



Constraints in Lin Shu's Literary Translation: A Social-Cultural Perspective

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Abstract

Lin Shu was one of the most famous translators in modern China. He was a monolingual who had to rely heavily on his collaborators in his translation. Therefore, translators or critics often find faults with him, criticizing that Lin Shu seemed to have been more concerned about spinning his own yarn than acting as a faithful intermediary between the original writer and his Chinese reader. Most of these studies on Lin's translation were carried out through traditional linguistic approach. The traditional translation study focuses on the analysis of linguistic transformation and puts the principle of "faithfulness to the original" on the first place, ignoring the social-cultural factors. Based on Lefevere's view of constraint, this paper tries to make a detailed analysis of ideological and poetical factors that manipulated Lin Shu. It comes to the conclusion that the ideology and poetics of the target culture are the most important factors that influenced the translator when he selected, understood and reproduced the source text.

Key words: Lin Shu's literary translation; Ideological constraint; Poetical constraint

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INTRODUCTION

Lin Shu was born on November 8th, 1852, in Fujian China. He was best known for his translations of western novels. After his first translation, *Bali chahuanv yishi* (La dame aux camélias), was published in 1899, it caused a national sensation among the Chinese readers. Its success inspired Lin Shu's ongoing introduction of foreign literature. For approximately twenty years thereafter, Lin Shu translated more than 180 foreign literary works into Chinese. It was through his translations that modern Chinese came to know many world-renowned writers and their books and realized that western literature was as excellent as Chinese literature. As a pioneer in modern Chinese history of literary translation, he started literary translation in China and made the translation of foreign literature a conscious practice. Therefore, Lin Shu's translation is of great academic interest in the Chinese history of translation and modern Chinese literary history.

In his translation process, Lin Shu fully shows his subjectivity as a translator. He translated foreign literary works in classical Chinese instead of modern Chinese. He preferred free translation to literal translation so translation techniques such as addition, deletion and alteration were not unusual in his translations. However, Lin Shu's freedom was not without restriction. As a matter of fact, he had to be subject to some factors at each stage of translating. This paper will probe into the constraints on translator's subjectivity in Lin's translation from socio-cultural perspective. Let's look at Lefevere's view of constraint first, upon which the current study is based.

1. LEFEVERE'S VIEW OF CONSTRAINT

André Lefevere (1946-1996), a native of Belgium, is one of the most influential scholars in "Translation Studies".

In 1990s, Lefevere took an interest in the norms and constraints that govern the translator. His essays clearly showed how translators operate under constraints of ideological beliefs and poetical norms inherent in the target culture or how translation is in ideological and poetical manipulation. In the introduction of his book *Translation/History/Culture: A Sourcebook*, he made such statement of constraints:

Translation needs to be studied in connection with power and patronage, ideology and poetics, with emphasis on the various attempts to shore up or undermine an existing ideology or an existing poetics.

Contrary to traditional translation theory, Lefevere demonstratively puts language at the bottom of constraint list: "It is my conviction that translations are made under a number of constraints of which language is arguable the least important" (Lefevere, 2004, p. xii). Indeed, most of his later essays and nearly all of his case studies and examples are designed to illustrate the importance of ideology and poetics at the expense of the language factor.

IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRAINT

The exercise of ideology in translation is as old as the history of translation itself. Since the term "ideology" was first raised by the French philosopher Destutt de Tracy at the end of the 18th century, there have been a profusion of diverse definitions of ideology defining the term from different perspectives. Lefevere viewed ideology as follows: there exist both the individual ideology and the dominant ideology, which are relevant to the notion of power; in some cases, the individual ideology equals to the dominant ideology, so the dominant ideology is what the individual translator willingly embraces; but in most cases, the individual ideology is in the control of the dominant ideology, and that is why ideology is described as constraints imposed on the individual translator. "Ideology is presented in concrete forms such as politics, art, aesthetics, religion, and ethics etc." (Newmark, 1997, p. 25) The paper will choose to illustrate ideological constraints in Lin Shu's translation from political and ethical aspect.

