

# A Survey of the Yangs' Versions of Lu Xun's Short Stories: 1954 vs. 1960

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Lu Xun (1881-1936) has been acclaimed "Father of Modern Chinese Literature". He is the first writer to use the vernacular to write fiction. His stories have laid a solid foundation for the development of modern Chinese fiction. The well-known husband-and-wife translators Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang have always been celebrated for their good command of both Chinese and English, precise and fluent translation as well as perfect cooperation so as to be chosen to translate all of Lu Xun's works into English by Beijing Foreign Languages Press (FLP). As for Lu Xun's short stories, their versions are characterized by their smooth British English, idiomatic expressions, and loyalty to the original, though there are some misunderstanding, omission, and misinterpretation.

**Keywords:** Lu Xun's short stories, the Yangs' versions, the 1954 version, the 1960 version

## Introduction

Lu Xun (1881-1936) is the first writer to use the vernacular to write fiction, and he has been acclaimed "Father of Modern Chinese Literature". In his short stories, he exposes the crimes of feudalism, describes the plight of the peasants, and also depicts the fate of the intellectuals who struggle in the intense social contradictions. His fiction has laid a solid foundation for the development of modern Chinese fiction. There are totally 33 stories in Lu Xun's works, most of which are short stories. *Call to Arms* (呐喊) is comprised of 14 stories, written between 1918 and 1922. *Wandering* (彷徨) composes 11 stories, written between 1924 and 1925. These two books represent the greatest achievement of Chinese fiction creation at that time. Since they were published, Lu Xun's stories have been translated into various languages all over the world, and enjoyed an international reputation. The well-known husband-and-wife translators Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang translated *The True Story of Ah Q*, published by Beijing Foreign Languages Press (FLP) in 1953; then *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun*, published by the same press respectively in 1954, 1960, 1972, and 2002. Next came the magnificent four-volume *Selected Works of Lu Hsun* (1956-1960) by them, the first attempt at a systematic introduction to Lu Xun in English. Moreover, the Yangs also translated Lu Xun's first two collections of stories, entitled *Call to Arms* and *Wandering*, in 1981. It is noticeable that most translated versions in different languages all over the world are mainly based on the Yangs' version by FLP.

## Changes and Differences

The Yangs' versions have different features during different periods. The first edition was published in March, 1954. It contains 13 of Lu Xun's stories, that is, "A Madman's Diary", "Kung I-chi", "Medicine", "An

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Incident", "Storm in a Teacup", "My Old Home", "Village Opera", "The New Year's Sacrifice", "In the Wine Shop", "A Happy Family", "The Misanthrope", "Regret for the Past", and "Forging the Sword", a story included in *Old Tales Retold*. The reason why these stories have been chosen is, in a larger part, that they can best expose the darkness and brutality of feudal system at that time and reveal the writer's fighting spirit. The author once said, "It is high time for our writers to take off their masks, look life honestly, penetratingly and boldly in the face, and write of blood and flesh. We have long needed a totally new arena for literature, and some fierce fighters". He himself was just such a "fierce fighter". It is not unnecessary to point out that "Forging the Sword" is based on a folk legend on the ancient Sword-Maker, and the author wants to express the determination and courage of the new generation in their fight against feudalism. Moreover, there is also an article written by Feng Xuefeng (1903-1976), Lu Xun's younger friend, to commemorate the writer. As to the translating approaches, the Yangs were trying to express the original text in British English in a fluent way although there are some misunderstanding, omission, and misinterpretation. At the same time, it lacks necessary annotations, and as a result, some cultural messages of the original text are lost or confuse. For example, in "A Madman's Diary", the Yangs omitted the date "七年四月二日识" in the "Introduction", which indicates the approximate time of writing and makes it more artistically authentic to the readers. Similarly, the Yangs did not translate the whole sentence in "Kung I-chi": "因为他姓孔, 别人便从描红纸上的 '上大人孔乙己' 这半懂不懂的话里, 替他取下一个绰号, 叫做孔乙己". In fact, it should not be neglected, for it not only tells the origin of the protagonist's name but also indicates an ironical tone, which is the symbol of Lu Xun's writing. Another case is the translation of two family names "华" and "夏" in "Medicine". The Yangs merely translated "华老栓" into "old Shuang", and "华大妈" respectively into "his wife", "the old woman", or "his mother", in which "华" was omitted, not to speak of mistranslating "shuan" into "shuang". Meanwhile, "夏" was transliterated into "Hsia". Actually, taken together as "Huaxia" (华夏), the two surnames form an ancient designation for China, and then a significant metaphor, in a larger part, intentionally set by the author. It is quite necessary to make up for such a significant indication, for it is impossible for English readers to be conscious of this cultural default. In a word, there are still some expressions and paragraphs to be improved in this edition.

