This book investigates the English translations and adaptations of the sixteenth century classic Chinese novel *Jin Ping Mei*. Acclaimed the ‘No.1 Marvellous Book’ of the Ming dynasty, *Jin Ping Mei* was banned soon after its appearance, due to the inclusion of graphically explicit sexual descriptions. So far there have been more than a dozen English adaptations and translations of the novel.

Working within the framework of descriptive translation studies, this book provides a translational history of the English versions of *Jin Ping Mei*, supported by various paratexts, including book covers, reviews and archival materials. It also conducts textual comparisons to uncover the translation norms at work in the only two complete renditions, namely *The Golden Lotus* by Clement Egerton and *The Plum in the Golden Vase* by David Roy. The notions of agency, *habitus* and capital are introduced for the examination of the transference of linguistic, literary and cultural aspects of the two translations.

The book represents the first systematic research effort on the English Translations of *Jin Ping Mei*. Given its pioneering status and interdisciplinary nature, the data, structure and findings of this book will potentially enrich the fields of Translation Studies, Comparative Literature, Chinese Studies, Cultural Studies and Book History.

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Texts, Paratexts, and Contexts
Lintao Qi

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Abbreviations

ST  Source Text
TT  Target Text
SL  Source Language
TL  Target Language
SC  Source Culture
TC  Target Culture
TS  Translation Studies
JPM  Jin Ping Mei
LOTUS  The Golden Lotus
PLUM  The Plum in the Golden Vase
Conversion of major proper names

Chinese proper names (names of persons, places, books etc.) in this book are generally in *pinyin* form, exceptions apply only to quotations where they may retain their forms in Wade-Giles system. Further details about these two Romanisation systems can be found in Chapter 5 of this book.

*Jin Ping Mei = Chin P’ing Mei*

Ximen Qing = Hsi-men Ch’ing
Pan Jinlian = Pan Chin-lien
Li Ping’er = Li P’ing-erh
Chunmei = Ch’un-mei
More than one close friend of mine has given me the suggestion, ‘Don’t tell others about your research project’ when they learnt that I conducted my PhD research on Jin Ping Mei. The reason why they have made that suggestion is not academic parochialism – many of them are not working in the academia – but the pornographic notoriety of the novel and its banned status in China.

Jin Ping Mei, a classic Chinese novel written in the Ming dynasty, circa 1618, has a long history of entanglement with literary censorship in China – and, as this book reveals, an equally prolonged battle with the Anglo-American censorship on obscenity in the twentieth century. However, as a literary gem, its glory has never been totally overshadowed by the political repression. On the contrary, it continues to live for many readers from China and elsewhere in the forms of revision, translation and adaptation, from the page to the stage. Its pornographic component sometimes gets downplayed, sometimes foregrounded, some other times magnified, but it never disappears altogether, which demonstrates that it is a core component of the novel. But as I will show in this book, erotic descriptions in the novel are by no means the most important, or the most detailed part of the million-word magnum opus which spans 100 chapters.

Its banned status means that the novel is comparatively under researched in proportion to its literary significance. Its English translations, in a similar vein, have only attracted a few sporadic research efforts in recent years. A systematic study of its journey into the English language is lacking, and is needed for any further research to be conducted in the area. This book represents one such effort – the first of its kind – to prepare the ground for more systematic and in-depth studies on the English translations of Jin Ping Mei.

Translation is by nature interactional: interaction between the translator and the socio-political context, between the translator and such other agents as the initiator, the publisher, and the printer, between the translation norms and the socio-cultural condition, but all these interactions are ultimately mediated through various forms of ‘-text’. The denotation of the term ‘text’ in this book is twofold. In the broad sense, it is an all-embracing signifier of both the text and the many terminologies sharing the root ‘-text’, for instance, a translation may be referred to as the target text (TT), which indeed means the published volume that consists of the text proper and its paratextual elements. In the narrow sense, text is
distinguished from the other ‘-texts’, mainly paratext, consistent with Genette’s (1997) use of the term.¹

Text and context

Whatever its form, a text does not grow out of a vacuum (Lefevere, 1992, p. 86), rather, to borrow Kristeva’s (1980, p. 36) phraseology, it is always born into a more ‘general text (culture)’, of which it is part and which is in turn, part of it. The inter-textual dimension between a text and the more ‘general text’ has been traditionally styled as the ‘background’ or ‘context’ (Allen, 2000, p. 36). The relegation of history to mere ‘background’ or ‘context’ of the text, however, is considered the evil of the so-called old historicism by the new historicists, who propose to read history and text together, ‘with each influencing the other, and without a stable sense of facts’ (Parker, 2008, p. 219). In other words, instead of speaking of a textual ‘foreground’ and a historical ‘background’ (Barry, 2002, p. 172), the new historicism believes in ‘equal weighing’ between the two, which is defined by the American critic Louis Montrose (1989, p. 20) as a combined interest in ‘the historicity of texts and the textuality of history’.

