

Translation of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* in China: A Diachronic Study

LI Changbao^{[a],*}; YAO Ying^[b]

^[a]Ph.D., Professor, School of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics, Hangzhou, China.

^[b]MA Student, School of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics, Hangzhou, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe has been in China for more than one hundred years and there are altogether about 146 Chinese versions since it was firstly translated into Chinese in 1902. The present paper aims to study the translation of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* diachronically by analyzing why the novel has been translated so many times till now and discussing the role the translated versions have been playing in the Chinese literature of four different historical periods—the first period from the late Qing Dynasty to the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (1902 to 1948), the second one from the foundation of the PRC to the Cultural Revolution (1949 to 1965), the third period of the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976), and the fourth one from the end of Cultural Revolution to 2012 (1977 to 2012).

Key words: Translation; Chinese versions of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*; Diachronic analysis

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1. CHINESE VERSIONS OF THE ADVENTURES OF ROBINSON CRUSOE: A GENERAL SURVEY

Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) is an English writer, journalist and pamphleteer. He is the first English author to write

without imitating or adapting foreign works, to create without literary models and to infuse into the creatures of his pen a truly national spirit, to devise for himself an artistic form which is perhaps without precedent. He is the father of the English novel (Shinagel, 1994).

The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Defoe's first novel, was published in 1719. It tells a story about an English adventurer Robinson Crusoe, who drifts to an island after a shipwreck in the sea. He spends 28 years alone on the island before he is rescued and returns to England.

Since the translation of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* firstly appeared in China in 1902, it has been accepted by the Chinese people for over one hundred years. In terms of time span, it has been experiencing the late Qing Dynasty, New Culture Movement, the foundation of the People's Republic of China and the new century. In the case of language form, paleography (ancient forms of writing), semi-literary and semi-vernacular language, vernacular language (the everyday speech of the people, as distinguished from literary language), as well as modern Chinese are all included. With regard to translation purpose, it is rendered at the very inception to heal the weakness of the people with strong political motives, and then to be classified as a story of adventure to arouse the adventurous spirit of our countrymen, and later to be labeled as one of the classic literary works and even to meet great needs of different readers in the society through retranslation. Till the end of the year 2012, there are altogether 146 Chinese versions or so available.

In the Chinese Mainland, the first Chinese version of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* was published by Kaiming Bookstore in Shanghai in 1902. According to Mao Dun, this work was introduced by Shen Zufen with the Chinese title *Jue Dao Piao Liu Ji*, which was in accord with that of a Japanese version (Wu, 2011). To attract readers' attention, Shen translated it in paleography, not following its original organization and style. Shen's version, however, was soon substituted by many other

versions due to its limitations of language form as well as circulation. Undoubtedly, his version plays a crucial role in promoting cultural communication and Chinese literary translation. After Shen's version, *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* has been retranslated continuously. Its retranslated versions are so numerous that we find it hard to have all of them included in this study. From 1902

till now, some source materials, however, are no longer available due to a series of factors, such as regime change, wars, social upheaval and so on. Thus the present authors have to turn to some secondary data such as academic monographs or books for help. The relevant monographs or books used for the data collection in this study are as follows (Table 1).

Table 1
Monographs or Books Used for Data Collection

Title of Book	Author / editor	Year of publication
<i>The List of Foreign Literary Works in the Republic of China from 1911 to 1949</i>	National Library of China	1987
<i>The List of Books in China : 1996</i>	China Archives of Publications	1998
<i>A History of the 20th Century Foreign Literary Translation in China</i>	Zha Mingjian & Xie Tianzhen	2000
<i>The Translation of British and American Literary Works in China: 1919-1949</i>	Wang Jiankai	2003
<i>The List of Novels in the Late Qing Dynasty</i>	Liu Yongwen	2008
<i>A History of the 20th Century Literature Translated into Chinese: British, American and French literary translation in the 1930s and 1940s</i>	Li Xianyu	2009
<i>China's Translation of British and American Literature: 1949-2008</i>	Sun Zhili	2009

