Liang Qichao's and Lu Xun's Translations of Fiction from a Functionalist Perspective

Pedro Simão Rocha Sobral

Abstract: When considering methods and practices of translation through a historical lens, we are confronted with two orders of questions, the first being "what to translate?" and the second "how to translate?". Both questions require taking into account the historically and culturally grounded norms behind translational activity. Bearing in mind that, in translation, the ends often justify the means, we attempt, in the present essay, to understand Liang Qichao's freer mode of translation and Lu Xun's literalist approach of "hard translation" through a functional perspective. We understand both the translator's intention and the function of the translated text from the point of view of the translator and the target culture. The attention given to the translator and his socio-historical situation will allow us to see how the translator's intention and the function he assigns to the translated text affect both what is translated and the norms followed in the translation. The essay attempts to show that Liang Qichao's more "domesticated" translations of fiction served the function desired by its translator, and contrast it with Lu Xun's closer and more "foreignizing" translation of western fiction, which served a different function as a result of changes in the cultural and intellectual milieu.

Keywords: Liang Qichao; Lu Xun; Fiction translation; Translation intention; Translation norms

1. Introduction

When considering methods and practices of translation through an historical lens, we are confronted with two orders of questions, the first being "what to translate?" and the second "how to translate?".[1] Both questions require taking into account the historically and culturally grounded *norms* behind the translational act. Indeed, we can see the practice of translation as following a set of cultural norms that influence action "by shaping a repertoire or 'tool kit' of habits, skills, and styles from which people

[1] Luo Xuanmin, "Ideology and Literary Translation: Liang Qichao," *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 13, no. 3 (2005): 178.

construct 'strategies of action'".[1] These norms are, clearly enough, historically situated. A perfunctory glance over the history of translation practices in China will reveal a stark contrast between free and "domesticated" translation prevalent during the 1890s and 1900s and a tendency for more literal and loyal translations in the 1910s.[2] The following article will attempt to illustrate this development by contrasting the translating activity of two of the most prominent intellectual icons of early Modern China: Liang Qichao (梁啟超 1873-1929) and Lu Xun (魯迅 1881-1936). While Liang Qichao employed a freer mode of translation, which he described as "translating the meaning and not the words" (*yiyi bu yici* 譯意不譯詞)[3], Lu Xun employed what has been called a literalist approach of "hard translation" (*ying yi* 硬譯), which seemingly attempted to reverse-translate the Chinese language and force it to encompass new grammatical and discursive structures from foreign languages.

These observations are well-known in Chinese translation scholarship, and both Liang Qichao and Lu Xun's careers as translators have been thoroughly studied. To mention a few studies closely related to the present essay, the second chapter of Chi Limin's *Modern Selfhood in Translation: A Study of Progressive Translation Practices in China (1890s–1920s)* analyzes Yan Fu's and Liang Qichao's translations from the perspective of the translator's intention, underlining both intellectual's "clear intention to present the source text as an agent of change" through domesticated translations.[4] While analyzing both fiction and non-fiction translations from Yan and Liang, the study pays great attention to the individual ideologies of both translators, but does not situate them in the context of translation norms in Modern China.

Studies like Kee Yi-man's "A Case Study of Liang Qichao's Literary Creations and Translations from Localization Theory" and Rui Qi's "From 'Literary Translation' to 'Translated Literature': a study on the Chinese version of *Two Year's Vacation*"[5]

---

[1] Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (1986): 273.
[2] Chi Limin, *Modern Selfhood in Translation: A Study of Progressive Translation Practices in China (1890s–1920s)*, New Frontiers in Translation Studies (Springer Singapore, 2019), 78.
[3] Unless otherwise specified, translations from the Chinese are our own and accompanied by the original text in the footnotes.
[4] Chi, *Modern Selfhood in Translation*, 42.
[5] Rui Qi, "From 'Literary Translation' to 'Translated Literature': A Study on the Chinese Version of Two Year's Vacation," *Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities Research* 2, no. 3 (2024): 29–32; Ke Yi-man, "A Case Study of Liang Qichao's Literary Creations and Translations From Localization Theory," *Journal of Literature and Art*

bear some similarities to the present essay, being centered on Liang Qichao's translation of Jules Verne's adventure novel *Deux ans de Vacances,* which will also be object of the present study. Both focus on the closer analysis of Liang's translation of Verne's story and account for changes in language and style, while lightly touching on the position of foreign fiction in Modern China.

On the other hand, studies like Wei Lou's "Cultural Constraints on the Selection of Literary Translation Texts in Modern China" attempt to situate modern Chinese translations of fiction in their broader social and cultural contexts and to hint at the way social needs affect the selection of literary translation texts in modern China, by paying due attention to the fact that translation emerges in order to fill gaps in the target culture.[1] It does this, however, by adopting a bird's eye view of various authors and translations, without dwelling on any particular one.

Due to their focus on a single author/translator (or, in the case of Chi Limin, on two contemporaries), most of the abovementioned studies therefore do not provide a diachronic picture of the evolution of Modern China's literary polysystem and of the position of translated fiction within it. In the present essay, we try to combine what was achieved by the studies cited above and, by contrasting two outstanding intellectuals that were extremely influential in their respective generations, to achieve a clearer view of the history of translation in Modern China. Always bearing in mind the societal and cultural gaps and needs of their time, as well as their individual positions on the role of literary fiction and its translation, we understand the practice of each of the above mentioned translator-intellectuals through a functional perspective, guided by the principle that, in translation, the ends justify the means.[2] Inspired by Chi Limin's use of the terminology of "skopos theory" in the above mentioned study of Yan Fu and Liang Qichao, we shall pay particular attention to the translator's *intentions* and to the *function* of the translated text.[3] These two terms require further elucidation, as the way

---

Studies 9, no. 4 (2019): 398-403.

[1] Wei Lou, "Cultural Constraints on the Selection of Literary Translation Texts in Modern China," *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 1, no. 4 (2010): 492.

[2] See, for example, Katharina Reiss and Hans J. Vermeer, *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action: Skopos Theory Explained*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2014); Christiane Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*, 2nd ed., Translation Theories Explored (Routledge, 2018).

[3] In order to highlight this dimension, we have opted to write *intention* and *function*, as well as derivate words, in

we use them here is somewhat different from their application in "skopos theory" literature.

Intention commonly refers to the purpose the original text means to achieve and is thus "defined from the viewpoint of the sender", while *function* pertains to what the text means from the point of view of the receiver.[1] Because these terms usually refer to the source and target cultures respectively, *intention* and *function* are normally deemed to be best studied from different points of view. While this is true in most instances of non-literary translative communication, it is not necessarily true in the case of literary translation, especially if foreign literature holds a relatively peripherical position in a given culture. In cases like this, the *intention* of the original author is often distorted or disregarded in favor of the needs of the target readership, particularly when it is the translators themselves who initiate the translation with a specific agenda in mind. As a result, in this essay, we shall understand both *intention* and the *function* of the translated text from the point of view of the translator and the target culture. This *intention* is to be found not in the psyche of the translator (which is obviously inaccessible to us), but in the style of the translated text. In other words, in the same way some understand style as resulting from the author's choices and embodying the author's attitude[2], here we understand it as reflecting what the translators view as the role, or *function*, the translated fiction is meant to serve in their target culture. In so doing, we are consciously placing a major emphasis on the figure of the translator as a self-conscious agent and, through him, on translated texts as "objects in a situation".[3] The attention given to the translator and his socio-historical situation will allow us to see how the translator's *intention* and the *function* he assigns to the translated text affect both what is translated and the norms followed in the translation.

Moreover, the status of the source text for translation, as pointed out by Hans Vermeer[4], is also a major factor in the final product, with fidelity being reserved for

---

italics throughout the essay.

[1] Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 27.

[2] Jean Boase-Beier, "Knowing and Not Knowing: Style, Intention and the Translation of a Holocaust Poem," *Language and Literature: International Journal of Stylistics* 13, no. 1 (2004): 29, https://doi.org/10.1177/0963947004039485.

[3] Reiss and Vermeer, *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action*, 54.

[4] Hans J. Vermeer, "Skopos and Commission in Translational Action," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed.

literature holding higher status in a given cultural milieu. As such, as famously stated by scholars like Even-Zohar, the position of foreign translation in a literary system has direct relation to the norms used in translation and can serve as a tool to interpret the history of translation in Modern China.

