
The Narrative Significance of Poems in *Er Pai* and Their Translations

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Abstract: The incorporation of verse in prose narrative is a distinctive generic feature of Chinese classical vernacular fictions. Many scholars have regarded poems in fictions as a type of narrative redundancy or a sign of orality and little attention has been paid to the narrative significance of them. The poems remain insignificant because of the potential inconsistency they bring to the narration, but in fact, they perform important narrative functions in the text. This article examines the narrative functions of the poems in *Er Pai*, and explores the translations of them from a narratological perspective. After an examination of the narrative significance of the poems in *Er Pai*, we have observed that under the influence of historiography narration, the poems in *Er Pai* perform structuring function, commenting function and edifying function. Through a detailed analysis of the translations of the poems in *Er Pai* from a narratological perspective, it reveals that the omission of the poems in translation will lead to the disruption of the narrative structure, weakening of the narrative power and the alteration of the narrator's image. Since the poems in *Er Pai* assume important narrative functions, the omission of them in translation is not suggested for the sake of narrative coherence and narrative strength in the target text.

Keywords: Classical Vernacular Fictions, *Er Pai*, Narrative Functions, Translations

1. Introduction

The Chinese classical vernacular fictions originate from the prose and verse narrative, in which the incorporation of verse in prose fiction is a distinctive narrative feature. The narrator, or the storyteller usually inserts poems in narration to attract the audience's attention, to connect the plots, or to give some comments. Many scholars considered the poems as part of "the storyteller's rhetoric", or "simulated storytelling mode" [1], by which the narrator assumes the voice of a professional storyteller and often uses poems to flaunt his literary talent. The incorporation of verse in prose narrative is part of the storyteller's rhetoric, but has been misunderstood as indicative of the text's origin in prompt books. Scholars have demonstrated that the explicit storyteller's rhetoric consciously utilized by writers of literary fiction is a relatively late development in vernacular fictions [2]. Although the rhetoric of the storyteller persona has received much scholarly attention, the focus is often on the storyteller's stock phrases used to directly involve the readers, such as "as

the story goes" (hua shuo 话说), "let us follow another thread of the story" (hua fen liang tou 话分两头) [3] and etc., while poems embedded in prose narrative as a constitutional element of storytelling rhetoric have relatively been overlooked. An investigation of the narrative significance of the poems in Chinese classical vernacular fictions is crucial for understanding their relation to the narrative structure of the story. The misinterpretation or omission of the poems in translation will consequently have some negative impact on the narration of the target text.

This article will examine the narrative functions of the poems and their English translations in *Er Pai*, the most well-known classical vernacular fiction in China. These poems are conspicuous because they mostly appear at the beginning, the end or the juncture of the story performing certain functions and are usually led by "as the poem says" (shi yue 诗曰) or "as the poem testifies" (you shi wei zheng 有诗为证). From a narratological perspective, the overall aim of this study is to offer a fresh insight into the translation of classical Chinese poems. In the first section of this article, we

will discuss the narrative functions of the poems in *Er Pai*, applying some notions such as narrative structure, narrative frequency, prolepsis and etc. In the second section, we will analyze the translations of poems in *Er Pai* followed by a discussion of loss of narrative functions caused by omission of poems in translation. And finally, we will draw a conclusion and offer suggestions for future research.

