



Original Research Article

The Reception of Harold Shadick's Translation of The Travels of Lao Ts'an in the English World

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Abstract: As the masterpiece of late Qing novelist Liu E, *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* has received extensive attention from scholars both in China and abroad since its birth. This article intends to examine the reception of Shadick's version in the English world from three dimensions: comments on Shadick's translation, research on the novel itself, and the comparative study on the novel.

Keywords: *The Travels of Lao Ts'an*; Harold Shadick; Reception; English world

1. Introduction

In 1903, *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* was published in *The Tapestry Fiction*, one of the four major magazines in the late Qing Dynasty. It is the representative work of the late Qing writer Liu E. The novel sets Jinan, Shandong Province as the narrative background, and narrates the travelling of an itinerant doctor Lao Can (implying old and hopeless) to explore the social contradictions in the late Qing Dynasty, especially the view that "pure" officials mislead the country, and to seek people's social attention and recognition.

Compared with other translated versions of the novel, Harold Shadick's translation of *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* (hereinafter referred to as "Shadick's translation")^[1] is a popular one in the English world, and it is generally mistaken by scholars, such as Henry McaLeavy(1953), Bonsall G. W. (1954), as the first full English translation. This article aims at taking Shadick's translation as the research object, and study the reception of this novel in the English world based on the comments on the translation, analyses of the novel itself and comparative study of the novel.

2. The reception of Shadick's translation in the English world

In 1952, Harold Shadick's translation attracted wide attention from foreign scholars, and it also opened the way for systematic researches overseas on the English translation of *The Travels of Lao Ts'an*. The research perspectives of scholars start with the evaluations and analyses of Shadick's translation, and then elaborate on the content of the novel and the interpretation of Liu E's philosophy. Of course, translation and research are a complementary process, and most scholars' research on the novel is also both.

2.1 Praises and criticisms in mixture

After the publication of Shadick's translation, Henry McaLeavy (1911-1968) pointed out that *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* is

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With the proposal one belt, one road, a large number of overseas students are pouring into China. Although our country's innovative training mechanism for international students is not mature, with the continuous maturity and development of innovative talent training mode, our country pays more and more attention to international education. I believe that with the support of the national government and the joint efforts of colleges and universities, China's innovative mechanism will continue to improve, and more and better talents can be cultivated.

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one of the most famous novels in China and an indispensable literary document in the social history of the late Qing Dynasty. McAleavy considered that the Chinese-English model of the Shadick's translation offers Chinese beginners to learn Chinese without a teacher, so it is widely welcomed by western readers. The text in the translated version is clear and smooth, but is limited by the excessive faithfulness of the original Chinese text, so the translation has a sense of redundancy^[2].

Ai-li S. Chin's study on Shadick's translation is a mixture of comment and research. Ai-li S. Chin highlighted the academic identity of Shadick and pointed out that Shadick as a professor of Chinese literature in Cornell University, his academic influence in the English world has laid academic foundation for the dissemination and research of *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* in the English world. Translator's academic foreword at the beginning of the translation creates the space-time imagination material for the novel plot for readers^[3].

Bonsall considered that Shadick's translation is faithful and accurate, but due to the limitation of the characteristics of the Chinese syntax, the translation is slightly blunt and lacks fluency. On the other hand, Bonsall also elaborates on the deficiency of documents enclosed in the translation. It is particularly worth mentioning that Shadick does not mention Průšek's Czech version of *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* in 1947, which is an important document for research on the novel^[4]. Regrettably, the academic research on the translation and study on the novel is relatively few, mismatching the value and significance of the novel itself.

Lionello Lanciotti considered that this novel is excellent and Shadick's introduction in the translation spotlights the whole book^[5]. Just like the viewpoint of Bonsall, Lionello also considers the deficiency in mentioning Průšek's Czech version and research article, entitled "Liu O et son roman, le Pèlerinage du Vieux Boiteux", a major defect of Shadick's version.

In 1991, Timothy Wong introduced *The Travels of Lao Ts'an*, and considered Shadick's version provided readers with "a chatty and informative new Introduction" to the reprinting of the version. In addition, Timothy Wong also compares three selected renditions (including H. Y. Yang and G. M. Taylor Gladys' version, Arthur Waley's version and Shadick's version) of the second chapter of the Text Proper to highlight the excellence of Shadick's version^[6].

In general, scholars' critical research on Shadick's translation can be described as "praises and criticism in mixture". Scholars affirmed that Shadick adopted a series of foreignization translation strategies, such as annotations and illustrations, in order to retain the essence of Chinese classical novels in his version. However, from the perspective of target readers, scholars believe that Shadick's translation is limited by Chinese language structure, causing the translation in verbosity and lack of fluency.

2.2 Studies on the novel itself

After the publication of the Shadick's translation, Hsia, C. T. published academic papers on the novel. The typical one is "The Travels of Lao Ts'an: An Exploration of Its Art and Meaning", which aims to explore the artistic achievements and political significance of the novel. Hsia, C. T. believes that *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* lacks the integrity of plot and the theme; however, Liu E's management of narration, dialogue, and description shows himself an outstanding artist, rather than a fledgling, unconscious novel author^[7].

