

## A Brief Analysis on Lin Yutang's Translation Aesthetics

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**ABSTRACT:** As a famous literary scholar and translator, Lin Yutang has made great contributions to the development of Chinese literature and Chinese translation theory. For the first time, he clearly and systematically put forward the criterion of “beauty” in the Chinese translation field, advocated that “translation as a fine art”, and promoted the application of aesthetics in the field of translation. In Lin Yutang’s book *On Translation*, he put forward three standards of translation—the standard of faithfulness, the standard of smoothness and the standard of “beauty”. Based on the criterion of “beauty”, this paper introduces the translation aesthetics of different scholars, Lin Yutang’s translation aesthetics, and sums up the unique features of Lin Yutang’s translation aesthetics by combining Lin Yutang’s translation practice and the embodiment of his aesthetic translation.

**KEYWORDS:** Lin Yutang; Translation Aesthetics; Translation Standard; “Beauty” standard; *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*

### I. INTRODUCTION

As a bilingual translator, Lin Yutang devoted his whole life as a scholar to cultural communication between China and the western countries. He contributed his energy to the transmission of Chinese culture to the world, and also to writing and translating works. He pursued the beauty around him, and applied his understanding of beauty to his translation theory and practice.

This paper is divided into four parts and mainly focuses on the researches of Lin Yutang’s translation aesthetics. The first part starts with a literature review, briefly introducing Lin Yutang and his writing and translation works, especially his article *On Translation*, and Shen Fu’s *Six Chapter of a Floating Life*, summarizing the pertinent researches on Lin Yutang’s translation aesthetics home and abroad and the traditional translation aesthetics. The dispute over wen and zhi in ancient China will also be discussed. The second part mainly analyzes Lin’s translation aesthetics from the translation aesthetics’ philosophy sources. In *On Translation* Lin proposed three translation principles, namely faithfulness, smoothness, and beauty, which are the source of his translation aesthetics. Part three makes a detailed analysis of aesthetics embodied in Lin Yutang’s translation practice. Part four is the conclusion.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### A. *Lin Yutang and his works*

Lin Yutang created many literatures works during his life, and most of the works were written in English. He created a long historical novel—*Moments in Peking* and as the success of this book, Lin Yutang was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature. Lin Yutang also translated numerous Chinese classic works, such as *A Nun of Taishan and Other Translation*, *The Peach Colony*, and *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, etc. Among all above *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* is considered the most outstanding and typical one of Lin Yutang’s translation works. Lin Yutang devoted most of his life time to writing books and translating work, but he still had written a few articles about translation theory, including the most famous book—*On Translation*.

#### B. *Relevant research on Lin Yutang’s translation aesthetics*

As the first person to talk about “aesthetics” from the perspective of translation, Lin Yutang proposed his translation aesthetics which is fully shown in his *On Translation* published in 1933. He put forward three translation criteria: faithfulness, smoothness, and beauty in his *On Translation*.

In the last century, there was little research on Lin Yutang’s translation theory and practical activities, and there was only one article on his translation theory. Chen Rongdong’s *One Translation Theory should not be Neglected—Perspectives on Lin Yutang’s Translation Thought from His On Translation*, presenting Lin’s translation aesthetics in depth, published in 1997. Cheng analyzed thoroughly aesthetic subject, aesthetic object, aesthetic process, aesthetic production and aesthetic judgment rules and so on. In

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this century, the study of Lin Yutang's translation activities has begun and gradually attracted the attention of scholars, and is gradually developing systematically. There are also many other scholars to analyze Lin's translation aesthetics from different perspectives.

### C. Traditional translation aesthetics thoughts in Chinese

It is a long history since the literature theory and aesthetics bear testimony to each other. From Buddhist translation in the ancient time, such as the aesthetics theory "the beautiful words are faithful, and the faithful words are not beautiful"(美言不信, 信言不美) has been put forward, then Yan Fu's "there are three difficulties in translation: faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance"(信达雅"译事三难). Actually Yan Fu's "elegance" also tallies with our Chinese classic aesthetics of literature and art. For example, Liu Xie more favored "beauty and elegance"(丽而雅) in Shang and Zhou Dynasty as a style.

