

## CAN ONE TRANSLATE WITHOUT KNOWING THE SL? A STUDY ON THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF *DAOMU BIJI*

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**Abstract:** *The publication and international circulation of Chinese Internet Literature (CIL) translations have recently garnered considerable attention. However, a notable gap exists in the comprehensive examination of the translations, both at the process and product levels. Notably, the translation of Chinese Internet Literature significantly influences the exposure of the said literary works to an international readership. To address this gap, the study aims to investigate the translation process of “Daomu Biji” (Grave Robbers’ Chronicles), a Chinese web novel series within the supernatural genre by Xu Lei. The book is written in eleven volumes, and six volumes were officially translated by Kathy Mok in 2011. On the other hand, a fan translation was released on the MereBear474765851 weblog, where the translator claims no knowledge of the source text. Essentially, the translator translates the source text using a machine, reads the official translation (indirect intralingual translation), heavily edits the translated text, and checks it with two specific users (native Chinese speakers) before publishing it on the blog. The readers are then free to comment on the translated text, and the translator would revise the text constantly. Surprisingly, most readers familiar with official and fan translations prefer the latter in their comments about the book. This study conducted an interview, where the identity of the translators are kept anonymous and confidential (as requested by them) to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations and procedures in the process of translating. The outcome may contradict the fact that to translate, one needs to master at least two languages.*

**Keywords:** *Chinese Internet Literature, translation process, crowdsourcing, indirect translation, Daomu Biji*

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## Introduction

Translation is a complex cognitive process that requires not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural understanding and contextual awareness. The issue of whether one can translate effectively without knowing the source language (SL) is particularly pertinent considering increasing globalization and the advent of advanced translation technologies. The current research explores the thoughts of the fan translator, particularly in the context of translating works such as *Daomu Biji* (also known as *Grave Robbers' Chronicles*), a popular Chinese literary series written by Xu Lei. An interview is conducted with the fan translator, where her identity is kept anonymous and confidential. The interview questions are based on the disclaimer (*Daomu Biji*. MereBear's Translation, n.d.) provided by the fan translator on the website where the English translation of the novel is published. The communication with the fan translator was via email. By exploring diverse perspectives on translation processes, challenges, and methodologies, this study aims to highlight knowledge gaps and suggest future research directions.

Chinese-to-English literary translations started to flourish when online forums promoted the publication of CIL. The vast number of people who read online literature may be attributable to the active promotion of both free and paid content by prominent platforms, which highlights the digital nature of the Internet literature market (Xiao et al., 2022). In addition, the growing demand for online literature has led to an increase in author employment in the digital economy. The 2023 interim report from Chinese Literature Limited, a company primarily engaged in operating online literature platforms, states that in the first half of this year, over two hundred thousand authors and three hundred fifty thousand literary works were produced. In response to the rapid development of Internet literature in overseas markets, a great deal of outstanding Chinese online literary works have been translated by numerous overseas literary translation websites (Xiao et al., 2022, p. 11). This illustrates the potency and positive impact of CIL in fostering cross-cultural understanding.

## Translation Processes and the Source Language

The translation process goes beyond simple word-for-word substitution; it requires deep cognitive engagement with the text. Translation is a complex and multifaceted process, often necessitating a profound linguistic and cultural understanding of the source language (SL). Li et al. (2021) highlight the significance of cultural context in translation, emphasizing that translators must develop culturally effective strategies to convey meaning accurately. This indicates that a strong comprehension of SL cultural nuances can significantly enhance translation quality, suggesting that a lack of SL knowledge may impede effective translation. According to Shadieva et al. (2018), the promotion of cross-cultural understanding through technology raises questions about the necessity of SL knowledge in traditional translation methods. The argument is that while

technology can assist in translation (Guo & Amirdabbaghian, 2025), it does not replace the nuanced understanding that a human translator possesses, especially when dealing with culturally rich texts like *Daomu Biji*.

Furthermore, Haldane et al. (2022) explore the translation processes in multilingual contexts, suggesting that familiarity with the SL can facilitate better collaborative translation outcomes. Their findings imply that translators who lack knowledge of the SL might struggle to navigate complex cultural and contextual elements, further supporting the notion that knowledge of the SL is crucial for nuanced translation. Moreover, Ho et al. (2019) discuss the implications of translating sensitive qualitative data, emphasizing that a lack of familiarity with the SL can result in misinterpretations and loss of meaning, particularly when addressing the cultural nuances. This suggests that understanding the SL is not merely beneficial but perhaps essential for accurate and effective translation.

