

# A Study on the 1904 Chinese Translated Version of "*The Treasure Island*"

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**Abstract:** *Treasure Island* is a novel published by Stevenson in England in 1883. Because of its great literary value, it has become a must-read literary work recommended by the Ministry of Education in compulsory education. At present, many translations have been published. It was first introduced in China in 1904 (the 30th year of the Guangxu era). This translation was born in the special historical period of the late Qing Dynasty, which has important research significance, but it has not attracted the attention of relevant research in mainland China, and more research has focused on the new translation within Chinese domestic. Based on this, this study takes the scanning version of *Treasure Island* published by the Commercial Press in 1904 as the object, studies some features of this version. It was found that this version is a re-creation of the original text that is adapted to the culture of the country. The language form selects a high variety language with high communication ability, avoiding sensitive and offensive content, changing the narrative perspective, and making a condensed description at the same time. These experiences may have some help in countering cultural colonialism and protecting weak cultures today, and also make supplements to the translation research activities in the late Qing Dynasty.

**Keywords:** *Treasure Island*, Late Qing Dynasty, Commercial Press, Stevenson

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## 1. Introduction

China actively introduced foreign cultural achievements in the late Qing Dynasty period (after the 1840s), which aimed to arouse a transformation. The movement of translation is not only confined to western scientific and technological masterpieces but also involves literary works and other ideological fields. During this period, the early translators represented by Lin Shu (林纾), made many achievements such as the Chinese version of "*The Lady of the Camellias*". And then, "*Treasure Island*" has also been introduced to China, as the earliest Chinese version- the 1904 version - that has been seen so far. Today, *Treasure Island* has become a must-read literary work in Chinese compulsory education (from primary school to middle school). Moreover, the literary value of *Treasure Island* also has a strong influence among young people around the world. Due to the special era of the late Qing Dynasty, the study of this translation has not only literary significance, but also historical significance in Chinese literature research. Through a search on CNKI, with "*Treasure Island*" as the key term, 277 documents were retrieved. The

main research perspectives include literary plot interpretation, character interpretation, multi-perspective text analysis, the translation process, translation strategy, etc. But there are still few related studies, and most of them focus on recently published versions, they found that communicative translation theory in Newmark has its success. The Effectiveness of Skopos Theory for Guiding Translators. And they Explored the impact of external norms on the translation of various Chinese versions of *Treasure Island* as well as the manipulation of translators' behavior by specific social background and cultural factors. [4-6, 17-18] In short, no one has studied the Guangxu-1904 version of "*Treasure Island*". Antecedent research did not pay attention to the initial stage of the introduction of the *Treasure Island* into China and its historical background and specific practice. it only knew that *Treasure Island* already had a certain influence, so this article will study the epoch-making first Chinese version of the *Treasure Island* to fill in the historical details and trace the origin of the *Treasure Island* literature's early days in China and serve as a supplement to the translation studies about the late Qing Dynasty.

## 2. The Significance and Method of the Research

Based on the above information, this research will conduct translation research on the Guangxu-1904 version [15] of "*the Treasure Island*". After Eight-Nation Alliance invaded China in 1900, the Qing Dynasty faced the pressure of reform. At that time, the Commercial Press established the "Oriental Magazine", aimed to enlighten Chinese people, by widely reporting international events, promoting constitutional democracy, and saving the nation from western power. Along with this background, the 1904 version was translated by the Compilation & Translation Institute (商务印书馆编译所 abbreviated as CTI) of the Commercial Press (CP 商务印书馆). Therefore, its translation activities contain political requirements, and it is also a try of Chinese continental culture to contact and explore western marine culture, and it is also the use and transformation of early modern Chinese translators. It may be helpful to inspire how to engage with western cultures but also keep their own culture under colonial invasion. My research on the 1904 Chinese version of "*the Treasure Island*" can not only fill the gap of the literary translation of *Treasure Island* but also play an important role in assisting the study of the history of translation activities in the late Qing Dynasty. In the following parts, the translator's background, translation strategies will be analyzed. The research process mainly refers to some relevant historical data and relevant files and analyzed *the Treasure Island* Chinese book published in 1904.

