

# FROM "LITERARY TRANSLATION" TO "TRANSLATED LITERATURE": A STUDY OF THE CHINESE VERSION OF TWO YEARS' VACATION

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**Abstract:** The translation of literary works involves not only the conversion of language but also the representation of cultural, emotional, and stylistic aspects. Departing from a broad cultural perspective of polysystem theory, this study aims to explore the distinctive textual features and underlying reasons of the first Chinese translation of the French novel *Two Years' Vacation*, as well as to analyze its comprehensive impact on the target language system. This research provides relevant insights for the exchange and interaction of literary works on a global scale.

**Keywords:** Literary translation; Translated literature; Polysystem theory; Two Years' Vacation

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Literary translation "is the process of converting the linguistic information of a literary work text into another language text..."[1]. Literary translation involves not only the conversion of textual information but also the representation of cultural, emotional, and stylistic aspects of literary works to ensure that the target readers can obtain a reading experience as faithful as possible to the original work. While research on literary translation focuses on methods or procedures to better translate literary works, translation literary studies attempt to study the results of translation activities from an open perspective, aiming to elucidate the interaction between translation and society. According to the polysystem theory, "various social symbolic phenomena should be regarded as systems rather than mixtures composed of disparate elements. These systems have different behaviors but are interdependent.[2]" As a component of the cultural system, the occurrence and development of translated literature are influenced by other components within the system. Polysystem theory "has changed the research mode of studying translation only from the textual level."[3]By abandoning the sole examination of whether the translated text correctly reproduces the meaning of the original, translation works are placed within the target language system, allowing for a more objective and accurate assessment of their impact on the target language system. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, there was a peak in the translation of foreign literary works, with novels as the main focus. In this context, Jules Verne's adventure novel *Two Years' Vacation* was first translated into China by Liang Qichao and had a strong response at that time. At present, research on Liang Qichao's translation of this novel in China mainly focuses on two aspects: first, exploring the translator's translation ideas and concepts from the perspective of the translation, such as Wang Bin's "study of Liang Qichao's advocacy of the new people's patriotism from the aspects of theme reconstruction, motif construction, and typical image shaping"[4]; The second is to focus on the translation process and explore the choices and reasons for translators' translation strategies. For example, Wang Jin et al. discussed the decisive role of factors such as the characteristics and cultural background of the target language readers in translation strategies[5]. The aforementioned studies are either limited to traditional translation strategy discussions or confined to the analysis of translated texts, failing to integrate translated works into a broader cultural research perspective.

## 2 CHARACTERISTICS OF LITERARY TRANSLATION IN TWO YEARS' VACATION

### 2.1 Addition

In the translated text, Liang Qichao added a large amount of political discourse either through the voice of the story's protagonist or directly intervention as the translator. For example, in the second chapter of the novel, when there was a disagreement between Briant from France and Doniphan from England about when to land, which originally was a dispute among the children, Liang Qichao, however, through the voice of the young characters, explained to Chinese readers political terms such as "freedom," "power," "obedience," "law," "political party," "the masses," "public opinion," "discipline," and "autonomy." In the fifth chapter, the boys decided to send a few older children to investigate whether they were truly stranded on the deserted island. The original French text describes this as "Aussi Briant et Doniphan, ainsi que Service et Wilcox, qui allaient les accompagner, auraient-ils soin de se tenir sur leurs gardes, de n'avancer qu'avec une extrême circonspection"[6] (Author 's note: Briant and Doniphan, as well as Service and Wilcox, who were going to accompany them, would take care to be on their guard and to advance with extreme caution). However, Liang Qichao transformed these young adventurers into "commissioners" who were responsible for the collective welfare: "To investigate whether there was a sea, it was proposed to send an expedition team. In addition to Wu'an and Dufan, there were four members, including Wei Ge and Shapi, as commissioners. [7]"

