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# Re-dissecting Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* from the Perspectives of Cognition, Translation and Reconfiguration of Culture

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## ABSTRACT

This article takes Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (CTHD in abbreviation) as an audiovisual translation discourse to explore its cognition, translation and reconfiguration of culture. It constructs an analytical framework that consists of three notions, namely cultural cognition, cultural translation and cultural reconfiguration. Within this framework, the three defined notions are used to guide the analysis of CTHD. The findings reveal that Ang Lee's CTHD is featured by a diasporic/intercultural Chinese identity that is rooted in his cultural cognition of an imaginatively traditional China. He skillfully tells a Chinese romantic wuxia story that represents the conflicts and negotiations between Chinese classic culture and Western ideological values (e.g., feminism). English subtitle translation plays a role in bridging the gap between Chinese culture and Western audiences, facilitating the dialog between East and West. In short, the romantic imagination of "Cultural China" shaped by Ang Lee presents a multicultural embracement of Chinese and Western cultures, but it objectively reinforces the stereotype of China as an "other" to the Western world.

## 摘要

本文以李安导演的电影《卧虎藏龙》(*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, 缩写CTHD)为研究对象,视其作为一种视听翻译话语,进而探究其文化的认知,翻译与重构。研究建构了一个包含文化认知,文化翻译与文化重构概念的分析框架。在此框架内,这三个被定义的概念用于影片的具体分析。研究揭示:李安的《卧虎藏龙》有着深刻的离散/跨文化的中国身份,这一身份根植于他对想象中的传统中国的文化认知。他巧妙地讲述了一个中国浪漫的武侠故事,其中呈现了中国传统文化与西方意识形态价值观(如女性主义)的冲突与协商。英文字幕翻译在连接中国文化与西方观众间扮演着重要的角色,促进了中西方的对话。简言之,李安在影片中所塑造的“文化中国”的浪漫想象呈现了中西方文化的多元融合,然而客观上却强化了中国作为西方世界一种“他者”的刻板印象。

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## 关键词

李安; 视听翻译话语; 文化认知; 文化翻译; 文化重构; 多元文化主义

## 1. Introduction

*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) (henceforth CTHD), directed by Ang Lee, is enshrined as one of the most successful Chinese-language martial arts films<sup>1</sup> in the global

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film circle. It is also the only Chinese-language martial arts film that successfully entered the American commercial film market dominated by Hollywood (Zhu 151). The success of CTHD can be attributed to “its stylish fighting sequences, romantic love stories, complex entanglements of old grudges between generations, elaborate costuming and picturesque settings” (K. Lee 281). Its popularity in the Western market suggests that Ang Lee’s CTHD is not a purely traditional Chinese martial arts film, such as Wong Kar-wai’s *Ashes of Time* (1994), Gordon Chan’s *Fist of Legend* (1994), and Tsui Hark’s *Once Upon a Time in China* (1991),<sup>2</sup> rather it is a new cultural product that fuses Eastern marital arts (also wuxia) tradition with Western cultural ideologies. Essentially, the CTHD is a modern transformation of Chinese martial arts film and “a carefully-designed entertainment product for global consumption” (Yang 125). Undoubtedly, Ang Lee’s CTHD has profound sociocultural connotations and it is worthy to be critically reinterpreted from multiple perspectives, though previous studies have produced many insights.

Previous studies of CTHD can be summarized by two general perspectives, i.e., film studies and audiovisual translation (AVT for short) studies. In the domain of film studies, Klein has investigated how Ang Lee’s multicultural identity (i.e., shaped by both American and Chinese culture) shapes his cultural cognition of China and how his imaginary cultural China is reflected in CTHD. In Klein’s (37) view, “*Crouching Tiger* stands as an exemplary instance of transnational cinema” and these kinds of films have “surprisingly fluid national-cultural identity.” Wang and Yeh propose an analytic frame for hybridization of film products, namely “deculturalization,” “acculturalization” and “reculturalization.” They see CTHD as a product of cultural hybridization. In the context of cultural hybridity, “cultures often generate new forms and make new connections with one another” (Wang and Yeh 175).

Ang Lee’s CTHD as a cultural product is transformed from textual reading of the novel to visual communication of the film. Lee Tsung-Ting (103) makes a comparison between the original novel written by Wang Dulu<sup>3</sup> (1909–1977) and the film directed by Ang Lee. In filmic narrative, it creates a kind of dual meaning that strikes a balance between Chinese traditional culture and Western values to satisfy not only Chinese audiences but also Western audiences who have not touched upon Chinese culture ever. In a similar vein, Shen (197) investigates the differences between Wang Dulu’s novel and Ang Lee’s film narrative, pointing out that Ang Lee had rewritten the original story and its theme through highlighting the embrace of Taoism and Buddhist philosophy instead of Confucianism and Confucian social hierarchy that were emphasized in Wang Dulu’s novel.

Moreover, in terms of the audiovisual translation of CTHD, the existing studies usually adopt specific translation theories, such as Venuti’s domestication and foreignization strategies. For instance, Hu (88–91) analyzes the domestication strategies (e.g., addition, omission, paraphrase) used in CTHD by using examples of Chinese-English translation, pointing out that the fluency, concision and easy-understanding are priority in subtitle translation. Yet, different from Hu’s study, Zhang (“A Cultural Discourse” 32) takes a cultural discourse analysis to comparatively examine Ang Lee’s CTHD and Yimou Zhang’s *Hero* within a global-local context, revealing that Ang Lee and Yimou Zhang respectively conducted different strategies to construct their fantastic worlds. His focus is on discursive construction of cultural ideology and hybridity in the two films, but also touches upon English translation of some typical Chinese dialogs. These studies of

CTHD have produced many valuable findings based on sociocultural interpretations, translation and linguistic analyses (e.g., Klein 18–42; Wang and Yeh 175–193; T. Lee 103–123; Shen 197–213; Hu 88–91; Zhang, “A Cultural Discourse” 32). However, they did not take into account of cultural cognitive elements in this film and there are fewer studies that recognized its multicultural dimension.

