

# Following the Trend and Focusing on Pastime—A Critical Review of the Poetry Translation by the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School

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**Abstract**—Looking close into poetry translation published in major magazines of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School, this paper finds out “pastime” has been a key word to explain the preferred themes, style and poetic features of its poetry translation. Using modern poetic theories, this paper also carries out contrastive analysis between original and translated poems, to diagnose poetic deficiencies and trace poetic genes of the translated poems. Besides, this paper tries to explain poetry translation development of this School based on its interaction with new literature groups in “May 4th” movement. A critical review of the poetry translation of this School can help to understand vernacular poetry creation and translation, and popular literature development in modern China.

**Index Terms**—Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School, poetry translation, pastime, poetics

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School is considered to say highly of amusement and entertaining, producing light creations for fun. Such creations flourished between the 1910s and 1930s, especially during the 1920s. The School’s works were widely spread in magazines like *Saturday (Libai liu)*, *Violet (Ziluolan)*, *Half-month (Banyue)*, *Civil Rights (Minquan bao)*, *A Cluster of Fictions (Xiaoshuo congbao)*, *A New Collection of Fictions (Xiaoshuo xinbao)*, *Free Talk (Ziyou tan)*, the supplement of *Shenbao*, *Funny Place (Kuaihua lin)*, the supplement of *Xinwen bao*, etc. Representatives of this School consist of Xu Zhenya, Li Dingyi, Cheng Xiaoqing, Gu Mingdao, Bao Tianxiao, Zhou Shoujuan, Zhang Henshui, etc. After rounds of battle between the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School and New Literature groups, the 1930s saw the fading of the former and growing of the latter.

Different from the Literature Study Society (Wenxue yanjiu hui) and the Creation Society (Chuangzao she), the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School didn’t start from a formal meeting with a guiding principle. It was Zhou Zuoren who first talked about “the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly style”. In a speech at Peking University on April 19th, 1918, Zhou took “the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly style like *Yulihun*” as an example to introduce modern novels in old style (Fan, 1999, p. 14). Qian Xuantong mentioned “*Yanqingchidu*, *Xiangyanyunyu* and the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly novels” (Qian, 1919, p. 74). Liu Bannong thought *Yulihun* (written in *pianti*, a rhythmic prose characterized by parallelism and ornateness), vague in content and sickening in style, should be classified into a Mandarin Duck and Butterfly novel (Wei, 1984, pp. 118, 180-181). It can be figured out that “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly” was first used to name romantic novels written in *pianti*. Since writers of this School touched many themes other than romance, “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly” as a notion has been expanded and scholars nowadays tend to judge this School from the angle of literary interest. “‘Mandarin Duck and Butterfly’, in a broad sense, can be used to refer to novels aiming at amusement” (Fan, 1999, p. 14). “‘Mandarin Duck and Butterfly’ writers tend to say highly of amusement” (Chen, 2005, p. 114).

As an important translating power in late Qing dynasty and early Republican China period (referring to 1912-1949 in mainland China), literary translation of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School has attracted scholars’ attention. Representative studies include: this School’s translation activities and its influence from the perspective of translation history (Li, 2004), description of this School’s translation of western literatures from the perspective of Imagology (Hu, 2011), mapping of this School’s translation pattern based on review of translation in the Republican China period (Xiu, 2014), etc. it can be seen that previous studies have mainly focused on novel translation of this School.

Many Mandarin Duck and Butterfly translators were excellent both in Chinese and English, is it possible for them to choose western poetry to translate for amusement? Few scholars have noticed this field. With this question in mind, using modern poetic theories, this paper makes a thorough investigation into the poetry translation of the Mandarin

Duck and Butterfly School [Table 1 near here], to get a better knowledge of the development of modern Chinese poetry creation and translation, and to get a better understanding of Chinese popular literature in the 1920s.

