

# A Comparative Study of Images in Chinese-English Translation of Red Classics: A Manipulation Theory Perspective

---

YANG XU

**Abstract:** China initiated large-scale translation of domestic literature into foreign languages after its founding, indicating another significant translation wave in its history. Under the combined influence of domestic and international environments, literary translation activities during that special period were subject prominently to external factors such as ideology and patrons. The manipulation theory, focusing on the influence of ideology, poetics and patronage on translation, provides a new perspective for the studies in this field. In view of this, the paper focuses on the shaping of images in C-E translation of Chinese red classic novels published by Foreign Languages Press for a comparative analysis. It discovers that translators, compelled by ideological factors, would resort to various skills including amplification, shift, and rewriting to achieve the intended publicity purposes, and suggests that external factors such as ideology and patronage should be taken into account in literary translation studies.

*Keywords:* Ideology, literary translation, red classics, manipulation

## 1. Introduction

Translation as cultural exchange activity is never carried out in a vacuum. It is always confined and influenced by various internal and external factors including history, society, culture, and politics, rather than simple personal activities or purely linguistic phenomena. However, traditional translation theories have long focused on the linguistic comparison between source languages and target languages. The manipulation theory, represented by André Lefevre, introduces such concepts as ideology, poetics, and patronage into translation studies, pointing out that literary translation is the rewriting of the source text under the influence of mainstream ideology and poetics. This provides a new perspective for translation studies, for it no longer confines translation studies to linguistic aspects, but examines them under a grander view of history, society, culture, politics, etc.

After the founding of New China, especially before the reform and opening up, Chinese literature creation and translation went through a special historical period, and literary works in those years, including translations, were inevitably marked with the ideology of the times. This has attracted the attention of many scholars, but in general, the concerned studies are mostly macroscopic researches (e.g., Zha, 2004; Xie, 2009), and focus primarily on foreign-to-Chinese translations (e.g., Fang, 2003; Liao, 2017). The research in this regard in Western academic circles is also far from enough (Fisac, 2012:135), and existing studies look into such translations more as social documents for understanding China than as literary works (Goldblatt, 2010:7; Harman, 2006:15). In view of this, this paper intends to concentrate on the C-E translation of works published by Foreign Languages Press in Beijing as examples, with the hope to explore the influence of ideology on literary translation activities based on textual analysis.

## 2. Methodology: Manipulation Theory

Theo Hermans points out that “from the point of view of target literature, all translation implied a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose” (1985:11). He incorporates “manipulation” into translation research paradigms, which is regarded as the prototype of the manipulation school. The standard-bearer of this school is the Belgian-American scholar André Lefevre. In *Translation, History and Culture: A Sourcebook*, he argues that translation is not simple language conversion, but subject to a series of conditions, including ideology, patronage, cultural systems, etc. Of the many constraints, the one from language is the least important (Lefevre, 2004: iii). In *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* published in 1992, he combines translation studies with power, ideology, patronage and poetics on the basis of extensive textual analysis, fully expounding his thoughts in a systematical way.

Translation is rewriting, which constitutes the core difference between manipulation theory and other translation theories. Lefevre believes that patronage and poetics are the two elements that influence translation. The literary system exerts its influences through both internal and external means. The former involves professionals inclusive of critics, commentators, teachers, translators, etc., whose focus is on the conformity of literature rewriting to mainstream ideologies (the views and attitudes generally accepted in a certain society at a certain time) and poetics. The latter refers mainly to patrons, which can be individuals or institutions that have the “power”. Patrons pay more attention to ideology than poetics (Lefevre, 2010:15). Generally, patrons are responsible for checking the ideology, while professionals are responsible for the gatekeeping of poetics. Both ideology and poetics are the major factors that influence literary translation, and the former is generally given greater priority of the two, since it not only determines the selection of texts to be translated, but also guides the translation strategies and problem-solving tactics. Therefore, manipulation theory provides a unique perspective to observe translation activities, and enriches the dimensions of translation studies.

