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The Re-Contextualization of Scientific Knowledge Discourse in Chinese Translated Science Fiction of the Late Qing (1902-1911)*

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Abstract— *This paper investigates the re-contextualization of scientific knowledge discourse in Chinese translated science fiction from 1902 to 1911, situating these texts within the broader epistemic transformation of late Qing intellectual culture. It argues that science fiction translation during this period functioned as a dynamic site of knowledge negotiation, in which scientific discourse was continuously reshaped in response to shifting political and cultural imperatives. Based on a corpus of representative translated texts, this study identifies three major stages in the evolution of knowledge discourse. In the first stage, translation practices construct a highly politicized knowledge framework centered on military and technological science. Through strong domestication strategies, scientific narratives are mobilized to serve reformist agendas, thereby foregrounding the authority and urgency of Western scientific epistemologies. In the second stage, the scope of scientific knowledge is significantly expanded beyond a predominantly political paradigm. Translations increasingly incorporate elements of natural and social sciences, producing a more diversified epistemic configuration while still retaining an underlying reformist orientation. In the final stage, translation practices exhibit a relative shift toward textual fidelity and narrative preservation. Ideological intervention is attenuated, and greater emphasis is placed on the transmission of scientific content itself, marking a transition from hybridized knowledge production to more differentiated and stabilized forms of scientific discourse. These evolving re-contextualization strategies demonstrate that translated science fiction operated as an important epistemic instrument in late Qing intellectual life. The paper further argues that such translational practices not only responded to immediate socio-political demands, but also contributed to the gradual restructuring, expansion, and normalization of scientific knowledge in modern China.*

Keywords— ***Discourse; Knowledge Discourse; Late Qing science fiction; Re-contextualization.***

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I. INTRODUCTION

Translation studies has undergone an epistemic turn in recent years, shifting from a primarily linguistic focus to concerns with knowledge production, mediation, and circulation. Translation is increasingly understood not as a neutral conduit but as an active process that reshapes and re-contextualizes knowledge across cultural contexts. In China, a vital manifestation of this turn emerged during the late Qing period, when national crises generated an urgent demand for Western knowledge, seen as essential for modernization and cultural revitalization, and for promoting societal enlightenment.

To reach the widest possible audience, late Qing intellectuals favored the most effective methods for disseminating knowledge. They actively promoted the eastward transmission of Western learning through large-scale translation projects. Within this broader intellectual movement, Liang Qichao, in 1902, articulated the

influential slogan: "If one intends to renovate the people of a nation, one must first renovate its fiction", in his essay *On the Relationship between Fiction and Mass Governance*. This declaration is widely regarded as the starting point of the so-called Novel Revolution. Later that year, Liang launched *New Fiction* in *The New Citizen Journal*, formally classifying science fiction, titled "philosophical and science fiction" to include Chinese translations. He defined it as fiction written to explicate philosophy and the natural sciences, distinguished by its "lofty ideals" and reliance on "scientific observation" (Liang, 1902).

Chinese translated science fiction thus emerged as a key medium for disseminating scientific knowledge, while simultaneously serving ideological and reformist purposes. Existing scholarship on late Qing Chinese translated science fiction can be divided into macro-historical and micro-textual approaches. Macro-level studies emphasize its didactic and political functions and the role of translation in mediating Western knowledge and intellectual transformation (Der-wei Wang, 1997). As Wang notes, the genre integrates "knowledge and truth" with "dreams and romance" (Wang, 1997, p. 157). Micro-level studies focus on translation strategies such as abridgment, adaptation, and commentary insertion, showing that translators often reshaped source texts by subordinating scientific accuracy to ideological or narrative concerns (Pollard, 2000).

Most existing studies, however, treat scientific knowledge and its discourse primarily as background content rather than as a structured object of transformation. As a result, the mechanisms through which scientific knowledge was reconfigured in Chinese translated fiction remain insufficiently theorized. Addressing this gap, this paper examines the re-contextualization of scientific knowledge discourse in twelve representative Chinese translated science fictions published between 1902 and 1911. Drawing on knowledge studies and translation studies, it analyzes how scientific discourse was represented, mediated, and restructured under the socio-cultural conditions of the late Qing. The study argues that translated science fiction functioned as a site of epistemic negotiation, where knowledge was selectively reorganized in response to reformist and political imperatives.

