

# A Study of Lin Yutang's Translator Behavior in the Translation of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* – Based on “Truth-Seeking-Utility-Attaining” Evaluative Model of Continuum

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**Abstract**—*Six Chapters of a Floating Life* is a well-known autobiographical prose written by Shen Fu, a famous writer in the Qing dynasty. Lin Yutang has been committed to spreading Chinese culture into the West. Because of his keen interests in this book, he translated it with various translation strategies skillfully, making his version a classic. The paper will analyze the translation of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* by Lin Yutang from the perspective of “translator behavior criticism” and further explore the translator's “truth-seeking” behavior from “intra-translation” and “utility-attaining” behavior from “extra-translation” and analyze the external factors that influence the translator's behavior. It is hoped that *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* could be evaluated from a more comprehensive and objective perspective in the future.

**Index Terms**—*Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, translator behavior, “truth-seeking”, “utility-attaining”.

## I. INTRODUCTION

*Six Chapters of a Floating Life* is an outstanding autobiography mixed with observations and comments written by Shen Fu, a famous writer in the Qing dynasty and depicts the life of a lower gentleman in a simple way, including the pleasures, the sorrows of misfortune, the joys of wedding chamber, and the delights of roaming afar. Lin Yutang was deeply touched by the tenderest wedded love, life aesthetics, and sadness of this book and was willing to translate it into English to show the simple life of this couple to the West. There have been four English versions so far, among which Lin Yutang's version has been regarded as a classic [1]. The three other English versions of this book are, *Chapters from a Floating Life* by Shirley M. Black in 1960 and published by Oxford University Press, *Six Records of a Floating Life* by Leonard Pratt and a Chinese translator Chiang Su-hui in 1983 and published by Penguin Books, and *Six Records of a Life Adrift* translated by Graham Sanders in 2011. However, taking “Lin Yutang” “*Six Chapters of a Floating Life*”, as the “theme term” to retrieve in CNKI, which shows 316 literature. And it indicates that in recent years, scholars have paid more attention to his English version from different perspectives, such as the subjectivity of translators, translation strategies, literary and linguistic, cultural perspective and so on. Although there are productive research achievements on his translation works, relevant

study of this book in the light of translator behavior criticism is insufficient. Translator behavior criticism is a more comprehensive evaluative system that considers both the translator's linguistic nature and social nature. Based on the “Truth-seeking-Utility-attaining” Evaluative Model of Continuum, this paper will analyze Lin's translator behavior of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*. Hopefully, it will contribute to a better understanding of Lin Yutang as a master translator.

## II. THE STUDY OF LIN YUTANG'S TRANSLATION TO *SIX CHAPTERS OF A FLOATING LIFE*

Lin Yutang was the first translator to introduce *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* to English readers [2], [3] Dong believed that his version is the most classic one in classical Chinese literature translation and can still be applied today. He showed the original beauty of emotion, character, image, and elegance. And based on Shen Fu's real-life experience, more emotional factors are integrated, making the translation full of cultural flavor. As Lin put it in the preface [4], “Yun, I think, is one of the loveliest women in Chinese literature, I seem to realize the essence of a Chinese way of life as lived by two persons who happened to be husband and wife”. I believe that a simple and peaceful life is the most beautiful thing in the universe. I am translating her story just because it is a story that should be told to the world [5]. Moreover, the philosophy of life reflected in the book is also coincided with Lin Yutang's view of life, and he has an emotional and spiritual resonance with the author, building a bridge between the author and the target language readers. As a translator, his understanding of cultures of the West and the East and proficiency in languages enables him to flexibly employ a variety of translation methods to translate the book, thus preserving the characteristics of Chinese culture and enjoying great popularity in western readers.

