[Special Contributions]

Freedom of Words and Self in Translation: Reading *Breaking Free: Liang Qichao's "Unfettered Translation" and Its Legacy*

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Abstract: Prof. Jiang Lin's recent book, *Breaking Free: Liang Qichao's "Unfettered Translation" and Its Legacy*, paved the way for translation history studies in a people-centered framework. This would allow scholars to gain not only knowledge about who Liang Qichao is and why he developed his unfettered translation strategy but also a lens into the interaction between the figure (conscious and unconscious motivations) and the socio-cultural-political environment at the turn of traditional and modern China about a century back. The timely and relevant monograph can inspire more research to break down a binary mode of "original-target", and introduce a triad of "original-target-self" to translators with their own personal background, mentality, practice, proclivity, stance, etc., and historical context in which they were situated. That will break a new path involving the freedom of words, translators' selves along with their conscious/unconscious motivations, and even the "in-betweenness" of the scholar and his/her target (i.e., translators) in studies to come.

Keywords: *Breaking Free*; Jiang Lin; book review; Liang Qichao; unfettered translation

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1. The Community *Breaking Free* Engages In

It is unusual to find English publications that do in-depth research on specific and significant translators who changed the game in political, literary, and cultural arenas during China's late Qing Period (1890s-1900s). Relevant books cover a wide range of topics, including policies, geopolitics, anthropology, and cultural exchange, though some recent articles have shed light on the power dynamics of translation during that time period (CHEUNG, 2014; GAO, Ren, & Moratto, 2024; GAO & Moratto, 2024); translators' roles as activists

(LIU, 2020; WANG, 2022); and translation and copyright (LI, 2012).

Prof. Jiang's relevant monograph, *Breaking Free Liang Qichao's "Unfettered Translation" and Its Legacy*, contributes to the international academic map of contemporary Chinese translation history. The well-structured book's premise is Liang Qichao, a self-hood with numerous identities such as sponsor, educator, political activist, and translator. Based on ample evidence of translation events, publications, methods, effects, and circulation in which the translator was involved, the book is more than a case description; it is a historical study into not only the socio-cultural-political contexts but also two political fractions within the Qing Imperial Court: reformists and conservatives. It is a translation and translator perspective on how progressive translators like Liang break free from Yan Fu's standards of *xin* (faithfulness), *da* (expressiveness), and *ya* (elegance) to embrace the emancipation of the shackle of rigid regimes of letters, thoughts, and monarchy back then. As a result, the book uses a vantage point to focus on a group of men of letters who struggled for their cultural and political emancipation while introducing "modern (western) mindsets through translations (political fiction in particular)" before the key moment of the Chinese Revolution. The book builds on Chi's (2019) chapter in "Translation as an Education in Modern Values: Yan Fu and Liang Qichao," which examines how education might spread liberalism and Darwinism to the general public in China back then.

2. Pace-Setter: A People-Centered Translation History Study

Jiang began with Liang's life as part of Chapter 1, which sets it apart from pertinent studies that jump directly to the translation problems revolving around translators from the outside (i.e. from texts to persons). The author compiled extensive notes on traditional Chinese education-related notions such as "eight-legged essays," "xiucai," "juren," "jinsh," and so forth, making the section fundamental and rather inform-based. This helps readers understand the historical contexts in which Liang was born, but perhaps more significantly, it renders Western readers' empathy for the exam taker who failed the imperial test a century ago in China in 1890, 1892, and 1895 (JIANG, 2024: 2). There are also major events such as First Sino-Japanese War (1895), Wuxu Coup (1898), Imperial Edict on Constitutional Reform and Modernization (1898), The Xinhai Revolution (1911), Anti-Yuan Shikai Movement (1915), and their influences on the Reformist fraction led by Kang Youwei and Liang.

