# Faith and Meaning: A Study of the Chinese Translation of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* by Liang Shiqiu from the Perspective of Topology

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Topology, as a branch of mathematics, studies on the invariability of topological spaces after topological transformation, whose essence is topological equivalence. From the perspective of cultural inheritance and coherence, translation is essentially topological deformation. In literary translation, complete equivalence is almost impossible. Topological equivalence can be used to transform the text dynamically, which means that the translation remains the fundamental properties of the original text. Therefore, people can understand the meaning of the text based on another culture from different cultural backgrounds. From the view point of topology, the present paper purports to examine Liang Shiqiu's translation of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and found that the translation remains the features of source text by rendering effective topological strategies to realize topological equivalence and promote cultural exchanges between China and the West.

*Keywords:* faith, meaning, Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Liang Shiqiu, topology

## Introduction

Topology is the study of geometrical properties and spatial relations unaffected by the continuous change of shape or size of figures. Researchers consider only the position of objects in relation to each other, regardless of their shape and size. In mathematics, topology is concerned with the properties of space that are preserved under continuous deformations, such as stretching, crumpling and bending, but not rearing or gluing. Topology has been applied in the study of chemistry, physics, economics, linguistics, literature and so on, which is worth popularizing and utilizing. It was first introduced into the study of culture and translation by George Steiner (2001), the American famous literary critic and translation theorist, in his most famous work, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. In this book, he proposed that "Topology is the branch of mathematics which deals with those relations between points and those fundamental properties of a figure which remain invariant when that figure is bent out of shape (when the rubber sheet on which we have traced the triangle is bent into conic or spherical form). The study of these invariants and of the geometric and algebraic relations

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which survive transformation has proved decisive in modern mathematics. It has shown underlying unities and assemblages in a vast plurality of apparently diverse function and spatial configurations" (p. 448). From the perspective of cultural inheritance and coherence, to a certain extent, translation embodies the topological deformation characteristic in different languages. Therefore, topology provides a new angle from translation studies.

William Shakespeare was the most famous playwright and poet in Renaissance in England, who is good at not only expressing profound thought, but also playing with words. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of his comic masterpieces. One of the reasons why it is so popular among readers in the world lies in its witty and humorous language style. Liang Shiqiu, one of the greatest essayists and translators in China, spent more than thirty years single-handedly translating *The Completed Works of William Shakespeare*, which is a magnificent feat in the Chinese translation history. For its faithfulness, we can say it is the model of "academic" translation, faithfulness but not fluent. Liang' daughter recalled his father in her memoir and recorded that when her mother advised him to translate in a fluently way, Liang replied: "this is Shakespeare's way and the translation need to be faithful" (Liang, 2013, p. 151). Liu Bingshan (2000) analyzed Liang's translation of Shakespeare's works, "Liang's translation does not focus on the aesthetic of the words, but on the purpose of 'sincerity'. It closely adheres to the original text, and tries its best to convey Shakespeare's original meaning. His translation is faithful, meticulous, euphemistic and clear, which can preserve the original appearance of Shakespeare's plays" (p. 244). Liang's translation is aimed at arousing the reader's interests. This paper, from the view point of topology, intents to examine Liang Shiqiu's translation of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and found that the translation remains the features of source text by rendering effective topological strategies to realize topological equivalence and promote cultural exchanges between China and the West.

## The Topological Properties of Translation

With the development of interdisciplinary research, topology, as a branch of mathematics, is gradually applied in the field of culture, literature, linguistics and translation. In *Cognitive Topological Linguistics: A New Trend of Cognitive Linguistics*, Wen Xu and Zhao Genglin (2017) combined cognitive linguistics and topology and to explore a new paradigm. In their opinion, in the study of linguistics, people cannot grasp the special properties and basic laws of linguistics, but can only extract its main topological properties (pp. 2-6). Luo Yimin, the famous Shakespearean scholar, introduced the principles of topological psychology into the study of foreign literature and the translation of Shakespeare's sonnets. The basic idea of topology is that physical universe is single, while the psychological universe is numerous. For a meaningful entity, the form and content contain each other, so the form includes the physical and spirit (psychological). Therefore, when people translate Shakespeare's sonnets, the form is also the carrier of spirit and inseparable (Luo, 2014, p. 5). When evaluating translation text from topology, it needs to inspect from the overall aspect. Chen Haodong and Chen Fan (2016), published a book named *Topotranslatology* to explain translation from the perspective of topology.

