

The Reception of the English Translations of *Honglouloumeng*

Insights from Topic Modeling

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1. Introduction

Honglouloumeng 紅樓夢, a Chinese classic novel, is often lauded as an encyclopedia of Chinese culture and enjoys a high reputation in different countries (Liu and Afzaal 2021). The past century has witnessed the translation of this Chinese novel into more than 30 languages, a fact which makes it a perfect case for promoting traditional Chinese literature and culture among overseas readers (Liu and Zhou 2021). Nowadays, translations of *Honglouloumeng* are available in different major languages in the West, including English, French, Spanish, Italian, and German. Reviews of the readers of these languages can provide first-hand information for the reception of this Chinese classic abroad, which may, in turn, shed light on how Chinese classic novels should be translated and promoted in order to be better received in the West. By analyzing readers' reviews of the English translations of *Honglouloumeng* around the world, this chapter examines the reception of this Chinese classic in the English-speaking world from cross-lingual, cross-regional, and cross-temporal perspectives. It is hoped that the detailed information garnered from this extracting method in the translation data will inform us how the translations of *Honglouloumeng* are received, appreciated, or judged by English readers, whose cultural backgrounds are very different from Chinese ones.

Specifically, the study aims at answering the following research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: How are different English translations of *Honglouloumeng* received by readers in different English-speaking countries?
- RQ2: Is there a pattern in the reception of the translations of *Honglouloumeng* in English-speaking countries across time?
- RQ3: In what ways can the current reception of the English translations of *Honglouloumeng* inform future translational practices of Chinese classics in English-speaking countries?

To answer these questions, we will first collect online readers' reviews of the available English translations from Amazon.com, which is one of the largest internet platforms for book reviews. Then, we will resort to topic modeling, a text mining technique which automatically extracts and classifies words of similar topics, to infer potential topics in our corpus of reviews.

Before the analysis, we will first conduct an overview of the existing studies on the reception of *Honglouloumeng* in English countries, as well as a review of the application of topic modeling in reception studies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Reception of Honglouloumeng in the English-Speaking World: A Brief Review*

Borrowed from reception theory, the concept of “reception” used in this study refers to readers' subjective expectation, interpretation, and evaluation when making meaning from literary works (Jauss et al. 1982). Reception values readers' reading experience and feedback, emphasizing readers' subjectivity in literary activities (Ma 2000). Reception studies have gained much ground after Jauss, the pioneer in the theory, proposed that literary works should not be cut off from their readers whose cultural backgrounds and life experiences play an active part in their interpretation and acceptance of a particular literary work. For the reception of the English translations of *Honglouloumeng*, most existing works have explored such topics as the translation history of the work (Jiang 2007; Wang and Wang 2014; Ji 2019), the receptive effects of the translations (Martin 2010; Chen 2020; Kong and Ong 2021), the translators (Xiao 2009; Li, Zhang, and Liu 2011; Hu and Peng 2015), and the translating strategies or methods used in the translations (Li 2006; Wang 2015; Tao 2021). For instance, Wang (2015, 56) discusses the relationship between overseas promotion of Chinese literature and selections of translation strategies from a communicative perspective. He argues that early translations of Chinese literary and cultural works were mainly completed by means of the strategy of “foreignization” in translation, which sometimes ignores target readers' abilities and willingness to receive the cultural otherness. According to him, “domestication” is preferred over “foreignization” in the translation for better comprehension by target readers of Chinese cultural practices depicted in *Honglouloumeng*. Ge (2002) explores different strategies translators have applied in their English translations of *Honglouloumeng* and argues that both “domestication” and “foreignization” strategies operationalized in the translated *Honglouloumeng* are founded on the premise that Chinese and English are linguistically and culturally equal languages. Woesler (2010, 82) argues that *Honglouloumeng* has been “used as a means to interpret Chinese literature and culture as a whole” in the West, where it is regarded as a masterpiece which has influenced Western literature in multiple ways.

Whereas all the studies explore different aspects related to the reception of *Hongloumeng* in the West to some extent, none of them examine the views of the readers, who perform the reading of the translation. We argue in order to gain a deeper understanding of how the work is actually perceived by its readers, it is necessary to study their comments in a systematic manner. This is where topic modeling comes into the picture.

