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Translating into Modernity: Nalai-ism in the First Chinese Translation of *Robinson Crusoe*

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ABSTRACT

Jue Dao Piao Liu Ji, the first Chinese translation of Robinson Crusoe, is but one of the nalai-istic translations at the turn of the 20th century in China. As a response to sudden external pressures in a time of existential crisis for the nation, these translations prioritize social-historical efficacy as the primary criterion. They no longer desire to serve two masters nor get caught in the so-called tragedy of the translator being torn between betrayal and loyalty. Instead, as is demonstrated by Jue Dao Piao Liu Ji, nalai-istic translations utilize the undercurrent of violence resulted from foreignness in translation to impact and dismantle the closed structures of the receiving culture. Nalai-istic translation demonstrates not only openness and dialogic intent, but also involve the translator's play of and with the receiving culture's center, which as a trans-visionary creation gives birth to a new vision distinct from both the source text and the original receiving culture. As a historical specimen, Shen Zufen and his Jue Dao Piaoliu Ji serves as a trace and reminder: it is translation that translates China into modernity.

Keywords: *Robinson Crusoe, Nalai-ism, translation, modernity*

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The publication of Daniel Defoe's seminal work *Robinson Crusoe*, while heralding the rise of the novel as a novel literary genre, foreshadowed the development of modern society towards individualization (self-centeredness) and banality (trivialization). In an era devoid of heroes similar to those from Greco-Roman mythology or Homeric epics, Robinson Crusoe's overseas success story became an inspiring commoner-hero, with his life trajectory viewed as a paradigm of good life for the European powers. The courage and enterprising spirit embodied by this heroic figure also captured the attention of Chinese cultural elites at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, for the purpose of navigating the storm of national predicaments and humiliation. The publication of *Jue Dao Piao Liu Ji* in 1902 marked the formal landing of this British commoner-hero on China.

Jue Dao Piao Liu Ji, widely recognized as the first Chinese translation of *Robinson Crusoe*, is actually a compilation of two novels by Daniel Defoe: *Robinson Crusoe* and its sequel *The Farther Adventures*. As an exemplification of European overseas expansion, the story of *Robinson Crusoe* primarily focuses on the narrative space of Europe, Latin America and Africa. In this translation, Shen Zufen, the translator, extends this transatlantic travel story into a global adventure covering places such as Brazil, Trinidad, Africa, China, India, Russia as well as European countries. Contrary to the extension of narrative space, the length of the narrative is significantly reduced to merely around 30,000 Chinese characters, which is roughly equivalent to 15,000 English words if translated back to English. The much discussed binary principles of fidelity or infidelity seems to be not pertinent in examining this translated work.

Jue Dao Piao Liu Ji does not stand as a rare case in translating foreign literature into Chinese in early 20th century. *Ba Li Cha Hua Nv Yi Shi* (1899), the translation of *La dame aux camélias* is widely recognized by Chinese academia as the first European literary masterpiece translated and introduced to China in the strict sense, excluding translations for missionary purposes, or fragmentary translations such as stories from the *Aesop's Fables*). Its translator Lin Shu however had no knowledge of foreign language. The translation is a collaborative effort while Wang Shouchang explained the meaning of the original text, Lin Shu creatively rewrote the story in classical Chinese. Over the next 30 years, in the same manner, Lin Shu completed the translation of around 160 to 170 foreign literary works (Shi, 1990, p. 6).

Even if we consider the translation of *Robinson Crusoe* alone, it is not uncommon to find translators who both translate and creatively rewrite the text. The 20th century witnessed the burgeoning of over 40 translations and editions of *Robinson Crusoe* (Li, 2009, p. 100), among which at least 8 translations were published in the first decade (Chen, 2018, p. 3), and 3

of which were published between 1902 and 1905. Despite the multitude of various editions, the first faithful translation did not appear until 1930 by Xu Xiacun, which means, in the first 30 years upon its landing on the Chinese territory, *Robinson Crusoe* had been consistently appropriated, adapted or abridged in translation. These unfaithful translations were translated from either English or Japanese; translated into standard Chinese, classical Chinese, or the Cantonese dialect; published either in book form, as serials or as pictorials. Some of them are products of cooperative efforts between those who speak English and those who are skilled at writing in Chinese.

