

## Cultural Context In Translation Studies: The Arabic Translation Of Chin P'ing Mei As An Example

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Received 2025-06-16

Accepted 2026-09-19

Published 2026-03-19

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To cite this article: Qi, Cheng. (2026). Cultural Context In Translation Studies: The Arabic Translation Of Chin P'ing Mei As An Example. *Ijaz Arabi: Journal of Arabic Learning*, 9 (2), 630-647, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18860 /ijazarabi.V9i2.32680>

### Abstract

Contextual culture represents one of the core challenges in cross-linguistic translation, particularly when a work carries a dense concentration of cultural information. Framed within Edward Hall's theory of high-context and low-context culture, this study examines how contextual culture is handled in the complete Arabic translation of *Chin P'ing Mei*. The research draws exclusively on the bilingual edition translated and annotated by Zhang Hongyi and included in the Library of Chinese Classics. Employing a combination of qualitative case study and textual comparison, the study selects representative passages from three dimensions—material culture, poetic culture, and dialectal culture—and conducts a comparative analysis between the source and target texts to identify the types of strategies employed by the translator in addressing the profound cultural differences between the Chinese and Arabic linguistic systems, as well as the effectiveness of these strategies. Through a comparative analysis between Chinese and Arabic, the study reveals that the translator's approach is characterized by systematic cultural mediation: amplification is used to supply background information absent in the Arabic context; reduction serves to avoid redundancy or comprehension difficulties arising from cultural differences; explanatory translation resolves the untranslatability of certain images and metaphors in the target language; and syntactic transformation aligns the translation with the grammatical structures and stylistic conventions of Arabic.

**Keywords:** Chin P'ing Mei; Contextual Culture; Translation Methods; Cross-Cultural Communication

### INTRODUCTION

*Chin P'ing Mei* is a chapter-based vernacular novel of manners, vividly depicting the social landscape of the late Ming Dynasty. The work adopts a unique "domestic" perspective to critique broader societal affairs, using the backdrop of the Song Dynasty to subtly satirize the corruption and moral decay of the mid-to-late Ming period. The Qing Dynasty scholar Zhang Zhupo highly praised it, calling it the "First Book of Wonders." Indeed, this remarkable novel has often faced criticism due to its explicit narrative approach of "using licentiousness to convey moral lessons and guiding the lost toward enlightenment." However, its flaws do not overshadow its brilliance—the novel's creative approach holds significant importance in the development of ancient Chinese full-length fiction, and its realistic portrayal of worldly affairs carries considerable historical research value.

Under the contemporary strategic backdrop of "Chinese culture going global," traditional Chinese literary classics have been successively translated and introduced abroad. Chin P'ing Mei has also been included in the second batch of the Library of Chinese Classics translation project. Prior to this, numerous foreign scholars had already undertaken translations of Chin P'ing Mei, among which the complete translation by American sinologist David Tod Roy stands out prominently. Roy's version is meticulously faithful to the original text and supplemented with extensive and accurate annotations, making it highly valuable for academic research. The Arabic translation, independently completed by Professor Zhang Hongyi, a renowned expert in Arabic literature in China, benefits from the translator's profound bilingual cultural competence and rigorous academic approach. The translated text is smooth, culturally precise, and possesses strong readability and communicative value. The Arabic version of Chin P'ing Mei truly fulfills the earnest expectations and serious perspectives held by scholars of Chin P'ing Mei studies—that the novel showcases the "gold" of its literary and historical worth, rather than the "yellow" of vulgar obscenity. This paper, grounded in Edward Hall's theory of cultural context, explores the contextual culture of the novel and the translation strategies employed in the target text, aiming to better achieve cross-linguistic and cultural communication in translation.

## METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, specifically employing a case study method combined with textual analysis. The research is framed within Edward Hall's theory of high-context and low-context culture, which provides the analytical lens for examining how contextual culture is rendered in translation.

The data are drawn exclusively from the Arabic translation of Chin P'ing Mei included in the Library of Chinese Classics bilingual edition, translated and annotated by Professor Zhang Hongyi and published by China Translation & Publishing House in October 2017. This translation was selected as the sole data source because it represents the only complete Arabic version of the novel to date, ensuring consistency in translation practice and eliminating potential variability that might arise from comparing multiple translations. Instances for analysis were selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria were: (a) passages where contextual cultural elements are prominently embedded in the source text; and (b) cases that illustrate distinct translation strategies. Following a preliminary reading of the entire novel and its translation, the selected instances were organized into three thematic dimensions—material contextual culture, poetic contextual culture, and dialectal contextual culture—which emerged as the most salient categories of contextual culture in the text.

The analysis follows a comparative textual analysis framework, conducted in three steps for each selected instance:

1. Source-text analysis: The original Chinese passage is examined to identify its contextual cultural features, including linguistic structures (e.g., pictographic characters, poetic forms, dialectal expressions) and extralinguistic cultural references (e.g., religious concepts, social customs, metaphorical systems).
2. Translation-strategy identification: The corresponding Arabic translation is analyzed to identify the strategy or strategies employed by the translator. Strategies were coded inductively based on the observed textual operations, resulting in four categories:

amplification (adding explanatory elements), reduction (omitting or condensing), explanatory translation (clarifying culturally specific imagery), and transposition (adjusting syntax or structure to target-language norms).

3. Effectiveness evaluation: Each strategy is assessed in terms of its effectiveness in achieving cross-cultural communication, considering both fidelity to the source texts cultural matrix and readability/acceptability for the target Arabic readership. The evaluation draws on criteria derived from Hall's theory, particularly the notion that high-context cultural content requires mediation when transferred to a lower-context linguistic system.

All analyses were conducted by the author, with selected cases reviewed to ensure consistency in coding and interpretation. The findings are presented in the following section, organized under the three thematic dimensions identified during the data collection phase.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis yielded three main categories of findings, corresponding to the three dimensions of contextual culture examined. For each category, the translator's predominant strategies and their observable effects are summarized below.

