

# Agents of May Fourth. Jing Yinyu, Xu Zhongnian, and the Early Introduction of Modern Chinese Literature in France

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**Abstract** Jing Yinyu (1901-1931?) and Xu Zhongnian (1904-1981) played a pivotal role in the dissemination of modern Chinese literature in France at the turn of the 1930s. Best known as Lu Xun's first translator into a Western language and a friend of Romain Rolland's, Jing compiled the *Anthologie des conteurs chinois modernes* in 1929. In his *Anthologie de la littérature chinoise. Des origines à nos jours*, published in 1932, Xu also devoted a section to recent literary developments. By analysing the nature of the two projects, the translated corpora, and their paratexts, I will describe the features of Jing's and Xu's dissemination of May Fourth literature in France and scrutinise their artistic and ideological stance *vis-à-vis* the new literary scene. Ultimately, I will attempt to pinpoint in what terms the two scholars-cum-translators' agency contributed to foreign readers' awareness of the cultural, social and political experience of the May Fourth Movement.

**Keywords** Jing Yinyu. Xu Zhongnian. May Fourth Movement. Institut Franco-chinois de Lyon. Modern Chinese literature. Agents of translation.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Jing Yinyu's *Anthologie des conteurs chinois modernes*. – 3 Xu Zhongnian's *Anthologie de la littérature chinoise. Des origines à nos jours*. – 4 Conclusions.

## 1 Introduction

Amid the turmoil that characterised the rocky transition from the imperial to the republican system, culminating in the outbreak of the May Fourth Movement (*Wusi yundong* 五四運動) in 1919, the Chinese cultural world experienced an unprecedented burgeoning. Many young, often foreign-educated intellectuals championed a radical revolution that embraced all aspects of art and life: this revolution notably included the use of a new literary vernacular and new forms, the popularization of imported knowledge through a feverish translation activity, and the denunciation of traditional ethics and social mores, perceived as backward and oppressive. The debates surrounding these claims and innovations, and the artistic possibilities they disclosed, provided Chinese literature with a new set of expressive and thematic resources that allowed it to enter into its modern phase.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding the epochal shifts that were taking place on the Chinese social, political, and cultural scene in the aftermath of May Fourth, with intellectual exchanges still at an early stage despite the influential role played by missionaries (Pino, Rabut 2005), the new literature of China received little attention within European learned circles at the turn of the 1930s. It is against such a background that the innovative contributions made by Jing Yinyu 敬隱漁 (1901-1931?) and Xu Zhongnian 徐仲年 (1904-1981), or Xu Songnian 徐頌年, acquire special significance.<sup>2</sup> Jing (1929) edited a collection of short stories entitled *Anthologie des conteurs chinois modernes. Établie et traduite avec une introduction par J. B. Kin Yn Yu*, prefaced and translated by himself. A more ambitious project saw the light three years later: Xu (1932) also devoted a section of his *Anthologie de la littérature chinoise. Des origines à nos jours* to the recent developments in Chinese literature, supplemented by a selection of texts in his own French translation.

I will start by describing the nature, scope, and features of Jing's and Xu's projects, with an eye on the principles of text selection and the rendition strategies adopted by their compilers.<sup>3</sup> By examining

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**1** The debate on the need for a new periodization of Chinese literature, as well as on the legitimacy of such labels as 'May Fourth literature', 'modern literature' or even 'modernity', is well beyond the scope of this article (for a discussion see Hockx 1999). Here I use the expressions 'modern literature', 'new literature' or 'May Fourth literature' for convenience.

**2** The publications authored by the two intellectuals bear the names "J.B. [or J.-B.] [Jean-Baptiste] Kyn [or Kin] Yn Yu" or simply "Kyn [or Kin] Yn Yu" for Jing Yinyu, and "Sung-nien Hsu" for Xu Zhongnian/Xu Songnian respectively. Here I will use the *pinyin* transcription of these names for transparency.

**3** The focus of this article is more on the introduction of modern Chinese literature in France from a historical angle, as well as from the point of view of the two intellectuals' ideological projects, than on their specific translation strategies. The features of

the corpora and paratexts, I will attempt to scrutinize the two intellectuals' artistic and ideological stance *vis-à-vis* the new literary scene, in an attempt to pinpoint in what terms their agency contributed to foreign readers' awareness of the cultural, social and political experience of China in their time, and of the experience of May Fourth in particular.

