“Afternoon, a Fall”:
Relationality, Accountability, and Failure as a Queer-Feminist Approach to Translating
the Poetry of Yu Xiuhua

Thesis

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Abstract

Yu Xiuhua (余秀华) is a contemporary Chinese poet who became a sensation in China after her poem “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You” (穿过大半个中国去睡你) went viral in 2015 via the popular Chinese messaging platform, WeChat (微信). As a woman with cerebral palsy who did not complete high school and lives on a small farm in rural Hubei Province, Yu’s popularity intersects with her various identities, making her not only an interesting poet but also an interesting public figure. This project aims to translate a selection of her poetry in a queer-feminist mode for a contemporary English-speaking audience of politically engaged poets and writers. Drawing on a long history of feminist translation practices that visibly “womanhandle” texts in order to attend to both the author’s and the translator’s agency, alongside Aimee Carrillo Rowe’s call for a politics of relationality and queer theory’s notion of failure as a mode of resistance, these translations challenge a discourse of fluency and the resultant invisibility of the translator in standard English translation. This project thus contributes to a feminist translation practice of accountability, collaboration, and play and promotes an “ecology” of translation that values how different translations interact with each, whether symbiotically or antagonistically. Building on that foundation, these translations enact a practice of vulnerability that acknowledges and honors the failure inherent in translation as it attempts to work across difference and the power dynamics embedded in that difference. The tension between attending to the poet’s style and poetics and making
visible the translator’s own processes of engagement is not relieved but rather presented as an integral part of the final translation. Ultimately, this project makes room for more varied and nuanced consideration of ethical reading approaches for those positioned in the Global North translating work by those positioned in more vulnerable locations within transnational power structures.
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Yu Xiuhua (余秀华) became a poetry sensation in China fairly recently, and quite rapidly, after her poem “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You” (穿过大半个中国去睡你) went viral via the popular Chinese messaging platform, WeChat (微信). As a woman who lives in rural Hubei province and did not graduate high school, her poetic talent has captured the Chinese imagination, or the Chinese imagination has captured her poetry. The fervor around her allegedly natural talent and prolific output intersects with Yu’s various identities, including the fact that she has cerebral palsy; many think that her disability informs her poetics. For example, a brief article in the Global Times from February of 2015 under the heading “Words burst from her body,” says of the poet:

She walks clumsily and talks haltingly. Yet she is keen on the physicality of language. Unlike the sentimentality and melodramatic softness of many established poets, the words Yu uses are brutal, free, vivid, angry and violent. Writing poetry is a natural physical impulse for her. She writes of body, of marriage, of sex, of the soul. (Zhou)

Yu herself enters the conversation saying, “label is [sic] necessary when you need to promote something. These labels differentiate me from someone else. But my disability really has nothing to do with my poetries [sic]. No matter [sic] a person is physically healthy or not, when they write poems, their mind and spirit are the same” (Yao 2016).\(^1\)

At other times, however, she does discuss her experiences with her disability on her blog

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\(^1\)
and in interviews and suggests that poetry is a “spiritual crutch” that allows her to express herself in a way she otherwise cannot. In other words, in relation to her writing, Yu Xiuhua makes an effort to identify as a poet rather than a female poet or a rural poet or a poet with cerebral palsy, yet her construction as a poet in the public eye (and perhaps even in her own), and thus the way her poetry is consumed, cannot be disentangled from these “labels.”

I encountered Yu Xiuhua’s poetry through a Chinese friend. He introduced her as a poetry sensation, the Emily Dickinson of China. Not only did he recommend her work, he sent me a PDF of her entire first full-length book: 月亮落在左手上, generally translated in English-language articles as Moonlight Drops on My Left Hand. I have to admit I didn’t bother to read what he sent me for quite a while, partly because at the time I didn’t want to find a poet who was, to my understanding, “popular” or in the mainstream. However, in the approximately six months that passed between receiving my classmate’s email and finally opening the file, during which time I finished a history of Chinese literature course and a Chinese film course, and spent two months studying in Taiwan and making some effort to explore the poetry scene there, I did not hear the name Yu Xiuhua again. For being as popular as my classmate claimed she was, there seemed to be very little buzz about her outside of mainland China. There were certainly no official English translations of her poems. Who was this Yu Xiuhua, I wondered. It was then that I opened the PDF and began to read. I almost immediately knew I wanted to translate her poems.

So then the question becomes: why? Why translate Yu Xiuhua’s poetry into English? And following from that why, how should I approach the translation? This is
where it begins to get interesting. This is where Yu Xiuhua lights up as a poet, then as a cultural phenomenon, and then as a poet again. In other words, while my initial interest in her stemmed partly from my interest in writing by women, my first reason for translating her work is simply that I like her poetry. Then, this translation feels especially important since there are ultimately very few Chinese women poets whose work has been extensively translated into English. Moreover, I find Yu Xiuhua’s writing and her status as a poet to be a compelling nexus in the complex web of cultural, political, and specifically literary forces at play in the contemporary Chinese poetry world. And finally, these things combine in the translation process to allow poetry to speak as poetry and as theory through a mode of translation that challenges the limitations of today’s standard mode of English translation and aims for a dynamic, collaborative, and subversive iteration of Yu’s work. Just like the many scholars and journalists writing about Yu Xiuhua, I cannot seem to separate her poetics from her interlocking identities, but I do not want to. Instead, I attempt a queer-feminist approach to translation that attends to Yu’s agency and poetics while at the same time visibly enacting my own engagement with her writing. Therefore the goals of this project are twofold. First, this project aims to introduce the poetry of contemporary Chinese poet Yu Xiuhua to an English speaking audience, specifically at the point where standard English literature buckles under the weight of its own histories and structural hierarchies giving way to the strange and vibrant realm of small press publication. Second, this project aims to explore the possibilities for queer-feminist translation methodologies that resist imperialistic tendencies in standard English translation and make room for more varied and nuanced consideration of ethical reading approaches by those positioned in the Global North who
want to translate work by those more easily exploited within transnational structures of power.

My queer-feminist mode of translation begins by interrogating what Lawrence Venuti (2008) calls the invisibility of the translator in standard English translation in order to resist an authoritative discourse of fluency and singularity, actively disrupting binaries that tend to structure translation theory, such as creation vs. reproduction and domestication vs. foreignization, and to engage a politics of relationality that acknowledges and playfully embraces hybridity and incompleteness. At its most basic level of intervention, my methodology is meant to realize and further encourage an ecology of translation wherein diverse approaches are valued as interrelated parts of a heterogeneous system. Building on this foundational approach, I attempt to make visible my own processes of translation as well as many of the contexts and resultant power dynamics that complicate my translation of Yu’s poetry, including how Yu Xiuhua writes, is read, and is received as a poet in China and how I write, read, and receive her here as a poet in the United States. I do not claim a mode of translation that is ethical in the sense that it erases transnational power differentials; instead, I have adopted a practice of vulnerability that acknowledges and honors the failure inherent in translation work as well as in my particular translations of Yu’s poems as I attempt to work across the difference manifest in our various positionalities and the power dynamics embedded in that difference. As such, the tension between attending to Yu Xiuhua’s style and poetics and making visible my own layered engagement with her poetry is not relieved but rather presented as an integral part of the final translation. It is possible that this queering of the conventional understanding of the translator as an authoritative, expert, and creative, yet nonbiased and
technically inclined craftsperson might appear to undermine my authority and claim to the role of “good” translator. But I believe that by making this tension visible, I hold myself and my readers more accountable for the kinds of violence we inflict in our readings of Yu Xiuhua. The result is translations that sit with discomfort. In order to more explicitly situate my approach, I will first address in detail why I have chosen to translate Yu Xiuhua’s poetry, and then I will turn to the detailed whys and hows of my queer-feminist methodology.
1.1 Yu Xiuhua: The Poet and The Poetry

Poet to Poet: Is “Affinity” Enough?

In Michelle Yeh’s (2011) discussion of the translatability of modern Chinese poetry, she proposes “elective affinity” as the driving force, or what should be the driving force, behind translatability. She borrows this term from chemistry “to suggest the resonance, or a meeting of the minds, between the translator and the text at the intellectual, aesthetic, and personal levels” (605). So let me begin by articulating the “meeting of the minds” that I experienced upon encountering Yu Xiuhua’s poems themselves, for the moment putting aside the various other textual materials that frame her writing and have also resonated with me intellectually, aesthetically, and personally. As a poet, I do not often push myself to articulate in detail why I like a particular poem and poet; even in my role as poetry editor for an online journal, I don’t articulate justifications for the choices I make when selecting or rejecting submitted writing. Nor are we at TENDE RLOIN unique in that respect. I have heard editors say, “we’re looking for fire,” “we want writing that stands out,” “read what we publish; that’s what we like.” At the level of affect, then, the level of gut reaction, where one knows it when one sees it, as soon as I began to read Yu Xiuhua’s poetry, I knew it. I knew that this was the poet I wanted to translate. More to the point, I was caught up by her poetry despite the fact that it actually does not fit with the style I was looking to find: something with an immediately obvious appeal to a particular U.S. independent press aesthetic, what one might dub the “avant-garde”—a term I will return to later in the context of modern Chinese poetry. I was hoping to find an aesthetic that might “resonate” with the
Gurlesque or the necropastoral.⁴ For example, I wanted to find the Chinese equivalent of
Korean poet Kim Hyesoon’s *Sorrowtoothpaste Mirrorcream*, the English translation of
which was published by Action Books in 2014.⁵ Instead, it was from a very personal,
emotional place that I first decided I wanted to explore Yu’s work more deeply through
the mode of translation.

But is love or affinity, even elective affinity, for a piece of writing a valid
justification for taking up the mantle of translation? In talking about his own translation
work, Hans Erich Nossack (1992) makes a distinction between working as a translator
and as someone who perhaps merely loves the work they have chosen to transmit, and
Yves Bonnefoy (1992) while discussing the particulars of translating poetry, tells us
“‘translate poets who are close to you,’” and then goes on “but what poet can be close
enough?” (191). Perhaps it is fair to say, then, that a statement of affinity is not enough
without some more detailed articulation of the nature of that affinity and how it might
more specifically lead into and through the translation process. In an academic setting
like the one in which I am writing now, it is certainly necessary to parse out the nature of
this affinity, particularly since my approach to translation involves engaging Yu’s poetry
at the level of her poetics and as her poems are in conversation with the greater cultural
and literary landscape out of which she writes. It seems important to be able to draw
some distinction between poetics and cultural context, if only to then show how they are
so entwined. Therefore I will first attempt to articulate in more detail why I “like” Yu’s
poetry, continuing for the moment to put aside the particulars of her reception and
construction as a poet, before moving on to a discussion of how her writing moves
through the landscape of modern Chinese poetry. The elements of Yu Xiuhua’s writing
that resonate most with me, then, are a deceptively simple use of language, an often striking and unsettling use of imagery against a realistically rendered rural setting, and what is often a confessional, intimate mode of first person narration. Her poems feel grounded and familiar, yet contain moments that over and again defamiliarize the otherwise mundane surroundings and activities she describes. Yu draws both on and into concrete descriptions of rural landscapes and women’s work and emotional labor in order to tear holes in the comfortable fabric of those worlds, creating new perspectives from which to critique or re-vision their familiarity, understandability, romanticism, and historical weight.

As one Chinese scholar, Shen Xiuying (沈秀英) (2015) simply puts it, “Yu Xiuhua’s poetry is not difficult to read” (余秀华的诗歌不难读) (147). Her poetry does not seem to rely on complicated word play or allusions, and one will find many words that frequently repeat throughout her book. Yet this simplicity of language is deceptive in the sense that it belies a great depth of affective possibility. For example, in her poem “Dog I Raise, Called Xiao Wu” (我养的狗，叫小巫), she relates her images in a calm tone that illustrates how certain forms of violence are so common and as a result so insidious. In the first stanza, the speaker in the poem sets out across the fields to see her maternal grandmother, her dog at her side, but after the speaker takes a fall, the poem shifts over a stanza break to tell of a man, a migrant worker, presumably the speaker’s husband, who is unsatisfied with her performance in bed and takes lovers when he labors in Beijing. There is no change in the speaker’s tone as she moves us from the image of herself letting the dog lick blood from her hand, to the drunken man saying “in Beijing he
has a woman / Better looking than me” (他说在北京有一个女人/比我好看). The accidental violence of the fall thus bleeds into the harsh directness of the man’s appraisal. Moreover, Yu’s language is clear and direct, refusing to cover up or mediate the husband’s coarse words. The poem’s abrupt shift from the narrator’s relationship with her pet dog to the violence of her husband told with such direct and easy language is both jarring and matter-of-fact, jarring because it is matter-of-fact, just as it is later in the poem when the speaker describes the dog wagging his tail while watching the man beat the speaker. The calm, direct telling of each moment, as if the speaker were simply listing her chores that day, poignantly illustrates the casualness, intimacy, and familiarity of domestic violence and the way it can become just one more thread woven into the tapestry of one’s home life.

In terms of her striking use of imagery, one example comes from the end of the poem “Someone Waving at the Sky” (向天空挥手的人). In this poem, Yu Xiuhua paints the image of a woman feeding fish as part of her chores. The poem begins with the lines “After feeding the fish, southern wind strong, a great expanse of blue swept in/She watches the fish for a while” (在喂完鱼以后，南风很大，大朵大朵的蓝被吹来/她看了一会儿鱼). Following from there, most of the poem seems like a straightforward meditation on life and sorrow through the vivid but not unusually rendered image of the fish. In the last stanza, however, Yu returns to the title: “Suddenly, she raises her hand, waves to the sky/Always waving. Until she’s blocked by a tree” (突然，她举起了手，向天空挥动/一直挥动。直到一棵树把她挡住). Perhaps one could read these lines as a description of the sun sinking behind a tree so that as the sun sinks the tree appears to rise
and block the girl. However, not only is the speaker waving to the sky, not the sun, but the time of day is never mentioned. In addition, the use of “一直,” which I have translated here as “always” but could also be “continuously” or “all along,” seems to indicated that she stands and waves for a long time. It is possible the tree branches have swayed in the wind and in that way “blocked” the girl, but Yu’s use of simple, direct language does nothing to support such a reading. Instead, it is as if time has expanded over these two lines making space for a tree to grow up between the girl and the sky, and this unusual final image up-ends the rural familiarity of the scene. Suddenly, just as suddenly as she begins to wave at the sky, the image of a girl going about her daily chores is replaced by a sense of impossible smallness, of the impossibly ceaseless march of time, and the helplessness of this girl, who is rooted to this place, this role, waving at the sky until she can no longer be seen.

Finally, and as Chinese scholars Shen Xiuying (沈秀英) (2015), You Chengcheng (尤呈呈) (2015), and He Meiju (何美菊) (2016) have also noted, the “I” in Yu Xiuhua’s poetry is grounded in a female voice so that as her poems refuse to shy away from discussing sexuality, “the body, anger and illness,” they also appear to refuse to “disguise the intimate, deeply personal particulars of the writer's life” (Holland 1999). This construction of the “I” gives Yu’s poems a sense of “真实,” reality or authenticity, as if the poet is speaking to us directly of herself. “Dog I Raise, Called Xiao Wu” is also an example of this, as are several other poems (including: “There Was a Man in my Room”/一个男人在我的房间里待过, “I Love You”/我爱你, and “Met with a Mirror”/与一面镜子遇见了), which when taken together seem as if they might begin to trace the
outlines of the poet’s romantic life, both the possibilities and the disappointments.

Furthermore, the speaker in Yu’s poems often directly describes her body as an impediment, something that “at any moment might cause an accident” (它随时就制造一场交通事故), and also frequently details her own sorrows, disappointments, injuries, and thoughts of death. As Liu Nian, an editor for one of China’s prestigious poetry magazines, is quoted as saying, “her poems, among contemporary Chinese poems, is [sic] like putting a murderer among a group of respectable ladies . . . her words are obviously bloodstained” (Yu 2016). Scholars seem to agree, Shen Xiuying suggesting that “fortune has hurt Yu Xiuhua, Yu Xiuhua in turn lets this hurt wound her poetry, its back covered in sharp knife cuts and blood” (命运伤了余秀华，余秀华又让这种伤痛伤了诗歌，诗歌躯体的背面布满锋利的刀口和血) (148). At the same time, as Yu’s use of imagery continues to defamiliarize the world of her poems, and poems from a third person point of view accrue, one can see how the “I” of Yu Xiuhua’s poetry is also “the I of poetry/And it should be able to do more than I can do” (Reines 2011, 15). What I mean here is that Yu is not simply relaying her day-to-day life without aestheticization; she is not just bleeding onto the page. The “I” of her poetry is not fully equivalent to the “I” of Yu Xiuhua, but also the “I” of a constructed speaker and part of Yu’s craft.

Now, if Yu Xiuhua’s work is engaging, intriguing, and felt even without a sense of her locatedness either historically or culturally, what makes her work “Chinese”? That is to say, is there something other than the language she writes in that makes her poetry “Chinese,” and if so, how should I consider that something? Certainly identifying her poetry as “Chinese” risks the Orientalizing perspective Rey Chow (2000) explicitly
critiques in her introduction to *Modern Chinese Literary and Culture Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field*; Chow’s critique further asks us to consider how Chinese poetry might, in fact, just be poetry. I would not argue against the value in appreciating what is “just poetry” about Yu’s work. There are things about her poetry that one can appreciate without any particular understanding of Chinese poetry or culture, and as such translating her writing can both widen her audience and broaden the scope of poetry without risking turning her poems into fetishized cultural objects. On the other hand, is there not damage done when a work of art is extracted from the context in which it was created and positioned instead as “just” an art object? It is that extraction that can present any traces of difference as fetishizeable, since whatever might seem “strange” is then free to take on whatever cast of “Chineseness” the English-speaking reader in inclined to give them, which may be rooted in a sort of essentializing ethnic construct. At the same time, a bid for the “universal” in poetry can result in a translation that flattens or smooths away anything that might intrude on the poem’s easy consumability. In other words, translating Yu’s poetry into English and reading it as if it were essentially poetry written in a vacuum, shorn of its cultural and historical context, might be one way to increase the popularity of her writing among an English-speaking audience who does not have much knowledge of or interest in China or the landscape of modern Chinese poetry. But if the goal is to decouple poetic production from the locatedness of the poet, what is the purpose of translation? Is it only then to affirm this sense of universalism, the notion that we are all people and as such a truly great poet can speak to anyone on equal terms? Yet, as my research here suggests, the terms of transnational transmission are never equal.
Poet to Yu Xiuhua: The Particularities of Contemporary Chinese Poetry

If one is working within a paradigm of translation that intends to translate poetry into English in order to affirm a universalist point of view, I would argue that instead of broadening the scope of poetry, the transmission of Yu’s work without any contextual elements actually reaffirms the hegemony of English poetics. That is to say, in this mode “Chinese poetry” is elevated to the status of “just poetry” partly by obscuring its historical and cultural specificity and positioning it as poetry written in English. The “just poetry” that exists in an English-speaking context is a construction built upon hundreds of years of poetry and criticism written or translated into English. This is not to say that the history of English poetry does not include numerous non-English influences, including Chinese influences. But taking into account the hegemony of the English language globally in terms of economics, politics, and the arts, it is important to consider what it means for poetry written in another language to be considered “just poetry” by an English-speaking audience when the processes of translation that would allow that poetry to reach said audience are obscured. Therefore, in my translation I aim to retain some of the particularities of Yu Xiuhua’s writing both in terms of her style and poetics and in terms of her historical and cultural context. As Joseph Harrington points out, quoted by Heather Inwood (2014), “poetry . . .is ‘not reducible to poems’ and can instead be considered a ‘social form’ that is dispersed across multiple textual institutional sites” (6). This means that poetry makes meaning not just through its poetics but also through the way it is circulated and received. In that case, I think it is not perhaps possible, or in the current instance very interesting, to read poetry completely removed from its historical moment or the particularities of its authorship. Yu Xiuhua’s poetry and her person
certainly lie at an interesting intersection of institutional sites, textual and otherwise, that have informed her reception in China and my approach to the translation of her poetry. And since an understanding of our current historical moment requires some understanding of the processes that have lead up to it, I find it important to contextualize the style and content of Yu’s writing and her reception as a poet not only at this particular “conjuncture”\(^7\) but also within a longer trajectory of both Chinese poetics and “poethood.”