### Material Contextual Culture

The performative dimension—where the translator's perception reconfigures the source text's cultural experience (Scott 2023)—is particularly evident in the translation of material culture. In passages describing material culture—such as architecture, religious artifacts, and culturally specific objects—the translator consistently employed amplification as the primary strategy. Three patterns were identified: first, for Chinese pictographic elements that lack visual equivalents in Arabic script, amplification through “using objects to explain forms” was used. Examples include rendering “嵯峨” (towering) as “a palace towering like mountain peaks,” “八字” (eight-shaped gates) as “gates shaped like an open book,” and “川纹” (river-patterned paths) as “three parallel paths leading into the grand compound.” These amplifications compensate for Arabic's phonetic script, which cannot visually convey the form-related meanings embedded in Chinese characters.

Second, for culturally specific religious references, amplification was combined with cultural adaptation. The term “三清圣祖” (Three Pure Ones), referring to Taoism's three highest deities, was rendered using the singular “Allah” in Arabic, a morphological simplification that reduces potential religious dissonance for monotheistic Arab readers while preserving the reference's sacred status. Third, for descriptions where cultural knowledge is presupposed—such as “正殿上金碧辉煌” (the main hall gleamed with gold and jade splendor), which assumes familiarity with Buddhist temple interiors—the translator explicitly named the implied elements, rendering the scene as “the pillars and statues in the main hall shone with golden brilliance, while the guardian figures on either side stood with solemn dignity”

### Poetic Contextual Culture

Literary language, especially in poetry, often appears concise on the surface yet carries profound meaning. Devices such as puns, allusions, and metaphors are embedded within, requiring readers to discern the implied messages—an experience that lingers in the mind and offers subtlety that resists explicit articulation (Liu Xianhe 2026). For poetic elements—including chapter titles, opening and closing verses, and embedded poems—the translator employed a combination of transposition and explanatory translation. For chapter titles structured as seven-character classical poetry with a 3-2-2 rhythmic pattern, the translator consistently used Arabic verbal sentences (verb-subject-object structure) to achieve uniform structural arrangement. End-rhymes were introduced to create parallel rhyming effects, aligning with Arabic poetic conventions while preserving semantic accuracy.

For lyrical poems conveying mood and emotion—such as the opening verses of Chapter 17—the translator adopted a first-person narrative perspective and utilized Arabic's rich verb morphology to evoke the original's poignant tone. Elliptical structures in the original Chinese were expanded into complete syntactic units to comply with Arabic grammatical requirements. For didactic poems containing culturally sensitive content—such as the erotic admonition in Chapter 1—the translator employed explanatory translation to navigate cultural taboos. The phrase “body like酥 (silken)” was rendered as “a tall stature and straight nose,” aligning with Arab aesthetic preferences and circumventing descriptions of female form that may be culturally sensitive. The metaphor “sword at the waist,” which carries connotations of female genitalia in Chinese culture, was reinterpreted as “a weapon that kills,” preserving the warning function while avoiding vulgar undertones. For the culturally specific concept of “marrow depletion” (骨髓枯), which lacks an equivalent in Arab-Islamic tradition, the translator expanded it into a dynamic depiction: “blood drying up, marrow exhausting, and bones stiffening progressively.” Such cases exemplify the inherent limitation of machine translation when handling “weak-correspondence texts” where semantic environments are unpredictable and cultural specificity resists algorithmic capture (Song Binghui 2024). They also affirm the existential nature of literary translation—an act not merely of linguistic conversion, but of re-creation shaped by the translator's perception, experience, and understanding of the source text (Long Jixing 2026). Poetry is the art of sound; a translation that fails to render its sound is inherently flawed (Wang Dongfeng 2024).

### Dialectal Contextual Culture

Dialect serves as a living carrier of regional culture, with its vocabulary and intonation embodying the historical traditions and everyday customs of a specific locality. (Chen Xi 2026) For dialectal expressions—including invectives, allegorical sayings, and culturally specific idioms—the translator employed reduction, explanatory translation, and semantic consolidation. For dialectal insults such as “小猴子” (little monkey) and “含鸟猢猻” (bird-holding macaque), the translator consistently rendered them as “monkey” (قرد) in Arabic. This reduction strategy exploits the strong negative

connotations of “monkey” in Arab culture—viewed as unclean and ominous—to convey the original’s intensity of contempt without reproducing the full range of Chinese invectives.

For culturally specific sayings, explanatory translation was used. The phrase 马泊六 (horse-pulling sixth, a pimp) was rendered directly as “pimp.” The allegorical saying “马蹄刀木杓里切菜” (cutting vegetables with a hoof-shaped knife in a wooden ladle) was expanded as “cutting vegetables with a small knife in a barrel—not spilling a drop,” preserving the metaphor of complete concealment.

For exchanges involving rapid-fire insults—such as the altercation between Aunt Yang and Zhang Si—the translator employed semantic consolidation. Multiple Chinese insults (“老花根, 老奴才, 老粉嘴”) were condensed into a single Arabic rebuke (“you shameless and depraved wretch”). Similarly, culturally specific references to “monks” and “Taoist priests” were consolidated into “religious practitioners” to avoid confusion for readers unfamiliar with Chinese religious distinctions.

### **Context and Contextual Culture**

Culture can be understood as a way of distinguishing different forms of life, and it is uniquely human beings who create and transmit culture (Longhurst et al 2008). From this perspective, culture is above all a whole system of meanings—“a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour” (Williams 1961). In systemic functional linguistics, context is conceptualized as a core stratum—alongside semantics, lexicogrammar, and phonology/graphology—within which language operates as a behavior potential available to social beings (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004; Halliday 1973). Context is further divided into context of culture, which provides the general backdrop for meaning-making, and context of situation, which specifies the immediate conditions for a given instance (Malinowski 1923, 1935). Building on this foundation, Hu Zhuanglin posits that context is a subject of common interest among semanticists, pragmatists, folklorists, anthropologists, philosophers, and cognitive scientists, yet each discipline approaches it with different emphases, making it difficult to establish an ideal definition (Hu Zhuanglin 2002).

