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# Re-Evaluation of Lin Shu (the Chinese Translator): A Systemic Approach to Literary Translation

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## Abstract

*The 'cultural turn' in Translation Studies provides a new perspective for studies on Lin Shu and his translation — the cultural perspective. The present article, framed within the framework of Lefevere's systemic theory, examines how ideology, patronage and poetics exerted influence on these works. Through qualitative analysis on abundant data, the article comes to the conclusion that Lin Shu and his translated works can be justly and plausibly evaluated by referring to systemic theory. Lin Shu and his translation are greatly influenced by various cultural elements in early modern times. The thesis intends to provide a new dimension for the study and the evaluation of Lin Shu and his versions.*

Lin Shu (1852-1924) was one of the most influential translators in China. Not knowing the ABC of any foreign language, Lin Shu, in collaboration with those who were well versed in foreign languages, translated more than one hundred and eighty works by ninety-eight writers from eleven countries. Among one hundred and sixty-three fictions he translated, approximately forty ones were world classics. It was Lin Shu who first introduced Dickens, Shakespeare, Scott, Irving and other literary legends into China.

## **Introduction:**

Despite much infidelity to the original, Lin Shu's versions in classical Chinese opened a window of foreign literature to Chinese and imported new ideas, literary concepts, styles and techniques from the West. These, in turn, played a significant role in the development of Chinese society and the modernization of Chinese literature in particular. It's Lin Shu's translation like a grinder to the original that widened Chinese horizon and resulted in the turbulent tidewater of literary translation since the New Culture Movement (1915-1919). It can be said that Lin Shu initiated regular literary translation in China.

Nevertheless, the criticism of Lin Shu's translation has usually been negative, highlighting its unfaithfulness to the original. Moreover, many a research has focused on the analysis of distortion in his translation to the source text and the discussion has rested upon whether he is worthy of the honor a "*translator*". In this kind of research, the traditional notion of "*faithfulness*" is adopted as the criterion to evaluate Lin Shu's translated works. So his translated works were often criticized. The concise classical language Lin Shu adopted to produce his versions is also one focus of the debate.

All these studies highlight linguistic and literary elements of Lin's translations. The dualistic division between a source language text (SLT) and its target language text (TLT) is employed in the process of research. Nevertheless, these studies focusing on the faithfulness or equivalence can not elucidate the impact of Lin Shu's translated works on Chinese society at the turn of the twentieth century. Though with much infidelity, why did Lin's translations greatly promote the development of early modern China and Chinese literature in particular? Why did Lin Shu distort the original so much?

Obviously, more extra-linguistic or extra-literary factors should be taken into account in the study of Lin Shu's translations. The majority of Lin's versions came into being in early modern times, when China witnessed great changes. In the late Qing Dynasty (about 1890), foreign aggressions brought on serious social crisis in China. Some intellectuals began to realize the inferiority of Chinese culture to Western civilization. As a means of importing Western civilization so as to build up national strength translation became flourishing.

Furthermore, traditional feudal ideology was not the only dominant ideology in the early modern China. National salvation and reform became the central idea of the prevalent ideology. Meanwhile, Chinese literature could not keep pace with Chinese social development. Thus Capitalist Reformists launched "*Literary Revolution*". To respond to the call of social development and "*Literary Revolution*", translated fictions by Lin Shu came into existence.

Evidently, the evaluation of Lin Shu and his translations cannot be interpretative, appropriate, objective and plausible without taking the status quo of China in the late Qing Dynasty into consideration. It gives a hand in uncovering the influence of socio-cultural factors on Lin's translation. This thesis attempts to re-evaluate Lin Shu and his translation from a cultural perspective. Through the examination of the influence of ideology, patronage as well as poetics on Lin's translation in particular, the article tries to elucidate what socio-cultural elements affected Lin's translated works. In brief, the intention of the thesis is to provide another perspective beyond linguistic level for the study and the evaluation of Lin Shu and his translation.