## 3. Creation and Translation of Red Classics

To study translation from the perspective of ideology is mainly to examine translation phenomena in specific historical and cultural contexts (Liu, 2012:112). For a long time after the founding of New China, the political considerations of literary works took precedence over their literariness due to the influence of various factors at home and abroad. The literary works created and translated during this period inevitably were imbued with the political air and the mindset of the public at that time. Against this backdrop, national organizations, institutions and various publishing agencies reflecting national ideology, as the largest patrons of literary translation, imposed obvious influence on source material selection and translation process. The invisible hand of external forces influenced not only what should and should not be translated, but also how.

Translators were not completely “free”, and instead they must comply with the requirements of relevant authorities and institutions. They had no right to choose works, but were only commissioned to translate, and therefore literary translation was generally regarded as a political task (Zhang, 2008:101). An obvious feature of the politicization of literature and its translation is that many works and translations are accompanied by “prefaces”, “notes”, “postscripts” and other introductory words in order to “guide” the reader’s understanding direction. As Yang Mo, the author of *Song of Youth*, writes in her “Postscript”:

I would like to tell my readers sincerely: During my entire childhood and youth, I lived in the dark society under the rule of the Kuomintang, and suffered oppression, persecution, loss of schooling and unemployment, and that life was deeply imprinted on my life. In my heart, I always had the desire to complain. However, in those dark desperate days, I was fortunate enough to meet the Party. It was the Party who saved me, made me see in despair the light and the promising future

of human beings. It was the Party who gave me a real life, and gave me the courage and strength to survive the long and brutal warring years, and finally become a member of the revolutionists... This gratitude and this deep feeling became the original basis of the novel. [My translation]

In the “Postscript to the Second Edition”, she wrote, “... to let the readers see the misery of the peasant life at that time and the evil of the landlord class...”. The “Postscript to the New Edition” mentions that “there are also young writers saying that *Song of Youth* is a work that ‘expresses established concepts’... I can only adhere to my creation with a heart that is loyal to the motherland, the people, and the communism.”

The literariness of works and their translations have been lessened to a certain extent over this special period, while the influence of ideology had been strengthened unprecedentedly. During this period, the influence of ideology on literary creation and translation also became particularly prominent, and literary translation adhered to a clear purpose, that is, “serving the revolution and serving literary creation” (Xu, 2002:64). As Xie claims, compared with local creative literature, ideology seems to impose greater and more direct constraints on literary translation (2009:30). Therefore, the literary translation of this period has become a “living fossil” providing excellent opportunities to probe into the influence of ideology on literary translation. The following section will focus on the images in C-E translations of red classics to explore how ideology and other external considerations influence literary translations through a comparative analysis.

#### 4. A Case Study of Images in Red Classics and Their English Translations

French scholar Antoine Berman asserts that translation strategies are choices made under the impact of ideology (as cited in Wang, 2003:17). In other words, literary translation, as a contrived system, is no exception and always subject to the ideology over a particular historical period. In order to meet the requirements of ideology, translators oftentimes adopt certain strategies and means to strengthen or weaken specific elements.

As one of the three publishing agencies for the dissemination of English versions of Chinese literary works in the last century, Foreign Languages Press had very close relationships with the Chinese government (Li & Liu, 2016:31). Since its establishment in 1952, it had been a subordinate agency of the State Publishing Administration. Its business policy was led by the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. The English translations of *Song of Youth* and other novels selected in this paper as representatives of the times were all published by Foreign Languages Press. Some scholars contend that these works “expressed established concepts”. It is undeniable that the works of this period have varying degrees of publicity and didactic purposes. As Yin and Fang suggest, the purpose of literary translation is to defend and build socialism for a long period of time after the founding of the People’s Republic of China (Yin, 2009:13; Fang, 2003:109). On the one hand, they aim at celebrating the glorious deeds of the communists, revolutionaries and the masses of the people, or the superiority of the socialist system, etc. On the other, they are also meant to exposing the despicability of reactionary forces such as the Kuomintang, the landlords or the Japanese invaders. Interestingly, to serve the above-mentioned purposes, the translation would occasionally betray the source work. In view of this, this paper intends to conduct a comparative study of images in these works and their English translations, in order to explore the influence of ideology on literary translating process.