The definitional rationale is clearly expressed and well-justified, but does not convince me to replace the traditional terminology with the newly proposed ones on the basis of the ideological overtones invested in the former. For one thing, the methodological revolution in research hinges not on the change of terms but on the evolution of theoretical underpinning. For another, any representation of human ideas will eventually have to be mediated by language, and the process is ubiquitously charged with ideology of its thinkers, speakers, writers and advocates. Therefore, instead of changing the old terms and introducing new ones to perplex the general public, what the theorists need to do might be simply to bring the ideological connotations of the old terms to the attention of the public and thus reforms their attitude and thinking pattern in favour of the new theory. To be sure, the change of terms and evolution of ideas very often concur in reality, but it is not the former that revolutionises the theoretical landscape, rather the latter. As such, to avoid profusion and confusion of terminologies, this book, while acknowledging the significance of history and its interaction with text, will use context without any negative connotation of its being a mere ‘background’. One focus of this research, accordingly, is the contextuality of the text and textuality of the context.

Representative of the interaction between the text and its context is the relationship between a translation and the context into which it is born. Not only is the translator’s interpretation conditioned by the social context in which he/she was raised and educated, but his/her way of framing the TT is also reflective of the socio-cultural milieu. Just as Bassnett and Lefevere (1990, p. 11) maintain, ‘there is always a context in which the translation takes place, always a history from which a text emerges and into which a text is transposed’.

The erotic components in Jin Ping Mei (hereafter JPM) have offered a serious challenge to most of its English translators. The problem here is not one of
understanding the source text (ST) but the way to present it in the TT. Literary translation, contends Wilson (2014, p. 88), ‘is an active process, transforming what it transfers, creating something new, reinventing literature and keeping it alive’. The history of the English translations of JPM, imbued with transformation and creation, reinvention and revitalisation, is a good illustration of the statement.

Until the second half of the twentieth century, the ideological context in the Anglo-American world was such that it permitted no unreserved and straightforward rendition of graphic sexual descriptions in literary works. The stringent censorship on obscenity meant that the translators had to wrestle with the socio-cultural milieu for a balance between having the ST translated and leaving the censors undisturbed. However, interaction is by definition dynamic, especially when evaluated diachronically: the relationship between the translation norms and the censorial system is constantly moving, hence different treatments of the erotic from JPM in the various TTs. If the censors were powerful and stringent, and the agents responsible for a pornographic translation risked legal prosecution, the translation norms for erotic description were more likely to be downplaying, revising, or omitting, but if the censorship showed signs of withdrawal, and a legal penalisation was lacking, the translation norms were open to breaking. When this happens, a new norm of intensifying, or at least unreservedly translating, the sexual details would be in the making. The odyssey of Jin Ping Mei’s entering the linguistic and cultural territory of English is a vivid example of the interaction between texts and contexts.

Text and intertext

Similar to the rationale behind the inter-textual relation between a text and its general context, but more specifically used to refer to the connection between verbal texts is the term intertextuality, which was coined and popularised by Julia Kristeva (Still & Worton, 1990, p. 1). The identification of a text as demonstrating intertextual relations is dependent on the interpreting capacity of the reader. While a text is regarded as ‘an autonomous sign structure’ with an internal coherence, whose boundaries are defined by ‘its beginning, middle and end’,

> [a]n intertext, on the other hand, is characterized by attributes that exceed it. It is not delimited, but de-limited, for its constituents refer to constituents of one or several other texts. Therefore it has a twofold coherence: an intratextual one which guarantees the immanent integrity of the text, and an intertextual one which creates structural relations between itself and other texts.

(Plett, 1991, p. 5; original emphasis)

As such, an intertext is, first and foremost, a text, but it differs from the latter in that over and above the intratextual coherence, its adequate interpretation calls for the recognition of the intertextual relation that exists between the current text...
and other texts predating it. Between them, the former is indiscriminately open to reader access, while the latter may not be equally or immediately accessible to all readers.

