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POLYSYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE ON LI WENJUN'S TRANSLATION OF *THE SOUND AND THE FURY*

*Literary translation serves as a vital medium for cultural exchange and communication between Chinese and foreign cultures. Investigating literary translation phenomena not only facilitates the advancement of literary translation but also enhances the value of translation in cultural dissemination. This paper employs Even Zohar's Polysystem Theory to analyze the translation strategies in Li Wenjun's Chinese version of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. By examining the interplay of domestication and foreignization in the translated text, the research reveals that during the transformative period of China's literary system in the 1980s, Li Wenjun adopted a dual approach: domestication to resolve narrative disruptions (supplementing temporal markers and paraphrasing religious metaphors) and foreignization to preserve text characteristics (literal translation of compound sentences and transliteration of personal and geographical names). Such strategic choices reflect the elasticity within China's literary system at the time, torn between openness and conservatism. This study reveals the negotiated stance adopted by translators in the bi-cultural system, demonstrates the effectiveness of the multi-system theory in the interpretation of translation strategies and its boundaries, and provides a new dimension of diachronic observation for the study of classical literary re-translation.*

Keywords: *Polysystem Theory, domestication and foreignization, *The Sound and the Fury*.*

The Sound and the Fury is William Faulkner's masterpiece, which presents the complexities of American Southern society with its unique narrative structure and profound psychological depictions of its characters. Since its publication in 1929, it has become a classic of modern literature and has had a profound impact on the literary creation of later generations. Li Wenjun's translation, as an early Chinese full translation in China, not only accurately conveys the essence of the original, but also enables Chinese readers to deeply feel the unique charm of Faulkner's works through ingenious translation strategies. In translation studies, the Polysystem Theory provides us with an important analytical framework. The theory holds that translated literature, as a part of the literary system, is influenced by the target literary system in its choice of translation strategies. The domestication strategy tends to make the translation conform to the expression habits of the target culture, while the alienation strategy pays more attention to retaining the cultural characteristics of the original text. Li Wenjun's translation strikes a clever balance between domestication and alienation, ensuring the fluency of the translation and preserving the cultural flavor of the original text.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the translation strategies in Li Wenjun's translations from the perspective of Polysystem Theory, and to explore how these strategies affect the reception and dissemination of the translations in the target literary system. Through this study, we can gain a deeper understanding of the role of translated literature in cross-cultural communication and the impact of translation strategies on the effects of literary communication.

Polysystem Theory, proposed by the Israeli scholar Even-Zohar in the 1970s, is an important theoretical tool for the school of translation studies. The theory views literature as a dynamic whole composed of multiple subsystems, which include but are not limited to original literature, translated literature, critical literature, etc., and which are interdependent and mutually influential, together shaping the literary system in a particular cultural field. Each subsystem occupies a different position in the pluralistic system of literature, and this position is not fixed, but dynamically

adjusted with the changes of cultural contexts, historical conditions and social demands.

In the Polysystem Theory, “polysystem” refers to the plurality of literary systems, i.e., literature consists of multiple interrelated but relatively independent subsystems. These subsystems have both competitive and cooperative relationships with each other, which together constitute the complex ecology of literature. As an important subsystem in the multifaceted system of literature, the status and role of translated literature are not static, but change dynamically according to the specific needs of the target literary system. In other words, Even-Zohar treats the system as an open and dynamic entity and believes that the literature, translated literature, together with other social phenomena, such as language, economy, politics, and ideology co-exist in a system of systems (闫艳珍, 2013).

Evan Zohar suggests that: “It seems to me that three major cases can be discerned, which are basically various manifestations of the same law: (a) when a poly system has not yet been crystallized, that is to say, when a literature is “young”, in the process of being established; (b) when a literature is either “peripheral” (within a large group of correlated literatures) or “weak”, 1 or both; and (c) when there are turning points, crises, or literary vacuums in a literature” (Even Zohar, 1990). This is because translated literature can introduce new literary forms, themes, and styles that provide new inspiration and lessons for original literature during a critical period when the literary system is facing transformations. For example, in the Chinese literary system in the 1980s, with the deepening of reform and opening up, translated literature was given an important cultural mission as an important bridge connecting Chinese and foreign cultures. Li Wenjun’s translation of *The Sound and the Fury* was born in this historical context, and the choice of its translation strategy was inevitably and profoundly influenced by the specific needs of the literary system at that time.