Previous studies about CTHD usually focus on one specific aspect, such as narrative strategies (Yang 124), diasporic interpretation (Klein 18), globalization and hybridization in cultural products (Wang and Yeh 175) and subtitle translation practice (Hu 88–91; Zhang, “A Cultural Discourse” 32). Therefore, the major research gap is due to the lack of a holistic view that is, in other words, they did not see the film as a cross-cultural and transnational product with characteristics of audiovisual translation discourse. In addition, cultural cognition in a cross-cultural context is important. Without a certain degree of Chinese cultural cognition, it is difficult for Western audiences to appreciate this mandarin Chinese film. In this regard, English translation plays a key role. Even for Chinese native audiences, most of them may not fully understand and appreciate the core values of the film, since Ang Lee fused Western cultural values (e.g., feminism, humanism) with which Chinese people are not very familiar. It thus creates a certain degree of cultural dislocation. Given the research gaps that are related to cognition, translation and reconfiguration of culture, this study proposes three research questions: 1) what kinds of cultural identities and ideologies are hidden behind the filmic narrative? 2) what kinds of cultural translation strategies are adopted to address Chinese culture-loaded contents? 3) how Chinese culture in this film can be reconfigured as a multicultural discourse with characteristics of Western values? These questions will be addressed through literature reading, content interpretation and discourse analysis with specific examples.

Overall, this study aims to provide a new analytical framework that combines the three notions, namely cultural cognition, cultural translation and cultural reconfiguration to re-dissect Ang Lee’s CTHD. By doing so, it aims to get new insights into its narrative structures, intercultural strategies and sociocultural ideologies. This involves not only filmic content interpretation, but also specific linguistic and discursive analyses. It is important to note that CTHD here is seen as an audiovisual translation (AVT) discourse. The reason is that on the one hand it is a form of audiovisual communication and on the other hand, as a transnational film, it needs to rely on translation to realize transnational and intercultural communication on the linguistic level. Discourse, here, is not only referring to language, but also a semiotic complex combining text, language, visual and acoustic systems for meaning-making. Although Ang Lee’s CTHD is a 20-year-old martial arts film, its artistic value and global influence have still represented the highest quality of Chinese martial arts film (Zhu 136, 151). Therefore, it is a good representative film for cultural studies.

## 2. Constructing an analytical framework

This study constructs a combined analytical framework toward cultural and discursive analysis of CTHD. The framework is constituted of three defined notions as three macro analytical dimensions, namely, cultural cognition, cultural translation and cultural reconfiguration. The structure and elements of the framework are outlined in Figure 1.

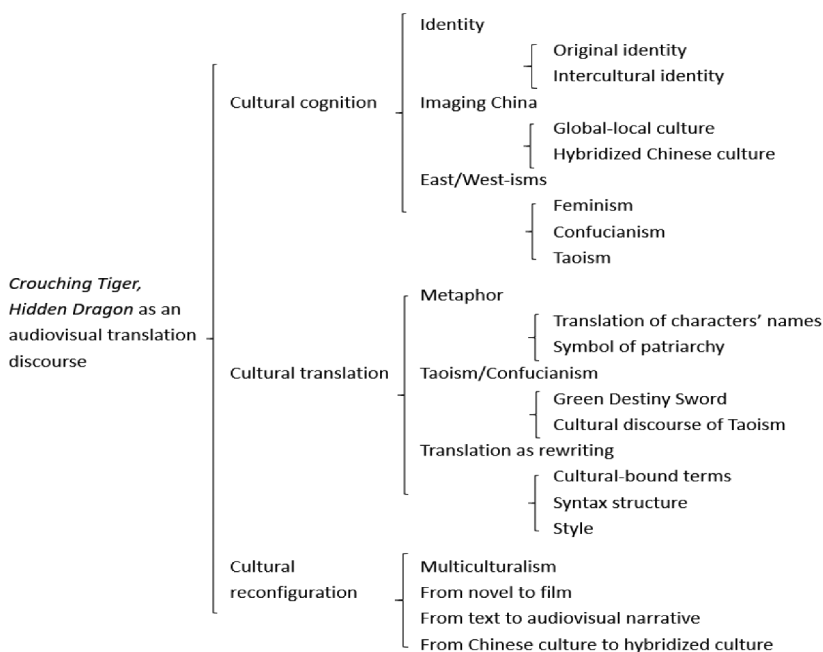


Figure 1. Analytical structure and elements of CTHD.

The concept of cultural cognition is related to cognitive science. Cultural cognition is borrowed here to emphasize that specific cultural background knowledge and context (Zheng and Xiang 5) would influence people's understanding on some intercultural phenomenon or product, such as transnational films and foreign novels. Therefore, cultural cognition can be defined as a cultural understanding that emphasizes the functions of cultural background knowledge and experiences of the human mind in understanding/interpreting different cultures or cultural products. Cultural translation can be seen as an intercultural translation behavior that involves multicultural conflict, negotiation and transformation (Sun 5, 11), including two levels: macro-sociocultural level and micro-linguistic level. Cultural reconfiguration means a cultural product is deconstructed from its original form in original context and then reconstructed into a new cultural form in a target cultural context. It reflects multiculturalism (Buden et al. 198–199; Shi-xu, “A multiculturalist approach” 384) in a varying degree. Multicultural discourse is an important concept in multiculturalism. It means that “as part of human cultures, human discourses, including their respective contexts (worldviews, norms and values, histories, societies, economic conditions, etc.) are diverse, complex and hierarchical” (Shi-xu, “Researching” 2). Adopting a multicultural discourse perspective is to get rid of using a mono-cultural angle to examine this film.

Furthermore, each of the three major components of the framework owns its specific elements used in analysis. Cultural cognition focuses on the analysis of Ang Lee's identity (original and intercultural), Imaginary China, and cultural ideologies of East and West; cultural translation focuses on metaphor, representations of Taoism and Confucianism, and translating strategies; cultural reconfiguration emphasizes the transformation of

genre and text and the fusion of different cultural ideologies in the filmic production. Within the framework, the following sections will further dissect this film.

### 3. Cultural cognition: identity, imaginary China and East/West-isms

Cognition essentially is related to the human brain and mental systems. According to Risku and Windhager (33), “cognition is not just an information manipulation process in the brain, it is contextualized action embedded in a body and increasingly mediated by technologies and situated in its socio-cultural environment.” Given this point, sociocultural environment constrains the cognition of a specific culture to some degree.