## 2 Jing Yinyu's *Anthologie des conteurs chinois modernes*

### 2.1 The Author

Jing Yinyu, born in Suining (Sichuan) in 1901, was a moderately prolific writer and translator: as a member of the Creation Society (*Chuangzaoshe* 創造社) in Shanghai, he became acquainted with the prominent writers Guo Moruo 郭沫若 and Lu Xun 魯迅, among others. His first contributions to the Creation Society journals date from 1923, and his collection of short fiction *Mary* (*Mali* 瑪麗) was published in the "Association of Literary Studies Series" (*Wenxue yanjiuhui congshu* 文學研究會叢書) in 1925. One of the stories featured therein, "Grace and Charm" (*Niaonuo* 嫵娜), even made it into the *Compendium of Chinese New Literature* (*Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi* 中國新文學大系). Later the same year he left for France, where he enrolled in the Institut Franco-chinois de Lyon (IFCL): suffering from mental derangement linked to the syphilis he had contracted in Lyon, he abruptly returned to China in 1930 and most likely committed suicide by drowning himself in Hangzhou the following year.<sup>4</sup>

When scholars within and outside China focus on this somewhat mysterious figure, they generally do so for two intimately connected reasons. The first is Jing's association with Romain Rolland, which began in 1924 and became closer during his French years, leading to the popularization of Rolland's work in China (Loi 1982; Findeisen 2001; Zhang 2017). Indeed, Jing undertook a Chinese translation of *Jean-Christophe*, published in instalments in the prestigious *Short Story Monthly* (*Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小說月報) in the first quarter of 1926, but discontinued after the first three chapters. He also contributed some French-language essays to *Europe*, the literary jour-

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Jing's translations from Chinese have already been the object of several studies (Findeisen 2010; Rabut 2010; Magagnin 2013; Zhang 2016), while Xu's translations have yet to be closely investigated in this respect. A more in-depth scrutiny of Xu's translation strategies and a detailed comparison of the translations carried out by the two intellectuals, from the perspective of translation criticism, remain topics for future research.

<sup>4</sup> The year, place, and circumstances of Jing's death being still largely shrouded in mystery, I here follow Findeisen 2010.

nal founded by Rolland. The second reason of interest is the fact that Jing was the first to make Lu Xun's fiction available to a Western audience (Liu 1992; Wang 2009; Gao 2014; Liang 2016). His French rendition of "The True Story of A Q" (*A Q zhengzhuan* 阿Q正傳) was published with a foreword in *Europe* shortly after his arrival in France (Lu 1926). Jing also acted as an intermediary between Lu Xun and Rolland by translating their correspondence and mutual manifestations of praise (Foster 2001) – a testament to his life-long endeavour to consolidate cross-cultural relations. Only recently have some studies (Findeisen 2010; Rabut 2010; Magagnin 2013; Zhang 2016, 258-72) been devoted to his agency that focus specifically on his *Anthologie*, a milestone in his translating career that, oddly enough, had never before been the object of in-depth analysis.

## 2.2 The Project and the Corpus

The Parisian publisher Rieder issued Jing Yinyu's *Anthologie* in the late March of 1929 within the series "Les prosateurs étrangers modernes". Jing was probably encouraged to undertake the project by Rolland himself, who had highly praised Lu Xun's "The True Story of A Q" a few years earlier; besides, Rieder was also the publisher of *Europe*. The book seems to have enjoyed some success in intellectual circles that even crossed national and language barriers: it was promptly retranslated into English for a British (Jing, Mills 1930) and an American edition (Jing, Mills 1931), and later into Spanish by an Argentinian publisher (Jing 1944).

The *Anthologie* included a publisher's "Note" (Jing 1929, 7), an "Introduction" by Jing himself (9-12), and a total of nine pieces of short fiction in his French translation (13-190), as listed below:<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1** Works of modern literature included in Jing Yinyu's *Anthologie des conteurs chinois modernes*. *Établie et traduite avec une introduction par J. B. Kin Yn Yu*

Author	Translated French title	Original Chinese title
Chen Weimo 陳煒謨 (Tcheng Wi Mo)	"Mademoiselle Lysing"	<i>Xieshezhuayi yu lixiangzhuayi</i> 寫實主義與理想主義 (Realism and Idealism)
Luo Huasheng 落華生 (Lo Houa Sen)	"Après le crépuscule"	<i>Huanghun hou</i> 黃昏後 (After Dusk)
Jing Yinyu (J.-B. Kin Yn Yu)	"Un divorce"	Written directly in French

<sup>5</sup> The authors' names are indicated in their *pinyin* transcription, followed by the form used by Jing in the *Anthologie* in brackets. The French titles of the texts listed in the table are also Jing's.

