

A Study to Lin Shu: An Echo From East to West on Translation in Late-Qing Dynasty

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ABSTRACT

The theme of this thesis study surrounds Lawrence Venuti's theory about utilization of domestication in translation, as well as how Lin Shu reflected Venuti's theory in his translation of Charles Dickens' novel *David Copperfield*. The first part of study contains the literature review and the statement. In my statement described my purpose and the importance of making an interrelated research between Venuti and Lin Shu. In case studies I picked up many translation examples in Lin Shu's *Kuai Rou Yu Sheng Shu* (塊肉餘生述) to illustrate the reflection of domestication in Lin Shu's work in details. Finally I gave a brief discussion of how Lin Shu's utilization of domestication changed readers as well as English-Chinese translation itself.

Keywords: *Lin Shu, Kuai Rou Yu Sheng Shu, David Copperfield, domestication, Lawrence Venuti*

1. LITERATURE REVIEWS

I could not find any cross-over studies about Venuti and Lin Shu, maybe because this idea is originated by me. But some research papers which solely discussed both of these two topics can provide us good interpretation about this cross-over theme and help us linking Venuti and Lin Shu together.

In *Foreignness and Familiarity: An Investigation into the Effects of Foreignization and Domestication in Translation*, the author, Helena Carvalho Henriques explored the using of domestication deep down into the history and revealed the complicated nature between the opposites of foreignization and domestication. By citing Venuti's writing in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, Henriques pointed out that the using of domestication strategies can be traced back even to Ancient Rome. And in order to indicate the importance of domestication on literature and politics in history, she also quoted what Nietzsche wrote in 1882: "translation was a form of conquest".^{[1]15} The evidences she provided also proved that domestication was the dominating strategy in the translation tradition when the practices also included the evangelical intention.

Henriques put a great effort to persuade her readers that choosing between domestication and foreignization was not merely based on the preference of translators. Through her analysis, translations are interpreted as political as well as cultural instruments, rather than simple aesthetic objects. And this understanding has an incredibly long history.^{[1]16} Her study strongly proves that it is totally rational to associate Lin Shu with the using of domestication strategies. And the theory that politics and culture drives translation also built a gateway for us to analyze the influence of Lin Shu's works in late Qing dynasty of China.

Researches which are surrounded Lin Shu and his works also gave inspiration to my thesis. In *Translation Thoughts and Strategies of Lin Shu* (林纾的翻译思想与翻译策略), as Chinese researchers and translators, Yanjie Sun and Jintao Li gave their unique points of views which are correlated with the era that Lin Shu lived. And they also briefly analyzed the purposes, importance and influence of domestication that Lin Shu used in his translation. First of all, Sun and Li mentioned that Lin Shu showed obvious intention of inspiring and encouraging to his readers. They quoted the sentences from Lin Shu's own preface in his translation of H. Rider Haggard's novel, *The People of the Mist*, in 1906, for which he defined his translational works as "a rooster calling for the dawn".^{[7]67} This is based on the era that Lin Shu lived. During 1850 to 1900, the ruling of Qing Dynasty was rotted by the invading and colonizing of Western countries, as well as inner corruption. Through his pens, Lin Shu revealed the darkness of society that foreign literatures illustrated, and used them to push a revolution at the stage of people's mind.^{[9]117} He reminded his readers to carefully think of the nation's ills, thus he can generally change the whole country.^{[7]67}

Not only the readers were changed, Lin Shu put the other focus on those Chinese men of letters like him. He compared those Western literatures which he translated with contemporary Chinese novels, and got a pretty sharp conclusion that Chinese novels were mainly separated from the reality. He picked *Dream of the Red Chamber* as an example and criticized that the theme of this novel was too narrow and naive to illustrate the pain of the whole country. Thus he appealed Chinese writers to create deep-thinking and realistic works in order to profit politics and the society.^{[7]68}

