

Trans-vision of *Robinson Crusoe*: The Migration of a Literary Text

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Abstract: Robinson Crusoe is more than a myth of modern individualism as labeled by Ian Watt, it is an embodiment of Enlightenment ideology. Since this modern myth first arrived in China via Japan at the turn of the 20th century, it was intentionally appropriated. This paper proposes the use of the concept of trans-vision to examine the first published Chinese translation of *Robinson Crusoe*, *Juedao Piaoliu Ji*, to reflect on its migration into China and on how, in an attempt to continue the Chinese tradition of *wenren* (literati), translated discourses are expected to contribute to the renewal and transformation of society in a painful period of transition.

Keywords: translation, *Robinson Crusoe*, Shen Zufen, re-vision

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Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is among the first foreign novels translated into Chinese. In strict terms, *Ba li cha hua nv yi shi*, the translation of *La dame aux camélias* by Lin Shu and Wang Shouchang, was considered the first foreign novel translated and published in Chinese, although only 100 copies were made and circulated. Approximately at the same time, in the year of 1898, *Juedao Piaoliu Ji*, the first published Chinese translation of *Robinson Crusoe*, was completed though its publication had to wait four more years.

It is not a coincidence that *Robinson Crusoe* is among the first novels to be translated into Chinese. The turn of the 20th century, having witnessed the fall of the last dynasty in China, was a painful period of transition. In the confrontation between the old and the new, the call for seeking new voices from foreign countries increased. The figure of Robinson Crusoe stands for a significant new voice, a voice for the adventurous spirit.

Statistics reveal the popularity of the Crusoe story at the time: over 40 translations and

editions were published in the 20th century (Li 100), among which at least eight in the first decade (Sixing Chen 3), and three of which were published between 1902 and 1905. These translations were translated either from English or from 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. Despite these differences, these translations invariably incorporate Chinese visions, which means these translations are substantially re-visioned.¹ As Ottmar Ette points out, literature has all the knowledge of the world (4-7). Translated literature is no exception. Through a discussion of the change of vision, this paper explores how translated discourses, as an action and reaction towards the global changes of the time, are expected to contribute to the renewal and transformation of society.

Trans-vision of Social Responsibility

Upon its publication, *Juedao Piaoliu Ji* was signed with a pseudonym, “Crippled Young Man from Qiantang,” suggesting that the translator came from Qiantang, which is currently the city of Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang Province and that he suffered a foot disability. The translator’s original name was Shen Zufen. He was born in 1879 and passed away in 1910. Shen received a traditional education when in his youth. His foot condition, however, prevented him from pursuing courtly positions as education is usually aimed towards. Then he turned to traditional Chinese medicine. Like many other Chinese intellectuals, Shen was embittered by China’s defeat in military confrontations since the First Opium War. Believing that it is his responsibility as a *wenren* or literati to contribute to the prosperity of China, he learned English and translated a number of works with the hope to open a window to the world outside of China and to enlighten the Chinese with new ideas and new visions. *Juedao Piaoliu Ji* is one of these works he completed at the age of 19.

The trajectory of Shen’s life, the story of abandoning the career of a doctor for a writer in particular, represents a typical narrative of responsibilities for Chinese *wenren*. Lu Xun, the literary giant in modern Chinese literary history, made the same choice years later, which consequently becomes a powerful metaphor for that transitional period of time. Lu Xun explained his choice as the result of prioritizing the social responsibility of *wenren* to free the mind and renew the national spirit. Interestingly, another metaphor he used and helped to popularize, the metaphor of “medicine” also appeared in the preface to *Juedao Piaoliu Ji*, claiming that Shen “is particularly fond of [the novel], hoping to use it as the medicine to cure our countrymen” (Shen 171).

The metaphors of sickness and medicine, individual-related as they seem to be, are used to signify the weakness and strengthening of the country. In other words, the weakness of the individual body alludes to the crisis of the country. Underlining the often underrated social value of the translation of foreign literature in China, these metaphors reflect the long-held doctrine of

taking literature as the vehicle of *Dao* (文以載道), suggesting the belief in the pedagogical value of literature. Leading intellectuals of the time such as Liang Qichao and Lu Xun believed that to solve the crisis, new discourses for change are compulsory.

