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A study on George Kin Leung's translation thought in *The Lone Swan*: motives, principles, and strategies

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Abstract. This study examines George Kin Leung's translation thought through his English translation of Su Manshu's *Duanhong Lingyan Ji*, a work hailed as "the first successful Chinese novel of the early Republican period" and published in English as *The Lone Swan*. Although Leung has received scholarly attention for his role in the overseas dissemination of Chinese drama and for his English translation of Lu Xun, this translation remains largely neglected. Combining contextual inquiry with close textual analysis, the study investigates the motives, principles, and strategies that shaped Leung's translation practice. It argues that his translation was driven by four main motives: personal affinity with Su Manshu, identification with the novel's spiritual and autobiographical dimensions, the pedagogical value of translation as English-learning material in the 1920s, and the translator's professional self-positioning. These motives were embodied in a guiding principle of "accuracy, clarity, and beauty" and in a strategy centered on literal translation, supplemented by free translation as well as such techniques as omission, addition, and explicitation. The translation thus reflects early Chinese translators' exploration of Yan Fu's translation theory of "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance" while highlighting Leung's multiple roles as an interpreter, educator, and cultural mediator.

Keywords: George Kin Leung, *The Lone Swan*, translation thought, literary translation, translation strategies

1. Introduction

George Kin Leung (1899–1977) was an important yet still understudied figure in the early translation and circulation of modern Chinese literature. As a Chinese American intellectual active in the first half of the twentieth century, he engaged in several forms of cross-cultural mediation, including the introduction of modern Chinese fiction to English readers, the overseas promotion of Chinese drama, and the interpretation of Chinese culture for international audiences. He is often remembered as the first translator to bring Lu Xun's *The True Story of Ah Q (A Q Zhengzhuan)* into English, and he has also been associated with the international reception of Mei Lanfang, a renowned Peking opera master and one of the most influential figures in modern Chinese theatre. Wu-chi Liu even described him as the first major translator of modern Chinese fiction into English [1]. Yet Leung's role as a literary translator has long been overshadowed by his prominence in the field of drama.

This imbalance is also reflected in existing scholarship. Studies on Leung have remained limited and tend to focus either on his role in the overseas dissemination of Chinese opera or on his English translation of Lu

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Xun. Jiang [2] and Guo [3], for example, examine Leung primarily as a dramatist and emphasize his contribution to the international dissemination of Chinese drama in the 1920s and 1930s. The remaining studies concentrate on his English translation of Lu Xun's *The True Story of Ah Q*: Ouyang [4] discusses its motives, process, and textual features; Wang [5] analyzes translatorial hexis theory in the translation of Chinese culture based on the same text; and Ji [6] investigates Leung's translation strategies. Many other discussions mention Leung only within comparative studies of multiple English versions of *The True Story of Ah Q*, rather than treating his translation practice as an independent subject of inquiry. Such studies often judge a historical translation by modern standards and tend to view Leung's version rather negatively, thereby overlooking the distinctive value of his work in its specific historical and socio-cultural context.

By contrast, his translation *The Lone Swan* has received almost no sustained scholarly attention. This neglect is particularly striking because the translation offers a valuable case for reconsidering the translator's agency, priorities, and methods in the early translation of Chinese literature into English. Originally published in 1912, *Duanhong Lingyan Ji* is one of the representative novels of the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School (Yuanyang Hudie pai). Written by Su Manshu (1884–1918) and hailed as "the first successful Chinese novel of the early Republican period", the work combines autobiographical sentiment, Buddhist reflection, and romantic tragedy. Its language moves between classical and vernacular registers, while its themes are closely tied to the author's cross-cultural identity and spiritual sensibility. In 1924, Leung translated the novel into English under the title *The Lone Swan*. Although the translation did not gain wide circulation in the English-speaking world, its marginal status makes it especially useful for recovering a mode of translation practice that mainstream literary history has largely ignored.

This paper examines the translation thought embodied in Leung's English rendering of *The Lone Swan*. Combining contextual reading with textual analysis, it first explores the motives behind Leung's decision to translate the novel and then analyzes the principles and strategies that shaped his translation practice. It argues that Leung's work can be understood through a threefold principle explicitly articulated in his foreword: accuracy, clarity, and beauty. Rather than a mechanical translator, Leung emerges as a historically situated mediator who sought to balance fidelity to the Chinese source text with readability and literary effect in English. By focusing on Leung's role as a translator and on his English translation of *The Lone Swan*, this study not only helps enrich the narrative of Chinese translation history, but also offers a valuable historical perspective for current research on cross-cultural communication.

2. George Kin Leung and *the Lone Swan*

A clearer understanding of Leung's translation of *The Lone Swan* requires attention to both the translator's intellectual formation and the literary character of the source text. Leung's bilingual and bicultural background laid an important foundation for his translation work. With ancestral roots in Xinhui, Guangdong, he was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, into an overseas Chinese family. As a second-generation immigrant, he received an American education while retaining competence in both Chinese and English. He later studied drama and music and, after his father's death, traveled widely in China, living in major cities such as Guangzhou, Hangzhou, Shanghai, and Beijing. These experiences not only deepened his familiarity with Chinese cultural traditions but also brought him into close contact with Su Manshu (1884–1918), the modern romantic "poet-monk". Their shared commitment to literature and art further strengthened Leung's identification with Chinese culture and stimulated his sustained interest in its study. These experiences shaped Leung's later role as a mediator between China and the West.