## II. LITERARY VIEW OF “AMUSEMENT AND PASTIME” INFLUENCED THE SCHOOL’S POETIC CHOICE

Commercialization of novels in late Qing dynasty and early Republican China period brought about writer’s professionalization. As early professional writers, Mandarin Duck and Butterfly writers loved to publish their creations and translations in newspapers and magazines. Moreover, most of them were editors, driving newspapers and magazines to be typical platform for them to manifest their works. An investigation of this School’s poetry translation published in newspapers and magazines has found out that writers preferred traditional Chinese poetic form, just like their preference of *pianli* when writing novels; due to their literary view of “pastime and amusement”, writers seemed relatively free when translating, adding and deleting at will.

Lefevere (2004, p. 26) holds that there are micro and macro levels concerning poetics: “one is an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters and situations, and symbols; the other a concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in the social system as a whole”. Mandarin Duck and Butterfly writers’ literary view of “pastime and amusement” place a direct influence on writers’ micro poetic choices.

The most direct influence of “pastime and amusement” upon Mandarin Duck and Butterfly translators is their sensitiveness to market demands. They needed to produce the most wanted products. Wanted products are usually profitable products. Literary genres other than novels were unpopular in Chinese publishing market at that time (Bao, 1971, p. 349). The submitting rule of *Play Magazine* (*Youxi zazhi*) even read that poetry submission would not be paid (see *Play Magazine*, 1931, Vol. 1). This explains the relatively few poetry translations for Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School. Although in a limited number, the poetry translation of this school still serves as a good example to manifest its poetic choice of translating theme and style.

### A. Translating Themes: Scenery and Romance

Similar to their novel translation, Mandarin Duck and Butterfly translators chose poetries describing sceneries and romance to translate (see Table 1 for reference). As editors, they also chose to publish such poems in their magazines. It can be seen that, in Mandarin Duck and Butterfly magazines, “interesting” was a key word. Wang Dungen said in the Preface of *Saturday* (*Libai Liu*) that it was interesting and simple to have such a magazine to kill time after a whole week’s labor (Wang, 1914, p. A1-2). Magazine theme mentioned in “Editor’s Word” in *Red Rose* (*Hongmeigui*) was to interest its readers (Zhao, 1929, p. A1-2). Scenery and romance are two typical themes to interest readers. Moreover, Mandarin Duck and Butterfly magazines tended to produce market-wanted works. In 1920s, inspired by Lin Shu’s translated novels, scenery and romantic themes were extremely popular. This provided another important reason for the School’s choice of translating theme.

TABLE 1  
POETRY TRANSLATION OF THE MANDARIN DUCK AND BUTTERFLY SCHOOL

Name	Author	Translator	Magazine	Publishing Year	Poetry Pattern
1. “Dear”	Pollard	Zhou Shoujuan	Saturday	1915	Free style (rewriting)
2. “A Red, Red Rose”	Robert Burns	Su Manshu	Saturday	1921	five-character classical
3. “A Red, Red Rose”	Robert Burns	Zhang Zhenlv, Zhu Qiuqing	Saturday	1921	vernacular
4. “Laogong yong” (“The Village Blacksmith”)	H. W. Longfellow	Xu Dange	Saturday	1921	five-character classical
5. “Qiangwei” (“The Last Rose of Summer”)	Tom Moore	Ruoqu (Teng Gu)	Saturday	1921	Lisao-style
6. “To a Lady”	Byron	Su Manshu	Saturday	1921	five-character classical
7. “Maid of Athens, Ere We Part”	Byron	Su Manshu	Saturday	1921	five-character classical
8. “Bukesiyide baofu”	(?)	Zhang Zhenlv	Saturday	1921	vernacular
9. “Ziluolan huaxia”	(?)	Yang Yuguang	Saturday	1921	Lisao-style
10. “Ziluolan”	Walter Scott	Jiang Wanli	Saturday	1921	five-character classical
11. “Zhanhou”	Alice Cary	Tianhunshi	Saturday	1928	vernacular
12. “Ziluolan qu”	Walter Scott	Zhou Shoujuan, Yuan Hanyun	Saturday	1929	five-character classical
13. “Yi womao”	(?)	Bi Renyong	Saturday	1929	five-character classical

