

Study on Lin Shu's Translation Style and Its Formation*

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Abstract—Lin Shu brought the style of elegance and succinctness of the ancient Chinese prose into his translation, but he also tried his best to convey the style of the original to readers. When rendering various original styles, he naturally brought the “inelegant” and “insuccinct” elements into the translation, thus weakening elegance and succinctness to some extent. Nevertheless, the “elegant and succinct” elements in his translation was maintained at a relatively high proportion as a whole, so his translation style could still be categorized as that of “elegance and succinctness”. In terms of its dynamic formation, it was closely related to the translator, target readers and translation cultural strategy. To be specific, Lin Shu's good command of classical Chinese prose, the stylistic preference of traditional literati and scholar bureaucrats, as well as the translation cultural strategy of assimilating the foreign languages with Chinese style, all contributed to the formation of Lin's translation style.

Index Terms—Lin Shu, translation style, elegance and succinctness, humor, translator, target text readers, translation culture strategy

I. INTRODUCTION

Lin Shu was a master of ancient Chinese prose, but he translated more than 150 novels and became “the first person engaged in introducing Western modern literature.” It was through his translation that Chinese people began to know many world-renowned writers and their works and realized that Western literature is as brilliant as that of China. Attracting the attention of scholars in different domains, his translation style was often mentioned by scholars but never got studied deeply. In view of this, this paper tried to make a static and dynamic analysis of Lin's translation style.

II. THE STATIC ANALYSIS OF LIN SHU'S TRANSLATION STYLE

This part will discuss how Lin's translation conveyed both the style of the translator and that of the original text. The former will analyze how Lin's translation conveyed the “elegant and succinct” style, and the latter will use the humorous style as an example.

1) Elegance and Succinctness in Lin's Translated Novels

To some extent, there will be connections between a writer's different writing styles. The language used in Lin Shu's novel translation was often mistaken for “ancient Chinese prose” by many contemporaries and later generations. Lin Shu himself often makes an analogy between novels and ancient Chinese prose, so when it comes to the style of his translated novels, his creation of ancient Chinese prose should be paid close attention to, which inevitably had a close connection with Tongcheng School of Literature at that time. An author's creation is related not only to his or her personal qualifications but also to the times. What are the stylistic similarities between Lin Shu and Tongcheng School? It is the style of “elegance and succinctness”, which is the essence of Tongcheng School.

Lin Shu had in-depth thinking about the style of “elegance”, and most of the translations are simple and elegant. Whether scenery description or narration, the texts are generally elegant and concise, adhering to the style of “elegance and succinctness”.

In order to achieve the effect of “elegance”, Lin Shu adopted the method of imitating the lexicon and syntax in pre-Qin Dynasty, which conformed to the usual practice of Tongcheng School. Tongcheng School laid emphasis on “seeking the roots in the traditional thought literature” (Tian, 2003, p.4). They thought highly of the articles from the Warring States Period to the Han Dynasty. Therefore, books like *The Analects of Confucius*, *Shijing* were what they advocated. It is complementary to imitate the morphology and syntax in pre-Qin Period and adhere to the style of Tongcheng School. In the process of translating, Lin Shu used content words, modal particles, judgment sentences, passive sentences, and inverted sentences with pre-Qin characteristics, which made the target language tend to be pure and standardized with a simple and elegant temperament.

As far as the style of “succinctness” is concerned, the translator doesn't have too much freedom. However, in his translation, if Lin Shu thought that the original text was not concise, he would sometimes replace the original author and delete the wordy parts. For example, the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* describes the appearance of the human trafficker

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Haley. Excerpts of the original and translation are as follows:

原文: One of the parties, however, when critically examined, did not seem, strictly speaking, to come under the species. He was a short, thick-set man, with coarse, commonplace features, and that swaggering air of pretension which marks a low man who is trying to elbow his way upward in the world. He was much over-dressed, in a gaudy vest of many colors, a blue neckerchief, bedropped gayly with yellow spots, and arranged with a flaunting tie, quite in keeping with the general air of the man. His hands, large and coarse, were plentifully bedecked with rings; and he wore a heavy gold watch-chain, with a bundle of seals of portentous size, and a great variety of colors, attached to it,—which, in the ardor of conversation, he was in the habit of flourishing and jingling with evident satisfaction. His conversation was in free and easy defiance of Murray's Grammar, and was garnished at convenient intervals with various profane expressions, which not even the desire to be graphic in our account shall induce us to transcribe. (Stowe, 1853, p.1)