In Taiwan, however, the publication of Chinese versions of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* encountered with an awkward situation. During the period of martial law (1949-1987), many publishers there had to name the mainland translators after their pseudonyms or simply put editorial departments as their signatures. According to Lai (2013), Hu Hesheng's version of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* was published under the pseudonym "Hu Mingtian" in 1955. His version was so well received that at least eight publishers issued and reprinted it ceaselessly, which was regarded

as the influential version in Taiwan at that time. But unfortunately, the translator Hu Hesheng remained unfamiliar to the native readers for more than half a century after the publication of his version. Besides, "Ji Dejun", "Yuanjing editorial department" and "Shuhua editorial department" were also used as pseudonyms for the translator Hu Hesheng. Xu Xiaocun and Zhang Baoxiang are replaced by "Qi Xiafei" and "Qi Ming editorial department". The following is the table providing a clear picture of pseudonyms for those translators of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* in Taiwan (Lai, 2013).

Table 2
Pseudonyms for the Translators in Taiwan

Pseudonym	Translator	Publisher	Year of publication
1 Hu Mingtian	Hu Hesheng	Taipei Great China Press	1955
2 Qi Ming Editorial Department	Zhang Baoxiang	Taiwan Qiming Bookstore	1956
3 Anonymous	Gu Junzheng & Tang Xiguang	Taiwan Kaiming Bookstore	1956
4 Ji Dejun	Hu Hesheng	Tainan Zonghe Publishing House	1972
5 Anonymous	Hu Hesheng	Taipei Fowen Publishing House	1975
6 Yuanjing Editorial Department	Hu Hesheng	Taipei Yuanjing Publishing House	1978
7 Anonymous	Hu Hesheng	Taipei General Political Department of National Defense	1978
8 Anonymous	Hu Hesheng	Taipei Altai Publishing House	1982
9 Qi Xiafei	Xu Xiaocun	Taipei Zhiwen Publishing House	1984
10 Shuhua Editorial Department	Hu Hesheng	Taipei Shuhua Publishing House	1994
11 Anonymous	Hu Hesheng	Taipei Guiguan Publishing House	2000

2. TRANSLATION OF *THE ADVENTURES OF ROBINSON CRUSOE* IN CHINA: A DIACHRONIC ANALYSIS

Throughout the Chinese history of literature, the trajectory of translating *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* could roughly fall into four periods, namely, the first period from the late Qing Dynasty to the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (1902 to 1948), the second one from the foundation of the PRC to the Cultural Revolution (1949 to 1965), the third one is the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976), and the fourth one from the end of Cultural Revolution to 2012 (1977 to 2012).

2.1 Translation in the First Period (1902-1948)

2.1.1 Social and Cultural Background

China witnessed a translation climax in the late Qing Dynasty, which, however, was the result of domination of reformers from the Feudalism Reforming Party, including Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei, and the translation work they undertook was not for the literary purpose only. There were two things contributing to the thriving fiction translation from foreign countries. One was the failure of the philosophy of "traditional Chinese values aided with modern Western science and technology". It was the Opium War that opened by force the long-closed door of the Qing Dynasty. With the invasion of western imperialists, the Chinese people began to realize that their weakness and backwardness not only lied in their military forces, but also in many other aspects, such as politics, science and technology and even literature. At that time, since lots of western thoughts and values flooded into China, the dominant cultural system had been deteriorating and the traditional ideology had been challenged. Under such circumstances, some enlightened intellectuals attempted to seek various ways for saving the country. They are expected to import western technologies by keeping the social and political system which they stuck to and took pride in. Nevertheless, the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) disrupted their plans of learning from the western technologies so as to rescue their country.

