

Negotiating Alterity in Translation: Mapping the Cultural Grid in Al-Manfaluti's *Majdolin* and Lin Shu's *Zei Shi*

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Abstract—This paper redefines the translation of cultures as an interpretive and ethical endeavor shaped by historical and ideological influences. It relies on Ricoeur's hermeneutics and Bassnett's cultural analysis to create the cultural grid, which is the set of overlapping pressures and permissions that translators use to deal with differences while making sure that the target culture is understandable. The article demonstrates, through two case studies, Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti's Arabic *Majdolin* and Lin Shu's Chinese *Zei Shi*, how European narratives are systematically re-inscribed to attain domestic resonance. Al-Manfaluti changes Romantic celestial innocence into Arabic-Islamic modesty (al-hayā') and honor, mostly by leaving things out and changing the way people think about morality. Lin Shu reinterprets Dickensian empathy and social criticism through the lens of Confucian filial piety (xiào), obligation, and historiographical analysis. These interventions are perceived as ethically significant acts of linguistic hospitality that acknowledge loss while preserving meaning under constraint. The study gives a way to compare cross-cultural rewritings that goes beyond just finding mechanical equivalents by showing how translators act as cultural agents and moral lawmakers in the cultural grid. It argues that such rewritings secure equivalence without identity and enable forms of deep endorsement that outlast momentary linguistic similarity.

Index Terms—Arabic translation, Chinese translation, cultural grid, hermeneutics, linguistic hospitality

I. INTRODUCTION

Translation studies have moved beyond the traditional view of translation as the transfer of meaning from one linguistic system to another. Debates once centred on accuracy, faithfulness, and equivalence, often treating texts in a formalist vacuum. In contemporary theory, translation is approached as interpretation, cultural mediation, and ethical responsibility.

From a hermeneutic perspective, translation is never reproduction but a negotiation of the text's surplus of meaning. Ricoeur frames the task as an attempt at equivalence without identity, and as linguistic hospitality: welcoming the foreign word into the host language without assimilation (Ricoeur, 1977, pp. 45–48; Ricoeur, 2006, pp. 10–15).

The cultural turn, associated with Bassnett and Lefevere, locates this interpretive labour within histories of convention, ideology, and power. Translation becomes a situated rewriting for new audiences, shaped by norms of selection, reception, and cultural expectation. Read together, these frameworks clarify how translators negotiate alterity within the constraints of a receiving culture.

This article theorizes translation as an interpretive and ethical practice governed by a cultural grid: an ensemble of intersecting pressures and permissions that mediates between textual alterity and target-culture legibility. Ethically, the grid is illuminated by Ricoeur's linguistic hospitality and the pursuit of equivalence without identity; ideologically, it is structured by the cultural-turn insights of Bassnett and Lefevere, for whom translation is a rewriting shaped by power, norms, and reception. Through *Majdolin* and *Zei Shi*, the study traces systematic reinscription: Romantic innocence is recalibrated as Arabic-Islamic modesty, and Dickensian compassion is reframed as Confucian filiality. Such interventions show translators acting as cultural agents and moral legislators, enabling deep endorsement beyond superficial linguistic equivalence.

Accordingly, the article is guided by the following research questions. First, how does the "cultural grid"—conceived as a synthesis of Ricoeur's hermeneutics and Bassnett's cultural turn—function as the primary mechanism for negotiating textual alterity in non-Western translations? Second, in what ways do Al-Manfaluti and Lin Shu systematically re-inscribe European concepts of "Romantic innocence" and "Christian compassion" into the Arabic-Islamic and Confucian ethical systems? Third, to what extent do the narrative interventions and omissions found in *Majdolin* and *Zei Shi* demonstrate the role of the translator as an active "cultural agent" and "moral legislator" rather than a neutral linguistic conduit?

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Hermeneutics

Paul Ricoeur viewed translation as an abiding philosophical interest, positioning it centrally within his hermeneutical endeavor, a focus made explicit in his work *On Translation* (Garcia, 2008). The fundamental necessity for translation

arises from the inescapable human condition of plurality and the diversity of languages and cultures (Bottone, 2014). Ricoeur reflects with some astonishment on the fact that humanity only comes to realization through a plurality of cultures rather than a single, unified humanity, and he reads this plurality against the fractured, post-Babel condition of languages that makes translation both necessary and problematic (Ricoeur, 2006), a condition that Garcia identifies as the definitive marker of an original incohesion (Garcia, 2008, p. 332). Translation thus serves as essential mediation between the multitude of cultures and the underlying wager on the unity of humanity.