In Lefevere's concept, literary systems do not occur in a void, but in the ideological milieu of an era (Gentzler, 2004: 136). This system is one of society, a constellation of systems. The literary

system is under the control of two mechanisms. One is from the inside of the literary system to keep order within the system. Here the determinant factor is poetics. The other is from the outside of the literary system to “*secure the relations between literature and its environment*” (Hermans, 2004: 126). Here the key term is ideology. Lefevere defined ideology as “*the conceptual grid that consists of opinions and attitudes deemed acceptable in a certain society at a certain time and through which readers and translators approach texts*” (ibid: 126-127). By patronage, Lefevere means “*something like the powers (persons, institutions) that can further or hinder the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature*” (Lefevere, 2004: 15). Ideology is the main concern of patronage (ibid.). Poetics is “*the dominant concept of what literature should be, or can be allowed to be, in a given society*” (Hermans, 2004: 127). Lefevere claimed that “*rewritings*” including translations “*are of crucial social and cultural relevance because they determine the ‘image’ of a literary work when direct access to that work is limited or nonexistent*” and “*all rewritings, then, take place under the constraints of patronage, ideology and poetics*” (ibid: 128). In sum, Lefevere thought of ideology, patronage and poetics as more important constraints on translation than linguistic differences.

This article further examines and elaborates how ideology, patronage, and poetics influence Lin’s translations respectively.

### **Ideology and Lin Shu’s Translation**

There’s a certain relationship between ideology and translation, and ideology imposes great impact on translation. (Lefevere, 2004: 41). This part seeks to expose how ideology influences Lin Shu’s translation through the analysis of Lin Shu’s choice of text for translation and the translating method he adopted.

## **The Era Background in Lin Shu's Time**

Lin Shu was born in 1852 and died in 1924. The transgression of the Chinese society was at its peak when he lived. The Opium War in 1840 had plunged the whole nation into the depths of suffering from the exploration and oppression of feudalism and imperialism. Soon after the second Opium War, the Sino-French war and the Sino-Japanese War broke out in succession. In 1900 Beijing was sacked by the armies from the U.K, the U.S, Germany, France, Japan, Italy and Austria. Owing to the corrupt and inept Qing government, these wars all ended in a series of treaties beneficial to the foreign invaders.

At home, Qing Dynasty (1636-1912) was crisis-ridden and its government on the verge of collapse; in the meantime, the world capitalist powers began to invade overseas to plunder rich resources and struggle for the lion's share in the world market. Compared with these capitalist powers, feudalist China was so undeveloped that it couldn't withstand a single blow from foreign invaders. Consequently, Chinese in early modern times had dual burdens, that is, to conduct a set of reforms to make China strong in the world and to resist foreign aggression. This background determined the prevalent ideology of that period.

## **Prevalent Ideology of Chinese Society at the Turn of the Twentieth Century**

In general, ideology refers to the mainstream belief, doctrine, or the thought that guides an individual, movement or group of a certain society at a certain time. In light of weak national power and foreign invasion, the mainstream ideology of Chinese society at the turn of the twentieth century was to enlighten the populace and seek to reform (Wang Yougui, 2003: 12). During this

period, the focus of translation in China shifted from science translation to fictional translation owing to the social function of fiction.

## **Ideology and Lin Shu's Translations**

Ideology prevalent at the turn of the twentieth century, to a large extent, influences Lin Shu's choice of text for translation as well as the translating method adopted by Lin Shu. Furthermore, traditional Chinese ideology also has an impact on Lin Shu's manipulation on the original.

### **A. Ideology and Lin Shu's Choice of Text for Translation**

Ideology plays a part in the decision-making and behavior of an individual or a group. The mainstream ideology in early modern China greatly influenced translators in that period, first in what to translate. This part mainly investigates the effect of ideology on translators' choice of text for translation.

It's well acknowledged that translation career in early modern China (about 1930) started with translation of Western science and technology as a by-product of Westernization Movement. Round about the Hundred Day's Reform, reformists cast much attention on translation of Western thinking and literature. In accompany with political reform, they launched "*Literary Revolution*", among which "*Fictional Revolution*" played the major part. Fiction was chosen to be a tool of social reform for its social function instead of its literary or aesthetic values. Fictional translation was first seen as a tool to arouse the populace's patriotism and to enlighten the masses.