Lu Xun (Lou Sioun)	“Con y Ki”	<i>Kong yiji</i> 孔乙己 (Kong Yi Ji)
Lu Xun (Lou Sioun)	“La vie de Ah Qui”	<i>A Q zhengzhuan</i> 阿Q正傳 (The True Story of A Q)
Lu Xun (Lou Sioun)	“Le pays natal”	<i>Guxiang</i> 故鄉 (Hometown)
Bing Xin 冰心 (Mademoiselle Ping Sing)	“Ennui”	<i>Fanmen</i> 煩悶 (Gloom)
Mao Dun 矛盾 (Mao Teng)	“Les illusions”	<i>Huanmie</i> 幻滅 (Disillusion)
Yu Dafu 郁達夫 (Yo Ta Fou)	“Un désenchanté”	<i>Yinhui se de si</i> 銀灰色的死 (The Silver-Gray Death)

Two of the nine stories had already been published in *Europe*, namely, the aforementioned “La vie de Ah Qui” (Lu 1926) and, only two weeks before the book came out, “Mademoiselle Lysing” (Chen 1929). Jing’s *Anthologie* includes a few soon-to-be classics of modern Chinese literature: besides displaying all the stylistic and thematic peculiarities of the latter, the corpus selected by Jing gives voice to the grievances, ideals, and social and political claims of the intellectuals who were linked, to variable extents, to the May Fourth Movement. The celebrated stories by Lu Xun portray the debasement of the intellectual, the degeneration of the national character, and the tensions and unease felt by the young generations in the transition from a rural, traditional culture to a ‘modernity’ that comes with a feeling of tragic disorientation. The stories by Chen Weimo, Yu Dafu and Jing Yinyu himself, much in the spirit of the Creation Society, bring to the fore characters fighting against a cruel society that seems to reject them, look in vain for pure love, and resist the constraints of traditional morals, especially traditional marriage practices: in Yu’s case they slip into decadence and debauchery, whereas Jing’s protagonist finds a new meaning in his life by joining the revolutionary army. Melancholy dominates Luo Huasheng’s (pen name of Xu Dishan 許地山) story of family grief and newfound hope, while Bing Xin and Mao Dun, by using the tools of Realism, describe the slow descent into depression and disillusion induced by an oppressive society that crushes young people’s ambitions and expectations.

Jing’s – somewhat pretentious – choice to include his own work, written directly in French (Zhang 2016, 265), deserves some final considerations. It is highly possible, as Rabut (2010, 198) suggests, that he felt entitled to present himself as not simply a translator of the great Chinese writers of his time included in his collection, but as their peer. On a less kind note, one could even insinuate that, by doing so, Jing was hoping to obtain, in French-speaking learned circles, the kind of literary recognition that he was being denied in his own country.

### 2.3 The Translation

No mention is made by Jing of a specific strategy adopted in the translation of the stories contained in his *Anthologie*. However, an interesting statement that points to the supposed untranslatability of Chinese logic is found in the “Introduction”: “sudden, concise, with no links to one another, [the Chinese’s] intuitive truths have to be promptly grasped. They are also difficult to put into words. Even more so, how could they be subjected to translation?”<sup>6</sup> (Jing 1929, 9-10). The “Note” that opens the book offers more interesting details. By the publisher’s account, in three cases – namely, the stories by Bing Xin, Mao Dun, and Yu Dafu – they agreed to resort to adaptations, “a bastard genre that we are no more ready to accept today than we once were” (7), instead of complete translations, and they confess to having been persuaded to break this editorial golden rule by Jing’s cogent arguments. Since “the field of new and genuine Chinese literature is still too sparse for us to be spoilt for choice”, they thought it best to “include texts that, if adapted with the appropriate technique, would retain part of their authentic and original flavor”, instead of “works that, if translated literally, would only result in a poor outcome” (7). Did such a statement reflect an earnest concern with the acceptability of works whose setting, style, and narrative were perceived as potentially challenging for the intended reader? Or was this simply a pretext for Jing to justify his far-reaching rewriting and recreation, in a further attempt to establish himself as a respected interpreter of the Chinese literature of his time? This is hard to determine with any reasonable level of certainty.

Be that as it may, the noteworthy part of Jing’s agency as a translator lies precisely in his adaptations – not only the three overt ones, signalled by the annotation “after...” (*d’après*), but also those carried out covertly. His translations of Lu Xun’s stories are generally close to their originals and prove “fairly solid renderings that have not necessarily been superseded by later translations” (Findeisen 2010, 146). The renditions of Luo Huasheng’s and Bing Xin’s works show some localised alterations and substantial omissions, possibly designed to make the plot clearer and sounder, as is also the case with Chen Weimo’s text (Zhang 2016, 263). Other stories undergo a more in-depth process of transcreation. Mao Dun’s “Les illusions” is a heavily abridged version of the original novella *Huanmie*, characterised by extensive rewriting and a high degree of structural rearrangement, as shown by Findeisen (2010). This strategy may have been carried out by Jing in order to redress the imbalances and weaknesses of the original plot at the level of character representation (e.g. by pre-

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6 All translations from French were made by the Author.

senting the female protagonist as a stronger woman than she was in the original). This makes the work a *transposition* that may even have improved the original (156). Similar considerations apply to “Un désenchanté”, with its radical rewriting of some portions of the original plot. For example, the protagonist’s musings on the happy life by the side of his late beloved wife are drastically rewritten into an outburst of rage, full of bitterness and resentment, at a still living but estranged spouse. Details from other stories by Yu Dafu are interspersed in the narrative, and the main character’s debauchery and whoring and drinking habits are expanded, or even added altogether, in order to stress his moral degradation (Rabut 2010; Magagnin 2013). These far-reaching changes may have been made to emphasise the deep transformations occurring in social and gender relationships, and generally to exacerbate the binary opposition between old and new – another trait of May Fourth literature in general, and of the writings of the Creation Society in particular. In other passages, Christian and Buddhist notions are inserted, thus adding or strongly emphasising a sense of spirituality that is absent, or at most only implicit, in the original (Rabut 2010, 196; Magagnin 2013, 139-40).

