

Navigating Trust in Translation: “Lin Shu, Inc.” in Late Qing and Early Republican Chinese Literature

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the history of Chinese translation, “Lin Shu, Inc.” is a term popularized by Hill (2013). The term alludes to the large “enterprise” that translator Lin Shu had built, and represents his distinct paradigm and multifaceted practices. This study employs the analytical framework of Trust Theory to situate the success of “Lin Shu, Inc.” within the historical and cultural milieu of late Qing and early Republican China, exploring the underlying dynamics of trust that shaped Lin Shu’s translation approach and professional collaborations. By analyzing his cooperative networks, institutional support, and broader cultural impact, the research highlights the pivotal role of trust in configuring translation practices. This case study sheds light on the complex interplay between trust, translation, and cultural exchange, offering new perspectives on how trust functions as a critical force in navigating literary and cross-cultural interactions.

KEYWORDS: Trust Theory, indirect translation, collaborative translation, Lin Shu, Chinese translation history, translator studies

1. Introduction

Lin Shu 林紓 (1852-1924), a renowned Chinese translator active from the late Qing dynasty to the early Republican period, has long been celebrated as the “first person to introduce modern Western literature to China” (Hu 1924: 113). Despite his inability to read or write any foreign language, he translated over 180 Western novels through collaborative and indirect translation methods, establishing what Michael Gibbs Hill (2013) termed the “Lin Shu, Inc.” paradigm. Rather than solely centering Lin Shu as a quasi-author figure, Hill viewed him as a

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key participant within a larger network of individuals engaged in translation and textual reproductions from early Chinese historical eras (Hill 2013: 6).

Lin Shu and his translations were instrumental to the development of Chinese translation, exerting considerable influence on modern Chinese literature. While the catalog, literary style, and textual analysis of Lin Shu have all been explored extensively (Lin 2011: 2), there remains little research systematically examining the underlying mechanisms which enabled his remarkable success (He and He 2019). Previous research has recognized Lin Shu's identity as a translator and the establishment of the *Linyi Xiaoshuo* (林譯小說, "Lin's Translated Novels")¹ brand, but his success is usually attributed primarily to favorable personal circumstances or the cultural trends of the time (Gong 2013; He and He 2019). These accounts offer reasonable explanations to an extent; however a more detailed and systematic analysis of the factors behind Lin Shu's achievements remains necessary.

To address this gap, the present study re-examines Lin Shu's success through the lens of Trust Theory (Rousseau et al. 1998), a multidisciplinary framework applied widely in social science, psychology, and organizational theory. Building on the three-level trust model proposed by Andrea Rizzi, Birgit Lang, Anthony Pym (2019)—comprising interpersonal trust, institutional trust, and regime-enacted trust—this research investigates how Lin Shu's personal credibility, institutional affiliations, and socio-cultural legitimacy jointly contributed to the acceptance and enduring influence of his translations. By situating Lin Shu's personal practices within the broader historical and cultural context, this research argues that trust serves as a critical bridge connecting individual reputation, institutional support, and reader confidence. This perspective offers a fresh lens through which to examine the complex interplay of linguistic mediation, cultural negotiation, and literary authority in times of transformation.

2. Historical Context and Significance of Lin Shu

Lin Shu stands as a unique and remarkable figure in Chinese translation history, whose achievements may be better understood by acknowledging his personal development and the events which shaped his career. Born into a modest merchant family in 1852, Lin Shu experienced financial insecurity but displayed diligence and a thirst for knowledge from a

¹ All translations from Chinese are the authors' own unless otherwise stated.

young age. Despite his family's limited means, Lin Shu read extensively across different kinds of literary works, mastering classical Chinese literature and embracing the teachings of Neo-Confucianism. Although he attained the status of *Juren* (舉人, "provincial graduate")² in 1882, Lin Shu experienced repeated failures in subsequent imperial examinations,³ leading him to abandon his pursuit of the traditional scholarly path. He devoted himself to teaching from the age of twenty, holding positions at various schools and academies while maintaining a keen interest in national affairs. Of particular interest to him were the political reforms, foreign incursions, and cultural debates that marked the late Qing dynasty. Additionally, he engaged in extensive studies of classical Chinese texts and forged close ties with the *Tongcheng* School⁴ (Zeng 1981).

Lin Shu's involvement in translation was somewhat coincidental, beginning in 1897 following the death of his wife. Plunged into melancholy after her passing, Lin Shu collaborated with his friend Wang Shouchang⁵ (upon the latter's introduction) to translate *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas fils. With financial support from Lin's other friend, Wang Kangnian, the reprinted translation garnered considerable attention (ibid.), marking the commencement of Lin Shu's illustrious two-decade-long translation career. César Guardé-Paz (2015) observes that, despite starting his translation endeavors relatively late in life, Lin Shu accomplished the remarkable feat of translating 59 historical articles and 350 individual stories and novels. This achievement is particularly noteworthy given his many other responsibilities such as giving lectures, writing essays, teaching, and painting.

In fact, Lin Shu's success manifested in several interrelated aspects: his vast market influence, distinctive stylistic approach, and the formative role his work played in the early introduction of Western literature into China. Lin Shu translated over 180 novels, and they were unprecedented in scale and popularity. Between 1906 and 1919, Lin Shu's translations accounted for nearly 40% of the fiction section in *The Eastern Miscellany* (*Dongfang Zazhi*

² *Juren* (舉人) was a rank achieved by people who passed the *xiangshi* exam in the imperial examination system of imperial China.

³ In the context of late imperial China, the civil service examination system (*keju* 科舉) was the primary avenue for social mobility and intellectual prestige. Failing repeatedly in these examinations often meant the loss of one's aspirations for official status and social recognition, which deeply shaped one's life trajectory.

⁴ The *Tongcheng* school was a Qing dynasty literary movement that promoted classical prose, advocating clarity, moral purpose, and imitation of ancient Han and Tang styles.

⁵ Wang Shouchang (1864-1926), a scholar recently returned from studies in Paris, introduced Lin Shu to Alexandre Dumas' *La Dame aux Camélias*.

東方雜誌) (Commercial Press 2016). Besides, many of his works were reprinted multiple times and circulated broadly among the late Qing and early Republican readership. Lin Shu was thus widely acclaimed as a leading figure in modern Chinese translation, earning praise as one of the “two greats of the era” alongside Yan Fu, in the oft-quoted phrase “Yan (Yan Fu) and Lin (Lin Shu)” (嚴、林並世) (China Daily 2010).

