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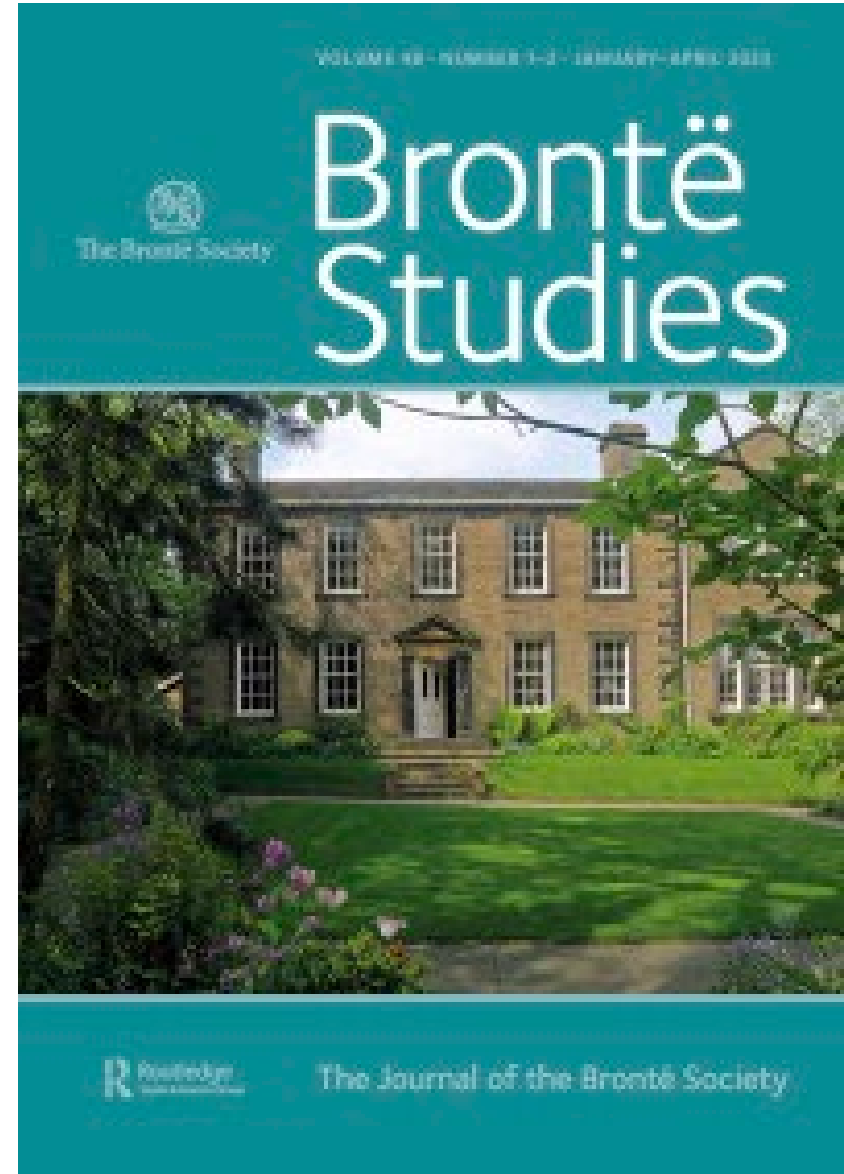


Jane Eyre in China, 1867-1949: A Transnational Transfer and Cross-Cultural Spread

PRESENTER: TIANMING BAI, Cotutelle-PhD candidate in English
Fudan University & Macquarie University

17 August 2023

- Bai, Tianming. “*Jane Eyre* in China, 1867-1949: A Transnational Transfer and Cross-Cultural Spread.” *Brontë Studies*, 48: 1-2 (April 2023), pp. 99-114. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14748932.2023.2182167>.



