Original Paper

An Analysis of Selected Modern Chinese Essays in English

Translation from the Perspective of Translation Aesthetics

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Received: July 11, 2025 Accepted: July 29, 2025 Online Published: August 15, 2025

Abstract

Prose occupies an important position in the development history of China's culture. In today's world of cultural exchange, we should not only absorb and learn from the advanced culture, but also focus on conveying the beauty and the essence of Chinese culture to the world. As a literary genre, prose is mainly divided into narrative prose and lyrical prose, which are shorter in length and full of emotions. In narrative prose, the author often conveys his inner thoughts and feelings through descriptions; in lyrical prose, the author often expresses his feelings directly. Most of the domestic and foreign studies focus on the translation of novels or poems, but less on the translation of prose. Therefore, based on the theory of translation aesthetics, this paper discusses Zhang Peiji's English translated prose, The Selected Modern Chinese Essays, and analyses it in terms of the formal system (including sound, lexicon and syntax) and the non-formal system (including style, emotion and context).

Keywords

translation aesthetics, prose translation, formal systems, non-formal system

1. Introduction

Taking Zhang Peiji's English-translated prose as the object of study, combined with the theory of translation aesthetics proposed by Liu Miqing, the study explores how Zhang Peiji reproduces the aesthetic value of the original text in the process of English translation of prose from the aspects of the formal system of the aesthetic object of translation (including phonology, lexicon and syntax) and the non-formal system (including style, emotion, and mood), so as to provide guidance and reference for the theory and practice of English translation of prose.

1.1 Research Background

Prose is an indispensable part of Chinese and Western literature. China is proud of its long and fruitful history of prose, and contemporary Chinese prose took shape after the May Fourth Movement.

Globalization is causing an increase in the frequency of cultural contacts as well as the gradual rise of Chinese cultural influence over global culture. Prose, with its simple language and beautiful rhythm, is an indispensable part of Chinese culture, and how to reproduce the beauty of prose in English translation is a key point that translators need to break through. (Zhu & Ge, pp. 30-32) An alternative viewpoint for the analysis of Chinese literature translated into English is offered by the translation aesthetics theory.

1.2 Significance and Purpose of the Research

We can find that the research on modern Chinese prose translation needs to be deepened, especially from the perspective of translation aesthetics. The significance of this paper lies in the application of aesthetic theory to the process of aesthetic analysis of prose translation. Professor Zhang Peiji's English translation of the prose is natural and fluent, precise and informative, whether in terms of vocabulary or the overall beauty of the text, it perfectly conveys the exquisite language and profound meaning of the prose, and it can be called the jewel of the translation world. *The Selected Modern Chinese Essays* in English Translation is the most representative work of Zhang Peiji, and the study of this work is of great significance. The author of this paper believes that aesthetics runs through the study of translation of modern Chinese prose. Prose focuses on the overall beauty, and the characteristics of prose determine that a successful prose should be a high degree of integration of form and soul, and the study of prose from the perspective of aesthetics is of great value.

Through an in-depth analysis of the original text, this paper expects to provide help and reference for practical and theoretical research on prose translation, and is committed to improving the aesthetic ability of readers when they appreciate prose translation. This paper expects to provide translators with a broader perspective on translation, inspire translation creativity among translation enthusiasts, continuously enhance their cultural self-confidence, and motivate them to translate more and better works, so as to make Chinese culture go out better. At the same time, this paper is expected to provide some help to the development of modern Chinese prose translation and the theory of translation aesthetics, as well as to inspire and reflect on the translators and readers.

1.3 Layout of the Paper

This paper is divided into four chapters. A general introduction to the paper is given in the first chapter, which also covers its background, relevance, goal, and structure. The second section reviews the development of aesthetic translation ideas both nationally and globally and discusses translation aesthetic issues, aesthetic objects, and their features. Additionally, Liu Miqing's aesthetic philosophy is emphasized. The author presents Zhang Peiji's personal experience, his opinions on prose translation, and his translation of contemporary Chinese prose in the third chapter. The fourth chapter is the main body of the paper, which analyses in detail the aesthetic performance of formal aesthetic values (involving the beauty of sound, lexicon, and syntax) and non-formal aesthetic values (involving the beauty of style, emotion, and context) in *The Selected Modern Chinese Essays* through a large number of specific examples. The final chapter concludes the full paper, summarizing the main findings, limitations and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

Translation Aesthetics are combined in the cross-disciplinary field of Translation Aesthetics, which studies and investigates aesthetic issues in translation using contemporary linguistics and aesthetics' foundational ideas.