Cultural cognition can be seen as a kind of cultural background knowledge in a narrow scope. Zheng and Xiang have conducted an empirical study to test the impact of cultural background knowledge (CBK) on the performance of sight translation when student translators come to translate metaphorical expressions (MEs) related to cultural background. One of the important findings is that “CBK markedly alleviates the cognitive load imposed by MEs and thus facilitates the process of translation by shortening the processing time and improving the translation quality” (Zheng and Xiang 5), yet it does not significantly influence the choice of translation strategies. The CBK is important not only for the translator/interpreter, but also for audiences to understand and appreciate a transnational film, such as CTHD, because the process of watching a transnational film is also a process of translating an exotic culture. Moreover, in the sociocultural context, cultural cognition relies on a kind of specific-shared cultural identity, language, ideology, ethnicity and religion, which can refer to a culturally “imagined community,” in Benedict Anderson’s term. Ang Lee’s CTHD, as a representative cultural product, can be taken as a case to examine its cultural cognition and how the cognition can be represented through translation, namely in which the translation action is seen as “an act of representation” (Sidiropoulou 96).

Cultural cognition emphasizes the effects of cultural background knowledge, cultural experience and cultural identity in understanding cultural products (e.g., transnational film). Undoubtedly, Chinese culture (especially classic Chinese philosophy) is embedded in Ang Lee’s CTHD. The philosophical thoughts are profoundly embodied by characters in storytelling. While on the other hand, as a transnational film, it is implanted by Western cultural ideologies consciously. So, that’s why Wang and Yeh (179–180) point out that it is a creature of cultural hybridization in a global-local context. In any case, one has to admit that the CTHD “mixes romance, feminism, martial arts, and high-art aesthetics” (Dilley 120).

#### 3.1. Ang Lee’s intercultural identity

Tracing back to Ang Lee’s cultural identity, his parents moved from Mainland China to Taiwan after the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949. He was born in Taiwan in 1954. He grew up and received junior and high school education in Taiwan before he went to the U.S. to receive his university education in which he majored in film production at New York University and later settled down and started his career in Hollywood. Apparently, his original identity is Taiwan-born Chinese (or specifically he is

a Taiwanese but belonging to Chinese cultural identity), while his cross-cultural identity is strongly influenced by American culture.

Ang Lee's intercultural identity between Chinese and American cultures makes him "able to function as a director with the support of transnational capital, crew and markets" (Han 227). His personal experience is branded by diasporic Chinese identity and therefore his Chinese martial arts film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, is regarded as "a work of diasporic cinema" (Klein 18). Ang Lee's Chinese family upbringing and American filmmaking training make him a multicultural director who can "speak to those two cultures (Chinese and American cultures) in a way" and further make Lee himself "a hybridized cultural being" (Yi 8). Admittedly, Ang Lee's cross-cultural identity and multicultural ideology that are shaped by the integration of Chinese and American cultures influence his film work, evidently the film of CTHD.

### 3.2. Imaginary China: Chinese culture in East/West and global/local context

CTHD reflects a diasporic Chinese wuxia (martial arts) dream and constructs an imagination of "Cultural China." It represents Ang Lee's understanding of the combination of Chinese traditional philosophy, e.g., Taoism, Confucianism and Zen Buddhism,<sup>4</sup> with Western values, e.g., humanism, feminism, freedom, rebellion against tradition. Although CTHD was a mandarin Chinese-language film, it achieved great success in the global box office, particularly in North America where it became the first foreign language film that made over 100 million US dollars at that time in American history (Martin 2005, 149).. It was also very popular in the British film market and ranked as one of the highest-grossing foreign language movies after it was released for several weeks (K. Lee 282). Not only a commercial success, the film also received the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 2001. It had become an icon implying that Chinese martial arts film could be successful in Hollywood and won Oscar.

Furthermore, Ang Lee's film does not merely deliver Chinese traditional culture in a plain way. Rather it digests Chinese culture and then uses a kind of Western narrative to reconstruct it so as to make Western audiences accept and understand Chinese culture in the film story. Just as Dilley (118) puts it "Lee's film represents not only the international crossing of boundaries but the repackaging and reappropriation of Chinese cultural identity." To some extent, Ang Lee's film is a production combining globalization with Chinese localization, which is so called cultural hybridization.

However, the film seemed to be not regarded with the same high praise in Chinese language societies as it had in the Western societies. This may be related to cultural cognition in cross-cultural context. Just as Chan (4) proposes that this martial arts film is not rendered in so "Chinese" a style and is lacking in "authenticity" of traditional wuxia (i.e., sword fighting and Kung Fu) film in Chinese people's general cognition. Ang Lee's cultural hybridization between China and the West, unavoidably, presents a certain degree of cultural dislocation in Chinese cultural cognition. It shows an illusion of "Cultural China" intertwined with China-West and global-local contexts and it also reversely enhances Western audiences' imagination of a distant China in their cultural cognition.



### 3.3. *Feminism*

Feminism, generally, is not a theme in a Chinese traditional martial arts film in that it should be a masculine film, but it does exist in CTHD. This indicates that Ang Lee adopted a multiculturalist attitude to incorporate cultures from East and West. In Chinese feudal society, women usually were subordinate to men. It is also a feature of Chinese traditional patriarchal society that is branded by Confucian values and norms. Feminism, female empowerment or female's independent consciousness is not an advocated value in traditional China. In CTHD, there are three major female characters, i.e., Yu Shu Lien (俞秀蓮), Jen Yu (玉嬌龍), Jade Fox (碧眼狐狸), representing their respective cultural ideologies and female tragedy in Chinese patriarchal society. Significantly, the storyline is driven by the three female characters.

Yu Shu Lien represents the woman warrior within the Confucian morality. She is brave, respectable and has excellent martial arts skills. Meanwhile, she is also educated by Confucian spirit as a Chinese woman with good virtues. In a scene at the beginning of CTHD, there is a Chinese couplet shown at Yu Shu Lien's hall, which is: “春祀秋嘗遵萬古聖賢禮樂, 左昭右穆序一家世代源流” (my translation: “A family shall obey the traditions of ancient sages' rituals and music in Spring and Autumn sacrificial ceremonies; hierarchy and order are key to the prosperous and long history of a family's generations”). This is a metaphorical message that symbolizes Yu Shu Lien's worship of Confucian moral order in her family tradition. In China's traditional social norms, Yu Shu Lien cannot cross the line expressing her true love to Li Mu Bai in that Li also is her dead fiancé's close friend, though they understand each other's feelings. Just as Ang Lee's saying “having chosen a life of duty, Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien had to suppress their passions and desires, and, most of all, their love for each other” (Chan 9).