- Although there has been growing scholarly interest in the Brontë studies in China since its Reform and Opening-up (*gaige kaifang*) in the late 1970s, the Brontë sisters' initial entry to China, the translation of their works, and their Chinese reception before 1949 have not been adequately mapped out. My presentation first delves into the transnational journey of the Brontës to China in Shanghai-based English newspapers. It then examines how the intellectual debate over literary translation in the 1920s preconditions the quintessentially Chinese reception of *Jane Eyre* and its cinematic reconstruction in the coming decades, centred on whether they were of political relevance to China. I attend to the ways in which the controversial Chinese reception of *Jane Eyre* and its 1944 film adaptation unveils a Chinese society that was dramatically transforming itself on intellectual, socio-political, and military fronts. In so doing, my research sheds new light on the interpretation of *Jane Eyre* through a Chinese lens.



Abstract

- The Brontës in Shanghai-based English-language newspapers, 1867-1946
- Intellectual debate over literary translation during the New Culture Movement, 1915-1923
- The introductions of Charlotte Brontë, the translation of *Jane Eyre* and its early reception, 1923-1945
- Reception of *Jane Eyre* and its movie adaptation after the Second Sino-Japanese War, 1946-1949



Structure

The Brontës in Shanghai-based English-language
newspapers, 1867-1946



PART I

The Brontës in Shanghai-based English-language newspapers, 1867-1946

- Qing Dynasty, the last dynastic rule over China: 1644-1912
- Two Opium Wars: the first, 1840-1842; the second, 1856-1860
- Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* translated into Chinese: 1872
- Seven novels of Charles Dickens rendered in Chinese: 1907-1914
- Treaties like that of Nanjing, which concluded the two Opium Wars, provided *de jure* guarantees for the boost of missionary work and an outpouring of English newspapers in Shanghai (port cities).



The Treaty of Nanjing

This treaty, signed on 29 August 1842, marked the end of the First Opium War. Made between the Qing and Britain, it was the first of China's unequal treaties with foreign powers. It ended the 'Canton system', whereby European and American traders were restricted to Guangzhou, Guangzhou, Xiamen,

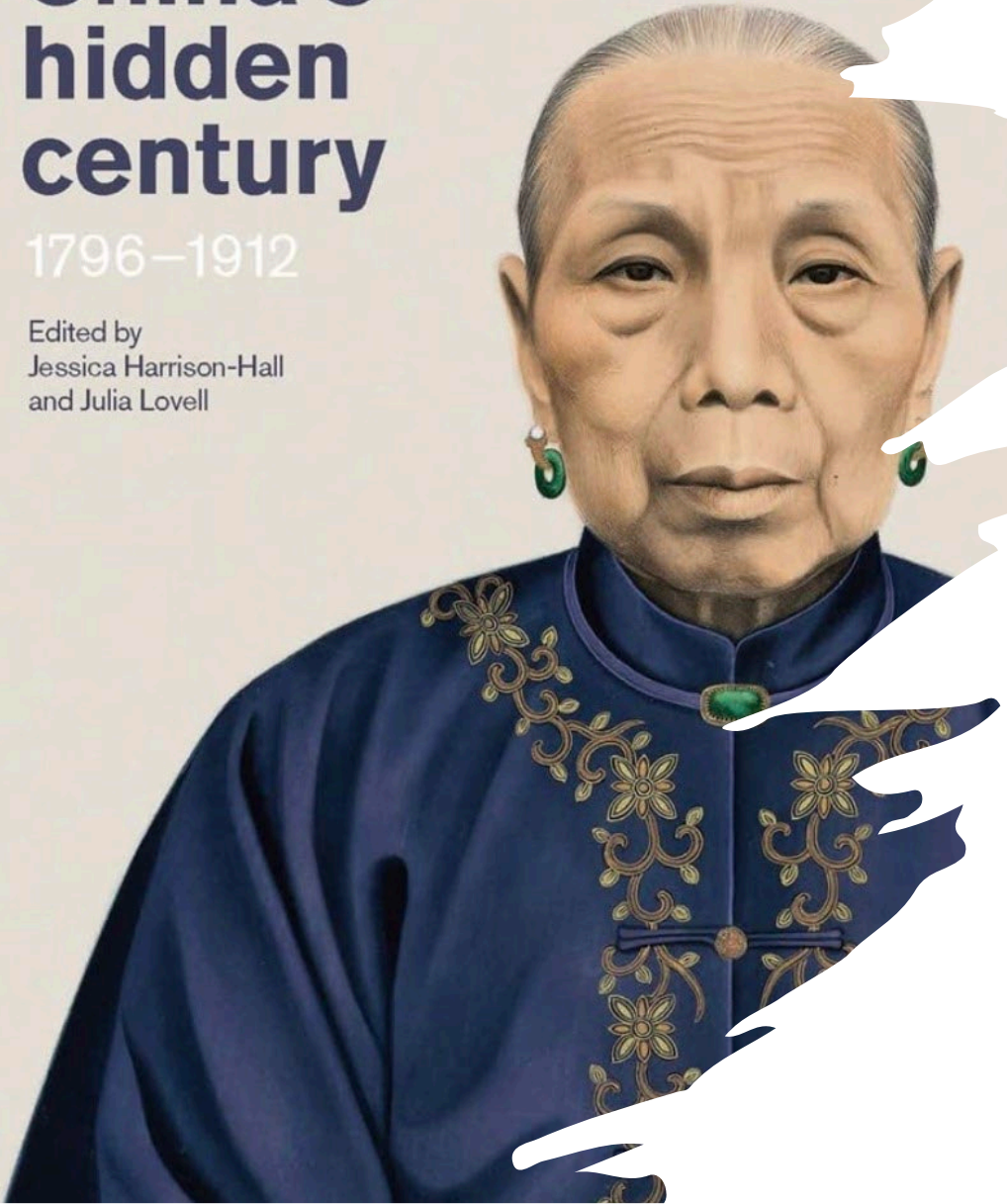
Document; ink and wax on paper
29 August 1842
Nanjing
On loan from The National Archives,
UK, FO 93/23/1b

