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The Transculturation of American Poetry in China, 1917-1937

Chris Song

Starting from the late 1910s, after the emergence of New Poetry 新詩 in China amid fiery debate in the pioneering journal *New Youth* 新青年, Chinese poets, critics and translators were eager to introduce American poetry to a Chinese readership. Notably, they did so mostly in the form of essays, which were occasionally accompanied by poetry translations that played an almost ancillary role in what was predominantly expository writing. These essays appeared in literary journals of divergent ideological persuasion. Some were original pieces that referred to disparate English-language sources; some were translations of journal articles first published in Britain and America; some were abridged translations of Louis Untermeyer's preface to his well-known anthology, *Modern American Poetry* (1921);¹ still others were relay (and often abridged) translations of articles written by Japanese modernist authors.

This wave of interest in American poetry lasted until the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. However, it paled in comparison with the Chinese enthusiasm for the literatures of European nations with what were perceived as longer histories and richer cultural traditions, such as Britain,² Russia, France, Germany

1 The first edition of Untermeyer's anthology was published in 1919, but it was the preface in the 1921 edition that became a primary reference for Chinese intellectuals.

2 In early twentieth-century China, the term *Yingguo* 英國, literally 'England,' usually denoted the United Kingdom of Great Britain and

and so on. Many Chinese intellectuals dismissed American literature as a thin branch of a history-laden English-language literature that was primarily associated with Britain. Hence, relatively little American literature was translated into Chinese at the time, and few poetry translations are available for in-depth influence studies. This may explain why the aforesaid essays have received insufficient scholarly attention to date—while in fact, perhaps more so than the occasional translated poem, they can to help us understand how in Republican China, American poetry was selectively understood and appropriated to meet the poetic and ideological needs of the budding Chinese New Poetry tradition; and how poetic and ideological differences were mediated at both ends in the contexts of the respective receiving cultures.

In order to enlarge the disciplinary scope of translation studies, Maria Tymoczko revives Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz's theoretical concept of *transculturación* to encompass a range of cross-cultural phenomena as objects of research (Tymoczko 2007, 120–27). Ortiz uses the Spanish *transculturación* to distinguish a two-way cultural interface from the English *acculturation*, which emphasizes one-way cultural acquisition imposed on, or volunteered by, the receptor. Ortiz incorporates acculturation as the first phase of a transculturation process whose second step is deculturation (the loss of a previous culture), and a third, neoculturation (the creation of a new cultural phenomenon) (Ortiz 1947, 102–3). This model has been used to analyze cultural hybridization in the postcolonial contexts of many South American nations since it was postulated in the 1940s. However, not until half a century later did it begin to gain popularity in the Anglophone world. In her *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary Louise Pratt defines the term as “[what] people on the receiving end of empire do with metropolitan modes of representation” (Pratt 1992, 7–8).

Tymoczko does not take up (anti)imperialism as a component of her theoretical discourse, and doesn't heed Pratt's emphasis on the receiving end of the process, or in Tymoczko's words, “the receptor environment.” By the same token, although she explicates Ortiz's “tripartite process in transculturation,” Tymoczko rarely uses this

Ireland. For instance, the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw was often introduced as an *Yingguo zuojia* 英國作家 (“English” writer).

model to describe the examples under scrutiny. Rather, her *transculturation* refers to a superordinate kind of cultural interface that covers not only the translation of texts, ideas and discourses but also the “uptake” of cultural, religious and social practices, between cultures and within them. It denotes a process in which a cluster of foreign cultural forms are appropriated by and integrated with the local culture insofar as their foreignness is naturalized and they cease to be considered “other.” According to Tymoczko, the defining feature of transculturation is its performative nature. The borrowed cultural form is performed as it arrives in the culture that receives it; both cultures then modify each’s understanding of the other and, moreover, reflect upon the self (Tymoczko 2007, 120–27).

Tymoczko extends the theory to describe how the fact that a writer’s works are translated into foreign languages and published abroad can raise their literary status in the home culture. Her examples are South American writers: Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez (126). However, if a writer gains in status at home when they are translated into “bigger” languages and “stronger” cultures, this may also be because members of the source culture look up to the target culture—in addition to things like wider international distribution, circulation and publicity. And obviously, this is not necessarily a two-way street. To use an example I will discuss below, the American poet Sara Teasdale did not gain in prominence in America by being translated into Chinese and widely read by May Fourth intellectuals after her work was included in Hu Shi’s 胡適 *Changshi ji* 嘗試集 (*Experiments*) (1920), the earliest single-author poetry collection in vernacular Chinese.

For this study, the model of reciprocal cultural modification as provided in Tymoczko’s theory of transculturation only makes sense if the investigation focuses on the context of the receiving culture. For this reason, I will analyze how American poetry was performed in Republican China through introductory essays and a limited number of well-known translated poems that helped to shape Chinese New Poetry in its first two decades; and how, in its turn, the rapid development of Chinese New Poetry impacted these authors’ and translators’ understanding of American poetry.