2. Narrative Functions of the Poems in *Er Pai*

Contemporary narrative theory is almost silent about poetry. In many classic contemporary monographs on narrative theory, specialist journals such as *Narrative*, and scholarly meetings such as the annual conference of the International Society for the Study of Narrative, poetry is conspicuous by its near-absence. Even the indispensable narrative poems, the ones that narrative theory seems unable to do without, tend to be treated as “de facto prose fictions” [4]. However, in recent years theories of narrative in poetry as a cross-genre narratological study have received increasing attention from international and Chinese academia. The narratological researches have been fruitful and some representative researchers of narrative in poetry are Claire Kinney (1992), Patrick Hogan (2003), Peter Hühn (2005) and etc. [5, 6, 7]. Narratologists began to apply narratological theories for the analysis of lyrical poems and explore the relation between lyricism and narrativity. They broke through the limitation of narrative in fiction and shifted the focus to other literary genres, expanding the scope of narratology. Influenced by the fruits of the narratological researches, Chinese academia pays increasing attention to the study of narrativity in poems [8]. Some representative researchers are Shang Biwu (2012), Li Xiaodi (2016), Tan Junqiang (2016) and etc. [9, 10, 11]. Based on the current research on the construction of poetry narratology, we propose to take narratology as a perspective and apply some related narratological theories into the translation of poems in *Er Pai*. First, we will clarify the narrative functions of the poems in *Er Pai*.

2.1. Structuring Function

As a literatus with refined literary taste, Ling Mengchu reformed and formalized the structure of classical vernacular fictions, which include the opening poem, the prelude commentary, the prologue story, the conjunction poem, the main story and the ending poem. The opening poem of *Ei Pai* is no longer borrowed from other poets but created by Ling Mengchu to make it in perfect harmony with the narrative structure of the story. The ending poem is usually the summary of the plot or some comments by the narrator which echoes the theme of the opening poem. And the conjunction poem, appearing between the prologue story and the main story, strengthens the logical relation between them. So, the narrative structure of *Ei Pai* is featured by the integration of the opening poem, conjunction poem and the ending poem, all of which constitute a narrative framework to steer the

intended reading of the story. For instance, story 22 of *Slapping the Table in Amazement (first series 《初刻拍案惊奇》)* starts with a poem:

Life's ups and downs are only to be expected.
Why hoist the sails fully when the wind is against you?
The vagaries of fate can happen in one day;
Reversals of fortune may occur in a trice [12].
菀枯本是无常数，何必当风使尽帆？
东海扬尘犹有日，白衣苍狗刹那间 [13]!

This story tells about a wealthy man who bought an official rank in the capital. Then by accident he lost the official documents and finally was reduced to being a boatman by the river. The opening poem presents the Buddhist motif of “emptiness” and warns the readers of the uncertainty of life and the futility of the pursuit of wealth and rank. After the opening poem, the narrator also inserts a prelude comment to expound the meaning of the poem, highlighting the theme of the story. The prologue story is about a high-rank official who suffered misfortune and descended to be a servant. After the prologue story, the narrator introduces a conjunction poem with “as the poem says”:

Wealth, rank, glory, and splendor—they all mean nothing;
The affairs of this world are all like clouds floating.
Puppets on the stage, do not take fright!
To boatman Mr. Guo, please turn your eyes [12].
富贵荣华何足论？从来世事等浮云！
登场傀儡休相吓，请看当艄郭使君 [13]!

This conjunction poem, which introduces the protagonist in the main story and sets the tone for the following narration, repeats what is stated in the opening poem, and the repetition increases the credibility of the narration. The conjunction poem strengthens the bond between the prologue story and the main story, and also enhances the coherence of the narration. The ending poem usually summarizes the story:

The rich, be not proud;
The poor, be not bitter.
Look ahead to where you will end up;
What's before your eyes does not count [12].
富不必骄，贫不必怨。
要看到头，眼前不算[13]。

The opening poem, the conjunction poem and the ending poem, foretell or summarize the plot, jointly highlighting the theme of the story. All the narrative elements are included within the narrative framework created by these poems. “As the poem testifies”, which asserts the poem's compatibility with the narration, directly shows the preference for truthfulness in classical vernacular fictions. All kinds of poems inserted into the narration are actually creating a truth-like narrative context, for the voice of the third-person seems more credible than the voice of the author.