The dichotomy between old and new is prevalent in the social discourses at the time. While Liang emphasized the social function of new novels, Lu Xun argued that the Chinese should seek new voices and visions from foreign countries (5: 68). This newness is achieved largely through the mediation of translation. Recognizing translation's capability to intervene in reality, it is believed that through the circulation of translated literature, a new mentality and spirituality will be created so that a common knowledge will be reached on certain issues. Translation then becomes a strategy to react and cope with the fundamental changes happened in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

As the translation of *Robinson Crusoe* demonstrates, it is an act that intervenes the shaping of the public imagination of an ideal subject. The admiration and promotion of the figure of Robinson Crusoe, regarded as a representative of the adventurous spirit, is part of these efforts to seek new discourses. Robinson Crusoe stands for an image of the "new man" who is courageous and perseverant in the face of the unknown and uncertain. This image serves as a correction to a cowardly and weak representation of the Chinese. Such advocacy, focusing on the cultivation of personal character and conduct, aims at "inspire[ing] the Chinese to be adventurous and enterprising," and to "wak[ing] the 40 million slumbering Chinese people up" through enhancing personal vision of the world and subsequently enhancing national strength (Shen 171).

Shen's translation in this case is a highly politically motivated and future-oriented translation, articulating the translator's vision of and anticipation for the future of China. It is a combined edition of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Farther Adventures*. The entire translation consists of 20 chapters, with chapters 1 to 13 based on the content of *Robinson Crusoe*, and chapters 14 to 20 on *The Farther Adventures*. The translated book contains merely around 30,000 Chinese characters. If translated back into English, it would comprise around 15,000 English words. Heavy abridgements and appropriations, therefore, are inevitable. For instance, while emphasizing the courage and perseverance in face of the unknown and the dangerous, Shen downplayed the economic and colonial intentions that are fundamental to the original work; while preserving the plots of various adventures, details concerning labor and psychological descriptions were greatly reduced. As some critics point out, he replaced the merchant ship in Defoe's original with a battleship as a response to the reality of warfare and coercion through force (Shi 58-59). These modifications disclose the political intentions of the translator. Guided by these intentions, Shen's translation underwent fundamental structural changes: the ethical framework of the story is shifted from risk-taking for self-interest in Defoe's work to risk-taking for national service.

If we accept the assumption that there are different forms of reality and that literature is about lived reality, the translation of literature may offer different visions of this lived reality through the mediation of languages. In essence, a translation may be a trans-vision, that is, translation as re-vision, entailing by nature the change of visions due to the different languages involved. Re-vision

is an act of retelling with different eyes. Adrienne Rich deems re-vision as a politically rebellious act in the feminist context, crucial to the awakening of female consciousness. Re-vision, as she perceives it, is “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (90). As part of the “awakening” experience, re-vision marks a rupture with the past. “We need to know the writing of the past,” Rich explains, “and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us” (91). For Rich, this rupture marks the moving away from tradition, a rebellion to tradition at the most, in which temporal distance or a sense of history is crucial. But what if translation enables the rupture to occur outside of the given tradition of the original text as the case of *Juedao Piaoliu Ji* discloses, that is, being transplanted and relocated into a context that is essentially different from a logocentric context?

The mediation of translation, enabling the migration of text through the media of language, expands the scope of reference for the “fresh eyes.” They may be eyes from other traditions, which allow the act of seeing through the lens of different paradigms, be they cultural or civilizational; they may be eyes that are eager to learn and ready to assimilate selectively. In this context, rupture simply connotes difference, no longer confined to a continuous or inherited tradition, with the political signification in Rich’s definition removed. Distance still matters, but not necessarily temporal. The new critical direction may well be derived from cultural relocation as long as the new version challenges and reveals the incompleteness of the original structure or center and releases the potential and possibilities for free play.

Trans-vision thus refers to the translation that constructs and projects intentionally or unintentionally a vision of the world, of the lived reality that transcends the vision of the original through the act of translation. This transcendence contains a multilateral relationality, transcending both the vision of the original work and that of the translated. By definition, trans-vision is transcultural, transareal, intertextual, and reflexive. Being generative and constructive, a trans-vision may enrich the old text, fulfilling “the art of addition in development” (Zhongyi Chen 6).