II. THE OVERVIEW OF CHINESE TRANSLATED SCIENCE FICTION OF THE LATE QING

The period of Chinese translated science fiction in the late Qing is conventionally defined as 1902-1911, beginning with Liang Qichao's formal definition of the genre and ending with the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. This time frame has gained recognition in Chinese literary scholarship, supported by established studies such as A Ying's *History of Novels in the Late Qing Dynasty* and Li Yajuan's *A Study on the Relationship between Late Qing Novels and Politics (1902–1911)*.

During this period, while many foreign literary works were translated into Chinese, yet not all were explicitly labeled as "science fiction" in titles or subtitles. Some were categorized as "romantic novels", "detective novels" or other genres, despite containing significant scientific elements and plots. Additionally, several translations incorporated scientific discourse without adopting the specific label of science fiction. To address this classification ambiguity, this paper draws on a wide range of scholarly sources, including *New Addition Catalogue of Novels in the Late Qing Dynasty and the Early Republic of China* by Tarumoto Teruo, *A History of Chinese Science Fiction* by Takeda Masaya, *Research on Late Qing Science Fiction Novels (1904-1911)* by Lin Jianqun, *History of Novels in the Late Qing Dynasty* by A Ying, *History of Chinese Translation* by Ma Zuyi, *Late Qing and Early Republican Fiction Series: Volume on Science*, *Chinese Science Fiction Literature Anthology: Late Qing Volume*, as well as relevant journal articles from Chinese Translation and Shanghai Translation.

Based on these sources, a total of 38 Chinese translated science fiction works were identified, including variant translations from the same source and plagiarized editions, published in newspapers, magazines, and separate editions. The period can be further divided into three phases: the beginning (1902-1903), the climax (1904-1907), and the ending (1908-1911). Analysis of scientific knowledge discourse in these works indicates that the discourse, which initially combined political and knowledge elements, gradually became more focused on scientific content, reflecting a general trend of increasing disciplinary purity in Chinese translated science fiction of the late Qing.

III. THE BEGINNING, PRIORITIZING REFORMIST POLITICAL APPEAL

This phase comprises ten Chinese translations of science fiction works, with Liang Qichao's *A Philosophical Novel: Record of the End of the World* appearing as the earliest example. Although Liang designated the work as a "philosophical novel", it falls within the category of science fiction as defined earlier in this study, since the broader contemporary classification of the genre was "philosophical and scientific fiction". For this reason, the translation is still regarded as part of early Chinese science fiction translation.

The original source text of Liang's adaptation is Camille Flammarion's *The Last Days of the Earth* (1891), a short narrative envisioning the far future when the Earth is engulfed in ice and snow, and human civilization disappears beneath glaciers. The last surviving man, "Omega", carries the hope of human continuation as he searches for habitable land and a companion. Although he eventually encounters his beloved, they discover that their homeland has already been buried under snow; as epidemics spread, the two embrace and die beneath the falling snow within a pyramid.

While the Chinese translation broadly preserves the narrative framework, Liang's two major revisions reveal a consistent tendency toward ideological reorientation, particularly the prioritization of reformist political discourse.

One important tendency is his attempt to arouse the Chinese nation's desire to cast off oppression and become strong, especially by contrasting China with Europe and expressing vengeance against the countries that had recently invaded the Qing dynasty. When translating the passage describing the gradual destruction of the world and the disintegration of nations, he deliberately adds: "Those European countries, with their bizarre and monstrous methods of social organization, ultimately perished in their own sea of blood... Never did they expect, in the blink of an eye, to be attacked by the Chinese for revenge, and thus scattered in disarray, with none able to defend themselves" (Liang, 1902, p. 109). Although the original passage is narrated from the perspective of humankind at the end of the world, Liang reinterprets, and in effect distorts, it as a vehicle for criticizing Europe, thereby foregrounding his own political message through interlinear commentary. He also adopts traditional Chinese editorial devices such as prefatory remarks, headnotes, and interlinear notes, as in: "Magnificent are we Chinese people! Having translated to this point, I cannot refrain from raising a full cup in celebration; yet I know not whether my compatriots will prove equal to this prophecy".