Furthermore, how did the Reformists and Conservatives from the imperial court negotiate as the aforementioned events' repeated effects on activity, publications, and even rebellion were explained? To provide a broad context for "why" Liang used translation as a tool to revolutionize, a great historical backdrop was necessary. We could designate the study's entry as matrix development. A reflection of people-centered translation studies, the figure is thus placed within a social and cultural network (Kim, 2009). Liang was thought to be the cause or link of this raging storm. The cultural interchange elements are also the work's greatest treasure. During the transition between tradition and modernization, readers might learn more than enough about various parts of China.

Therefore, it is clear that the work itself is a translation, i.e., it introduces historical-cultural ideas and events to the global academic community that might not be familiar to Western readers (including English titles of numerous Chinese translation studies, which serve as a voice for the Chinese perspectives on translation history). The material is sufficient to stimulate further research on China in the future, including literary theories, literary groups in contemporary China, translation history, translation theories, Liang Qichao Studies, and China's social, cultural, and political history during the late Qing Dynasty. Additionally, the extensive use of notes

throughout the book serves as a context builder, which is essential for the author and reader to establish a shared understanding of a historical character. Since a translator can never be viewed as a symbol but rather as a subject, the work's context development is a significant model for translator studies to follow. In other words, one may utilize enough notes to create the space-person-time matrix in translator studies. Given the translation community's demand, it appears imperative to put people at the forefront of conversations (Robinson, 2001, 2019). And Jiang's work is an excellent example and trailblazer in the field of people-centered translation history studies.

3. What's Unfettered Translation?

Despite creating a pretty impressive historical backdrop, Jiang also included translation instances that are common in analysis. Prior to all of that, he cleared the way for other research, which often starts with text analysis, by figuring out what "unfettered translation" actually is. The monograph's most pertinent theoretical contribution to the community is seen to be this subject.

This leads to the comparison of such a notion with concepts that have comparable meanings. The distinction between the "unfettered" and the "free" is the most obvious. While the former is infused with more Chinese literary elements, the latter is comparable to the global translation community. Jiang linked ancient Chinese literary theory's "*wen* (文, form)" and "*zhi* (質, content)" to the concept of "unfettered translation." Later, translators of Buddhist texts used the dyadic ideas as grounds for their translations. Specifically documented in his work "Preface to Dhammapada," Zhi Qian, a monk and translator during the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 CE), was the first to introduce the binary set (JIANG, 2024: 41–42). In short, the debate on whether the translated language should be literary (*wen*) or faithful (*zhi*) set the background for traditional Chinese translators.

The term "unfettered translation" indicates a considerably more extreme preference for the translator's creative expression over the author's. That is the most evident distinction between the fresh idea and the widely used word, free translation, which refers to the literary production that is founded on the original meanings and forms. For translators, particularly those who are in dire need of liberation from very inflexible and organized traditional political and cultural standards, the "unfettered" provides a third path from this vantage point.

Thus, "unfettered" and "translation" are both metaphors for the forward-thinking men of literature of that era. They first required a mental and structural break from the rejection of both "*wen*" and "*zhi*," and such a cynical departure may be seen as a "translation" from Chinese tradition to modernity *in* and *of* itself.

> Firstly, unfettered translation is premised on a lack of respect for the original text. It disregards both the "form" and "meaning," making it impossible to accurately translate the "intent" of the original text. Therefore, it cannot be called "free translation." … Secondly, unfettered translation extensively alters the structures, themes, and characters of the original work, which involves major "surgery" on the narrative framework … Thirdly, most translators in the late Qing dynasty had a limited proficiency in a certain foreign language, which often made them unable to fully understand the original work, resulting in a significant reduction in fidelity. (JIANG, 2024: 45)

To put it succinctly, the distinction between "unfettered translation" and "free translation" opens up a fresh avenue for us to comprehend the boundaries of what a translator would produce depending on the source. The aggressive and inventive meaning of the word "unfettered" suggests that this kind of translation was standard

practice for forward-thinking translators like Liang Qichao in the late Qing Period. Jiang started using Liang's case as an example to do specialized analysis in order to respond to the following queries after departing from the thorough conceptual delineation: In Liang Qichao's instance, how is translation possible? What motivated Liang to use translation to "break free"? What are the unconscious components or even the purposes? That makes up the majority of the work.