2.2. Commenting Function

Commentary is a general category designating those speech acts by a narrator that go beyond providing the facts of the fictional world and the recounting of events. For this reason, they are also occasionally identified as “authorial intrusions” or “narrative interventions”. Following

Chatman's distinction, two basic kinds of comments can be distinguished: commentary on the story and commentary on the discourse. The former can be subdivided into explanatory, evaluative, and generalizing comments, while the latter refers to the act of narration rather than to the represented world of the characters [14]. In commentary on the story, a narrator can explain or interpret an event, a character's motive, or the significance of a narrative element, express his personal values and moral opinions, or express gnomic and philosophical thoughts. Commentary on the discourse includes self-reflexive and self-conscious references to the act or process of narration. Commentary can fulfil a variety of functions in narration.

Comments are typically made by an overt and omniscient narrator. In classical vernacular fictions, events are usually narrated from a wholly unrestricted or omniscient point of view. The narrator has access to limitless information in the story which was defined as the mode of "non-focalization" or "zero-focalization" by Genette [15]. Merely assuming the voice of a professional storyteller, the narrator in *Er Pai* is visible and often comes out to explain or judge the events and characters in the story. The commenting functions performed by the poems in *Er Pai* are shown in three aspects:

First, the poem is the narrator's judgment on the characters. For instance, in Story 8 of *Slapping the Table in Amazement (first series)*, "his lofty sense of honor soars to the sky" (说时侠气凌霄汉) and "a bandit turned out to be just as generous" (谁知剧盗有情深) directly express the narrator's praise of the main character, General Wu, who is a bandit but righteous and honest. The proper judgment of the characters by the narrator can improve the tellability^① of the narrative, and help the readers avoid some reading obstacles in interpreting the personal traits of the characters. Through the comments in the poem, the narrator chooses a detached stance from the characters and maintains the authority and objectivity of the narration.

Second, the poem is the narrator's evaluation of the plot. For example, in the ending poem of Story 11 of *Slapping the Table in Amazement (second series 《二刻拍案惊奇》)*, "shame on those whose death is caused by unfaithfulness in love" satirizes the plot that the life of an unfaithful lover was demanded by his ghost lover. The ending poem, which can be regarded as the narrator's intervention, summarizes a deeper understanding of the plot and sublimates the significance of it. Typically, this ending poem, also an appeal for the equality of men and women, is a loci of didacticism of this story, and it delimits the perimeter within which the readers will interpret the story.

Third, the poem is the revelation of the theme of the story. For example, in the opening poem of Story 11 of *Slapping the Table in Amazement (first series)*, "Those who harm others bring harm on themselves" reveals the theme of karmic retribution in the main story. Through the poem, the narrator prepares his readers for a story about retribution. This opening poem, which sets the tone and introduces the moral theme of the story, builds up a thematic framework for the following narration.

A narrator's commentary is not merely ornamental; it can serve important rhetorical or ideological purposes. Since it distinctly conveys a narrator's voice, values, and norms, commentary can present the narrative intention of the narrator and also project the image of the narrator.

2.3. Edifying Function

The relationship between narration and temporality has been one of the most popular research areas in narrative theory. According to Genette's tense theory, narrative frequency investigates the relationship between the number of times events are inferred to have happened in the story world and the number of times that they are narrated [16]. Narrative theorists distinguish between discourse time (narrating time) and story time (narrated time) [14]. Discourse time is measured in words or pages of text or in the hours of reading time, whereas story time represents the temporal duration and chronology of the underlying plot. It is usually assumed that the story level of a narrative, i.e., the sequence of events reconstructed from the surface level of the linguistic medium, can be viewed as having a chronological order, whereas on the discourse level several reshufflings take place to produce a number of anachronies, i.e., flashbacks or flashforwards.

