

A Survey of Major English Versions of Lu Xun's Short Stories in the 20th Century

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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. *Call to Arms* (1923) and *Wandering* (1926) represent the greatest achievement of Chinese story-writing at that time. His short stories are not only profound in thinking, but also worthy of admiration for their great value and innovation in art. Since the 1920's, Lu Xun's stories have been translated into various languages and published throughout the world, enjoying an international reputation. Only their English versions in the 20th century are discussed within this paper. These versions are different with various features, especially in dealing with Chinese traditional culture according to different purposes and towards different English readers.

Keywords: Lu Xun's short stories, Wang's version, the Yangs' version, Lyell's version

Introduction

Father of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun (1881-1936), is the first writer to use the vernacular to write fiction. In his short stories, he exposes the crimes of feudalism and describes the plight of the peasants, who have been economically exploited and spiritually enslaved. He 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. The author chose the title in order to boost the morale of the revolutionaries, urging them to go forward without the slightest fear. The stories show the tendency of anti-feudalism. Both in the general thrust and specific descriptions, they are in complete harmony with the May Fourth Spirit. In short, they embody the characteristics of the cultural and ideological revolution going on at the time. *Wandering* (彷徨) composes 11 stories, written between 1924 and 1925. All of them focus on the sufferings and struggles of both women and intellectuals, and also reflect the change of the writer's thought. The book gives voice to a more profound and complicated feeling of the author. *Call to Arms* and *Wandering* represent the greatest achievement of Chinese fiction creation at that time. Since they are published, Lu Xun's stories have been translated into various languages all over the world, and enjoyed an international reputation, in particular, his representative work, *The Story of Ah Q*. Among them, three English versions are of significance and of influence in that they make these stories known to English readers, that is, Chi-chen Wang's version, Yang's

version, and William A. Lyell's version.

Major English Versions of Lu Xun's Stories in the 20th Century

As early as in 1926, *The Real Story of Ah Q*, translated by the American Chinese George Kin Leung, was published at first by Shanghai Commercial Press. It must be pointed out that this is the first English version of Lu Xun's stories. What's more, Leung wrote several letters about the translation to Lu Xun in April, 1925, and the author read and revised them, and even pointed out two inadequate places.

Later, on the basis of the French version, *Selected Modern Chinese Stories*, translated by J. B. Kyn Yn Yu, a Chinese student in France, the Britisher E. H. F. Mills translated and published several Lu Xun's stories under the title of *The Tragedy of Ah Q and Other Modern Chinese Stories* in both Britain and U.S.A. successively in 1930 and 1931.

Then Harold R. Isaacs brought together a selection of *Chinese Short Stories 1918-1933* to which Lu Xun himself wrote a forward on August 15, 1934. In his introduction, Isaacs wrote that the translated stories were assembled in 1934 and were chosen with the guidance and counsel of the writer.

In 1936, Edgar Snow, the famous American journalist, translated and edited *Living China: Modern Chinese Short Stories*, which was reprinted several times later, including "Medicine", "A Little Incident", "Kung I-chi", "The New Year's Sacrifice", and "Divorce".

Later on, a new version with the title *Ah Q and Others: Selected Stories of Lusin*, translated by the famous translator Chi-chen Wang, was published by Columbia University Press in 1941, and reprinted by Greenwood Press in 1971. This is the first translation to be widely known in the United States, which included a critical introduction and 11 stories. Wang has rendered the stories into a smooth and fluent American English. But his translation has omitted and simplified some original content to some degree. Besides, this book, Wang also published several other Lu Xun's stories in different journals, such as "Sister Hsiang-lin" (*The Far Eastern Magazine*, New York, November & December, 1938), "The Dawn" (*The Far Eastern Magazine*, New York, March, 1940), "Warning to the Populace", "Professor Kao", and "A Happy Family" (*The China Journal*, Shanghai, June, July, & August, 1940).

Lu Xun's works have been translated into different languages within a wider range since 1949. 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 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 Foreign Languages Press.

Up to 1990 appeared a completely new English version in the United States, *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*, by William A. Lyell, the professor of Chinese Language and Literature of Stanford University. Lyell's version has included all of stories in *Call to Arms* and *Wandering*. There are also a full and accurate introduction and a note on Chinese pronunciation. Since the Yangs have systematically translated Lu Xun's stories into a British English, Lyell is the first to translate all of these stories into the American branch of the language. He has

not only vividly and lively translated dialogues with distinct American colloquialism, but also conveyed a great many culture-loaded messages, which is incomparable with other versions before.

Conclusion

As a whole, Lu Xun's stories are celebrated for his skillful use of irony, in which readers find contradictory statements made by the author. They are characterized with a great volume of highly Chinese culture-loaded messages, including traditional thought, traditional convention, local folk customs, Chinese names and appellations, as well as certain historical background. This is also a good way to make foreign readers know more about Chinese culture and traditions. The three versions are translated by different translators at different times, by different patronage, with various purposes and functions. Therefore, it is concluded as follows: (1) The translators choose different stories and adopt differentiated strategies in these versions and these English versions have played different roles in cross-cultural communication; (2) the Yang's version is more target-culture oriented, while Wang's and Lyell's are, rather, source-culture oriented. Hence, the purpose of the translation determines the translation methods and strategies that are to be employed in order to produce a functionally adequate result; and (3) in Chinese-English fiction translation, translators tend to objectify some subjective perceptions and judgments by shifting from the internal experiencing self to the external narrating self. Moreover, a literary translator must be sensitive in detecting intentional "illogicality" and in reconstructing its true meaning or purposes, so as to avoid distortion of the original. In summary, the C-E translation of Lu Xun's short stories are a good way to make English readers know more about Chinese culture, traditions, and history.

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