### B. Translating Style: Free and Leisure

Errors can be seen quite often in Mandarin Duck and Butterfly poetry translations. Adding and deleting were also common. One typical Mandarin Duck and Butterfly translator Zhou Shoujuan deleted 8 sentences when translating a

British poem named “Dear”. These are due to their leisure attitude in poetry creation and translation, as well as the common liberal attitude for translation in 1920s. Yan Fu’s “Translator’s Words” in *Tianyan lun* indicates literary translation’s norms at that time: “As long as the theme of the original work be transmitted, there’s no need to stick to word-for-word translation” (Luo, 2009, p. 202). This trend hadn’t changed till the May 4th Movement.

The free translation style is also closely tied to this School’s literary interest. Since translation was for amusement, there’s no need to be serious. After the May 4th Movement, literal translation gradually gained acceptance. However, the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly poetry translation was still free. The translation of “Farewell” (written by Tagore, translated by Fengsheng, published in No. 5, Vol. 11, 1920 *Fiction Monthly*) was not a complete reproduction, with lots of errors; two “Violet”s (written by Walt Scott, one translated by Zhou Shoujuan and Yuan Hanyun, published in No. 1, Vol. 4, 1929 *Violet*, the other translated by Jiang Wanli, published in No. 103, 1921 *Saturday*) had totally different line numbers and different meanings. That is to say, poetry translation of this School can be seen as creation rather than translation. The original poem was taken as raw materials for translators to make a second creation.

Literary view of “pastime and amusement” has influenced Mandarin Duck and Butterfly’s choice on genres, themes and styles, etc. Moreover, Poetic form, as an important manifestation of poetic choice, also showed the impact of this literary view, which will be elaborated in the next section.

### III. LITERARY VIEW OF “AMUSEMENT AND PASTIME” LED TO MIXTURE OF POETIC FORMS IN THIS SCHOOL’S POETRY TRANSLATION

Growing in traditional Chinese culture, Mandarin Duck and Butterfly writers were “easy to satisfy and unwilling to change” (Feng, 2013, p. 27), which can find its roots in traditional Chinese philosophy. They, as traditional Chinese writers, loved traditional writing style such as *pianti* in novels, and traditional Chinese poetic form in poetry. However, sensitivity to market demand and reader preference made them willing to follow the trend of vernacular poetry. This School’s poetry translation, therefore, manifests a mixture of traditional and new poetic forms. Their translating strategies transferred from domestication, to trying vernacular poetic form, ending up with a drastic decline after this School’s “departure” with the New Literature groups.

#### A. Following the Tradition: Domestication

The period from 1890 to 1919 saw a peak in introducing foreign literatures (Shi, 1990, p. 18). During that period, almost all foreign poetries were translated into traditional Chinese forms, be it five-character, four-character, saoti (a poetic form named after *Lisao* written by Qu Yuan). Mandarin Duck and Butterfly translators initially translated poetry into traditional Chinese poetic forms. Here is an example from No. 102 in *Saturday*:

TABLE 2  
JIONGJIONG CHIQUANGMI

A Red, Red Rose (Translated by Su Manshu in 1908)			
O, my luv'e's like a red, red rose,	8	頰頰赤牆靡	
That's newly sprung in June;	6/a	首夏初发苞	a
O, my luv'e's like the melodie,	8	惻惻清商曲	
That's sweetly played in tune.	6/a	眇音何远姚	a
As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,	8	予美谅天绍	a
So deep in luv'e am I;	6/b	幽情申自持	b
And I will luv'e thee still, my dear,	8	仓海会流枯	
Till a' the seas gang dry.	6/b	相爱无绝期	b
Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,	8	仓海会流枯	
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;	6/c	顽石烂炎熹	b
I will luv'e thee still, my dear,	7	微命属如缕	c
While the sands o' life shall run.	6/c	相爱无绝期	b
And fare thee still, my only luv'e!	8	掺祛别予美	d
And fare thee weel a while!	6/d	离隔在须臾	c
And I will come again, my luv'e,	8	阿阳早日归	d
Though it were ten thousand mile (Burns, 1996, p. 694).	7/d	万里莫踟蹰 (Su, 1921, pp. 52-53)	c

PS: in “6/d”, “6” is the number of English syllables or number of Chinese words, “d” the rhyming scheme. The same below.