Political Constraint

Lin Shu was born in 1852, the twelfth year after the First Opium War. Later, the Sino-Japanese War in 1894 and the Hundred Days of Reform in 1898 took place one after another. If the defeat of China in the First Opium War had made the Chinese intellectuals begin to taste the humiliation brought by the imperialistic aggression, the defeat of China in Sino-Japanese War made China face the danger of extinction. The dominant ideology at that time was self-salvation: to drive away the foreign aggressors, to wake up the Chinese people and to restore China's prosperity, which determined the purpose of almost all the social and cultural activities in Chinese society at

that critical time, not excluding the field of literature and translation. At that time, the intellectuals who showed even little concern for the nation's situation would ponder on the future of the nation, and each patriotic Chinese began to explore ways to save China from extinction. However, the failure of the Hundred Days of Reform in 1898 made China's situation even worse. Then Chinese intellectuals were aware of the impossibility of successful reform merely through technology and the importance of the social and political reform. Therefore, social and political reform developed consequently, and translation of foreign political, economical and legal works substituted for the technological ones.

These momentous political events exerted great influence on Lin Shu and his political ideology. Being a patriotic intellect who was experiencing more and more serious national crisis, Lin Shu also realized that the most urgent demand of the time was to wake up the Chinese people and to restore China's prosperity. Much concerned about the fate of the nation, he translated fictions to warn the people and save the nation. When he translated *People of Mist*, he wrote the preface to the fiction: "I am old and lack intelligence, learning and strength, so I can not apply myself to avenging national enmity. Everyday, I shed tears to encourage students to save our nation. Besides that, I am also devoted to translating fictions to warn our people" (WU, 1999, p. 45). These words clearly indicated that Lin Shu's translation practice was in agreement with the dominant political ideology at that time and that the main purpose of his translation was to help the social reform of the nation and to enlighten Chinese people.

Lin Shu's ideology was politically progressive, but his political position was also greatly influenced by the ideology of the late Qing Dynasty. He was among such royalists as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao who supported Emperor Guangxu and the constitutional reform around 1898. Sun Yat-san, the leader of the Republican Revolution maintained that the monarchy must be thoroughly overturned in order to establish a Republic China. In the preface to his *Collection of Poems*, Lin sighed, "As the republic revolution broke out and the emperor resigned his power, the things I saw and heard made me depressed." This remark shows Lin's conservative side in his political ideology, which often influenced his translation practice.

Here is an example:

Source Text "I—thought that I saw some allusion to King Charles the First's head again, in one or two places." (Dickens, 1994, p. 259)

Lin's Version 有数处咸记却而司遇害事 (LIN, 1981, p. 119).

Influenced by the ideology proposed by the Qing Dynasty at that time, he thought that the British people were rebellious and that King Charles the First was murdered by them. The words "遇害" used here indicate

Lin Shu's disapproval of the action that British people sent Charles the First to the guillotine in the year of 1694.

Ethical Constraint

The traditional Chinese ethical thoughts, refer to, in a broad sense, various kinds of ethical doctrines proposed by all the schools of thoughts from the late Spring and Autumn and early Warring States periods to The Opium War; in a narrow sense, the doctrines proposed by the Confucian School, since it has played a dominant role in the evolution of Chinese ethical thoughts.

During the late Spring and Autumn and early Warring States periods, there appeared different schools of thoughts, and scholars of these schools carried out academic discussion. The era is often known as that of the Hundred Schools of Thoughts, from which came many of the great classical writings. The school of thought that had the most enduring effect on subsequent Chinese life was that of Literati, often called the Confucian School in the west. The written legacy of the school of Literati is embodied in the Confucian Classics.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, among various social transformations, the transformation of the ethics was an important and sensitive problem. Many reformers, like Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, agitated for the political and ethical reforms. Based on the western ethical standards, most reformers planned to design a picture of the Chinese ethics in the future. Yet, the dominated view at that time was that the traditional Confucian ethical codes were still superior to those of the west though the western technology was more advanced. In the following, the paper will focus on two traditional Chinese ethical codes: Xiao (孝) and Li (礼).

In China, children must show filial obedience to their parent, which is called 'Xiao'. In western Christian community, people believe in fraternity. The filial obedience is not valued as much as in China. In his translations, Lin Shu rendered the love between children and parents into Chinese Xiao.

