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“Creation Through Translation” in Early Twentieth-Century Women’s Fiction: On a Literary Trend in the Initial Stages of Cultural Exchange Between China and the West

Guo Yanli

Translated by Caterina Weber

Abstract

In the 1910s, the trend of “creating through translation” emerged in fiction by female Chinese writers. This concept, similar to that of “covert translation,” introduced by the contemporary Western translation theorist Juliane House, sprang up from the early stages of new literary forms that developed in the context of changes in early modern Chinese literature. The works of female Chinese authors were influenced by the plot, characters, and narrative techniques in Western literary works from which they consciously or subconsciously took inspiration, passing from the imitation of foreign novels to “creation through translation.” The arrival of this phenomenon is closely connected to the increased dissemination of Western knowledge and to a wider circulation of foreign novels among female writers in China. When reading and translating foreign literature, female authors transposed, filtered, and rewrote it into new texts that featured local elements. Ideologically and artistically, the practice of “creating through translation” provided enlightening guidance for modern women’s fiction in that it broadened the means of learning from Western literature, proving beneficial to China’s literary and cultural development. The same trend appears in early vernacular poetry during the May Fourth era, from which it can be traced further back to scholarly texts of the early modern period, such as Wei Yuan’s *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms* (Haiguo tuzhi 海國圖志) or Wang Tao’s *Report on the Franco-Prussian War* (*Pu-fa zhan ji* 普法戰紀). Also Liang Qichao’s writings on Western thought and culture, for example, his *Notes on Rousseau* (*Lusuo xue’an* 盧梭學案), are written in a similar form. The emergence of “creation through translation” therefore evidently represents

* Guo Yanli 郭延禮 is a professor at the School of Literature and Journalism at Shandong University; e-mail: guoyl@sdu.edu.cn.

both a conscious, active effort by a generation's intellectual elite to seek knowledge and truth from cultural exchange between China and the West, and a new exploration and practice under Western influence that had a positive impact on China's literary and academic history, in that it broadened cultural/academic perspectives and stimulated the development of Chinese literature and culture.

Keywords

Chinese vernacular poetry – covert translation – creation through translation – female novelists

In the early twentieth century (1900-1919), some sixty female novelists emerged on China's literary scene; this was a completely new phenomenon in the history of Chinese literature. Considering the many female authors of *shi* (詩) and *ci* (詞) poetry, Chinese women's literature can be said to be highly successful, and yet for a long period China's traditional society produced no female novelists.¹ The first novel by a woman for which textual evidence exists is *Shadows of "Dream of the Red Chamber"* (*Honglou meng ying* 紅樓夢影, 1877) by the Manchu poet Xi Linchun (西林春) (also known as Gu Taiqing [顧太清], 1799-1877); this work, however, only appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century. Therefore, both the first generation of female Chinese novelists in the early twentieth century and a number of literary phenomena that emerged from their creative practice are a key academic research area and have great significance for the history of literature.

I

The creative nucleus of early twentieth-century female Chinese novelists was China's first generation of female intellectuals. Most of them fall into one of two groups: those among the first Chinese women to be educated abroad, and those who graduated from missionary schools or modern girls' schools.

1 For a detailed study on the reasons for this, see Guo Yanli, "Ershi shiji chu Zhongguo nüxing wenxue sida zuojia qunti kaolun 20 世紀初中國女性文學四大作家群體考論 (On the Four Groups of Chinese Women Writers in the Early Twentieth Century)," *文史哲 Journal of Literature, History and Philosophy*, no. 4 (2009): 5-16.

They had all received a “new” education and had gained a thorough knowledge of specialized subjects, such as natural sciences, social sciences, and foreign languages as well as music, sports, and arts. Their forward and innovative thinking, ideology, and behavior were also different from those of aristocratic female authors (*guixiu zuojia* 閩秀作家) in and before the nineteenth century. This first generation of female Chinese intellectuals lived in the early twentieth century, an era in which movements for women’s rights, capitalism, and democracy were thriving in China; moreover, they had received a new Western-style education. These and other additional factors, such as their self-defined position as forward thinkers, made this group of female novelists feel a strong impulse and conscious need to learn from the West; literary creation was no exception.

As most female authors of the early twentieth century had learned foreign languages, some of them were both writers and translators. Such authors accounted for about one-quarter of female novelists; among the well-known ones are Huang Cuining (黃翠凝) (b. 1875-?), Huang Jingying (黃靜英), Chen Xiaocui (陳小翠) (1902-1968), Tang Hongfu (湯紅紱), Liu Yunqin (劉韻琴) (1883-1945), Huang Bihun (黃璧魂) (1875-1923), Mao Xiuying (毛秀英), Lady Fengxian (鳳仙女史士), Zhu Wanjiu (朱畹九), Zha Mengci (查孟詞), Gao Jianhua (高劍華) (b. 1890), and Zheng Shenhua (鄭申華) (b. 1898).