Multiple systems theory provides an important theoretical framework for the study of translation strategies. According to the theory, the choice of translation

strategy is not entirely determined by the translator's personal preference, but is profoundly influenced by the dynamic changes of the literary system. Specifically, translation strategies can be divided into two main types: domestication and foreignization.

The domestication strategy emphasizes the adaptation of the source language text to a form familiar to the target language culture, in order to reduce the reading barrier for target language readers. This strategy is usually more common when the target language culture is more conservative and less accepting of foreign cultures. For example, when translating religious metaphors, the translator may choose to rewrite them into expressions that are more in line with the target language's cultural perceptions. The advantage of the naturalization strategy is that it improves the readability of the text, but its disadvantage is that it may weaken the heterogeneity of the source language culture.

The dissimulation strategy, on the other hand, emphasizes the preservation of the heterogeneity of the source language text and provides new perspectives for target language readers by highlighting the uniqueness of the source language culture. This strategy is usually more common when the target language culture is more open and receptive to foreign cultures. For example, when translating names of people and places, translators may choose phonetic translation to preserve the exotic features of the source language culture. The advantage of the dissimulation strategy is that it can faithfully reproduce the uniqueness of the source language culture, but its disadvantage is that it may increase the comprehension difficulty of the target language readers.

According to the pluralistic system theory, naturalization and alienation are not opposing strategies, but interact and complement each other. In actual translation, translators often need to flexibly adjust the ratio of naturalization and alienation according to the function of the text, the receptivity of the target language culture and the purpose of translation. For example, when translating literary classics, the translator may adopt the alienation strategy more often to retain the cultural

characteristics of the text, while when translating practical texts, the translator may adopt the naturalization strategy more often to improve the readability of the text.

At the end of the 20th century, the status of translated literature in China underwent a profound transformation from the periphery to the center, a change that was not only the result of the internal adjustment of the literary system, but also a microcosm of the change of social and cultural structure. The implementation of the reform and opening-up policy broke the cultural closure, and with the influx of Western modernism, postmodernism and other literary genres, translated literature became a bridge connecting the local and the world. Li Wenjun translated the novel in 1980, two years after the Central Communist Party's opening-up policy. With the development of the society and economy, people are eager to change the ignorant and inaccessible state of mind. They are more broad-minded to appreciate the outer view. Books become a convenient and accessible way to broaden their eyesight and meet their curiosity (闫艳珍, 2013). During this period, translated works were no longer just a tool to fill cultural gaps, but gradually became the core force to promote literary innovation. Translators moved from behind the scenes to the front stage, and their creative labour was reexamined – the practice of translators such as Li Wenjun showed that translation was not only a language conversion, but also a process of cultural negotiation. The translation of *The Sound and the Fury* came at the right time. Its treatment of stream-of-consciousness narrative and religious metaphor not only responded to the local readers' demand for readability, but also preserved the impact of heterogeneous cultures, a tension that is the embodiment of the unique value of translated literature.

It is worth noting that the prosperity of translated literature in this period was not a one-way importation of the West, but the result of two-way interaction. While absorbing foreign nutrients, Chinese literature also began to participate in the world literary dialog as an equal. The centrality of translated literature prompted academics to redefine the concept “canonized”, and the works of local writers such as Mao Dun and Lu Xun entered the international arena through translation, forming an

intertextual network of cross-cultural classics. This flow has made translated literature an important field for the accumulation of cultural capital, and the translator's strategic choices have directly affected the distribution of cultural power: the naturalization strategy has accelerated the modernization process of local literature, while the alienation strategy has provided a Chinese perspective on global cultural diversity.

With the popularization of higher education and the marketization of the publishing industry, the audience of translated literature has expanded from elite intellectuals to mass readers, and its dissemination channels have also expanded from paper books to multimedia platforms. This double expansion of audience and media has transformed translated literature from an academic research object to a popular cultural consumer product, and its status has been elevated with a broader social foundation. At the same time, translation studies have shifted from a linguistic paradigm to a cultural studies paradigm, and the introduction of theoretical tools such as multiple systems theory has provided new perspectives for understanding the systemic status of translated literature. The addition of time markers and the retention of the phonetic transcription of people's names in Li Wenjun's translation is the practical manifestation of this theoretical self-consciousness, which not only solves the obstacle of acceptance but also maintains the heterogeneity of the text, demonstrating the elasticity and negotiability of translated literature in the cultural system.