In contrast, the emerging role of artificial intelligence and machine translation presents a different perspective. With the popularity of Chinese Internet (CIL) Literature, substantial translated novels have been automatically produced by machine translation systems (Guo & Amirdabbaghian, 2025). The reliance on machine translation tools, as discussed by Zhang (2023) and Kuek et al. (2024), raises concerns about the accuracy and reliability of translations, particularly when the question posed is not in English. This study indicates that while machine translation may facilitate understanding, it also risks oversimplifying complex linguistic structures and cultural contexts inherent in the SL. Similarly, Al-Jarf (2022) identifies specific difficulties in translating polysemous words between English and Arabic, which can lead to significant misunderstandings. This issue is compounded in the translation of culturally specific texts where polysemy and cultural references are prevalent. Such challenges underscore the importance of SL knowledge in ensuring fidelity to the original text. The work of Robertson and Díaz (2022) also further emphasizes the critical nature of understanding the SL, particularly in the context of machine translation. They note that users often employ strategies to recover from mistranslations, which indicates a reliance on their comprehension of the SL and the target language (TL) to navigate these challenges. Without a foundational understanding of the SL, translators may struggle to identify and rectify inaccuracies, leading to potential miscommunication.

## **Literary Translation**

Literary translation is one of the types of translation that has drawn the attention of many scholars, with numerous studies examining the literary translation of various cultures. According to Boase-Beier, Fisher, and Furukawa (2018), literary texts exhibit three key traits as “they are fictional, employ literary devices like rhyme or ambiguity, and yield distinct cognitive impacts on readers,

evoking emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, excitement, empathy, and more” (2018, p. 3). Several theorists have raised several issues regarding literary translation, particularly regarding how closely it must be treated in relation to culture. For instance, a growing number of scholars have turned their attention to literary translation in China. Valdeón and Zhao (2020) conducted an overview of the significant contribution literary translation has made to the development of translation studies in China. They explain that in the middle of the nineteenth century, Western powers started to exert a major influence over China. As a result, classic works from languages like English, French, and Spanish have been translated into the Chinese language (Valdeón & Zhao, 2020, p. 2). In the thirty years between 1987 and 2016, Han and Li (2019) conducted a comparative study of literary translation research in China. They discovered that literary translation clearly predominates in Chinese translation studies, and that “Chinese translation researchers seem to be obsessive about literary translation” (Han & Li, 2019, p. 3). Unfortunately, there is very little knowledge available on this phenomenon because “there is not much research on the subject and most of the data they rely on are not reliable enough or representative” (Han & Li, 2019, p. 34).

### Chinese Internet Literature

The origin of Chinese Internet Literature (CIL) can be traced back to an online journal called *China News Digest* (华夏文摘) (My China news digest, n.d.), established in 1989 by a group of Chinese students studying in the United States (Chen, 2012). They wrote and published literary works such as prose, novels, and poetry on the website to cater to the needs of overseas Chinese students. This movement did not gain much attention outside the Chinese students’ circle in America, let alone in China, where the Internet was almost non-existent. With the growth in the use and popularity of the Internet in China, the first dedicated Chinese literary website, *Under the Banyan Tree* (榕树下), was launched in 1997. Some scholars considered this to be the official beginning of CIL in China because it provided a platform where aspiring writers were welcome to publish their works (Hockx, 2015). *Under the Banyan Tree* continued to grow and produce many writers who later became acclaimed authors in the print industry, such as Murong Xuecun and Anni Baobei (Aquilino, 2023). What truly promoted CIL to an even bigger scale was the serialized web novel *The First Time of Intimate Touch*, published by Cai Zhiheng on the bulletin board system (BBS) in Taiwan. It was a phenomenal success that motivated even more writers to join the CIL world.