While it is beyond the scope of this project to give a detailed overview of the history of Chinese poetry\(^8\) regarding its style or its cultural significance, in order to better situate Yu Xiuhua’s poetry and her status as a poet, I would like give a brief account of what I see as the most relevant\(^9\) forces at play in shaping and sustaining modern Chinese poetry. But before moving back in time, I would like to draw attention to a couple of aspects of poetry in China that might be unfamiliar to a non-specialist reader, both because of a general lack of knowledge about China and because there is not quite a corresponding situation in the U.S. First of all, one should keep in mind that poetry in China, with its two and a half thousand years of history, has a certain cache even today that English poetry does not have in the United States. Classical Chinese poetry continues to actively live in the consciousness of the Chinese people, scholars, poets, or otherwise. Poems from the \textit{Shijing} (诗经) and those penned by Tang and Song poets such as Li Bai, Du Fu, Li Shangyin, Su Shi, and Li Qingzhao are still popular today, and as Inwood \cite{Inwood2014} points out, “many children are taught to recite Tang poems as soon as they can talk” \cite{3}. In fact, classical Chinese poetry continues to live in translation, and I would venture to say that classical Chinese poetry is more familiar than modern Chinese poetry
to an English speaking audience. If you were to ask someone in the U.S. to name a Chinese poet, it is more likely they would name Li Bai than even Bei Dao, one of the most widely translated and published modern Chinese poets of the Obscure or Misty Poetry (朦胧诗) school. However, even though modern Chinese poetry is quite a departure from the finely wrought classical forms of the past and does not garner the reading audience that classical poetry does even today, its status as a mode of cultural production continues to be inflected by poetry’s long and exalted history in China.

The examination system in pre-modern China, which could lead to coveted and relatively secure positions within the imperial bureaucracy, are fundamental to the lofty status of poetry and the poet. The examinations during that Tang and to some extent the Song dynasties “tested aspiring officials for their command of poetry,” establishing a connection between elite culture and poetry acumen. This basic connection continued, even as the form of the examinations changed, and literati culture in many ways revolved around poetry—its writing, collection, recitation, printing, and so on. Classical poetry was defined by a variety of techniques, “sophisticated, musical forms and styles,” and differed from prose writing in terms of theme and function (van Crevel 2008, 2). For example, “the majesty of the natural world, the fate of kingdoms and empires, and the tragedy of the official whose advice goes unheeded by the ruler” were all popular themes, and officials often used poetry to remonstrate with rulers (1-2). This was because, as Maghiel van Crevel (2008) explains, literature in general was valued by “its capacity to ‘convey the Way,’” and poetry more specifically by its ability to “[articulate] what is on the mind intently” or “[verbalize] emotion” (诗言志).” In the context of premodern China,
that did not mean individual self-expression, but rather appropriate expression of a mental state that suits the “circumstances” all in accordance with “the socio-moral code of Confucianism” (2). In sum, Chinese poetry has a long history as a valued mode of communication and moral instruction, which required great skill and could result in high prestige, and it has always played a significant part in China’s political affairs.

Modern poetry (现代诗) in China emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century alongside the collapse of the Qing dynasty and in concert with the establishment of the Republic of China. Not only was New Poetry (新诗) heavily influenced by Western poetics, it was also wrapped up in discourses of democracy and a broad push to change the manner of literary expression. With “the Literary Revolution (文学革命) of 1917, triggered in the pages of New Youth (新青年),” many intellectuals, particularly Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu, began calling for the use of more “colloquial modern language” in literature, leading to the eventual establishment of vernacular or plain Chinese writing (白话) (van Crevel 2008, 3).10 This literary reform, which was part of a largely political project of nation building, eschewed classical Chinese as elitist and feudal. Instead, writers at the time attempted to retroactively trace a history of “vernacular” Chinese writing in order to create a narrative of literary progression that would further undergird the “modernization” of China. At the same time, with the dismantling of the imperial court system, poets in China lost their particular status. That does not mean, however, that the construction of the poet as a cultural figure of interest disappeared. Instead, moving through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, there is a shift toward language, poetics, and themes that address contemporary Chinese life while retaining
echoes of classical poetry’s political engagement and a literati gatekeeping mentality, to which I will return to below, even within poetry schools that self-define as non-elitist.

In the interest of most efficiently and effectively situating Yu Xiuhua’s poetics, I will largely gloss over much of the twentieth century, but that is not meant to imply that there was no literary activity in China between the 1920s and 1980s, far from it. In fact, literature, including poetry, was at the heart of China’s twentieth century political and social movements, and the use of language was closely tied to identity practices and power. As noted above, the Republican era (~1912-1949) was a time when Chinese intellectuals embraced and experimented with foreign ideas and writing styles that affected “discursive and stylistic practices” in Chinese writing (Denton 1996, 17). However, even though there was an emphasis on colloquial writing styles, literary writing was still something of an elite practice and retained aspects of its classical origins. It was after the Chinese Community Party came into power that poetic production changed drastically, as the arts and every facet of their production and distribution came under control of the CCP, and ground nearly to a halt during the Cultural Revolution. Yet literature, and specifically the use of language, remained an important political tool. For example, as the Communist Party fought to legitimize itself as a peasant-based revolutionary movement, there were efforts to collect folk songs and stories in order to incorporate the language of the peasant class into the Party’s rhetorical and aesthetic strategies. After Mao gained control of China, he promoted politically “correct” poetics, essentially collapsing art and propaganda, which ultimately produced the trend known as Political Lyricism (政治抒情诗). Combined with heavy censorship of other writing styles, Mao’s control of language ran so deep that its mark lingered on Chinese language
use in the PRC for at least thirty years; “known as the Mao Style or Mao speak (毛文体),” it was characterized by “a predilection for political lingo, ideologically heavy abstractions and the grand gesture” (van Crevel 2008, 4-5). It is for this reason that the Misty Poets, who emerged in the late 70s, used a more personal, subjective, soft or “misty,” and aesthetically abstract language to resist the Party’s supremacy.

Quoting scholar Hu Xundong, Michel Hockx (2015) notes that “the 1980s was the heyday of modern poetry in China. Poetry was like pop culture then,” where people in China, particularly those who were more scholarly, were again able to consider poetry as entertainment and as art (143). It was out of this post-Mao cultural fervor that the two poles Maghiel van Crevel (2008) focuses on, Elevated and Earthly, began to solidify in the poetry movements of the 80s and 90s. On the one hand, there was the “1980s self-proclamation of (Elevated) Intellectual Writings, and in Yeh’s words, the emergence of a ‘cult of poetry’—tragic-heroic like Obscure Poetry but semi-religious rather than semi-political,” while on the other hand there were the “Earthly oriented” schools, including the Trash School and the Lower Body Poetry Movement. Earthly poetics grew out of a distrust of anything that smacked of officialdom and intellectualism and actively worked into “colloquializing and vulgarizing trends” (18). In other words, poets of the “Earthly oriented” schools actively positioned themselves in opposition to the “government-sponsored uses of literature and culture in China” that I have traced the roots of above, including official channels of publication and recognition (Inwood 2015, 53). Yet despite these two very different positions, van Crevel, Inwood, and Yeh all agree that they still fall within the constellation of modern Chinese poetry as it is organized around the idea
of the avant-garde (先锋), a label that the poets themselves are quite conscious of. While this designation does not necessarily mean the same thing it has in other parts of the world, where it is defined more narrowly, one can clearly see that modern poetry in China has from its inception pushed against the “traditional,” it has considered itself experimental (实验) and explorative (探索), and it has often been poorly received by the public at first encounter (van Crevel 2008, 6). Modern Chinese poetics, then, are generally so far removed from classical poetics that in a population where “many children are taught to recite Tang poems as soon as they can talk,” modern Chinese poetry has not gained the readership classical poetry still enjoys (Inwood 2014, 3). In many ways, despite the proclaimed efforts of the Lower Body group and the School of Rubbish as Earthly movements to associate themselves with a “Popular Standpoint,” they have in fact been invested in conversations and poetics that in no way include a “popular” sensibility. However, I would argue that as the Earthly camp “tends toward the quotidian, colloquial, anticultural, antilyrical, antimythical, mundane, realist, relative, ordinary, authentic, indigenous, local, Southern, and corporeal” (34), it has helped to create a path for a poet like Yu Xiuhua to enter not only poetry scenes defined and regulated by active contemporary poets, but also the “popular” consciousness.

Returning to Yu Xiuhua’s poetics, her relatively plain use of language in combination with the content of her writing can make her poetry feel “mundane . . . ordinary, authentic, indigenous, local, Southern, and corporeal.” As noted above, her poems are firmly rooted in the rural landscape of her home village in Hubei province and she often describes her day-to-day tasks, including fetching water, farming the earth,
walking to town, feeding fish, taking medicine, or drinking tea. And despite her own assertion that her various identity tags should not be used to label her poetry, she often writes about these daily tasks specifically from the point of view of a woman, which includes the threading through of themes of love and marriage, as well as describing her embodied experience as someone with cerebral palsy, all lending her work a certain “authenticity.” Yet while these elements of modern poetry have not necessarily become popular outside of the tight-knit poetry “live scenes” that Heather Inwood studies, Yu Xiuhua has been embraced as “the Emily Dickinson of China.” The parallels between these two women perhaps require a little more investigation, and it is highly likely this is just another “label,” in this case chosen to promote Yu’s work and thus modern Chinese poetry in general on the transnational literary stage. However, it is the case the Yu Xiuhua and her poetry are popular in China, more “popular” than the School of Rubbish or the Lower Body poets, and she did not become famous through the usual channels, by which I refer to participation in the various poetry movements that, regardless of what the group claims, tend to be urban and actively curated. How is it that Yu Xiuhua’s work has found itself in such a prominent spot on the national literary stage?

Poet to the People: Chinese Poetry on the Internet

One of the most immediately striking things about Yu Xiuhua’s popularity is how she arrived at it. She gained her popular audience through the internet, and even more specifically, through the phenomenon of virality. Of course, as anyone involved in small press poetry scenes here in the United States could surmise, and as Heather Inwood (2014) Discusses at length in Verse Gone Viral, it is not in and of itself striking that a poet
would write and publish on the internet in China. In fact, poets in China embraced the internet nearly as soon as it came into being, and “the love affair between poets and the Internet” has resulted in newly energized discourses of poetry in China, both shifting how poets think about audience and publication and creating a space for a wider range of participants, again in terms of audience but also in terms of producers (46). The concept of the avant-garde has long been central to modern Chinese poetry on the mainland, and certainly the internet is a space where the new is constantly supplanting the old. As a result, China’s poetry “live scenes,” as they are termed by Inwood, now tend to position “live” interaction and participation through the internet against a more established, “official” poetry arena defined by high levels of gatekeeping and print publication (17).13 Inwood points out that numerous poets in China today position the poetry arena “as an ‘area of the dead,’” or to put the distinction more clearly, “the Internet is where poetry ‘happens’ . . . ‘it is changing, happening, and growing, whereas the poetry arena is pre-existent and static’” (18). Therefore, many contemporary poets conceive of print editors and publishing houses as out of touch with the poetry of “now,” the poetry vanguard, because the only way to truly gain an understanding of current poetry is “through participation online,” and it is no longer necessarily the case that internet publication is seen as merely a step on the way to print publication (21). In this light, it is not surprising that a poet might find her voice and her audience by posting her poems and engaging with a poetry community online.

Perhaps even more relevant to Yu Xiuhua’s situation, it is not merely that the online poetry scene is an integral part of modern Chinese poetry discourse, and poetry published and circulated online can be considered equally if not more literary or relevant
than poetry published in print. Just as the internet has created a general “communication revolution,” since it is open to anyone who can access it and it is difficult to control, it has also become an “unofficial” space where poets can publish and interact that is far beyond the scope of any previous means of engagement. Not only has this resulted in an uptick in very public debates on modern poetry, but it has also meant increased participation of “‘common people’ and, increasingly, socially and economically disenfranchised groups such as migrant workers and the rural poor,” or in this case, a poet like Yu Xiuhua (Inwood, 2014, 49). One example of this phenomenon has recently culminated in the documentary film and resulting anthology *Iron Moon* (我的诗篇 or “The Verse of Us” in the original Chinese), which collects poetry written by migrant workers from all around China. In his review of the anthology, Maghiel van Crevel (2017) notes that beginning at the turn of the century “the internet has boosted [this poetry’s] dissemination and raised connectivity and group consciousness among poets and readers,” leading to increased attention and additional modes of publication for migrant worker poets both online and in print. Of course, it is still true that the internet is a space where those one might term the modern literati, whether they align themselves with an intellectual genealogy and Yeh’s “cult of poetry” or position themselves alongside the Lower Body school and its ilk, continue to manage participation in poetry schools and scenes (Inwood 2015, 51). Yet, the sheer reach of the internet not only invites a broader reading audience than modern Chinese poetry has ever had before, but because of its nature it also invites that reading audience to participate in what Inwood calls “a mass form of gatekeeping” that interrupts what could otherwise be the gatekeeping authority of those explicitly embedded in poetry scenes (22). As a result, it is
not too surprising that Yu Xiuhua has been able to reach a poetry reading audience from her variously marginalized positions—as a woman, a farmer, a non-able-bodied person. This has clearly been facilitated by the relationship between modern Chinese poetry and the internet.

However, despite the fact that the internet has created spaces that allow those outside the literary elite to participate in literary scenes, it is still noteworthy that Yu Xiuhua broke into print publishing through the phenomenon of virality. As noted above, Yu Xiuhua came fully into being as a poet in the Chinese consciousness not because of her active engagement in the more established live poetry scenes in China, but through this very “mass form of gatekeeping” where “China’s otherwise non-poetry-reading online public behaves like a collective consciousness or what some are calling the ‘hive mind,’ using the acts of clicking and forwarding as a means of expressing an attitude toward modern Chinese poetry” (Inwood 2014, 22). This may not seem odd, but Yu Xiuhua’s particular brand of virality does not quite fit with the examples Inwood selects as representative in her study. For one thing, when poems have previously gone viral, it appears to be largely as the result of a critical response from the “common people.” Inwood focuses on two examples of this larger phenomenon. One instance was the viral parodying of Zhao Lihua’s work, which people angrily claimed was just sentences written with line breaks and, particularly in the context of China’s grand poetic tradition, should not have led to the kind of status Zhao had achieved. The term “Pear Blossom form” was coined as a shorthand for criticizing her writing, “Pear Blossom” or lihua ti (梨花体) being a pun on the lihua (丽华) in Zhao Lihua’s name (160). The other example Inwood discusses of a known poet’s work going viral involves a very similar public
response to poet Che Yan’gao, a government official who upon winning the Lu Xun Prize for Literature was accused of corruption and hardly ridiculed (159-65). His name also birthed a pun-based from—“Baby Lamb form”—and his poetry judged unworthy in the court of public opinion. The main difference between these two incidents was that while other poets came to Zhao Lihua’s defense, in Che Yan’gao case they did not, both because he was not involved with live poetry scenes and because his original critic was a well-known and respected poet in China. In both of these cases, the gatekeeping function of the internet worked to draw attention to specific poets and poems that “China’s otherwise non-poetry-reading online public” found to be unworthy of praise and recognition, quite a different brand of virality than in the case of Yu Xiuhua.

Of course, Inwood does explore poetry going viral as an expression of approval rather than criticism, but it is in the context of the outpouring of “Quake Poetry” in response to the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake. In this instance, there were many poems that went viral, making “Quake Poetry” a kind of cultural phenomenon that “can be considered one of the defining incidents in Chinese poetry in the first decade of the new millennium,” and was also deeply tied to national identity and the processing of collective trauma (Inwood 2014, 168). As such, Quake Poetry demonstrates the way the internet enables a broad swath of the population to participate in poetic production, and further demonstrates how poetry, like anything else posted on the internet, becomes to some extent the property of all. There is one poem in particular, titled “Child, Quickly Grab hold of Mama’s Hand” (孩子，快抓紧妈妈的手), that received a lot of attention. Inwood suggests that this poem’s popularity had to do with its style and content, which made it easy to memorize and was emotional without being too sad (172). The author, a
Su Shansheng from Shandong who hadn’t graduated high school or previously written much in the way of poetry, was for a period of time unknown. Even after discovering the author, it was the poem itself that retained the internet’s attention. In fact, the poem made its way into sentimental slideshows, songs, and “commercially produced videos” that were authored by others. Thus it was not the poet himself who was ultimately the point of interest, but the poem, which like many of the Quake Poems that were circulated, became the collective property of the people and of the Chinese Communist Party, which supported the circulation of these poems and videos in order to “[bolster] an image of unity and national strength that the CCP has been intent on promoting since the 1980s” (175). As one can see, in all of these cases of poetry going viral a broad cross-section of the Chinese population sat up and took notice of modern Chinese poetry, but none of these instances look just like the case of Yu Xiuhua.

At this point, one should already be able to discern the way some of the forces at play in modern Chinese poetry have converged to create the phenomenon of Yu Xiuhua, but let me articulate several things that I see as being particularly significant, both to her popularity in China and to my interest in her and her work. First, as Inwood suggests in each of her examples of poetry gone viral, the style of the poetry had something to do with the heated response from a “non-poetry-reading online public.” On the one hand, Yu Xiuhua’s poetics resonate with Earthly poetry and perhaps even the Lower Body School, who in their manifesto claim:

Knowledge, culture, tradition, poetic sentiment, lyricism, philosophy, contemplation, commitment, calling, mastership, canon . . . all these words belong to the upper body and have nothing to do with art . . .
As regards poetic sentiment from the Tang and Song dynasties . . . we are going to make poetic sentiment die a very ugly death . . .