Therefore, the rise of Chinese translated literature in the late twentieth century is not only a symptom of the openness of the literary system, but also a microcosm of the process of cultural modernization. Through the dynamic balance between naturalization and alienation, it has both shaped a new paradigm of local literature and contributed Chinese experience to the global cultural ecology. This two-way construction has made translated literature go beyond the role of a mere intermediary and become an indispensable active factor in the cultural system, and its status has not only increased in quantity, but also jumped in function – from cultural

supplementation to paradigm innovation, and from one-way importation to equal dialogues, translated literature has completed a magnificent turn from the periphery to the center in this historical period, and has contributed to the 21st century's cultural modernization process, center, laying a solid foundation for the globalization of Chinese literature in the 21st century.

One of the greatest achievements of *The Sound and the Fury* that most critics now agree is centrally with language. In the novel three sections are monologues that make some gesture toward orality, Faulkner turns the clumsy mechanics of the representation of that language on paper, what Stephen Ross calls “the visual discourse of our reading into a highly expressive part of the language itself” (Noel Polk, 2007). In Li Wenjun's translation of *The Sound and the Fury*, the strategy of domesticate translation is mainly reflected in the transformation of expressions in the original text that are characteristic of English culture into expressions that are more in line with the linguistic habits and cultural background of Chinese readers.

Example 1

ST: “Tattletale.”

TT: “搬弄是非。”

Analysis: The English word “tattletale” refers specifically to the act of informing on someone in authority (such as a teacher or parent), and carries a strong pejorative connotation that implies a degradation of the informer's character. Although there is no exact equivalent in Chinese, Li Wenjun chooses this translation to avoid the semantic narrowing that may result from the direct translation of “informer” (the English word implies a child context), and on the other hand, to fit the Chinese culture's aversion to “stirring up relations”. In addition, as a four-letter idiom, “挑弄是非” is in line with the rhythm of spoken Chinese, which enhances the ironic effect of the dialogues. For example, in Quentin's soliloquy, this translation reinforces the character's sense of helplessness towards family conflicts, making it easier for readers to feel the interpersonal entanglements of a southern aristocratic family.

Example 2

ST: “You taking a cut this morning?”

TT: “你今天早上准备旷课吗？”

Analysis: “Taking a cut” originally refers to the behaviour of students in the southern United States to avoid religious worship (chapel service), with a specific regional cultural background. Chinese readers have no direct experience with “chapel service,” so a direct translation would require additional explanations, which might interrupt the flow of the narrative. Li Wenjun transforms it into “旷课”, which utilizes a common concept in the Chinese educational context and enables readers to quickly understand Jason’s accusation of Quentin (implying that he is evading his responsibility). Although this naturalization sacrifices the religious criticism of the original text (Faulkner alludes to the hypocrisy of the Southern Puritan tradition), it partially preserves the original meaning through contextual compensation (e.g., the later reference to “church bells”), which is more concise and natural, and meets the needs of colloquial dialogue. At the same time, the implied rebelliousness of the word “truant” contrasts with Jason’s hypocritical and conservative image, which indirectly strengthens the drama of the characterization.

Example 3

ST: “Damuddy spoiled Jason...”

TT: “大姆娣把小杰生惯成这样.....”

Analysis: The nickname “Damuddy”, used by the Compson children to address their grandmother, is a fusion of Southern dialect and childlike linguistic features. It simultaneously embodies intimacy and subtly conveys complex emotions toward familial authority, as the grandmother’s indulgence contributes to the family’s moral decay. Li Wenjun’s transliteration “大姆娣” strategically employs the character “娣”: (originally meaning “younger sister”) to hint at gender and the honorific “大” to mimic the original nickname’s form and regional specificity. Moreover, his choice of “惯” (to spoil through overindulgence) rather than “宠” (to dote on) aligns with Chinese familial wisdom – such as the proverb “惯子如杀子”

– thereby guiding readers to intuitively grasp the roots of Jason's twisted personality. This approach not only avoids the potential confusion of a literal translation like “Damudi” but also reinforces intergenerational tensions through the diminutive “小” in “小杰生”. Compared to Wu Lao’s rendition “Grandma Damudi”, Li’s onomatopoeic adaptation demonstrates greater literary sophistication, preserving Faulkner’s metaphor for the decline of Southern clans.