Linguistic hospitality (*hospitalité langagière*) functions in Ricoeur's work as an explicitly ethical model for translation, and not merely as a descriptive metaphor about language. Linguistic hospitality is presented as an ethical stance in which the translator accepts the "risk" and asymmetry involved in opening the host language to the foreign, rather than treating translation as a neutral technical transfer (Connelly, 2018). On this reading, translation becomes a form of moral engagement: to translate is to welcome the other's discourse, to let it unsettle the self-sufficiency of one's own language, and at the same time to take responsibility for how the foreign word is "received at home". This philosophical position centres on the welcome extended to the foreign text, requiring the host language to overcome its 'pretensions to self-sufficiency' and resist linguistic ethnocentrism (Ricoeur, 2006). Linguistic hospitality is specifically characterized as the pleasure of receiving, in one's own language, the word of the Other (Garcia, 2008).

The moral obligation is to make this integration happen without violence or forcing people to fit in, while still being truly open to differences. Ricoeur calls translation a difficult "work of mourning" in which the translator has to give up the idea of a perfect universal language and the idea of a completely accurate, flawless translation (Ricoeur, 2006, pp. 3–5; Dreyer, 2011). This giving up is not just technical; it is also moral, because it encourages a kind of humility that lets the translator aim only for what Ricoeur calls an "equivalence without identity." This shows that there is an irreducible distance between languages and cultures (Ricoeur, 2006, pp. 10–11; Simonotti, 2022). By permitting the host language to experience the "test of the foreign" and by opting to inhabit the other's word amidst conditions of loss and asymmetry, linguistic hospitality emerges, within Ricoeur's framework and its recent interpretation, as a paradigm for extensive cultural and even interreligious exchanges founded on respect, recognition, and responsible mediation (Dreyer, 2011; Simonotti, 2022).

The translator can give up the impossible goal of absolute adequacy and instead focus on the practical and moral goal of achieving "equivalence without identity." This important difference recognizes the "gap between adequation and equivalence," which means that translation conveys meaning without ever giving the original message an exact identity. This humility turns loss into a way to be "happy." The acceptance of 'loss and gain' is thus central to ethical interpretation, as it confirms the irreducible distance between languages and positions translation as a model for navigating human plurality (Kearney, 2007).

Ricoeur defines translation as an *épreuve*, a "test" that must be comprehended in a dual context: firstly, as a trial that presents the translator with resistance, loss, and the potential for failure; secondly, as a probation that scrutinizes and hones the desire to translate (Ricoeur, 2006). In this context, the translational test is inextricably linked to what he refers to as the "test of the Other," as it assesses the translator's readiness to allow the foreign work, its author, and its language to challenge the self-sufficiency of the mother tongue, thereby rendering translation an ethical examination of exposure to alterity.

B. Cultural Turn

Recent studies in translation studies confirm Bassnett and Lefevere's pivotal role in initiating the cultural turn during the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly through their 1990 edited volume *Translation, History and Culture*, which redirected the field's emphasis from isolated linguistic comparisons to more expansive socio-cultural contexts. This paradigmatic shift dismissed assessments of translations conducted in a "formalist vacuum," wherein analysis was confined to source and target texts exclusively, advocating for the examination of texts within historical, ideological, and power-laden contexts (Koskinen, 2004). Contemporary scholarship continues to trace this evolution, noting how the cultural turn expanded translation studies to include issues of patronage, poetics, and reception, creating interdisciplinary bridges with sociology and cultural analysis (Dizdar, 2023).

The cultural turn necessitated an emphasis on overarching concerns of context, history, and convention in the practice of translation. The new focus was not on linguistic accuracy, faithfulness, or isolated equivalence, but on the text as something that is part of a network of cultural signs from both the source and the target (Bassnett, 2013). Because of this wider scope, it was necessary to look at how texts are manipulated, such as how texts are chosen for translation, what patrons and publishers do, how translation strategies are chosen, and how the text is received in the target system (Munday, 2022). For Bassnett, translation is always political and ideological, happening in a continuum and never in a void. It is also limited by both textual and extratextual factors (Gentzler, 2016).

Lefevere says that translation is a "rewriting of an original text, all rewritings reflecting a certain ideology and a poetics" (Lefevere, 1992). This poetics refers to the most common literary styles and conventions in the target culture. The ideology, on the other hand, includes the beliefs, morals, and power structures that shape the receiving society. This means that the process of translating is always a "manipulative textual process" because there are conscious or unconscious rules that determine how a text is chosen, how it is translated, and how it will be received in the target system (Lefevere, 2016, pp. 11–17).

Translation is always a part of systems of representation, cultural identity, and the politics of meaning. Translators are acknowledged as cultural agents who mediate between conflicting discourses rather than as unseen servants of the source text. The choice of texts, the standards that guide translation strategies, and the influence of institutional factors like publishers, patrons, and editors are all seen as politically charged choices (Zhang, 2013).