These women were mostly outstanding students in missionary schools or had been educated in a foreign country (some of them had attended missionary schools before studying abroad). This learning experience and cultural background allowed for frequent contact with Western literature and culture and opened opportunities for reading some Western literary works in the original. Consciously or subconsciously, the writers then let elements such as the plot, characters, and narrative techniques of Western literature trickle into their own creative writing process, which led to the trend of imitating Western literature. Of course, such “imitation” happened at different levels. In some cases, it was merely a matter of copying and learning from specific artistic devices in Western literature (e.g., psychological description, setting description, flashback, and first-person narrative); this is an artistic trend common across changes in modern fiction and will not be discussed here. In other cases, despite clear signs of imitation, borrowing, and transposing of elements such as cultural background, plot, and characters’ appearance, the author and title of the original were not clearly indicated. This practice is called “creation through translation” and is similar to the idea of covert translation in Western translation studies.

The concept of covert translation was put forward by the translation theorist Juliane House, who defines it as “concealing the translation status of a

target text by producing a text functionally equivalent to the original”; in other words, it is a translation that to some extent retains the authenticity of the source text, but because the translator needs to adapt the work to the receiving culture and remold it according to the standards of local readers, the final target text bears little resemblance to the source text and is, instead, closer to original writings in the target language. Huang Cuining’s first work “The Monkey Assassin” (Hou cike 猴刺客), published in the anniversary issue of *The All-Story Monthly* (*Yueyue xiaoshuo* 月月小說), is one early example of this literary trend in women’s fiction.

“The Monkey Assassin” tells the tragic story of a love triangle involving two men and a woman. Ma Weisheng, one of the men (who is already engaged to Baoqin), is murdered; the detective Wang Mingqing investigates and finds out that the assassin is a well-trained monkey belonging to Ma’s rival, the artist Lin Guocai. This novel was clearly influenced by the forerunner of detective fiction, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” by the American writer Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849): the murderer in this famous detective story is none other than a ferocious orangutan. It is worth noting that Huang Cuining’s story was published in the October 1908 issue of *All-Story Monthly*, and, according to my research, Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” had not yet been translated into Chinese at that time, which proves that Huang was inspired by the original of Poe’s story.

If “The Monkey Assassin” was simply inspired by Poe and contained traces of imitation rather than of “creating through translation,” works by other female novelists from the same period—including Huang Jingying, Chen Xiaocui, Ying Chuan, as well as authors of *Eye-brow Talk* (*Meiyu* 眉語), most notably Gao Jianhua—were typical examples of this trend.

Huang Jingying was an important writer and translator of the 1910s. Proficient in French and English, she was the first female translator who, after Hu Shi 胡適, translated in full the French novelist Alphonse Daudet’s short story “La dernière classe” (The Last Class) (rendered by Huang as “Zuihou zhi shouke” [最後之授課] and now generally known in Chinese as “Zuihou yi ke” [最後一課]). Her translation was of relatively high quality and is very significant for modern Chinese literary translation history. Huang Jingying’s career path began with literary translation, a process from which she gained the necessary experience and inspiration to engage in literary creation later. At the beginning of 1915, she published her two first translated stories in *Saturday* (*Libailiu* 禮拜六), Daudet’s “La dernière classe” (in no. 42) and the detective story “Fifty Thousand Dollars” (Wuwan yuan 五萬元, no. 41). Shortly afterward, in the winter of 1915 and the following year, she consecutively published eight pieces of creative writing in *Saturday* and in *Short Story Monthly* (*Xiaoshuo*

yuebao 小說月報). Of these eight short stories, at least three are “created through translation”: “Fishing-Line Lovers” (Diaosi yinyuan 釣絲姻緣), “Spilled Milk” (Fu shui 覆水) and “The One-Armed Lieutenant” (Du bi shaowei 獨臂少尉). The cultural background, the characters’ appearance, and the setting and situations in these short stories are all Westernized, evidently telling a foreign story. The works, however, are not clearly labeled as translations, and today it is very difficult to locate their corresponding original texts. These three short stories can all be seen as belonging to the trend of “creation through translation,” which marked cultural exchange between China and the West in the early twentieth century.

“Fishing-Line Lovers” tells the story of a young man and a woman who communicate by passing each other love letters with a fishing rod, eventually becoming husband and wife. Not only does the marriage ceremony in the story have typically Western religious characteristics (a priest reads out the vows in church, and the couple answers); the names of both main characters (the young man is called Hua’ertuolili (華爾脫利立), the girl Asailaishi (阿塞來史), their looks (“a pair of sky-blue eyes,” “blond hair”) as well as the settings and the tableware (“spoon and knife”) are all Westernized. Though the author does not say it explicitly, the reader has the impression that the author is revealing a story from another country. The aforementioned “Spilled Milk” and “The One-Armed Lieutenant” as well as Chen Xiaocui’s “The Subdued Bride” ([Xinfu huawei quan 新婦化為犬], in *Saturday*, no. 78) are similar. This inclination in early twentieth-century women’s fiction to imitate shows that female novelists were very eager to absorb artistic inspiration from Western works in order to distance themselves from the set patterns of China’s traditional fiction, as well as broaden the creative outlets for Chinese fiction and spur its growth. These progressive writers with an innovative mind-set therefore turned to a new tool: creation through translation.