We will thus try to see how Liang Qichao's more domesticated and *acceptable* (i.e., close to the target readership) translation served the *function* he desired, and contrast it with the more foreignizing and alienating translations by Lu Xun, which served a different *function* as a result of a shift in the status of foreign fiction in China's cultural and intellectual milieu. The choice of these two translators derives, naturally, from the fact that they are the most representative intellectuals of their age, their differences and similarities better showcasing the twists and turns of the history of translation in Modern China.

Finally, a preemptive note on the translation samples used in this article. The difficulty in finding the Japanese text that served as the source of Lu Xun's translation, compounded by our poor command of the Japanese language, has made it difficult to include the source texts in Japanese and contrast them with the Chinese translations.[1] Thus, any changes in nuance that might have resulted from the translations from Japanese into Chinese are not evident in this study. However, since we are concerned here with general stylistic differences/similarities in relation to the original foreign texts that are indicative of the translator's *intentions*, a close comparison with the Japanese source versions does not seem essential. For the sake of this kind of comparison, excerpts of the works in the original European languages have been included.

Lawrence Venuti, 3rd ed (Routledge, 2012), 192.

[1] A facsimile of the Japanese version used by Liang Qichao can be seen in "Jugo Shonen [Fifteen Boys (Deux Ans de Vacances; A Two Years Vacation)] /One Hundred Japanese Books for Children (1868-1945)," International Institute for Children's Literature, Osaka, accessed May 7, 2025, http://www.iiclo.or.jp/100books/1868/htm-e/frame014-e.htm.

2. Translated fiction in China (1898-1920s): context and relevance

Itamar Even-Zohar once showed that the position (i.e. status) of translated literature in a given literary polysystem has a direct impact on the norms applied in translation.[1] Even though the concrete impact and popularity of foreign works of fiction in China during the 20th century is hard to measure, a study by Tarumoto Teruo concludes that the number of published translations of fiction[2] exceeded the number of domestic Chinese titles for the first time in 1902, a situation that was to be reversed only six years later, in 1907.[3] A comprehensive survey of the history of translated fiction in China will not occupy us here. It is, however, perhaps not just a happy coincidence that 1902 also marks the publication, in Yokohama, of the first number of the *New Fiction* (*xin xiaoshuo* 新小說) magazine, behind which we find none other than the political reformist and public intellectual Liang Qichao. On the pages of the first number of *New Fiction*, we can read the following paragraph, written by Liang himself:

If one intends to renovate the people of a nation, one must first renovate its fiction. Therefore, to renovate morality, one must renovate fiction; to renovate religion, one must renovate fiction; to renovate politics, one must renovate fiction; to renovate social customs, one must renovate fiction; to renovate learning and the arts, one must renovate fiction; and to renovate the human mind and remold its character, one must renovate fiction. Why is this so? This is because fiction has a profound power over the way of man."[4]

This passage is as well-known as it is redundant and bombastic. Liang Qichao's *Foreword to the Publication of Political Novels in Translation* (*yiyin zhengzhi*

---

[1] Itamar Even-Zohar, "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (Routledge, 2000), 197.

[2] *Xiaoshuo* 小說, commonly translated as *fiction*, is not limited to prose romances but includes every kind of "imaginative literature" (including drama) with the exception of lyrical poetry.

[3] Teruo Tarumoto, "A Statistical Survey of Translated Fiction 1840-1920," in *Translation and Creation: Readings of Western Literature in Early Modern China, 1840 - 1918*, ed. David E. Pollard, Benjamins Translation Library 25 (J. Benjamins, 1998), 39.

[4] Liang Qichao, "Foreword to the Publication of Political Novels in Translation [譯印政治小說序]" in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*, ed. Kirk A. Denton, trans. Gek Nai Cheng (Stanford University Press, 1996), 76.

xuaoshuo xu 譯印政治小說序), while not the most sensible and sophisticated defense of the transformative power of fiction, signaled the advent of a new appreciation for the genre in China. The response, both in terms of critical essays and of creative work, is said to have been quite substantial.[1] As unprecedented as the response to Liang's essay was, the notion of the power of literary fiction over society was not anything new in China. Since ancient times, Chinese scholars have understood the written word as being the embodiment of culture, so that social disintegration was frequently ascribed to a poor choice of literary models. Moreover, awareness of the novel's potential to contribute to the moral cultivation of the reader can be found in commentaries to the numerous works of vernacular fiction in circulation since as early as the 16th century.[2] Thus, it can be said with confidence that the basis for an ideological conception of fictional literature in China far precedes the significant political and cultural developments of the late-Qing period. However, fiction was traditionally attributed a particularly low status, namely because it was written in the vernacular and not in the erudite language associated with Chinese officials and literati. This division between literary language and vernacular, which served purposes more ideological than practical in nature, held on despite a boom in the amount of vernacular fiction published during the last 60 years of the Qing dynasty, a period David der-wei Wang has called *fin-de-siècle*.[3] Still, the fact that the most prolific translator of the late-Qing period, Lin Shu (林紓 1852-1924), chose to translate western fiction in beautiful classical Chinese illustrates both an increase in the status of (foreign) fiction and the high status classical Chinese still enjoyed.

By the turn of the century, however, there was a growing awareness that writings in the vernacular were more likely to get a point across to the greatest number of people. Even though, during the Hundred Days Reform (1898), Liang Qichao and Huang Zunxian (黃遵憲 1848-1905) were still advocating for a revolution in classical

---

[1] Theodore Huters, "New Theories of the Novel," in *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 115; Chi, *Modern Selfhood in Translation*, 10.
[2] Alexander des Forges, "The Uses of Fiction: Liang Qichao and His Contemporaries," in *The Columbia Companion to Modern Chinese Literature* (Columbia University Press, 2016), 98.
[3] David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1848-1911* (Stanford University Press, 1997), 1–2.

poetry[1], the former soon realized that if the goal was to mobilize social forces to implement reform and cultivate patriotism, a less elitist language and literary form were necessary. Fiction written in vernacular Chinese met two requirements: it made possible for writing to reach out to a greater audience, and was able to represent to this audience the full scale of the existential threat China was facing.[2] We can thus see how considerations of language and literary genre were directly influenced by the *intentions* of the intellectuals-*cum*-translators and, through them, by the social and political climates.

As we will see below, it was Liang Qichao's *intention* to influence the political system through the political novel, which led him to translate this kind of literature and even try a hand at writing it himself. In the same way, reform through literature was to be the lifelong task of another eminent intellectual of the generation that followed Liang's. We are talking, of course, of the father of Modern Chinese Literature, Lu Xun.

Lu Xun also paid significant attention to the role of fiction, and of foreign fiction in particular, as an instrument for the introduction of new ideas and forms of expression in a country that had been isolated from the outside world for far too long. His view of the role of literature was formed during an earlier stage of his intellectual life, as can be seen from the definition he gave in 1906 to Zhang Binglin (章炳麟 1869-1936): "Literature is something different from philosophy. Philosophy is that whereby men's thoughts are stimulated, but literature is that whereby men's feelings are enriched."[3] This was true at least for himself, as he was at this time deeply engaged in reading literature from small and oppressed peoples, which would prove decisive for his career as writer and, particularly, as translator.

