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From "Sushi" (素食) to "Shushi" (蔬食): A Corpus-Based Study of Lü Bicheng's Terminology Construction

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Abstract: Studies of translated terms in modern China have largely focused on male intellectual elites and on scientific and technological terminology; the people who coined renderings for everyday-life and social-movement concepts have received less attention. Drawing on the self-built Lü Bicheng Translation Corpus (93,973 characters, 44 items, stratified into Chinese and Western sub-corpora), this article examines quantitatively the terminology system of *The Light of Europe and America* (1932), compiled by Lü Bicheng. The statistics show that *shushi* 蔬食 occurs 90 times across 15 items, whereas *sushi* 素食 , the later standard rendering, occurs only twice, both times when Lü reports others' words; her own naming uses *shushi* throughout. The form heads a complete derivational series (*shushi-hui* "vegetarian society," *shushi-zhuyi* "vegetarianism," and so on), roughly symmetrical with the *vegetarian* family (91 occurrences) in the Western sub-corpus, and its dominant-form ratio reaches 97.8 percent. The article then analyzes naming motivation, consistency of use, and translation norms, takes the self-coined proper name *You Lake* 麀湖 (Moosehead Lake) as a case, and explains, with reference to the historical fate of Yan Fu's renderings, why *shushi* failed to replace *sushi* in modern Chinese.

Keywords: Lü Bicheng; Terminology; Translated terms; Corpus-based translation studies; Translation norms; *The Light of Europe and America*

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1. Introduction

In the lexical history of modern Chinese, the coining of translated terms and the competition among them tracked the eastward spread of Western learning closely. Existing research has discussed the terminological practice of male intellectual elites such as Yan Fu and Liang Qichao extensively. By contrast, those who coined renderings for everyday-life concepts (diet, ethics, social movements) have received less attention, even though competition in this domain was equally intense and circulation arguably wider. The case

of *vegetarian* (素 食 *sushi* / 蔬 食 *shushi*) belongs here. The term concerns a dietary practice and, at the same time, the discursive construction of the modern animal-protection movement; the two forms differ in semantic core, since 素 *su* originally means "plain white silk" and names the diet through plainness and abstention, whereas 蔬 *shu* means "vegetables, greens" and names it through the plant material itself.

Lü Bicheng (1883–1943) offers a suitable case. In 1932, the Buddhist Book Company of Shanghai published her compiled volume *The Light of Europe and America* (*Ou Mei zhi guang*), which introduced the Euro-American animal-protection and vegetarian movements to Chinese readers [1]. As one of the very few women compiler-translators of the period, she faced a practical choice: Chinese already possessed *sushi* to denote a meat-free diet, yet she installed *shushi* as the dominant rendering of the whole book. Was this incidental preference or systematic terminology construction? And why did the form fail to replace *sushi* in modern Chinese? Existing research on Lü Bicheng has unfolded mainly from literary and gender perspectives [2]; corpus-based examinations of her terminological practice remain few.

Drawing on the self-built Lü Bicheng Translation Corpus, this article addresses four research questions: Q1: What is the pattern of frequency, distribution, and collocation of *shushi* and *sushi* in the book? Q2: What is the naming motivation of *shushi*, and how does it correspond semantically to *vegetarian*? Q3: Is Lü's use of renderings systematic and consistent, and how should it be positioned within the theory of translation norms? Q4: What naming strategy is embodied by self-coined renderings such as *You Lake* 麆湖 , and how is the historical fate of *shushi* to be explained? The corpus profile and construction details have been reported in a companion paper.

2. Literature review

2.1. Principles of term translation and norms for renderings

Lu argues that term translation should be oriented toward "the stability of renderings," reusing established renderings wherever possible [3]. Wang, drawing lessons from the Chinese rendering of "helicopter," shows that competition among renderings is ultimately settled by the choice of a normative knowledge space [4]. This account frames the competition between the two naming motivations of *shu* and *su*. Huang, from the perspective of eco-translatology, proposes that renderings are selected within the translation ecosystem by "eliminating the weak and retaining the strong" [5]. Together, these studies suggest that a rendering is established by the joint action of naming motivation, norm orientation, and ecological competition.

2.2. Studies of modern Chinese neologisms and translated words

Shen advocates complementing conceptual-history research with a lexical-history perspective, stressing the foundational role of digital resources and corpora [6]. F. Yu, Cui, and Tong make an observation that matters here: most of the translated words Yan Fu painstakingly coined ultimately failed to enter the modern Chinese lexicon, and "a famous translator's renderings do not necessarily circulate" is a normal state of affairs in modern lexical history [7]. This judgment provides a frame of reference for explaining the historical fate of *shushi*.