After the Sino-Japanese War, people, especially scholar-bureaucrats and intellectuals, had to ponder over the pattern of "traditional Chinese values aided with modern Western science and technology" and they realized that it was no use in saving the country. Thus, the reformers came into being. Those who advocated the reformation held that it was indispensable for them to learn from foreign political system since China was not only laggard in science and technology, but in the social and political system. Owing to the lack of related books for their reference, the reformers decided to render books about politics, law, philosophy and education and so on. But the failure of "Hundred Days of Reform" in 1898 forced many intellectuals to realize the incompetence

of the Qing government; they pinned their hope on the common Chinese people. It was generally believed that translating western fiction was the very means to enlighten the public under such a social and cultural background.

The other thing was the innovation of novels. In the Qing Dynasty, novels were expelled from the orthodox literature and ignored by intellectuals, thus fiction rendition had been seated in a peripheral position for a long time. In 1899, Liang Qichao, one of the reformers of the Feudalism Reforming Party, began to launch three revolutions for literature innovation, namely, revolution in prose circle, revolution in literary circle and revolution in fiction circle (Chen, 2005, p.3). As the important component of Bourgeois Reformation, the three revolutions aimed to reform and rebuild Chinese literary system by introducing foreign literature. It was believed that the revolution in fiction circle exerted the most far-reaching influence on the literature innovation among the three (Chen, 2005, p.4).

2.1.2 Overview of Chinese Versions of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*

Since the first appearance of Shen Zufen's Chinese version of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* in 1902, some other translated versions had been published by various publishers in Shanghai. For instance, Lin Shu and Zeng Zonggong's *Lu Bin Xun Piao Liu Ji*, a well-known Chinese version, was published in 1905. One year later, Cong Kan was familiar to readers with his *Jue Dao Ying Xiong* consisting of sixteen chapters in paleography. In the 1930s, this novel began to be widely retranslated by a large number of translators, such as Peng Zhaoliang (1931), Yang Jinsen (1932), Li Lei (1932), Gu Junzheng & Tang Xiguang (1934), Xu Xiacun (1934), Zhang Baoxiang (1936), Wu Hesheng (1937), and Wang Yuanfang (1947) and so on.

According to Shen Zufen's *Records of Translator*, the novel chosen to be rendered was to awaken the public and cure their weakness with the help of Robinson's adventurous spirit (Wu, 2011). Shen Zufen was influenced by Liang's revolution in fiction circle, so was Gao Fengqian, a well-known publisher and a senior of the Commercial Press. In the preface written for Shen's version, Gao mentioned that Defoe created his novel to inspire people's enterprising and adventurous spirit during his time in jail. He tied Defoe's experiences of criticism of politics with the motivation of his creation in his later life. Gao's interpretation of this novel as a vehicle for delivering traditional Chinese ethnics not only caters to native readers, but also leads them to integrate enterprising and adventurous spirit with the destiny of the state (Cui, 2008). In a word, the translator has to yield to the restriction and influence of many factors in his society, because the translated literature is related with literary polysystem in the way that source texts are chosen by the target literature, and the principles of selecting works

correlate with the home co-systems of the target literature (Even-Zohar, 1990, p.46).

As a sub-system in the literary polysystem, the translated literature is always placed in a secondary position except when it encounters a cultural crisis or a great event. This period of time witnessed the May Fourth Movement in 1919, and the Chinese literature, clashing with the translated literature, became “weak” in the literary polysystem. As a result, western thoughts and values streamed into China through translation, entrusting the Chinese people with innovating ideas and new concepts. Before 1919, only three translated versions of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* were published in Shanghai. But from 1919 to 1948, there appeared 12 Chinese versions, four times as many as the former.

Furthermore, it is interesting to find out that the translated versions of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* in the first period were all published by book companies in Shanghai, which are listed according to the number of editions published in the following table.