## III. “TRUTH-SEEKING-UTILITY-ATTAINING” EVALUATIVE MODEL OF CONTINUUM

Traditionally, translation studies mainly focus on text research. Still in the late 1970s, “cultural turn” broadens people's horizon, making them center on extra-translation instead of only intra-translation, from which the scholars began to study the text and the translator in the social context and pay attention to the extra-translation factors with little

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attention on the issues of linguistic scope. As a result, this contributes to the transformation of translator behavior criticism, which is first used as a term for translation criticism by professor Zhou Linshun, describing how a translator's behavior has influenced the translation. It is a descriptive theory instead of a prescriptive one, in this theory, translator behavior is a result of both linguistic elements and non-linguistic factors of a translator and is concerned with how the translator deals with text and society.

According to translator behavior criticism, the translators should try to find a balance between their linguistic identity and social roles. In other words, the translators seek for a degree of rationality between their goals of truth-seeking and utility-attaining. Human being is a typical body of willpower, the action of volitional translators is two-way, which involves not only the source text but the society, and translators are embodied with the linguistic attribute that is shown in the code shifting between different languages, and they also endowed with the social attribute. What is more, translators have the dual responsibility of serving the writer/original and reader/society [6].

In this Evaluative Model of Continuum, "truth-seeking" and "utility-attaining" are located at two extremes of the continuum, between which lie different gradient states. "continuum" is a mathematical concept, which refers to a continuous and gradient states, and here "continuum" is a relative concept to dispersion. Generally speaking, "continuum" refers to a real interval that can be continuously valued. "Truth-seeking" refers to the notion that the translator will seek for the equivalence of the whole or part of the meaning the source text conveys to achieve its utility-attaining goal"; "utility-attaining" refers to the translators' attitude or methods for the purpose of meeting the readers' need on the basis of completing their "truth-seeking" of the text totally or partly [6]. "Truth-seeking" and "utility-attaining" are integrated, but they are different from each other to some extent [7].

In the study of translators, we should distinguish between "intra-translation" and "extra-translation". In [6], "intra-translation" is used to discuss the internal factors, mainly related to the problem of linguistic code-switching and meaning reproduction, thus it also can be called "intra-linguistic". On the contrary, "extra-translation" refers to the extra factors of translation, mainly related to social issues, so it is also known as "extra-linguistic". As Lefevere [8] put it: "translation activities are not conducted in a vacuum, and the translators are influenced by a specific culture at a certain time, and their understanding of culture and the original text may have a certain impact on the version", which coincides with Aksoy's [9] point of view: "translation is never a single activity, and the situation and historical environment in which the translation was produced are very important." We should regard the translator Lin Yutang as a volitional person with two attributes: linguistic one and social one. Hence, "Truth-seeking-Utility-attaining" Evaluative Model of Continuum can be employed to explain the process of translation socialization, including the investigation of the psychological and other social factors behind from the perspective of translation socialization.

#### IV. LIN YUTANG'S TRUTH-SEEKING BEHAVIOR AND INTRA-TRANSLATION EFFECT

As a translator, Lin Yutang put forward the famous three standards for qualified translation: fidelity, fluency, and beauty. His notion of translation were well-illustrated and discussed in his article *On Translation*. He valued sentence-for-sentence over word-for-word translation [10]. When he was translating *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, he tried to give consideration to the style and content of the original text and wanted to express it in vivid language. At the same time, he attached more importance to the methods and techniques of translation, such as syntactic translation, translation of words, rhetorical translation.

Syntactic translation:

Example (1):

“以丛草为林，以虫蚁为兽，以土砾凸者为丘，凹者为壑。” [4]

“The little plot of grass into a forest and the ants and insects into wild animals. The little elevations on the ground became my hills, and the depressed areas became my valley.” [4]

Example (2):

“翠姑告以迎新送旧之苦，心不欢必强笑，酒不胜必强饮，身不快必强陪，喉不爽必强歌。” [4]

“Ts'uiku told me how hard the singsong girls' life was: they had to smile when not happy, had to drink when they couldn't stand the wine, had to keep company when they weren't feeling well, and had to sing when their throats were tired.” [4]

In Example 1, it's easy to understand the meaning of the sentence with no confusing or ambiguous vocabulary, and the things described are well-known to everyone, so Lin Yutang accurately expressed author's thoughts and intentions by using the literal translation, embodying his truth-seeking to the original text and language. Example 2, Ts'uiku was showing the hardness and sadness of being a singsong girl. In Lin's translation, he preserved the structure of the original, which was rhythmic, and emphasized the emotion of the speaker so that the readers can also have a similar feeling instead of only getting the meaning.