The American anthropologist Edward Twitchell Hall, in his book *Beyond Culture*, first proposed that culture is context-dependent and further classified contexts into high-context (HC) and low-context (LC) cultures. Hall states, Anything can serve as high-, middle-, or low-context. High-context (HC) transactions feature pre-programmed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message; low-context (LC) transactions are the reverse—most of the information must be in the transmitted message to supplement what is missing in the context (both internal and external) (Hall 1988:96). Hall examines the role of culture in communication from the perspective of interaction and perception. According to his theory, in high-context cultural systems, community members are immersed in relatively uniform, stable, and deeply ingrained cultural conventions, sharing a wealth of internalized and tacit cultural understandings. This implicit shared knowledge system

leads to an indirect and concise linguistic style in communication, where a few words can convey complex, multilayered meanings. The receiver relies on culturally acquired background knowledge, customs, and other implicit cues to accurately decode the message. Conversely, in low-context cultures, where members come from diverse backgrounds and cultural heterogeneity is pronounced, the lack of a common cultural foundation necessitates clear, logically structured language to prevent misunderstandings arising from cultural gaps or asymmetries, ensuring precise transmission and reception of information.

Hall categorized countries and cultures based on their contextual characteristics. He argued that while no culture exists purely at one extreme of the contextual spectrum, some cultures tend to occupy higher positions while others lean toward the lower end. As he noted, China, with its great and complex culture, stands at the extreme high-context end of the scale (Edward Hall 2010: 82). From a research perspective, Hall examined the boundaries between high- and low-context cultures on a macro level, focusing on nations and ethnic groups. His classification system encompassed diverse linguistic and cultural samples, placing China, Japan, Arab nations, and Native American communities—each with distinct cultural traits—within the high-context cultural camp. These cultural groups typically share long-standing historical traditions, strong collective consciousness, and profound cultural heritage, leading to implicit and indirect communication styles where much of the meaning remains unspoken. In contrast, Germany, Switzerland, the United States, Canada, and other predominantly Latin-derived, industrialized, and urbanized societies with open and pluralistic structures were classified as low-context cultures. Their communication tends to be explicit, precise, and highly dependent on verbal expression to convey key information.

However, it is worth noting that Hall's classification of contextual cultures, though initially aimed at optimizing cross-cultural communication strategies and fostering mutual understanding, remains constrained by the cognitive limitations and entrenched biases typical of Western scholarship under the lens of Orientalism. Beneath the surface of his theory lies a deep-seated Western academic tradition of cognitive misconceptions and subjective assumptions. These misconceptions, like an undercurrent, reinforce Western prejudices toward Eastern and indigenous cultures, undermining the foundation for mutual understanding and equal dialogue. As a result, Eastern and indigenous cultures are further distorted and diminished under Western scrutiny. In essence, Hall's theory of cultural communication, Samuel P. Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations," and Bernard Lewis' Middle Eastern studies share the same underlying framework—one that deliberately polarizes the West and the East, emphasizing Western logic, scientific rationality, and perceived superiority through stark contrast.

Fundamentally, contextual culture stems from the cultural norms and customary practices of different social groups within specific temporal and spatial settings. On a macro level, it is linked to the evolution and transformation of communities—the more distinct the group differentiation and the greater the temporal and spatial separation, the more pronounced the differences in contextual culture become. On a micro level, it is shaped by the participants within a given contextual setting, where varying audiences exhibit different cultural expressions, making contextual cultural differences ever-present and ranging from subtle to significant. As social and communal beings, humans naturally gravitate toward affinity with groups that share similar living environments and linguistic

systems. Through frequent interaction and deep familiarity, members can achieve efficient communication via subtle cues, idiomatic expressions, and even body language, eliminating the need for excessive verbal elaboration. However, when encountering the "Other"—those from vastly different cultures and languages—an instinctive wariness and suspicion often arise, leading to an overinterpretation of their words and actions, as if they conceal hidden meanings and metaphors. Consequently, explicit language becomes necessary to clarify meaning, dispel doubts, and mitigate speculation and resistance in communication.

Thus, contextual cultural differences cannot be simplistically generalized under broad categorizations like "nation" or "ethnicity." As an extension of culture in communication, contextual culture exists in a naturally diverse and vibrant state—it should not be politicized or exploited to deliberately create divisions between the self and the Other. When confronting the complex issue of contextual cultural differences, the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius offered timeless wisdom in *The Analects (Zilu)*: "The nobleman seeks harmony but not uniformity." This insight powerfully reveals a value orientation that embraces pluralistic coexistence and inclusivity. The renowned Chinese scholar Fei Xiaotong further articulated the principle of "Each culture appreciates its own beauty, and together they create a shared beauty," constructing a bridge from theory to practice for intercultural exchange. This perspective underscores that contextual culture, in its truest form, is neither monolithic nor rigid but rather a dynamic interplay of shared and divergent practices—one that should be celebrated rather than weaponized in the discourse of cultural difference.

### **Contextual Culture and Translation of Chin P ‘ing Mei**

Culture can be understood as a meaning system—a “meaning edifice” composed of numerous semiotic systems, with language serving as a special semiotic system that encodes others (Zhang Delu 2023). From this perspective, translating a culturally dense work like *Chin P ‘ing Mei* requires not only linguistic transfer but also the mediation of complex semiotic systems. The novel *Chin P ‘ing Mei* vividly depicts the social customs and human relationships of feudal China. Even for contemporary Chinese readers, many of its specific contextual cultural elements - including ritual traditions, dialects, and slang - require reference materials to fully comprehend their exact meanings, let alone Arabic readers.

In the process of translation, context encompasses three dimensions: cultural context, which refers to the broad cultural background beyond the text itself; situational context, denoting the shared contextual knowledge between source-text readers and target-language readers; and textual context, meaning the internal informational content of the discourse (Yang Meng 2006). Given the considerable geographical and cultural distance between China and Arab countries, certain contextual cultural elements may be either entirely absent or significantly different. Examples include the celebratory customs in aristocratic households, the musical performances at weddings and funerals, the complex interpersonal relationships in feudal society, and the shifting clan power dynamics behind concubine rivalries. These substantial contextual cultural differences significantly increase the difficulty of translation.