Leung's broader intellectual reputation rests on three main achievements. First, he was an active scholar of traditional Chinese drama, publishing seven English books and thirty-eight articles on the subject and delivering twenty-one lectures to international audiences [2, 6]. Second, he contributed to the English translation and cultural framing of Chinese operatic performance, including work related to Mei Lanfang's tours of the United States and the Soviet Union, and also served as Mei's English tutor. His expertise in this field won broad recognition abroad, and he was described by Western commentators and overseas scholars as "an authority on the traditional dramatic art of China and its modern exponents" [7]. Third, although Leung's output as a literary translator was limited, his two major literary translations, *The Lone Swan and The True Story of Ah Q*, secured him a prominent place in the early history of Chinese literature in English [7]. The republication of *The Lone Swan* and the multiple editions and reprints of his translation of *The True Story of Ah Q* in both China and abroad further attest to their standing and influence.

Yet, Leung's reputation as a literary translator has long been overshadowed by his prominence in drama. If the existing scholarship has paid some attention to his translation of *The True Story of Ah Q*, his English translation of Su Manshu's *Duanhong Lingyan Ji*, published as *The Lone Swan* [8], has remained largely neglected. This neglect not only leaves an important translator underexamined, but also obscures an illuminating moment in the early history of Chinese literary translation into English.

The source text itself deserves close attention. *Duanhong Lingyan Ji* holds an important place in the literary culture of early Republican China. As a novel by Su Manshu, it reflects a life marked by cultural hybridity, spiritual conflict, and emotional unrest. Its language is rich in metaphor, allusion, and Buddhist diction, and its narrative combines lyricism with psychological introspection. These features make the work difficult to translate, but they also make it especially revealing for the study of a translator's priorities. In Leung's hands, the novel became not simply an object of linguistic transfer, but a site where questions of cultural representation, intelligibility, and literary value had to be negotiated at the same time. For this reason, *The Lone Swan* provides an especially productive entry point for examining Leung's translation thought in both its historical and textual dimensions.

3. Motives for translating *The Lone Swan*

Given Leung's bilingual background, his intellectual trajectory, and the literary character of the novel, his decision to translate *The Lone Swan* emerged from the convergence of personal affinity, spiritual identification, pedagogical purpose, and professional self-positioning. The translation was not simply an act of linguistic transfer, but a culturally situated undertaking in which emotional attachment, literary admiration, social utility, and career formation intersected.

One important motive lay in Leung's sense of personal affinity with Su Manshu and in the cross-cultural resonance between translator and author. Su was born in Yokohama to a Chinese father and a Japanese mother, and his life was marked by movement across linguistic, cultural, and religious worlds. His repeated entry into and withdrawal from monastic life further intensified the tension between worldly attachment and spiritual aspiration that runs through his writing. As a Chinese American who likewise inhabited more than one cultural sphere, Leung may well have felt a strong affinity with the emotional atmosphere of drifting, loneliness, and divided belonging that permeates the novel. In this sense, the image of the "lone swan" may also articulate a condition of displacement that would have been deeply legible to Leung himself.

A second motive lay in Leung's identification with the novel's spiritual and philosophical core. His foreword suggests that he understood Su's narrative in two closely related ways. On the one hand, he read it as a form of autobiographical writing. On the other, he regarded it as a vehicle for expressing Buddhism in its

pure form and for dramatizing a movement beyond worldly desire [8]. His favorable description of Buddhism as a "great religion" [8] indicates that he did not approach the text merely as a linguistic or literary exercise. Rather, he recognized and valued its spiritual dimension, and this recognition likely strengthened his commitment to translation. Leung was therefore interpreting what he took to be the author's larger moral and philosophical vision.

A third motive can be located in Leung's view of translation as English-learning material within the social context of the 1920s. During a period of intensified contact with the West and expanding demand for foreign-language education in China, translation and language learning were closely linked, especially within modern publishing institutions. In his foreword, Leung states that his original intention was to publish the work in bilingual form for the convenience of Chinese students studying English: "… the translator's original intention to have this book in bilingual form for the convenience of Chinese students who were studying English" [8]. Although the work was ultimately issued as an English-only volume at the publisher's request, this practical orientation closely aligned with the Commercial Press's broader educational mission. It also reveals Leung's sensitivity to contemporary socio-cultural needs. Through translation, he sought not only to mediate literature but also to participate in the dissemination of knowledge and to respond to the growing desire among Chinese readers to gain access to Western language and culture. In this respect, the translation answered the demands of its historical moment while also expressing the translator's active role in cultural formation. This pedagogical motive also helps explain Leung's emphasis on close adherence to the Chinese text whenever possible.

Finally, Leung's translation may also be understood as a form of professional self-positioning. Having recently returned to China in the mid-1920s, he needed to establish himself within the local cultural and intellectual field. Translating a well-known work by Su Manshu could demonstrate not only bilingual competence but also literary sensitivity, cultural discernment, and scholarly ambition. In this sense, *The Lone Swan* offered Leung an opportunity to claim a place within the emerging field of modern Chinese literary translation. The translator's foreword reveals a notably self-conscious stance in this regard. Leung acknowledges that *The Lone Swan* has "necessarily lost much of its exquisite phrasing and the actual music of its flawless lines", yet insists that he "has made great effort to preserve the lyrical tone of the narrative which the author intentionally employed in writing his story" [8]. This mixture of modesty and assertion suggests a translator who was carefully shaping his public identity. The lengthy acknowledgments in the foreword [8] reinforce this impression, as they point to his concern with intellectual affiliation, scholarly recognition, and professional legitimacy.

Jointly, these four motives show that Leung's translation of *The Lone Swan* was informed by his cross-cultural self-understanding, his engagement with the novel's spiritual vision, his pedagogical awareness, and his desire to position himself within a broader literary and intellectual network. Recognizing this motivational structure helps explain why his translation practice combines strong fidelity to the source text with a strategic concern for readability, clarity, and literary effect.