The other major tendency is Liang's emphasis on traditional Chinese Buddhist thought and the incorporation of Buddhist discourse as a means of restructuring scientific imagination. When translating the passage in which the pyramid is described as the sole structure remaining on Earth at the end of the world, Liang inserts a substantial amount of Buddhist discourse into his description. For example, he writes that the pyramid, "with its detached and dispassionate gaze from beyond the mundane world, ... surveys the whole of this world: innumerable families, innumerable clans, innumerable tribes, innumerable states, innumerable sages, innumerable heroes, innumerable vulgar men, innumerable fools, innumerable political systems, innumerable branches of learning, innumerable writings, innumerable arts and techniques, and even innumerable joys, innumerable affections, innumerable terrors, innumerable cruelties, and innumerable sorrows." The repeated use of "innumerable" translates the Chinese term wuliang (无量), a characteristic expression in Buddhist vocabulary that evokes the notion of immeasurable or countless phenomena. Through such additions, the pyramid is transformed from a physical remnant of human civilization into an observer endowed with a transcendental, quasi-Buddhist perspective on worldly existence.

Liang further makes this orientation explicit in a translator's note appended to the end of the work: "This translation is spoken for Bodhisattvas; it is not spoken for ordinary worldlings, nor for the Śrāvakas." By invoking central categories of Buddhist thought, Liang recontextualizes Flammarion's scientific vision of the future within a Chinese intellectual framework. The translated text thus becomes not merely a narrative about the end of the world, but also a vehicle for expressing Buddhist conceptions of history, human affairs, and transcendence.

As the first Chinese translated science fiction work, the fiction greatly influenced the translation methods and translators' approaches in later works. Firstly, Liang Qichao's strong political appeal for reform shaped the orientation of early translated science fiction. Just as Novel Revolution itself carried an explicit reformist implication, translated works were introduced as part of literary reform, and even literary revolution. Consequently, during the following two years, many translated science fiction works in this phase presented obvious reformist political appeals, often accompanied by dissatisfaction with the Qing government and concerns for national salvation. This tendency further encouraged translators to privilege practical and immediately applicable forms of knowledge, particularly military discourse, which was widely regarded as essential to national survival in the late Qing period.

Secondly, Liang's understanding of "science" also influenced the intellectual framework of early translated science fiction. In *A Brief Historical Survey of the Development of Natural Science*, also published in 1902, he offered a systematic delineation of the disciplinary scope of "science". He classified philosophy, political science, economics, and sociology as metaphysical learning, while chemistry, astronomy, and geology were categorized as physical learning. Moreover, he explicitly regarded metaphysical learning as superior to physical learning. Under this intellectual framework, many early translated science fiction works continued to reflect the

previous tendency of valuing traditional Chinese ideological principles through the formula of "Chinese Learning as Substance, Western Learning for Application".

A comparable pattern of re-contextualization in the stage can be observed in *The Latest Scientific Novel of the West: Undersea Travel*, translated by Nanhai Lu Jidong and Dongyue Hongxi Sheng, based on Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas* (*Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*). While the translation preserves the general narrative of underwater exploration, it also significantly restructures the source text and remains incomplete, being serialized only up to Chapter Twenty-One.

The translators re-contextualized science fiction at both the formal and contextual levels, operating across three linguistic dimensions: the lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels.