4. The Motivation Under the Translation Triad of the Original, Target and Self

What piques my interest is Liang's own reasons for using the unfettered translation and how he would use this tactic throughout his translated work. Jiang first attributed Liang's unfettered tendency to his "poor proficiency" in other languages, citing the work of Liang's contemporary, renowned fiction translator Lin Shu, who also underwent unrestricted translation of more than 200 works in China. Even though Liang could "barely read Japanese" (JIANG, 2024: 55), he translated many Western phrases into Japanese, such as the novel *Romantic Encounter with a Beauty*. It was noted that Liang also translated several fundamental Japanese phrases into Chinese using straight translation techniques. Furthermore, Liang's translation style evolved as a result of his political goals. Jiang here made an impressive logic that "for the translator, only by clarifying the fundamental issue of 'why to translate' can the issue of 'what to translate' be solved (JIANG, 2024: 61).

Liang, a reformist, saw translation as a means of educating the public and engaging in social and political endeavors. But he was also terrified of the might of the Qing dynasty's imperial court. In *Romantic Encounter with a Beauty*, he removed the main character's name, Fan Qing, since it implied anti-Qing dynasty sentiment, which also went against his nationalist beliefs. Nearly all reformist translators at the time had this mindset, and they desperately needed to act as a mediator between domestic political issues and foreign texts and ideas. In the same novel, Liang presented progressive political ideas such as democracy, equality, freedom, and science, while polishing the aggressive ideas upon the Qing dynasty imposed by the Japanese character Shiba Shirô's stance to support the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) as a punishment for the Qing court's assistance to Korea. The last justification for Liang's unrestricted translation is his desire to educate the broader audience intellectually rather than those who could read the original. Many reformists thus arrived at a dilemma: potential recipients could not accept many western fiction styles, and domesticated translations would violate enlightenment causes such as emancipation from *Zhanghui* fiction, introduction of baihua (the transformation of the ancient system of writing and reading), and gender equality (the self-deprecation of female characters), etc. For translators, this is the divide, or even schizo. They ought to figure out how to persuade the Chinese readers to accept the "pills" from the West. In order to update the original to better fit the recipient's circumstances and to infuse the writings with reformist ideas that may motivate the nation, Liang unavoidably chose the unfettered translation approach. The three barriers of reception, speech, and political consequence are symbolized by the fetter.

Skopos theory is the case in point when it comes to how the translation is received. Jiang then started comparing the two schools of thought. In the translation community supported by academics such as Christian Nord, Hans Vermeer, and Katharina Reiss, Skopos appears to be similar to functionalists. According to Reiss and Vermeer (2013), the goal of their academic growth is to produce translations based on the various text types while serving a variety of purposes. Jiang used Liang's unfettered translation to show how they appeared to have overlooked the ideological and political role that translations play. Liang's Skopos (purpose) ought to be broadened to include political transformation in addition to text transmission. Besides, I think reformists' purpose

considers three aspects, namely, the original, the target, and themselves. Therefore, the Skopos adopted by Liang is structured like a tripod (see Fig. 1).

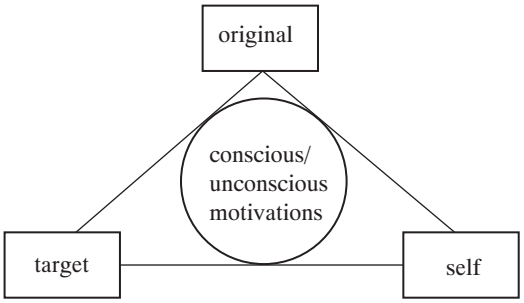

Figure 1 The triangle of reformists' motivation

5. The Conscious and Unconscious Dyad: The Fetter Breaker

The question of what is inside the tripod—that is, the essence of Liang's Skopos through translation—now emerges. Jiang's response may be seen as Liang's personal political ambition, which I could then further explain by pointing to both his conscious and unconscious impulses as the outcome of his underlying yearning for liberty and the sociopolitical context (also shown in Fig. 1). As a result, Jiang has subtly moved beyond the textual, pragmatic, and stylistic aspects of the praised functionalism to the translator's own self. In such a sense, the book also encourages future researchers to investigate how "the self" of the translator responds to "inner (personal aspirations)-outer (objective environment)" dialectics using somewhat hybrid motivational and sensational factors.