Lin Shu's whole life was spent in a society with weak national strength. Reforms and enlightenment are the mainstream

ideas of that society. Intellectuals at that time expressed their patriotism in various ways to make the nation strong. Under the influence of “*learning from the West*” and bringing the social function of novels into play, Lin Shu started his translation career. Just at the end of the nineteenth century, Lin Shu had his Chinese version of *La dame aux camélias* by Alexandra Dumas Fils published. It was the first influential fictional translation in China. To a certain degree, the novel was anti-feudal, that is, against the rigid social stratification, which got a ready response among Chinese youngsters fettered by the feudal ethics. Since 1903, Lin Shu successively translated three novels with wars as the main content. He thought it was the shame of French defeat in Waterloo that inspired French to master knowledge and then made France avoid the loss of national sovereignty (Zhang Juncai, 1992: 98). Lin Shu tried to tell readers that Chinese should be ashamed of national defeats and weakness so as to make efforts for the prosperity of the country. Lin’s Chinese version of *Ivanhoe* was a broad hint for Chinese because at the turn of the twentieth century Chinese had the same experience with Anglo-Saxons. Through his Chinese version of *Le tour de la France par deux enfants* (1907) he hoped that Chinese youngsters could promote industry to build up national strength so as to save the nation from being defeated. He also produced *Ai Si Lan Qing Xia Zhuan* (the Chinese version of *Eric Brighteyes*), *Shi Zi Jun Ying Xiong Ji* (the Chinese version of *The Talisman*) and *Jian Di Yuan Yang* (the Chinese version of *The Betrothed*) to spread martial spirit in China so that Chinese could fight bravely against foreign invaders.

In short, the translated works by Lin Shu greatly reflected the ideology of reform and enlightenment so as to strengthen the nation. As he expressed in preface to *Bu Ru Gui* (a novel translated from Japanese) he translated foreign fictions to waken Chinese populace to save the nation (Guo Yanli 1998: 209).

## **B. Ideology and the Translating Method Employed by Lin Shu**

In the early modern China, translators, including Lin Shu mainly adopted domestication. Lin Shu's choice of translating method is primarily embodied in his constant adaptation of the original to the perceived needs of Chinese culture and the acceptability of his translations to Chinese readers. Here ideology also played a part in Lin Shu's choice of translating method. Lin's intention was to consolidate Chinese culture by applying Western learning.

In early modern times, Chinese intellectuals looked to Western civilization. Translation was prosperous and it attained a primary position in the Chinese literary world. It was usual and predictable for translators during that period to break traditional Chinese conventions and adopt the mode of foreignization. Nevertheless, translators including Lin Shu still conformed to the existing norms and employed the domesticating mode of translation for the most part. This was partly due to the necessity of the social ideology in early modern China as well as the traditional Chinese ideology. Lin Shu produced a domesticated translated texts for Chinese readers' convenience. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, some characters were reformed by Tom's behavior and come to believe in Christianity. However, in its Chinese version, their change is explained from the perspective of morality instead of Christianity. Unlike the original that demonstrates the victory of Christianity, Lin Shu's version shows that the change of Sambo and Quimbo is based on the famous Chinese idea that human beings are born to be kind (Martha P. Y. Cheung, 2003: 17).

Lin Shu's main concern in his translating enterprises was not to be faithful to the original, but to follow the ideology of his times and consolidate the traditional Chinese ideology. Thus he

manipulated the original according to the Chinese readers' demands and expectations. He let foreign writers approach Chinese readers. As a result, he used the domesticating method in translation.

Once a text functions as a tool of ideology, its significance can be distorted so freely that readers can accept the ideology of the author or the translator. The historic context of the text is ignored and the intention of the author is not considered as the central point.

### **The Role of Patronage in the Shaping of Lin Shu's Translation**

Patronage is the most important among the three elements according to Lefevere's systemic theory (Yang Liu, 2001: 49). Lefevere regards ideology and patronage as the two factors that govern a literary system from the outside to ensure that "*the literary system does not fall too far out of step with the other subsystems society consists of.*"(Shuttleworth & Cowie, 2004: 123). Lefevere defines patronage as "*something like the powers (persons, institutions) that can further or hinder the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature*" (Lefevere, 2004: 15).