2.2 *Topic Modeling and Reception Studies*

As a text mining technique, topic modeling regards all the words in the corpus as a “bag of words” and automatically extracts and categorizes them under similar topics through algorithms such as Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA), Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), and Neural Topic Model (NTM) so as to uncover latent topics in large-scale corpora (Blei 2012, 81). Compared with traditional corpus analysis methods, topic modeling performs more efficiently in annotation and classification (Jaworska and Nanda 2018, 376) as well as delivers more accurate results. Being a data science technique, topic modeling provides good support for a series of natural language processing tasks such as topic prediction, automatic summarization, text generation, and machine translation (Huang et al. 2020, 827). With the rise of “digital humanities” in recent years, scholars have also applied this method to the studies of society and politics (DiMaggio, Nag, and Blei 2013; Liang 2019), economics and business (Pröllochs and Feuerriegel 2020; Zhang, Wan, and Liu 2020), language and literature (Jockers and Mimno 2013; Murakami et al. 2017), arts and culture research (Shalit, Weinshall, and Chechik 2013; Garcia-Zorita and Pacio 2018), and other fields in humanities and social sciences. Indeed, the technological advantages of topic modeling over some existing corpus-based/corpus-driven methods have also led to the “digital turn” in humanities and social sciences. By applying topic modeling to the analysis of readers’ reviews of the English translations of *Hongloumeng*, we hope to demonstrate the robustness of the technique in reception studies in translation, since it can help improve the reliability of analyses results by including larger data samples.

In this study, the automatic analysis of topic modeling of corpus data allows us to compare the reception of different English translations of *Hongloumeng* more efficiently. Meanwhile, output from a single modeling package (e.g., MAUI, Gensim, KEA) can ensure the comparability of analytical results when we examine the reception of different translations. Topic modeling is also preferred over other text-mining techniques in this study for the following reasons: first, unlike previous reception studies that largely rely on sentiment analysis (Zhang 2019; Shi and Deng 2020), topic modeling is an unsupervised machine learning, which does not need a training corpus. This minimizes the subjectivity in selecting different training corpora for analysis. Second, some online review platforms (Amazon.com, Goodread.com, etc.) have already carried out sentiment classification for all readers’

reviews in different languages (English, French, Spanish, etc.), which can be directly used as a starting point for topic modeling. All these factors make topic modeling an ideal method to our reception study of different English translations of *Honglouloumeng*.

3. Data and Methodology

Our study shows that readers from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada have contributed a significant number of quality reviews among the online reviews of different English translations of *Honglouloumeng* on Amazon.com. A huge number of quality reviews helps us to build a corpus of a relatively large size, which is an advantage for text mining. This is also the reason why we select the reviews by readers from these three countries as the starting points of our present investigation. Among dozens of English translations of *Honglouloumeng*, we chose the two versions translated, respectively, by David Hawkes and John Minford and Mr. Yang and Mrs. Yang for analysis, as both of them have attracted the greatest number of online reviews. The higher the number of reviews, the more valid and representative our research results will be. At the time of writing this article, altogether a total number of 2,321 and 1,896 reviews have been collected for these two versions, respectively. The details are shown in Table 14.1.

To conduct an in-depth exploration of the readers' reception of *Honglouloumeng*, we analyze the content of readers' reviews from cross-version, cross-regional, and cross-temporal dimensions. The cross-version dimension is adopted to conduct topic modeling on the positive and negative reviews of each translation so as to find out the similarities and/or differences of readers' reception from both positive and negative sides. The cross-regional dimension is employed to analyze readers' reviews from different English-speaking countries so as to explore the possible influence of regional factors on the reception of these *Honglouloumeng* translations. The cross-temporal dimension is employed to mainly examine the reviews at different periods to compare the reception of *Honglouloumeng* translations at different periods of time. All the analysis has been conducted in Python 3.7 by using software package such as "NLTK" and "Gensim."