2.1 Translation Aesthetics

Liu Miqing established the study framework of contemporary Chinese translation aesthetics and outlined the fundamental ideas of translation aesthetics based on the aesthetic roots of translation studies. The application of contemporary aesthetics' fundamental ideas to the study, interpretation, and resolution of aesthetic issues in interlingual transformation is known as translation aesthetics.

The objective objects that are impacted by people's aesthetic behavior are referred to as aesthetic objects. The aesthetic object of translation refers to the original text to be translated and processed by the translator, whose aesthetic composition includes not only the formal system composed of language, text, words, sentences, etc., but also the non-formal relations composed of aesthetic fuzzy sets and images. An aesthetic subject is a person who uses an aesthetic item in aesthetic activities. The aesthetic subject in translation is the translator. The organic combination of aesthetic object beauty and specific aesthetic subject in translation is the premise of endowing aesthetic meaning.

2.2 Translator's Subjectivity

One of the hottest subjects in Chinese translation studies throughout the 1990s was translator subjectivity. Xu Jun defines translation subjectivity as the relationship between the subject of the translation and the artistic personality consciousness that is embodied in the translation, with the subject's aesthetic criteria and creative expression serving as its core points. Cha Mingjian claims that the translation subject's conscious cultural consciousness, humanistic nature, and creative cultural and artistic expression are its fundamental traits. On this basis, Tu Guoyuan and Zhu Xianlong emphasize that the translator's subjectivity is embodied in three aspects: initiative, creativity and passivity. Around the subject, Tu Guoyuan and Zhu Xianlong made a detailed elaboration: the translator's choice of translation text, the determination of the translation strategy and purpose are affected by the original author's language style, aesthetic taste, and the target audience's aesthetic expectations; At the same time, the translator's subjectivity is limited by different language systems, the language and cultural norms of the translator and the original work. The translator is the reader of the original text as well as the author of the translation, and what he thinks and writes should be consistent with the original author.

2.3 The Relationship between Translation Aesthetics and Translator's Subjectivity

Li Zehou discusses the relationship between beauty and subjectivity from the aesthetic point of view. Beauty is the externalization of the form of freedom, and aesthetics is the corresponding psychological structure that integrates sensibility and rationality, and is the final result of human subjectivity. The aesthetic subject of translation is the translator. The aesthetic experience in translation generally follows the following rules: First, the translator selects the text and determines the aesthetic attitude, that is, the translation purpose and intention; Secondly, it carries out the understanding of the aesthetic object,

namely the formal system and non-formal system of the original work, and transforms, processes and reproduces the aesthetic understanding, namely the translation process and the final presentation of the translation. The psychological factors such as aesthetic perception, association, imagination, emotion and will of the aesthetic subject in translation vary from person to person, and the operation process, characteristics and results of the psychological structure composed of these factors in aesthetic judgment will also vary from person to person. Chinese aesthetics summarizes the characteristics of the aesthetic subject such as the initiative, creativity and the high motivation and stimulation of the aesthetic potential of the aesthetic object as "subject practicality". In translation, although the translator is subject to the object, as long as he is good at giving full play to his subjective initiative and practicing the aesthetic standard of the organic unity of dialectic and holistic view, translation can still become an activity created in faithfulness.

3. Zhang Peiji and His Selected Modern Chinese Essays

Zhang Peiji believes that Chinese people have the obligation and responsibility to introduce Chinese literature and spread Chinese culture to the world. As the essence of Chinese literature, Chinese prose is inextricably linked with Chinese culture, and prose translation is one of Mr Zhang Peiji's favourites.

3.1 Personal Profile of Zhang Peiji

Prof. Zhang Peiji was born in 1921 in Fu Zhou, Fu Jian province. In his childhood, he moved to Shanghai together with his family. There he received his primary and secondary education (Yang, p. 14). Influenced by his English teacher Yao Zhiying during this period, he was very passionate about learning English, which not only laid a solid foundation for his English studies, but also accumulated valuable inspiration for his later translation career.