Table 3
Publishing Houses and Number of Editions Published From 1902 to 1948

No.	Publishing house	Number of editions published
1	Shanghai China Book Company	3
2	Shanghai Kaiming Bookstore	2
3	Shanghai Commercial Press	2
4	Shanghai Guangyi Bookstore	1
5	Shanghai Chongwen Bookstore	1
6	Shanghai World Bookstore	1
7	Shanghai Chunjiang Bookstore	1
8	Shanghai Qiming Bookstore	1
9	Shanghai Jianwen Bookstore	1
10	Shanghai Yongxiang Press	1
11	Shanghai Yusi Press	1

In this period, Shanghai played a central role in culture and literature, and there were altogether 1089 translated novels published there (<http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2245/node4521/node29060/node29267/node29269/userobject1ai54471.html>). The system of translated literature had been categorized as primary (canonized) one in the literary polysystem of Shanghai. The publication of the Chinese versions of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* in Shanghai may reveal two facts. On one hand, the system of the translated literature in Shanghai had an impact on the publication of the foreign work; on the other hand, the introduction of the alien novel, to some extent, contributed to the development of the system of the translated literature, especially in Shanghai. The scholars who carried on translating this novel were to adapt their versions to the social-cultural context in Shanghai. Meanwhile, their purpose of arousing the adventurous

and enterprising spirit of the countrymen resulted in the acceptance and retranslation of this novel under such a social and cultural background.

2.2 Translation in the Second Period (1949-1965)

2.2.1 Social and Cultural Background

On October 1st, 1949 witnessed the foundation of the People’s Republic of China. The Chinese government carried out a series of policies to consolidate and develop the new socialist China, and it underwent profound transformations in every aspect of the society because of continuous political movements. In the early 1950s, such movements as the elimination of anti-revolutionaries, the cooperation of public and private companies, and the Counter-Rightist Movement took place one after another. Besides, the war to resist the U.S. aggression and aid Korea as well as the anti-imperialism movement was still under way during this period. In terms of literature, the translated literature is inevitably affected within the literary polysystem, which is bound to be involved in the social changes. After the foundation of the PRC, Marxism ideals are permeated and strengthened in the whole society, resulting in the predominant idea—“first, conform to political criteria; second, artistic criteria”—for literary and artistic activities (Zha & Xie, 2007, p.562). As the translated literature is related with literary polysystem in the way source texts are chosen by the target literature and the principles of selecting foreign works correlate with the home co-systems of the target literature, foreign literary translation had to be in line with the principles for its survival. Since 1949, Marxist Thought had assumed a manipulating position in the mainland. Literary translation moved toward the peripheral position in the culture system and occupied a secondary position in literature system. Therefore, those alien works that were considered to make little contributions to achieve the political purpose would be ignored and expelled in the years from 1949 to 1965.

In the 1950s, the translation of Soviet literature was given priority and the Soviet literature was treated as a model for both translated literature and Chinese literary creation. Zhou (1985, p.182) points out in an article that the mission for the Chinese people, particularly for people who devote themselves to literature and art, is to facilitate the popularization of Soviet literature, art and movies among the Chinese people. At the same time, people who are engaged in literature and art should learn from the creative experience and skills of Soviet writers, and pay much attention to socialism and realism, which are the base of their literary production. Between 1949 and 1965, the repertoire of translated literature had its own features. The translated works that were admitted into the repertoire in this historical period ought to be in accord with the leading political ideology. It is said that merely those “progressive” and “excellent” texts, which were beneficial to consolidation and construction of the socialist ideology, and reflected the poetics of realism and socialist realism

in particular could be imported into China at that time (Zha, 2001). Owing to the political ideology, Soviet literary system greatly affected the option for literary translation in the beginning years of the People's Republic of China. As a result, a large number of Soviet literary works and literary theoretical works were published and reprinted at that time, including Gorky's novels and other works related to literary theories, Leo Tolstoy's *Road to Calvary* (1941), M.A. Sholokhov's *Quiet Flows the Don* (1940) etc. (Zha & Xie, 2007, pp.563-564). Wu (1979, p.6) recalls the situation of publication at that time like this: "Soviet literature and Russian classics were the largest source, and some publishers prescribed that Soviet and Russian literature should amount to 60% among all foreign literature. The introduction of foreign works of other countries depended on two factors: First is what works the Soviet Union had translated; second is what attitude the Soviet Union had toward those works."