According to Sun and Li, the presence of Lin Shu's translational strategies was interesting. He used

domestication while considering the sentences, but kept the idea of foreignization from the beginning to the end. When conservative Chinese men of letters rejected to absorb Western ideas, Lin Shu was totally aware of the cultural glamour that foreign literatures held. Thus he tried to keep this unique glamour and utilized it to irrigate the cultural soil where he rooted. ^{[7]68} His works used traditional Chinese to narrate, but completely reserved the speaking, lifestyles and social features of Western countries. Sun and Li cited Weixuan Qiu, a critic who was contemporary with Lin Shu to describe Lin Shu's manner: "(Lin) used Chinese allusions and classics to narrate disposition and temperament of Europeans. (He) indirectly reached his purposes and spent painstaking effort." ^{[7]68}

Sun and Li's research is complex. Their analysis indicates the complicated nature of Lin Shu's translational manner, and inspires me to consider both literal and mental aspects when doing case studies to Lin Shu's translation. On the other hand, they indicate me the direction when I generate my own ideas of Lin Shu's influence.

2. INTRODUCTION

I think it is okay to start the discussion with a paradox. As one of the most complicated activities of cultural communications of human, it is usually hard to accurately describe the definition of translation. Since the inevitable barriers among different languages, translational works could only rather be compromised to fluency, or accurate reproducing of flavor of the original texts which sounds obscure to speakers of their translating languages. As an experienced translator and researcher, Lawrence Venuti worried about this paradox. He cited Friedrich Schleiermacher's argument in an 1813 lecture in his book *The Translator's invisibility: a history of translation* to indicate this dilemma: "There are only two. Either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him." ^{[3]15}

No one knows which strategy is better, because abusing of either one is harmful. Concerning cultural backgrounds of translators themselves, for those which have a weaker cultural impact as well as self-confidence, over-emphasis of the flavor of foreign languages might cause cultural inferiority, even potential threat of colour revolution. For speakers of those languages which are dominant in global communication of recent history, like English speakers, intentional neglect toward styles of foreign literature causes arrogant, and deprivation of reading pleasure. Venuti gave his own answers. As an elixir to solve both kinds of situations, his theory system divided styles of translation into domestication, as well as foreignization to fit into different cultural requirements. ^{[3]19} And Lin Shu, a Chinese letter man and translator who lived in an era with extremely conservative and exclusive cultural context (1852-1924), echoed Venuti with his ideas of domestication from more than one-hundred years ago. His translation of Charles Dickens's novel *David Copperfield* is considered as one of

the most successful cases of domestication.

3. WHY WE SHOULD LEARN LIN SHU AND VENUTI?

The reason of focusing on Venuti's theory is deep-rooted in the history of translation. In the academia of translation, which is generally influenced by value and legal systems of Western developed countries, self-expression of translators is much rarer than mere pursue of fluency. This fact means translators are required to be "invisible" for a very long time period. ^{[3]8}

In Medieval era, translation usually appeared on academic and religious works. Thus fluency and accuracy became the only pursues of early translators, because generally their works had no requirements of emotion expression and reading pleasure. In some famous cases like the translation of Septuagint, for which seventy-two separated Jewish scholars made totally identical Greek translational works from Biblical Hebrew, total hiding of any personal styles became the symbol of skills and godliness. After 1886, when countries start to join into international copyright treaties like Berne Convention, translators continually lost their possibility of self-expression, because governments could not give full legal recognition for the "disobedience" of foreign writers. ^{[3]8} In recent years, the situation is getting worse. In English-speaking countries, book markets and publishers marginalize the translators as defining their works as "work made for hire" but not original creation of authorship. Thus the relationship between final publications and translators' effort is cut off. ^{[3]9} These truths alert us to seek the rectification of names for translators, like what Venuti appealed in his book. We have to return the rights of personal style-expression to translators in order to prevent our cultural soil from becoming rigid and barren, which means to make the translators "visible".

