

## Study on the Formation of Lin Shu's Translation Style

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### Abstract

The features of classical Chinese style with elegance and conciseness manifested in Lin's translation were far away from the stylistic features of the original works, which was actually "unfaithful" to the original works. From the perspective of the dynamic generation process, his translation style was related to three factors, namely, his profound cultivation in ancient Chinese prose, the stylistic preference of the traditional literati and officialdom readers, as well as the translation cultural strategy adopted by him on the basis of the assimilation of foreign languages with ancient Chinese style, which made a joint contribution to the generation of his translation style.

**Key words:** Lin Shu's translation Style; Translator; Target text readers; Translation culture strategy

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### INTRODUCTION

In modern English, there are little differences between the written language and the spoken one. Most of the original works translated by Lin Shu are written in modern English, but Lin translated them in ancient Chinese, which was different from the language people used in

daily life and exclusive to the social elites of that time. The separation of written and oral Chinese was attributed to their disconnection and mutual exclusion. Therefore, in the process of translating novels, the features of classical Chinese style adopted by Lin Shu, which were elegant and concise, were different from those of the original works, which were, in fact, not faithful to the original works. These stylistic features in Lin's translation were formed due to the translator himself, the target text readers and the translation culture strategy.

### 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 field 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.

Ultimately, it came to his instruction on 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 showcase 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 ten years.

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## TARGET TEXT READERS

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As the object of the translation process, the target text reader was another factor influencing the generation of the style of target text, which should be taken into consideration in the course 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 was 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 that 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 respect 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.

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## TRANSLATION CULTURE STRATEGY

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Translation culture strategy was 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 could 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 that 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.

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## CONCLUSION

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Being exquisite 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 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. 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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