At the lexical level, the translation exhibits a lack of consistency in rendering key scientific terminology (Chen, 2018), reflecting the unsettled state of scientific vocabulary in late Qing China. Two central terms from the text illustrate this problem. The first is submarine, which is translated variously as shuidi qianxing chuan (水底潜行船, "underwater vessel"), shuidi qianxing tiejian (水底潜行铁舰, "underwater iron warship"), shuidi tiejian (水底铁舰, "underwater iron ship"), tiejian (铁舰, "iron ship"), tonghang (通航, "navigation"), haidi de lunchuan (海底的轮船, "steamship beneath the sea"), and neizhi chuan (内支船). Rather than functioning as a stable technical term, the object is repeatedly described through its physical characteristics or mode of operation. A similar pattern can be observed in the translation of diving-dress, which appears as shujiaopi zhi de yifu maozi (树胶皮制的衣服帽子, "clothes and hat made of rubber"), xiashui de yifu (下水的衣服, "clothes for entering the water"), youshui yifu (游水衣服, "swimming clothes"), or simply yifu (衣服, "clothes"). These renderings identify the object primarily through its material composition or practical function rather than through a standardized technical designation. Consequently, although the translators conveyed the basic meaning of the scientific objects, the knowledge discourse underwent inevitable distortions during the process of re-contextualization.

The translation places considerable emphasis on the dissemination of scientific knowledge and seeks to impress upon readers the importance of science. Nevertheless, a large proportion of the original text's detailed discussions of flora, fauna, astronomy, and geography are either heavily condensed or omitted altogether. In Chapter Seven, a marginal note attempts to justify this editorial strategy: "This book is originally a scientific novel and everything in it is based on the principles of science; yet its full import cannot be completely conveyed to laymen" (Nanhai Lu Jiedong & Dongyue Hongxisheng, 1902, p. 76). The note reveals the translators' awareness of the tension between scientific complexity and the intellectual background of their intended readership. As a result, scientific knowledge is selectively presented rather than comprehensively translated.

The translators' preference for forms of scientific knowledge with direct political relevance, together with their own political interventions, becomes even more apparent at the syntactic and discourse levels. Formally, the text is rendered entirely in the style of a traditional Chinese chaptered novel. It adopts a highly colloquial narrative voice and concludes each of the first twelve chapters with an epilogue poem that anticipates subsequent developments. Moreover, as the work was serialized in a periodical, many chapters considered insufficiently engaging for readers were either abbreviated or omitted. Combined with the conventions of indigenous Chinese fiction, these adaptations further disrupted the continuity of the original narrative and reshaped its discursive structure.

At the contextual level, the translators likewise prioritized reformist political appeal over the faithful transmission of scientific knowledge. On the one hand, they omitted or significantly abridged passages regarded as scientifically informative but politically irrelevant, particularly discussions of foundational natural sciences such as geography, biology, and astronomy. Even when such episodes were retained, they were often drastically condensed. The following example illustrates how a scientifically oriented passage was preserved in outline while much of its original explanatory content was removed:

"A highly strung conchologist would certainly have fainted at the many display cases classifying specimens from the branch of molluscs. There I saw a collection of inestimable value, which time does not allow me to describe in full. Amongst the various products, I will cite for memory only: the elegant royal hammer-shell of the Indian Ocean, with regular white spots standing vividly out from a red and brown background; a brightly coloured imperial spondylus, all bristling with spikes, a specimen rarely seen in the museums of Europe, and worth, I thought, about 20,000 francs; … and finally some periwinkles, delphiniums, screw shells, ianthines, ovules, volutes, olives, mitre shells, casques, murexes, whelks, harps, winkles, Triton's shells, cerites, spindle-shells, wing shells, scorpion shells, limpets, hyales, and Cleodora: all delicate and fragile shells that science has baptized with its most charming names." (Verne 2009:74)

"起身看那房内的珠宝，只见一幅相架旁有几个头号玻璃瓶，装满着许多珊瑚、玛瑙、珠贝之类。各瓶种类不同，各瓶放出各种异彩，也有青的、也有红的、也有黄的、也有白的、也有光怪陆离，精莹四射。只是眼睛好看，名儿是不知道的。又是长的、短的、粗的、细的、方的、圆的、三角的、扁的。"(Nanhai Lu Jidong and Dongyue Hongxi Sheng, 1902，p. 67)

(Rising to his feet, he examined the treasures displayed in the room. Beside a framed portrait stood several large glass jars filled with corals, agates, pearl shells, and similar specimens. The contents of each jar differed, and each emitted its own distinctive brilliance. Some were blue, some red, some yellow, some white; others displayed dazzling and variegated colors, glittering with crystalline radiance. They were pleasing to the eye, though their names were unknown to him. Their forms were equally diverse—some long, some short, some thick, some slender, some square, some round, some triangular, and some flat.)