Despite his lack of proficiency in foreign languages, Lin Shu collaborated with bilingual partners to translate a large number of Western novels. However, many of these literary translations involved intermediary versions in French and English. Due to these indirect translation practices, Lin Shu faced criticism from figures of the New Culture Movement who questioned his linguistic fidelity. Despite this, many influential writers (e.g., Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, Guo Moruo, etc.) acknowledged Lin Shu’s influence on their literary sensibilities (Zhang 2006: 29). In fact, Lin Shu’s translations exhibited remarkable creativity and artistry. To navigate the cultural disparities between East and West, Lin Shu adopted techniques such as adaptation, amplification, deletion, and modification. Rather than aiming for literal fidelity, his translations sought to convey what he perceived as the core themes or moral messages of the originals, while reshaping the narrative style and language to align with the literary tastes and rhetorical conventions of late Qing Chinese readership. For example, through his adaptations of major Western works such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and other influential novels, Lin Shu helped shape a new literary horizon for Chinese readers, laying narrative foundations that would influence modern Chinese fiction. His use of classical Chinese to convey foreign plots forged a hybrid literary style that was both aesthetically compelling and culturally accessible, reflecting a domesticating strategy that prioritized readability and resonance over formal equivalence.

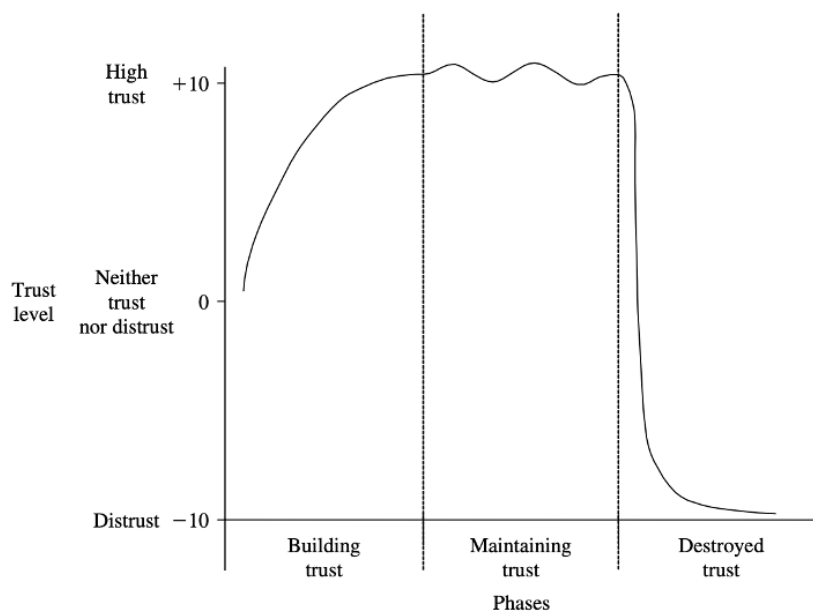
In summary, Lin Shu’s example challenges conventional notions of trust in translation by foregrounding the translator’s cultural credibility, aesthetic judgment, and textual agency over linguistic fidelity. Due to the complexity of Lin Shu’s translation methods and collaborative practices, Hill (2013) coined the term “Lin Shu Inc.” to describe the intricate dynamics of his distinctive translation approach. Most importantly, it encompasses multilayered relationships between himself and his bilingual collaborators, between readers and the authority of the translator, and between traditional Chinese literary expectations and foreign literary content. These reveal how translation and trust work together in a complex way, resonating closely with recent theoretical discussions (Rizzi et al. 2019).

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3. Trust Theory and its Application in Translation Studies

Trust Theory, first conceptualized by Rousseau, D. M., Sitkin, S. B., Burt, R. S. and Camerer, C. (1998), is an important framework in social psychology and sociology that focuses on comprehending and explaining the mechanisms involved in the establishment, growth, preservation, and deterioration of trust among individuals and communities. Steven C. Currall and Andrew C. Inkpen (2002) proposed a model consisting of three levels: interpersonal trust, inter-group trust, and inter-organizational trust. Currall and Epstein (2003) further presented a model outlining the developmental stages of trust formation (Figure 1). The creation of trust is typically a lengthy and incremental process. During the phase of “establishing trust”, trust at one level has an influence on trust at another level. Nevertheless, when an occurrence undermines trust, it results in a significant decrease in trust levels, leading to the phase known as “trust-breaking”. Rebuilding trust from scratch necessitates significant efforts in establishing trust, followed by further endeavors to reach a state of positive trust.

Figure 1: Evolutionary phases of trust. Source: Currall and Epstein (2003)



In the field of translation studies, trust has emerged as a fundamental and multifaceted concept that permeates every stage of the translation process. All transformations of trust are propelled by a complex array of rhetorical, emotional, and attitudinal factors: signals or commitments, sincerity, and the audience’s and readers’ capacity to accept texts and media (Rizzi et al. 2019: 11). When discussing trust in the translation process, George Steiner (1975)

emphasized that translators must believe there is something worthwhile to understand and translate in the original text. He also mentioned that this trust extends not only to the relationship between translators and the original text but also to all participants in the translation process, including translators, readers, commissioners, publishers, and the original authors (if still alive), and this trust relationship is reciprocal. Andrew Chesterman (1997) further underscored the centrality of trust in the translation profession, arguing that translators must earn the trust of all stakeholders in order to survive professionally. He noted that “without this trust, the profession would collapse, and so would its practice” (ibid.). Trust is generally presumed to exist unless disrupted; however, it is far easier to lose than to establish (Chesterman 1997). Its absence may thus result in the breakdown of both professional legitimacy and translational practice. In literary translation in particular, translator visibility functions as a form of trust signaling: prefaces, notes, and other paratextual elements allow readers to assess the translator’s principles, stance, and reliability.

The measurement of trust in translation remains complex and underexplored. Building on Trust Theory, some scholars have examined the relationship between trust and translation reception through a trust-based compromise model, where readers evaluate losses and gains via mediated intercultural communication (Hu 2022). This model has found applications in fields such as healthcare, machine and legal translation (e.g., Hu 2022; Chen 2024).