In contrast with Yu Shu Lien, Jen Yu is a representation of freedom and rebellion against tradition. She is young, passionate, desires for freedom and also possesses the bravery to break the norms of Chinese patriarchy to pursue her true love with Lo. Jen Yu's rebellious behavior “reflects her deep resistance to patriarchy” within the context of Chinese traditional culture (Chan 9). In the film, Jen Yu disguises herself by cross-dressing as a male swordsman who goes to adventure, which can be seen as a rebellion against Chinese feudal moral ethics. In a fighting scene, Jen Yu fought against a group of male fighters by using the “Green Destiny” Sword and beat them all, indicating her feminism and rebellion to the norms of patriarchal society. As Yi's (3) interpretation, Jen Yu “refuses to be tamed by any male, even her lover Lo. Her rebellious nature might be one of the reasons she jumps off the cliff, to have the ultimate real freedom, even though it might mean killing herself.” Jen Yu's pursuit of freedom and resistance to the norms of Chinese hierarchical society echo Western values (feminism, individualism, freedom and equality), which resonates with Western audiences.

Compared with Yu Shu Lien and Jen Yu, Jade Fox is a female villain in the story, but she represents the traditional women's tragedy in ancient China. She is an assassin with excellent martial arts techniques but is illiterate. In order to become stronger and learn secret skills of Wudang swordsmanship, she seduced Li Mu Bai's master. However, Li's master refused to teach her resulting in his being killed by Jade Fox using tricks. In a dialog between Jade Fox and Li, she says, “Your master underestimated us women. Sure, he'd sleep with me, but he would never teach me. He deserved to die by a woman's



hand!” In this sense, Jade Fox is a tragedy of feminist rebellion in Chinese patriarchal society.

### 3.4. Taoism and confucianism

Two classical Chinese philosophies, namely Taoism and Confucianism, are intertwined throughout the narrative of the story. As Klein (19) puts it “the film focuses on the tension between the characters’ Taoist aspiration to follow the ‘way’ and their Confucian sense of obligation to others.” The two Chinese philosophical thoughts are embodied in characters and their conflicts are also reflected in the film plot. Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien can be seen as the avatars of Taoism and Confucianism, respectively.

In the film plot which is adapted from Wang Dulu’s novel, Li is a swordsman who pursues the “way” of Taoism from Wudang Sect. He loves Shu Lien but he cannot fully confess his true feelings since he is constrained by the social morality of Confucianism and his pursuit of the “way” of Taoism. Similarly, Shu Lien is shaped as a female warrior featured by Confucian morality. Although she likes Li Mu Bai deeply, she has to repress her amorous desire for Li Mu Bai. The repressed love between Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien reflects a conflict between Taoism (freedom) and Confucianism (traditional social morals and patriarchy) in the story. Thus, the tension between Taoism and Confucianism projecting on those characters and events constitutes the core theme of the film.

The CTHD actually reflects Ang Lee’s intercultural identity, which is a diasporic Chinese identity. The cultural identity of the film can be seen as cultural hybridization in the context of integration of globalization and localization, the East and the West. Meanwhile, feminism and the pursuit of freedom are two Western cultural ideologies hidden in this “inauthentic” Chinese martial arts film (Chan 4).

## 4. Cultural translation: metaphor, Taoism and rewriting

Cultural translation of CTHD is examined in the context of audiovisual translation. Audiovisual translation (AVT) requires a multidisciplinary approach (Chaume, “Film Studies” 12). Therefore, it is a multidisciplinary research that covers film & TV translation, visual discourse, multimodal analysis, cultural study and the translation techniques that involve linguistic and semiotic transfers in texts.

AVT has been studied by scholars from various perspectives since the 1990s (see Nedergaard-Larsen; Díaz-Cintas and Remael; González; Gambier; Wang and Zhang). Generally, AVT has four major forms, namely subtitling, dubbing, remaking and adaptation (Yau 492). Specifically, it involves “interlingual subtitling,” “dubbing,” “consecutive interpreting,” “simultaneous interpreting,” “voice-over,” “free commentary,” “simultaneous (or sight) translation” and “multilingual production” (Gambier 172). Simply put, AVT is “a mode of translation characterized by the transfer of audiovisual texts either interlingually or intralingually” (Chaume, “The turn of audiovisual translation” 105). In order to make an in-depth analysis of audiovisual texts, translation scholars have developed some analytical frameworks. For example, Taylor shows a multimodal approach (i.e., multimodal transcription) to analyze linguistic, visual and sociocultural elements in Italian films and argues that it can “take us a step further along the road to optimizing subtitling strategies” (191). Incorporating cognitive and multimodal approaches, Braun

suggests a cognitive-pragmatic model that is regarded as a new empirical method to study audiovisual translation wherein the audiovisual material is seen as a multimodal discourse. Ramos Pinto further proposes a framework that combines textual, diegetic and sociocultural dimensions for dealing with those nonstandard linguistic varieties in translating subtitles, facilitating the improvement of subtitling analytical framework.

In Chinese AVT studies, Wang and Zhang explore the social-political tensions in Chinese fansubbing networks and propose a new term, i.e., “gamification,” to describe Chinese fansubbing practices. They argue that “gamification enables ordinary citizens to translate, distribute and consume foreign audiovisual products in a strategic move that pits collective activism against government dominance” (Wang and Zhang 301). Furthermore, Zhang (“Audiovisual Translation” 58–64) systematically reviews China’s film translation from a China-Western comparative angle and emphasizes the development of Chinese AVT studies. He further proposes that the English translation of Chinese martial arts film can be exported to the English-speaking world as an adaption of cultural discourse or soft power. In a word, AVT has facilitated the spreading of transnational films to some extent, meanwhile it progresses the cross-cultural dialog between the East and the West as well as the South and the North in the world.