Jing possessed undeniable linguistic skills and writing talent in his second language, which he enriched with his own erudition and a strong lyrical sensibility, despite often slipping into overly exotic and somewhat baffling phrasing. He also inserted details that could only be construed by highly educated Chinese readers, and abstained from clarifying cultural references that remained largely unintelligible to his French-speaking audience. However, this may have been compensated by the latter’s willingness to accept the unfamiliar in the reading process (Rabut 2010, 196-8; Magagnin 2013, 140).

## 2.4 The Paratext

In his “Introduction”, dating from January 1929, Jing claims to have established an anthology of short stories upon request of some “European friends, curious about the evolution of Chinese thought” (Jing 1929, 9). At the head of these “European friends”, of course, was his mentor Rolland. A promotional leaflet accompanying the *Anthologie* contains the following statement: “if this book were not considered primarily a testimony, it would probably defeat its essential purpose” (Les Éditions Rieder, s.d.). Curiously enough for an accomplished writer and translator who even included his own work in the collection, the literary value of these stories does not seem to be as important to him as their documentary value and sociological relevance. Jing qualifies the stories he selected as “generally works by students” (1929, 9) who are “mostly too young” and “have not yet probed the meanders of the Dao” (11). Even if “they are not writers,

not in the European sense of the word”, they still “prove praiseworthy in that they try to expand their horizons” (11) by following the teachings of European writers, and are therefore capable of revealing “a new phase of China” to French readers (10). In addition to this, the text is interspersed with classical quotations (notably from the *Laozi* 老子 and the *Zhuangzi* 莊子), and contains a barrage of pseudo-Daoist statements that may resonate with the expectations of an European audience that, until that point, had only had access – if at all – to a strongly exoticised image of China. The latter is described as “so mysterious yet so simple” (9) and the Chinese are referred to as “black-eyed sage[s]” (10), “quiet, silent, yet profound”, possessing a “primitive” logic (9).

Lu Xun deserves a special mention: “he is an enemy of the Dao”, Jing states, “but may understand it better than most of those who are only superficially Daoists or Confucianists” (12). Elsewhere, Lu Xun is also celebrated as “one of [China’s] most renowned authors” (Lu 1926, 56) thanks to the skilful combination of psychological analysis and symbolism that can be observed in “La vie de Ah Qui”, a masterpiece of satirical realism that denounces all the evils of the old society. Jing suggests, however, that behind Lu Xun’s passionate hatred for “the old Chinese spirit (in its negative aspects)” (1929, 12) one could actually see a heartfelt desire to revive traditional wisdom. Indeed, Jing’s praise seems to go to the classics, because of their unique ability to encapsulate the spirit of a nation in few, elegant words (11). Even so, a passing annotation on the merits and expressive potential of the new vernacular, or “plain language” (*baihua* 白話), is made when Hu Shi 胡適 is credited with having replaced the ancient literary language with a simpler and more accessible one, the same language used by “students” (10-11). Apparently, however, Jing saw the new intellectuals as still too immature to bring significant social and cultural change, and believed that a solution to the current unrest could only be sought within the nation itself. The closing lines tellingly state that “after having tried in vain the remedies of Europe, which are not suitable for its illness, China, by a huge detour, will plunge again into the depths of the Dao” (12). Perhaps, these lines reveal how Jing was less of an iconoclast and an advocate of revolutionary literature than his association with the Creation Society – and of his picks for the *Anthologie* – might at first lead us to believe.



### 3 **Xu Zhongnian's *Anthologie de la littérature chinoise.* Des origines à nos jours**

#### 3.1 The Author

Born in Dongting (Jiangsu) in 1904, in 1921 Xu Zhongnian was among the young Chinese who left for France in the framework of a work-study (*qingong jianxue* 勤工儉學) programme sponsored by the government. Upon his arrival he enrolled in the IFCL, where he inevitably met Jing Yinyu. While in France, he also got in contact with Rolland and visited him several times. In 1926 Xu enrolled at the Université de Lyon and obtained his doctoral degree *ès lettres* in January 1930, with a dissertation entitled *Li Thai-po, son temps, sa vie et son œuvre* (published in book form in Beijing in 1934 under a slightly different title, and in Lyon in 1935). After returning to China in October 1930, he was appointed professor of French language and literature at several prestigious universities, and held prominent positions in organisations devoted to the promotion of Sino-French friendship and cooperation. Despite being a Nationalist Party sympathizer, he did not leave for Taiwan after the end of the civil war and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. In 1956 he obtained a position as professor of French at the Shanghai Foreign Language Institute. Denounced as a rightist in 1958, he was also persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, before being fully rehabilitated in 1979 and resuming his scholarly and teaching work. He died in Shanghai in 1981.