His admission to the Department of English Literature at St. John's University in Shanghai for further study happened in 1942, and he finished his studies three years later. He began his career as a translator in the same year that he was an assistant editor for *China Year Book* and a contributing editor for *The China Commentary Weekly*. His career as a translator began in 1946, when he was invited to Tokyo, Japan, to serve as an interpreter and translator for the International Military Court for the Far East in English.

He traveled abroad to study English at Indiana University in the United States after returning to China. He resolved to go back home as soon as the People's Republic of China was established. He was employed in 1951 by the Beijing Foreign Language Press as an editor and translator. He also spent 25 years teaching English at the Foreign Language University of the Chinese People's Liberation, beginning in 1955. He subsequently relocated to Beijing, where he worked as an English instructor at the University of Foreign Trade before retiring in 1991. Zhang Peiji has produced beneficial discoveries in both translation theory and practice. He edited the textbook A Course in English-Chinese Translation, which was widely praised by teachers and students. It has been reprinted several times since its first publication. He has dealt with numerous translation genres, including novels, biographies and essays, of which the

translation of modern Chinese prose is his favourite. Zhang Peiji has made great contributions to the cause of Chinese translation and enjoys a very important position in Chinese translation studies, and he is also listed in the Dictionary of Chinese Translators. Some of his works are treated as true classics of translation and are very popular among readers. Zhang Peiji provides a good example for Chinese translation scholars to further their theoretical research and practical work on prose translation.

3.2 Zhang's Views on Prose Translation

He defines translation as the linguistic activity of precisely and thoroughly expressing thoughts and contents conveyed in another language in one language. This is stated in the book *A Course in English-Chinese Translation*. This definition contains the following aspects: firstly, translation is an activity with linguistic characteristics; secondly, what is to be translated, it's about ideas and content; thirdly, translation takes place between at least two languages. In addition to the definition, Zhang Peiji also proposed translation standards, which have a guiding and constraining role.

He also follows several principles in choosing translation standards, firstly, translated works can introduce Chinese ideas and concepts to foreigners and spread Chinese culture. Secondly, the ideological concepts contained in the translated works have certain practical significance to modern Chinese language. In addition, his translations always make readers think after reading. He believes that native English speakers have sufficient linguistic advantages, but due to their lack of knowledge of Chinese culture and customs, they may not be able to produce satisfactory translations, so Zhang Peiji has always been committed to working as a translator.

3.3 Zhang's Selected Modern Chinese Essays

Mr Zhang Peiji's love for Chinese prose was formed at an early age. With the help and guidance of his teachers, he read and memorised a large number of Chinese and English prose. Out of his love for Chinese prose, Mr Zhang Peiji also used his spare time to translate some short essays after his retirement. Few scholars were willing to introduce the ideology in modern Chinese prose to foreigners, and Zhang Peiji filled this gap.

The first volume in the first edition was published in 1999, which contains fifty-two essays, and the second volume in first edition was published in 2003, which includes forty-five essays. Later, based on the first edition, Zhang Peiji published the second edition for works of modern Chinese essays in three volumes (Zhou, pp. 15-16). In Zhang Peiji's work, he has succeeded in embodying the style of the original works with great skill and craftsmanship, thus fully realising the aesthetic value of the original works.

4. Aesthetic Reproduction in Zhang Peiji's Selected Modern Chinese Essays

The formal and non-formal systems that make up the aesthetic composition of the aesthetic object of translation are complementary in both appearance and meaning, and this is the ontological feature of the object of translation.

4.1 Aesthetic Reproduction of Formal Systems

Formal system is also called external formal system. According to Liu Miqing, form is the external conformation of the aesthetic object, which is mainly embodied in the three levels of speech, vocabulary and sentence.

4.1.1 The Beauty of Sound

Since shape and sound can both be perceived by the eye and heard by the ear, they are the two most apparent means of communicating beauty. This section addresses how to translate lyrical prose from Chinese into English while preserving "The beauty of sound."

The renowned British writer Stephen Spender (1909-1995) often said that words and phrases in writing have a rhythm that draws readers in, much like music does. Indeed, literature is not only to be enjoyed with the eyes at leisure, but also with the ears. Every word has a latent sense of jumping music.