Our analytic steps are as follows: (1) collect readers' reviews from different English-Speaking countries through *Instant Data Scrape*, a special crawling tool for collecting Amazon online reviews; (2) clean the corpus of reviews by carrying out such preprocessing steps as stopwords-removing, tokenizing, and lemmatizing; (3) use LDA to perform topic modeling on the collected corpus of readers' reviews. We choose LDA here because it is currently the most widely used topic model (Murakami et al. 2017, 276). In the modeling process, we need to determine the number of topics to be generated; (4) assess LDA modeling effect by comparing topic coherence scores which are retrieved from Gensim and adjust the setting of topic numbers to obtain the best modeling effect; and (5) summarize detailed information

Table 14.1 Numbers of reviews for the two English translations of *Honglougeng*

<i>Title</i>	<i>Translator</i>	<i>Debut years</i>	<i>No. of reviews</i>	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>
<i>The Story of the Stone</i>	David Hawkes and John Minford	1974d Haw	2,321	1,789	532
<i>A Dream of Red Mansions</i>	The Yangs	1978Yangs	1,896	1,258	638

about translation reception from each of the three dimensions and discuss the implications for promoting Chinese classic overseas from such aspects as “translation quality,” “editing and binding,” and “marketing and pricing.”

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Reception of Different Translations of *Honglougeng*

Repeated LDA modeling on the positive and negative reviews of Hawkes and Minford’s and Yangs’ translations shows disparity in readers’ both positive and negative reviews of the two English translations. For the positive side, the reviews of Hawkes and Minford’s translation and Yangs’ translation contain five and four topics, respectively, with the topic coherence scores being 0.57 and 0.53.¹ According to the keywords under each topic, we label these topics in the reviews of Hawkes and Minford’s translation as “translation quality,” “traditional Chinese medicine,” “clothing and garment,” “editing and binding,” and “interpersonal strategies”; and those in the reviews of Yangs’ translation as “translation quality,” “food,” “interpersonal strategies,” and “editing and binding” (see Table 14.2). In terms of topical strength, “translation quality” and “traditional Chinese medicine” are the first and second hottest topics in the readers’ reviews of Hawkes and Minford’s translation, with the strength being 28.2% and 27.2%, respectively. The top two most popular topics in readers’ reviews of Yangs’ translation were “translation quality” and “interpersonal strategies,” with their topical strength being 30.6% and 29.7%, respectively. This shows that translation quality and fictional content are the topics of shared concerns by readers of the two translations.

A comparison of these topics and their keywords reveals that the readers of Hawkes and Minford’s and Yangs’ translations have their own focus of attention in their positive reviews of *Honglougeng*. First, the readers of both translations are very concerned about the translation quality, though with slightly different expectations. The readers of Hawkes and Minford’s translation appear to be more interested in whether the translation is faithful to the original, while the readers of Yangs’ translation seem to focus more on

Table 14.2 Topics and topical keywords in the positive reviews by readers of the two translations

<i>TTs</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Keywords (top 10)</i>
Hawkes and Minford's Translation	Translation quality	28.2%	Translation, text, version, original, quote, true, easy, understand, relevant, translated
	Traditional Chinese medicine	27.2%	TCM, medicine, herbal, clear, knowledge, Chinese, essential, cure, ill, treatment
	Clothing & garment	15.5%	Garment, style, colors, traditional, clothing, beautiful, grace, woman, wide, texture
	Editing & binding	15.3%	Cover, page, beautiful, hardcover, binding, content, copy, size, item, illustrations
	Interpersonal strategies	13.8%	Life, apply, advice, situation, persons, help, mind, interpersonal, anyone, interaction
Yangs' Translation	Translation quality	30.6%	Quality, excellent, translation, charm, idiomatic, reading, translate, great, easy, smooth
	Interpersonal strategies	29.7%	Useful, strategy, life, apply, tips, everyone, teachings, situations, helpful, branding
	Clothing & garment	23.2%	
	Editing & binding	16.5%	Size, cover, binding, shape, illustrations, product, fonts, images, design, color

the linguistic smoothness of the translation. Such a tendency is supported by the list of the top 10 keywords for the topic of “translation quality” in the reviews of the two translations. In the reviews of Hawkes’s translation, “translation quality” has a topic strength of 28.2% and includes keywords such as “translation,” “version,” “original,” “true,” “easy,” and “understand.” By contrast, Yangs’ the same topic in the reviews of Yangs’ translation has a higher strength of 30.6% and includes keywords like “excellent,” “translation,” “charm,” “idiomatic,” “translate,” and so on. This shows that the readers of Hawkes and Minford’s translation expect a high degree of representation of the original content, while the Yangs’ readers pay more attention to a smooth reading experience in translation.