Here is an example:

Source Text "Oh Trotwood!" cried Anges, putting her hands before her face, as her tears started on it, "I almost feel as if I had been papa's enemy, instead of his loving child". (Dickens, 1994, p.29)

Lin's version (安尼司) 语时以手掩面, 哭曰: "拖老忒乌得, 吾自审吾非孝女, 殆吾父夙仇耳。" (LIN, 1981, p. 210).

Anges, the heroine in David Copperfield, is a positive and idealized character under Dickens' pen. She possesses such characters such as mildness, intelligence, independence and strong mind, but none of the virtue that she possesses is equal to Xiao. In Lin's translation, she is depicted as a daughter of Xiao.

According to Chinese ethical codes, a person's behavior must be in agreement with the established rules of propriety, namely Li. Each person should act according

to the prescribed relationship. Lin Shu often rewrote the source text with Li.

Here is an example:

Source Text "Me leave you, my precious!" cried Peggotty. "Not for all the world and his wife. Why, what's put that in your silly little head?"—For Peggotty had been used to talk to my mother sometimes like a child. (Dickens, 1994, p. 164)

Lin's version 壁各德曰: "吾宝, 吾安能舍尔, 以汝年少最聪, 胡遽及于此。" 读吾书者须知壁各德之视吾母甚狎, 故出话不检, 初无主仆之分。 (LIN, 1981, p. 64)

When Peggotty talked with David's mother, she treated David's mother as a little child. However, neither David nor Peggotty herself thought that the remarks were rude. Lin Shu probably thought if he translated this piece literally, he would distort Peggotty's image in Chinese reader's mind, because Peggotty was a servant. So he added the explanation in his translation: "读吾书者须知壁各德之视吾母甚狎, 故出话不检, 初无主仆之分". At that time, servants in China were not allowed to treat their masters or mistresses in such a rude way. Lin's addition reflects the constraint of Chinese traditional ethical codes on the translator.

POETOLOGICAL CONSTRAINT

Though highlighting the ideological factor to a great extent, Lefevere never ignored the fact that ideology is not the only factor to manipulate the translator. Poetics is another. Lefevere often emphasizes the combination of ideological and poetical constraints. The definition of poetics could be controversial for theorists. For Lefevere, poetics is "the dominant concept of what literature should be, or can be allowed to be, in a given society" (Lefevere, 1992, p. 14). Poetics consists of a functional component and an inventory component. The former is a concept of "what the role of literature is, or should be, in the social system as a whole", or is described as "an idea of how literature has to, or may be allowed to function in a society" (ibid, p. 26). The inventory component of poetics in a literary system refers to an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters and symbols. We can find that the word "poetics" here suggests formal aspect of art. These literary norms are not "immediately subject to direct influence from the environment once the formative stages of the system is past" (ibid., p. 33). The paper will investigate how social views on fiction and literary norms affected Lin Shu's choices.

Social Views on Fiction

In the hierarchy of traditional Chinese literary system, poetry in classical Chinese, conveying the moral principles of orthodox Confucian aesthetics, was in the core, whereas traditional fiction, being considered to be pure entertainment with no didactic value, was confined

to the margin in spite of its popularity among the public. Therefore, the distaining attitude towards fiction, together with the distaining attitude towards western cultures and literature, led to the distaining attitude towards translated fictions among Chinese intellectuals then.

According to Lefevere, the social function of poetics is "more likely to undergo direct influence outside the system," and is "obviously closely tied to ideological influences from outside the sphere of the poetics and generated by ideological forces in the environment of the literary system" (*ibid*, pp. 27-34). In terms of translation, it implies that the social function of translation is closely related to, and sometimes even caused by ideology. Between ideology and poetics, ideology always plays a more important role in deciding what the translated version will really be, for it dominates the translator's basic strategy, and the specific methods to resolve the problems during the translating process as well.

From 1840s onwards, China's repeated defeats in conflicts with western powers and the prevailing political ideology of "fighting for the survival and salvation of the nation" altered some Chinese traditional concepts a great deal. Each possible means was approached in a utilitarian way to help this country to survive, not excluding literary works. The distaining attitude towards fiction, therefore, changed greatly. Liang Qichao believed that fiction would serve to inculcate the populace. He did much to encourage aspiring translators of western literature, thus began the large-scale introduction of foreign fictions in early modern times. As it was estimated by Ah Ying, there were altogether more than 600 translated fictions between 1875 and 1911, which amounted to two thirds of all translated works (CHEN, 1989, p. 7).