This Chinese poem was translated by Su Manshu in 1908, from “A Red, Red Rose” by Robert Burns (1759-1796). Poetry translation into Chinese at that time were normally in traditional Chinese form (Wang, 2014, pp. 927-938). Two other poems translated by Su Manshu in 1914 were also in traditional Chinese form.

The original poem was in ballad form, 4 lines in each stanza, with the 1st and 3rd lines in iambic tetrameter, and the 2nd and 4th lines iambic trimeter (Baldick, 2001, p. 24). Metrical variations occur in the 11th and 16th lines, the 11th line headless with 7 syllables and the 16th line hypermetrical (McAuley, 1966, p. 77). The translated poem was in five-character form, retaining the rhyming pattern and adding rhyming lines. The five-character line was inconsistent in foot number with the original. Linguistic repetitions such as “O, my luv'e's like ...”, “Till a' the seas gang dry” have been retained in the translated version. Compared with the original plain style, the translated poem appeared to be a traditional Chinese poem.

Traditional Chinese rhythm has been a major constraint to retain the original poetic features. Many a translator noticed this phenomenon. Liu Bannong said that it was hard to transfer foreign poetic rhythm into traditional Chinese poetic forms (Liu, 1918, p. 433). Zhou Shoujuan mentioned it was a great pity to fail to translate a foreign poem into traditional Chinese form. In order to recoup this pity, Zhou started his experiment of translating English poems into vernacular Chinese.

*B. Attitude Toward Vernacular Poetic Form: From "Pitiful" Try to Active Following*

The pitiful try made by Zhou Shoujuan is "Dear" below published in *Saturday* (No.52, 1915):

TABLE 3  
"DEAR"

Dear (Trans. By Zhou Shoujuan in 1915)			
One little word we oft bestow,	8/a	一小字者	4
The root from which all friendship grow,	8/a	实为相爱之根	6
which joy and sweetness may impart,	8/b	脱以真心出之	6
If given truly from the heart.	8/b	则弥觉甜蜜而温馨	8
But if with careless ease it slips,	8/c	顾用之过滥,	5
Too frequently o'er honeyed lips,	8/c	即一无可贵	5
It falls unnoticed to the earth,	8/d	摔之地上	4
To any heart of little worth.	8/d	人且不屑掇拾	6
But coming from a heart sincere,	8/e	设出自真心,	5
And spoken tenderly, how dear	8/e	道以檀口,	4
The little word of letters four,	8/f	则虽止寥寥四字母,	8
Thus consecrated evermore.	8/f	亦足以乘千秋万世而弗朽	11
"Dear friend", he in a formal way,	8/g		
Addressed her but the other day,	8/g		
And now he pauses long, to think	8/h		
When he can with pen and ink	7/h		
The loving tenderness impart,	8/i		
That vibrates through the passionate heart	9/i		
And wondered if she will forgive,	8/j		
And emphasize the adjective.	8/j		
This little word we often trace	8/k	此一字	3
May cover but a tiny space	8/k	于纸上占地虽小	7
Upon the page, and yet include	8/l	实则其四字母之间	8
A world within its latitude.	8/l	乃有一世界在	6
Dear_dearest_DARLING_thus it throws	8/m	此亲爱也 至亲爱也	8
Its tendrils out, so fast it grows,	8/m	有如植物 卷鬚一出	8
And ripens in suspicion's hour,	8/n	立即怒长	4
To love's serene and perfect flower (Zhou, 1915, pp. 35-37).	9/n	不久遂开庄严灿烂之花	10

