

# Translation for Children: A Case Study of Chinese Version of *Gulliver's Travels* for Children

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## ABSTRACT

*Gulliver's Travels* is a long travelogue-style satirical novel written by English writer Jonathan Swift, first published in 1726. Due to its unique fantasy adventure, it becomes a classic children's literature when it is translated into China. This paper examines the definitions of children as well as children's literature by different critics in the world, analyzes the translation methods adopted for children readers in *Gulliver's Travels* (children's illustrated version with phonetic notation) published by Tiandi Press, and concludes with a commentary.

**Keywords:** *Gulliver's Travels, children's literature, children readers, translation, translation methods*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Gulliver's Travels*, written by the English writer Jonathan Swift and first published in 1726, is a long travelogue satire. From the perspective of Captain Gulliver, the work recounts his adventures in four countries and exposes and satirizes the corruption of the English ruling class in the first half of the 18th century. Using rhetorical devices such as hyperbole, irony, contrast, symbolism, innuendo and irony, Jonathan Swift criticizes the absurdity of British politics, the evils of colonization and money, the ugliness of human nature and the hypocrisy of academia at the time.

### 1.1. Definition of children's literature

#### 1.1.1. Definitions of Child and Childhood

International critics are divided in their views of the definition of children's literature. The book *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (1996) (abbreviated as *The Companion*) points out that children's literature is a category of books, the existence of which absolutely depends on supposed relationships with a particular reading audience: children. [1] Children's books, as *The Companion* says, are books good for children, particularly good for their emotional and moral values. Canadian critic Michele Landsberg also believes that good books can do so much for children. [2] But which books are good books? The children's literature critics devote little systematic argument but discuss in terms of

emotional responses and consciousness--how they think the book will attract the child and whether the child will like the book.

It poses another question -- what is "child" and what is "childhood"? *The Companion* concludes that the definition of "childhood" has differed from culture to culture throughout the history. Historian Philippe Ariès points out that the idea of childhood is an awareness of the particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. [3] To British theorist Jacqueline Rose, the idea "child" is a construction invented by the Children's literature authors and critics concerning their own needs. Yet, children's literature and its criticism continue to adopt different, even contradictory definitions of "children".[4]

#### 1.1.2. Arguments about standard of Children's books

Arguments occur in the actual use of the two constituent terms -- "children" and "literature" within "children's literature". The British cultural theorist Fred Inglis argues that novelists of children's literature have developed a set of conventions for their work which characterize the way adults tell stories to children. [5] Australian critic Barbara Wall also agrees that adults are conscious of the child audience and all writers for children must have a child reader in mind. Because it's a self-imposed task to judge whether a book to be good for children or not. Some writers will consciously add their own perspectives of preaching in writing process.

[6] Rosemary Sutcliff, for instance, says that “I do try to put over to the child reading any book of mine some kind of ethic”. But some other writers argue that they don’t incorporate moral messages into books or make a book specifically for children. [7]

It goes back to the question -- how do people know which books are good or bad for children? Gillian Avery believes that children have their own defence against what they don’t like or understand. [8] (Adult critics often define “child” from their own perspectives and for their own purposes which cannot be disrupted by child’s own voiced opinions.) Also, some questionnaires and surveys for children have been conducted, which Nicholas Tucker says it is a clumsy way because the powerful searchlight like elusive and interrogative comments --“good”, “not bad” or “bad” cannot measure complex and diffuse patterns of reaction.[9] Simply put, different critics have different views and there is no definitive standard for children’s books.

### *1.1.3. Children’s literature in different cultures*

To define “child” and “children’s literature”, critics in different cultures describe the “child” as an exciting entity and the “children’s literature” a western import. For Indonesia, Indonesian critic Sunindyo states that the history of children’s book in Indonesia evolved along with the development of the government publishing agency when Indonesia was a Dutch colony.[10] Japanese critic Tadashi Matsui notes that the modern concept of “child” and “children’s literature” was fostered in 1920s when ideas of European Liberalism spread.[11] But Birgitt Dankert’s attention is focused on another aspect of response to western influence--the introduction of the colonial powers and Africa’s mixture of rejection and respect.[12]

