



7-2019

Imitation and creation: Bing Xin's Fanxing (A Maze of Stars) ??and Chunshui (Spring Water) ??

Xiaoqing Liu

Butler University, xliu@butler.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers



Part of the [Modern Languages Commons](#), and the [Modern Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Xiaoqing Liu (2019) Imitation and creation: Bing Xin's Fanxing (*A Maze of Stars*) ??and Chunshui (*Spring Water*) ??, *Comparative Literature: East & West*, 3:1, 79-100, DOI:[10.1080/25723618.2019.1616660](https://doi.org/10.1080/25723618.2019.1616660)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarship and Professional Work - LAS by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

Imitation and creation: Bing Xin's *Fanxing* (A Maze of Stars) 繁星 and *Chunshui* (Spring Water) 春水

Xiaoqing Liu

Department of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, Butler University, Indianapolis, IN, USA

ABSTRACT

Fanxing (A Maze of Stars) and *Chunshui* (Spring Water) are two poetry collections of modern Chinese woman writer Bing Xin (1900–1999). Because they stand at the beginning of a new genre, *xiaoshi* (short poetry), and are commonly regarded as representative works of this genre, people use the epithets “Bing Xin style,” “Fanxing style,” or “Chunshui style” to refer to *xiaoshi* writing. Nevertheless, viewed from their intimate relationship with Rabindranath Tagore's *Stray Birds*, I argue that *Fanxing* and *Chunshui* are products of both imitation and creation. Imitation is not plagiarism. Dryden defines imitation as a form of translation, which allows the full play of the translator's freedom and personality. With writing as translation, Bing Xin creates her poetics of short poetry writing based on her imitation and appropriation of Tagore's *Stray Birds*. Imitation provides the authority and inspiration as well as a model for Bing Xin to follow. However, she does not imitate slavishly or translate faithfully in a traditional sense. Rather, while taking influence from Tagore, Bing Xin reverses the patriarchal and Orientalist tendencies of Tagore with her feminist and realistic writing style. In this way, she both aligns herself with the May Fourth writers and also demonstrates her own voice and features.

摘要

中国现代女作家冰心的《繁星》与《春水》被认为是中国小诗运动的起点。但是，如果把它们放在世界文学的角度去看的话，就能既看出冰心的“模仿”，也能看出她的创作。模仿，从翻译的角度来看，不是一个贬义词，德莱顿最初就把模仿定义为翻译的一种。虽然受传统忠实的翻译思想影响，他不认为模仿是一种好的翻译策略和方法，但是他认为模仿是最能发挥译者自由和个性的一种方式。西塞罗就是这种翻译方法的实践者。在五四运动的狂飙中，冰心以写为译，创造性地模仿了泰戈尔的《飞鸟集》。首先，模仿让她获得了灵感，提供了对于像小诗这样一种崭新的诗歌形式的模版，同时也保证了权威的肯定和鼓励，但是，她没有局限于仅仅是借鉴，引用，或者是传统意义上的翻译传递，而是在他的影响之下，在反射他的风格和味道的时候，写出了她自己的风格，意义和主题。这样，她在一定程度上继承了他，更重要的是反转了他。她抛弃了他的男权和东方主义倾向，写出了她自己的女性主义和中国特色，特别是她自己的声音。

KEYWORDS

Imitation; translation; Tagore; Bing Xin; Chinese short poetry

关键词

模仿; 翻译; 泰戈尔; 冰心; 中国短诗

1. Introduction

Fanxing (*A Maze of Stars*) and *Chunshui* (*Spring Water*) are two poetry collections written by modern Chinese woman writer Bing Xin (1900–1999). Although the poems are short and concise and the books are thin, they mark the beginning of a new genre, *xiaoshi* (short poetry), of modern Chinese poetry and are commonly regarded as representative works of this genre. People use the epithets “Bing Xin style,” “Fanxing style,” or “Chunshui style” to refer to *xiaoshi* writing. Accordingly, Bing Xin is considered one of the most important poets of *xiaoshi*. Nevertheless, the well acknowledged status of *Fanxing* and *Chunshui* as well as Bing Xin as a poet in modern Chinese literature does not owe solely to Bing Xin’s creation but is largely indebted to other influences. Among them, *Stray Birds* (1916), a poem collection by Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) plays a direct role in Bing Xin’s creation of *Fanxing* and *Chunshui*. To be specific, *Fanxing* and *Chunshui* are created on the basis of imitating Tagore’s *Stray Birds*.

Viewed from the perspective of translation studies, which regards imitation as a form of translation, I argue that *Fanxing* and *Chunshui* are Bing Xin’s translation of Tagore’s *Stray Birds*. On the one hand, translation is embodied in her careful shadowing of Tagore. She follows him closely in the images, subjects, themes, philosophical meanings, and even some concrete lines; on the other hand, it is also reflected in her deliberate deviation from Tagore. Rebelling against Tagore’s transcendental writing, Bing Xin writes in a considerably realistic way. Furthermore, she writes from her position as a modern Chinese woman writer. That is, she not only reverses Tagore’s direction of translation, which is from East, India, to West, but more importantly, corrects his Orientalist and patriarchal tendencies by asserting her gender role and her poetics that is both innovative and also connecting to the Chinese classical tradition. In this way, translation becomes her way of creation.

In this creative writing as translating, Bing Xin’s roles of being both a writer and a translator are interconnected. The role of translator facilitates her writing: it inspires her writing and provides a pattern for her to imitate in her creation of a new way of poetic writing. At the same time, the role of writer highlights her independence and power as a critical translator. She exhibits her own poetic characteristics, her voices, lived experiences, and most of all, her creative power.

1.1. Translation theories

In experiential translation theory, imitation is commonly recognized as a form of translation. In the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, Douglas Robinson traces the history of imitation in translation and finds that contrary to the ordinary meaning of imitation, which suggests “slavish copying, mimicking, and miming,” in translation “the word has come to mean almost the exact opposite in translation theory: doing something totally different from the original author, wandering too far and too freely from the words and the sense of the SL text. In fact, imitation has come to be virtually synonymous with FREE TRANSLATION” (Robinson 111). In other words, in translation imitation breaks away from its negative connotation associated with the ordinary use of the word. That is, it rises from the dependent and slavish status and becomes equal with the “original.”

According to Robinson, John Dryden was the writer who most popularly established the definition of imitation in translation. Dryden breaks translation into three categories, i.e., metaphrase, paraphrase, and imitation. The definition he gives for imitation is that “Where the translator (if now he has not lost that name) assumes the liberty, not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion; and taking only some general hints from the original, to run division on the groundwork, as he pleases” (Dryden 241). In the same essay, Dryden expands his thought that

I take imitation of an author, in their sense, to be an endeavor of a later poet to write like one who has written before him, on the same subject; that is, not to translate his words, or to be confined to his sense, but only to set him as a pattern, and to write, as he supposes that author would have done, had he lived in our age, and in our country [...] To state it fairly; imitation of an author is the most advantageous way for a translator to show himself, but the greatest wrong which can be done to the memory and reputation of the dead. (Dryden 239–40)

Nevertheless, when applying his three methods to translating poetry, Dryden proposes that the first and the third, i.e., metaphrase and imitation, are two extremes that should be avoided and that the poet should strive to achieve “the mean betwixt them” (Dryden 239–40). The reason accounting for his misgiving is that fidelity, as the guiding principle, dominated the criteria of translation.

The first writer who applied imitation in translation was Cicero. When he realizes that word-to-word translation fails to achieve the sense he intends to attain, he resolves the issue by translating freely. In this way, by imitation he makes recreation – departing from resembling the “original” but bringing the inspiration into creating his own. Robinson regards Cicero’s term “*exprimere*,” which literally means “to squeeze out,” as “a powerful image for the translation process [...] akin to giving birth” (Robinson 112). He comments that Cicero’s “*exprimere imitando*,”

gives us the translator as mediator, but not as neutral transfer-machine; rather as the artist who mediates between two forms of being, two modes of understanding, natural and plastic, material and verbal, matter and manner, SL and TL. The expressivist mediation of translation as *exprimere imitando* is specifically channeled through the translator’s transformative relation to both forms of being, both modes of understanding. (Robinson 112)

In other words, imitation empowers translator as a mediator.