There are many translation aesthetics theories in Chinese history, including the dispute of wen and zhi(文质之争), Yan Fu's, Fu Lei's, Qian Zhongshu's and Lu Xun's theory. Comparing with these main theories, Lin's uniqueness lies in that Lin's theory contains the discussion on psychology and meanwhile he put forward that "translation is an art".

Wen and zhi actually comes from classics in pre-Qin dynasty and are used for figures description. The proposition of wen and zhi is originated from The Analects. Confucius once said, "it is rough when simple is better than decoration, and it is flashy when decoration is better than simple. The combination of simple and decoration is the virtues of a gentleman." (质胜文则野, 文胜质则史。文质彬彬, 然后君子。) here wen means "musical" "礼""乐" and some exterior quality, while zhi means "benevolence and righteousness" "仁" "义" and some interior cultivation. Confucius believes that gentleman have to possess wen and zhi, namely "礼乐仁义", which is obvious in describing persons. Later wen and zhi were extended as "文采" and "实质"。"文采" is used in the literature form and "实质" in the content, then the wen and zhi from describing persons changed to form and content in describing literature, as two aspects of rhetoric. "质胜文" means even the content is good but "文采" is not enough; "文胜质" means even language is beautiful but dull content. So the perfect writings have wen and zhi bonded like a person with wen and zhi. The wen style refers to the pattern, or the elegant style, while the zhi style refers to the substance, or the plainness. Later the debate over wen and zhi became the debate over the pattern and substance.

## III. LIN YUTANG'S TRANSLATION AESTHETICS

### A. Lin Yutang's theory on translation

At the beginning of 1932, Lin published his most systematic and famous Translation article On Translation, which dealt with many theoretical issues of translation and presented his views on translation theory in the most comprehensive and systematic way.

Lin Yutang is the first person who presents the aesthetic or beauty principle from translation's view and put forward translation's aesthetic thoughts, so Lin's translation theory actually is translation aesthetic beauty theory.

On Translation is a prelude to Wu's Upon Translation. The essay composed four parts: firstly Lin raises three translation principles: faithfulness, smoothness, and beauty. The second part is about faithfulness, Lin points out that "zhi yi" and "yi yi" is not called appropriately and he puts forward two concepts "zi yi" and "ju yi" which would be more appropriate in his eyes. In the essay he also declared his attitude for "ju yi" but against "zi yi". He stresses that "faithfulness is not word by word when translating"(忠实非字字对译之谓), "faithfulness have to be spirit-like"(忠实序求传神). In the third part, Lin discussed the responsibility and requirements of translators. The forth part is about beauty. Lin believed that "translation as a fine art". "Outer form and inner form" are also mentioned.

On Translation is just a short article, but it systematically reveals Lin Yutang's translation aesthetic theory for the first time in a written pattern. However, most of his translation aesthetics were embodied in his translation works.

### B. Requirements for translators

Lin Yutang elaborated his ideas on the aesthetics of translation in the course of his general discussion on translation standards. According to him, the art of translation relies on three parts: The first is the translator's thorough understanding of the textual content of the original text; the second is the translator's considerable knowledge of the Chinese language and his ability to write smooth and fluent Chinese article; and the third is the translator's training in the matter of translation, and the translator's justified opinion on the standard of translation and on surgical problems." It is worth pointing out that the translation he refers to in On Translation is from a foreign language into Chinese, so the second requirement he puts forward for the translator is that the translator has a high level of Chinese language proficiency.

Firstly, a translator should hold a thorough understanding of the language and content of the original text; Secondly, a translator should have such a good command of the Chinese language that he can express it fluently and smoothly; Thirdly, a

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translator should develop appropriate opinions towards the standards and operation of translation through enough training in translation.

In a word, Lin Yutang provided translators with three requirements from the perspective of linguistics and psychology, in the purpose of giving them necessary assistance. It must be pointed out that "in China's translation history, Lin Yutang was the first to clearly employ modern linguistics and psychology as the foundation of theoretical analysis of translation".