Compared to intralingual factors, contextual factors often play a more crucial role in determining the success or failure of a translation (Kang Zhaochun 2011). Addressing

such contextual challenges requires translators to possess strong cross-cultural competence and international cultural vision (Dang Zhengsheng 2024), a task often accomplished through annotation strategies that reconstruct the source cultural context (Deng & Xu 2026). Due to space limitations, this paper will focus on examining three main aspects of contextual culture in the novel: material contextual culture, poetic contextual culture, and dialectal contextual culture.

### Material Contextual Culture and Translation

The material contextual culture in Chin P 'ing Mei is constructed through detailed textual descriptions of objects and settings. For instance, the term "金銮大殿" (Golden Luan Palace) creates an image of solemn grandeur, while "小桥流水" (small bridge over flowing water) evokes a sense of tranquil warmth. Chinese characters inherently possess the ability to establish specific contextual cultures through their pictorial meanings, a feature absent in Arabic. This fundamental difference stems from the nature of writing systems: Chinese, as a logographic script, naturally carries richer cultural connotations compared to phonetic scripts like Arabic. While English (Indo-European) and Arabic (Afro-Asiatic) primarily use alphabets for phonetic representation, Chinese characters preserve cultural meanings through their structural composition. Each character combines graphic symbolism with linguistic signification, creating an intrinsic connection between writing and art (Sun Lüjiang 2011). Traditional Chinese philology's "Six Scripts" theory (including pictograms, indicatives, and semantic-phonetic compounds) systematically explains the cultural dimensions of character formation (Xie Shumin 2013). Given these script differences, translating Chin P 'ing Mei into Arabic often requires explanatory amplification to convey the rich contextual culture embedded in the original characters. For example, the description of the Jade Emperor's Temple in Chapter 1 presents particular translation challenges:

不到数里之遥，早望见那座庙门，造得甚是雄峻。但见：

殿宇嵯峨，宫墙高耸。正面前，起着一座墙门八字，一带都粉赭色红泥；进里边，列着三条甬道川纹，四方都砌水痕白石。正殿上金碧辉煌，两廊下檐阿峻峭。三清圣祖庄严宝相列中央，太上老君背倚青牛居后殿。

لم يقطعوا إلا أميالا حتى قابلهم باب المعبد، فيأله من معبد عظيم فترى:

صروحا عظيمة عظيمة الجبال الشاهقة، وجدراننا حصينة عالية. أمام المعبد جدار حاجز لونه أحمر مائل إلى البني على شكل كتاب مفتوح، وإذا دخلت الباب وجدت ثلاثة سبل متوازية كل منها يؤدي إلى عمق الدار. والوجه الداخلي للجدران الأربعة مبلطاً بشرائح الرخام الأبيض الذي عليه نقش أمواج البحر. وعندما تدخل الصرح الرئيسي، فإذا بك مبهور باللون الذهبي البراق الذي يغطي التماثيل والأعمدة. وترى إلهين للحراسة مهيبين يقفان على جانبي المنصة، وتمثالاً عظيماً لإله الدين الطاوي المقدس يجلس وسط المنصة، وتمثالاً آخر للرسول الطاوي تاي شانغ لاو جون الذي يستند إلى بقرة سوداء يقف وراء المنصة.

The original scene description unfolds with fluid elegance and majestic grandeur. It skillfully capitalizes on the pictographic nature of Chinese characters, utilizing characters like "嵯峨" (towering), "八" (eight), and "川" (river) to vividly depict the temple's imposing magnificence, the unique shape of its gates, and the intricate layout of

its pathways. Arabic, lacking this inherent pictographic quality, struggles to find exact lexical equivalents that precisely convey such contextual culture. Recognizing this challenge, the translator employed an amplification technique of "using objects to explain forms," rendering the relevant passages as "a palace towering like mountain peaks," "gates shaped like an open book," and "three parallel paths leading into the grand compound." Through these supplemented descriptions, the translation clearly elucidates the contextual culture implicit in the original characters' visual forms. This approach significantly enhances Arabic readers' immersive reading experience and effectively facilitates unimpeded cross-cultural understanding and communication. The translation strategy successfully bridges the gap between the Chinese text's visual semantics and Arabic's phonetic system, preserving both the aesthetic qualities and cultural significance of the original architectural imagery while ensuring comprehensibility for the target audience. This case exemplifies how thoughtful amplification can overcome fundamental linguistic differences in literary translation.

Beyond their differences in phonetic versus ideographic representation, Chinese and Arabic also diverge significantly in cultural preferences and metaphorical applications. In Chinese culture, the noble character of a gentleman is revered and often symbolized by the "Four Gentlemen" (plum blossom, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum), while Arabic culture celebrates heroic ideals, frequently employing metaphors like "an unsheathed sword." Generally, the more commonplace an object is in daily life—whether admired or despised—the richer and more varied its associated metaphorical expressions become. Within the same cultural framework, metaphorical language does not hinder understanding; rather, it serves to simplify complex concepts and render them more vivid. For instance, the original description, "正殿上金碧辉煌 · 两廊下檐阿峻峭" ("The main hall gleamed with gold and jade splendor, while the eaves of the side corridors stood steep and majestic"), does not explicitly name the objects creating this resplendent scene. However, readers familiar with Chinese cultural context will immediately visualize the golden statues of the Buddha in the main hall and the guardian deity sculptures along the corridors.