With CIL being established, CIL translation has slowly gained momentum since the year 2000, as wuxia novels by Gu Long and Jin Yong garnered tremendous attention in overseas online forums. To date, there are at least fifty-one websites, mostly based in America, dedicated to translating and disseminating CIL (Zheng,

2018). Statistics from thirteen CIL translation websites, such as an average DRV/P (daily reading volume/person) of 8.7 times and an average DRT/P (daily reading time/person) of twenty minutes, reflect the huge number of followers such CIL translation portals have (Zheng, 2018). Speaking of Wuxia web novels, the creator of Wuxiaworld(Wuxiaworld, n.d.) Chinese-American Lai Jingping, also known online as RWX, was worth a mention. As an avid Wuxia novel fan, he translated the *Coiling Dragon* (盘龙) saga originally written in Chinese by a popular fantasy novel writer, *I Eat Tomatoes* (我吃西红柿), and created Wuxiaworld in 2014 to share the English translations with the world. Subsequently, other serial novel websites were created, including Gravity Tales (n.d.), Novel Updates (n.d.), and Paper Republic (n.d.) to cater to the growing population of writers, translators, and readers. To date, Wuxiaworld remains the leading CIL translation website, which attracts an average of 672,000 visitors per day and approximately 6.5 million pages per visitor every day (Xu & Hua, 2020).

According to the 2023 Research Report on the Development of Chinese Online Literature (Chen et al., 2024), the CIL market size was reported to reach 40.4 billion RMB, and the CIL IP market increased to 260.5 billion RMB. There were 24 million registered writers of whom 2.3 million were new, producing 36.2 million writings with an increase of 4.2 million and an increase of 9% in registered users, amounting to 537 million. Using Web Novel (n.d.) as an example, there were 3,800 translated works, increasing 31% from 2022. Such staggering figures only reflect the prominence and significance CIL has achieved since its early years.

Given the development of CIL in the past two decades, many observers have called it a phenomenal media wonder. Some even consider CIL to have the potential to be one of the major cultural phenomena in the world, capable of competing with America's Hollywood, Japan's anime, and Korea's KDrama (Shao, 2016, p. 19). While CIL's influence and soft power remain to be seen, it is undoubtedly an important vehicle to promote Chinese culture, values, and tradition, as can be seen in the growing number of studies focusing on the promotion and dissemination of CIL with keywords like "going out" "going global" "going overseas" or "going to the world" (Hao, 2019; He, 2021; Ji, 2016; Liu & Song, 2019; Peng & Hu, 2019; Wu, Gu & Zheng, 2020; Song, 2021; Yang, 2021; Yang & Zhang, 2021; Zhao, 2021).

Other major focuses of CIL research are on the genres or categories of web novels, namely *wuxia* (martial heroes), *xianxia* (hero fantasy), and *xuanhuan* (magical fantasy) (Chang & Zhao, 2022; Tang et al., 2023) and the themes, most significantly on growth, adventure, conquest (Wu, Gu & Zheng, 2020). On the features and characteristics of CIL, researchers agree that being light novels, CIL provides a pleasurable and satisfactory reading experience as well as a sense of escapism for the readers (Wu, Gu & Zheng, 2020; Yang, 2021;

Shao, 2020). Other factors that contribute to the popularity of CIL, as seen in the increasing reader base, include CIL's reader-centered and reader-friendly stories with minimal cultural or ideological content. Some works like *Coiling Dragon* are infused with new elements like gamification or Western character names, such as Linley Baruch, Delia, and Bluefire. Such strong literary vitality and creativity help CIL open new frontiers in the digital realm, making it easily acceptable for readers from the English-speaking world (Wu, Gu & Zheng, 2020; Yang, 2021).

Different from traditional Chinese literature, CIL offers a totally new reading experience to the readers, in which the readers play multiple roles. This unique feature corresponds with the CIL translation modes and strategies, which are another major branch of CIL research. Different from the author-centered mode of writing in the past, CIL emphasizes reader-translator/writer dynamics (Yuan & Xue, 2022) because the readers may join as members of the writing/translating team and contribute to the collective effort of writing/translating part of the series; therefore, the readers are the authors and translators (Chang & Zhao, 2022; Liu & Teng, 2022). The mode of translation is shifting from user-generated (translations posted by the user/translator on online forums or social media) to that of crowdsourcing (translations coordinated and completed by volunteers on translation websites like Wuxiaworld) (Wu, Gu & Zheng, 2020).