We want only the lower body. That is real, concrete, tangible, exciting, wild, sexy, unimpeded. (van Crevel 2008, 316)

Yu’s poetic style, at least in her use of language and form, is not complex nor is it reminiscent of classical Chinese poetry to any degree. Her images are often “real, concrete, tangible” and her expression of love and desire is also considered “unimpeded,” especially in relation to her disability, which to Chinese scholars seems to indicate she should not be able to write so passionately about “her desires and amorous feelings” (欲望、风情) (Shen 2015, 147). However, her striking use of imagery also disrupts the mundane and concrete elements of her writing, and draws on “poetic sentiment, lyricism, philosophy, contemplation” to create something poignant and affective. In fact, I recently had one of my translations critiqued by a professor who felt I had not adequately addressed the “spirituality” in the poem. Therefore, I suggest that, first, as the “lay” public found itself face-to-face with modern Chinese poetics through the various instances detailed above, by the time Yu Xiuhua’s poetry came on the scene, the public was primed for a more positive assessment of poetry written in a modern style similar to that promoted by the Lower Body School. Yu’s poetry in particular might lend itself to public approval in this context since it does not come accompanied by any manifesto or strong statement of poetics that would embed her writing in the exclusionary discourses of the avant-garde. Furthermore, because her language is relatively plain, her poetry could be considered “accessible” to a wide range of readers, but because the content is vivid and there are certainly qualities of lyricism and poetic sentiment it is not overly
mundane and would not fall into the “lineated sentences” category. Yu Xiuhua’s poetics take on a modern Chinese avant-garde aesthetic and temper it with a lyric affectivity.

Another angle from which to consider Yu Xiuhua’s reception is that of her interlocking identities. Alongside poetic style, Inwood’s examples indicate that the social positioning of the author and thus the “China” that they portray in their writing appears to be related to the tenor of mass reception online. Both Zhao Lihua and Che Yan’gao were largely criticized because of their official status, and Inwood’s example of a Quake Poem that went viral because of positive response is attributed to an essentially uneducated poetry nobody. As I have indicated, poets in the Earthly camp like the Lower Body poets were anti-intellectual, but van Crevel (2008) and Inwood (2015) point out that these poets never fully divorced themselves from the “pollution” of academic knowledge, nor do they allow just anyone to become a member of their school, often deleting posts from their blogs that they feel don’t fit with their aesthetics or views. As such, their poetry remains somewhat obscure in the context of popular opinion. So it seems that as a form of “mass gatekeeping,” poems seem to go viral largely in reaction against more official poetry discourse, including established poetry schools and also “government-sponsored uses of literature and culture” (Inwood 2015, 53). Yu Xiuhua, as any popular article about her will be sure to remind us, did not graduate high school and has never lived outside of her rural village. She also articulates struggling with both with her disability and her gendered positionality; her father arranged what has apparently turned out to be an unhappy marriage for her with a man from another village who works as a migrant worker. These various elements lend Yu Xiuhua and her poetry a certain sheen of “unofficial” authenticity. Regardless of how she may engage with the vast contents of the
internet, she appears to be genuinely “not ‘polluted by knowledge,’” nor was she, at the time her poem first went viral, a member of any suspect official institution that might promote her work for corrupt reasons. Lastly, as readers are constantly reminded by those writing about her poetry, the sentiments she expresses appear to be legitimately grounded in her embodied experiences as rural farmer, as woman, as someone with cerebral palsy. Not only are her poetics relatively consumable for a general audience, but her particular positionality makes her, well, authentically likable. Moreover, aligning oneself with her poetics by sharing her poems could also have been considered a subtle move to align oneself against the mechanisms of the CCP as cultural producer, since her poetry appears to be written from an explicitly personal rather than political position. Yu Xiuhua herself is adamant that “I just want to write poems, my poems” (Zhou 2016). However, her relationship to the CCP has become more complex.

While both Yu Xiuhua’s poetics and her identity have certainly intersected with contemporary Chinese poetics and the phenomenon of the internet to make her particular brand of popularity possible, it is also important to revisit an aspect of poems going viral that Inwood notes at the end of her discussion of Quake Poetry: official approval of the CCP. Since her original poem went viral, Yu’s poetry has been collected and published by a university press, a player in China’s official poetry “arena,” and she was recently awarded the 3rd annual Peasants’ Literary Award (农民文学奖), organized “by Zhang Yiyi, a famous writer from central China's Hunan Province,” which includes a monetary prize of 30,000 yuan (U.S.$ 4,400) (Wang 2016). Yu has had insurance companies offer her free packages, her house has been rebuilt at no cost to herself, and she has been “elected” (scare quotes in the original story) as deputy chairman of the Federation of
Literary and Art Circles in Zhongxiang city (Yu 2016). While it may be the case that her poetry, untainted by any official institutions, appealed to a wide audience in China, it is also the case that she has now been enthusiastically embraced by these official worlds so invested in mechanisms of legitimation and gatekeeping. Certainly supporting this rural poet for whom “writing poetry is a natural physical impulse” is an excellent way for the CCP to “reclaim ideological legitimacy in the eyes of the Chinese public” (Yu 2015; Inwood 2014, 175). As a political party that grew out of a peasant-based revolutionary movement, but has since been continually accused of corruption and has ushered in a fiercely competitive capitalist economy that has only widened the economic gap between rural and urban areas, the CCP is always looking for ways to realign its brand of Chinese national identity with peasant culture and to reaffirm itself as the party of all the people. While Yu Xiuhua does not romanticize rural living, her talent and her story might appear to be a testament to the spirit and humanity of the Chinese peasant class and has certainly created a widely united response, akin to the phenomenon of Quake Poetry. Official recognition positions the ruling elite again in line with the rural, working population, and supports a particular discourse of a united Chinese nation. If “mass gatekeeping” is in part an attempt to wrest power from official institutions, it will be interesting to see how this part of her reception affects her popularity in the future.

By now, it should be clear that Yu Xiuhua is not “just” a great poet, but that her poetry and her reception in China are particularly Chinese in a number of interesting ways. What I mean is that her writing fits into the trajectory of modern Chinese poetry such that it bridges the print poetry arena, more avant-garde poetry live scenes, and a popular aesthetic. Even her rise to fame seems to be a particularly Chinese phenomenon
as the nature and status of poetry in China has been further shaped by the internet as a means of production, circulation, and publication. As noted earlier, poetry is not just an aesthetic object; it is also a “social form” that both emerges from a particular history into its current conjuncture and as such tells us something about that history and its present. I hope now it is easier to see why I find a translation of Yu Xiuhua’s poetry “shorn of its cultural and historical context” to be not just difficult but undesirable. Not only would such a translation necessarily leave behind many of the interesting layers that resonate in Yu’s work, but it would also drain her poetry of its very “liveness,” part of what its original audience experienced through the mechanisms of the internet. This includes not just the text of her work or its viral circulation, but the various paratexts of internet materiality, including things like comments by readers, her own comments and edits, recontextualizations of her poems when shared on various platforms and alongside advertisements embedded in internet pages, and related articles and online discussion of her and her work. It is partly for these reasons that I plan to explore a queer-feminist method of translation that will allow me to engage and enact some of these fluid layers of meaning on the page. But in order to do so, I must also confront the limiting expectations for standard English literary translation today.
1.2. Grounds for a Queer-Feminist Translation Methodology

**Imperialistic Tendencies in English Translation**

Literary translation as a key site of cultural exchange has the potential to act in concert with transnational power structures reaffirming global inequalities and upholding colonialisit and imperialist interrelations. It also has the potential to make radical interventions that can disrupt the us/them, familiar/strange, self/other binaries and subvert existing hierarchies, surfacing a more complex mapping of the transnational present. However, in order for English translation to be a truly effective tool of change, it needs to be a genre of literary writing that is considered valuable enough to have a significant audience. Then it must be more than a “reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with the values, beliefs, and representations that preexist it in the translating language and culture” (Venuti 2008, 14). Therefore, I am first invested in the importance of translation generally as well as in the specific case of my translation of poet Yu Xiuhua. Secondly, I argue the need to draw from queer and feminist theories in order to intervene in the mode of standard English translation that is dominant today. In so doing, I hope to make space for a plurality of translation approaches as well as to actively confront the potential violence enacted through a standard of English translation that casually suppresses the agency of both the translator and the author, and appeals to a mainstream or popular sense of human universality and/or the exotic other. I argue that a queer-feminist methodology of translation, both as it might currently be practiced and as it has yet to be imagined, can function as a non-U.S.-centric intervention that enacts collaboration through difference rather than solely through an imposed sameness. I consider this queer-
feminist approach to be aligned with Lawrence Venuti’s (2008) call for resistant modes of translation. In order to position it as such, I will first detail the modern standard for English literary translation and discuss how it is entwined with our global economy, parsing out how the devaluing of English translation as a genre functions within an imperialist framework, facilitating a policing of cultural exchange that continually recenters U.S. literary and cultural ideologies for a U.S. audience.

Discourses of Fluency

What does standard English translation look like today? Keeping in mind that the various vocabulary used to describe translations—including terms like domestication, foreignization, resistance, and fluency—change across cultural contexts and historical conjunctures, Venuti (2008) argues in *The Translator’s Invisibility* that invisibility is the preferred status of the Anglo-American translator today. In other words, at least in the realm of literary translation, which will be the focus of this project, a translated text is meant to convey the impression that, using one of many flawed metaphors for the process of translation, the reader is looking through a clear window into another world. As such, the presence or mark of the translator or the processes of translation should be completely undetectable to the English-speaking reader. Venuti holds that the invisibility of the translator is secured via “an illusionist effect of discourse” in the translator’s rendering of the source text into English as well as through standard modes of “reading and evaluating” translations in both the United Kingdom and the United States (1). This, then, brings us to the matter of “fluency” in English translation.
Following Venuti’s (2008) logic further, “the illusion of transparency is an effect of fluent discourse, of the translator’s effort to insure easy readability by adhering to current usage, maintaining continuous syntax, fixing precise meaning” (1; emphasis mine). Fluency then intimates a use of English that feels current but generally not too colloquial, abides by the basic tenets of standard English grammar so as to flow smoothly, and reads with a certain air of authority such that images and underlying or overt meaning is conveyed unambiguously. To put it another way, the style of the English should not intrude uncomfortably on the experience of reading, or the style of the original text should be secondary to its “meaning” for a translator. This standard of fluency has been regularly affirmed through the language chosen by reviewers when they do occasionally elect to comment directly on the translation of a book. Perusing a short list of representative quotes that Venuti has pulled from reviews of texts translated into English between the 1940s and the 1990s, style as it relates to fluency is repeatedly the concern: “the style is elegant, prose lovely”; “gracefully if not flawlessly translated”; “pleasantly fluent”; “a triumph of fluent, gravid momentum, all stylishness and commonsensical virtuosity”; “this book is faithful . . . if not quite idiomatic”; “fluently translated”; “flows crisply” (2-3). Vladimir Nabokov (1992) similarly laments the regular praise of translations that “read smoothly” at the beginning of his own argument in favor of rendering the “textual sense” of a work in translation through the use of copious footnotes (127). On the other side of the judgment coin, criticism is articulated in the terms “wooden”; “doughy”; and “translationese”; “translationese”; translateese”; “translatoese”; and “the dull thud of translationese” (Venuti 2008, 3-4). This mode of review affects approaches to reading translations, linking English fluency with perceived
accuracy in a translation, such that anything that moves too far outside of the boundaries of fluent, standard English risks being considered bad, or at the very least artless, regardless of the nature of the source text being translated.

At the same time, translation as a genre in English has a lengthy history of being considered second-class literary output. Translators have long framed their discussions of translation in terms of its (im)possibility and thus taken a defensive stance regarding its value. Part of this continued need to defend translation stems from the fact that, as noted by Cosima Bruno (2012), authenticity is more deeply entwined with the discourse of translation than with any other discourse (269). Because most English-speaking readers are aware that something is “lost in translation,” though with little sense of what or how this might affect their engagement with the translated text, they tend to be suspicious of anyone new entering the scene, whether translator or unknown foreign author. As Johannes Göransson (2014) puts it, “to be a translator is to assume to [sic] role of a hoaxer, someone who might be undermining the quality and trustworthiness of literature (and taste)” (para. 3). Or, what is perhaps even worse, translators themselves and the work they do is entirely ignored by the average English-speaking reader. How many translators could, for example, a typical U.S. college student name? Certainly few if any.

As a result, the translator is always defending their own authority to translate. In so doing, another question arises: to borrow the title from Walter Benjamin’s famous essay on the subject, what is the task of the translator? Is the translator an active, creative agent, as skillful and imbued with talent as an author of an “original” creative work, or is the translator simply “performing a technical stunt?” (Venuti 2008, 7). Despite the fact
that many translators and theorists have both prior to and after the advent of
deconstructionism either argued convincingly for the creative agency of the translator or
troubled the very originality of creative production to begin with, I would venture to say
that the question has not been settled in the minds of English-speaking readers. Instead,
this paradigm of invisibility and fluency avoids and perpetuates both of these concerns.
As stated above, this paradigm links English fluency with perceived accuracy or
authenticity in translation, and it also removes the translator further from view so that a
reader might pretend they don’t exist at all. In so doing, a suspicious attitude toward
translation is fostered, which helps to maintain firm limits on possible approaches to
translation. It is this phenomenon in combination with the current economics of
translation that allows for the policing of foreignness as it enters an English-speaking
U.S. consciousness and continually reaffirms a Western paradigm of literary excellence,
at least as far as readers in the U.S. are concerned.

The Economics of Invisibility and Fluent English Translation

Surely one can already begin to see how discourses of fluency might be entwined
with the economics of literary translation in English through the language of criticism
detailed above. However, the economics of invisibility and fluency in English translation
are even more intricate and subtly entrenched. To begin with, this standard of fluency
partly developed out of a shift in communication strategies and technologies after World
War II that fueled the expansion of “the advertising and entertainment industries and
support[ed] the economic cycle of commodity production and exchange.” This
commercial shift is rooted in a scientific approach to communication “emphasizing
immediate intelligibility and the appearance of factuality” in English writing in general. Those who wanted to make a living by writing found their work commodified and commercially quantified in relation to a particular prose style that I would call the “rhetoric of objectivity”—plain and authoritative language that appears to convey information through and not from the author. One can see how “the dominance of transparency [here read as invisibility] in contemporary writing,” tied to an economy of “objective writing,” might have given rise to a translation approach that as it matches English-speaking standards of clear prose appears to give an unobstructed view into the “original” text. This standard and its resultant rhetorical effect also aligns with a notion of translation as just a tool of communication or a means of relaying information about another culture. Here again is the notion of the window, where the translator must create the illusion of allowing the original “information” to pass through them as if through a pane of glass. Here is the legacy of English translation as secondary reproduction wherein as a mode of writing it is shaped by standards of intelligibility and consumability rather than self-expression and aesthetic play. Moreover, the fluency standard was “enforced by its economic value, which sets up acceptable ‘limits’ for deviation” (Venuti 2008, 5).

This basis for evaluation, both in terms of skill and monetary worth, is further enforced by United States’ copyright laws and the market demand for English translations, both of which harden these limits of “deviation.”

Copyright law in the United States, which Venuti (2008) discusses in some detail, articulates the value of translation through the binary of creative production/passive reproduction. Since copyright itself is based on a concept of authorship that “is defined as the creation of a form or medium of expression, not an idea, as originality of language,
not thought,” translators can be granted copyright because they are writing into a new language. However, the law also positions translation “as an ‘adaptation’ or ‘derivative work’ based on an ‘original work of authorship,’” and that original copyright, under which the right to make adaptations or “derivative works” is elaborated, “is vested in the ‘author’” (8). When translation contracts are drawn up, they usually fall under the category “work made for hire” meaning that all rights under the copyright accrue to the “the employer or person from whom the work was prepared” (9). In other words, just exactly whether or to what extent U.S. translators own the product of their own labor is somewhat ambiguous. As a result, copyright laws skew the monetary value of financial gains for a work in translation in the author’s or publisher’s favor such that literary translation is not generally a lucrative practice in the United States.

In order to make a reasonable income from translation alone, one would have to undertake multiple translation projects each year, which limits “the literary invention and critical reflection applied to a project” and positions translators as competitors in a free-market system leading to potentially lower compensation as the supply of texts for translation falls short of the demand for translation work (11). Thus local economies of translation in the United States do not allow the translator much room for experimentation if they hope to be fairly compensated, since the somewhat ambiguous state of translation copyright law in conjunction with standard contracts have created a highly competitive market, a market that abides by the standards of fluency and invisibility.

Taking a bigger-picture view of trends in literary translation from and into English, copyright law and compensations begin to look like just one small part of an economic system of translation embedded in capitalist structures of U.S. dominance and
imperialism. Tracing the flow of literature transnationally, it is quickly apparent that for the U.S. (and the U.K.) literature tends to flow out but only trickle in (Venuti 2008, 12). The imperialistic contours of this imbalance begin to come into view through the examination of book production statistics for these two nations, which “increased fourfold since the 1950s, but the number of translations remained roughly between 2 and 4 percent of the total” with only a small uptick in the 1960s. In contrast, the trend in other countries, including Western European nations like France and Germany, has been in the opposite direction (11). Moreover, when looking at the makeup of translations bought by other nations, for the majority of books the source language is English. This means that when considering literature as an international commodity, there is a definite trade imbalance: U.S. publishing houses, and perhaps authors as well, make money from the export of English books—$1.43 million in total in 1990—but literature from non-English speaking nations has only marginal salability in the United States (15).

Of course, in the context of the United States’ economy, $1.43 million is not a very significant amount. However, the significance of the uneven literary “trade” goes beyond financial gain. In Internet Literature in China, Michel Hockx (2015) draws our attention to the lively translation forums hosted by the Chinese poetry website Chinapoet around 2004. Although the website did not specify a language of translation, the only translation work Hockx observed was from and into English. This stood in contrast to Everypoet, a Sweden-based, English-language poetry website that largely served a U.S. audience, which did not have a single forum or thread devoted to translation of any kind (154). It is this “trade imbalance” that encourages a situation where famous English poems are translated into and then discussed and shared in Chinese, but “the hierarchy of
global literature causes westerners to mistakenly believe that they have nothing to learn from Chinese literature” (Wang 2012, 572). Clearly transnational literary flows tend to follow colonial trade patterns, continuing a colonial framework of cultural currency.

As Venuti (2008) puts it, “foreign publishers have exploited the global drift toward American political and economic hegemony since World War II, actively supporting the international expansion of British and American cultures” (12). In a sense, film and literature act as cultural wedges with the potential to further open foreign markets to a variety of other (Anglo-)American exports, commercial, cultural, and ideological. Literature and the arts are a particularly effective way of exporting ideology because rather than attempting to ram ideas and values down someone’s throat, similar to the way the translator’s invisibility obscures any manipulation of the source text, literature obscures the transmission of cultural values. Generally, literature appears to be about something else—characters and their individual stories, the “human condition”—while it is at the same time completely steeped in the value systems out of which it is written, via various mechanisms from themes to cultural patterns of behavior to narrative structure to poetics and beyond. At the other end, the sheer lack of a market for translations in the United States indicates at best a lack of awareness of literary worlds beyond those that exist in English and at worst a disdain for non-U.S. cultural production. Of course, this is in turn fueled by the interlocking discourses of fluency, accuracy, authenticity, and authority that keep translation work and works in translation from gaining the same literary status in the U.S. as “original” creative works written in English. The continued devaluing of translation also feeds the continued affirmation of U.S. cultural and literary hegemony, at least for a U.S. English-speaking readership.
"Invisible" Gatekeeping and Cultural Exchange

Not only do these literal economies of translation as they intersect with present day standards of fluency continually devalue the work of translators working into English and maintain a certain limited notion of what translation does in the English-speaking world, but they also affect who gets translated into English and in what capacity. This selectivity and the ways it informs future translation projects has the effect of policing cultural exchange through an economics of familiarity and domestication that further affirms the us/them, same/other, familiar/strange binary. Let me note here that my purpose is certainly not to argue that domestication, the process of bringing the text towards the target-language reader, is the wrong approach to translation, or that it is even possible to translate without domesticating the text to some extent. At the same time, I do believe that privileging a thoroughly domesticated approach that excludes all other modes of translation effectively obscures the violence that takes place as “a fluent translation masquerades as a true semantic equivalence when it in fact inscribes the foreign text with a partial interpretation, partial to English-language values, reducing if not simply excluding the very differences that translation is called on to convey” (Venuti 2008, 16). While literature does not simply flow freely across borders, there is certainly a transnational exchange and English-language literature is most definitely influenced by literary discourses and trends positioned outside of the English-speaking sphere. However, since that literature for the majority of U.S. readers is consumed in translation, the economics of translation in combination with discourses of fluency act as effective gatekeeping mechanisms that influence the kinds of narratives, styles, and poetics
considered representational of particular brands of foreignness while at the same time surreptitiously inflecting those narratives, styles, and poetics with “the values, beliefs and representations that preexist” in the English of the United States (14).