Culture and translation are closely interdependent and interrelated (Nedergaard-Larsen 207–208). Cultural translation is a key conceptual tool adopted to understand the hybridization of cultures in a wide scope of context from post-colonialism, multiculturalism, to modernism (Sun 5). It can be seen as a translation behavior/process related to cultural contact, conflict and negotiation and further it is an arena of hybridizing different meanings and signs (Sun 5, 14). More specifically, cultural translation of film can be understood as “the process in which film creators, considering audiences living in different cultural backgrounds, transform the original values of the cultural texts into a new form recognizable by the audiences” (Qi 82), wherein the consciousness of (multi-)cultural identity is very significant.

In order to critically analyze the specific elements of cultural translation in CTHD, 1030 Chinese-English film lines have been manually collected. Specific culture-loaded terms may cause problems of understanding when a film enters a different cultural context. In the Chinese martial arts film, the culture-loaded terms appear throughout the film. These cultural terms are examined by using specific translation examples and their underlying socio-cultural implicatures are further investigated.

#### 4.1. Translation of characters’ names: the loss of metaphorical symbols

One of the obvious cultural elements is in characters’ names translation. Characters’ names have certain cultural metaphors in Chinese wuxia novel and film sometimes.

As shown on Table 1, the leading character’s name, “李慕白(Lǐ Mùbái)” is translated into mandarin Chinese pinyin “Li Mu Bai” by transliteration. Similarly, the heroine’s

**Table 1.** Cultural connotations and English-Chinese translation of characters’ names.

Character name	English translation	Chinese pinyin	Cultural projection
● 李慕白	Li Mu Bai	Lǐ Mùbái	Taoism
● 俞秀莲	Yu Shu Lien	Yú Xiùlián	Confucianism
● 玉娇龙	Jen Yu	Yù Jiāolóng	Feminism and rebellion
● 罗小虎	Lo “Dark Cloud”	Luó Xiǎohǔ	Freedom and untamed

name “俞秀蓮(Yú Xiùlián)” is transliterated into “Yu Shu Lien” that is a Taiwan’s Wade-Giles pinyin in English subtitle. More specifically, Li Mu Bai’s “慕白(Mùbái)” can be literally translated to “pursuing emptiness” in English, which reflects a kind of spiritual pursuit and self-training of Taoism. Yu Shu Lien’s name, “秀蓮(Xiùlián)” reflects a Confucian moral metaphor in that “蓮(lotus)” in Chinese culture represents pureness and elegance. In Chinese, their names contain rich Chinese cultural metaphors, but these metaphorical meanings are lost when they are simply transliterated into English.

However, different from the two transliterations, “玉娇龙(Yù Jiāolóng)” and “罗小虎(Luó Xiǎohǔ)” are translated into two American names or nicknames by domestication strategy, i.e., Jen Yu and Lo Dark Cloud, respectively. The two English translations have lost their metaphorical connotations, which are in their Chinese names “龙”(“Lóng” in pinyin) refers to *Hidden Dragon*’s “Dragon” and “虎”(“Hǔ” in pinyin) refers to *Crouching Tiger*’s “Tiger.” So, the Chinese essence is lost in English translation. Furthermore, the English translations of the characters’ names are mixed from mandarin Chinese pinyin, Taiwan’s traditional Chinese pinyin, and the American name, which results in confusion and also the loss of Chinese cultural connotations and metaphors.

#### 4.2. Green Destiny Sword: a metaphor of patriarchy

Green Destiny Sword is a literal translation of Li Mu Bai’s fabled sword that is a major plot trigger pushing the storyline. In Chinese, Green Destiny (青冥, “Qing Ming” in Chinese pinyin) generally refers to “sky” or “heaven” metaphorically, but it is offered a profound meaning in Taoism, masculine power and sexual symbol in the filmic narrative. According to Chan (12), the Green Destiny Sword is “a phallic symbol of Jiang Hu authority” and the phallic symbol of the sword is further reflected in Yu Shu Lien’s warning to Jen Yu, “Don’t touch it! That’s Li Mu Bai’s sword!” In the film, the sword has become an avatar of Li Mu Bai’s male sex organ and power in a metaphorical sense. For the two female characters, touching the sword projects a sexual implication of touching Li Mu Bai’s phallus. It is a kind of Freudian sexual metaphor. In Ang Lee’s word:

With *Crouching Tiger*, for example, the subtext is very purely Chinese. But you have to use Freudian or western techniques to dissect what I think is hidden in a repressed society—the sexual tension, the prohibited feelings. Otherwise you don’t get that deep. (qtd. in Chan 6)

Furthermore, “Green Destiny” sword can be seen as a kind of metaphor for Chinese Taoism, because “mercury green [...] is the most remote and mysterious place of the ultimate yin, where all existence comes from” (Dilley 130). The “Green Destiny” also implies Li Mu Bai’s death and Jen Yu’s jumping off a cliff from Wudang Mountain at the end of the story, which means they return to the ultimate freedom of Taoist philosophy. The sword is not just a weapon in the story; instead, it plays as a plot trigger and also a symbolic metaphor of masculine power in this martial arts world.

### 4.3. Cultural discourse of Taoism

In the film, Li Mu Bai's words are full of Taoist thought. They are the representations of Chinese classic culture, but unfortunately most of the cultural connotations are not translated into English. In order to deal with cultural problems in translation, literal translation, paraphrase, abstraction and omission are adopted as strategies in the film.

#### Case 1

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Timeline: 00:02:30,930 – ≥ 00:02:48,800

- 李慕白:这次闭关静坐的时候,我一度进入了一种很深的寂静,我的周围只有光。时间,空间都不存在了。我似乎触到了师父从未指点过的境地。
  - Li Mu Bai: During my meditation training, I came to a place of deep silence. I was surrounded by light. Time and space disappeared. I had come to a place my master had never told me about.
  - 俞秀莲:你得道了?
  - Yu Shu Lien: You were enlightened?
- 

In this case, two typical cultural terms, “闭关静坐”(“Bi Guan Jing Zuo” in pinyin) and “得道”(“De Dao” in pinyin) are translated into “meditation training” and “be enlightened” respectively by substitution translation in line with the domestication principle. The former term “闭关静坐”(“Bi Guan Jing Zuo”) is usually used to describe self-training and mediation of the Chinese Taoist who wants to explore the nature of the inner world. The English rendition is easier to understand, but it loses the language style of Taoism. The concept of “得道”(“De Dao”) is a religious term in Chinese Taoism and also Buddhism. It is translated into “be enlightened,” which slightly distorts its connotations in Chinese culture. The reason is “得道”(“De Dao”) should be understood as “find a way to be immortal” in Taoism specifically. Although there are some flaws, the two translations have delivered the general meanings of the two terms in the context of the film story, making the non-Chinese audiences get the point of their dialogs in English subtitles.