Also, some of the readers play the role of sponsors as well as translation critics (Chang & Zhao, 2022; Hao, 2019). Termed “commissioned production of fictions” (Tian & Adorjan, 2016, p. 881), CIL has entered the era of commercialized, freemium readership, when Qidian (n.d.) was established in 2008 (Tang et al., 2023). Qidian is currently China's largest web novel platform, which not only hosts original online literature but also provides source materials to be translated and published on Wuxiaworld. It was Qidian that introduced the free-to-read but pay-to-unlock-VIP-contents membership subscription system. Readers are allowed to interact with the authors by tipping them or paying for customized stories (Tang et al., 2023). This is a game-changer as the readers could actively engage with the authors directly in the creation process and have more power over what or how they read.

### **Supernatural fiction and *Daomu Biji***

Supernatural fiction is defined by its focus on supernatural phenomena or aspects, which frequently defy naturalist interpretations of reality. Afolayan (2023, p. 26) describes the supernatural world as “the unknown and potentially unknowable or that which cannot be apprehended”. Supernatural fictions typically incorporate elements that defy rationality in science and the natural world. It can deal with objects, people, animals, or phenomena that are deemed “abnormal”, “strange”, or “extraordinary”. Traditionally, supernatural fictions in Chinese

culture are part of the zhiguai (志怪), which means “record of abnormalities”, or “tales of the supernatural”. Zhiguai is one of the earliest forms of fantasy literature in Chinese. According to Liu and Zhang (2018), the term zhiguai was first used in the early Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* (around 320 BCE). It continued to be utilized as the title of various collections of supernatural tales during the Six Dynasties period. It is important to note that zhiguai is very different from fantasy and supernatural literature in the Western tradition (Liu & Zhang, 2018). This is because the zhiguai collection is greatly influenced by Taoist or Buddhist philosophy. As a result, it frequently incorporates principles, values, and ideas that are meant to promote Buddhism or religious beliefs. The zhiguai and Western supernatural literature are only similar in the way they deal with abnormalities that defy natural laws in the human world (Liu & Zhang, 2018). A taxonomy of abnormalities discovered in zhiguai collections from the Wei and Jin periods has been mentioned by Liu and Zhang (2018) to provide additional insight into the many forms of abnormalities in zhiguai. The table below shows the types of traditional abnormalities listed by Liu and Zhang (2018).

**Table 1:** *Types of traditional abnormalities by Liu and Zhang (2018)*

Types of abnormalities	Examples
1. The Supernatural Beings	Deities, ghosts, monsters, immortals
2. The Realms Beyond the Human World	Heavens, underworld, immortal land, exotic territories
3. Cross-Boundary Oddities	Omens, thaumaturgy, metamorphoses, trafficking between humans and supernatural beings, interactions of humans with humanized beasts
4. Human World Oddities	Legendary figures, strange creatures, natural wonders, other marvels

In Chinese pre-modern literature, zhiguai is a historical writing that can still be traced in supernatural fiction. According to Macdonald (2019), Tianxia Bachang is one of the representative authors who wrote *Gui Chui Deng* (鬼吹灯)<sup>1</sup>, an online novel series released in 2006. *Gui Chui Deng* is a series of zhiguai that plays with the uncertainty between the real and the unreal by re-creating the ghost story as a parody of history and fiction. In fact, the series even gave rise to a completely new genre known as grave-robbing fiction (Macdonald, 2019, p. 18). Another author named Xu Lei began serializing a similar story on grave robbing in 2006 on the Baidu forum, before moving to Qidian China, a platform for reading, publishing, and writing Chinese novels, under the pen name *Nanpai Sanshu*. This series, *Daomu Biji* 盗墓笔记<sup>2</sup>, was inspired by the *Gui Chui Deng*. *Tomb Raiding* is a novel series that chronicles the tomb-robbing exploits of Wu

1. Ghost Blows out the Light

2. Grave Robbers' Chronicles

Xie, who was born into a family of grave robbers and is the sole heir of the Wu Family. The narrative unfolds 50 years ago when four men embark on a tomb raid at Biaozi Hill in Changsha. The story takes a tragic turn when they encounter a mutated corpse (referred to as a zombie in the official translation), leaving Wu Laogou as the lone survivor. Half a century later, Wu Laogou's grandchild, Wu Xie, is visited by an old man bearing a photocopy of a silk script for valuation. Wu Xie shares the silk script with his third uncle, Wu San Xing, the only inheritor of the tomb-raiding business in the family. It is revealed that the silk script is a map leading to an ancient tomb. From this point, Wu Xie begins his adventure into the mystery of tomb-raiding, entwining himself with centuries-old truths that somehow relate to the history of his family. Alongside Wang Pangzi and Zhang Qiling, his fellow tomb raiders, they collaborate to uncover the truth and embark on the thrilling journey that unfolds before them. The original novel series is accessible on the Qidian (n.d.) website, with the first fifty-six chapters of the first volume available for free, while a subscription is required to access the remaining content. Alternatively, readers can purchase the printed version at bookstores or online platforms like Amazon. Additionally, all six volumes of the official translation can be purchased from Amazon, whereas the fan translation is available online in PDF form. This way of writing establishes a balance between realism and fantasy, producing literary works that are distinct in their combination of adventure and the supernatural. Literary translators often work with supernatural fiction, particularly when there is a market for the translated works. However, it might be difficult for translators to grasp the meaning and allusion behind terms relating to the paranormal when their degree of cultural awareness comes as a barrier.