Published in 1960, the second edition has added five more stories on the basis of the 1954 version, which are "Tomorrow", "The True Story of Ah Q", "Soap", "The Divorce", and "The Flight to the Moon". The male protagonist Meng of the last story, chosen from *Old Tales Retold*, who shot the heroic archer Yi, is an allusion to the arrogant and individualistic careerists of Lu Xun's time. It is true that the Yangs have corrected and revised what's inappropriate before and made much amelioration in this new version. A good example is that more notes and explanations have been supplied to make target readers more easily comprehend the original content, in particular, those culture-loaded messages. Take "A Madman's Diary" for instance. In Entry II, there is a sentence as follows, "把古久先生的陈年流水簿子, 踹了一脚". There is only a short translation for it in the first edition: "I trod on Mr. Ku Chiu's account sheets", which makes readers wonder who Mr. Ku Chiu is and does not convey the meaning of "陈年流水". In fact, what have been omitted here is very important images to comprehend what the author has really bitterly attacked. Then, in the second edition, it has been translated instead as "I trod on Mr. Ku Chiu's account sheets for many years past", plus an annotation: "Ku Chiu means 'Ancient Times'. Lu Xun had in mind the long history of feudal oppression in China". Thus, the theme of the story has been sublimed naturally. Another case in point is the complicated paragraph in Entry X:

易牙蒸了他儿子，给桀纣吃，还一直是从前的事。谁晓得从盘古开辟天地以后，一直吃到易牙的儿子；从易牙的儿子一直吃到徐锡林；从徐锡林又一直吃到狼子村捉住的人。去年城里杀了犯人，还有一个生痲病的人，用馒头蘸血舐。

This paragraph is not very easy to understand for Chinese readers, not to speak of those foreigners who know very little about Chinese history and customs. Therefore, it is necessary to interpret it in details, coupled with notes, to be faithful to the original context to the full. From this point of view, the first version is not successful for it had so many cultural images confused and even lost by means of the “domestication” method and cultural mediation:

In ancient times a cook boiled his son for a tyrant to eat; that is the old story. But actually, since the creation of heaven and earth men have been eating each other, down to the time of that cook, continuing to the time of the Revolution, and from the time of the Revolution to the case of the man caught in Wolf Cub Village. Last year, they executed a criminal in the city, and a consumptive soaked a piece of bread in his blood and sucked it.

In contrast, the Yangs have tried every means to retain the traditional historical and cultural messages of the original text in the second version:

In ancient times Yi Ya boiled his son for Chieh and Chou to eat; that is the old story. But actually, since the creation of heaven and earth by Pan Ku men have been eating each other, from the time of Yi Ya's son to the time of Hsu His-lin, and from the time of Hsu His-lin down to the man caught in Wolf Cub Village. Last year, they executed a criminal in the city, and a consumptive soaked a piece of bread in his blood and sucked it.

Meanwhile, there are three annotations at the bottom of the same page to respectively explain the story of Yi Ya, who Xu Xilin is and the superstition of Chinese people that human blood could cure consumption. In fact, English readers will undoubtedly be impressed much more than the words themselves, which is important, for translating is not merely to paraphrase every single word or sentence of the source text but instead plays an important role in cross-cultural communication. Another example can be found in “Kung I-chi”. It has been mentioned previously that the sentence concerning the origin of the character's name has been omitted by the Yangs in the first version. But readers are entitled to realize that the name is actually a nickname given by others to the protagonist at random. Thus they would turn to sympathize with him, for his real name has been replaced and even forgotten. So, it has been supplemented in the second edition: “As his surname is Kung, he was nicknamed ‘Kung I-chi’, the first three characters in a children's copy-book”.

## Conclusion

Compared with the 1954 edition, the 1960 edition succeeds in being faithful to the original text while trying hard to retain the original images. All in all, the Yangs' versions are characterized by their smooth British English, idiomatic expressions, and loyalty to the original, although there are still some misunderstanding and omission in 1954 version. But most of these flaws have been corrected and improved in 1960 version. Besides, the Yangs' versions do not convey enough unique cultural messages and relevant information, which are attractive to average readers, resulting in cultural loss in communication. And stories included in the Yangs' versions are not always the same, according to different requirements and different historical periods. Moreover, the Yangs' version is more target-culture oriented. In fact, either before or during translating, translators should decide on what to be translated and what strategies to be adopted in target texts according to their patrons. Meantime, the purpose of

the translation determined the translation methods and strategies. In a sense, the Yangs' version is a significant and influential way to make Lu Xun's stories known to English readers.

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