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GENDER FLUIDITY OF CHINESE WOMEN IN QING CHINA:
TRANSLATING AND INTERPRETING JIAMU IN HONGLOU MENG

by

Zhang Shaodan

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in
Translation and Interpretation

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City University of Hong Kong
I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Qian Jun for his inspiration, advice and encouragement on this project.
Abstract

This study mainly probes into the image of Jiamu in the two major translations of *Honglou meng* --- David Hawkes’ and Yang Xianyi’s versions. Some representative critiques on Jiamu are also included in the discussion. It reveals that Hawkes’ translation and certain critiques betray an implicit or explicit influence of Western feminism in the sense that the gender system represented in those interpretations seems to impose a relatively static gender identity on Jiamu.

Those interpretations of Jiamu throw some light upon the stance of gender binary of Western feminism and reflect the distinctiveness of gender relationships in Qing China when Jiamu not only enjoyed flexibilities in her gender roles but also consciously crossed gender boundaries and gained her subjectivity from entering into male domains.

Therefore, this study hopes to lead to discussions over the special gender role of females and gender relationships in China and the limitation of Western feminist understanding of Chinese women.
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**Introduction**

With the emergence of feminism, the concept of gender started to be widely discussed. By focusing on “gender”, feminists aim to dismiss the use of “sex” which emphasizes fixed and pre-determined differences between men and women. In this sense, the concept of gender is related to “sex”, revealing a system of distinctions of people based on sex. The distinctions are based on sex but not determined by it; instead, feminists believe that gender is imposed on a sexed body ---a male or a female---by social power which includes any form in society such as the economy and policies. Therefore, gender is the social imposition of the appropriate roles on women and men whose identities are constructed rather than inherent. The word “imposition” implies a sense of suppression. In actuality, some feminists think gender identities are constructed by the suppression of sex ambiguities and opposite sexual elements, the refusal of people’s potential for bisexuality (Scott 1999, 38). That is the reason for contests against the gender system sometimes, and it also suggests that gender identification is unstable. Its stability partly depends on the strength of the suppression. Since no social or cultural studies could indeed unfold without touching upon the relationships between men and women, the rising of the concept of gender required a critical reexamination of almost all the existing literary, artistic and scholarly works from a new perspective, and such a reexamination unsurprisingly led to different interpretations insofar as men were considered to be not necessarily masculine and women not necessarily feminine.
The reexamination has undergone several phases along with the development of feminism. Early feminists (in around 1970s and 1980s) mainly pay their attention to women’s subordination under patriarchy, aiming to raise women’s self-consciousness by defying male dominance and emphasizing the opposite position of men and women. Therefore, the review of women’s history and women in literature then also embodies the perspective of gender binary. Joan Scott (1999) has discussed three main approaches of early feminist historians to reviewing the history of gender, namely the patriarchy theories, Marxism and psychoanalysis, which are also adopted in the field of literary criticism. The ground they share in common is the fixed opposition between males and females. To be specific, theorists of patriarchy attribute women’s subordination to men’s appropriation of women’s reproductive labor as well as the sexual objectification of women by men. Hence, it appears that they deem the inferior role of women as a result of patriarchy, but the root cause is still ascribed to women’s physical characteristics ---reproduction and sexuality, which, as pointed out by Scott, “contributes to the kind of thinking they want to oppose” (40) ---viewing gender relationships as fixed and based on sex. Similarly, gender binary prevails among Marxist feminists due to their stance of dialectical materialism. As for psychoanalytic theorists, though they regard gender identities as constructed during one’s growth, the antagonism between women and men is “an unavoidable aspect of the acquisition of sex identity” in their view (39). From such a perspective, traditional Chinese women, reviewed by Western feminist scholars, fall into the stereotype as profoundly victimized and enslaved since gender dichotomy is a pre-assumption.
It should be noticed that, however, since 1980s when gender binary prevailed among Western feminists, criticism against this viewpoint has also emerged. The aforementioned feminist historian Joan Scott (1999) is a typical example. She thinks the three approaches discussed above give rise to unnecessary antagonism, especially when some of them attribute the gender binary back to the physical differences between the sexes. The development of deconstructionism also forces feminists to review their perspective insofar as languages become open to diverse interpretations and any differences and boundaries are blurring (康 1994, 136-137). They begin to turn their attention to the real situations of women in history as well as the distinctive value and individuality of females.

The change of direction is reflected in the feminist study on Chinese women, and their change of perspective allows them to become more aware of the distinctiveness of the gender view and gender traditions in imperial China. For instance, scholars including Roger Ames (1981), Charlotte Furth (1999) and Sandra Wawrytko (2000) have noticed the androgynous traditions and the complementary gender relationship in both Daoism and Confucianism. Dorothy Ko (1994) manages to reproduce a picture of the life of 18th-century Chinese women, revealing their creativity in “crafting a space from within the prevailing gender system” (8-9) and in expanding their social roles through constant interactions and negotiations with men. She has discussed on the Confucian notion of inner and outer spheres for women and men respectively and argues that unlike the case in the West, there is no fixed sphere for traditional Chinese women. Other feminist scholars also recognize the capacity of female bodies and
view reproduction as an inborn ability entitling traditional Chinese women with power rather than diminishing them as tools. And they also focus on female writers, revealing their talents and their entering into male literati’s world (孙 2001, 161).

Therefore, it can be discerned that the understanding of “gender” and Chinese women has undergone a gradual development. Under the examination of early feminism, women in traditional Chinese society are viewed as “victimized women”, oppressed by strict patriarchy, living a miserable life. The real life of Chinese women in imperial China, however, has become the spotlight of feminist historians in recent years and has been unveiled gradually, showing a disparate picture.

This paper is going to use the perspective of feminism after 1980s to look at Jiamu in Honglou meng, and it will be revealed that Jiamu enjoys much fluidity in her gender roles. I will further argue that such a perspective is not enough to understand Jiamu, who not only enjoys flexibilities in her gender identity but also consciously crosses gender boundaries and gains her subjectivity from it.

Meanwhile, by discussing over David Hawkes’ and Yang Xianyi’s translations of Honglou meng and some representative critiques on Jiamu, it will be discernable that some of them betray an implicit or explicit influence of Western feminism. Those feminist representations of Jiamu highlight the distinctiveness of the gender relationship in Qing China. While Jiamu enjoys fluidity in terms of her gender roles
assumed as argued in this paper, the gender system represented in those interpretations seems to impose a relatively static gender identity on her. Below I will analyze Jiamu’s gender fluidity from two aspects: Jiamu in the eyes of others --- Jiamu’s social roles, and Jiamu’s self-perception --- Jiamu’s subjectivity in terms of her gender identity.

