

## Hybrid Writing in Moment in Peking by Lin Yutang

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**Abstract:** It is explored in the paper whether it is proper to put China under the context of post-colonial study, the significance of post-colonial writing for the translation studies, and then takes *Moment in Peking* by Lin Yutang as a case study, trying to find out inspirations for translation based on his writing techniques in dealing with Chinese cultures.

### 1. Introduction

With regard to the question whether China should be put into the context of post-colonial study, there has still been different opinions. So first of all, it should be made clear whether it is proper to place China under the post-colonial context.

As for the precise scope of postcolonial studies, Robinson (1997/2007) proposed that it is: 1) the study of Europe's former colonies since independence; 2) the study of Europe's former colonies since they were colonized; 3) the study of all cultures/societies/countries/ nations in terms of their power relations with other cultures/etc. (p.13- 14). His definition of the scope of postcolonial studies is generally accepted by most scholars. The third definition is much wider than the previous two, as it goes beyond the restriction of geography and time. It cares more about the asymmetries of cultural status, and applies to any condition when minority-culture meets with majority-culture. In this sense, postcolonial studies should go beyond the limited scope of former colonizers and the colonized, and "post-colonial literature as a literary phenomenon is more than just literature about a former colony or by a citizen of a former colony" (Maria Tymoczko, 1999, p. 36). Therefore, postcolonial perspective is significant and meaningful in the Chinese context. "The terms 'postcolonial' and 'colonization' are used here in their broader sense, being restricted neither geographically nor temporally" (Leo Tak-hung Chan, 2000, p. 54). The "uniqueness of the Chinese case" under the perspective of postcolonial studies should be "a kind of cultural and linguistic colonization" (ibid.). To conclude, any writer who creates works in the language of strong cultures with the purpose of striving for his/her own cultural space can be counted into postcolonial writers.

From 1840, the imperialists opened the gate to China with advanced and strong arms, and then China became a semi-colony of the imperialists. Although China has no history of completely being colonized, backward political and economic conditions put Chinese people under the tyranny of the imperialists. So was the Chinese culture whose status in the world was determined to some extent by that of economy and politics. In another word, during the semi-colonial period, the imperialists not only tried to control Chinese political and economic development, but also enslaved Chinese people spiritually and culturally. The situation is especially severe for those who strived to live abroad in the imperialist countries. As minority group, the immigrants represented the weak culture and had to strive for living space under the strong culture. The situation appropriately falls into the third scope of post-colonial study defined by Douglas Robinson. Just like Indian English writers, Chinese American writers used English - the language of the strong culture - to express their own cultures and cultural identity. The special way of writing gradually becomes an important subject of post-colonial study.

### 2. Lin Yutang and Moment in Peking

Lin Yutang went to the United States in the 1930s and began to create works in English. *Moment in Peking* which was published in 1940 is the first novel created by Lin in the Western context. It is

its popularity that established Lin's reputation as a successful writer in the West and made him the candidate for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1975. Pear Buck highly praised the novel. After the novel was published in 1939, a book review by Time Weekly followed soon, stating "Moment in Peking may well become the classic background novel of modern China" (cited in Lin, 2005, p. 3). It received a high reputation of the encyclopedia of modern China from Mei Zhongquan, the general editor of Collected Works of Lin Yutang. All these demonstrate that the novel is a great success on the West land.

The novel represented through the language of the strong culture is totally about Chinese society and people. The success of the novel on the West land set a good example for the minority-culture writers to strive for living and cultural space under the strong culture context. In this sense, it's feasible to study Lin Yutang and his *Moment in Peking* from the post-colonial perspective, and it's worthwhile to study the way of expressing Chinese cultures in English adopted by him.

### 3. Hybrid English reflected in *Moment in Peking*

In the 1930s and 1940s, western countries had stepped onto a way of modernization, while China was still in war and poverty. Most westerners knew little about China. Strong industrial civilization enabled them to look down upon the Chinese people lagging far behind and view China as an inferior nation. Seeing the malpractices in the West, in order to correct foreigners' prejudice against Chinese people, Lin Yutang embarked on a road of introducing to the westerners in a positive way the long history and glorious culture of China. With the purpose of maintaining the distinctiveness of Chinese culture and free it from long-time inhibited and silenced situation in the western context, Lin adopted hybrid English to represent his own Chinese cultural identity. Just as Chen Baoyan described, "His (Lin Yutang) works created in English is adulterated with Chinese words and expressions. Reading his English works, we often feel that they are full of Chinese flavor." (cited in Gao Wei & Liu Shicong, 2001, p. 46). In the following part, evidence will be listed to elaborate on the hybrid English adopted by Lin in order to correctly represent the Chinese culture and his own Chinese cultural identity.