4. Translation thought and strategies in *The Lone Swan*

The most explicit statement of Leung's translation thought appears in his foreword: "Practically all the lines of the original Chinese have been carefully and literally translated, however, excepting in cases where changes were absolutely necessary for the sake of clarity of meaning or beauty of expression with due regard to accurate translation" [8]. This statement reveals not merely a set of preferences but a hierarchy of values. "Accuracy" remains the governing principle, while "clarity" and "beauty" function as secondary but legitimate

grounds for intervention. Leung's translation thought may therefore be understood as organized around a threefold principle: accuracy, clarity, and beauty.

Accuracy, for Leung, does not mean mechanical lexical equivalence in every instance; nor do clarity and beauty justify unrestricted freedom. Rather, the translation proceeds from close adherence to the source text and allows departure only when literal translation would obstruct comprehension or weaken literary effect. His practice is thus best understood not as a simple opposition between literal and free translation, but as a carefully balanced strategy among competing priorities.

4.1. Accuracy

Leung's pursuit of accuracy is especially evident in his preference for literal translation. Because the work was originally intended as a bilingual edition for Chinese readers learning English, he adopted what may be called an accuracy-first principle and stressed that he "took great care to follow the Chinese text, word for word, whenever it was possible" [8], which was meant to provide learners with a reliable linguistic reference. Even after the publishers decided to issue the work as an English-only volume, and even though Leung acknowledged that he had "made many changes in his work in order to make the English read more smoothly" [8], literal translation remained his default procedure. He departs from the source text only when "clarity" or "beauty" requires it.

4.1.1. Faithful reproduction of metaphorical imagery

One important manifestation of Leung's accuracy-first principle lies in his near-verbabtim translation of figurative language. *Duanhong Lingyan Ji* is saturated with metaphors, especially in passages that articulate Saburo's emotional life. As shown in Table 1, Leung often preserves the original imagery rather than replacing it with smoother idiomatic English. These translations may sound foreign in English, but that freshness is central to Leung's method. He seeks to preserve what he calls the "spirit of the original text" [8], not merely its referential meaning.

Table 1. Leung's translation of metaphors in *The Lone Swan*

Source Text	Target Text	Translation Method
情澜	love's surging waves	Literal Translation
情网已张	love's net had already spread itself about me	
系于情者	He who is tied by the silken threads	
自绾愁丝	wound up my own silken threads of sorrow	
插翼难飞	it was difficult for entangled wings to fly	

As Table 1 indicates, Leung's treatment of metaphors is defined by retention rather than domestication. He reproduces the source images as fully as possible, even at the expense of stylistic smoothness, thereby preserving both the emotional intensity and the rhetorical texture of the original. Accuracy, in this sense, involves not only semantic fidelity but also fidelity to figurative form.

This tendency is especially visible in the following examples.

(1) Source text: 其妹微蹙其眉,太息曰:"其如玉葬香埋何?" [9]

Target text: The sister slightly contracted her brows and heaved a deep sigh, saying, "Her jade person has been interred; her fragrance, buried" [8].

The phrase "玉葬香埋" in this example employs metonymy. "Jade" evokes "her" (Snow Mei's) beauty and bodily presence, while "fragrance" suggests moral refinement and feminine grace. Together, the phrase does more than say that she has died; it converts death into an elegiac image. Leung preserves this structure almost

intact. "Jade person" is unusual in English, and "her fragrance, buried" is even more marked syntactically. Yet to normalize the expression into something like "she has died" would erase precisely the ornamental compression and the indirect mode of mourning which matters most in the source text. The translation thus reveals Leung's willingness to accept a degree of foreignness in order to preserve the rhetorical texture of the original. What is "accurate" here is not merely denotation, but the source text's elevated mode of feeling and its poetical touch. At the same time, this choice involves a trade-off. The English sounds conspicuously literary and perhaps opaque, especially to readers unfamiliar with Chinese figurative conventions. But that opacity is not a failure of control. It shows that Leung is prepared, at least in some passages, to privilege metaphorical structure over immediate naturalness.

(2) Source text: 嗟乎!望吾慈母,切勿驱儿作哑羊可耳! [9]

Target text: Ah, how I hoped that my mother would not force me to be a dumb sheep, that is, let me suffer because of silence. I earnestly hoped that my wish would be granted [8].

In Example 2, Leung again begins with literal translation. In the case where "驱儿作哑羊" becomes "force me to be a dumb sheep", the metaphor is preserved rather than paraphrased. But unlike Example 1, he immediately adds an explanatory gloss: "that is, let me suffer because of silence". This addition shows that literal translation remains the starting point even when the image may not be self-explanatory in English. He first preserves the metaphorical surface and only then clarifies its implied meaning. In this way, rhetorical fidelity is maintained, but interpretive access is also supplied. This is characteristic of Leung's broader practice. Accuracy is not abandoned in favor of paraphrase; rather, paraphrase is subordinated to accuracy.

(3) Source text: 将行李放堂外左边,即自往右边鹄立 [9].

Target text: After I had put my baggage outside the hall to the left side, I went to the right side and stood as immovable as the proverbial swan [8].

Here, the phrase "鹄立" compares a standing posture to that of a swan, emphasizing uprightness, stillness, and composure. Leung retains the avian image and reinforces it with "immovable", thereby bringing out the posture's controlled stability. The modifier "proverbial" is not required for basic comprehension, but helps frame the swan as a culturally legible image rather than an arbitrary bird comparison. In effect, Leung tries to naturalize the image just enough to keep it readable without dissolving it into a flat paraphrase such as "stood upright". The example thus shows that his literal translation is deliberate rather than mechanical. He preserves the metaphor, but he also manages its reception.

4.1.2. Preservation of cultural elements

Leung's concern with accuracy also extends to culture-loaded terms, namely expressions that carry culturally specific meanings, references, or associations beyond their immediate lexical sense. In dealing with names, place names, titles, official ranks, religious expressions, and idiomatic formulations, he generally adopts a source-oriented approach that seeks to preserve the cultural flavor of the original. Rather than systematically replacing such items with domesticated English equivalents, he often retains their source-language form through transliteration, literal translation, or partial transliteration, sometimes supplemented by annotation or explicitation. The result is a translation that keeps cultural flavor visible while still offering target readers enough guidance to follow the text.