The Citi exhibition

China's hidden century

1796–1912

Edited by
Jessica Harrison-Hall
and Julia Lovell



- “The signing of the unequal Treaty of Nanjing (1842) led to more ports being forcibly opened to foreign trade.”

From “[An introduction to 19th-century China](#),”
by Jessica Harrison-Hall, Head of the Chinese
Section at the British Museum

North-China Daily News

and the first Brontë-related news

The *North-China Daily News* (*Zilin xibao*, 1864–1951) is the daily edition of the weekly *North-China Herald* (*Beihua jiebao*, 1850–1940) which was founded by the British auctioneer Henry Shearman (1802–1856) in the British concession in Shanghai in 1850.

[1867] It was reported in the newspaper that English nationals in Shanghai were promised a ‘visitation’ of three bishops, like those readers of ‘one of Miss Brontë’s novels’ who were apprised that ‘at a particular date a shower of curates fell in the North of England’ (*North-China Daily News*, February 16, 1867; see also *Brontë Shirley* [1849] 2008, 5).



North China Daily News building, a historical Neo-Renaissance-style office building located at 17 Bund, Shanghai, CHN, which currently houses the American International Assurance (AIA)

North-China Daily News

and Brontë-
related news from
1904 onwards

- 1914-1949: 17 issues of the *North-China Daily News* covered a multifarious combination of topics pertaining to the Brontës.
- The obituary of Augustine Birrell (1850-1933): he was remembered for “Essays and Bronte Life [sic]”.

▲圖書館新添書籍表

書名	著者
● 小說類	
Charlotte Bronte.....	E. F. Benson
Great Modern British Plays.....	1e32
Plays of a Half Decade.....	1933
Wesley.....	James Laver
What Would Be The Character of a New War?.....	Norman Angell
What is Technocracy.....	Alan Raymond
Gordon, An Intimate Portrait.....	H. E. Wortham
Japan, Mistress of the Pacific.....	Etherton and Tiltman
The Medici.....	G. F. Young
Escapers All, Personal Narrative of Fifteen Prisoners of War..	
● 小說類	
The Poison Trail.....	Anthony Armstrong
Travail of Gold.....	E. F. Benson
Tales of the Sea.....	"Blackwood"
In Lighter Vein.....	"Blackwood"
The Advances of Harriet.....	Phyllis Bottome
Nobody Starves.....	Catherine Brody
Tom's A-Cold.....	John Collier
The Hog's Back Mystery.....	F. W. Crofts
Finale.....	Winifred Duke
The Gold Falcon.....	Anonymous
Accorned Hog.....	Shamus Frazer
The Sea Tyrant.....	Peter Freuchen
Sergeant Whaisname.....	L. Patrick Greene
Jenny Rorke.....	Muriel Hine
The Paradine Case.....	Robert Hichens
Julian Grant Loses His Way.....	Claude Houghton

