “the golden mean”), it is necessary to combine context reconstruction, such

as translating “filial piety” as “filial piety” and implying its connotation of “the core of family ethics” through the plot, avoiding simplification to mere “respect of children for parents”.

To address the core challenge of cultural heterogeneity, a dual cultural cognitive coordinate system needs to be constructed. Translators should not only deeply grasp the cultural context of *A Dream of Red Mansions* — such as understanding the court etiquette of “Imperial Consort Yuan’s Visit to Her Family” by studying *The Draft History of the Qing Dynasty · Records of Rites*, and grasping the mythological prototype of “the Wood-Stone Pledge” through Redology research; but also predict the cognitive blind spots of the target culture. For example, Western readers lack the concept of “the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children”, and it is necessary to supplement the institutional explanation of “lineal primogeniture system” in translation. The cultivation of such two-way cognitive ability can be realized through the paths of comparative literature training and cultural anthropology field investigation. For example, analyzing the narrative differences between Western literary “family epics” (e.g., *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) and *A Dream of Red Mansions* to accurately locate the “high-risk areas” of cultural default.

The construction of translator subjectivity is a key variable in practical application. The success of Hawkes and Yang Hsien-yi shows that translators need to have the dual abilities of “cultural interpreter” and “literary re-creator”. For such pun metaphors as “the Romance of the Mirror”, they should not only identify its dual attributes of “Taoist artifact” and “moral warning” (the role of interpreter) but also balance the metaphorical function and cultural information through differentiated expressions such as “magic mirror that reveals vice” (Hawkes’ translation) or “wind-moon mirror (a Taoist symbol of moral reflection)” (Yang Hsien-yi’s translation) (the role of creator). Such abilities can be strengthened through “special training”, for example, carrying out three-stage training of “image disassembly — cultural connotation extraction — target language reconstruction” for “the translation of poems and allusions” to improve the accuracy of strategy application.

## 5. Conclusion

This study focuses on the cultural default phenomenon in the English translation of poems and allusions in *A Dream of Red Mansions*. Through the comparative analysis of multiple translation versions, it is found that the essence of cultural default is the systematic difference between Chinese and Western cultural cognitive frameworks, and its manifestations run through multiple levels such as semantic symbols, image systems and social systems. The study finds that effective compensation needs to achieve a dynamic balance between cultural faithfulness and target language acceptability — Yang Hsien-yi’s translation mode of “literal translation and in-depth annotations” focuses on the reconstruction of cultural context, Hawkes’ translation strategy of free translation and cultural substitution focuses on lowering the cognitive threshold, and the hierarchical differences in the annotation system reflect the different judgments of translators on readers’ cultural presuppositions. At the same time, the subjective interpretation of translators in the compensation process constitutes a key link in cultural reproduction, but the effectiveness of its strategies still needs the support of more empirical data, and the limitations of research samples also restrict the universality of the conclusions. Future research can make breakthroughs in three aspects: first, refine the default typology based on cultural semiotics, construct a multi-dimensional analysis framework of semantic level, image level and institutional level, and reveal the generation mechanism of default at different levels; second, combine corpus and reader reception theory to establish a quantitative evaluation model of compensation strategies, introduce neural machine translation and cultural knowledge graph technology, and explore a human-machine collaborative dynamic compensation path; third, expand the perspective of digital humanities, develop an interactive translation version system, present the loss and reconstruction process of cultural information through visualization technology, and provide methodological support with both theoretical depth and practical value for the cross-cultural communication of classic Chinese literature.

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