Translation of words:

Lin Yutang's truth-seeking is also manifested in his translation of words. To translate a poem correctly, the translator should try to keep its beauty in form and sound without distortion of the original meaning, which sets higher requirements for a translator.

Example (3):

“秋侵人影瘦，霜染菊花肥。” [4]

“Touched by autumn, one's figure grows slender. Soaked in frost, the chrysanthemum blooms full.” [4]

Example (4):

“兽云吞落日，弓月弹流星。” [4]

“Beast-clouds swallow the sinking sun, and the bow-moon shoots the falling stars.” [4]

The first example vividly depicts the scene in the late autumn, and the usage of “侵”、“染”、“瘦”、“肥” brought the scene to life. Besides, his translation made two striking elements “秋” and “霜” in the source text more

explicit. Lin Yutang translated the original content part by part, and retained the grammatical structure, keeping a great truth to the original lexical meaning and structure. In a word, he retained the same literary style and revealed the real charm of the Chinese language to foreigner readers. Example 4 reflects the beauty of the setting sun. Here are two beautiful lines composed by Shen Fu and Yun when they were enjoying the fantastic scenery of evening glow. There is a perfect matching of both sound and sense in two lines. It is also reflected in Lin Yutang's attention to the meaning of the source text in terms of word selection, such as "beast" and "bow", "swallow" and "shoot", "sun" and "stars", these words are alliterations, reproduce lingering charm, which, to some extent, reflects his efforts to seek truth in form, so that the target readers will feel the beauty of symmetry. Lin Yutang effectively practiced his criterion of "beauty" by presenting the harmonious beauty in meaning, sound and style.

Lin Yutang strived for truth in translation, paid more attention to the translation style, and tried to retain the form of the original text without too much personal emotion, which is the instinctive behavior of the translator and the embodiment of the translator's linguistic behavior. From the perspective of intra-translation effect, he reproduced the meaning of the source text. This kind of truth-seeking behavior largely retains the literary value of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* and creates a sense of charm for the readers.

Rhetorical translation:

Example (5):

“俯视河中，波光如练。” [4]

“When I looked down at the creek, the ripples shone like silvery chains.” [4]

Example (6):

“余接此札，如闻青天霹雳。” [4]

“I received this letter like a bolt from the blue.” [4]

The simile is the simplest and most widespread device in literary works for making the description more vivid, there are two similes in examples, “波光如练” indicates at the degree to which the ripples sparkle and creates an image in reader's mind. However, Lin Yutang still translated into “the ripples shone like silvery chains”, not “the ripple seemed quite beautiful under the moon”. “青天霹雳” was used to show how Shen Fu was shocked when receiving the letter. However, when Lin translated the four words, he did not translate directly as “I was shocked”, which is more comfortable for the reader to understand. Herein, he kept the beauty of the original image of the poem, which reflects his linguistic nature.

## V. THE ANALYSIS OF LIN YUTANG'S INTRA-TRANSLATION

In [6], “seeking-truth” pays more attention to the degree of truth of translation while “utility-attaining” emphasizes the pragmatic degrees. However, the rational translator puts his version between the elements of the source text and the reader, and the rationality of his behavior is determined by the degree of reasonableness and balance of text. The rationality is conducted based on truth-seeking and utility, which interacted with each other. The reasonableness of a

translator depends on the balance between seeking the truth of the source text and the utility of the target text. Under the trend that utility gives priority to seeking truth, efforts should be made to maximize the effect according to the specific target of translation [11].