Creation through translation was particularly common among *Eyebrow Talk* authors. *Eyebrow Talk*, a literary magazine established in Shanghai in 1914 by a group of modern female intellectuals, mainly published fiction (particularly short stories) with the main purpose of leisure and recreation. The chief editor of *Eyebrow Talk* was Gao Jianhua; her ten-strong editorial team consisted entirely of women: Ma Simei (馬嗣梅), Gu Renchai (顧纫菑), Liang Guiqin (梁桂琴), Xu Yuhua (許毓華), Liang Guizhu (梁桂珠), Liu Peiyu (柳佩瑜), Xie Youyun (謝幼韞), Yao Shumeng (姚淑孟), and Sun Qingwei (孫青未). Most of these novelists came from Jiangsu and Zhejiang and had received a modern education. Gao Jianhua first attended the Hangzhou Normal School for Women (Hangzhou nüzi shifan xuexiao 杭州女子師範學校) and in 1910 enrolled in the Beijing Normal School for Women (Beijing nüzi shifan xuetaang

北京女子師範學堂); her niece Xu Yuhua also graduated from a modern school and spoke English. The other women had a similar educational background; several had studied at missionary schools. Most of them had learned other languages, and some were able to read foreign literature in the original. They then sifted and remolded fragments of texts they remembered, shaping them into new creations: from the narrative structure and characters' appearance to the cultural setting, all parts of their work contained elements of Western culture, and their writing patterns also clearly resembled those in foreign fiction.

Of the *Eyebrow Talk* authors, only the ten editors whose existence is proven through photographs are mentioned here. Except for Gu Renchai, who did not publish any works, the other nine writers published a total of twenty-three stories in *Eyebrow Talk*, of which eight—one-third—were examples of creation through translation. These stories were mostly based on an original text and are possibly examples of covert translation. Because at the time of their publication, it was not clearly indicated who had translated or adapted the work, and the originals were not well known, it is now impossible to determine to which author and country these writings should be attributed; their titles do not provide any evidence either, having been adapted to suit local tastes.

II

The literary phenomenon of creating through translation has a specific social and cultural background. Particularly with the increased dissemination of Western knowledge at the turn of the twentieth century, the novelty, unfamiliarity, and romanticism of foreign literature were attracting widespread interest among Chinese intellectuals, as described here by Lu Xun (魯迅):

In Liang Qichao's journal *Current Affairs* (*Shiwu bao* 時務報), we followed with excitement the *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*; then, in *New Fiction* (*Xin xiaoshuo* 新小說), we read works known as "science fiction," such as Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*; and again, through the great translator Lin Qinnan's (林琴南) renditions of the English writer H. Rider Haggard's novels, we experienced the gentleness of London ladies and the quirkiness of African savages.²

Translated literature, however, was always limited by the translator's own views and could hardly satisfy the expectations of Western literature

2 Lu Xun 魯迅, "Zhu Zhong-E wenzi zhi jiao 祝中俄文字之交 (A Celebration of Sino-Russian Literary Ties)," in *Lu Xun quanji* 魯迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981), 4: 459.

enthusiasts; female intellectuals would therefore strive to read foreign fiction in its original version.

As their reading progressed, the female writers' understanding of the ideology and the artistic elements in Western works became deeper and more rational. In order to broaden the scope of women's fiction and further spur its development, these authors transposed, filtered, and rewrote the foreign literature they read into new texts. In doing so, they did not indicate that these texts were translations of works by foreign authors, nor did they acknowledge their role as translator; rather, they posed as authors. These creations through translation are worth looking at for several reasons.

First, while it can generally be said that creations through translation by female novelists appeared in the first two decades of the twentieth century, a more detailed investigation shows that representative texts of this kind were mainly published in the 1910s. As mentioned earlier, the beginnings of this trend can be traced back to Huang Cuining's story "The Monkey Assassin," but her work cannot be classified as a creation through translation in the proper sense (its main tendency still being that of imitating a Western novel). Actual creations through translation begin with "Tiny Embroidered Shoes" ([Xiuxie'er gang banzhe 繡鞋兒剛半折], in the first issue of *Eyebrow Talk*, October 1914) by Ma Simei, and its most typical, foremost examples are the works of the aforementioned authors Huang Jingying and Chen Xiaocui, along with those by leading *Eyebrow Talk* authors such as Gao Jianhua, Yao Shumeng, and Liu Peiyu, on whom more is said below. All these women were both novelists and translators, and their works of creation through translation all appeared between 1915 and 1916.