#### Case 2

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Timeline: 00:45:42,120 – ≥ 00:45:58,890

- 李慕白:我一直在想找一个徒弟,能把武当派的“玄牝剑法”传下去。
  - Li Mu Bai: I've always wanted a disciple worthy of Wudang's secrets.
  - 玉娇龙:你不怕我学会了杀了你?
  - Jen Yu: And if I use them to kill you?
  - 李慕白: 即为师徒, 就要以性命相见。我相信, 碧眼狐狸未能泯灭了你的良心。
  - Li Mu Bai: That's a risk I'm willing to take. Deep down, you're good. Even Jade Fox couldn't corrupt you.
- 

In case 2, literal translation, paraphrase, abstraction and omission are main strategies to deal with culture-bound problems. “玄牝剑法”(“Xuan Pin Swordsmanship”) is translated to “Wudang's secrets” by abstraction, omission and paraphrase, which is easily understood by global audiences, but one important Taoist concept, i.e., “玄牝”(“Xuan Pin”) is lost. The concept of “玄牝”(“Xuan Pin”) is from the sixth chapter of Laozu's *Tao Te Ching* (道德经). “玄”(“Xuan”) refers to ultimate profoundness, while “牝”(“Pin”) refers to female and fertility. The term “玄牝”(“Xuan Pin”) indicates the ultimate origin

of the world and life (T. Lee 110). Since its profound Taoist implicature, the term is concisely paraphrased as “Wudang’s secrets” in English in that there is no substituted cultural concept in English language. It is acceptable in film subtitle translation. In terms of the case of the bad guy’s name, i.e., “碧眼狐狸” (Jade Eye Fox), it is translated into “Jade Fox” literally, which sounds very oriental. For the case of omission translation, Li Mu Bai’s lines “即为师徒, 就要以性命相见” are translated into “That’s a risk I’m willing to take” by paraphrasing and omitting the Chinese terms “以性命相见” which literally refers to “one is willing to sacrifice life for another.” Their communicative meanings are delivered to target audiences, though deleting some original concepts in order to reach concision and fluency.

### Case 3

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Timeline: 01:18:55,010 – ≥ 01:19:21,220

- 李慕白: 秀莲, 我们能触摸的东西没有“永远”。师父一再的说, 把手握紧, 里面什么也没有, 把手松开, 你拥有的是一切。
  - Li Mu Bai: Shu Lien. The things we touch have no permanence. My master would say, there is nothing we can hold on to in this world. Only by letting go can we truly possess what is real.
  - 俞秀莲: 慕白, 这世间不是每一件事都是虚幻的。刚才你握着我的手, 你能感觉到它的真实吗?
  - Yu Shu Lien: Not everything is an illusion. My hand, wasn’t that real?
- 

The dialogs about “illusion” and “reality” are translated by abstraction and paraphrase. In order to make sense to target audiences, the subtitle translator rewrites the film lines by deleting some words and reconstructing syntactic structures. Specifically, the conversations between Li and Yu reflect the deep thoughts of Taoism and Confucianism in their minds. In Li’s worldview, nothing is permanent and real, because his belief is the “way” of Taoism that emphasizes the naturalness and detachment from desires. In contrast, Yu is on the side of Confucianism that emphasizes the reality and materiality. The conflict between Taoism and Confucianism is a tension pushing the storyline.

Essentially, Li Mu Bai’s word, “The things we touch have no permanence” projects his philosophical views of Taoism that everything in real life will be changed and not real to some extent; while in Yu Shu Lien’s reply, “not everything is an illusion” reflects the worldview of Confucianism that the world is real and one can strive for what he or she wants and even change the world. It seems like the two characters’ love confession, but actually it is a tension or conflict between Taoism and Confucianism.

## 4.4. *Translating as rewriting*

Rewriting is a key strategy in translation and it is also employed in the English subtitling of CTHD. Translation as rewriting is seen as a manipulation by power and ideology in literature translation, according to Lefevere,

All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewriting can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. (vii)

Rewriting is a salient feature in cultural translation of CTHD. In the context of AVT discourse, mood and tone, linguistic style, semantic meanings and esthetic value of the Chinese source text is unable to be fully translated into the English target text in subtitle translation, because audiovisual translation is a constrained translation. This also reflects the untranslatability of Chinese culture in some aspects. Taking Jen Yu's Chinese poem in one of the scenes as an example, its English rendition is translated by rewriting and paraphrase, while some of the culture-specific items are translated literally by foreignization strategy.

#### Case 4 Jen Yu's poem

Timeline: 01:23:59,580 – ≥ 01:25:03,500

- 我乃是潇洒人间一剑仙,
- 青冥宝剑胜龙泉。
- 任凭李俞江南鹤,
- 都要低头求我怜。
- 沙漠飞来一条龙,
- 神来无影去无踪。
- 今朝踏破峨嵋顶,
- 明日拔去武当峰。

I am the Invincible Sword Goddess.  
Armed with the incredible Green Destiny.  
Be you Li or Southern Crane.  
Lower your head and ask for mercy.  
I am the desert dragon.  
I leave no trace.  
Today I fly over Eu-Mei.  
Tomorrow, I'll kick over Wudang Mountain!

In this case, Jen Yu's Chinese poem is translated by rewriting and semantic interpretations. Some Chinese concepts are deleted, substituted, generalized and even distorted in English translation. For example, in the first line, “潇洒人间一剑仙” is translated to “Invincible Sword Goddess” by deleting “潇洒人间” (unconstrained life/a life of freedom). In the second line, “青冥宝剑胜龙泉” is translated into “armed with the incredible Green Destiny” in which “龙泉” (“Long Quan” is also a famous Chinese sword) is deleted in the target text.