林译: 其一人猥丑, 名曰海留, 衣服华好, 御金戒指一, 镶以精钻, 又佩一金表。状似素封, 而谈吐鄙秽, 近于伧荒。(Lin & Wei, 1981a, p.3)

The description of Haley, with 175 words in the original, is extremely specific, while Lin's translation is only 40 words, less than a quarter of the original. The translation here is a generalization after the translator has an overall grasp of the vulgar image of human traffickers portrayed in the original text. Although many details are omitted in the translation, the overall spirit is retained in the translation. The translated text is short, concise and readable, conforming to the style of ancient prose.

2) The Reproduction of the Original Style

Lin Shu's translation not only embodies his typical style of "elegance and succinctness", but also conveys the style of the original text. Lin Shu was a person with high appreciation of literature and art. His long-term translation practice had enabled him to recognize different styles of foreign writers.

Relying on the tacit cooperation with interpreters and his good command of ancient Chinese, Lin Shu conveyed the styles of the original texts well. Tom's tragedy and the slave owner's cruelty in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the knight's romance and mystery in *Ivanhoe*, the various characters in *David Copperfield*—for all of these, Lin Shu had a very thorough analysis and a good reproduction.

For these styles, it is impossible to analyze each separately. Humorous style will be exemplified with details. There are few funny flavors in ancient literature, but Lin Shu "has a deep understanding of the humor of the original books, so he tends to pay more attention to describe these contents, which got very wonderful results." (Hu, 1998, p. 215). Of so many novels translated by Lin Shu, Dickens's novels are particularly humorously wonderful. Dickens was one of Britain's most outstanding novelists in the 19th century. He was good at detecting fun in daily life and seeing profound ideological connotations through these comical phenomena. Lin Shu vividly rendered the humor of Dickens' novels to readers. Take a fragment from Chapter 7 of *David Copperfield* by Dickens as an example. The original text is as follows:

Here I sit at the desk again, on a drowsy summer afternoon. A buzz and hum go up around me, as if the boys were so many bluebottles. A cloggy sensation of the lukewarm fat of meat is upon me (we dined an hour or two ago), and my head is as heavy as so much lead. I would give the world to go to sleep. I sit with my eye on Mr. Creakle, blinking at him like a young owl; when sleep overpowers me for a minute, he still looms through my slumber, ruling those ciphering-books, until he softly comes behind me and wakes me to plainer perception of him, with a red ridge across my back. (Dickens, 1981, p.83-84)

The original narrates a small fragment of life in which little David just dozed off, and immediately ate a whip from the principal's back in a summer afternoon class. Dickens narrates a pure, innocent but frightened boy from the perspective of a child. This style seems relaxed and humorous, but in fact it is "tears in laughter", which leaves a very deep impression.

The following excerpts are the translations of Lin Shu and Dong Qiusi (1950):

林译: 尤有一日, 似夏午后, 众声嚶嚶如虫鸣, 余脑重如铅, 嗜睡至酷, 即以全世界易此片晌之寐, 余亦甘之。时尚撑其二睫视先生, 似小驹初试其目光者。已而睫交, 忽尔如梦一高大之校长, 矗立余前, 然状甚猙獰, 但觉其可畏, 已而背上受笞, 红痕涌起, 斗视之, 果先生也。(Lin & Wei, 1981b, p.51)

董译: 现时仿佛我又坐在书桌旁了, 那是一个令人昏睡的夏天的下午。我四周起了一片营营声和嗡嗡声, 仿佛学生们是那么多的青蝇。我身上有一种微温的肥肉的油腻感觉(我们在一两个钟头前吃过饭), 我的头像那么大块铅一样重。我愿牺牲一切来睡。我坐在那里, 眼盯着克里古尔先生那里, 像一头小猫头鹰一般对他眨着眼; 当睡魔一下子征服了我时, 他依旧隐隐地从我的昏睡中出现, 他正指着那写算术簿, 轻轻地走到我后面, 用横过我背上的一道红岭子唤醒我, 使我把他看得更清楚一点。(Dong, 2009, p. 69)