On the other hand, the translators also introduced entirely new episodes that strengthened the text's political orientation. A notable example appears in the section discussing coral. While the source text presents coral as an object of scientific interest, the Chinese translation adds an episode in which a character discovers a coral ornament, about the size of a potato, supposedly worn on the official hat of a high-ranking Qing official. The coral is labelled "old man", satirizing the fact that senior officials were typically advanced in age. Through a punning commentary—suggesting that the coral's age appropriately matched that of its wearer—the narrative shifts from natural history to political criticism. The episode culminates in the observation that "China has been brought to its present condition by those who wear red coral upon their heads," transforming what was originally scientific knowledge about coral into an explicit critique of the Qing bureaucracy. Such additions demonstrate that scientific discourse was not merely simplified during the process of re-contextualization; it was frequently subordinated to the translators' reformist political agenda.

The translations produced during this phase exhibit different forms of constraint and adaptation. Some replace the original religious discourse with Buddhist concepts familiar to Chinese readers, while others substitute the source text's narrative structure with conventions derived from indigenous Chinese fiction. Despite these variations, one feature remains constant: the prominence of political discourse. Scientific knowledge is consistently re-contextualized in ways that serve political ends.

The Chinese translations demonstrate a strong reformist orientation. Rather than engaging systematically with the foundational principles of the natural sciences, they tend to emphasize the prestige, utility, and abstract sophistication of scientific knowledge. Particular attention is often devoted to descriptions of military technology and armaments, which function as symbols of national strength and as reminders of the gap between China and the technologically advanced West. Scientific discourse is therefore valued less for its epistemological content than for its political significance.

As a result, the scientific knowledge retained in the translations is highly selective. Passages that support the translators' political agenda are preserved, adapted, or expanded, whereas knowledge deemed politically irrelevant is frequently condensed or omitted. In many cases, the re-contextualization of scientific discourse occurs primarily at the lexical level, focusing on the translation and introduction of scientific terminology. By contrast, at the syntactic, discourse, and contextual levels, political concerns assume a dominant role. The transmission of scientific knowledge is consequently reshaped, subordinated, and at times transformed to meet the demands of reformist political discourse.

IV. THE CLIMAX, BALANCING POLITICAL APPEALS AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSMISSION

Following the initial two-year phase of introducing and translating foreign science fiction, Chinese translated science fiction reached its peak between 1904 and 1907. During this period, the scope of source texts expanded significantly and was no longer confined to scientific novels. This diversification was driven by both the flourishing literary market and the increasing demands and aesthetic preferences of readers. Of the twenty-two translated works produced in this phase and 16 can be analyzed, seven were derived from non-science-fiction originals. Unlike the preceding phase, in which scientific discourse was largely subordinated to reformist political objectives, the period from 1904 to 1907 witnessed a gradual balancing between political appeal and knowledge transmission. While translators continued to view science fiction as a vehicle for social reform, they increasingly emphasized the educational, literary, and epistemological value of scientific knowledge itself. This shift was reflected both in the diversification of source texts and in new strategies of re-contextualization.

Compared with the earlier phase, science fiction translations during this stage display two notable tendencies: an expansion in the scope of knowledge discourse and a more deliberate preservation of literary qualities. A major factor contributing to this shift was the

incorporation of non-science-fiction texts into the translation corpus. In response to market demand, translators began to render a wider range of foreign literary works, including children's literature, detective fiction, military fiction, and romance narratives.

In the process of translation, these texts were often reinterpreted through a scientific or quasi-scientific lens. Elements associated with science, technology, or rational knowledge were selectively highlighted, even when they were not central to the original works. As a result, scientific discourse was no longer restricted to domains such as politics and military affairs. Instead, the scope of knowledge representation expanded, allowing for the systematic introduction of scientific knowledge from multiple fields and everyday domains.