## 2.2 Deletion

In the original work, the adventure of the young boys on a deserted island allude to the conflicts and struggles between different Western countries in the colonial background. For example, in Chapter 10, the children set distress signals in the bay while preparing to move to a cave: Baxter hissa le pavillon anglais, en même temps que Doniphan le saluait d'un coup de fusil. <Eh ! eh ! fit observer Gordon à Briant, voilà Doniphan qui vient de prendre possession de l'île au nom de l'Angleterre ! – Je serais bien étonné si elle ne lui appartenait pas déjà !> répondit Briant. Et Gordon ne put s'empêcher de faire la moue, car, à la manière dont il parlait parfois de <son île>, il semblait bien qu'il la tint pour américaine[6]. (Author's note: Baxter raised a British nationality flag to the top with a sling, while Donifan fired a gun in tribute to the flag. "Hi! Hi!" Gordon said to Brion, "Donifan owns this island in the name of Britain!" "If this island doesn't already belong to Britain, I would be surprised!" Briant replied. Gordon couldn't help but smack his lips, as from his sometimes mentioning "my island" tone, he seemed to have seen the island as belonging to the United States.) Verne vividly describes the different behaviors and psychological activities of the boys when they use flags to set up the distress signal, highlighting the desires and disagreements of different Western countries over territorial claims on the deserted island, indirectly reflecting the colonial wave of the late 19th century. Against the backdrop of China's era of being divided by foreign powers, Liang Qichao directly deleted this part of the story in the translated text, only mentioning the unanimous decision of the boys to set up a distress signal: "Odun turned to everyone and said, 'For the present, we should set up a long pole on the cliff with a signal constantly hanging on it, so that passing ships will know...'"[7].

## 2.3 Change

"When translated literature is on the edge, it often applies the existing secondary model in domestic literature.[8]" Liang's translation, in terms of narrative mode, adopts the choice of applying the traditional Chinese episodic structure. This episodic structure has distinct characteristics and typical compositional modules, such as dividing chapters based on storylines, each chapter accompanied by neatly matched titles, and there are usually poems that lead the content of the chapters at the beginning and end. Additionally, the author frequently steps out of the storyline to directly communicate with the reader about the story's content. During the late Qing Dynasty, both creators and readers were extremely familiar with this narrative mode. Therefore, Liang Qichao changed the narrative style of the original work in his translation. He restructured the translation into eighteen chapters, each with carefully crafted matching titles. During the fluctuations of the plot, he further guides the reader with an omniscient third-person narrative perspective, saying, "Dear readers, you need not worry, this Wu An will not die..."[7]. In comparison to the original work, the character images in Liang's translation have also undergone changes. For instance, in the third chapter of the novel, an introduction is provided for one of the protagonists, Briant: L'ainé a treize ans. Peu travailleur quoique très intelligent, il lui arrive le plus souvent d'être un des derniers de la cinquième division...D'ailleurs, il a souvent protégé les plus faibles contre l'abus que les grands faisaient de leur force, et, en ce qui le concerne, n'a jamais voulu se soumettre aux obligations du faggisme. De là, des résistances, des luttes, des batailles..."[6] (Author's note: The eldest is thirteen. Though not very diligent in his studies, he is quite intelligent; he often finds himself among the last in the fifth division... Moreover, he has frequently protected the weaker ones against the abuse of strength by the older ones, and as for himself, has never been willing to submit to the obligations of faggism. Hence, there have been resistances, struggles, battles...) In the original text, Briant is portrayed as intelligent, brave, with a strong sense of justice and spirit of resistance, but also as a child with his own flaws, making him a complex and vivid character. However, in Liang's rendition, Briant transforms into a perfect leadership figure: "Wu An has an excellent memory, positive emotions, is intelligent and lively, sincere and considerate..."[7].

## 2.4 Creation

In order to enhance the acceptance and influence of novels among the common people in China, Liang Qichao created a language mode that was a blend of vernacular and classical Chinese when translating *Two Years' Vacation*. The translation contains both the classical style of Classical Chinese and the modern language of vernacular Chinese, increasing readability, and showcasing Liang Qichao's unique literary translation style. At the same time, when Liang Qichao translated *Two Years' Vacation* in 1902, he intentionally used westernized Chinese which refers to the "Chinese new grammar influenced by Western grammar." [9] The Chinese version of Liang contains a large number of compound words represented by loanwords, such as "engineering doctorate", "black person", "whisky", "wine", "biscuit", "pen", "tableware", "hurricane", "hymn", "God", and "deserted island".