That texts created through translation were mostly published in the 1910s is by no means unusual. Women who could read Western literature in the original were still uncommon in the 1900s, but the development of modern education for women and the rising numbers of female students schooled abroad caused a rapid increase in the number of those who could read originals of Western literary works and, consequently, a growing interest in foreign fiction. Many female writers were already striving to imitate the writing patterns of Western literature; they reinterpreted these works by transposing and rewriting them, merged them with their aesthetic ideals and pretended to be the author, thereby "creating through translation." In the foreword to her imitation of Western fiction, "How Should One Make Him Care" ([Zen dang ta doude shang xin lai 怎當他兜的上心來], in the first issue of *Eyebrow Talk*), the writer Wu Peihua 吳佩華 spoke out about this trend among female authors: "When I study works of Western literature, I notice that very common events are described wisely and beautifully; they just flow naturally. Great works of

Chinese literature like the *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Story of the Western Wing* (also called *Romance of the Western Chamber*) read that way, too. This is rare and very valuable. My imitation cannot capture the essence of such works; it simply reflects my yearning to do so." It is easy to detect the delight these writers took in imitating Western fiction. Zha Mengci's detective story "The Precious Mandarin Ducks" ([Baoshi yuanyang 寶石鴛鴦], in *The Grand Magazine* [*Xiaoshuo daguan* 小說大觀, no. 1]) is also an example of creation through translation and is probably the most accomplished work in early twentieth-century women's detective fiction.

Second, another noteworthy feature of creating through translation is indigenization; it was a widespread trend in modern translated literature, particularly so in free translations and translation editing of the early modern era.

One main feature of this is the indigenization of titles: looking at some works by female writers, it would be hard to guess from their title that the contents are, in fact, foreign. Take Gao Jianhua's "Liulang Defeats Ruanlang" (Liulang sheng Ruanlang 劉郎勝阮郎): Liulang and Ruanlang are originally characters in ancient Chinese mythology who become romantically involved with a fairy. This story is completely unrelated to the contents of Gao Jianhua's novel, which is about an English village girl called Gu Lunna. The good-hearted main character is lured by money and sinks low into avarice and desire for material wealth. Set in the simplicity of the countryside, the story outlines the evils caused by the disparity between rural and urban wealth in English society; the actual contents of the novel therefore have no relation to its title. Gao Jianhua openly called this work "creative writing," acknowledging neither the original author nor the fact that the text was translated; looking at the contents, it is clearly a case of creation through translation.

Another element is the indigenization of characters' appearance. Even though these texts essentially portray a foreign story, the description of characters can contain indigenized features. Ying Chuan's story "The Bridegroom's Face and the Concubine's Arm" ([Lang yan qie bi 郎顏妾臂], in *Saturday*, no. 63) is one such example. The main male and female characters in the story have been given Chinese names, Zuo Feili 左飛理 and Xia Lian 霞蓮; descriptions of their looks, hairstyle, and clothing also feel Chinese. The author, however, tells the story of the love between a beautiful girl and a heroic young man set in France, recounting a young girl's love for a hero defending his country. Although parts of this work are indigenized, if looked at in its entirety, it is still a creation through translation. Two other works by Ying Chuan, "Green and Blue" ([Lü lan ji 綠藍記], in *Saturday*, no. 65) and "Lovers in Peril" ([Huo li yuanyang 火裡鴛鴦], in *Saturday*, no. 66) are, like the previously discussed works by Huang Jingying and other authors, two texts about foreign

stories. Just as was common practice in early modern translations and translation editing, the names of characters, the setting and background descriptions, and the narration all feature distinct Western characteristics.

Third, female authors were far from avoiding or concealing the practice of creating through translation. For one thing, they openly signed such works as authors; also, they never entirely indigenized their writings, thereby revealing that the plot was foreign;³ and, finally, this kind of fiction maintained the overall sense of the original, that is, the plot and the characters' foreign names and physical features, as well as a Western atmosphere and setting. All this points to early twentieth-century female writers' frank and straightforward identification with this creative practice.

III

Creation through translation was a widespread literary trend in early twentieth century female fiction; how exactly though has it opened up new channels and influenced the development of women fiction in that period?

The practice of creation through translation is significant in that it provided enlightening ideological guidance for modern women's fiction. Creation through translation covers a relatively wide ideological ground, ranging from praise for young people's fervent patriotism (as in Ma Simei's "Tiny Embroidered Shoes" and Ying Chuan's "The Bridegroom's Face and the Concubine's Arm"), seeking an independent spirit and support for women's emancipation (as in Sun Qingwei's "My Heart" [Nong zhi xin 儂之心]), to the satirizing of snobbish materialism and money grubbing (as in Huang Jingying's "Spilled Milk"), or again praising the noble behavior of those who help anonymously without expecting reciprocation (as in Li Huizhu's "Kind and Merciful" [Pusa xinchang 菩薩心腸]). The analysis that follows is restricted to examples taken from texts about love and marriage.