After the comparison of Lin's and Dong's translation, it can be found that the latter's translation rendered nearly all the details in the original, while the former's translation had frequent omissions. But as for the expressive effect, Dong's translation seemed to repeat the story mechanically, revealing a mature and calm tone peculiar to adults. Therefore, little David's innocence and loveliness were totally lost in Dong's translation. Though Lin Shu had to cooperate with his oral translator and be confronted with the constraints of classical Chinese form, but he could convey Dickens' humorous style and the charm of tears in laughter on the whole. For instance, Dong translated "I would give the world to go to sleep" into "我愿牺牲一切来睡", which was emotionally plain. In contrast, Lin translated it into "即以全世界易此片

响之寐，余亦甘之”，which fully expressed David’s difficulty in suppressing his sleepiness.

There are countless examples of conveying the original humorous style in Lin Shu’s translation. No wonder Zheng Zhenduo (1981, p.15) said, “Sometimes even the ‘humor’ which is the most difficult to express in the translation can be well conveyed in Mr. Lin’s translation”.

III. DYNAMIC ANALYSIS OF LIN SHU’S TRANSLATION STYLE

Popular in the late Qing Dynasty, the style of “elegance and succinctness” was the most prominent style in Lin Shu’s own creation. In his translation, this style came into his translation, making the translated texts simple and elegant. The style in Lin’s translation was formed due to the translator himself, the target text readers and the translation culture strategy.

1) Translator

As the main subject of the translation process, translators play a leading role in the generation of translation style. Although Lin Shu’s translation was the crystallization of the oral narration by his co-workers and the written record by himself, the translation style was virtually under his entire control. His literary accomplishment was related to the formation of the stylistic features of the translation to a great extent. During his entire life, Lin Shu had a deep feeling toward classical Chinese. Therefore, sorting out the relationship between Lin and the ancient Chinese would be conducive to the comprehension of the reasons why Lin translated western novels in classical Chinese.

First of all, it is necessary to know his experience of learning ancient Chinese prose. Since he was a child, he began to read ancient Chinese prose. At the age of 11 to 12, he studied under the guidance Xue Zeke, his abecedarian who boasted enlightened insights in teaching young children. During his instruction, Xue Zeke imparted the prose of Ouyang Xiu, a famous litterateur in ancient China, to Lin, instead of Baguwen, a stereotyped writing for examination-oriented education. Since then, Lin had a strong aversion to Baguwen and a deep inclination to the traditional classical Chinese prose.

Secondly, his creation of the ancient Chinese prose is also helpful to our understanding of his translation style. While learning the ancient Chinese prose, Lin Shu also wrote classical prose. In 1910, the Commercial Press published his first collection of ancient essays, *Wei Lu Anthology*. Later, *Wei Lu Anthology Sequel* and *The Third Wei Lu Anthology* were respectively published in 1916 and in 1924 by the same press. In view of the fact that the modern literary works were created under the context of the coexistence of old and new literature, Lin Shu’s ancient prose belonged to old literature, which still possessed a very high position in the literary circle during the late Qing Dynasty.

Furthermore, it is also necessary to know something about Lin Shu’s compilation and comment on ancient Chinese prose. While studying ancient Chinese prose all his life, he kept making compilation and comment related to ancient Chinese prose, thus making unique contribution to the field. His representative works included *High School Chinese Reading Book*, *Chun Jue-zhai*, and *The Collection of Lin Shu’s Comments on Works*. Among them, *Chun Jue-zhai* occupied an important position in the whole ancient literary theory. At that time, the literati and officialdom boasted modeling themselves after Lin Shu.