In the case of *Juedao Piaoliu Ji*, the trans-vision is *nalai*-istic. *Nalai*-ism is a concept coined by Lu Xun. *Nalai* is one of the most frequently used daily phrases consisting of two Chinese characters, 拿 (*na*) and 来 (*lai*), whose literal meaning is “take over” or “bring it.” Lu Xun coined this 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 a new master of an old mansion, he gives a vivid illustration to the generative, assimilative, and miscellaneous nature of the concept:

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. (6: 41)

Taking constant renewal of the local literature and art as the aim, the principle of *nalai* is proposed as a response to the oscillation in Chinese society's attitudes toward the western world between "shutting our door up" and "delivering to their door." With no intention to oppose "delivering" or self-promotion to the West, Lu Xun, however, believed that the imperative for China at that critical moment is to *nalai*, to take over, to renew the thought and thus renewing the society. For this purpose, he proposed to *nalai* while observing the traditional Chinese principle of etiquette, courtesy, and reciprocity. Since then, *nalai*-ism becomes synonymous with selective assimilation for improvement and has been a slogan widely circulated and used in Chinese society until today.

Shen's trans-vision of *Robinson Crusoe* encapsulates the principles of *nalai*-ism. Crusoe's image has deeply penetrated Western consciousness and become part of the collective unconscious, even a modern Western myth. As a desirable object of *nalai*, the translator removes the elements that have little to do with the expression of his political intentions. The value of this myth for Shen is therefore two-fold: the adventurous enterprising spirit it embodies and the sense of hope it passes on.

As a myth of Enlightenment ideology, Robinson Crusoe is shaped into a superhuman who is capable of anything as long as he looks inside for the inner light of reason, the seed of truth. His rationality, capability, and above all, enterprising spirit are precisely what the Chinese *wenren* admired in the late 19th century. The First Opium War, a most crucial event in modern Chinese history, dragged China into the vortex of modernity as defined by the West. This war also set up a violent model for the following contact between China and the West. Failures in the battlefield led to a painful recognition of loss and a painful insight into the incompleteness in the Chinese vision of self. Various slogans emerged during this period such as "save the nation and protect the people" and "save the country from destruction and strive for survival" which witness to the shattering of the complete vision of the world offered by Tian-Xia.

The adventurous as well as the enterprising spirit in *Robinson Crusoe* when transplanted in Chinese culture are (mis-)represented as correspondent to self-empowerment and attempting the impossible, noble spirits repeatedly emphasized in canons such as *Book of Changes* and *The Analects*, enactments of qualities essential for *Junzi*, the supreme ethical level of human existence. Certainly, Shen's admiration for the "spirit of adventure" as manifested in Robinson Crusoe and the removal of colonialism intrinsic to the myth are rather ironic. For it was precisely under the drive of this spirit of adventure that European powers launched global overseas exploration and colonization, taking China as one of their targets.

Robinson Crusoe is as much an adventure story as an island story that passes on a sense of hope. Shen transforms this sense of hope into a future-oriented vision for life. The island is a sign for hope and possibility as long as we agree with Gilles Deleuze in equating the desire for the island with the desire for separation to start anew (6). *Robinson Crusoe* masterfully delivers this sense of hope. By confirming the possibility of a happy life through one's own efforts, the positive ending that Defoe provides generates a vast space for hope, setting up an exotic-happiness model for life (Ren 499). The optimism and aggressiveness shown in the figure of Crusoe echo

the resilience and optimism inbuilt in the Chinese cultural spirit, although they may differ in its connotation and nature. With the benefit of hindsight, we may well say that this optimism in the novel needs to be understood and examined together with the critique of modernity. But the Chinese *wenren* as represented by Shen at the time were too eager to learn and assimilate from Europe. In the spirit of *nalai*, they chose to overlook the problems.

In this context, foreign literature became a means of translating the world into China. To be more specific, translation has become a strategy, a response towards the violent contact, an activity against a sense of fragmentation and incompleteness, an act to provide the cure for the disease, and most important of all, to usher in new visions of the world that is expected to empower the spirit and mentality of the Chinese.

The *Nalai*-istic Play in *Juedao Piaoliu Ji*

Christianity, slavery, and colonialism, inbuilt in European history, constitute the British vision of the world in *Robinson Crusoe*. To re-locate the text in a Chinese context for didactic purposes, Shen adopted the strategy of domestication in his trans-vision, creating an adventure story based on the vision that takes family rather than the individual as the unit of society. As Shen perceives it, the individual is embedded in the community of family; that is, the individual is an individual within the family, not an individual free from the family structure. The realization of the value of the individual, be it for independence or freedom, should not be confined to the good of the individual per se. Instead, it is realized within the family structure for a greater good. Thus, unlike Defoe's Robinson Crusoe who departs from a definite place to explore and colonize in a faraway place with an unknown destination, Shen's protagonist leaves with a clear intention to return, which renders his adventure a limited one.

