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Kunlun Nu: Translation and Character Analysis of a Tang Dynasty Martial Arts Classic

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Abstract

This article presents a groundbreaking English semantic translation of the classic ancient literary novel Kunlun Nu, a martial arts work by Pei Xing, a renowned writer of the Tang Dynasty. The study employs quantitative analysis using the time series method to examine the character images in the English semantic translation of Kunlun Nu. A bubble diagram, a key descriptive tool in time series analysis, is utilized to analyze three variables: Plot, Positive and Negative Image, and Quantity of Character Qualities. This framework is applied to the four main characters of Kunlun Nu, assessing them in terms of the quantity of character qualities (flat characters or round characters), character development dynamics (static characters or developmental characters), and character impact (protagonist and antagonist). The results provide a comprehensive analysis of character portrayal and development in this seminal work. The findings offer fresh insights into the complexities of character roles and relationships in Kunlun Nu, contributing to a deeper understanding of the narrative's structural and thematic intricacies in translation.

Keywords: Character Analysis, English Translation, Kunlun Nu, Martial Arts Literature, Pei Xing, Tang Dynasty, Time Series Method.

Introduction

Kunlun Nu is a renowned martial arts novel authored by Pei Xing, a celebrated writer from the Late Tang Dynasty. This novel holds significant significance in the history of Chinese martial arts. In the declining years of the late Tang Dynasty, after its grandeur and economic prosperity had faded away, the economy was deteriorating, divisions among clans and towns were prevalent, and society was in a state of chaos (Yang, 2024). In such dire circumstances, people yearned for heroes who could provide solace in the face of the harsh and unjust social realities. It was during this time that *Kunlun Nu* emerged as a remarkable masterpiece in the realm of martial arts literature (Yang, 2024). This novel vividly portrays a range of unique and easily identifiable characters, reflecting people's longing for justice and fairness presented by martial arts novel. The novel consists of unique and identifiable characters that embody humanity's unwavering commitment to combatting evil, promoting goodness, empathising with the vulnerable, and campaigning for fairness and justice.

Kunlun Nu narrates the tale of Kunlun Mole, a heroic individual who is the slave of Cui Sheng's family, assists his master and a courtesan named Hong Xiao, who belongs to the first-ranking official, in forming a romantic relationship. The article depicts a story of four remarkable people

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in the narrative: Cui Sheng and Hong Xiao, a courtesan from the household of the first-ranking official, instantly fall in love with each other. However, they face the challenge of limited opportunities to meet and be together. Consequently, Mole takes decisive action to assist Cui Sheng. Mole adeptly assists Cui Sheng in pilfering Hong Xiao from the residence of the first-ranking official by skillfully navigating over numerous tall barriers. Consequently, the two individuals get together with each other. Nevertheless, after two years, when the first-ranking official becomes aware of the whole occurrence, Cui Sheng, driven by fear, shifts the entire responsibility onto Mole. Consequently, the first-ranking official orders his subordinates of 50 soldiers to eliminate Mole, and Mole manages to escape over the tall walls and ultimately attains his freedom (Kang, 2015).

In *Kunlun Nu*, four main characters are portrayed: Mole, Cui Sheng, Hongxiao, and the first-ranking official. The hero Mole is the central figure driving the story's development and the actions of all the characters in the entire novel. The concept of Kunlun being associated with Malays is also discussed by many scholars, including the scholar Md. Salleh Yappar, who thinks Kunlun is a Malay too (Yappar, 2019). Understanding the story and characters of this work is not only particularly important for the inheritance of the chivalrous spirit highly praised in the Tang dynasty tales but also plays an important role in the cultural exchange between China and Malaysia. Therefore, this study highlights the necessity and gap in the analysis of the characters in this work.

Upon examining the scholarly discussions, it becomes evident that there exists just one English communicative translation of *Kunlun Nu*, namely Liu Jue's *Tales of the Marvelous*, which focuses on the target language readers and aims to convey a message that aligns with the target language and culture, rather than faithfully reproducing the original text. In other words, there is no restoration in semantic translation depending on the substance of the source text. The significant role of *Kunlun Nu* in Chinese martial arts literature and its crucial connection to the advancement of Sino-Malaysian cultural exchange, coupled with the absence of English semantic translations that faithfully capture the essence of the original text of Pei Xing, have resulted in a gap that requires attention.

This paper aims to provide a groundbreaking semantic translation of the ancient Chinese novel *Kunlun Nu* into English, closely resembling the original text. Additionally, it will analyse the main characters and roles in *Kunlun Nu* to gain a deeper understanding of the characters narrative employed in ancient Chinese literature, characterised by simplicity of speech and profound meaning, contributing to the field of global martial arts literature by providing detailed accounts of ancient Chinese martial arts in their original language, highlighting their significance within the broader context of martial arts worldwide.



Picture1 Kunlun Nu (Note. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/43Sbywq>)

The Translation of Tang Dynasty Classic Ancient Martial Arts Literary Novel *Kunlun Nu*

In the Dali period of the Tang Dynasty, there was a scholar named Cui Sheng whose father was a great official and had a good relationship with a first-ranking minister of great merit. At that time, Cui Sheng was working as the emperor's personal guard, and his father asked him to visit the sick first-rank minister. Cui Sheng is young and handsome, strict behavior, elegant demeanor, also calm and steady, so the first-ranking minister like him very much at first sight. Then, the first-ranking minister ordered his attendant to roll up the curtain and invite Cui Sheng into the room. Cui Sheng respectfully conveyed his father's condolences, and the first-ranking minister admired the young man's elegance and greeted him and sat down to talk. At that time, there were three courtesans in the room, each one is a stunning beauty. The one at the front was holding a small golden basin with cut cherries and cheese on it. The first-ranking minister asked the red-veiled courtesan named Hong Xiao to invite Cui Sheng to eat, but Cui Sheng was young and shy and did not eat. The first-ranking minister asked Hong Xiao to serve Cui Sheng with a soup spoon. The courtesan laughed as Cui Sheng just ate. After eating, Cui Sheng was ready to leave, and the first-ranking minister said, "Young man, if you have time to visit me here, don't alienate me, an old man." Then he asked Hong Xiao to escort Cui Sheng out of the courtyard. When Cui Sheng looked back at her, the courtesan held out three fingers, turned her hand over three times, then pointed her finger at the small mirror on her chest and said, "Remember this well," before turning around and going inside.