##### 4.1 Building-up of Positive Images

###### Amplification

Example 1.

ST: “党的纪律——服从，绝对服从！……”他心里叨念着，又沉思了一会儿，然后迈起大步走到人群里面去(Yang, 2004:125)。

TT: "Party discipline!" he muttered. "Instructions are given for a purpose. They must be obeyed."  
After some reflection, he strode into the crowd (Yang, 1996:137).

In Example 1, the unconditional imperative “党的纪律——服从，绝对服从” (literally: Party discipline—obedience, absolute obedience!) emphasizes the obedience of the individual to the organization, which is a distinctive feature of oriental collectivism. If this is literally translated into Western culture where individualism prevails, it may not be well accepted by readers, and even probably create a totalitarian and unreasonable image among target readers, which is contrary to the intention of literary translation at that time. Therefore, in order to better enhance publicity purpose and readers' acceptance, a causal explanation (“Instructions are given for a purpose. They must be obeyed”) is added in the English version.

### Shift

Example 2.

ST: “不要旧秧歌，来个新的，大伙同意不同意？”

“同意，唱个新的。”有人响应。

“好吧，”张景祥停止唱歌，眼睛瞅着人堆里的刘胜，说道：

“我唱一个八路军的歌。” (Zhou, 1992:223)

TT: Someone clapped, but another shouted, “No more of those dirty ditties. How about a new song?”

“Right! A new song!” others responded.

“All right,” Zhang glanced at Liu Sheng. “I’ll sing one in praise of Chairman Mao.” (Zhou, 1981:206)

In Example 2, “我唱一个八路军的歌” (literally: I’ll sing a song in praise of the Eighth Route Army) is translated into “I’ll sing one in praise of Chairman Mao”. Are all the songs of the Eighth Route Army praising Chairman Mao? The answer is definitely no. If the specific social environment of the time is taken into account, such shift may be well justified. Yin Chengdong, deputy director of the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, maintains that for a long time after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, one major purpose of translating Chinese into foreign languages is to “raise the red flag of Mao Zedong Thought all over the world” (2009:13). Therefore, it is not difficult to conclude that the adopted shift is exactly in line with the translation purpose and social ideology at that time.

### Rewriting

Example 3.

ST: 鬼子找不到花姑娘，就去找那个五十多岁的瞎老婆婆。那老婆婆叫哭连天，警备队长周长泰尖溜溜的声音笑着说：“老刘婆婆，皇军爱你，都不嫌乎你老，那你就去嘛。有什么怕的呢？”玉宝气得心里直骂：“这些畜生！你也有母亲，你也有老婆、姑娘，为什么不带来陪鬼子呢？”眼看着可怜的老人被鬼子拉走了。(Gao, 1958:10)

TT: The devil seized this blind woman and started pushing her around. When she cursed them Chou Chang-tai shouted angrily at her, “Shut your mouth or I will kill you...” Locating him by ear, Liu swung her arm and give him a resounding slap in the face. Then she struck a Japanese near her. The devil, recovering, ran her through with his bayonet. As Liu staggered and fell dead Chou Chang-tai, rubbing his smarting face, kept up a flood of abuse. (Gao, 1975:20-21)

The shaping of the positive image in the novel is not only embodied in the portrayal of the protagonist, but also in minor characters. The blind old lady Liu in Example 3 appears only once in the novel where the traitors, not finding the “young girl” for pleasure, takes away the old lady Liu. The source text focuses on the despicable behaviors of the Japanese soldiers and Chinese traitors via the sufferings of such minor characters as Mrs. Liu. Mrs. Liu, for instance, “cried for a long time”, which shows her inability and submissiveness, while the translation is rewritten

as Liu cursing them, thus demonstrating the spirit of resistance. In addition, the source text euphemistically mentions “the old lady was pulled away by the devil”, while the translation adds the plots the original story does not cover, for example, “Locating him by ear, Liu swung her arm and give him a resounding slap in the face. Then she struck a Japanese near her. The devil, recovering, ran her through with his bayonet”. This rewriting creates a brave image of the old lady Liu who stands up to fight despite her blindness. Compared with the source text, the translation conveys to its readers not only the “evil deeds” of negative characters, but also ordinary people’s “resistance” against evil.