Part I. Jiamu’s social roles

While certain feminist historians in 1990s have paid their attention to the distinctiveness of the gender view and gender traditions in imperial China as well as the real living situations of traditional Chinese women, they still, to a certain extent, view women and men as two groups and try to illustrate women’s status by highlighting the mutual respect and considerations between women and men, especially what men pay to women, and by showing that women are able to attain power and honor through their ability of reproduction and hence their significance in ensuring the family continuity. For example, Furth (1999), in her book *A Flourishing Yin*, emphasizes the privileges of Chinese women when they are old due to their noble status as mothers (307). Francesca Bray (1997) has also discussed on the complementary relationship between Chinese couples and argued that the unequal relations of *wu lun* (The Five Relationships) also require the senior or the superior treating the other partner with “kindness, consideration and understanding” (94-95). This paper, however, is going to argue that traditional Chinese women are able to gain
more than female privileges. As some scholars have probed into the phenomenon of female writers entering into the world of male literati “as substitute or honorary men” (Ko 1994, 18), there are also possibilities for Chinese women to cross boundaries and enter into male domains of politics, taking their power and authority, among whom Jiamu is a representative.

Almost all the critiques touching upon Jiamu focus on her power and authority over the Jia Household insofar as it is at odds with the Confucian doctrines in her times which attribute the household management power to the male head of a family. Thus, Jiamu’s taking male power is firstly reflected on her status as the manager of the household. As Bray (1997) has revealed, though the household management power has been granted to the male head since Sima Guang, the real case is that it is “normal and desirable” for wives to take charge of the domestic affairs (94). This fact is closer to the original Confucian idea of the complementary roles of women and men that endows them with the inner and outer spheres respectively. It is argued by some scholars that even so, the family should be separated from political and economic fields (Scott 1999, 30). This view may fit the concept of “domesticity” of Western women, but as mentioned above briefly, the Chinese notion of “the inner sphere” is disparate from “domesticity” in the West. As Bray remarks,

The fact of women’s seclusion in imperial China has disposed scholars to visualize women’s work as being restricted simply because it took place within the inner quarters; we have therefore assumed that it was more or less limited to
the reproductive activities that our own historical experience of industrialization leads us to associate with the domestic sphere (271).

Through this proposition, Bray suggests that there exist certain differences between China and the West in terms of the understanding of “domesticity”. Since her focus is social production and gender, she argues that women in the Qing Dynasty are not confined to reproductive activities; productive activities, which do not belong to domestic affairs, also take place within the inner sphere. In actuality, apart from social production, the inner sphere in China, that is, the family, is also inseparable from the outer political world. Chinese deem the family as a microcosm of the state and therefore, “managing the family is the basis for managing the state” and they share the same political nature. As a result, the behavior of managing a family is indeed closely related to politics as well as public morality (Ko 1994, 13). Females, thus, by taking the power of managing the family, are integrated into the male domain or “the outer sphere”, the boundary of which from “the inner sphere” is only relational and never as clear as defined by Western feminists.

The above analysis shows how Jiamu is integrated into the male domain by taking the role of the house manager who does not simply attend to domestic matters. But it is not enough to explain Jiamu’s great authority and influence over the Jias. I am going to further argue that Jiamu is not simply an agency or a complement of men, but she takes the place of men and substitutes them. It is, first of all, directly due to the absence of Jiamu’s husband and she has no one to complement. Her sons cannot be
the male head she complements though the doctrine of *san cong* (Three Obediences) requires a woman to obey her son when the husband dies. As Lin Yutang (1939) has pointed out, “obeying her son” is “of course never carried out” in real situations in China as a result of its obvious contradiction with the principle of “filial piety” (134). Apparently filial piety weighs more, which is the root of social ranks and the basis for ruling the state according to Confucianism in the sense that loyalty to the Emperor comes from filial piety. Bray (1997) has also remarked on this point and argued that the hierarchies of generations and ages are more significant than that of gender in a Chinese family and “the respect and obedience owed to seniors of either sex were absolute” (95). The hierarchy of gender only comes after other social ranks, as quoted by Ko (1994) from the work of Priscilla Ching Chung (1981):

…subservience of women to men did not mean total subordination of all women to all men but the subordination of specific women to specific men within their own class, and only in terms of personal and family relationships (7).

Therefore, Jiamu, as the only survivor in her generation in the Jias, represents the authority of the oldest generation on behalf of those ancestors of the Jias including her husband. And thus, as will be illustrated below, the filial devotion paid to Jiamu by the younger generations in the Jias is closer to *jing* (reverence), which features the filial piety for fathers and rulers rather than *ai* (love) for mothers as prescribed in *Xiaojing*:

As they serve their fathers, so they serve their mothers, and they love them equally. As they serve their fathers, so they serve their rulers, and they reverence
them equally. Hence love is what is chiefly rendered to the mother, and reverence is what is chiefly rendered to the ruler, while both of these things are given to the father (chap. 5).

In this sense, it is not a surprise that Jiamu’s female identity seems to be overshadowed. Jiamu is addressed as “the old ancestor”, indicating only her class and generation but not gender. She is respected by all the younger generations in the Jias including those who do not have a blood relationship with her such as Jia Jing and Jia Zhen. They reverence her out of their obligatory filial duties towards an older generation rather than the family sentiment for their mother or grandmother. And their reverence and obedience betray Jiamu’s authority which is not diminished by her gender as a female since she embodies the male ancestors.

Jiamu is represented differently in Hawkes’ translation. She still enjoys much power and respect, with a relatively static gender identity as a female, though, probably since Western women are able to receive more freedom and power than traditional Chinese women as prescribed in the gender system. She is addressed as “Grandmother Jia” and her children and grandchildren respect her out of their affection towards their mother or grandmother. They show to her voluntary following rather than obligatory obedience. Therefore, Jiamu in Hawkes’ translation is no less powerful, but less formidable, which is kept as a characteristic of other male dominators in Honglou meng by Hawkes however, betraying his view of gender binary. Below I am going to show how the power and authority of Jiamu is depicted in Honglou meng and in
Hawkes’ translation respectively. Another major translation of *Honglou meng* by Yang Xianyi will also be included in the discussion, and it can be revealed that this version of translation does not show the similar tendency of Hawkes’ work.

1.1. Translating “老祖宗”

Jiamu is addressed in various ways corresponding to her different roles. She was born as a Shi and therefore she has a title “史太君”. She has been married to a Jia and therefore she is called “贾母” or “(贾)老太太”. She is also the oldest generation in the Jias and addressed as “老祖宗”. To her children and grandchildren, she is the Mother and the Grandmother as well. Most of the time, however, she is only addressed as either “老太太” or “老祖宗” (“贾母” is also frequently used but only by the narrator).