Late twentieth century trends in the translation of modern Chinese poetry into English are a good example of how the selection of literature for translation can be limited by U.S. Cold War ideology. In Cosima Bruno’s (2012) detailed study of contemporary Chinese poetry in English translation she points out that the Anglo-American market shows a marked “preference for socio-political themes” (265). Considering U.S. politics and international policy during the twentieth century Cold War era wherein the United States used the promotion of a U.S brand of democracy internationally as one means of maintaining global supremacy, it is not surprising that during the 1980s and 90s there was a strong desire to find traces of a democratic consciousness and anti-Chinese Communist Party sentiment in contemporary Chinese poetry (Owen 1990, 29). In fact, of the 42 single-authored collections that were translated into English from 1980-2009, a majority were originally written around 1989-90, and only four were written by poets living on the mainland; the rest were penned by poets in exile (Bruno 2012, 264). These numbers demonstrate particular interest in poetry written within the political context of the period leading up to and immediately following the Tiananmen Square massacre, as well as interest in the perspectives of Chinese poets who were positioned outside of and perhaps in opposition to the Chinese government’s ideologies. Or as Kan Wang (2012) puts it, “as long as the writers and their works were banned in China, American publishing houses are always keen to introduce them” (575). Wang even suggests that Chinese literature that “lacks literary polish” is chosen for
translation over more “polished” works if the themes satisfy a U.S. vision of social problems in China (576). Michelle Yeh (1996) also points out the marketability of “dissent literature in a totalitarian regime,” noting that in this framework, “Chinese avant-garde poetry can easily be turned—as some may say, has already been turned—into a commodity in the international (especially Western) cultural market” (77). Bruno further explains that even when anthologies of Chinese poetry published between 1980-2009 may have emphasized aesthetic criteria in the selection process and included poems that were not overtly political, these anthologies were generally packaged and marketed in English as politically themed.28 Clearly contemporary poetry selected for translation within the current English-language paradigm has been influenced by U.S. political and cultural value systems, leading to a very particular poetic snapshot and mode of reading framing Chinese political, cultural, and social realities.

Not only do U.S. ideologies inform who and what gets selected for translation, but the standard of fluent English translation as it informs choices made in the translation process also inflects the final translation itself, further influencing the conceptual “translatability” of the literature of a particular region. Michelle Yeh (2004), in discussing “the [Chinese] poem behind the [English] poem” in a translation context states “that the act of choosing certain poems for translation always presupposes what a Chinese poem is in the mind of the translator, which further influences the way the poems are translated” (252). This describes a sort of feedback loop in which the popular idea of what Chinese poetry is has been determined not only by (Anglo-)American cultural values but also by certain preexisting translated versions based on the English-language standard of fluency. This then leads to further “selective translation” of Chinese literary
works that fit within and thus affirm this preexisting notion of what Chinese literature is; then, the works selected are translated in such a way as to further emphasize the features they contain that led to their selection in the first place. This can have the effect of hardening any pre-existing notions of “Chineseness” held by an English-speaking readership.

Likely the quintessential example of this kind of translation feedback loop between English and Chinese appears to begin with Ezra Pound and his translations of classical Chinese poetry. Both poets and Sinologists suggest that in his collection *Cathay*, Pound not only opened the door to modern English poetry, he simultaneously “invented” Chinese poetry for the English-speaking world (Weinberger 2015, 49; Yeh 2004, 251). More specifically, Yeh discusses how Pound considered “visuality” to be the most translatable aspect of poetry (Yeh 2004, 605). While there is certainly an abundance of imagery in classical Chinese poetry, and the language itself has a different visuality than English, Pound’s insistence that the imagistic nature of Chinese characters made them capable of conveying meaning to one who has not studied the language is suspect, and his translations have since been critiqued in terms of “accuracy” by scholars including Yeh, who suggests that Pound’s emphasis on imagery left behind the rich layers of metaphorical meaning (and elements of sound) that classical Chinese poetry contains (253). While the question of “accuracy” in the translation of poetry is complex, and Eliot Weinberger (2016) suggests that Pound as a poet “intuitively corrected mistakes in the Fenollosa manuscript” (11), certainly one can say that Pound’s interpretations of Classical Chinese poetry, based largely on an idea he had about the nature of the Chinese language and poetics, have influenced both how Chinese poetry has been translated since
as well as which Chinese poems are considered translatable. Furthermore, I would like to note that Pound’s emphasis on imagery over style, cultural allusion, and even knowledge of the Chinese language itself allowed him to write in free verse, resulting in fluent English poems (49). I would argue that it is this fluency, in combination with Pound’s skill as a poet, that effected the enthusiastic reception of his “translations.” In other words, if Pound “define[d] what is ‘translatable China’” through these translations (Yeh 2011, 605), he did so partly in service to fluent translations in which his own quite heavy-handed manipulations are not made visible to anyone who cannot compare his work to the original Chinese.

Therefore, discourses of invisibility and fluency create a system wherein Chinese texts that lend themselves to the dominant mode of translation are selected for translation whereas others are not, which inherently pre-selects for topics, styles, and forms that are already more “familiar” or akin to U.S. notions of what is literary or what is essential to or representative of the Chinese people. To go a bit further, this may also have an effect on cultural production in the place of a foreign text’s origin. It has been suggested that not only have Western poetic movements such as surrealism and modernism had a clear impact on Chinese poetics (Yeh 2011, 607), but perhaps there are Chinese poets who write specifically for translation.30 Certainly this is not to say that literary innovation flows only in one direction; I am not saying that China is only acted upon by U.S. or Western literary paradigms and standards, nor is this to say that Chinese poets are without agency and do not, even in the process of writing poetry “for translation,” impress their own artistic stamp upon what they create. Still, this does seem to suggest that the supremacy of the English-language in terms of how it articulates literary
excellence and how it opens up a broader market for one’s work does to some extent organize cultural exchange through literary production. Moreover, the mechanisms at work are masked by the fluency/invisibility paradigm that Venuti details, which presents English translation as “accurate,” “authentic,” and untouched by the hand of the translator.

Of course, as I mentioned briefly in the last paragraph, it is important to avoid painting the picture that transnational geographies of literature, in terms of production, circulation, and evaluation, are organized solely by English-language standards, and as such reaffirming the often myopic and self-centered perspective of the literary scene in the United States. While English may in many ways appear to be the controlling language in terms of global literary excellence and discourses of translatability, the geographies of translational literature are more complex. In *A Common Strangeness*, Jacob Edmond (2012) explores how various transnational interactions among poets and critics alike have both perpetuated and disrupted “the binary opposition of commonness and strangeness” that have generally framed discussions of Chinese, Russian, and U.S. poetics since the Cold War era (4). In his words, looking at a World Literature only through the lens of Western discourse rather than considering it to be a descriptive term that takes into account the entirety of the world as a physical space ignores “‘the varieties of the world’s world literatures’ . . . the many lives that literary texts lead beyond their place of origin and the diverse literary canons and values that, depending on the place and time, the term names” (97). That is to say, literature does not all flow toward, through, or out of
English-speaking nations, and the particular topography of a world literature might appear quite differently depending on where one is situated on the globe.

English-language literature has not been the only literature to influence Chinese poets and Chinese writers and thinkers have not simply succumbed to Western modes of literary thinking. While it may be the case that Western literary paradigms have shaped Chinese poetics to the extent that some Chinese poets do write with English translation in mind, diverse literatures from all over the globe, including Eastern Europe and South America, have greatly influenced China’s literary development (van Crevel 2008, 55). And returning to Pound’s important translations in Cathay and their impact, the poetics of Modernism itself was thus influenced by Chinese poetics, at least as translated by Pound (Göransson 2016; Yao 2002). Thinking about translation as a movement or as a vessel for the exchange of aesthetics, ideologies, and culture, it is important to remember that these ideas and forms are in flux and do not simply begin in one location and land squarely in another. Instead, they continue to circulate, even within the receiving language. As Kirk Denton (1996) astutely reminds us in the introduction to Modern Chinese Literary Thought, while Western ideologies and aesthetics were embraced by those at the vanguard of China’s Republican movement, it was not as if these things were borrowed whole cloth and simply inserted into a Chinese context. Chinese thinkers and writers at the time folded these “foreign” ideas into their own thinking, adapting them for their own agendas within the new Republic of China. Similarly, the influence of English literary standards may influence both how foreign literatures are presented in English-speaking contexts and how literature has developed in our transnational environment, but that does not mean these standards are not inflected by either the cultures they are not native to or
by the dynamic movement of English-speaking or U.S. culture itself, which is by no means static or immutable.

Thinking about these more complex transnational literary flows, consider how I first encountered Yu Xiuhua’s poetry through the recommendation of a peer. In this case, I did not come across her work through the mechanism of English translation or markets of literary exchange, nor was her writing recommended to me by another U.S. poet. The point being that there are ways for literature to move across borders and between languages that fall, if not fully outside of then at least to the left of mechanisms of the market. Moreover, these channels do not necessarily rely on the expectations set up by previous translations or U.S.-centric acquisition strategies. In fact, there is a long history of textual exchange between China and other parts of the globe wherein selection and translation is not based solely on English, U.S., or Western standards of the literary or preconceptions of “Chineseness,” but on intimate relationships between people. In recent years, it is the university that has become a location for a more direct exchange among visiting and local professors and students in China and the United States (Yeh 2011, 603). While the university is not free from the power dynamics discussed above, nor even from the long histories of imperialism and exoticization that exist between “West” and “East,” they reveal the very nature of the transnational: we live within it all the time, regardless of our location on the globe, and it connects us in complex, dynamic ways. Literary exchange between China and the United States is thus not a forgone conclusion, utterly prescribed by a static approach to English translation employed by translators trapped within the confines of their own cultural discourses, cleanly controlling how Chinese poetry is encountered and perceived. There is room for
somewhat serendipitous, multidimensional encounters that have not yet been thoroughly processed through more official economies of international exchange, from which, I argue, it is possible to carve out more space for alternative responses or translation approaches that also embody the live, continuous, and potentially collaborative movements of literature around the world.

Venuti (2008) himself writes on the invisibility of the translator not to claim that there is no hope for us but to succumb to imperialist modes of literary exchange; instead, he is making a call to action. He wants us to recognize the invisibility of the translator in order to “at once critique the current situation and to hope for a future more hospitable to the differences that the translator must negotiate” (277). He calls on Maurice Blanchot’s notion of the translation not as a secondary copy of an unique and irrefutable original, but instead as a text that is itself “derivative, dependent on other, preexisting materials . . . but also dependent on the translation” (265). This frames the original as also continuously in transit, making meaning, different not only in comparison to other texts or other cultural textual production, but continuously different from itself. Through Blanchot’s move to unsettle the hierarchy between “original” and “translation, Venuti makes room for resistant modes of translation, first by allocating value and power equally between the translation and the “original,” and second by creating a space for translation work that performs its own creativity. His argument, like mine, is not that domestication is necessarily evil, but rather that a resistant mode of English translation today should include foreignizing discourses as one means of unsettling standard interpretations of Chinese poetry, poetics, and culture more broadly.
1.3 “Be Longings:” Theoretical Genealogies

“Womanhandling” a Translation

In order to move toward a resistant praxis in translation, I propose an exploration of the possibilities and limitations of a queer-feminist translation methodology that emphasizes transparency as opposed to invisibility. Again, although Venuti has used “transparency” as a synonym for invisibility, I use it here as one might use it in a business context to mean clarity and accountability, or a mode of operation that does not hide its processes from someone interested in the final product. My goal is to subvert not only the layered power dynamics of standard English translation and to make apparent the interplay of the domestic and the foreign in any literary work, but also to disrupt the production/reproduction and authentic original/copy hoax binaries that stem from a conception of the individual as complete, coherent subject. In order to do so, I call on women of color feminism and Aimee Carrillo Rowe’s (2005) politics of relation in conjunction with a queer theory of radical failure and a theory of the monstrous to map out an approach to translation that refuses to produce the polished, singular, fluent translation that is the English standard. I hope to situation this project within a genealogy of feminist political interventions where women have actively used the manipulation that is translation to further their political goals and then to draw translation theory together with queer and feminist theoretical discussions that do not directly address translation in order to contribute to a feminist translation theory of accountability, relationality, collaboration, and play.
In order to orient this part of the discussion, I turn to Sherry Simon’s (2000) succinct overview of feminist theory’s three main interventions into translation theory and praxis. Simon considers how women have been engaged in the act of translation, the way translation might approach grammatically gendered languages, and the gendered metaphorics of translation or how gendered language has long been variously entwined with translation theory ultimately maintaining a hierarchical binary: creation (male) vs. translation (female). “Grammatical gender,” as appears more noticeably in Spanish, French, or German than in either English or Chinese, is not the point of this particular project, but Simon’s other two points and the ways they overlap are worth taking a moment to discuss. As Simon (1996) points out in the introduction to Gender in Translation, “translators and women have historically been the weaker figures in their respective hierarchies: translators are handmaidens to authors, women inferior to men” (1). Therefore Simon suggests that the aim of feminist translation theory is to understand and critique the various discourses that have created and maintained these power dynamics. I also approach this translation from a desire to critique and subvert the patriarchal structures that inform how literature (and translations) are approached and valued in part by increasing the audience for a woman poet who writes of her “woman’s world” while simultaneously promoting translation as a valuable literary genre. Alongside that goal, I am interested in how feminist theory produces a mode of translation or a methodology that itself critiques and works to dismantle the imperialistic and thus patriarchal work of current standard English translation.

To begin with, the history of feminist translation is also a history of feminist intervention and political engagement. Because women and translation have shared this
secondary status, women have found work in translation since the Renaissance, during periods when “to publish or appear in print was considered aggressive behavior for females” (Simon 1996, 46). From the beginning, women were able to use translation as a means to enter literary conversations from which they were otherwise barred and made an effort to translate other women. In more recent history, women have translated important feminist texts in order to support their political agendas, such as the anti-slavery movement, and the prefaces and introductions to translated volumes created a space where women could respond to the logics that constructed a male-dominated world of letters. In other words, translation allowed women “to enter the world of letters, to promote political causes and to engage in stimulating writing relationships” (39).

Translators have long understood that translation is always an act of manipulation, and women have addressed themselves to the task with a deep “distrust of traditional hierarchies and gendered roles, deep suspicion of rules defining fidelity, and the questioning of universal standards of meaning and value” (8). As such, texts translated by women flouted the practice of invisibility in numerous ways, whether in the sense that women as active subjects should be “invisible” in the world of letters (and in the public world at large), or that a translated text should bear no mark of the translator.

Considering not just the history of feminist theory and translation that Simon (1996) traces but also post-structuralist and deconstructionist discourses, one is reminded that “meaning is no longer a hidden truth to be ‘discovered,’ but a set of discursive conditions to be ‘re-created’” (13). That being the case, what is at stake in translation is not so much “fidelity” to the original text itself or careful attendance to the “spirit,” “soul,” or “meaning,” which indicate if not a truth to be discovered, than a Truth to be
discovered. Instead, the translator’s work is “the continuation of a process of meaning creation” (23) that relies not just on the words and syntactical structures that exist in two different languages, but also on the literary, social, and cultural webs of discourse that lend language meaning. As noted above, authenticity is more deeply entwined with the discourse of translation than any other discourse (Bruno 2012, 269). Most recently it has been an “illusionistic effect” of fluency as consumability that has produced an authenticating effect in translation (Venuti 2008, 1), but I argue for a return to a politically engaged mode of translation that eschews authenticity through invisibility. As Barbara Godard proposes, quoted by Simon (1996):

> the feminist translator, affirming her critical difference, her delight in interminable re-reading and re-writing, flaunts the signs of her manipulation of the text. *Womanhandling* the text in translation would involve the replacement of the modest-self-effacing translator. (13)

Luise von Flotow (1991) further specifies how one might begin to approach this flaunting or *womanhandling* through practices of supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, and “hijacking,” which she describes as “excessive interference in the translation,” including footnoting and other explanatory interjections, or in the case of an English to French translation, purposely using a female-gendered form of French throughout. In all of these instances, “the feminist translator is conscious of her political role as a mediator” (75), and while von Flotow is speaking specifically of feminist translators working in real-time collaboration with feminist authors, she also suggests that “the translator’s collusion with the author is, I think, of secondary importance” (80). In her eyes, these feminist translators are also creators, doing important work that holds itself accountable for pointed manipulation of the original text through its transparent or forthright
mechanisms. Clearly Venuti’s call for visibility and accountability in translation has a long history in the hands of women translators. But what does this look like in practice?

Gayatri Spivak may not be as well known for her literary translations as for her feminist postcolonial scholarship and theory production, but she certainly does attend to translation, and in that context she is specifically concerned with how women positioned in the Global North might translate writing by women located in the Global South. For that reason, although she does not translate Chinese poetry, I find Spivak’s theory and praxis to be a useful starting point for my own methodology. In Spivak’s (1993) chapter “The Politics of Translation,” she explores the concept of feminist translation from an English-speaking perspective by calling for more than just translating literature written by women into English. For those of us located in the Global North, thinking in terms of “giving voice” to women elsewhere is not enough, as that can become “speaking for” other women and lead us back into the cycle of cultural domestication described in the previous section (Sharoni 2015, 654). Instead, there is need for a methodology of translation that seems to me to stem from what Audrey Thompson (2003) terms asymmetrical listening. In her discussion of the failings of white feminists to truly work with women of color, Thompson proposes a radical listening, “a demand not just to register or include the voices of women of color but to change how we as white women act and think. It is a call to rethink our theories” (89). As far as English translation, where there is also a power dynamic and a tendency to translate “as we have always done” and simply include more women, there is also a need to reconsider the terms of that inclusion.

Returning to Spivak (1993), she claims that “the task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the workings of gendered agency” (179). What this
means is that it is not enough to translate the “spirit,” “soul,” or “meaning” of a text as something cleanly severed from the particularities of the author’s use of language. It is not enough to hear how “she is just like me,” and to then assume that inclusion of women’s voices regardless of how they are translated is sufficient (183). For Spivak, a feminist mode of translation means attending to the agency of the woman author being translated, which requires a deep reading, or listening, that moves beyond a “safe” understanding of another language as a mechanical system for meaning making into “the silence between and around words” or the way that language is employed as rhetoric (181). In this “rhetoricity” lies an agency that disrupts the communal logic of language so that it might not only convey meaning but also become self-expression. Although Spivak finds it worthwhile to translate into English despite problematic power dynamics because it is of value to allow “the largest number of feminists” to converse, she warns against letting English translation simply succumb to “the law of the strongest.” In other words, because of the nature of the power behind the English language, in an unexamined standard approach to translation the result can be “all the literature of the Third World get[ing] translated into a sort of with-it translatese, so that the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan” (182). To put it another way, Spivak calls for translation with attention to style.