Second, regarding the fictional content of *Hongloumeng*, the readers of the two translations have different topics of interest, even though they all value whether the topics could be related to their applications in daily life.

“Traditional Chinese medicine,” with a topical strength of 27.2%, seems to be the topic of secondary concern by the readers of Hawkes and Minford’s version. It is made up by keywords such as “TCM,” “herbal,” and “medicine.” Meanwhile, “interpersonal strategies,” with the topical strength being 13.8%, is a topic of the least concern by the readers of Hawkes and Minford’s version. It contains keywords such as “life,” “everyone,” “interpersonal,” and “branding.” By contrast, the readers of Yangs’ translation seem to have fewer concerns for topics related to traditional Chinese medicine. Instead, they focus a lot on the topic of “interpersonal strategies,” which has a topical strength of 29.7% and mainly includes such keywords as “advice,” “life,” “teachings,” and “everyone.” This shows that the readers of Yangs’ translation have a higher approval of the wisdom conveyed in *Hongloumeng* about dealing with personal relationships, while the readers of Hawkes and Minford’s version pay less attention to this concept.

In terms of the negative reviews, readers of the two translations maintain a high degree of consistency in the numbers and content of their reviews. When it comes to the review numbers, the best number of topics for the readers’ reviews in the both English versions is three, with the topic coherence scores being 0.48 and 0.51, respectively. For the review content, according to the keywords under each topic, we label the three topics in the reviews of both translations as “editing and binding,” “translation quality,” and “fictional content” (see Table 14.3). As shown in the table, “translation quality” and “editing and binding” are the core topics that have attracted these readers’ attention. For the readers of Hawkes and Minford’s translation, the topical strength of “editing and binding” was as high as 40.1%, signifying that this topic could be their primary concern. Meanwhile, 34.1% of topical strength for “translation quality” shows that this topic might be their secondary concern. On the contrary, the topical strength of “translation quality” in the reviews of Yangs’ translation is as high as 43.0%, meaning that this topic could be their primary concern. At the same time, the topical strength of “editing and binding” is 35.8%, showing that this is a topic of secondary concern among these readers. The reason for the difference between the two versions may be due to the fact that Hawkes and Minford’s translation has a longer history of circulation than that of Yangs’ translation in the English-speaking world, as the former was published five years earlier than the latter. Consequently, the readers of the former may have a relatively wider interest in different aspects of this Chinese classic than the readers of Yangs’ version.

When it comes to the keywords under the topics in the reviews, the readers of Hawkes and Minford’s translation give negative reviews in a more detailed way. In the topic of “translation quality,” the readers of Hawkes’ translation often use keywords such as “error,” “abridged,” “condensed,” “summary,” and “omission”; in “editing and binding” and “fictional content,” the keywords are often associated with detailed descriptions such as “page,” “fonts,” “poetry,” and “medicine.” This shows that some readers of

Table 14.3 Topics and topical keywords in the negative reviews by readers of the two translations

<i>TTs</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Keywords (top 10)</i>
Hawkes and Minford's Translation	Editing and binding	40.1%	Price, bad, disappointed, waste, review, edition, cover, page, small, fonts
	Translation quality	34.1%	Error, translation, abridged, short, condensed, original, summary, content, omission, ill
	Fictional content	25.8%	Misleading, boring, life, poetry, insignificant showcase, nothing, medicine, obsolete, useless
Yangs' Translation	Translation quality	36.0%	Translation, quality, errors, taste, ill, content, lousy, disappointed, poor, unfaithful
	Editing and binding	35.8%	Cover, cheap, brochure, paper, simple, format, size, spelling, bad, small, color
	Fictional content	28.2%	Problem, easy, today, situations, clothing, apply, manual, simple, lacks, difficult

Hawkes and Minford's translation are dissatisfied with the translation quality, which may due partly to the omission of some original fictional details in the translated work. On the other hand, the negative reviews for Yangs' translation appear to be more general in negative descriptions. In the topic of "translation quality," there are some keywords of general evaluation such as "lousy," "ill," "disappointed," and "poor." In the topics of "editing and binding" and "fictional content," such keywords for overall evaluation as "cheap," "simple," "problem," and "difficult" make their frequent appearance in the reviews.