Next, Lin Shu had close relationship with the Tongcheng School. Since Lin Shu had studied the literary theories of Zuo Qiuming, Sima Qian, Ban Gu and Han Yu for decades, the origin of his literary theory was objectively consistent with the Tongcheng School. Although he had repeatedly declared his position that he was not a disciple of the Tongcheng School, it was deniable that there was similarity between the style of Lin’s ancient Chinese prose and that of the Tongcheng School. What’s more, his critical theory of ancient prose has a very close relationship with the ancient prose criticism theory of the Tongcheng School. Therefore, he could be regarded as an important member of the Tongcheng School.

Ultimately, it came to his instruction of the ancient Chinese prose. Lin Shu, free from obtaining a post in the government, managed to teach as a teacher in his lifetime. Since he started to teach in the old-style private school in his hometown at the age of 21, he had never left the teaching rostrum until he passed away at the age of 73. In order to promote the ancient Chinese prose, he tried his best to recruit and teach young students.

Lin Shu cherished classical Chinese, and he couldn’t live without it. As a master in the ancient Chinese prose, Lin Shu had used all his energy to develop the prose, hoping to prolong the life expectancy of classical Chinese. Moreover, his translations in ancient Chinese could not only showcased his conversancy in it, but also could expand its application and lengthen its vitality. Such choice could fulfill many things at one stroke, so why not? There were facts which proved that Lin did achieve some fruits: with his efforts, the translation of novels in the style of “ancient Chinese prose” came into a fashion at that time, which extended the life span of the declining ancient Chinese prose by more than 10 years.

2) Target Text Readers

As the object of the translation process, the target text reader is another factor influencing the generation of the style of target text, which should be taken into consideration in the process of translating. Therefore, who were the target readers of Lin Shu’s translation? What stylistic preferences did they have?

Liang Qichao, a leader of Hundred Days’ Reform, had learnt from its failure and been aware that the only way to achieve the success of the reform was to renew the people. In Liang’s view, the people here were referred to those of the lower class. Influenced by Liang, Lin also regarded the common people as his target readers. However, Liang Qichao’s rapid failure in novel translation also taught Lin Shu an important lesson. From then on, Lin firmly believed that the

target readers of western novels were not the poorly-educated lower class, but the educated people who had a good command of classical Chinese.

Modern Chinese enlightenment thinkers all believed that there was no necessity for literati and scholar-bureaucrats to read the Chinese translation of foreign novels, because they were able to acquire new ideas directly by reading a large number of western learning works introduced into China at that time. The implication of it was: the Chinese versions of foreign novels were ready for the people from the lower class. But in fact, it was these literati and scholar-bureaucrats who read the translated foreign novels. This was one of the reasons why Liang Qichao's translated novels, just like a flash in the pan, failed to have a profound impact on readers. On the contrary, Lin Shu took the traditional literati and scholar-bureaucrats as the target readers, so the real readers were his supposed readers. His translated versions were able to live up to the expectations of the target readers in the aspect of the style, hence gaining a favorable reception from the readers.

The literati and scholar-bureaucrats had been immersed in *Four Books* and *Five Classics* for a long time. Therefore, although they had purchased the translated foreign novels for reading, they had already formed a fixed pattern in thinking modes, reading habits and language expressions, without making any corresponding changes. Meanwhile, they had been in a closed and stable literary circle for a long time. As a consequence, they were almost instinctively against heterogeneous cultures. The traditional literary concepts and norms were deeply rooted in their minds, especially those related to the language. At that time, there was a tradition that the orthodox literature had always been characterized by the classical Chinese occupying the center of literature palace. It was difficult for the literati and scholar-bureaucrats to change this literary criterion in short time.

In the past centuries, Chinese literati paid great attention to the comments on the style of writing in an effort to pursue the elegance and purity of language. The cultural background, language habits and the criticism perspective on novels of the literati and scholar-bureaucrats all made it an excellent choice to translate the foreign books into classical Chinese, just like the translation style of Lin Shu.

3) Translation Culture strategy

Translation culture strategy is another important factor affecting the generation of translation style, which directly shaped the basic features of translation style. Lin Shu's translation culture strategy could be summarized as the domestication strategy, that is, the assimilation of foreign languages with ancient Chinese style.