In this short chapter she gives a few brief examples of what it might look like to attend “to the author’s stylistic experiments.” A short, but clear example lies in the two translations of one of Mahasweta Devi’s story titles: “The Wet-Nurse” and “Breast-Giver.” While I cannot compare either version to the original Bengali, following Spivak’s explication I think it is possible to understand what is at stake. Certainly “The Wet-
“Nurse” aligns with fluent English, using a common term that conveys something of the meaning of the second version, but in its very familiarity “neutralizes the author’s irony in constructing an uncanny word,” which Spivak puts forth as part of Devi’s style (182). On the other hand, “Breast-Giver” not only retains the author’s “signature style,” but in so doing also retains a sense of the breast as-object or “as organ of labor-power-as-commodity” so that upon entering the story the reader can already grasp a sense of “class-specific access to modernity” as it is played out through the body of a woman (183). This second translation as it attends to the author’s style also allows layers of dissonance and affective meaning to permeate the English title itself, expressing the artistry of the author in even this detail. In contrast, any meaning beyond the denotation of “Wet-Nurse” would suggest itself only after reading the story, flattening Devi’s creative work. Further on, Spivak also discusses a translation of Ram Proshad Sen’s songs for Kali, which she prefaces by discussing his cultural significance and how his “innovative playfulness” with his native language makes meaning in a colonial context. First come three lines as they were originally translated into French and re-translated by Spivak “into an English comparable in tone and vocabulary”:

> Why have you, my soul [mon âme is, admittedly, less heavy in French], left Ma’s feet?
> O mind, meditate upon Shokti, you will obtain deliverance.
> Bind those holy feet with the rope of devotion (185).

And now compare those lines with Spivak’s own English translation:

> Mind, why footloose from Mother?
> Mind mine, think power, for freedom’s dower, bind bower with love-robe (186)
Spivak sees in those first lines “the pervasive orientalism ready at hand,” perhaps in the solemn, spiritual language of “meditate,” “deliverance,” and “devotion.” The language of the second translation is palpably more playful, shot through with various poetic elements of sound and employing word choice that centers dynamic movement (“footloose”) and creative or felt expression (“love-rope”). In both examples, I think it is clear how Spivak eschews English “fluency” and familiarity of expression in the name of attention to style.

Of course, Spivak is not the only translator to work with a feminist methodology, either directly expressed or otherwise. Barbara Godard’s (1986) translations of Nicole Brossard’s lesbian feminist texts attempt to find creative ways to express in English some of “the doubleness and multiplicity of meaning created through puns, ellipses and portmanteau words” (11). She attends to “the materiality” of Brossard’s conscious manipulation of language, which “sets up a ‘sapphic semantic chain’ in which everything is turned upside down” and Brossard is able to interrogate the male tradition of the book and the patriarchal structures of the French language itself (Henderson 2013, 203; Godard 1986, 8). The title *Lovers* visibly attempts to render Brossard’s title *Amantes*, emphasizing Brossard’s manipulation of the gendered French language in order to make room for new female potentials. Luise von Flotow (1991) gives another succinct and vivid explication of Godard’s “supplementary” translation of another of Brossard’s titles, *L’Amèr*. Through a layering of English terms and creative formatting Godard expresses three of the meanings present in the French: mère (mother), *mer* (sea), and *amer* (bitter) (74-75). And while Chantel Wright (2013) does not refer to her own translation of Toko Tawada’s *Portrait of a Tongue* as feminist, I do not think it a stretch to read her intervention in this context. Translating a text written by a woman that constellates
around her friendship with another woman, Wright divides each page into two columns. On the left is her translation of Tawada’s work, on the right a more meditative response that includes explication of terms, citations to other texts, and the translator’s “conscious mimicry of the author’s anecdotal style” and tendency to “think out loud” in her writing (31-32). Again here is an attention to style alongside Wright’s proposal that translation is a creative act, and the notion that there is a space for translators to make visible layers of meaning otherwise obscured in more standard practice that lies “between enslavement to the original” and something “so loosely inspired by the source text that it is no longer, strictly speaking, translation” (29). It seems the attention to style promoted by Spivak can open translation so that the translator’s sensitivity, engagement, and creativity has room to work alongside the author’s.

At this point, perhaps the lack of examples from Chinese to English has become all too apparent. There does seem to be a dearth of pointedly feminist translations of Chinese literature, although I believe that this is changing, my own project standing as one indication of such a change. I also believe it is pertinent here to turn to Fran Martin’s (2003) translations of Taiwanese queer fiction. Of course, Martin does not discuss her approach to literary translation, and in the blurbs on the back of Angelwings the translation is referred to as “competent” and “pellucid,” terms that echo discourses of fluency and mastery. That as it may be, in her academic scholarship Martin has written extensively about the translation of terms like “queer” and accompanying political and cultural value systems into Chinese, particularly in Taiwan, and how these terms take on their own life in this new context. Certainly Martin is invested in exploring the mechanisms of translation and drawing attention to specifically Taiwanese iterations of
queerness. I believe this attention is visible in how Martin, like Spivak, attends to the style of her authors, and that just from reading her English prose it is possible to perceive the styles of the Taiwanese authors she translates. For example, in the story “Poems from the Glass Womb” by Hong Ling, Martin’s translation is dense, almost overwhelmed by unusual imagery that brings the reader directly into the narrator’s violent world, for example: “your last scream was like a broken water bottle, glass dashing against liquid, your sorrowful sobs cutting me to the bone” (190). There are also moments when the author’s sci-fi inspired style, where the possibilities of the body expand in unfamiliar ways, comes through vividly, such as in the lines “like a computer hacker finding the secret code to hack into the Internet’s womb”; “I pull the theme from your mouth and search for phrases and images in your vagina”; and “when I really heard the sound of the fetus violently churning in my blood-engorged womb” (190, 192, 204). All the while, Martin maintains Hong Ling’s “up-to-the-minute narrative style” (190), so that even flashbacks that move from present to past tense are rendered in sentences thick with activity, “smuggling,” “trembling,” “ripped into scattered shreds.” So although there is not much written about a feminist approach to the English translation of Chinese literature, Fran Martin’s attention to style, especially when translating the writing of queer women, seems to align with what Spivak’s demands of the feminist translator.

Following in the steps of these feminist thinkers and translators and relying on their insistence on the creativity of translation work, I also hope to work into the space “between enslavement to the original” and a poem merely inspired by it in order to further the collaborative and generative possibilities of a resistant mode of translation.
Although this moves us a few steps away from the direct intersection of feminist and translation theory, I would like to lay out the feminist theorizing by women of color that I have found extremely useful in order to think about how I might ethically approach a translation of Yu Xiuhua’s poetry across or beyond the lines of power that work to situate her and I and our work in relation to each other. Women of color feminism has been essential to recognizing and theorizing “difference within and between communities as a source of strength rather than of disunity, as something to be explored rather than avoided or denied” (El-Tayeb 2011, 47). Aimee Carrillo Rowe (2005), Maria Lugones (1987, 1994), and Audrey Thompson (2003), among others, all articulate in slightly different ways approaches to working across and within difference that are rooted in a loving and critical mode of intentional awareness that is truly collaborative. Here “collaborative” does not mean that everyone does the same kind of work but that any work—future theorizing, activism—is done with constant recognition of and attention to one’s position within a greater community, or as Rowe (2005) puts it: “a ‘politics of relation’” (16). Rowe considers subjectivity to be a discursive process wherein the “self” is configured differently in any given moment depending on where one is situated within shifting communities and how one is currently being “hailed”—or called into a particular form of being—by existing power dynamics embedded in our relationships with each other. Being, then, is not tied to individuality as Western thinking has long proposed, but instead rises out of our various belongings, the connections we have with others, whether intentionally cultivated or imposed by social and cultural institutions of power. Rowe calls for a politics of “be longing” which she describes as “a process that places oneself at
the edge of one’s self . . . learning and tipping toward the ‘others’ to whom you belong, or with whom you long to be—those who are ‘you’”(17).

In terms of thinking about how to activate longing and to make this approach visible through a methodology of translation, I find it useful to turn to Maria Lugones’ concepts of world traveling and curdling. In “Playfulness, “World”-Traveling, and Loving Perception,” Lugones (1987) calls for a mode of interaction and belonging that both recognizes “the plurality in each of us and among us as richness and as central to feminist ontology and epistemology,” enabling us to move away from mainstream ways of being into other selves (3). As an alternative to perceiving others “arrogantly,” or with preconceived notions that preclude shared understandings and construct the other from within one’s own positionality, Lugones asks us to “world travel,” or essentially to be willfully open to recognizing and considering different ways of being and belonging while simultaneously recognizing that one cannot fully understand or be of another’s worlds. In order to do so, she asks us to travel through playfulness. Rather than thinking about play as agonistic, “in which competence is supreme,” there are clear rules, and the stakes are framed in terms of winning and losing, Lugones describes play as “openness to being a fool . . . not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred and finding ambiguity” through creativity (15-17). In other words, Lugones asks us to be open to the possibility of and possibility in failure, not as the opposite of “competence” and winning, but as part of the flux of play. Lugones (1994) further develops this concept of ambiguity and openness in her articulation of “curdling” and mestiza consciousness as modes of resistance. Curdling—a lack of clean separation and a resistance to purity, fragmentation, and homogeneity—can be actively deployed to work against “the Anglo ideals of
progress and efficiency,” disrupting creative domination (470). Therefore by cultivating a
playfulness that allows us to move into the space between the “worlds” we occupy and
practicing “curdling” as a means of actively resisting separation of ourselves from others
and ourselves from ourselves, we can move toward a more complexly loving world that
is not structured around power hierarchies built out of rarefied difference.

What both Lugones and Rowe propose is a form of political engagement located
in complexity, creativity, and a deep sense of accountability both to others and to one’s
dynamic self. They also articulate the importance of transparency and critical awareness
as a means of making possible the disruption of sedimented lines of power and the limits
of our ability to fully step outside of those lines:

By rendering visible the conditions and effects—both oppressive and liberatory,
and more often both—of belonging, the multiple sites and communities to which
we belong or don’t belong become apparent. This awareness pushes us to
consider the political, social, and spiritual effects of our choices to belong. This is
not to suggest that belonging is merely free floating and that we are free to choose
our belongings outside of the bound of power . . . our belongings are conditioned
by our bodies and where they are placed on the globe.” (Rowe 2005, 36)

Here, a politics of relation asks us to be vulnerable and open to difference as well as
constantly vigilant and intentional, conscious of how our actions function within a
complex community or as an endless collaboration. I emphasize again that these theorists
describe the practice of collaborative action not as a means of working efficiently or
“equally” but as a process of working creatively and relationally. Below, I articulate in
detail my methodology of collaborative translation as it draws on the concept of
multiplicity and ecology, failure and infection, and asymmetrical listening.
Translating Theory into Practice

To begin with, I have worked to surface or enact what I call an ecology of translation in my own practice in order to not only destabilize the notion of the authoritative version, but to also make room for a thorough practice of visibility where my modes of translation as they may shift from poem to poem are able to perform a range of complex processes in relation to each other. This “ecology of translation” is inspired in part by Schleiermacher’s (2012) vision of different schools of translators, wherein “different translations of the same work made from different points of view will be able to coexist, and it would be difficult to say that any one of them is as a whole more perfect than the others,” because they will complement and supplement each other (55). One of the things that the discourse of fluency does is to promote the notion of the “authoritative translation,” or the idea that there is one best translation out there or an ultimate best to strive toward. However, as Erin Odor (2014) suggests in her master’s thesis, the translation of a premodern Chinese text, perhaps it is more useful to think of other translated versions of a text as collaborators, or to use my language, as a living ecology. I use the term “ecology” in an attempt to articulate the importance of looking at how different translations interact, whether symbiotically or antagonistically, rather than focusing on determining which translation should survive all others—which are winners and which are losers. For one thing, it is important to consider how the concept of accuracy in relation to translation might depend on what kind of text is being translated—e.g. poetry or instructional manual—or who the intended audience might be—e.g. academic or literary. This notion of an ecology of translation is the foundation for my intervention into questions of originality and authorship; it allows me to make visible
some of the other textual materials upon which Yu Xiuhua’s poetry and my translations depend as well as the ways in which an author’s—or translator’s—intentionality is complicated by the numerous forces that shape the reception and interpretations of any piece of writing. This ecological mode also makes possible an exploration of the liminal spaces rendered invisible in a final product that claims the authority of singularity through discourses of fluency by making some of what goes on in those spaces visible.

While I am not aware of another volume of translation that enacts this “ecology of translation” as I have, Eliot Weinberger’s (2016) *19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei* now collects and comments on as many as twenty-nine different translations of Wang Wei’s poem *Lu zhai* (鹿柴), including a few versions translated into Western languages other than English. I read Weinberger’s slim volume as similarly promoting a healthy variety of translations as it makes visible the numerous possibilities one single poem can elicit, and by juxtaposing and critiquing these versions also reveals something of the manipulation that exists in the *trans* of translation.

Along with a push to value multiple translations of a text and interrogate the concept of universal superlatives, I also use my ecology of translation as one means of disrupting rather than flipping what might be the most iconic binary in translation theory: domestication vs. foreignization. Friedrich Schleiermacher (2012) in his 1813 treatise “On the Different Methods of Translation,” clearly articulates for us the basic distinction between foreignization and domestication: “either the translator leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him” (49). In this context, I have created multiple version of each poem in order to move visibly between and beyond these two
possibilities. These multiple versions often contain elements of foreignization, including nonstandard English syntax and vocabulary, which move the reader toward the author, but they also contain elements of domestication that in some respects move the author towards the reader or both the reader and the author towards the translator. In all cases this ecology of translation resists easy consumption through its very visible layering of multiplicity. My goal is not to create one cohesive translation for each of Yu Xiuhua’s poems that reads as if she had originally written it in English, nor is my goal to create a singular, authoritative, and cohesive logic of foreignization that repeats itself smoothly across all of the poems in the translation. By putting these two approaches at play, or playfully approaching a space between or beyond domestication and foreignization, my translation does not pretend to be a window that gives “the reader unobstructed ‘access to great thoughts,’ to what is ‘present in the original”’ (Venuti 2008, 5). Instead, it reveals my own participation in the act of translation in order to combat the “consumability” of foreignness, in this case “Chinese” culture and literature, coated in familiarity and to enact a questioning of the “naturalness” and authority of originality, creativity, and talent.

Moving deeper into my ecology of translation, one facet of my methodological approach in terms of content is the mobilization of discourses of nonfiction in order to create transparency and move toward a collaborative approach. I find framing translation as a mode of nonfiction makes it possible to surface both the personal, subjective elements and the interpretive, “imaginative acts of criticism” that inform the process (Grossman 2010, 4). Approaching translation as nonfiction avoids perpetuating the idea perpetrated by the translator’s invisibility that one is able to put aside one’s
biases or personality in the act of translation. Or, we can once and for all do away with
the notion that, in the words of Willard Trask, as quoted by Lawrence Venuti (2008):
“when you translate you’re not expressing yourself. You’re performing a technical stunt”
(7). Rendering the translator invisible asks readers and translators alike to pretend the
process of translation is in some way mechanical, that a person can process a piece of
writing into a different language without leaving any trace of themselves on the final
product. Not only does it ask us to believe that such a thing is possible, but as these
standards of fluency and English-ification have taken root so deeply in the economics of
translation, it encourages translators to approach their work by attempting to empty
themselves of themselves.

By implying, or outright stating, that translators should try to put their biases and
personal aesthetic sense aside in order be able to access the text’s true “meaning” or
“spirit,” I believe translators are encouraged in a lack of self-awareness, or a lopsided
attention to self that can, at best, lead to translations by Lydia Davis all just sounding like
Lydia Davis. If we try to put ourselves aside, we are left working through ourselves
without reflecting on what that might actually mean—why I might be translating this
piece, why I am invested in the mode of translation I have taken up, or what the
intentions and ramifications of that mode might be. A translator is then unable to make
thoughtful use of biases and personal investment, such as an intentional feminist
intervention or “strategic construction” of foreignness in a translation, which “can be a
form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism,
in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations” (Venuti 2008, 20). Not only does this
approach mean translators cannot be seen for their particular styles and the particular
expressive work they may do, reaffirming the creation/reproduction hierarchy, but they themselves may not be able to actively access their subjectivity in the act of translation, meaning they have less control over how their translation is affected by their personal self, rather than meaning it is somehow less affected.

Conceiving of translation as a form of creative nonfiction, here emphasizing the mode of the personal essay, asks translators to recognize, theorize, and write into the ways in which their selves are present in the process of their work and to thus be able to consider their positionality in relation to the author, language, and culture they are translating. One way to think about this is through the lens of Aimee Carrillo Rowe’s (2005) politics of relationality. Rowe reminds us that “the reflexive turn within feminist and cultural studies is a necessary move to locate the interplay among theory, praxis, and experience,” and that this is a way of combating “modernist notions of objectivity and disinterested knowledge production” by both clearly articulating relationships between power and knowledge production and also by performatively “calling attention to the particularity of the author’s identity, and sometimes going so far as to investigate the desires and interests that drive the textual production” (19). This is especially important for those belonging to privileged groups, in this case a Western-located English-speaking positionality such as mine, since the particular play of one’s own privilege is generally only immediately visible to those “who occupy marginalized standpoints” (20). Rowe proposes that one shift their sense of being from individuality and locatedness—where am I—to belonging and relationality—among whom do I belong and to whom am I accountable (18).
What I suggest here is that the only way to begin to engage a process of English translation that is aware of how it might be implicated in maintaining imperialistic institutions of power, and is then capable of subverting those dynamics, is to shrug off “modernist notions of objectivity.” It is that “objectivity” that appeals to the universality of literature as a mode of knowledge production wherein a translator is only “performing a technical stunt” that allows the pure spirit of the source text to move unimpeded and unmanipulated between languages, cultures, and individual readers. I argue that framing translation as a mode of creative nonfiction, a form of writing that is either firmly located in the “I” or at least self-consciously aware of the “particular, historicized, and contingent question of knowledge production” in the context of constructing a narrative, allows the translator to potentially “‘see’ herself as embedded in power and privilege” and from that perspective to consider how to negotiate her relationship to the author and writing she is translating. Without recognizing one’s own positionality, one is unable to consider relational responsibility to a broader community, even if that community consists only of the source author and the translator. Therefore, I do not suggest promoting more self-awareness in the translator in order to help them smother biases, or that self-awareness is ever complete, but that by framing translation as a form of creative nonfiction, it might better give a translator room to consider in more complex and intentional ways how to employ their own “I,” whether that “I” is explicit or implicit in the final translation(s).