Furthermore, drawing on the three-level trust model proposed by Currall and Inkpen (2002), Rizzi et al. (2019) identified three key dimensions of trust relevant to translation: interpersonal trust, institutional trust, and regime-enacted trust. These interrelated dimensions extend from micro-level interactions to macro-level cultural and political structures.

- Interpersonal trust arises from direct social or professional relationships between individuals (Rizzi et al. 2019). It involves professional and social relationships among translators, editors, publishers, marketing personnel, sponsors, or supervisors (Rizzi et al. 2019: 12). Patrick Cadwell (2020) distinguishes between *thick* interpersonal trust—grounded in kinship, friendship, or shared identity—and *thin* trust, which depends only on reputation or generalized social confidence (Khodyakov 2007).
- Institutional trust refers to trust placed in organizations or systems, based on perceptions of their reliability and legitimacy (Rizzi et al. 2019). Trust in institutions depends on the perceived reliability and legitimacy of their operations (Möllering 2006). This trust stems

from the characteristics of the societal (*Gesellschaft*) community, where clients and intermediaries have sufficient confidence in professionals, believing that the products or services provided will meet certain standards (Tönies 1988).

- Regime-enacted trust refers to trust mechanisms embedded in broader ideological, cultural, or institutional frameworks that govern translation norms and expectations (Rizzi et al. 2019). This form of trust significantly shapes both interpersonal and institutional dimensions of translation. It encompasses values and perceptions about skills, knowledge, aesthetic or literary practices, and social capital that can either facilitate or hinder the translators' trustworthiness across time and space. This kind of trust may manifest as the ideology or concept of translation (Sakai 1997), the translation principles widely accepted in a specific culture and period, or the norms and practices adopted by translators that align with the expectations or acceptance of contemporary readers and patrons (Burke 2012).

In translation studies, trust serves as a quintessential lens to understand and analyze the complex socio-cultural dynamics behind translation activities. Rather than viewing translation as a purely linguistic act, the recent scholarship conceptualizes it as a network of interdependent trust relationships connecting translators, authors, readers, and institutions. The multi-dimensional trust model proposed by Rizzi et al. (2019), which includes interpersonal, institutional, and political levels, provides a theoretical framework capable of capturing both micro-level interactions among translators and macro-level cultural and political structures. In contrast, Hu's (2022) "trust-based compromise model" focuses more on systemic conditions for translational acceptability, which makes it less effective in addressing the translator's adaptive strategies under historical constraints. Thus, Rizzi's model proves more suitable for analyzing Lin Shu's case, where collaborative networks and shifting power dynamics were key to his success.

As Anthony Pym (2020: 147) observes, trust acts as the "adhesive" that binds actors into functional translation networks, while distrust may dissolve them. These trust-based chains transform translation from isolated acts into broader historical processes encompassing production, reception, and retranslation. In the case of "Lin Shu, Inc.", this framework helps explain how the widespread dissemination and lasting influence of Lin Shu's translations,

despite his lack of foreign language proficiency, were sustained by multiple layers of trust mechanisms, ranging from personal credibility to cultural legitimacy.

That said, applying Trust Theory to specific historical contexts still presents challenges. Trust is a dynamic and multifaceted social phenomenon, whose formation, breakdown, and reconstruction are difficult to quantify. Moreover, its explanatory power in cross-cultural transmission would benefit from further integration with social network analysis, institutional theory, and cultural studies. This paper adopts Rizzi's model as a primary analytical framework while critically assessing its limitations, with the aim of enriching Trust Theory's application within historical translation studies.

4. Methodology

Building on previous scholarship, this study conducts an in-depth analysis of key materials related to Lin Shu's translation works, with a particular focus on his translation practices, creative philosophy, and their cultural and literary significance. Due to the dispersed nature and limited accessibility of Lin Shu's original archival materials, including handwritten manuscripts and personal correspondence, this study does not rely on primary sources. Instead, it makes strategic use of authoritative secondary sources that compile, preserve, and annotate the original documents. Key sources for this study include *A Century of Ups and Downs: A Comprehensive Study of Lin Shu* (百年沉浮：林紓研究綜述) by Lin Wei (林薇) (1990) and *Research Materials on Lin Shu* (林紓研究資料) by Xue Suizhi (薛綏之) (1983) and Zhang Juncai (張俊才) (1983). These works systematically compile Lin Shu's biographical details, literary activities, and translated works while offering extensive bibliographies, indexes, and critical analyses. Of particular note are the annotations and prefaces within these edited volumes, which belong to the realm of paratext. These not only reflect the academic perspectives of the compilers but also serve as crucial tools for interpreting Lin Shu's texts and understanding their broader historical and cultural contexts.

While not Lin Shu's authentic manuscripts, these edited compilations preserve the content of his writings and are enriched with editorial notes and scholarly commentary, offering valuable insights into his translation philosophy, creative process, and intellectual interactions with his contemporaries. Relying on these sources, this study extracts key information for analyzing the reception and significance of Lin Shu's translations. By integrating textual analysis with

contextual interpretation, it examines paratextual elements such as annotations and editorial notes to explore the defining characteristics of Lin Shu's translation practices and their connections to contemporary intellectual trends. Incorporating biographical and critical studies, the research further situates Lin Shu's contributions within multiple literary and cultural contexts, enabling a comprehensive understanding of his legacy.

In summary, these materials allow us to gain direct insights into Lin Shu's interpersonal relationships, translation strategies, approaches, and ideologies, thereby enhancing our understanding of his characteristics and behavioral patterns as a translator, as well as the trust mechanisms manifested within the field of literary translation. Crucially, by elucidating how translators overcome linguistic barriers, foster trust, and ultimately emerge as successful translators, this study presents a concrete example of the practical application of Trust Theory in translation studies. In the following section, relevant analysis is based on three levels of trust derived from Trust Theory: interpersonal, institutional, and regime-enacted trust.

5. Navigating Trust in the Case of Lin Shu's Success

Trust, as a crucial factor in Lin Shu's success, manifests across multiple levels. The following sections will explore in detail the construction of trust in interpersonal, institutional, and regime-enacted contexts, revealing the complex dynamics underlying his achievements.

5.1 Interpersonal Trust

At the interpersonal level, Lin Shu's approach to building trust is multifaceted but can be generally divided into two main types. On the one hand, Lin Shu fostered a "thick trust" (Khodyakov 2007), that is, he nurtured positive relationships with various stakeholders involved in the translation process, including editors, publishers, marketing personnel, collaborators, and sponsors, which greatly facilitated the publication and promotion of his translations. The foundation of this collaboration lay in the trust placed in Lin Shu's personal integrity and professional competence. Furthermore, his sustained reputation and expertise in the translation field reinforced this trust.

