

The *Huajian ji* as English Ballad: A Case Study of Literary (Re)Translation

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Re-translations are often influenced directly or indirectly by previous versions in the target language, a phenomenon comparative literature scholar Eugene Eoyang has termed *déjà lu*. The genealogy of a single text in translation illuminates individual translators' distinct approaches, yielding fruitful insight for scholars of translation history and practicing translators alike.

The late-Ming Cantonese narrative poem *Huajian ji* (Story of the Flowery Notepaper) spawned no fewer than four European-language translations, including two in English: Peter Perring Thoms's *Chinese Courtship: in verse* (1824) and John Bowring's *Hwa Tsien ki: The Flowery Scroll, a Chinese Novel* (1868). This paper presents a case study, from the translator's perspective, of a new translation in verse of the *Huajian ji* conceived with a self-conscious knowledge of its translation history. Unlike previous versions, this re-translation uses the English ballad as a vehicle for reproducing the style and sentimentality of the source text in English, foregrounding the formal, poetic characteristics of the *Huajian ji* over literal meaning when the two conflict. This paper describes the rationale for adopting ballad meter and details strategies for approximating the *Huajian ji*'s literary devices, such as parallelism and alliteration, as well as potential challenges of poetics-focused translation strategies. Through discussion of specific examples, the case study argues for a broad definition of equivalence that prioritizes formal elements of a source text in addition to linguistic content while presenting a re-translation that not only complements its predecessors but also aspires to expand the literary exchange between China and English-speaking communities.