Teasdale and Poetic Form

Hu Shi's *Experiments* retains its historical significance to date. The volume contains not only Hu Shi's original poems but also his translations of works by George Gordon Byron, Anne Lindsay and Sara Teasdale, and a relay translation of a poem from Omar Khayyam's *Rubáiyát*. Among these, Hu Shi's would appear especially happy with his rendition of Teasdale's "Over the Roof" 關不住了！. He marked it "the beginning of my 'New Poetry' era" 我的「新詩」成立的紀元 in the preface to the second edition of *Experiments* (Hu 1920, 2), and it was a successful incorporation of his renowned proposition of "a great liberation of poetic form" 詩體大解放, made in his seminal essay "On New Poetry" 談新詩. He believed that "once there is this liberation of poetic form, rich material, shrewd observations, high ideals and complex emotions can find their way into the poem" 因為有了這一層詩體的解放，所以豐富的材料，精密的觀察，高深的理想，複雜的感情，方才能跑到詩裏去 (Hu 1935 [1919], 295).

Hu's translation of Teasdale has led to much discussion in what we might term translation studies of modern Chinese literature, but many scholars have characterized it as a faithful rendition, since it replicates the ABAB rhyme scheme of the English text.³ This is not entirely correct if we trace the matter back to its beginnings, for there are minimally two, slightly different versions of the translation. The most frequently cited is found in the fourth edition of *Experiments*, published in 1923, which was to become the source for all later editions of Hu Shi's collected works. However, prior to this widely anthologized text, an earlier edition had been included in the book's second edition, which was published in 1920. Here are the second stanza of Teasdale's poem and Hu Shi's two translations:

But over the roofs there came
 The wet new wind of May,
 And a tune blew up from the curb
 Where the street-pianos play.
 (Teasdale 1937, 87–88)

3 For a striking example, see Liao Qiyi's 廖七一 monograph, which focuses exclusively on Hu Shi's poetry translation, see Liao 2006 (52–53).

但是屋頂上吹來	但是五月的濕風，
一陣陣五月的濕風，	時時從屋頂吹來；
更有那街心琴調	還有那街心的琴調
一陣陣的風吹到房中。	一陣陣的飛來。
(Hu 1920, 46–47)	(Hu 1923, 51)

Apparently his “New Poetry’ era” began with the earlier translation, which is a more loyal realization of his “great liberation of poetic form.” The most striking difference between the two translations is the rhyme. The earlier version does not follow the ABAB rhyme scheme, and the later version does so at the cost of changing the order of the first two lines. In terms of poetic form, the former is freer than the latter, whereas their similarity is also apparent as they faithfully duplicate the indentation in the original poem, a formal feature that does not exist in the “native” tradition of classical Chinese poetry. The shift from an unrhymed to a rhymed quatrain reveals Hu Shi’s wish to lend Chinese New Poetry a form that is borrowed from Western poetry. Teasdale’s poem was thus appropriated twice by Hu Shi, as part of a process in which his ideas about New Poetry took shape and evolved. For him, (un)faithfulness in translation was a matter of expediency.

As Hu Shi’s devotion to creating New Poetry in Chinese subsided in the mid-1920s, Wen Yiduo 聞一多 continued the effort to construct a form for New Poetry with considerable theoretical depth. Most famously, his essay “The Form of Poetry” 詩的格律, published in May 1926 in *The Morning Post Supplement* 晨報副鐫, which was edited by Xu Zhimo 徐志摩, formulates a tripartite aesthetic of poetry, by bringing in the beauty of music, of art and of architecture (Wen 1926). This lays the theoretical ground for the Crescent poets 新月派 to produce poems with patterned meter, neat lineation, regular stanza breaks and consistent rhyme schemes. Again, Teasdale’s poetry curiously participated in this project. Between the fall and the winter of 1926,⁴ Wen Yiduo rewrote Teasdale’s “Let It Be Forgotten” into the fifth and sixth stanzas of his own “Forget Her” 忘掉她, a eulogy for his four-year-old daughter who had tragically died:

4 For a chronology of Wen Yiduo’s poems, see Lu 2009 (233-51).

Let it be forgotten, as a flower is forgotten
 Forgotten as a fire that once was singing gold,
 Let it be forgotten for ever and ever,
 Time is a kind friend, he will make us old.