On the other hand, there is "thin trust" (Khodyakov 2007), where stakeholders not only trust Lin Shu individually but also extend trust to the broader group or class to which he belongs.

This trust in Lin Shu and his affiliations serves as a critical cornerstone for collaboration and mutual support.

While the dynamics of trust may shift from thick trust to thin trust over time, Lin Shu's interpersonal relationships remain characterized by a solid foundation of trust. Therefore, at the interpersonal level, the thick trust towards Lin Shu personally and the thin trust towards the class he belongs to have collectively enhanced his efficiency and influence within the translation community.

5.1.1 Lin Shu's Interpreters as Collaborators

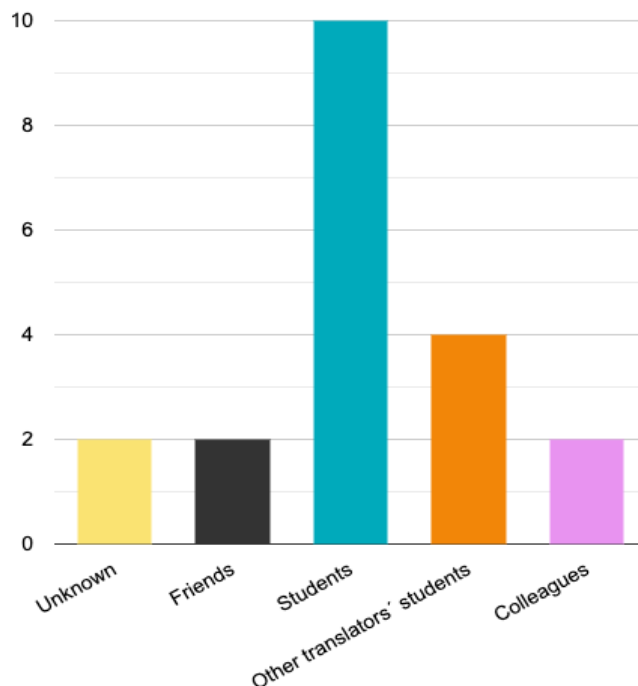
To understand Lin Shu's success, we must first identify what made his particular translation model viable and productive. Lin Shu's achievement rested on three indispensable elements that distinguished his collaborative approach from conventional translation practices: exceptional efficiency in the oral-transcription workflow, sustained high-quality literary output despite linguistic barriers, and long-term commitment from collaborators who often worked without immediate material compensation. These elements were not merely beneficial but foundational to his unprecedented productivity of over 180 translated novels.

The efficiency of Lin Shu's "oral interpretation + transcription" model was extraordinary. Lin Shu himself claimed to work only four hours a day, translating at a rate of fifteen hundred words per hour, often completing his rendition even before the interpreter had finished speaking (Zheng 1924). This rapid workflow allowed collaborators to quickly agree on the genre and original text for translation and to carry out oral renditions within just a few days. Such speed would be impossible in a typical professional relationship where translators must constantly negotiate interpretations, verify meanings, and clarify ambiguities. The quality of output, despite his lack of foreign language proficiency, required that interpreters convey more than merely literal meanings: they needed to convey cultural nuances and literary aesthetics that could be reshaped into elegant classical Chinese prose. Finally, the sustained commitment of collaborators, who selected texts, conducted oral renditions, and dedicated time to proofreading and refinement, was essential to maintain both the scale and standard of Lin Shu's translations.

These indispensable elements could not have been achieved without what Khodyakov (2007) terms "thick trust", meaning deep, relationship-based confidence that transcends transactional

professional arrangements. The efficiency of the workflow required collaborators who trusted Lin Shu's literary judgment implicitly, which eliminated the need for extensive negotiation or verification at every stage. Lin Shu, in turn, had to trust his collaborators' linguistic accuracy and cultural understanding completely, as he had no means to independently verify their oral renditions. The quality control required interpreters to trust Lin Shu to preserve the essence of the original works even while adapting them significantly for Chinese readers, while Lin Shu had to trust that his collaborators selected worthwhile texts and conveyed them faithfully. Most critically, the sustained commitment, often spanning years and multiple projects, relied on trust relationships that went beyond immediate professional benefits and motivated collaborators to invest considerable unpaid time in literary work. Having established what was indispensable for Lin Shu's success and why thick trust was necessary to achieve these elements, we now turn to evidence demonstrating that such trust indeed existed and operated in practice. The composition of Lin Shu's collaborative network provides the first layer of evidence. Throughout his life, Lin Shu collaborated with a total of twenty interpreters (Lin 2012: 2). As illustrated in Figure 2, an examination of Lin Shu's collaborators reveals that the majority were his own students, totaling ten individuals. Following them are two colleagues and two friends. Additionally, there are four others, including individuals from the same hometown or acquaintances, students of other translators, and some whose relationships with Lin Shu remain unspecified.

Figure 2: Distribution of Lin Shu’s collaborators



Further exploration of Lin Shu’s relationship with interpreters can be revealed in Table 1 by listing the basic information of the collaborators in decreasing order of the number of translations with Lin Shu. Some interpreters had multiple relationships with Lin Shu simultaneously (Gong 2013: 27). This intricate network of relationships formed a solid basis for the creation and development of the brand of “Lin’s Translated Novels”. Notably, Lin Shu’s primary collaborators, including his students and colleagues, were individuals with whom he shared close bonds. Such close relationships likely facilitated smoother communication and collaboration, which contributed to maintaining a certain level of literary acumen and translation quality. This collaborative environment, built on mutual understanding and shared goals, helped foster what Khodyakov (2007) terms “thick trust” among them.