For monotheistic Arab readers, this imagery is foreign, as Islam holds that Allah is formless and prohibits statues or portraits in mosques. Thus, supplementary explanation in translation becomes essential. The Arabic version renders this as, "The pillars and statues in the main hall shone with golden brilliance, while the guardian figures on either side stood with solemn dignity." This amplified translation bridges the cultural gap effectively. Another example is the term "三清圣祖" ("Three Pure Ones"), referring to the three highest deities in Taoism. In Chinese culture, both Taoism and Buddhism belong to polytheistic systems, while Arabs traditionally view polytheism as heretical, creating religious discomfort. To mitigate this cultural dissonance, the translator leveraged Arabic morphology, using the singular form "Allah" to represent the three Taoist deities. This linguistic simplification helps dissolve contextual cultural conflicts and facilitates smoother intercultural communication.

These examples profoundly demonstrate how the material contextual culture in Chin P'ing Mei creatively utilizes the cultural connotations embedded in Chinese characters, transmitting cultural essence through unique metaphorical systems and pictographic mechanisms. For Arabic-speaking audiences, their phonetic writing system

lacks corresponding cultural coding genes, which renders the adoption of explanatory amplification strategies particularly necessary in translation. Such translation practice involves not merely the transmission of textual surface information, but more importantly assumes the crucial mission of constructing interpretive pathways between two heterogeneous cultural cognitive systems, so as to ensure the complete preservation of the source text's cultural matrix while avoiding semantic distortion during cross-linguistic conversion. This translation paradigm highlights the essential nature of cultural translation as an act of deep interpretation, especially when dealing with texts like *Chin P'ing Mei* that possess high cultural density. In this process, the translator's functional scope transcends traditional linguistic conversion, elevating to the level of cultural mediation, which requires both systematic academic understanding of the source cultural context and creative cultural adaptability for the target readership.

### Poetic Contextual Culture and Translation

Poetry, *ci*, *qu* and *fu* can be collectively termed as “rhymed literature,” representing the pinnacle of aesthetic achievement in classical Chinese literature due to their condensed language, concise form, and strict metrical rules (Wu Junru 2009). Chinese poetic forms not only possess distinctive linguistic charm but also convey profound imagery and evocative meaning, rich in aesthetic connotation. In Chinese aesthetics, “blank-leaving” (留白) serves as an artistic device that uses empty space to create a sense of beauty and evoke imaginative resonance (Qian Zhongshu 2002). This openness in semantic space—where meaning extends beyond words—represents precisely the most challenging aspect of poetic translation. If we were to arrange various text types—poetry, prose, fiction, letters, expository writing—along the spectrum of high and low context cultures, poetry would undoubtedly stand as the supreme example of high-context cultural expression. *Chin P'ing Mei*, composed in classical vernacular Chinese, employs poetic forms and moral admonitions to open and conclude each chapter. The text is interspersed with numerous *ci* lyrics and songs, while even its chapter titles feature meticulously balanced couplets with perfect tonal patterns and ingenious parallelism. Judged by Fu Lei's criteria of “faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance,” the translation of poetry should attain the standard of elegance—achieving equivalent effects in lexical beauty, phonetic beauty, formal beauty, and semantic beauty. For example:

蔡太师覃恩锡爵 西门庆生子加官

琴童儿藏壶构衅 西门庆开宴为欢

李桂姐趋炎认女 潘金莲怀嫉惊儿

陈敬济失钥罚唱 韩道国纵妇争风

献芳樽内室乞恩 受私贿后庭说事 (第三十至第三十四回)

كسب سيمون تشينغ بركتين: منصباً وولدا

كرم الأستاذ تساي سيمون بمنصب رسمي

أقام سيمون تشينغ مأدبة احتفالاً وابتهاجا

أخفى تشن تونغ إبريقاً مما جلب خطراً مهدداً

فزعت بان جين ليان المولود الجديد غيرةً وحقداً

صار تلي قوي جيه بنتا ليوي نبانغ بالتبني تملقا

تغافل هان داو قوه عن نزاع امرأته مع الجيران

عوقب تشن جينغ جي بإنشاد الغناء لفقد مفتاح

ارتشى هان داو قوه لإزالة الدعوى

قدم شو تونغ الخمر هدية طلباً للخير

The chapter titles employ the form of seven-character classical poetry, unfolding in a 3-2-2 rhythmic pattern that foregrounds characters while placing narrative elements afterward, precisely encapsulating each chapter's core themes. For translation, Arabic verbal sentences are consistently employed, capitalizing on their distinctive syntactic structure - primarily following a verb + subject + object arrangement. This approach skillfully incorporates various grammatical elements including objects, prepositional phrases, adverbial modifiers, and case markers for distinction. Consequently, the poetic lines achieve a uniform structural arrangement with end-rhymes creating parallel rhyming effects. This methodology not only aligns with Arabic poetic techniques and stylistic conventions but also maintains semantic accuracy, phonological rhythm, and linguistic sensibility consistent with the original text. The inherent tension and aesthetic qualities of the language are thus fully manifested in the translation.

Each chapter of Chin P'ing Mei begins with a poetic invocation marked "诗曰" (The Poem Says) and concludes with a closing verse. These poems exemplify contextual culture through their meticulous attention to tonal patterns, rhetorical elegance, harmonious rhythms, contextual coherence, and transcendent imagery. Similarly, poetry holds paramount status in Arab cultural tradition, where desert-dwelling ancestors particularly revered poets. While Arabic poetic verses vary in length, they characteristically maintain consistent end-rhymes and convey profound emotion with refined subtlety. As poetry fundamentally expresses emotional resonance, translations must faithfully render this affective quality. Consider the opening verses of Chapter Seventeen:

诗曰:

早知君爱歇，本自无容妒；谁使恩情深，今来反相误。  
愁眠罗帐晓，泣坐金闺暮；独有梦中魂，犹言意如故。

قال الشاعر:

عرفت من قبل أنه من غير المخلصين للحب، ولم حسدته على ما فعله من غدر؛  
ولماذا صرت متممة به من أعماق القلب، حتى ضاع شيئاً فشيئاً لأجلك العمر.  
تقلبت على المضجع والشاهد هو ستار السرير، وجلست حزينة طوال اليوم؛  
لم يطرق بابك إلا طيف له يزور، وظل يعزم أنه يفني بعهدته ولن يخون.