Bassnett, for example, says that translation can be a powerful tool for control because it can impose meaning while hiding the power dynamics that shape that meaning. This is clear in historical acts of censorship (Bassnett, 2013). As a result, the translation is seen as a new cultural product that is shaped by the outside factors of the receiving culture and either supports or challenges existing cultural hierarchies.

Lefevere emphasized the analytical value of this concept, asserting that translation issues arise “at least as much from discrepancies in conceptual and textual grids as from discrepancies in languages” (Lefevere, 2016, p. 76). This statement puts cultural-epistemological structures, or grids, on the same level as language differences as the main causes of translation problems. The grid shows how translations between cultures, especially between Western and non-Western cultures, often change the meaning of the original text by putting it into Western terms. So, the grid is a dynamic network that maps the “interpretive, ethical, and cultural forces that shape the movement of texts.” This means that the translator has to navigate through different structures of history and ideology to make the text understandable in the target culture (Yi, 2025). By analysing these grids, scholars can better understand how texts assume or lose ‘cultural capital as they cross boundaries.

C. *The Cultural Grid as the Ethical-Ideological Arena*

The cultural grid is the space where these approaches converge. Bassnett and Lefevere foreground the constraint, ideology, poetics, and reception—that dictate permissible forms of rewriting in the target system (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990, p. 5). Ricoeur provides the ethical demand that this rewriting remain a form of hospitality rather than assimilative violence, pursuing equivalence without identity under conditions of loss (Ricoeur, 2006). In synthesis, the grid names both the limits and the enabling conditions of translational practice: it restricts what can be said and shown, yet it also makes intercultural intelligibility possible through responsible mediation.

III. METHODOLOGY

Accordingly, the article will discuss the following hypothesis. First, the cultural grid is the primary arena where linguistic hospitality is negotiated under the ideological and aesthetic constraints of the receiving society. Translation is thus a dynamic rewriting governed by pressures and permissions that render alterity intelligible within the target culture’s network of signs. Second, when European narratives enter Arabic and Chinese contexts, values such as Romantic innocence and Christian compassion are re-inscribed as Arabic-Islamic modesty and Confucian filiality. Deep endorsement depends on aligning a text’s moral core with interiorised patterns of expectation in the target audience. Third, the translator operates as a cultural agent and moral legislator, using narrative intervention and strategic omission to preserve ethical integrity within the host grid. These acts realise equivalence without identity by prioritising the receiving culture’s didactic imperatives over mechanical fidelity.

This article adopts a qualitative, comparative approach that discusses translation as cultural production and rewriting rather than as a purely linguistic exercise. It reads each translated text as embedded in a network of source and target cultural signs, and it operationalises analysis through the cultural grid. Analytically, the study integrates, first, a hermeneutic reading (Ricoeur) that evaluates linguistic hospitality and the pursuit of equivalence without identity; and second, a cultural-turn reading (Bassnett and Lefevere) that traces extratextual constraints, especially ideology, poetics, and reception, as they shape translational choices.

The cultural grid is defined here as the dynamic ensemble of intersecting pressures and permissions—interiorised patterns of expectation—that govern how a receiving culture selects, reshapes, and legitimises a foreign text. Applied to *Majdolin* and *Zei Shi*, the procedure identifies key source-text values (Romantic innocence; social compassion), maps their reinscription into target virtues (al-hayā’; xiào), and documents salient strategies such as censorious omission and commentative narration.

In addition, the analytical procedure follows these steps, first, pinpointing the foundational “cultural capital” of the source texts, such as Romantic innocence in Karr and social compassion in Dickens. Second, analysing how these values are transformed through the cultural grid into target-culture virtues, such as Arabic-Islamic modesty (al-hayā) and Confucian filiality (xiào). Third, documenting specific “manipulative” strategies, including censorious omissions (e.g., Al-Manfaluti’s removal of sexual union) and commentative additions (e.g., Lin Shu’s “external historian” intervention).

IV. DISCUSSIONS

A. *Cultural Grids and Core Values: Romantic Celestial Innocence and Confucian Moralization*

The core European value embedded within the source text, Alphonse Karr’s Romantic novel *Sous les Tilleuls*, that centrally enters the cultural grid is a concept of celestial innocence and spiritual purity. This value functions not merely as a moral measure, but as an aesthetic and ontological ideal essential to the Romantic worldview dominating the mid-nineteenth century, where the norm was European in cultural evaluation (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1998, p. 129). Within the

narrative, this innocence is the foundational cultural capital defining the protagonists' relationship. Stephen's love for Magdeleine is clearly shown by how high and ethereal it is. The story says that he loved her so much that he thought she was an angel (Karr, 1890, p. 95). This spiritualization of the woman makes the relationship more than just a normal one; it makes their commitment a holy and virtuous union (Karr, 1890, p. 23). The contrast between Magdeleine and other female characters, like Marie, who was just a woman to him, makes this Romantic purity even stronger. This shows the difference between pure spiritual devotion and base physical desire.