Through the above analysis, it is found that the readers of the two translations pay attention to different aspects of the translated *Honglouloumeng*. The following parts will continue to discuss the reception of the two translations from a cross-regional perspective, which involve analyses of reviews by readers from different English-speaking countries.

4.2 Reception of Honglouloumeng in Different English-Speaking Countries

Of all the reviews, 2,875 came from US readers, 902 from UK readers, and 440 from Canadian readers. Repeated LDA modeling on the reviews by readers from the three English-speaking countries illustrates that the best numbers of topics in the reviews by readers from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada are all three, with the topic coherence scores being 0.51, 0.54, and 0.49, respectively (see Table 14.4). Hence, it is clear that

readers from the three English-speaking countries not only pay attention to the fictional content of *Honglouloumeng* but also to the translation quality, book editing and binding, and other translation-related topics. Specific analyses of readers' reviews from the three English-speaking countries are listed as follows.

Overall, readers from Britain, the United States, and Canada mainly focus on the fictional content and the translational aspects of *Honglouloumeng*. First of all, although readers in the three countries all mentioned the practical value of *Honglouloumeng* wisdom in daily life, they have different focuses. The topic of "food and dining" (with a topical strength of 32.6%) appears in the British readers' reviews, and contains keywords such as "cuisine," "food," and "etiquette." This indicates that these British readers have a wide concern about the application of *Honglouloumeng* wisdom in areas ranging from food categories to cuisine etiquettes. In the US readers' reviews, "interpersonal strategies" (36.7% of the topical strength) is the most discussed topic. It includes keywords such as "everyone," "interpersonal," and "strategies." This shows that these American readers are very focused on the application of the *Honglouloumeng* wisdom in handling interpersonal connections. In addition, the topic of "traditional Chinese medicine" (30.3% of the topical strength) appears in the reviews of American readers, and contains keywords such as "medicine," "herbal," and "pills." This could indicate that the American readers are also concerned about *Honglouloumeng* wisdom and knowledge in medical practices. In the Canadian readers' reviews, "traditional Chinese medicine" is the most talked about topic. It has a topical strength of 46.9%, and contains keywords such as "herbal," "TCM," and "cold." In addition, the topic of "costumes and garments" (23.9% of the topical strength) also appears in the Canadian readers' reviews, and includes keywords such as "cloths," "style," and "garment." This shows in part that the Canadian readers also pay attention to the different styles of dressing by male and female characters in *Honglouloumeng*. Comparing the focuses on the application of *Honglouloumeng* wisdom by those readers in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, the study finds that both the US and Canadian readers mentioned the traditional Chinese medicine. This may demonstrate that readers in these two countries are more concerned about the practical uses of the *Honglouloumeng* knowledge and wisdom in the modern world. The British readers, by contrast, seem to pay more attention to areas such as food recipes and table manners depicted in *Honglouloumeng*.

Second, readers in Britain, the United States, and Canada also pay attention to the role of marketing in introducing the translation of *Honglouloumeng* to Western readers. The British readers seem to focus more on market promotion of the translated *Honglouloumeng*. In the topic of "marketing and pricing" (with a topical strength of 28.3%), their reviews mainly involve keywords such as "marketing," "seller," and "price." In addition, they also pay more attention to "translation quality" than American and Canadian readers (39.1% of topical strength) do. "Translation quality" is the most concerned

Table 14.4 Topics and their keywords in the reviews by British, American, and Canadian readers