From the above cases, we can find that when translating *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, Lin Yutang took the meaning and language of the source text into account, followed the will of the author, and effectively adopted some clever translation techniques to the truth of the source text. Few annotations are added in his version, which takes on a higher degree of reasonableness.

## VI. UTILITY-ATTAINING BEHAVIOR MANIFESTED IN THE TRANSLATION OF CULTURE-LOADED WORDS

Lin Yutang's utility-attaining behavior is reflected in his translation of culture-loaded words. [12] holds the view that “culture-loaded words refer to the words, phrases and idioms indicating peculiar things in a specific culture and reflecting a nation's unique manner formed in a long history and different from other nations. In terms of culture-loaded words in *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, Lin Yutang mostly took utility-attaining behavior to maintain cultural characteristics so as to avoid misunderstanding of another culture, thus achieving the great extra-translation effect.

Example (7):

“余虽居长而行三，故上下呼芸为三娘，后呼为‘三太太’。” [4]

“I was born the third son of my family, although the eldest; hence they used to call Yun “san niang” at home, but this was later suddenly changed into “san t'ait'ai”. [4]

Footnote: “san” means “number three.” The meaning of “niang” and “san t'ait'ai” varies with local usage, but generally “niang” refers to a young married woman in a big household, while “t'ait'ai” suggests the mistress of an independent home.”

Example (8):

“芸曰：‘妾见市中卖馄饨者，其担锅、灶无不备。’” [4]

She said “I have seen wonton sellers in the streets who carry along a stove and a pan and everything we need...” [4]

“娘” and “太太” are two kinds of titles for women in ancient China. In the Qing dynasty, different calling reflects their different social status. “娘” was generally used for addressing the wife of a commoner, and “太太” was an honorific title for the wife of an official or a high-status person. Since Shen Fu is just an ordinary scholar, Yun should be called as “娘”. However, the couple's generosity and Yun's talent make other members of the family be jealous, and then these people call Yun “太太”, which, to some extent, is a kind of sarcasm. In Lin Yutang's translation, he adds footnotes to these words with cultural characteristics, which is mainly because there is no corresponding word to describe them in English. In this way, he compensated for the relevant information, enabling western readers to understand the source text more clearly. As a result, his version is an embodiment of his utility-attaining behavior.

Names of foods appeared in Example 8 are very distinct in

China. Lin introduces this special Chinese food to westerners. The translation of “wonton” is translated by using its pronunciation, and it is the same as mant’ou. He offers a footnote to the translation of mant’ou to avoid misunderstanding. Therefore, this translation strategy not only spreads Chinese culture but strengthens the dissemination effect of the translation.

#### VII. LIN YUTANG’S UTILITY-ATTAINING BEHAVIOR AND EXTRA-TRANSLATION EFFECT

The study of translator should not only be limited to the language level, but should consider him as a social being, which is bound to impact on the translation, and the influence of these social factors will produce a text of utility-attaining over truth-seeking. Lin Yutang’s extra-translation behavior is influenced by many factors, but this paper will make an analysis of the source text factors, the reader reception, and factor of the translator.

The source text factors:

Example (9):

“先一日约鸿干赴寒山登高。” [4]

“I had arranged with Hungkan to go to the Hanshan Temple that day and climb high mountains(as was customary on this festival).” [4]

Example (10):

“芸谓华夫人曰：‘今日真如渔父入桃源矣。’” [4]

“Now I really feel like the fisherman who went up to the Peach-Blossom Spring,” said Yun to Mrs.Hua.

Note: Reference to an idyllic retreat mentioned in an essay by T’ao Yuanming. [4]

Customs varied from place to place in people’s life. In the Double Ninth Festival, Chinese people would climb high mountains to pray for good fortune. But foreign readers who didn’t know this tradition would probably regard their arrangement to be a casual decision. Thus, Lin did an explanation so that readers can make a connection between climbing the mountain and festival. He tried to convey the author’s meaning by adopting the method of annotation. By doing so, his translation reduces the readers’ reading obstacles, and successfully introduces Chinese culture to the target readers.