Magdeleine's identity is fundamentally connected to her celestial innocence. Her anxiety about Stephen is mostly about keeping her innocence and my honor safe. The narrative framework establishes the source text value grid centred on the sanctity of purity, mirroring the prevalent aesthetic ideals in the European context. Susan Bassnett says that European cultures have a "common textual grid that comes from the Christian and Greco-Roman traditions" (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990, p. 5). In the Romantic era, this tradition often channelled spiritual or transcendent desires through idealized feminine innocence. This made it an important standard for moral worth and textual integrity when translated.

The tragedy of *Sous les Tilleuls* hinges entirely on the violation and subsequent disintegration of this fundamental value. When Stephen finally seeks terrible revenge by corrupting Magdeleine, he breaks the sacred promise they made to each other, which is what he does sous ces mêmes tilleul (Karr, 1890, p. 302). This infringement of innocence culminates in Magdeleine's lethal despair. The ultimate failure of the love is not a social or economic disaster, but a metaphysical one, showing how deeply the idea of spiritual innocence was a part of the source culture's ideas about morality and human destiny.

Thus, when the text undergoes translation, the widespread value of Romantic innocence serves as a significant constraint or influencing factor on the receiving culture's system (Schor, 1992). The subsequent translation decisions, illustrated by the cultural transformations enacted by adapters such as Al-Manfaluti within the target culture (as examined in the contextualizing study), inherently interact with, and frequently recontextualize, this particular European notion of purity and its association with destiny and elevated moral status (Kilpatrick, 1974). The aesthetic appreciation of Karr's work, which facilitated its initial traction and success ('joli caractère, talents, énergie'), is founded on the deep spiritualization of love represented by this celestial innocence.

In another enlightening example of cultural-grid negotiation, Lin Shu's 1908 translation of Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, titled *Zei Shi* (賊史), exemplifies the negotiation of the cultural grid, positioning translation as an interpretive and ethical endeavor. This method changes translation from just moving words from one language to another to a strategy of making things more Chinese. Lin Shu, a Chinese writer and Confucian conservative, used an oral interpreter named Wei Yi to help him understand the source text. He did this translation at a time when China was trying to use foreign knowledge as a cultural technology to help a country that was in trouble (Xu, 2023). Lin saw similarities between Dickens's London slums and China's own corrupt government and social decay (Li, 2025). He recognized the novel's ability to critique society by showing the problems of the lower class.

Lin's formal textual choices show that he is consciously ideologically anchored. First, the title, *Zei Shi* (Thief History), exemplifies Lin's domestication strategy, deliberately utilizing a Confucian historiographical reframing instead of a direct translation (Li, 2025). Second, by making Zei (thief) the main character, Lin brought out Oliver's stigmatized social identity and made fun of the systemic injustice that often leads poor people to crime. This focus makes the text similar to the moral lessons found in traditional Chinese writing (Li, 2025).

The use of the word Shi (History) did raise the story to the level of Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*, which brought stories that had been left out of the Chinese classical tradition into the fold. This strategy clearly included social criticism and placed the work in the context of the contemporary fiction revolution, which aimed to revitalize the nation through new literature. Lin's choice of Zei also showed how Confucianism corrected names (正名) (Li, 2025).

Lin was aware of his power as a translator throughout *Zei Shi* and used it to shape the work according to his own vision. His method is a clear example of how subjective a translator can be operating in different cultural settings, the translator is an active participant who chooses, adapts, and reconstructs meaning instead of just passing it along. Lin also often used the commentative narrative subject "外史氏曰" (external historian). This device changes the original third-person objective narration into the "史官介入" (historian intervenes) mode, which is typical of traditional Chinese narrative (Tang, 2024).

This author's voice also talks about events in a clear way through the lens of traditional Chinese morality. For instance, the phrase "外史氏曰" in one part shows how the translator feels about the warmth and coldness of human feelings and the turning point of fate (Li, 2025).

This makes sure that the moral center of the novel—Oliver's struggle and natural goodness—was set within the Chinese system's well-known moral limits. These systematic selections illustrate that Lin's objective was ethical interpretation rather than mechanical equivalence, thereby ensuring that the foreign text was rendered comprehensible and morally significant within the target culture.