Translations are not limited to linguistic exchange but are necessarily conducted on a cultural basis. Based on his insightful thought on the hybrid characteristics of the immigrant culture in the postcolonial background, Homi Bhabha redefines translation in a cultural sense, saying that

Translation is also a way of imitating, but in a mischievous, displacing sense – imitating an original in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced but by the very fact that it can be simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum and so on: the “original” is never finished or complete in itself. The “originary” is always open to translation so that it can never be said to have a totalized prior moment of being or meaning – an essence. (Bhabha 210)

Bhabha follows the established link between translation and imitation; however, he diverts scrutiny from the translation to the “originary.” Through the imitative nature of translation, Bhabha points to the fact that the “originary” exists in a plural form and

lives in a process. Accordingly, he justifies the mutation of translation as a natural consequence of the partial translation of the “originary.”

The translation theories can be applied to the reading of Bing Xin’s *Fanxing* and *Chunshui*. On the one hand, as Bhabha points out, the “originary,” Tagore’s *Stray Bird*, does not exist with an absolute essence but is open to continuing interpretations. The two different Chinese versions – Zhen Zhengduo’s linguistic translation and Bing Xin’s rewriting – serve as good examples in this regard. The open ending of Tagore’s *Stray Birds* justifies Bing Xin’s unconventional translation. On the other hand, as Dryden propounds that “imitation is the most advantageous way for a translator to show himself,” imitation helps Bing Xin establish her writing style on the basis of modeling after Tagore.

1.2. *Stray Birds, Fanxing, and Chunshui*

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), a Nobel laureate, was commonly recognized as one of the greatest poets in India. *Stray Birds* is one poetry collection among his prolific productions. It records Tagore’s outlooks on nature, art, life, love, and the world. Some of the poems were taken from *Kanikā*, a collection written in 1889 and published in Bengali in 1896, and the rest were inspired by Japanese *haiku* and written in English during his visit to Japan (Zhang 7; Thompson 247). Tagore himself translated the Bengali poems into English. The poetry collection was published by Macmillan Company in New York in 1916.

The translation of *Stray Birds* took place amid the Tagore fad in China during the May Fourth period. Zheng Zhenduo first translated several selections from *Stray Birds* into Chinese and had them published in *New Youth* and other major May Fourth newspapers and journals. In October 1922, Zheng’s Chinese translation of the entire book was published under the name of *Fei Niao Ji* 飞鸟集 by Shanghai Commercial Publishing House. It was the first translation of one of Tagore’s collections published in China and became one of the best sellers at the time in China (Zhang 7).

Bing Xin was one of the readers who took a fancy to Tagore. Furthermore, she was one of the rare few who brought the influence of Tagore into their writings. She was struck by the form of *Stray Birds* at the outset. The distinctive feature of *Stray Birds* is that the poems do not rhyme in English and are very short. In fact, because the majority of the poems in *Stray Birds* are made up of a few lines of irregular lengths, or even of just one sentence, the work is sometimes read as prose. The prosaic form inspired Bing Xin when she read his work in 1919 as it promised a new way of writing poetry.¹ Bing Xin explicitly acknowledged this in her preface to *Fanxing*:

On an evening of 1919, when I was reading R. Tagore’s *Stray Birds* by the stove fire with my brother Bing Zhong, he said to me, “Don’t you often say that your thoughts are scattered and are not easy to extend into paragraphs? In fact they can be collected in this way.” From that time on, I sometimes jot down my thoughts in a small notebook. (Bing Xin 131, my translation)

In another essay, “My Literary Life,” published in 1933, Bing Xin repeated the similar idea that she owed her poetry to Tagore in that she imitated Tagore’s form to gather together her random thoughts (Bing 124). Tagore’s inspiration proves to be the starting point for Bing Xin’s poetry writing.

However, Bing Xin does not imitate Tagore indiscriminately. Her differences from Tagore in gender, social and cultural backgrounds, and political registers make her approach poetry differently from Tagore, even though she shares his philosophical and poetic thoughts and involves the same themes and topics in her writing. Being a modern Chinese woman writer, Bing Xin makes poetry not only a platform to assert her literary and social subjectivity but also a career to build Chinese modern culture. To this end, Bing Xin not only imitates Tagore's poems as the basis of her poetic writing but also corrects patriarchal and colonial tendencies in his poems.

Bing Xin reverses the direction of Tagore's translation. This is not only in the physical sense of bringing Tagore back from the West to the East but more importantly in resisting the colonial power that dominated the contemporary East-West relationship and also westernized Tagore's translation. Although China is not the same as India, the two nations both belong to the East from which Tagore departs. While Tagore imagines a version of the East for Western readers, Bing Xin writes her life and thought for her Chinese readers.

Similarly, Bing Xin changes the gender perspective in her poetic writing. Tagore's stand on women is not particularly positive or negative. However, he reveals his essentialist thoughts on women by attributing certain characteristics to women and indicating the domestic sphere as their space of activity in *Stray Birds*, in which he conceives women as objects for love, appreciation, and sympathy. Bing Xin appropriates Tagore's poetry from a patriarchal voice and changes it into a feminist one. Bing Xin not only writes as a woman but also takes an insider's view of women's lives rather than adopting Tagore's position as a detached outsider. Particularly, Bing Xin expands the topic of maternal love from Tagore's minor one into her major theme. By writing both of the life experiences between her and her mother and psychological union between daughters and mothers in general, Bing Xin demonstrates her feminist stance of constructing the female world against the interference of patriarchy.

2. Imitation

2.1. Form

The first and foremost feature that Bing Xin takes from Tagore's *Stray Birds* is the form of the poems. The poems are short, consisting of only a few lines of irregular length. They do not conform to any rhymes. To Bing Xin and other Chinese poets like her who have been constrained by the rigidity of Classical Chinese poetry and are new to the vernacular poetry, Tagore's new form is eye-opening and even revolutionary. It points out a promisingly new way of poetic writing: poetry can be short and concise and free of any constraints of rhythms, tonal patterns, and other rules. The new form not only suits for jotting down random thoughts but more importantly signifies liberation that fits both the spirit of the May Fourth movement and also the poetic reform that has just started in China. In this sense, it embodies double senses of liberation – literary and social. That both accounts for its appealing to Bing Xin and the popularity of Bing Xin's short poems later on.

2.2. Images and associations

The common images shared by *Fanxing* and *Chunshui* with *Stray Birds* are extensive. The list ranges from nature – celestial objects such as the sun, the moon, stars; fauna and flora such as birds, fish, bees, grasses, flowers, leaves, fruit; and the natural phenomena of light, darkness, the sea, waves, dewdrops, hills, trees, storms, the dawn, the rain, sunsets, the wind, rivers, and clouds – to abstract concepts of time, life, death, eternity, love, and loneliness. Common images such as flowers, leaves, fruits, children, rain, dawns, evenings, and silence occur most frequently in the three books. For instance, flowers appear twenty-nine times in Tagore's *Stray Birds* and fifteen times in Bing Xin's *Fanxing*. The sea occurs eight times in *Fanxing*, twelve times in *Chunshui*, and eight times in *Stray Birds*. The richness and variety of images represent a broad coverage of the world and their subject matter; their resemblances illustrate similar patterns in Bing Xin's poems and those of Tagore.

With the same images, Bing Xin also follows the associations established by Tagore and writes her lines with his imprint. For instance, Tagore suggests that people appreciate beauty instead of possessing it. The images he uses to make his point are floral. In poem CII he writes, "Don't linger to gather flowers to keep them, but walk on, for flowers will keep themselves blooming all your way" (Tagore 239). Similarly, in *Fanxing*, Bing Xin's lines read, "人从枝上折下花儿来, /供在瓶里 —/到结果的时候, /却对着空枝叹息。" (People pick flowers from boughs, /raise them in the vase – /In the end, only to sigh over the empty bough) (Bing 27, my translation). With the same image of flowers and the action of plucking flowers, the philosophical meaning Bing Xin achieves is the same as Tagore's: possession ruins beauty.