### **C. Translation standards**

Lin Yutang inherited the essence of his predecessors' translation theories and put forward three standards of translation: First, the criterion of Faithfulness. Lin believes that the degree of faithfulness can be roughly divided into four levels: literal translation, dead translation, free translation and nonsense translation. He believes that literal translation and free translation are easy to use, but they are still not correct terminologies, and they are opposite to each other and penetrate each other. Moreover, absolute faithfulness is impossible, and it is not required to correspond to each word, but to achieve its meaning, and to express the spirit as the purpose. Second, the criterion of Smoothness. As for the standard of fluency in translation, he pointed out from the perspective of psychology that "if the purpose of text is to obtain fluency, the meaning of sentences must be the first, and the meaning of words must be the second." At the same time, Lin also put forward the theory of sentence translation, which is that "what the translator should be faithful to is not the words of the original text, but the semantic meaning of the words." Third, the criterion of Beauty. In Lin Yutang's view, in addition to faithfulness and smoothness, translation should also focus on the art of translation. An ideal translator should treat translation work as an art, love it with the love of art, and make translation one of the fine arts.

Actually Lin's beauty in translation is the highest pursuit while faithfulness and smoothness serve as the foundation of his translation aesthetics. In Lin's perspective, only after the three requirements for the translator are realized and achieved, can beautiful translation be produced.

### **D. Lin Yutang's translation aesthetics**

Translation is the art of transforming linguistic forms. It not only pays attention to the content of conversion, but also to the way of speech. Lin Yutang's way of speech in translation is manifested in translation aesthetics. In Lin Yutang's view, "beauty" is obviously richer than "elegance", and it includes the issue of "the translator's responsibility for art". Among the three translation standards in *On Translation*, the standard of "beauty" is the essence. In particular, he emphasized the need to translate as beautifully as possible in literary translation, the most important factor being the integration of the style of the original text with its content.

Lin Yutang criticized "dead" and "imprudent" translation and questioned the terms of "word-for-word" and "sense-for-sense", claiming that these terms were misleading. Translation terms play an important role in the construction of translation studies. When most scholars were engaged in their arguments on whether literal translation or free translation should be adopted, Lin abandoned these two ways. He was strongly against the word-for-word translation by pointing out the fact that a word had different meanings in different contexts from the linguistic perspective. He proposed that the unit of translation should be the sentence.

## **IV. APPLICATION OF LIN YUTANG'S TRANSLATION AESTHETICS**

Lin Yutang, a renowned Chinese writer, translator, and literary critic of the 20th century, made significant contributions to the field of translation aesthetics. His theories and practices in translation have had a profound impact on the development of translation studies and the application of aesthetics in this discipline. In this part, we will continue to explore the application of Lin Yutang's translation aesthetics in his translation practices.

Xu Yuanhong concluded that Lin Yutang's aesthetic perspective in translation is about "Five Beauties": beauty of sound, beauty of meaning, beauty of spirit, beauty of literary style, and beauty of literary form. Lin Yutang pointed out that the realization of the five beauties in a single work is of little possibility, because the translator either pays much attention to the meaning, or neglects the spirit, either achieves the spirit or misses the form. In this part, we are going to analyze the embodiment of Lin Yutang's translation aesthetics from several perspectives.

### **A. The aesthetics of sound**

Lin Yutang emphasized the importance of "beauty of sound" in translation, believing that translators should preserve the musical beauty of source language. A fantastic translation should strive to achieve the harmony of sound between the source language and target language which conveys the aesthetics of sound. In the version of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, alliteration

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and rhyme can be considered as one of the most important features to achieve the aesthetics of sound and bring the aesthetic satisfaction to the readers.

### Example 1.

当时六月，内室炎蒸，幸居沧浪亭爱莲居西间壁。

It was the sixth moon, then, and the rooms were very hot. Luckily, we were next door to the Lotus Lover's Lodge of the Ts'anglang Pavilion on the east.

The original words “爱莲居” enable readers to sense the image of Chinese scholars because of the Chinese saying “gentlemen love lotus”. When translating, Lin Yutang uses “Lotus Lover's Lodge” as alliteration to achieve the effect of acoustics and visual sense so that readers can feel the aesthetics while pronouncing the consonant.

### Example 2.

头巾已揭，相视嫣然。

When her bridal veil was lifted, we looked at each other and smiled.

In this short version, Lin Yutang uses three verbs, “lifted, looked, and smiled”. Each of them ends up with “ed” in form and [d] in sound. When reading it, the rhyme [d] gives readers a feeling of happiness as if it were them to uncover the bridal veil and to marry a beautiful woman. Here “头巾” is translated as “bridal veil”, not headscarf so that western readers can understand more accurately that this version is close to their marriage.