Chinese poetry emphasizes the conveyance of mood and artistic conception, where core sentence elements may be omitted for narrative effect. In contrast, Arabic, governed by its grammatical structure, generally requires strict syntactic construction with limited flexibility for ellipsis. In translating this poem, the translator employs a first-person narrative perspective, skillfully utilizing Arabic's rich verb morphology and phonetic patterns of end-rhyme. This approach enables the rendition to evoke a poignant emotional tone when recited, vividly portraying Li Ping'er's lamentation and profound sorrow. Achieving poetic equivalence in translation, it demonstrates the translator's mastery in linguistic and cultural mediation.

The poetry in Chin P'ing Mei not only serves narrative and lyrical functions but is also imbued with didactic and cautionary intent, urging readers to abstain from greed and lust. Much like Chinese culture, which emphasizes self-restraint and introspection, Arab culture similarly prioritizes moral cultivation. Due to religious influences, Arabic literary

works almost entirely avoid explicit depictions, opting instead for subtle and indirect expressions when addressing private matters. Translation is not merely the direct transfer of text but a complex process of continuous negotiation between two cultures (Sun Yifeng, 2016). In practice, translators must consider the cultural impact of linguistic choices and remain attentive to constraints and taboos across different cultural contexts—such as the erotic admonitions in the novel's first chapter.

二八佳人体似酥，腰间仗剑斩愚夫；  
明里不见人头落，暗地使君骨髓枯。

جميلة حسنة في عنفوان الشباب، ممشوقة القوام مرفوعة الأنف،  
لها بين فخذيهما سلاح قاتل ينتظر رجلا غيبا قدمه ببطء يستنزف،  
لا يرى أحد رأسا يسقط على الأرض فيتدحرج،  
إلا أن دما ينفذ ونخاعا يسيل وعظما يجف فيجف.

This poem originates from Lü Dongbin's *Quan Tangshi: Admonitions*, serving as a moral warning against lust. In translation, the translator demonstrates profound insight and precise mastery of distinct cultural aesthetics and metaphorical connotations. Take the phrase "body like酥 (silken)"—while the original portrays a frivolous depiction of feminine physique, the translator ingeniously adapts it to align with traditional Arab aesthetic preferences, rendering it as "a tall stature and straight nose." This transformation holds multifaceted significance: first, it deftly circumvents cultural taboos surrounding descriptions of female form in Arab contexts; second, it enhances the vividness and immediacy of imagery, allowing readers to visualize the figure more clearly. Similarly, the expression "sword at the waist" carries connotations of female genitalia in Chinese culture—a metaphor strictly avoided in Arabic literary tradition. Recognizing this, the translator astutely reinterprets it as "a weapon that kills," employing a grave and literal phrasing to clarify the poem's core message. This approach eliminates potential vulgar undertones while maintaining cultural adaptability and semantic precision, achieving a translation of exceptional fidelity and refinement.

The latter couplet of the poem sharply focuses on the dire consequences of lust. In traditional Chinese cultural belief, marrow is revered as the fundamental essence of life, vital for generating qi and blood—once depleted, death becomes inevitable. In contrast, Arab-Islamic tradition holds that humans were created by Allah from a clot of blood, with life ending when blood dissipates, lacking any conceptual equivalent to "marrow depletion." Confronting this cultural divergence, the translator expands "withered marrow" into a dynamic, visceral depiction: blood drying up, marrow exhausting, and bones stiffening progressively. This vivid elaboration bridges the linguistic-cultural gap while capitalizing on Arabic's inherent rhythmic cadence, simultaneously conveying the poem's moral gravity and aesthetic resonance. The translation exemplifies the translator's acute cultural-code-switching proficiency and linguistic mastery, offering a paradigm for cross-cultural poetic adaptation.

### Dialectal Contextual Culture and Translation

Chin P'ing Mei is composed entirely in dialect, and from the perspective of cultural commodity attributes, it belongs to the category of vernacular fiction. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, a growing readership of ordinary urbanites with relatively low

cultural literacy emerged. Given this target audience and creative orientation, novelists of the period actively employed various strategies to promote textual accessibility (Chen Caixun, 2017). Among these, the use of dialect was a fundamental and crucial technique. As Hu Shi noted, the value of dialectal literature lies precisely in its ability to capture the essence and psychology of characters with precision. While vernacular Chinese already held distinct advantages over classical prose, it still fell short of dialect in vividly rendering a speaker's mannerisms and tone (Hu Shi, 1996). In Chin P'ing Mei, Shandong dialect appears frequently, imbuing the text with a distinctive flavor and enabling strikingly lifelike characterizations. Expressions such as "thieving little dog-bone," "dog of a rogue," "sorghum brat," "weird piece of goods," "stunted turtle," "old oily mouth," and "old slaughter-worthy wretch"—rich in regional color—serve as vivid idioms, proverbs, and invectives that sharpen depictions of daily life and heighten interpersonal conflicts.

In the translation practice of Chin P'ing Mei, dialect translation presents a significant challenge and focal point. Given the strong regional and cultural imprints embedded in dialects, translators must carefully consider the target-language readers' reception and comprehension. Some dialectal terms may lack direct equivalents even in Mandarin, let alone in foreign languages such as Arabic. As Wang Ning (2014) observes, in the process of cross-cultural interpretive translation, excessive interpretation risks creating a palpable sense of alienation between the translation and the original work, causing them to diverge in cultural connotations and emotional expression. Conversely, rigid adherence to linguistic "fidelity" through mechanical word-for-word correspondence often fails to uncover the rich cultural layers embedded in the source text, leaving the regional customs and folkloric nuances carried by the dialect inadequately conveyed to the target readers. Thus, the translator must strike a balance between preserving the cultural distinctiveness of the dialect and ensuring the translation's fluency and intelligibility. On one hand, simply transliterating dialectal terms would render the text obscure and bewildering to the target audience. On the other hand, excessive paraphrasing at the expense of cultural elements would strip the translation of the original's unique flavor and authenticity.