Table 1. List of Lin Shu’s collaborators (Lin, 2012: 2)

Collaborator	Languages of collaboration	Number of translations	Relationship with Lin Shu

陳家麟[Chen Jialin]	English	67	Disciple
魏易[Wei Yi]	English	45	Colleague
毛文鐘[Mao Wenzhong]	English	24	Colleague
王慶通[Wang Qingtong]	French	15	Disciple
曾宗鞏[Zeng Zonggong]	English	14	Disciple of Yan Fu
樂賢[Le Xian]	Unclear	3	Disciple
力樹萱[Li Shuxuan]	English	2	Disciple
陳器[Chen Qi]	English	2	Disciple
李世中[Li Shizhong]	French	2	Disciple
王慶驥/王景岐[Wang Qingji]	French	2	Disciple
鬚朝梁[Hu Chaoliang]	English	1	Disciple of Chen Sanyuan ⁶
林凱[Lin Kai]	English	1	Disciple

⁶ Chen Sanyuan (1853-1937) is a famous representative poet of ancient Chinese literature in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic.

王壽昌[Wang Shouchang]	French	1	Friend
廖琇崑[Liao Xiukun]	Unclear	1	Unknown
葉於沅[Ye Yuyuan]	Unclear	1	Unknown
嚴培南[Yan Peinan]	English	1	Nephew of Yan Fu
嚴璩[Yan Qu]	English	1	Son of Yan Fu
林驎[Lin Zou]	Unclear	1	Disciple
魏瀚[Wei Han]	French	1	Friend
蔡璐[Cai Lu]	Unclear	1	Disciple

The nature of these relationships, particularly with his most productive collaborators, reveals the depth of trust that characterized their partnerships. Consider Wei Yi (魏易, 1880–1930, courtesy name Chunshu 充叔 or 春叔), who began collaborating with Lin Shu in his early twenties. Their partnership was marked by exceptional rapport and mutual confidence. In the preface to 英國詩人吟邊燕語序 *Yingguo Shiren Yinbian Yanyu Xu* “Preface to Poetic Voices from England’s Shores” (1904: 1), Lin Shu directly praised Wei Yi as “my close friend from Renhe, young Chunshu, youthful yet erudite, thoroughly versed in Western languages” (摯友仁和春叔，年少英博，淹通西文). This commendation not only highlights Wei Yi’s linguistic competence and scholarly depth but also serves as direct evidence of the mutual trust within their collaborative relationship. Before co-translating major novels, they had already collaborated on shorter works such as 英女士意色兒離鸞小記 *Yingnüshi Yise’er Liluan Xiaoji* “A Brief Account of the English Lady Isabel’s Separation” and 巴黎四義人錄 *Bali Siyi Ren Lu* “Records of Four Righteous Men of Paris”, published in the October and November 1901 issues of 普通學報 *Putong Xuebao* “The Universal Gazette”. Subsequently,

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they co-translated numerous Western classics, including 塊肉餘生述 *Kuairou Yusheng Shu* “David Copperfield” by Charles Dickens, 黑奴吁天錄 *Heinu Yutian Lu* “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” by Harriet Beecher Stowe, and 海外軒渠錄 *Haiwai Xuanqu Lu* “Gulliver’s Travels” by Jonathan Swift. This progression from short works to major classics, sustained over years and multiple projects, demonstrates how thick trust enabled both parties to develop a stable collaborative model while maintaining mutual recognition and confidence.

The actual collaborative practices provide further concrete evidence of thick trust in operation. The commencement of Lin Shu’s translation career itself illustrates this foundation. As mentioned previously, Lin Shu’s foray into translation was greatly influenced by the guidance and support of his friends. With the initiative aimed at helping him overcome his grief of losing his wife (Zeng 1981), Lin Shu and his friends embarked on their first collaborative translation project using an oral rendition approach. Eventually, 巴黎茶花女遺事 *Bali Chahuanv Yishi* “La Dame aux Camélias”, quickly gained widespread popularity and became highly sought after. This origin story, in which friends initiated a translation project primarily to help Lin Shu through personal tragedy, exemplifies the kind of relationship-based trust that would characterize his entire translation career. Hence, it can be argued that the thick trust between Lin Shu and his collaborators, built through long-term relationships and shared intellectual goals, facilitated efficient collaboration. Their mutual trust minimized the need for lengthy negotiations or verification, enabling them to promptly decide on the genre and source text and complete the oral translation within only a few days. However, such trust also posed risks, such as errors in translation. Lin Shu acknowledged in the preface to 巴黎茶花女遺事 *Bali Chahuanv Yishi* “La Dame aux Camélias”:

In hastily drafted chapters, errors are inevitable. Recently, acquaintances from within the country have pointed out my mistakes in their writings, which deeply troubles me. However, as I have no knowledge of Western languages and can only render in writing what others interpret orally, errors are unavoidable and stem entirely from my lack of understanding (1908: 1).⁷

⁷ Original text: “急就之章,難保不無舛謬。近有海內知交投書舉鄙人謬誤之處見箴,心甚感之。惟鄙人不審西文,但能筆述,即有訛錯,均出不知。”

The most striking evidence of thick trust lies in the delegation of text selection authority. The choice of original texts was mainly at the discretion of Lin Shu's collaborators. Since Lin Shu did not have proficiency in any foreign language, the selection of original texts relied entirely on the professional judgment of his collaborators. If the translator possessed a solid literary background, they tended to choose more significant works; otherwise, they might select lesser-known texts. As Zheng (1924) noted, among all the works translated by Lin Shu, later generations generally considered only sixty to seventy of them to be of notable value, while the rest were largely mediocre or of limited worth; however, this outcome cannot be entirely attributed to Lin Shu himself. Regardless of the ultimate value of the works, the complete delegation of authority over text selection itself reflects Lin Shu's trust in his collaborators. He relied on their literary judgment and, through collaboration, carried out translation tasks, thereby applying in practice a strategy of thick trust that enabled the translation work to be not only efficient but also capable of harnessing the professional expertise and aesthetic discernment of his collaborators.

In summary, Lin Shu's extensive translation work was inseparable from the deep trust embedded within his close-knit network of collaborators. This trust was built through long-standing social ties, primarily teacher-student relationships, collegial bonds, and friendships, and manifested in candid communication about personal limitations, enabling the complete delegation of critical decisions and sustaining long-term, efficient collaboration across multiple projects. Such trust, cultivated through mutual reliance and shared intellectual goals, not only ensured efficient workflows, supporting rapid oral translations and seamless coordination, but also fostered a shared commitment to quality. Notably, this deep trust was a crucial enabling factor, providing Lin Shu with a stable environment in which he could rely on others' expertise while focusing on his strengths in literary expression and style. Without this trust, the scale, speed, and quality of Lin Shu's translation work would have been unattainable. Therefore, it was precisely this profound interpersonal trust that underpinned Lin Shu's sustained productivity and ultimately contributed to his enduring success as a translator.