B. The Translator as a Moral Legislator and a Parallel Author

The transition of Alphonse Karr's *Sous les Tilleuls* into the Arabic linguistic and ideological context illustrates the significant limitations imposed by the receiving culture, necessitating a fundamental re-evaluation of moral standards. The Arabic-Islamic cultural grid requires this transformative process, which goes far beyond just changing words. It puts

the values of modesty (al-hayā') and honor (al-sharaf) above the original Romantic aesthetics (Al-Manfaluti, 2014). The resulting textual adaptation, characterized by the core analysis as parallel authorship, serves as a pivotal mechanism for ideological reinforcement within the target system.

The supreme virtue of modesty (al-hayā') serves as a central influence in the development of Magdeleine's narrative (Al-Manfaluti, 2014, p. 25). The Romantic idea of celestial innocence is what the relationship is based on in the source text. It is described as a holy and virtuous union that is later ruined by circumstances.

However, once in the Arabic context, the portrayal of female character development is strictly limited by moral consequence. For example, Al-Manfaluti's (2014) version changes the story so that Magdeleine, who had done something wrong (the perceived "treachery" or *ghadr*) (p. 81), gets punished and is then turned down with pride by Stephen. This decision is not based on aesthetics but on ideology; it changes the story from a Romantic tragedy about broken idealism to a moral reckoning that fits with the materialistic Western world by focusing on spiritual poverty. Moreover, the initial textual ambiguity concerning financial versus ethical motives is clarified in favor of the moral dimension associated with honor (al-sharaf) (Al-Manfaluti, 2014, p. 37).

The most important thing about these limits is that they show cultural hegemony at the time of text transfer. Instead of following the rule of faithfulness, the translator uses the "cultural turn" model to create a system of narrative justice. The resulting text must conform to the entrenched expectations of the target culture concerning female roles, the association of fate with moral integrity (Al-Manfaluti, 2014, p. 75), and the depiction of idealized behavior to the audience, illustrating how the Arabic-Islamic framework actively modifies texts to preserve its fundamental values. Consequently, Al-Manfaluti's work is assessed not by its fidelity to Karr's original text but by its coherence as a piece of authorship and composition that effectively integrates and validates local cultural ethics.

In a similar act of cultural re-inscription, Lin Shu's translation of Oliver's defense against Noah Claypole's insults about his dead mother shows how Christian-inflected social compassion can be strategically re-inscribed as Confucian filiality (Lin, 1908, p. 44). Dickens's English story shows Oliver's sudden, extreme violence as a natural, instinctive reaction to deep emotional harm. He says, "his spirit was roused at last; the cruel insult to his dead mother had set his blood on fire" (Dickens, 1843, p. 44). This emphasizes Dickens's criticism of systemic cruelty and the suffering of the lower class.

Lin Shu, on the other hand, was a self-proclaimed Confucian conservative who used a strategy of domestication to try to make things more Chinese. This translation act used the cultural grid to turn spontaneous, rebellious anger into a respected order. The mother's honor (*xiao*, or filial piety) is no longer a desperate personal outburst, but a moral duty to follow Chinese customs. Lin made sure that the European story had moral meaning and cultural resonance among the late Qing literati by framing the boy's "struggle and inherent righteousness" in terms of principled filial duty (Baker, 1997, p. 41). This explanation of Oliver's motives helped to support his moral character in the Chinese ethical system, which Lin saw as universal.

The provocation expressed by Noah Claypole, who calls Oliver's dead mother a "regular right-down bad 'un" and says that children like Oliver are "born to be murderers and robbers from their very cradle" (Dickens, 1843, p. 37), is an example of how cruel the English story is to the orphan. Oliver's outburst of "fury" and his instinctive defense of his mother's honor show that his "good sturdy spirit" (Dickens, 1843, p. 11) has been awakened in response to social condemnation.

Lin Shu's Chinese re-inscription in *Zei Shi* (History of the Thief) turns this social criticism into a morally charged act of filiality (孝). By focusing on the defense of the mother (母, *mǔ*) against malicious slander (誣), the Chinese text connects the foreign novel to the Chinese cultural grid, which is what the Chinese literati wanted for moral improvement (Lin, 1908, p. 34).

This change shows how subjective Lin Shu's project is as a translator (Li, 2025, p. 51). His strategy for domesticating, which put reception ahead of strict equivalence (Gao; as cited in Li, 2025, p. 28), used the scene to promote Confucian values. Scholar Olivia Lingyi Xu observes that this cultural reframing, which entails cataloging and identifying form, is profoundly experienced and politically motivated in the receiving culture (Xu, 2023, p. 412). Lin Shu's rewriting thus serves to instill new moral concepts by demonstrating a principle that resonated powerfully within Chinese tradition.