A student of mining and, later, an aspiring medical practitioner, Lu Xun had always shown a great propensity for the natural sciences. However, scientific and technical texts, despite "stimulating men's thoughts", were not written in a way that

---

[1] Jianhua Chen, "The Late Qing Poetry Revolution: Liang Qichao, Huang Zunxian, and Chinese Literary Modernity," in *The Columbia Companion to Modern Chinese Literature*, ed. Kirk A. Denton (Columbia University Press, 2016), 89–90.
[2] Huters, "New Theories of the Novel," 101.
[3] William A. Lyell Jr., *Lu Hsün's Vision of Reality* (University of California Press, 1976), 85.

was accessible to the general public. Therefore, during his years as a foreign student in Japan, Lu Xun tried to achieve a middle ground between science and literature by translating foreign works of science fiction. If philosophy (including natural philosophy) was the way of introducing ideas and knowledge and literature was a way to move hearts, perhaps science fiction would be able to do a little bit of both. On the preface of his translation of Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* (published in 1903 as *yuejie lüxing* 月界旅行), he admitted that:

Formal scientific discussions are disliked by ordinary people; they will never read a whole essay without falling asleep. This is inevitable since also strong people find science difficult. Only by borrowing the force of fiction and disguising itself in a comedian's robe can it penetrate people's minds without tiring them although it penetrates reason and talks of the mystical. (…) Thus, by using scientific principles but taking the seriousness away and making it light, one can make the reader acquainted with them without mental labor, and so he will unconsciously acquire a tiny amount of knowledge".[1]

At the same time, his awareness of the importance of translating foreign literature was to grow exponentially during his stay in Japan. Japanese experience following the Meiji Restoration (1868-1889) had an eye-opening effect on both Liang Qichao and Lu Xun and, following in the footsteps of the former, the latter also came to see in literature the way to enlighten the people of China. About those times, Lu Xun wrote in 1920 that:

When we were studying in Japan, we had a vague hope that literature and art would be able to change people's temperament and reform society. Because of this opinion, we naturally thought of introducing new foreign literature.[2]

---

[1] Lu Xun, *Lu Xun Quanji*, vol. 10 (Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005), 164. Translated in Lennart Lundberg, "Lu Xun as a Translator: Lu Xun's Translation and Introduction of Literature and Literary Theory, 1903-1936" (PhD Diss., University of Stockholm, 1989), 36.

[2] Lu Xun, "Yuwai xiaoshuo jixu," 域外小說集序 in *Yiwen xubaji* 譯文序跋集 (Renmin wenxue chubanshe,

If such idea came "naturally", it was because Lu Xun shared Liang's conviction that China needed foreign fiction to break the intellectual isolation responsible for sedating the spirits of the Chinese people. Such conviction led both of them, arguably the two most representative intellectuals of their age, to engage in fiction translation.

3. Translation norms and historical factors

Gao Yu is essentially correct in affirming that "alien cultures cannot exert their influences on a home culture unless they are internalized and integrated with it."[1] However, this process of internalizing and integrating can vary in tone, which has direct implications on the choice between "domesticating" and "foreignizing" translations. Both serve concrete needs and *functions* in the target culture, giving credit to the opinion that a translation is a more or less conscious appropriation of a text for such needs and purposes.[2] As such, the translator's activity and methodology (i.e. the strategy he or she follows) should not only be considered in light of the cultural and social milieu, but also of the *intentions* of the translators themselves.

Every translator, however small their practical experience, is inevitably confronted with the methodological choice between a more "domesticated" or a more "foreignizing" translation from the point of view of the target culture. In Lawrence Venuti's famous formulation, they can make themselves more or less "invisible". It is common knowledge in translation studies that a given translated text is often understood in terms of its acceptability or adequacy, the first meaning the distance of the translated text to the target culture, and the latter its distance to the text in the original language. Any particular process of translation is a compromise between these two extremes of a spectrum, and the closer we are to one side, the more we distance ourselves from the other.[3] If no translated text is 100% acceptable or adequate and a

---

2022)，14. In the original, "我們在日本留學時候，有一種茫漠的希望 以為文藝是可以轉移性情，改造社會的。因為這個意見，便自然而然的想到介紹外國新文學這一件事。" Translation our own.

[1] Yu Gao, *The Birth of Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature: Revolutions in Language, History, and Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 105.

[2] Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: a History of Translation* (Routledge, 1995), 18–19.

[3] Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies--and Beyond*, expanded 2nd ed., Benjamins Translation Library, v.

translation is inevitably a compromise between the two, it is in the way this compromise is achieved that we see the impact of translation norms. However, since the target culture exerts the biggest influence in the translation, the translator works within the context of sociohistorical factors which are very much culturally and historically situated, such as the reception climate, domestic needs and dominant ideology.

Translation practices during the late Qing period followed a strict conformity to the target culture, its domestic needs and its reception climate. We owe the best description of this methodology to none other than Liang Qichao himself: *to translate the meaning and not the words* (*yiyi bu yici* 譯意不譯詞). The matters the translator faced were not only grammatical and syntactical in nature, but of a conceptual and cultural order too. In practice, the content had to be transmitted to a reading public that was, to a certain degree, still convinced of Chinese superiority in spiritual and moral matters. In the case of fiction, nowhere are these efforts to "domesticate" western fiction clearer than in the translation work of Lin Shu. We don't have space in these pages to address this literati-turned-translator. Suffice it to say, Lin had no knowledge of foreign languages and took great liberties in his translations, to the point many current scholars refuse to consider them translations at all. More importantly, although he started to translate foreign fiction as a way to cope with personal sorrow, Lin Shu was moved by a will to use this fiction to contribute to the traditional moral order in which he was raised. In the preface to his translation of *Oliver Twist*, for instance, he exhorted the Chinese to "follow good advice and reform ourselves".[1] Su Manshu (蘇曼殊 1884-1918), another eminent early translator, even went as far as adding a new character to his translation of *Les Misérables*, who commented on the social and political problems of China.[2] This kind of practices never seemed to bother the translators, much less a readership so far removed from western cultures and languages.

---

100 (John Benjamins Pub. Co, 2012), 69–70.

[1] Lin Shu, "Preface to 'Oliver Twist,'" in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*, ed. Kirk A. Denton, trans. Yenna Wu (Stanford University Press, 1996), 83.

[2] Lawrence Wang-chi Wong, "From 'Controlling the Barbarians' to 'Wholesale Westernization': Translation and Politics in Late Imperial and Early Republican China, 1840-1919," in *Asian Translation Traditions*, ed. Eva Hung and Judy Wakabayashi (St. Jerome Pub, 2005), 126.

The situation above illustrates clearly the dynamics and status of translated literature within a given literary polysystem noted by Itamar Even-Zohar. According to him, the more central the positioning of translated literature in a given literary polysystem, the more likely translators are to stick closer to the original in terms of *adequacy* and the more willing they are to break with home norms and conventions regarding domestication.[1] In the late years of the Qing dynasty, the situation was the opposite, and any authority the original work might have had held little sway in light of domestic needs and concerns. In this context, we believe the translator was a major agent in addressing such national concerns, and his *intention* in translating determined what works were translated, as well as the norms followed in translating them. For this reason, we see the person of the translator as the conduit through which historical and ideological concerns are reflected in the history of translation in modern China.

4. Liang Qichao's translations of political novels

For Liang Qichao, translation was the first principle for strengthening the nation. His influence is rarely overstated, nor can it be otherwise: his various essays on the power of fiction and the importance of translation enjoyed a wide readership, and the near-vernacular style of writing he employed was a major influence on the subsequent New Culture movement. The numerous journals created under his guidance likewise exerted a huge influence among the intellectual elite. Despite his influence in the realm of literature, however, Liang was not a literary theorist, remaining throughout his life a political intellectual and reformer. He was no consummated literary writer either, although he did have a go at it with his aborted 1902 novel *The Future of New China* (*xin zhongguo weilaiji* 新中國未來記). In the preface of this novel, he plainly stated his *intention* to express his political views and discuss the affairs of the nation (專欲發表區區政見).[2] As such, discussions of Liang's translations of fiction literature are intimately connected with his highly influential view of the political role of fiction.

---

[1] Even-Zohar, "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem," 196.
[2] Liang Qichao 梁啟超, "Xin Zhongguo weilai ji," 新中國未來記 in *Liang Qichao quanji* 梁啟超全集, ed. Zhang Pinxing 張品興 (Beijing chubanshe, 1999), 5609.

We have seen above that literature as an instrument of moral cultivation was nothing new in China. However, for Liang, Chinese fiction up until that time provided nothing but terrible examples, which also accounted for the low status of the genre in China:

When [a writer] wished to write of heroism, he took Shuihu zhuan [The water margin] as his model; when he spoke of relationships between men and women, he followed The Dream of the Red Chamber. In general there was nothing that did not fit into the two categories of inciting robbery and inciting debauchery. All these [works] followed one another and stuck with one another [in their perpetuation of the harmful]. Therefore, presentable writers disdained [the genre].[1]

Therefore, for Liang, even the most renowned examples of the Chinese novel were examples of immoral behavior, which often met their just reward in the end, as in the case of Jia Baoyu in the *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*hong lou meng* 紅樓夢) or Song Jiang in *The Water Margin* (*shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳). The situation was all the more worrying due to the high degree of accessibility of the novel: even someone mildly literate was able to read novels, even though he could not read the classics. If these considerations appear to take for granted that the reading public would be easily influenced by what they read, that is because such was precisely the view Liang and his contemporaries held regarding the effects and power of literature.[2] However, Liang pushes this view further: for him, the evils of Chinese traditional society had their source in the defective quality of national fiction. As such, everything that was done before would not serve the *function* of reforming traditional Chinese society and educating the nation.