I turn now to a slightly different nonfictional mode: criticism. In Why Translation Matters, Edith Grossman (2010) echoes Gayatri Spivak’s sentiment, claiming translation is “a kind of reading as deep as any encounter with a literary text can be” (4). And John Felstiner (1980) in the context of discussing his translation of Pablo Neruda seems to
define the function of a critic/translator as that of interpreter, making and fixing meaning for another (3). Of course, if you Google literary criticism, the result is: “the analysis and judgment of the merits and faults of a literary or artistic work.” I don’t want to emphasize judgment as a key aspect of my approach to translation, but I do want to position translation specifically as a type of critical response. Rather than mechanically transferring elements of the source text from one language to another, a translator actively responds to the original text through the act of translation. Translation is not only the recreation or transmission of “the emotional impact of words, the social aura that surrounds them, the setting and mood that informs them, the atmosphere they create” (Grossman 2010, 3), but an active exploration and determination of how a text embodies those things, and thus—just as an author makes choices in order to convey what they hope to convey—a translator makes choices about how to render a text in the target language so as to emphasize a particular textual embodiment. As a translator, I am interested in how a poem “works,” which may vary from poem to poem, and my translations cannot help but reflect how I think that poem works. They may, in fact, emphasize my reading of how the poem works. If this is a mode of reading, and as David Damrosch (2003) points out in his discussion of world literature as a mode of reading, “no single way of reading can be appropriate to all texts,” then critical responsiveness through translation is valid (particularly if it exists in a strong ecology) (5). At the same time, translation, as “a cultural political practice,” has the potential to function as criticism of one’s own cultural modes of knowledge production, as it is interested in “constructing or critiquing ideology-stamped identities for foreign cultures, affirming or transgressing discursive values and institutional limits in the target-language culture”
(Venuti 2008, 19). It is for these reasons that I work consciously to make apparent the responsiveness in my translation work as it functions like nonfiction criticism.

As should be clear by this point, through a discourse of relationality and self-reflexive modes of nonfiction, I have produced translations that do not abide by current standards of “fluency” and authority. In other words, I have failed at creating a “familiarized” and easily consumable object that appears “natural” (or naturally) in English in terms of how the translated text reads and in terms of how it performs on the page. Theorists from Schleiermacher to Venuti have considered the danger in failing to abide by these standards in terms of acceptance and publication; if one attempts to create a translation that doesn’t meet the institutionalized standards of fluency, assuming it even makes it through to publication, one risks that translation being labeled “bad” or perhaps “lazy.” Here I call on Jack Halberstam (2011) and his exploration in *The Queer Art of Failure* of the ways in which masochism, pain, passivity, and failure offer us alternative means of feminist expression that refuse to work “within the same logic as the normative regimes against which they struggle” and are therefore powerfully subversive (129).

While I do not consider my work as a translator passive, in its intentional refusal to measure success in English translation as it is currently measured by economic and literary institutions of power, I do attempt a queering of translation, and I recognize that the results may, in part, be read as failure or laziness. My translation mode also makes visible some of the messiness—the pain and necessary failures—one encounters in the work of translation.
Taking up the concept of radical passivity as a means of “opt[ing] out of certain systems built around a dialectic between colonizer and colonized” (Halberstam 2011, 131), let us return for a moment to the ways in which gender intersects with translation theory. As Lori Chamberlain (1988) discusses in “Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation,” translation has long been implicated in a gendered notion of passivity. In this sense, “passivity” can refer to the secondary and more “feminine” work of the translator as reproduction (or reproductive) in opposition to the masculine work of the author as creative production (466). It may also be deployed such that the text itself becomes a passive woman that must be “penetrated,” the site of the “rape and pillage of another language and text” (461), whose paternal lineage is all important, the female leg of an oedipal triangle in which the translator hopes “to kill the symbolic father text/author” (462). But as Chamberlain proposes, rather than simply flipping the binary, or upholding it by claiming (feminine) translation is in fact equal to (or as masculine as) creation, perhaps there is a way to reclaim (a feminist) passivity and in doing so to simultaneously disrupt the power dynamic inherent in the notion that action in translation moves in one direction and that power moves only along that path. Chamberlain suggests that perhaps a feminist theory of translation is “governed by what Derrida calls the double bind . . . the double-edged razor of translation as collaboration, where author and translator are seen as working together, both in the cooperative and the subversive sense” (470). So it is that in the context of subversive collaboration, and in order to further think beyond an either/or paradigm that pits translator against author or forces original and translation into a hierarchy, I turn to queer theory. Rooted as it is in a politics of the body that emerged out of practices of gender and sexuality that fall beyond the hetero-norm,
queer theory encourages working into “the uncomfortable place in between, the no-place, or the place of disidentification” that inhabits the *trans* of translation (Ruvalcaba 2016, 10). By combining the framework of nonfiction writing described above with Jack Halberstam’s insistence on the subversiveness of a refusal to cohere, I explore the possibility of translation as a collaboration, a movement “away from ‘individuality’ and in the direction of the inclination toward the other . . . through its own longings to be with” (Rowe 2005, 17), that has the power to shift our understanding of the subject and individual creation toward a relational process of perpetual becoming.

Along these lines, as I have noted previously, my translated text defies categorization as “finished” or “complete.” Consider how Derrida troubles the notion of originality or “the original,” along with the boundary between languages, and as Chamberlain (1988) points out “exposes the impossibility of the ‘dream of translation without remnants’: there is, he argues always something left over which blurs the distinction between original and translation” (469). Here my translations occupy a conceptually liminal space that refuses to commit them to standard English and U.S. cultural and literary expectations either in terms of fluency or in terms of exotification. They “[refuse] to cohere, [refuse] to fortify herself against the knowledge of death and dying, and [seek] instead to be out of time altogether, a body suspended in time, space, and desire” (Halberstam 2011, 141). By performing a radical passivity that does not align with liberal notions of productivity and linear progression in the pursuit of happiness, or in this case easy legibility and consumability, I attempt to step outside of the “dialect between colonizer and colonized.” As Halberstam puts it, this is “the refusal quite simply to be,” or the refusal to “be” in place (140). To elaborate this notion, perhaps I can play
with Walter Benjamin’s (1992) declaration that “translation issues from the original—not so much from its life as from its afterlife” (73). Here the translation is not wholly distinct from the original, nor is it exactly of the original, but it grows from its “afterlife.” Perhaps then the translation is not the “spirit” of the original but its undeath. It marks the monstrous continuation of existence after “life,” an undead text where the source of its own “lifeliness” is uncomfortably uncertain.

In order to think through the potentiality of the monstrous as a marker of difference, blurred boundaries, and potentiality I engage both Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s (1996) discussion in his introduction to Monster Theory and Johannes Göransson’s (2016, 2014) notion of translation as infection and excess. In his “seven theses,” among other things Cohen defines the monster as “the harbinger of category crisis,” “difference made flesh,” and that which guards the gate to what is possible (6-8). The monster is not simply a scary creature but an embodiment of cultural rupture, scary because it is the foreign, it is alterity, it is difference that walks among us. Yet, as the monster stands at the borders of the domestic sphere, of what is considered acceptable, so as to police our curiosity and our “mobility (intellectual, geographic, or sexual), delimiting the social spaces through which private bodies may move,” the monster also marks an entry point into a realm of possibilities beyond the sphere of what might in any historical moment be considered “being human” (12). Therefore a translation that performs an unwillingness to legibility and consumability, that in some instances even refuses to “be” a translation, as there are places where Chinese characters remain or in which an image or a poem by another author stands as one layer of translation, points toward new possibilities for meaning making across difference. For one thing, as it creates a hybrid, curdled work that
does not claim to smoothly transfer meaning from one context to another, and as such
reveals the ways in which the “original” text is not a container for meaning but is its own
web of interpretive processes, the monstrous translation challenges “the assumption that
we were born to ‘segregation, separation, isolation, competition’” that is at the heart of a
Western construction of subjectivity as individuality (Rowe 2005, 16). This supports a
theory of translation built upon Rowe’s call to long “toward the other so that ‘being’ is
constituted not first through the ‘Self,’ but through its own longings to be with” (17). As
such, the monstrous translation both marks the current limits of translation, and thus the
limits of our ability to speak through difference, and also refuses to abide by those limits,
embodying the possibility of greater territories of understanding.

Similarly, Johannes Göransson (2016) as well as Joyelle McSweeney have written
about translation as “the deformation zone” where “the versioning and contagions of the
foreign are part of the poem, not something that must be abjected in order to keep the
poem whole” (sec. 9). They draw on notions of excess and kitsch to claim that translation
is not “an autonomous artwork,” but a knock-off, a hoax that is the site of hybridity,
contamination, and rupture. A place where

as Elaine Scarry has pointed out, beauty proliferates, makes copies of itself,
invites versions. And these versions cross boundaries. If a literary text is part of a
deformation zone, it is inherently volatile, potentially a part of a movement, a
motion, rather than a stable entity that can be frozen into place. It can generate
versions, and these versions need not be put into place, need not be separated.
(sec.10)

In other words, the translation is constantly in motion, constantly hailing us to respond,
constantly becoming. It is partly this flux and the way it might undermine a translation’s
perceived authority that results in the translator regularly “fac[ing] questions about the
authenticity of their projects” (Göransson 2014, para. 3). If a translation is not stable and verifiable, then “to be a translator is to assume to [sic] role of a hoaxter” where “translations fail to be poems, and instead become counterfeit versions” (para. 8) Göransson argues that if this is the case, the enjoyment in reading a translation—a “knock off”—threatens to destroy the supremacy, the very notion of “authentic” poetry to begin with. While he seems to suggest here that domestication is a tool of subversion, since it does not mark the poem as foreign, perpetuating this hoax that “we cannot figure out,” I believe is it legitimate to argue that my translations activate a visible “deformation zone” between current discourses of domestication and foreignization, between creation and reproduction, that equally disrupts the notion that any text is “pure.” As such, embracing the monstrous potential in translation is a queer intervention that returns the translated poem to its place “located in between . . . permanently in transit, a continuous escaping from the boundaries of meaning” (Ruvalcaba 2016, 7). This displacement of both the “original” and the translation so that neither one embodies singularity is also a means of combating the hegemony of the United States and the English language as cultural producers as well as U.S. notions of poetry as “a thing complete in itself,” something whose proper patrilineal lineage can be traced, “something that can be read and mastered” (Göransson 2016, sec. 5). Instead, poetry becomes active meaning making, always offering itself to interpretation and rewriting, always enacting the collaborative process of communication. And here poetry and the translation of poetry meet.

Before releasing you into my actual practice, I would like to return to women of color feminism for a moment in order to temper the notion that perhaps as a translator I
feel I have no responsibility to anything in the original text or to the author herself: that I feel free to “fail” at translating or that to make my work unintelligible as translation in its (monstrous) relationship to the original means that I believe translation is a mode of writing that is only critical or political, simply using the source text as a tool to further the translator’s personal agenda. Certainly this process of translation also works upon me and my engagement with Yu Xiuhua’s poetry requires more than embracing sameness and familiarity, more than either retreating from or showcasing strangeness and difference. I find this process to be more akin to Rowe’s (2005) insistence on belonging and belonging as “that movement in the direction of the other: bodies in motion, encountering their own transition, their potential to vary” (27). While consciously in motion, it is possible to see the ways in which “hegemonic discourses ‘hail’ us as subjects” articulating us as singular, legible, and disconnected and to consider “the ways in which power may be hailed by us as a resistive reinscription” (28). By refusing to commit to a method of translation that results in versions that in any way perform authoritativeness or completeness, I am better able to keep a critical eye turned on my own intentions and preconceived notions about translation, and specifically the translation into English of this poet and her poetry. Spivak (1993) tells us “the translator must surrender to the text” but only through an earned (right to) intimacy—through understanding of the source language, the cultural and literary contexts, the rhetoricity of the writer—is that surrender possible (183). Moreover, she posits that the demands of intimacy are higher for those translating from languages outside of the Western European sphere because of colonial legacies of erasure and appropriation. Lugones (1987) also reminds us that intimacy with another is more than “travelling to another’s ‘world,’” it is knowledge of another that
requires great effort and intentionality (17). While it may look as if I myself intrude too much in my translations, I posit that this approach to translation is able to make visible my yearning toward intimacy, and the way that as I do “surrender to the text” it in turn works on me. The failure in my work is an attempt to stay at play as Lugones defines it and in doing so to move toward Yu Xiuhua’s worlds without assuming an intimacy with her or an understanding that perhaps I have not yet fully earned or could ever completely arrive at. It is a means of making myself open to what is different both in Yu Xiuhua’s poetry and in myself. It is a means of creating an ethical reading practice where I make myself continuously vulnerable in the text, and as such I hope it has the effect of encouraging a vulnerability in the reader as well. By that I mean a desire not to judge, compare, or categorize either my translation work or Yu Xiuhua’s poetry in any definitive way, but instead a desire to experience, to wonder, and to stay curious. A desire to continue moving.
1.4 Conclusion

I think it important to reiterate that my purpose with this translation project is not to propose a best way to translate, or even the best way to translate Yu Xiuhua’s poetry. I explore a queer-feminist practice of visibility through relationality and failure in order to see how it might lead to a collaborative mode of translation that intentionally attends to both Yu Xiuhua’s agency and my own. In other words, I hope that I have created translations that work from Yu Xiuhua’s style but that don’t pretend my own style is not also in play, and in doing so that this project both extends the reach of Yu Xiuhua’s voice and makes more room for other approaches to translation. Perhaps in the future I will also be able to share my work with Yu Xiuhua, and this project will thus continue to ask for more versions, to reproduce itself, to self-replicate, to further multiply. Ideally, these translations will encourage further translation of Yu Xiuhua’s work, perhaps even in a more standard iteration, so that a more extensive ecology can emerge.

As I pointed out at the start, I did not expect to fall for Yu Xiuhua’s poetry or to invest so much of myself in the deep reading that is the translation of her work. I thought that as a “popular” poet she probably wouldn’t have enough edge. That is to say, I thought that her poetry would not challenge, not in terms of translation but in the way that art challenges us to see, think, or feel either further into or totally outside of ourselves. While I still wouldn’t recommend her writing in the same breath as I might most of the contemporary U.S. poets I most love, nor would I say “her writing is obviously bloodstained,” I would not say her poetry is simple or easy. It was suggested to me that perhaps being a “popular” poet in a country that has a long, deep culture of poetry like China does means something different than being a “popular” poet in the
United States. In truth, I can’t imagine a poem going viral among U.S. netizens for any reason. I don’t know what it would mean for a poet to be popular here in the way that Yu Xiuhua seems to be popular in China. Perhaps that is the difference. When I thought “popular poet,” because my point of reference was the United States literary world, I was thinking of big-name poets who have won big awards, sat as poet laureates, published books with Penguin, and taught at the best universities. But these poets aren’t really popular in the sense that they have a broad audience among “otherwise non-poetry-reading” folks. If these are the poets one might consider popular in the United States, then Yu Xiuhua is not popular in these terms. When the concept of popular that I was using as a point of reference is translated into the realm of Chinese poetry, it does not apply to Yu Xiuhua. Here is another good reason to attend not just to Yu’s poetry but also to the worlds in which she writes. Poetry is most certainly more than poems, and translation, as it is much more than a mechanical task, can make that visible.

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1 My understanding is that this interview with Yu Xiuhua was conducted in Chinese and then translated into English for this publication, so if the English reads as nonstandard, it is not necessarily a result of Yu Xiuhua’s manner of speaking, but rather a result of the translation process.

2 A comparison made by comparative literary scholar Shen Rui, who has also written the introduction to Yu’s print book.

3 By “extensively” here I mean beyond a few poems translated here and there in English literary journals or academic anthologies, as is the case with some contemporary Chinese women poets such as Yin Lichuan, one of the prominent members of the Lower Body school. Some names worth noting, however, include Xue Tao (768–831) a
courtesan whose poems have been collected and translated by Jeanne Larsen, and Li Qingzhao (1084 – ca 1155), who has garnered a lot of attention in academic circles as a rather prolific Song Dynasty poet quite skilled in the ci词 style poetry popular at the time. In the modern era, Zhai Yongming, Wang Xiaoni, and Shu Ting of the Misty Poetry school, all of whom first gained an audience in the 1980s, have had books translated into English, and of course the Taiwanese poet Hsia Yü, who often writes in an experimental mode and who has been dubbed a feminist poet, has had all of her books to date translated into English.

4 For the Gurlesque, see the anthology by that title compiled by Lara Glenum and Arielle Greenberg (2010) and published by Saturnalia Books. For the necropastoral, see Joyelle McSweeney’s (2011) The Necropastoral: Poetry, Media, Occults from the University of Michigan Press.

5 Kim Hyesoon’s poetry is political in the sense that she does not shy away from writing vividly about sexuality, the body, violence, or the horrific. She is known for lines like these which come from her I’m OK, I’m Pig! sequence in Sorrowtoothpaste Mirrorcream: “We return as hot pigs/We return for our final act/The act in which our fingers rot even before we lie down in our coffins.”

6 I use this term in conscious reference to the “Confessional School” in English poetry, including poets like Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton, who were known for their particular use of a first person speaker who seems to speak for the poet themself. These poets often wrote about sexuality, mental illness, depression, and death. According to Jeanne Hong Zhang (2004), Plath’s poetry in particular has had a big impact among contemporary Chinese poets and particularly so in “the formation of a discourse of Chinese women’s poetry” that works with themes of darkness and death (20). I am not arguing here that Yu Xiuhua should be considered a confessional poet. Her poetry, however, has many things in common with confessional poetry, and if “contemporary Chinese confessional poetry arises from a need to revive selfhood, gender the self, and articulate the silenced self,” it seems that many of the Chinese scholars who have written about Yu thus far engage a discourse of confessionalism in their analyses.

7 Inwood (2014) defines “conjunctures” as “specific historic moments formed by the coming together of different kinds of context and circumstances that include discourses, everyday life practices, and regimes of power” (6). I use the term in this way.

8 Let me clarify, however, what I mean by “Chinese” poetry. That is, I follow Maghiel van Crevel’s (2008) categorical boundary line: poetry “written in Chinese, as part of the larger linguistic environment of cultural China and specifically contemporary mainland China—which, in exile poetry, doesn’t stop at the nation’s borders” (54). What that means is that an exhaustive exploration of modern “Chinese” poetry that includes either poetry written by Chinese people in other languages or the vibrant and important writing coming out of Taiwan is beyond the scope of this project. Certainly even a fully detailed overview of modern poetry as it might be contained on mainland China and written in Chinese is too ambitious for the current project, and I direct readers interested in more thorough histories to consider picking up any of the books I have cited here, as well as Michelle Yeh’s (1991) Modern Chinese Theory and Practice Since 1917, and the anthology Modern Chinese Literary Thought,
edited by Kirk Denton (1996). Michelle Yeh has also written about and anthologized Taiwanese poets and their writings.

9 Here I mean specifically relevant to an understanding or appreciation of Yu Xiuhua’s poetics and her reception in China.

While “vernacular” has long been used as an English term for baihua (白话) narrative writing, Shang Wei (2014) explores the usefulness and accuracy of this term, as well as its political implications in “Writing and Speech: Rethinking the Issue of Vernaculars in Early Modern China.” In particular, Shang Wei aims to investigate the complex relationship between writing and speech in order to interrogate the use of a term that is clearly linked to orality.