In Chin P'ing Mei Chapter 4, when Yun-ge goes to Granny Wang's house looking for Ximen Qing, they immediately engage in a fierce war of words filled with distinctive dialectal proverbs. In translating these dialectal sayings, the translator must carefully balance multiple considerations: avoiding confusion that might arise from direct transliteration for Arabic readers, while simultaneously preventing excessive paraphrasing that would dilute the original dialect's unique flavor and cultural significance.

那婆子一把揪住道：“小猴子，那里去？人家屋里，各有内外。”郢哥道：“我去房里便寻出来。”王婆道：“含鸟猢猻，我屋里那得甚么西门大官人！”郢哥道：“干娘，不要独吃自呵！也把这些汁水与我呷一呷！我有甚么不理会的！”婆子便骂道：“你那小猢猻，理会得甚么！”郢哥道：“你正是‘马蹄刀木杓里切菜’，水泄不漏，半点儿也没得落地。直要我说出来，只怕卖炊饼的哥哥发作！”那婆子吃他这两句道着他真病，心中大怒；喝道：“含鸟猢猻！也来老娘屋里放屁辣臊！”郢哥道：“我是小猢猻，你是‘马泊六’！”那婆子揪住郢哥，凿

上两个栗暴。郗哥叫道：“做甚麽便打我！”婆子骂道：“贼猢猻！高做声，大耳刮子打你出去！”郗哥道：“老咬虫！没事得便打我！”

لكن العجوز وانغ سحبت ملبسه، وقالت: "يا قرد، إلى أين تدخل؟ هذا بيتي." قال: "أدخل المقهى للبحث عنه." شتمته تقول: "يا قرد طائش، لن تجد سيدك الكريم في بيتي." قال: "يا عمه، لا تتمعي بالفريسة وحدك، أعطيني بعض الفضلات، دعيني أشاركك." قالت العجوز: "ماذا تقصد؟ ما هي الفريسة؟ وما هي الفضلات؟" قال الشاب يون قه: "شأنك شأن قاطع الخضر بالسكن الصغير داخل الدلو--- كيلا ينساب منه شيء. لكن إذا انكشفت الفضيحة في وجه بائع الخبز فكيف؟" لما سمعت هذا الكلام الذي يصيب قلبها غضبت غضبا شديدا، وصاحت: "يا قرد، لا تبصق في بيتي." قال يون قه: "إني قرد، لكنك قطعة لحم كلب يجذب الوحوش، أنت من الذين لا يعملون إلا لربط الوصال بين الجنسين." فأمسكت العجوز رأسه وضربت ضربتين شديديتين. فصاح يون قه: "لماذا تضربيني؟" فقالت: "يا قرد لا ترفع صوتك، وإلا سأصفعك." قال يون قه: "لماذا تضربيني يا قطعة لحم الكلب."

In this scene, Granny Wang unleashes a torrent of dialect-laden insults at Yun-ge, fully revealing her shameless and vicious nature. Yun-ge, far from being an ignorant child, responds with equally brazen and cunning retorts. Chinese vernacular boasts a rich repertoire of invectives, often employing metaphorical language to slander others. When translating into Arabic, certain dialectal and regional linguistic features are inevitably modified or sacrificed to facilitate cross-cultural comprehension. Here, the translator consistently renders Granny Wang's abusive language toward Yun-ge as "monkey." Within Arabic cultural context, calling someone a "monkey" conveys intense disgust and contempt, as Arabs traditionally view monkeys as unclean and ominous creatures. This adaptation amplifies Granny Wang's loathing to its utmost intensity.

For culturally specific phrases like "horse-pulling sixth" (马泊六, a pimp) and "cutting vegetables with a hoof-shaped knife in a wooden ladle" (马蹄刀木杓里切菜), the translator employs explanatory techniques: the former is rendered as "pimp," while the latter becomes "cutting vegetables with a small knife in a barrel—not spilling a drop." This approach not only demonstrates the translator's profound understanding of Chinese culture but also showcases masterful Arabic proficiency, allowing cultural elements to remain vivid in the target language. Another exemplary case occurs in Chapter 7, where Auntie Yang and Fourth Uncle Zhang engage in mutual vilification—a quintessential display of the novel's dialect usage, whose translation methodology warrants further examination.

那张四在旁把婆子瞅了一眼，说道：“你好公平心儿！凤凰无宝处不落。”只这一句话道着婆子真病，登时怒起，紫涨了面皮，指定张四大骂道：“张四，你休胡言乱语！我虽不能，是杨家正头香主。你这老油嘴，是杨家那臊子昏的？”张四道：“我虽是异姓，两个外甥是我姐姐养的，你这老咬虫，女生外向，怎一头放火，又一头放水？”姑娘道：“贱没廉耻老狗骨头！他少女嫩妇的，你留他在屋里，有何算计？既不是图色欲，便欲起谋心，将钱肥己。”

张四道：“我不是图钱，只恐杨宗保后来大了，过不得日子，不似你这老杀才，搬着大，引着小，黄猫黑尾！”姑娘道：“张四，你这老花根，老奴才，老粉嘴！你恁骗口张舌的，好扯淡！到明日死了时，不使了绳子杠子！”张四道：“你这嚼舌头老淫妇！挣将钱来焦尾鞑！，怪不得您无儿无女！”姑娘急了，骂道：“张四，贼老娼根，老猪狗！我无儿无女，强似你家妈妈子，穿寺院，养和尚，合道士！你还睡在梦里！”