### Example 3.

朱子亦有诗，曰：“相思欲回首，但上曲江楼。”

Chu His also wrote two lines: There shall I go, up the towering Tower of Wingding River, When of something I wish to refresh my memory that does wither.

With the implications of both the drooping of plants and the declining of a person's memory in figurative use and, the word “wither” vividly reflects the scenery, the atmosphere and the person's feelings, and corresponds with the word “River” in rhyme as well. In addition, the use of inversion makes the translation feel more rhythmic and readable. Generally speaking, the English version is a successful reproduction of the aesthetic of sound, form and meaning of the original poem. Lin Yutang's excellent mastery of both Chinese and English is presented once again.

## B. The aesthetics of meaning

Lin Yutang's theory of translation emphasizes the importance of “aesthetics of meaning”. He believed that translation should not only accurately convey the meaning of the original work, but also pay more attention to expressing the beauty and artistic value of the original work. In the process of translation, the translator needs to take advantage of the expression and aesthetic characteristics of the target language and recreate them flexibly in order to maintain the beauty of the original work.

### Example 4.

倚窗俯视，风动竹梢，如翻麦浪。

As we leaned over the window and looked downwards, we saw the bamboo trees bent before the wind in swaying billows like a wheat field bowing before a summer breeze.

In this version, “bent” is the past tense of bend, meaning “to form a curve”. Here, “bent” indicates that the moving because the wind was blowing. “Bow” is usually a human activity to show modest, respect, and “bowing” in this sentence shows the summer breeze is so gentle that the wheat field is deeply attracted by it.

### Example 5.

所谓病入膏肓，良医束手，请勿为无益之费。

The illness is now deep in my system and no doctor will be of any avail, and you may just as well spare yourself the expense.

System here refers to the human body and the whole health condition. This is different from its original meaning. The usage of system indicates that the illness of Yun is hard to cure. Spare is often used as an adjective, meaning additional or a little. In this version, “spare the expense” means save the money which may be spent on Yun's illness. These two words “system” and “spare” in this version express the idea that Yun's illness is hard to cure and the sorrow and helpless of the speaker. That can easily stick a responsive chord in the hearts of its readers.

### Example 6.

其形削肩长项，瘦不露骨，眉弯目秀，顾盼神飞，唯两齿微露，似非佳相。一种缠绵之态，令人之意也消。

Of a slender figure, she had drooping shoulders and a rather long neck, slim but not to the point of being skinny. Her eyebrows were arched and in her eyes there was a look of quick intelligence and soft refinement. The only defect was that her two front teeth were slightly inclined forward, which was not a mark of good omen. There was an air of tenderness about her which completely fascinated me.

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The concept of beauty is different in Chinese and western culture, yet Lin still creates a kind of oriental beauty to westerners for his determination is to transmit Chinese culture to the western countries. Lin says "Yun, I think, is one of the loveliest women in Chinese literature." So he uses slender, drooping, slim, but not skinny, intelligence, refinement, tenderness, etc. to modify Yun's image which may be roughed out in readers' minds.

### C. The aesthetics of style

Lin Yutang had pointed out that "a word can be beautiful in the sound, meaning, spirit, as well as form and style". It's known to all that Lin Yutang insisted on the leisurely and comfortable style both in his literary creation and translation, and then formed a distinctive stylistic characteristic in his work.

#### Example 7.

若夫园亭楼阁，套室回廊，叠石成山，栽花取势，又在大中见小，小中见大虚中有实，实中有虚，或藏或露，或浅或深，不仅在周回曲折四字，又不在地广石多，徒增工费。或掘地成山，间以块石，杂以花草，篱用梅编，墙以藤引，则无山而成山矣。

As to the planning of garden pavilions, towers, winding corridors and out-houses, the designing of rockery and the training of flower-trees, one should try to show the small in the big, and the big in the small, and provide for the real in the unreal and for the unreal in the real. One reveals and conceals alternately, making it sometimes apparent and sometimes hidden. This is not just rhythmic irregularity, nor does it depend on having a wide space and great expenditure of labour and material. Pile up a mound with earth dug from the ground and decorate it with rocks, mingled with flowers; use live plum-branches for your fence, and plant creepers over the wall. Thus one can create the effect of a hill out of a flat piece of ground.