In classical vernacular fictions of the Ming Dynasty, apart from some riddles, prophecies and Buddhist verses that serve as flashforwards, many poems in the beginning and middle of the story also perform the function of prolepsis, which are the common chronological distortions in *Er Pai*. The opening poem, with the prelude commentary, usually drops the hint about the ending of the story, and readers may sense the result even before the actual start of the story. Consequently, the motivation of the narration is not the outcome but how the outcome is achieved [17]. Such a prolepsis summarizes the whole story and also insinuates the fate of the characters, the direction of the plot and the ending of the story. For instance, let us take a look at the opening poem in Story 27 of *Slapping the Table in Amazement (first series)*:

Husband and wife are birds in the same woods;

At the fated hour, they fly their separate ways.

If a lost pearl is returned to Hepu,

One rub will more than restore its luster [12].

夫妻本是同林鸟，大限来时各自飞。

若是遗珠还合浦，却教拂拭更生辉 [13]。

The first and second lines of the poem indicate the separation of the husband and the wife while the third and fourth lines imply their reunion in the end. The prolepsis of the poem includes some key clues of the plot and also keeps the readers in suspense. For the readers, they will look forward to the following plot owing to the ambiguity and irresolution of the poem. That is to say, the revelation of the story line in advance will not dispel the suspense but reinforce it instead. The prolepsis attracts the readers' attention to the fate of the characters and to the twists and turns of the plot [16].

More importantly, for classical vernacular fictions, prolepsis can facilitate the edifying function of the story. The opening poem can present the moral implication in advance, and the following main story is a proof of the validity of the

moral ideas. For instance, like the opening poem in Story 33 of *Slapping the Table in Amazement (first series)*:

Gains, losses, ups and downs are all decreed by fate;
All clever intrigues are but labor lost.
Greed makes a snake try to swallow an elephant;
In the end, all efforts will come to naught.
No medicine can prolong your life span;
Money cannot buy success for your offspring.
Accept poverty and take life as it comes!
You will then be as free as a divine being [12].
得失荣枯总在天，机关用尽也徒然。
人心不足蛇吞象，世事到头螳捕蝉。
无药可延卿相寿，有钱难买子孙贤。
甘贫守分随缘过，便是逍遥自在仙 [13]。

In this poem, the narrator points out the importance of the abstinence from greed, and then a relevant story is told to specify and advocate the moral ideas. In this way, the theme of the story is highlighted through the prolepsis in the poem. The main interest then does not lie in the novelty of the “meaning” of the narrative, which has already been delimited in the opening poem, but in the configuration of narrative details. In classical vernacular fictions, the narrator, in the simulated storytelling mode, repeatedly appears during the narration in order to communicate with the readers. Besides the storytelling expressions such as “of this, no more” (bu ti 不题), “as the story goes” (hua shuo 话说), and “gentle reader, let me tell you” (kan guan ting shuo 看官听说), which indicate the narrator’s eagerness to communicate with the readers, the poems are also important media for the communication between the narrator and the readers. Through the poems, the narrator guides the readers and morally educates them, advocating some moral ideas which are helpful for the edification of the masses in the Ming Dynasty.

3. Analysis of Translation of Poems in *Er Pai* from the Perspective of Narrativity

As a covert means of narration, the poetic images in the poems of *Er Pai* render a picturesque and vivid narration, and create an immersive experience for the readers. Meanwhile, the beauty of rhyme in the poems of *Er Pai* gives narration a rhythmic and emotional auditory effect. In this section, we will analyze the translation of the poems in *Er Pai* from the reproduction of the rhyme and the transfer of the poetic image.

3.1. Reproduction of the Rhyme

All Chinese classical poetry is lyrical, in the sense that it was originally intended to be set to music and sung. Rhyme is inherent in Chinese poems, and a poem can not be considered as a poem if it is not rhymed. Musical beauty of Chinese poems can be reflected in many aspects, such as rhyme, stress, antithesis, use of reduplicated words and etc., among which rhyme is prominent and most important. Rhymed verses can not only create the musical beauty but also form a narrative entirety in the poems of *Er Pai*. For

example:

破布衫巾破布裙，逢人惯说会烧银。
自家何不烧些用？担水河头卖与人 [13]。

Yang Xianyi: Though their clothes are too tattered to keep out the cold,

They assure you they change all base metals to gold.

