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## Cross-cultural Interaction of Nostalgia Writing and the Formation of Rural Consciousness: A Review of *Imported Nostalgia: The Translation and Introduction of Foreign Nostalgic Fictions in the 1930s and Before*

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**Abstract:** Feng Bo's *Imported Nostalgia: The Translation and Introduction of Foreign Nostalgic Fictions in the 1930s and Before* (2023) examines the translation and reception of foreign nostalgic fictions around the 1930s in China, analyzing its impact on Chinese intellectuals' understanding and reconstruction of modern rural consciousness through four dimensions: "physicality", "family", "sexuality", and "destiny". The book is characterized by two key contributions: on the one hand, it constructs a multidimensional analytical framework encompassing "physicality-cognition", "image-text", "gender-rurality", and "destiny-modernity", thereby expanding the depth and breadth of rural consciousness studies; on the other hand, through meticulous analysis of translation historical materials, it dynamically traces the evolution of intellectuals' rural consciousness in the 1930s, offering fresh insights into the production of modern rural consciousness in Chinese literature. This research not only deepens the understanding of modern Chinese rural consciousness but also provides methodological inspiration for comparative literature and cross-cultural studies.

**Keywords:** *Imported Nostalgia: The Translation and Introduction of Foreign Nostalgic Novels in the 1930s and Before*; foreign nostalgic fictions; modern rural consciousness; intellectuals

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**标题:** 乡愁书写的跨文化互动与乡土意念生成——《舶来的乡愁——30年代前后域外乡愁小说的译介》评述

**摘要:** 冯波的《舶来的乡愁——30年代前后域外乡愁小说的译介》(2023)以1930年代前后域外乡愁文学译介为研究对象,从“身”“家”“性”“命”四个维度切入,分析域外乡愁文学的译介与接受如何影响中国知识分子对现代乡土意念的理解与重构。本书的主要特征有二:构建“身体—认知”“图像—文本”“性别—乡土”“命运—现代性”等多维分析框架,拓展乡土意念研究的深度和宽度;通过翔实翻译史料分析,动态呈现1930年代知识分子乡土意念的嬗变过程,为中国文学中现代乡土意念的产生提供了新解。该研究不仅深化了对中国现代乡土意念的理解,也为比较文学与跨文化研究提供了方法论启示。

**关键词:** 《舶来的乡愁——30年代前后域外乡愁小说的译介》;域外乡愁小说;现代乡土意念;知识分子

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Associate Professor Feng Bo's work *Imported Nostalgia: The Translation and Introduction of Foreign Nostalgic Fictions in the 1930s and Before* (published by The Commercial Press in November 2023, hereinafter referred to as "The Imported Nostalgia") focuses on the translation and introduction of foreign rural nostalgia literature in China in the 1930s and before. Through a meticulous analysis of translation historical materials, the book elucidates the complex process of the formation and evolution of the rural consciousness in modern Chinese literature. Feng Bo believes that the rural consciousness in modern Chinese literature is deeply rooted in the lived experiences, familial concepts, emotional appeals, and perceptions of fate among the Chinese people. These elements of "physicality", "family", "sexuality", and "destiny" collectively constitute the "aesthetic object of the spiritual and cultural time of the Chinese people" (19)<sup>1</sup>. The translation and introduction of overseas rural nostalgia fictions in the 1930s and before provide an important frame of reference for the shaping of rural consciousness in modern China, through the collision, integration, and transformation of different national rural concepts.

The book is divided into four main chapters, with an introduction and a conclusion. Chapter One, "Inseparable Physicality and Land", focuses on the embodied dilemma of intellectuals. Through case studies of writers like Yu Dafu, it explores the sensory perception of the physicality and cultural adaptation under the impact of modernity. Chapter Two examines the intertextual relationship between the illustrations and texts

<sup>1</sup> All the quotations of *Imported Nostalgia: The Translation and Introduction of Foreign Nostalgic Fictions in the 1930s and Before* in this research are from Feng Bo's book published by The Commercial Press in November 2023. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

in the journal *Translation* (*Yiwen*), demonstrating how visual art participates in the construction of rural consciousness. It further analyzes how the “leaving home/returning home” narrative affects the emotional structure of intellectuals. Chapter Three approaches the issue from a gender politics perspective, investigating how female characters in nostalgic fictions serve as a medium for cultural reflection. It reveals the ethical tensions and anxieties of modernity embedded in the translation and introduction process. Chapter Four, centered on the “concept of destiny”, analyzes how intellectuals reconstruct rural consciousness through the transformation of “knowing one’s destiny, establishing one’s destiny, and fulfilling one’s mission”. It showcases the dialectical integration of tradition and modernity.