<i>Region</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Keywords (top 10)</i>
UK	Translation quality	39.1%	Translation, text, accuracy, quality, amazing, perfect, readable, recommend, worth, fine
	Food and dining	32.6%	Manners, practical, cuisine, food, applied, today, future, etiquette, knowledge, life
	Marketing and pricing	28.3%	Product, service, marketing, sample, seller, price, delivery, item, shipping, vendor
US	Interpersonal strategies	36.7%	Everyone, life, interpersonal, world, money, easy, understand, strategies, use, everyday, apply
	Editing and binding	33.0%	Cover, hardcover, edition, binding, paperback, frontpage, illustration, small, fonts, footnotes
	Traditional Chinese medicine	30.3%	Medicine, TCM, pills, herbs, cold, attack, cure, heal, food, disease
Canada	Traditional Chinese medicine	46.9%	herbal, ill, cold, TCM, treatment, Recipe, food, cure, ancient, knowledge
	Marketing and pricing	29.2%	Product, fast, delivery, shipping, buy, order, marketing, price, seller, vendor
	Costumes and garments	23.9%	Clothing, garment, fashion, style, Chinese, traditional, situation, elegant, loose, wide

topic for UK readers. It contains keywords such as “translation,” “quality,” and “readable.” In the topic of “editing and binding” (33.0% of the topical strength), the American readers’ reviews mainly involve keywords like “hardcover,” “binding,” and “illustration.” In the topic “marketing and pricing” (29.2% of the topical strength), the Canadian readers’ reviews mainly involve keywords such as “marketing,” “delivery,” and “price.” Therefore, it is clear that the American readers attach great importance to the layout and design of the translated book, with such details as illustrations, fonts, and binding in particular. Meanwhile, the Canadian readers seem to be more interested in marketing information of the translated book such as pricing and vendors.

By examining the reviews by readers from different English-speaking countries, we found that readers who speak the same language but come from different regions have different topics of interest about *Hongloumeng*. This gives us some insight into the receptive details of Chinese classics in different countries. Further investigations of the readers’ reviews published

in different periods will give us more information about the reception of these two versions.

4.3 Reception of *Honglougeng* across Periods

The English reviews under investigation were published in the period from 2004 to 2021, with an overall time span of 18 years. This means that the two English translations of *Honglougeng* have received continuous attention from English-speaking readers since the early 2000s. In order to compare the reviews of English readers at different periods, we categorized the reviews as early (i.e., 2004–2009), middle (i.e., 2010–2015), and late periods (i.e., 2016–2021), with an interval of six years. Then, we performed the LDA modeling repeatedly on the reviews of each period. We took topics with the highest topic strength in each period as the hottest topic to explore the readers' interests in each period. The details are shown in Table 14.5.

In the early period, the number of reviews by English-speaking readers was relatively small: the number of reviews in 1998–2005 was only 109 (2.6% of the total). The number of reviews by the readers during the middle period increased to 713 (16.9% of the total). The late period had witnessed a significant increase of the reviews to 3,395 items, accounting for 80.4% of the total. Evidently, the number of reviews from these readers has doubled over time. This shows that English translations of *Honglougeng* have gained growing popularity among English-speaking readers over this time period. In addition, based on the optimal number of topics (topic coherence score ≥ 0.5) of reader reviews in each period, the number of topics contained in the English reviews also expands as time progresses. This likewise shows that the translated *Honglougeng* versions have gained increasing popularity among those English-speaking readers over time. To compare the topics of interest among those English-speaking readers over time, we will examine the hottest topics in each period in terms of topical strength and keywords.

From a holistic perspective, the most popular topics shared by English-speaking readers have evolved from extra-translation topics to translation-related topics. In the early period (i.e., 1998–2005), the readers seemed to focus a lot on topics connected to “fictional content,” whereas in the middle (i.e., 2006–2013) and late (i.e., 2014–2021) stages, they were more interested in topics related to “translation quality” and “marketing and pricing,” respectively. Thus, it might be safe for us to claim that the English-speaking readers have multi-dimensional reading interests in the translations of *Honglougeng*.

