

REVIEWS

Transcultural Lyricism: Translation, Intertextuality, and the Rise of Emotion in Modern Chinese Love Fiction, 1899-1925. Jane Qian Liu. Brill, 2017. ISBN: 9789004301313. 241 pp.

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The recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in the creativity inherent in translation, and yet the field of translation studies remains mired in a torpid discussion on equivalence, originality, fidelity and plagiarism. Jane Qian Liu's book *Transcultural Lyricism* offers a refreshing perspective on translation and creativity in the context of early twentieth century Chinese love fiction. Liu effectively circumvents this debate by focusing on instances of translation and intertextuality as key junctures in a changing landscape of emotional expression. Central to Liu's argument is the figure of the writer-translator, an important but often overlooked critical category within modern Chinese literature. By emphasizing the split role of the writer-translator, Liu foregrounds the slippages between translation and literary creation.

Transcultural Lyricism proposes a continuum of textual production between translation and creation, coining the terms *translated creation* and *creative translation* to represent the extremities of this spectrum of authorial practice. Drawing on the work of a broad range of authors including Bao Tianxiao, Li Dingyi, Lin Shu, Zhou Shoujuan, Su Manshu, and Yu Dafu, *Transcultural Lyricism* offers a cogent framework for rethinking the sticky questions of influence, adaptation and borrowing. Moving beyond the tired question of originality, Liu's analysis squarely refocuses on the relationship between literary creativity and borrowing, using the transformation of emotional expression as a focal point. Liu mobilizes the Chinese conception of *huwen* 互文 (intertextuality) to critique and supplement the field of intertextuality studies. In doing so, she traces the development of affective modes of expression including love, sorrow, longing, admiration, as well

as authorial strategies used to either heighten or subvert the emotional climax of a narrative.

Underpinning this approach is the question of multilingualism, a topic that has seen a great surge of interest within both translation studies and comparative literary studies in the recent years. While not explicitly addressed, the implications of multilingual competencies lurk just beneath the surface throughout *Transcultural Lyricism*, and Liu's nuanced approach makes a valuable contribution to the discussion of the multilingual author in the Chinese context. Unlike the majority of conversations on multilingual or translingual authors (as represented by the seminal works of Steven Kellman, Suresh Canagarajah and Gustavo Pérez Firmat) that focus overwhelmingly on the split loyalties of the author, the writer-translators discussed here suffer no such conflict of allegiance. Instead, their multiple language competencies (real or imagined, in the case of Lin Shu) serve primarily to enrich their own creative prospects by offering them access to a wealth of foreign texts to adapt, intertextualize and appropriate.

The key innovation in this approach is that the focus on the author as writer-translator allows Liu to treat both translations and literary creations with equal weight. Instead of treating these two types of literary production as a set of binary processes, Liu emphasizes the common strategies that underlie their creative processes. By combining the approaches of translation studies and intertextuality, the book emphasizes the process of creation rather than the product, revealing a fluidity between translations and literary creations. This spectrum is further complicated by the changing conception of authorship during the first quarter of the twentieth century when, as Liu argues, it was common practice both to disguise one's own creative work as a translation as well as add one's own rhetorical and narrative flourishes to translated works. Liu's painstaking work addresses the complexity of authorial and translational practice at the time, meticulously tracing sources of influence and instances of intertextuality, both with Western and traditional Chinese texts.

In some cases, such as with Li Dingyi's supposed translation of *Perils of Fair Ladies*, a careful examination of Western archives reveals that the 'original' text, and indeed the 'original' author never existed. When dealing with instances of fabricated translation or pseudotranslation, as Liu terms it, *Transcultural Lyricism* does not restrict itself to discussing authorial intent or what is to be gained by disguising one's own work as a translation. Instead, care is taken to treat these occurrences as decisions with aesthetic as well as political import. In examining the slippages between translation and creation, Liu proposes the juncture between appropriation and adaptation as a site of historical import. Seizing on these instances of *psuedo-*

creation or *pseudotranslation* (translation disguising itself as creation and creation disguising itself as translation, respectively), Liu traces the changing landscape of emotive expression, considering these sites of rupture as key points of transformation. Building on the legacy of Haiyan Lee as well as important work by Perry Link and Leo Ou-fan Lee, Liu explores the history of melodrama and Romanticism in early Republican fiction. Drawing on David Wang's conception of lyricism, Liu proposes the term *transcultural lyricism* as a critical framework from which to "parse, analyse, and describe the very process of influence" (3) that shaped the development of emotional expression in Republican love fiction.

Through her careful inclusion of key figures of the so-called Butterfly School as well as more equivocal figures such as Su Manshu and Yu Dafu, *Transcultural Lyricism* explores the strategies that author-translators use in cultivating new modes of emotive expression. The inclusion of Yu Dafu is a tribute to the versatility of this approach, one that in turn begs the question of how the categories of pseudocreation and pseudotranslation might shed new light on the work of other May Fourth writers.

Transcultural Lyricism joins the ranks of *Translingual Practice* and *Lin Shu, Inc.* in bringing translation studies into the broader conversation on modern Chinese literature. Liu's clear, accessible language and well-articulated critical framework will prove a valuable resource for scholars working on Bao Tianxiao, Li Dingyi, Lin Shu, Zhou Shoujuan, Su Manshu, and Yu Dafu, as well as those looking to gain a broader perspective on the shifting currents of emotive expression. The emphasis on the fluidity between translation and literary creation offers not only a much needed intervention into our understanding of authorship in the early twentieth century, but provides an incisive critical angle just as suited to the often ignored intersections of translation and authorial practice in the late 70s and early 80s.

Transcultural Lyricism offers a succinct analysis of developments in the fields of intertextuality and translation studies, accompanied by a cogent critique of their shortcomings in the Chinese context. By drawing on examples from Chinese love fiction in the first quarter of the twentieth century, Liu is able to critique the Eurocentric focus of these theoretical frameworks without sacrificing their critical edge. Her work is an invaluable resource both for students and scholars of Chinese studies looking to glean new critical tools for analysis, as well as for Europeanists seeking to better understand the changing conception of authorship in early twentieth century China.

Author Profile:

Kate Costello is a doctoral candidate at the University of Oxford, specializing in modern Chinese literature and culture. Her doctoral project examines the relationship between bilingualism, language games and word play in experimental literature. Paying special attention to the creative manipulation of sound, script, and syntax, her dissertation examines the playful, devious and irreverent ways that bilingual competencies manifest themselves in experimental writing. Her other research interests include translation studies, linguistics, film, and critical theory.