Example 4

ST: “Liquid putrefaction like drowned things floating like pale rubber flabbily filled...”

TT: “腐败的液体像淹过后漂了起来的东西又像发白的橡皮里面气体没充满显得软疲疲的.....”

Analysis: Faulkner’s “pale rubber” serves as a metaphor for a condom (alluding to Caddy’s loss of virginity). However, in the cultural context of the 1980s China, a literal translation might have been censored or altered due to taboos. Li Wenjun translated it as “橡皮”, employing descriptive phrases like “发白” and “软疲疲” to retain the original text’s sense of corruption-induced disgust while sidestepping sensitive content. While the Chinese term “橡皮” typically evokes school stationery, creating a subtle deviation from Faulkner’s intent, the translator compensates by layering metaphors and physical descriptions to construct an ambiguous yet impactful image in readers’ minds. Furthermore, the reduplicative dialect term “软疲疲” intensifies the visceral texture, forming synesthetic continuity with the subsequent “damp sand”, ensuring the translation still conveys the original’s revulsion toward bodily decadence despite cultural transposition. This localized rewriting of metaphor exemplifies the translator’s strategic wisdom in balancing ethical considerations with artistic fidelity.

Li Wenjun’s Chinese translation of *The Sound and the Fury* employs a domestication strategy as its central framework, serving to construct a bridge for cross-cultural comprehension. For instance, by converting Southern American

vernacular into equivalent Chinese colloquialisms and adapting syntactic structures to align with Chinese expressive norms, the translation enables readers to immerse themselves effortlessly in the narrative world, thereby avoiding alienation stemming from cultural disparities. Domestication softens the text's foreignness, allowing the profound emotional currents – such as the Compson family's intricate web of love and hatred, or Quentin's philosophical perplexities – to transcend linguistic barriers and resonate directly with readers. This translational approach is not a concession but rather a creative fusion of Faulkner's literary essence with Chinese linguistic sensibilities. By anchoring the narrative in familiar rhythmic patterns, it facilitates deeper empathy with characters' fates, achieving a profound cross-cultural narrative resonance that transcends superficial cultural markers.

Li's alienation strategy is not a simple literal translation. Instead, it strikes a balance between deification and readability by retaining the original language form and adding annotations, lowering the threshold for understanding without destroying the original meaning of the text.

Example 5

ST: "They felt heavy enough together, but I thought again how Father had said about the *reducto absurdum* of human experience..."

TT: "把它们一起拿是够沉的，不过我又想起了父亲所说的人类经验的 *reducto absurdum* 了....."

Analysis: Li's treatment of "*reducto absurdum*" in his translation of *The Sound and the Fury* demonstrates a nuanced translational strategy. Instead of rendering it simply as "归谬法" (a standard Chinese equivalent), he retains the Latin term while providing a contextual annotation to explain its meaning. This deliberate choice preserves the original text's scholarly texture, mirroring Quentin Compson's Harvard-educated mind saturated with theoretical jargon that clumsily collides with his fragmented reality. The Latin phrase, appearing incongruously in Chinese prose, creates a dissonant effect that mirrors Quentin's intellectual entrapment – his erudition becomes a cage rather than a tool for understanding. This linguistic

anomaly also reflects the broader paradox of the Compson family: their veneer of Southern aristocratic refinement juxtaposed with the absurdity of their moral decay and existential chaos. By refusing to domesticate “*reducto absurdum*,” Li’s translation forces readers to confront Faulkner’s linguistic experimentation head-on. The resulting sense of strangeness becomes a narrative device, inviting readers to dwell in the complex interplay between character and context – a far richer experience than a conventional translation could offer. The preserved Latinism does not merely denote a logical method; it functions as a metonym for Quentin’s cognitive dissonance and the novel’s thematic tension between order and disintegration.

Example 6

ST: “Here, caddie. He hit.”