Written over five years, the main novel series comprises eight volumes, with the final volume split into two books, resulting in a total of nine physical books. As reported in the *People's Daily* (2015), the novel series underwent its initial adaptation into the 2015 TV series *The Lost Tomb*, focusing on the narrative of the first book. The following year, a cinematic adaptation, *Time Raiders*, hit the screens, securing the ninth spot for the largest box office in mainland China and ranking fifth in the Chinese movie box office. In 2019, *The Lost Tomb 2* was unveiled, featuring new casts and encompassing the storyline of the second, third, and partially fourth books. The year 2020 witnessed the release of *Ultimate Note*, which encompassed the events of the fifth, sixth, and seventh books. The unfolding narrative continued in 2021 with the debut of *Explore with the Note* on WeTV, exploring the events of the Heavenly Palace on the Clouds (Part 1 and Part 2 draw inspiration from books 2 and 3, respectively). Although no adaptation addresses the events of the final volume of the book, various TV series have explored the prequel, sequel, and side-story elements of the narrative.

A translation of the original novel series was published in English by Kathy Mok in 2011, but the serialization concludes with Volume six, specifically covering events from the fifth book. Later in 2020, a dedicated fan translator took up the task, completing the translation for the remaining volumes, including the prequel, sequel, and side story, and even resumed work on the first four volumes. For a better understanding, the following table illustrates the list for each novel volume and its English translations.

**Table 2:** *Overview of the volumes and the English translations*

Vol	Titles	Official Translation (Volumes/Titles)	Fan Translation (Volumes/Titles)
1	七星鲁王 (Seven Star Lu Palace)	Volume 1 Cavern of the Blood Zombies Volume 2 Angry Sea, Hidden Sands	Volume 1 Seven Star Lu Palace & Angry Sea, Hidden Sands
2	秦岭神树 (Qinling Mountain Sacred Tree)	Volume 3 Bronze Tree of Death	Volume 2 Qinling Mountain Sacred Tree & Heavenly Palace on the Clouds (Part 1)
3	云顶天宫 (Heavenly Palace on the Clouds)	Volume 4 Palace of Doom	Volume 3 Heavenly Palace on the Clouds (Part 2)
4	蛇沼鬼城 (Snake Swamp Ghost Town)	Volume 5 Deadly Desert Winds	Volume 4 Snake Marsh Ghost City
5	谜海归巢 (Mystery Sea Returns to Nest)	Volume 6 Graveyard of a Queen	
6	阴山古楼 (Yinshan Mountains Ancient Building)		Volume 6 Ancient Building Under the Dark Mountain
7	邛笼石影 (Qionglong stone shadow)		Volume 7 Stone Shadow in Qiong Cave
8	大结局 1 & 2 (The Finale Part 1 & 2)		Volume 8 The Finale (Parts 1 & 2)

It is noteworthy that Nanpai Sanshu originally ventured into writing as an amateur driven by his passion for producing stories of grave-robbing adventures. In the epilogue of the novel series sequel *Ten Years Later*, he openly acknowledges being a writer who joined the field midway, expressing a constant unease, fearing that others might discover his amateur status. This aligns with Duan's (2018) assertion that many online writers initially start as grassroots writers, later attaining fame and professional standing due to the success of their literary works. Overwhelmed by pressure, the author even announced his retirement from writing in 2013, citing challenges arising from the conflict between the demands of the publishing cycle and maintaining writing quality. He also mentioned facing substantial criticism due to delays in uploading new chapters. After a long hiatus, he returned to writing in 2018 with another sequel, *Reboot: Thunder at the Distant Sea*. The novel series received the Best Adventure Novel Award in the 7<sup>th</sup> China Writers Rich List in 2012, and the author was honored with the New Talent Award for Internet Literature in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mao Dun Literature Prize in 2019. With over twenty million copies sold (Brzeski, 2016), the series has become one of the noteworthy representatives of the grave robbers (Duan, 2018, p. 674), breaking various publishing records at the time.