Much influenced by the social conviction on fiction at that time, Lin Shu got to be aware of the great power of fiction and chose to translate western fictions. In the preface he wrote to a magazine entitled "Translation Jungle", Lin Shu emphasized the social function of fiction translation: "Though the best way to enlighten our people is to establish new schools to teach them, but it is not as practical and effective as delivering addresses to them. However, to assemble them and give them speeches is also a very difficult task. Therefore, the only possible way lies in translating novels." (CHEN, 2000, p. 122)

Literary Norms

In the late Qing Dynasty translation was in boom, but China's traditional literary norms still occupied the preliminary position with little influence from abroad. This situation was just like what Lefevere have pointed out: "Change in the poetics of a literary system very rarely occurs at the same pace as change in the environment of that system" (Lefevere, 1992, p.30). Because most of Lin's translated works are fictions, the paper will examine how Lin Shu was restricted by China's narrative traditions such as the narrative viewpoint and structure.

Chinese traditional fiction is characterized by the third point of view, which keeps the trace of the story-telling by a story-teller. By employing this kind of view, the writers could freely describe any character's experiences, depict any scene and analyze any character's psychology. However, western fiction is written in the first person point of view. The narrator was an acting character involved in the story, and he/she is not unrestricted in his/her subjective evaluation, reactions, and comments on the story. Foreign fiction with the first person point of view made translators rather confused in the early period so the translators changed the original first person point of view into the third person point of view. Lin Shu's translations are also not an exception.

Here is an example:

Source Text Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or hither that situation will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. (Dickens, 1994, p.1)

Lin's version 大卫考坡菲尔曰: "余在此一部书中, 是否为主人者, 诸君但逐下观, 当自得之。" (LIN, 1981, p. 3)

It is obvious that "大卫考坡菲尔曰" and "诸君" were deliberately added by Lin Shu. Such addition discolors the first person narration in the original.

In traditional Chinese fiction, the narration of intricate and exciting plots is far more important than those descriptions of settings or character's psychology which are emphasized in western literature. Therefore, the deletion of such descriptions can be easily found in the translated works at that time. Lin Shu also often made such deletions.

Here is an example:

Source Text He was a short, thick-set man, with coarse, common-place 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, redropped gaily with yellow spots, and arranged with a flaunting tie...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, 1994, p. 1)

Lin's version 其一人猥丑, 名曰海留, 衣服华好, 御金戒指一, 镶以金钻, 又佩一金表。状似素封, 而谈吐鄙秽, 近似伧荒。 (LIN, 1981, p. 3)

The original author uses nearly 160 words to describe the appearance and character of Haley, an evil slave trader. Compared with Stowe's detailed description, Lin Shu's translation of 48 Chinese characters is quite simple. In Lin Shu's eyes, the original description severely slow the story progression so he deleted many details.

CONCLUSION

Instead of being totally free in his translating process, Lin Shu had to deal with many restraining factors. Among the constraints, ideology and poetics are two most important factors. The dominant political ideology determined Lin's translation purpose and material selection, and his translations were also influenced by the late Qing Empire's ideology; ethical reasons made Lin conform to Confucian codes. Poetically, encouraged by social conviction on fiction, he knew the great power of fiction and chose to translate western fictions; he made his own works conform to China's traditional literary norms.

Translation consists of the selection, the comprehension and representation of the source text. At each stage source culture will influence translator. For instance, translators are restricted by two factors in selecting the originals: the target culture's intrinsic needs and the potential of the source culture standards being used as models in the target culture. Translators must take the source culture into account while focusing on target culture. At the comprehension stage, the source culture also seems very important, for if the translator tends to objectively convey the message of the author, his comprehension must be based on source culture. Besides its significance to comprehension, the role of source culture in re-presentation is also great. As stated, Lin Shu knew no foreign languages, so he adopted a rather unique approach to translation. Lin Shu preferred a readers oriented approach according due consideration

to the target culture. Compared with source culture, target culture plays a more important role in his translation.

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