[1] cit. in Huters, "New Theories of the Novel," 110.
[2] C. T. Hsia, "Yen Fu and Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao as Advocates of New Fiction," in *Chinese Approaches to Literature from Confucius to Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao*, ed. Adele Austin Rickett (Princeton University Press, 1978), 226.

Liang was convinced that fiction, namely political fiction, had performed a role in bringing about modernity in the West. We cannot avoid quoting the bombastic assertion below:

In the past, when European countries began their reform movements, outstanding scholars, men of superior knowledge and men of principle often used novels to write about their personal experiences and to express their ideas and political views. Thus in schools, teachers would carry these novels about with them and talk about them when they had leisure. Even soldiers, merchants, peasants, artisans, chauffeurs, grooms, children and women would all carry them about and talk about them. Very often, the thinking of the whole nation changed with the publication of one book. The contribution of political novels to the daily progress in the politics of America, England, Germany, France, Austria, Italy and Japan has been tremendous. A famous person in England once said, "fiction is the spirit of the nation". Isn't this most correct? Isn't this most correct?[1]

This hyperbolical notion of the role of the political novel in the promotion of social and political progress contains several important points regarding Liang's views of translation. First, the authors of such works were both statesman and scholars, active participants in the political life of their nations; second, the novels they wrote conveyed elevated political values; third, these novels supposedly had an enormous impact in their home countries. All these aspects are presented in a manifestly exaggerated manner in the above paragraph, which also shows how, for Liang, the pragmatic and *functional* aspects of the texts had complete priority over their aesthetic and artistic merits.

Where, then, could the works best suited for China's national conditions be found? Even-Zohar once noted that situations of crisis or rupture in a given literature,

[1] cit. in Wang-chi Wong, "'The Sole Purpose Is to Express My Political Views': Liang Qichao and the Translation and Writing of Political Novels in the Late Qing," in *Translation and Creation: Readings of Western Literature in Early Modern China, 1840 - 1918*, ed. David E. Pollard (Columbia University Press, 2016), 107.

when the available models are deemed to be ineffective or insufficient, constitute opportunities for translated literature to acquire greater prominence.[1] This was exactly what happened in late-Qing China. Liang was convinced about the transformative potential of fiction, but disapproved of the available Chinese works, which he deemed unadjusted to China's plight. The first source of alternatives was Japan, to where Liang fled following the failure of the Hundred Days Reforms.[2] At the time, Japan had already undergone a long process of reform and could, by contemporary western standards, be considered a modern country. It was also a country where the novel had acquired high status as a legitimate form of literary expression. As such, post-Meiji Japan was for Liang the prime example of the power of fiction as an instrument of reform and change, and the importance he attributed to the genre of the political novel was clearly influenced by the particular case of Japan.[3] The proximity between the Chinese and Japanese languages also facilitated its introduction in China, and Liang was far from alone in thinking that it would be much more productive to translate the Japanese translations instead of the western originals:

After a reform in 1860, Japan was determined to learn from the West and translated many books in almost all fields. There is also extensive publication of new books written by Japanese nationals. If we start to learn Japanese right now in order to translate these books into Chinese, our efforts will be very fruitful. There are several advantages in learning Japanese as it is easily done. Firstly, Japanese is succinct and terse. Secondly, the pronunciation is similar to that of Chinese, with no difficult or rough sounds. Thirdly, the grammar is fairly loose and free. Fourthly, terms and names are much like Chinese. Fifthly, the vocabulary contains about sixty or seventy per cent words of Chinese origin. Since we are Chinese we have to study in order to master it.

---

[1] Even-Zohar, "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem," 194–95.
[2] Japan exerted enormous influence as an intermediary in intellectual contacts between China and the modern West, to the point it is a simplification to understand the "intellectual assault of the West" in merely bilateral terms. It is not at all surprising that the intellectual careers of both Liang and Lu Xun are closely tied to Japan. For the role of Japan in the formation of Chinese literary modernism, see, for example Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937*, Berkeley Series in Interdisciplinary Studies of China 1 (University of California Press, 2001), 4.
[3] Keiko Kockum, "Liang Qichao: The Japanese Years," in *XXXth European Conference of Chinese Studies Proceedings*, vol. 21 (Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 1988), 197.

Provided one can learn many words, one can master Japanese in half a year. It is preferable to learn Japanese to Western languages, as it requires less effort to achieve a greater command of it.[1]

Liang started working on fiction translation as soon as 1898, the year of his escape to Japan, with his translation of Shiba Shirō's (柴四郎 1852-1922) *Chance Meetings with Beautiful Women* (*Kajin no Kigū*, published in Chinese as 佳人奇遇記 *jiaren qiyuji*). The genre of the political novel had enjoyed great fame in Japan in the 1880s, and *Chance Meetings…* had precisely been one of the most commercially successful ones.[2] The very theme of the novel must have resonated with Liang, since it revolved around the main character's encounters with nationalists from other countries exiled in the United States and united by western colonial oppression of their respective homelands.[3][4] The main narrative is also interspersed with accounts of historical incidents in countries like Ireland, Turkey and Egypt, which indicates that Shiba, like Liang, wrote with the conscious goal of conveying a political message. The author himself confesses this in the preface to volume 5 of *Chance Meetings…*, published in 1886, when he states that "[t]he novelist's goal is not to play with exquisite devices or to describe customs and human emotions; it is to demonstrate opinions and principles and to smoothly shape people's views - in other words, the goal lies outside the text".[5] In this respect, the intended *function* of Shiba's text coincided with that of Liang's translation.

However, although we are looking at a convergence of *function* between the original and the translation, the former is still a foreign text and the product of a different ideology. It is no surprise, then, when the translator's opinions differ to some degree from those of the original author. The individuality of the translator, although

---

[1] cit. in Luo, "Ideology and Literary Translation: Liang Qichao," 181.
[2] Atsuko Sakaki, "Kajin No Kigū: The Meiji Political Novel and the Boundaries of Literature," *Monumenta Nipponica* 55, no. 1 (2000): 84.
[3] Satoru Hashimoto, "Liang Qichao's Suspended Translation and the Future of Chinese New Fiction," in *A New Literary History of Modern China*, ed. David Der-wei Wang (The Belknap Press, 2017), 163.
[4] For a closer analysis of the original novel, see Wong, "Liang Qichao and the Translation and Writing of Political Novels in the Late Qing."
[5] Cit. in Sakaki, "Kajin No Kigu," 88.

still a question up to the present day, is considered to be best kept away from the product of the translation. We must remember, though, that Liang's main *intention* was not simply to introduce foreign literature to China, but to use it as a vehicle to convey his own political ideals. As such, once the decision to translate the original was made, translator Liang had to somehow adapt parts of it in conformity to his convictions. For instance, Shiba Shirō's strong anti-Manchu sentiment[1] was at odds with the anti-radical political proclivities of Liang Qichao. Moreover, in later volumes of *Chance Meetings*…, Shiba's increasing nationalism and imperialism are felt in a more pronounced way, forcing Liang to change his translation in controversial ways and to insert condemnatory words against Japan for its role in starting the first Sino-Japanese war.[2]

Another important instance in Liang's career as translator of fiction was his translation, together with Luo Xiaogao (羅孝高), of Jules Verne's *Deux ans de Vacances* ("Two Year's Holiday"), translated in Chinese as *Fifteen Young Heroes* (*shiwu xiaohaojie* 十五小豪傑)[3] and published in Liang's *Xinmin Congbao* (新民叢報). This tale, which tells of a group of children who find themselves on a deserted island on the Pacific, was translated from Japanese, which in turn had derived from an English translation. Still, Liang says of his translation that:

According to the English translator's preface, he replaced the French style with an English style and translates the meaning rather than the words, and yet he is confident that he has retained the full significance of the original novel. According to the preface by Morida, the Japanese translator, his translation is conveyed in a Japanese style and also retains the meaning of the original. Now I have rendered it in a Chinese narrative style (說部體)*, and I am confident that it is as accurate as the*

[1] The name of one of the main characters, the Chinese Ding Fanqing (鼎范卿), is precisely a play on the homophone characters *fan qing* 反清, "to oppose the Qing".
[2] Wong, "Liang Qichao and the Translation and Writing of Political Novels in the Late Qing," 112–14.
[3] Translated by Morita Shiken and published in Tokyo in 1896 as *Fifteen Boys* (Jūgo shōnen). That *boys* was translated by Liang as *heroes* attests to the exemplary quality of the protagonists, besides being a reflection of the romantic image of heroic youth.

others. This was proved true by both readers and reviewers after the book was published. Its meaning is close to that of the original.[1]

As stated in the beginning, the present article does not directly cite the Japanese version which served as source text for Liang. However, while taking the significant risk of believing Liang's remarks about the proximity of the English and Japanese versions (his command of English was, after all, lacking), we can nonetheless form an idea of the nature of the formal and tonal modifications introduced by Liang in his translation of Verne's text. For this, we need to quote at least one extensive passage, ideally the very beginning. In the French original, it reads as:

Pendant la nuit du 9 mars 1860, les nuages, se confondant avec la mer, limitaient à quelques brasses la portée de la vue. Sur cette mer démontée, dont les lames déferlaient en projetant des lueurs livides, un léger bâtiment fuyait presque à sec de toile.[2]

As for the Japanese version which served as the source text for Liang's translation, it reads as follows, in English literal translation:

On the night of 9 March 1860, black clouds overhung the sea, turning everything black, and it was hard to make out objects just a few inches away. At this juncture a little boat with lowered sail moved swiftly through the torrential waves toward the east. From time to time lightning pierced the sky and shone on the boat.[3]

---

[1] cit. in Luo, "Ideology and Literary Translation: Liang Qichao," 183.
[2] Jules Verne, *Deux ans de vacances*, vol. 319, À tous les vents (La Bibliothèque électronique du Québec, n.d.), 7.
[3] Direct translation from the Japanese from Fan Xiangtao 范祥濤, "Kexue fanyi yingxiangxia de wenhua bianqian," 科学翻譯影響下的文化变遷 in *Yixue xinlun congshu* 譯學新論叢书, eds. Zhang Bairan 張柏然 and Xu Jun 許钧 (Shanghai yiwen chubanshe，2006), 196. In the original, "1860 年 3 月 9 日夜，滿天黑雲低低地垂壓在海面上，四周一片漆黑，難辨咫尺之外。這時一隻尚未扯起風帆的小船掠過巨浪，向著東方飛快地駛去。閃電不時劃破天空照亮了小船的身影。" Literal English found in Chi Limin, *Modern Selfhood in Translation: A Study of Progressive Translation Practices in China (1890s–1920s)*, New Frontiers in Translation Studies (Springer Singapore, 2019), 69.

The Japanese version therefore at least conserves the succinct and descriptive tone of the French original. Now, contrast this literal English rendering of the Japanese version with Liang's translation:

莽重洋驚濤橫雨，一葉破帆漂渡。入死出生人十五，都是髫齡乳稚。逢生處，更墜向天涯島無歸路，停辛佇苦。但抖擻精神，斬除荊棘，客我兩年住。英雄業，豈有天公能妒。殖民儼闢新土，赫赫國旗輝南極，好個共和制度。天不負，看馬角烏頭奏凱同歸去。我非妄語。勸年少同胞聽雞起舞，休把此生誤。看官，你道這首詞講的是什麼典故呢？話說距今四十二年前，正是西曆一千八百六十年三月初九日。那晚上滿天黑雲，低飛壓海，濛濛暗暗，咫尺不見。忽有一艘小船，好像飛一般，奔向東南去。

The vast sea surged violently, accompanied by sweeping rain; a boat with broken sail drifted along. Through life and death came fifteen people, all young children. After weathering the storm and surviving the savage sea, they were left stranded on a remote island. But by overcoming trials and tribulations, they managed to stay for two years. Their heroic deed is the envy of the Heaven. Colonies are created in a new land; national flags are flying proudly in Antarctica – what a good republican system! Heaven will not let these heroes down; see how horned horses and headed tortoises return triumphant. I am not talking nonsense. I thereby urge our young compatriots to rise at the rooster's crow and not to idle away your lives.

Dear reader, what do you think the above poem is all about? It started forty-two years ago, on 9 March 1860, according to the Western calendar. On that night black clouds drifted low, over the sea; darkness reigned, and it was hard to make out objects just a few inches away. All of a sudden there was a little boat, which was, as it were, flying toward the southeast.[1]

[1] Liang Qichao, "Shiwu xiaohaojie," 十五小豪傑 in *Liang Qichao quanji*, ed. Zhang Pinxing (Beijing chubanshe, 1999), 5664. Translated in Chi, *Modern Selfhood in Translation*, 69.

From the passage cited above, we see that more than half the translation was added by Liang in accordance both with his political leanings and the *function* he intended for his translation. He goes far beyond an "effect-oriented" translation that strives to replicate the reception of the original text in its original culture, instead molding the text to his very concrete purposes: he basically reveals right from the start the main message of the story and dresses himself as narrator in order to include his own opinion and make political commentary ("what a good republican system!"). In line with traditional Chinese narrative structures, Liang also adds a very interventive narrator, a characteristic already found in nineteenth-century Chinese fiction[1] and which possibly helped readers draw the "right" lessons and conclusions from the story.

As the examples above attempt to showcase, Liang's translation strategy is dependent both on substantial freedom from the constraints of the original text, as well as on the *function* of the translated text in serving as a conduit for his *intention* of expressing his political views. Differences between the *functions* and target readerships of the source and the translated texts reveal the importance of the functional component of late nineteenth and early twentieth century fiction translation in China. Particularly in the case of Shiba's *Chance Meetings…*, even though author and translator are moved by the same goal of expressing political views, China's needs and their reflection in the person of the translator led Liang to choose a less confrontational approach by "nativizing" the text and its content instead of opting for emphasizing the differences. As for Verne's *Fifteen Young Heroes*, the function is significantly different, and Liang intervenes more to make the original text conform to his *intended function* of introducing to Chinese readers political terms such as "freedom", "power", "obedience", "law", "political party", "the masses", "public opinion", "discipline", and "autonomy."[2]

[1] Patrick Hanan, *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, Masters of Chinese Studies, vol. 2 (Columbia University Press, 2004), 9–10.
[2] Rui Qi, "From 'Literary Translation' to 'Translated Literature,'" 29.

5. Lu Xun's "foreignizing" turn in translation

To look at Lu Xun as a translator might still feel counterintuitive due to his tremendous impact as fiction writer and essayist. It is easy to overlook that Lu Xun's corpus of translations is significantly larger than that of his fiction writings and, although he ended up not working in the translation and editorial industry, he had plans to do so and never stopped paying attention to translation. He is a perfect example of how the leading writers of an age are also the most deeply engaged in translation and serve as a way for translated literature to exert an impact on the center of a literary system.[1]

From an early stage in his career, Lu Xun is associated to a translation practice that, by its "literalism" and close adherence to the original text in matters such as grammar and syntax, is diametrically opposed to the domesticating practices of Lin Shu and Liang Qichao. The former had an obvious influence in Lu Xun's turn into a more foreignizing translation. In a 1932 letter to Wataru Masuda (增田涉), Lu Xun recalls how he and his brother started translating foreign fiction back in 1909:

Zhou Zuoren and I were still in Tokyo. At that time, works of foreign fiction translated into wenyan *by Lin Qinnnan* [Lin Shu] *were read in China; their language was very good but they were full of translation errors. We felt dissatisfied over this and wanted to amend the situation.*[2]

In this instance, Lu Xun says nothing about his goals in translation, nor about what aspect of Lin Shu's translations displeased him. However, this is the first question we need to consider if we are to understand his future object and methodology of translation, basically the two questions posed at the start of our essay. Lu Xun's brother and, at the time, translation partner Zhou Zuoren (周作人 1885 – 1967) gives us some clues in this regard, as he accuses Lin Shu of "turning the unorthodox thinking of the

[1] Even-Zohar, "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem," 193.
[2] Lu Xun，*Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 14 (Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005), 196. In the original, "（…）我與周作人在日本東京時。當時中國流行林琴南用古文翻譯的外國小說，文章確實很好，但誤譯很多。 我們對此感到不滿，想加以糾正（…）。" Translation our own.

foreigners into Confucian morality".[1] Lin's translations were deemed too "domesticated" and removed from the original texts, thus erasing or severely attenuating any novelty they might contain.

