

# Transcultural Lyricism

TRANSLATION, INTERTEXTUALITY,  
AND THE RISE OF EMOTION  
IN MODERN CHINESE LOVE FICTION,  
1899-1925



BY

JANE QIAN LIU

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JANE QIAN LIU,

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“The Making of Transcultural Lyri-  
cism in Su Manshu’s Fiction Writing”  
in *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*  
(Fall 2016).

*In Transcultural Lyricism: Translation, Intertextuality, and the Rise of Emotion in Modern Chinese Love Fiction, 1899–1925*, Jane Qian Liu examines the profound transformation of emotional expression in Chinese fiction between the years 1899 and 1925. While modern Chinese literature is known to have absorbed narrative modes of Western literatures, it also learned radically new ways to convey emotions.

Drawn from an interdisciplinary mixture of literary, cultural and translation studies, Jane Qian Liu brings fresh insights into the study of intercultural literary interpretation and influence. She convincingly proves that Chinese writer-translators in early twentieth century were able to find new channels and modes to express emotional content through new combinations of traditional Chinese and Western techniques.

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## Transcultural Lyricism

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*For my mother He Wenfang and my father Liu Jin*







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# Introduction: Translation and Intertextuality of Foreign Literatures in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Love Fiction

The advantage [of translating speeches of the great orators from Greece] was not only that, when rendering in Latin what I had read in Greek, I could use the finest words that were nevertheless common, but also that, by imitating Greek words, I could coin certain others that were new to our language—provided they were appropriate.

CICERO<sup>1</sup>

...

One of the surest tests [of the superiority or inferiority of a poet] is the way in which a poet borrows. Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different than that from which it is torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest.

T. S. ELIOT<sup>2</sup>

••

Both Cicero (106 BCE–43 BCE) and Eliot (1888–1965) address the way literary creativity grows out of borrowing from previous texts. While Cicero points out the way that translation can generate new modes of expression, Eliot discusses the importance of intertextuality in the formation of new literary texts. These two passages epitomize the phenomenon examined in this book: the transformation of emotional expression in early twentieth-century Chinese

1 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator (De Oratore)*, trans. James M. May and Jakob Wisse (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 92.

2 T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), 114.

love fiction by translating and intertextualizing foreign literary texts. Eliot's assertion that "a good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest" is especially germane to this subject, because the foreign literary texts absorbed by Chinese literature in the early twentieth century—by their very nature—were written in alien languages, at different times and places, yet they were eagerly sought after and appropriated by modern Chinese writers.

Scholarly interest in the enormous changes that took place in Chinese literature at the turn of the twentieth century—particularly the transformation, or "modernization," caused by translating and intertextualizing foreign literatures, as well as by the lingering legacy of the Chinese literary tradition—has always been keen. The seminal work by Chen Pingyuan 陳平原, *The Transformation of Narrative Modes in Chinese Fiction* (*Zhongguo xiaoshuo xushi moshi de zhuanbian* 中國小說敘事模式的轉變, 1988), focuses on the separate roles Western literatures and traditional Chinese literature played in the transformation of the narrative modes of Chinese fiction, particularly political and detective fiction, drawing our attention to the development of diary-style writing, first-person narrative, and psychological interests that emerged from the encounter with foreign literatures.<sup>3</sup> C. T. Hsia and Leo Ou-fan Lee also explore the way modern Chinese writers borrowed from their Western counterparts, even when they did not fully understand them.<sup>4</sup> Whereas some scholars consider the modernization of Chinese literature to be a direct result of foreign influence in the form of translation or textual borrowing,<sup>5</sup> others consider it a natural development of traditional Chinese literature.<sup>6</sup> On the basis of these scholarly inquiries, there is a consensus that the modern transformation of Chinese literature was a result of both internal and external forces.

3 Chen Pingyuan 陳平原, *The Transformation of Narrative Modes in Chinese Fiction* (*Zhongguo xiaoshuo xushi moshi de zhuanbian* 中國小說敘事模式的轉變) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1988).

4 C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction, 1917–1957* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961); Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).

5 Yuan Jin 袁進, "On the Influence of Early Modern Translated Fiction on Chinese Love Stories" (*Shilun jindai fanyi xiaoshuo dui yanqing xiaoshuo de yingxiang* 試論近代翻譯小說對言情小說的影響), in *Translation and Creation: On Early Modern Chinese Translation of Foreign Fiction* (*Fanyi yu chuangzuo: Zhongguo jindai fanyi xiaoshuo lun* 翻譯與創作：中國近代翻譯小說論), ed. Wang Hongzhi 王宏志 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), 206–233.