## Results and Findings

As promised, the interview was conducted anonymously to safeguard the translator's identity. According to the US copyright law, anyone found liable for civil copyright infringement may be ordered to pay either actual damages or "statutory" damages affixed at no less than \$750 and no more than \$30,000 per work infringed. For "willful" infringement, a court may award up to \$150,000 per work infringed. Since it is believed that the fan translator resides in the US, the identity of the translator is kept confidential. The questionnaire, as stated, is based on the disclaimer published on the weblog managed by the translator regarding the *Daomu Biji*. The interview revealed some demographic information about the translator. The translator is a female (therefore, from now on will be addressed as she), in her early 30s. She is no Chinese diaspora and has no knowledge of the Chinese language.

Regarding the translation, she believes in mastering the source text (ST) to do the original work justice, while she claims no knowledge of the original language of *Daomu Biji*. Therefore, that could be the reason why she believes that her target text (TT) would be different if she knew the Chinese language. To get a preliminary target text, she utilizes three online translation websites, namely Baidu (n.d.), SOGOU (n.d.), and Google Translate (n.d.), as well as an online Chinese-to-English dictionary called MDBG (n.d.). Moreover, she refers to several context clues to figure out the addresses of pronouns when she is confused about what the author conveys. She also refers to the first six books published by the official translator to double-check the references. She

also considered watching some Chinese dramas inspired by the *Daomu Biji* in 2020 to translate the names of characters correctly, but she did not reveal which dramas exactly she had in mind. Therefore, she confirms that her work is a retranslation. After she puts the ST in online translation machines, she imagines herself in the author's shoes and tries to reword the statements in the English language. She even modifies the tense of verbs in the text following the context. That is how she manipulates the TT heavily.

However, it is noteworthy to say that she is not alone on this journey. As stated in the disclaimer and confirmed in the interview, two readers are also in the picture, helping the translator with the task. Tiffany X and Yvette are two readers who reached out to the translator with their comments on the text. The translator decided not to reveal any demographic information about them. However, both are claimed not to be part of the Chinese diaspora and not to have a strong command of the Chinese language. From the pronouns she used, it is understood that Tiffany X is a female since whenever the translator refers to her, she uses the pronoun *she*. Tiffany X, according to the translator, acts as a quality control person in charge, where she provides feedback and/or corrections on the work the translator edited using machine translation. Tiffany X has the experience of translating *The Southern Archives*, another Chinese Internet Literature, into English, published in 2021 on the *Daomu Biji* Wiki website as well as the weblog managed by the fan translator of the *Daomu Biji*. Similarly, in 2019, Yvette translated *A Thousand Faces*, an extra written by the *Daomu Biji* author, and published it on the same platforms.

Asking her about the collaborative translation work, the fan translator refuses to call her work a collaborative and/or crowd-sourced translation since she believes that it is her who is doing most of the work. However, she claims that any individual who helped her with constructive comments received credit on the website. She usually receives comments on the TT from several readers as well. She claims to edit and revise the TT based on the readers' comments continuously if she agrees with their corrections and believes the comments are reasonable and constructive. Her definition of constructive comment is either a misinterpreted source text with a correction provided or pointing out a typo in the TT. For her, there is no set stop-point for editing the TT.

She also revealed the motivation behind the translation of *Daomu Biji*. As stated by the fan translator, she first watched the drama series *The Lost Tomb* on a whim, then started reading the English translations related to the story. Since she could not find more of the stories in English, she managed to find the ST. At first, she used Google Translate to read it in English, but the text was not to her satisfaction. After editing the TT heavily for easier reading, she thought there might be others out there who would like to read the rest of the stories like her. That was the time she decided to publish her version of the TT on a website.

For this, she does not carry any knowledge of the ST language, and based on the definition provided to her during the interview, she considers herself a post-editor rather than a translator. Since she has no permission from the ST author, she publishes her TT freely on her website, which she believes is ethical.