Describing Oliver's extreme rage focuses on his innate good sturdy spirit (Dickens, 1843, p. 11) rising up as an instinctual defence of his dead mother's memory. The English narrative emphasizes the physical and emotional eruption: 'Crimson with fury, Oliver started up; overthrew the chair and table; seized Noah by the throat... and collecting his whole force into one heavy blow, felled him to the ground' (Dickens, 1843, p. 38). This violence is immediately qualified by the narrator as a moral awakening: 'his spirit was roused at last; the cruel insult to his dead mother had set his blood on fire' (Dickens, 1843, p. 48).

Lin Shu's Chinese re-inscription of *Zei Shi* utilizes this exact moment of fury, which in the original is tied to Dickensian social compassion, to enact a domestication strategy by re-framing the conflict within the Confucian cultural grid of filial piety (孝, *xiào*) (Lin, 1908, pp. 33–34). In Lin's translation, Oliver's defense of his mother (母, *mǔ*) against malicious slander (誣) becomes a righteous act (Li, 2025, p. 51). This exemplifies translator subjectivity, wherein Lin Shu, the English-illiterate distant reader (Xu, 2023), mediates the foreign text to align with the moral didacticism (Li, 2025) demanded by the Chinese readership of the early 20th century. By shifting the interpretation of Oliver's rage from an emotional outburst against systematic cruelty to an ethical fulfillment of filial duty, Lin ensured the text's successful reception by conforming it to the target culture's literary and hermeneutic tradition (Xu, 2023).

C. Re-Coding Purity: Female Chastity and the Filial Slogan ‘吾母非贼’

In Karr's novel, Stephen articulates an intensely possessive ideal of purity that, while reflecting Romantic ideals, becomes a severe moral standard in Al-Manfaluti's translation—a standard that Magdeleine is bound to uphold for the sake of her marital value. French Source Text (Alphonse Karr, *Sous les Tilleuls*):

‘tu es une fleur dont le parfum m'appartient; tu ne dois le donner qu'à moi; ce n'est pas assez que tu n'aimes que moi, tu ne dois être aimée que de moi; l'amour et les désirs d'un autre homme te salissent; tu dois te réserver pure pour te donner à moi’. (Karr, 1832, p. 113)

Arabic Rewritten Text:

أنت زهرة لي... فمحة رجل غيري إياك أو شهوته إليك تدنسك. فيجب أن تحتفظي بنقاوتك حتى توفياني إياها

(Al-Manfaluti, 2014, p. 61)

Translation: You are a flower to me. A man who loves you or wants you other than me makes you dirty. You must stay pure until you give it to me.

This part, where Stephen says he owns Magdeleine's very essence (her perfume, her being loved), is an important moral commentary. Al-Manfaluti's rewriting keeps this possessiveness but makes its religious and social meanings clearer. The Arabic word "تدنسك" (defiles you) comes directly from the French phrase "l'amour et les désirs d'un autre homme te salissent" (the love and desires of another man defile you). In Arabic culture, "defilement" has a deep meaning that has to do with family honor and premarital purity, which are important parts of Arabic-Islamic modesty.

Magdeleine is not only keeping her sentimental ideal, but she is also keeping her social and religious status as a "pure" woman (naqāwah) who is "fulfilled" (tūfīnīhā) to her husband. This puts the responsibility for moral upkeep squarely on the female character and sets strict rules for what is considered acceptable "innocence" in the cultural context of the translated text.

Oliver's violent reaction to Noah Claypole's verbal attack is based on the English story as a moment of instinctual Christian/social compassion fighting against widespread cruelty. The English text goes into detail about this provocation, noting Noah's malicious slander when he called the dead mother a "regular rightdown bad 'un" (Dickens, 1843, Ch. 6). This immediately sets Oliver's "blood on fire" (Dickens, 1843, Ch. 6) and activates his "good sturdy spirit" (Dickens, 1843, Ch. 2). Lin Shu's Chinese re-inscription (*Zei Shi*) turns this personal anger into a right and moral act through the lens of Confucian filial piety (孝, xiào) (Lin, 1908, p. 33). By stressing the protection of the mother (母, mǔ) from malicious slander (诬, wū) (Lin, 1908, pp. 29–33), the rewriting turns the violent outburst into a moral duty. This strategy of domesticating the foreign text makes it fit with Chinese culture, which is what people expect literature to do: teach morals and help societal duties. This shows a lot of translator subjectivity (Li, 2025), since Lin changed the story to fit "traditional Chinese morality" and make sure the foreign work was acceptable and had an impact on China's current moral standards.