The ST of this research, *Jin Ping Mei*, is famous and infamous for the abundant presence of intertextuality: skilful incorporation of stories from other sources, free copying of poems, numerous quotations from contemporary dramas, not to say its heavily allusive language. The competency of a reader to decipher and decode the intertextual relations in the novel may only impact his/her individual comprehension of the story, if his/her reading is kept private. However, in the case of a translator, who will have to publicise his/her private reading of the novel, the ability to understand the intertextuality becomes vital for the quality of the TT. Failure to identify or maintain the intertextual relations embedded in the novel will inevitably result in an under-translation, where the intertextuality of the ST is compromised or lost, together with the potential literary effect encoded. The recognition of the intertexts necessitates translatorial decision as to whether it is possible and how to preserve the intertextual relations. Both types of translation have the potential to make a good reading, but this research will demonstrate that the reading experience they will elicit are essentially and profoundly different.

**Text and paratext**

All the references to the ST and TT so far are made in the broad sense of the term ‘text’, which, as mentioned earlier, can actually be further divided into text and paratext. Paratext is a concept proposed by Genette since the 1980s. In contrast to a text which he defines as ‘a more or less long sequence of verbal statements that are more or less endowed with significance’, he explains that ‘the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public’ (Genette, 1997, p. 1). On the back cover of the English translation of his seminal monograph *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, the term is more explicitly presented as follows:

> Paratexts are those liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book, that form part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher, and reader: titles, forewords, epigraphs, and publishers’ jacket copy are part of a book’s private and public history.

( ibid., n.p.)

Of the two kinds of paratexts, those within the book and outside it, Genette further designates the former as the peritexts, and the latter, epitexts. As the thresholds of interpretation and the mediators between the text and its public, the paratexts are instrumental in exploring not only the text, but also its intended audience. Part II of this book is based mainly on the analyses of different forms of paratexts in the English translations of JPM.
Paratext is sometimes referred to as extratext. In the field of Translation Studies (TS), for a long time, its significance has been underestimated. For example, Toury (1995, p. 65) warns that extratexts should be treated ‘with every possible circumspection’ due to the partiality and bias that may be inherent in them. However, as Munday (2014, p. 64) astutely points out, extratextual sources such as archives, manuscripts, post-hoc accounts and interviews are central to historical research methodologies:

Such primary sources, central to the historian’s research [. . .], are under-utilised in translation studies research, yet they are an indispensable resource for the investigation of the conditions, working practices and identity of translators and for the study of their interaction with other participants in the translation process.

Sharing Munday’s recognition of the significance of extratexts in the construction of a microhistory of translation and translators, this book will make extensive use of archival materials and data from interviews to reconstruct and present the history of the English translations of JPM, and the interaction between translators and other agents.

Genette insists that ‘a text without a paratext does not exist’, and defines paratext in relation to text, which demonstrates that the relationship between the two is such that in theory one is nullified without reference to the other. As such, their differing position, location and function are by no means an indication of hierarchy. As this research reveals, paratexts are just as informative and instrumental as texts in TS, particularly in the historical research of translations and translators.

Structure of the book
This book is in three parts. The first chapter serves as the introductory part, which aims at elucidating the rationale of the research project. The chapter begins with a synopsis of the novel, followed by an introduction to its literary significance, generic features, different editions, and its reception and dissemination in China. There is a brief comparison of the two popular editions, namely the Wanli edition and the Chongzhen edition, which are the STs for the translations of Roy and Egerton, respectively. It also includes an overview of the research on the English translations of JPM and identifies the research gap. In addition to a section on the major theoretical concepts to be used in Part II and Part III, the chapter closes with a discussion about the aspects that have been selected for textual comparisons in this book.

The second part comprises three chapters (Chapters 2–4), which furnish a sociological reconstruction of the translational history of JPM in English, based mainly on various paratextual materials. Chapter 2 provides a historical overview of all the extant English adaptations of JPM, many of which are newly discovered
Introduction

and thus introduced into the academic world for this first time. The common thread in this chapter is the interrelationship between censorship and adaptation. Adaptation is not a mere passive victim of the contemporary censorship, as it can sometimes turn into a powerful weapon against the censors.

The next two chapters deal with the two major texts of this research, namely The Golden Lotus (hereafter referred to as LOTUS) by Clement Egerton and The Plum in the Golden Vase (hereafter PLUM) by David Tod Roy. Egerton’s translation is the focus of Chapter 3, in which the network of various agents involved into the production of LOTUS are unveiled. The chapter opens with Egerton’s initial purpose of translating and his qualification/capital as a translator of JPM, followed by the introduction of the other agents who have different roles to play in the production of LOTUS. The best showcase of this is the use of Latin in the English translation, which involves the work of the publisher, the printer (through its reader), the copyeditor and the Latin translator. The case study owes its significance to not only the complex network of agents, but also the fact that it has never been previously noticed, much less explored, debunking some popular myths around LOTUS.