Shen's re-location or *nalai*-istic play starts with the title which he claimed to have borrowed from the Japanese translation by Takahashi Yulo. The title "*Juedao Piaoliu Ji*" may be roughly translated back into English as "The Adventures of Drifting to the Isolated Island." "Jue dao" in Chinese means "isolated island." By emphasizing detachment and separation, "jue dao piao liu," drifting to the isolated island, diverts attention to the harshness of the surroundings and makes the enterprising spirit of the protagonist distinctive. Eliminating Robinson Crusoe the name of an individual, from the title and replacing it with an event instead, Shen intentionally downplays the individualism that is crucial to the original text and highlights the adventure plot.

By focusing on adventurous events rather than characterization, Shen's trans-vision not only appeals to traditional Chinese narrative with various twists and turns in plotting, thus creating a sense of familiarized freshness, but also attempts to find the balance between a world based on individualism as is eminent in Defoe's text and the traditional Chinese imagination of the world as concentric rings. This Chinese imagination of concentric circles about the world is backboned by the ethical structure represented by Confucianism. Ridding the story of religious elements, Shen

retains, moderates, and contains the enterprising spirit of the original mythic hero through the substitution of the European religious framework in Defoe's narration with this ethical framework rooted in Chinese culture, thus reconstructing an image of an idealized rational figure that meets the expectations of the Chinese readership.

Although the trans-vision is entitled *Juedao Piaoliu Ji*, the spatial dimension of the story is not confined to the isolated island. Crusoe travels at a global scale, visiting Brazil, Trinidad, Africa, China, India, Russia, and European countries, among others. In this global trotter, we perceive an aspiration to seek changes and break free from the status quo, which evidently is an articulation and transplantation of the translator's desire.

Transplanting a global travel story into a society rooted in the soil, therefore, is foreign to high mobility, and to propagate the adventurous spirit of the individuals is, in itself, a paradoxical effort. Shen makes significant modifications to balance the need for the adventurous spirit of individuals and to downplay individualism. This reconstruction is structural and non-Eurocentric.

According to Fei Xiaotong, "Chinese society is fundamentally rural," based on rituals and customs rather than law and reason (37, 42). Intrinsic to such a society is a sense of order or norm obtained through familiarity with these ritual and customs. This order is largely hierarchical. Cai Yuanpei summarized the Chinese vision of the world as follows: "The essence of the world is *dao-de* (the way and ethics). When crystalized in the physical world, it is hierarchical order" (17). Removing elements that he considered irrelevant to the renewal of the national spirit such as religion and slavery, Shen constructs the Chinese-style social order.

Shen starts his narration with an ordered rather than a meandering account of the family background of Robinson Crusoe:

I was born in York in the year 1632. My father was a native of Bremen (now part of Germany), who had made his fortune in the mercantile trade and settled in York. My mother was a member of the Robinson family, an old and respected English family. She bore three children, and our family took the surname "Crusoe." I was the youngest and was originally named "Kreutznaer." But as this name was common among the English, I changed it to "Crusoe." My eldest brother became a colonel in the English army and died in a campaign against the Spanish. My second brother left home to travel abroad and has been missing ever since, his fate unknown.

As I grew older, I began to share my second brother's ambitions and constantly attempts to ask my father's permission to leave home. (Shen 176)²

It is typical for an autobiography to start with a self-introduction or introduction of the background. Defoe's original introduction merely presents a loose family structure while putting an emphasis on geographical mobility whereas Shen weaves a tightly knit family structure and creates an impression of decent continuous lineage. Robinson Crusoe's mother was a member of the Robinson family, "an old and respected English family" (176) rather than "a very good

family in that country” (Defoe 4). While old and respected in the Chinese context indicates a good lineage, they also imply that this is likely a family that shoulders more than their due responsibilities towards the community and the country. As adjectives that convey positive implications, “old” and “respected” establish and confirm a social order that is readily acceptable to the Chinese readership.