D. Narrative Intervention and Ethical Omission: Under the Linden Trees and in Sowerberry's Household

The clearest proof of Al-Manfaluti's change is the big difference between Karr's clear description of physical surrender and Al-Manfaluti's narrative intervention (or lack of it) about the sexual climax under the linden trees (Tilleuls). French Source Text (Alphonse Karr, *Sous les Tilleuls*): ‘Et Stephen la prit dans ses bras, et, sous ces mêmes tilleuls où autrefois elle avait promis d'être à lui, elle tint sa promesse’ (Karr, 1832, p. 302). In Arabic version, Al-Manfaluti writes ‘إلى أن أذعن له... وغلبتها عواطفها فانبعثت من مكانها في لحظة واحدة جميع عواطف الحب... ودفعته عن نفسها فجأة وثبة الهانج المختل، وانتزع يده من يدها... ودفعها عنه دفعاً شديداً فسقطت’ (Al-Manfaluti, 2014, p. 130) Al-Manfaluti's version recounts Stephen's final encounter with Majdulin under the *Zayzafūn* trees (linden trees). The text talks about a passionate kiss and hug, but the story that follows is cut short and moves the reader's attention away from the physical act. In *Sous les Tilleuls*, Magdeleine's "keeping her promise" is a clear euphemism for the sexual union, which is a Romantic climax based on complete emotional surrender. It is important to note that Stephen's rejection comes after the promise is kept and only happens when Magdeleine says Edward's name. Al-Manfaluti accomplishes two moral goals at once in *Majdolin*. First, the phrase that clearly refers to the successful physical act is missing. The story goes from a lot of kissing and feelings to being rejected right away. Second, the climax is seen as a moral failure of Majdulin's (Magdeleine's) feelings, not a physical act. When Stephen hears her say Edward (her future husband, as the Arabic text calls him), the physical scene suddenly turns into a fit of rage and rejection. This intervention makes sure that Majdolin stays physically pure, which is important because in this culture, chastity is non-negotiable for the heroine.

Moreover, Al-Manfaluti exacerbates Magdeleine's persistent fear of social disgrace, directly associating her actions with the public domain of shame (ʿAyb) and reinforcing the cultural framework's focus on (ʿard) honor. Alphonse Karr, *Sous les Tilleuls* says,

‘si quelqu'un nous eût vus, je n'aurais plus osé me montrer, j'en serais morte de honte; si vous saviez comme j'ai pleuré toute la nuit! comme je me suis retracé toutes ces tristes images de déshonneur dont me parlait la tante qui m'a élevé! je me sentais moins pure, j'osais à peine’. (Karr, 1832, p. 41)

However, Al-Manfaluti, uses ‘الجل’ (shyness/embarrassment) and ‘الخوف’ (fear). Karr says that Magdeleine's emotional distress after the first kiss made her feel "less pure." Al-Manfaluti keeps the focus on the visible effect: the fear of being seen and the shame (ʿayb) of her actions, which fits with social modesty rather than personal guilt. The character

is depicted not solely as a sentimental idealist but as an individual profoundly cognizant of the social contract governing female behavior (Al-Manfaluti, 2014, p. 25).

Lin Shu's Chinese version of moral shows that Mr. Sowerberry's reason for punishing Oliver is based on a cynical view of authority that is more about keeping the peace at home than judging morality (Lin, 1908, p. 44). When Oliver yells, "It's a lie!" to Mrs. Sowerberry's attack on his mother, he is saying that it is not true (Dickens, 1843, p. 40). Her planned answer is to cry a lot. The narrator stresses that this emotional outburst "left him no choice" but to hit the boy, showing that he had to do what he did to avoid being called "a brute, an unnatural husband, an insulting creature, or a base imitation of a man".

Lin Shu's Chinese re-inscription, which aimed to teach moral lessons and fit the text into the Confucian framework, changes the meaning of this failure of justice. Lin, who accepted a high level of translator subjectivity (Li, 2025) and a domestication paradigm (Li, 2025), used translation to promote ideas of social responsibility. While Oliver's defense of his mother (母, mǔ) is based on righteous filiality (Lin, 1908, p. 34), Sowerberry's purely cynical motivation—based on keeping the hierarchy of marriage intact—is very different from what Chinese literature usually does, which is to provide moral commentary (Xu, 2023). Lin's intervention redirects attention from Dickensian satire of domestic hypocrisy to the requisite moral actions of the hero.

E. From Innocence to Modesty: From Christian Pity to Confucian Gratitude and Moral Self-Cultivation

Al-Manfaluti's work, *Majdulin*, is a great example of cultural translation. In this case, the translator acts as a cultural agent, using a cultural grid to make sure that the target audience finds the source text both morally and aesthetically acceptable. The cultural grid at work here is based on conservative Egyptian society from the early 20th century, which put Islamic moral standards first. European romanticism's praise of physical love, suicidal passion, and going against family (as seen in Stephen's first letters, where he ignores social rules) is toned down (Al-Manfaluti, 2014, pp. 77–79). The focus changes from the characters' physical beauty, which Karr describes in detail, such as Magdeleine's hair and eyes, to their moral integrity (Al-Manfaluti, 2014, p. 121). Al-Manfaluti's most effective tactic is omission and sublimation. The overt sexual union in Karr is eradicated due to the incompatibility of female premarital transgression with the Arab ideal of the pure heroine.