5.1.2 Editors and Sponsors

The success of Lin Shu's translation enterprise was fundamentally grounded in networks of interpersonal trust that facilitated both the production and dissemination of his works. Lin Shu

had an extensive social circle, and as Gong (2013: 29) notes, the publication and distribution of Lin Shu's translated novels were facilitated through his connections. The success of Lin's translations was not solely his achievement; another crucial element was the support of publishers and sponsors. Lin Shu's smooth translation journey and the rapid publication of his translated works were also indebted to the assistance of his friends (He and He 2018: 62). Many influential figures influenced Lin Shu's translations, who either helped him start his translation career, encouraged him to continue, or supported him throughout his journey. These sponsors became the guardians of Lin Shu's translation career, accompanying him through life and influencing both readers' reception and the dissemination of his translations.

Lin Shu's most crucial relationships exemplified thick interpersonal trust, where deep personal bonds transcended mere professional collaboration. The principal patron of Lin Shu's translation endeavors was Wei Han, a prominent figure in academia and society, renowned as China's first doctoral graduate in law and a trailblazer in naval architecture (He and He 2019). He invited Lin Shu and Wang Shouchang to collaborate on the translation of *La Dame aux Camélias* as a means of overcoming personal challenges. Besides, Wei Han supported Lin Shu by financing his translations, securing a teaching position for him, and providing for his needs, which enabled Lin Shu to begin his prolific translation career. Collaborating closely, Wei Han and Lin Shu jointly produced many European and American works, a testament to Wei Han's pivotal role in fostering Lin Shu's translation legacy. Notably, several masterpieces within the "Lin's Translated Novels" collection, such as 黑奴籲天錄 *Heinu Yutianlu* "Uncle Tom's Cabin", bore the imprint of Wei Han's translation prowess, underscoring his indispensable contribution to Lin Shu's translation enterprise.

Similarly, the relationship between Lin Shu and his Commercial Press patrons, Zhang Yuanji and Gao Mengdan, demonstrates how thick interpersonal trust sustained long-term professional partnerships (He and He 2019: 66). Gao Mengdan's trust in Lin Shu was rooted in familial connections and personal affinity, creating bonds that transcended business considerations. Their shared hometown origins and Gao Mengdan's fraternal ties with Gao Fengqi, Lin Shu's fellow imperial examination candidate in 1882, provided the social foundation for sustained trust. This personal trust enabled Gao Mengdan to champion Lin Shu's work consistently, playing a pivotal role in establishing the "Lin's Translated Novels" brand without requiring constant oversight or verification of quality. Gao Mengdan's instrumental role in promoting and disseminating 巴黎茶花女遺事 *Bali Chahuanv Yishi* 'La Xingzhi Wan and Hongying Li, *Navigating Trust in Translation: "Lin Shu, Inc." in Late Qing and Early Republican Chinese Literature, 124–153*

Dame aux Camélias' underscored his crucial contribution to fortifying Lin Shu's identity as a translator.

Moreover, Zhang Yuanji's relationship with Lin Shu, while initiated through professional introduction via Gao Mengdan, evolved into a profound friendship based on shared literary aspirations, as highlighted in Lin's preface to the translation of 蠻荒誌異 *Manhuang Zhiyi* "Black Heart and White Heart and Other Stories" in 1906. Investing in the Commercial Press in 1901 and assuming directorship in 1903, Zhang Yuanji's erudition in English and discerning eye for talent catalyzed the transformation of the Commercial Press into a publishing juggernaut. A standard-bearer of erudite scholars and traditional intellectuals in the late Qing dynasty, Zhang Yuanji ardently espoused the dissemination of Western culture, zealously championing the publication of Lin Shu's translated works. The trust Zhang Yuanji placed in Lin Shu is shown through his hands-off publishing approach, allowing Lin Shu's translations to be published with few changes to speed up the process and avoiding unnecessary criticism. Even as Lin Shu's translation acumen waned in his later years, Zhang's personal trust remained steadfast, leading him to personally oversee proofreading and editing endeavors. This trust persisted despite market vicissitudes, with Zhang Yuanji continuing to publish Lin Shu's translations in 小說世界 *Xiaoshuo Shijie* "Novel World", evidencing his unwavering commitment to sustaining Lin Shu's career amidst physical and mental duress. The concerted efforts of patrons like Zhang Yuanji bolstered Lin Shu's resilience, enabling him to navigate the challenges of his twilight years as a translator.

Wang Kangnian's relationship with Lin Shu further exemplifies thick interpersonal trust built on personal affection and mutual respect. Lin Shu's dedication in 彗星奪婿錄 *Huixin Duoxulu* (1909) exemplifies this bond: "My esteemed friend Wang Rangqing, possessed of a sharp wit, often utters words that compel my laughter." Following Wei Han's sponsorship of the engraving of 巴黎茶花女遺事 *Bali Chahuanv Yishi* "La Dame aux Camélias", Wang Kangnian contributed to the publication of its lead type edition. Although Wang Kangnian's involvement in this endeavor seemed fortuitous, the trust evident in this collaboration significantly elevated Lin Shu's prominence and broadened the influence of his translations (Zhang 2011).

In summary, the genesis and evolution of Lin Shu's literary work were significantly supported by his social circle. The "thick interpersonal trust" from these associates not only facilitated

his novel creation but also ensured their propagation and refinement. The Commercial Press, particularly its editors and leadership, demonstrated unwavering confidence in Lin Shu's work by offering generous compensation, expedited publication, advance royalties, and even a stake in the company. This strategy aimed to leverage Lin Shu's works to cultivate a distinctive brand identity, "Lin's Translated Novels", for mutual benefit.

Furthermore, from the perspective of "thin interpersonal trust", Lin Shu's membership within the literati conferred a predisposition towards trust. According to the hierarchical structure of traditional Chinese society, literati occupied the loftiest echelon among the "Four Occupations" of ancient China: scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants, garnering profound respect and confidence (Chi 2020). They served not only as the primary leaders and bearers of culture but also as members and reserves of government officials within the state's administrative machinery (ibid.). Flourishing in the golden age of classical literature, Lin Shu's roles as an educator and classical scholar fostered intimate connections within the *Tongcheng* School, renowned for its reverence of classical literature and moral precepts (Zeng 1981). This scholarly lineage not only bolstered Lin Shu's standing within intellectual circles but also engendered trust among readers, substantiating his credentials as a translator. Consequently, it can be posited that his own esteemed status provided a firm foundation for the gradual augmentation of readers' trust in his translated novels.