6 Jaroslav Průšek, *The Lyrical and the Epic: Studies of Modern Chinese Literature*, ed. Leo Ou-fan Lee (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

Lydia Liu's pronouncement that the "change is always already different from China's own past and from the West, but has profound linkages with both" adds a new dimension to our perception of the complexity of literary influence and the role it plays in creativity.<sup>7</sup> As Harold Bloom rightly points out, all poets are burdened with the anxiety of influence, yet thrive on it.<sup>8</sup> However, it is not enough simply to assert that modern Chinese literature was influenced by foreign literatures, or that it reconstructed the traditional Chinese literary legacy in various ways. A more articulate conceptual framework is needed to parse, analyse, and describe the very process of influence. This book strives to construct such a framework.

In this book, I probe the complex scene of early twentieth-century Chinese literature from a fresh perspective. I argue that through the combination of translation studies and intertextuality studies, we might shed more light on the intricate *process* of literary adaptation and appropriation that eventually brought about what is usually termed "the modern transformation of Chinese literature."<sup>9</sup> This modern transformation is no doubt multi-faceted, and in this book I focus primarily on the transformation of emotional expression. I posit that the way writers articulated emotions in their fictional narratives underwent a significant change in the early twentieth century. In many ways, those writers expressed emotions by engaging with literary texts of foreign cultures, either via translation or via intertextuality. In those fictional works, emotions were often conveyed by quoting a passage from a certain foreign literary text, or by transposing the entire emotional ambiance of one or several foreign texts into the new text. These intertexts mingle with traditional Chinese lyrical modes to form a new and hybrid mode of emotional expression. I have coined the term "transcultural lyricism" to refer to this kind of emotional expression, and it can best be understood using the new methodological framework presented in this book.

Translation studies and intertextuality studies, although they at first appear to be two rather distinct fields of inquiry, have in fact much in common. As both

7 Lydia He Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 39.

8 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

9 The term "the modern transformation of Chinese literature" (*zhongguo wenxue de xiandai zhuanxing* 中國文學的現代轉型) has been frequently used in histories of modern Chinese literature. See, for example, Yang Lianfen 楊聯芬, *From Late Qing to May Fourth: The Advent of Chinese Literary Modernity* (*Wanqing zhi wusi: Zhongguo wenxue xiandaixing de fasheng* 晚清至五四：中國文學現代性的發生) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2003).

of them have risen to prominence in academia in recent years, scholars have started to look more closely into these two fields for their potential to deepen our understanding of literary creativity. In this book, I combine approaches from both fields and apply them to the study of early twentieth-century Chinese fiction. I specifically focus on the interaction of twentieth-century Chinese fiction with foreign literatures and its own literary tradition, probing the creativity inherent in two modes of textual production: translation and intertextuality. I am pursuing a strict parallel between *translation*, which is clearly a form of textual production, and *intertextuality*, which throughout I describe as a parallel form of textual production. I also use the term “intertextuality” to refer to the fact that every text exists in relation to and, in a sense, is always created out of, other texts, as will be further explained later.

The following passages begin with a discussion of the methodological framework of the book. First of all, I discuss separate aspects of the two general fields of translation studies and intertextuality studies, before moving on to explore their inherent commonalities, which make it possible to combine them into a new theoretical framework. I then argue that the combination of these two fields yields a theoretical language that enables us to describe and analyse literary influence. Next, I provide an overview of current scholarship that analyses the transformation of modern Chinese literature using either translation studies or intertextuality studies. While insightful findings have been made by scholars using one or the other of these two approaches—particularly that of translation studies—this book makes a contribution to the field by introducing a new methodology that combines translation studies and intertextuality studies, and specifically by applying it to the study of the transformation of emotional expression in early twentieth-century China. Next, I demonstrate the significance of the object of this study, love fiction, which is a vehicle of emotional expression, as well as my criteria for selecting the writers examined in this book, which are informed by the fluidity between popular literature and the so-called May Fourth literature. This introduction ends with an outline of the core chapters of the book.

## Translation and Intertextuality

### *Translation Studies*

For a long time in the history of translation criticism, it was believed that the aim of translation was to construct the equivalent version of the original work in a different language, that is, to transpose its exact meaning from one language to another. The embryonic stage of translation studies saw the advent