The deliberate elements that influenced Liang's translation have been extrapolated by Jiang. For instance, when translating, he included some of his own commentary. Liang said about the fictional work "The Last Days of the Earth": "Wow! My fellow Chinese! While interpreting here, I can't help but sip on a large glass of wine, but I question if our people will actually carry out this prophecy—that is, the Chinese retribution strike against Europeans" (cf. JIANG, 2024: 87). Liang made noticeable adjustments to the translated passages in addition to the para-text that was included with his translation. A typical example is found in his renowned translation of Byron's "Isles of Greece". Jiang made a comparison out of renderings of Liang and a modern poet Bian Zhilin, and I would zone in on Liang's way to get unfettered from the cage of traditional Chinese poetics within his creativity.

The Original:

The Isles of Greece, the Isles of Greece
Where burning Sappho loved and sung,
Where grew the arts of War and Peace,
Where Delos rose, and Phoebus sprung!
Eternal summer gilds them yet,
But all, except their sun, is set.

Liang's Version:

［沉醉東風］
咳！希臘啊！希臘啊！
你本是和平時代的愛嬌，
你本是戰爭時代的天驕。
撒芷波歌聲高，女詩人熱情好，
更有那德羅士、菲波士（兩神名）榮光常照。
此地是藝文舊壘，技術中潮。
即今在否？
算除卻太陽光線，萬般沒了！

（cf. JIANG，2024：132）

Liang's version has many additions; aside from the aesthetic vibe of "沉醉東風 (intoxicated by the East wind, my back translation)", there are in-text annotations for Delos and Phoebus as "two gods (it is a mistranslation, in that Delos is the birthplace for Apollo whose epithet is Phoebus)" and the creative amplification like "此地是藝文舊壘，技術中潮. 即今在否? (Greece was the place of arts, literature, and techs. Is it still here? my back translation)". Even there appears Liang's free association based on "War" and "Peace" as "戰爭時代的天天驕 (hero during the war)" and "和平時代的愛嬌 (beauty during peace)". By placing himself, Byron, and Sappho together in the imaginary location of Greece (either at war or in peace), we may deduce that Liang was generating more than just meaning but also a passionate feeling. As we can see from the above, Liang left behind more than just a unique impression of how "himself" would re-present Byron's feelings when he discussed the ups and downs of Greece during the 19th-century Turkish invasion and occupation of the center of knowledge and the arts. The drive and force inside the parallel lines staring from "where," as well as the sublimity Byron displayed, were clearly Liang's own obsessions and emotional echoing. It is evident that, from such a trivial addition found in Liang's translation, Liang is a political activist by letters, a sharp literate, and perhaps most importantly, a human who had emotion and empathy (with Byron, Sappho, Greek people, and Chinese public).

Additionally, I think that Liang translated not just Byron's poem but also other works under the influence of a combination of conscious and unconscious motivations. "The reason I chose Byron's Isles of Greece is to enlighten Chinese fellows to reform," and "how would I make the translated text more accessible to possible readers, i. e. to annotate the foreign names and render the poem into rhymes" are some examples of what he would choose to translate as the result of his conscious motivation. Liang's "free association" approach, which is based on the original yet goes beyond it, is imaginary and intuitive in terms of the unconscious. This not only caused some mistranslations, like the wrong information for "Delos" and "Phoebus", but also set up a restructured but dreamy Greece that is mutational according to war and peace. Here, Liang's poem, along with a lot of fiction translations, serves as a psychic field "where grew both the East and West," and Liang served as the self-mediating and negotiating the two, much reminiscent of Freud's triad of "Id-Ego-Superego". Given that, Liang's role is more than a translator or an activist, but a representation or metaphor, if possible, of the general Chinese, who themselves got trapped in multiple binary settings like the past-future, old-new, conservative-

reformative, tradition-modernity, East-West, etc. Liang, with his aspiration and intellect, figured out a "what to" and "why to" for the Chinese through translation that I would name as "self-analysis."