Different from the translation by Yang who renders “贾母”, “老太太” and “老祖宗” into “the Lady Dowager”, “the Old Lady” and “the Old Ancestress” respectively, Hawkes does not keep his translations all consistent, especially in terms of “老祖宗”, which literally means “the old ancestor”, indicating only the age and the status of Jiamu, blurring Jiamu’s biological sex. It is used in diverse contexts by people from various social ranks. For example, Jiamu is addressed so by people outside the Jia Household who are in a lower social status than hers, indicating that this title suggests no family attachment or kinship. It also reveals that Jiamu’s highest status in the Jias
is also recognizable for people from the outer world. Below are some instances when Jiamu was addressed as “老祖宗” by storytellers, nuns, opera actors and Daoist priests outside the Jias:

女先生回说：“老祖宗 不听这书，或者弹一套曲子听听罢。” (Cao II.54.685)

‘If Your Old Ladyship doesn’t want to hear a story,’ said the blind woman who had spoken before, ‘perhaps you’d like us to do a song for you.’ (Hawkes III.54.33)

两个姑子忙立起身来，笑道：“奶奶素日宽洪大量，今日 老祖宗 千秋，奶奶生气,岂不惹人谈论。” (Cao III.71.922)

The two nuns rose to their feet with propitiatory smiles.

‘Come, Mrs Zhen! You are such a kind, forgiving person as a rule. Surely you are not going to lose your temper on Her Old Ladyship’s birthday? Whatever would people say?’ (Hawkes III.71.402)

正唱《西楼·楼会》这出将终，于叔夜因赌气去了，那文豹便发科诨道：“你赌气去了，恰好今日正月十五，荣国府中 老祖宗 家宴，待我骑了这马，赶进去讨些果子吃是要紧的。” (Cao II.53.674)
At this point the child-actor playing the part of his little page Leopard Boy, observing what was going on in the hall, began to extemporize:

‘You can go off in a huff if you like; but today is the fifteenth of the first month and did Lady Jia of Rong-guo House is holding a family party; so what I am going to do is to get on this horse and gallop there as quickly as I can and ask them for some sweeties!’ (Hawkes II.53.581-582)

那张道士先哈哈笑道：‘无量寿佛！老祖宗 一向福寿安康？众位奶奶小姐纳福？’ (Cao I.29.347)

The abbot prefaced his greeting with a good deal of jovial laughter.

‘Blessed Buddha of Boundless Life! And how has Your Old Ladyship been all this while? In rude good health, I trust? And Their Ladyships, and all the younger ladies? — also flourishing?’ (Hawkes II.29.75)

In these passages, Hawkes translates “老祖宗” as “Lady Jia” or “Her/ Your Old Ladyship”, reflecting the reverence the speakers pay to Jiamu when addressing her, though, compared to their Chinese counterpart, these translations still betray the gender of Jiamu.

Jiamu is also often addressed as “老祖宗” by people within the Jia Household including her children and grandchildren. As illustrated by the above examples, this
title suggests no family relationships, and therefore, by addressing Jiamu as “老祖宗”, people within the Jias show their reverence for an elderly representing the highest authority as people from the outside do rather than for their old mother or grandmother. Hawkes, however, by rendering “老祖宗” into “Mother” and “Grandmother” in these cases, seems to have foregrounded Jiamu’s biological sex and diminished the male authority of Jiamu by emphasizing Jiamu’s role as a female with reproductive ability. Below shows Jiamu is addressed as “老祖宗” by Wang Xi-feng and Qin Ke-qing:

这熙凤…因笑道：“天下真有这样标致的人物，我今儿才算见了！况且这通身的气派，竟不象 老祖宗 的外孙女儿，竟是个嫡亲的孙女，怨不得老祖宗天天口头心头一时不忘。” (Cao I.3.30)

‘She’s a beauty, Grannie dear! If I hadn’t set eyes on her today, I shouldn’t have believed that such a beautiful creature could exist! And everything about her so distingué! She doesn’t take after your side of the family, Grannie. She’s more like a Jia. I don’t blame you for having gone on so about her during the past few days!’ (Hawkes I.3.92)

贾蓉之妻秦氏便忙笑回道:“我们这里有给宝叔收拾下的屋子, 老祖宗 放心,只管交与我就是了。” (Cao I.5.53)

Qin-shi, the little wife of Jia Rong, smilingly proposed an alternative.
‘We have got just the room here for Uncle Bao. Leave him to me, Grannie dear!
He will be quite safe in my hands.’ (Hawkes I.5.125)

In these two examples, “老祖宗”, which is a mark of Jiamu’s social role and status, is rendered into “Grannie (dear)”, foregrounding the blood relationship between the speakers and Jiamu. In addition, by using the informal word “grannie” and the added modifier “dear”, Hawkes strengthens the family love between them, and therefore Jiamu’s role is fixed as a loving and loved female with offspring. Hawkes also foregrounds the affections between Jiamu and Jia Zheng:

贾政见母亲如此明断分晰，俱跪下哭着说：“老太太这么大年纪，儿孙们没点孝顺，承受 老祖宗 这样恩典，叫儿孙们更无地自容了!” (Cao IV.107.1376-1377)

Jia Zheng was moved to tears to see how clearly she had worked everything out.

‘We have failed you, Mother!’ he sobbed, falling to his knees. ‘We have not done our filial duty towards you in your old age; and yet you shower us with such bounty! How can we ever outlive our shame!’ (Hawkes V.107.147)

In this example, Jia Zheng’s affections for Jiamu are intensified not only by calling her “Mother”, which seldom happens in Honglou meng, but also by certain emotional expressions such as “moved” and “sobbed”, implying that Jia Zheng is touched by Jiamu’s love and sacrifice. Jia Zheng’s crying in ST, however, seems to be more probably out of his feeling of shame due to his failure in fulfilling filial piety. In
Impressed by her sound judgement and fair treatment, Jia Zheng and the rest knelt down and said with tears, "You are so advanced in years, Old Ancestress, and your sons and grandsons have failed in their duty to you. Your goodness to us makes us doubly ashamed!" (Yang III.107.381)

Here, Jia Zheng was only “impressed” by her mother’s management ability. The phrase “with tears” no longer implies his sadness and sentiment suggested by “sobbed”. And he called Jiamu “Old Ancestress”, showing his reverence for her, though this title still betrays Jiamu’s gender.

Jiamu is also addressed as “老祖宗” by Faithful:

鸳鸯笑道：“鲍二家的，老祖宗又拉上赵二家的。” (Cao II.47.583)

‘It was Bao Er’s wife, my old love, not Zhao Er’s,’ said Faithful, laughing.

(Hawkes II.47.435)

In this case, that family love is strengthened even between Jiamu and her maid.