11 I think it’s interesting to note here that whatever Mao’s literary legacy, Heather Inwood (2014) points out that “Chairman Mao. . . spent his spare time composing classical-style poems like a member of the traditional literati” (3). Alongside the manipulation and suppression by the CCP of poetic output Mao’s poetic inclinations certainly speaks to the very importance poetry holds still in modern China.

12 Consider how the founder of the School of Rubbish situated Rubbish poetics as what would happen “if the Beat Generation walked a beat further,” thus drawing connections between the Chinese School of Rubbish and the U.S. Beat Generation (Inwood 2015, 50).

13 Inwood emphasizes that “the concept of the poetry arena needs to be understood in light of the close connection between poetry and the nation in twentieth-century China, itself a continuation of the political importance attached to poetry in imperial times” (13). In other words, the “poetry arena” is the legacy of the Republic-era efforts to revolutionize poetry in the early twentieth century as discussed briefly above. Although part of their efforts were intended to create a poetry that was more “accessible” to more people, this “modern poetry has always represented the avant-garde” and was not only not broadly appreciated, but the practices of writing and publishing were still circumscribed by “tight-knit literary societies” (13-14).

14 It should perhaps not really be necessary to clarify this, but in light of the U.S. conception of total internet censorship and control by the CCP, I will note that just as elsewhere around the globe, the internet has created a space for “ordinary citizens” to communicate at lightning speeds, particularly through the Chinese Twitter-like app, Weibo. Heather Inwood (2014) points out that by July 2013, there were more than 350 million Weibo users in China, which totals 56% of China’s internet population. This has meant that in China citizens also “spread news and information among themselves, thereby outdoing the ability of the state-run news media to report in a timely and truthful manner on events of national significance” (157). Furthermore, although there is most certainly censorship of the internet, it is still quite porous, and the net is a very lively, engaged space for discussion and circulation of all kinds of ideas and materials.

15 Michelle Yeh (1996) ties the “cult of poetry” in part to the Misty Poets and Bei Dao, who “instead of serving the proletariat and singing praises of the Party, he sees the poet as a human being who is alone and lonely, at odds with the system, seeking solace in nature or romantic love” (60). This cult, a term which Yeh uses specifically because of its religious significance, was nurtured in the small circles of modern avant-garde poetry,
where poets, mostly men, were elevated to the status of martyrs for the sake of their art. In many cases, these poets were from the lower echelons of society or gave up any material comfort for their art, also at times taking their own lives.

16 She has not only been published in numerous “official poetry journals” and sat as a judge for some of China’s highest literary awards, but she is also a member of the China’s Writers’ Association and recognized as “a top-ranked national author” (Inwood 2014, 159-60).

17 Originally translated as “Farmers’ Literary Award” in the English-language articed quoted here.

18 Here I take literary translation to encompass poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction, although I will tend to focus on the translation of poetry.

19 For the purposes of this project, I will try to shift the focus toward the situation in the United States. However, regarding translation and imperialism or empire building, the United Kingdom—and Britain specifically—remain significant and will occasionally return.

20 Venuti uses the term “transparency” to mean something one can see through and therefore as another way to express the concept of the “invisibility.” In my own usage elsewhere, I use the term “transparency” instead to mean candor, clarity, and straightforwardness in order to refer to the practice of making the existence and work of the translator visible.

21 See, for example, essays on translation by José Ortega y Gasset (1992), Andre Lefevere (1982), and Yves Bonnefoy (1992).

22 Schleiermacher (1813, 1992) distinguishes translation as a tool of art and scholarship from interpretation, a mechanical tool of business; Hans Erich Nossack (1965, 1992) discusses the importance of knowing one’s own native language in order to translate and avoid work with “no breath of life” (230); Spivak (1993) emphasizes the great skill needed to translate so that the final product attends to the author’s style; Edith Grossman (2010) begins by explaining how translators think of themselves as writers; Derrida (1985, 1992) and Göransson (2016, 2014) both ask us to reconsider that stability and originality of any piece of writing at all.

23 Venuti (2008) uses as an example the case of Paul Blackburn’s translation of Julio Cortázar’s novel-length collection of stories, End of Games. Engaged with just exactly the style of contract described above and paid by word count, Blackburn walked away with $1200 for his labor and Cortázar not only received an advance that exceeded Blackburn’s total gains, but was also promised a percentage of the list price for initial sales up to a $5000 cap (10).


25 Johannes Göransson (2014) makes what a particularly compelling argument for domestication, which I believe coincides with my own theoretical and methodological intentions, in a short online article up at The Boston Review, titled, “The Hoax of Translation.” I will return to this article later on.
It should be noted that Bruno (2012) defines “Chinese” poetry to be “written by poets who were born and educated in mainland China” (257), therefore these numbers exclude translations of Taiwanese poets, whose work garnered significant interest in English-speaking literary circles during this timeframe.

The rising popularity of Taiwanese poetry in the United States during this time also seems to support the idea that a taste for anti-CCP poetry, whether explicitly or more implicitly so, influenced which Chinese poetry texts were chosen to be translated into English.

Bruno’s (2012) examples include *A Splintered Mirror: Chinese Poetry from the Democracy Movement*, and *Out of the Howling Storm*, a title that refers to the Cultural Revolution. *Out of the Howling Storm* also includes a significant introduction by editor Tony Barnstone situating the poems therein as having “traveled from Tiananmen Square to your living room” (Barnstone 1993, xviii-iii).

I want to note that Michelle Yeh (2004) also calls Pound’s translation an “often ingenious rendition of the Chinese—fully justified in view of his Imagist project” (251).

For example, Stephen Owen (1990) claims that not only have “new poetries” from places including China, India, and Japan been influenced by Western poetry in translation, but “this poet from another land and from a different culture is writing at least in part for us, writing at least in part what he imagines will satisfy us” (29). And although he doesn’t say that this is a guiding principle of the Lower Body school’s writing style, Maghiel van Crevel (2008) suggests that poetry from the Lower Body school lends itself to translation: “this is because of its one-dimensionality or . . . textual shallowness; and because of its loose composition on the levels of words, phrase and sentence, which makes the translator less obliged than usual to be ‘faithful to the original’ in the narrow sense’” (319).

Perhaps it is worth noting here that the Nobel Prize for Literature, the most prestigious international literary prize and what might be considered the bar-setter for a “universal” literary excellence, is firmly rooted in a Western locality, and since its inception 25% of the recipients of the Nobel Prize for Literature have been authors who write in English, with the next most common languages being French, German, and Spanish (“Alfred Nobel’s Will”; “Fact on the Nobel Prize”). This certainly suggests the potential influence of English-language literary standards on the production of literature and the very definition of literature, internationally. In terms of considering how different cultures do in fact construct different literary paradigms Wang Kan (2012) also details “a biased misconception of ‘universal’ literary concepts of standards that exist within the field of English literature” and how these might influence the reception or selection of literature specifically from China. Wang uses as an example what he considers to be John Updike’s faulty critique of the Chinese novel *My Life as Emperor*, claiming Updike’s lacks an understanding of Chinese narrative conventions (577-78).

The history of translation from Chinese into Western languages, including English, is a complex one that was heavily influenced by religious and commercial interests, but also reveals more intricate patterns of exchange. For example, the Jesuit missionaries represent an early institutional exchange of writing between China and the West, wherein Jesuit missionaries worked to convert the Chinese people, and at the same
time lived in China and developed close relationships with members of the Chinese literati (Mungello 1999). In their translation work, they were not just interested in portraying Chinese writings or people as backwards or incommensurably exotic for a European audience. Instead, the Jesuits translated the Confucian Classics into Latin as part of their attempt to present Europeans with an image of China as highly cultured and morally and ethically advanced (59-60). On the other end, however, Chinese officials were also gathering information from the Jesuits, and framing them “as tributary officials who had come to China to serve the Chinese emperor” (Kitson 2013, 2). The point being that the flow of knowledge across languages and cultures could at its heart be considered “a collaboration of a small group of Chinese scholar-officials and Jesuit missionaries” rather than a blunt tool of empire and resulted in nuanced exchanges (Kitson 2013, 2). These kinds of multidimensional, person-to-person interactions continued in the context of succeeding missionary and commercial activities. Of course, it was through the Jesuits’ representations, and certainly those of subsequent, self-styled sinologists, that “China entered the realm of popular Western culture,” which moves the conversation back toward some of the more questionable processes of intercultural exchange discussed previously (62). And that is where modes of translation or the presentation of art and culture become so important. To delve further into this history, both of the sources cited above are useful places to start, as are perhaps some of the texts that discuss early practices of translation in the context of Buddhism in China, such as Salguero’s (2014) *Translating Buddhist Medicine in Medieval China*, and James St. André’s (2007) article, “The Development of British Sinology and Changes in Translation Practice.”

33 Venuti gives an example wherein a text considered marginal in the receiving culture is retranslated—perhaps plagiarized—in a domesticating mode or as if it had been produced in the translating language, “translating it with a canonical discourse . . . ultimately reforming the literary or scholarly canon in the translating language” (267). Furthermore, as noted above, Johannes Göransson’s (2014) short piece reminds us that foreignization may not always be the best mode of resistance, and James St André (2007) also takes issue with what he says is Venuti’s oversimplification of foreignization as resistance. I see both Venuti’s argument and my own as a call to include a wider range of approaches in English translation rather than as a strict equating of foreignization with resistance or foreignization as the “best” approach.

34 For example, in a departure from her previous work and perhaps after having made a name for herself as a translator, Mary Sidney (1561-1621) was able to undertake the translation of the secular play *Antonie* by Garnier (1592), which not only contains a sympathetic view of the adulterous Cleopatra, but more broadly “questions conventional definitions of masculine and feminine virtue” (Simon 1996 47).

35 I footnote this only to say that I will not try to gloss Ram Proshad Sen or his songs in a footnote, since Spivak begins her discussion of this translation with a critique of just such an attempt. See Spivak’s chapter itself for more background information on Ram Proshad Sen (184-85).

36 See *Situating Sexualities: Queer Representation in Taiwanese Fiction, Film and Public Culture* (2003); *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, and
Chinese Cultures (2006); and AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking Genders and Sexualities (2008).

37 I use the term “love” or “loving” here not in a romantic or appreciative sense, but as Kelly Oliver (2001) asks us to reconceive of it as an always active and critical mode of opening to another: “love as the first and primary form of recognition necessary for subject formation . . . love is the ethical agency that motivates a move toward others, across differences. Love motivates a move beyond self-interested political action, which is necessary to move beyond domination” (217-218).

38 I am greatly indebted to Lina Maria Ferreira for this concept.
2. 月亮落在左手上

Moonlight Drops on My Left Hand

The Moon Sets on My Left Hand

Moon Sinks Atop Left Hand

A Translation of Selected Poems from

Moonlight Drops on My Left Hand (月亮落在我左手上)
我爱你

巴巴地活着，每天打水，煮饭，按时吃药
阳光好的时候就把自己放进去，像放一块陈皮
茶叶轮换着喝：菊花，茉莉，玫瑰，柠檬
这些美好的事物仿佛把我往春天的路上带
所以我一次次按住内心的雪
它们过于洁白过于接近春天
在干净的院子里读你的诗歌。这人间情事
恍惚如突然飞过的麻雀儿
而光阴皎洁。我不适宜肝肠寸断
如果给你寄一本书，我不会寄给你诗歌
我要给你一本关于植物，关于庄稼的
告诉你稻子和稗子的区别

tt

告诉你一棵稗子提心吊胆的
春天
I Love You

This living, every day I fetch water, boil rice, take medicine on the dot
When the sun shines good, I put myself in like putting in a piece of orange peel
Drinking tea in turns: chrysanthemum, jasmine, rose, lemon
These fine things seem to carry me along the road to spring
So bit by bit I hold down the snow in my heart
Its too pure white too close to spring
In the neat yard I read your poem. These human things
Dreamy like a sparrow’s suddenly flight
And the limpid moonlight. I’m not fit for heartbreak
If I send you a book, I can’t send you poetry
I want to give you one about plants, about crops
Tell you the difference between rice and weeds

Tell you one weed’s heart-in-its-mouth
Spring
“And so different schools, as it were, will form among the master practitioners, and different parties of their adherents among the reading public: and even though it is the same method that forms the basis of each school, different translations of the same work made from different points of view will be able to coexist, and it would be difficult to say that any one of them is as a whole more perfect that the others or falls short in merit; rather, certain passages will prove more successful in one version, and other passages in another version, and only the sum of all these taken together and in relations to each other - the way one places particular value on approximating the original language, while the other rather insists that no violence be done to its own - will fulfill the task completely, and each in its own right will always have only relative and subjective value.”
I Love You

So alive, every day fetch water, boil rice, take medicine on the dot
Sun shines nice time, I dip myself in like a piece of tangerine peel
Turning tea leaves to drink: chrysanthemum, jasmine, rose, lemon
These fine things seem to carry me along the road to spring
So I moment to moment press down the snow in my heart
Its too pure white terribly close to spring
In the clean yard I read your poetry. These human things
Insubstantial like a sparrow’s suddenly flight
And limpid moonlight. I’m not fit for heartbreak
If I send you a book, I can’t send you poetry
I want to give you one about plants, about crops
Tell you the difference between rice and barnyard grass

Tell you one stalk of barnyard grass its nervous
Spring
I Love You

So so living, every day pound water, boil rice, take medicine on time
When the sun shines right, I put myself in like a piece of dried orange peel
Tea leaves turn to drink: chrysanthemum, jasmine, rose, lemon
These fine things seem to carry me along the road to spring
So again and again I restrain the snows in my heart
Their terribly pure white so close to spring
In the clean yard I read your poetry. These human things
Fleeting like the sudden flying sweep of a sparrow
And moonlight’s dazzling white. I’m not fit for heartache
If I send you a book, I can’t send you poems
I want to give you one about plants, crops
Tell you the difference between rice and millet

Tell you one tassel’s tender
Spring
I Love You

So so alive, every day fetch water, boil rice, eat medicine on time
Times the sun shines good just slip myself in, like one might a piece of tangerine peel
Cycle of tea leaves to drink: chrysanthemum, jasmine, rose, lemon
These good things seem to carry me toward the spring road
So I once again hold down my heart’s snows
Their too too whiteness threatening spring
In the clean yard I read your poems. These human things
Shimmer like the sudden flying sweep of a sparrow
And moonlight’s limpid white. I’m not fit for heartache
If I send you a book, I can’t send you poetry
I want to give you one about plants, crops
Tell you the difference between rice and weeds

Tell you one stalk’s spring, heart lifted stomach
Sunk
下午，摔了一跤

提竹篮过田沟的时候，我摔了下去
一蓝草也摔了下去
当然，一把镰刀也摔下去了
鞋子挂在了荆棘上，挂在荆棘上的
还有一条白丝巾
轻便好携带的白丝巾，我总预备着弄伤了手
好包扎
但十年过去，它还那么白
赠我白丝巾的人不知去了哪里
我摔在田沟里的时候想起这些，睁开眼睛
云白的浩浩荡荡
散落一地的草绿的浩浩荡荡
Afternoon, A fall

While carrying a bamboo basket over a ditch, I fell
The basket of grass also fell
Of course, the sickle also fell
Shoes caught in the brambles, caught in the brambles
Too a white silk kerchief
Light little white silk pocket scarf, I’m always prepared to bind up
A bruised hand
But ten years later, it’s still so white
And the one who gave me the white silk scarf I don’t know where they’ve gone
When I fall into the ditch that’s what I think, open my eyes
Clouds’ white so mighty vast
Grass scatters the ground a green of mighty vast
Afternoon, a fall¹ (Google Translate)²

Bamboo basket over the field when the ditch³, I fell down
A blue grass also fell down
Of course, a sickle also fell off
Shoes hanging in the thorns, hanging on the thorns⁴ on
There is also a white scarf
Light and easy to carry the white scarf, I always prepared⁵ to hurt his hand
Good dressing⁶
But ten years past, it is so white
Give me a white scarf⁷ I do not know where to go
I fell in the ditch when the thought of these, opened his eyes⁸
Clouds of white mighty
Scattered in one of the mighty grass green⁹

¹ “She walks clumsily and talks haltingly. Yet she is keen on the physicality of language. Unlike the sentimentality and melodramatic softness of many established poets, the words Yu uses are brutal, free, vivid, angry and violent. Writing poetry is a natural physical impulse for her” (Zhou 2016).
² “Yet, social media may be turning the tide. This past January, WeChat, a messaging and social networking app, produced an unlikely media darling whose poems don’t rhyme and don’t avoid the fact that, yeah, sometimes life sucks. Yu Xiuhua had two books come out in one week and sell out overnight — 15,000 copies” (Simone 2015).
³ “Her poems, among contemporary Chinese poems, is like putting a murderer among a group of respectable ladies - everybody else wears fancy clothes, puts on makeup and perfume, and readers can’t see a single bead of sweat. Only she is desperately struggling. Her words are obviously bloodstained” (Zhou 2016).
⁴ “‘She is a sensitive woman and the verses flow out of her heart naturally,’ said writer Zhu Min” (“Yu Xiuhua”).
⁵ “Zha Wenjin, a fellow poet, said that although Yu’s work was of varying quality, ‘they were worth savoring’” (“Yu Xiuhua”).
⁶ “It sounds wild and bold, but you can feel the bitterness between the lines” (“Yu Xiuhua”).
⁷ “Of course, there are those unmoved by her poems, such as poetry critic Han Mo. ‘She is only famous because of media hype,’ he said. ‘We should forget that she is a peasant with cerebral palsy, and rate her work by pure literary merit’” (“Yu Xiuhua”).
⁸ “Every day, after tending to farm animals, she sets pen to paper and escapes into her internal world” (“Yu Xiuhua”).
In the afternoon, had a fall\(^\text{10}\) (有道youdao.com)\(^\text{11}\)

Bamboo basket too field ditch, I fell down
A blue grass also fell
Of course\(^\text{12}\), a sickle also hurled down
Shoes hung on the thorns, hang on the thorns
There is a white silk scarf Portable\(^\text{13}\) carrying white silk scarves,
I better prepare the injured\(^\text{14}\) his hand bandaged
But in the past ten years, it is so white
Give me white silk scarves of people do not know where\(^\text{15}\)
I think of these falls in the field of the ditch, opened his eyes
The mighty cloud white\(^\text{16}\)
Scattered grass green of the mighty

\(^9\) “Whenever we had guests, she would crawl along the ridge of the field,’ her father Yu Wenhai recalled. ‘I always imagined that she was trying to prove something’” (“Yu Xiuhua”).
\(^10\) “Brimming with rich imaginary, realistic touch and vibrant vitality, Yu Xiuhua's poems are neither angry nor hysterical. Instead, she is not shy of illustrating the weakness of herself and the ugliness of life itself. Many of her fans claim to be touched by her frank attitude and lyric words” (Li 2016).
\(^11\) “The Internet is her only link with the outside world. In 2008, she started to publish poems on local Internet chat rooms, where she would submit and discuss poetry with online friends. Then, fame and fortune suddenly came” (Zhou 2016).
\(^12\) “Poetry, a unique cultural and linguistic expression of the human heart, has never been so marginal than it is today” (Li 2016).
\(^13\) “In this pragmatic world, people lack the time and energy to savour the clarification and sentiments that verses and poems usually bring” (Li 2016).
\(^14\) “Yet for farmer-turned-poet Yu Xiuhua, poetry is plucking her from earthliness and making music with her soul” (Li 2016).
\(^15\) “Some are astonished by her amazing ability to craft words, some have raised doubts about her creativity, while others are curious about how overnight fame has changed her life” (Zhou).
\(^16\) “Never did Yu receive a high school education, and the disease also deprived her of the opportunity to pursue true love. Back in 1995, when Yu was as young as 19 years old, she pursued the recommendation of a local matchmaker and got married with a man named Yin Shiping, who is 18 years her senior. There is no doubt that true love never existed between Yu and Yin” (Liu 2015).
Afternoon\textsuperscript{18}, fell has a falls mention basket had field ditch of when, I fell has down a blue grass also fell has down certainly, a put sickle also\textsuperscript{19} fell down has shoes hanging in has thorn Shang, hanging in thorn Shang\textsuperscript{20} of also has a article white silk towel light good carry of white silk towel, I total prepared with Lane injury has hand good dressing but 10 years past\textsuperscript{21}, it also so white gift I white silk towel of people not know\textsuperscript{22} to has where I fell in field ditch in of when reminds these, open open eyes cloud white of mighty scattered a to of grass of mighty\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{17} “It’s hard not to feel good about social networks like WeChat if they can launch a woman like Yu Xiuhua into literary celebrity. And WeChat recently debuted a new program where every evening at 10pm it publishes a poem read by a ‘daily guest,’ including luminaries like China’s first lady, Peng Liyuan. WeChat’s goal for the project is to help people ‘develop a deeper understanding of life’” (Simone 2015).