Not only does Crusoe’s family enjoy a long history and have a good reputation, which is essential in acquaintance society as Chinese society is, family members are close to each other with everyone conforming to their respective position in the hierarchy. According to this account, the mother gives birth to three children, who are invariably ambitious. It seems that ambition and an adventurous spirit are in the blood of the family. Thus, a close bond between family members is created. Although there is no mention of brotherly respect, following the elder brother’s aspirations conforms to Confucian ethical norms. This bond between family members is further strengthened through their sense of responsibility towards the family and country. Unlike Defoe’s narration which simply details the father’s persuasion against the son’s desire for overseas adventures, in Shen’s version, the narrator constantly asks for permission to leave home. The switch of perspective provides evidence that the narrator shoulders his responsibility towards the family by paying due respect to his father as is required by the Chinese familial order.

Family-leaving is a significant symbol in modern Chinese literature, usually signifying the break with or breakthrough in the continuous tradition as well as the possibility for redemption. Given that *Juedao Piaoliu Ji* unfolds within the traditional ethical framework, family is not represented as a hindrance or fetter to the newness as it is in the works of Cao Yu and Ba Jin. Instead, it is more of a shelter that provides structural and systematic support. Family-leaving is associated with self-realization that is not based upon rebellion but is a result of negotiation and compromise. Shen’s Crusoe’s departure from home marks a breakthrough in tradition instead of break with the tradition.

This representation of and respect for familial order is a partial fracture of the social order in which responsibilities towards society are as important as responsibilities towards the family. Traditional Chinese configuration of tian-xia³ or the cosmos as a concentric circle structure, in which family is considered a fractal of country, and country of the world. The admonition from Crusoe’s father embodies such a conception and expectation:

Now I have commanded you to study law, and you will benefit greatly from it. You can avoid the dangers of the stormy sea of life and learn the principles of self-cultivation. Once you become proficient in it, you can contribute to the country or become a leading figure in the legal community. Isn’t that better than traveling around? (Shen 176)

Serving the country or the community as the purpose of education and cultivation is a shared ideal in Confucius ethics. Mentioning the elder brother’s involvement in royal affairs testifies to this ideal and aligns with the expectations of Chinese people who have been educated since

childhood to “cultivate one’s moral character, to bring order to the family, to rule the country and to pacify Tian Xia” in the imagination of a concentric world order.

With this world order in place, however, it is Shen’s intention to inspire the challenge to the status quo through the figure of Robinson Crusoe. Crusoe’s silent departure and leaving his family behind to explore an unknown world in Defoe’s work marks a rupture with the established social order. But such a decisive leave, highly offensive and considered heartless and ungrateful in the Chinese eye, is more often than not labeled unfilial. The code of conduct “when parents are alive, do not travel afar; if you have to travel, you need to inform them your whereabouts” (Yang 40) from *The Analects* eloquently articulates the Chinese attitude in this scenario. The second part, largely concerned with the emotional need to reassure the parents, emphasizes the responsibility to fulfil filial duties which should not be hindered by spatial distance.

If Robinson Crusoe is a *homo economicus* and his adventure is fundamentally driven by economic interests and colonialist intention, it is logically reasonable that he needs to stay away from a life of sentiments. When Shen re-locates the story into the Chinese context, there clearly is a tug-of-war between the forces of conformity and the forces of dissociation. This tug-of-war may explain why Shen incorporates the adventures described in *The Farther Adventures*. The constant displacement, departures, integration, and re-departures resolve or at least mitigate the conflict between conformity and dissociation, between family sentiment and individualism, and more importantly highlight his world-traveling ambitions and adventurous spirit, while still adhering to traditional Confucian ethics as formal norms. Given the significance of emotional needs and emotional connections in Chinese culture, Shen uses emotion, which is constantly linked to righteousness, as the adhesive or binding agent to moderate Crusoe’s gesture of breaking off with the family while diverting attention from the desire for exploration of the unknown, thus rendering his departure acceptable.

Resorting to the common strategy in the representation of farewell scenes in classical Chinese literature, Shen’s trans-vision turns the unnoticed leave in the original into a tearful and hesitant farewell loaded with a strong sense of guilt and self-blame:

Although it is good to receive my father’s guidance at home, I have turned a deaf ear to it. I know that I have repeatedly disobeyed my father’s orders and will soon offend *tian*. Fortunately, I am still young and can leave his side for a while. I will repay his parental grace and kindness in the future. But when thinking that my parents are getting old and lonely, I cannot help but shed tears of sorrow. My father also leaves with a heavy heart. The date of departure is approaching. I plan to pack up and leave in a few weeks, and I will not be able to listen to my parents’ advice. In quiet contemplation, I unconsciously clutch my chest and sigh deeply. (Shen 177)

Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* places the emphasis on individual adventure by cutting off family connection or constraints, while in this social structure of “self-cultivation, governance, and

peace,” a person’s value lies in serving the country (loyalty) and repaying parents while staying by their side (filial piety). That his father leaves with a heavy heart informs the reader that this Robinson Crusoe departs with his father’s consent and there is no intention to sever ties with the family.