In some of Bing Xin's poems, her images appear different from Tagore's; however, the structures and meanings are so close that one cannot miss the influence. The forty-eighth poem of *Chunshui* reads, "萤儿自由的飞走了, /无力的残荷呵!" (Fireflies fly freely away, /how helpless the diminishing lotuses are!) (Bing 61). It calls to mind the first poem of Tagore's *Stray Birds*, "Stray birds of summer come to my window to sing and fly away. / And yellow leaves of autumn, which have no songs, flutter and fall there with a sigh" (Tagore 220). Although the images change from Tagore's "stray birds" and "yellow leaves of autumn" to Bing Xin's "fireflies" and "diminishing lotuses," the comparison remains between winged animals, which are free to fly, and plant leaves, which are still and are at the mercy of the seasons. The parallel is the same in the contrast between the animal and the plant: one is flying away and the other is dying away; one is free and the other is restrained. Both poems linger with a faint tone of tragedy.

2.3. Themes

Tagore's primary themes of nature, love, philosophical thinking, and silence in *Stray Birds* all find their correspondences in Bing Xin's *Fanxing* and *Chunshui*. Both Tagore and Bing Xin love nature deeply. This can be seen in each of the titles of the three works and the number of their nature poems. One hundred and five of the three hundred and twenty-five poems of *Stray Birds* either directly refer to or touch upon nature; sixty out of one hundred sixty-four poems in *Fanxing* and one hundred and two of one hundred eighty-two poems of *Chunshui* involve this theme.² All of them, without exception, extol nature.

Tagore has an exceptional sense in perceiving and experiencing the beauty of the nature. For instance, in trees he hears “the yearning voice of the dumb earth”; he sees the evening sky “like a window, and a lighted lamp, and a waiting behind it” (Tagore: 232-248). When he is fully immersed in nature, Tagore blurs the line that separates himself as a human being from nature. He writes, “I am like the road in the night listening to the footfalls of its memories in silence,” and “I am the autumn cloud, empty of rain, see my fullness in the field of ripened rice” (Tagore 248). He celebrates this merging by writing, “My thoughts shimmer with these shimmering leaves and my heart sings with the touch of this sunlight; my life is glad to be floating with all things into the blue of space, into the dark of time” (Tagore 244). Unlike Kant’s “disinterestedness” in the appreciation of aesthetics, Tagore closes the gap between himself as a subject and nature as an object; instead, he integrates himself into nature.

Bing Xin shares Tagore’s acuteness in sensing beauty in nature. She hears that “朦朧的月下 - 長廊靜院里。/不是清磬破了岑寂，/便落花的声音，/也听得见了” (Under the dim moonlight, in the silent corridor of courtyard, / not the clear bell / but the falling petals / break the stillness) and sees “晚霞邊的孤帆，/在不自覺里 / 完成了 “自然” 的圖畫” (The lonely sailboat / set against the sunset clouds / in its unconsciousness / accomplishes a picture of “nature”) (Bing 93-4, 60, my translation). Like Tagore, Bing Xin also fuses herself with nature in such lines as “我是橫海的燕子，/ 要尋覓隔水的窩巢。” (I am a swallow that is separated by the sea. / I am looking for my nest on the other side of the water) (Bing 19, my translation). Thus, sharing Tagore’s love for nature and sensitivity of its perception, Bing Xin constructs her own aesthetic world of nature that distantly corresponds to Tagore’s.

Alongside nature, the theme of love is just as notable. Love is a major and all-encompassing concept in Tagore’s philosophy. The word “love” appears with the greatest frequency in *Stray Birds*. Tagore uses it twenty-seven times. It runs through *Stray Birds* from the beginning to the end, starting from the third poem, which reads, “The world puts off its mask of vastness to its lover” until the last poem, “Let this be my last word, that I trust in thy love” (Tagore: 220-262). In content, the theme of love permeates almost all the poems in *Stray Birds*: the relationship between human beings and nature, between human beings themselves, and between men and God. In all, love enwraps the whole world. The effusion of the expression of love testifies to Tagore’s philosophy of love, which is that in love “all the contradictions of existence merge themselves and are lost. Only in love are unity and duality not in variance” (Gupta 61).

Tagore’s belief in love has a deep influence on Bing Xin. It is well acknowledged that it constitutes a third vital part of her philosophy in addition to her own family background and Christian belief. In fact, Bing Xin is most known as a modern Chinese woman writer concerned with love. Like Tagore, Bing Xin’s concept of love is all-encompassing. A most frequently quoted motto of Bing Xin is that “With love, there is everything.” In her two poetry collections, this theme is also the most prevalent one.

Tagore’s other themes also find echo in Bing Xin’s poetry. For instance, on the relationship between silence and speech, both of them think that words are limited and that silence is the highest form for expressing truth or beauty. Regarding the dialectics of humility and greatness, Tagore points out that “We come nearest to the great when we are great in humility” (Tagore 235). Bing Xin uses a metaphor of the flowers at the corner of the wall to express the similar thought. Their common thought on smallness embodying greatness is also reflected in both

poets' valorization of children. They share the same thinking that the Great and children are close to each other in their innocent wisdom and transcendence from worldly vulgarity.

2.4. Figures of speech

If images, philosophical meanings, and themes are materials Bing Xin borrows from Tagore, then figures of speech are devices that Bing Xin inherits from Tagore's pattern of weaving the materials together. In *Fanxing* and *Chunshui* Bing Xin uses the same figures of speech on similar or identical natural objects to arrive at the same meaning as Tagore. For instance, Tagore's poem CLXI writes, "The cobweb pretends to catch dewdrops and catches flies" (Tagore 246). Bing Xin's corresponding poem in *Chunshui* reads, "小蜘蛛! / 停止你的工作罢, / 只网住些儿尘土呵!" (Little spider!/Stop your work,/you only catch some dust!) (Bing 63, my translation). Bing Xin's poem acts as the flip side of Tagore's poem: Tagore's cobweb appears silly but is really cunning, whereas Bing Xin's spider intends to be hardworking but turns out to be stupid. They are like two sides of one coin: opposite but representing the same thing. In this way, Bing Xin's verse reflects Tagore's.

Tagore uses a lot of antonyms to create contrasting meanings and parallel structures. For instance, in poem LXXX he writes, "Let life be beautiful like summer flowers and death like autumn leaves" (Tagore 237). In structure, the two lines parallel each other. In meaning, "life" and "death" and "summer flowers" and "autumn leaves" form oppositions between two states of being. This feature of Tagore's writing can be easily found in Bing Xin's poems. As a matter of a fact, poem 22 of *Fanxing* deftly responds to Tagore's. Bing Xin's poem reads, "生离 - / 是朦胧的月日, / 死别 - / 是憔悴的落花" (parting in life - /is the obscured sun and moon,/separated by death - /is the weathered, fallen flower) (Bing 9, my translation). In her poem Bing Xin uses the celestial objects - the sun and the moon - to contrast the botanical item - flower - to parallel the contrast between life and death. Although the images are changed, the parallel structure of Bing Xin's poem follows Tagore's pattern so closely that they achieve a similar contrast between life and death.

2.5. Philosophical meaning

Tagore's poems in *Stray Birds* all have deep philosophical meanings, which constitute one of the most noted features of Tagore's poetic writing. This motto-like, epigrammatic feature consequently becomes Bing Xin's style. Su Xuelin, Bing Xin's contemporary female writer, comments that Bing Xin's poems, which are well put with only ten or more words or phrases, cannot be explained by thousands of words (cited in Xu 90).

Tagore's other techniques, such as analogies, dialogues, rhetorical questions, and imperative sentences that address his readers directly as friends, are all well represented in Bing Xin's poems. Together with their common images, themes, and other literary characteristics, all these similarities and correspondences demonstrate Bing Xin's conscious and conscientious imitation of Tagore.

Bing Xin's imitation of Tagore is literary; however, what lies behind it is their comparable thinking. Zhu Fenghua proposes that Tagore's fascination for nature, which manifests his philosophy of pantheism, corresponds to the spirit of the May Fourth era in China. Zhu sees a commonality between the two in their mutual

inspiration drawn from the liberty and life force of nature (Zhu 41–42). In fact, Bing Xin herself sees their accord is larger than that. She expresses her affinity with Tagore explicitly that

Your ultimate belief – your belief that “there is a grand harmony between universe and individuals’ souls” and your poems that hoard and emanate “natural beauty” permeate my mind. Bit by bit, they synchronize with my thoughts, which no words can express, into chords and plays a toneless and soundless music that is cryptic, mysterious, and amazing. (Bing 7, my translation)

Bing Xin strongly identifies herself with Tagore. It shows that her imitation of him is not random but out of their kindred minds rooted in their shared belief.