There are 7 stanzas in the original poem, 4 lines in each stanza. The original rhyming scheme is aabb ccdd ceff gghh ijij klll mmmn. There are metrical variations in the 16th, 18th and 28th line. The 16th line is headless with 7 syllables, "passionate" in the 18th line pronounced as 2 syllables, the 28th line hypermetrical with the last one uncounted as part of the rhythm (McAuley, 1966, p. 77). The translated poem hasn't manifested either the original's rhythmic or rhyming scheme. Two stanzas omitted, the translated poem has retained almost none of the original poetic features.

1915 saw the establishment of *La Jeunesse (Xin qingnian)*, judged as the start of New Culture Movement. Zhou Shoujuan's translated poem above was published in the same year. Its unrhyming and free style can be seen as the prelude of Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School's vernacular poetry translation.

Elites like Hu Shi tried to manipulate translation to control the trend of the New Culture Movement. Poetry in vernacular form without meter suited their purpose, just as Hu Shi said, "No *pianti* for prose, no rhythm for poetry" (Hu, 1918, pp. 286-306). They resorted to this poetic form to translate foreign poems. In fact, what elites at that time wanted to manipulate was much more than culture. They were eager to improve the whole society. They used their discursive power to change the paradigm of poetry translation to realize their ideological demand. The Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School had a short "honeymoon" with the New Literature writers at the beginning of the New Culture Movement. Evidence can be found in poetry translation of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School at that time.

The period between 1920 and 1921 witnessed most of vernacular poetry translation of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School. Zhang Zhenlv, one of this School's translators, contributed about half of the total number of vernacular poetry translation. A close look into Zhang's translating style can provide a practical reference to the overall translating style of the School. Zhang's translation of "A Red, Red Rose" is as follows:

TABLE 4  
YIDUO HONGMEIGUI

A Red, Red Rose (Co-trans. By Zhenlv and Qiuqing)			
O, my love's like a red, red rose,	8	我爱像那鲜红的玫瑰,	9
That's newly sprung in June;	6/a	六月里花纔(才)娇滴滴的放;	10/a
O, my love's like the melodie,	8	我爱像那温和的音乐,	9
That's sweetly played in tune.	6/a	弹出来甜蜜蜜的声响。	9/a
As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,	8	我那轻盈的妙人儿啊! 像你这样的美丽,	16
So deep in love am I;	6/b	竟累我溺入深深的爱河;	10/b
And I will love thee still, my dear,	8	可是我依旧爱你, 我爱,	9
Till a' the seas gang dry.	6/b	纵使有一天海枯。	7/b
Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,	8	等到哪一天海枯, 我爱,	9
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;	6/c	连那石头都给太阳晒融了;	11
I will love thee still, my dear,	7	我依旧爱你, 我爱,	7
While the sands o' life shall run.	6/c	那是生命像飞沙般的乱跑。	11
And fare thee still, my only love!	8	同你分别, 我唯一的爱,	9
And fare thee well a while!	6/d	同你分别一会儿见。	8/c
And I will come again, my love,	8	我一定要再到此地来, 我爱,	10
Though it were ten thousand mile (Burns, 1996, p. 694).	7/d	即使有一万里的路程见。(Zhang & Zhu, 1921, pp. 52-53)	10/c

As a typical vernacular translation, the 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, 14th and 16th lines are rhymed, inconsistent with the original; word number in each line are irregular, failing to retain the original form of intersection between tetrameter and trimeter; as to the semantic level, errors are seen in the translation of “And I will love you still” and “while the sands o’ life shall run”.