In other words, Liang's unconscious desire to play a part in helping the Chinese awaken and prosper supported his conscious decisions. According to a different viewpoint, Liang's unfettered translations can mirror his own psychical reality in order to break down the cultural barrier and rebuild a path for himself and his fellow Chinese following the political and cultural repression—or even trauma—caused by the Qing monarchies and Western imperialists. The translator, Liang, is the fetter-breaker, or analyst as in a psychoanalytic context. Given the binary, unfettered translation serves as an approach and/or a medium of negotiation between the inner and outer sets of thedyad, forming a trio. That would be the possible contribution of Jiang's work for future studies on the translator's role, identity, self-analysis, desire, and the fetter-breaking through translation to make the double ends of translations a third road to translators.

6. Conclusion: Beyond Translators' Conscious Choices

Certainly, Prof. Jiang has done more than translation descriptions. He acutely captured the specifics of Liang's unfettered translation and categorized them into (1) A Hybrid Style of Classical Chinese and Vernacular Chinese; (2) A Majestic and Passionate Translation Style (JIANG, 2024: 114–136), while listing "why it is so", i. e. (1) "Translating the Meaning Rather Than the Words" as Translation Method; (2) "Pursuing Fluency at the Cost of Faithfulness" as Translation Philosophy; (3) "Domesticating the Western Texts with the Chinese Flavor" as Translation Strategy (ibid. 136–161). Given the information built around Liang and his unfettered translation, Jiang took the biggest part in expounding the cultural significance of Liang's unfettered translation towards the end of the monograph. The voluminous section could be summarized as follows. (1) Chinese literature's passion for beating the Western intruders at their own game, which includes serial development, reform, and enlightenment movements that aim to strengthen China's national power. (2) Modernity and its discourse *from* and *in* Liang's unfettered translation: subversion of the traditional family-dynasty regime to the nation-state, and of subjects of feudal society to citizens in the modern city (ibid. 194–195). (3) The relationship between new fiction and Liang's unfettered translation, expansion of cliche themes of Chinese classical novels (i. e. plots about romances between scholars and beauties, stories about immortals and ghosts, great deeds of upright officials, heroic feats of swordsmen, and unsurpassed achievements of the nobles) to political, detective, science fiction, and so on (ibid. 204). (4) More narrative modes and transformation of literary presentation brought into the Chinese context, such as flash-back plot and flash-forward narration, and the adoption of vernacular Chinese to fiction writing (ibid. 206–212). All the changes brought about by Liang's unfettered translation have inspired not only political activities, but also numerous modern Chinese writers, represented by Lu Xun, Zhou Guisheng, Zhou Zuoren, etc.

The book not only examines the life and works of Liang Qichao, but it also highlights Prof. Jiang's academic career, from his doctoral dissertation on Liang's "Hao Jie translation style" to the "unfettered translation" of today. The subtle changes in the translation of the title connect Jiang and Liang, Liang and his beloved country of China. That further implies the historical cultural cage during the transition from monarchy to republic, and the connection between the current social development following the courageous reform and

revolution of translators over a century like Liang and the meticulous discovery of translation scholars like Jiang. The change of the book title must have reflected Jiang's academic life on the single subject of Liang Qichao for more than 15 years. In light of the intertextuality between the translator and the translator scholar, the translator in history, and the socio-cultural-political context (assuming the world is viewed as a text), the next step is to investigate the parallels between the psychological aspects of scholars' selections of translators to study. This might be a remedy for the deadlock of translator studies which ignore the implicit relationship between the dyad of researchers and their targets. That would depart from the freedom of words and mind by translators who adopted unfettered translation to the emancipation of translation studies that are solely featuring translators' conscious choices instead of their unconscious factors as well as the "in-betweeness" of the scholar and the translator he/she studies.

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