Patronage consists of three components, among which "*ideological constraints on form and subject matter, economic provision for writers, translators and other REWRITERS, and the bestowing of status on these individuals*"(Shuttleworth & Cowie, 2004: 123). Among the three ones, ideology is the primary concern of patronage.

Before the late Qing Dynasty, fiction had been on the periphery of Chinese literary system. Just at the turn of the twentieth century, fiction assumed the central position and attracted the populace's attention. Capitalist reformists are the important patrons of fictional translation in China. They admitted fiction to be the canon of Chinese literary system. And fictional translation as a means of national salvation and mass enlightenment, was flourishing

in China. Under the circumstances, Lin Shu chose fictional translation to contribute to the strengthening of China, and to “boost Chinese patriot aspiration” (ibid: 124)

*Tongcheng* School was opposed to the *bagu* (eight-part) essay (stereotyped writing) with stereotyped form and hollow arguments. The school preferred simple but graceful style and the expression of genuine feelings. The literati of the school were also influential figures in the late Qing society. As a member of *tongcheng* School, Lin Shu produced his translated works by following the doctrines of the school to cater to the taste of the school’s literati and to gain their support. Thus Lin Shu frequently adopted simplification. A case in point is that Lin Shu put eleven Chinese characters to describe the doctor whose gentle character was exaggerated by Dickens in one hundred and twenty-seven words in Chapter I in *David Copperfield*.

“*Fictional Revolution*” in the late Qing Dynasty made the publisher print and sell novels publicly without worrying about being exiled. Talking about novels had become a new social trend (Chen, Pingyuan, 2003: 18). Consequently, large number of people became readers of fiction. In the meantime, the great headway made in the development of the printing industry made it easy to print books and newspapers (ibid: 255). Literary periodicals and newspaper supplements which mushroomed greatly promoted the translation of fiction. From 1902 to 1916, fifty-seven kinds of literary periodicals emerged (ibid: 258). Translation of fiction shared some sixty percent of some periodical’s content. These literary periodicals needed writers and translators to produce more novels. Thus authors of creative fiction came to be highly paid. Lin shu earned such a large amount of money by having his translated works published that his bookroom was called a “*mint*” by his friends. It’s true that Lin Shu quitted pursuing official position through imperial civil examinations due to the political circumstances obtaining in

China. Another undeniable fact was that Lin Shu could live comfortably by translating fictions. Moreover, Lin Shu's translated works were printed again and again, from which Lin Shu benefited a lot financially.

The third element of patronage is concerned with the status component. In early modern China, patronage of fictional translation was differentiated. On the one hand, prevalent social ideology was controlled by capitalist reformists who regarded fiction producers as the persons rendering outstanding service to enlightening the populace. From this point of view, the status of fiction producers including translators was greatly promoted in Chinese literary history. On the other hand, the income of fiction translators was dependant on private publishers, unlike science translators sponsored by the Qing government. Patrons of fictional translation were weak in political and economic power, which led to the humble status of fiction translators. Lin Shu was no exception. When the version of *La Dame aux Camélias* came out, his true name was not printed on the front cover. Instead, it was published in his literary name, Leng Hong Sheng.

### **Poetics and Lin Shu's Translation**

Lefevere conceives literary system as a subsystem within a society which is a conglomerate of systems. A literary system is governed by a dual control mechanism. Besides ideology and patronage, the factors governing the literary system from the outside, poetics keeps order within the literary system (Hermans, 2004: 126). Poetics is "the dominant concept of what literature should be, or can be allowed to be, in a given society" (ibid: 127). This part goes on to probe into the influence inflicted by poetics of Chinese literature on Lin Shu's translations from three aspects: the language system, narration modes and literary style.

## **The Poetics of Chinese Literature in Early Modern Times**

Translators and target readers live in the target culture. The mainstream literary form and popular poetics affect the whole process of literary translation to a large extent (Yang Liu, 2001: 48). Poetics of Chinese literature and popular literary form in early modern China greatly influenced Lin Shu's translation.