If anyone asks, say it was forgotten
 Long and long ago,
 As a flower, as a fire, as a hushed footfall
 In a long forgotten snow.
 (Teasdale 1924, 61)

忘掉她，像忘掉一朵花。
 年華那朋友真好，
 他明天就叫你老；
 忘掉她，像忘掉一朵花！

忘掉她，像忘掉一朵花。
 如果是有人要問，
 就說沒有那個人；
 忘掉她，像忘掉一朵花！
 (Wen 1929, 32-33)

The semantic echo of the original in the rewrite is evident, and both exhibit regular rhyme. Only the metrical pattern in Wen's poem is more coherent than that in Teasdale's poem. More importantly, both Teasdale's reiteration of "forgotten" and Wen's repetition of the line "Forget her, like forgetting a flower" 忘掉她，像忘掉一朵花 perform the same paradoxical act of forgetting, in which the insistent recurrence of the notion of forgetting keeps reminding the reader of what it is that the speakers try so hard to forget, as their emotion overwhelms both poems in their entirety. Thus, while Hu Shi's translation primarily replicates the original poem's surface form, Wen's rewrite probes deeper into its inner structure.

The pursuit of a rhymed Chinese New Poetry, which lasted from the late 1910s through the 1920s, was severely criticized by Shi Zhecun 施蛰存 in the 1930s. Shi had gained fame as a fiction writer associated with the New Sensationalism group 新感覺派 in the 1920s and revealed a fervent interest in poetry in the 1930s, starting

with his editorship of the widely read, prominent literary magazine *Les contemporains* 現代 in Shanghai. He remarked:

Mr. Hu Shizhi's New Poetry movement has helped us break away from the tradition of classical Chinese poetry. But scholars of New Poetry since Mr. Hu Shizhi himself have unconsciously fallen into the trap of the tradition of classical Western poetry. They believe poetry should be written with consistent rhyme schemes, or at least with neat metrical patterns. Therefore, some people follow the rules in order to create "square poems" such as sonnets.

胡適之先生的新詩運動，幫助我們打破了對於中國舊體詩的傳統，但從胡適之先生一直到現在為止的新詩研究者卻不自覺地墜入於西洋舊體詩的傳統中。他們以為詩該是有整齊的用韻法的，至少該有整齊的詩節的。於是十四行詩，「方塊詩」，也還有人緊守著規範填做著。(Shi 1933, 7).⁵

Translating American poetry became part of a determined effort by Shi Zhecun to turn the tide of Chinese New Poetry toward his favorite variety of free verse, "imagistic lyrical poetry" 意象抒情詩. Not only did he translate a selection of American poetry for a special issue of *Les contemporains* on modern American literature,⁶ he also published his own "imagistic lyrical poetry" in several issues of the magazine; this kind of writing was, in fact, even better exemplified by the works of his then more prolific friend Dai Wangshu 戴望舒. "Imagistic lyrical poetry" was primarily inspired by Imagism, and marked by the unreserved adoption of free verse. Shi Zhecun summarized its four characteristics: "(1) No rhyme scheme; (2) The length of the line and the shape of the stanza vary; (3) Foreign or

5 "Shizhi" is Hu Shi's courtesy name. Unless otherwise specified, all translations in this paper are mine.

6 Shi Zhecun's promotion of American Imagism was buttressed by the essays of critics Shao Xunmei 邵洵美 (1934) and Xu Chi 徐遲 (1934), who believed the trendiest American poetry was written by poets like Pound and Eliot. However, their preference to the hardcore modernist poetics was drowned in the special issue as they went without translated poems as manifest examples partly due to the difficulty in translation.

archaic words are mixed in; (4) The meaning of the poem cannot be readily deciphered,” and he admitted that his advocacy of this poetics was a direct reaction against Crescent poetry (Shi 1981, 217). The four points were conspicuous in both his original poems and his translations of Imagist poetry. Here are Shi’s poem “Sullivan Chocolate Shop” (on the left) and his translation of the first stanza of H.D.’s “Dusk” (on the right):

沙利文

我說，沙利文是很熱的，
連它底刨冰的雪花上的
那個少女的大黑眼，
在我不知道的時候以前，
都使我的 Fancy Suudaes 融化了。
我說，沙利文是很熱的。
(Shi 1932, 230)

夕暮

日光消逝了
從這山嶺到那山嶺，
從這朵花道那朵花——
那 Hypaticas 花，在日光下
怒放著的
現在萎殘了——
花瓣卷攏了
藍色的瓣尖彎俯著
向著那更藍的花心，
於是這些花都消隱了。
(Shi 1934, 1208)

Indeed, Shi’s poetic preferences can be seen to pre-condition his translation. Alongside works by other poets who primarily wrote rhymed poetry, such as Robert Frost, Teasdale’s “Let It Be Forgotten” was translated into “imagistic lyrical poetry”:

讓牠忘記了罷，像一朵花被忘記一樣。
像曾經閃過金光的火焰一樣地被忘記罷。
讓牠永遠永遠地忘記了。
時間是個好朋友，他將使我們年老。

如果有人問起來，就說已經忘記了。
忘記了好久好久了。
正如一朵花，一個火焰，
一個消融了多時的雪中足印。
(Shi 1934, 1025)

In Chinese, the two quatrains have neither a rhyme scheme nor a metrical pattern. Perhaps the only consistent formal feature of the translated poem is its indentation. Yet, it reads unequivocally as free verse.