An examination of the topical strength and keywords of the hottest topics in the English reviews across different periods also point to the cross-temporal shifts of topics. As far as topic strength is concerned, the strength of the hottest topics emerged from the readers' reviews in each period is mostly maintained at about 20%, and the strength of some of the hottest topics, such as “fictional content” in the early period, is not greater

Table 14.5 The number of reviews and their hottest topics in different periods

Period	No. of reviews	Ratio	No. of topics	Hottest topic	Strength	Keywords (top 10)
2004–2009	109	2.6%	4	<i>Honglougong</i> wisdom	34.6%	Characters, opinion, philosophy, truism, knowledge, insight, military, thoughts, guidance, idea
2010–2015	713	16.9%	6	Translation quality	21.3%	Translation, content, quality, easy, simple, understand, error, omission, problem, lousy
2016–2021	3,395	80.5%	7	Marketing and pricing	18.9%	Price, marketing, delivery, order, buy, shipping, seller, agents, copy, fast

than 35%. From the perspective of keywords, besides some generalized abstract words such as “characters,” “opinion,” “life,” and “useful,” those English-speaking readers also use terms such as “seller,” “agents,” “price,” and “copy,” which are specific keywords related to the marketing, circulation, and pricing of the two English translations. All these reception details once again suggest that those English-speaking readers have wide reading interests in the translated *Honglougong*. A possible reason for such interests may be related to a long publication history as well as a wide circulation of the English translations of *Honglougong*.

4.4 Implications for the Translation of Chinese Classics in the West

By examining the online reviews of translated *Honglougong* from cross-version, cross-regional, and cross-temporal dimensions, we found that issues highly concerned by readers from different English-speaking countries can be categorized as “translational” and “extra-translational” ones. Specifically, these issues are mainly related to the three aspects—“translation quality,” “editing and binding,” and “marketing and pricing.” Overall, our analysis of the reception of *Honglougong* in those English-speaking countries has the following implications for the translation and promotion of Chinese classics in the West.

First, in terms of translation quality, reasonable translator intervention is important in making the translation of Chinese classics being more readily

accepted by Western readers. Here translator's intervention includes both making in-text comments and providing paratextual annotations for target readers. Many English-speaking readers find that these translator's intervention measures can greatly help them understand the content of the original. For instance, some American readers wrote: "The translators' comments in the text help to understand the original work," "The translation with the translators' comments in the text reads better," and "Embedding the translators' comments in the translation can improve the comprehension of complex content in the original work." Some British and Canadian readers also mentioned: "The English translations lack translators' necessary comments to elucidate the complex ideas in the text," "The comments in the translation make it easier for us to understand the original," and "The comments inserted in the translation clarify many difficulties," to list a few. Therefore, we have reasons to believe that appropriate in-text comments inserted by translators can not only aid readers to appropriately understand the original text and appreciate the cultural essence expressed in the original but also highlight the translator's subjectivity by making him/her visible in the translation of Chinese classics. In terms of paratext annotations, some readers in English-speaking countries agree that too many annotations will interfere with their fluent reading experience and undermine their favorable impression of the translation and even the original. In addition, some UK readers commented: "Lots of footnotes interrupt my reading from time to time," "Tired of unnecessary footnotes, just some translators' comments are enough," and "Overuse of footnotes is annoying." In a similar fashion, the American and Canadian readers commented: "Some footnotes in the English translation are redundant," "Too many footnotes distract me," and "I think embedded reviews in the translation are better than footnotes." Apparently, compared with a large number of paratext annotations, translators' in-text comments are more helpful for readers to understand the difficulties in the original work. For this reason, we argue that in-texts comments, if they are properly inserted by translators, will ensure readers' pleasant and smooth reading experience for the translation of Chinese traditional novel into English.

Second, from the perspective of editing and binding, traditional Chinese style book binding and in-text illustrations are the key factors for target readers to appreciate Chinese culture and art as well as enhance their recognition of Chinese classical literature. Many English readers think that the exquisite Chinese-style binding is like a unique piece of artwork from China. This would make these readers rate more positively about the translated book. For example, some British readers reviewed that, "In addition to translation, the Chinese-style binding makes the translation a work of art," "I recommend this book with Chinese-style binding to all readers interested in Chinese history and culture," and "This book is beautiful, its Chinese binding is great and it's a work of art." In the same regard, some American readers commented: "What attracts me most is the binding, it