In summary, mostly, Jiamu is addressed according to her social roles, especially the title of “老祖宗”, implying only Jiamu’s status but not her gender. In English, it is difficult to think of any title for females without suggesting their gender. And in Hawkes’ translation, he even foregrounds Jiamu’s role as a mother and a grandmother, emphasizing her physical characteristic ---reproduction --- as a female. By doing so,
Jiamu’s gender is fixed as a female, and from the following analysis of the two expressions “不敢” and “陪笑”, it is even clearer that in Hawkes’ translation, the gender role of Jiamu is static, with her power coming from the concerns and love everyone devotes to her due to the family attachment and blood relationships.

1.2. Translating “陪笑”

The Chinese expression “陪笑” has many connotations and can be used in various contexts. Its general meaning is to make someone feel pleased, from which several other implications are derived. The word is used in Honglou meng for about 85 times and considering the focus of this paper, its occurrences are classified into two types according to its functions.

Firstly, people wear such a smile when they feel emotionally inferior to the other one in a conversation, which includes situations where they intend to show their apology, to ask for a favor, or to assuage the other one’s anger. This function is closer to the modern usage of the word.

Secondly, “陪笑” appears on someone in a lower status. There may not be much emotion involved in this scenario where the smile only suggests a sense of hierarchy. For instance, in the world outside the Rong and Ning Houses, such a smile is offered to the royals or high officials by people from relatively lower social ranks:
水溶见他语言清楚，谈吐有致，一面又向贾政笑道...贾政忙陪笑道：“犬子岂敢谬承金奖。赖藩郡余祯，果如是言，亦荫生辈之幸矣。”(Cao I.15.165)

Jia Zheng smiled politely.

‘My son is doubtless unworthy of the compliment Your Highness is good enough to pay him. If; thanks to your encouragement, he turns out as you say, we shall count ourselves truly fortunate.’ (Hawkes I.15.289)

In this case, Jia Zheng offered “陪笑” to the Prince Bei-jing. Hawkes’ translation “smiled politely” suggests no emotion but an attitude of respect.

却说封肃因听见公差传唤...封肃忙陪笑道：“小人姓封，并不姓甄。只有当日小婿姓甄，今已出家一二年了，不知可是问他？” (Cao I.2.14)

Feng Su’s smile became even more ingratiating. ‘My name is Feng, not Zhen. My son-in-law’s name is Zhen, but he left home to become a Taoist more than a year ago. Could he be the one you want?’ (Hawkes I.2.167)

贾政听了这话，抓不住头脑，忙陪笑起身问道：“大人既奉王命而来，不知有何见谕，望大人宣明，学生好遵谕承办。”(Cao II.33.396)

Jia Zheng was totally at a loss to imagine what the purpose of the man’s visit
might be; nevertheless he rose to his feet out of respect for the prince and smiled politely. (Hawkes II.33.143)

In these two examples, it is the high officials who received “陪笑”. Again, Hawkes’ translation implies not much emotion. The word “ingratiating” used on Feng Su is deeper in terms of the degree of inferiority than “politely”, suggesting a larger gap between the status of the one wearing “陪笑” and the one receiving “陪笑”.

Other than being showed to those in the outer world, this kind of “陪笑” is mostly showed to Jiamu within the Jia Household (sometimes also to Lady Wang and Lady Xing, but only from maids and the female younger generation). The distinctively high status enjoyed by Jiamu is thus obviously revealed by her receiving “陪笑” from almost everyone in the Jia Household including Jia Zheng who shows “陪笑” for 10 times in total with 2 of them given to the royals and high officials and the other 8 are all to Jiamu, and Jia Lian who even disobeys with his mother Lady Xing but has to “陪笑” when speaking to Jiamu. These “陪笑”, of course, cannot appear along with no emotions at all since people must have certain emotions in certain contexts, but different from the first function mentioned above, emotions here are not the main cause of the smile just like those shown to the royal and officials. For instance, the “陪笑” of Jia Zheng in the following passage mainly shows his deference towards Jiamu. Hawkes, however, overtly attaches various emotions to “陪笑” in every situation.

(这里贾母忽然想起，和贾政笑道：“娘娘心里却甚实惦记着宝玉，前儿还特
特的问他来着呢。"

贾政陪笑道："只是宝玉不大肯念书，辜负了娘娘的美意。" (Cao III.84.1099)

‘Her solicitude,’ replied Jia Zheng with a sarcastic smile, ‘is as generous as it is undeserved. Increasing idleness is the only fruit that young tree will ever bear.’

(Hawkes IV.84.95)

Here, in ST, Jia Zheng’s “陪笑” is mainly for echoing Jiamu’s mood, showing his deference to Jiamu, while in Hawkes’ translation, it turns into a smile related to his dissatisfaction about Bao-yu’s school work, and in this way, the implication of Jia Zheng’s deference to Jiamu is lessened.

There are also other instances when such an implication of Jiamu’s status tends to be weakened by the attachment of other emotions.

(贾母亦知因贾政一人在此所致之故，酒过三巡，便撵贾政去歇息。贾政亦知贾母之意，撵了自己去后，好让他们姊妹兄弟取乐的。)

贾政忙陪笑道："今日原听见老太太这里大设春灯雅谜，故也备了彩礼酒席，特来入会。何疼孙子孙女之心，便不略赐以儿子半点？" (Cao I.22.259)

Jia Zheng… smiling forcibly, appealed against his banishment. (Hawkes I.22.466)

By translating “陪笑” into “smiling forcibly”, Hawkes seems to change the implication of hierarchy into Jia Zheng’s sadness and love for his mother. And
Hawkes also leave out the adverb “忙”, further weakening Jia Zheng’s reverence for Jiamu.

探春有心的人…因此窗外听了一听，便走进来陪笑向贾母道：“这事与太太什么相干？老太太想一想，也有大伯子要收屋里的人，小婶子如何知道？便知道，也推不知道。” (Cao II.46.577)

Tan-chun herself, after listening for a while at the window, boldly stepped into the room and faced her grandmother with an intrepid smile. (Hawkes II.46.425)

In this example, the implication of “陪笑” is changed into a depiction of the braveness of Tan-chun.

(贾母叫他坐下，便说：“…你们两个也商量商量，还是要宝玉好呢，还是随他去呢？”)

贾政陪笑说道：“老太太当初疼儿子这么疼的，难道做儿子的就不疼自己的儿子不成么。” (Cao IV.96.124)

Jia Zheng smiled anxiously.

‘Could I, who as a child received such tender love and care from you, Mother, not have fatherly feelings myself?’ (Hawkes IV.96.32)

In this case, the “陪笑” worn by Jia Zheng to echo Jiamu’s mood turns into a smile caused by Jia Zheng’s anxiety that Jiamu may be blaming him for not caring about his own son.
贾母听见，才止住泪问道：“不是又有什么缘故？”凤姐陪笑道：“没什么缘故，他大约是想老太太的意思。” (Cao IV.98.1280)

Xi-feng smiled coaxingly.

‘Of course not, Grannie. He is probably just missing you.’ (Hawkes IV.98.379)

This “陪笑” of Xi-feng, in Hawkes’ translation, becomes a smile she wore to appear natural when she lied to Jiamu.