The significance of imitation is that it provides the legitimacy for Bing Xin to start her own creation. It ignites and justifies the short and prosaic form of poetry and helps Bing Xin to blaze a new trail in poetic writing. Moreover, *Stray Birds* furnishes the prototype for Bing Xin to follow; imitation is her way of learning. With imitation as modeling, Bing Xin reproduces Tagore’s major writing features as well as his particular images, rhetoric, philosophical thoughts, and meanings. Also with imitation as translation, she both transfers those characteristics and transforms them in her own poetic writing.

3. Creation

The imitation does not make Bing Xin’s writing derivative. Rather, true to what Robinson describes, she wanders far and freely from her model to start on her own. In other words, imitation helps her find her own creativity. The form, the most evident part of imitation, as Bing Xin herself acknowledges, is a good example. In addition to the total abandonment of rhyme, Tagore’s English poems and their Chinese translation do not follow any particular pattern; some are made up of one line and others a few short lines. The length of the lines also varies: it can be one long line of more than twenty words, or several short lines with four or five words in each. Nevertheless, in her adaptation she keeps the brevity of the poems but changes the length and number of the lines. Of all the poems in *Fanxing* and *Chunshui*, there are none made up of one long line, as is common in *Stray Birds*. Rather, Bing Xin writes her poems in a slightly more regular form than Tagore: there are no more than twelve characters in one line and no poems with fewer than three lines or exceeding fourteen lines. In this way, Bing Xin actually creates her own form on the basis of her adaptation of Tagore’s.

Bing Xin does not just appropriate the form of *Stray Birds* but makes it her entire project. The themes, perspective, poetics, politics, and other writing features all undergo changes. In themes, she connects her shared themes with Tagore to her environment. In perspective, she changes Tagore’s male or even patriarchal point of view into a female and feminist one. In contrast to Tagore’s English poetics that has Orientalist flavor, Bing Xin explicitly writes with classical Chinese and contemporary May Fourth poetics. Behind all of these changes, Bing Xin exhibits her social and political consciousness as an early modern Chinese woman writer.

3.1. Personal

Bing Xin rewrites Tagore's influences with the distinct characteristics of her own environment. Generally speaking, Bing Xin changes the transcendental, abstract, utopian, mystical, and ahistorical atmosphere in *Stray Birds* into a specific, concrete, real, and contextualized one in *Fanxing* and *Chunshui*. In *Stray Birds*, there are no people or events that correspond to Tagore's life. Rarely in his poems can one detect evidence of Tagore's own environment, let alone the social background in Bengal or India more broadly, at a time when anti-British sentiments were high. Furthermore, the word "God," as well as Tagore's religious thinking, permeates almost every poem of *Stray Birds* and lends them a strong sense of mysticism.

Although Bing Xin does not make the political issues of her times the major topics of her poetry or write about them directly, she does not exclude them from her poems; rather, she makes her social climate perceptible through her writing. Furthermore, writing autobiographically is a distinctive feature that separates Bing Xin from Tagore. This can be seen that although Bing Xin and Tagore both use first-person narrators in their poems Tagore's narrator "I" stands separately from the life of Tagore whereas the "I" in Bing Xin's poems coincides with Bing Xin herself in life. As a result, while following Tagore, Bing Xin either adapts his themes according to her Chinese context or adds the personal and social situations that are lacking in Tagore's writing. In a word, Bing Xin takes over the features of Tagore's *Stray Birds* and assimilates them into her creation with her own personal and social characteristics.

3.1.1. Childhood/children

In Tagore's philosophy, children are creations of God; therefore, children have a natural affinity with nature. Also, being incarnations of freedom and angels of love, children are the group that is closest to God. Tagore does not put children in opposition to adults. Rather, they are independent of each other. By contrast, although Bing Xin also treats children as pure, innocent, carefree, and adorable, her thought of children has more to do with the biological stage and social involvement – that children are at an early stage of life and have not been contaminated by society yet. Most of her childhood poems overlap with those on love, in which she recollects happy times spent with her immediate and extended family or unforgettable moments in the past. Bing Xin's poems about childhood, corresponding to her essay on the same topic, has the feature of being autobiographical in content and nostalgic in feeling.

In addition to appearing personal and private, Bing Xin's childhood poems have strong social meanings. Childhood plays an indispensable role in the formation of the identity of the adults. In the case of early modern Chinese writers, the connection is especially strong because many of them feel compelled to go back to their childhood to understand their own identity and the nation, both of which undergo the agonizing process of construction. Bing Xin's childhood poems put her within this group. At the same time, childhood represents a carefree, pure, and happy time for her to fight the issues or evils of society and relive the pure and innocent time, as Ann Anagnost argues that in the May Fourth period in China, "The child, then, becomes for the adult a means of nostalgic retrieval of an innocence lost through the corruption of culture and the mediation of writing between the child and the real world" (Anagnost 207).

Thus, as a major writer of children's literature, writing of the childhood has both personal and social meanings for Bing Xin.

3.1.2. Love

Although Bing Xin takes considerable influence from Tagore on the philosophy of love, their disparities on love are also notable. In Tagore's poems, love is a broad and abstract concept. Tagore uses love to describe the ideal state of the world – that is, the admiration and appreciation of God and nature, care between human beings, and essentially harmonious relationships in the world. Bing Xin rewrites the subject with her personal experiences and feelings. Touching little upon Tagore's topics of religious love and romantic love, she concentrates her poems of love on concrete relationships, especially her loving relationships with her surroundings. The way she expresses love is by narrating or remembering the scenes rather than explicitly using the word "love" as Tagore does in his poems.

In the love poems, the same images Bing Xin shares with Tagore also acquire different meanings when she connects them to her life. That is to say, Bing Xin transplants Tagore's images into her life and accordingly transforms their distance and strangeness into closeness and familiarity in her poems. The sea is one example. In Tagore's poems, the sea is always associated with vastness, greatness, power, and even separation but never with intimacy. Accordingly, the tone is always somber. Bing Xin rewrites the image and imbues it with personal meaning. Because the sea has special meaning for her father, she associates the sea with him. Sometimes Bing Xin uses "your" to modify the sea, which indicates that the sea is her father's. Although it cannot be understood as a personal possession, the writing completely changes the conceptual image of the sea in Tagore's poems and connects it to the real sea and her real life.

Bing Xin also incorporates the image of the stars into her life. In Tagore's poems, stars are high, remote, and in every way opposite to the warm household lamps. Bing Xin turns them into her brothers. The affection she reveals toward "the three brothers" in the poem coincides with what she expresses in one essay of *To Young Readers*, in which Bing Xin draws a direct connection between the stars and her brothers. From this and other poems, it can clearly be seen that Bing Xin's appropriation of Tagore's images is accompanied by her emotional investment. She rarely takes the detached attitude of Tagore but sees the connection of her subjects with her life.

In the loving world of Bing Xin's poems, nature, child, mother, and love jointly reign. It is a pure and innocent world. In it even the desire between men and women has no ground to grow. It is easy to see that romantic love is noticeably absent in Bing Xin's writing. Along with it, Tagore's theme of religious love is considerably diminished. By contrast, love without sexual desire is stressed. Maternal love as an unselfish, protective, boundless, and unending love is a major form of love that Bing Xin exalts.

Bing Xin turns maternal love from Tagore's minor topic into her major one. In *Stray Birds* Tagore has two poems about maternal love. The two poems are comparable in several aspects. Both of them are written by the poet in the first person to address Mother, in the second person. Both are set in the evening, the time of which gives the narrator the feeling that he is a child again and looks for his mother. Nevertheless, although the poems are in the first person, it is hard to tell whether the character "I" has any relationship with Tagore himself because there is no reference to real functioning

life outside it. Moreover, because of the strong symbolic implication of these two poems, this child-mother relationship can also be read as the relationship of the poet with nature, wisdom, God, etc. In a word, there can be many readings about Tagore's poems of maternal love. A realistic one is not particularly strong among them.

Bing Xin shares Tagore's feeling of being as young as a child in front of her mother. However, she differs from him in her direct reference to the real-life experiences and her perspective as a daughter. Bing Xin's poems have a sense of history that differs from Tagore's eternally present time. Also, the scenes, although they are not described in detail, have traces of reality that also appear frequently in her essays. Thus, from Tagore's general and universal love between child and mother in a utopian world, Bing Xin makes her maternal love poems grow in a more specific and actual environment that has traces of her personal life experiences.