Cui Sheng went home and conveyed the first-ranking minister's thanks to his father. When he arrived home, he suddenly became disoriented and depressed. He was in a trance, thinking hard all day, unable to eat, and humming a poem: "误到蓬山顶上游,明珰玉女动星眸。朱扉半掩深宫月,应照瑤芝雪艳愁。(I unexpectedly visited the top of Penglai Immortal Mountain and

saw a beautiful woman with her soulful eyes at me wearing earrings flashing. Although half of the moon in the deep palace was covered by the red door, the sight of a beautiful woman with outstanding talent could relieve my sorrow.)" When he recited this poem, no one beside him could understand what he meant. At that time there was a Kunlun Nu (Kunlun Slave) named Mo-le (摩勒) in Cui Sheng's house, and he looked at Cui Sheng and said, "You could tell me what you are worried about." Cui Sheng said, "Is there any meaning if I tell you?" The Mo-le said, "You can tell me, and I can help you relieve all your worries". Cui Sheng was astonished, so he told what happened to him when Cui Sheng was in the first-ranking minister's house. Mo-le said, "This is only a small matter, why didn't you tell me earlier?" Cui Sheng also told Mo-le about the cryptic words of Hong Xiao. He said, "It's not difficult at all. The courtesan held out three fingers to tell you that she was in the third door of the first-ranking minister. And she turned her hand over three times meant three times five, three times five is 15, so she meant that you could see her on the 15th. The small mirror on her chest was to tell you to go to the third house to find her on the 15th night when the moon is as bright as a mirror." Cui Sheng smiled happily when he heard this and said to Mo-le, "How can you help me relieve this worry?" The Mo-le smiled and said, "On the night of the 15th, you should prepare two pieces of green silk to make straitjackets. For there is a very ferocious dog guarding the door of the courtesan's court. Anyone who enters will be bitten by it. No one in the world can kill that dog except me, Kunlun Nu. On that day, I will go and kill it." Cui Sheng rewarded him with wine and meat.

In the middle of the night that day, Mo-le took the chain awl and went to the first-ranking minister's house. After a while, he came back and said, "The dog is dead, and there is no one to stop you." He and Cui Sheng each put on a straitjacket, then Mo-le carried Cui Sheng through a dozen walls, stopping at the third door of the courtesans' courtyard. The door was open and there was a little light, and Hong Xiao sat sighing as if waiting for something. Her earrings were dangling from her ears, and her expression was a little melancholy, and she was reciting a poem: "I was crying like a yellow warbler in the cave of the Deep Palace, but I was really complaining about Ruan Lang. The blue clouds and letters that convey messages had gone, only the sorrowful sound of the jade flute was left behind."

At that time, the guards were asleep and the courtyard was quiet, so Cui Sheng slowly lifted the curtain and entered the door. After looking for a long time and confirming that it was Cui Sheng, Hong Xiao jumped down from the bed, took Cui Sheng's hand and said, "I know you are very smart and must be able to understand the cryptic words I am expressing, so I used hand gestures to show it, but what magical way did you use to get in here?" Cui Sheng told her of Mo-le's plan and that Mo-le had carried him here. Hong Xiao asked, "Where is Mo-le?" Cui Sheng said, "Outside the curtain." So Hong Xiao invited Mo-le into the house and thanked him with a golden cup of wine. The courtesan said to Cui Sheng, "My family was very rich and lived in the north. My master, who was the commander there at that time, forced me to become a courtesan, but I did not seek death, but lived on earth. Although I put a lot of rouge on my face every day, my heart was sad and unhappy. Every day there were good wine and good food, the golden incense burner emitted a burst of fragrance, and the embroidered quilt also put a lot of jewelry, but I wore silk and silk. All this is not what I want, it is like a fetter that binds me. If your servant is so powerful, why doesn't he help me break out of this cage? If I could do that, I would not regret dying. After I get out, I am willing to be your servant and serve you. And what do you think about it?" Cui Sheng said nothing, and his expression was very serious. The Mo-le said, "Since you are so determined, it will not be difficult." The courtesan was very happy to hear that, so Mo-le carried out her various supplies in three times, then came back and said, "It's almost dawn,

let's go." So he carried Cui Sheng and Hong Xiao on his back, crossed over ten walls, returned to Cui Sheng's house and hid Hong Xiao in it. The next day, after dawn, the first-ranking official's family found the dog dead and the courtesan gone. The first-ranking official was shocked and said, "My house is heavily guarded and the door is securely locked, why is the dog dead and the courtesan gone? Let's not make any more noise so as not to be retaliated against again."

The courtesan hid in Cui Sheng's house for two years, and one day, when the peach blossoms were in full bloom, the courtesan and Cui Sheng took a cart to Qujiang River to play, and when they returned, they were seen and reported by someone from the first-ranking official's house. The first-ranking official thought it was peculiar so he called Cui Sheng to his house and ask him about it. Cui Sheng was very frightened so he told the whole story. He also said that it was all done by Mo-le. The first-ranking official said, "The courtesan has been living with you for two years, so I'll leave her alone. But I want to get rid of this scourge, Mo-le." So the first-ranking official sent fifty soldiers with high martial arts to arrest Mo-le.