## Discussion

The current research tries to not only shed light on the role of ST language knowledge in producing an acceptable translation for the readers but also provide insights specifically on the fan translation of *Daomu Biji*. As concluded by the current body of literature, a certain level of knowledge in SL as well as the cultural context of both the SL and TL are required factors for translators to be able to deliver a translated product that would be understood by the TT readers (Shadiev et al., 2018; Ho et al., 2019; Ratnasari, 2020; Li et al., 2021; Haldane et al., 2022; Al-Jarf, 2022; Robertson & Díaz, 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). However, as the results of the interview revealed, the fan translator of *Daomu Biji* does not know the SL and she acquires her ST cultural context online, which may not even be accurate and/or enough. Considering her answers to the questions regarding the crowd-sourced translation and intralingual translation, it could be safe to say that her work is not related to any of the notions above. However, as confirmed by her, this fan translation could be safely discussed under the phenomenon of retranslation since the work of fan translation is heavily influenced by the official English translation. In other words, the official English translation has been accepted as the main source of inspiration for this fan translation, according to the interview. Retranslation can generally be understood as the act of translating a text that has already been translated before. It often involves the re-examination of the source material and the previous translations, intending to produce a new version that may better reflect contemporary language use, cultural nuances, or authorial intent. The past studies, therefore, confirm that retranslation has emerged as a significant area of study within the field of translation studies, particularly due to its implications for understanding the dynamics of meaning, cultural reinterpretation, and the evolving nature of texts across different contexts and periods (Carl et al., 2019; Sipahutar et al., 2021; Munkova et al., 2021).

## Conclusion

Official and fan translations are said to be two categories of online literary translations. Official translations are those that have been produced by certified translators and checked for accuracy, making them legally acceptable translations. These translations are usually commissioned and/or managed internally by institutions or administrations on behalf of private clients (Taibi & Ozolins, 2022). Meanwhile, fan translations are unofficial translations of texts

made by fans. It is a literacy practice in which people translate for enjoyment, usually in response to a concrete fan activity that they find appealing. Typically, fans translate because they have learned the language through their frequent online interactions and the process of finding suitable expressions in translation (Vazquez-Calvo et al., 2019, p. 50). In most cases, fan translations are even made freely available due to the non-availability of the official translations in the corresponding language. The types of fan translation include the translation of literary works, comics, fan fiction, fan subbing or dubbing, video games, sports, music, etc. Fan translation can be considered a service to the fan community since it enables the texts to be read in languages other than their original languages, sometimes even before an official translation is prepared and made available, or as a substitute for it (Evans, 2019, p. 178). It is important to note that fan translations are done primarily for the sake of text accessibility and improved attribution to the original works, and not for financial gain. As a result, fans may be inspired to participate in discussions and share their enthusiasm for these cultural products (Deppey, 2005; Lee, 2009, pp. 1015-1017; Evans, 2019, p. 178).

The present study conducted an interview with the fan translator of *Daomu Biji* to reveal more about the motivations and procedures in the process of translating the said novel. The results reveal that the translator considers her work a retranslation of the ST, where the official English translation plays a role in inspiring this task. It is traditionally believed that translation requires knowledge in both source and target languages; however, the current study could be said to be the only one conducted that contradicts the belief. The fan translator clearly does not know SL. Moreover, she carries no information on the ST cultural context, which makes it clear that the fan translator is only proficient in the TT. This research confirms that in the modern world of Translation Studies, with the heavy overcast of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) involved in the process of translation, translators may not necessarily need knowledge of the SL. As confirmed by the fan translator, inspired by the definition of post-editing, she prefers to carry the title of post-editor instead of translator. This could mean that individuals involved in the act of translation using technology and AI could possibly translate a text without knowing the SL and post-edit the TT with their personal preferences. This, of course, would be favorable and/or rejected by the readers. The positive side of the story is that there might be an increasing number of fan translations, making it easier for readers to access foreign writings in their preferred languages. However, the threat of manipulation, since even the fan translator of *Daomu Biji* pleaded with it, would be a greater concern for the readers as well as the Translation Studies scholars.

The current research is considered to be a case study, looking at a single fan translator. The results may not seem suitable for generalization, which is clearly due to the limitations of this research. It is recommended that further studies

consider looking deeper at the process of translation and post-editing involving a group of individuals who are not familiar with the SL. That would help to delve deeper into the complex cognitive processes of translation as well as a possible comparison between the translated products.

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