### *1.1.4. The Reading Child*

The differences of the definition of “child” and “children’s literature” have made it a problematic issue thus influencing critics’ suggestions of reading for children of critic. The first and most basic step critics take to define “children’s literature” is to differentiate books used for didactic purpose or educational purpose from “children’s literature”. To the critics, the prominent characteristic of children’s literature is that it is supposed to speak to the reading child through amusement and inherent appeal, and not through didactic messages. It’s also the main means of indicating the “literary” qualities of children’s books which are defined in terms of how the book is supposed to affect the “child”. [13]

Margery Fisher points out that instead of being sermons, children’s stories are independent works of art which must appeal to the imagination, the mind and the

heart on their own terms, that is, they are supposed to be good for children and affect children better than non-literature. [14]

What the reading child is? It is a controversial question. For instance, Joan Glazer and Gurney Williams stated that good children’s books are characterized by “strong materials--good plots, rich settings, well-developed characters, important themes, and artistic styles...bold and imaginative language”. [15] However, they continued by arguing that the likes and dislikes of children do not determine the quality of literature. Books must be judged as literature on their own merits and children should be given excellent literature. In Darton’s view, the reading “child” is related to ideas about freedom, emotion and consciousness.[16] The concept the “child” develops along with ideas of literature and liberation which derive from the ideals of Western liberal humanism, originating in classical Greek culture. Well into the twentieth century, the children’s literature began to respond to the needs of children rather than adults. Reading child and children’s literature are often defined as one thing and children’s literature is often spoken of as if it is written by children expressing their need, emotions and experiences.[17] Myles Mcdowell claims that different from adult books, children’s books are featured in shorter length, active treatment, dialogue and incident, child protagonists, conventions, clear-cut moral schematism, optimism, well-ordered plots, child-oriented language, and endless talking of adventure, simplicity, fantasy and magic.[18] But American critic and author Natalie Babbitt holds the opposite view. She thinks children’s books are neither necessarily less serious nor concerned with simpler or different emotions and there are few differences in content or language between children’s literature and adult literature.[19]

How the reading child reads? There is a mainstay of the critics: “identification”-- an explanation of how and why the child reads. Israeli critic Adir Cohen says that for the child, a book is a source of satisfaction deriving from identification and participation. Donna Norton describes “identification” as a process that requires emotional ties with the model, to which the children believe they are similar.[20] But American critics Judith Thompson and Gloria Woodard conclude that identification in many books is only relevant to middle class children.[21] But British critic Robert Leeson points out that the working-class children do not only want to read about itself but like to escape into a different world and have pleasure and thrills.[22] Therefore, “identification” remains a problematic concept despite its widespread use because it must assume a “child in the book”, but even if it does, it cannot account for other hypothetical processes in reading.

As for the critics of children's literature, they have different views on definitions of children, childhood and children's literature, which has led to a conflict. They assume that there are independent, essential definitions of "literature" and "childhood" which only meet to their mutual benefit, within children's literature and its criticism. [23]

### **1.2. Views on children's literature and its translations in China**

The modern Western view of the child was formed and spread in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in the mid-eighteenth century, children's literature developed, of which Hans Christian Andersen of Denmark is regarded as the founder of children's literature. In a broad sense, a child is any person under the age of 18, according to *the International Convention on the Rights of the Child*, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on November 20, 1989, which entered into force in China on April 1, 1992, and is used in legal provisions. Narrowly defined, children refer to pre-adolescence, which, according to *Xinhua Dictionary*, is before the age of 12 or 13.

Children, as a special group in society, have different psychological and linguistic characteristics from those of adults, and therefore they have special needs for literature. A prerequisite for the emergence of children's literature is the "discovery of children" view on children.[24] The development of children's literature in China, on the other hand, could not have been achieved without the introduction of Western studies at the end of the Qing Dynasty. Zhou Zuoren wrote in his essay *The Literature of Children* that children's literature "must focus first on the 'children', and only secondly on the effect of the literature." He also stated that in the past, children were often not properly understood, regarded either as miniature adults or as incomplete person. During the late Qing and early Republican periods, the emphasis on the "human being" due to the introduction of Western thought also influenced and changed the traditional view on children. It was not until the May Fourth Movement that the independent personality of the child was affirmed, from the "adult requirements orientation" or the total rejection of children's needs, to the attention of objective characteristics of children and the concern for "childness" in children's literature. However, due to social instability and the frequent revolutionary struggles from the 1930s, the view of children's literature shifted to an "adult orientation" again in the service of the revolution. It was only after the 1980s that the focus on the individuality of children reaffirmed, and children's literature became truly literature for children. [25]