A prolific scholar and translator of French literature, in addition to his substantial scholarly output, Xu was responsible for the Chinese renditions - some of them still popular today - of several classics, including Dumas' *Les Trois mousquetaires* and Dumas fils' *La Dame aux camélias*. Conversely, he also greatly contributed to the popularization of Chinese literature, mainly from the premodern era: he did so by penning some three hundred articles in literary journals and publishing several volumes of translations in France and especially in China for the French-language publisher Imprimerie de la Politique de Pékin. Celebrated as a pioneer of Sino-French cultural relations (Yang 2013), Xu is mostly an object of scholarly research because of his merits in establishing a cultural bridge through his French translation of Chinese classics (Che 2016; Ma 2016). However, his role as a translator of modern literature has been largely neglected or is only mentioned with reference to his interest in Lu Xun (Liang 2016), while an in-depth scrutiny of his *Anthologie de la littérature chinoise* has yet to be conducted.

### 3.2 The Project and the Corpus

Xu's *Anthologie*, published in Paris in 1932, two years after its editor had returned to China from his studies in France, is an ambitious attempt to collect the milestones of Chinese literature, thought and historiography from their origins to the present day. The novelty, exhaustiveness and scholarly significance of this endeavour were praised by some European sinologists (Giles 1934), but the book seems to have enjoyed less success compared to Jing's. Surprisingly enough, or perhaps out of modesty, Xu makes no mention of his own work when lamenting the lack of a comprehensive and scientific history of Chinese literature, nearly two decades after its publication (Xu 1950). However, the *Anthologie* still had some cross-national impact within Europe: some of Xu's French renditions of Tang poems later became source texts for an Italian collection of Chinese premodern poetry, edited by Giorgia Valensin (1943) and prefaced by none other than Eugenio Montale, while three modern poems were given a Swedish retranslation by the poet Gunnar Ekelöf (1943).

The *Anthologie* features quite a long "Introduction" (Xu 1932, 5-90), which was written in Shanghai and carries the date of September 9, 1931. It is followed by the anthology proper (91-432), which includes Xu's French translations of representative works and excerpts, divided into five sections (poetry, fiction, drama, philosophy, and historiography) and listed chronologically. Of relevance to our investigation is the selection of modern literature, which excludes drama, philosophy, and historiography altogether and only comprises the fourteen poems (218-225) and four short stories (305-345) listed below:<sup>7</sup>

**Table 2** Works of modern literature included in Xu Zhongnian's *Anthologie de la littérature chinoise. Des origines à nos jours*

Author	Translated French title	Original Chinese title
<b>Poetry</b>		
Hu Shi (Hou Che)	"En gravissant la montagne"	<i>Shang shan</i> 上山 (Climbing a mountain)
Guo Moruo (Kouo Mo-jo)	"Aurore"	<i>Chenxing</i> 晨興 (Daybreak)
Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (Siu Tche-mo)	"C'est un monde lâche"	<i>Zhe shi yige qienuo de shijie</i> 這是一個怯懦的世界 (This is a gutless world)

<sup>7</sup> As in Table 1, authors' names are indicated in *pinyin* and followed by the form used by Xu (in his own, often inaccurate, phonetic transcription) in brackets. The French titles listed are also those used by Xu. However, Mu Ding's attribution remains uncertain, and I have been unable to identify the Chinese title of the poem by Wang Yi'an.

Xu Zhimo (Siu Tche-mo)	“Allez-vous-en”	<i>Qu ba</i> 去吧 (Go away)
Xu Zhimo (Siu Tche-mo)	“Poison”	<i>Duyao</i> 毒藥 (Poison)
Bing Xin (Ping-sin)	“Pluie nocturne”	<i>Yu de ye</i> 雨的夜 (Rainy night)
Bing Xin (Ping-sin)	“Mère”	<i>Muqin</i> 母親 (Mother)
Kang Baiqing 康白情 (K'ang Po-ts'ing)	“Doute”	<i>Yiwen</i> 疑問 (Doubt)
Zong Baihua 宗白華 (Tsong Po-houa)	“Hiver”	<i>Dong</i> 冬 (Winter)
Liu Dabai 劉大白 (Lieou Ta-po)	“Feuilles mortes, X”	<i>Luoye zhi qun</i> 落葉之群 (A bunch of dead leaves) (10th stanza)
Xu Dange 徐丹歌 (Siu Tan-ko)	“Je suis un démon”	Written directly in French?
Mu Ding 牧丁? (Me-cheng)	“Deux étoiles brillantes”	<i>Xing</i> 星 (Stars)
Feng Zhi 馮至 (Fong Tche)	“Le reste du vin”	<i>Canyu de jiu</i> 殘餘的酒 (The liquor left)
Wang Yi'an 王怡庵 (Wang Yé-ngan)	“Baiser”	N/A
<b>Fiction</b>		
Lu Xun (Lou Sin)	“K'ong Yi-ki”	<i>Kong yiji</i> (Kong Yi Ji)
Zhu Ziqing 朱自清 (Tchou Tseu-ts'ing)	“L'histoire des rires”	<i>Xiao de lishi</i> 笑的歷史 (The history of laughter)
Yu Dafu (Yu Ta-fou)	“Sang et larmes”	<i>Xuelei</i> 血淚 (Blood and tears)
Guai An 夬庵 (Yang-ngan)	“Une fillette d'une vertu inflexible”	<i>Yige zhenlie de nühaizi</i> 一個貞烈的女孩子 (A virtuous and strong girl)