2.3. Corpus methods in the study of renderings and terminology

Baker proposes a corpus-based methodology for investigating the style of a literary translator through recurrent linguistic patterns [8]. Hu and Tian expound the significance of multilingual-corpus-based translation

studies, and P. Lü and Chen demonstrate an operational path for small specialized corpora in comparing the *Analects* versions of Gu Hongming and Arthur Waley [9–10]. The present article borrows these methods and applies the operations of "frequency–distribution–collocation" to the specific layer of translated terms. Work at the intersection of the three strands remains uncommon, however. The present article advances there and examines one woman compiler-translator's terminology construction for everyday-life and social-movement concepts.

3. Research design

3.1. Corpus overview

The corpus takes as its base text Lü Bicheng's compiled *The Light of Europe and America* (1932 reprint, Buddhist Book Company, Shanghai) [1]. The 252-page scan was transcribed from the traditional-character vertical layout; page-header marks were deleted, and an alien leaf bound in by mistake was removed, yielding a clean full text of 93,973 characters (whitespace excluded), comprising 51,925 Chinese characters and 6,526 Western tokens. The text was segmented into forty-four item files and stratified into a Chinese sub-corpus (2,074 lines) and a Western sub-corpus (708 lines); sixteen illegible characters are marked □. The Western sub-corpus preserves such parallel materials as the English source poem, English speeches, and lists of vegetarian societies.

3.2. Term annotation procedure

The terminology statistics follow a three-step procedure of "identification–classification–counting": exact string matching counts the frequencies of the target items (*shushi*, *sushi*, *rusu* 茹素 "to abstain from meat," *roushi* 肉食 "meat eating," and so on) in the clean full text and in the forty-four item files, with collocations of *shushi* and *sushi* extracted within a ±5-character window; items are graded by the number of item files in which they occur into systematic use (≥3 items), local use (2 items) and sporadic use (1 item), and the context of every key occurrence is rechecked manually to distinguish "self naming" from "reporting others"; finally, item-level distributions, consistency indicators and the frequencies of Western correspondents are aggregated, all reproducible by the statistics scripts.

3.3. Criteria for self-coined and characteristic renderings

A candidate self-coined rendering is defined as an item satisfying either of two conditions: a newly coined form not found in contemporary common usage (for example, *You Lake* 麂 湖), or an extant classical expression that stands in competitive opposition to the current rendering of the period and was selectively reactivated by the translator (for example, *shushi* against *sushi*). The second condition requires contextual evidence that the translator knew the current rendering yet deliberately chose another, testable precisely through the corpus-internal pattern of mixed use (see Section 4.3).

4. Data analysis and discussion

4.1. *Shushi* versus *sushi*: A quantitative description of frequency, distribution and collocation

The statistics for the core word pair are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Frequencies and item-level distribution of the *shushi* family (clean-version basis)

Term	Total frequency	Items	High-frequency items
蔬食 *shushi* "vegetable diet"	90	15	美國蔬食會 *Meiguo Shushi Hui* 24; 目錄 *Mulu* (contents) 11; 海外蔬食談 *Haiwai Shushi Tan* 10; 國際蔬食大會 *Guoji Shushi Dahui* 9; 各國蔬食會名目地址表 *Geguo Shushi Hui Mingmu Dizhi Biao* 8; 柏拉圖與象 *Bolatu yu Xiang* 8; 倫敦蔬食會 *Lundun Shushi Hui* 7
素食 *sushi* "plain diet"	2	2	國際蔬食大會 *Guoji Shushi Dahui* 1; 赴維也納璞記 *Fu Weiyena Suoji* 1
茹素 *rusu* "to abstain from meat"	16	6	國際蔬食大會 *Guoji Shushi Dahui* 8
肉食 *roushi* "meat eating"	14	7	—

The frequency ratio is 90:2; with a forty-five-fold advantage, *shushi* constitutes the absolute dominant form of the book. It occurs in 15 items (34.1 percent of the forty-four), spanning compiled news, reference tables, travel notes, a speech and Lü's own manifesto, and six item titles are themselves headed by *shushi* (國際蔬食大會 , 各國蔬食會名目地址表 , 各國蔬食雜誌表 , 倫敦蔬食會 , 美國蔬食會 , 海外蔬食談). *Shushi* is the signature term of the book's column-based management, not a sporadic variant.