Chapter 4 continues the discussion on agents by singling out the translator as a central agent in the production of a translation – in this case, the effect of Roy’s researcher habitus and capital. The chapter firstly reconstructs a biographical history of Roy, in which his linguistic, cultural and academic knowledge and interest in JPM are discussed in relation to Bourdieu’s concepts of economic capital, cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital. As a researcher-translator, Roy’s TT distinguishes itself from all the others in many aspects, most notably in terms of paratexts. In conjunction with the primary data collected from my interviews with Roy, and his former students, Professor David Rolston from the University of Michigan and Professor Katherine Carlitz from the University of Pittsburgh, the chapter investigates the academic nature of his paratexts, trying to establish the relationship between the translator’s habitus and capital and the grand paratextual apparatus brought into play in PLUM: the titular stratification, cast of characters, annotations and illustrations, among others.

Part three, which covers the final three chapters (Chapters 5–7), presents a comparative textual analysis of LOTUS and PLUM to explore the divergent interpretation and reproduction of the linguistic, cultural and literary features of the ST. Although the three aspects are hard to isolate in practice, the chapters in this part provide a general picture of the essential differences between the two translations in terms of translation strategy and norms, and their possible sociocultural motivation.

In English translations of Chinese novels, proper names may be the most readily recognisable feature of otherness, and in JPM personal names alone amount to over 1,000. Therefore, based on their linguistic and cultural understanding of the ST, translation of these names is indicative of the overall translation strategy of the translators. Chapter 5 classifies the names in JPM into two groups and examines the two translators’ transference of them into English.
According to the contemporary understanding of the genre of novel, the profusion of poems in JPM is very un-novelistic, which makes the mixture of prose and poetry a most prominent narrative feature of JPM. Chapter 6 compares the two translators’ idiosyncratic choices regarding the poetic components of the novel. The chapter is committed to unravelling the narrative consequences as well as social context of the different translatorial decisions as regards the poetical forms.

Erotic passages in JPM, as are vividly revealed by its translational history, are not possible for the translators to eschew. Therefore, no research on the English translations of JPM would be complete without scrutinising the transference of the erotic descriptions. Chapter 7 examines how the erotic ST, which covers a wide spectrum of sexual activities, crosses linguistic and cultural boundaries into the TTs of Egerton and Roy. The chapter opens with a review of the function of the erotic in the ST, followed by a scrutiny of the use of Latin in Egerton’s LOTUS; it then examines the implications of different translatorial actions on the narrative structure of the two TTs, and concludes with a textual comparison of the translations of the erotic language, especially the abundant presence of metaphors.

Notes
1 Genette’s concept of paratext is introduced in the following section.
2 Details on Bourdieu’s concept of capital are included in Chapter 1.

References


Part I

Contextualisation of texts
1 *Jin Ping Mei*

Texts, genre and research

The Ming Dynasty in China (1368–1644), approximately contemporaneous with the Renaissance, witnessed the appearance of the so-called *si da qishu* 四大奇書 (Four Great Marvellous Works) in feudal China. As the youngest one, *Jin Ping Mei* 《金瓶梅》 distinguishes itself from the other three classic novels by shifting its attention from legendary heroes to the everyday life of ordinary people. Centring around the everyday domestic life in the household of Ximen Qing, a typical social climber who actively interacts with people from all walks of life, the book furnishes an encyclopaedic picture of sixteenth-century Chinese society in naturalistic detail, although the author sets the story between 1112 and 1127 in the final years of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127).

*Jin Ping Mei* and its literary significance

This section provides a very simplistic sketch of the story in JPM, covering only some of the key plots, as it would be too ambitious to give a proper recount of the storyline of a million-word masterpiece in a mere section. The novel starts with a scene borrowed from an earlier classic novel *Shuihu Zhuan* 水滸傳 about the adulterous encounter between Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian, the wife of Wu Da. When the news of their illicit love affair was circulated in the neighbourhood, the two lovers plotted the murder of Wu Da, whose younger brother, Wu Song, was a herculean hero who had slain a tiger barehanded. Soon after her husband’s death, Pan promptly married into Ximen’s household as his fifth wife. The attempted revenge by Wu Song of his brother’s murder was thwarted by Ximen Qing’s bribery of the local magistrate, who connived at the exile of Wu Song to a remote area.

It is hard, though, to believe that Ximen married Pan for the sake of love. The readers do not have to wait long to witness in the novel another immoral affair between Ximen and Li Ping’er, then wife of one of his sworn brothers, who later became Ximen’s sixth concubine. However, Ximen did not stop at that; he seemed to have an aberrant desire to carry out his romantic adventures with any woman pleasing his eyes, be she another’s wife, a servant of his household or a prostitute from a bawdy house. Husband of six women and lover of many others, Ximen found his home a battlefield of vicious competition for his favours