Also, compared to the tender sentiment the child feels toward the mother in Tagore's two poems, the emotion in Bing Xin's poems is much more expressive and intense. Apart from poem 105, all these poems have a line, "Ah, mother!" either in the beginning or the middle of the poems. Clearly, she displays more emotion in her writing. Also, Bing Xin's poem has the daughter's perspective and an experiential element that Tagore's poem lacks. Furthermore, in her poems Bing Xin not only fulfills Tagore's theme of a child as a separate being returning to the mother but also emphasizes the inner connection between the mother and the daughter.

In her essay, "Exploring Mother Image and Its Cultural Meaning in Bing Xin's Poems," Lu Zhenglan remarks that Bing Xin was the first to write the close relationship between mother and daughter positively among the modern writers. According to Lu, the mother image in traditional Chinese culture exists more as a moral code than as a human being in the flesh (Lu 46-51). Furthermore, Li Ling points out that the filial piety for mother emphasized in Chinese tradition is the "son's mother" rather than the "daughter's mother." That is, the relationship between mother and daughter was excluded in the patriarchal writing. In this sense, Bing Xin's writing of maternal love signifies her defiance of traditional Chinese writing and asserting her feminist thinking.

Admittedly, Bing Xin's philosophy of love also has faults. Maternal love is not universal. Therefore, love cannot be a panacea or a cure-all solution to social issues. Wei Yanmei argues that the idealized mother image created by Bing Xin has to "be born into a certain privilege and opportunity" and also that in the intimate relationship either the daughter's identity or the mother's subjectivity can be overlooked (Wei 45-6). Nevertheless, compared to the hate philosophy proposed by May Fourth radicals, Bing Xin's endorsement of love points to a different direction that does not draw a clear-cut distinction with tradition and family. Rather, in contrast to most women writers who advocate running away from traditional families for their modern pursuits, Bing Xin extols a loving family and does not see modernity and family as incompatible. As Wei rightfully explicates, "Bing Xin advocates the cultivation of love and empathy as the means for social and personal improvement. Her love philosophy emphasizes human bonding and enduring relations, while many of her contemporaries were in favor of individualistic and iconoclastic endeavors" (Wei 46). In this way, Bing Xin demonstrates both her belonging to the May Fourth writers and her unique position on love.

3.2. Social/political

Despite his favoring the Eastern world in the East-West antagonism and his promotion of Indian independence and development, Tagore was seen visibly to have adopted Orientalism in writing or translating his poems into English. In poetics, he consciously follows the style and standards of Victorian English in his auto-translation. In the introduction to Edward Thompson's biographical work, *Rabindranath Tagore*, Harish Trivedi notes that "Tagore systematically left out much that was local, specific and original in his work for fear that it would prove unfamiliar and 'difficult' to an English reader" (Thomas a1). He cites Tagore's own words in the letters he exchanged with Thompson, in which Tagore admits that

In my translations I timidly avoid all difficulties, which has the effect of making them smooth and thin[...].

You are right in your diagnosis. I become acutely conscious of gaps and cracks in my translations and try to cover them up with some pretty designs [...]. The moral is, I should never have handled your language. (quoted in Thompson a1-a2)

It is easy to see that Tagore is concerned over his English translation and essentially his reception in the Western world. Tagore's strategy, as well as his translation practice, reveals the power of the Western target system and his willingness to conform to it.

According to translation theorist Lawrence Venuti, conciseness and fluency are the dominant writing criteria in Anglo-American countries. The criteria are prescribed for all forms of writing, especially translation, which renders the role of the translator invisible. Venuti argues that this practice of erasing the unique features of other cultures and languages in writing by the Western standard, especially in translation, testifies to the hegemony of Western culture enabled by its economic and political power (Venuti 1-42). In this sense, the fact that Tagore subjects his writing consciously to normal English and that he has Yeats and other well-known literary figures polish poems for him shows his eagerness to comply with Western criteria. Despite his protest against the Western political and economic imperialism, he simultaneously submits to its cultural hegemony. This incongruity is seen also in his inability to retain the linguistic and poetic features of his native language, Bengali, when he translates his poems into English.

In her essay, "Translation, Colonialism and Poetics: Rabindranath Tagore in Two Worlds," Mahasweta Sengupta uses *Gitanjali* as a tool to analyze the factors of culture, ideology, and poetics that affect Tagore's auto-translation. Sengupta proposes that Tagore's translation, which goes from the colonized nation to the colonizer, clearly demonstrates his conformity to the ideological and poetic powers as well as the politics of the colonizer.

Sengupta holds that to reach a wide audience in the West, Tagore makes adjustments in the style, tone, imagery, and the register of language "to suit the poetics of the target system" (Sengupta 57). This target system, which is Romantic and Victorian English, becomes the guiding principle by which Tagore gauges his translated language. Despite the poverty-ridden reality of the East, Tagore's poems portray a mystical and tranquil picture of reality, which, according to Sengupta, falls into the stereotype that the West creates of the East. In other words, Tagore performs Orientalism in his translation. At the same time, the Western publishing institutions also set up all kinds of criteria to safeguard their cultural hegemony.

Thus, Sengupta suggests that in his compliance with the Western ideology, Tagore's auto-translation unconsciously takes on a colonial color.

By contrast, Bing Xin was conscious of the social and historical role of her writing. In fact, her whole literary career was promoted by the May Fourth movement. Her access to Tagore was through reading the May Fourth journals, and her poems were also first published in the May Fourth journals.³ Thus, the May Fourth movement, her social milieu, has its clear imprints in her poems. Despite her ardent identification with Tagore, she is never as unworldly as him in poetry writing. The following subjects testify to her concern with the time.

3.2.1. Youth

Being the foremost leaders and major activists of the May Fourth movement, "youth" is the word most closely linked to the movement and the time. In fact, the flagship journal of the May Fourth movement is *New Youth*, which refers to both the actual youth of the society and the hope and future of the nation. In this context, the writing about the youth shows Bing Xin's social involvement and her concern about the future of the nation.

Bing Xin writes poems on youth in an admonitory tone to spur on young people. For instance, Poem 67 in *Chunshui* writes, "信仰将青年人扶上'服从'的高塔以后, /便把'思想'的梯子撤去了" (When belief helps the youth onto the tower of "obedience,"/it then removes the ladder of the "thought") (Bing 65, my translation). These lines were written against the background of Chinese youths subscribing to the Western thoughts and becoming their devoted or even blind followers in the early twentieth century. Bing Xin reminds the youth of the real spirit of the May Fourth movement, that is, creating themselves rather than merely imitating others. By writing about and to the youth, Bing Xin deals implicitly with one of the most crucial issues of the May Fourth movement.

Along with poems about youth, poems involving war, pioneers, and social senses make up Bing Xin's social poems. Poems of this type are not large in number, and the topics are not always primary in each verse; nevertheless, they form a significant deviation from *Stray Birds*. Among them, two poems on war are worth mentioning. In one poem Bing Xin writes that guns kill millions of people and their sounds are incessant at night. Another poem praises the little flowers that console the dead bodies on the battlefield. Although neither poem deals with the name or any details of the war, nor is war the theme of these two poems, their significance is that they break the peaceful and romantic world created by Tagore in *Stray Birds* and show the unpleasant and even cruel side of the world.

3.2.2. Pioneer

Xianquzhe 先驱者 (pioneer) is a rather new word in Bing Xin's time. This word can refer to the people who are in the lead in general or specifically to the May Fourth intellectuals who initiated and sponsored the May Fourth movement and who were often addressed as pioneers. Bing Xin uses this word in four of her poems. All of them are written with great emotion. Among them, two poems especially have evident reference to the time. Poem 22 of *Chunshui* clearly associates the pioneer with the masses; that is, the goal of the pioneers is to save the masses, which is also what the May Fourth pioneers strove to do. Poem 152 of *Chunshui* has a similar idea of asking the pioneers to have the poor and laboring masses in mind but not merely their own fate. With the phrase "poor and laboring masses" appearing directly in this poem, Bing Xin

unambiguously utters her political and social agenda: the ultimate goal of the political movement is to save the poor and laboring masses and to achieve social equality. The contrast she sets between the summit and the foot of the mountain analogizes to the situation between the pioneers and the poor and laboring masses. With the vast distance between them, Bing Xin implies the problem existing in the May Fourth movement, which is that some pioneers fail to connect their own liberation and ideals with the masses. In this sense, her poem serves as a social critique.