When Mo-le saw many men were coming to arrest him, he took his dagger and flew out of the high wall as if he had wings and flew as fast as an eagle. Cui Sheng's whole family was shocked, and the first-ranking official was so regretted and afraid when he heard about it that he sent someone with a weapon to guard him every night. A year passed. And after another ten years, Cui Sheng's family saw Mo-le in Luoyang City, selling medicine in the market, and he just looked the same as before.

Problem Statement

- i. Despite the prominent status of *Kunlun Nu*, a classic martial arts novel by Pei Xing from the Tang Dynasty, there remains a significant gap in the scholarly literature: the absence of an English semantic translation closely resembling the original text and a thorough analysis of its main characters. *Kunlun Nu* is vital to Chinese martial arts literature, preserving the martial arts ethos of Tang tales and fostering cultural exchange between China and Malaysia. However, academic discussions have largely overlooked the contextual significance and intricate character portrayals within the novel.
- ii. This gap is particularly pressing due to the novel's historical and cultural importance. Without an English translation that accurately conveys the meaning of the original work, non-Chinese speaking scholars and readers are deprived of the opportunity to fully understand and appreciate the original novel's narrative techniques and character dynamics. Understanding these characters is crucial for a comprehensive appreciation of *Kunlun Nu's* contribution to world martial arts literature and its role in facilitating Sino-Malaysian cultural interactions.
- iii. Thus, this study aims to fill this gap by providing a source-language-centred English semantic translation of *Kunlun Nu* and conducting a detailed analysis of its main characters using quantitative methods. This will enhance global understanding of ancient Chinese literature and its narrative techniques and contribute to the study of international martial arts literature through the rich and vivid content of *Kunlun Nu*.

Research Objectives

- i. To provide a groundbreaking semantic translation of the ancient Chinese novel *Kunlun Nu* into English, closely resembling the original text.
- ii. To analyze the main characters: employ quantitative methods, including time series analysis

and bubble charts, to analyze the character representations in *Kunlun Nu*. This analysis will categorize characters based on literary terms proposed by Desmond and Peter Hawkes, examining their development dynamics, positive or negative portrayals, and overall impact on the narrative.

iii. To enhance understanding of Ancient Chinese Literature: explore and elucidate the narrative techniques employed in *Kunlun Nu*, contributing to a deeper understanding of ancient Chinese martial arts literature and its cultural significance.

Literature Review

This research aims to evaluate the four character roles in *Kunlun Nu* using the English semantic translation which can capture the essence of Pei Xing's original text. Hence, this study will examine both the literature review on the English translation of *Kunlun Nu* and the literature review on the character analysis of *Kunlun Nu* in order to identify the deficiencies in the existing research.

Researchers have conducted thorough examinations of the characters in *Kunlun Nu*, with particular emphasis on the examination of the protagonist, Mole. There is a scarcity of analyses of the other characters in *Kunlun Nu*. There is a noticeable absence of significant scholarly engagement in the application of specific theories to systematically analyse the characters in *Kunlun Nu*. This gap emphasises the necessity of examining the character portrayals in *Kunlun Nu* using Desmond's adaptation theory's role division of literary terms. This approach will enable a thorough analysis of the narrative techniques employed in the story.

Literature Review on the English Translation of *Kunlun Nu*

Peter Newmark is a highly esteemed academic in the realm of English translation theory. He has made substantial contributions to the field of translation. Peter Newmark published *A Textbook of Translation* in 1988 (Newmark, 1988). In 1981, he proposed two significant translation strategies in *Approach to Translation*, specifically semantic translation and communicative translation, and contended that distinct translation techniques should be employed based on varying text genres (Newmark, 1981). These interconnected translation procedures signify the development and sophistication of his translation theory. (Zhang & Feng, 2024)

Yanhong Zhang and Jie Feng noted that Peter Newmark started focusing on the communicative aspect of language and developed the concept of communicative translation under the impact of Vygotsky; additionally, Newmark's views has concentrated on the semantic translation influenced by Chomsky (Zhang & Feng, 2024). Communicative translation firstly stresses the information transferring of the source text in a way that conforms to the cultural, linguistic, and pragmatic conventions of the target language (Zhang & Feng, 2024). When using communicative translation, the content and the language ways are easily accepted by the target language readers. In general, the core of communicative translation is to convey a message that is in line with the target language and culture, rather than be a faithful reproduction of the source text (Palumbo, 2009). Semantic translation tries to provide an accurate translation that is as faithful to the original as possible within the syntactic and semantic structure of the target language. Semantic translation tends to be source language-centered, combining the advantages of word-by-word translation, literal translation, and faithful translation when using semantic translation (Zhang & Feng, 2024). Based on the original text, it is inclined to place considerable value on the source language to preserve the language characteristics and expressions of the original text. All in all, it can be seen as a translation approach that pays attention to the exact

contextual meaning of the source text (Zhang & Feng, 2024, p. 145). Hence, this translation approach is typically appropriate for literary works that necessitate a thorough examination of the original text. Put simply, communicative translation prioritises the target reader, whereas semantic translation prioritises the source language.

Kunlun Nu is an influential martial arts novel from the Tang Dynasty, so the restoration of the Tang Dynasty setting and the preservation of the original text of Pei Xing is of utmost significance. It can provide valuable insights into Pei Xing's use of language to describe characters and their behaviours, as well as the intricate details of their portrayal. The need for an accurate semantic translation of the original text of *Kunlun Nu* is emphasised by the urgency to bridge the gaps. Hence, this research suggests employing semantic translation to retranslate *Kunlun Nu* in order to get insight into its language coherence and intricacies.