The English translation of the third line is ambiguous. In the third line, “任凭李俞江南鹤” is translated into “Be you Li or Southern Crane” by literal translation. But there is a translation mistake. “李俞江南鹤” should be three characters' names, namely, Li Mu Bai, Yu Shu Lien and Jiang Nanhe (i.e., Li Mu Bai's swordsmanship teacher). However, the line is translated into “Be you Li or Southern Crane” which is very strange and does not make sense. Especially, the translation of “江南鹤” (“Jiang Nanhe” in pinyin) that is translated into “Southern Crane” is not correct in that it is not a bird's name, but instead a name of Li Mu Bai's swordsmanship teacher.

As for the other lines, they are translated by rewriting and paraphrasing in general, and some cultural information has been lost. For instance, “沙漠飞来一条龙” has been translated into “I am the desert dragon” without considering context. However, the source text does not certainly mean a “desert dragon,” it means a “dragon” flies from other places, maybe a fire or water dragon. The last two lines' translations are faithful to the source text style to a large degree, though non-Chinese background audiences might not understand what are the “Eu-Mei”<sup>5</sup> and “Wudang.”<sup>6</sup>

Based on the discourse analysis of Chinese-English subtitles, free translation and domestication strategies dominate in subtitle translation of CTHD, though literal translation and foreignization strategies are also adopted accordingly. However, it is very difficult to fully translate cultural implications of Chinese martial arts into English since there are no such alternative cultural concepts in English. In such case, “it is probably hard to come up with conceptual substitution in English for Chinese martial arts notions.

If the translator could not make sense of them by either paraphrasing or trans-coding, deletion is perhaps a handy option” (He 217). Indeed, deletion and omission are employed frequently in English subtitle translation of CTHD, especially when the Chinese cultural expressions are untranslatable in English.

In short, domestication/foreignization strategies and rewriting were used flexibly in order to effectively translate the Chinese-cultural load items into English language. As for specific translation techniques, literal translation, free translation, paraphrase, omission, substitution and addition were employed according to specific sociocultural and language contexts.

## 5. Cultural reconfiguration: a multicultural fusion

Cultural reconfiguration reflects multiculturalism in the film of CTHD to a varying degree. Multiculturalism usually is an ideological concept/stance that emphasizes diversity, co-existence, negotiation and cooperation of different cultures in society. It holds the view that culture is “not just innocent ‘difference’ in knowledge, values or customs external to action and communication, but rather a historically evolved set of ways of thinking, concepts, symbols, representations (e.g., of the self and others), norms, rules, strategies, embodied in the actions and artifacts of a social community in power relations with those of other communities” (Shi-xu, “Cultural Discourse Studies” 2). Specifically, a multiculturalist stance, or in Shi-xu’s (“A multiculturalist approach” 383) term, a multicultural-epistemological stance, refers to “a reflexive and critical position of meaning making in between Eastern and Western, North and South, and local and global regimes of knowledge/power.” Furthermore, multiculturalism, according to Buden et al. (198), “is based on the idea of the uniqueness and originality of cultural formations” and “it assumes there is an intrinsic connection between culture and “racial, gender or ethnic origins.” For a multiculturalist, the world is consisted of “a sort of cluster of different cultural identities either tolerantly recognizing or violently excluding each other” (Buden et al. 198). In examining the cultural reconfiguration of CTHD, it emphasizes that Sino-western culture is “tolerantly recognizing” rather than “violently excluding” each other.

Moreover, it should be noted that cultural reconfiguration is related to discursive reconstruction. The notion of “discourse” is not merely constrained in text and talk, rather it is “culturally saturated forms of communication, involving linguistic-symbolic activities in the various domains of social and cultural life of a community” (Wu 2). Briefly speaking, taking a multiculturalist discourse approach means to examine language, national identity, East and West, conflict and negotiation of cultural ideologies of CTHD in a multiple and tolerant stance, avoiding being trapped in one sole cultural angle.

In the sense of generation of cultural product, cultural reconfiguration refers to one original cultural product or element that is deconstructed in its cultural context and then reconstructed in a new form with new cultural features in a target cultural context. The process of cultural reconfiguration is similar with linguistic recontextualization that means “the dynamic transfer-and-transformation of something from one discourse/text in context (the context being in reality a matrix or field of context) to another” (Linell 145). Yet, the meaning of cultural reconfiguration is broader than text-based



recontextualization. It is not only on the textual level but also on the physical level of cultural product.

From novel to film and from Chinese culture to Western culture, the original story of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is deconstructed, translated, and rewritten into the new filmic narrative so as to satisfy global audiences from different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, Chinese language dialogs and their English translations, Chinese culture and China's landscapes shown in the film are branded by diasporic Chinese identity. For the film, it represents an imaginary China and it is also a cultural China reconstructed by Ang Lee's artistic re-creation. Just as Ang Lee said, "the film is a kind of dream of China, a China that probably never existed, except in my boyhood fantasies in Taiwan" (qtd. in K. Lee 291). Therefore, the film does not intend to emphasize the historical facts that truly happened in China, but reflects Ang Lee's imaginary China and a dream of the Chinese martial arts world in his Chinese cultural cognition (Dilley 121).

In addition to Ang Lee's diasporic cultural identity, the screen script writing and film subtitle English translation also play a role to reconstruct Chinese culture in the film. For the film script, it was adapted from Wang Dulu's novel and then rewritten and translated into English subtitle by three film screenwriters, namely, James Schamus (from America), Hui-Ling Wang (from Taiwan) and Kuo Jung Tsai (from Hong Kong), amongst which Schamus is American and the other two are Chinese (Chien 152). According to Dilley (121), the screenplay had been adapted from its original novel and then rewritten in Chinese and then it was translated into English, back and forth, until the film script could be finalized as the form of subtitles where its Chinese culture was still retained. As Schamus said:

It was really rewriting the script so many times, translating back to English, back to Chinese, writing it and, of course, finally rewriting the film one last time in the form of the subtitles and at that moment, through discussion [...] realizing how little of the movie I understood. [The film's] meanings remain embedded in the Chinese language and culture. (qtd. in Dilley 121-122)

The process of screenplay writing actually is a cross-cultural dialog between East and West and also a mini global-local process (Zhang, "A Cultural Discourse" 35-36). Within it, reconfiguration of multicultural discourse (i.e., incorporates the understandings of Chinese culture from the senses of East and West, Hong Kong and Taiwan) was created, which shows Ang Lee's multiculturalist consciousness in the film. It thus can be summarized that the writing of the screenplay is a process of reconfiguring Chinese culture, translating Chinese culture and fusing Western values on the discourse level. The cultural reconfiguration in the film story actually is the hybridization of culture from China and the West, which is largely reflected in the portrayal of characters, film languages and English subtitle translations. The traditional Chinese culture in the film is reconstructed by implanting Western ideologies and Westernized language-style and it is also further reinforced by English subtitle translation.