Then why don't they make gold for their own uses, pray?

Why just carry the burden for others all day [18]?

Yang Shuhui: Covered in tattered rags,

They brag to all of their alchemical skill.

Why don't they produce silver for themselves

And sell it like water by the river [12]?

This story tells about a wealthy man in Songjiang who was addicted to alchemy. He was cheated by an alchemist and finally became a beggar. The opening poem is quoted from a famous poet and painter Tang Yin in the Ming Dynasty. The vowels of the last syllable of each line of the poem are not the same, but they are all level tones and have similar rhyming effect. The translator Yang Xianyi chose to render the original poem into rhymed verse while Yang Shuhui preferred unrhymed format. The perennial conflict between the need of rhyme and accuracy of translation is particularly acute here. It seems that Yang Xianyi deliberately altered the meaning of the original in order to produce a rhymed couplet. For instance, he altered the original meaning “silver” into “gold” in order to make “cold” rhyme with “gold”, and added “pray” whose meaning cannot be found in the original to rhyme with “day”. His translation sacrificed the meaning of the original for the sake of producing a rhymed verse. Although rhymed verses are the intrinsic qualities of English poetry, Yang Shuhui thought they are outdated to modern English readers. So he chose unrhymed format and paid more attention to foot and stress. For another example:

有生总在业冤中，悟到无生始是空。

若是尘心全不起，凭他宿债也消融 [13]。

Wen Jingen: The life's a debt in former incarnation;

The world, a constant lifeless being.

If you are not aroused by carnal feeling,

You are absolved from any obligation [19].

Yang Shuhui: No life is free from the bond of karma;

Only the enlightened understand the Void.

If no mundane thought raises its head,

Debts from previous lives vanish of their own accord [12].

The original poem is a typical Buddhist poem which contains many Buddhist concepts and advocates the Buddhist thought of emptiness and karma. The first, second and fourth lines of the poems rhyme “ong”, forming a rhyming format of “aaba”. Wen Jingen’s translation rhymes “abba”, attempting to preserve the musical beauty of the original poem. But it fails to convey the Buddhist concepts into the target text. For instance, “kong” (emptiness) does not equal to nothingness, and “wusheng” (no life) is the ultimate nature of all phenomenon in the universe. In Wen Jingen’s translation, “lifeless being” can not convey the meaning of “wusheng”. In Yang Shuhui’s unrhymed translation, “Void” also can not convey the meaning of “wusheng”. For Buddhist poems, translators need to add some annotations to explain

the philosophical thoughts in the poems, and otherwise, the readers may be at a loss upon reading either rhymed or unrhymed poems.

Apart from rhythmic effect and musical beauty, rhyme can make the poem become a narrative entirety. So, the reproduction of rhyme is very important in the translation of the poems in *Er Pai*. But seen from the above examples, it is inadvisable to jeopardize the meaning for the sake of rhyming, and translators can compensate the unrhymed verses with foot, stress and etc.

3.2. Transfer of Poetic Image

In western poetry, imagery is a vivid and vibrant form of description that appeals to readers' senses and imagination. Despite the word's connotation, "imagery" is not focused solely on visual representations or mental images—it refers to the full spectrum of sensory experiences, including internal emotions and physical sensations. Simply, poetic image refers to using vivid or figurative language to represent ideas, objects, or actions. In Chinese poetry, poetic image is the image that symbolizes certain meaning, which is the objective thing created by the unique affective activity of the author. The compatibility of poetic image adds to the abundance of narration, and it becomes the carrier of aesthetics which embodies the social and cultural connotation of the poems as well as the ingenuity of the author.