The essence of topology is to study the properties of geometric shapes that remain unchanged under continuous deformation. During the deformation we stretch and bend the polyhedron at will, but we never identify distinct points and we never tear it. The resulting correspondence between the points of the given polyhedron and the points of the sphere is an example of a topological equivalence or homeomorphism

(Armstrong, 1983, p. 4). We cannot possibly examine each function between the two spaces individually and check that it is not a homeomorphism. Instead we look for "topological invariants" of spaces: an invariant may be a geometrical property of the space (Armstrong, 1983, p. 19). Steiner assimilated this property of topology with cultural succession. There are invariants and constants underlying the manifold shapes of expression in our culture. It is useful to consider the fabric cultural as "topological". The constants can be specifically verbal; they can by thematic; they can be formal (Steiner, 2001, p. 448). Based on the fundamental characteristics of translation, the translation process is essentially a kind of topological transformation among various languages. Therefore, as a means of cultural succession, translation is essentially topological deformation, namely keeping invariability (invariants) within variability (constants), also known as topological equivalence.

What is the invariant in translation? From the legend of the beginning of western translation, the Tower of Babel, people in the world speak the same language. Our world has been fragmented since the babble of confusion at Babel. Some philosophers, linguists and translation theorists have proposed and emphasized like, "pure language" (Benjamin, 2004, p. 18) by Benjamin, "language universality" (Nida & Taber, 2004, p. 4) by Nida and other theories for expounding the invariants in translation, which are the existing foundations of invariants. In fact, all translation involves differing of paraphrase, since there is no way in which one can successfully translate word for word and structure for structure (Nida, 2001, p. 4). Also, although words may have meanings that can be fixed in word lists, these words acquire their actual meanings only in a given situation (Lefevere & Bassnett, 2001, p. 19). Therefore, faithfulness, fidelity, loyalty or accuracy, in other words, the invariant, is the primary goal in translating. Both in the West and in China from the past to the present, many scholars proposed various translation criteria, but faithfulness or fidelity is an ongoing issue to evaluate the quality of translation. Horatius mentioned "faithful translator" in poetry translation" (Lefevere, 1992, p. 15). Faithfulness is a primarily a quality of the message rather than of the form, i.e., it results from dynamic equivalence rather than formal correspondence (Nida & Taber, 2004, p. 203). In China, Yan Fu put forward "Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance" in the late nineteen century. Lin Yutang proposed "Faithfulness, smoothness and elegance". Some scholars nowadays found that faithfulness is the translator's first choice by the means of empirical study. (Wang & Zhang, 2020). Translation is an expressing activity in some sense, whose foremost task is to keep Xin (loyalty, faithfulness, fidelity, accuracy, etc.). New Criticism is a relatively effective approach which deserves conscientious solitude to explain Xin (Luo, 2012). In a word, Xin (loyalty, faithfulness, fidelity, accuracy, etc.) is the invariant in translating, which is not the word-for-word translation, but keeping the basic properties of source text.

The variability (variables) in translation, another vital property of topology, can be shown in the linguistic and non-linguistic factors. On one hand, language is representational, but fails to contains all characteristics of an object. Signs or the combination of them will lead to various meaning. For the multi-meaning and obscure language and words, the relationship between signifier and signified is not compulsory (Zhao, 2005, p. 90). Also, the evolution and adoption of language can be regarded as the variables. On the other hand, for the contradiction between language and thought, there is a certain distance between the author's original intention and the words who uses to express. The understanding of source text depends on the translator's cognitive construal ability, creating ability, aesthetic appreciation, cultural background, etc. All the variables cannot be expressed adequately in the process of translating, due to the difference of two languages and the factors of

translators. Therefore, from the perspective of topology, the translators can render effective topological strategies to achieve the basic features of source text, also known as topological equivalence.

## Topological Strategies in the Chinese Translation of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* by Liang Shiqiu

Liang Shiqiu spent more than thirty years single-handedly translating *The Completed Works of William Shakespeare*, which is a magnificent feat in the Chinese translation history. People hold different views on his translation. This paper will analyze his translation of *Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream* from form and content under the perspective of topology and found that the translation remains the features of source text by rendering effective topological strategies to realize topological equivalence and promote cultural exchanges between China and the West.