Regarding the English translation of the article *Kunlun Nu*, there is no article in Google scholar, web of science, scps, cnki, google except for Liu Jue's *Tales of the Marvelous*. At present, only Liu Jue's *Tales of the Marvelous* is a communicative translation of Pei Xing's *Kunlun Nu* of the Tang Dynasty. In other words, Liu Jue's *Tales of the Marvelous* omits or add or modify the content and language of the original text mainly focusing on the target audience, retaining the simpler language that is more comprehensible to the countries related to the target language. However, the restoration of the source text and its cultural heritage is neglected. In Plot 1, the original description of Cui Sheng as “生少年,容貌如玉,性稟孤介,举止安详,发言清雅。(English meaning: Cui Sheng is young and handsome, strict behavior, elegant demeanor, also calm and steady)” has been modified according to the target language and culture as: “Young and handsome, Cui was a righteous person with a serene bearing and a refreshing manner of speech” (Liu, 2013). In Plot 3, Liu Jue amend and omit the original text “脸虽铅华,心颇郁结。纵玉箸举饌,金炉泛香,云屏而每进绮罗,绣被而常眠珠翠,皆非所愿,如在桎梏。(英文意 : Although I put a lot of rouge on my face every day, my heart was sad and unhappy. Every day there were good wine and good food, the golden incense burner emitted a burst of fragrance, and the embroidered quilt also put a lot of jewelry, but I wore silk and silk. All this is not what I want, it is like a fetter that binds me)” as: “Though I wear beautiful makeup, my heart is in pain. Despite the luxury, I feel like a prisoner” only according to its meaning (Liu, 2013). In Plot 4, the meaning of “因花时(when the peach blossoms were in full bloom)” has been excluded and deleted from the original text “姬隐崔生家二岁,因花时,驾小车而游曲江。(英语意 : The courtesan hid in Cui Sheng's house for two years, and one day, when the peach blossoms were in full bloom, the courtesan and Cui Sheng took a cart to Qujiang River to play)”, and only translated as “Cui kept the former concubine for two years, until they took a tour of Qujiang” (Liu, 2013). The absence of the gap in the text-centered semantic translation emphasises the need for the semantic translation of *Kunlun Nu* in this study.

Literature Review on Character Analysis in *Kunlun Nu*

A comprehensive search across various academic databases including Google Scholar, Web of Science, SCPS, CNKI, and Google has revealed a total of 138 articles related to the work of *Kunlun Nu*. However, among these articles, only 54 specifically focus on the roles or character evaluations of *Kunlun Nu*. Out of the total of 54 articles, the primary emphasis of 41 articles is on analysing the genesis and portrayal of the Kunlun hero Mole. Currently, there are only 13 publications that comprehensively analyse the other characters in *Kunlun Nu*. None of these articles contain scholars who have analysed *Kunlun Nu* using specific theories. This highlights

the need for further analysis of the characters in *Kunlun Nu* and the existing gap in scholarly research. The procedure is outlined as follows:

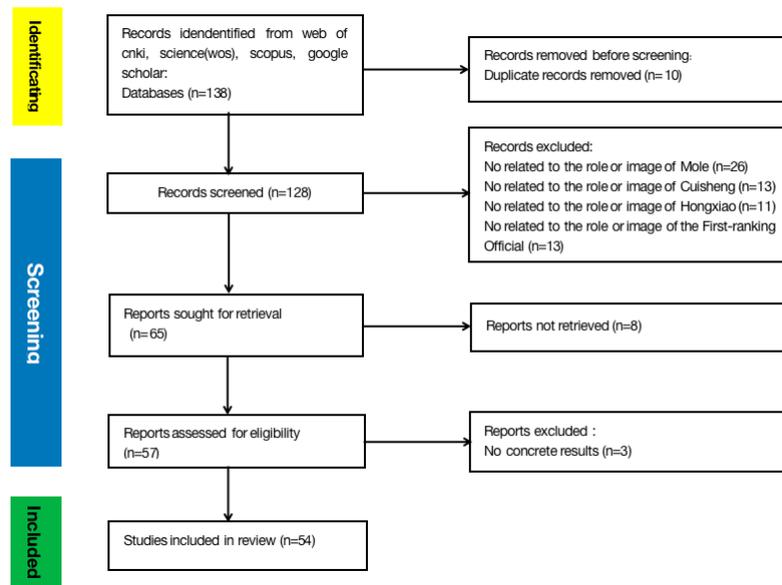


Figure1 The Literature Search Flow Chat

Firstly, There are a total of 41 articles that analyse the protagonist of *Kunlun* hero, Mole. These 41 articles comprehensively or partially examine the role of Mole in *Kunlun Nu* in relation to the present study. In *A Brief Discussion on the Image and its Shaping of Kunlun in Kunlun Nu*, Jia Wensheng examines the character of Mole in *Kunlun Nu*, highlighting his proficiency in martial arts, physical strength, and exceptional agility. Mole, a central figure in the novel, not only possesses great self-assurance in his abilities but also demonstrates a keen intellect. Mole, a prominent character in the novel, is depicted as highly self-assured and intellectually astute. He demonstrates a willingness to assist others when they are in need, displaying both generosity and a strong sense of responsibility. Furthermore, his remarkable martial arts abilities and exceptional agility are truly awe-inspiring (Jia, 2011, p. 45). In *The Chivalry Shadow Kunlun Nu*, Shi Lin highlighted the diverse abilities possessed by the *Kunlun* hero Mole, including expertise in horticulture, farming, animal training, music, martial arts, medicine, treasure appreciation, and swimming. Additionally, they are characterised by their loyalty and willingness to make sacrifices. The inclusion of the *Kunlun* hero greatly enhanced the creative richness in ancient Chinese novels (Shi, 2010). In *A Brief Analysis of Kunlun Nu in Tang Fiction*, Chai Liu Jin and Yuan Shuhui highlight that the *Kunlun* hero depicted in Tang fiction possess exceptional abilities in aerial locomotion and wall traversal. Mole possesses a remarkable ability to find solutions and take risks, and demonstrates exceptional proficiency in martial arts. His intelligence is evident in his ability to decode the enigmatic language of Hong Xiao (Chai & Yuan, 2006, p. 19). The novel acquaints the reader with the genesis of the ferocious dog, as narrated by Mole, to demonstrate his extensive knowledge and self-assurance. Additionally, Mole's proficiency in swimming is highlighted to showcase his aptitude (Chai & Yuan, 2006, p. 20).