Narrative image is the special artistic image with certain historical or cultural connotation, which performs a narrative function and can invoke readers' aesthetic feeling and imagination. The use of narrative image caters to the aesthetic standards of the literati, and it can add to the beauty of implicitness in narration. The image in the process of narration usually involves various information about myths, history, nature, society and etc., thus triggering the readers' perception and imagination. The narrator often arranges these different kinds of images to introduce the characters, advance the plot of the story and deepen the inner implication of the narration. With the help of symbolic meaning of the image, the narrator renders the image as the focus of narration and indirectly conveys the philosophical meaning. And the successful translation of narrative image is the key of smooth and vigorous narration in the target text. For example:

丹术须先断情欲，尘缘岂许相驰逐？

贪淫若是望丹成，阴沟洞里天鹅肉 [13]。

William L. Jenny: In performing alchemy, one must first abjure lust,

For alchemy and worldly desire are as separate as water and fire.

Hoping to obtain alchemy with a sinful heart

Is like longing for the swan's meat while dwelling in a sewer [20].

Yang Shuhui: Alchemists must first quench their carnal desires;

All bonds are predestined. Why run around?

Lustful men greedy for metal transmutations

Are only indulging in impossible dreams [12].

In the fourth line of this poem, "the swan's meat" (天鹅肉)

is a folklore image. It actually refers to the Chinese common saying "a toad wishing to eat swan meat", which covertly satirizes those who are addicted to the alchemy are craving for what they are not worthy of. This ending poem sublimates the educational effect of the story: the abstinence from greed. William L. Jenny retains the original image of "the swan's meat" as well as the meaning of this common saying. But Yang Shuhui abandons this image and uses free translation to express the connotation of this saying. Let us see another example:

世间百物总凭缘，大海浮萍有偶然。

不向长安买钿盒，何从千里配婵娟 [13]？

Ma Wenqian: Everything in the world is predestined;

Even a chance meeting is at the mercy of Fate.

With the help of a box lid,

How could the scholar come from afar to his mate [21]？

Li Ziliang: Everything in the world is predestined,

Every meeting is ordained by fate.

If not for the adventures of this box lid,

How the scholar came this far to his mate [22]？

The story tells about a scholar who accidentally bought a box lid in the market, and then got a happy marriage. The second line of the poem does not have the subject, but we may know it refers to the protagonist according to the plot of the story. The narrator uses the natural image "floating weeds" (浮萍) to symbolize the solitude of the protagonist. Western literary theory treats literature as the mimesis or reproduction of life, and compares literature with a mirror to reflect the real life. Although there are also poetic images in western poetry, but it seems that westerners do not delve into the connection between objects and emotion. Explicitness is their aesthetic tendency. While in Chinese literary tradition, poetic images, a means of concealed narration, are created to insinuate the connection between images and emotions. Although they are the manifestation of the author's subjective affection, they are featured by ambiguity and fuzziness, which shows Chinese aesthetic tendency toward implicitness. Ma Wenqian adds "the scholar" as the subject and also adds "with the help of" to clarify the meaning, catering to the aesthetic expectation of western readers. Li Ziliang also abandons the image of "floating weeds" and adds "the adventures of" to achieve explicitness. And the use of "adventure" is quite vivid and conforms to western readers' fondness for risk-taking. Both the translators pay heed to aesthetic taste of western readers. But their omission of the poetic image is regrettable in that as a traditional image in Chinese literature, "floating weeds" embodies deep Chinese philosophy and unique poetic quality. Its omission in translation is a loss of Chinese culture as well as a weakening in narrative vigor.

4. Loss of Narrative Functions Caused by the Omission of Poems in Translation of *Er Pai*

Through the analysis of the translation of poems in *Er Pai*, we observe that some translators omit the translation of the

poems due to their translator's habitus or the consideration for the target readers. But the poems are not embellishments. They perform important narrative functions in the source text and if they are not translated into the target text, the narration in the target text will be disrupted in some way.