## 4.2. Shaping of Negative Images

### Amplification

Example 4.

ST: 有个鬼子小队长，叫饭野的，把翠花儿糟蹋了。接着又是许多鬼子……

半夜，一个披头散发的女孩儿，爬到井跟前，抽抽噎噎地哭了一阵，就一头栽下井去。翠花儿……牺牲了！（Gao, 1958:74）

TT: First, she was raped by the Japanese platoon leader, Iino. Then, many other Japanese... In the early hours before dawn, a tousled, bedraggled, young girl crept into a well. She sobbed heartbrokenly for a few minutes, then plunged in, head first. Hua, another victim of Japanese aggression. (Gao, 1975:79)

In Example 4, “翠花儿……牺牲了！”(literally: Cuihua'er... died.) is translated as “Hua, another victim of Japanese aggression”, and the use of the added word “another” stresses that the sacrifice of “Cuihua” is only the tip of the iceberg that exposes the atrocities of invaders. Obviously, the above example indicates that the amplification in the translation indirectly portrays the cruel image of the negative character, further highlighting the publicity purpose of the original work.

### Shift

Example 5.

ST: 好啊，蒋介石这时先来了一套妙法，他在中央军校召集学生讲了个话，嘿，请听！他讲得可妙哩！（Yang, 2004:96）

TT: Chiang Kai-shek thought up a trick to cope with the situation. He summoned the students to the Central Military Academy and made a speech. Listen to what he said, and see what an ass he is! (Yang, 1996:103)

Example 6.

ST: 咱们又可以在一块儿啦，又可以在一块儿革蒋秃子的命啦！（Yang, 2004:417）

TT: Oh, isn't it splendid! Now we can fight together against that monster Chiang Kai-shek! (Yang, 1996:431)

In Example 5, the teasing and sarcastic tone of “请听！他讲得可妙哩” (literally: Listen! How wonderfully he spoke!) is shifted into a straightforward condemnation in the translation—“Listen to what he said, and see what an ass he is!” In Example 6, the ironic expression in the original text of “蒋秃子”(literally: Jiang, the bold) is also shifted into a direct accusation of “that monster Chiang Kai-shek!”. Such a shift sacrifices the rhetoric of the original text for better publicity effects, which demonstrates the fact that literature serves and gives way to external considerations.

### Rewriting

Example 7.

ST: 玉宝心里一边恨，一边骂：“我爷爷病了，我爹想杀一只鸡给爷爷吃，爷爷都不叫杀，这回叫恶鬼给吃了……叫你们这些黄皮狼子吃吧，吃了就叫你不得好死！”(Gao, 1958:9)

TT: Yu-pao cursed: Dad was going to sell those hens to buy medicine for granddad, but these devils are eating them... I hope they choke to death! (Gao, 1975:18)

In Example 7, the source text “我爹想杀一只鸡给爷爷吃，爷爷都不叫杀” (Literally: My father wanted to kill a chicken for my granddad to eat, but my granddad didn't agree.) is rewritten as “Dad was going to sell those hens to buy medicine for granddad”. In the source text, the hens that the “devils” eat should have been prepared to nourish “granddad” for he is seriously ill, while in the translation, those same hens are rewritten as the ones sold to buy medicine and save granddad's life, highlighting the evils of the invaders indirectly. The translator's subtlety and the motivation for the rewriting here are evident. It is not difficult to find that the translator has successfully displayed the evil deeds of various negative images in an indirect way, fulfilling the requirements of mainstream ideological publicity and intended translation purposes.

## 5. Conclusions

The C-E translations of Chinese modern and contemporary novels, bringing together the efforts and minds of previous generation of translators and experts at home and abroad, represent the massive translation campaign initiated by the state in the specific period. The contributions of these translations, though occasionally criticized as being endowed with explicit publicity purposes, to China's translation undertakings cannot be denied.