2.2.2 Overview of Chinese Versions of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*

In comparison with the large quantity of literary works rendered from Soviet Union, only a small quantity of literary works was translated from the western countries. From the mid 1950s to the eve of the Culture Revolution, a limited number of new foreign works were translated and there were usually the reprints of the previous versions. As for the translation of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, in the second period, however, there appeared only one version—the reprint of Xu Xiaocun's version in 1959. Since the rendition of Soviet literary works took precedence over other foreign literary works, little attention had been paid to the translation of this adventurous novel, because it did not reflect the Marxist Thought which was badly and politically needed at that time. Besides, as for British and American literature, those works conforming to the literary concepts and political ideology at that time were allowed to be translated. In the 1950s, Chinese literary translation attached greater importance to those writers who contributed a lot to the classic works, such as Shakespeare, Dickens and Hardy and so on. It is said that those foreign works would not only tally with the literary concepts, but conduce to fight against feudalism as well as capitalism (Zha & Xie, 2007, pp.570-571). Thus, *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* was less concerned and translated in this period.

2.3 Translation in the Third Period (1966-1976)

2.3.1 Social and Cultural Background

From 1966 to 1976, China underwent a social and political movement commonly known as the Cultural Revolution. Launched by Mao Zedong, the chairman of the People's Republic of China, it aimed to strengthen the Maoist orthodoxy in the Communist Party of China by eliminating capitalist, traditional and cultural factors. The Cultural Revolution symbolized the return of Chairman

Mao to the position of power after the failure of Great Leap Forward. This movement paralyzed China politically and greatly damaged the country economically and socially.

The revolution was set into motion in May, 1966. Mao insisted that bourgeois elements were penetrating the government and the society and attempting to restore capitalism. He alleged that those revisionists ought to be eliminated by a violent class struggle. Many young people responded to the call of Chairman Mao by organizing Red Guards all over the country. This movement quickly expanded to all walks of life and as a result, it triggered struggles in all sectors of the society. A large number of people suffered hardships, such as public humiliation, homelessness, imprisonment, torture, confiscation of possessions, etc..

In the 1960s, ultra-leftism began to take its solid position, resulting in the limited choice of literary works to be translated. In the early 1960s, the translation of Soviet literary works was dramatically reduced as the relationship between China and the Soviet Union was deteriorating. The priority previously given to Soviet literature had been cut off and even its right of existence in the Chinese translated literary system had been deprived. Besides, the literary translations of western capitalist countries were criticized by the government. The impact of dominant political ideology on literary translation gave rise to the fact that people could only choose the "progressive" foreign literary works. In the 1960s, the literary works from a minority of "friendly" countries like North Korea, Vietnam, Albania, Cuba and Chile began to be attached great importance (Zha & Xie, 2007, p.754).

In the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, the translation of foreign literary works vanished in China. It was the year of 1972 that the Chinese government permitted the publication of western literary works. However, the political purpose of translation was still the top priority over that of literary appreciation and cultural communication.

2.3.2 A Historical Period of No Translation of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*

In this period, literary translation was almost plunged into a dead state and literary works moved to a marginal position, therefore, no Chinese version of the novel was published since it could not meet the demands of the social ideology of such a specific time.

Whether a foreign work is rendered would be determined by the social needs in the target culture rather than the literary value of the work, especially during the historical period with so prevailing a political climate. The alien works would be easily welcomed if the ideology and poetics as revealed in the texts are identical with those of the target society. Those works, conforming to the requirements of the authorities and the government, would be not only accepted by the readers with similar

values, but aided by the government as they are able to reinforce the leading political ideology. The poetics in this period is in line with the principle that literature and art should be subordinate to politics, but they, in turn, could affect politics. Translation, like other social and cultural activities, is confined to the track that ought to be organized by the patronage, the authorities and the government.