## 3. Study Content

### 3.1. About the Translator

The 1904 Chinese version has no translator information. Only a CTI-compiled signature is left. From style and narrative way of re-creation translation, Mr. Lin Shu's translation works have similarities with the that of this book. According to the research of Chen Jianing (2019), it can conclude that this is not a coincidence (see the table 1), most of the important figures in the early Commercial Press were from Fujian province. [1] Among them, Minhou County was formed by the merger of Min County and Houguan county in 1913, and both belong to the Fuzhou city, capital of Fujian Province.

And according to Mr. Fei Xiaotong's theory of "Differential Pattern" [2], the connection between Fujian translators has become a kind of "community of literati", they related to each other academically and support each other in terms of shared interests. Therefore, although this book is not written by Lin Shu, it is handled by a Fujian translator with a similar provincial background. It can say that the translator is likely to have participated in the translation activities of Lin or Yan and others, or has been instructed by them, and intentionally imitated their strategies and used them for their use, forming the overall style of text translation.

Table 1. The stuff of the CP from Fujian province, Qing Empire.

Personal	Position	Domicile
Gao Mengdan	Director of CTI	Changle, Fujian
Zheng Xiaoxu	Member of the CP Board	Minhou, Fujian
Li Xuan'gong	Manager of CP head office	Minhou, Fujian
Wu Zengqi	Director of Hanfen library	Minhou, Fujian
Zheng Zhenwen	Manager of Science	Changle, Fujian
He Gonggan	Manager of Compliance	Minhou, Fujian
Lin Shu	Important Translator of CP	Minhou, Fujian

The major ideology of China at that time was changed from simply anti-colonial to learning western countries and thus saving the Qing dynasty from collapsing and saving the Chinese nation. It insisted on the importance of its own culture, although it advocated learning from foreigners, and used a practical attitude to "Chinese Learning as Substance, Western Learning for Application. Of course, there were limitations at the time, but later history has gradually proved that when facing Western culture, we cannot blindly follow the Western way.

This is neither in line with the country's actual situation nor in line with objective laws. As a disadvantaged culture, in the process of learning from Western culture, cultural colonization must be vigilant. Retaining its cultural characteristics can support cultural diversity to a certain extent. Extract the essence of foreign culture and combine it with the process of a nation's development. The epoch in which CTI is located has laid the reason for its author as an individual not being mentioned. These various factors also set the direction for the overall translation, and the translation strategy selection also surfaced. The translator is also the translator under the era, and the translation is also the translation of the era. It is a reference for today's translation.

### 3.2. The Style of the Translation

The translation of *the Treasure Island* in 1904 adopts a formal style close to Classical Chinese written language, which is consistent with the translation style adopted by Lin Shu and Yan Fu, and Many works published by the Commercial Press are in this style too. Did China only have the classical Chinese style? This answer is not so, before the end of the Qing Dynasty. Since the Six Dynasties, Buddhist books such as the Baiyu Jing (百喻经 Sutra of a Hundred Parables) began to adopt an oral style close to the spoken language for translation practice. Then, after the development from the Bianwen (变文 Buddhist preaching articles found by A. Steine) style in Tang dynasty to citizen novel style of Song and Yuan dynasty, and it soon became the vernacular Chinese written style that is relatively similar to modern oral Chinese, and it has gradually formed in the Ming and Qing dynasties and used in some famous masterpieces of that time such as *the Romance of Three Kingdom* (三国演义). This vernacular style, however, is not the same concept as of today's modern Chinese Mandarin.