In light of the above considerations, Tymoczko's theory can be applied to the transculturation of Imagist poetics in *Les contemporains*, through a process of naturalizing the foreignness of Imagism and free verse by relentlessly printing translations of Imagist poetry and "imagistic lyrical poetry."

The examples above clearly show that Teasdale's poems were maneuvered, or as Tymoczko would have it, "performed," to comply with the respective translators' poetics in three crucial moments in the early history of modern Chinese poetry, but Teasdale did not enjoy equivalent praise at home. Her lyrical poetry continued to be ridiculed notably by the then more prominent male poet Conrad Aiken, for a lack of "personality" and "metrical fitness" (Aiken 1925, 108–14). In fact, the reception of Teasdale's poetry in China was unknown to her contemporaries in the United States and goes unmentioned in two monographs about the poet that were published several decades later (Drake 1979, Schoen 1986), and it could hardly be argued that this transcultural encounter had any influence on the writing of American poetry. However, just as the translation of Teasdale's poems informed the writing of Chinese New Poetry, so each translation modified how her poetry was to be understood in China in its turn. Hence, I submit that in this case, it is meaningful to speak of her poetry in terms of transculturation only within the context of the receiving culture.

"New Poetry"

The interaction between the transculturation of Teasdale's poetry and the early development of Chinese New Poetry constitutes an intriguing element of the introduction of American poetry in China. It is safe to say that by the time Shi Zhecun promoted the "imagistic lyrical poetry" in the pages of *Les contemporains* in the early 1930s, the foreignness of free verse, a cultural form borrowed from the West, had naturalized and ceased to be considered "other" in China. But this is only one side of the story. Shi Zhecun and his followers'

embrace of free verse would not have been possible without the fecund discussions about America's "New Poetry" in various earlier essays. Tymoczko's transculturation as a superordinate kind of cultural interface encompasses all types of performance of the original cultural form. Rather than translating individual poems, many May Fourth intellectuals' performance of American poetry took the form of the essay. And so, to map out the overall picture of this influx requires a detailed investigation of the many Chinese essays about the American New Poetry Movement, which had erupted only a decade earlier than the one then underway in China.

Before entering the discussion of the essays that sought to promote American poetry in China, it should be noted that there was a widespread contempt for American literature among Chinese readers at the time. In 1921, the *Eastern Miscellany* 東方雜誌 published Wang Jing's 王靖 translation of St. John Greer Ervine's "American Literature Now and To Be." In the article, Ervine chastises "rebellious" free verse proponents such as Amy Lowell, Vachel Lindsay and Carl Sandburg for writing what he believes to be "foolishness" (Ervine 1921, Wang 1921). In 1928, Zeng Xubai 曾虛白, an admirer of French culture, in an essay called "My View of American Literature" 我的美國文學觀, criticized American literature for its "failure to capture the force of life" 沒有抓住人生的力量 and American poets for being "as shallow as the light of a waning moon, striving for perfection only through technique [...]" 淺薄得祇發著月亮般的光芒，祇在技巧上求全 (Zeng 1928, 6). In the republication of this article as the general introduction 總論 to his *ABC of American Literature* 美國文學 ABC, he takes his ignorant disdain even further: "The proper noun 'American Literature' has no independent status in the actual history of world literature" 「美國文學」這個名詞在真正世界文學史上是沒有獨立的資格的。牠祇是英國文學的一個支派 (Zeng 1929, 1).⁷ In 1929, the Tianjin-based *National News*

7 The booklet belonged to a series that introduced foreign literatures into China, published by the World Bookstore 世界書局 in Shanghai and widely distributed to major cities and provincial towns in 1920s China. Before long, Chen Su 陳淑 accused Zeng of plagiarism, see Chen 1929 (1–4). His sources are likely to be John Erskine and W.P. Trent's *Great American Writers* (1921) and *A Short History of American Literature* (1922).

Weekly 國聞週報 published an anonymous translation of American critic Paul Elmer More's "The Modern Current in American Literature," in which More condemns whatever is "modern" or "modernist" about American literature as "half-educated taste" 半吊子品味 (More 1928, Anonymous 1929).

This string of negative views should not be underestimated. It was so expansive that whoever worked to introduce American literature in China at the time had to refute it in one way or another. In 1926, American literature was selected to be the fortieth chapter of Zheng Zhenduo's 鄭振鐸 *Outline of Literature* 文學大綱, a five-year serialized column in *Fiction Monthly* 小說月報 (1923–1927) before its publication as a four-volume paperback in 1931. Zheng's essay is a brief historical account of American literature from the nation's independence to the early twentieth century, and he argues that American literature should enjoy a status equivalent to that of Britain, France, Germany or Russia. There is an appreciable generic imbalance in the essay: the quick sketch of American poetry from the seventeenth century to the present takes less than three pages (Zheng 1926, 10–13). In a 1933 Chinese booklet about American literature, Zhang Yuerui 張越瑞 propounds that the history of American literature is the process of achieving literary independence from British influence. Poetry is given little attention. Poets discussed include Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman and Sidney Lanier for the nineteenth century, several active figures in the American New Poetry Movement of the 1910s and prominent modernists such as e. e. cummings and T. S. Eliot (Zhang 1933, 1–6).