لقى تشانغ سي نظرة على هذه العجوز، وقال "يا لك من صاحب عدالة، ألم نسمع من قبل ان العنقاء لا تقعد إلا على عرش." كلامه هذا قد أصاب العجوز في قلبها، فثارت غضبا وسخطا، وسبت مشيرة باصبعها إليه تقول "هراء، هراء، صحیح أني عجوز مسنة، لكني من أصحاب هذه الأسرة، فمن أنت ومن أي بطن خرجت؟" فقال تشانغ سي: "صحیح أني لم أحمل شهرة يانغ، لكن أختي قد أنجبت الولدين. أنت يا عجوز كريمة، ولدت ووجهك تجاه الخارج، أفتعملين عملا مضرا بالأسرة؟" فشتمت العجوز: "يا عار، يا رجل دعي بخس كعظم الكلب! إنها امرأة شابة، فما قصدك أن تبقىها في البيت؟ فهل قصد آخر؟ لو لم تفكر في جسدها فهل تفكر في قتلها ثم تتلع ما معها من الأموال؟" فقال تشانغ سي: "لا أريد منها شيئا، بل أخوزوجها لا يزال صغيرا وكيف سيكون بعد أن يكبر وليس لديه رزق؟ ولن أفعل ما فعلت يا صاحبة القلب القاسي، يا منافقة، تتظاهرين بالعدل وتخفين النية الخبيثة كالقط الذي رأسه أصفر وذيله أسود." قالت العجوز: "يا تشانغ سي، أنت دنيء ورذيل، أتخدع الجميع بلسنك الخبيث؟ هذا كلام فارغ! عندما تموت فلن تجد تابوتا بل تحمل بحبل."

قال تشانغ سي: "يا لاذعة اللسان! عرفت لماذا لم تلدي ولدا ولا بنتا؟ ذلك لأنك عقيمة محروقة الذيل." غضبت العجوز غضبا شديدا، فسبت تقول: "يا تشانغ سي، أنت خنزير، أنت كلب، لم ألد لك أحسن من أمك التي تنزل بالمعابد وتنام مع الرهبان وأنت في نومك العميق."

In the heated exchange between Aunt Yang and Zhang Si, the verbal altercation escalates from personal attacks to slanderous insults targeting each other's ancestors, employing a barrage of coarse and vitriolic dialectal slurs to vent emotions. Given Arabic cultural sensitivities toward vulgar expressions, the translation adapts the rapid-fire insults like "old rotten root, old slave, old powdered mouth" into the equivalent Arabic rebuke "you shameless and depraved wretch." This localized rendering ensures Arabic readers can grasp the original's intense hostility and verbal aggression while aligning with target-culture acceptability. Through such culturally attuned transformations, the translation effectively conveys the essence of dialectal invectives without triggering cultural taboos, thereby preserving the communicative impact while avoiding interpretative distortions.

Chinese allegorical sayings (歇后语), as condensed cultural essences of the language, require explanatory supplementation for Arabic readers' comprehension. For instance, "Carrying the big while leading the small, a yellow cat with a black tail" is expansively rendered as: "A two-faced person who feigns impartiality while harboring ulterior motives—just like a cat with a yellow head and black tail." This amplification technique vividly elucidates the metaphorical meaning behind the saying. Similarly, the

culturally specific expression "When you die tomorrow, you won't need ropes or poles" conveys veiled yet absolute hatred. The translator adopts a literal approach: "Go hang yourself to death without a coffin." Though suicide is taboo in Arabic culture, this rendition allows readers to viscerally grasp the speaker's extreme fury and resentment. By preserving the raw emotional intensity embedded in the original dialect, the translation enables Arabic audiences to experience the uncompromising vehemence characteristic of Chinese vernacular expressions.

Moreover, when the aunt insults Zhang Si's mother with the phrase "frequenting temples, keeping monks, sleeping with Taoist priests" – where the latter two clauses carry semantically similar implications – the translation adopts a strategic consolidation. Recognizing that Arabic readers might struggle to distinguish between these culturally specific Chinese religious figures (monks and Taoist priests), a literal separate rendering could introduce unnecessary complexity and confusion. Thus, the phrase is deftly synthesized as "frequenting temples and bedding religious practitioners." This approach serves dual purposes: it circumvents potential comprehension barriers stemming from the audience's unfamiliarity with distinct Chinese religious roles, while fully preserving the original's accusatory tone condemning the woman's moral impropriety. By doing so, the translation achieves optimal balance – faithfully conveying the core meaning while enhancing cross-cultural accessibility.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how contextual culture is rendered in the Arabic translation of Chin P 'ing Mei, guided by Edward Hall's theory of high-context and low-context culture. The analysis reveals that the translator employs a systematic set of strategies—amplification, reduction, explanatory translation, and transposition—each calibrated to the specific type of cultural asymmetry encountered. In material culture, amplification compensates for the gap between Chinese logographic script and Arabic phonetic script by reconstructing visual-cultural meanings in descriptive form. In poetic culture, transposition and explanatory translation navigate structural and prosodic divergences while preserving aesthetic and didactic functions. In dialectal culture, reduction and semantic consolidation prioritize pragmatic force and cultural acceptability over lexical diversity. These findings advance the current understanding of cross-cultural literary translation in two respects. First, they complicate Hall's binary classification by demonstrating that translation between two high-context cultures—China and the Arab world—requires mediation no less intensive than translation between high- and low-context cultures. What matters is not simply whether a culture is high- or low-context, but the degree of overlap between their specific contextual reference systems. Second, the study offers an empirically grounded account of how a single translator navigates multiple dimensions of contextual culture within one text, providing a methodological model for future qualitative studies of literary translation. Several directions for future research emerge from this study. Comparative analyses involving multiple translations of Chin P 'ing Mei—such as a systematic comparison between Zhang Hongyi's Arabic version and David Tod Roy's English version—would help distinguish translator-specific choices from broader patterns shaped by target-language and target-culture contexts. Additionally, empirical reception studies examining how Arab readers actually perceive and interpret the mediated cultural elements in this translation would provide a

more robust basis for evaluating translation effectiveness than textual analysis alone. Such research would further illuminate the mechanisms of cultural mediation that this study has begun to map.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was funded by the Shaoxing Philosophy and Social Sciences Research “14th Five-Year Plan” 2025 Key Project (Grant No. 145548), for the project “A Study on the Mutual Learning between Song-Yun Culture and Arab Culture along the Silk Road (10th-13th Centuries).”

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