The political aspiration to "enlighten the people" in the late Qing Dynasty gave impetus to the translation of

children's literature. However, the purpose of translation during this period was not child-oriented, as mentioned by Liang Qichao, for example, whose aim was to get public opinion behind the Reform Movement and to influence the patriotic people, including "children". The translation of children's literature during this period was still in its infancy, with different translation aims. In this period, most of the translation methods were addition, omission and adaptation. During the May Fourth period, the status of children's literature as an independent branch was established, and the translation of children's literature gradually shifted to a "child-oriented" approach. During this period, the translation of children's literature gradually flourished, with discussions arising on "who should translate", "how to translate" and "what to translate". For example, Shen Yanbing required translators to have a creative flair; the method of translation advocated literal translation requiring faith to the original, and writings in the vernacular rather than in classical style; the content of translations was mostly fairy tales. In the 1930s and 1940s, when Chinese society was at a critical juncture of national survival, children were seen as an emerging revolutionary force, and translations of children's literature were oriented towards the "revolutionary struggle", with most of the Soviet children's literature and realist works being translated at this time. After the founding of the People's Republic of China. Especially after the 1980s, the "child-oriented" view of translation was again established. As a result of China's accession to *the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, and the promulgation of *the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Minors*, the basic rights of children, such as the right to live, the right to development, the right to protection and the right to participation, were taken seriously. Translations of children's literature during this period advocated "translation for children".[26]

### **1.3. Research on Gulliver's Travels and its translations**

There were three Chinese translations of *Gulliver's Travels* in the late Qing period and 18 in the Republican period, including *Haiwai Xuanqulu*, written by Weiyi and Linshu, a famous translator in modern China.[27] Since the founding of People's Republic of China, and especially after the twenty-first century, there has been a surge in translations of *Gulliver's Travels*, over a hundred translations today. In the late Qing dynasty, when salvation and survival were the main trends of thought in China, *Gulliver's Travels* was regarded as a "scientific novel" and the main purpose of its translation was to promote scientific ideas and enlighten the people. During the Republican period, especially after the May Fourth Movement when the main trend of thought in China was democracy and science, the translation work

of *Gulliver's Travels* continued and the number of its translations increased, with vernacular translations appearing in that period. In 1979, *Gulliver's Travels* (updated edition), published by the People's Literature Publishing House in Beijing, was included in Must-read Series of New Chinese Course Standard, and the main readers gradually changed from adults to children.

On the basis of the data collected from China Academic Journal Database - CNKI concerning the subject of "Gulliver's Travels", from January 1, 2000 to August 12, 2021, there are 520 articles and the number of annual publications increased significantly after 2012, but gradually slowed down after 2018. The themes of related literature can be roughly divided into the following categories: studies of the author Jonathan Swift, comparative studies of masterpieces, the translations and their comparative studies, translation strategies, artistic techniques, new historicism, colonialism, rewriting theory, teleological perspectives, reception aesthetics, abbreviated texts, narrative perspectives, defamiliarization theory, etc. There were 17 papers with more than ten citations, of which five papers were on the theme of translation and one on the perspective of children's literature.[28]

## 2. Study of the Translation Methods of the Selected Version

The version of *Gulliver's Travels* (children's illustrated version with phonetic notation) edited by Yu Nan was published first in January 2017 by Tiandi Press. It is selected into the world classic reading series of New Curriculum Standard which means it is officially recognized. The translation methods will be analyzed from three levels: lexical level, syntactical level and textual level.

### 2.1. Linguistic Level

#### 2.1.1. Addition of function words

The sentences in the translation employ a large number of conjunctions and auxiliary words to facilitate comprehension by child readers.