The work has a clear structure, detailed historical materials, and rigorous logic, mainly presenting two key features. It emphasizes the analysis of how the emotional resources and value systems in foreign rural nostalgia fictions have influenced the emotional structure of “physicality”, “family”, “sexuality”, and “destiny” in rural China. Meanwhile, it adopts a cross-cultural research approach, systematically tracing the formation and development of rural consciousness in modern Chinese literature within the broader context of cultural exchange between China and foreign cultures.

### **1. Debate of Physicality and Land: The Embodied Dilemma and Cultural Adaptation of Intellectuals**

Chapter One, “Inseparable Physicality and Land” analyzes the physicality narratives under the impact of modernity. Feng Bo focuses the research on the complex psychological landscape of Chinese intellectuals facing the impact of modernity, examining their initial cognitive experiences of modern civilization and the internal contradictions presented in the modernization process. In Chinese society in the 1930s and before, the introduction of overseas rural nostalgia fictions brought various cultural shocks. As Raymond Williams (1991, p.403) stated: “Culture is a whole way of life”. Yu Dafu likened the contemporary Chinese society to a “marmot-like society” (Section One), revealing the closedness and disorder of that time, and presenting the “internal contradictions and complexities” in the formation of modern rural concepts (32). The imagery of the “mechanical horse” and the “mill” (Section Two) reflects the “coexistence of expectation and anxiety, excitement and trepidation” in the people’s initial encounter with modern objects (36). “The window” and “the spring night” as core imagery in Section 3 have transcended simple rural nostalgia, becoming a spatial metaphor for the experience of modernity (47). If the persistent “melancholy” reflects the subject’s passive adaptation to the external space, then the “foreign illness” or “diseased body” (Section Four) constitute typical symptoms of cultural maladjustment. Meanwhile, the writers’ special perception of the hometown manifests their subjective awareness in “actively constructing spatial connections” (59). Alongside this, the “delirious writing” (Section Five) in rural nostalgia fictions delves into the individual’s irrational imaginative demands from a spiritual dimension. As Susan Sontag (2003, p.43) said, “illness reveals character” —the “delirious writing” dialogues with the process of pathologizing cultural encounters in literary writing, capturing the generative experience of modern rural consciousness amidst multiple conflicts (76).

Chapter One focuses on the unique context of China’s modernization transition in the 1930s, systematically elucidating the complex relationship between physicality perception and the shaping of modern rural consciousness. It delves deeply into the triple deconstruction of the traditional “inseparability of

physicality and land" under the wave of modern industrialization—the flow of geographical space, the collision of cultural values, and the crisis of identity. The translation and introduction of overseas rural nostalgic literature precisely become an important medium for intellectuals to reconstruct rural consciousness.

Feng Bo first reveals the progressive process from sensory cognition to value identification. The sensory contradictions of Yu Dafu and the typical case of the "mechanical horse" are collective psychological representations of intellectuals in the specific historical transitional period, which are essentially cultural stress reactions produced by the encounter of traditional agrarian civilization with the impact of industrial modernity. The "window" and "spring night" reflect that the writers' inner spatial experience is not a passive reflection, but an active externalization of the anxiety and quest for identity into specific spatial imagery. This mechanism of mutual projection between "inner/outer" space actually reveals the subjectivity dilemma of modern intellectuals in the urban-rural transition process: on the one hand, they try to maintain their spiritual connection with tradition through spatial imagination, and on the other hand, they have to face the spatial alienation brought by modernity. In addition, Feng Bo introduces the perspective of existentialist philosophy, viewing the body as an intermediary with dual functions of practical intervention and subjective construction. Especially through literary representations such as "foreign illness", "diseased body", and "delirious narration", this chapter profoundly reveals the spiritual dilemma of modern intellectuals in cultural transformation. This pathological metaphor is not the endpoint, but rather a turning point for the awakening of subjectivity—writers achieve the transformation from passive acceptance to active shaping of spatial cognition through the re-perception and reconstruction of their hometowns.