In Example 10, this sentence is involved in the cultural background—Peach Blossom Spring, “桃源” originated from the story of the Peach Blossom Valley, a famous Chinese ancient essay written by Tao Yuanming. Shen Fu used this allusion to describe his happiness after being invited to Mrs.Hua’s home after they underwent sadness in their family. Foreigners may still have problems in understanding because of the lack of necessary background information. Lin Yutang also took additional notes in his version, which makes easier for western readers to understand the source text. Therefore, Lin’s version conveys the exact implied meaning, and the readability of the text is increased.

The reader reception:

Example(11):

“又在扬州商家见有虞山游客携送黄杨翠柏各一盆，惜乎明珠暗投。” [4]

“Once I also saw at the home of a merchant at Yangchow

two pots. One of boxwood and one of cypress-presented to him by a friend from yushan. But this was like casting pearls before swine.” [4]

Example (12):

余曰：“无他，恐公等掀衾揭帐耳。” [4]

“I was afraid of you people teasing me at night and was only trying to get a little privacy.” I explained. [4]

The original meaning of “明珠暗投” refers to a bright pearl thrown into darkness. This phrase is often used to indicate that a valuable thing gained by a person who doesn’t know it at all. Lin Yutang translated it into “like casting pearls before swine”, on the premise of not losing the meaning of the source text, conforming to the reader’s acceptance, and thus making the reader easy to understand and feel more cordial.

In Example 12, if the literal translation was adopted, readers may be a little confused. So in Lin’s version, he translated into “I was afraid that you would lift the bed account and quilt”, which showed that he adopted the free translation, and rejected to be influenced by others and clearly expressed the meaning of the sentence. Therefore, the readability of the version is improved.

The factor of the translator:

In [7], the translator’s translation activities are inevitably influenced by his cultural stand and cultural choice, and his version inevitably reflects his cultural view. Lin Yutang was born in a Christian family in 1895, and studied in the United States and Germany in his early years and obtained a master’s degree in literature from Harvard University and a doctor’s degree in linguistics from the University of Leipzig. After returning to China, he taught at Tsinghua University, Peking University and Xiamen University. From childhood to youth, Lin Yutang gradually accumulated his traditional knowledge of Chinese history, philosophy and literature. He had a deep love for traditional Chinese culture, but to cater to western readers, he had to make some changes. Therefore, western culture is the basis of his knowledge and serves as the cultural background of his observation.

Example (13):

以龙井为最，小有天园次之。 [4]

I regard Lungching (the Dragon Well) as the best in point of general plan and design, with the Hsiaoyü’tien Garden (Little paradise) coming next. [4]

In the above example, “龙井” and “小有天园” are both scenic spots. Firstly, Lin transliterated these two words, and then he translates “龙井” into the Dragon Well word by word, and later explains “小有天园” into little paradise, which is more attractive for foreign readers. This can also be explained by the fact that Lin Yutang’s cultural background influences his translation.

#### VIII. CONCLUSIONS

As a celebrated translator and writer with a unique bilingual and cultural background, Lin Yutang made efforts to promote the cultural exchanges between the East and the West, particularly by introducing the essence and brilliance of Chinese culture to western readers. To a great extent, translation purposes will affect translation strategies and methods. This paper analyzes Lin’s translation of *Six*

*Chapters of a Floating Life* with the exercise of “Truth-seeking-Utility-attaining” Evaluative Model of Continuum towards translator behavior. In his version, since he aimed to tell the touching story of the couple, and to introduce the essence of Chinese culture to the West, he tends to be both truth-seeking behavior as a linguistic being and utility-attaining behavior as a social being. And Lin Yutang found an optimal balance between faithfulness to the source text and readability of the translation, thus contributing to spreading Chinese culture effectively.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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