The statutory national language movement in Asia first came out after the Meiji Restoration succeed in Japan. With the help of Japan's universal compulsory education achieve the propagation of the upper-class dialect of Edo, where the

central government is located. While it has only taken nearly a recent dozen years - after the reforming and opening up in 1978 - for China to achieve full coverage of compulsory education. Therefore, the translation at that time adopted a style that was relatively close to classical Chinese, both due to historical inertia and more realistic factors. This style is derived from the Northern Chinese language, but it is not an official language and does not have the basis for the whole society to read. For the common people in the northern Chinese, this style is more colloquial for oral communication, but the uneducated illiterate class cannot read it, and the educated class finds it too vulgar to read. While the Commercial Press's works mostly served the literate class with relatively high education, and the texts contacted by the reader class are mostly written in elegant classical Chinese, which makes it easier for its major readers to accept. In addition, the early missionary translation activities also had a similar strategy. The early Christianity preaching in China was mostly in vernacular style before they contacted the literati class. Later, when they build connections with literati, they gradually switched translation styles from oral Chinese to classical Chinese to achieve wider dissemination in society. From a view of language policy, Ancient China is in Diglossia. The classical Chinese language which was written in court orders is high variety and possessed supremacy, and colloquial Chinese or oral mandarin is only a low variety with less social impact, till 1911. The same case is that the Buddhist scriptures originally contains an affinity to oral language, for its doctrine of universal salvation for all. After entering China, Buddhist translators chose the written language system of the ruling class to preach to gain the support of the educated and even changed the way of their narratives.

Moreover, Qian Zhongshu once divided Lin's translation into deferent time stages and thought that "the Li Hentian" (离恨天) published in the second year of the Republic of China (A. D. 1913) was the turning point [12]. It was considered a swan song in the style of Lin's novels, so through the excavation of the important representative Lin Shu, we can know that the Chinese version of Treasure Land which have a style the same as Lin's former masterpieces truly and only belongs to that time. The translation style of literature, after entering the period of the Republic of China, was swiftly abandoned, and soon replaced by a more colloquial expression way. It was not valued for a long time after the founding of the Republic of China, but it seems to have its value now. Especially for a highly civilized culture, what choices did its intellectuals make when they encountered an empire more than itself, to fight that colonization from literature and to also learn its advanced ideology. The CTI reprinted a second edition in 1914 with no changes [14], while in 1929 the Commercial Press completely discard the previously classical translation style and adopted a new popular colloquial style to match the May Fourth Movement aroused by the left-wing. Subsequent editions have no substantial changes in language and style, and they are all in a modern colloquial style rather than Classical Chinese [7].

### 3.3. Omission of Details

The prosperity of marine empires such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Spain have led to expeditions and adventure stories with "pirates and the search for treasures" as the main plot, which are deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, especially the pirate figure of the one-eyed one-legged captain with a parrot.

In the 19th century, author Robert Louis Stevenson published *Treasure Island* in *Young Folks* from 1881 to 1882. Its Chinese name is "JinYin Dao" (金银岛), also translated as "Bao Dao" (宝岛), formerly known as "The Sea Cook: A Story for Boys". The work has been translated into many languages for a century, laying the basic elements of the "pirate" image, such as the treasure map marked with "X" as the treasure location, the pirate sailboat, the Black Spot (Black Spot, props that declare the death penalty for pirates), and tropical Caribbean islands with hidden treasures, and one-legged pirate sailors with parrots on their shoulders. It indeed contributed to many key images of the pirate.

However, pirates-related activity was not tolerated by the Ming and Qing courts. The *Treasure Island* conveyed a value of marine culture prompting adventure to the ocean as an origin of treasure, though these activities involved marine crimes. This is exactly in line with the main theme of the rapid accumulation of early capitalism through colonial plunder. Perhaps the author himself did not think of advocating colonial activities, but under the influence of the fashion of this era, the setting of various scenarios is very easy to have distinct characteristics of the times. But Chinese translators do not want this predatory-related content, which is contrary to the traditional Chinese values of self-reliance and mutual respect, to be imitated by citizens, and even if such content is translated, it will inevitably be regarded as indecent. It is also a risk for the translator itself.

The Haijin (海禁) or Sea Ban first appeared at the end of the 13th century. The Sea Ban aimed to stabilize prices, protect the social economy, and at the same time suppress the rebel forces. Although the fishing industry and commercial losses were caused, its status must be legally established. The Great Qing Legal Code (大清律) recorded: "Officials, soldiers and Citizen who go to sea for the trade without permission, and those who move to the outlying islands to live and cultivate, will all be capitated as a traitor" [13], and no need to mention that of pirates-related activity. Therefore, the image of pirates was neither introduced nor described too much in the Chinese version. The translation omitted the specific image in the translation and does not convey it.