These examples show that Hawkes tends to infuse other emotions into “陪笑”，diminishing the implication of hierarchy and everyone’s reverence paid to Jiamu. When Jiamu receives those smiles in Hawkes’ translation, mostly she receives them as a mother or a grandmother who is comforted or complained by her son or grandchildren due to their love for her, which indicates her identity as a female rather than someone in superiority.

1.3. Translating “不敢”

Compared with “陪笑”, the meaning of the expression “不敢” seems to be simpler, which basically implies “dare not”, or “afraid to do”. The usage of this phrase can also be classified into two categories according to the degree of the involvement of emotions (its connotation that indicates modesty is not considered here).

Firstly, “不敢” is used when someone is really afraid for he or she has done
something wrong or the other speaker is in a rage. Secondly, “不敢” is simply used when someone in a lower status speaks to someone in a higher status. Like “陪笑”，“不敢” in this sense is an embodiment of social hierarchy, not necessarily indicating someone’s emotion of fear. There are a number of examples when someone said “不敢” to Jiamu without really being afraid:

邢夫人王夫人道:“我们不敢和老太太并肩, 自然矮一等, 每人十六两罢了。” (Cao II.43.527)

Lady Xing and Lady Wang called next: ‘We obviously can’t put ourselves on a level with Lady Jia. Sixteen taels.’ (Hawkes II.43.346)

‘We dare not rank ourselves with the old lady,’ disclaimed Lady Xing and Lady Wang laughingly. ‘Since we’re one grade lower, we’ll give sixteen apiece.’ (Yang II.43.433)

In this example, “不敢” does not imply fear but the high respect and obligatory deference Lady Wang and Lady Xing paid to Jiamu. In Hawkes’ translation, the implication is not changed, but the high degree of Jiamu’s authority suggested by “不敢” seems to be diminished, which is kept by Yang’s direct translation.

凤姐见贾琏进来, 便劈手夺去, 不敢先看, 送到贾母手里。(Cao IV.95.1242)

Xi-feng saw Jia Lian come in, and thrusting forward her hand, snatched the parcel from him and without looking at it herself, placed it in Grandmother Jia’s hand.
Of course, Xi-feng was not afraid to look at the jade by herself first in this context, “不敢”, on the other hand, indicates Jiamu’s high status which requires others to do something only after she has done so. Hawkes’ translation, nonetheless, does not convey the implication that Xi-feng had to let Jiamu look at the jade first. Yang’s translation, however, keeps the implication:

As soon as Jia Lian came in Xifeng snatched it from him and, not venturing to examine it herself, presented it to the old lady. (Yang III.95.222)

The above abatement of Jiamu’s authority by Hawkes may be subtle, but there are more conspicuous instances.

Since it was now evident that nothing more could be done about Faithful, Jia She had to put up with his mortification as best he could. He did, however, from that day onwards, discontinue all duty calls on his mother on the pretext of being ill. Lady Xing and Jia Lian were sent to make the mandatory calls on her in his stead. (Hawkes II.47.436)

In this example, Jia She’s fear to meet Jiamu is omitted in Hawkes’ translation.

贾政知是老太太的主意，又 不敢 违拗，只抱怨王夫人几句。 (Cao IV.95.1241)
When he learnt that the reward was the old lady’s idea, Jia Zheng knew that he could not very well openly oppose it. He criticized Lady Wang instead for her part in it. (Hawkes IV.95.318)

As for this example, in ST, under the Confucian ethical codes, Jia Zheng should show his absolute filial piety to Jiamu. Such a principle was inculcated into his mind and therefore he dared not disobey Jiamu. But in Hawkes’ translation, “dare not” is weakened into “could not”, and “very well openly” also suggests the possibility of covert opposition.

Therefore, in Hawkes’ translation, Jiamu does not enjoy the absolute obedience of the younger generations, and Hawkes tends to maintain the family relationships with hierarchies by enhancing the sentimental attachment between them, which means Jiamu gains her power and authority not as someone on top of the hierarchy but as a mother and a grandmother whose children and grandchildren pay her respect due to their ties of blood and love, as shown in the following instances:

彼时贾政见贾母气未全消，不敢自便，也跟了进去。（Cao II.33.402）

Jia Zheng, conscious that his mother’s wrath against him had not abated and unwilling to leave things where they stood, had followed the little procession inside. (Hawkes II.33.152)

As the Lady Dowager was still incensed Jia Zheng dared not withdraw but followed them, aware from a glance at Baoyu that this time he had flogged him
too severely. (Yang I.33.485)

In this instance, it is clear that Jia Zheng, in Hawkes’ translation, tended to care about his mother, while in ST and Yang’s translation, he tended to feel anxious when the head of the family was angry about him.

贾琏陪笑道：“见老太太顽牌，不敢惊动，不过叫媳妇出来问问。” (Cao II.47.583)

‘I could see that you were playing cards,’ said Jia Lian with a somewhat artificial smile. ‘I didn’t like to interrupt you. I was hoping to get my wife to come out so that I could ask her.’ (Hawkes II.47.435)

With reference to this passage, in Hawkes’ translation, it seems that Jia Lian did not want to interrupt Jiamu’s fun. In ST, however, it seems that Jia Lian dared not interrupt Jiamu’s fun insofar as it might spoil her high spirit and make her angry, which would make him an unfilial grandson.

There is also an example showing Hawkes twisting the cause of “不敢” overtly:

贾珍尤氏二人亲自递了茶，因说道：“老太太原是老祖宗，我父亲又是侄儿，这样日子，原不敢请他老人家，但是这个时候，天气正凉爽，满园的菊花又盛开，请老祖宗过来散散闷，看着众儿孙热闹热闹，是这个意思。谁知老祖宗又不肯赏脸。” (Cao I.11.127-128)

‘We realize,’ said Cousin Zhen, ‘that Lady Jia is a generation older than Father.
Father is only her nephew, of course, and strictly speaking it wasn’t correct form to invite a person of her age at all. Nevertheless,...’ (Hawkes I.11.229-230)

“The Lady Dowager is our Old Ancestress,” said Jia Zhen with a smile. “My father is only her nephew, and we wouldn’t have presumed to invite her on his birthday if not for the fact that…” (Yang I.11.153)

Obviously, the cause of “不敢” here is related to the sentence “老太太原是老祖宗，我父亲又是侄儿，这样日子”. Since that day was Jia Jing’s birthday, “不敢” actually indicates the improperness of inviting someone in a higher status ---“老祖宗” to celebrate the birthday of someone in a lower status ---“侄子”, which is also shown in Yang’s translation. But in Hawkes’ translation, Jia Zhen tended to care more about the age of Jiamu, and “不敢” thus implies Jia Zhen’s care and worry about Jiamu’s health.