The above text analysis indicates that domestic literary translation activities were closely intertwined with external considerations for a long time after the founding of the New China, and were also marked with the ideological brand of the times. The C-E translation strengthens the specific elements of the source text by amplification, shift and rewriting to better adapt to the mainstream ideology and other publicity considerations. Examining texts from the view of ideology provides a unique perspective for translation research and practice, enriches the dimensions of translation research, and enables us to understand translation activities and processes in a more comprehensive manner.

Lanzhou University, China

## Works Cited

- Fang, Changan. “The Modernity Characteristics of Translated Foreign Literatures in the 17 Years after the Founding of the People's Republic of China.” *Academic Research*, no. 1, 2003, pp. 78-84.
- Fisac, Taciana. “Anything at Variance With it Must be Revised Accordingly’: Rewriting Modern Chinese Literature During the 1950s.” *The China Journal*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2012, pp. 131-148. <https://doi.org/10.1086/665743>
- Gao, Yubao. *Gao Yubao*. People's Literature Publishing House, 1958.
- Gao, Yubao. *Kao Yu-pao: Story of A Poor Peasant Boy.*, translated by Anon. Foreign Languages Press, 1975.
- Goldblatt, Howard. “The Dissemination of Chinese Literature in the United States from the Perspective of Translation.”, translated by Wenhua Wang. *China Social Sciences Newspaper* 23 Feb. 2010, p. 7.
- Harman, Nicky. “Foreign Culture, Foreign Style.” *Perspectives*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2006, pp. 13-31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09076760608669014>
- Hermans, Theo. *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*. Routledge, 1985.

- Lefevere, André. *Translation/History/Culture: A Sourcebook*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2004.
- Lefevere, André. *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2010.
- Li, Qingliu, and Guozhi Liu. "How China's Foreign Languages Press-Published English Versions of Modern and Contemporary Chinese Novels Circulate in the United States." *Chinese Translators Journal*, no. 5, 2016, pp. 31-38.
- Liao, Qiyi. "Critical Discourse and Translating 'Red Classics' in the 'Seventeen Years'". *Comparative Literature in China*, no. 3, 2017, pp. 35-48.
- Liu, Yingli. "The Influence of Ideology on Literary Translation: A Case Study of Two English Versions of 'Camel Xiangzi'". *Journal of Changsha University*, no. 1, 2012, pp. 112-114.
- Wang, Dongfeng. "An Invisible Hand: Ideological Manipulation in the Practice of Translation". *Chinese Translators Journal*, no. 5, 2013, pp. 16-23.
- Xie, Tianzhen. "Special Translation in Special Times—Literary Translation during the Cultural Revolution in Mainland China." *Comparative Literature in China*, no. 2, 2009, pp. 23-35.
- Xu, Jun. "The Choice in Translation". *Journal of Foreign Languages*, no. 1, 2002, pp. 62-69.
- Yang, Mo. *The Song of Youth.*, translated by Ying Nan. Foreign Languages Press, 1996.
- Yang, Mo. *The Song of Youth*. Beijing Publishing House & Beijing October Literature and Art Publishing House, 2004.
- Yin, Chengdong. "On the Translation of Chinese Works since the Founding of PRC with the Translation of Mao Zedong's Works as An Example". *Chinese Translators Journal*, no. 5, 2009, pp. 13-16.
- Zha, Mingjian. "Cultural Manipulation and Utilization: Ideology and the Construction of Translated Literary Classics: A Case Study of Chinese Translation Literature in the 1950s and 1960s". *Comparative Literature in China*, no. 2, 2004, pp. 89-105. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1006-6101.2004.02.020>
- Zhang, Guojun. "Power Discourse and the Translation of Foreign Literature during the Cultural Revolution". *Journal of South China Agricultural University (Social Science Edition)*, no. 4, 2008, pp. 99-103.
- Zhou, Libo. *The Hurricane.*, translated by Mengxiong Xu. Foreign Languages Press, 1981.
- Zhou, Libo. *The Hurricane*. People's Literature Publishing House, 1992.