In light of this situation, the Chinese translation theory of "resemblance in aura" (shensi lun), which posits that Chinese aesthetics prioritize expression over mimesis, and thus "Chinese values the artistry of translation that captures the aura of the original, while the West emphasizes equivalence and fidelity" (Luo, 1990, p. 285) does not apply. Instead, Gao Fengqian's Preface to *Jue Dao Piao Liu Ji* is highly suggestive as a reference point for deciphering this phenomenon. In this Preface, Gao mentions that Shen Zufen is "particularly fond of [*Robinson Crusoe*], hoping to use it as the medicine to cure our countrymen." (Shen, 2018, p. 171) Based on the Chinese conception of individual-family-country-tianxia as mutual fractals that form a concentric structure, the metaphor of sick individuals are symbolic of the country at the time: afflicted with a serious illness and had to seek remedies from afar. The spirits of adventure and the courage to leave one's homeland to explore in particular, are the remedies the Chinese intellectual elites found since they appeal to the Chinese imagination for the sudden rise of the West as represented by the Great Britain.

In 1902, the same year when *Jue Dao Piao Liu Ji* was published, Liang Qichao (1873-1929), a representative revolutionary thinker and scholar of the time, published "The Relationship Between Fiction and the Governance of Society," in which he proposed the theory of "saving the nation through fiction," one that corresponds to the translation practice of Shen Zufen. This theory, emblematic of the prevailing ideas among intellectuals during that era, was proposed after the failure of the Reform Movement of 1898 that Liang Qichao co-initiated, a movement that sought to learn from the West, promote science and culture, and reform the political and educational systems by leveraging the power of Emperor Guangxu of the Qing Dynasty. Its failure forced the reformists to seek alternative solutions. They turned to educating the public to cultivate a sense of nationhood, freedom, and independence, as well as fostering a spirit of adventure and courage, thereby achieving the goal of "awakening the people" and transforming them into "new citizens."

Liang began his essay by a straightforward statement: "To renew the people of a nation, one must first renew its fiction" (Liang, 1989, p. 6). Proposing that fiction could provide "a self beyond the self, a world beyond the world" (6) and was "the highest form of literature" (7), he

particularly emphasized the didactic function of fiction, incorporating the spatial dimension of "influence through immersion" and the temporal dimension of "influence through permeation" to enlighten the people. A dedicated practitioner of this belief, Liang launched a fiction magazine *New Fiction* in Yokohama during his exile to Japan after the failure of the reform. In this magazine, a special column for the adventure novel was established and *Robinson Crusoe* was among the first works he planned to translate and publish (Li, 2023, p. 35). For the spirit of adventure as embodied through Robinson Crusoe (Ren, 2005) was expected to serve as a remedy to "influence" and "immerse" the Chinese populace, and to quote Gao Fengqian, to "inspire the Chinese to be adventurous and enterprising," and to "wake the 40 million slumbering Chinese up" through enhancing personal vision of the world and subsequently enhancing national strength (Shen, 2018, p. 171).

2

If we agree with the assertion that "in China, since modern times ... the main drive of literature has always been politics" (Qian; Huang; Chen, 2019, p. 38), it becomes evident that, in a context where "literature actively takes on the historical responsibility of 'intellectual enlightenment'" (Qian; Huang; Chen, 2019, p. 64), the translation of literature from the end of the 19th century to the early 20th century, the first two decades in particular, is more than linguistic conversion or cultural activity. With the aesthetic demands on literary translation ceasing to be the primary consideration, translation assumes the socio-political function, serving as a tool for intervention, for cultivating "new citizens." How did Shen Zufen formulate his prescription in this context?

As a problematic myth of the Enlightenment, Robinson Crusoe is a rational colonialist living in a utopian world. Also emphasizing the subjectivity in this modern subject, Shen Zufen intends to turn the values he perceives in Crusoe, be it his courage to embark on a perilous journey, to confront the unknown and his unyielding perseverance and resourcefulness, or his optimistic outlook conveyed through ambition, or his remaining steadfast in the original resolve, into shaping forces to arouse the sense of subjectivity among a populace that privilege the collective over the individual, to seed the notion of citizenship among those who are alien to concepts such as nation-state, and most important of all, to be modern. Thus, Shen transforms a myth of the Enlightenment ideology into an allegory for domestic enlightenment. In this attempt, the contradiction between modern values from the West and traditional Chinese values takes the form of tension between the individual and the collective.