It is important to note that Lu Xun's first translations of science fiction, namely *From the Earth to the Moon* (*yuejie lüxing* 月界旅行, 1903) and the incomplete *Voyage to the Center of the Earth* (*di di lüxing* 地底旅行, 1903), were less translations and more like trans-compilations (*bian yi* 編譯).[2] Both were heavily edited and omitted about half of the content of the original, mainly to guarantee the brisk pace of the narrative and an even distribution of text for each chapter. There were also additions, mainly at the end of the chapters, but also in the middle. For example, some verses by the Six Dynasties poet Tao Yuanming (陶淵明 365-427) clearly stand out in the first chapter of *From the Earth to the Moon*. Although not as loose a translation as those by Lin Shu or even Liang Qichao, these translations by Lu Xun still show some effort to adapt the text to the readership, which makes sense if we bear in mind the motivations of the translator and the function of the translation. Also, an intellectually less mature Lu Xun was more likely to be influenced by the sort of translation style represented by Lin Shu. He was later to regret having succumbed to this translation habit.

The most ambitious fiction translation project in his early years was to be *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji* (域外小說集). This collection is relevant for mainly two reasons: first, the politically reactionary nature of the selected texts; second, the "foreignizing" and direct way in which they were translated. Both these aspects were to have momentous importance in Lu Xun's subsequent engagement with World Literature and his role in promoting this literature in China. Regarding the first point, the selection of authors deserves attention for what they say about Lu Xun's understanding of the role of foreign literature in China: he translated very few western European and American authors (Oscar Wilde, Edgar Allan Poe and Guy de Maupassant were exceptions that proved

---

[1] Zhou Zuoren 周作人, "Andesen de shizhijiu," 安德森的十之九 in *Tanlongji* 談龍集 (Beijing shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 2011), 118-21. In the original: "以把外國異教的著作，都變成斑馬文章，孔孟道德。" Translation our own.

[2] Haiyan Xie, "'Grabbism' and Untranslatability: Reinterpreting Lu Xun's Position as a Translator," *Comparative Literature Studies* 57, no. 1 (2020): 133.

the rule) and a lot from the so called "weak and small peoples", namely Russia, Finland, Poland, Bosnia, etc. The prominence of Russian literature tells us that by "weak and small", we are not talking about territory or population size, but about being oppressed and exploited by colonial powers or by oppressive governments. In other words, the priority was to translate literature related to fight and resistance. Although he never stopped paying attention to science fiction, his translations of this genre stopped after he decided to abandon his study of medicine. By this time, Lu Xun was no longer interested in preaching science to his readers, but to give voice to the people's concerns and beliefs. Science was important, but its introduction in China was by far not enough to reform the country. A society did not only need science, it needed also literature and the arts, it needed an outlet for "satanic" nonconformism. From then on, he would wholly dedicate himself to literature and translation.

Lu Xun's translations in *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji* let us see that his reputation as translator would be marked by the adherence to a translation practice starkly opposed to those of Lin Shu and Liang Qichao. While Lin and Liang displayed loyalty to the target culture and took great liberties with the original texts in terms of form and content, Lu Xun turned his forebears' practice, as well as previous translation norms, on their heads. Then to what do we owe Lu Xun's break with early translation practices?

As intellectual activity and a process of "rewriting" pre-existent works in a new cultural and linguistic environment, the translational act must be understood through the ideological milieu in which it takes place. Toury has argued that "translations are facts of target cultures" [1], and while some functionalist theorists might not entirely agree with this assertion[2], it is safe to say that the rationale for translation is that of filling gaps in the target culture, and that the ideological nature of such gaps plays a formative effect on the result of the translation. As such, the factors for Lu Xun's approach to translation should, unsurprisingly, be sought in the cultural and ideological climate of his time.

---

[1] Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies--and Beyond*, 23.
[2] Reiss and Vermeer, *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action*, 74.

Although they are only one generation apart, the bigger part of Lu Xun's literary career takes place in a China that is much different from the one in which Liang wrote. Tired of failed reforms and plagued by the subsequent disappointments, as well as battered and humiliated by a semi-colonial experience, the Chinese people had seen their hopes for recognition dashed at the end of the first great war. As is well known, this crisis at the cultural and political levels had its biggest reflection in the great upheavals of the New Culture and the May Fourth movements. As iconoclastic as their proponents were, they had in common with the past the conviction that literature would alter the very worldview of its readers. Literature, especially realist literature, was thus burdened with the enormous responsibility of cultural transformation, for it was believed it could succeed where political change had failed. What also didn't change was the feeling that the necessary ingredients for change could not be found in China but in the West, and so intellectuals "scanned Europe's diverse cultural weave for the strand that held the secret of its 'wealth and power'".[1]

Such crisis within China's cultural sphere was conductive to a bigger role for translated foreign literature and, according to Even-Zohar's systematic model, to the adoption of more daring translation methodologies that went against established norms. After the May Fourth period, under the exhortation of intellectuals like Hu Shi (胡適 1891- 1962) and Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀 1879-1942), the vernacular *baihua* gained a much more prominent status as literary language. Lu Xun himself stopped writing in and translating to literary *wenyan* in 1918 and started using *baihua*, which was still in the earliest stages of development and consisted of a mishmash of popular vernacular, classical language, and Europeanized and Japanized elements. This made way for the greater degree of "syntactic experimentation" [2] with the language which can be seen in Lu Xun's translations.

Although, as we will see, "hard translation" is not as prevalent in Lu Xun's translations of fiction, understanding the reasons behind the practice will help us see

---

[1] Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (University of California Press, 1990), 3.
[2] Lingyan Zhu, "A Comparative Study of Pound's and Lu Xun's Syntactic Experiments," *English Language and Literature Studies* 6, no. 1 (2016): 99–108.

more clearly the motivations behind Lu Xun's translational activity as a whole. The most explicit formulation of Lu Xun's translation method can be found in his *Translator's Note on Lunacharsky's "The Death of Tolstoy and the Young Europe"* (《托爾斯泰之死與少年歐羅巴》譯後記, 1929):

Due to my inadequacy as a translator and the limitations inherent in the Chinese language, I found my translation obscure and uneven, and in many places very hard to understand. Yet if I were to tear apart those subordinate clauses, the essential linguistic vigor of the original would have been lost. As far as I am concerned, either I produced this hard translation, or none at all. My only hope is that readers will be willing to persevere and make an effort to keep reading.[1]

Lu Xun's practice of hard translation is obviously not connected to his inadequacies and literary insufficiencies. It was a deliberate strategy, related to his belief that if one were to excessively emphasize fluency above meaning (*shun er bu xin* 順而不信), such meaning would get polluted and distorted, the most contrasting aspects of the original work erased or dissimulated. If dressed in Chinese "garments", there was a risk of thinking that the difference between Chinese and Western thinking was not that great.

With this sort of translations, Lu Xun did not make reading easy by thinking *of* or *for* the reader, instead forcing the reader to acquire a new worldview the hard way. How would this be possible if the works were domesticated and their most contrasting aspects softened or erased? The only possible options were a translation that made the text feel worlds apart from the readership, or a sinicized one that, in light of his *aims*, equated to "none at all". The difficulty in reading such "hard" translations would decrease in time, like what happened in Japan:

---

[1] Lu Xun, " « Tolstoy zhi si yu shaonian Europe » yihouji," 《托爾斯泰之死與少年歐羅巴》譯後記 in *Yiwen xubaji* 譯文序跋集 (Renmin wenxue chubanshe，2022), 175. In the original, "但是因為譯者的能力不夠和中國文本來的缺點，譯完一看，晦澀，甚而至於難解之處也真多；倘將仂句拆下來呢，又失了原來的精悍語氣。在我，是除了還是這樣的硬譯之外，只有了 "束手" 這一條路——就是所謂 "沒有出路" ——了，所餘的惟一的希望，只在讀者還肯硬著頭皮看下去而已。" Translation our own.