One representative Chinese translation at this stage is *Scientific Novel: Xin Zaisheng Yuan*, adapted from *My First Patient*, the first story in *Stories from the Diary of a Doctor (Series I and II)*, published in *The Strand* in 1893. Narrated in the first person by a protagonist who is both physician and detective, the English source text recounts a sequence of events beginning with a young woman's critical illness, followed by medical intervention and the discovery that she has been poisoned, and concluding with an investigation that identifies both the perpetrator and the motive.

In its re-contextualization at both the formal and contextual levels, the Chinese translation departs significantly from the conventions of earlier translated science fiction. At the formal level, the translators demonstrate a notable appropriation of English narrative techniques. They abandon the traditional Chinese chaptered-fiction style characteristic of the preceding phase and largely preserve the linear narrative sequence of the source text, including the decision to postpone the revelation of the murderer until the end of the story. This stands in contrast to many earlier Chinese translations, which frequently disclosed the culprit at the outset. Such changes indicate a greater willingness to preserve the literary qualities of the source text, suggesting that translators increasingly valued narrative effectiveness alongside educational objectives.

At the contextual level, however, the translation reorients the narrative emphasis. Rather than foregrounding the detective plot, the Chinese version places greater emphasis on the seemingly miraculous efficacy of the stomach-pump, which rendered in translation as a "poison-extracting device", employed during the medical treatment. In doing so, it elevates a specific medical instrument into a symbol of scientific and technological power, while relegating the detective dimension of the narrative to a secondary position.

The following passage illustrates this shift in emphasis:

"The electric battery was then brought into force and artificial respiration resorted to. For a long time we worked without any apparent result. One glance at the contents of the stomach-pump had caused Dr. Roper to turn so white....." (L.T. Meade & Clifford Halifax, 1893, p.96).

俄而电槽间之电器，即顾抽吸作用，然抽之既久，不见有丝毫之效果。余等渐将失望，然仍坚持从事，又竭力抽吸。继而路般注目于抽毒器中，不觉惊骇欲死。盖器中所容，已纯属毒质之气体。(Chen Wuwo & Zhang Mianzhan, 1907, p. 95)

(Soon after, the electric apparatus in the battery compartment—namely the device used for suction—was activated, but after prolonged extraction, no slightest effect was observed. We gradually began to lose hope, yet still persisted and exerted every effort to continue the suction process. Then Dr. Roper fixed his gaze upon the poison-extracting device and was suddenly struck with terror, almost as if he would die on the spot. For what the device now contained had become entirely a mass of poisonous gas.)

A comparison of the two passages reveals that, whereas the English text briefly reports the medical procedure and the doctor's reaction, the Chinese translation expands the process of extraction and heightens the dramatic effect of the medical device itself. The focus thus shifts from medical observation to technological intervention. Scientific authority is embodied not in abstract scientific principles but in a tangible instrument whose efficacy appears almost miraculous. Through this reorientation, scientific knowledge is rendered more concrete, visible, and accessible to readers through the discourse.

Whereas *Xin Zaisheng Yuan* demonstrates how a detective narrative could be reoriented toward medical science, Bao Tianxiao's *Faluo Xiansheng Tan* illustrates an even more radical form of re-contextualization, namely the transformation of a fantasy narrative into a scientific novel. This work demonstrate how translators incorporated material from non-science-fiction texts while simultaneously reframing them as vehicles for the transmission of scientific knowledge. The source text, *Baron Munchausen's Narrative of his Marvellous Travels and Campaigns in Russia*, is primarily a work of fantastical adventure rather than science fiction. In the process of translation, however, Bao Tianxiao deliberately reconfigured it as a scientific novel. He substantially expanded the scientific content of the narrative, providing rational explanations for originally fantastic episodes and

systematically recasting supernatural or implausible elements in scientific terms. Through this process of rationalization—or, more precisely, "scientificization"—the translation transformed a work of fantasy into one that could be presented to Chinese readers as science fiction. Unlike the translations of the previous phase, where scientific discourse was frequently subordinated to political concerns, Bao's adaptation illustrates a growing effort to expand the scope of knowledge transmission by embedding scientific explanations within entertaining literary narratives.