- (1) “我非常吃惊，就大吼了一声。”
- (2) “我躺在那里很不舒服，于是用力把一些绳子挣断了。”
- (3) “很快，我就睡着了。”
- (4) “告别了孟诺迪先生，就出发了。”

In the translation, there are a lot of words such as “就”，“于是”and “了”，which are often avoided in adult books that seem colloquial. The translator has added more of these words to the translation for the sake of the cognitive ability of children readers, so that the

translation appears to be colloquial and close to life, thus making it smooth and amiable to children readers.

#### 2.1.2. Omission of proper nouns

Specific names of people and places, as well as foreign words made up in the original text, are omitted. For example,

(1) Language of Lilliput, “Borach Mivola” and “Hekinah Degul” are omitted;

(2) “His Dress was very plain and simple, the Fashion of it between the Asiatick and the European.”

“他的衣服非常简朴。” (His Dress was very plain and simple.)

(3) “The Man-Mountain shall not depart from our Dominions, without our Licence under our Great Seal.”

“不能随便离开利立浦特国”

(4) “...that I might have Licence to see Mildendo, the Metropolis.”

“我请求到京城里看看。”

(5) “One Morning... Reldresal, Principal Secretary (as they style him) of private Affairs, came to my House, attended only by one Servant.”

“一天.....内务大臣来到我的住处。”

In the translation, the words Swift used to describe the languages of these fantasy countries as well as the names of people and places are omitted. On the one hand, due to language differences, such words without practical meanings can only be translated into Chinese by phonetic transliteration whose biggest problem lies in the fact that it will be unfamiliar and awkward-sounding for readers of the translated language, not to mention children readers. On the other hand, though the translator omits the names, but he keeps their titles. From the perspective of the novel as a whole, they are only secondary characters and places, so the omission of their names will not only not affect the meaning of the original text, but also reduce the reading burden of child readers and make them grasp the meaning the text wants to convey more clearly and directly.

As for the words that contain actual meaning, such as “Asiatick and the European”, which is used to describe the style of dress in the second sentence. Though there are corresponding translations in Chinese, for children readers in China, they have little knowledge about Europe, much less European dressing style. So, the translator omits such difficult explanatory descriptions and keeps the main part of the sentence.

## 2.2. Syntactical Level

### 2.2.1. Simplification

#### 2.2.1.1. uses of short sentences

The translation adopts condensed expressions with uses of short sentences. For example,

(1) “These Circumstances, added to the Refreshment I had received by their Victuals and Drink, which were very nourishing, disposed me to sleep.”

“我吃饱了，也喝足了，突然感到很困，不一会儿就睡着了。”

(2) “The People in the Streets walked fast, looked wild, their Eyes fixed, and were generally in Rags.”

“街上的人走路急匆匆的，样子狂野，目光呆滞。”

In the translation, short sentences are used frequently because they cut the meaning into different small parts, which are easier for the children readers to understand. For children readers, they have much shorter attention span which made long sentences without pauses seem boring and complicated to them, resulting it difficult to attract their interest. Therefore, the translation adopts uses of short sentences, which is in line with the reading psychology of children readers and makes them understand the text quickly and accurately.

#### 2.2.1.2. Simplification of detailed descriptions

In Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, he narrates the events and characters in great detail as a way to highlight the characteristics of the characters or the logic of the events. However, in this translation, the translator has simplified many descriptions out of consideration for the needs of children readers.

(1) “He acted every part of an Orator; and I could observe many Periods of Threatnings, and others of Promises, Pity, and Kindness.”

“这个人对我发表了长篇讲话。”

(2) “shoot me in the face and hands with poisoned arrows”

“处死” (put to execution)

(3) “The Emperor had a mind one Day to entertain me with several of the Country Shows; wherein they exceed all Nations I have known, both for Dexterity and Magnificence.”

“有一天，国王请我观看他们的表演。表演十分精彩”

In the examples, when describing the “Orator” in Lilliput, the translator concludes the orator’s behavior which contains “Threatnings, and others of Promises, Pity, and Kindness” into “长篇大论”; when describing the way of execution, the translator simplifies it into “处死”; when describing the delicacy of the dance on the rope, the translator simplifies it into “表演十分精彩”. This is due to the fact that overly detailed descriptions may seem obscure to children. For example, in the first sentence, if translated directly, the children readers may wonder why the orator has to intermingle such complex emotions to deliver his speech. Based on their mental development, children have a short attention span and have difficulty analyzing details. Therefore, the translator simplifies these detailed narratives in order to keep children’s interest and attention to reading.