Japanese is very different from all European languages, yet it is gradually acquiring new methods of expression, so that it is easier to translate in the classical Japanese without losing the flavor of the original (...) And now that we are dealing with "foreign languages" we may need many new forms of construction – which, to put it strongly, have to be made by "hard translation". In my experience, you can retain the flavor of the original better by this method than by rearranging your sentences; but modern Chinese has its limitations because it is still waiting for new constructions.[1]

Lu Xun was no doubt aware that the process of translation is not at all a unidirectional exercise. If translation is a matter of (partial) transposition from one culture to another, this transposition does not only affect the "guest" text. It can also happen, particularly in more literal translations, that the "host" language is also strained to accommodate foreign ways of expression. In this process of "translating backwards"[2], the translator is forced to consider other discursive formations, as well as to reconsider the ones he already has. Moreover, several scholars have noted that Lu Xun's practice of "hard translation" was based on his belief on the impact that language has on worldview[3], pointing out the similarities between this belief and Wilhelm von Humboldt's understanding of language as "the formative organ of *thought.*"[4] Humboldt believed the phonetic and the syntactic aspects of language to be equally essential for the way one perceives and processes reality: if "[t]hought and language are therefore one and inseparable from each other", "the former is intrinsically bound to the necessity of entering into a *union* with the verbal sound".[5] The same logic is

---

[1] Lu Xun, "'Hard Translation' and the 'Class Character of Literature,'" in *Selected Works, Vol. III*, trans. Xianyi Yang and Gladys Yang, 3rd ed., vol. 3 (Foreign Languages Press, 1980), 80–81.
[2] Jeremy Tambling, *Madmen and Other Survivors: Reading Lu Xun's Fiction* (Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 5.
[3] Cui Wenjin, "'Literal Translation' and the Materiality of Language: Lu Xun as a Case," *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 6, no. 3 (2012): 1–18; Mao Yuxuan, "The View on Language in Lu Xun's 'Stiff Translation' Strategy," in *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, vol. 631 (2021 International Conference on Social Development and Media Communication, Atlantis Press, 2022), 351–55.
[4] Wilhelm von Humboldt, *On Language: The Diversity of Human Language-Structure and Its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind*, trans. Peter Heath, Texts in German Philosophy (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 54. Italics in the original.
[5] Wilhelm von Humboldt, *On Language: The Diversity of Human Language-Structure and Its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind*, trans. Peter Heath, Texts in German Philosophy (Cambridge University Press,

believed to be behind Lu Xun's use of a more literal translation, in both syntactic and phonetic terms, as a tool of change. Although the direct connection between Humboldt and Lu Xun's views on language and thought is yet to be convincingly proven, Lu Xun's efforts to innovate in phonetic and syntactic terms, as we will later show, are evident in his translations. By translating the foreign into Chinese and by "foreignizing" the Chinese language, he is effectively closing the gap between languages and worldviews, bringing them closer to each other. Walter Benjamin seems almost to allude to Lu Xun's method when he says:

A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully. This may be achieved, above all, by a literal rendering of the syntax which proves words rather than sentences to be the primary element of the translator.[1]

Even though this defense of a loyal translation to the point of syntax reminds us of Lu Xun, we must not forget that, for Benjamin, "consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful" in art and in translation.[2] Without commenting on the implications for the ontology of translation of disregarding the receiving culture, we understand the *function* of Lu Xun's translations as still being oriented towards the target audience through what Pérez-Barreiro Nolla has called an "irritation factor".[3]

The most extreme instances of Lu Xun's hard translation, namely his translations of soviet literary theory, did in fact succeed in irritating many. The most outstanding polemic regarding this topic involved Liang Shiqiu (梁實秋 1903–1987), of the liberal Crescent Moon Society (*xinyue she* 新月社), who manifested his opposition and perplexity towards Lu Xun's "practically dead" (*jinyu siyi* 近於死譯)

1988), 54.
[1] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Schocken Books, 1968), 79.
[2] Benjamin, 69.
[3] Fernando Pérez-Barreiro Nolla, "Lu Xun's Ideas on 'Hard Translation': A Historically Justified Case of Literalism," *Babel. Revue Internationale de La Traduction / International Journal of Translation* 38, no. 2 (1992): 85.

and almost incomprehensible translation. For the likes of Liang Shiqiu, a distorted translation was still preferable to a literal one because, as Lu Xun quotes him saying, "[m]aybe unfaithful renderings give a wrong idea of the original, but they give the reader something even though they are mistaken. Even if the wrongness does damage, it is still pleasant to read."[1]

Since Liang Shiqiu belonged to the liberal left, it is easy to account for his criticism as being political in nature. However, criticism of Lu Xun's translations also came from the left, most notably from Qu Qiubai (瞿秋白 1899 – 1935). With the goal of constructing a proletarian and revolutionary literature, Qu advocated strict adherence to popular *baihua*, which was much different from the *baihua* advocated by the May Fourth intellectual elite. Although Lu Xun did translate to *baihua*, his was not the "absolute baihua" (*juedui baihua* 絕對白話) Qu thought of as representative of the language of the common people. For him, "in order to create new ways of expression, it is necessary to write in a way that can be spoken orally".[2] Once again, the *function* of the translation is determined by the effect the translator *intended* it to have in the target tradership, and the language used changed accordingly.

Considering the divergence between Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai, we are facing an apparent contradiction: if Lu Xun's ultimate aim was to reform Chinese thought and society and he disagreed with those who left the masses out by pandering exclusively to intellectuals, why this divergence with Qu Qiubai? His hard translation would no doubt be counterproductive by alienating his readership. However, he admittedly did not write for the public at large, but only for those with enough capacity and curiosity. In his words:

I translate for myself, for a few who consider themselves proletarian critics, and for some readers who want to understand these theories and are not out for "pleasure"

---

[1] Lu Xun, "'Hard Translation' and the 'Class Character of Literature,'" 78.
[2] Li Jin 李今，*Ershi shiji Zhongguo fanhiwenxueshi* 二十世紀中國翻譯文學史, vol.30s and 40s Soviet Russia (Baihua wenyi chubanshe 百花文藝出版社, 2009), 50. In the original, "要創造新的表現方法，就必須顧到口头上 '能够說得出來'的条件"。Translation our own.

or afraid of difficulties.[1]

As such, even though it was bound to alienate and cause difficulties for the reader, Lu Xun's methodology nonetheless aimed to produce an effect on the readership. The irritation and alienation caused by this conscious deviation from the translation norms had pedagogical motivations, therein residing the *function* of the translated texts. In this regard, the motivations determining Lu Xun's choice of translation norms are not so different from those of Liang Qichao, even though the methodology employed by both is diametrically different.

As we have said before, "hard translation" does not have such an obvious presence in Lu Xun's fiction translations. Even translations done in the later stages of his life are actually quite easy to understand for a modern readership, also due to the greater simplicity of the source material in comparison with literary theory. These could be considered more like "direct" translations (*zhi yi* 直譯) that do not pose the challenges to reading alluded to above. However, they also do not shy from breaking Chinese grammatical rules and previous literary models and practices, in contrast with how Liang Qichao handled his source material. The examples we will see below were taken from Lu Xun's translation of *Elizabide el Vagabundo,* by the Basque writer Pío Baroja y Nessi (1872-1956). This text, whose title was translated quite literally as *Vagabond Elizabide (fanglangzhe yilishabitai* 放浪者伊利沙辟台), is a rather inconspicuous entry in Lu Xun's translation catalogue and was published in 1929, precisely the same year as the controversial publication of his translation of soviet literary theory.

First of all, it should be noted that Lu Xun's *Elizabide* was not translated directly from the Spanish. Much like Liang Qichao's translation of *Fifteen Young Heroes*, Lu Xun's translation of Baroja was made according to an existing Japanese translation, this time by a certain Kasai Takuo (笠井镇夫 1895-1989), who Lu Xun says had studied in

[1] Lu Xun, "'Hard Translation' and the 'Class Character of Literature,'" 91–92.