This chapter constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework of "physicality—cognition—culture", which not only expands the theoretical dimension of rural literature research, but also provides new methodological insights for cross-cultural communication research.

## 2. Flowing Nostalgia: The Cross-cultural Rewriting of the Returning-home Narrative

This chapter first examines the imported rural landscape—the illustrations in the journal *Translation* (Yiwen). These overseas rural images provide a cross-cultural field for the transformation and evolution of rural sentiments. They are not only a visual supplement to literary translation, but also constitute an important medium for cross-cultural dialogue—evoking an emotional resonance with the traditional pastoral imagination, as well as carrying the urban-rural anxiety and identity crisis in the process of modernization transformation. The intertext of image and text possesses both the idealized resonance (traditional pastoral imagination) and "the individualized lyricism in the dilemma of enlightenment and the political ethical expression of revolutionary utopia" (172), completing the revaluation of traditional rurality at different modern levels.

Secondly, modern intellectuals, through observing the conflict and fusion of local and foreign cultures, rationally examine the homeland narratives in overseas rural literature. This observation has led them to not only recognize the historical limitations of traditional rural concepts, but also "reconstruct the modern rural cognitive system" (146) through cross-cultural comparison. The fictional narratives of homeland defense in overseas rural nostalgic literature particularly evoke the emotional resonance of intellectuals, while the trend

of local compromise with foreign cultures in reality drives them to transcend simple emotional reactions and turn to more rationally-grounded cultural reconstruction. The development of modern transportation and the travel boom in the 1930s provide “a new context for intellectuals to reflect on rurality” (173). The “leaving home” narratives in overseas rural nostalgic literature echo the family revolution thoughts since the May Fourth Movement, and through the cultural tensions within and outside the text—evoking resonance while highlighting differences—they have triggered the complex emotional anxieties of intellectuals, which in turn have driven the reconstruction of modern rural consciousness and emotional structure in China.

Furthermore, this chapter also explores the duality of the “returning home” narrative in overseas rural nostalgic literature and its impact on the spiritual world of modern intellectuals (174). It argues that the homeland in the “returning home” narratives has both realistic and virtual attributes, and the conflict between memory and reality triggered by this spatial-temporal fluidity has plunged the individual into the dilemma of cultural identity.

The specific academic contributions of this chapter are listed as follows. It constructs an intertextual analysis framework of “image–text”, breaking away from the traditional view on the supplementary role of illustrations. It treats the foreign rural illustrations in the journal *Translation* (*Yiwen*) as an independent cultural semiotic system, demonstrating that the illustrations not only supplement literary translation, but also actively participate in the construction of modern rural concepts, providing a new paradigm for cross-media research. In addition, through the dialogue between overseas homeland narratives and the traditional concept of “co-construction of family and nation”, intellectuals complete the reconstruction of their rural cognitive system in cultural comparison. Particularly worth mentioning is that this chapter’s research perceptively captures the interaction between the modernity of transportation in the 1930s and literary narratives. Especially through the analysis of the duality of the “leaving home/returning home” narrative, it presents how the transformation of spatial–temporal experience catalyzes the transition of emotional structure.

### **3. Gender in Nostalgic Narratives: The Dual Projection in the Emotional Structure of Modern Intellectuals**

Nostalgia and sexuality together constitute the most intimate and yet most universal emotional dimensions in human spiritual world. In a cross-cultural context, the interweaving of these two emotions is particularly evident in the portrayal of female characters in overseas rural nostalgic novels—they are both the objects of desire projection and the carriers of cultural nostalgia. Through the gender perspective, intellectuals are able to deconstruct both the traditional constraints and modern dilemmas.

In the translation of overseas rural nostalgic fictions in the 1930s, rural writings involving sexuality often encounter local poor reception and criticism, highlighting the significant differences between Chinese and foreign erotic writings. This phenomenon reflects the translators’ and critics’ complex dual mentality: they criticize traditional rural ethics, yet also expect modern gender awareness, providing an important perspective for us to examine their attitudes towards the “way of life, ethics and even value standards” of their hometown (176). Works like *The Spring and Autumn* depict female body as a medium for writing cultural nostalgia,

reconstructing modern rural consciousness through erotic writing, while the rural erotic narratives in *A Woman's Drifting History* present the tensions between traditional rurality and modern concepts. The portrayal of female suffering and struggle, and individualized love narratives in *The Insulted and Injured* become typical cases of cross-cultural acceptance. *Lisa's Lament*, as an important text that presents female tragedy in the cross-cultural rural perspective, reveals the undeniable foreign influence on the evolution of Chinese modern intellectuals' rural consciousness. Rural women's erotic narratives and tragic fates in works like *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *The Return of the Native*, not only challenge traditional rural ethics, but also reconstruct modern rural consciousness. The character of Anna in *The Diploma* vividly presents the profound contradictions between traditional rural constraints and the awakening of modern female consciousness.