is very beautiful,” “This is a good book, and the Chinese-style binding is very distinctive,” and “because of its excellent traditional binding, the whole book can be called a work of art.” These readers’ reviews tell us that translation alone is not enough for the promotion of the translation of Chinese classics in the West. It is equally important to lay a greater focus on the design of book binding, so that readers can visually appreciate the charm of Chinese culture and art. Moreover, those readers in English-speaking countries also agreed that vivid illustrations of story characters and events in the translated works can greatly enhance their reading experience and develop favorable impressions of the translated works. For example, some Canadian readers commented: “This is a beautiful book, the illustrations are very attractive,” “The beautiful illustrations have improved my reading experience,” and “The illustrations are almost works of art, and they are very helpful to the reading experience.” Some American readers also pointed out: “The binding is very good, and the illustrations are also great,” “full-color illustrations containing Chinese culture are the plus,” and “I highly recommend this book, it is the best version I have ever seen, and the illustrations are the icing on the cake.” In other words, in addition to ensure the translation quality, translators of Chinese classics need to take into account the visual communication with their target readers and provide them with a multimodal channel to understand the original.

Third, from the perspective of pricing and marketing, overpricing and limited sales channels are the two major problems which have hindered the promotion of the translations of Chinese classical literature in the West. In some reviews, many American readers complained that overpricing has discouraged them from buying a copy of the translated *Honglougongmeng*. For example, some readers argued: “A little disappointed to see the price,” “This is a good book, but the price is disappointing,” and “I like Chinese classics, but this book is too expensive.” Some Canadian readers expressed similar views, believing that even though book versions of translated *Honglougongmeng* are beautifully designed, the high price of these translated copies has hindered the circulation of this Chinese classic among readers. Some commented: “It is worth buying the book, but it is expensive,” “Classic but expensive,” and “Although it is a good book that should be kept at home and in the library, the pricing is a bit unreasonable.” It is apparent that the high price will greatly reduce target readers’ enthusiasm to purchase copies of translation. Consequently, it will have a negative impact on the dissemination of Chinese classics in the West. Limited promotion channels are another issue, which has blocked the circulation of Chinese classics such as *Honglougongmeng* in the West. In this respect, some UK readers pointed out: “This is a masterpiece, but it’s hard to get it outside of Amazon,” “Good book, but limited marketing channels,” and “Only five sellers sell this book online, so the selling price very high.” Some Canadian readers also reviewed: “It’s almost impossible to buy this book outside of Amazon,” “This Chinese

classic has limited purchasing channels online and offline,” and “Classic, but expensive and difficult to buy.” In a nutshell, the present promotion channels of *Honglougong* in English-speaking countries are very limited, mostly confined to some online selling and purchasing platforms such as Amazon.com and Goodreads.com. Meanwhile, the number of vendors selling the translation online is also quite limited. In terms of pricing and marketing, if the translations of Chinese classics are to sell well in the Western market, good translation quality and characteristic binding designs are not enough. It is also necessary to set a reasonable price and expand promotion channels to increase Western readers’ accessibility to them.

5. Conclusion

As a text mining technique, topic modeling is used in the current study to discover potential topics in readers’ reviews, and provide a methodological support for our analysis of the reception of the translations of Chinese novel *Honglougong* into English. Our analysis finds that the topics of shared concerns by these readers are “translation quality,” “editing and binding,” and “marketing and pricing.”

Both practical and theoretical implications can be drawn from this study. Practically, the study demonstrates that successful promotion of Chinese classics in the English-speaking countries requires not only faithful translation strategies and effective multimodal designs but also a reasonable mechanism for pricing and marketing. Theoretically, by using topic modeling in mining translation data, the research showcases the applicability and potential for applying the method in corpus-based translation study and thus expands the field into new territories.

Nevertheless, the inclusion of only two English translations of *Honglougong* is the main limitation of this study. This prevents us from a more comprehensive study of the reviews of all English translations of this great Chinese novel. For future research, it is advised to include more readers’ reviews on different English translations of *Honglougong* for reception studies.

Note

- 1 The topic coherence scores, direct outputs of “Gensim,” are used to assess the topic modeling effect when we set different numbers of topics in a single corpus. The best modeling effect here is achieved when we set five topics in the reviews of Hawkes and Minford’s translation and four topics in the reviews of Yang’s translation, with the coherence scores being 0.57 and 0.53, respectively.

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