### 3.4. Changes in Narrative Perspective

In the writing of the original text, the author Stevenson narrated from the perspective of "I", which is a typical first-person method. In the beginning, it has been pointed out that this text is a memory narrative made by "I" at someone's request, so it started from the recollection of "I", see Example 1.

In the Guangxu-1904 version, the translator changed the

narrative perspective to the third person and described it from a nearly neutral bystander stance. The re-creativity of translation has been hugely improved here. If the incident is taken as a shooting camera in a stage scene, then the perspective of the original text fixes the lens on "I", while that of the translated version is to zoom out the lens to a larger vision and thus become narration of another witness but not an omniscient perspective, from which one does not know the thoughts of other people in the same time and space, but only involves the description of the character's inner monologue and what he saw under the specific lens at then.

Two translations are provided here for reference and comparison with the original text. The first is the 1904 Chinese version, and the second is the English Back translation of it. We can more clearly see the changes or re-creations of the translation to the original text.

Example 1:

Original text: *I remember him as if it were yesterday, as he came plodding to the inn door, his sea-chest following behind him in a hand-barrow—a tall, strong, heavy, nut-brown man, his tarry pigtail falling over the shoulder of his soiled blue coat, his hands ragged and scarred, with black, broken nails, and the saber cut across one cheek, a dirty, livid white.*

1904 version: 一日, 有客至, 状似航海为生者, 面棕黑色, 体伟, 衣蓝色水手衣, 垢秽甚, 积污黧指甲, 颊有刃伤。

Back translation: *One day, a guest came, who seemed to be making a living from sailing, with a brown-black face, a great body, a blue sailor's suit with a lot of dirt, and dirty (on the hands) stains the nails, and a saber cut on his cheek.*

In example 1, all the actions of the captain are in the memory of "I", but they are not reflected in the 1904 version and are completely deleted, but this does not prevent it from conveying the functional purpose of the original translation. There are two things Through the memory of "I", described that first the appearance of the captain, and second the appearance of him. In this respect, the translated version describes these facts very briefly with the stingy attitude in using words. As far as the original form is concerned, the translation does not convey 100% of the original information, and original details are lost in the process. For example, the adjective (plodding) of how the captain got into the inn has not been conveyed, nor has the thing (sea-chest) carried by the captain been conveyed. 1904 version condensed it into "seemed to be making a living from sailing".

It can be said that it has achieved a more ingenious treatment. Chinese boatmen (for Haijin only allow Inland waterway transportation) is different from a foreign sailor. This kind of description has no concept for the readers of the target language. Therefore, these image details are not presented, but the social meaning that needs to be expressed is retained, that is, by seeing these things, we associate this person with people who depend on the sea for a living. And thus only an interpretation remained.

In addition, for the description of the captain's physique, the 1904-version directly sums up the three narrative words of "tall, strong, heavy" in the original text as "Wei (伟 great)".

From the explanation of the Shuo Wen Jiezi [for "Wei, Qi Ye"(伟, 奇也 unusual) and the Kangxi Dictionary for "Wei, Da Ye". (伟, 大也 big) [9, 16], it can conclude that this generalization seems to be refined and effective. The original text uses three adjectives, and its significance is that this person's body is extraordinary, and he is more prominent than normal, so "Wei" is a good generalization. The difference here is that it retains a refined abstracted image. Not the whole image.

In the following description, the description of the captain's braid is also omitted, and this description is included in the sentence "living by sailing". Because braids are meaningful to sailors, sailors wear braids for the convenience of work. It is said that people's hair is in weak acid, and seawater is more alkaline, which will cause hair follicles to shrink after washing hair. However, the freshwater source for a long-term voyage is more precious, and it is impossible to wash hair with fresh water. Therefore, they keep pigtails tightly wrapped around their hair, which can also prevent the growth of insects. This is a typical image of a sailor and a pirate. But for the late Qing Dynasty, this image was less prominent. During the Shunzhi period of the Qing Dynasty, the order of hair shaving was issued, and adult men generally wore braids. The typical navigator features of English culture have no significance in the social culture of the Qing Dynasty and will cause unnecessary explanation and annotation.