One fantasy episode in *Baron Munchausen's Narrative* describes the protagonist's ascent to the moon by climbing a rapidly growing bean stalk, which later breaks and causes him to fall back to earth:

"I recollected that Turkey-beans grow very quick, and run up to an astonishing height. I planted one immediately; it grew, and actually fastened itself to one of the moon's horns... I was four or five miles from the earth at least, when it broke; I fell to the ground with such amazing violence..." (Gottfride August Bürger, 1840, pp. 20-21)

Bao Tianxiao reconfigures this fantastical sequence as a scientifically explicable event: "氢气球忽为天空流星所冲突，予为地球所吸，即颠蹙下坠，离地愈高，坠下之力愈重。"(Bao Tianxiao, 1905, p. 43)

(The hydrogen balloon was suddenly collided by a shooting star in the sky under the gravity of the Earth. It immediately jolted and fell. The higher it was from the ground, the heavier the force of its fall became.)

In the translation, the magical bean stalk is replaced by a hydrogen balloon, and the fall is explained through gravitational attraction rather than mechanical accident. This substitution removes the supernatural basis of the narrative and introduces basic physical concepts such as buoyancy and gravity as causal principles. Scientific knowledge is thus embedded directly into the narrative logic, transforming a fantasy adventure into a medium for the popularization of elementary physics.

This strategy reflects the broader tendency of the period to balance educational objectives with readers' demand for literary enjoyment.

Meanwhile, translators also began to engage with the ethical implications of scientific development. For example, Chen Hongbi's translation *Electric Crown*, drawing on themes associated with Frankenstein, explores the consequences of scientific experimentation and technological intervention. Similarly, Lu Xun's translation *Zaorenshu* ("*The Art of Creating Human Beings*"), adapted from *An Unscientific Story*, directs readers' attention to questions of scientific ethics and the moral limits of human intervention in nature. These works indicate that scientific discourse was no longer confined to issues of national strength or military modernization, but had begun to extend into broader ethical and philosophical reflections on science itself.

Although translators during this period continued to express reformist political concerns, the dominance of political discourse was considerably reduced compared with the preceding phase. At the same time, the scope of knowledge discourse expanded significantly, moving beyond military affairs to encompass ethical, social, and cultural dimensions of scientific knowledge. Science was thus increasingly positioned as a framework through which to interpret a wide range of modern social issues.

Nearly half of the source texts translated during this period were not originally science fiction. Through the adaptation of children's literature, detective fiction, military fiction, and romance narratives, translators introduced knowledge discourses drawn from multiple domains. In doing so, they extended science fiction translation beyond the segmental level into broader discourse-level experimentation. As a result, the overtly political orientation of earlier translations gradually receded, while knowledge-oriented content became more prominent. Scientific and political discourses entered into a more balanced and hybrid configuration, giving rise to a more diverse and inclusive form of translated science fiction.

V. THE ENDING, PRIORITIZING KNOWLEDGE TRANSMISSION

Only six Chinese translated science fiction works were produced between 1908 and 1911, of which only three are available for analysis. Compared with the flourishing period of earlier years, enthusiasm for translating foreign science fiction declined sharply. This shift was closely linked to the political collapse of the late Qing dynasty. In 1908, both the Guangxu Emperor and the Empress Dowager Cixi died, marking the disintegration of the existing political order and triggering profound transformations across late Qing society, including literature and intellectual life.

At the same time, late Qing literary translation had, by this stage, largely completed its formative function. As Zhang Jing (2019, p. 3) notes, "the various models that could be offered for the modern transformation of Chinese literature had by then largely taken shape". The weakening of reformist political ideology, combined with the failure of earlier reform movements, led to a shift in intellectual orientation. Revolutionary discourse gradually replaced reformist rhetoric, while science fiction itself came to be increasingly regarded as fiction rather than a vehicle for

political intervention. Concurrently, domestic Chinese science fiction began to emerge, often "prioritizing imagination over scientific accuracy"(Chen, 1999, p. 268).

During this period, only three translated science fiction texts remain available for analysis: *The End of the World*, *The Future of Aerial Warfare* (a war fantasy narrative), and *The Secret Party Leader*, adapted from Jules Verne's *The Steam House*. All three texts were translated by Bao Tianxiao.