Clearly, conflicting views on American literature at large and the said generic bias created a tense context for those who sought to promote American poetry in Republican China. It was only natural for these authors to tailor a different narrative of American poetry, with which a local readership of Chinese New Poetry would be able to identify. America's New Poetry, which in Chinese is synonymous with Hu Shi's coinage *xinshi* 新詩, shifted their literary horizon toward the West.

According to *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, America's "new poetry," also known as free verse or *vers libre*, had become the rage, and was a source of lively and contentious debate among poets, critics, and popular audiences" and

“[t]he ‘new poetry’ movement officially began in October 1912 with the establishment of Harriet Monroe’s *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* [...] devoted exclusively to the genre” (Churchill and Jaffee 2012, 299–300). Following Monroe’s poetic aspirations, anchored in Chicago, other magazines were founded and several anthologies and collections of poetry in free verse were published.⁸

Albeit not without fierce domestic debates over its defining characteristic of abandoning metrical patterns and rhyme schemes, these publications sparked a storm of free verse poetry in primarily Midwestern America, which instantly resonated with China’s May Fourth intellectuals in light of their recent rupture with the traditional forms of classical Chinese poetry. The story the May Fourth intellectuals were trying to sell is the successful rise of a New Poetry that combined poetic modernity and a new national psyche. Their major frame of reference was Untermeyer’s anthology, *Modern American Poetry* (1921), with a key role for the preface. For Untermeyer, the poetic modernity suggested by the book’s title started from the end of the American Civil War, because after the war, “America developed a national consciousness; the West discovered itself, and the East discovered the West.” As New England writers “withdrew to their libraries,” their writings were no longer able to reflect a post-war political nationalism that called for “a new expression; crude, jangling, vigorously democratic,” and they made way for rising literary giants in Midwestern America such as Whitman and Mark Twain (Untermeyer 1921, xvii–xviii). Untermeyer believes that Whitman “ended and began an epoch” in American poetry’s course of development (xliv) and was the “godfather” of new poetry, as the form of his monumentally influential *Leaves of Grass* is “elemental, dynamic, free” (xxi). The emergence of the American New Poetry Movement in 1913, or in Untermeyer’s word the “Renaissance,” inherited Whitmanesque poetics in combination with “the new spirit—free in expression, unhampered in choice of subject, penetrative in psychology” (xlv).

Just as the title of Untermeyer’s anthology promoted modernity in American poetry, the authors of the Chinese essays examined here adopted a similar strategy by advertising American poetry with words

8 For a list of these publications, see Untermeyer 1921 (xxx).

such as “modern” 現代, “recent” *jindai* 近代, “new” 新 or “post-war” 大戰以後 in their titles. Among these essays, the first reference to Untermeyer’s preface was made as early as in 1922 by Liu Yanling 劉延陵 in his “America’s New Poetry Movement” 美國的新詩運動, published in *Poetry* 詩, the earliest Chinese periodical that solely focused on (Chinese) New Poetry. Preceding his abridged translation of Untermeyer’s preface were a couple of paragraphs asserting that the New Poetry Movement was a global cultural phenomenon and that China’s movement was part of this “irreversible trend” 不可逆轉的潮流 (Liu 1922, 23–24).

Liu’s essay features two full sections from Untermeyer’s preface: “Walt Whitman” and “Renaissance–1919.” Whitman is identified as “the forefather of new poetry” 新詩的始祖 that has inspired E.A. Robinson, Edgar Lee Masters, Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg and the American Imagists. Thus, Liu basically follows Untermeyer’s historical narrative of American poetry from the civil war to the early twentieth century. From here, the Chinese incarnation of Untermeyer’s preface shifts toward the poetic preferences of the founders of *Poetry* magazine. The monthly was run by the Chinese New Poetry Society 中國新詩社, which had been established by Liu and his fellow poets Ye Shengtao 葉聖陶 and Yu Pingbo 俞平伯 in Shanghai. Less than half a year later, the founders merged into a larger group, The Literary Association 文學研究會, that advocated “art for life’s sake” 為人生而藝術 and sought to propagate realism.⁹ Liu, an active member in both groups, upheld this basic literary principle in his essay. While the sections about his contemporaries in America are excerpts from various sections of Untermeyer’s preface, Liu refurbishes the Chinese version with the aspirations, the diction and the tone of Hu Shi’s “great liberation of poetic form.” Hu’s influence is also obvious in that his “On New Poetry” is quoted as the Chinese interpretation of the six principles of Imagism. Additionally, Liu argues that modern poets should use “modern language, everyday language” 現代語, 日用所常之語 to write on subjects that are “close to life” 切近人生 (Liu 1922, 31): exemplified, as in his essay, by the works of Sandburg, Masters and Frost.