Some of the poems featured clearly embody the style and spirit of the new *baihua* literature, as is particularly evident in Hu Shi's and Xu Zhimo's texts. Hu Shi's poem is permeated by the sense of the sublime and makes extensive use of several stylistic devices favoured by the new generation of writers, especially anaphora and exclamation. These general traits also characterise Xu Zhimo's three poems; moreover, “Poison” makes widespread use of disturbing symbolist imagery, which adds to the gloomy tenor of the verses. Surprisingly, however, most of the other poems are significantly more lyrical and peaceful, as typified by Zong Baihua's “Hiver”. Indeed, despite their general use of free verse, some reveal a manifest influence of the Chinese tradition in which Xu was particularly well-versed, as witnessed by his life-long activity as a scholar and translator of classics. Even Guo Moruo's “Aurore”, with its conventional tropes and orderly stanzaic scheme, is an odd choice for an author who had earned his reputation thanks to his bombastic and vigorous style. Paradoxical-

ly enough, “Je suis un démon”, which Xu may have written directly in French under his pseudonym Xu Dange, reads like a blatant imitation of Guo’s “The Heavenly Hound” (*Tiangou* 天狗), with its pounding rhythm, the persistent “I” opening each stanza, and its radically iconoclastic message. Xu Zhongnian could not resist the temptation to carve out a little space for himself, either: but the fact that he did so under a pen name, perfectly opaque to his French readers, may sweep away the suspicion that he was driven by similar reasons as Jing Yinyu.

The works of short fiction picked by Xu are largely in line with the typical themes of May Fourth literature. Like Lu Xun’s “K’ong Yi-ki” (which had also been included in Jing’s collection), Yu Dafu’s “Sang et larmes” portrays – with harshness and sarcasm – the humiliation of modern intellectuals through its protagonist, a poorly paid writer unable to follow a profitable ‘-ism.’ In Zhu Ziqing’s “L’histoire des rires”, told from a female perspective, the youthful enthusiasm of a young bride is slowly eroded by the oppression of the traditional family, which emphasises the contrast between the constraints imposed by old customs and the desire to express one’s feelings. A comparable theme and tone are found in the rather obscure “Une fillette d’une vertu inflexible” by Guai An, whose protagonist is starved to death by her family after the loss of her fiancé, only to be celebrated by the local notables as a girl of exemplary chastity.

### 3.3 The Translation

Toward the end of the first part of the “Introduction”, Xu briefly explains the criteria that have inspired his work as a translator:

The best method of translation is obviously *tight translation* [*traduction serrée*]. By this term I mean *any translation rigorously faithful to the idea expressed in the original text*. The ‘word-for-word’ translation method is not foolproof. First, we cannot always find an expression, a turn of phrase, a French word that corresponds *exactly* to the Chinese characters. Even if this could be achieved, would a literary work thus translated give an even approximate idea of the original text? So, I have translated word-for-word whenever I could; but where it has been impossible for me to use this method, I have sought and employed the phrases, the expressions or the French words which come closest to the Chinese text. (Xu 1932, 6-7; emphasis in the original)

Vocabulary-wise, the notion of ‘tight translation’ seems to echo Lu Xun’s own ‘hard translation’ (*yingyi* 硬譯), namely, a non-idiomatic strategy aiming to reproduce – to the fullest possible extent – not

only the content, but also the formal traits of the original. However, the labels Xu uses here are somewhat ambiguous. What he means by “word-for-word translation” in the first occurrence is indeed similar to hard translation. However, in the second occurrence, this strategy is contrasted with one that comes closer to the original text: in this sense, the description now seems to point to Berman’s concept of ‘literal translation’, in the sense of a translation which “does not reproduce the facticity [i.e. the formal appearance] of the original, but the logic that underlies such a facticity” (Berman 1999, 141). The two statements appear somewhat contradictory – unless, of course, Xu understands ‘text’ as ‘the idea expressed in the original text’.