Furthermore, when it comes to the examination of all four characters in *Kunlun Nu*, namely

Mole, Hong, Cui, and Sheng, there are only 13 articles that make reference to them. One notable example is Wu Dafu's article on the specific actions and image analysis of four characters, namely Cuisheng, Hong Xiao, Mole, and First-ranking Official, which can be found throughout the article of *Status, Wisdom and Character - Reading and Interpreting Kunlun Nu*. This article provides the most comprehensive coverage of these characters. The author analyses Cui Sheng's selfishness, weakness, and fear of responsibility, highlighting that his attractive appearance and high social status cannot hide his inherent flaws (Wu, 2007, p. 61). Additionally, the author discusses how the First-ranking Official maintains the feudal ruling class and exemplifies his oppressive character traits by forcing a normal person to become a courtesan. This action prevents other social classes from interfering in the affairs of the nobility, ensuring the nobility's enduring privileges (Wu, 2007, p. 61). Furthermore, the author acknowledges the dual nature of Hong Xiao's character, portraying her as a vulnerable woman, yet her weakness does not overshadow her inherent qualities. She harbours a profound affection for Cuisheng and holds a high regard for Mole (Wu, 2007, p. 62). Mole, despite his clandestine status, is unequivocally the central figure of chivalry in the novel. He exhibits the qualities of wisdom and bravery, upholding the principles of chivalry and righteousness. He defies authority, displaying fearlessness in the face of peril, and assumes the responsibility of forging his own path in life (Wu, 2007, p. 62). In *Reassessing the Ideological Value of Kunlun Nu*, Zhou Chengming examines the character traits of the four characters. He believes that Mole possesses great martial arts skills and displays chivalry. Additionally, he is more intelligent than Cui Sheng. Mole's decisive actions in helping Hong Xiao when she is in trouble indicate his sentimental nature, which surpasses that of Cui Sheng. On the other hand, Cui Sheng's cold and detached observation of the persecution of the first-ranking official can be seen as equivalent to being an accomplice of the official, thus bolstering the arrogance of the evil forces. Hong Xiao, on the other hand, possesses a remarkable beauty and is both fearful of danger and seeks her own path in life. After Hong Xiao's disappearance, the first-ranking official experiences a constant feeling of anxiety throughout the entire day (Zhou, 2010). In Zhou Feng's analysis of *The Parody and Intertextuality of No.1 Lixin Street A and Kunlun Nu*, it is argued that *Kunlun Nu* effectively depicts a character who is loyal, clever, brave, honourable, and just. Additionally, it exposes the corrupt practices of Tang Dynasty officials, particularly through the portrayal of the first-ranking official, and satirises Cui Sheng's lack of courage and gratitude. Furthermore, *Kunlun Nu* intricately portrays Hong Xiao's delicate, gentle, and subtly shy nature (Zhou, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework used in this paper is John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes on the delineation of character roles of literary terms in adaptation theory. Based on the three proposed divisions of the number of character's qualities, the consistency or changes as the plot progresses, and the positive or negative characteristic, John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes put forward the main role of *Kunlun Nu* can be divided into: flat and round characters, static and developmental characters, protagonists and antagonists.

The theory proposed by John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes explores the strong connection between literature and film. It introduces two key concepts: literary terms and film terms. These concepts offer analytical support for understanding the shift from literature to cinema and the process of adapting literature into film. John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes extensively outlined that literary terms primarily encompass four elements: story, plot, character, setting, point of view. Character role plays a crucial part in creating the overall theme of a story and is a significant aspect in the analysis of literary works (Desmond & Hawkes, 2006). According to

John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes, “Some critics identify character rather than plot as the defining feature of narrative. In this view, plot is a framework of actions that focuses attention on character. The character's desires, motives, or goals lead to action.” (Desmond & Hawkes, 2006, p. 20). Futhermore, the necessity to analyse character roles arises from the significant correlation between character and action, which serves as a foundation for plot. “Character and action are often so intertwined that it is difficult to distinguish between the two. In sophisticated narratives, action grows out of character and character grows out of action” (Desmond & Hawkes, 2006, p. 20).

John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes emphasise the significance of comprehending literary terms in the realm of literature. John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes categorised characters in literature into flat characters and round characters, depending on whether the character possesses a single quality or not. They also classified characters as static characters or development characters, based on whether the character’s role remains unchanged as the plot progresses. Additionally, they defined protagonists and antagonists based on the positive and negative portrayal of the character’s role (Desmond & Hawkes, 2006). They contend that flat characters possess only one quality, whereas round characters have a more multifaceted quality. Static characters have a consistent persona throughout the narrative, whereas developmental characters undergo changes in accordance with the scenario. Positive characters consistently evoke a favourable image and influence on the reader, whereas negative ones consistently evoke an unfavourable image and influence (Desmond & Hawkes, 2006).