More often seen than direct translations from Untermeyer’s

9 For a more thorough account of *Poetry*, see Liu 1990.

preface are relay translations from the Japanese. These pieces were (re)written by intellectuals who had studied in Japan, such as Chen Baoyin 陳豹隱 under the alias Shaoshui 勺水 (1928), Fang Tianbai 方天白 (1929), Liu Dajie 劉大杰 (1930) and Gao Ming 高明 (1931). Ito Sei's 伊藤整 translation of Untermeyer's preface had been published in the Japanese modernist literary magazine *Poetry and Poetics* 詩と詩論 in 1928, which published numerous Japanese translations of Western modernist writings in the early twentieth century, with Ito frequently contributing literary translations. For those Chinese literati who had a sufficient command of Japanese to appreciate the magazine but were less competent in English, *Poetry and Poetics* was a perfect set of binoculars to peer at what they felt were trendsetting literary developments in the West; but their horizon was also confined by it. Not until Ito's Japanese translation of Untermeyer's preface appeared did they produce a relay version of it in Chinese.

When translating Untermeyer's preface, Ito had selected the part from "Renascence-1913" to the final section, "Summary—New Spirits" (Ito 1928, 201–8). Ito's preference for the American poets since the "Renascence," unsurprisingly, reappeared in Chen Baoyin's translation, which was published in *Comradeship* 樂群, a literary periodical of decidedly left-wing persuasion. It had been established by Chen himself and Zhang Ziping 張資平 who also had studied in Japan. However, Chen's translation does not reflect the journal's ideological bent. Fang Tianbai's essay "Literature of Modern America" 現代美國的文學 is a combined rewrite of articles by Shimizu Terukichi 清水暉吉 on poetry, Yuasa Teruo 湯淺輝夫 on drama and Kitamura Kihati 北村喜八 on fiction, which belonged to a special feature about American literature in another pioneering Japanese periodical, *The Era of Literature* 文學時代. Terukichi's historical narrative of American poetry is determined by the framework provided in Untermeyer's preface. Liu Dajie's "General Outline of Modern American Literature" 現代美國文學概論 (1930) owed a considerable debt to Japanese authors such as Matsuo Takagaki 高垣松雄, Nii Itaru 新居格, Kitamura Kihati 北村喜八 and Yokoyama Yusaku 橫山有策. The four sections of Liu's essay were devoted to "the New Literature Movement" 新文藝運動, drama, fiction and poetry respectively. The essay was regrettably cut short

and the latter half omitted, but its first section touches upon New Poetry and tries to incorporate it into a larger literary movement viewed as having renovated American literature on all fronts. One thing the relay translations have in common is that they do not feature the discursive bifurcation into paralleling narratives of new poetics in America and China that echo one another. For example, although Liu Yanling and Chen Baoyin translated similar selections from Untermeyer's preface, Chen's relay translation follows Ito's Japanese version on a sectional basis and seems more "faithful" to Untermeyer's original writing than Liu's direct translation. That said, Chen's rendition does not divulge the influence of Hu Shi that is on display in Liu's.

I hope to have provided sufficient evidence that the essays by these intellectuals stimulated a process of familiarizing America's new poetry by selectively rewriting Untermeyer's preface to *Modern American Poetry*. On the one hand, Untermeyer's preface informed these authors of the successful rise of American New Poetry; on the other, they deliberately disregarded what Untermeyer wrote about American poetry *before* the New Poetry Movement, with the exception of Whitman as its "forefather." Untermeyer's preface and the intermediary Japanese essays met their expectations of America's New Poetry—as an example for Chinese New Poetry.

Left Poetry and Black Poetry

In November 1930, the Communist Party of China galvanized the many groups of left-wing writers to amalgamate and found the League of Left-Wing Writers 中國左翼作家聯盟 (hereafter, the League) in Shanghai, with the aim of further propagating proletarian literature in China and introducing Russian interpretations of Marxist literary theory through translation. The League had a significant impact on the transculturation of American poetry in China. The discourse of revolutionary literature permeated their introductory essays on American Left poetry and Black poetry.¹⁰ League writers viewed these as serving the proletarian revolution and criticizing capitalist society, and therefore as the most radical,

10 "Black poetry" is a translation of *Heiren shige* 黑人詩歌, literally "black people's poetry."

pioneering and hopeful forces among the many schools of American poetry.

Zhu Fu's 朱復 treatise "General Outline of Modern American Poetry" 現代美國詩概論 was published in the May 1930 issue of *Fiction Monthly* 小說月報, then an official periodical of the Literary Association, which was to join the League five months later. Like Untermeyer's preface, Zhu's long essay covers the period from the American civil war to the New Poetry Movement, with more attention to the latter. He provides a thorough description of each poet's biographical background and stylistic features, which often comes with a translated excerpt to illustrate these individual portraits. While the essay mainly follows Untermeyer's periodization, its conclusion charts a new course. Zhu writes:

Modern American poetry can be said to have grown out of a colonial stage of imitation and entered an experimental stage of vigor, complexity and elegance [...] Part of America's "New" poetry is a literature of resistance, against the ugly, against the advancement of mechanization, against standardized "success" [...].