#### 3.1. The insertion of pinyin

In the novel, there are a lot of Chinese pinyin, providing an authentic circumstance of real Chinese life. The presence of pinyin is not a random occurrence. Instead, it is a strategic arrangement of unusual ingenuity. In most cases, pinyin is used for expressions of objects or occasions with rich Chinese cultural connotations and difficult to find equivalents in English. For example: e.g. Mulan was carried into the mother's room, where the grandmother was anxiously waiting, and laid on the **kang**, or earthen bed. (Lin, 2005, p. 53) **Kang** is a unique bed used in northern China. Its inner meaning can not be stated clearly just as "earthen bed" only. According to the Contemporary Chinese Dictionary (Chinese-English Edition, 2002), kang means "oblong platform built of adobe or brick and covered with a mat, with a fire raised underneath for heating purposes and with the smoke thus produced discharged from a narrow passage to a chimney". The connotation of kang is more than that of earthen bed. Therefore, Lin adopted pinyin first in an attempt to preserve its full Chinese flavor. The same condition exists through the whole novel, such as "fochi", "yuanchia", "jiafa", "tsungtse", "tangtuan", "chiaotse", "tsunghsi", "menpao", "pingli", "Laoyeh", etc. In another case, pinyin is deliberately involved although it's very easy to find English equivalents. e.g. Let the bride descend from the sedan and lift her steps, step by step, climbing high! **Ching!** (Lin, 2005, p. 119) "**Liaoputeh!**" said Mr. Fu, in enthusiastic praise, "You see our Szechuen produces men. Born of the Spirit of the Omei Mountains, I should say!" (Lin, 2005, p. 155) Ching and Liaoputeh are respectively Chinese pinyin for "qing" and "liao bu de", each having English equivalents as "please" and "great" respectively. By using pinyin deliberately, Lin aims to represent the sound of spoken Chinese in westerner's ears though it rings strange to them. In the first case, readers can have a vivid image of Chinese wedding ceremony. Similarly, they can also appreciate Chinese way of appraising the talented in the second case. There are also many similar examples, such as "Saotse", "meimei", etc. The deliberate attempt to replace English

equivalents by pinyin indicates Lin's intention to abrogate the privileged centrality of English by using language to signify difference while employing a sameness which allows it to be understood.

### 3.2. Literal translation based on meta-texts

Besides the insertion of pinyin, another widely existing phenomenon is the literal translation of Chinese expressions with distinct Chinese flavor indicated by double quotation marks. Although there are no existing source texts, the expressions are colloquial Chinese used in daily life. e.g. When the guests saw Cassia appear with Ailien, they immediately rose from their seats and Cassia said **“ten thousand fortunes”** to greet them. (Lin, 2005, p. 85). Although it is easy for English readers to understand the meaning of “ten thousand fortunes” in the context, it is still strange to their ears, as it is not idiomatic in English; instead, it is a word-for-word translation of Chinese “wanfu” (万福), an idiomatic Chinese way of greeting.

e.g. Chastity was a passion; girls were taught to regard it as a sacred possession and to consider their body as practically untouchable by men, or as it is said, to **“guard their bodies like jade”**. (Lin, 2005, p. 61)

“Guard their bodies like jade” is the literal translation of Chinese expression “shou shen ru yu”. Jade is the symbol of flawlessness and virtue in traditional Chinese culture, describing a young woman who is beautiful in appearance and noble in character. However, in English ‘jade’ refers to a rude or immoral woman. Despite the great gap between the two languages, Lin insisted using the literal translation of Chinese expression marked with quotation marks, indicating the distinct Chinese flavor.

More evidence is listed here, “killing a landscape” (literal translation for “da sha feng jing”), “mouth-luck” and “eye-luck” (for “kou fu” and “yan fu”), “wash the dust” (for “xi chen”), “sweeping the grave” (for “sao mu”), etc. Besides these phrases, literal translation of sentences is also common in the novel, like “You predetermined enemy, I almost died thinking of you and waiting for you”, “Living, I shall be a Tseng family person; dead, I shall be a Tseng family ghost”, etc. All these above are literal translation of idiomatic Chinese expressions, showing the writer's deliberate attempt to present Chinese cultures under the context of English discourse.

### 3.3. Translation of Chinese idioms and classics

The novel includes a large-scale of transplant of Chinese idioms and classics expressed by the way of translation from the existing texts. When encountering these materials, Lin mainly translated them literally.

e.g. Mulan thought of the phrase, **“for one general to achieve fame, ten thousand skeletons must lie exposed”** and remained silent. (Lin, 2005, p. 199)

The words in the double quotation marks is a literal translation of Chinese saying “yi jiang gong cheng wan gu ku”.

e.g. Mencius said, “Therefore when Heaven intends to call a man to a great mission, He always first hardens his ambition, belabors his muscles and bones, starves his body, denies him the necessities of life, and frustrates what he sets out to do, so that his ambition may be kindled and his character be strengthened and he may learn to do what he could not do before.” (Lin, 2005, p. 204)

The small paragraph is very familiar to every Chinese person, direct translation from the famous saying of Mengzi- “gu tian jiang jiang da ren yu si ren ye, bi xian ku qi xin zhi...”.

e.g. Mulan replied at once, “Doesn't the poem about the crab in Red Chamber Dream say: The roads and ways before its eyes are neither straight nor across; The spring and autumn in its shells are black and yellow in vain.” (Lin, 2005, p. 257)

Obviously, the saying is from the famous Chinese classic works Hongloulou, the original Chinese saying goes like this, “yan qian dao lu wu jing wei, pi li chun qiu kong hei huang”.

Lin almost literally translated these idioms and classics, and presented them with strong Chinese flavor for westerners. The purpose is to make Chinese cultures well known among the English readers and strive for a living space for minority-culture representatives under the great pressure from English cultures.

It should be reiterated that the existence of the three aspects mentioned above is not accidental occasions in the novel. They exist in large quantity through the whole novel. The hybrid English caused by translation fully demonstrates Lin's writing purpose.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The scope of post-colonial study has gone beyond the limitation of time and geography, taking the imbalance among cultural powers into consideration and moreover as an important measurement for the division of the scope. In this sense, it is proper to study China from the post-colonial perspective. Lin Yutang wrote *Moment in Peking* in English, expressing Chinese cultures under the great pressure of strong English cultures. The success of the novel in the West provides us with inspirations on how to effectively translate Chinese cultures into English: using hybrid English resulted from transliteration and literal translation (sometimes followed by further explanations) is an effective way of representing culture-specific factors in the cross-cultural communication.

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