When translating, translators must make every attempt to preserve the original text's exquisite tone and make every effort to convey the text's imagery in a way that faithfully captures this sound. Rhetorical devices, including alliteration, rhyming, onomatopoeia, and reduplication, are frequently used. The reader may easily become engrossed in the material and develop empathy for the writer and translator by combining sound and visual.

4.1.1.1 Reduplication

Since the rhythm of every language is the unity of repetition and change, the rhythm of language may be replicated through translation. Through word repetition, stacked words are employed to provide a feeling of cyclical rhythm that stays with the reader and strengthens the impression.

(1) 原文:田沟里的水,潺潺地流着,近村的绿树,都笼在湿烟里。——冰心《笑》

The water in the field ditches was murmuring. The green trees in the neighboring village were shrouded in a mist.

The author depicts the steady, soft flow of water in a field ditch during the silence of the night by using the term "murmuring" to describe the sound of the water in the ditch in the original language. The reader is given the impression that the author is speaking softly and slowly, reaching their innermost softness and evoking the peaceful flow of a stream that night beneath the moonlight when the word "murmuring" is said twice, again, and between closed lips.

4.1.1.2 Onomatopoeia

The beauty of their form and spirit of translation is closely related to the stylistic characteristics of the original work and the style of the translator (Lu & Chang, p. 84). It may be argued that a translation is maintaining its workmanship if it is able to mimic the original text's expression while also attempting to maintain its style.

Like superlatives, onomatopoeia can also create a kind of phonetic harmony and make readers feel like they are there by imitating the sounds of nature.

(2) 原文:草场中牧放着的几条黄牛,不时曳着悠长的鸣声,好像在叫它们的主人快来牵它们回去。——郭沫若《夕暮》

A few cows grazing on the pasture let out a long drawn-out moo now and then as if urging their master to lead them home as quickly as possible.

The term "曳着悠长的鸣声" in the original text refers to the sound a cow makes when it moos. To reflect the lengthy drawn-out moo sound, Zhang added the explanation "let out a long drawn-out moo" to the translation. Moo is an onomatopoeic word used to represent the sound of a cow's moo. Similar to the Chinese term, the English word "moo" is an onomatopoeic expression used to convey a cow's mooing. Here, Zhang uses language that is suitable and understandable, creating a vivid picture of a few yellow cows mooing in a large grassland at sunset. The reader gets the impression that he is strolling over the meadow with the cows, taking in the tranquil dusk.

1. Alliteration

Alliteration is a rhetorical device commonly used in English, which gives the pronunciation of the two words before and after a musical and unifying sound by using the same initial and consonantal letters. This rhetorical device is found in Zhang's English translations, which are too numerous to mention. Take the following example to illustrate.

(3) 原文:有时流到很逼狭的境界......江河流于其间,回环曲折,极其险峻。——李大钊《艰难的国运与雄健的国民》

Sometimes it comes up against a narrow section... winding through a course with many a perilous twist and turn.

The original text depicts a river flowing between lofty mountains, with cliffs on both sides and a fast-moving river. It alludes to the fact that life is not a straight path and sometimes encounters difficult and dangerous situations. The author likens history to a river, where one may find a restricted and confined realm despite encountering a large and terrible realm. People's lives there are rough and unpredictable, much like traveling. Zhang's translation twist and turn appropriately highlights the twists and turns of the journey, and the two consonants [t] vividly and imaginatively reproduce the treacherous steepness of the mountains between the lips and teeth, which makes for a memorable reading.

4.1.2 The Beauty of Lexicon

The aesthetic message of the lexical layer is mainly reflected in the wording. Wording refers to the careful choice of words and phrases that people use when speaking and writing. Writers usually spend a lot of time on word choice. This is most true of poetry, but also of prose. Sometimes the use of a word can make or break a sentence. Authors who use words with precision and originality are sure to leave the world with many classics that will be remembered for years to come. An author's wording reflect his or her unique style of language, and in the process of translation, the translator also needs to be selective in order to preserve the flavour of the original work as much as possible.

4.1.2.1 Simile

(4) 冰心的《笑》一文中描写月亮的画面: 弓儿似的新月, 挂在树梢。The crescent new moon looked as if hanging on the tips of the trees.