In the face of the gender writings of overseas rural literature in the 1930s and before, Chinese intellectuals display a transformation from the emotional attachment to motherhood/hometown to the political identification with patriarchy/nation. Chapter Three profoundly reveals the complex interaction between sex/gender and the construction of modern rural consciousness. Through the analysis of the translation and reception of works by writers such as Nagai Kafū and Maupassant in 1930s China, Feng Bo points out that on the one hand, sexuality as the authentic expression of bodily desires forms a profound ontological connection with the rural experience of "inseparability of physicality and land", providing a sensual basis for modern rural consciousness. On the other hand, the narrative of gender differences becomes an important point for social criticism, as the literary image of the "insulted and injured" has triggered reflections on the inequality in rural society. The research particularly focuses on the phenomenon of cognitive bias in the translation process—local readers often produce moralized misreading of the sexual descriptions in overseas rural nostalgic fictions (with Maupassant as a typical case), and this kind of misreading precisely reflects the tension between traditional ethics and modern consciousness.

Through analysis in Chapter Three, Feng Bo not only identifies that the female characters in overseas rural nostalgic fictions have dual cultural functions of emotional projection and reflective medium, but also profoundly reveals the complex mentality of intellectuals who both criticize tradition and resist modernity. The chapter demonstrates the deconstructive and reconstructive effects of erotic writings on rural ethics, providing an important reference for understanding modern rural concepts in China.

#### **4. From Destiny to Mission: The Dilemma of Modernity and the Intellectuals' Concept of Destiny in Rural China**

Literary practices including fiction translation are seen as "a powerful agency" in the process of nation-building (Liu He, 2014, p.3). In the 1930s and before, the "sense of destiny" of Chinese intellectuals is not an abstract philosophical proposition, but is deeply rooted in the historical context of national crisis, social transformation, and the impact of modernity. During this period, the translation and dissemination of overseas rural nostalgic fictions, with their profound writings on the destiny of individuals and collectives, become an important intellectual resource for Chinese intellectuals to reflect on their own as well as the nation's destiny (256).

*Sorrows of the Village* through the protagonist's repeated "escape-return" cycle, deeply reveals the structural dilemma of modern people in the rural nostalgic experience, reflecting the profound alienation between the individual and the hometown in the rural modernity transformation (Section One). Works like *The Return of Kopylov* by Leonid Leonov, from the dimensions of religious destiny, the conflict of urban-rural ideology, and the historical context of intellectuals, jointly construct the complex landscape of subject identity and fate cognition in the context of modernity (Section Two). The translation of works of Upton Sinclair and Sinclair Lewis highlights the differentiated reconstruction of traditional rural concepts in class discourse and the complex dialectics of subject identity in the process of modernity transformation (Section Three). Overseas war fictions constitute a profound deconstructive impact on the "rural" as the core representation of national uniqueness, and the nostalgia they have engendered has become a key medium for intellectuals to seek identity and spiritual refuge between national ethics and individual values (Section Four). The "rural experience of Mao Dun" and the "contradictory rurality" reflect the double exploration of Mao Dun and other intellectuals in the specific historical field of rural China towards subject construction and the imagination of the nation-state, shaping the basic path of the generation of their national consciousness (Section Five).