As Table 2 shows, Leung's treatment of culture-loaded terms is governed by a broadly source-oriented principle, though the techniques through which this principle is realized are varied rather than uniform. When the cultural specificity of the source term is itself central (e.g., "百越"), Leung tends to preserve its original form through transliteration or literal translation. In such cases, especially with place names, it is often sufficient for readers to recognize the item simply as a place marker; further semantic unpacking is unnecessary. Transliteration and literal translation, for this very reason, not only identify the geographical

referent but also preserve the cultural distinctiveness of the original. By contrast, when a source term (e.g., "五时八教") would remain insufficiently intelligible if retained without support, to the point of obstructing the development and interpretation of the context, Leung supplements it with annotation, descriptive translation, or explicitation. And where formal retention alone is unlikely to communicate effectively (e.g., "肝胆照人"), he resorts to freer translation in order to convey its functional or cultural meaning more directly, without unnecessarily elaborating their deeper cultural implications. What unites these different procedures is not a single technique, but a consistent translational priority that Leung seeks, whenever possible, to keep the source term, image, or cultural reference visible rather than fully assimilating it into English.

Table 2. Leung's translation of culture-loaded terms in *The Lone Swan*

Type	Source Text	Target Text	Translation Technique(s)
Ecology	百越	Pai Yüeh	transliteration
	吴梅村	Wu Mai-ts'un	
	黄叶村	Yellow Leaf village	literal translation
	幽燕	Yu or Yen [modern Peking]	alternative transliteration supplemented by annotation
Material Culture	《内典》	Nai-tien	transliteration
	吴绵	Wu cotton	partial transliteration
	冷泉亭	Cold Spring Pavilion	literal translation
	雁柱鸣筝	a chêng, the handle and tuning knobs of which reminded one of swans in angular flight	transliteration supplemented by descriptive translation with explicitation
Social Culture	清明节	Ch'ing Ming	transliteration
	知府	Chih-fu	
	澹归和尚	Tan-kuei [a famous scholar of the Ming dynasty]	transliteration supplemented by annotation
	科举	the examination system	free translation
Religion	真言	"True Words"	literal translation
	三藏	"San-tsong" (Tripitaka)	transliteration supplemented by annotation (double presentation)
	五时八教	the five seasons and eight teachings to [referring to the teachings of Buddha]	literal translation supplemented by annotation
	阿弥陀佛	Blessings on you	free translation
Linguistics	日出而作，日入而息	work in the fields by day and rested at nightfall	literal translation
	束手待毙	let their hands fall to their sides to await death	semi-literal rendering with explicitation
	肝胆照人	uprightness in his daily dealings with others	free translation
	雄浑奇伟	Heroic, all-embracing, mysterious, gigantic	interpretive free translation with amplification

In this regard, the examples in Table 2 suggest that Leung's preservation of cultural elements operates on two levels. On the one hand, he retains the linguistic and cultural form of the original through transliteration, literal translation, and semi-literal rendering; on the other, he controls potential incomprehensibility through annotation, descriptive expansion, and selective free translation. His principle therefore does not amount to rigid foreignization, but it is a strategy that preserves cultural provenance while preventing incomprehensibility. The table further suggests that Leung also seems to follow a principle close to the Chinese notion of rendering names according to the pronunciation or naming convention of their own linguistic communities. In Leung's translated work, Chinese names such as "Ch'ao (潮儿)" and "Tsung-lang (宗郎)", Sanskrit-derived religious names such as "Buddha Sakyamuni (大日如来)" and "the god Vyasa (马鸣菩萨)", English names such as "the Reverend Mr. Roberts (罗弼牧师)", and Japanese names such as "Saburo (三郎)" and "Keiko (惠子)" are all treated in this way. Accuracy, in this context entails respecting the historical and cultural identity of the source term, even when some degree of mediation is needed for target readers.

An especially revealing case is Leung's treatment of the term "天", which shows that his notion of accuracy is not limited to lexical repetition but extends to contextual and cultural precision. In Chinese contexts, he consistently renders "天" as "heaven", even though the term carries different meanings in different instances. It may refer to the physical sky, as in "昼夜向天呼号" ("Day and night, they cried to Heaven") and "天忽阴晦" ("the heavens suddenly darkened"); to a higher spiritual power, as in "天乎!天乎!" ("Heaven, great Heaven!"), "吾感谢上苍" ("I feel grateful to Heaven"), and "静子慧骨天生" ("Kiyoko's brilliant mentality comes straight from heaven"); or to heaven as a cosmological realm, as in "碧落黄泉" ("I searched high heaven and deep earth"). Despite these semantic variations, Leung preserves the term within a shared Chinese conceptual horizon by consistently translating it as "heaven". What he retains, then, is not merely a word, but a culturally specific worldview in which "天" can move flexibly between natural, moral, and cosmological meanings. By contrast, when the term appears in the blessing spoken by the Spanish missionary Reverend Roberts, Leung renders it as "Father" as shown in Example 4:

(4) Source text: 孺子珍重,上帝必宠锡尔福慧兼修 [9].

Target text: Take good care of yourself, son, and our heavenly Father will surely grant you blessings and wisdom in full measure [8].

The translational choice here is highly significant. Instead of maintaining formal consistency by translating every instance of "天" in the same way, Leung shifts the term into the doctrinal language appropriate to Christian speech. In doing so, he preserves not the surface form of the original expression, but the cultural and religious voice of the speaker. The contrast between "heaven" in Chinese contexts and "Father" in the missionary's speech therefore reveals a deeper translational logic that for Leung, fidelity lies not in mechanical sameness, but in preserving the cultural and semantic context in which an utterance makes sense. In this sense, accuracy is inseparable from contextual judgment and requires the translator to recognize that the same lexical item may belong to different symbolic systems and must therefore be rendered differently if its cultural force is to be preserved.