Based on the above English semantic translation, *Kunlun Nu* features four primary characters: Mole, Cui Sheng, Hong Xiao, the first-ranking official. This study will utilise John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes’ three divisions of character roles in literary terms as the theoretical framework to define the roles of the four main characters, which can help to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the narrative of *Kunlun Nu*, focusing on the characters. It can also contribute to gain a deeper understanding of ancient Chinese martial arts literature and its cultural significance through the lens of the textual narrative. The framework is outlined as follows:

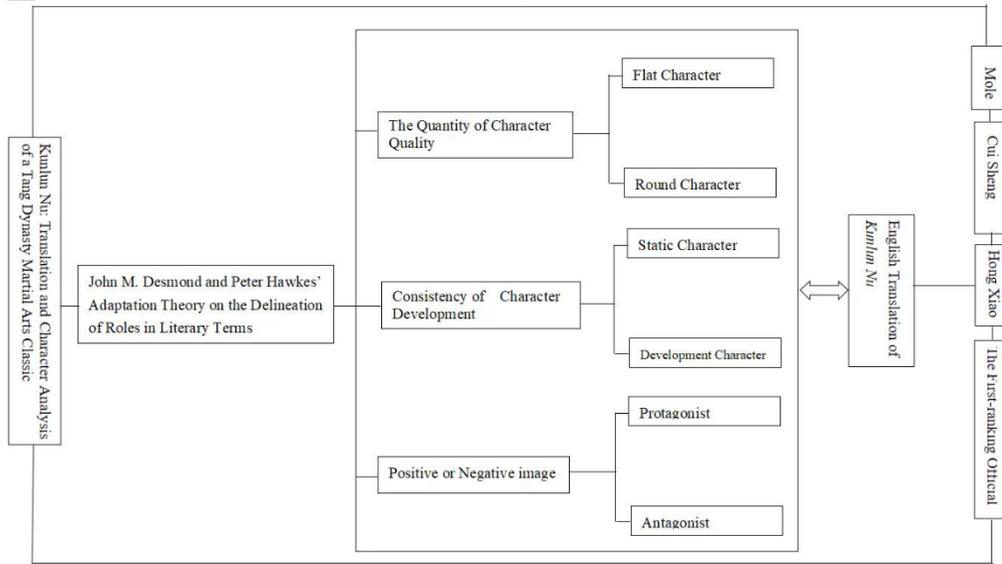


Figure2 The Theoretical Framework

Methodology

The present study uses the time series approach in quantitative analysis to examine the character representations in the English translation of *Kunlun Nu*. Time series, also known as time series analysis, refers to the collection of data that represents social, economic, and environmental processes recorded in a sequential manner. For instance, this includes the highest and lowest temperatures measured by meteorologists each day, the daily volume of a specific commodity, the daily closing price of a particular stock, the cumulative profits generated by a corporation over time, and similar examples. Time series analysis is a method used to analyse the behaviour of certain variables over a specific time period. It involves tracking and studying quantitative changes in variables such as monthly product sales, quarterly coal consumption, or monthly unemployment rates. The goal is to determine if there are any significant statistical changes in these variables over time.

The present study utilises bubble charts, a significant descriptive technique in time series analysis, to analyse and present the quantity of character qualities (flat characters or round characters), character developing dynamics (static characters or developmental characters), and character impact (the protagonist and antagonist).

Bubble charts depict the correlation among three variables by assigning variable 1 to the x-axis, variable 2 to the y-axis to represent positive and negative aspects of the image, and variable 3 to the size of the bubbles to indicate the number of character qualities. The bubble diagram can be utilised to illustrate the multidimensional correlation among character roles in the literary terms formulated by John M. Desmond & Peter Hawkes. This aids in conducting a more comprehensive and lucid analysis of the character roles in *Kunlun Nu*, while also facilitating comprehension of the plot progression in *Kunlun Nu* and the depiction of pivotal characters, such as Mole.

An Analysis of the Characters of Tang Dynasty Novel *Kunlun Nu*

Generally, based on the aforementioned translation of *Kunlun Nu*, the storyline can be categorised into five distinct plots using the time series approach. Each plot has four people who exhibit distinct attributes or quality of character. According to the original tale description, the storyline is arranged as follows:

Plot 1: The first time Cui Sheng went to first-ranking minister's house where he met Hongxiao (the red-veiled courtesan)

Character	Original text	Quality of Character	Quality Numbers
Cuisheng	Cui Sheng is young and handsome, strict behavior, elegant demeanor, also calm and steady	young	1
	Cui Sheng is young and handsome, strict behavior, elegant demeanor, also calm and steady	handsome	2
	Cui Sheng is young and handsome, strict behavior, elegant demeanor, also calm and steady	serious-behaved	3
	Cui Sheng is young and handsome, strict behavior, elegant demeanor, also calm and steady. Cui Sheng respectfully conveyed his father's condolences, and the first-ranking minister admired the young man's elegance and greeted him and sat down to talk.	elegant	4
	Cui Sheng is young and handsome, strict behavior, elegant demeanor, also calm and steady	calm	5
	Cui Sheng is young and handsome, strict behavior, elegant demeanor, also calm and steady	steady	6
	The first-ranking minister asked Hongxiao to invite Cui Sheng to eat, but Cui Sheng was young and shy and did not eat.	shy	7
Hongxiao	At that time, there were three courtesans in the room, each one is a stunning beauty.	extremely beautiful	1
	The courtesan laughed as Cui Sheng just ate.	risible	2
	The first-ranking minister asked the red-veiled courtesan to serve Cui Sheng with a soup spoon. Then the first-ranking minister asked the red-veiled courtesan to escort Cui Sheng out of the	polite	3

	courtyard.		
	When Cui Sheng looked back at her, the courtesan held out three fingers, turned her hand over three times, then pointed her finger at the small mirror on her chest and said, "Remember this well," before turning around and going inside.	clever	4
Mole	Mole didn't appear		0
The first-ranking minister	The first-ranking minister asked the red-veiled courtesan to serve Cui Sheng with a soup spoon. Then the first-ranking minister asked the red-veiled courtesan to escort Cui Sheng out of the courtyard.	commanding	1