In some other poems that are not specific in themes, Bing Xin also expresses her strong sense of social responsibility. One poem reads, “心呵! /什么时候值得烦乱呢? /为着宇宙, /为着众生” (Oh, heart!/When is it worth upsetting?/When it is for the universe and for all human beings) (Bing 54, my translation). This poem reverses the attribution of the disturbance of their hearts either to the natural beauty or to the poet’s own sentimental feelings in Bing Xin’s own early poems and Tagore’s in *Stray Birds*. Instead, she shows that social responsibilities should be the primary concern of a person, and therefore they should be the primary reason that perturbs the heart. In another poem, Bing Xin writes that “不解放的行为/造就了自由的思想!” (Acts of repression give rise to thoughts of liberty) (Boynton 101; Bing 60–61). Below her translation, Grace Boynton makes a note that “This poem was written in response to the Twenty-One Demand made on China by Japan in 1915” (Boynton 101). Because Boynton worked closely with Bing Xin for her translation of *Fanxing* and *Chunshui*, considering their relationship first as teacher and student and later as friends for more than thirty years, the note must come from the poet herself. If this is true, it evidently shows Bing Xin’s active attention and involvement in social affairs, although she never gave direct or definite references in her poems.

In all the poems of this kind, the traces of Tagore are minimal. The major topics Bing Xin deals with, namely, her family, self, youth, and society, are her new topics and are absent in Tagore’s poems. Except for the form and a few other writing techniques, the content is completely her creation. This creation is grounded in her personal and social milieu. As a poet, Bing Xin does not exclude herself from the social environment. Rather, she writes her world into her poems. Although she is unlike the May Fourth male writers who deal with social issues head-on in their writing, Bing Xin, similar to other female writers of her time, responds to the social affairs and social changes in a subtle and indirect way. Nevertheless, these subtle and indirect social poems not only displace and disrupt the romantic world created by Tagore in *Stray Birds* but also demonstrates her social sensitivity and involvement.

3.3. Feminism

Essentially, in her poetic rewriting Bing Xin exhibits her feminist position. In *Fanxing* and *Chunshui* Bing Xin subtly changes Tagore’s perspective of gender in *Stray Birds*. She does not flaunt her role as a female poet, much less a radical feminist. Rather, only in those poems concerning maternal love does the reader get some clue that the poet is female. Nevertheless, her seemingly neutral and unspoken female position on gender corrects the bias caused by Tagore’s patriarchal thinking, demonstrated by his implicit male stand in *Stray Birds*.

Tagore writes from the perspective of an adult male, who takes an essentialist view of women. The woman in his poems in *Stray Birds* does not have a face, name, or any other particular physical features. She is an abstract concept that is called “woman” or “maiden.” Although Tagore does not use derogatory words about women but shows his appreciation of them, his mind-set is in line with patriarchal thinking. For example, in Poem CLXXIX he writes, “Woman, thou hast encircled the world’s heart with the depth of thy tears as the sea has the earth” (Tagore 248). Tagore draws an analogy between the woman’s tears and the sea. The tears are nothing negative in Tagore’s eyes. Rather, as the sea surrounds the earth and provides it with water, which is necessary for the sustenance of the earth, the tears of the woman encompass the world and sustain it with their nutrition and profundity. This shows Tagore’s appreciation of women. It is commendable that he defies the traditional stereotype of disparaging women’s tears as weakness or debilitation.

However, one cannot help asking such questions as why they are women’s tears but not men’s tears. To put it in another way, why should women necessarily shed tears? In seeking the answer to this question, one can assume that woman is the sufferer of the world. If women’s suffering sustains the world the same as the sea does the earth, then it can easily be seen that while sympathizing with women’s suffering, Tagore shows no signs of changing it. The paradox of his thought is that he acknowledges the woman’s suffering and also naturalizes it with his analogy between her and nature. As shown in this poem, the painful tears of women are relegated from a social level to a natural one; that is, like the sea, which exists as the life water to the earth, the tears of women become natural and necessary to the world. In the line, the unequal treatment or even abuse of women that causes their tears is not questioned. The effect – the tears – exist as if they had always been there and will always be there as the sea on the earth.

The other poems about women are based on the same thinking. In poem CCIX he writes about the virtue of the woman, i.e., her simplicity, as in the line, “Maiden, your simplicity, like the blueness of the lake, reveals your depth of truth” (Tagore 251). Again, it is a comparison between the woman, or to be exact, woman’s virtue, and nature. Poem CXLIII describes the dexterity of women’s fingers, which Tagore thinks produces the order of the world. This poem corresponds to poem XXXVIII, which describes the way a woman performs her household service with adroitness. It is not accidental that in both poems Tagore focuses on the body of a woman, i.e., her fingers and limbs. This shows that in spite of his appreciation, she still exists only as a biological woman. Furthermore, all the women in *Stray Birds* inhabit the private house. She is a housewife and works in the domestic sphere from whence comes the music and beauty that Tagore appreciates. In this way, Tagore both appreciates women’s work and also confirms their traditional position, which tacitly comports with the patriarchal mentality.

In addition to housewife, another role in which Tagore casts women is romantic lovers. Poem CXX reads, “I feel thy beauty, dark night, like that of the loved woman when she has put out the lamp” (Tagore 241). In this poem, woman is modified by the word “loved.” The passive voice reveals the thinking Tagore has toward the role a woman takes in romantic relationships; as a lover, she is being loved rather than loving. In other words, she is passive. She is still possessed. In a word, women in Tagore’s poems are portrayed and treated as objects rather than subjects.

Despite his favorable opinion of women, Tagore's poems reveal his essentialist view of women, which is how Simone de Beauvoir describes treating women as the second sex. Being the second sex means women are in a secondary and inferior position to men. According to de Beauvoir and other Western feminists, the ways in which patriarchy controls women are not only demonstrated physically and visibly but also politically and invisibly. Patriarchal power prescribes that women possess essential characteristics, such as femininity, beauty, gracefulness, tenderness, and other virtues that define her as a (good) woman. By regulating women with these characteristics, patriarchal society constructs the image of a woman. At the same time, to conceal its construction and accordingly hide its power, patriarchy also portrays "female" as inborn and natural. Tagore's poems show that his sympathetic description of women falls in line with this kind of patriarchal thinking.

In Bing Xin's rewriting, poems addressing women directly from a male point of view are eliminated. Bing Xin does not treat women as an abstract concept nor does she write about feminine beauty and female virtues as Tagore does in *Stray Birds*. Instead, she focuses on the relationship between her and the women in her lives. In the form of maternal love, family, and friendship, these women provide care and love for each other. This close and even intimate relationship is different from its counterpart in *Stray Birds*, whose narrator takes a well-intentioned but condescending attitude toward his women. Tagore's narrator is an outsider and an observer. He looks at or even appreciates his women characters from a distance, whereas Bing Xin is closely related to or emotionally involved with hers. In this sense, the differences between their poems about women can be generalized by noting that Tagore's poems about women are aesthetic and patriarchal, which is sympathizing as well as stereotyping, while Bing Xin's are emotional and feminist, which elevates the status of women and identifies their bonds.

The strongest bond in all the relationships she describes is that between mother and daughter. In the poems, Bing Xin frequently uses such phrases as "in your arms," "on your knees," or "returning to you" to indicate the intimacy or the unity of the relationship. Excluding men in this female world, Bing Xin's symbiotic relationship between mother and daughter resonates with the thinking of Julia Kristeva and other French feminists, who hold that women return to the Imaginary stage to resist the power of patriarchal rule. Taking Lacanian theory of psychology to the advantage of feminism, French feminists regard returning to the Imaginary stage as a resistance against the rule of patriarchy in that "the Imaginary corresponds to the pre-Oedipal period and the child believes itself to be a part of the mother and perceives no separation between itself and the world. In the imaginary there is no difference and no absence, only identity and presence" (*Moi* 97). Bing Xin's poems about the mother-daughter reunion at the Imaginary stage, which shun the intervention of men, conform to French feminist thought.