4. CASES STUDIES

I have to clarify the way that Lin Shu used to do his translation before starting doing cases studies for the sentences in his translation of *David Copperfield*, because it is incredible that he knew nothing about foreign languages. What Lin Shu had done was actually a kind of "collaboration" with masters of English. His helpers read and interpreted foreign text then retold the stories to him. And Lin Shu's work was rewrote those stories by Chinese. That is why it is hard to define Lin Shu as a conventional translator, because his works are so unusual: his existence in his works was so evident that these books were totally "reconstructed" by him. This is also the key reason for me to choose Lin Shu as the object of my study to echo with Venuti's theory. In a cultural environment when nearly all translators have to yield to "the translator's invisibility", Lin Shu's disobedience at one-hundred years ago is memorable and irreplaceable.

The reconstruction of Lin Shu starts from the title of his

translation of *David Copperfield*. The way Charles Dickens titled his novel is traditional, for which using the name of the protagonist as the name of the whole story. When we observe some contemporary novels, like *Emma* and *Nana*, we will find that this naming strategy is well-used and common-received among European writers. And contemporary readers were also quite in tune with this way of titling, for which they would not refuse a new novel only because of its subtle, obscure name. This common view between writers and readers came from people's attitude toward novels at that time. And this attitude was rooted from the unique cultural ecology. With the influence of the Enlightenment and the bourgeois revolution in England and France, middle-classes replaced nobles and became the ones who defined literature. And the novel, which was much easier to approach than classical literary genres like poems, became ubiquitous. In order to take the fancy of well-educated readers, the novel generally turned into a kind of serious literature with complex themes and remarkable depth.

But in China, the stories of novels are pretty different. When we look back to more than one-thousand years ago, we can find that the definition of Chinese literature always surrounds the imperial examinations. In their daily lives, male students studied and recited classics as their curriculum in order to get the good ranks in the imperial examinations which were held every three years. These extremely rare opportunities pushed them to put their effort on their courses and exams as much as possible, and gave up other "useless" literary genres like the novel.^{[10]132} Actually, the importance of accessing imperial examinations and starting respectable political lives made ancient Chinese novels could not escape from being treated as a kind of "amusement" and becoming serious. And the lack of modern publishing business further made the situation of novels unfavorable. During the long time period, from Chinese novels' sprouting in Ming Dynasty to Qing Dynasty, themes of novels were usually odd and exaggerated in order to catch the eyesight of readers among the common people.^{[10]132} Writers wrote the novels in spoken languages, and added romantic and erotic contents into their works to favor their readers. The titles of these novels were also required to have intriguing and straightforward titles to reflect their amusing plots and attract people to read them. And in this circumstance, we have to say that "David Copperfield" sounds too ordinary and obscure to reach these goals.

It was lucky that Lin Shu knew enough about novels and his readers in China. His first step of reconstruction was totally abandon of the original title of *David Copperfield*, and gave this book a new title *Kuai Rou Yu Sheng Shu* (块肉余生述), which could be translated in English as "A Narration of Life of A Piece of Flesh". This is an exquisite utilizing of domestication. Lin Shu made an analogy between David Copperfield and "a piece of flesh" to allude David's life as an orphan: being alone, being abandoned, and rarely receiving love and kindness among people. But "a narration of life" contains much more information. In our common-sense, only legends and hero are capable to narrate their stories because of their bizarre experience. The strange

fate of an orphan is out of the imagination of most of us. Lin Shu used this sharp contrast as a metaphor to indicate the life of David Copperfield which contains full of ups and downs; also he attracts readers' curiosity using a different way with Charles Dickens himself. And one of the most important, this title adds the atmosphere of cavalier-type romance and legend to this serious novel, and makes it more in line with the taste of Chinese readers. When the idea of Charles Dickens collapsed with Chinese value system of novels, Lin Shu made a very absolute decision of domestication directly at the cover of this book. And his attempt made his translation worthy to praise.

On the other hand, Lin Shu is a traditional Chinese man of letter who received a comprehensive education of Confucianism, which included both the accumulation of knowledge of classics as well as the building of a very conservative value system. This education background built up the limitation on Lin Shu's moral cognition, and made him could not fully understand and acknowledge some of the actions of the characters from the source text that he worked with.^{[5]173} This is totally understandable, but it actually changed the result of translation. After Lin Shu's intentional deletion and modification, the sentences and plots which could not being fit into traditional value system were rationalized. This is the domestication on the stage of ideology. Not only Lin Shu himself, but also the whole society was requiring a compromise from the literature to the morality. Here I would like to give some examples in *Kuai Rou Yu Sheng Shu*, comparing with the source text *David Copperfield*, in order to present my opinion.