Although both the original and the translation use similes, the metaphors are different. While the original compares the moon to a curved bow, the translation translates the state of the moon on the tips of the trees as "hanging on". Although the metaphors are different, the aesthetic effect is the same: a bright, clear moon hanging on the tips of the trees. Crescent also has the usage of describing the moon means narrow curved shape that tapers to a point at each end, like the new moon. One movement and one stillness well integrates the process of the moon on the willow-top, translating the original melancholy and sadness under the moon.

4.1.2.2 Colour Translation

Colour translation is one of the highlights of prose. The writers attribute distinct emotions to colors, depending on the situation.

(5) 一朵紫红,一朵嫩红,一朵是病黄的象牙色中带点血晕。

One was purplish-red, another pink, still another a sickly, ivory-yellow slightly tinged with blood-red. This text is taken from Guo Moruo's The Roses by the Roadside, which describes a rose abandoned by the roadside, withered and trampled on, and the original text is full of the decadence and sadness of "寂寞开无主". These feelings can be seen in the words: "病黄,血晕". Let's see how the interpreter handles it: First, "purplish-red" indicates "slightly purple" since the proportion of red is higher and somewhat purple. The English suffix "-ish" is used to indicate "with characteristic" after a noun and "a little" after an adjective. "Be tinged with" implies "slightly colored" with a little blood halo, which is the same as the original "带着几分…". This adverb can also indicate "slightly". The phrase "slightly tinged with" highlights the brightness of the hue by acting as a postposition to a sickly ivory-red. Two compound words that Zhang Peiji taught her students to delicately convey the emotions and meaning of the phrases. Professor Zhang Peiji used two compound words to express the meaning and feeling of the word cleverly.

4.1.3 The Beauty of Syntax

The sentence's structure mostly reflects the syntactic information that is visually pleasing.

Sentence patterns that carry aesthetic messages at the syntactic level include ellipsis, inversion, circumlocution, parallelism and antithesis, etc. There are also many similarities between Chinese and English sentence structure, which help translators to reproduce the aesthetic message at the syntactic level.

Writers frequently employ the rhetorical device known as parallelism, which involves placing three or more phrases or sentences side by side that have the same tone, the same structure, and related or comparable ideas in order to increase the pace of speech.

Parallel sentences are commonly found in prose, on the one hand, the neatness of the sentences gives readers visual impact, on the other hand, the harmony of the rhythm gives readers auditory enjoyment. This type of phrase structure is typically retained by translators when translating prose in order to better maintain the original sentence's elegant form and tone.

4.2 Aesthetic Reproduction of Non-Formal Systems

The non-material, non-natural, non-sensual, non-external aspect of the aesthetic object that cannot be inferred by intuition is known as the non-formal system, sometimes known as the inner formal system. Style, emotion, mood, and other qualities of writing are where the non-formal system's aesthetics are most evident. The aesthetics of the non-formal system is mainly manifested in the aspects of style, emotion and context.

4.2.1 The Beauty of Style

Style is an author's internal and external artistic expression that captures the energy of prose writing. After a protracted period of creative practice, many prose authors have developed their own distinctive writing style that not only reflects their own personal framework of knowledge and life experiences but also their artistic development and aesthetic talent. The author's distinct style is essential for drawing readers into writing. Next, while translating prose, it is important to think about how the translator will be able to accurately capture and translate the original text's literary style.

(6) 可是,我真爱北平。这个爱几乎是要说而说不出的。我爱我的母亲。怎样爱?我说不出。——《爱北平》

I do cherish, however, a genuine love for Peiping-a love that is almost as inexpressible as my love for mother.——Fond Memories of Peiping.

The original text is sentences from *Fond Memories of Peiping*. Despite the straightforward and unstructured nature of these statements, the author conveys his genuine affection for his mother by employing them often in a conversational style that makes readers feel at ease. When translating, the translator grasps the meaning of the original text as a whole, regards the first phrase as the first layer to express love for Peiping. The translator combines the remaining four phrases into a second layer, which is a concrete interpretation of "love", and connects the two layers through the clever addition of dashes. The original language then abruptly shifts from five small sentences to one lengthy, simple statement with a compact structure that is catchy and easy to read, keeping with the original text's informal and straightforward tone.

4.2.2 The Beauty of Emotion

Writing in prose allows an author to share their genuine thoughts about life with the reader and establish an emotional connection with them. Prose is a literary form that focuses on the communication of inner experience and inner emotion. One may argue that prose's characteristic and goal are the expression of emotion. As a result, when translating prose, translators focus closely on the emotional components of the source text. Once they have a firm understanding of the text's emotional tone, they incorporate their own emotional experiences throughout the translation process to successfully recreate the original text's emotion.