Spain.[1] For this reason, since we are not dealing with Lu Xun's source text in Japanese, a close grammatical analysis of the translation would be dubious.[2] What concerns us here is how Lu Xun's translation differs from that of Liang Qichao's and reflects his own *intentions* and view of language. Even so, in stating the closeness of Lu Xun's translation to the Spanish original, we have to bear in mind that such was possible because the Japanese version was also fairly close to the original.[3]

In fact, both Kasai's and Lu Xun's translations were so close to their respective source texts that we don't have much trouble tracing every sentence of the Chinese translation through the Japanese, and to the original in Castilian Spanish. Unlike what we find in Liang Qichao's translations, as well as in Lu Xun's early translations, there is very little by way of omissions or additions in the Chinese version of *Elizabide*. There is no interaction between the narrator and the reader, and the order of the presentation of direct speech closely follows the Spanish original text. It is often placed at the end of the speech, other times in the middle, as in:

"— Es una mujer fuerte—pensaba después; —su alma es tan serena (…)"

"'— She is a strong woman' – he would think afterwards; — her soul so quiet (…)"

"意志堅強的娃兒呀，" 於是又想， "那娃兒的魂靈太過平穩 （…）"[4]

"—Y usted, ¿por qué está tan triste? — le preguntó Maintoni con voz maliciosa, y sus ojos negros brillaron en la noche."

---

[1] Lu Xun, " « Fanglangzhe yilisha bitai » he « Vasco de renmen » yizhefuji,"《放浪者伊利沙辟台》和《跋司珂族的人們》譯者附記 in *Yiwen xubaji* 譯文序跋集 (Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2022), 268–69.

[2] Other more linguistic oriented analyses of Lu Xun's fiction translations from the German language can be found in Lundberg, "Lu Xun as a Translator: Lu Xun's Translation and Introduction of Literature and Literary Theory, 1903-1936"; and Xie, "'Grabbism' and Untranslatability."

[3] Although we cannot address this issue here, a discussion of the impact of western literature in modern Japanese written expression can be found in Yoshihiro Ohsawa, "Amalgamation of Literariness: Translations as a Means of Introducing European Literary Techniques to Modern Japan," in *Asian Translation Traditions*, ed. Eva Hung and Judy Wakabayashi (St. Jerome Pub, 2005), 135–51.

[4] Lu, "« Fanglangzhe yilisha bitai »," 301; Original Spanish version taken from Pío Baroja, "Elizabide El Vagabundo." English translations our own.

— And you, why are you so sad – asked Maintoni with a mischievous voice, her dark eyes shining in the night"

「『你為什麼這樣悶悶的？』瑪因德尼用了尖酸的聲音向他問。那漆黑的眼，在夜的昏暗裡發光。」 [1]

Also, as noted in several comparative studies[2], Lu Xun sometimes chooses not to simplify or separate sentences, preserving a chain of modifiers that, being common in many European languages, is usually not to be found in Chinese:

"Era un tipo curioso el de Elizabide el Vagabundo (…)"
"It was a curious sort, that of Vagabond Elizabide (…)"
"放浪者伊利沙辟台是奇妙的樣式的人。"[3]

Here, the modifier 的樣式(的) is clearly superfluous and could have been left out, but it finds correspondence with the use of "tipo" (*of a certain type*…) in the Spanish original, which was probably retained in the Japanese translation Lu Xun was following. This is, however, a rare instance of such treatment in this particular text, mostly used in long and more complex descriptive clauses like the one below:

"(…) y los demás, por una especie de túnel largo formado por perales que tenían las ramas extendidas como las varillas de un abanico, bajaron (…)"
"(…) and the others went down through a kind of wide tunnel formed by pear trees whose extended branches resembled the ribs of a fan (…)"
"別的人們便通過了成行德梨樹德扇骨似的撐開了枝子所成的隧道，降到（…）" [4]

[1] Lu, " « Fanglangzhe yilisha bitai »," 310.
[2] See, for example, Lundberg, "Lu Xun as a Translator: Lu Xun's Translation and Introduction of Literature and Literary Theory, 1903-1936"; Zhu, "A Comparative Study of Pound's and Lu Xun's Syntactic Experiments"; Xie, "'Grabbism' and Untranslatability."
[3] Lu, " « Fanglangzhe yilisha bitai »," 301.
[4] Lu, 304.

On the conceptual level, he chose to translate phonetically terms previously inexistent in the Chinese language. Once again, this is the result of Lu Xun's concern that the discursive power of the Chinese language at the time was mainly controlled by the feudal culture from which that language originally sprung. In *Elizabide*, phonetic translations included not only character and place names (the character Maintoni is translated as *mayindeni* [瑪因德尼] and the American continent as *yameilijia* [亚美利加]) but also other more culturally specific terms from outside the sinosphere. Chocolate is interestingly translated as *chuogulade* (綽故拉德)[1], while other instances demanded the addition of explanatory notes. For example, after the term *mulato* (謨拉忒 *molate*), Lu Xun added the explanation "*mix-blood child of white and black parentage*" (*bairen he heiren de hunxue er* 白人和黑人的混血兒). In other instance, the term *choruas*, the meaning of which also required clarification in the Spanish original, was phonetically translated by Lu Xun as *qu'er'aisi* (曲爾愛斯) explained as "*meaning crazy roses*" (狂蒿薇之意). As we have explained above, this decision to translate terms phonetically was well in line with Lu Xun's intention of introducing them in the Chinese language not through the value and connotation intrinsic to the Chinese characters themselves, but by the phonetic value of the signs. This was also a point of critique by Liang Shiqiu, who said there was "no need to translate 'proletariat' phonetically when one can translate its meaning".[2] To this, Lu Xun responded by asking:

"Suppose we translated 'chemistry' phonetically, would readers confuse it with the alchemy of ancient Egypt?"[3]

We can thus assume that, by translating phonetically, Lu Xun was preventing these terms from being interpreted according to Chinese etymology, which would deny their novelty in the national context. Turning China into an articulate China (有聲的中

[1] Lu, 304.
[2] Lu, "'Hard Translation' and the 'Class Character of Literature,'" 77.
[3] Lu, 77.

國) demanded that the problems of rigid grammatical structure and small vocabulary of the Chinese vernacular be addressed. With this *intention* in mind, Lu Xun followed a different set of translation norms from Liang Qichao, preserving the structural characteristics of the source text and presenting terms and concepts in a foreignizing way.

6. Conclusions

In this essay, we are obviously not trying to criticize or evaluate the "correctness" of the methodologies of either translator. Both Liang Qichao and Lu Xun deserve, in our view, to be considered great translators, due not only to the products of their labor, but also to the impact of their views on fictional literature and translation in their intellectual milieu. What we have tried to explore through the examples of Liang and Lu Xun is how the *intention* of the translator and the intended function of the translated text are historically determined and serve to determine the kind of methodology adopted in the translation process. Lu Xun's pedagogical *intentions* led him to adopt an unorthodox approach and produce foreignizing translations that forced new forms of expression into the vernacular language. Liang Qichao, even though adopting a nativized translation diametrically opposed to that of Lu Xun, is also clearly bound by the *function* he intended his translations to serve, namely that of conveying his own political views and educating the people through political fiction. Each in their own way, both types of translation are oriented to the target readership, aiming to get close to it or to consciously alert it to its foreignness. No matter the methodology used, to translate is effectively to produce a text in a target setting, for a target purpose, for certain target addressees in target circumstances.[1] This situatedness is felt both at the level of selection and of *praxis*. Whether by choosing to translate political fiction, science fiction or literature from exploited nations, Liang Qichao and Lu Xun were pretty opportunistic in their choice of source text, selecting not canonical works but those which allowed them to achieve their aims and *intentions*.

[1] Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 12.

Throughout these pages, we have also found these two translators to reflect the relation between translation norms and the relative status of translated literature in a given literary polysystem, as expressed by Even-Zohar. As we have seen, Liang Qichao's emphasis on the translation's acceptability still had at its factor the relative peripheral status of foreign literature at the time. This gave way, particularly after the New Culture and May Fourth movements, to a greater focus on adequacy, proximity to the target text and, as in the case of hard translation, a distancing of the target readership.

Author Affiliation: University of Macau