4.2. Clarity

If "accuracy" is the governing principle in Leung's translation thought, "clarity" is the point at which fidelity becomes negotiable. As the discussion of literal translation in the previous section has shown, Leung generally begins from close adherence to the source text, yet he does not equate fidelity with mechanical word-for-word translation. Whenever literal translation threatens to obscure meaning in English, he turns to a set of clarifying procedures—most notably explicitation, omission, free translation, and addition. These strategies do not

displace "accuracy"; rather, they operate within it to make the source text readable without wholly abandoning its rhetorical or cultural flavor.

4.2.1. Explicitation

Explicitation is one of Leung's most characteristic strategies for achieving clarity. Because the Chinese source text often relies on compression, implication, and culturally embedded associations, a formally close translation may preserve wording while leaving the intended sense obscure. Leung therefore frequently makes implicit information explicit by identifying referents, unpacking emotional logic, or restating culturally specific implications. In doing so, he shifts part of the burden of interpretation from the reader to the translation itself.

(5) Source text: 余与法忍至上海,始悉襟间银票,均已不翼而飞,…… [9].

Target text: When Fa-jên and I had arrived at Shanghai, all the money in my coat had taken flight, although it had no wings; in other words, the money had been stolen [8].

A clear example is his translation of "不翼而飞" shown in Example 4. Literally, the phrase means that something has "flown away without wings", but in context it simply means that the money has been stolen. Leung preserves the metaphor first—"had taken flight, although it had no wings"—and only then adds the explicating clause, "in other words, the money had been stolen". He does not immediately replace the idiom with its denotative meaning; instead, he allows the figurative surface of the Chinese to remain visible before securing comprehension through paraphrase. The result is a two-step translation: the first part preserves the idiomatic image, while the second part prevents misreading. What is clarified here is not only the event itself but also the relation between figurative language and contextual reference.

(6) Source text: 自念拒之于心良弗忍;受之则睹物思人,宁可力行正照,直证无生耶? [9]

Target text: I thought to myself that I could not have had the heart to refuse the gift; again, if I were to accept it, I would remember Kiyoko every time I looked at the token. How was it possible for me to carry out my mother's wishes and at the same time fulfill the desires of Kiyoko's heart? [8]

In Example 6, explicitation operates at a deeper interpretive level. In "受之则睹物思人", the source text leaves both "人" and "物" unspecified, relying on the reader to infer them from the narrative situation. Leung identifies them explicitly as "Kiyoko" and "the token", thus converting a compact emotional formula into a concrete interpersonal scene. Additionally, "力行正照,直证无生" carries strong Buddhist resonance and remains semantically compressed in Chinese. Instead of translating the phrase literally, Leung recasts it as a conflict between "my mother's wishes" and "Kiyoko's heart". This shift makes the narrator's dilemma immediately intelligible, but it also alters the register of the original that doctrinal and spiritual abstraction is translated into emotional and relational terms. It is an interpretive intervention that clarifies by reorienting the sentence towards the target reader's emotional comprehension.

(7) Source text: 斯时,余正觉心中如有所念,移时,又怃然若失 [9].

Target text: I perceived at the time that my heart entertained yearnings for a coming romance; but it was not long before I felt frustrated by the realization that this hope could never be consummated [8].

A similar tendency appears in Example 7 in a more psychological register. "心中如有所念" merely suggests that some thought or feeling has arisen in the narrator's mind, without specifying its content. Leung turns this vague indication into "yearnings for a coming romance", thereby giving the feeling a definite emotional direction. Likewise, "怃然若失" names a mood of loss without stating what has caused it. In the translation, however, the cause becomes explicit: the narrator is frustrated by the realization that "this hope could never be consummated". Leung thus supplies not only the emotional state but also its causal structure, so that the translation becomes more narratively transparent and psychologically analytic than the source text. In

this sense, clarity and thus readability are enhanced. What is emotionally resonant in Chinese because of its restraint becomes more explicit and accessible in English because it is explained.

4.2.2. Omission

Leung also uses omission, especially where he considers the source text stylistically repetitive or rhetorically excessive in English. His aim is not to reduce meaning, but to remove what he sees as unnecessary lexical redundancy so that the translation reads with greater concision and flow. In the foreword, he explicitly criticizes what he regards as Su Manshu's overuse of certain expressions, remarking that "Even a genius like Mandju has pet habits that are annoying" and that "other cases of this nature necessitated omissions, in order to avoid monotony" [8]. Omission therefore emerges as a deliberate stylistic principle rather than as accidental loss.

A representative example appears in the opening sentence of Chapter 23: "忽一日,监院过余言曰: ……" [9], which Leung renders simply as "One day the overseer of the affairs of the monastery came to me and said: …" [8]. The omitted "忽" contributes little concrete information and mainly marks the opening movement of the narrative. By removing it, Leung streamlines the sentence without substantially affecting its meaning.

This principle becomes more evident when repeated markers of suddenness cluster in close proximity.

(8) Source text: 余言甫发,忽觉静子筋脉跃动,骤松其柔荑之掌.余知其心固中吾言而愕然耳.余正思言以他事,忽尔悲风自海面吹来,乃至山岭,出林薄而去 [9].

Target text: My words had barely left my lips when I suddenly perceived Kiyoko's whole body trembling. Her soft white palm loosened its hold and fell away. I realized that she was startled by my words, and I was trying to turn the conversation to something else when a moaning wind arose from the sea and brushing over the mountain peaks and tree tops, finally subsided [8].

