



Robinson Crusoe's translation and spreading of marine spirit in pre-modern China



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Abstract Western marine literature classics were translated into Pre-modern China, and *Robinson Crusoe* is one of the most representative. Various Chinese versions were rendered with the political and educational push of the time. The translation and introduction of the noted classic played a key role in the spreading and formation of the Chinese marine spirit, thus profoundly inspiring Chinese readers. The adventure of Robinson on the wild island provided a powerful spiritual impetus for those Chinese with lofty ideals. It is without doubt that the translated novel conforms to the spirit and demand of the time, and voices the inner mind of the Chinese, which is the very reason why it has been loved and accepted by the massive Chinese readers and influenced them so much ever since.

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Translated literature in Pre-modern China presented a magnificent view. Most western countries are marine nations; therefore, in western literature most outstanding literary works are shining with the spirit of the sea. Western marine literature classics were translated into Pre-modern China, and *Robinson Crusoe* is one of the most representative. *Robinson Crusoe*, the masterpiece of Daniel Defoe is known almost all over the world, and regarded as a realistic marine adventure novel. The book is so well received by the readers for its adventurous plots on the island and readable language for the common Englishmen that wherever there is the *Bible*, there is a copy of *Robinson Crusoe*. For these, there are not only many full translated adventure of *Robinson Crusoe* in Chinese for adults but also lots of Children's versions. The translation and introduction of the noted classic has played a great impact on the Chinese society. The hero was a man full of intense curiosity

for nature and human society, screaming for personality independence, and attempting to verify his enterprising spirit through battles with severe living environment. The marine spirit embodied by Robinson coincided with the anti-feudalism and development of personal freedom of the Chinese people of that time; furthermore, it played a key role in the formation and spreading of the Chinese marine spirit, such as martialism and overseas adventure, etc., thus profoundly inspiring the Chinese readers (see Fig. 1).

Introduction of Defoe and his *Robinson Crusoe*

Daniel Defoe (1660–1731) was one of the founders of the English realistic novels, and gained the name “the father of the English novels” (Qishen and Zhu, 1981:93). He was born in a merchant family, spent many years in business during his youth, and then became a soldier, having been to Spain, Italy, France, Germany and other places. He also engaged in

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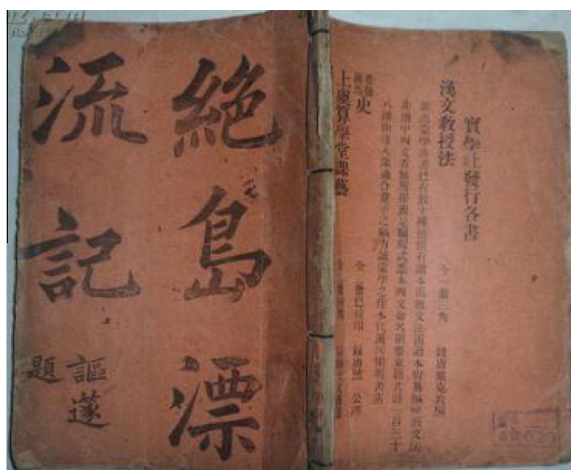


Fig. 1 The covers of the first Chinese Version of *Robinson Crusoe*.

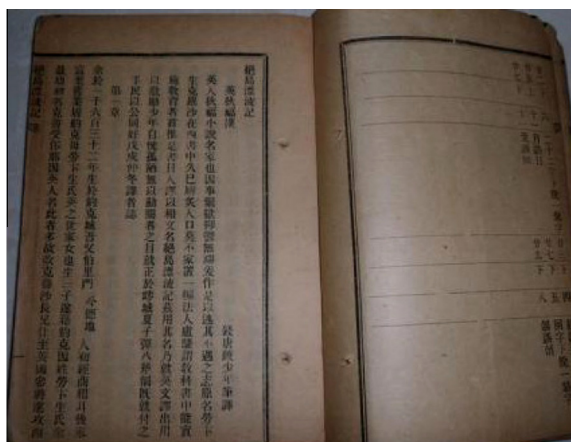


Fig. 2 The first page of the first Chinese Version of *Robinson Crusoe*.

political activities, actively advocating social reforms. The rich life experience offered the essential ideas and skills for his literary creation (see Fig. 2).

Defoe started the job of writing *Robinson Crusoe* when he was almost 60, which is his first novel and the best (Anixter, 1981:198). Later, he also wrote in succession *Captain*

Singleton, *Moll Flanders* and many other novels. But today Defoe is chiefly remembered as the author of *Robinson Crusoe*. This masterpiece appeared in the year of 1719, and after its publication politicians, economists, preachers, literary historians and critics made comments on it from various perspectives. *Robinson Crusoe* was based on a real adventure. In 1704, A Scottish sailor Alexander Selkirk was marooned on the island of Juan Fernandez in the Atlantic and lived there quite alone for four years. The story of his adventures aroused great public attention and several records of his solitary life on the island appeared in different publications. With the real story as the basis, Defoe created the noted novel. In the book he took the hero's 28 years living alone on the island as the main clue, narrating the unusual and exhilarating experience by Robinson himself. The story has three sections: The first part is concerned with Robinson's three sailing experiences away from home; the second specifically describes the ship wreckage that Robinson underwent and the marooning on a lonely island, including his hunting, cave seclusion, engagement in agricultural production, which lasted twenty-eight years. The third part involves that he finally got relieved and returned to England. The second part is the main body of the novel (see Table 1).

Literature is in essence humanism, always following the tides of the era. Defoe's works evidently demonstrate the atmosphere of the times – the 18th century, when British society was experiencing great and profound changes. Along with the fast economic development, the British bourgeois of the middle class also grew rapidly. As one of the members of the new class, Robinson was a representative figure in the rising period of capitalism; hence, the novel *Robinson Crusoe* can be viewed as a miniature of the rising British bourgeoisie. These were the people who had known poverty and hardship, and most of them had obtained their present social status through hard work. They believed in self-restraint, self-reliance and advocated human labor instead of waiting and praying. Though some of them behaved themselves and made every effort to obtain an uneventful life, but more aspired to involve competition, attempt exploration in the outside world, and meet the challenges of the various forces. Robinson was one who specifically and fully embodies the idea. "The significance of *Robinson Crusoe* is that it records the burgeoning of quite a few intellectual and social traits that latter became the epochal features of Western Man, such as the belief that material improvement is entwined with spiritual advancement, alongside the rise of capitalism, individualism, and European supremacy." (Li'an, 2007:25–48).

Table 1 The main versions of *Robinson Crusoe* from 1902 to 1919 (Tarumoto, 2002).

Translator	Version's name	Press	Publishing time
Shen Zufen 沈祖芬	Jue Dao Piao Liu Ji 绝岛漂流记	Shanghai Kaiming Bookstore & The Civilized Bookstore 开明书店、文明书店	1902
Lin Shu & Zeng Zonggong 林纾、曾宗巩	Lu Bin Xun Piao Liu Ji 鲁滨孙漂流记	Shanghai Commercial Press 上海商务印书馆	1905/1913/ 1914/1917
Cong Kan 从龛	Jue Dao Ying Xiong 绝岛英雄	GuangYi Bookstore 广益书局	1906
Xiao Bo&Hongfu 小波、红绂	Wu Ren Dao Da Wang 无人岛大王	Unknown	1909
Zhou Di 周砥	Jue Dao Ri Ji 绝岛日记	Qunyi Publishing House 群益书社	1910
Sun Yuxiu 孙毓修	Jue Dao Piao Liu 绝岛漂流	Shanghai Commercial Press 上海商务印书馆	1910

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