Collocation analysis (±5-character window) shows that *shushi* has generated a complete word-formation series (**Table 2**): 蔬食會 *shushi-hui* 28, 蔬食雜誌 10, 蔬食大會 8, 蔬食主義 5, 蔬食家 4, 蔬食者 3 and 蔬食談 2 among right-collocates, and 美國蔬食 20, 國際蔬食 11, 倫敦蔬食 7, 各國蔬食 5 and 終身蔬　食 "lifelong *shushi*" 4 among left-collocates. This series corresponds neatly to the English *Vegetarian Society*, *vegetarian*, *vegetarianism*, *vegetarian magazine* and *Vegetarian Congress*: Lü was doing more than translating an isolated word; she was erecting in Chinese an entire concept-and-terminology apparatus. On the Western side, *vegetarian* is counted 72 times (73 after merging line-break hyphens), *vegetarianism* 4, and the loose count including the *-ism* substring is 91, roughly symmetrical with the 90 occurrences of *shushi*; *vegan* does not occur, consistent with the fact that the word was coined only in 1944.

Table 2. The derivational series of *shushi* and its English counterparts

Compound	Frequency	Items	English counterpart
蔬食會 *shushi-hui* "vegetarian society"	28	6	Vegetarian Society
蔬食雜誌 *shushi zazhi* "vegetarian magazine"	10	—	vegetarian magazine(s)
蔬食大會 *shushi dahui* "vegetarian congress"	8	2	Vegetarian Congress
蔬食主義 *shushi-zhuyi* "vegetarianism"	5	3	vegetarianism (4)
蔬食家 *shushi-jia* "vegetarian (person)"	4	2	vegetarian (72; 73 after merging line-break hyphens)
蔬食者 *shushi-zhe* "vegetarian (person)"	3	3	—
蔬食談 *shushi-tan* "talks on the vegetable diet"	2	—	—

Note: For comparison, the loose count of *vegetarian* (including the substring within *vegetarianism*) in the Western sub-corpus is 91 (92 after merging line-break hyphens), roughly symmetrical with 蔬食 90 on the Chinese side; *vegan* does not occur in the book, consistent with the fact that the word was coined only in 1944.

Forming the opposite axis is　肉　食 *roushi* "meat eating" (14 occurrences, 7 items): "advocating *shushi*" and "abstaining from *roushi*" mirror each other in the corpus. Between the two axes, 茹素 *rusu* (16 occurrences, 6 items) is a processual, first-person expression, concentrated where Lü narrates her personal

experience, most famously in 海外蔬食談 *Haiwai Shushi Tan*: 予昔之茹素屬道德。今之茹素屬宗教 "formerly my *rusu* was a matter of morality; now it is a matter of religion." The three items each have their office (*shushi* the term, naming institutions and the -ism; *roushi* the opposite pole; *rusu* the behavioral first-person expression). This functional differentiation is itself the mark of a mature terminology system: an improvised rendering would not exhibit so tidy a division of labor.

4.2. Naming motivation: The Semantic Competition between *shu* and *su*

Why did Lü Bicheng set aside *su* in favor of *shu*? The two morphemes select different features of the concept. The original meaning of 素 is plain white silk, extended to white, empty, and unadorned; using 素食 for a meat-free diet emphasizes "removing the meaty and keeping the pure," and its later Buddhist usage denoting the monastic fast further lowered its transparency. 蔬 , by contrast, points directly to herbaceous plants; 蔬食 , an extant classical expression (as in 布衣蔬食 "plain cloth and vegetable food"), literally means "taking vegetables as food" and corresponds transparently to the etymological semantics of *vegetarian* (Latin *vegetus*, "lively, growing," denoting plant food).

In the frame of Wang's "selection of optimal naming features," *su* selects an inherent-property feature of the concept (purity), whereas *shu* selects its object-material feature (plants) [4]. Lü's choice maximizes interpretability: a Chinese reader who does not know *vegetarian* can infer from 蔬食會 that it is "a society of those who take vegetables as food," whereas 素食会 requires the cultural background of Buddhist fasting to decode. *Shushi* is naming oriented toward semantic transparency, *sushi* toward cultural association. *Shushi* was not coined out of thin air: it reactivates a classical expression endowed with new conceptual content, a strategy of "new wine in an old bottle" in the same line as Yan Fu's use of 名學 *mingxue* for *logic* and 群學 *qunxue* for *sociology*.