All labels aside, a scrutiny of the translations shows how Xu generally refrains from adopting a domesticating strategy in favour of an essentially philological approach. Still, his translator’s style is vivid and sophisticated, just like his own French writing; he does not surrender to unidiomatic phrasing, and avoids all unnecessary exoticism. At the same time, he provides the readers with all the tools that are indispensable for an in-depth, contextualised reading of the text, as exemplified by the frequent use of footnotes.

### 3.4 The Paratext

The “Introduction” of the *Anthologie* opens with the editor’s reasons for taking up the project. Xu declares to have collected “all the pieces that someone aspiring to [understand] Chinese literature should know” (1932, 5), devoting substantial space to poetry, fiction, and drama, following the principles of accuracy and impartiality (6). His purpose, he continues, is to provide a supplement to the existing anthologies of Chinese literature, which he deems wanting and unsatisfactory, especially when it comes to fiction and drama, which are wrongly considered to be lesser genres. His notes on the translation method adopted, found at the end of the preamble, have already been discussed (§ 3.3). The editor then goes on to present chronologically the history of Chinese civilisation and its cultural achievements. For each epoch, a profile of major intellectuals, schools, and genres is provided, along with a brief outline of significant works.

Let us now focus on the section discussing the 20th century, which occurs at the end of the “Introduction” (80-90). The debate on *baihua* and the new literary language is described in detail, and the merits of the “new school” of intellectuals who advocate innovation are recognised, against the resistance shown by such conservatives as “the stubborn Lin Shu” and “the smiling Yan Fu” (83). The new expressive possibilities disclosed by the new language are specially celebrated by Xu: despite the political and social pressure,

the new intellectual scene seems to benefit greatly from the newly achieved linguistic freedom (84).

According to Xu, “philosophy is dying” (82), with a few notable exceptions; “history has not produced any great masters, either” but, “philosophy and history aside, the evolution of poetry, fiction, novel and drama has brought about the emergence of a literature that is still young, yet aware of itself and its destiny” (83). Drama has witnessed some developments but appears generally monotonous and unconvincing: for instance, when Guo Moruo superposes new ideas onto old forms in his historical plays, “it is exactly as if a top hat were placed on Confucius’s head, which often causes laughter” (86). This verdict may well explain why translations of philosophical, historical, and theatrical works are excluded altogether from the anthology.

From Xu’s point of view, the literary forms that show the highest vitality within the new cultural landscape are poetry and fiction. In some cases, young poets appear to be still caught between classical tropes and forms and a modern sensibility, as is the case with Hu Shi (84); some are influenced by European poetry, like Guo Moruo and even more so Xu Zhimo, the latter being acclaimed as “the best representative of this school”, whereas others find their inspiration in the conciseness of Japanese poetry and in Tagore’s works (85).

Xu is unequivocal in praising the young, bold fiction emerging in his time: he has words of praise for Yu Dafu, Zhang Ziping, and Mao Dun, but appreciates Lu Xun in particular. The latter’s artistic production, while still meagre at the time, is declared to be of outstanding quality, and “some of [his] short stories [...] are real masterpieces” (86). This admiration is also witnessed by a French-language article published shortly before the *Anthologie*, in which Xu presents Lu Xun’s first short fiction collection *Outcry* (*Nahan* 呐喊) as a milestone in the new literature of China (Xu 1931). Some years later, when Xu became a regular contributor for the column “La littérature chinoise d’aujourd’hui” in the French-language *Journal de Shanghai*, he chose to inaugurate this collaboration with a French translation of Lu Xun’s story “Soap” (*Feizao* 肥皂) (Lu 1934). Guo Moruo is also the object of some interesting remarks. Although Guo is esteemed for some of his prose, “he writes too much”, especially now that he is producing an enormous amount of communist propaganda, which leads Xu to make the following statement: “I am not interested in politics in the least, but when the pen trots quickly, it cannot dig deep” (1932, 85).

Nevertheless, politics, in its broadest sense, is far from absent from Xu’s argument. In the final part of his “Introduction”, the editor reflects on the importance of freeing literature from the traditional burden of moral preoccupations, a process with which contemporary writers are still coming to terms: “few authors dare to express frankly what they think: the slow Confucian poison has not yet finished to work its ravages” (88). Now that they have thrown off the

yoke of a tradition based on sheer imitation, Xu continues, the new writers are “both too personal and not personal enough”, giving in to narcissism and a tendency to excessive introspection. At the same time, many of his fellow countrymen seem to resist a “modernity” that they feel would bring an excess of “material civilization” (89). Despite all these obstructions and contradictions, unsurprisingly common in times of transition, Xu gives voice to a twofold hope: on the one hand, “that this modern civilization, often rejected in its healthy contributions and often enthusiastically welcomed in its dangerous aspects, will be established and spread peace and well-being among us”; on the other hand, “that the new generations, which now possess a new tool (*baihua*), will work unrelentingly, methodically, with patience and *conscience*, and follow the example of a great number of their elders” (90). The ability to *evolve*, Xu concludes, is the key to survival; without it, “Chinese civilization will only live on in the souls of a few artists and people of learning” (90).