Despite their different source materials, these translations share several formal characteristics: they consistently adopt first-person narration, abandon the traditional chaptered-fiction structure, and omit marginal commentary and interpretive annotations. *The Secret Party Leader* even incorporates illustrations and other para-textual elements. Compared with earlier phases, these translations preserve dialogue and psychological description more fully, while scientific elements embedded in the narrative are retained with relatively greater consistency.

A diachronic comparison of Bao Tianxiao's translation practice reveals a significant shift in translational orientation. Political appeals, which were prominent in earlier stages, are now largely relegated to paratextual commentary, and their rhetorical intensity is markedly reduced. Rather than functioning as explicit calls for reform, political discourse is transformed into narrative framing, such as speculative reflections on "the aerial world of the twentieth century".

Overall, this period marks a transition in which translated science fiction no longer primarily serves as a vehicle for political intervention. Instead, it increasingly functions as a medium for the preservation and circulation of scientific knowledge within literary form. The decline in translation output thus reflects not only historical and institutional changes, but also a reconfiguration of the role of science fiction translation itself—from ideological instrument to epistemic archive.

VI. CONCLUSION

From a quantitative perspective, the translation of late Qing science fiction followed a three-stage trajectory of emergence, peak, and decline. In the initial stage, translators actively responded to Liang Qichao's call for the Novel Revolution. The term "revolution" itself carried strong political connotations, and early science fiction translation was therefore closely bound to reformist ideological concerns. In this phase, science fiction primarily functioned as a vehicle for the transmission of political ideas through scientific discourse, or more precisely, as a means of articulating political knowledge through selectively appropriated scientific content. The most prominent form of scientific knowledge introduced at this stage was military and technological knowledge, which was widely perceived as the most immediate indicator of national strength. To enhance its persuasive force and accessibility, scientific concepts were often simplified, reinterpreted, or even mythologized. Correspondingly, narrative techniques and discourse-level structures embedded in the source texts were largely subordinated to ideological concerns, and scientific knowledge operating at syntactic and discursive levels was frequently condensed or omitted.

In the second stage, science fiction translation began to exhibit a more systematic effort to reconstruct the knowledge discourse embedded in source texts. Translators increasingly adopted foreign narrative techniques and descriptive logics, while also expanding the source repertoire through the incorporation of non-science-fiction genres. As a result, the knowledge discourse of science fiction became significantly diversified. Translations of military fiction continued the earlier emphasis on technological and martial knowledge; detective fiction foregrounded rational investigation and the perceived epistemic authority of scientific instruments; and adaptations of ethical or speculative narratives introduced reflections on the limits and consequences of scientific practice. In this period, the re-contextualization of scientific discourse was no longer confined to lexical-level terminology transfer, but extended to syntactic and discourse-level restructuring. Traditional narrative modes were disrupted, and new configurations of temporality, spatiality, and narrative perspective were introduced into Chinese literary systems.

In the final stage, the number of translated science fiction works declined sharply, and the range of source texts contracted again toward canonical Western science fiction. Against the backdrop of political transformation at the end of the Qing dynasty, translators' reformist enthusiasm gradually waned, while readers increasingly came to recognize that science fiction could not function as an all-encompassing epistemic framework. At the same time, influenced by earlier phases of translation activity, indigenous Chinese science fiction began to emerge. Once science fiction translation was no longer burdened with the explicit task of political enlightenment, the political dimension of knowledge discourse largely receded, leaving behind a more stabilized emphasis on scientific knowledge transmission within literary form.

Across these three stages, the trajectory of late Qing science fiction translation reveals a gradual shift from politicized knowledge transfer, to hybridized knowledge expansion, and finally to epistemic consolidation. More

broadly, it demonstrates that scientific discourse was not transmitted as a fixed or self-contained body of knowledge, but was continuously re-contextualized through literary mediation. The key issue, therefore, is not only what scientific knowledge was translated, but how it was narratively and discursively reconfigured within fiction—through plot construction, environmental description, dialogue, psychological representation, and the embedding of scientific terminology within literary discourse.

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