




*Hermeneutic Motion in Literary Translation:  
The English Translation of Lao She's Novels*



# 文学翻译中的“动态阐释”

——老舍长篇小说英译研究

夏天◎著

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## 内 容 提 要

本书以阐释学为理论支点,从历史角度研究 1940 年代至 1990 年代老舍长篇小说的英译情况;以乔治·斯坦纳“动态阐释”理论(Hermeneutic Motion)为框架,将“信任”(trust)、“侵入”(aggression)、“吸纳”(incorporation)、“补偿”(restitution)分别对应翻译活动中的文本选择、源语文本的理解与翻译的内容操控、文学样式操控与译本形成、输入与输出双方付出努力,以求达到翻译平衡。本书将从以上 4 个方面展开研究,以期发现老舍长篇小说英译始于何时、起于何因、通过何种方式被译介到西方,英语世界读者又以何种方式接受。本书具体考察老舍长篇小说西行过程初期经历了怎样的扭曲与变形、中西方译者与出版商通过怎样的努力力争恢复老舍长篇小说的本来面目、恢复源语文本的内部平衡和文本间平衡。本书兼具描述性与规定性研究范式——除了对翻译活动进行描述性研究之外,更对老舍长篇小说的英译提出了明确判断,并提出英译中国现代小说的广义实践标准与最终伦理目标。在本书中,老舍 8 部长篇小说以及 1 部未完成长篇小说将被作为一个延展的源语文本整体,而老舍小说英译史将被作为一个延展的翻译过程,即一个延展了的动态阐释过程。

本书分为 4 章。第一章对老舍长篇小说英译活动进行了分阶段梳理与分析;第二章从斯坦纳“动态阐释”理论的阐释学渊源出

发,将其置于更广阔的历史—文化语境中,对该理论进行了解释与适应性扩充与细化;第三章在“阐释运作”理论框架下对老舍长篇小说英译进行具体研究;第四章结论对研究进行总结:老舍长篇小说经历了1970年代之前西方译者的实用“信任”、偏见“侵入”、归化“吸纳”,以及1940年代末至1950年代初老舍不适时的“补偿”努力之后,逐渐走向“平衡”,这是向西方世界译介中国现代小说的广义技术标准与最终伦理目标,它显示“动态阐释”理论兼具描述性与规定性的特征及其应用于某一作家、某一类文学作品英译历史研究的特殊意义。

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# Chapter I Introduction

## 1. Lao She and His Novels

Lao She is the nom de plume of Shu Qingchun (舒庆春), a prolific Chinese writer whose life was but a mixed blessing. During his sixty-seven years of life, he was firstly and mostly greeted with big applause, later forced into the center of a heated dispute, condemned as a traitor and reactionary and was posthumously rehabilitated. His ups and downs are accompanied by the rise and fall of his works — novels, short stories, plays and essays, as well as scripts for different forms of folk entertainment like crosstalk and drum-singing, amounting to about 1,000 pieces of 8 million words.

To relieve his homesickness while teaching in London in the 1920s, Lao She read a large number of English novels, by which he was inspired and soon started his own. He firstly learned the craft of fiction in London — he was an admirer of Dickens, Hardy and Conrad (George Kao, 1980: 4). While modeling on the humorous and sarcastic literary style of these writers, Lao She derived inspirations from his life experiences. Most of his novels are set in Beijing delineating local life and local people, especially those small bureaucrats and conservative intellectuals and struggling grassroots.

Exotic writing style, vicinal characters and familiar settings were mingling in the works of the talented novelist who had since then mounted to the Chinese literary peak. It was not long after the New Culture Movement when classical Chinese was giving way to vernacular Chinese in literary creation and therefore works abreast of the times were in bad need. Lao She's adeptness in Beijing dialect set up a literary role model in this transitional era. Coming back from London, hailed as a rising literary star, Lao She was encouraged and immediately recommenced his writing in his homeland. Novels like *Luotuo Xiangzi* (《骆驼祥子》), *Si Shi Tong Tang* (《四世同堂》), *Er Ma* (《二马》) and plays like *Teahouse* (《茶馆》) and *Long Xu Gou* (《龙须沟》) all have been enjoying a house-hold fame.

Lao She was converted to Christianity and Buddhism alternately but joined no political party throughout his life. He had both benefited and suffered from his nonpartisanship. Chances are that he could see things in a neutral perspective and could criticize and satirize any corruption and inability bred in any political camp, which was consequently welcome both at home and abroad. However, he could also easily fall into the dilemma during political strifes and sometimes offended both sides. His novel *Mao Cheng Ji* (《猫城记》), a satirical fiction about the narrator's uncanny experience in the fabricated Cat Country, a ruthless disclosure of the hateful and incorrigible cat man, was immediately recognized as the lashing of the darkness of contemporary China. All the characters and incidents in the novel were undergoing hairsplitting analysis and all of them were found with “counterparts” in the real world. On the one side, the novelist is called a “genuine patriot, moved by deep

awareness of social obligation,” and, on the other, he is condemned as a “running dog of the Kuomintang and revisionism” (Paul Bady, 1980: 6). Never expecting such chaos, Lao She started with weak self-defense and ended up with harsh self-accusation. This novel also went from the initial conspicuousness to later thirty years’ obscurity<sup>①</sup>. A few years later, his plays like *Long Xu Gou* (《龙须沟》), *Fang Zhenzhu* (《方珍珠》) and *Xi Wang Changan* (《西望长安》) achieved great success and Lao She was awarded with the lofty title of “People’s Artist”; in the mean time, he was criticized by Western scholars for having changed from an independent thinker to a propagandist of the political party (see in Hsia C. T., 1999: 374-375) and therefore his later works are in want of literary worth he had achieved before. Ranbir Vohra (1974: 163) commented in *Lao She and the Chinese Revolution*:

*Though Lao She did not stop writing after Teahouse, it will suffice for our purpose to consider this play as the last great work in which he could manage to express himself without having to introduce Communist slogans and to force himself to emphasize revolution.*

Lao She’s disputed death was also correlated with his works. It is believed that Lao She was tortured by the Red Guards physically and spiritually shortly before he committed suicide on August 24, 1966<sup>②</sup>. He was condemned as a traitor and reactionary at the first thrust of

① This novel had never been published during the period between 1950 and the rehabilitation of Lao She in 1978.