Source text:

Then I proposed Mrs. Micawber: or, at least, said, modestly, 'if you'll allow me, Mrs. Micawber, I shall now have the pleasure of drinking your health, ma'am.' On which Mr. Micawber delivered an eulogium on Mrs. Micawber's character, and said she had never been his guide, philosopher, and that she would recommend me, when I came to a marrying time of life, to marry such another woman, if such another woman could be found.^{[2]323}

Translation:

余亦起壽密昔司曰：“飲此酒，祝馬丹長壽。”
密考伯遂歷稱其妻嘉言懿行，為世賢女，能相夫教子，共處患難，且謂余曰：“汝論娶者，所娶亦當如吾妻。惟不審閨秀中更有賢類吾妻者否？”^{[4]52}

Lin Shu's conservative value is sharp in this quote. When treating a wife as the "guide and philosopher" of her husband collapsed with Chinese value of marriage, Lin Shu absolutely filtered these contents and symbolized Mrs. Micawber as a traditional Chinese wife: a tolerant lady with appropriate speaking and actions, and treated taking care of her husband and children as a career.^{[8]110} This domestication may look ironically with the viewpoint of a modern reader, especially when modern morality and education tells us females and males are equally respectable. Other than modification, Lin Shu intentionally omitted some of the contents which were unfamiliar to Chinese readers, especially those quotes or metaphors with colours of religion (Protestantism).

Source text:

And the natural consequence is, as anybody but a baby might have foreseen, that he prowls and wanders. He's an like Cain before he was grown up, as he can be. [2]²⁴¹

Translation:

因之此兒乃被荼毒至於萬狀，實則再醮之非，雖孺子猶能辨之。 [4]¹¹

In this example, the aunt made a metaphor between young David with Cain, a character in the Old Testament who killed his own brother, in order to indicate the terrible suffering that David's step-brother had brought him. Lin Shu chose directly omitting this analogy, and only ambiguously explained that "this kid was tortured terribly". I have no idea about whether Lin Shu knew the story of Cain and Abel, but his judgment based on Chinese cultural background and contemporary cultural circumstance was accurate. The general idea of Han Chinese refused to honour deities other than heaven and parents. So after Church of the East was introduced in China in 639 B.C.E, Christians are always only small portion of Chinese people, especially in late-Qing Dynasty when the speed of cultural spreading was still slow. Lin Shu soberly realized that. And he chose conservative sentences to blandly express the original ideas of Dickens without visible flaws. This is also a skillful domestication. Other than modification, Lin Shu made his work familiar to Chinese readers by cautiously deciding what disappears and what remains.

5. CONCLUSION: WHAT DID LIN SHU GAVE US?

Now we have fully interpreted Lin Shu's using of domestication, and his purpose behind the strategy. But after exploring those skillful things, the most important quest for us to finish is to understand why he captured our interest, and what he gave us as the influence. Here I would like to cite the discussion of Qian Zhongshu about translation to create a general idea: "the 'medium' and 'attraction' absolutely indicates translation's act on cultural communication. It is an intermediary or liaison, introduced us to read foreign literature. It builds up the 'cultural marriages' between countries as the matchmaker." [6] In his passage, Qian also used the metaphor in the novel *Don Quixote*, "seeing the patterns from the back of a woven carpet" to describe the feeling of reading a translational work. His idea is pretty clear, for which defines reading translational works as a "beginning" rather than an "ending". [6] And what Lin Shu had done, as a translator who lived at the "beginning" of Chinese translation in a real sense, was dispersing the mist which covered on the Western culture, and illuminated it. Although we could not deny the flaws in his works, and even criticized his twisting of Western value and omitting of sentences, we still not ignore his enlightenment to us. He made his voice and himself visible, echoed to a modern translational theory system from a time far behind us. For even when he and his works return to dust, he still left his gateway for us to follow.

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