現代美國詩，可說是已超脫了模仿的殖民地的時期，而到精壯複雜優美的實驗時期了[……]有一部分的美國「新」詩，是一種反抗的文學——反抗醜惡，反抗機器化的進步，反抗標準化的「成功」[……] (Zhu 1930, 839).

Although this passage does not directly exhibit class consciousness, the signature antagonistic mentality of Chinese left-wing writers at the time is palpable. On the other hand, Zhu also embodies the ideal of "art for life's sake": "Compiling these works and studying them is no different from looking off into a splendid tapestry of the landscape of American life, thought and enterprise" 總集他們的作品而研究之，這無異於觀覽一幅描寫美國生活思想事業風景的華美繡幔 (Zhu 1930, 839). This is immediately followed by a list of recommended titles, including "works that describe the life and special spirit of black people" 描寫黑人生活及特殊精神的作品 in *Negro Folk Rhymes* (1922, edited by Thomas W. Talley) and *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922, edited by James Weldon Johnson),

as well as “songs from the life of the common people” 民間生活的歌謠 in *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (1910, edited by John A. Lomax) and *Songs of the Cattle Trail and Cow Camp* (1919, edited by John A. Lomax), and additionally “poetry and essays descriptive of and sympathetic with the oppressed masses of the people” 描寫並同情於一般被壓迫民眾的詩文, by which he means literature about the working class (Zhu 1930, 839). Thus, Zhu Fu’s treatise not only provides a thorough introduction to American poetry from the civil war to the early twentieth century, but also manifests the Literary Association’s ideological shift in the general direction of the League. More importantly, Zhu’s essay seems to have set the course for the Chinese left-wing writers’ introduction of American poetry to Chinese readers in the 1930s.

Once the League had been established, its members were quick to find like-minded counterparts in America, especially among the authors of the radical left-wing literature published in magazines such as *The New Masses*, often literally translated into Chinese as *Xin Qunzhong* 新群眾, which Foley has called “the principal organ of the American cultural left from 1926 onwards” (Foley 1993, 65). The signals of American left-wing literature were picked up by the Chinese cultural left and transmuted into ever bolder statements. Lin Yijin’s 林疑今 1931 “Review of Modern American Literature” 現代美國文學評論 starts with a summary of “the revolution in American literature and its poetry” 美國文學的革命及其詩歌. He asserts that after World War I, “The prospect of the American poetry scene is very bleak” 美國詩壇的前途非常渺茫, and the only glimmer of hope lies with “poets of the New Masses school” 新群眾派詩人 such as A.B. Magil and Mike Gold, both devoted communists and proletarian writers (Lin 1931, 3). Lin also points to the annual *Unrest* anthologies, edited by Jack Conroy and Ralph Cheyney from 1929 to 1931; he believes these are part of the New Masses school, but they actually belonged to the Rebel Poets, a complex literary group of radical workers, anarchists, populists, liberals, Christian socialists and so on.¹¹ For Chinese left-wing writers in the 1930s, America’s New Poetry was no longer new. In his “Discourse on Recent American Literature” 近代美國文學講話, Yu Mutao 余慕陶 dismisses Edgar

11 For a detailed study of American radical literature, see Wixson 1994.

Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* (1915) as “decadent, symbolic, aestheticist” 頹廢，象徵，唯美 (Yu 1932, 4). Yu writes that “revolutionary poetry” by “proletarian writers” such as John Reed and Max Eastman “breaks away from this moribund atmosphere and strides toward the status of revolutionary poetry” 脫離了這死氣沉沉的氣氛，大踏步到革命詩的地位 (4).

From the end of the 1920s to the outbreak of the war with Japan in 1937, Chinese intellectuals' interest in Black poetry and Black literature at large focused on works by African-American writers and was mostly ideologically oriented.¹² Yang Ren's 楊任 *Anthology of Black Poetry* 黑人詩選 (1937), the earliest such collection published in China, is a case in point, containing works by nine African-American poets and no works by authors based outside America. According to a preface Yang Ren wrote in Tokyo in 1936, he compiled and translated this book following his teacher Matsuo Takagaki's 高垣松雄 “earnest advice” 懇切指導, and he believed these Black poets “[had] become the voice of their ethnicity and give free rein to a fiery spirit of resistance and criticism” 做了自己民族的咽喉，發揮出火樣的反抗和批評的精神 (Yang 1937, 4). In current scholarship in mainland China, the translation of Black literature in Republican China is often studied in the context of what was then known as the study of “the literatures of small countries” 小國文學, driven as much by the official Nationalist Literature & Art Movement 民族主義文藝運動 (Song 2007, 57) as by left-wing proletarian ideology. At times, these rival ideologies were undistinguishable in the early study of foreign literatures, such as in Yang Changxi's 楊昌溪 book *Black Literature* 黑人文學 (1932). Yang partook in the Nationalist Literature & Art Movement, but nonetheless wrote this book from a left-wing perspective (Han 2014, 91–98).