In Defoe's text, the rationality of the subject is accentuated. As the story unfolds, the use of introspection and reason enables Robinson Crusoe to acquire various skills singlehandedly, which ultimately allows him to showcase on the island at a microcosmic scale the evolution of

human society, from hunting to farming and animal husbandry. Jean-Jacques Rousseau regards the desert island as Defoe's stroke of genius as it provides a platform to demonstrate the potentials of the seed of truth in a rational human subject. Rationality is as much the core of modern subject as individualism, the foundation of modern society. In Shen's translation, however, the emphasis is shifted to foreground Crusoe's courage, curiosity, and adventurous spirit in face of the unknown. What he intends is to retain the individuality of the individual without individualism.

Thus, in the translation, family replaces individual as the smallest constitutive unit of the society. The geographical seclusion of the desert island as well as the image of Robinson Crusoe as a lone ranger, with his connection with family and friends cut off, shape Defoe's text into a "defining text in the post-Renaissance trajectory of solitude" (Engelberg, 2001, p. 17), a story in which "the universal appeal of solitude" is central to its meaning (Watt, 1996, p. 167). In Shen's translation, the solitary rational modern subject is re-visioned as an individual embedded in the social order that is based on relationality. In a society that is "fundamentally rural," based on rituals and customs rather than law and reason (Fei, 1992, p. 37 and 42), this order, a hierarchical one, is believed to have reflected *dao-de* (the way and ethics), the essence of the world (Cai, 2009, p. 17).

Unlike the meandering account that emphasizes geographical mobility and presents merely a loosely related family in Defoe's text, Shen creates a highly respectable lineage with a web of relations implied for Robinson Crusoe, with his mother coming from "an old and respected English family" (Shen, 2018, p. 176) rather than "a very good family in that country" (Defoe, 1994, p. 4) and his eldest brother "a colonel in the English army and died in a campaign against the Spanish, a service for the King" (Shen, 2018, p. 176). The sacrifice implies the accumulation of honor, respect and responsibility in this family. To ensure the continuation of this tradition, Crusoe's father even plans a career in the law for Crusoe in the hope that he could follow his brother's example and serve the country (176).

Not only is Crusoe positioned in a tightly knit web of relations in the family but also this family is closely connected to the country. The sacrifice Crusoe's brother makes and the expectation laid out for Crusoe are often articulated as a reflection of the sentiment of familial and national devotion, which originates from the Confucian ideal of "cultivating the self, regulating the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to tianxia" with family, state and tianxia[1] being concentric circles and mutual fractals at the same time. This is the structure that forms the backbone of the Chinese vision of the world.

Hence family acquires special significance due to this concentric system. Defoe finishes his account of Crusoe's family life in two sentences, with his wife dead at the beginning of the second:" for first of all I marry'd, and that not either to my disadvantage or dissatisfaction,

[1] Zhao Tingyang updates this traditional concept in the modern context. Cf. Zhao Tingyang: *The Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of World Institution*. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2011; Zhao Tingyang: *A Possible World of All-under-Heaven System: The World Order in the Past and for the Future*. Beijing: China Citic Press, 2016.

and had three Children, two sons and one daughter: But my Wife dying..." (Defoe, 1994, p. 219). But Shen Zufen devotes the whole of chapter 13 to depict Crusoe's family life with great detail.

To leave or to stay, that is a question. Since familial harmony or domestic bliss does not prevent Crusoe from leaving home in the first place, the presence of a wife is not a reason strong enough to keep the husband who longs for travel home. That marriage becomes an "unexpected" twist in this adventure novel reveals the irreconcilable tension between the imperative to depart and the obligation to stay.