### Changing the Literary Form

Form, one of the cores in translational translation theory, refers to the material manifestation of linguistic meaning, including character pattern, morphological pattern, sentence pattern, text structure, figures of speech and various phoneme permutation, such as tone and metre (Fang, 2004, p. 4). It is generally recognized that form is less important that content. According to Nida and Taber, translating is essentially a process of communication and this means that a translator must go beyond the lexical structures to consider the manner in which an intended audience is likely to understand a text, because so much depends on the underlying presuppositions of respective source and target cultures (Nida & Taber, 2004, p. VII). But in literature translation, form is a necessary component. The success or failure of literary translation depends on whether the translator can reproduce the artistic form of the target language successfully. Due to the difference between two languages, it is inaccessible to achieve the complete equivalence. Sun Dayu, another famous translator who translated eight Shakespeare's plays with high equality, mentioned that some translator who translated *The Completed Works of William Shakespeare* failed to be aware that Shakespeare's play is metrical verses, except Liang Shiqiu (Sun, 1987). Liang thought that Shakespeare's work is poetic drama, but not dramatic poetry, that is there are some poems in the drama (Liang, 2002, p. 595). The target text mainly assumes the form of prose, with rhymed lines inserted on occasions. In Liang's view, Shakespeare's language, strictly speaking, cannot defined by "poem" or "prose", and only "Shakespearean" can be accurately described (Liang, 2002, p. 603). Therefore, in the illustratory note of the translation of *A Midsummer-night's Dream*, Liang elaborated that blank verse in the source text holds majority, while a small part is prose and rhyming parallelism and antithesis. For example:

Example (1)

[ST] Lovers and madman have such seething brains,/Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend,/ More than cool reason ever comprehends./ The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,/ Are of imagination all compact:/ One sees more devils that cast hell can hold,/ That is, the madman; the lover, all as frantic,/ Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:/…/ That, if it would but apprehend some joy,/ It comprehends some bringer of that joy;/ Or in the night, imaging some fear,/ How easy is a bush suppos'd a bear!

[TT]: "情人与疯子都是头脑滚热，想入非非所以能窥见冷静的理智所不能明察的东西。疯子，情人，诗人都完全是用想像造成的：一个人若看见比地狱所能容的更多的鬼，那便是疯子；情人，也是一样的狂妄，在一个吉

普赛女人脸上可以看出海伦的美貌：…… 强烈的想象有这样的本领，所以它如果想到一些快乐，立刻就会悟到带来那些快乐的人；或是在夜里，一个人想像到恐怖，那么一棵树是多么容易的被看做为一只熊啊！(Liang, 2001, pp. 148-149)

This is a famous speech in Shakespeare's plays and quoted by many times. It is said that Shakespeare elaborated his views on art by Theseus's mouth. Theseus takes a very rational and common-sense view of the lovers' story, but he makes it clear that the world of the wood is the world of the poet as well as the lover and the lunatic. He uses the words "apprehend" and "comprehend" each twice. In the ordinary world we apprehend with our senses and comprehend with our reason; what the poet apprehends are moods or emotions, like joy, and what he uses for comprehension is some story or character to account for the emotion (Hacht, 2007, p. 603). The source text is meaningful and rhythmical. Liang translated into prose fluently and faithfully. The two words, "apprehend" and "comprehend" are respectively translated into "窥见", "明察", "想到", "悟到", which achieve the designative meaning and associative meaning in the context. Also, for the rhyming lines, Liang also reproduced the rhyme.

Example (2)

[ST] Over hill, over dale,/ Thorough bush, thorough brier,/ Over park, over pale, / Thorough flood, thorough fire,/ I do wander every where,/ Swifter than the moone's sphere;/ And I serve the fairy queen,/ To dew her orbs upon the green:/ The cowslips tall her pensioners be;/ In their gold coats spots you see;/ Those be rubies, fairy favours,/ In their freckles live their savours:/ I must go seek some dew-drops here, / And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.

[TT] 翻山冈，踱原野，披丛林，斩荆棘，过游苑，越栅届，涉水来，投火去，我是到处云游，迅速赛过月球：我专为仙后服务，在草地仙环上洒甘露：高高的樱草是她的侍卫；金袍上面有斑斓的点缀；那些是红玉，是小仙们的馈赠，那些斑点是她们的爱的象征：在这里我要找些甘露，给每株樱草挂上一颗珍珠。(Liang, 2001, pp. 46-47)

These lines sung by a fairy and describes their work in a wood near Athen. The poetic monologue references various elements from the play, most notably, the Fairy Queen, Titania. They are in response to Robin's question: "How now, spirit? Whither wander you?" This is a fourteen-line, single stanza poem that is structured in the traditional Shakespearean form, conforming to the pattern of ABAB CDCD EFEF GG and written in iambic pentameter. Shakespeare makes use of several poetic techniques in this poem, such as repetition (the use of anaphora in the first lines when "over" begins lines one and three) and alliteration ("bush" and "brier" in line two and "park" and "pale" in line three). Although Liang Shiqiu failed to duplicate the rhetorical devices, that is keep the constants in the translation, but he retained the rhyme. Especially, in the first four lines, he changed in parts of speech to reproduce the stage performance of the fairies. In the second quatrain, there is an allusion, where Liang Shiqiu added annotations to explain that the speaker says that they wander faster than the moon orbits the earth and organize fairy dances for her "upon the green" or in the grass. The atmosphere of the play is successfully reproduced in the translation.