4.1. Disruption of the Narrative Structure

As we discussed earlier, Ling Mengchu formalized the structure of *Er Pai*, and all the stories in it are composed by the opening poem, the prelude commentary, the prologue story, the conjunction poem, the main story and the ending poem, forming a complete narrative mechanism. The opening poem implicitly or explicitly points out the moral preaching and runs through the whole narrative process, and the readers can speculate the ending of the story from the opening poem. For example, Story 6 of *Slapping the Table in Amazement (Second Series)* tells a story of a devoted couple who were separated by political turmoil, and finally, their ghosts reunited in the underworld. The opening poem is borrowed from *Everlasting Regret* by a famous Tang-dynasty poet Bai Juyi. "Up high, we'd be two birds flying wing to wing; On earth, two trees' branches twined spring to spring" [22] (在天愿为比翼鸟, 在地愿为连理枝) indicates the narrator's control of the narrative time. The narrator drops a hint that it is a love story possibly with a tragic end. The prolepsis by the opening poem quickens the narrative frequency and increases necessary suspense for the readers. It is also an allusion to the love story of Emperor Tang Minghuang and his concubine Yang Yuhuan, and readers' sympathy will be easily evoked by the poem.

Yang Yi put forward that the start of the narrative literature is a unique part, and as a formulaic part of the structure, it stands at different narrative level with other parts. In view of the exceptional attention to the start and the rich cultural implication of the start, it can be named as "narrative start" [23] which describes social life and conducts moral education, providing philosophical foundation for the development of the story. In this way, narration is not only all about the story, but full of profound meaning. The opening poems in *Er Pai*, which can be regarded as "narrative start", carry out the function of prolepsis and set the narrative tone for the whole story. If they are omitted in translation, not only the narrative structure will be disrupted, but also the artistic effect and the suspense of the story will be greatly reduced.

Historiography narration has always been the benchmark of the narration in novels. The construction and the stylistic form of classical vernacular fictions are deeply affected by the manner of historiography narration. At the end of the historical biography, the narrator's commentary is often added to give some comments on the hero, complement some historical facts or express the author's emotions. This kind of commentary in metric form is called "as Sima Qian says" (taishi gong yue 太史公曰). Similarly, "as the poem says" in classical vernacular fictions reflects the tradition of historiography literature. However, the convention of the ending poem is more than a mindless repetition or an example of literary inertia. It echoes the opening poem and sublimates the narrative theme. In a word, beginning, ending

or connecting, the poems in *Er Pai* are of great narrative significance and construct a complete narrative structure. So, they cannot be omitted in translation for the completeness and coherence of the narration.

4.2. Weakening of the Narrative Power

As we know, narrative reference is a tool to strengthen the narrative power in the original text. In the poems of *Er Pai*, the narrator often uses reference to link concepts that the readers already have knowledge of, with concepts discussed in the story. The indirect reference, an integral part of narrative content, plays a vital role in strengthening narration, for the reference that already enters the domain of time, can provide a "historical support" for the narrator [24]. As a kind of vigorous popular literature among the people, classical vernacular fictions were granted with the ideas and taste of the literati, and narrative references in the poems are the reflections of the poetics and aesthetics of the literati. Through narrative references, the narrator seeks justification for his own ideas and values, elevating the aesthetic taste of the literary work. For instance:

每讶衣冠多盗贼, 谁知盗贼有英豪?
试观当日及时雨, 千古流传义气高 [13].

Yang Shuhui: One may be surprised that so many men take up banditry,

But as it turns out, there are heroes among bandits.

Consider "Timely Rain" of yesteryear;

His sense of honor is the stuff of legend [12].

Yang's Endnote: "Timely Rain," according to the Ming dynasty novel *Water Margin (Shui hu zhuan)*, is the sobriquet of Song Jiang, leader of a rebel bandit group.