Possible cross-fertilisation between the newspaper's English readers and Chinese communities in Shanghai

E. F. Benson's *Charlotte Brontë* (1932) headed the 'List of Newly Arrived Books to the Library,' 1933, *The Municipal Gazette* (Chinese edition) of Shanghai Municipal Council 4 (29): 447. English words in this image appear sideways because Chinese characters at that time wrote from top to bottom, and the typesetting of English in this book list followed the Chinese style of writing.

Intellectual debate over literary translation during
the New Culture Movement, 1915-1923

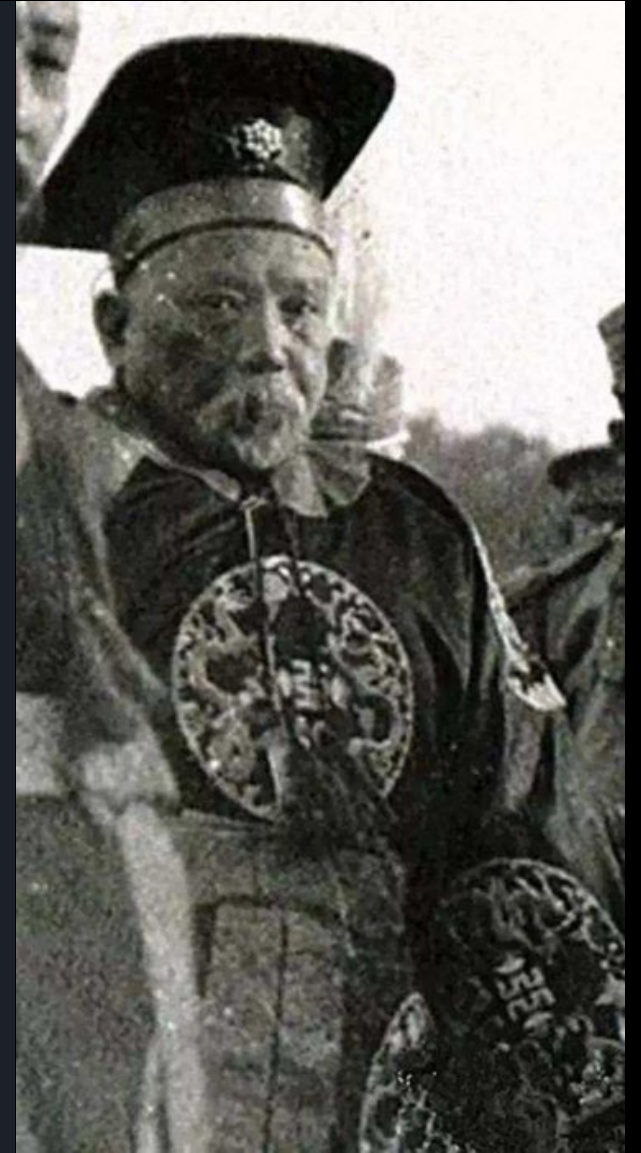


PART II



Context

- The end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 and the subsequent founding of Republic of China in 1912
- The 1915 political fiasco of restoring hereditary monarchy in China initiated by Yuan Shikai (1859-1916)
- Two pictures of Yuan Shikai in 1915, one Republican-styled, one [right] before his “coronation”





Leading figures of New Culture Movement debating the importance of literary translation in China

- From left to right: [Chen Duxiu](#) (1879-1942), [Zhou Zuoren](#) (1885-1967), [Mao Dun](#) (1896-1981) [Li Dazhao](#) (1889-1927)



The Chinese intelligentsia were actively involved in debating the categorization of literary works to be translated in a descending order of urgency

- On 27 December 1920, Zhou Zuoren wrote to Shen Yanbing (best known for his penname Mao Dun) on the issue of translated literature, repudiating the call by Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao for translating Western literary classics amidst Chinese scholars.
- Zhou identified works to be translated in two categories. The first category was **classic literature** translated for scholarly purposes, including Goethe's *Faust*, 'one or two dramas by Shakespeare', and Cervantes's *Don Quixote*; the second was the 'must-reads' which 'mainly consist of literary works of **modern times**'



The difficulty with interpreting their correspondence in relation to *Jane Eyre* lies in the fact that they did not actually define what they meant by ‘classic’ and ‘modern’, and they never mentioned Brontë’s novels.