### 2.2.2. Omission

#### 2.2.2.1. Omission of modifying words or subordinate clauses

(1) “a sudden flurry from the North”

“一阵狂风”

(2) “I viewed the Town on my left Hand, which looked like the painted Scene of a City in a Theatre.”

“眼前的城市也很美丽，就像一幅画。” (The town looked like a painted scene.)

(3) “But that Prince, who is an excellent Horseman, kept his Seat, until his Attendants ran in, and held the Bridle, while his Majesty had Time to dismount.”

“它差点把国王摔下来，多亏侍卫及时勒住了缰绳。”

(4) “By the same Computation they provided me with Sheets, Blankets, and Coverlets, tolerable enough for one who had been so long endured to Hardships as I.”

“之后，他们又用同样的方法，给我准备了床单、毯子和被子，我感到很满足。”

In the first sentence, “from the north” is omitted. To make the novel seem more realistic, the original text is very detailed in describing the sailing process, often involving knowledge of maritime geography. However, the description of the voyage has been extensively deleted in the translation, and only the general description of “the ship encountered a storm” is retained. Obviously, the translator’s focus is on Gulliver’s fantastic experience after he went to the island, so the description of the voyage was cut down. There are many other examples such as the second and third sentences in the translation. The translator deletes the modifying words or subordinate clauses, while retaining only the central meaning. But it is these modifying words or subordinate clauses that make the

original text logical and smooth. Thus this point also reflects that the translation focuses on fantasy rather than logic and rigor. The fourth sentence has a self-deprecating tone, which the translator has omitted and translated into “我感到很满足”, successfully changing the adult tone to a child’s tone.

#### 2.2.2.2. Omission of expressions related to “reader”

In the original work, Gulliver wrote his fantasy experience of sailing in the form of a retrospective book. Thus, in the original, the author often refers to his readers in his role as a “writer” and speaks to them, especially when his story is not appropriate or is too absurd. Here are some examples,

(1) “for which I cannot but hope the candid Reader will give some Allowance”;

(2) “the reader may please to observe”;

(3) “By which, the Reader may conceive an Idea of the Ingenuity of that People.”

However, in the translation, all references to the reader are removed, which has the advantage that the reader can get closer to the story. In the original work, the reader’s “readership” is often mentioned which could remind the children readers Gulliver’s authorship and interrupt their reading. For children, these narrative distances them from the story and even makes them feel that their perspective is limited by the writer. But in the translation, however, the existence of the writer is reduced.[29] The children readers’ attention is diverted from the writer to the story itself. As a result, children readers can enjoy a more fluid and complete reading experience.

### **2.3. Textual Level**

#### *2.3.1. Omission of indecent plots*

(1) When the army of the Lilliput was maneuvering under Gulliver, they looked up at Gulliver and found that Gulliver’s crotch was torn: “...not prevent some of the younger Officers from turning up their Eyes as they passed under me. And, to confess the Truth, my Breeches were at that Time in so ill a Condition, that they afforded some Opportunities for Laughter and Admiration.”

(2) “that I was able to turn upon my Right, and to ease myself with making Water; which I very plentifully did, to the great Astonishment of the People, who conjecturing by my Motions what I was going to do, immediately opened to the right and left on that Side, to avoid the Torrent which fell with such Noise and Violence from me.”

Since Swift’s original intention of *Gulliver’s Travels* was to satirize the English politics at that time, not to

write for children, it is inevitable that the original text contains some descriptions that are improper for children to read. For example, the first example is about the little men in Lilliput looking up at Gulliver’s crotch, in which “my Breeches were at that Time in so ill a Condition, that they afforded some Opportunities for Laughter and Admiration.” implies an adult joke. The second example is the about Gulliver urinating. Since Gulliver is an adult male, such a depiction is obviously improper for children readers, especially girls among children readers.