### **1.1 A. The Change of Literary Theory in Early Modern China**

Chinese literature in early modern times is a kind of transitional literature. On the one hand, it is the continuation of classical literature; on the other hand, it is the base of modern literature. Great changes occurred in Chinese literature during this period.

In Chinese literary history, literature has always been conceived as a vehicle of Way (*Yi Wen Zai Dao*). Specifically speaking, literature has been a tool to spread Confucian ideas. However, in early modern times the content of "Way" changed.

Just before the Opium War, famous scholars such as Gong Zizhen (1792-1841) and Wei Yuan (1794-1857) paid much attention to the practical knowledge of managing state affairs. They criticized the status quo of Chinese literature in which literature lost contact with reality (Guo Yanli & Wu Runting, 2003: 101). After the Opium War, Wang Tao (1828-1897), Feng Guifen (1809-1874) and other literati stressed the close relationship between literature and reality as well as the social function of literature (ibid: 106). During this period, "Way" was understood to be the practical knowledge which was concerned with the call for saving the nation through industrial development (ibid: 107).

At the turn of the twentieth century, theories of evolution were to the fore in China. Chinese literature was also challenged by evolutionism. Liang Qichao first espoused literary evolutionism. He put “*old literature*” at the opposite position of “*new literature*”. The idea in literary evolutionism was to root out “*old literature*”. The advocating of “*New Fiction*” was only part of the literary evolution. He also held the idea that literature should be an efficient instrument to propagate new thoughts and to transform the old world (ibid: 117). Until then, the “*Way*” conveyed in Chinese literature referred not only to Confucian ideas, but also to ideas of national salvation and democracy.

Lin Shu’s translation followed the principle that literature must be a vehicle of the “*Way*”. He understood “*Way*” as national salvation and feudal ethics as well. A case in point is the Chinese version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. First he treated the novel as a political novel to rouse the Chinese populace to save the country. At the same time, he also educated his readers with traditional Chinese ethics. In order to propagate traditional Chinese morality of repaying a debt of gratitude and to cater to the taste of Chinese readers who were not familiar with doctrines of Christianity, Lin Shu distorted the original.

## **1.2 B. Literary Form Prevalent in Early Modern China**

At the end of the nineteenth century, capitalist reformists launched “*Literary Reform Campaign*”. “*Revolution of Fiction*” was one part of it. From then on, fiction challenged the central position of poetry in Chinese literary system and began to have the lion’s share in Chinese literature. The number of readers of fiction was much more than that of other literary forms. This can partly explain why Lin Shu transformed Western dramas into fictions. Hu Shi (1891-1962) thought of Lin Shu as “*the worst offender to Shakespeare*” because he translated dramas by Shakespeare into fictions. During that period, fiction served as a tool of wakening

Chinese populace to save and strengthen the nation. On the contrary, Chinese dramas could not fulfill this duty owing to its slow rhythm and stylized form of artistic performance. Furthermore, the prevalence of fiction made fiction writers and translators get paid while drama producers could not benefit financially. Lin Shu, as a famous fiction translator, could get the highest pay among fiction producers. So Lin Shu would rather change the style of the original.

### **Poetics and Lin Shu's Translations**

Poetics is concerned with linguistic and literary levels in a given culture. To better deal with the relationship between poetics and Lin Shu's translations, this part investigates the influence of poetics first on language system, then on narration modes and finally on literary style.

#### **A. Language System and Translation Strategies Adopted by Lin Shu**

Translation first involves the transformation between two languages. Translated works convey the content of the original through the medium of target language. How a translator successfully transforms the original in the target language is certainly related to the language environment of his time. At the same time, characteristics and limitations of the target language surely dictate a translator's choice for certain strategies.

Classical Chinese had long been the dominant language style in Chinese language system. Fiction translators at the turn of the twentieth century including Lin Shu and Liang Qichao produced their versions in classical Chinese in that classical Chinese could enhance the status of fiction that had been despised by most literati for several centuries. At that time, no one, especially a political

figure or a literary celebrity, would like to read a translated version if it was translated in vernacular Chinese (Hu Shi, 2004: 139).