## 3 THE VALUE AND INFLUENCE OF THE CHINESE VERSION OF TWO YEARS' VACATION

### 3.1 Enlightenment of Thought and Consciousness

In the translation of *Two Years' Vacation*, Liang Qichao introduced political discourse regarding freedom and rights. He helped late Qing readers to understand Western political ideas more deeply. Understanding these concepts was conducive to prompting intellectuals of that time to reflect on the current state of Chinese society, inspiring their pursuit of freedom and equality, advocating for political reform, and democratic concepts. Additionally, the depiction of party

strife and the concept of rule of law in the novel introduced new ideas to late Qing society, which was beneficial for sparking thoughts on political systems, prompting intellectuals to pay attention to the importance of rule of law, advocating for the establishment of a more just and stable political structure, and encouraging them to actively engage in social reform practices. During the late Qing period, Chinese society faced tremendous changes and turmoil, with the pressure of national peril becoming increasingly prominent. The spirit of independence, adventure, and autonomy was exactly what the Chinese people lacked at that time. Liang Qichao used the story of survival on a deserted island in *Two Years' Vacation* to enlighten the people. The resilience and perseverance displayed by the characters on the deserted island can be seen as a metaphor for the social crisis at that time. This indomitable quality provided an optimistic inspiration for the state of the country at that time, motivating the people to pursue independence and have the confidence to take risks. The cooperation and mutual support of the young people in a foreign environment, facing difficulties together, stimulated the national spirit of unity to resist foreign aggression. In the survival of deserted islands, they need to rely on their own wisdom and efforts to survive, which emphasizes the autonomous spirit of individual self-reliance, echoing the rise of the self-improvement movement and reform trend at that time, providing positive guidance for promoting the national spirit of self-reliance and autonomy.

### 3.2 The Renewal of Literary Genres

The development of modern Chinese literature is closely related to translated literature. In the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China, Chinese literature was mainly dominated by traditional classical novels, with themes largely revolving around history and traditional customs. However, under the impact of the wave of translated literature, the deep structure of Chinese classical literature, which had long remained static, began to undergo fundamental changes. The translation and dissemination of *Two Years' Vacation* introduced political novels and scientific adventure novels lacking in Chinese literature in the late Qing Dynasty, injecting new vitality into literary diversity. This work provided readers with the opportunity to encounter unusual storylines and themes, offering Chinese readers a broader literary experience. The initial Chinese version of *Two Years' Vacation* received strong feedback at the time. Simultaneously, the translation and influence of this novel sparked a translation climax of similar themes in foreign novels, injecting fresh blood into the traditional literary field of that time, "causing the collapse of traditional literary concepts that had been maintained for over a thousand years"[10], promoting the innovation of traditional Chinese literary genres.

### 3.3 Stylistic Improvement

The innovation of this language style "objectively promoted the vernalization of classical Chinese and the vernalization of classical Chinese [11]." The innovative language style of universal use of language and prose played a demonstrative role in the translation of foreign novels in the late Qing Dynasty, profoundly affecting subsequent translation practice activities. The adoption of this language style demonstrates unique charm in the field of translation, with its concise and clear expression style and a more colloquial style, making the translated work easier for readers to understand and accept. At the same time, this innovative language style not only injected new vitality into translated works, but also promoted the development and promotion of vernacular Chinese in the late Qing Dynasty. Through the application in translation practice, the innovative language style of universal use of text and white has stimulated the exploration and innovation of language expression in literary works. With the gradual popularization of this style, literary creation in the late Qing Dynasty began to pay more attention to the naturalness and vividness of language, gradually forming a more realistic language and style model. During the translation of *Two Years' Vacation*, Liang Qichao pioneered a translational style that bridged classical and vernacular Chinese. This innovation not only made the text more accessible compared to classical Chinese but also enhanced the elegance of vernacular Chinese. This innovative style "objectively promoted the colloquialization of classical Chinese and the classicization of colloquial Chinese [11]." Liang's creation of this mixed-style translational approach served as a model for translating foreign novels during the late Qing dynasty, profoundly influencing subsequent translation practices. The adoption of this style exhibited unique charm in the translation field, with its concise and lively expression, closer to colloquialism, making translated works more understandable and appealing to readers. Moreover, this innovative linguistic style facilitated the development and popularization of vernacular Chinese during the late Qing period. Through its application in translational practice, this mixed-style innovation sparked exploration and innovation in the linguistic expression of literary works. As this style gradually gained popularity, literary creations during the late Qing period began to prioritize the naturalness and vividness of language.

## 4 CONCLUSION

When literary works from the source language enter the target language system, they are subject to various factors. Compared to the original French version *Two Years' Vacation*, Liang's translation exhibits distinct textual features. Despite significant deviations in language between Liang's translation and the original text, this should not overshadow the independent value of Liang's translation, which emerged during the late Qing dynasty. The translated literary works of the late Qing Dynasty, represented by Liang's translation of *Two Years' Vacation*, have played a positive role in ideological enlightenment, reform of traditional literary genres, and promotion of vernacular literature. This also provides valuable reference for the translation and evaluation of literary works in the new era.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

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