If we however take Goethe’s *Faust* (written in 1760s and first published in 1808) as the most recent work cherrypicked by Zhou Zuoren in the first category of literature (classic) that merits Chinese translation, then Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* published forty years later than *Faust* probably fits into the second category (modern ‘must-reads’).

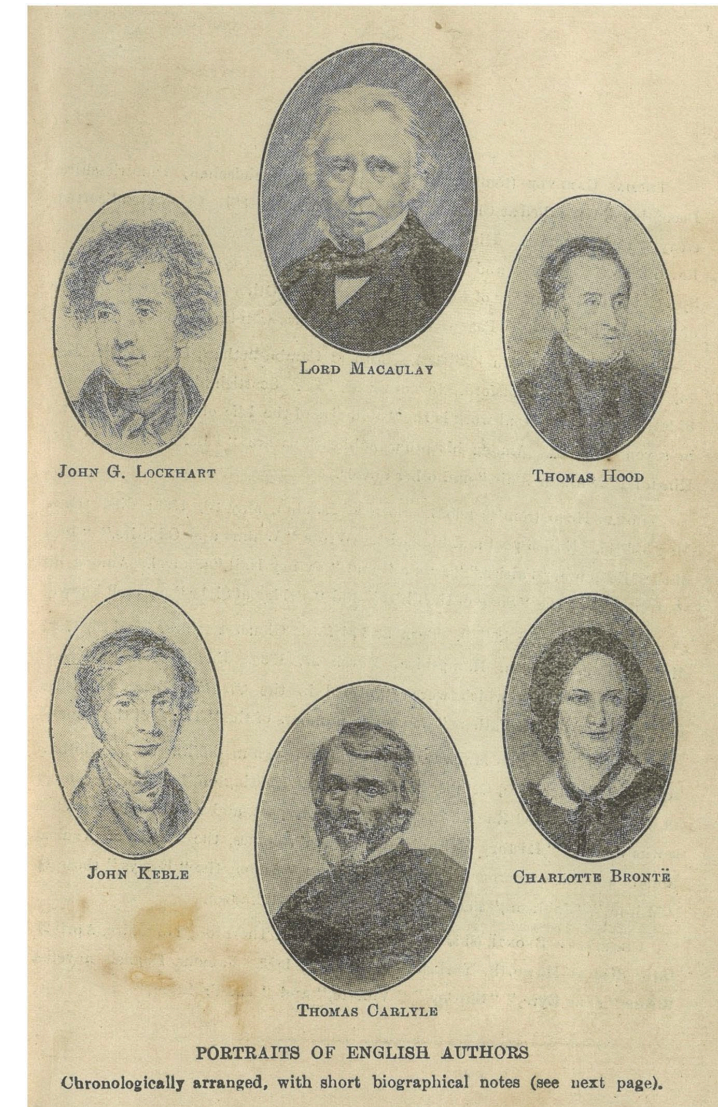
The introductions of Charlotte Brontë, the translation of *Jane Eyre* and its early reception, 1923-1945



PART III

Two book-length translations of *Jane Eyre* in 1935 and 1936 and some abbreviated forms before

- Wu Guangjian, 1935, *Gunu piaoling ji* 孤女飘零记 (*The Story of a Roving Orphan Girl*)
- Li Jiye, 1936, *Jianai zizhuan* 简爱自传 (*The Autobiography of Jane Eyre*)
- In the early 1920s and '30s: biographical notice with portrait, excerpts of translation with Chinese annotation were also to be found in Chinese periodicals devoted to English teaching in China.



‘Portraits of English Authors,’ 1923, *The English Student* 9 (9): frontispiece.