5.2 Institutional Trust

The concept of institutional trust, as described by Rizzi et al. (2019), embodies a "strong but thin" or depersonalized form of trust, wherein the brand name and reputation of the publisher are sufficient to instill confidence in readers regarding the quality of the works. This form of trust proved instrumental in Lin Shu's translation success, compensating for his lack of foreign language proficiency and establishing his credibility in China's emerging translation market.

Lin Shu's association with the Commercial Press exemplifies how institutional trust functions in literary translation. As China's leading publishing house during the early 20th century, the Commercial Press enjoyed sterling reputation for quality and extensive influence in the literary community. Founded in 1900 by four distinguished scholars, the press had established an unshakable position in the publishing industry through its commitment to quality publications, advanced printing technology, and comprehensive distribution networks

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spanning over 10 cities by 1911 (Gong 2013: 39). The Commercial Press has witnessed the fluctuations of modern Chinese history, directly or indirectly influencing the formation of modern Chinese culture and social landscapes, particularly during the New Culture Movement, during which it played a pivotal role in shaping modern Chinese culture and introducing foreign scientific and cultural ideas (Shi 2006). According to Chen Pingyuan and Xia Xiaohong (1997: 49), from 1901 to 1906, the Commercial Press led in the publication of translated novels, producing a total of 241 works, while the second-ranked publisher released only 90. This underscores the Commercial Press's leading position in the field of translated novel publishing. This institutional prestige became a crucial factor in Lin Shu's translation success, as the Commercial Press emblem represented a quality guarantee that made readers more willing to trust and purchase his translated works.

The Commercial Press's institutional support for Lin Shu's success is evident in both the scale and commercial terms of their collaboration. Beginning in 1903, the Commercial Press published 140 individual translated works by Lin Shu over two decades, including eight works in 1905 alone and consistent monthly publications during 1916, 1917, and 1919 (He and He 2019: 67). Additionally, the advanced printing equipment and comprehensive distribution system of the Commercial Press laid a solid material foundation and reader base for the widespread dissemination of Lin Shu's translated novels, significantly enhancing their visibility.

According to He and He (2019), Lin Shu's remuneration for translating novels was 6 yuan per thousand characters, which was significantly higher than the prevailing rate of 1-2 yuan per thousand characters for translators at the time. The Commercial Press spared no effort in building Lin Shu and his works into a brand, conducting extensive promotional campaigns (Gong 2013: 47). Even though the quality of Lin Shu's translations declined in later years, he still maintained a considerable readership (Gong 2013: 48). Despite Lin Shu's lack of proficiency in foreign languages and potential doubts about his qualifications as a translator, the association of his works with the prestigious brand and reputation of the Commercial Press lent them a significant level of institutional trust. The emblem of the Commercial Press represented a quality guarantee, making readers more willing to trust and purchase Lin Shu's translated works. The recognition of his identity as a translator by the publishing industry, combined with the symbolic authority of the Commercial Press, provided quality assurance that led readers to embrace his translations. Through the wide dissemination of his works

published by the Commercial Press, Lin Shu further enhanced both his institutional trust and professional reputation.

This institutional trust operated dynamically with interpersonal trust to amplify Lin Shu's success. According to Cadwell (2020), these trust forms share a complementary relationship, with individuals basing their trust of institutions on perceived adherence to established standards. The Commercial Press's strategy of rapid publication with generous advance royalties not only demonstrated institutional confidence in Lin Shu but also strengthened trust relationships with readers and other stakeholders. Overall, as a trusted leader in the culture and publishing market, the Commercial Press provided both economic support for Lin Shu and extensive publication opportunities that maximized benefits for both parties while endorsing his translations through institutional authority.

The trust evolution model emphasizes that trust relationships are dynamic and continuously changing processes, encompassing three stages: formation, maintenance, and breach. Applying this model to the interaction between Lin Shu and the translation market provides a more systematic understanding of the trust mechanisms underlying his success. In the formation stage, Lin Shu leveraged the Commercial Press's brand reputation alongside his literary prestige to establish both institutional and interpersonal trust. During the maintenance stage, ongoing collaborative publishing and promotional efforts reinforced this trust, facilitating widespread recognition of his translated works. While no evident breach of trust occurred, some controversies over translation quality revealed potential challenges, reflecting micro-level risks of trust deterioration that the institutional framework helped mitigate.

In summary, institutional trust through the Commercial Press provided the foundational credibility that enabled Lin Shu's translation success despite his unconventional qualifications. The dynamic interaction between institutional endorsement and interpersonal trust created a sustainable framework for his career, demonstrating how publishers' reputational capital can be leveraged to establish translator credibility and achieve commercial success in emerging literary markets. This case illustrates that translation success often depends not merely on linguistic competence but on the institutional trust networks that validate and disseminate translated works.

5.3 Regime-enacted Trust

At the level of regime-enacted trust, the discussion examines how Lin Shu's translation methods—such as collaborative and indirect translation—and his textual strategies, including deletion and revision, contributed to social recognition and cultural influence, thereby gaining endorsement within the broader late Qing context of translation norms and cultural expectations. In terms of translation methods, Lin Shu employed collaborative and indirect translation, which were deeply rooted in the societal and cultural conditions of the time, thereby fostering a form of trust recognized by the prevailing institutions. Regarding his translation strategies, although his practices may have been seen as innovative and departing from traditional conventions, it was precisely this innovation and departure that earned the admiration of both readers and critics. Lin Shu's translation practices were not merely technical operations but mechanisms through which trust was constructed and sustained, which helps explain his remarkable success.

While the concept of indirect translation in existing theories may carry negative connotations (Ringmar 2012: 142), Lederer (1994/2014) elucidates translation as a (concurrent) three-stage process involving comprehension, de-verbalization, and re-expression. Due to variations in how translators handle texts across these stages, translation outcomes may vary among individuals, occasionally resulting in differences from the original text. Consequently, the intervention of intermediate versions may increase the distance between the source text and the final target text, contingent upon the quality of the intermediate text. Collaborative translation also has its drawbacks, especially concerning the oral interpretation mode discussed in this study, which heavily relies on the preferences of collaborators, with the quality of the original text closely linked to the literary competence of these collaborators. The power dynamics of this collaborative mode are often intricate, with these interpreters potentially occupying a position of extreme subordination in such relationships (Cordingley and Frigau Manning 2017).