In this passage the source text uses three different markers of suddenness—"忽", "骤", and "忽尔"—within a very short span. Leung renders only the first explicitly as "suddenly". The other two are omitted as lexical markers, but their force is redistributed elsewhere: "loosened its hold and fell away" conveys abrupt bodily reaction, while the syntax of "when a moaning wind arose" preserves the sense of sudden atmospheric interruption. Therefore, Leung omits repetitive adverbial signals but retains their effect through verbal action and sentence rhythm. Omission in his translation is often compensatory as what disappears at the lexical level reappears in the momentum of the narrative. Clarity here is achieved not by reducing intensity, but by preventing the translation from sounding over-insistent or monotonous in English.

4.2.3. Free translation

Where literal translation would fail to communicate effectively, Leung adopts free translation as a flexible means of securing intelligibility. Such freedom is grounded in his effort to preserve what he takes to be the semantic core or functional force of the original, even when its formal structure cannot be carried over without producing awkwardness or obscurity.

The title itself is the clearest example. Rather than translating "断鸿零雁" literally, he condenses it into "*The Lone Swan*". A literal title such as "*The Shattered and Lone Swan*" would be cumbersome and obscure. By selecting "*The Lone Swan*", Leung sacrifices part of the source image cluster while preserving its dominant emotional force: loneliness, drift, and estrangement. As he explains in the foreword, the narrative makes it clear that "the Reverend Mandju means that he himself was shattered and lone" [8]. The title thus exemplifies a broader strategy of symbolic simplification.

(9) Source text: 叟曰:"勉乎哉,客今回头是岸,佳也" [9].

Target text: "Have courage", the old man added, "it is fortunate that you have learned a bitter lesson and will be wiser hereafter" [8].

In Example 9, the phrase "回头是岸" is a saying with strong Buddhist resonance, suggesting that one who repents may turn back from error and find release. Leung does not preserve either the literal image of "turning back" or the metaphor of "the shore". Instead, he translates the phrase in terms of moral lesson and future wisdom. This choice gives up the culturally specific image but retains the pragmatic force of the phrase which is meant to console, admonish, and redirect. The translation therefore privileges speech act over image.

(10) Source text: "慈母见背,吾心悲极为僧,庐墓于此,三经弦望矣" [9].

Target text: "My kindly mother has passed away. I was so very sad that I entered the monkhood and have lived here by the grave for three months" [8].

A similar case appears in Leung's treatment of "弦望", a term from traditional Chinese astronomy referring to lunar phases. Since "三经弦望矣" means that roughly three lunar months have passed, Leung translates it simply as "for three months". The decision removes the culturally marked temporal expression and replaces it with a familiar English unit of time. Here free translation functions as pragmatic simplification. The phrase is therefore rendered according to what matters locally in context, not according to its etymological or cultural density.

4.2.4. Addition

Addition is closely related to explicitation, but it usually involves the amplification of detail, imagery, or contextual information. Whereas explicitation often clarifies what is implicit, addition more actively develops the target text's descriptive surface. In Leung's translation, this strategy increases clarity and enhances vividness.

(11) Source text: 一日凌晨,钟声徐发,余倚刹角危楼,看天际沙鸥明灭 [9].

Target text: It was at dawning one day when the deep-throated gong boomed forth its leisurely notes that I leaned against a high tower in a remote corner of the monastery and watched the sea gulls appear and disappear in the distant sky, as they drew near or withdrew in flight [8].

Here Leung amplifies both sound and sight. "钟声徐发" becomes not merely "the bell sounded slowly", but "the deep-throated gong boomed forth its leisurely notes". The additions—"deep-throated", "boomed forth", and "notes"—not only clarify the scene but also texture it acoustically, giving the bell a timbre and rhythm that the concise Chinese leaves implicit. Similarly, in translating "看天际沙鸥明灭", he adds "as they drew near or withdrew in flight", thereby turning the visual alternation of "明灭" into an explicitly dynamic explanation. These additions show that Leung often achieves clarity through added sensory detail so that the scene is staged more fully for the English reader.

(12) Source text: 使尔离绝岛民根性,冀尔长进为人中龙也 [9].

Target text: She arranged for your complete estrangement from the island people [Japanese], hoping that after you had reached maturity, you would be a dragon [a hero] among men [8].

Example 12 shows how parenthetical addition can mediate cultural reference. "[Japanese]" identifies the referent of "岛民", which might otherwise remain ambiguous in context. More clearly, "[a hero]" annotates the positive force of "dragon", thereby preventing an English reader from importing the negative or monstrous associations often attached to dragons in Western traditions. The additions not only explain lexical meaning, but also anticipate likely intercultural misreadings. In this sense, addition secures the intended symbolic value of the expression before misinterpretation can take hold.

(13) Source text: 余读至此,谓其词雅谑.首章指道员,其二郎中,其三知府,其四同知,其五知县,其六光禄寺署丞,其七待诏,惜末章为风雨剥灭,不可辨,只剩: …… [9].

Target text: When I had read to this point, I realized that the phrasing was refined and satirical in nature. Each stanza referred to one kind of official: the first, to "Tao-yuan"; the second, to "Lang-chuang"; the third, to the "Chih-fu"; the fourth, to "T'ung-chih"; the fifth, to "Chih-hsien"; the sixth, to "Kuang Lu Szu Shu Cheng";

the seventh, to "Tai-chao". It was a pity that the last stanza had been washed by wind and rain until it was unreadable save for the remaining lines: … [8].

The added sentence "Each stanza referred to one kind of official" functions as a structural guide. Before presenting a list of transliterated official titles, Leung supplies the organizing principle of the passage. This is addition at the level of discourse management rather than lexical meaning. It prepares the reader to process a sequence. The strategy reveals Leung's practical awareness that comprehension depends not only on words and images, but also on the structure of information.