Wu Guangjian (1867-1943) and *Gunu piaoling ji* (1935)

- *Gunu piaoling ji* is expressive of the unsettling nature of the heroine's quest-plot—*piaoling* 飘零 in Chinese means 'to drift around without a settlement'—and arguably speaks to the up-rootedness of Chinese people and, by extension, Chinese society in the 1930s.
- Wu's indirect yet sentimental translation of the title became so deeply assimilated into the mass media across China that two news reports mirroring the proto-narrative of Jane's early maltreatment at the Reed household were published under the same headline of 'The Story of a Roving Orphan Girl'.
- The geographical reach of the news reports from southeast (Shanghai) to northwest (Lanzhou) China and its time span from 1939 to 1949 unequivocally show that the emotional appeal of plain Jane's tale to Chinese readers was both nationwide and long-lasting.

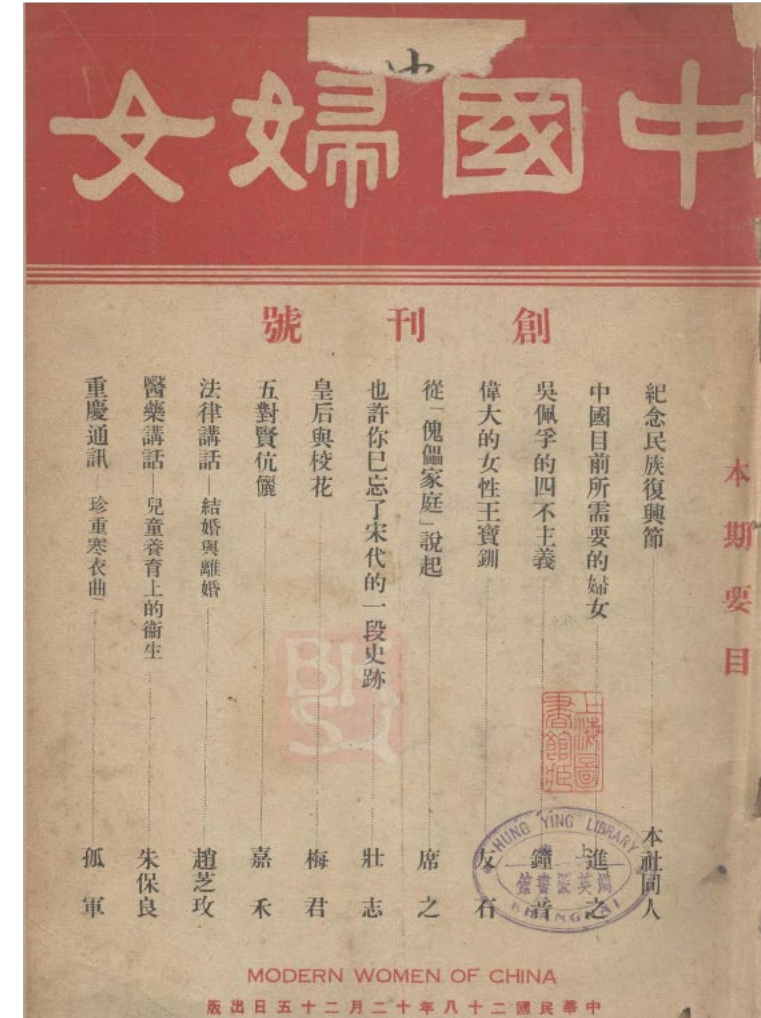


Reception of *Jane Eyre* the novel

A critic in *Modern Women of China* bluntly lambasted what he (less likely she) saw as the paltry concerns of *Jane Eyre* and the shallowness of its author. He maintained that ‘thought reflects life, and it is only natural that women who often lead a monotonous life have a mundane thought’ (Zhang, Jing 1940, 18).

“A person, great or ordinary, who lives on this planet has close connections with the world, the nation as well as the society, just like plants bear different fruits due to different climates and soils. In the principle of ‘autobiography’, the author has neglected history and environment, and the elements which have contributed to the story.” (Zhang, Jing 1940, 19)

All translations of the Chinese quotations hereafter are my own.