After the launch of the Cultural Revolution, foreign literature was labeled as the product of feudalism, capitalism and revisionism. According to an article published in 1970, the ancient and foreign arts were the representatives of political desire, thoughts and emotions of the ruling classes, so they should be criticized and eliminated (Zha & Xie, 2007, p.754). From this article, the negative attitude toward both Chinese and western literature during the Cultural Revolution could be clearly seen. Until 1972, the translation of western literature began to put in an appearance. However, a great many literary works came from the Soviet Union, Japan and some Socialist countries like Vietnam, North Korea and Albania (Zha & Xie, 2007, p.760). In this situation, the British and American Literature moved to a marginal position and almost was excluded from the Chinese literary system. Undoubtedly, *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* was doomed to be deserted in this period.

2.4 Translation in the Fourth Period (1977-2012)

2.4.1 Social and Cultural Background

After ten years of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government began to take up the task of reviving the domestic economy. In the following years, it seemed that the Chinese people had found the right way to construct a stronger socialist China. Since the reform and opening up to the outside world, China has undergone dramatic changes in political, economic, cultural and social system.

The end of the Cultural Revolution was an essential turning point in literary history in which established models were no longer believed to be sufficient. The translated literature turned out to be in the central position of Chinese literature polysystem. It was not until 1978 when the authorities got rid of the chaos of class struggles and assumed the responsibility for economic development. Since then, China has witnessed a new translation climax in the climate of globalization.

Affected by Darwin's evolution theory emphasizing childhood as the most critical period during one's life, children's special social status has been gradually valued (Qiu, 2008). The social recognition of children contributed to the development of children literature in this period. Translators began to concern about the demands of children by introducing literary works to meet their tastes. Children literature, therefore, moved to a relatively central position in the translated literary system in the new era compared with the previous historical periods. *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* was labeled

as a one of the classic literary works and retranslated by various translators to meet different demands of readers. Particularly, the original text had been rewritten or reedited by quite a few translators to draw children's attention and published by a large number of children publishing houses. Besides, this novel, a venturesome story with attractive plots, simple language and strong perseverance of the protagonist, conveys a positive attitude towards difficulty, failure and even life for various readers, especially children. It may be one of the most significant reasons that this novel has been retranslated once and again in China and widely read in the new era.

2.4.2 Overview of Chinese Versions of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*

The fourth period witnesses the thriving of retranslating *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. Since the implementation of China's reform and opening-up policy in 1978, this novel has been retranslated once and again, especially after the year 2000. Based on the collected data, there are 24 versions published in the years from 1978 to 1999 and 106 versions in the years from 2000 to 2012.

Among the translators were some well known ones including Guo Jianzhong (1996), Luo Zhiye (1996), Huang Gaoxin (1997), Gao Cheng (2000), Lu Jin (2002) and Zhang Leifang (2008) and so on. Apart from its great number of translators and their translated versions, its publishers in this period were diversified including the Commercial Press, China Book Company, Kaiming Book Store, etc., which greatly differs from those in the first period mostly in Shanghai.

CONCLUSION

As can be seen above, in the first period (1902 to 1948), the translation of various Chinese versions of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* mainly aimed at arousing the adventurous and enterprising spirit of countrymen, enlightening the Chinese people and advocating the proletarian values in line with the dominant ideology before and after the May Fourth Movement. In the second period (1949 to 1965), little attention had been paid to the translation of this adventurous novel since the rendition of Soviet literary works took precedence over that of other foreign literary works. Therefore, only one translated version of this novel was available. The third period (1966 to 1976) witnessed the Culture Revolution during which literary works had moved to a marginal position and no Chinese version of the novel was published since it could not meet the demands of the social ideology of such a specific time. In the fourth period (1977 to 2012), the novel was translated once and again in China and widely read in the new era because its attractive plot, simple language and strong perseverance of the protagonist

conveyed a positive attitude towards adversities of life for various readers, especially children.

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