Poem 120 in *Fanxing* and poem 105 in *Chunshui* are distinctive examples in this regard. Poem 105 reads, "造物者 - /倘若在永久的生命中/只容有一次极乐的应许。/我要至诚地求着: /我在母亲的怀里, /母亲在小舟里, /小舟在月明的大海里。" (Oh Creator - /If in this eternal life/There is only one guarantee for one blissful wish./I earnestly plead:/"I will be in the arms of Mother,/the mother in the boat,/and the boat in the moonlit sea") (Bing 75, my translation). The images of "I" - the mother, the boat, and the sea - form three concentric receptacles, with the mother holding "I," the boat holding the mother, and the water encircling them all. Dai and Meng propose that the

images connote the relationship between the fetus and the womb, and it best exemplifies the state of the Imaginary stage. Poem 120 in *Fanxing* goes even further in tracing the origin of her writing to the time before she was born: “母亲呵！/这零碎的篇儿，/你能看一看么？/这些字，/在没有我以前，/已隐藏在你的心怀里。” (Ah, Mother!/Can you take a look at/those fragmentary pieces?/Those words,/even before I was born,/were hidden in the bosom of yours) (Bing 33, my translation). In this poem, Bing Xin extends the mother-daughter relationship even earlier to the time prior to the Imaginary stage. In this way, Bing Xin expands the link of mother and daughter from the biological level to the intellectual and telepathic ones. In all the poems of this kind, Bing Xin creates a world exclusively of her (Bing) and her mother. It is a world without men, not even the father. This returning to the Imaginary stage and excluding men rejects the patriarchal order on a psychological register.

The practical significance of Bing Xin's poems about maternal love is that they defy Chinese patriarchy. In terms of overthrowing the thousand-year-long domination of Chinese feudalism, Meng and Dai argue that the May Fourth period is an era of killing the father. While the May Fourth male writers cast themselves as rebellious sons taking on the responsibility of this historic task, the female writers responded to the call of the time and became automatically the rebellious daughters participating in the mission (Meng and Dai 3–19). As a major woman writer of the time, although Bing Xin's personal life is rarely painful, tortuous, or suppressive as is the case with most other women writers, her acclamation of maternal love and the union with the mother to the exclusion of men shows her feminist stance, for which cannot be fully accounted by the Chinese feminist movement of the time.

Also, Bing Xin demonstrates her feminist thinking and classical breeding in reclaiming Chinese women's writing in general. She owes her heritage to an earlier woman writer, Li Qingzhao. Li Qingzhao (1084–1151), one of the greatest women poets in China, was another poet who influenced Bing Xin next to Tagore. Two cases are exemplary. During her graduate study at Wellesley College between 1924 and 1926, Bing Xin studied Li Qingzhao's poems as her academic project, which resulted in her master's thesis, *An English Translation and Edition of the Poetry of the Lady Li I-An*.⁴ Later, in the article “The Treasures that Cannot be Deserted,” Bing Xin compares her artistic hobby of collection against the drifty and homeless background in the Chinese civil war in the 1940s to Li Qingzhao's similar experiences almost eight hundred years ago. In fact, their similarities also include their family backgrounds and happy marriages. Thus, in both writing and life, Bing Xin saw herself connected to her poetic female predecessor. Niu Jingliu discusses the affinity between the two women poets in her essay, “From Ling Qingzhao to Bing Xin.” She confirms their lineage, emphasizing that the diction, image, and tone of Chinese classical poetry, especially Li Qingzhao's *ci*-poems, permeate Bing Xin's early poems.

Bing Xin shares Li Qingzhao's delicate style: both of them belong to the *wanyue* school, which is generally known as delicate and restrained as opposed to the bold and unrestrained style of the *haofang* school of Chinese poetry. The *wanyue* style applies to almost all the poems of *Fanxing* and *Chunshui*. Some of them have a flavor of Li Qingzhao. The resemblance is especially strong in poem 156 of *Chunshui*. The poem reads, “睡起 - /廊上黄昏, /薄袖临风, /庭院水般清, /心地镜般明, /是画意还是诗情?” (When I arise from sleep - /the corridor is already at dusk./Wind fills in my

thin clothes./With the courtyard as limpid as water,/my heart is as pure as the mirror;/ Is what I experience a pictorial scene or a poetic mood?) (Bing 89, my translation). The first half of the poem particularly evokes the sentiments of Li Qingzhao with their common images of the dusk, courtyard, thin sleeves, and the dainty tone.

In the introduction to her Master's thesis, Bing Xin praises Li Qingzhao highly as an extremely talented woman poet in Chinese history and also sympathizes with Li's difficult situation as a woman writer. Bing Xin's conscious reflection of and comparison with Li aligns herself with Chinese women's writing in general. Also, corresponding to her clear statement that her English translation of Li Qingzhao was for the purpose of disseminating Li's poetry to Western readers, her incorporation of Li's writing style into her own poetry becomes another form of her translating this earlier woman poet into modern time. In all her efforts, Bing Xin demonstrates her consciousness of the gender role in writing and her endeavor to promote women's writing.

Although the radical May Fourth intellectuals sought vernacular Chinese, which is a colloquial language spoken by ordinary people, to replace the traditional Classical language, with a view to completely breaking with the Confucian tradition, the fact is that the legacy of classics cannot be nullified. The new and the modern have to be built on top of the old and the traditional. The visible traces of classical Chinese poetry in Bing Xin's poetic writing show her deliberate efforts to put herself in connection with the Chinese literary tradition. This can be considered another form of imitation – she recreates and modernizes classical Chinese poetry.

Fanxing and *Chunshui* are mostly referred together as the pioneering and representative poetic works of *xiaoshi*. People seldom separate them mainly because the poems were written and published on newspapers around the same time period. In fact, the collection of *Chunshui*, which was published in May 1923, was only three months later than *Fanxing*. Therefore, I treat and analyze imitation and creation as the shared feature of both books. Nevertheless, an attentive reader can still detect that the trace of imitation is slightly weaker and creation a little stronger in the latter book, *Chunshui* than the earlier one, *Fanxing*. In title, *Fanxing* (The Myriad of Stars) still follows the common image of star from Tagore, although Bing Xin appropriates it by conferring the analogy of her brothers onto the image. By comparison, *Chunshui* (Spring Water) is no longer a usual image in Tagore's poetry, but a familiar one in classical and modern Chinese writing. In addition, the words and phrases that resonate strongly with the time, such as "pioneer," "faith," "liberty," "liberation," and "creation" either enter for the first time or appear more frequently in the latter collection too. The difference shows that Bing Xin is less constrained by imitation and gains more freedom and more creation in her latter poetic writing.

4. Conclusion

Bing Xin imitates both the form and content of *Stray Birds* and appropriates them in her creation of *Fanxing* and *Chunshui*. As a result, she formally establishes a new style of poetry, that is, the unrhymed, freestyle, Chinese vernacular, short poetry of modern Chinese literature. The two poem collections were well received upon publication. Beginning in 1920, Bing Xin's short poems began to appear in newspapers. In 1923, the poems were collected into two books, published under the titles of *Fanxing* and *Chunshui*, respectively. Hu Yuzhi commented that the literary circle harvested "numerous pearls of sentiments"

from these poems; Zhao Jingsheng praised Bing Xin's presentation of personal spirits as being as limpid as pond water and thus the poems are mentally refreshing; Zhao Zhen thought Bing Xin's poems had the same value as Li Qingzhao's (Fan 361, 388, 365, 390). Among them, Ba Jin's words are especially representative of the readers, especially the young readers, of the time. In the preface to *The Biography of Bing Xin*, Ba Jin wrote,

We all like Bing Xin. We love the stars and the sea along with her. The lonely child like me finds the warmth and the lost maternal love in her works. I still remember that summer before I left home, I read *Fanxing* with my cousin, accompanied by the singing of cicadas in the yard, and learned the writing of short poems together. Those short poems are still etched firmly in my mind, although I only wrote ten or twenty poems. I am not a poet. I often feel that with someone reciting a poem before me, I can follow suit to recite my poems and move onward. (people.com.cn, my translation)

The identification with Bing Xin's thought and the freshness and inspiration of the writing made her poems popular among the youth. There were also many readers who took up their pens and imitated her writing as Ba Jin did. Indeed, inspired by Bing Xin, writers Zong Baihua, Su Xuelin, and Ba Jin formed a "short-poem campaign" to promote short-poem writing. The short-poem writing reached its height in the late 1920s until it was overtaken by intellectual poems soon after. It is true that the short poems are not deep, sophisticated, or refined, as some critics accuse. Still, as a fad in the May Fourth period, they help writers and readers find their voice, philosophy, poetry, beauty, and self in everyday life. This poetry corresponds to the call of the time, a time of breaking away from various forms of shackles and fetters. As the most representative poet of short-poetry writing, Bing Xin marked her place in the development of modern Chinese poetry.