In 1994, Hsia, C. T. investigated on Liu E's life, representative works, the writing process of the novel, the social and political background of the characters such as "Yu Xian", "Gang Bi", "Zhang Yao" and "Huang Longzi", etc. In deep analyses. Hsia, C. T. believes that Liu E uses the character of "Huang Longzi" to highlight the philosophical belief of Liu E—the teachings and ideas of the Taigu School, which is the collection of traditional Chinese Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism.

In 1998, David D. Buck analyzed the nine characters of the novel, including "Lao Can", "Gao Shaoyin" and "Zhuang Gongbao", "Yu Xian", "Shen Dongzao", "Shen Ziping", "Huang Renrui", "Cui Huan" and "Gang Bi", Buck introduced the background identity, character characteristics of the above characters in the novel^[8]. However, Buck's character analyses ignores "Yu Gu" and "Huang Longzi" of Mount Taohua, the spokespersons of Liu E's Taigu thought in the Text Proper. Buck also discussed the place names described the novel, such as hotel layout, yamen, Jinan Mansion, Caozhou Mansion, and the virtual Mount Taohua, and all these scenes provide clues for the novel readers' to construct a space-time imagination and also offer the novel's social geographic context^[9].

Philip F. Williams discussed the novel from two parts, "Plot of the Novel" and "Critical Evaluation"^[10]. In "Critical Evaluation", Philip expresses that "Lao Can" is an artistic figure integrating Liu E's values, who advocates combining traditional Chinese thought with Western scientific and technological thinking to solve the social crisis in the late Qing Dynasty.

Scholars' research on the *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* itself focuses on the analyses of novel, narrative methods of the author, as well as the interpretation of Liu E's thoughts of Taigu School. It is a multidimensional investigation of Chinese classical novels in the context of Western literature. It is also the concrete manifestation of the continuation and growth of Chinese classical literature in the context of western literature and culture, which is beneficial to the exchange and communication of Chinese classical literature and western literature.

2.3 Literary and philosophical studies of the novel

Apart from the comments on Shadick's translation and analyses of the novel itself, scholars also put *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* in the research scope of comparative studies. Considering the differences between Chinese literature and western literature, scholars broaden the research field from translated version and novel itself to a wider area of comparative literature and philosophy, which is beneficial to both the development of Chinese literature and the intercultural communication of Chinese literature and western literature.

Hsia, C. T. explored the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western literature and philosophy and put forward four questions at the end of the article "Chinese Text: Narrative: Liu E's *The Travels of Lao Can*?"^[11], which arouses readers' deep thinking: First, Liu E is juxtaposed with many ancient writers, such as Sima Qian, Du Fu and Cao Xueqin, what do they have in common? Second, what are the differences between Liu E's novel and Chinese traditional novels, and from which aspect does

his novel differ from western novel? Third, what are the similarities and differences between Liu E's novel and Western political novels? Fourth, Chinese scholars regard *The Travels of Lao Can* as a critique of Chinese bureaucracy and Neo-Confucianism. How about Theodore de Bary's *Defense of Neo-Confucianism in The Liberal Tradition in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) and *East Asian Civilizations: A Dialogue in Five Stages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). Based on the translation of the novel and the study of literary ontology, Hsia C. T. further broadens the connotation and denotation of Chinese and Western comparative literature research, which have inspired scholars to conduct in-depth explorations of Chinese classical novels and Chinese literature from a broader field.

Timothy C. Wong (2002) examined the self-commentary of the novel, suggesting to put the novel outside the tradition of western fiction, and examining Liu E's self-commentary as a wild history outside the official history. Timothy C. Wong believes that Liu E's moral philosophy of Taigu School is the key to interpret the core idea of *The Travels of Lao Ts'an*, therefore, the analyses of the novel should start from a philosophical standpoint, a research model of comparative literature and comparative philosophy^[12].

In 2015, James Schall (1928–2019) quotes the last poetry lines of the novel. The poetry lines are "May all lovers under the sky achieve the marriage state; These things are fixed in heaven: do not miss your mate."^[13] The above poetry discusses love, freedom, loyalty, providence and miss. James Schall raises a series of questions to elucidate it: Can the marriage of lovers be free and still be "fixed" in heaven? Is it possible for us to "reject" or "miss" what ought to be? And if we do miss it, isn't that ending also "fixed?" But if it is not possible to miss our "mate," what is the meaning of our freedom? ^[14] As we can see that the original implication of the poetry lines are used to elaborate the existential philosophy, so as to analyze the paradox existing in life. Schall's study can be regarded as a model of Chinese and Western comparative philosophy research.

3. Conclusions

In summary, in recent years, scholars have explored the logical discourse of *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* and even Chinese literature and Western literature from the comparative perspective of literature and philosophy. The spiritual essence of *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* and Chinese classical novels are elucidated from cross-contextual and cross-cultural dimensions, which can be regarded as the frontiers of Chinese classical novels' intercultural exchange, as well as the forward direction of exchange and communication of Chinese and Western literature and culture.

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