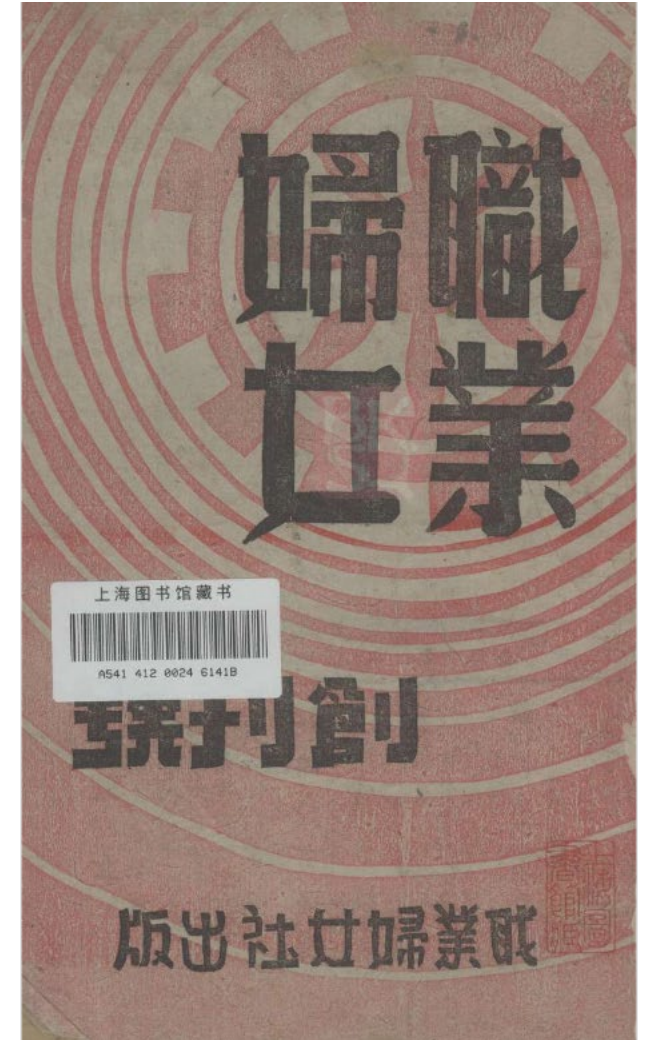


Reception of *Jane Eyre* the novel

For another critic of *Zhiye Funu* [*Professional Women*], *Jane Eyre*'s 'winding path' of survival—that she escapes from the maltreatment of her aunt, does not get lost on a ramshackle wagon to Lowood, takes risks in placing an advertisement on the newspaper to look for a job and succeeds in doing so, and is saved by St. John Rivers on the brink of death—was a delusion, nothing but the result of 'sheer luck' which should not be taken seriously in China:

Therefore, [Jane's] happiness is actually obtained through countless sheer luck and coincidences. In an unreasonable society devoid of orders and plans, almost the life of every individual is sustained likewise. [...] Only in a reasonable social system can everyone be happy, their happiness inevitable. In China, there are so many orphan girls, but I am afraid that only very few of them, if any, can be like Miss Jane Eyre, the author of *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre*, right?

(Zong 1944, 35)



Reception of *Jane Eyre* and its movie adaptation
after the Second Sino-Japanese War, 1946-1949



PART IV



Although released in America in 1944, Twentieth Century Fox's film *Jane Eyre* (directed by Robert Stevenson)¹⁷ did not premiere in China until 1946, one year after the end of the Pacific War (7 December 1941–15 August 1945). When the film had its debut in China under the title of *Jian niang* (*Miss Jane*), reviews of the movie hit the headlines of many Chinese newspapers.



1946 as a turning point for Chinese history

- While acknowledging the emotional catharsis—‘nobody can help withholding their tears’—upon seeing how ‘youth is being deprived and bud is being destroyed’ in the film adaptation, Shen Liang ‘turned tears into smile’ because it was only film watching (Shen 1948, 3).
- The prodigious victory led to a light-heartedness in people’s appreciation of *Jane Eyre* and its movie adaptation: they were no longer considered thought-provoking representations of the moral turpitude or social evils of a given society, but works of art for leisure and recreation.