## 6. Conclusion

This article has re-dissected Ang Lee's film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* from the three dimensions of cultural cognition, cultural translation and cultural reconfiguration. Firstly,

the study examined cultural cognition embedded in the film narratives which identified the dialectical integration of Chineseness and Western values (i.e., Confucianism vs. Taoism and feminism vs. freedom); secondly, the cultural elements that need to be understood through activating specific Chinese/Western cultural cognition (i.e., related cultural knowledge) in interpreting the theme of the film and further their cultural translations were examined by analyzing specific samples; thirdly, the cultural reconfiguration of narrative from Wang Dulu's novel to Ang Lee's film and from Chinese culture to Western culture was investigated, which echoed a process of multicultural reconfiguration that covers discourse level and social-cultural level. From the analysis, it was found that Ang Lee's CTHD was not a purely traditional Chinese-language wuxia film, instead a romantic-filmic narrative about an imagined China which contains multicultural conflict, negotiation and embracement, and which involves China vs. West, Confucianism vs. Taoism, feminism vs. patriarchy, and freedom vs. repression. However, the imagined China is still constructed as a cultural "other" to appear in the global cultural field hegemonized by Anglo-American culture. In this sense, the CTHD is "a minoritarian artwork [...] by deterritorializing cultural Chineseness from the nation state" (Coe 100).

Undoubtedly, Ang Lee's CTHD is a re-narration of Chinese martial arts film in the globally cultural capital field and also a visual representation about "Cultural China," facilitating multicultural contact between East and West. It is a romantic imagination of "Cultural China." The CTHD indeed has led to a revival of martial arts film in Chinese societies. Many quality martial arts films have been released to the market, such as Yimou Zhang's *Hero* (2002), Tsui Hark's *The Seven Swords* (2005), Wong Kar-wai's *The Grandmaster* (2013), Hou Hsiao-hsien's *The Assassin* (2015), and Yimou Zhang's *Shadow* (2018). However, the pity is that most of them could not have the success like Ang Lee's CTHD in the international film circle. One of the reasons is that they might not target international markets, or specifically they lacked multicultural consciousness in filmmaking. It is necessary to make a comparative analysis between CTHD and those films in future studies so as to further examine their differences in terms of narratives and cultural ideologies.

In the meantime, Chinese martial arts film or Chinese culture is facing dilemmas in this global digital era that is flooded by social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok), Hollywood blockbusters (e.g., *The Avengers* series 2012, 2015, 2018, 2019) and online games. In a broad sense, Chinese culture and other national cultures, such as Japanese, Korean, Arabian, Southeast Asian and Latin American, are facing the clash of Anglo-American-led Western culture that has hegemonized global culture capital through the huge media network and modern cinematic industry. It is worth thinking about how Chinese culture and the Anglo-American dominated Western culture can improve mutual understanding and realize cultural harmony through multicultural exchange in the world. This is not only shown in the film, but also in a broader socio-political and economic agenda.

## Notes

1. The terminology of "martial arts film" here was interchangeably used with "wuxia film." Yet, they indeed have some differences. In K. Lee's ("[Far Away, so Close](#)" 292) discussion, martial arts film usually related to Chinese Kung Fu, such as Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, Jet Lee, in

modern China, while wuxia film is often set in an ancient Chinese dynasty, such as Tang Dynasty, Song Dynasty or Ming Dynasty. For precisely, Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is a wuxia film. But some scholars see it as a martial arts film in a general way, see Klein (18), Wang and Yeh (179).

2. These examples are representative Chinese martial arts films made by Hong Kong directors in the 1990s. They are Wong Kar-wai's (王家卫) *Ashes of Time* (东邪西毒, 1994), Gordon Chan's (陈嘉上) *Fist of Legend* (精武英雄, 1994), and Tsui Hark's (徐克) *Once Upon a Time in China* (黄飞鸿, 1991). Specifically, *Ashes of Time* belongs to the wuxia genre, while *Fist of Legend* and *Once Upon a Time in China* to the Kung Fu genre.
3. Wang Dulu (王度庐, 1909-1977) was a Chinese wuxia novelist. He was seen as a master of the tragic wuxia novel and influenced other famous Chinese wuxia novelists (see Xu 62). In Greater China, there were three renowned wuxia novelists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely, Hong Kong's Jin Yong (金庸, 1924-2018) (also known as Louis Cha), Liang Yusheng (梁羽生, 1924-2009) and Taiwan's Gu Long (古龙, 1938-1985).
4. Zen Buddhism, also known as Chan school (Chanzong, 禅宗), is an indigenous school of Buddhism developed in China. "Chan" can be simply translated as "meditation," and thus "Chanzong" is "Meditation school" (Hershock, "Chan Buddhism" web). Moreover, "Chan was not distinctive within Chinese Buddhism in its use of meditative techniques," but "what distinguished Chan were its novel use of language, its development of new narrative forms, and its valorization of the direct and embodied realization of Buddhist awakening" (Hershock, "Chan Buddhism" web). The representative figure of Chinese Zen Buddhism is master Hui-neng (慧能 638-713), also known as "the Sixth Patriarch" of Chan. His teachings, stories and discourses were composed in the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (Liuzu Tanjing, 六祖坛经).
5. Eu-Mei should be Mount Emei (in Chinese pinyin) (峨眉山). It is a famous long-history Chinese Buddhist sacred mountain in Sichuan province. Emei Sect is usually shaped as an important Chinese martial arts school in different wuxia novels, TV dramas and films.
6. Wudang refers to Wudang Mountain/Wudang Sect (武当山/武当派). It refers to a Taoist sacred site with a long history in Hubei province, China. Wudang Mountain is also a Taoist symbol and Chinese martial arts school. It usually appears in different Chinese wuxia novels, TV dramas and films.

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## Notes on contributor

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