Jointly, these examples reveal that clarity in Leung's translation is an active interpretive strategy. He clarifies by explicating, streamlining, recasting, and amplifying. Yet these interventions remain constrained by his prior commitment to accuracy. Clarity is therefore best understood as a disciplined form of adjustment, not a departure from fidelity but its adaptation to a different readership.

4.3. Beauty

If "accuracy" governs Leung's translation practice and "clarity" regulates his departures from literalism, "beauty" defines his effort to preserve the poetical touch of the text. In the foreword, Leung acknowledges that the original's "exquisite phrasing and the actual music of its flawless lines" cannot be fully reproduced, yet he repeatedly stresses his attempt to retain its "lyrical tone of the narrative" [8]. "Beauty", in his attempt to produce an English version that remains readable as literature, operates not against "accuracy" and "clarity", but after them. Once semantic transfer and intelligibility have been secured, Leung seeks to restore something of the source text's tonal, rhythmic, and affective force.

4.3.1. Rhythmic compensation

One of the most significant ways in which Leung pursues beauty is through rhythmic compensation, especially when translating verse embedded in the novel, to address the loss of formal music. Rather than reproducing Chinese prosody mechanically, he adjusts line length, syntax, and sound patterning in order to create an English rhythm capable of performing a function roughly analogous to that of the original.

(14) Source text: 二品加衔四品阶,皇然绿轿四人抬.黄堂半跪称卑府,白简通详署宪台.督抚请谈当座揖,臬藩接见大门开.便宜此日称观察,五百光洋买得来 [9].

Target text: With haughty head in green sedan and borne / By bearers four, there rides a parvenu / Just raised from fourth-class office to two grades / Above, and now is called an officer / Of second rank. How vain and grand he feels! / The lower officers half kneel when past / He rides, and call themselves, "the humble ones". / Yet, this same haughty rider proud and vain / When offering up indictments to the man / Above, must be as self-abasing as / The man below was when he rode proud by. / The governor invites this parvenu / To have a little chat. About they sit, / Polite they bow and smile. Now when the men / That work below the governor once see / That favor shines on this new guest, they wait / For this new guest to pass their homes and throw / The great front door wide ope with fawning smile. / This day he's called "Official So-and-So". / Five hundred dollars bright in Mex. will buy / This glor'ous state described and penned above [8].

The source poem is a seven-character regulated verse marked by formal compactness, parallelism, and end-rhyme. Its repeated -ai rhyme in characters such as "阶", "抬", "台", "开", and "来" gives the original a polished and memorable acoustic finish, while the paired middle lines sustain the poem's satirical balance. Leung does not attempt to reproduce these formal features line by line, which would likely have produced stiff and unreadable English. Instead, he disperses the poem into a sequence of flexible English lines and seeks to recreate its rhetorical energy through cadence, recurrence, and occasional rhyme-like echo.

What matters here is not formal equivalence but functional equivalence. End-rhyme and near-rhyme appear only intermittently, in combinations such as "borne" and "parvenu" or "vain" and "man", while repetition in

phrases such as "the man / Above" and "The man below" creates a sense of recurrence that partly compensates for the tighter sound pattern of the Chinese original. Likewise, the lineation creates a measured but varying movement. The English does not sound like regulated verse, but neither does it collapse into plain prose. Instead, it reads like heightened English verse, with a clear sense of rhythm and poetic form.

This choice reveals how Leung understands beauty under translational constraint. He does not treat poetic form as something that can simply be copied across languages. Rather, he assumes that losses at the level of meter and rhyme must be compensated for elsewhere—through line breaks, controlled repetition, and rhetorical pacing. In that sense, beauty in translation lies in recreating the original effect in a different form so that what cannot be preserved at the formal level may still be reproduced at the level of effect.

4.3.2. Literary diction

Leung also pursues beauty through literary diction, seeking to recreate emotional and stylistic intensity at the level of phrasing. When the source text is emotionally heightened or rhetorically marked, he often prefers idiomatic yet literary English to flat paraphrase. Through literary diction, he reconstructs atmosphere, emotional pressure, and symbolic resonance. Beauty here is achieved by lexical choices that allow the translation to register as literary language.

(15) Source text: 余无端闻其细腻酸咽之词,以余初不宿备,故噤不能声 [9].

Target text: On abruptly hearing her low, tender, sorrowful, choking words and hearing them without previous preparation, I could say nothing and remained with sealed lips [8].

In example 14, the key phrase is "sealed lips". A plainer translation such as "I could not speak" would have conveyed the basic meaning, but it would have weakened the emotional force of the moment. "Sealed lips", by contrast, gives speechlessness a more physical and immediate force, as if the narrator's inability to respond were felt in the body as well as in the mind. This matters because the source text does not simply report silence; it dramatizes a moment of emotional shock. Therefore, Leung's translation here heightens the feeling while remaining concise and idiomatic. The phrase is literary without sounding inflated, and its force lies precisely in that restraint.

(16) Source text: 自谓忧患之心都泯 [9].

Target text: I told myself that the sorrows and troubles of my heart had also been swallowed into oblivion by the same waves [8].

This example shows Leung's ability to turn abstraction into image. The source text states, with notable compression, that the heart's sorrows have vanished. Leung does not render this disappearance in neutral terms. Instead, he writes that they have been "swallowed into oblivion by the same waves". Two choices are especially important. First, "oblivion" is more resonant than a simpler word such as "forgetfulness". It suggests not just mental loss, but absorption into a space beyond recall. Second, "swallowed" supplies violent motion. Sorrow is not merely reduced or eased; it is engulfed. The translation thus amplifies the imaginative pressure of the sentence. By turning inner release into a concrete image, Leung preserves the source text's lyrical tendency to express feeling through scene and movement. The waves become the medium through which emotion is transformed. Beauty here lies in Leung's ability to heighten the sentence without breaking its connection to the emotional logic of the original.

(17) Source text: 实属前缘 [9].