3 In Yao Shumeng's "creation through translation," "Bridegroom or Bandit?" (郎歟盜歟 Lang yu dao yu), *Mei yu* 眉語 no. 3 [1914]), it is clear from the beginning that the story is foreign: "The wealthier a city is, the more thieves it has: this is a common evil everywhere in this world. There are many secret gangs in Europe, and nowhere more than in Paris and London . . . thieves there are just as powerful as the police. Their top leaders would confuse officials and outwit detectives; local authorities would be completely helpless against them. I've heard, for example, about the great London bandit Jing Gang: his adventures are so fascinating they are well worth retelling. Allow me to briefly do so."

Novels about love as the one condition for marriage were still not very common in early twentieth-century Chinese women's fiction; this was, of course, related to the conservative Confucian ethics and principles that restricted female authors. Creation through translation, however, already contains the new concept of love as the primary prerequisite of marriage between a man and a woman. In "Bridegroom or Bandit?" the author Yao Shumeng emphasizes the position and function of individual cognition, willpower, and emotion in a love relationship and the idea of being true to what one loves and disregarding the rest. The priority of love and the freedom of choosing one's life partner described in the book was not at all uncommon in Western society but was relatively rare in female Chinese novelists' fiction at that time. These views on love are also reflected in another work, the novel *Meizhu and Xueyu Vie for Love* (*Mei-Xue zheng chun ji* 梅雪爭春記). In this novel, the twin sisters Meizhu and Xueyu both fall in love with Qiong'en, the son of the love rival of their father, Aitang Nakesi, whom the latter intends to kill. Qiong'en, however, is only in love with Meizhu; Xueyu nonetheless continues to pursue her love, even if it involves holding on to her older sister's admirer, and goes so far as to using every possible means to make the sisters' rivalry public.

Female writers' awareness of sexual love and passion in creation through translation also deserves attention. In the early twentieth century, descriptions of sexual acts in women's fiction (as also in works by male authors) were rather conservative and contained hardly any concrete portrayal of sexual behavior. In an act of love, the one to take the lead would also mostly be the man; the woman would be the one "being loved." Although in some works of fiction, women would show a need and desire for sex, during the act itself they would lack power and courage. In creation through translation, however, women often show more sexual initiative: they are the first to disclose their love to their partner or make love to a man on their own initiative. The rise in these female characters' overall consciousness and sexual awareness made creation through translation more emotional, more human, and more secular.

An episode about the tragic marriage of a young English couple in Gao Jianhua's *Meizhu and Xueyu Vie for Love* contains even bolder descriptions of physical love. Lian Niang and Aitang Nakesi are lovers; however, unable to pay off his gambling debts, Lian Niang's father gives her as collateral to his creditor, the rich Du Lü'en. Lian Niang is forced to marry Du, gives birth to twins, and devotes all her time and efforts to raising them, forgetting about the past. One day years later, while out in the fields, Lian Niang runs into her former lover Nakesi, who by then is also married with children, and his family. Both feel very awkward, only casting a quick glance at each other in silence. From that moment, Nakesi feels driven to seek the earliest opportunity to see Lian Niang

again. One evening, while Du Lü'en is away on business, Nakesi finds the main door ajar and secretly enters the house. As he sees Lian Niang, he gives in at once to his desires and kisses her. Lian Niang falls into his embrace, and their long-suppressed emotions flame up anew: the irrepressible lust causes both to slip into an extramarital affair and to indulge in the pleasures of love to their heart's content. The author Gao Jianhua does not critique this act of transgression, instead deliberately using her views on human nature to stand by the former lovers. She writes:

In this moment of supreme silence, the scene appeared cold and still in the faint light of the moon. At this very time, a seed of illicit love was planted, gradually growing and eventually leading to disastrous consequences. One has no choice in these extreme moments, in spite of feeling uneasy about such dishonest and shameless acts. It is mostly the case that love, if denied, becomes all the more ardent; unfulfilled desire cannot but end in passionate secret meetings. Who would still care for talk of one's integrity and reputation being at stake? Such are the consequences of being unable to follow one's heart.

While it cannot be said that the author condemns this irrational marriage and its sinful outcome from a feminist standpoint, she does show fervent sympathy for a tragedy caused by the objectification of women in a patriarchal society (in which daughters pay fathers' debts) and regrets the fact that the lovers are unable to become a family. It is important to note here that, in writing about lustful fantasies, female authors dared to describe a woman's need for sexual passion and considered it a natural human trait and the consequence of a senseless marriage. This open, unrestrained, deeply human sexual awareness in female novels created through translation was still rather avant-garde and inevitably had an influence on early twentieth-century women's fiction.