(7) 还是成都的那些老街道,我跟着你一步一步地走过平坦的石板路,我望着你的背影,心里安慰地想:父亲还很健康呢。一种幸福的感觉使我的全身发热了。——《梦》

It was the same old streets of Chengdu. I followed you step by step on the smooth flagstones. Looking at you from behind, I inwardly consoled my-self with the thought that father was still hale and hearty. A sensation of blissfulness warmed me up all over.——*Dreams*

The original passage comes from *Dreams*, an essay by Ba Jin. The essay portrays a moment in which the author, experiencing deep and profound sensations, visits his beloved but departed father again in a dream. However, the author avoids vague lyricism in expressing his feelings for his father and integrates his sincere feelings for his father into seemingly insignificant details of life such as a walk on the old street, revealing his deep love for his father through the close-up description of these details in the dream, which arouses a strong emotional resonance in the readers' hearts. The translation cleverly reproduces the original implicit and introverted expression of emotion, such as the beginning with "the same" to translate the first "\(\mathcal{L}\)", as if the deceased is still there, the past is still the same, and the feeling of nostalgia can't be contained. In addition, consoled is a graphic expression of the author because of the father's health and inner satisfaction and gratification of the real emotions, life atmosphere thick, let the reader with the plain words associated with their own life experience, real natural, tearful.

4.2.3 The Beauty of Context

Context is a literary work in the scene on the basis of the formation of an artistic realm, it can be limited in the text of the infinite scenery, out of the literature or sentimental, or ethereal meaning of the beauty. When composing and assessing text, individuals frequently use mood as a yardstick for artistic excellence. "Literary translation can only make the translated text have a similar aesthetic interest as the original text by maintaining and reproducing this mood and atmosphere of the original text," claims Liu Shicong. Given the importance of mood in prose, it is worthwhile to thoroughly examine how to translate prose while preserving the original's beauty.

(8) 从槐树叶底,朝东细数着一丝一丝漏下来的日光,或在破壁腰中,静对着像喇叭似的牵牛花 (朝荣)的蓝朵,自然而然地也能够感觉到十分的秋意。——《故都的秋》

Saunter eastward under locust trees to closely observe streaks of sunlight filtering through their foliage, or quietly watch the trumpet-shaped blue flowers of morning glories climbing half way up a dilapidated wall, and an intense felling of autumn will of itself well up inside you.——Autumn in Peiping

Yu Dafu's Autumn in Peiping describes an autumn landscape in Peiping in the original language. The strange and even run-down sights in "日光," "破壁," and "牵牛花" have beauty, according to the author, yet this beauty is depressing. "一丝一丝", "破", "蓝朵", these seemingly simple descriptions are all a true portrayal of the author's sad, despondent heart, so that one can read from the surface of the leisurely and cosy a hint of the The translator has a good understanding of the original text's mood. The translator uses the direct translation technique, accurately and thoroughly understanding the original mood. For example, they translate "破", "静", and "蓝朵" as "dilapidated", "quiet", and "rando" accordingly. On the one hand outlining the desolate and sad mood of autumn in the old capital, and on the other hand subtly responding to the author's lonely and sad state of mind. However, it also quietly addresses the

author's feelings of loneliness and melancholy. Successfully reproduced the original scene, the aftertaste of the mood, so that the reader seems to be in the same place.

5. Conclusion

One of the most significant methods for promoting Chinese culture overseas is through prose translation, which is essential to the process. Based on the theory of translation aesthetics and taking the aesthetic object as the research object, this paper studies Mr Zhang Peiji's translations from the aspects of formal system (including sound, lexicon, and syntax) and non-formal system (including style, emotion, and context). The core concept and theoretical foundation for the growth and development of conventional Chinese translation theory is translation aesthetics, which unites translation and aesthetics. The author explores the aesthetic features of the English translation of *The Selected Modern Chinese Essays* and the translation techniques used, hoping to demonstrate the feasibility and necessity of applying translation aesthetics to prose, and combining a variety of translation techniques to let foreign readers more deeply appreciate the artistic beauty of modern Chinese prose, which also has a positive significance for the translation practice of the translators in the future.

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