In the light of the discrepancies between the two languages and their cultures, domestication and foreignization can be roughly regarded as two different translation strategies adopted by translators who takes into consideration the differences in text types, translation purposes, author's intentions and target language readers and whose purpose is to guide the selection and application of specific translation methods and techniques. The domestication strategy adopts the language and cultural norms in line with the target language culture, making the translation fluent and smooth, so as to be more readable for the target language readers. On the contrary, in order to make the target language readers have access to the "original flavors" of the text, the foreignization strategy tends to choose the language and cultural norms which do not conform to the target language.

Domestication and foreignization are dynamic, so they are closely related to the historical and cultural context at that time. Domestication was substantially prevailing in the translation history of modern China. Lin chose to translate the western novels in the style of classical Chinese with high elegance and succinctness. Though his translations had missions and were sometimes unfaithfulness to the original works, it was greatly conducive to the smooth dissemination and acceptance of the translated versions in the target language.

Lin Shu's domestication strategy in translation style was widely adopted by other translators in the late Qing Dynasty. Featured by the combination of classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese, Liang Qichao's translated works were very readable, exquisite and elegant. He also often rewrote the original ballads and poems according to Chinese poems and songs. Lu Xun, a distinguished Chinese litterateur, did go even further than Liao Qichao in the application of the domestication strategy. In all of his early translated works, such as *Ghost of Sparta*, *An Unscientific Story*, and *Originede Fantine*, he adopted the classical Chinese to translate and sometimes even used the words and phrases of the pre-Qin.

Translation facts at that time showed that if the translator did not follow the trend of domestication, his or her translation was doomed to fail. *The Collection of Translated Foreign Novels*, co-rendered and co-published by Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren, the latter being an outstanding modern Chinese essayist, was a very typical example. Their translation was seldom bought by readers at that time. Lu Xun later talked about its sale, "I heard that only 20 copies have been sold, and the rest of them will just stay on bookshelves forever." (Lu, 1997, p. 202)

Tan Xiaolan divided the translators in the late Qing Dynasty into two generations, with Lin Shu and Liang Qichao as the first generation, Hu Shi and Lu Xun as the second one (Tan, 2004, p. 197). There were obvious differences between the two generations of translators in their choice of literary styles. The former held on the principle of assimilating foreign novels with Chinese literary style, while the latter tended to accept the stylistic forms of foreign novels. This difference was closely linked to the cultural mentality of Chinese people. For the first generation of translators such as Lin Shu, their cultural stand was centered on the Chinese culture, so they tended to adopt the domestication strategy to deal with the style of foreign novels. However, since then, Chinese people possessed a more open mind to foreign culture, and translators were more likely to accept the westernized style of translated foreign novels.

IV. CONCLUSION

The paper made a static and dynamic analysis of Lin Shu's translation. Popular in the late Qing Dynasty, the style of "elegance and succinctness" was the most prominent style in Lin Shu's own creation. In his translation, this style came into his translation, making the translated texts simple and elegant. Because translation is not a creation, a responsible translator should convey the original style to the target readers. Lin Shu had done a good job in this regard. Although his translation could not be superficially compared with the original text, the overall artistic style of the original was well conveyed to the target readers. When rendering various original styles, he naturally brought the "inelegant" and "insuccinct" elements into the translation, thus weakening elegance and succinctness to some extent. Nevertheless, the "elegant and succinct" elements in his translation were maintained at a relatively high proportion as a whole, so his translation style could still be categorized as that of "elegance and succinctness".

Being elegant and succinct, Lin's translation was to some extent disloyal to the original work. In terms of its dynamic formation, it was closely related to the translator, target readers and translation culture strategy. To be specific, Lin Shu's good command of classical Chinese prose, the stylistic preference of traditional literati and scholar bureaucrats, as well as the translation cultural strategy of assimilating the foreign languages with Chinese style, all contributed to the formation of Lin's translation style. Of course, in the evolution of literary style, the classical Chinese style such as Lin's translation could serve as a historical intermediary. Lin Shu's translation style would lose its value and application in the wake of the disappearance of traditional literati and scholar-bureaucrats and the establishment of scientific translation standards. But it played an important transitional role in the late Qing Dynasty and the early period of the Republic of China.

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