Second, artistically speaking, creation through translation broadened the means of learning from Western literature. In the 1900s, only few works of women's fiction existed. Available materials show that these consisted of approximately ten types of text, half of which were novels; over 95 percent of modern women's fiction (particularly short stories) all emerged in the 1910s. In this period, and particularly in 1914, the appearance of works created through translation drove the overall development and success of women's fiction. The peak of creation through translation was between 1914 and 1916: in these three years, the number of works (especially short stories) made up approximately 80 percent of women's fiction published in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Not only were the works in this period plentiful but

their artistic form also underwent remarkable changes, with a new trend of learning from foreign literature mirrored in literary elements, such as composition, narrative structure, and artistic expression. This transformation mainly had two aspects: the first was a change in the text structure from the traditional longitudinal cut that delved into the origin and outcome of facts to a cross-cut that picked the “most exciting aspects of life” (also called a cross-section). Xiu Ying’s “The Bearded Old Man’s Inheritance” ([Ranwengzhi yichan 髯翁之遺產], in *Saturday*, no. 94), Zhi Yin’s “Flower Girl” (Mai hua nü 賣花女), in *Short Story Monthly*, no. 10), Huang Jingying’s aforementioned “Fishing-Line Lovers,” Lü Yunqing’s 呂韻清 “Dream of a Rich Husband” ([Jin fu meng 金夫夢], in *Spring Voice* [Chunsheng 春聲], vol. 2) all select a specific cross-section: they depict the joys and sorrows of life, praise women’s pursuit of their ideals, criticize the traditional concept of seeing men as superior to women, caution against typical pitfalls in life, or explore questions of economic and social well-being. In Huanying 幻影’s “Peasant Women” ([Nongfu 農婦], in *Saturday*, no. 83), the author chose the difficulties of childbirth in rural areas as her theme and describes the death of a young peasant girl due to blood poisoning during labor caused by the midwife’s poor hygiene precautions: “It is impossible to estimate how many come to hospital with this ailment; many can be saved, but for over half these wretched people, it is too late.” This work revealed that the shortage of medical care and the lack of hygiene awareness in the countryside were the actual reasons that more than half of pregnant women died in childbirth. The story counts some eight hundred characters and stretches over twenty-four hours; it is narrated in the first person by a trainee doctor on duty. It tells of a young woman who, in the course of difficult labor, pities her mother-in-law and husband without taking into account her own touching circumstances. The author’s artistic intuition portrayed a typical real-life situation, picking its “most fascinating section” (the cross-section). Although the piece is relatively short, it has an exquisite storyline and smooth flow, completely unlike the rigid, perpetual quests for origins and consequences in the longitudinal construction pattern of classical short stories.

Another aspect of the transformation in women’s fiction was changes in the use of narrative technique and narrative voice. Classical short stories essentially employed third-person objective narration. In modern short stories by female writers, however, the use of first-person narration was widespread, particularly works created through translation. Before this literary practice emerged, first-person narrators in short stories mainly gave an account of the events; in creation through translation, however, the first person “I” (“*yu* 余” or “*wo* 我”) was no longer an onlooker but one of the story’s main characters. Liu Peiyu’s “Serene Love” (Lang qing ru shui 郎情如水) uses first-person narration

and opens as follows: “My name is Make Geni’er. . . . I am among the happiest and most fulfilled people in this world.” The narrator then recounts his love story with Ma Lin. The first person narration in this work is reminiscent of autobiographical narration: not only is the plot told by “I,” but “I” is also the main character in the story. Compared to the observing “I” in female fiction before the appearance of creation through translation, this is a considerable step forward that allowed first-person narration to fully develop its use of participation and personal experience in order to directly express the narrator’s feelings, thereby enhancing his or her prominence. First-person narration also intensified the subjectivity of emotional expression in works of fiction, easily conveying characters’ feelings and helping to develop their inner world through meticulous psychological descriptions. Moreover, first-person narration brought the narrator closer to readers, thereby reinforcing the work’s sense of realism.

Interestingly, in the 1910s, those who used a limited first-person narrator most often were precisely female authors of creation through translation. They employed this device in works created through translation, but often also in their original writings. Huang Cuining’s “Leaving the Nestlings” ([Li chu ji 離雛記], in *Illustrated Novel Magazine* (*Xiaoshuo huabao* 小說畫報), no. 7) as well as Gao Jianhua’s “Visiting the Children in Spring” (Chun qu er jia 春去兒家), Liu Peiyu’s “Lover” (Xiaolang 蕭郎), and Xu Yuhua’s “Departure” ([Yi sheng qu ye 一聲去也], published in *Eye-brow Talk*, nos. 1-3), all make skillful use of first-person narration. This point illustrates the influence of creation through translation on narrative techniques in original works of women’s fiction.