Therefore, in ST and Yang’s translation, Jiamu attains power and authority by representing the oldest generation and thus enjoys the highest status, to whom everyone is obliged to pay filial piety under the Confucian ethical system, while in Hawkes’ version, Jiamu is always a female in the first place, and she is respected by those who care about their mother and grandmother.

1.4. Translating “孝”

The above analysis reflects Hawkes’ diminution of filial duties paid to Jiamu; below
are some examples showing more directly Hawkes’ changing of filial piety into family love.

贾母听说，便止住步喘息一回，厉声说道：“你原来是和我说话！我倒有话吩咐，只是可怜我一生没个好儿子，却教我和谁说去！”贾政听这话不象，忙跪下含泪说道… (Cao II.33.401)

‘Oh! Are you speaking to me? — Yes, as a matter of fact I have got instructions”, as you put it; but as unfortunately I’ve never had a good son who cares for me, there’s no one I can give them to.’

Wounded in his most sensitive spot, Jia Zheng fell on his knees before her. (Hawkes II.33.151)

"Were you addressing me?" she demanded sternly. "Yes, I have some instructions. The pity is I’ve borne no filial son to whom I can speak."

Appalled by this rebuke, Jia Zheng fell on his knees, tears in his eyes. (Yang I.33.484)

In this example, the different understanding of “a good son” between Hawkes and Yang is betrayed. While Hawkes deems "好儿子" as a son caring about his mother, Yang lays more stress on the quality of filial piety. In addition, Jiamu’s words blaming
Jia Zheng for being unfilial put Jia Zheng’s morality into question, which made Jia Zheng very anxious or “appalled”. In Hawkes’ translation, however, the emotional words “wounded” and “sensitive” imply that Jia Zheng loved his mother and therefore felt hurt when Jiamu denied his care for her.

If you have any consideration for my feelings at all, you’ll get up off the floor now—because you are forgiven as far as I am concerned—and you’ll apologize handsomely to that poor wife of yours and take her back home with you. Otherwise you can just take yourself off, for I shan’t accept your kotow!’ (Hawkes II.44.378-379)

If you’ve any respect for me, get up. I’ll forgive you on condition that you apologize to your wife and take her home. That’s the way to please me. Otherwise just take yourself off, I won’t have you kneeling to me.’ (Yang II.44.56)

In this passage, Jiamu asked Jia Lian to apologize to Xi-feng if he recognized her authority and did as she said. The meaning of Jiamu’s words “若你眼睛里有我” is closer to Yang’s translation “if you have any respect for me”. Hawkes changes the matter of power relation into a matter of consideration for one’s feelings, making Jia Lian’s apology a reflection of his care of Jiamu. Hawkes also omits the clause “我就
喜欢了”，which originally suggests that Jia Lian’s apology is a way to please Jiamu, and therefore implies a relationship of inferiority and superiority between Jia Lian and Jiamu.

There is also an instance showing explicitly the different understanding of the relationship between parents and children in ST and the two translations. In *Honglou meng* and Yang’s translation, a family is maintained by “孝” which emphasizes the action of obedience and devotion of the children to the older generations. In Hawkes’ translation, a mother is respected out of the affections of her children.

贾琏道: “如今当今贴体万人之心, 世上至大莫如‘孝’ 字...当今自为日夜侍奉太上皇、皇太后, 尚不能略尽孝意, 因见宫里嫔妃才人等皆是入宫多年,抛离父母音容, 岂有不思想之理? 在儿女思想父母, 是分所应当。想父母在家, 若只管思念女儿, 竟不能见, 倘因此成疾致病, 甚至死亡, 皆由朕躬禁锢, 不能使其遂天伦之愿, 亦大伤天和之事。” (Cao I.16.180)

‘Our present Emperor, who has always had a great sympathy for the common man, believes that the filial affection of a child for its parents is the most important thing in the world… He has found that in his own case, even after seeing the Ex-Emperor and Ex-Empress morning, noon and night every day of his life, he is still unable to express more than a fraction of the devotion he feels for them; and this has led him to think of all those concubines and maids of honour and other court ladies, taken from their homes and shut up in the Palace for years and years on end, and to realize how much they must miss their
parents…” (Hawkes I.16.312-313)

Jia Lian explained. “Our present Emperor is concerned for all his subjects. No duty is higher than filial piety… Though he himself waits day and night upon his Imperial parents, he considers this too little to express all his filial devotion; and he realizes that the secondary consorts and ladies-in-waiting in the Palace who have been away from their parents for many years must naturally be longing to see them again, for it’s only right for children to miss their parents…” (Yang I.16.217-218)

In this passage, the concept of “孝” is briefly explained. It is revealed that in China, the virtue of “孝” is defined in action, emphasizing the importance of “尽孝意”, that is, children’s “孝” for their parents should be expressed by their actual deeds.

Moreover, “孝” is a unidirectional concept, only from children to their parents and it behoves children to follow the doctrine of “孝” (“在儿女思想父母, 是分所应当”). While in Hawkes’ translation, “孝” is translated into “filial affection”, emphasizing the mental attachment rather than a sense of duty. The phrase “日夜侍奉” is rendered into “seeing the Ex-Emperor and Ex-Empress morning, noon and night every day of his life”, with the degree of the word “侍奉” which emphasizes the action greatly weakened, betraying that Hawkes probably thinks how many actions have been done may not be that important to measure the degree of “孝”. Last but not least, Hawkes leaves out the proposition “在儿女思想父母,是分所应当”, which in ST highlights the unidirectional nature of the concept of “孝”.

Such a representation of Jiamu with a relatively static gender identity in Hawkes’ translation can find equivalent in critiques. As briefly mentioned above, most of the critics have noticed the dominating power and influence of Jiamu over the Jia Household; however, they view Jiamu as primarily a woman and therefore have to look for other explanations for Jiamu’s ascendancy over men. For instance, both Dore Levy (1999) and Bettina Knapp (1992) try to attribute Jiamu’s authority and power to factors beyond the patriarchal society. To be specific, Levy believes Jiamu’s authority over Jia Zheng is an inversion of the ideal authority pattern “resulting in actual disaster” of the Jia Household (43). Therefore, in his view, Jiamu’s authority is both abnormal and pernicious. Knapp, on the other hand, ascribes Jiamu’s power to divinity and depicts Jiamu as “mysterious and virtually omnipotent”. She argues that the power of Jiamu symbolizes “the virtually unlimited life force or yin power” in Daoism. The location of Jiamu’s house in the Rong House, which reflects Jiamu’s highest rank in the Jias, is regarded as symbolizing mandala which generates a “primordial” life force and gives “impetus” to all people in the Jias for developing their potentials in terms of “mind”, “psyche” as well as “body” (140-143).