Plot 2: Cui Sheng went back to his home and had the conversation with Mole

Character	Original text	Quality of Character	Quality Numbers
Cuisheng	When he arrived home, he suddenly became disoriented and depressed.	depressed	1
	I unexpectedly visited the top of Penglai Immortal Mountain and saw a beautiful woman with her soulful eyes at me wearing earrings flashing. Although half of the moon in the deep palace was covered by the red door, the sight of a beautiful woman with outstanding talent could relieve my sorrow.	lovesick	2
Hongxiao	Hongxiao didn't appear here, but through the description of Cuisheng, Hongxiao is charming	charming	1
Mole	The Mo-le said, "You can tell me, and I can help you relieve all your worries"	accommodating	1
	Mole said, "It's not difficult at all. The courtesan held out three fingers to tell you that she was in the third house of the first-ranking minister. And she turned her hand over three times meant three times five, three	clever	2

	times five is 15, so she meant that you could see her on the 15th. The small mirror on her chest is to tell you to go to the third house to find her on the 15th night when the moon is as bright as a mirror.		
	The Mo-le smiled and said, "On the night of the 15th, you should prepare two pieces of green silk to make straitjackets. For there is a very ferocious dog of Meng Hai of Cao Zhou City guarding the door of the courtesan's court. Anyone who enters will be bitten by it. No one in the world can kill that dog except me, <i>Kunlun Nu</i> . On that day, I will go and kill it."	strong	3
The First-ranking Minister	The First-ranking Minister didn't appear here, but through the description of Cuisheng and Hongxiao loves each other but can't get together, he is oppressive.	oppressive	1

Plot 3: Mole rescued Hongxiao from the first-ranking minister's home and let Hongxiao and Cuisheng get together with each other privately

Character	Original text	Quality of Character	Quality Numbers
Cuisheng	After Hongxiao sought for help, Cui Sheng said nothing, and his expression was very serious.	incapable	1
Hongxiao	After looking for a long time and confirming that it was Cui Sheng, the red-veiled courtesan jumped down from the bed, took Cui Sheng's hand	soulful	1
	If your servant is so powerful, why doesn't he help me break out of this cage? If I could do that, I would not regret dying. After I get out, I am willing to be your servant and serve you.	grateful	2
Mole	The Mo-le said, "Since you are so determined, it will not be difficult."	capable	1
	The courtesan was very happy to hear that, so Mo-le carried out her various supplies in three times, then came back and said, "It's almost dawn, let's go."	strengthful	2

	So he carried her on his back, crossed ten walls, returned to Cui Sheng's house and hid the red-veiled courtesan in it.	altruistic	3
The First-ranking Minister	The first-ranking official was shocked and said, "My house is heavily guarded and the door is securely locked, why is the dog dead and the courtesan gone? Let's not make any more noise so as not to be retaliated against again."	cowardly	1

Plot 4: Cui Sheng and Hong Xiao have been discovered, and the first-ranking official hunted down Mole

Character	Original text	Quality of Character	Quality Numbers
Cuisheng	Cuisheng and Hongxiao were seen and reported by someone from the first-ranking official's house. The first-ranking official thought it was peculiar so he called Cui Sheng to his house and ask him about it. Cui Sheng was very frightened so he told the whole story.	cowardly	1
	Cuisheng also said that it was all done by Mo-le.	selfish	2
Hongxiao	Cuisheng and Hongxiao were seen and reported by someone from the first-ranking official's house.	helpless	1
Mole	The first-ranking official said, "I want to get rid of this scourge, Mo-le."	influential	1
	So the first-ranking official sent fifty soldiers to arrest Mo-le.	skilled	2
The first-ranking official	The first-ranking official said, "The courtesan has been living with you for two years, so I'll leave her alone. But I want to get rid of this scourge, Mo-le." So the first-ranking official sent fifty soldiers to arrest Mo-le.	coercive	1

Plot 5: Mole flew out of the high war and sold medicine in the market with freedom and liberty

Character	Original text	Quality of Character	Quality Numbers
Cuisheng	Cui Sheng's whole family was shocked	unhelpful	1

Hongxiao	unpresented		0
Mole	When Mo-le saw many men were coming to arrest him, he took his dagger and flew out of the high wall as if he had wings and flew as fast as an eagle.	intrepid	1
	And after another ten years, Cui Sheng's family saw Mo-le in Luoyang City, selling medicine in the market, and he just looked the same as before.	disengaged	2
The first-ranking official	The first-ranking official was so regretted and afraid when he heard about it that he sent someone with a weapon to guard him every night.	wimpy	1

In summary, Cui Sheng has a total of 13 qualities of character, with 7 qualities of character in plot 1, 2 qualities of character in plot 2, 1 quality of character in plot 3, 2 qualities of character in plot 4, and 1 quality of character in plot 5.

Hongxiao has a total of 8 qualities of character, with 4 qualities of character appearing in plot 1, 1 quality of character in plot 2, 2 qualities of character in plot 3, 1 quality of character in plot 4 and 0 quality of character in plot 5.

Mole have a total of 10 qualities of character, with 0 qualities of character appearing in plot 1, 3 qualities of character appearing in plot 2, 3 qualities of character appearing in plot 3, 2 qualities of character appearing in plot 4, and 2 quality of character in plot 5.

There are a total of 5 qualities of character of the first-ranking official, with 1 quality of character appearing in plot 1, 1 quality of character in plot 2, 1 quality of character in plot 3, 1 qualities of character in plot 4, and 1 quality of character in plot 5.

Conclusion

The aforementioned formulation is represented by a bubble chart in the following manner:

(1) The X-axis represents the progression of the plot, dividing it into four distinct sections: Plot 1, Plot 2, Plot 3, Plot 4 and Plot 5;

(2) The Y-axis represents the spectrum of positive and negative attributes associated with the character. The higher the position on the scale, the more positive the image is, while the lower the position on the scale, the more negative the image is;

(3) Bubble size refers to the number of character qualities. The greater the quality of the character, the larger the bubble; the lower the quality of character, the smaller the bubble.