Zhang Zhenlv was good at writing and translating, receiving Zhao Shaokuang’s appreciation (Rui et al., 2010, p. 323). Zhang published various vernacular novels during the May 4th Movement (Jia & Yu, 1993, pp. 377-383). He also manifested notable talent in poetry creation. As to translation, Zhang published 4 translated proses in vernacular form in “Free Talk” from Aug. 11th to 14th, 1920. “A Red, Red Rose” translated by his partner and him retained part of the rhyming scheme of the original. All above has proven Zhang’s basic ability to handle the poetic features of the original. His ignorance of such poetic features in his translation attributed to his tended accordance with the New Culture Movement.

“Following the trend” manifested in Zhang’s poetry translation could also be seen in poetry creation and translation of other Mandarin Duck and Butterfly writers. In the “partial reform” period of *Fiction Monthly* (*Xiaoshuo yuebao*) in 1920, Shen Yanbing was invited to be the chief editor of a new column called “New Trends in Novels (*Xiaoshuo xinchao*)”. During this period, Zhou Shoujuan published 7 short translated novels and a multi-scene drama (*Social Pillar* by Ibsen), whose content and form were consistent with the New Culture Movement (Fan, 2009, pp. 5-14). Even after 1921, when the Literature Study Society took full charge of *Fiction Monthly*, Mandarin Duck and Butterfly works rejected, Zhou Shoujuan still opened up special issues in *Free Talk* to publish vernacular novels together with their translations (Fan, 2009, pp. 5-14). Moreover, *Saturday*, co-edited by Zhou Shoujuan and Wang Dungen, published 7 vernacular poems and translations from January to August in 1921. Drastic fall in the number of vernacular poems could be seen before and after that year. All these can be judged as “honeymoon” evidence between the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School and the New Literature groups.

However, it didn’t last long before the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School stopped its steps to “follow the trend”. The reason lies in that it is unwilling to investigate or think steadily (Wei, 1984, p. 118). Lack of theoretical construction, this School lost its field when faced with criticism mainly from the Literature Study Society.

### C. Giving up Poetry Translation in Vernacular Form

Zhou Shoujuan’s “Free Talk of Free Talk” published in No. 30 “Special Issue for Fictions (*Xiaoshuo tekan*)” marks the end of cooperation between the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School and the New Literature groups (Zhou, 1921, p. 5). Ever since then, no poetry translation appeared in *Saturday*, as a typical Mandarin Duck and Butterfly magazine. For *Violet*, another typical one, only 1 poetry translation appeared from Nov. 1925 to Jun. 1930. In sharp contrast to the New Literature scholars’ literary interest of “translating foreign masterpieces” (Hu, 1918, p. 305), the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School, representative of “popular” literature, departed from the “elite” one gradually.

However, departure from the “elite” literature doesn’t mean Mandarin Duck and Butterfly’s giving up of new poetry. “Popular” literature means to cater for popular taste instead of sticking to old culture. Fashionable as it is, new poetry has a considerable number of readers at that time. This School continued to produce poetry in vernacular form. Typical Mandarin Duck and Butterfly magazines were embellished with poems in vernacular forms. What is notable for the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly writers lies in that they lacked conscious exploration of the vernacular poetic form and was quite free at poetry creation and translation.

It can be seen from analysis above that the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly writers mainly translated poems in traditional Chinese form. They followed the trend of translating in vernacular form in the New Culture Movement, mainly during the period from 1920 to 1921. Departed from the New Literature groups, they lost interest to look into poetry translation in vernacular forms. Poetic features haven’t been retained in their poetry translation, be it in

vernacular or traditional Chinese form.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Influenced by the literary interest of “amusement and pastime”, the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly translators haven’t done many poetry translations. However, this literary interest has had a deep impact on themes, styles and features of this School’s poetry translations. The poetry translation of this School has been in vernacular form for a little while. It is also “amusement and pastime” that determines this School’s giving up on vernacular poetry translation. More than 100 years later, taking the relation between the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School and the New Literature groups in May 4th period into consideration, we can find that this School didn’t stick to the “old”. It “followed the trend”. It is just “amusement” deep in its heart that causes its departure from the “new”. Based on the historical context, we can see the reason why it made that choice, to realize the whole picture of poetry translation of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School.

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