Louise Edwards (1994), different from those two critics, does not recognize Jiamu’s dominance of the household, but only acknowledges Jiamu’s “great degree of influence over family customs” (116). It is worth noticing that she uses the word “influence”, while the real power and authority, in her perspective, does not lie in Jiamu’s hands. Such a claim is similar to Bray’s (1997) view on the relation between a widow and her sons in Qing China, which will be discussed over below.
Part II. Jiamu’s self-perception

In the above analysis, it has been argued that filial piety overrides the doctrine that requires females to follow their sons after the death of their husbands. Nevertheless, Bray (1997) has a different view on the contradiction between *san cong* and filial piety and believes that a son pays respect to his mother while at the same time controlling her behavior (96). In this sense, females act as the surrogate of men with the awareness of their restricted female identity and their complementary role of helping men with the family affairs imposed by the society. They manage the household to fulfill their task prescribed by the patriarchal society and let themselves be controlled by men heads as quoted by Ko (1994) from Pierre Bourdieu (1977),

> Even when women do wield the real power, as is often the case in matrimonial matters, they can exercise it fully only on condition that they leave the appearance of power, that is, its official manifestation, to the men (10-11).

To some extent, Jiamu is also the surrogate of male, restricted by the patriarchal culture of the society and inevitably influenced by the conventional ideas of women’s obedience and men’s ascendancy. In her way of life, she behaves in accordance to the social doctrines such as “Ignorance is a woman’s virtue.” Therefore, it is plausible to claim that Jiamu is a surrogate to execute patriarchal power. However, rather than being unconsciously oppressed to follow the patriarchy and therefore losing her individuality, she takes the male role actively and gets the sense of moral authority from entering into male domains. She identifies herself as not only a female
prescribed in the gender system but a subject who can cross gender boundaries and wield male power without justifying herself in doing so.

2.1. Translating Jiamu’s subjectivity in wielding male power

Jiamu’s subjectivity in wielding male power can be revealed by her discipline of her two sons, which shows that Jiamu extends her authority beyond females and servants who belong to the inner world to men from the outer world including her sons who are supposed to control her behavior according to the Confucian Doctrines. The two examples have both been briefly discussed upon above to show how Jia Zheng and Jia She revere Jiamu, and from the other side, they can also reflect how Jiamu disciplines her two sons subjectively. When Bao-yu was beaten by Jia Zheng, Jiamu made Jia Zheng stop by threatening to leave the house and thus put Jia Zheng into the position of being an unfilial son (chap. 33). As for Jia She, when he intended to take Faithful as his concubine, Jiamu categorically rejected it with rage when she first heard about it. Then she reprimanded Lady Xing in the face and made Jia She feel ashamed and dare not meet her (chap. 47).

These two cases, of course, are limited to family affairs and thus in Jiamu’s domain, and it cannot be denied that Jiamu’s role as a mother is important in these scenarios; however, there is another example showing that Jiamu also feels comfortable dealing with issues in Jia Zheng’s domain. In Chapter 95, when Bao-yu lost his jade, everyone
was in panic. Finding the jade outside the Jia Household seems to be Jia Zheng’s
domain as there are repetitive propositions about telling Jia Zheng and asking Jia
Zheng to come to deal with the affair, such as "难道老爷也是撂开手的不成",
"叫人快快请老爷", "便叫麝月传人去请". Finally, since Jia Zheng was temporarily absent,
Jiamu said, "不用他也使得,你们便说我说的话" (Cao IV.95.1240). Jiamu’s utterance
reveals that she is confident that her authority is enough to deal with affairs even in
the outer sphere. It betrays Jiamu’s subjectivity in taking male power. She is not
simply a surrogate of men, but by crossing gender boundaries, she identifies herself as
not only a socially constructed role of a female:

“叫人快快请老爷，我与他说。”…便叫麝月传人去请，不一时传进话来，
说："老爷谢客去了。" 贾母道："不用他也使得，你们便说我说的话。" (Cao
IV.95.1240)

‘Send someone at once to his father and ask him to come here. I must speak to
him about this.’ …She told Musk to send someone for Jia Zheng. Minutes later,
the message returned that he was out visiting a friend.

‘Well, we’ll go ahead without him,’ said Grandmother Jia. ‘For the present, none
of the servants is to be punished. ‘Those are my instructions, and I shall take full
responsibility.’ (Hawkes IV.95.315-316)

In Hawkes’ translation, however, as argued above, Jiamu attains power as a “female”;
therefore, when she wielded obviously Jia Zheng’s power which seems to be
impossible for females prescribed in the gender system, her action is represented as only an expedient for the sake of the family rather than a common scene with Jiamu being the family authority. Her words “你们便说我说的话”, which shows Jiamu’s confidence in her authority and power, is translated into “those are my instructions, and I shall take full responsibility”, suggesting that was an emergent circumstance and Jiamu had no choice but to give those instructions, and by doing so, she expected there might be some consequences for crossing the boundary. In Yang’s translation, it is obviously a different case:

“Send for the master at once and I’ll tell him this.”…The old lady ordered Sheyue to send to fetch him. Presently it was reported that he was out paying a call.

“We can do without him then,” she said. “Say these are my instructions.” (Yang III.95.218-219)

Here, Jiamu’s confidence and subjectivity are clearly revealed by saying “say these are my instructions”. And Yang’s translation for “我与他说” is also closer to the ST, which more probably implies the meaning of “Let me talk to him since you are so afraid; he dare not be angry with me.”

Hawkes’ representation of the incident further strengthens the argument that he limits Jiamu to a relatively static gender role, which is also a tendency of a number of feminist critiques. For example, the aforementioned scholar Edwards (1994) has
classified Jiamu into the group of *ci mu* (benevolent mothers) as opposite to the group of *yan fu* (strict fathers) represented by Jia Zheng, clearly betraying her perspective of gender dichotomy. As mentioned above, she does not recognize Jiamu’s gender fluidity in terms of power and authority, and thus she regards the wielding of patriarchal power by Jiamu as taking advantage of her privileges as a mother to seize control over the family for her own sake and confront men in the Jias. The incident of Bao-yu being beaten by Jia Zheng is deemed as Jiamu taking advantage of filial piety to “ensure that Baoyu remains under her control and away from Jia Zheng’s influence” (120). And her wielding of Jia Zheng’s power is deemed as undermining his authority in public purposely. Jiamu is viewed as a selfish and sophisticated woman accumulating wealth and seizing power in the Jias for her own sake.