4.3. Systematicity and consistency: Term use in the perspective of translation norms

The normative dimension hinges less on "which word was chosen" than on "whether the choice was carried through consistently," tested here with three indicators. First, dominant-form consistency: 90 occurrences of *shushi* against 2 of *sushi*, a dominant-form ratio of 97.8 percent. Second, cross-item consistency: *shushi* is distributed across 15 items covering all genres, with no switching to another name. Third, the nature of the mixed use: only item 08 (國際蔬食大會) and item 23 (赴維也納瑣記) contain *sushi*, in both cases coexisting with *shushi*, and a recheck shows that neither occurrence is Lü's own naming (see Examples 1 and 2). Whenever she reports discourse produced by others, she follows their word and uses *sushi*; for self naming she uses *shushi* throughout. This is a fine-grained register distinction rather than oscillation: *sushi* is "the others' word," *shushi* "the self's word." Casual sampling could easily misread it as inconsistency.

Example 1 (*sushi* in item 08, reporting another's work)

Original context: 次由貝爾格博士據其所撰之素食主義屬於生理之重要 (The Biological Significance of Vegetarianism) 謂 ……

Viewed in terms of Toury's theory of translation norms, *shushi* is a typical acceptability pole: a transparent form built from extant Chinese morphemes makes an unfamiliar concept immediately interpretable in the target culture [11]. Yet measured against the "stability of renderings" norm emphasized by Lu, Lü's practice is a conscious exception: she demonstrably knew *sushi* and nevertheless systematically installed *shushi* [3]. In the field of everyday-life terms in the 1930s, norms had not yet sedimented into

coercive constraints, and the individual translator retained considerable naming space, which Lü, through the column-based management of an entire book (six items titled with *shushi*), was self-consciously exercising. Huang's ecological account reminds us that promotion within a single text is only the first round of competition; the outcome is decided by the wider translation ecosystem [5]. The fate of *shushi*, discussed below, illustrates the point.

The scan of candidate renderings further shows that Lü's systematic terminology is not the isolated case of *shushi* alone: 保護動物 *baohu dongwu* "protecting animals" occurs 88 times (14 items), 活剖 *huopou* "vivisection" 53 (12 items), 人道 *rendao* "humanity" 21 (12 items), 戒殺 *jiesha* "abstaining from killing" 13 (6 items) and 護生 *husheng* "protecting life" 8 (5 items), all in stable cross-item use, whereas 護生會 , 放生 , 戕生 and 斷葷 occur once each and are sporadic. This "systematic cluster plus sporadic items" structure indicates a clear core–periphery pattern, with the consistency of the core terms being far higher than that of random wording.

4.4. Case study and historical fate: The naming strategy of You Lake and the lexical-history destination of *shushi*

The translation of proper names is another window onto a translator's naming strategy. The most representative self-coined rendering of the book is 麀湖 *You Lake* (see Example 3).

Translation: "Next, Dr. Berg, on the basis of his treatise *The Biological Significance of Vegetarianism* (素食主義屬於生理之重要), stated that …"

Analysis: The sole occurrence of 素食 *sushi* in item 08 (國際蔬食大會 , "The International Vegetarian Congress") translates the title of the German Dr. Berg's treatise. The surrounding text uses 蔬食 *shushi* nine times for Lü's own narration; the switch to *sushi* is occasioned by reporting another's wording.

Example 2 (*sushi* in item 23, referring to fellow members)

Original context: 予之斷除肉食。僅五閱月。彼等均多年之素食者。

Translation: "My abstention from meat has lasted only five months; they are all *sushi*-followers of many years."

Analysis: In item 23 (赴維也納瑣記 , "Jottings on the Way to Vienna"), *sushi* refers to the fellow members of the German vegetarian society. In the same item Lü's self-reference runs 予之斷葷，卽從是日起 "my abstention from meat began on that very day," and in her Vienna speech she says 現吾國仍有多數佛教信徒皆蔬食之人 "at present our country still has a great many Buddhist believers who are *shushi* people," using *shushi* throughout for self-designation.