This tension articulates the translator's oscillation between or more accurately conflation of two grand narratives, that of the West and those validated by traditional Chinese society. This may account for the expansion of the narrative space, which allows Shen to give a new choreograph to the plot. In the translation, Crusoe's travel begins and ends in England, with Brazil, where he owns a plantation, serving as an important midpoint and stopover. The entire book comprises 20 chapters, with only one-third of the book that is from chapter 3 through 9 detailing Crusoe's adventure from the shipwreck to his return to England. Out of these 7 chapters, only three are assigned to the twenty years before Crusoe's encounter with Friday, among which two are less concerned with "make a living" and more with "adventure." Upon return, Crusoe marries, has children, and abandons his desire for further travel. It is only after his wife's death that he sets sail again for Brazil, then proceeds from Brazil to India, across Southeast Asia to China, then through Russia, and finally returns to England via the European continent. Chapters 14 to 20 cover this second journey. As a result of this spatial expansion, Crusoe's travels, originally confined to the transatlantic region in the Defoe text, are expanded to a global scale or to be more exact to a tianxia scale, transforming him from a lone ranger in the time of colonial expansion into a brave and fearless tianxia trotter.

Implicit in these constant displacement, departures, integration, and re-departures is Shen Zufen's intention to provoke the Chinese to move beyond the insular perspective of China's perceived superiority as the Celestial Empire and encourage the Chinese to be more aware of the global realities and to confront the changing world, to use the oft-quoted Wei Yuan's words "opening the eyes to see the world." For a long time, Chinese were basked in prosperity and a sense of pride. However, the Qing Dynasty's defeats in the Opium War and the First Sino-Japanese War shattered this illusion of invincibility. Shen Zufen gives a sharp critique to this complacency through Crusoe's foreign perspective. When Robinson arrives in China and sees the Great Wall, the local guide praises it as the world's greatest marvel and most impressive construction (Shen, 2018, p. 226). Crusoe, however, remarks that while the Great Wall may have been an effective protection against the Tartars in the age of cold weapons, it would be useless in the face of artillery attacks: "Upon hearing this, they seemed somewhat uneasy, and after leaving the pass,

they parted ways with me. From that point on, wherever I went, the locals remained silent. It was then that I recognized the weakness and cowardliness in the Chinese as underachievers, unfit for self-betterment" (226-227). Through this critique, Shen Zufen urges a shift from pride to self-reflection and openness to change.

Shen's admiration for the spirit of adventure as manifested in Robinson Crusoe seems to be ironic, for it was precisely under the drive of this spirit that European powers launched global overseas exploration and colonization, taking China as one of the targets. The admiration unfolds the strategy of sublation, retaining the valuable while discarding the undesirable. In other words, dismantle and strip the much desired ethos from the original context to appropriate them for one's own use. The critical issue of power dynamics is often addressed through this strategy. Hence the power dynamics in Defoe's text is significantly altered in *Jue Dao Piao Liu Ji*. Shen retains the representation of adventurous spirit while discarding colonialism and avarice. In the translation, Crusoe mentions colony in a fleeting thought in his global travel years after leaving the island. Even then, what he seeks is the fame of a pioneer that may be compared to Columbus rather than land, property or resources (Shen, 2018, p. 219).

Slavery is likewise downplayed and the master-slave dichotomy is transformed into master-servant relationship that entails elements of a familial bond. Power issues do not disappear, but they are overshadowed by other concerns. When Friday gets shot to death in chapter 14 on a trip to Brazil, a funeral is held in his honor: "Everyone on board respectfully bowed, and [Crusoe] ordered twelve cannons to be fired as a salute." (Shen, 2018, p. 218) Crusoe thus mourns: "Although he was among the servants, he was dutifully filial to his parents and loyal to the master... Every time I think of him, I cannot help but shedding tears" (Shen, 2018, p. 218). In the name of filial piety and loyalty to the master, the exploitative power dynamics are cloaked in an ethical guise.

The tears Crusoe sheds for Friday signify a fundamental re-vision: Crusoe is not only changed from an symbol of individualism to a relation-based individual centered on family but also changed from a man of sense to a man of sensibility. Emotional structure that is absent in Defoe's text becomes the mediator between contradictory values. Thus without downplaying his commercial motives, Crusoe is reshaped into a sentimental man abide by Confucian ethics rather than an homo economicus. He sheds tears of heartfelt sadness for the death of Friday, tears of remorse for failing to fulfill his filial duties, having stubbornly embarked on distant travels against his father's wishes (Shen, 2018, p. 177). He is overwhelmed with grief with "tears streaming down his face uncontrollably. He collapsed to the ground, crying out to heaven, wishing he could give his own life a hundred times over to undo his regrets" (179) when realizing his parents are dead and there would be no change of repaying them.