The lack of emotional ties with family and others in *Robinson Crusoe* is obvious. This disconnection is unacceptable in a culture that holds family as religion if we have to apply the concept of religion here to clear things up. Indeed, when Shen’s Robinson Crusoe leaves home, he leaves with the intention to come back and repay the parental grace. He does come back and more importantly marries, which of course predicts continuous lineage in the family tree. This sense of continuity is crucial to Chinese culture.

As is expected, spousal relations as well as marriage are viewed differently than in Defoe’s original. Defoe’s Crusoe describes his family as follows:

In the mean time, I in Part settled my self here; for first of all I marry’d, and that not either to my Disadvantage or Dissatisfaction, and had three Children, two Sons and one Daughter: But my Wife dying, and my Nephew coming Home with good Success from a Voyage to Spain, my Inclination to go Aboard, and his Importunity prevailed and engag’d me to go in his Ship, as a private Trader to the East Indies: This was in the Year 1694. (219)

Among the four sentences quoted above, the second is all he has to say about family, and his wife dies at the beginning of the third. But Shen’s Robinson Crusoe recounts a harmonious scene of family life, infused with affection and admiration. He recounts:

Mine was a gentle wife and our family life was as harmonious as fish in the water. We had three children. [...] My wife was also thrifty and had a good handle on managing the household. Everything she did was in good order. What can be more joyful than a husband and a woman following each other? The wisdom of my wife got me out of the thinking of travelling. Her wisdom was better than the admonitions of my parents, teachers, and friends. When we were free, we would talk about worldly matters and she always shared my opinions. There was no greater affection and loyalty between husband and wife than ours. Her unexpected leave separated us after seven years of marriage, leaving young children yet to be grown up. Vast as the world is, why can’t couples stay together as a round jade mirror that is never broken? (214-215)

In this idealized representation of family life perceived from the perspective of a husband, the hierarchical dimension in social life is naturalized rather than rationalized through sentiments. Given the Chinese philosophy of the unity of nature and humanity, the natural state is considered the most desirable. Shen invokes the conventional metaphor of fish in water, a metaphor in accordance with the way of nature, to stimulate a positive imagination of a natural, comfortable,

and harmonious relationship. When used to describe a marital relationship, this metaphor also implies intimacy. The jade mirror is another conventional metaphor for reunion. In Chinese literature, the jade mirror is another name for the full moon, which is a symbol of reunion. The round shape of the full moon is a sign of consummation and completion. Meanwhile, the image of a round mirror alludes to the Chinese idiom “to reunite the broken mirror.” At the end of the Southern Dynasty, Xu Deyan broke open a bronze mirror and gave half of it to his wife as a token for future meetings. When they eventually reunited, the mirror was restored. Since then, “to reunite the broken mirror” becomes a metaphor for the reunion of a couple who are previously separated. A constantly round mirror then is a mirror that is never broken.

This representation of a harmonious marital life delineates a picture of an ideal spousal relationship in which everyone remains true to their respective position in the social structure. Such harmony is also present in the relationship between Crusoe and Friday. With the benefit of hindsight, slavery in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* has been critically examined, particularly in a post-colonial context. Eliminating the institution of slavery that is foreign to the Chinese context, Shen replaces it with the master-servant relationship that conforms to the social norms of human relationships and etiquette in Chinese society. When Friday is killed in another sea adventure, Crusoe orders twelve cannons to be fired in tribute while everyone on board pay their due respects to Friday. The reason Friday receives such an honor, as Crusoe explains, is “filial to his parents, loyal to the master, and had an integral personality which was rarely found among men” (Shen 218). Together they form a symbiotic relationship bonded by mutual care rather than oppositional binarism. As Crusoe recounts, whenever he thinks of Friday, “tears flow uncontrollably” (218).