Shakespeare's plays were performed for the public. Like the popular theatre of any age, his audience liked to hear vulgar and obscene jokes for amusement, and Shakespeare had to create and play with words (Ke, 1988). Some translator omitted the jokes for the decency, while Liang Shiqiu preserved them in order to keep the faithfulness. In his opinion, the gags in the play made their sense. Even if it involves obscenity, it is harmless and sometimes a sign of mental health (Ke, 1988). In addition, the translator retains the same punctuation marks in the original text. Shakespeare's language is called "poetic language", in which rhymes and rhetoric

raise difficulties for the translator. From the macro level, Liang shiqiu's translation contains the most fundamental information of the original text, namely, the constant. For the modern reader or playgoer, English as Shakespeare used it can seem alien and puzzling: vocabulary and grammar are in transition, pronouns and verb-forms can seem unfamiliar. Moreover, the conventions of poetic drama may also pose an impediment. From the micro level, Liang shiqiu used different translation strategies to reproduce the source language information, which can be regarded as different topological transformation strategies, such as semantic translation for the characters' name, literal translation with annotation, etc., to achieve the effect of authenticity and meaning.

### Semantic Translation and Literary Translation with Annotation for the Content

To a large extent, the complexity of translation lies in how to deal with the relationship between form and content, especially in literary translation. Content and form are the dual factors of literary aesthetics. George Steiner proposed understanding as translation. The quality of the translation depends on the translator's understanding, which can be regarded as the variability in the topology. When translating Shakespeare's plays, Liang Shiqiu took many factors into consideration, such as the names of minor characters, allusions, puns, and proverbs. He wisely rendered semantic translation and literal translation with annotation to maintain the constants and narrow the gap between the source text and the translation readers.

Shakespeare is good at playing word. He preferred to express the theme of a play by meaning, image and rhythm. In translation, the translator needs to take the name of character into consideration to achieve the harmony between meaning and rhythm (Zhuang, 2017). As the name of a character in a literary work is endowed with meanings, which is significant to the understanding of the character concerned as well as to the appreciation of the plot and the work as a whole, it is often mandatory for the translator to present the name together with the relevant meanings and connotations into the target language.

For the name in this play, the major characters are translated in transliteration while the minor are semantic translation by Liang Shiqiu, according to their personality description and specific context. Semantic translation of names is called for when a name is assigned with some specific meaning relevant to the appreciation of the play. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Athenian working class characters including Bottom and his fellows are all related to their professions. The name of Bottom is a tag for the spool around which thread is wound, recalling the technique that Theseus used to find his way out of the labyrinth. In addition, Bottom with his ass' head is a kind of Centaur in reverse, reminding one of the episodes in the myth when Theseus drives out the Centaurs from the wedding feast of Pirithous and Hippodamia. Also, the name Bottom is a pun on ass, an association reinforced by the visual image of Bottom's head. The world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is topsy-turvy; things are turned around, bottoms are up. The meaning of Bottom as the core for a skein is referred to by Grumio when he speaks of "a bottom of brown thread" in *The Taming of the Shrew* (Levith, 1978, p. 77). What's more, Bottom is actually a core character. Horald Bloom said, this play is "bully Bottom's" play, though its four realms of being—fairies, ancient Athenians, contemporary rustics, and erotically confused young women and men (Bloom, 2004, p. xi). Liang translated it into "线团", to achieve its

semantic meaning and associative meaning. Bottom's gangs: they are Quince (木楔[1]) the carpenter, Snug (简洁) the joiner, Flute (笛子) the blows-mender, Snout (壶嘴) the tinker and Starveling (瘦鬼) the tailor. Quince and Snug are carpenters, as quince or quines were blocks of wood to be joined snugly. Flute's job is to repair bellows with holes in them, and the fluted stops of church organs that whistle when defective; his name additionally suggests his small, flute-like voice. Tinkers like Tom Snout weld or solder spouts or snouts to pitchers. Robin Starveling is a thin, bird-like tailor. Puck, another character, is Oberon's attendant and a household spirit. Acting on the king's commands, he carries out most of the play's mischief. By identifying the character Puck with Robin Goodfellow, the popular name of a so-called "housefairy", Shakespeare makes his spirit non-malignant (1978). Liang Shiqiu translated "Puck" into "促狭鬼"[2] with literariness and imagery. Therefore, when translating the names of some characters, Liang took the explicit content and symbols into consideration and used semantic translation instead of transliteration to maintain its demonstrative and associative meaning, namely, the constants in translation.