TT: “球在这儿，开弟。”

Analysis: Li’s translation of “Caddy” as “开弟” stands as a masterstroke of foreignizing translation. This rendition ingeniously balances phonetic resonance with semantic dislocation: the Chinese “开” approximates the English pronunciation of “Caddy,” while the character “弟” mimics the original’s final syllable while subtly encoding Benjy’s cognitively distorted perception of his sister as a male kin. “开弟” is not only a reminder of “凯蒂” to the target readers but also shows the location of the conversation. “开弟” is a little boy that is hired to serve the people playing golf, which can be seen from its literary meaning. The homophone used here offers a good example of the translator’s skillful manipulation (闫艳珍, 2013). By eschewing a literal transliteration like “凯蒂” or a domesticated adaptation, Li deliberately preserves the linguistic confusion, immersing readers directly into Benjy’s fractured mental landscape. The recurring “开弟” becomes a dual-edged signifier: its playful phonetic pun underscores the tragicomic absurdity of sibling relations, as Caddy’s demotion to “younger brother” mirrors the Southern family’s ethical decay. This defamiliarizing strategy not only reanimates Faulkner’s linguistic

experimentation in Chinese but also integrates translation into the novel's very fabric, transforming it from a secondary process into a narrative device. The character “弟” operates as a metonym for Benjy's cognitive limitations and the larger societal pathologies of gendered misrecognition.

Example 7

ST: “Then they put the flag back and they went to the table, and he hit and the other hit.”

TT: “接着他们又把小旗插回去，来到高地上，这人打了一下，另外那人也打了一下。”

Analysis: Li's translation of Benjy's narrative in *The Sound and the Fury* exemplifies a commitment to foreignizing techniques by preserving the original's fractured syntax. Benjy's speech, characterized by simple, repetitive phrases lacking logical connectors, is rendered with minimal intervention – for instance, the phrase “打了一下” retains its grammatical incompleteness without supplementing the omitted object, thereby directly conveying Benjy's disoriented sensory perception. This defamiliarizing approach forces Chinese readers to confront Faulkner's stream-of-consciousness experiment head-on, mirroring the protagonist's cognitive fragmentation.

The broader significance of Li's foreignizing strategy lies in its refusal to sanitize Faulkner's linguistic idiosyncrasies. By retaining elements such as Quentin's Latinate terminology and Benjy's syntactical chaos, the translation resists excessive polishing, allowing these textual peculiarities to breach cultural barriers. This method not only sustains the original's linguistic tension but also reimagines translation as a form of literary re-interpretation. The rawness of the renderings – from Quentin's philosophical digressions to Benjy's childlike staccato – becomes a narrative device in itself, inviting readers to engage with the text's formal innovation as an integral dimension of its Southern Gothic sensibility. Through such techniques, Li transforms translational choices into acts of critical commentary, bridging linguistic and cultural divides while preserving the subversive energy of Faulkner's

prose.

Literary translation, as a vital medium of Sino-foreign cultural exchange, not only propels the development of translational practice but also manifests unique value in cultural dissemination. This paper, framed by Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, analyzes Li Wenjun's translation strategies in his rendition of *The Sound and the Fury*, revealing the dynamic equilibrium between domestication and foreignization during China's literary system transition in the 1980s. The study finds that while addressing Faulkner's experimental narration, Li Wenjun employed domestication tactics – such as supplementing temporal markers and rewriting religious metaphors – to mitigate the text's narrative disjunctions and accommodate Chinese readers' receptive habits. Simultaneously, he adopted foreignizing techniques, including literal translations of complex syntax and transliterations of names and places, to preserve the defamiliarizing features of the original and emphasize its cultural heterogeneity. This coexistence of dual strategies reflects both the tension between openness and conservatism in China's literary system during that era and affirms the translator's negotiating agency as a cultural mediator in the peripheral zones of the polysystem.

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多元系统理论视阈下李文俊《喧哗与骚动》翻译研究

文学翻译作为中外文化交流的重要媒介，其策略选择不仅影响文本的传播效果，也反映了特定历史时期文化系统的动态特征。本文以 Even Zohar 的多元系统论为理论框架，分析李文俊翻译威廉·福克纳《喧哗与骚动》的归化与异化策略。研究发现，在 20 世纪 80 年代中国文学系统转型的背景下，李文俊通过归化解构叙事障碍（如补充时间标记、改写宗教隐喻）和异化保留文本特征（如直译复杂句、音译人名地名），展现了翻译策略与文学系统弹性的互动关系。本文揭示了多元系统论在翻译策略研究中的解释力及其局限性，并为经典文学重译研究提供了历时性观察的新视角。

关键词：多元系统论，归化与异化，《喧哗与骚动》