IV

From the point of view of comparative literature, creation through translation is a type of active influence resulting from an exchange between two cultures, which is beneficial for the development of local literature and culture. Looking beyond female authors’ works, we find that the trend of creation through translation appears in vernacular poetry of the May Fourth era and that traces of it can be found even in early modern historical and geographical texts. Wei Yuan’s *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*, Xu Jiyu’s 徐繼畲 *A Brief Account of the Maritime Circuit* (*Yinghuan zhilüe* 瀛寰志略), Wang Tao’s *Report on the Franco-Prussian War* and his *A Brief Introduction to France* (*Faguo zhilüe* 法國志略), and even Liang Qichao’s introduction to Western theories such as *Notes on Hobbes* (*Huobusi xue’an* 霍布斯學案), *Notes on Spinoza* (*Sipiannuoshu*

xue'an 斯片挪莎學案) and *Notes on Rousseau* all contain elements characteristic of or follow the writing patterns of creation through translation.

I first discuss creation through translation in May Fourth era poetry. The tendency to create through translation is clearly perceptible in the early stages of free verse in this period. It is widely known that, in his explorations of new poetic forms, Hu Shi put a lot of effort into translating poems and considered translation an ingenious means of exploring changes in language and form in vernacular poetry. He saw translation as a means of innovation: after successfully translating the foreign poems “Auld Robin Grey” (Lao Luobo 老洛伯), “Over the Roofs” (Guanbuzhu le 關不住了) and “Hope” (Xiwang 希望), he included them in his own poetry collection *A Book of Experiments* (*Changshi ji* 嘗試集), stating: “Over the Roofs’ has marked the beginning of my achievements in writing free verse.”⁴ Hu Shi openly considered some of the translated poems his creations, taking a very clear stance on this. Other famous poets of the May Fourth era, including Wen Yiduo (聞一多) (1899-1946), Xu Zhimo (徐志摩) (1896-1931), and Li Jinfa (李金發) (1901-1976), were all influenced by foreign poetry in the early stages of their writing career. Some have called this “imitation” or “transposition”; we now call it creation through translation. Wen Yiduo’s famous poem “Forget Her” (Wangdiao ta 忘掉她, 1926), which he wrote while mourning his young daughter, Wen Liying (聞立瑛), was influenced by the work of American Imagist poet Sara Teasdale (1844-1933) “Let It Be Forgotten.” Similarly, Xu Zhimo’s poem “Venice” (威尼市, 1922) is also thought to have been inspired by the German poet F. W. Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) well-known poem of the same title.⁵ Also Li Jinfa’s “In the Corner” (Qiangjiao li 牆角裡) was possibly influenced by the poem of the French poet Verlaine (1844-1896) “Colloque sentimental” (Sentimental Conversation). This kind of “imitation” has also been called “plagiarism,” which it is certainly not. In the early stages of the process of literary creation and particularly with the emergence of new literary styles (e.g., early twentieth-century women’s fiction or vernacular poetry and modern drama in the May Fourth era), the occurrence of influence and imitation is unavoidable. Moreover, the poems Wen Yiduo, Xu Zhimo, Li Jinfa, and others imitated and rewrote had not been translated into

4 Hu Shi 胡适, “Changshi ji· zaiban zixu 嘗試集· 再版自序 (Preface to the Second Edition of *A Book of Experiments*),” in *Hu Shi quanji* 胡适全集 (*The Complete Works of Hu Shi*) (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006), 10: 35.

5 Mao Xun 毛迅, “Weinishi: Xu Zhimo zaoqi shiyi zhongde yige yidian 威尼市>: 徐志摩早期詩藝中的一個疑點 (Venice: An Ambiguity in Xu Zhimo’s Early Works),” *Wenxue pinglun congkan* 文學評論叢刊 no. 2 (2000): 2.

Chinese before (when the aforementioned works by these three poets were published, no translation of the foreign poems that had inspired them existed in China). The poets remembered fragments from their wide reading of foreign poetry in the original and used this inspiration as a motivation for their creativity, employing modern techniques to shape new texts in Chinese. This creation through translation was typical as part of the tendency to learn from the West and take inspiration from Western works in literary creation and was a catalyst that accelerated the progress of a new literary style toward artistic maturity and perfection.