### 2.2. Translating Jiamu’s feminine individuality

It can be concluded from the above analysis that Jiamu is not a victimized female losing her individuality. Therefore, assuming the role as a male ruler is not in contrast with her individual character, especially feminine personalities. She is endowed by nature with the feminine benevolence. Thus, she shows great kindness and love to her grandchildren as well as other youngsters. When staying with her grandchildren, Jiamu identifies herself as one of them rather than one of the patriarchal dominators. She even uses her male power to expand the female sphere under patriarchy including the Prospect Garden, the poetry club and constant female parties.
Lee (1997), on the other hand, regards Jiamu as losing her individuality rather than being benevolent. Lee believes that Jiamu’s loyalty to the patriliny “overwrites” all of her feminine personalities, and in this sense, her affection for Bao-yu “is nearly exclusively based on his status as the prime scion of the clan.” She claims that Jiamu completely disregards “the emotive aspect of Bao-yu’s identity” as well as her own emotive identity, which leads to “her betrayal of Dai-yu” (100).

In Hawkes’ translation, since Jiamu is represented as a powerful female, her feminine personalities are actually foregrounded to show how Jiamu develops her female subjectivity and confronts males. The incident of Jiamu seeing a doctor can be a good example when she refused to hide behind a curtain to avoid being looked at by men outside the family. Such a deed is regarded as a typical action for females emancipating themselves from men by Western feminists since they emphasize constantly females’ control of their own bodies to defy male dominance and manipulation (孙 2001, 169-170). But the original intention of Jiamu herself may not be that complicated since her own words implies that it is simply due to Jiamu’s easy attitude about sexuality at such an old age—“我也老了,那里养不出那阿物儿来”.

Correspondingly, the doctor portrayed in ST did not behave so differently with Jiamu’s direct presence. He only showed proper and necessary etiquette usually paid to people in higher status. To be specific, in the short passage describing Jiamu’s seeing a doctor, phrases about the doctor’s attitude of reverence appear four times, and it is discernable that his attitude of reverence to the Jias revealed by the expression “不敢走甬路,只走旁阶” is not remarkably different from that to Jiamu
In Hawkes’ translation, however, the implication of the three salutes shown to Jiamu by the doctor is modified, with a prominent emphasis added onto the doctor’s daring not raise his head, overtly suggesting that his salutes were mixed with his fear of looking at a woman directly, which is not shown in ST.

王太医 便不敢抬头，忙上来请了安。 (Cao II.42.516)

Not daring to raise his head in so much female company, Dr Wang advanced and saluted his patient. (Hawkes II.42.328)

The doctor bowed.

‘He was my great-uncle,’ he said, smiling demurely, but still not daring to raise his head. (Hawkes II.42.329)

After that he made another bow and retired, eyes still on the floor, as they had been throughout the consultation. (Hawkes II.42.329)
By two “still”, Jiamu’s authority appears to be reinforced in this example, but actually it is diminished, since “不敢抬头/低头” is no longer an embodiment of respect in Hawkes’ translation, but a reflection of gender dichotomy. Such special “respect” paid to Jiamu added by Hawkes is in sharp contrast with his weakening of Jiamu’s authority in other passages of the translation (such as paragraphs with “陪笑” and “不敢” mentioned above), and also from his general weakening of the sense of hierarchy as shown in the translation of the phrase “不敢走甬路,只走旁阶” within the short passage:

一时只见贾珍、贾琏、贾蓉三个人将王太医领来。王太医 不敢走甬路, 只走旁阶, 跟着贾珍到了阶矶上。(Cao II.42.516)

…Modestly declining to walk up the central ramp, he followed Cousin Zhen up the right-hand side steps onto the terrace. (Hawkes II.42.329)

In this proposition, Hawkes, as usual, diminishes the implication of the strict social hierarchy. Such a contrast between these two almost opposite directions of translation tendency of Hawkes highlights the uniqueness and significance of his emphasis on Dr. Wang’s “不敢抬头/低头”, which arguably reflects Hawkes’ stance of gender binary.

Therefore, Jiamu’s feminine personalities are foregrounded in Hawkes’ translation, which, however, still reflects how Hawkes imposes a static gender identity on Jiamu. Additionally, as a result, Hawkes regards all females in the Jias as in the same group and does not seem to understand Jiamu’s conscious separation of herself from other
females like Lady Wang and Lady Xing as shown in the following example:

黛玉因让王夫人等。贾母道：‘今日原是我特带着你们取笑, 咱们只管咱们的，别理他们。我巴巴的唱戏摆酒，为他们不成？他们在这里白听白吃，已经便宜了，还让他们点呢！’ (Cao 1.22.252)

Next Dai-yu was asked to choose. She deferred to Aunt Xing and Aunt Wang; but Grandmother Jia was insistent:

‘I’ve brought you young people here today for some fun,’ she said. ‘I want you to enjoy yourselves. Never mind about them! ...’ (Hawkes 1.22.434)

In this passage, Jiamu identified herself as one in the same group with her granddaughters, while Lady Xing and Lady Wang were excluded from this girls’ party since they are the wives of men, who are supposed to identify themselves as one in the patriline into which they are married. Actually, Jiamu is also a wife of Jia, but implied from this passage, with her husband dead, Jiamu identifies herself as a female subject like Dai-yu and Bao-chai rather than a wife, a role attached to men. However, in Hawkes’ translation, Jiamu separated herself from the girls by saying “I want you to enjoy yourselves” rather than “let’s enjoy ourselves.”

Likewise, it seems that Jeanne Knoerle (1972) is also confused about Jiamu’s intention in participating girls’ party. She has talked about Jiamu’s active involvement in “the young people’s games with a relaxed good humor that belies her age.” However, she thinks these characteristics of Jiamu are “almost comic” for Western
readers (74).

To summarize, Jiamu is a female with not only her feminine personalities, but also her individuality which is not attached to any men. She identifies herself as being distinguished from those married women such as Lady Wang and Lady Xing and belonging to the group of girls.

Conclusion

To conclude, Jiamu enjoys flexibilities and fluidity in terms of her gender roles assumed. She is able to enter into male domains and take male power. But her subjectivity is not oppressed by her merging into the patriarchal society. She wields male power actively and does not feel inferior to other male heads in the Jia Household. Also, she still holds her female identity, developing her feminine personalities and expanding the female sphere for other women under patriarchy through negotiations with men. Jiamu in Hawkes’ translation and certain critiques, however, is imposed with a relatively static gender role. She only attains power as a female, by becoming a mother and a grandmother with many offspring and thus getting their love and respect for her or by symbolizing the primordial yin life force and therefore exercising her power as a divinity. In her subjectivity, she only identifies herself as a socially prescribed female, and her wielding of power is therefore regarded as either trying to seize power to guarantee her own position in the Jia
Household, or being forced to guard the patriarchy, losing her individuality. These interpretations and representations of Jiamu may betray the stance of gender binary of Western feminism and may throw some light upon the distinctiveness of the situation of gender negotiations, compromises and relationships in Qing China, which probably can help to explain the absence of early feminist movements in China. Therefore, this paper hopes to lead to some discussions over the special gender role of females and gender relationships in China and the limitation of Western feminist understanding of Chinese women.

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