Lin Shu, who was completely illiterate in any Western language, relied solely on oral dictation to complete numerous novels, making him a unique individual in Chinese history known to have employed this method. However, his approach to translation finds parallels in translation history (Zhang 2006: 60). In fact, collaborative translation has a long history in China. For instance, the large-scale translation activities of ancient Chinese Buddhist

scriptures that commenced in the Eastern Han Dynasty involved collaboration between Indian and Central Asian monks and Chinese assistants (Chen 2000: 6), who orally transmitted the texts for recording and compilation. The translation work of missionaries in the 19th and 20th centuries was often completed through collaboration between second-language missionaries and first-language speakers, also employing an ‘Oral translation + note-taking’ mode of operation (Hill 2013). Zhang (2006) argues this practice persists due to two main factors: limited language proficiency of translators and a lack of translation theory. These factors remain prevalent especially during the late Qing dynasty, but the regime-enacted acceptance and recognition of this collaborative translation model allowed it to gain social legitimacy and circulation, enabling translators like Lin Shu, despite lacking proficiency in Western languages, to achieve widespread recognition and appreciation. In this sense, his success depended not only on his personal translation strategies but also on trust established at the regime-enacted level.

Meanwhile, between 1840 and 1920, the sources of many translated Western novels were often difficult to ascertain: many translated works omitted the original titles and/or authors (Tarumoto 1998). Even if identifiable, many works were translated through a third language (ibid.). In China, during the early 20th century, a large number of works were translated from Japanese as an intermediary language into Chinese, which also became common among Chinese translators (Xiong 1998). This indirect translation method enabled works to be introduced into the target country, facilitating the creation of works in an era when translators and original texts were difficult to obtain. Tarumoto (1998: 42) stated that he was unable to track any new Western novels retranslated from Japanese after 1911. This does not mean that they have completely stopped, but it does indicate a significant shift from relying on Japanese as an intermediary to directly translating from European languages, which in turn reflects China’s own progress in teaching and learning European languages, as well as the shift in destination for Chinese students from Japan to the United States and Europe.

Therefore, on the one hand, collaborative and indirect translation were common practices at the time. These methods were often accompanied by textual strategies such as deletion and revision, as the primary aim was to broaden intellectual horizons and facilitate an understanding of Western literature. As a result, these translation methods did not give rise to distrust. On the other hand, during the Late Qing and Early Republican Era, the boundary between translation and creation was blurred, and the criteria for translation quality were not

confined to whether it was a direct translation or had undergone modifications (Wong 2019: 27-28). Approximately 90% of novel readers were intellectuals or old literati, with the general public accounting for only about 9%, and the remaining 1% being social elites who received modern education and possessed a relatively open mind (Xue and Zhang 1983). Therefore, to make Western translated works acceptable to society, translators had to meet the demands of most readers, who were intellectuals and old literati, by using a specialized translation language they were particularly familiar with, namely classical Chinese (Guarde-Paz 2017). Additionally, to cater to their preferences, translators frequently removed elements that conflicted with Chinese traditions or Confucian values, while emphasizing aspects that resonated with local cultural expectations. This strategy strengthened the bond of trust between translators and their audience: by employing a language imbued with cultural authority, Lin Shu was able to secure both literary legitimacy and the confidence of his readers.

To sum up, for early Chinese readers who were first exposed to foreign literature, strategies such as free translation and local adaptation facilitated comprehension and acceptance of content. Fortunately, Lin Shu's literary translation philosophy resonated widely within the late Qing translation community. On the one hand, he emphasized that translation should reflect faithfulness to the original text, acknowledging its core meaning and spirit. Yet, on the other hand, he freely adapted and altered the text as he saw fit to suit the tastes and cultural expectations of Chinese readers (Guan 2008: 353). Writing in classical Chinese, Lin Shu's translations were more accessible and acceptable to his audience, creating a sense of trust despite his lack of foreign language proficiency. This approach established him as a trusted figure and set a model that many translators of the time followed.

6. Conclusion

Through a thorough analysis of the "Lin Shu Inc." case, this research aims to reveal the role of trust as an indispensable element in translation history. The findings not only elucidate how trust serves as a bridge between a translator's reputation, institutional support, and cultural expectations in the literary translation field but also shed light on the significance of establishing and maintaining trust in translation practice. On the first level of trust, Lin Shu's personal integrity and professional competence played a crucial role in establishing interpersonal trust. Moreover, the societal recognition of literati during Lin Shu's time

conferred upon him a high social status, further contributing to the trust he gained. On the second level, the reputation of the Commercial Press lent institutional trust to his works, facilitating the widespread dissemination of his translations. On the third level, Lin Shu's translation strategies, language choices, and modes aligned with the societal and cultural demands of the time, thereby establishing regime-enacted trust and solidifying his reputation as an authoritative and trustworthy figure in the translation field.

The analysis of Lin Shu's case supports Pym's (2020: 146) assertion that trust serves as the "glue" binding translators, texts, and their receivers. By exploring Lin Shu's strategies for building and adjusting trust over time, this study highlights the practical realizations of Trust Theory in specific historical and cultural contexts. From a theoretical perspective, this research fills a critical gap in applying Trust Theory to translation history, uncovering its multidimensional nature and contextual variability. While Trust Theory has been extensively applied in practical fields such as healthcare interpretation (e.g., Hu 2022; Cadwell 2020), and legal and machine translation (e.g., Chen 2024; Scansani 2020), its integration into translation studies (particularly in historical and translator-focused research) remains underdeveloped: little attention is given to temporal frameworks and detailed case analyses. In this regard, Lin Shu's unique case highlights that translation is not merely the transfer of language and culture, but a complex process of trust-building. It demonstrates how translators adapt their strategies to maintain trust in the face of historical transformations and cultural shifts, a topic that merits further scholarly exploration.

In terms of future research, this study advocates for deeper exploration of the practical applications of Trust Theory in translation practice. Specifically, it suggests exploring how trust dynamically functions between translators and institutions, as well as between translators and readers, across different historical contexts. Additionally, future research can focus on the evolving role of trust in the context of modern translation technologies, contributing to the advancement of translation studies.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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