Given that the fictional world of Robinson Crusoe is a capitalist utopia, Shen also constructs an ideal picture of life that is in line with the Confucian ethical imagination. From blood relations to marriage relations to master and servant relations, he re-locates the myth of Robinson Crusoe through a reconfiguration of the personal relationship within the family and thus reconciles the conflict between the “adventurous spirit” and the order of Chinese society. As part of the Chinese vision of concentric circles of the world, the vision of family is a fractal of the vision of the country and then Tian Xia, the world, the orderly society where parents are respected and loved by children, husband and wife live in harmony, and master and servant coexist peacefully, which embodies the Chinese wisdom of living together, the wisdom of “being harmonious yet different,” and “seeking common ground while preserving differences” as the idiom goes.

The plot of *Juedao Piaoliu Ji* is tumultuous, but the structure is rather uncomplicated. While giving due credit to the literariness of the text, we should note that its significance is largely determined by the complex social-historical context of the time. Shen’s *nalai* undertakes complex social functions. It would not be too presumptuous to claim that its translation is an inevitable accident since. Shen’s trans-vision of Robinson Crusoe as a new man is part of the efforts to shape the Chinese imagination for modern man through literature.

The conflict between the old and the new is a major theme in China after its being dragged

into the modern era. The vortex model Zhao Tingyang proposed to expatiate the making and becoming of China (43) is also valid in elucidating the changes that China has undergone in the past two centuries. Upon realizing that it was no longer the center of the vortex, China started to identify with and move closer to the center.

Nalai-ism as a strategy is in line with this model of seeking the common good among differences. Politically speaking, the vortex model has nothing to do with domination or occupation; it is a model of harmonious coexistence based upon differences. The center-periphery relation in this model is not one of control and being controlled, but rather one of active identification out of the desire for the good; in other words, theories of manipulation or power are not sufficient for understanding this model.

Shen's translation appears at the initial stage of transformation. In this translation, "one's life is the result of one's own efforts" (Zou 189), the modern concept that is regarded as the one of the main attractions in the Robinson Crusoe myth for the Chinese has not yet been highlighted. But the translation of this modern western myth is an act *per se* by exporting a new and modern vision to China.

This retelling of more or less the same story in different languages constitutes a dialogical relationship between texts. If language constructs reality, unfamiliar language constructs unfamiliar reality. Trans-vision, then, through the construction of an unfamiliar or defamiliarized reality with familiar language, provides a mirror for the reflection of the living reality. At the turn of the 20th century in China, trans-visions even defines the future. Translators at that particular historical period serves as pioneers of national culture and exerts a decisive influence on the formation and development of modern China. Shen's text is a microcosm of the burgeoning of translated literary works in that particular historical period. This trend of translation consequently delivers modern literature in China.⁴ Due to the transcending influence brought out by these trans-visions, the novel as a genre, which was once regarded as irrelevant to the orthodox narrative tradition and unimportant, has gained unprecedented importance. Liang Qichao once said: "A new nation must first have a new mindset, and a new mindset comes from new literature." Just as Shen has hoped, foreign literature becomes a powerful contributor to China's renewal and transformation during a painful period of transition.

Notes

1. The first faithful translation of Defoe's original story in the Chinese language was first published in 1930 by Shanghai Commercial Press. The translator was Xu Xiaocun. This version soon became the most popular translation circulating in the Mingguo period. It was later revised in the 1950s and republished by People's Literature Publishing House.
2. The translation back into English from Shen's translation was mostly completed by ChatGPT with some corrections from the author of this paper.
3. There is no equivalent for the Chinese concept 天 (*Tian*) in English. There are myriad implications in this

word. Sometimes it is translated into nature, sometimes into sky. Zhao Tingyang attempted to update this traditional Chinese concept in the modern context and translated it into All-under-Heaven which carries religious implications that are irrelevant to the Chinese. Cf. Zhao Tingyang, *A Possible World of the All-under-Heaven System: The World Order in the Past and for the Future*. CITIC Press, 2016.

4. In 1918, *New Youth* launched a special issue on Henrik Ibsen, the first Chinese special issue on a foreign writer; in 1922, the New Poetry Society was founded, with Ye Shaojun, Liu Yanling, Zhu Ziqing and others using the monthly magazine *Poetry* as a platform to publish new poetry; Feng Xuefeng, Pan Mohua, Ying Xiuren, Wang Jingzhi and others founded the Lakeside Poetry Society; Lu Xun published the first collection of novels *Call to Arms (Na han)*. All of these appeared under the influence of foreign literature and are in many senses be considered the products of *nalai*.

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