簡孃觀後

·沈涼·

被英國文壇鍾子與薩克萊公認爲「
伴的不御之士」的夏綠蒂白朗底女士
筆觸是銳利的，他寫出了黑暗時代的
廢與罪惡以及貴族豪門的荒謬與醜陋
這些深刻的浮世繪是與迭更司的作
有異曲同工之妙的。她比迭更司更易
人熱淚的緣故是她作品中滲有強烈
愛與憎。當這部不朽傑作通過第八
內幕七次見在銀幕上時，我們仍爲這
所震撼。

歧視與在羅沃德公益學校受盡
師的鞭撻誰都免不了由裏的輕
我們看到青春在那裏被剝奪，
真被摧殘，我們不禁咬牙切齒
不平，而仔細想想却破涕爲笑，
們發覺我們是在看戲。而這感人
氣氛之造成者正是導演勞勃史
看了「簡孃」，我賞識勞勃
茫的才華，他的手法是那麼細
末慰貼。他處處地方忠實原著，
枯燥。因爲他的手正緊緊地抓住
發展點。
對人物的介紹，他也是忠實
。從這一點可以看出他的虔誠與

- On the other end of the critical continuum, however, critics—unlike their peers before 1945—did not treat Jane Eyre’s autobiographical account simply at face value.
- For Chen Wei, the ostensibly autobiographical form of the fiction unveils the ‘undemocratic system’ of Lowood(1946b, 7). Chen’s resentment against Lowood, as depicted in the film, remained unchanged when he wrote another cinematic review entitled, rather oddly, ‘Miss Jane: A Good Film Which Does Not Suit the Taste of Shanghai People’. Yet his repugnance for the institutionalized school this time was no longer confined to Victorian England as he made an analogy with the education in Shanghai International Settlement: ‘several shots which depicted Miss Jane’s early childhood are nicely taken, and they give away the English education policies. In the past, there was also similar enslavement education in the public school for Chinese of Shanghai Municipal Council’ (Chen 1946a, 4).

Cinematic review

An illustration of Joan Fontaine (1917-2013) and George Orson Welles (1915-1985), which writes “Two central characters of Miss Jane: Orson Welles and Joan Fontaine”, *Zhongyang ribao* (*The Central Daily News*), October 22, 1948, 6.

「簡孃」兩主角：奧遜威爾斯
瓊芳登。



June 1946-September 1949: the Chinese civil war

- Call for social reforms and improvement of people's livelihood
- Tang Zhi compared the novel with the movie adaptation, considering the novel as a social critique of Regency England [fictional setting of the novel], the movie adaptation a failure for “the director [Robert Stevenson] treated it as a love story” (Tang 1948, 6).
- the terms associated with feudalism—‘unreasonable ethos’ and ‘ethics’, ‘old society’, or ‘feudal life’—which Tang used in his critique of Victorian England, were often used by progressive Chinese intellectuals to draw a clear-cut line between themselves and the established ethics of the Chinese past. And with hindsight, social reforms in Victorian England were never as violent as those that had happened in modern China since the 1840s.

Gan Nu [Nie Gannu] (1903-1986)

- Gan Nu managed to see the implicit social critique hidden underneath the autobiographical narrative mode criticized the novel not for its violation of established social norms, but for its half-hearted rebellion against them.
- ‘I don’t like this book’, declared Gan Nu (1946, 46). ‘I cannot help but dislike it since [Jane] feels happy, honored and is thus filled with gratitude once her master falls in love with her’ (1946, 46).



- During the Culture Revolution (1966–1976), the reception of *Jane Eyre* in China underwent a long period of quiescence due to its heavily ideological response to the dissemination of foreign literature. The introduction of the Brontës and the critical discussion over *Jane Eyre* and its movie adaptation, however, happened long before Brontë studies in China gathered momentum after the Reform and Opening-up of the country in the late 1970s. On the one hand, a systematic scrutiny of the transnational appearance of the Brontës in Shanghai-based English newspapers since the late Qing Dynasty fills a research niche since previous scholarship maintains its foci on cross-cultural exchange.

The intellectual debate over literary translation and the subsequent reception of the translations and film adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, on the other hand, uncovers the zeitgeist of China which is inextricably tied to the political turmoil, intellectual revolution, and military upheaval before 1949.



Conclusion

Thanks for your attention

Q&A

tianming.bai@students.mq.edu.au



The end