Creation through translation is not limited to the literary field: the practice can also be observed in a number of early modern historical and geographical texts. Wei Yuan's *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms* is one such example. It is widely known that this work stems from Lin Zexu's (林則徐) (1785-1850) *Gazetteer of the Four Continents* (*Sizhou zhi* 四洲志), which again is based on collaborative translation efforts between foreigners and Chinese versed in foreign languages, a team of whom Lin Zexu had brought together in Guangzhou to work on H. Murray's *Encyclopaedia of Geography*. This publication introduced the geography, history, political affairs, and other aspects of over thirty countries across the five continents; the name *Gazetteer of the Four Continents* is sometimes attributed to the fact that the work merges the Americas into one continent or to its use of ancient terminology from Buddhist texts. This was therefore the main source of material for compiling the *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*. Moreover, Wei Yuan's supplement is mainly based on material written by foreign missionaries. According to statistics, this text cites more than ten such sources. The most frequently quoted works are *Geography of Foreign Nations* (*Waiguo dili beikao* 外國地理備考) by the Portuguese missionary José Martinho Marques, and the German missionary Karl Gützlaff's *Universal Geography* (*Wanguo dili quan tuji* 萬國地理全圖集, 1838), the former being cited 91 times (comprising 120,000 characters); Wei Yuan valued this book very highly and quoted from it most frequently. The latter work is cited 57 times. In addition, one of the main components of the *Illustrated Treatise* is a collection of 78 maps that includes the *Historical Chart of Maritime Countries* (*Haiguo yange tu* 海國沿革圖), the *Front and Rear View of the Earth* (*Diqiu zhengbeimian tu* 地球正背面圖) and *Individual Country Maps of All Continents* (*Ge dazhou fenguo ditu* 各大洲分國地圖); all were maps published by the Hong Kong British Company.

These facts show that the three main sources of material for the *Illustrated Treatise* were all translations of foreign studies, charts, and data. It can therefore rightly be described as a creation through translation. Precisely

because he has mainly used foreign sources, Wei Yuan says of the *Illustrated Treatise* that it “sees foreign places just as foreigners perceive them”⁶ and “discusses the West through Western works.”⁷ His comments reveal that his is indeed a work of creation through translation. Wang Tao’s *Report on the Franco-Prussian War* and his *A Brief Introduction to France* are also such examples.

In order to introduce Western thought to Chinese intellectual circles, the scholarly elite of the early twentieth century, represented by Liang Qichao, wrote a large number of studies. Let us take Liang Qichao as an example: although he published a lot of essays under his own name, many of them were based on Japanese works or on translations by the Japanese. Liang’s source material for the previously mentioned *Notes on Hobbes*, *Notes on Spinoza*, and *Notes on Rousseau* all came from a translation by the Japanese scholar Nakae Chōmin (1847-1901) of a Western philosophical work, Alfred Fouillée’s *Histoire de la philosophie* (1875). That Liang absorbed Western theory and ideology through a Japanese “intermediary” for his instruction and cultivation is common knowledge among Chinese and non-Chinese academics alike. Only his *Notes* are used here as an example, but there are many similar texts that can also be identified as creation through translation.

Why, then, did the phenomenon of creation through translation and its literary patterns appear in modern literature and academic writing? There are several major reasons.

First, this practice stems from the political idea of “learning foreigners’ skills in order to control foreigners” (*shi yi changji yi zhi yi* 師夷長技以制夷). Second, China has a long tradition of translating and disseminating Western knowledge. As modern translated literature was spreading, the passionate and romantic young Western women and ardent quests for love in foreign novels, the thrilling mysteries and thick suspense of detective stories, and the miraculous wonders and unpredictable changes in science fiction all aroused a keen interest among Chinese readers. Female readers, in particular, who were emotional by nature and longed for romantic stories, developed a fondness for foreign literature and consequently a strong desire to imitate it and to learn from it. What had started as a practice of borrowing and replicating some of the artistic techniques used in Western fiction (e.g., flashback and psychological description) later developed into a comprehensive study and expansion of knowledge, ranging from progressive Western thought and narrative patterns

6 Wei Yuan 魏源, *Haiguo tuzhi* 海國圖志 (*Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*), in *Wei Yuan ji* 魏源集 (Wei Yuan’s Works) (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1976), vol. 4.

7 Wei Yuan 魏源, 海國圖志敘 (Preface to the *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*), 1: 207.

to expressive techniques and other skills. These are the roots of the appearance of creation through translation in women's fiction. Third, all throughout Chinese literary history, changes in and the appearance of new forms of literature were mostly influenced by two factors: one was folk literature, for example, the development in ancient poetry from four-character poems to five- and seven-character poems and the emergence of *ci* poetry and lyric verse; the other was foreign literature. Early twentieth-century women's fiction, May Fourth era vernacular poetry, and modern and contemporary drama were all influenced by foreign literature in their early as well as advanced stages, as Chinese literature was undergoing a shift from classical to modern. Creation through translation was a response among the intellectual elite to the strong influence of foreign works on China's own literature and culture in the context of cultural exchange between China and the West. The developmental patterns of literary history tell us that a major change is unlikely to occur without the influence of the outside world; the appearance of creation through translation is precisely the outcome of such an impact from abroad.

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