In these tears and sentiments, Crusoe, adhering to Confucian ethics such as filial piety, loyalty, righteousness, and reciprocity, becomes a courageous adventurer, sentimental filial son, loyal friend, devoted husband and virtuous master all at once. He send home gold dust from the profits of his first business venture to comfort his parents (179); he refers to his deceased former shipmaster as "the true confidant of my life" (204); he practices the way of forgiveness when urging the shipmaster to pardon the mutinous soldiers (203). Consequently, a story of an homo economicus breaking through established order to achieve colonial success and wealth is transformed into a tale of a successful Confucian merchant navigating a well-ordered world—marked by marital harmony and master-servant accord—while engaging in trade, travel, and adventure.

Evidently, while the translator makes substantial alterations to the original plot and characterizations, he opts for a less radical representation of the individual, cautiously navigating the tension between foreignness and domestication. His dismantling and reassembling of *Robinson Crusoe* partially rather than entirely disengages the narrative from its original value system. In this attempt to stimulate and energize the local imagination of the world in face of intense external pressures for fundamental transformation, Shen Zufen creates not a re-visonary translation but a trans-visionary one in which the vision of the world as well as of "the lived reality" (Ren, 2024, p. 181) transcends the vision of the original through the act of translation.

3

The dismantling and reassembling made by Shen Zufen is of course affected by the Chinese "hierarchies of value" (Venuti, 2021, p. 163). But these hierarchies themselves are dynamic rather than static. What prompts Shen Zufen to translate *Robinson Crusoe* is the intention to interrogate and challenge these hierarchies of value with an outsider's vision. The explicit political and ideological concerns behind the translative act enable the translator to exercise a larger degree of autonomy so much so that this type of trans-visional translation as represented by *Jue Dao Piao Liu Ji* exceeds the scope of either the instrumental model of translation or the hermeneutic model as Venuti calls them. Rather it falls into the category of nalai-istic translation.

Nalai-ism as a term first appeared in Lu Xun's short essay of the same title, published on June 7, 1934 in *Zhonghua Daily*. Nalai consists of two characters, 拿(*na*) and 来(*lai*), whose literal meaning is "to take over" or "to bring it." Lu Xun coined the term by welding together the most common vocabulary, almost a catch phrase, in everyday life with the imported expression of "-ism," which in itself may be deemed a form of nalai.

Using the metaphor of the new master of an old mansion, Lu Xun gives a vivid illustration to the generative, assimilative, and miscellaneous nature of the concept. He starts with a question: how would a poor young man react when he comes into possession of a grand mansion? He negates the attitude of either wholesale rejection in refusing to enter the mansion out of fear of being contaminated, or wholesale westernization or uncritical revivalism in accepting everything with the mansion blindly, or the even more radical nihilism in burning the mansion down. Instead, he advocates that, regardless of how one acquired it, be it deceit, theft, legitimate inheritance, or even becoming a son-in-law, one should simply take it, or nalai.

Nalai must be deliberate, which means one must "use one's brain, sharpen one's vision, and nalai for oneself!" (Lu, 2005, p. 40). The procedure of nalai includes to "possess and select" (Lu, 2005, p. 40). Where there is no possession there is no nalai. Lu Xun critiques both not willing to take and being afraid to take in cultural exchanges. He describes the former form of rigid conservatism as "shutting our door up" and "delivering to their door," standing respectively for outright rejection and conservatism or even Sinocentrism under the guise of active exchange. Also he warns against a third form, being intimidated by what is forcibly "sent" by others such as the colonizers to the point of being afraid to take. It is worth noting that nalai-ism embraces an openness for the mansion harbors a myriad of significations. It is as much a metaphor for the socio-historical reality of China at the time and beyond as for both traditional Chinese culture or, more broadly, the complex legacy of culture itself whatever its origin.