Because *Fanxing* and *Chunshui* are products of imitation and creation, the perspective of translation provides a vantage point from which to read them. Bing Xin's poems are not "originary," standing isolated in the Chinese national poetry. Rather, the credibility given to them for opening a new path in modern Chinese poetry should acknowledge their indebtedness to literatures of other nations. To put it in another way, the reading and understanding of *Fanxing* and *Chunshui* should not be bracketed within national literature but should be embedded in the world literature.

Although, ironically, Bing Xin has to imitate in order to create, her creation demonstrates her power. In her creation she is powerful enough to be herself. This self is different from Tagore, the one she admires. While she is attracted to Tagore's aestheticism, philosophy, themes of love and children, and writing styles, she is not ahistorical, mythic, and Orientalistic, as he was. Rather, she is personal, social, and political. She owes her writing to her time, the May Fourth movement. Yet she does not simply echo the grand discourse of nationalism called out by her male peers. Instead, she is herself, seeking, searching, and finding her identity, including her worries and happiness, in literature and life. The act of finding itself is modern, compared to the alienation or even suppression of self in Chinese traditional literature and society. Meanwhile, Bing Xin does not put herself in a categorical cutoff with tradition, either. She keeps visible and clear traces and connotations of classical Chinese poetic writing in her poems. She writes her identity as a daughter to a loving mother to illustrate a form of feminism that loves rather than hates and that includes values of love and family rather than breaking away from families. In this way, the imitative

creation helps Bing Xin establish her unique position in Chinese literature and feminism, along with finding her voice and self.

Notes

1. In her essay, “How I Wrote *Fanxing* and *Chunshui*,” Bing Xin mentioned that the version of *Stray Birds* she read was Zheng Zhenduo’s Chinese translation. However, Zheng translated *Stray Birds* into *Fei Niao Ji* 飞鸟集, which literally means “Collection of Flying Birds,” whereas Bing Xin referred to the name as *Mitu zhi niao* 迷途之鸟 (Lost or Stray Birds), which is closer to Tagore’s original title. Thus, I suspect that Bing Xin read both Zheng Zhenduo’s Chinese translation and Tagore’s English original version of *Stray Birds*.
2. I calculated the number on the basis of the explicit words related to nature appearing in Bing Xin’s poems. In Colena Michael Anderson’s dissertation, *A Study of Two Modern Chinese Women Authors: Ping Hsin and Ting Ling*, Anderson writes that “one hundred and eight of the one hundred eighty-two verses in *Spring Water* mention nature in one or more of its forms” (Anderson 89).
3. They were mainly published in 晨报 (*The Morning Newspaper*).
4. Li I-an is another name of Li Qingzhao.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Xiaoqing Liu is an associate professor of Chinese at Butler University. Her research interests include translation studies, comparative literature, modern Chinese literature, and women’s studies. She has published peer-reviewed articles with *Translation Quarterly*, *Translation: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, and *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies*. Her contact information is xliu@butler.edu.

Works cited

- Anagnost, Ann. “Children and National Transcendence in China.” *Constructing China: The Interaction of Culture and Economics*. Eds. K. G. Lieberthal, S-f Lin and E.P. Young. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, (1997): 195–222. Print.
- Anderson, Colena Michael. “A Study of Two Modern Chinese Women Authors: Ping Hsin and Ting Ling.” Ph.D. Diss. The Claremont Graduate U, 1954. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi. “The Third Space.” *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. J. Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990. 207–21. Print.
- Boynton, Grace. Trans. “Selections from *Spring Water*.” *Renditions: A Chinese-English Translation Magazine*. 32 (1989): 88–117. Print.
- Dryden, John. “Preface to Ovid’s Epistles.” *Essays of John Dryden*. Ed. W. P. Ker. New York: Russell & Russell, 1961. 230–44. Print.
- Fan, Boqun. 冰心研究资料 (*Bing Xin Research Materials and Resources*). Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1984. Print.
- Gupta, Kalyan Sen. *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. Print.
- Hogan, Patrick, and Lalita Pandit. *Rabindranath Tagore: University and Tradition*. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2003. Print.
- Ling, Li, 李玲. “冰心创作中母性之爱的复杂性.” (The Complexity of Maternal Love in Bing Xin’s Creation). *Journal of Modern Chinese Literature Study* 3 (2008): 68–78. Print.

- Lu, Zhenglan, (陆正兰). “冰心诗歌中母亲形象及其文化含义探寻.” (The Exploration of the Image of Mother and its Cultural Meaning in Bing Xin’s Poems). *Journal of Chongqing College of Education* 16.1 (January 2003): 46–51. Print.
- Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- Niu, Jinling, (牛金玲). “从李清照到冰心.” (From Li Qingzhao to Bing Xin). *Journal of Chengde Teachers’ College for Ethnic Minorities* 26.4 (2006): 52–55. Print.
- People.com.cn. “《世纪之交: 巴金与冰心》的精彩章节.” (Charming Chapters from *Friends of Century: Ba Jin and Bing Xin*). 26 Oct. 2018. <<http://culture.people.com.cn/GB/22226/72026/72090/72451/5076487.html>>
- Robinson, Douglass. “Imitation.” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. Ed. Mona Baker and Kirsten Malmkjær. New York: Routledge, 2001. 111–12. Print.
- Sengupta, Mahasweta. “Translation, Colonialism and Poetics: Rabindranath Tagore in Two Worlds.” *Translation, History and Culture*. Ed. Susan Bassanett and André Lefevere. New York: Printer, 1990. 57–63. Print.
- Sinha, Sasahhar. *Social Thinking of Rabindranath Tagore*. New York: Asia, 1962. Print.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. *Collected Poems and Plays of Rabindranath Tagore*. New York: The Macmillan, 1964. Print.
- Thompson, Edward. *Rabindranth Tagore: Poet and Dramatist*. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1991. Print.
- Trivedi, Harish. “Introduction.” *Rabindranth Tagore: Poet and Dramatist*. Ed. Edward Thompson. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1991. a1–a36. Print.
- Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- Wang, Ke, (王珂). “印度诗歌及泰戈尔对我国新诗诗体建设的影响.” (The Influence of Tagore and Indian Poetry on the Construction of Chinese New-Style Poem). *Journal of Nanjing Normal University (social Science)* 24.1 (2003): 128–33. Print.
- Wei, Yanmei. “Femininity and Mother-Daughter Relationship in Twentieth Century Chinese Literature.” Ph.D. Diss. State U of New York at Stone Brook, 1999. Print.
- Xin, Bing. “An English Translation and Edition of the Poetry of the Lady Li I-An.” Master Thesis. Wellesley College, 1926.
- . 《冰心传》 (The Biography of Bing Xin). Nanjing: Jiangsu Literary Publishing House, 1995. Print.
- . “遥寄印度诗人泰戈尔.” (A Distant Correspondence with Indian poet Tagore). *The Choice Selections of Bing Xin’s Works*. Guangxi: Lijiang, 2006. Print.
- Yang, Mengya, (杨萌芽). “泰戈尔访华与20世纪20年代中国文坛.” (Tagore’s Visit to China and the Chinese Literary Circle in the 1920s). *Academic Journal of Zhongzhou* 4 (2006): 212–16. Print.
- Yue, Meng, and Dai Jinghua 孟悦, 戴锦华. *Fuchu Lishi Dibiao*. (Emerging from the Horizon of History). Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2004. Print.
- Zhang, Yu, (张羽). 泰戈尔与中国现代文学 (*Tagore and Modern Chinese Literature*). Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 2004. Print.
- Zhu, Fenghua, (朱凤华). “自然·真理·爱—《飞鸟集》与《繁星》、《春水》的比较.” (Nature·Truth·Love – Comparison of *Stray Birds*, *Fanxing*, and *Chunshui*). *Journal of Liuzhou Vocational & Technical College* 2.3 (2002): 41–44. Print.