#### 4 Conclusions

Jing Yinyu and Xu Zhongnian are two intellectuals who, at the turn of the 1930s, undertook the pioneering enterprise of making the most recent literary developments in China known to a foreign audience – in their case, a French-speaking one. They did so by establishing a small canon of modern literary works, providing their own translations, and resorting to paratextual devices to comment – more or less extensively – on the young generation of writers and their output. In this sense, Jing and Xu played a pivotal role in the introduction of modern Chinese literature and culture in France – and beyond – in the first half of the 20th century. To accurately assess the scope of their influence on international readers and on the learned community of their time is no easy feat. However, if nothing else, the fact that some of their renditions of modern Chinese fiction and poetry became source material for retranslations into other languages over the two following decades is a testament to the significance of their contribution, which came at a time when international awareness of the new cultural landscape of China was still very scant. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to state that they were among the first – and arguably the most authoritative – intellectuals to give the world a glimpse of a changing China, by introducing a selection of the literature fostered by the May Fourth Movement.

Unsurprisingly, Jing and Xu present certain similarities in terms of the nature and traits of their agency: this is almost inevitable, considering that they belonged to the same generation, had a largely similar educational background and pursued similar studies, shared the same artistic interests and a few friendships, and even attended the same establishment – the IFCL, a hotbed of prominent foreign-edu-

cated Chinese intellectuals since the early 1920s.

Firstly, the two share an explicit admiration for Lu Xun, who enjoys a special place in their translations and – particularly in Jing’s case – in their career as a whole: it is mostly thanks to them that the author of “The True Story of A Q” first came to be known and read outside China as the putative father of modern Chinese literature.

Secondly, Jing and Xu made an effort to bring to the fore all the tropes and stylistic features of May Fourth literature: a literary reflection of the debates between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ and of the radical social and cultural transformations that were taking place in China at the time.

Thirdly, by engaging in their respective projects, Jing and Xu unquestionably pursued self-legitimation in the eyes of their intended audience, by presenting themselves as authoritative spokespersons of the new literary scene, as well as privileged interpreters of the complex social, political, and cultural situation of China. At the same time, it could be suggested that they also strove to obtain recognition from their French-educated Chinese peers, starting from their fellow students at the IFCL. Their linguistic and artistic background naturally supported this attempt; their excellent proficiency in the French language, as well as their ties with such a celebrated representative of French-speaking cultural circles as Romain Rolland, certainly helped provide them with the cultural capital they needed for their enterprise.

Despite these similarities, their paths show some major differences. These are immediately obvious in the nature of their work and in the selection of a canon. Jing’s *Anthologie* is a literary collection that only focuses on modern fiction, presented as a document of the evolution of Chinese thought. In Xu’s project, which is much more ambitious in scope and critical depth (and which certainly had scholarly value in the eyes of its author), the translations of new literary works only cover poetry and fiction and represent but a part of the whole project. Moreover, Jing explicitly aspired to be recognised as standing on the same level as the writers that he included in his collection, whereas Xu was much less explicit in this respect.

Substantial disparities can also be observed at the level of translation strategies. Jing did not refrain from heavily manipulating the Chinese originals, either in order to make them more suitable to the supposed taste of his readers or because of a “creator’s complex” (Rabut 2010, 98) that was often expressed to the detriment of intelligibility. Contrary to Jing, Xu adopted a more philological approach, bringing the foreign reader closer to the Chinese text instead than the other way around, by means of a vast array of paratextual devices.

Differences in the use of exoticizing discourse also deserve to be pointed out. In both his “Introduction” and his translations, Jing frequently resorted to unannotated exotic expressions and no-



tions – perhaps another attempt at self-canonization that relied on the conventional, well-established image of China familiar to his European readership. Conversely, exoticism is virtually absent from Xu's *Anthologie*, in line with the academic preoccupations of its compiler.

Finally, the diverging ideological stances of the two intellectuals with regard to the situation in China is noteworthy. Jing Yinyu explicitly praised classical knowledge and even championed a 'return to the Dao' to bring an end to decades of national turmoil, even if this claim seems to clash with his artistic persona, that of a modern and progressive intellectual. This contradiction, however, may be only apparent, as most May Fourth intellectuals experienced a life-long tension between traditional values and radical viewpoints. That said, one might be surprised to see how Xu, a scholar of premodern literature who never denied his partiality for the classics (and might even superficially seem conservative), not only sung the praises of the new literature and condemned the 'Confucian poison' that prevented it from expressing its full potential, but even went as far as to advocate progress and evolution as the only path leading to peace and national salvation.

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