To possess without being selective is blind acceptance, an act in Lu Xun's eyes equivalent to "gleefully sneaking into the bedroom to smoke opium." One needs to have the "calmness, courage, discernment, and selflessness" to select. Perceiving culture as an assemblage of dissectable and reconfigurable elements of resources, the criteria for selection is grounded in historical efficacy rather than abstract ethics. While the essence of cultural heritage is like shark's fin that should be consumed and good for the health, certain dual-natured traditional morals or Western technologies are like opium that should be sent to the pharmacy to moderate its usage, and feudal ethics or colonial cultural dregs are like opium pipes that should be destroyed and utterly discarded (Lu, 2005, p. 40-41). These strategies in selection enable a play of and about what is being taken and turns nalai into a generative and creative act. The aforementioned Shen Zufen's strategy to divorce adventurous spirit from its original contexts and integrate it into local framework is a case in point.

Indeed, Lu Xun proposes nalai to explore how the blades of critique may be forged into a tool of renewal. He presupposes the nation of Chinese as the agentic subject in crisis whose survival hinges on constant critical evaluation and appropriation. Unlike the "foreigner's gaze" in a Shakespearean culture (Castro Rocha, 2020, p. 15), China's modernity crisis lies in its liminal state, grappling with how to regain the cultural confidence after the collapse of a long-held pride. He contends that:

> In short, we must take things from the outside. We must either use them, or store them, or destroy them. Then the master becomes a new master, and the mansion becomes a new mansion. However, the pre-requisite is that this person should be calm, brave, discerning, and unselfish. Without *nalai*, one cannot become a new person, and without *nalai*, literature and art cannot become new literature and art. (Lu, 2005, p. 41)

Nalai-ism is Lu Xun's dream of new mansion. It is more than an update in form and content. It should also be interpreted in the etymological meaning of modern, as a continuous process of social renewal and reconstruction. It is fluid, non-dogmatic, perpetually dynamic and unfinished. New master, new mansion, new person and new literature and art, the newness while suggesting Lu Xun's insistence and belief on the agentic subject's capability for critical self-reflection and reconstruction signifies that nalai-ism is a liberating force with self-renewing capacity. Meanwhile, it is a self-renewal strategy against cultural hegemony in any form. For although believing that the rigid feudal culture is the greatest obstacle to China's modernization, Lu Xun values western culture as an effective liberating tool to challenge local hegemony, he also rejects the hegemonic gestures of the West.

In all the rejections, possessions, and selections, nalai-ism breaks the linear power narrative and move beyond the issue of one-dimensionality in postcolonial discourse. It is neither an integration of a dominant system by a weaker one, nor a one-sided act of appropriation. Instead, nalai-ism offers a paradigm for multi-dimensional cross-cultural exchanges. Those who are capable of nalai are strategic thinkers and players.

Shen Zufen's nalai took place between 1890 and 1919, "the most vigorous era for introducing foreign literature [to China]" (Shi, 1990, p. 18), also one of the most active phases of nalai from the West through translation. It is generally concurred that there are four high tides of translation in Chinese history. Although the mention of the title "Xiangxu" (Luo, 2006, p. 3), officials responsible for translation and communication with foreign emissaries in the Zhou court (about 11th century BC-3rd century BC) was found in the "Offices of Autumn" section of the *Rites of Zhou*, the first high tide is the translation of Buddhist sutra from Eastern Han Dynasty to Tang and Song Dynasties. Chronologically, it was followed by the translation concerning science and technology in late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, the translation of Western works between the Opium War and May the Fourth Movement, and the translation of Western works in the last two decades of the 20th century.

Shen Zufen's translation falls on the third tide. Statistics show that in this era, in terms of quantity, translations of natural sciences ranked first, followed closely by the translation of literary works.[2] In *Newly Compiled and Expanded Bibliography of Novels from the Late Qing to Early Republican Period*, Tarumoto Teruo (2002) records a total of 19,156 entries of works created and translated between 1902 and 1919, including reprints, republications, and facsimiles, among which 5,346 entries are translated works, exceeding a quarter of the total (Teruo, 2002, p. 2). The seventh issue of *Xiaoshuo Lin* (*Forest of Fiction*) of 1908 listed 40 original novels published that year, while translated novels numbered 80. Similarly, *The Classified Catalog of New Books from Hanfen Library* documented merely 120 original novels whereas translated novels reached 400 in 1911 (Shi, 1990, p. 17-18). The translation of foreign literature contributes to the monumental transformation of Chinese literature in the 20th century, effecting a comprehensive and profound rupture with previous literary traditions unparalleled in Chinese literary history. Novel as a literary genre in the modern sense is also a product of nalai through translation. Translation transforms the old mansion of Chinese literature into a new one. As scholars observe:

> Never before had Chinese literature witnessed such radical formal upheavals as in the twentieth century... Classical poetry, ci lyrics, qu songs, and classical prose abruptly lost their canonical dominance; classical Chinese fiction virtually disappeared, while entirely new genres like modern drama, reportage literature, prose poetry, and the modern short story emerged ex nihilo. (Qian; Huang; Chen, 2019, p. 28)

It is precisely this transformative power of literary translation that informs Chen Zhongyi's retrospective analysis of China's century-long engagement with foreign literatures since the turn of the 20th century. He contends that "from the perspective of disciplinary history, the study of foreign literature and Chinese literature constitute two sides of the same coin, inherently inseparable" (Chen, 2019, p. 5). The profound and multifaceted importance of translated literature to modern Chinese literature leads to the recognition that translated literature has become an integral part of modern Chinese literary landscape so much so that some scholars propose "translated literature" as a new field of research within the discipline of Chinese literary studies. Translated literature, not peripheral mediation but constitutive praxis in the formation of China's modern literary identity, is being taken and possessed.

Jue Dao Piao Liu Ji is but one case of the nalai-istic translations at the turn of the 20th century in China. As a response to sudden external pressures in a time of existential crisis for the nation, these translations prioritize social-historical efficacy as the primary criterion. They no longer desire to serve two masters nor get caught in the so-called tragedy of the translator being torn between betrayal and loyalty. Instead, as is demonstrated by Shen Zufen, they utilize the tension, the undercurrent of violence resulted from foreignness in translation to impact and dismantle

[2] This dataset includes retranslations. For specific details, see Zhang Xiao, *Annotated Bibliography of Modern Chinese Translations of Western Works*, Beijing: Peking University Press, 2012. Special thanks to Jiao Xinbo for his assistance in compiling the statistics.

the closed structures of their own culture. Nalai-istic translation demonstrates not only openness and dialogic intent, but also involve the translator's play of and with the receiving culture's center, which as a trans-visionary creation gives birth to a new vision distinct from both the source text and the original receiving culture. This play, embodying a liberating force, renders the structure open. As a "highly charged, transgressive activity" (D'haen, 2024), it differs from deconstructive play that focuses on revealing the "structurality of structure" as a way to critique the "history of the concept of structure" (Derrida, 2001, p. 351–352). The intention for social-historical efficacy endows nalai-istic play with a clear purpose and moral stance that prevents it descent into nihilism.

As a historical specimen, Shen Zufen and his *Jue Dao Piaoliu Ji* serves as a trace and reminder: it is translation that translates China into modernity.

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Traduzindo para a Modernidade: O Nalai-ismo na Primeira Tradução Chinesa de *Robinson Crusoe*

RESUMO

Jue Dao Piao Liu Ji, a primeira tradução chinesa de Robinson Crusoe, é apenas uma das traduções nalai-ísticas na virada do século XX na China. Como uma resposta a pressões externas súbitas em um tempo de crise existencial para a nação, estas traduções priorizavam a eficácia sócio-histórica como critério primário. Elas não querem servir a dois senhores nem ser apanhadas na chamada tragédia do tradutor dividido entre traição e lealdade. Em vez disso, como se demonstra em Jue Dao Piao Liu Ji, traduções nalai-ísticas utilizam a corrente subjacente de violência resultante do estranhamento na tradução para impactar e desmontar as estruturas fechadas da cultura receptora. A tradução nalai-ística demonstra não somente abertura e intenção de diálogo, mas também envolve o jogo do tradutor a partir de/com o centro da cultura receptora, que, como uma criação transvisionária gera uma nova visão, distinta tanto do texto fonte quanto da cultura receptora original. Como um espécimen histórico, Shen Zufen e seu Jue Dao Piaoliu Ji serve como um traço e uma recordação: é a tradução que traduz a China para a modernidade.

Palavras-chave: *Robinson Crusoe, Nalai-ismo, tradução, modernidade*