In Liang's translation, literal translation with annotation is the most common method. In his article, *The Difficulty of Translation*, Liang Shiqiu thought that it is irresponsible for a translator to start translating without thoroughly understanding the source text. It is necessary to tirelessly check the quoting from classics works and add annotations so that readers can easily understand (Liang, 1997, p. 617). Language is an integral part of social culture. Any language has its own particularity as well as the particularity of its cultural connotation. When translators deal with the contradictions between the forms of two languages, the inherent contradictions between two cultures and the interlacing contradictions between language and culture, they often use in-text interpretation or annotation (Fang, 1993). From the perspective of cultural communication, the essence of interpretation and annotation lies in faithfully conveying the ideological content and cultural information expressed in another language. George Steiner once proposed four steps of translation: trust, aggression, import and compensation. The fourth step, "compensation", can be used to analyze the translation method of literal translation with annotation. In order to maintain the original flavor of the original text, Liang Shiqiu adopted the strategy of topological transformation, such as annotation, to achieve topological equivalence without losing the exotic features and the inherent meaning of the original text. For example, for the festivals and some allusions, such as a morn of May, Cupid, Venus, Phoebe, he added the annotation to explain their connotation. In addition, he used the same way to deal with puns.

Example (3)

[ST] DEMESTRIUS: I would I had your bond, for I perceive./ A weak bond holds you: I'll not trust your word.

[TT]: 地 我很愿得到你的字据哩，因为我看出一个微弱的力量就能束缚住尼；我不信任你的话。(Liang, 2001, pp. 112-113)

Liang added an annotation after the translation text: "bond" is a pun. The former means "a written pledge", and the latter means "constraint". Here, Hermia held Lysander to prevented him dueling. For some proverbs,

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[1] The translation of the characters in the play is from the Dramatis personae of in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* of *The Completed Works of William Shakespeare,* p. 16.
[2] "促狭鬼" means the one who plays tricks on people in Online *Cihai* (*https://www.cihai.com.cn/index*) and it is used in *A Dream in Red Mansions.*

Liang still adopted this way. For instance, when Puck played a trick on the lovers, he said "Jack shall have Jill; Nought shall go ill". Liang translated it into "杰克娶吉尔，一点儿没有错" (Liang, 2001, pp. 126-127). Also, he gave an annotation "Jack and Jill" are the names commonly in countryside. This usage is common to see in English-Chinese text. In the beginning of the thirty-six chapter of *Vanity Fair*, Yang Bi literally translated the names of the sentence, "or so extremely charitable as not to wonder how his neighbour Jones, or his neighbour Smith, can make both ends meet at the end of the year". "Jones" and "Smith" are the names of neighbours. In *The New Oxford English-Chnese Dictionary*, we can check that "Tom, Dick, and Harry" means "ordinary people in general" (in Chinese: 普通人；张三李四，阿猫阿狗；每一个人；任何人). If the readers fail to understand the cultural meaning, they will feel puzzle about the names. In a word, to achieve to keep the invariants of translation, Liang Shiqiu adopted the literal translation, but for the variability (variables) in translation, such cultural differences, he complemented the annotation to reach the topological equivalence. However, there is neither time nor place to annotate onstage performances, so the immediate response of the audience and the lag of annotation are irreconcilable contradictions. Therefore, Liang's translation is suitable to study rather than perform.

## Conclusion

Since Chinese people began to translated Shakespeare's works, various translations have emerged one after another and the relevant researches were fruitful. Previous studies have mainly discussed the translation of Shakespeare's works from the perspective of linguistics, culturology and also corpus-based method. The paper traces the nature of translation language, analyzes the translation mechanism, discovers topological nature of translation, and evaluate Liang's translation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* from the perspective of topology. This paper provides some methodological references for the study of the Chinese translation of Shakespeare's works and makes topology better applied in the practice of literary translation. By analyzing the differences of English and Chinese and the features of this play, we found the Liang Shiqiu adopted effective topological strategies to realize topological equivalence. He reproduced the spirit of the source text by rendering blank verse and the rhyming parallelism and antithesis in the form, and employing semantic translation for characters' name and literal translation with annotation for the puns and proverbs to achieve the faith and meaning of translation. In short, Liang Shiqiu's "academic" translation presents a complete "Shakespeare" for Chinese readers, inspires and promotes the communication between Chinese and Western cultures, and provides Chinese readers with a golden key to open the "Soul of The Times"—Shakespeare.

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