This story tells that a merchant, Chen Dalang treated General Wu a meal by chance, and later received generous help from General Wu, who turned out to be a bandit but righteous and heroic. The opening poem begins with a comment on "bandit", and the narrator holds that although most bandits are depraved characters, many of them do fight injustice and help the needy. The narrator uses "Timely Rain" to refer to Song Jiang, the leader of a rebel bandit group in the famous Ming Dynasty novel *Water Margin (Shuihu Zhuan 水浒传)*. The bandit characters in the novel *Water Margin*, who, calling themselves "heroes," are determined to win glory for themselves in that dark social environment. With the reference to another fictional figure in a popular novel, the narrator swiftly connects General Wu with Song Jiang, a more familiar figure, and lays a foundation for the next stage of narration. If the poem is omitted in translation, the narrative reference, as a rhetoric device, is also omitted. The narrative power of the target text will certainly be weakened. The omission of the poem in translation is also against the manifestation of the narrative intention of the narrator and does not conform to the aesthetic requirements of the narration of the classical vernacular fictions.

4.3. Alteration of the Image of the Narrator

Narrator, as the speaker for the implied author, serves as an

important bond to connect the implied author^② and the implied reader^③, which plays a vital role in the communication between the author and the reader. Booth once pointed out that in any reading experience there is an implied dialogue among author, narrator, the other characters and the reader [25]. Each of the four can range, in relation to each of the others, from identification to complete opposition. These elements are usually discussed under “aesthetic distance”. The translation of classical vernacular fiction is a re-narration of the original work and also carries on the process of narrative communication. The difference is that the translator joins in the communication process. The translator should face the challenge of target readers with different cultural backgrounds. The discrepancies in the text and out of the text, the manipulation of the agent and different contexts, will change the narrative communication in the target text, including change of the image of the narrator, change of the image of the character, and the distance between each narrative element.

If the translator chooses to omit the translation of the poems in *Er Pai*, the alteration of the image of the narrator becomes obvious. The stories in *Er Pai* all start with a poem and end with a poem, portraying the narrator as a refined scholar with elegant taste, showing short distance between the narrator and the implied author. And the distance between them will be widened if the poems are omitted in the translation. The narrator in the target text is no longer a refined scholar and his authority and credibility in narration will be deconstructed. The alteration of the image of the narrator evidently jeopardizes the literariness of the target text. If the readers only pay their attention to the plot of the story while overlooking the way the story is narrated, it will be impossible for them to appreciate the narrative art.

5. Conclusion

This article has investigated the narrative functions of the poems in *Er Pai* and their translations. After the analysis of the poems in *Er Pai*, we find their narrative functions are structuring function, commenting function, and edifying function. Based on the comparison of different translation versions, this article analyzes the translation of the poems in *Er Pai* from a narratological perspective in terms of the reproduction of the rhyme and the transfer of poetic image. It should be noted that the omission of the poems in translation will cause loss of narrative function, i.e., disruption of the narrative structure, weakening of the narrative power and alteration of the narrator’s image.

There is no denying that the poems in *Er Pai* perform lyric function to express feelings and emotions, but their narrative functions should also be paid equal attention to since the narrative art reflected by these poems are inherent quality of Chinese classical vernacular fictions. Translators should pay heed to their narrative significance and should not omit them in translation. For further studies, some researches on the translation of classical Chinese poems in other literary genres, for instance, in drama are suggested to uncover more findings between translation and narratology.

Notes

- 1) Tellability is a quality that makes stories inherently worth telling, independently of their textualisation. It contrasts with narrativity, a property found in all texts interpretable as stories, whether they elicit a “so what” or a “wow” reaction. But the two concepts are often hard to disentangle, and some scholars regard tellability as a condition of narrativity.
- 2) The term “implied author” was introduced by Wayne C. Booth and there is no widespread agreement about what the term actually designates. Booth describes the implied author as the real author’s “second self”, an implied version of “himself” that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men’s work, and is an ideal, literary, created version of the real man.
- 3) The term “implied reader” was invented by Wolfgang Iser and construed as the communicational counterpart of the implied author. Although the concept is usually taken to cover the whole range of reading effects, it is inferred on the basis of textual evidence rather than on an analysis of real reader responses.

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