Target text: There surely must have been some divine hand in the arrangement of this meeting [8].

The source phrase "前缘" in Example 17 is culturally dense and semantically compressed. It suggests a bond formed in a previous life, a sense of fated affinity, and the feeling that a present encounter is rooted in an unseen past. Instead of translating the phrase literally, Leung translates it as "some divine hand in the arrangement". This choice replaces a Buddhist-inflected concept with a more general image of fate. "Divine

hand" gives the sentence a vivid image and makes unseen causation easier for an English reader to grasp. Fate is no longer an abstract idea, but becomes an unseen force shaping events behind the scenes. Here Leung is less concerned with preserving the precise conceptual meaning of "前缘" than with recreating its emotional force, namely the sense that the meeting is shaped by a power beyond ordinary human intention. The example shows that Leung sometimes achieves beauty through symbolic substitution, seeking not to reproduce the original concept in technical terms but to create an image of comparable emotional weight.

Overall, these examples suggest that Leung's pursuit of beauty is a deliberate attempt to preserve the literary mode and poetical touch of the source text under conditions where its formal and cultural resources cannot be transferred intact. In verse, he compensates rhythmically rather than mechanically reproducing form. In prose, he relies on literary diction to restore affective pressure and vividness. Beauty in *The Lone Swan* lies in Leung's effort to preserve the translation as a literary work rather than reduce it to mere information.

5. Discussion

The threefold principle of "accuracy, clarity, and beauty" form a hierarchy of priorities rather than a set of parallel criteria in Leung's translation of *The Lone Swan*. "Accuracy" is the foundation of Leung's practice. He seeks to follow the Chinese text closely and preserve its imagery, rhetoric, and cultural markers. However, when literal translation risks obscuring meaning or diminishing literary effect, "clarity" and "beauty" become grounds for intervention. His translation is thus best understood as a structured negotiation among competing priorities rather than a fixed method.

This hierarchy is historically significant. Leung was translating at a moment when English translations of modern Chinese literature had not yet developed stable norms. The field was still taking shape, translation served multiple functions, and his readership was similarly diverse. On the one hand, he imagined Chinese readers using the translation as a tool for learning English. On the other, he also addressed foreign readers with limited knowledge of Chinese culture. These dual audiences help explain the tension in his practice between literalness and mediation. A learner-oriented translation benefits from close correspondence with the source text, whereas a literary translation for general readers requires a greater degree of interpretive shaping. Leung's solution was not to choose one readership at the expense of the other, but to move pragmatically between them. His translation of *The Lone Swan* is therefore marked by a productive tension. It is at once pedagogical and literary, source-oriented and reader-conscious, conservative in principle yet flexible in practice.

Leung's translation thought also deserves to be placed in relation to the Chinese tradition of "xin, da, ya"—"faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance" proposed by Yan Fu in 1898. Although he does not explicitly invoke this triad as a rigid theoretical formula, his emphasis on "accuracy, clarity, and beauty" clearly echoes it. What is especially significant is that this inherited ideal is reworked in a distinctly early twentieth-century context. In Leung's hands, the older discourse of good translation is adapted to a bilingual, transnational, and pedagogical environment shaped by modern print culture and cross-cultural dissemination. His practice thus shows not only the persistence of traditional Chinese translation values, but also their transformation under new historical conditions.

In this sense, *The Lone Swan* is critical not only as an individual translation, but also as a document of an emerging translational modernity. It shows how an early translator of modern Chinese literature negotiated between source-text loyalty and target-reader accessibility, between literary aspiration and pedagogical usefulness, and between cultural preservation and interpretive intervention. Therefore, Leung's work occupies an instructive position in the history of Chinese-English translation. It demonstrates that early literary

translation was not merely a matter of transmitting texts abroad, but also a site where ideas of language, readership, culture, and literary value were actively being redefined.

6. Conclusion

George Kin Leung's English translation of *The Lone Swan* reveals a historically significant and textually sophisticated mode of translation practice. It also reflects his multiple roles as an interpreter of Su Manshu's thought, a promoter of English education, and a mediator between Chinese and Western cultures. Shaped by personal affinity with Su, identification with the novel's spiritual and emotional world, sensitivity to contemporary socio-cultural needs, and concern for his own professional positioning, Leung approached the text as both a literary work and a cultural instrument. His foreword and his translational choices together point to a coherent translation thought organized around a guiding principle of "accuracy, clarity, and beauty".

In practice, this translation thought led him to rely primarily on literal translation, especially in dealing with metaphorical imagery and culture-loaded terms, thereby preserving the rhetorical texture and cultural flavor of the source text while also providing Chinese learners of English with a relatively precise linguistic reference. At the same time, he employed explicitation, omission, free translation, and addition whenever closer adherence to the source text would have impaired comprehension or readability. He also sought to preserve the poetical touch of the work through rhythmic compensation and literary diction, so that the English version would remain not only informative but recognizably literary. The result is neither a fully domesticating translation nor a rigidly literal one. It is a negotiated text shaped by multiple purposes, audiences, and historical pressures.

This study therefore suggests that Leung's translation of *The Lone Swan* should be read as more than an isolated literary experiment. It constitutes an early practical reworking of Yan Fu's translation theory of "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance" within a modern bilingual and transnational setting. More broadly, it reminds us that translators who have remained marginal in mainstream literary history may nevertheless preserve crucial evidence about how translation functioned in specific historical moments. Reconsidering Leung's work not only enriches our understanding of early Chinese literary translation into English, but also helps recover a more complex picture of how modern Chinese literature entered global stage.

Future research may build on this study in at least two directions. One would be to examine more closely the reception, circulation, and readership of Leung's translations in the English-speaking world. Another would be to compare his practice with that of other early translators of modern Chinese literature, in order to clarify more fully the range of translation strategies and cultural assumptions that shaped this formative period.

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