The difficulty in translating this paragraph lies in how to render the structure of parataxis of the Chinese text into the structures of hypotaxis in the English version. Only by doing so, the translation can be faithful, fluent and coherent, so the English readers can grasp the inner meaning of it. Lin Yutang provided for us a good example of reorganizing sentences by employing two methods. One is to grammatically supplement and the other is to semantically supplement. Grammatically, Lin Yutang supplemented conjunctions, prepositions, adverbs as well as a past participle to make the translation coherent in form and in meaning, such as "and", "with", "from", as well as "thus", "out of", etc. Semantically, Lin Yutang supplemented the implicated subjects, objects, and verbs and so forth, such as "one", "this", as well as "it", etc, and these words were omitted in the source text to make the sentence more complete. By means of skillful handling of the structure of the whole paragraph, Lin Yutang's translation sounds as well as reads smooth and coherent.

#### Example 8.

芸果肩舆至，解维出虎啸桥，渐见风帆沙鸟，水天一色。

By and by, Yun arrived in a sedan-chair, and we started off, passing by the Tiger's Roar Bridge, where the view opened up and we saw sailing boats and sand-birds flitting over the lake. The water was a white stretch, joining the sky at the horizon.

When readers read this line, especially the word "水天一色", they will be attracted at once by the beautiful scene with clear sky and blue water. Lin Yutang applied his proposition of "sentence-for-sentence translation" and rendered it into a complete sentence. The target readers' aesthetic impulse will be inspired, and they will image the beautiful scene just as the original portrayed by the usage of "a white stretch" and "joining the sky at the horizon". In this way, Lin Yutang reproduced the beauty of style and conveyed infinite association about the beautiful scenery beside the river to the target readers.

Lin Yutang's translation aesthetics continue to inspire and influence contemporary translation practices. His emphasis on preserving the aesthetic qualities of the source text, the concept of transcreation, and the internationalization of literature has enriched the field of translation and contributed to the global exchange of literary works. Contemporary translators continue to apply Lin Yutang's principles in their work, striving to produce translations that capture the beauty and cultural resonance of the original texts. As a result, Lin Yutang's translation aesthetics have left a lasting legacy and continue to shape the practice of translation today.

To sum up, in Lin Yutang's translation theory, he regarded "translation as a fine art" and set great store by the beauty of language and the "aesthetic quality" criterion of translation; and in translation practice, he believed that translators should convey not only the meaning but also the feeling-tone of the original works, and translators should bear in mind that the translated works should give the target readers an aesthetic impulse in their reading process, just like they are standing together with the original authors. It's easy to tell that Lin Yutang did take the target readers into his consideration in his translation practice.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Lin Yutang inherited the traditional translation theory and injected new ideas from the perspective of aesthetics. He advocated that on the basis of faithful and fluent expression of the original text, the translation should also reflect the beauty and

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charm of the original text. Based on Lin Yutang's *On Translation*, this paper analyses the application of his translation aesthetics theory and practice. His Chinese and English translations are impressive in terms of meaning, sound and form. His aesthetic perspective has not only theoretical value but also practical value.

Aesthetics plays a vital role in Chinese translation theory; it is essential to apply translation aesthetics when translating Chinese classic literature. From the analysis above, a conclusion can be drawn that Lin Yutang's contribution to Chinese translation undertaking is irreplaceable, and it is him who translated and introduced a large amount of Chinese classics to westerners.

Lin Yutang inherited traditional translation theory, such as Yan Fu's "three difficulties in translation", and he also poured new elements into Chinese translation theory especially from the perspective of aesthetics. Besides his achievement in translation theory, Lin Yutang's translated works expanded the intercommunication and cultural exchange between China and foreign countries. So it is not the time to come to a final conclusion about Lin Yutang's contribution to translation theory, practice and cultural exchange between East and West, and more studies and evaluations of Lin Yutang's translation theory and practice should be explored as well as enriched with new perspectives for his rewarding effort.

In addition to his achievements in translation theory, Lin Yutang's translation works have made remarkable achievements and far-reaching impact in promoting cultural exchanges between China and western countries in promoting Chinese culture. All in all, Lin Yutang's contribution is remarkable and irreplaceable, and his translation theories and works are worthy of appreciation and further study.

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