It's interesting that classical Chinese was, at first, used to spread the new ideas from the West; these ideas then hastened the decline of classical Chinese and the adoption of vernacular Chinese. Most translators at the turn of the twentieth century employed “*sense translation*” due to the discrepancies between classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese. Lin Shu used a kind of language combining classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese (Xi Yongji, 2000: 342). Lin Shu realized that Western fictions could not be translated unless regulations of classical Chinese were slackened. For the sake of translation, Lin Shu used some spoken vernacular Chinese in his versions. Lin Shu usually employed addition, deletion, substitution and extraction at the cost of faithfulness to the original in order to make convenience for Chinese readers.

In Lin Shu's time, classical Chinese still maintained the dominant position in Chinese literary system. Thus there were obvious marks of classical Chinese in his translated works. When lexical blanks occurred in Lin Shu's translating practice, Lin Shu used loanwords besides deletion. Lin Shu also adopted transliteration to make his translated works have a foreign taste. He directly transliterated those words which had been familiar to Chinese. Sometimes he added notes to those words that were not familiar to Chinese after he transliterated them.

## **B. Narrative Traditions and Lin Shu's Translation**

Besides language system, fiction translation is also subject to literary traditions in a target culture. Traditional Chinese narrative techniques have impact on Lin Shu's translation. This part will investigate this kind of influence from three aspects, namely, narrative point of view, narrative time, and narrative structure.

Owing to the influence of *huaben* (script for story-telling in Song and Yuan<960-1368> folk literature in China), Chinese classical fictions were written in omniscient narration and from the third person's point of view (ibid: 73). In other words, Chinese classical fictions are all told by an omniscient storyteller. However, it is usual for Western fictions to be narrated from the first person's point of view. So Lin Shu, in his translating, changed the first person's into the third person's.

Traditional Chinese literature is characteristic of lineal and chronological narration. The narration in chronological order can tell a story from the beginning to the end, to which Chinese readers were accustomed in early modern China. On the contrary, flashback and insertion are often used in Western fictions. Lin Shu dealt with flashback or insertion in Western novels by adding some information to indicate the narrative time for readers.

The narrative structure of Chinese classical novels basically focuses on characters and plots, but the narrative structure of Western fictions emphasizes not only characters and plots but also settings. Chinese readers in early modern China were fond of reading novels with cleverly structured and complicated plots. They paid little or no attention to descriptions of natural environment or the characters' psychology (ibid: 109). Considering readers' reading habit, translators at that time including Lin Shu usually deleted descriptions of settings which Chinese readers did not expect to read.

### **C. The influence of Traditional Chinese Literary Style on Lin Shu's Translations**

In early modern China, the inner structure of the Chinese literary world changed a lot. As the result of this change, fiction

assumed the central position in the Chinese literary system, which made it possible for Chinese fiction to draw upon from other traditional literary styles. Lin Shu borrowed much from Chinese jokes in producing his translated works.

## **Conclusion**

Studies on Lin Shu's translation, confined to the principle that a target text should be faithful to its source text, have been mainly conducted at the linguistic and literary levels without considering extra-linguistic factors. These studies can not completely interpret the distortion in Lin Shu's translation and its impact on Chinese society and literature.

On the basis of the Polysystem theory, Lefevere proposed his '*systemic theory*', which in sum states that poetics, ideology and patronage enormously influence a translated text. These three factors affected Lin Shu's choice of text for translation, the translating method he adopted, the language style and the narration modes he employed.

Lefevere's systemic theory provides a cultural perspective to evaluate Lin Shu and his translated corpus. Compared with previous research into Lin's translated works at the linguistic level, systemic approach seems to yield more results. The present article is a tentative study in the application of systemic approach to Translation Studies and intends to serve as a milestone on the road towards a more reasonable and feasible study of Lin's translation. Furthermore, the article provides another dimension for translation criticism on the evaluation of Lin Shu and his translated works.

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