② In the campaign for the rehabilitation of Lao She, which went on through the spring of 1978, the date of his death was officially given as August 24, 1966.

Chinese “Cultural Revolution”. Scholars, both Chinese and Western, had tried to find facts about Lao She’s death and the reasons why he was prosecuted by the Red Guards. Gu Shicang (谷世仓), Wu Xiaomei (吴小美) in their co-authored book *Lao She and the Chinese Revolution*, Paul Bady, a French scholar and scholar of modern Chinese literature, in his article *Death and the novel — on Lao She’s “suicide”* and Fu Guangming (傅光明) in his paper *Lao She’s death in oral history* (《口述历史下的老舍之死》) (2005: 276-298) all mentioned that Lao She’s contacts with foreign countries and with the old past directly led to his being accused and humiliated. His was accused of having sold the copyright of *Luotuo Xiangzi* to the American publisher (傅光明, 2005: 284) and of ridiculing the revolutionists in *Mao Cheng Ji*. Song Yongyi (宋永毅) (1988: 178) thought that Lao She would rather commit suicide than being humiliated for absurd accusations because he had the sentiment and integrity of the traditional Chinese literati and patriots like Qu Yuan (屈原) and Wen Tianxiang (文天祥). Anyway quite a few characters in his novels were constrained to take their own lives as Lao She did when they were cornered in despair and burned with indignation. Lao She and his works never failed to attract the attention of critics, scholars and translators both in China and abroad. His life experience was in resonance with what his country was undergoing and his works were rich with implications of his fate.

## 2. A Historical Overview of the English Translation of Lao She’s Novels (1945–now)

Lao She’s novels have been translated into English, Japanese,

Russian and French. English translation of his novels have introduced Lao She to a large Western readership and made indirect translation possible. The year of 1945 saw the publication of the first English translation of Lao She's novel *Luotuo Xiangzi*. The version published by the New York Reynal & Hitchcock with the title *Rickshaw Boy* became a bestseller in America not long after it was chosen by the Book-of-the-Month Club (George Kao, 1980: 27). Other prominent novels like *Li Hun* (《离婚》), *Gu Shu Yi Ren* (《鼓书艺人》), *Si Shi Tong Tang*, *Niu Tian Ci Zhuan* (《牛天赐传》), *Er Ma* (《马》), and *Zheng Hong Qi Xia* (《正红旗下》) have been rendered into English subsequently. Most of them have been re-translated and some versions have been republished. 1990 saw the publication of *Mr. Ma and Son, a Sojourn in London* by the Foreign Languages Press (FLP) in China and it is the third English version of *Er Ma*. Now re-publications and retranslations are showing up from time to time: Howard Goldblatt had his translation of *Luotuo Xiangzi* (*Rickshaw Boy*) published in 2010. The English translation history of Lao She's novels since 1945 can be roughly divided into five periods: Debut (1945-1948); Lao She's Self-translation after World War II (1946-1952); Intermission (1953-1969); Retranslation (1970-1979); Falling Action<sup>①</sup>(1980-now).

## 2.1 Debut (1945-1948)

Two of Lao She's novels were translated by Evan King (pen name of Robert S. Ward), a former American consular official in

① The term of dramatic structure is used in a metaphorical way. During the falling action, the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist unravels.

China. Apart from *Rickshaw Boy*, Evan King translated *Li Hun* (*Divorce*) into English, but he did no minor bowdlerization and alteration to these two novels. He had taken upon himself to alter the last part of *Camel Hsiang-tzu* (*Luotuo Xiangzi*) from its original tragedy to a happy ending presumably better-suited to the taste of the American reading public (George Kao, 1980: 30). And he added two new characters in the ending chapters (see King's *Rickshaw Boy*) in order to make his alterations natural and convincing. Similarly, Evan King changed the plots of *Li Hun* largely and made it a half farce. In the translation, the main characters lived a life of Western style especially when dealing with love and marriage issues, which led to a fatal damage to the themes of the original. Lao She accused Evan King of his presuming alterations, sued him to the court and managed to take back the copyright aided by his friends. In accordance with the verdict, *Divorce* was to be sold solely in Evan King's own bookstore. What is worth mentioning is that, in contrast to the heavy alteration in plot, Evan King translated the cultural terms faithfully, sometimes literally or explanatorily in both novels. The fact that two contradictory translation methods were adopted indicated the translator's complex attitude toward the source text. Anyway, Lao She stepped into the Western world with no bad image and had won an international fame ever since. Evan King was surely have insights and foresights when he set his eyes on *Luotuo Xiangzi* among quite a few other works that were also well-known in China. Evan King's faithful and occasionally literal translation of Chinese cultural terms opened the door through which the Western readers could have a glimpse of Chinese cultural and spiritual life. As for the initial period of literary translation, bowdlerization or alteration is