By leaving out the act, Al-Manfaluti (2014) protects Majdulin's chastity (ʿiffa), which is important for her story of martyrdom later in the book when she kills herself because she is sad about losing her honor, not because she was seduced (p. 130). Karr's Stephen also tells Magdeleine to go against the world, its rules, and its prejudices, making their love seem like it is above all else. Al-Manfaluti keeps the passion but makes sure that Majdulin's final choice to marry Edward is based on duty and obeying her parents. She tells him she needs to forget her romantic dreams for her father's sake and her own experience. This praise of obedience fits with the target culture's hierarchical family structure.

To sum up, changing "innocence" to "modesty" means replacing sentimentality with social morality. Al-Manfaluti employed the narrative frame of Stephen's possessive demands for purity and, significantly, utilized censorious narrative omission during the pivotal act of intimacy to correlate the heroine's tragic fate with a moral framework in which the forfeiture of chastity, rather than the forfeiture of love, represents the ultimate and irredeemable tragedy. This ensures Majdulin operates within the cultural parameters of honor and moral reserve expected of an Arabic literary heroine.

The cultural re-inscription in *Zei Shi* shifts moral expression from a Christian-inflected economy of pity and compassion toward Confucian virtues of filiality, gratitude, and moral self-cultivation. Lin's domestication aligns the narrative with late Qing ethical pedagogy and Chinese narrative tradition, guiding readers toward social responsibility rather than sentimental charity (Lin, 1908; Xu, 2023; Li, 2025). For instance, in the English narrative, Oliver's attachment to his protectors is framed through pity, compassion, and charitable rescue (Dickens, 1843, p. 46). However, Lin rewrites this attachment as obligation and repayment of 恩 (ēn), emphasising duty over sentimental affect (Lin, 1908, pp. 46, 214–238).

In addition, Lin also reframes Mr. Brownlow's home as a space of harmony and moral order, where goodness (善, shàn) demands internal commitment to self-cultivation rather than passive gratitude (Lin, 1908, p. 181). Moreover, for *Zei Shi*, the reception of goodness (善, shàn) is translated into an internal commitment to moral self-cultivation and social responsibility, aligning character development with Confucian pedagogical aims (Lin, 1908, pp. 214–238). Lin further reinforces this moral reading through the authoritative commentary '外史氏曰', which directs interpretation toward didactic closure (Lin, 1908, p. 181; Tang, 2024). In short, Oliver's goodness is recoded from a Christian sentimental register into a Confucian ethical program, illustrating how the cultural grid converts foreign moral capital into domestic legibility.

V. CONCLUSION

This study has argued that cross-cultural textual movement is best understood not as linguistic transfer but as ethically charged interpretation structured by a cultural grid. Across *Majdolin* and *Zei Shi*, the grid—an ensemble of intersecting pressures and permissions—conditions what can be rewritten, omitted, or moralised so that a foreign narrative becomes intelligible and authoritative within the receiving culture.

The framework combines Ricoeur's hermeneutics with the cultural analysis of Bassnett and Lefevere. Ricoeur grounds translation in linguistic hospitality and the pursuit of equivalence without identity, a task that accepts loss through the work of mourning (Ricoeur, 2006). The cultural turn situates this ethical labour within a continuum of ideology, poetics, and reception, where translation operates as rewriting rather than as neutral service (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990; Lefevere, 2016). The cultural grid names the point of convergence between these ethical and ideological demands.

In the Arabic case, Karr's Romantic innocence is recalibrated as modesty and honor. Al-Manfaluti's (2014) most consequential intervention is the omission of consummation under the linden trees, which preserves the heroine's chastity and reorients tragedy toward the threat of disgrace rather than the metaphysics of defiled love (p. 130). More broadly, Majdolin converts sentimental ambiguity into moral consequence through a didactic logic of narrative justice.

In the Chinese case, Dickensian compassion and social critique are re-inscribed as Confucian filiality, duty, and gratitude. Lin Shu's strategy of domestication, indicated by the title *Zei Shi* and the persistent commentary from historians, embeds affect within ethical pedagogy and solidifies its reception among late Qing readers (Lin, 1908; Xu, 2023; Li, 2025). When you look at all the case studies, you can see that translators are both cultural agents and moral lawmakers. So, it gives us a flexible way to compare cross-cultural rewritings and to make clear how ethical responsibility is handled when there are power dynamics at play.

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