The concept of "destiny" (ming) in Confucian thought contains a dual connotation. The "finiteness" (vital energy/limited fate) as an objective constraint and the "infiniteness" (moral destiny) as the subject's transcendence, whose dialectical "Unity of Righteousness and Destiny" constitutes the core value concept of rural China. Feng Bo believes that modern Chinese intellectuals' cognition of the "destiny" of rurality presents a dialectical unity of "knowing one's destiny" and "establishing one's destiny". Compared to the religionized concept of destiny in the West, Chinese intellectuals tend to interpret "destiny" from a secularized perspective, and gradually shift towards emphasizing the agency of "fortune" ——this transition from passive cognition (knowing one's destiny) to active construction (establishing one's destiny) is the core mechanism of modern transformation of rural consciousness. The core viewpoint of Chapter Four is that, in a specific historical context, intellectuals complete the identity transformation from traditional Confucian scholars to modern intellectuals through a triple leap of "knowing one's destiny" ——"establishing one's destiny" —— "fulfilling one's mission". This transformation is specifically manifested as: Yu Dafu-style literati elevate their personal lyrical suffering to spiritual reflection, realizing the awakening of individual subjectivity; the selective acceptance of Sinclair's works exhibits the collective effort to transform the traditional "moral destiny" into the revolutionary "mission"; the various contradictions in Mao Dun's writings further reflect the intellectuals' difficult balance between individual consciousness and national responsibilities.

This chapter dynamically presents the historical process of conceptual transformation, avoiding a simplistic understanding of modernity transition; through the analysis of specific cases (Yu Dafu, Sinclair, and Mao Dun), it concretizes the abstract discussion of intellectual history into tangible cultural practices; and it reveals the unique dialectical logic of Chinese modernity ——not a rupture with tradition, but a creative transformation of tradition to achieve rebirth.

## Conclusion

“Physicality”, “family”, “sexuality”, and “destiny” constitute the emotional-ethical system by which the Chinese people cognize their native land, and it is a systematized life experience (359). The translation practice of overseas rural nostalgic fictions in the 1930s and before has vividly presented the complex interaction between intellectuals’ understanding of “physicality”, “family”, “sexuality”, and “destiny” and the historical context, through the expressive mode of “the melancholy of nostalgia” that is full of tension and difficult to resolve. To better present this relationship, in *The Imported Nostalgia*, Feng Bo has constructed multi-dimensional analytical frameworks such as “physicality-cognition”, “image-text”, “gender-rurality”, and “destiny-modernity”, expanding the theoretical horizon of rural literature research. Through the meticulous analysis of translation historical materials, the book dynamically presents the evolving process of intellectuals’ rural consciousness in the 1930s, providing new interpretations for the unique path of Chinese modernity. In the concluding part of the book, Feng Bo innovatively proposes a theoretical framework for the comparative study of Chinese rural literature, which has dual academic value. At the theoretical level, by combining the phenomenological analysis of emotions and the perspective of historical materialism, it constructs a new paradigm for understanding rural narratives in modern Chinese literature; meanwhile, in terms of methodology, its cross-cultural research approach provides an important reference for the field of comparative literature. Feng Bo has been dedicated to the research on urban-rural narratives in modern and contemporary Chinese literature for a decade, tracing and expounding the transmission and evolution of traditional rural concepts in China. This reflects the unique perspectives and insights of young Chinese scholars, and also demonstrates the self-awareness of Chinese academic discourse construction.

From the perspective of the author of this research, *The Imported Nostalgia* demonstrates significant value in both theoretical construction and empirical analysis, and its research paradigm and problem awareness provide multi-dimensional expansion space for subsequent academic exploration. For example, a “Database of Foreign Rural Fiction Translations in the 1930s and Before” should be established, systematically integrating translated texts, translators’ manuscripts, journal reviews, and other diverse historical materials, combining traditional text analysis with digital technology, and utilizing digital humanities analysis methods to deeply explore the dissemination paths, reception effects, and variation mechanisms of overseas rural nostalgic fictions during this period. This digitalized research framework not only can break through the material limitations of traditional literary research, but also through multi-dimensional data analysis, can present the reconstruction and influence of overseas rural nostalgic fictions on contemporary rural concepts of Chinese intellectuals in the 1930s. Furthermore, by placing the core symbols (such as “land”, “church”, “gentry”) of overseas rural nostalgic fictions within the framework of glocalization, and combining semiotic analysis, translation studies, and cross-cultural communication theory, multi-dimensional analysis can reveal the network of meaning transformations of these symbols in the source culture, translated versions, and target culture. In addition, from the perspective of cross-media narrative research, one could examine how overseas rural nostalgic fictions are adapted into theatrical, film, and comic forms during the translation process, analyzing how different media strengthen or undermine the cultural connotations of the original works.

Combining visual analysis, a comparative study of the symbolic representations (such as the visualization of rural imagery) between original texts and adapted works can also be conducted.

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