(4) Blue bubbles refer to Cui Sheng, orange bubbles refer to Hong Xiao, yellow bubbles refer to Mole, and grey bubbles refer to the first-ranking official.

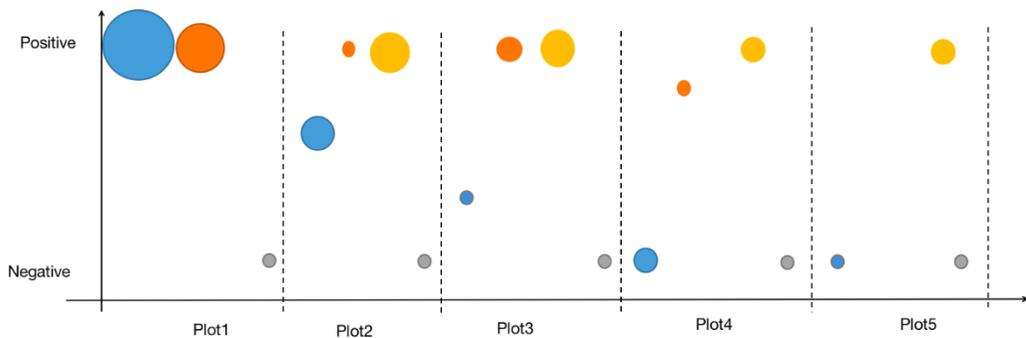


Figure 2: Bubble Charts of the Characters in *Kunlun Nu*

Hence, the aforementioned chart's presentation leads to the following conclusions:

Firstly, regarding the singularity of character quality, the four major characters in *Kunlun Nu* possess a quality of character that is multiple, indicating that they exhibit multi-dimensional characterization and may be classified as round characters.

Secondly, regarding the consistency of character portrayal throughout the plot's progression, both the Mole and the first-ranking official in *Kunlun Nu* have upheld their respective personas without any alterations. So, they both belong to static character.

The character of Mole always possess predominantly positive, progressive attributes and exude good energy.

In contrast, the persona of the first-ranking official consistently embodies negativity, reactionary tendencies, and feudal values, serving as the adversary in the novel. The demeanour of the first-ranking official has consistently exhibited a tendency towards oppressing the opposing party. In plot 1, readers see that the first-ranking official's demeanour towards Hong Xiao at his home is authoritative. He perceives Hong Xiao as his personal possessions and consistently requests aid from Hong Xiao to support those he admires. In plot 3 it reveals that Hong Xiao, through her oral testimony, states that she was coerced into become a courtesan by the first-ranking official, rather than doing so willingly.

The character of Cui Sheng in *Kunlun Nu* undergoes significant and unpredictable changes during the plot, making him a clearly developmental character in the novel. In Plot 1, Cuisheng is portrayed as young, handsome, serious-behaved, elegant, calm, steady, shy. These seven attributes serve to depict Cuisheng's multifaceted character in the novel, offering readers a comprehensive understanding of his persona. These seven character portraits all reflect the favourable impression that Cui Sheng creates on the readers at his initial introduction in the novel. During the encounter with a first-ranking official, the readers are presented with a portrayal of Cui Sheng: Cui Sheng is young and handsome, strict behavior, elegant demeanor,

also calm and steady. Cui Sheng respectfully conveyed his father's condolences, and the first-ranking minister admired the young man's elegance and greeted him and sat down to talk. The aforementioned descriptions depict a character who possesses both gracefulness and unwavering composure. In Plot 2, Cuisheng experiences a state of depression and lovesickness, causing his facade of perfection to crumble. However, in reality, Cuisheng's emotional state in Plot 2 is simply a result of missing his lover, which is a common cause for a temporary poor mood. In plot 3, After Hongxiao sought for help, Cui Sheng said nothing, and his expression was very serious. Cui Sheng's character deteriorated when his lover asked for assistance, as he displayed indifference and incompetence in areas related to his personal interests. When it comes to things that he is interested in, he lacks the necessary skills and confidence, causing his reputation to rapidly diminish. In plot 4 and plot 5, Cui Sheng and Hong Xiao are seen playing outdoors and reported to the first-ranking official. In an attempt to defend himself, Cui Sheng immediately shifts all the responsibility onto Mole, claiming that everything was done under Mole's guidance. This directly prompts the official to arrest Mole. Even when Mole successfully escapes from the official's pursuit, instead of feeling relieved that the person who helped him has been able to flee from danger, Cuisheng reacts with shock, revealing that he believe Mole should be captured. An picture portraying cowardice and self-centeredness is shown to the public, resulting in a total transformation of his identity into a negative one.

Hongxiao's image in *Kunlun Nu* undergoes subtle modifications in tandem with the narrative, rendering her a developmental character too. Throughout the first three plots, Hongxiao displays a range of excellent character attributes, including that she is extremely beautiful, risible, polite, clever, charming, soulful, grateful. These qualities not only captivate the viewer, but also serve as a substitute for her physical attractiveness. In the fourth plot, Hongxiao does not exhibit any opposition to Cui Sheng's blame about Mole who helped them, and her sense of powerlessness also contributes to the support of the feudal society.

Thirdly, regarding the portrayal of positive or negative character images, Cuisheng's character image transitions from positive to negative, although Mole consistently maintains a positive image. Conversely, the first-ranking official consistently embodies a negative image. Therefore, the text devotes a significant portion of its content to emphasise the favourable portrayal of Mole, who serves as the novel's protagonist. Conversely, the first-ranking official assumes the role of promoting the feudal society in the text, creating a contrasting character image to that of Mole, who acts as the novel's antagonist.

In conclusion, this article significantly contributes to the fields of literary studies, translation studies, and Tang Dynasty scholarship by providing a comprehensive semantic translation of *Kunlun Nu* while offering an in-depth analysis of its principal characters.

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