Example 3 (*You Lake* 麀湖 , a self-coined proper name)

Source: Moosehead Lake (in the English poem *My Fawn*)

Lü's rendering: 麀湖 *You Hu* "Lake of the Doe"

Back-translation: "Lake of the Doe"

Analysis: Moosehead Lake, in Maine, would conventionally be transliterated as Musiheide Hu. Lü instead coins 麀湖 by borrowing the character 麀 (*yōu*, "doe") from the line 麀鹿麌麌 ("does and stags in plenty") in the "Ji Ri" ode of the Minor Odes of the *Book of Songs*: phonetically *yōu* approximates *Moose-*, and semantically "Lake of the Doe" chimes with the poem's theme of a doe nursing her fawn. *Moosehead* occurs once in the Western sub-corpus and 麀 湖 once in the Chinese. A one-off proper-name creation, it concentrates the three pursuits of her naming strategy: phonetic consonance, semantic fit, and a canonical

source.

Read against *shushi*, the case reveals a consistent methodology: whenever she establishes a name, she seeks the motivatedness of the Chinese morphemes themselves. *Shu* surpasses *su* by pointing directly to plants, and 麂 surpasses a transliterated character string by combining phonetic consonance, semantic fit, and a canonical source. *You Lake* is a newly coined form, *shushi* the reactivation of an old word; the one a proper name and sporadic, the other a term and systematic. These are the two polar specimens of Lü's terminological practice. Other proper names display the same tendency: *Canada* is rendered 坎拿大 *Kannada* (6 occurrences), selecting the meaningful characters 坎 and 拿 ; the British monk B. is rendered 馬顯德 *Ma Xiande* (5), 顯德 "manifest virtue" openly commending his propagation of the dharma; the hound of the translated poem is named 香驄 *Xiangcong* (2), where 香 "fragrant" lends the animal a spiritual aura. Lü's names are names that can be "read and interpreted," not names that can only be "recognized."

Yet from the hindsight of lexical history, neither type of Lü's naming entered the common layer of modern Chinese: Moosehead Lake is today Musiheide Hu, and the standard rendering of *vegetarian* is *sushi*, not *shushi*. As the verdict of F. Yu et al. on Yan Fu's translated words shows, the outcome of modern term competition often depends not on a rendering's motivatedness but on the number of its users, institutional ratification, and media circulation [7]. *Su* was supported by the millennium-long sediment of the Buddhist fasting tradition and by the colloquial 吃素 *chisu* "eating vegetarian," a social base far beyond what one translator's single-book promotion could shake; although Lü promoted *shushi* with a six-thousand-copy print run, lacking the relay of societies, textbooks and dictionaries (the normative knowledge space), *shushi* exited the stage as the book faded. The process Wang describes appears here as a mirror image reversed: the better-motivated *shu* lost, for want of institutional confirmation, to the less motivated but deeply based *su*. The standardization of renderings for modern everyday-life terms was in essence social selection rather than individual creation [4].

5. Conclusion and limitations

This article has examined the terminology construction in *The Light of Europe and America* and answers the research questions as follows. First, *shushi* is a systematic act of terminology construction rather than a sporadic variant: 90 occurrences across 15 items, a dominant-form ratio of 97.8 percent, six item titles headed by *shushi*, and Chinese–Western frequencies roughly symmetrical with the *vegetarian* family together form a complete chain of evidence. Second, the motivation for choosing *shu* over *su* lies in semantic transparency (the object-material feature over the inherent-property feature), and the form is the reactivation of a classical expression. Third, both occurrences of *sushi* report others' discourse; Lü's terminology system is internally highly consistent, and her "exception" reflects a woman compiler-translator's self-conscious exercise of personal naming space in a period when norms had not yet sedimented. Fourth, the failure of *shushi* to enter modern Chinese is structurally homologous to the fate of Yan Fu's translated words, showing that modern term competition hinges on social selection and institutional confirmation rather than on the motivatedness of individual renderings. Methodologically, even a small specialized corpus, equipped with the complete operation of "frequency–distribution–collocation–context recheck," can yield replicable answers to concrete questions in the history of modern renderings.

The study has three main limitations. First, the corpus is small, and a single book by a single translator cannot support cross-translator comparison. Second, the base text is a transcription from a scan, and sixteen illegible placeholders □ remain, so individual counts carry a theoretical error of at most ±16 characters (negligible for

the main items discussed). Third, the present corpus cannot answer the use of *sushi* in contemporary corpora: judging the real competitive situation of *shushi* and *sushi* in the 1920s–1930s requires diachronic comparison with newspaper databases such as *Shenbao* and *Ta Kung Pao*. This is a direction for future research.

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