The year 1933 marked a high point of enthusiasm for Black literature among League writers, with Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes' visiting the Soviet Union and China in 1933 (Hughes 1956, 245) and meeting with leading League representatives such as Lu Xun 魯迅. Hughes' visit was reported in many literary

12 For a prosaic chronology of the America's black poetry that were translated into China from 1928 to 1937, see Zhang 2011 (201-3).

magazines¹³ and his poetry has been extensively published in Chinese translation ever since. Notably and perhaps inevitably, his poetry was invariably taken to inspire revolution, effectively excluding other readings. For a typical example, after Zheng Linkuan 鄭林寬 spends considerable time dissecting Hughes' poetry, he finds that "the vestiges of the past and a deep-rooted psychology often torment the poet, but his heart's ultimate destination has always been revolution [...] It seems he should be secretly glad that he is the first revolutionary poet among the black people." 過去的殘餘，根深蒂固的心理，常常使這位詩人苦惱，然而他最後心嚮往之的地方終身革命 [……] 他似乎應私自慶幸自己是黑人中第一位革命詩人 (Zheng 1934, 139).

In all, the establishment of the League overwhelmingly swept intellectual attention toward America's Left poetry and Black poetry. Unmistakably, a Chinese discourse of "revolutionary literature" bent their narrative of American poetry toward one of "revolutionary poetry," as a nearby future whose realization they eagerly awaited—and a future they may have wished to see for Chinese New Poetry as well. Crucially, in so doing, their essays present a projection that goes well beyond the framework of Untermeyer's narrative. Not a single poem of Hughes, then the most acclaimed African-American poet, was included in Untermeyer's lionized 1921 anthology, and not a single African-American poet is mentioned in the equally lionized preface. Clearly, the left-wing ideology in the essays by the Chinese authors can hardly be said to have come solely from the American poetry they were bringing to China. Rather, they were appropriating American Left poetry and Black poetry to re-impart a revolutionary ethos to the writing of Chinese poetry.

Concluding Remarks

Taking Tymoczko's theory of transculturation as my point of departure, I have offered a critical overview of the reception of American poetry in China from 1917 to 1937, and related this to the evolution of poetic form and ideology in modern Chinese poetry at the time. By examining a selection of translations and essays, I have shown how foreign originals were performed to meet local poetic

13 See Fu Donghua's 傅東華 (under the alias Wu Shi 伍實) interview with the Hughes, "Xiushi zai Zhongguo" 休士在中國 (1933).

and ideological demands. Thus, through translation, American poetry helped shape modern Chinese poetry in its first two decades; and in its turn, the aesthetic and ideological development of modern Chinese poetry changed the way American poetry was understood in China. In the cases under scrutiny, the reciprocal modification between these two poetries occurred in the context of the receiving culture only. It did not affect how modern Chinese poetry was understood in America, nor did it raise the literary status of widely translated poets such as Teasdale and Hughes at home.

In this framework, we can observe how the foreignness of a cluster of cultural forms undergoes a process of naturalization in the receptor environment. These cultural forms can be as generic, prominent and wide-ranging as free verse, but also as tiny and technical as indentation. Their scope also extends to the ideological realm, especially in relation to the function of literary production in society; in the cases discussed above, they affected the development of the national psyche and strengthened the discourse of revolutionary literature.

At the same time, to avoid simplification, it should be noted that while the analysis primarily speaks to the story of American poetry in Republican China, the cultural forms in question were not borrowed solely from America. Free verse or *verse libre* came originally from France and arrived in America in the early twentieth century alongside Amy Lowell's in-depth discussions published in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*; ¹⁴ the history of indentation in poetry is far longer than its manifestations in American poetry; Marxist-inspired, Soviet-Russian-interpreted left-wing ideology had been in place in China before American Left poetry and Black poetry arrived on the scene.

As such, we need a bigger umbrella than that of American poetry, or perhaps several bigger umbrellas, like a matryoshka doll. However, this entails a risk of reverting to the East-West paradigm of translation studies which postcolonialists like Tymoczko try so hard to escape, and of the borrowed cultural forms becoming less and less visible in the mists of an ever larger framework. Whether or not the foreignness of a borrowed cultural form is naturalized, research on a single form can affect the overall framework, subtly yet significantly.

14 See, for example, Lowell 1914.

Tymoczko's theory of transculturation offers a valuable vantage point, but where it seeks to encompass everything, it is in danger of obstructing the particularity of the texts under scrutiny from view.

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