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### 3.5. Another Example

In the second example, several things were also conveyed, as soon as the captain came, he walked towards his dining table, secondly, one came and called the captain, and thirdly the captain panicked when he heard the voice. In the description of the translation, the ghost and evil images with obvious religious connotations are deleted. The retrospective and the translation "turned around, facing" (spun, fronted), which are limited to the original form, are more refined. One word is better than two words. It is not necessary to obtain a one-to-one correspondence between forms, but a general

correspondence between actions. In addition, compared to the original text, after the perspective of "I" was deleted as in the previous example, the psychological feelings of the protagonist are not described here. This choice seems to lose details, but in fact, the feelings of the protagonist are very important to promote the story. As "Occam's Razor" [3], new ideas should not be introduced if there is no need to add entities, and the introduction of ideas does not help to make things clear. Translation serves a specific translation purpose, which reflects the translator's meticulous work on the translation.

#### EXAMPLE 2:

Original text: *At last in strode the captain, slammed the door behind him, without looking to the right or left, and marched straight across the room to where his breakfast awaited him.*

*"Bill," said the stranger in a voice that I thought he had tried to make bold and big.*

*The captain spun round on his heel and fronted us; all the brown had gone out of his face, and even his nose was blue; he had the look of a man who sees a ghost, or the evil one, or something worse, if anything can be; and upon my word, I felt sorry to see him all in a moment turn so old and sick.*

1904 version: 顷之，船长自外来。昂然诣其早膳之桌，绝不旁顾，其人忽呼曰：毕尔，船长回顾，陡然失色，本棕黑，突变为青，而举止尽失措矣。

Back translation: *After a while, the captain came from outside. He went to his breakfast table proudly and never looked away. Suddenly he called out: "Bill", and the captain looked back and suddenly frightened, (his face) before is brown and black, but suddenly turned blue, and his behavior is totally at a loss.*

## 4. Conclusion

By studying some aspects of the 1904 version of the Treasurer Island, using translation history knowledge and analysis of the original translation, this paper draws some results that can be referred to, that is, firstly the 1904 version is relative to be the same as the translation activities group of Lin, Yan. And it has great relevance with them; The translation secondly also changes the narrative perspective from first to third; thirdly the translation has a generalization and summary of the form of the original text, but still realizes the meaning conveyed by the original text, and to an extent, the text is more refined, which also preserves the translator's moral and customs requirements of his own time. It is in line with the conclusion of former researches on Lin's translated novels, literature should educate ethics of a nation's traditional morality [8, 10]; and stylistically, the translated version strategically more prefers to catch readers with high impact, which served the purpose of translation that both propagating western advanced ideology and reserving customs, moreover some strategies are also developed around this purpose, which means that the translation itself holds the hope of conservative reformers to initiate political changes in China in the late Qing Dynasty but not a replica of the

western world (which soon became a systematical theory in Chinese modernization). And thus for these purposes, the Commercial Press replaced its published version with a new one under a new historical situation.

In addition, for the translation take social customs into account, and for the translation can be generalized and summarized, I think it coincides with some views of the feminist translation perspective that traditional theories regard the translation as female attached to the male which stands as the original text [11]. Thus, it discriminates translators and translation as second than original, just as the patriarchal system treats women. In the colonialist era, the original text itself with its culture was accompanied by the output countries invasion, that is, some ideologies hidden in the structure of the world unequal relation, threaten those pre-modern nations culture. In the face of today's Western neo-colonialism, Translators from disadvantaged nations should prudently mull original text, not blindly be bound by the superficial form of the original text, because some inconspicuous ideologies are internalized in their language narration.

At the same time, due to the length, more examples are absent. And specific translation theories are not inferred which is expected to be improved.

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