In Chinese educational concept for children, parents and schools adopt a relatively conservative educational philosophy, especially with regard to body parts and physical needs, which most parents avoid talking about too much. It is believed that such an approach will prevent children from focusing on the physical differences between boys and girls in terms of their physical and psychological growth process, thus guiding them to a sound development.

#### *2.3.2. Adjustment of chapters*

The translation makes selective cuts to the plot of the original work, especially those in relation to politics and satire. For example, the partisan battles between the High Heelers and Low Heelers in Lilliput, the depiction of women and the local scientist’s cure for tummy aches in Laputa, and Gulliver’s comments about England in Houyhnhnms, etc. Thus, the content of the chapters has been adjusted. For instance, the fifth chapter of the original text tells about Gulliver who help Lilliput defeat its enemy and put out the palace fire with his urine; the sixth chapter tells about the academics, laws and culture of Lilliput; the seventh chapter tells about Gulliver’s escape to Blefuscu; and the eighth chapter tells about Gulliver’s return to England. While in the translated version, Gulliver’s help to defeat the enemies of Lilliput is incorporated into the fourth chapter, and the content related to academics, law and culture is deleted, so there are only six chapters of the first part in total of this version.

#### *2.3.3. Employment of illustrations*

It is worth mentioning that although a large number of details have been deleted and omitted in this version, they are reflected in the illustrations. For example, there are two descriptions of Gulliver’s vest in the first part, the first is when Gulliver visits the capital for the first time, as the original text writes: “I stept over the great Western Gate, and passed very gently, and sideling through the two principal Streets, only in my short Waistcoat.” The second is when Gulliver is fighting in the war against Blefuscu in the sea: “I went back to the North-East Coast, and put off my Coat, Shoes, and Stockings, walked into the Sea in my Leathern Jerken,

about half an Hour before high Water.” Although both of these details about Gulliver’s clothing have been removed from this translation, they are reflected in its illustrations which show that Gulliver is wearing his waistcoat. In addition, almost all of the fantasy plots in the book are illustrated in colour. These illustrations are highly entertaining and not only allow children readers to visualize the story, but also to engage their interest in reading.

### 2.3.4. Transformation of satire

*Gulliver’s Travels* makes use of a great deal of bitter satire, which is notably muted in this translation. For example, the second chapter of Part III of *Gulliver’s Travels*, which tells of the fears and disquietudes to which the inhabitants are subjected, contains the following descriptions:

(1) “Yet in the common Actions and Behaviour of Life, I have not seen a more clumsy, awkward, and unhandy People.”

“可在实际生活中，他们却笨手笨脚的。”

(2) “Most of them, and especially those who deal in the Astronomical Part, have great Faith in judicial Astrology,\* although they are ashamed to own it publicly.”

“他们大多数人非常相信占星学。”

(3) “Imagination, Fancy, and Invention, they are wholly Strangers to, nor have any Words in their Language by which those Ideas can be expressed; the whole Compass of their Thoughts and Mind, being shut up within the two forementioned Sciences.”

“除了数学和音乐，他们对其他任何学科都不敢兴趣。”

In the above examples, Swift uses a biting satire of the absurd pseudo-scientists. But in the translation, the translator translates “clumsy, awkward, and unhandy” as “笨手笨脚” (fumble or bumbling). The translator mutes Swift’s satire in a childlike tone and purposefully cuts out the satirical parts of the original text, retaining only the key messages. Take the third part “A Voyage to Laputa”. For example, Swift criticized the brutality of colonial warfare. He satirized the English philosophers, the detached and fantasy-obsessed scientists, the absurd inventors and the critics and historians who distorted the facts. In the translation, however, the translator has rewritten it as a fantasy story with flying islands and strange people.

## 3. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of translation, this paper analyzes the translation methods adopted by the translator of *Gulliver’s Travels* (children’s illustrated

version with phonetic notation) published by Tiandi Press. The author believes that this edition successfully transcribes *Gulliver’s Travels* into a children’s literature with children readers in mind. However, as a world classic of new curriculum standard in China, the translation would be enriched if more descriptive content of the original work could be retained. As for the choice of language diction, it would have been better if more consideration had been given to the interestingness of the language. Since both children’s literature and translation are creative activities which have no single fixed standard of measurement and translations of children’s literature in China is still a relatively new discipline, more research and practice are needed.

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