\textsuperscript{18} “Dozens of journalists have swarmed to her village in Hubei Province to interview her in the hope of finding out how a woman from the countryside was able to shake up the world of poetry in such a short span of time” (Zhou 2016).

\textsuperscript{19} “With the help of her parents, she gradually learnt how to stand and walk, yet the sense of solitude and alienation still haunted young Xiuhua. Until in high school, she finally found peace and solace in poetry, which has become her crutch, something she always turns to” (Li 2016).

\textsuperscript{20} “Yu said she doesn't want her illness to attract attention either” (“Yu Xiuhua”).

\textsuperscript{21} “American author Washington Irving once said: ‘Little minds are tamed and subdued by misfortune; but great minds rise above them.’ In that case, Yu Xiuhua, a Chinese female farmer suffering from cerebral palsy, is undoubtedly a giant in her own right” (Li 2016).

\textsuperscript{22} “Even with her poem having gone viral, Yu has remained level-headed, putting a great deal of emphasis on the creation process of her poem and all but ignoring the sudden fame and barrage of comments from the Chinese media and netizens” (Liu 2015).

\textsuperscript{23} “While the media portray her as "China's Emily Dickinson," her most widely distributed poem on WeChat shows something quite different” (Zhou 2016).
我身体里也有一列火车

但是，我从不示人。与有没有秘密无关
月亮圆一百次也不能打动我。月亮引起的笛鸣
被我捂着
但是有人上车，有人下去有人从窗户里丢果皮
和手帕。有人说这是与春天相关的事物

它的目的地不是停驻，使经过
是那个小小的平原，露水在清风里发呆
茅草屋很低，炊烟摇摇晃晃的
那个小男孩低头，逆光而坐，泪水未干
手里的朵花瞪大眼睛
看着他

我身体里的火车，油漆已经斑驳
它不慌不忙，允许醉鬼，乞丐，卖艺的，后什么领袖
上上下下

我身体里的火车从来不会错轨
所以允许大雪，风暴，泥石流，和荒谬
I felt a Funeral, in my Brain

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading - treading - till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through -

And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum -
Kept beating - beating - till I thought
My mind was going numb -

And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
With those same boots of Lead, again
Then Space - began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race,
Wrecked, solitary, here -

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down -
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing - then -
I Also Feel a Train Inside my Body

But, I don’t show anyone. And secret or not whether
The moon rounds full one hundred times it can’t touch me. The moon lifted flute’s call
I’ve numbed it
But people step on, and people step down, they toss fruit skins and handkerchiefs
from windows. Some say this is the stuff of spring

Its destination really isn’t stationed, coursing past
That little bit of plain, the fresh wind dazed with dew
And thatched houses low, chimney smoke staggering to and fro
And that little boy’s head hangs, sitting backlit, tears still wet
And the flowers in his hand wide-eyed
Stare at him

The train inside my body, the paint’s already peeled
It’s in no hurry, hurry, it lets on drunkards, beggars, entertainers, then whatever leaders
On and off and off and on

The train inside my body always minds the tracks
So come big snow, storm winds, mudslides, then 荒谬
我养的狗，叫小巫

我跛出院子的时候，它跟着
我们走过菜园，走过田埂，向北，去外婆家

我跌倒在田沟里，它摇着尾巴
我伸手过去，它把我手上血舔干净

他喝醉了酒，他说在北京有一个女人
比我好看。没有活路的时候，他们就去跳舞
他喜欢跳舞的女人
喜欢看她们的屁股摇来摇去
他说，她们会叫床，声音好听。不像我一声不吭
还总是蒙着脸

我一声不吭地吃饭
喊“小巫，小巫”把一些肉块丢给它
它摇着尾巴，快乐地叫着

他揪着我的头发，把我往墙上磕的时候
小巫不停地摇着尾巴
对于一个不怕疼的人，他无能为力

我们走到了外婆屋后
才想起，她已经死去多年
Dog I Keep, Called Little Wu

In “The Politics of Translation” Spivak claims that a feminist translation, when translating work by women, is one in which “the translator attends to the specificity of the language she translates” (180). One must be a good listener.

I limp out of the courtyard time, it follows
We walk the garden, walk the ridge between fields, going north, to maternal grandmother’s house
I stumble into a field ditch, it wags tail
I stretch hand out across, of the blood on my hand it laps clean

He’s drunk, he says in Beijing he has a woman
Better looking than me. Doesn’t have a means of survival time, they go dancing
He likes dancing women
Likes to watch their butts wag back wag forth
He says, they can call bed, voices sound good. Not like me a voice wordless
Still always hiding my face

I voice wordless eat
Call “Little Wu, Little Wu” of a few pieces of meat toss it
It wags its tail, happily barking

He seizes my hair, knocks me against the wall time
Little Wu ceaselessly wags its tail
As for those unafraid of pain, he can’t bother

After we arrive at maternal grandmother’s house
Then I realize, she’s already been dead many years
I Keep a Dog, Called Xiao Wu

Is it then important that 小 means “little” and 吴/Wu is a common Chinese surname? As a name, it is a unit of sound, a script that marks dog and has no “meaning.” How to truly translate a proper noun? How does the speaker hear her dog’s name? For me, the meaning of the name, like the meaning in the dog, somewhat inscrutable. Instead I hear her voice “Xiao Wu.” I am listening

When I limp out the courtyard, it follows

Yu Xiuhua refers to the dog as 它/it and to the man as 他/he. The sound the same, the pronoun clearly different. Reading in Chinese I think of the dog as “he,” partly because of the aural overlap of 它/ta and 他/ta and partly because Americans would never refer to a pet dog as “it.” too impersonal, objectifying. Does the Chinese 它 have the same quality of thingness? Does it indicate a more practical, less intimate relationship between woman and animal? Does it allow the dog to overlap with the “he,” implicating the dog in a lineage of patriarchal violence, or does “it” fully stand between the two, the indeterminacy of 它 also opening into a blankness of possibility, a liminality, a way out?

We walk the garden, walk the ridge between fields, going north, to my grandmother’s house

Chinese, unlike English, has a complex vocabulary for articulating family relationships. The term 外婆 means maternal grandmother, literally “outside grandmother,” so this is the speaker’s grandmother, not her husband’s, outside the patriarchal line of descent

I fall in a field ditch, he wags his tail

I stretch out my hand, of the blood on my hand he laps clean

He’s drunk, he says in 北京 he has a woman

As in “has”

better looking than me. When he doesn’t have work, they go dancing

He likes women who dance

Inhabit their bodies

in motion

Likes to watch their butts wag back and forth

Now dog and women overlap in the verb “摇”

He says, they can call out in bed, and their voices sound good. Not like me without a word

叫床, one word that means to cry out
in ecstasy (during lovemaking). I wonder if this word is used for the pleasure of both men and women.

Always hiding my face

I eat without a word

Call “Xiao Wu, Xiao Wu” toss him a piece of meat

also means “shaman” and Google translates the dog’s name as Little Shaman. One of my professors asks me why I haven’t translated it as such. She says that to her this poem is very spiritual. Again the dog’s role is contested. It stands as a vessel between

The dog wags his tail, barking happily

“Happily” sounds insipid in English. I don’t think this is a bad translation

He seizes my hair, knocks me against the wall, then

Little Shaman wags and wags his tail

Does the dog wag its tail or does its tail wag? Who has agency here? Is violence always a sign of power?

As for those unafraid of pain, he can’t be bothered

It’s only after we arrive at my grandmother’s house

There is research that shows that, at least in some rural areas, women now wield more power in the marriage market, demanding high bride prices, 3 pieces of expensive jewelry, a house, and a motorcycle from the prospective groom’s family. Women can divorce their husbands more easily if they are mistreated, and more girl children survive infancy, more girls are only children.

I realize, she’s already been dead many years
Dog I Raise, Called 小巫

In the context of a feminist mode of translation, Lori Chamberlain suggests the process should be cooperative. Carol Maier says we should “get under the skin of both antagonistic and sympathetic works” and speak with the antagonistic work. Do we not also speak with sympathetic works?

When I limp out the courtyard, it follows

I am not a dog person. I tend to think of all dogs as dumb dudes. Dogs don’t understand us, they don’t even understand themselves. Dogs are the shadow of our need to be needed.

We walk the garden, walk the ridge between fields, north, to my grandmother’s house

My maternal grandmother is my last living grandparent. A difficult woman who taught my mother who taught me to be insecure, inconsistent, and impatient with others who can’t read your mind. Or who aren’t your son. She used to have a little dog named Dusty. Now she has a cat she complains about who won’t cuddle. She and my mother don’t get along well, but my grandma lives closest to us. We’ve been three generations of women on our own for over 30 years. Now, she’s beginning to forget things.

I fall in a ditch in the field, it wags its tail

I stretch out my hand, of the blood on my hand it laps clean

I joke with my brother that the Nunes blood runs deep. He and I share a father. Our three uncles, our cousins, we all share a look, we all brood. We do not ask for help. The violence in us, a slick seam, a wealth of silence.

He’s drunk, he says in 北京 he has a woman

My grandmother told my mother she didn’t enjoy having sex with her husband, and my mother told me. We are not women who have taught each other how to take pleasure better looking than me. When he’s between jobs, they go dancing.

He likes women who dance

But we do all like to dance.

Likes to watch their butts wag back and forth

My father met his current wife ballroom dancing. My mother says, “Your father always wanted a
He says, they can call out in bed, and their voices sound good. Not like me without a word.

My mother also told me it took her a long time to learn that finding your own pleasure is sexy for your partner. I don’t know anything about my father’s sex life, but his wife does wear leopard print and short shorts, and she does speak her mind. She runs her own business and buys things she likes no matter what my father thinks. She grew up in upstate New York and hasn’t been to college. Sometimes I think she’s jealous of my relationship with my father, a space where she is of no use. I don’t know how I learned to perform my pleasure, how I learned this one way to make people feel like I need them.

Always hiding my face.

I eat without a word

Silence is complicity. Silence, for us, is also the glue that holds us together at the points we cannot meet without violence.

Call “小巫，小巫” toss it a piece of meat

It wags its tail, barking happily

But the violence is there.

He seizes my hair, knocks me against the wall, then

小巫 wags his tail without stopping

I want to have a relationship with my father’s wife even though we live in different worlds. We fought about gun rights once so she wouldn’t speak to me for days. It’s true I think she’s racist and small-minded. I don’t know what she thinks of me. When I dance, as a friend once said, “I have titties and an ass and I want to shake ’em.” I ask her questions about things like her poodles and her Red Hat luncheon. Somehow we are both women. We are both afraid.

As for those unafraid of pain, he can’t be bothered.

It’s only after we arrive at my grandmother’s house

My grandmother is in her eighties. We recently moved her to a new house, an apartment, smaller and closer, where she can meet other seniors and walk to the bakery in town. She doesn’t make friends easily. She didn’t know her husband would have a heart attack at 65 and leave her alone. It’s hard for me to talk to my grandmother; we don’t have much in common other than a love for fashion and a narrow foot, both of which skipped my mother. She only seems happy when she talks about the past. She only seems happy when we’re enjoying a meal she’s cooked.

I realize, she’s already been dead many years.
在湖边散步的女人

云落在湖水里，她落在云上，树影落在她背上
这棕红的时辰，这泥质的时辰
这薄而脆的，一捅就破的时辰
在她前面摇晃

身体里没有酒杯，装不住风
这些年，她不再摇摆。不再把昨夜的雨
夹在裙褶里
走着走着，就走进一棵树里，被树梢挂起来

而人群摇晃
没有人留意一个空酒瓶一样的女人
也不知道一瓶酒
酒在了哪里
Woman Walking Beside the Lake

Clouds fall into lake waters, she falls on the clouds, tree shadows fall on her back

This date-red hour, this muddy hour

This barren and brittle, one poke busted hour

Trembles before her

Insider her body no wine glass, can’t hold the wind

These few years, she’s stopped wavering. Stopped folding last night’s rain

Between skirt pleats

Going going, she’s gone right inside a tree, hung up by a twig

And the multitudes tremble
No one pays attention to a girl like an empty wine bottle

And no one understands a bottle of wine

Where the wine has gone
一个男人在我的房间里待过

两支烟蒂留在地板上了，烟味还没有消散
还没有消散的是他坐在高板凳上的样子
跷着二郎腿
心不在焉地看一场武术比赛

那时候我坐在房门口，看云，看书
看他的后脑勺
他的头发茂密了几十年了，足以藏下一个女巫
我看他的后脑勺，看书，看云

我看到堂吉诃德进入荒山
写下信件，让桑乔带走，带给杜尔西内亚
然后他脱光衣服
撞击一块大石头

武术比赛结束，男人起身告辞
我看到两根烟都只吸了一半就扔了
不由
心灰意冷
A Man Stayed in my Room

Two cigarette butts left on the floor, scent of cigarettes still lingers
The feel of him sitting on the wooden stool also lingers
Legs crossed
Absently watching a martial arts competition

At the time I sat in the doorway, watched clouds, watched a book
Watched the back of his head
His hair decades thick, enough to hide a witch
I read the back of his head, read a book, read the clouds

I saw Don Quixote enter the barren hills
Write down a letter, make Sancho carry it out, carry it to Dolcinea
Afterwards he stripped naked
Dashed against a big rock

The martial arts finished, the man got up and took his leave
I see two butts only half-smoked and tossed
Can’t help
My heart ash desire cold
A Man Stayed in My Room

“Of particular difficulty to the Western translator is the absence of tense in Chinese verbs: in the poem, what is happening has happened and will happen.” - Eliot Weinberger

Two cigarette butts remain on the floor, scent of smoke still lingers
The feel of him sitting on the wooden stool also lingers
Legs cross
Absently watching a martial arts competition

At the time I sit in the doorway, watch clouds, watch a book
Watch the back of his head
His hair decades thick, enough to hide a witch
I read the back of his head, read a book, read clouds

I see Don Quixote enter the barren hills
Write down a letter, have Sancho carry it out, carry it to Dolcinea
Afterwards he strips naked
Dashes against a big rock

The martial arts contest finishes, the man gets up and takes his leave
I see two butts only half-smoked and tossed
I cannot help
My heart ash desire cold
One Man Stayed in My Room

“Similarly, nouns have no number: a rose is a rose is all roses” - Eliot Weinberger

Two cigarette butts remain on the floor, scent of smoke still lingers
The feel of him sitting on the wooden stools also lingers
Two legs cross
Absently watching some martial arts competitions

At the time I sit in the doorway, read a cloud, read books
Read the backs of his head
His hair decades thick, enough to hide one witch
I watch the backs of his head, watch books, watch a cloud

I see Don Quixote enter the barren hill
Write down letters, have Sancho carry them, carry them to Dolcinea
Afterwards he strips naked
Dashes against one big rock

The martial arts finishes, the man gets up and takes his leave
I see two butts only half-smoked and tossed
I cannot help
My heart ash desire cold
One Man Stayed in My Room

“Articles, unexpectedly, may be the most difficult thing to translate in poetry”
- Eliot Weinberger

Two cigarette butts remain on floor, scent of smoke still lingers
Feel of him sitting upon wooden stools also lingers
Two legs cross
Absently watching martial arts competitions

At the time I sit in doorway, read cloud, read books
Read backs of his head
His hair decades thick, enough to hide one witch
I watch backs of his head, watch books, watch cloud

I see Don Quixote enter barren hills
Write down letters, have Sancho carry them, carry them to Dolcinea
Afterwards he strips naked
Dashes against one big rocks

Martial arts contest finishes, man gets up and takes his leave
I see two butts only half-smoked and tossed
I cannot help
My heart ash desire cold
One Man Stayed in My Room
“Translation is always dependent on the smallest words” - Eliot Weinberger

Two cigarette butts left on the floor, scent of smoke still hasn’t faded
Also what hasn’t faded is the feel of him sitting on a wooden stool
Legs crossed
Absently watching a round of martial arts

That time I sat in the doorway, watching clouds, watching a book
Watching the back of his head
His hair having thickened for decades, enough to hide one witch
I read the back of his head, read a book, read clouds

I saw Don Quixote enter barren hills
Write down letters, have Sancho carry them off, deliver them to Dolcinea
Then he stripped off his clothes
Dashed against one big rock

The martial arts contest finished, the man got up took leave
I see two butts only half-smoked then tossed
I can’t help
Heart ashes desire cold
与一面镜子遇见了

我的身体倾斜，如憋了一只胎的汽车
所以它随时就制造一场交通事故，为此得准备大篇的
说辞，证词。以及证供下来的水和营养
——这样的事情总是搞得我虚脱。虚脱让人产生遗忘
所以，另一场车祸不远了

我的嘴也倾斜，这总是让人不快
说话和接吻都不能让它端正一些。有人说接吻的地方不对
它喜欢那些发光的额头
那些高地容易产生并储存雷电
不定什么时候给你一下子

没有这面镜子，世界该是公允的了
就是这样，没有那个人，世界就是公允的
遇见他，我就喜欢在镜子前徘徊，如一个傻子，一个犯病着
结果我不停地撞上去
知道自己是死在哪里，却不肯写一个
验尸报告
Met with a Mirror

My body tilts, like a car with one flat tire
So at any moment it might cause an accident, for this I
must prepare a ream of
Excuses, testimony. As well as water and sustenance for
after the testimony
——-This kind of thing always makes me collapse.
Collapse and people forget
So, another crash isn’t far

My mouth tilts too, always making people unhappy
Speaking and kissing can’t correct it any. Some say the
kissing place is wrong
It likes those glowing brows
Those highlands charged thunder and lightening
Hard to predict when it might strike you

Without this mirror, the world should be fair
That is, without that person, the world is fair
Meeting him, I like to linger before the mirror, like a fool,
someone afflicted
Meaning I keep on colliding
I know where I’m dead, but I’m not willing to write an
Autopsy report
Met with a Mirror

My body tilts, like a car with one flat tire
So at any moment it might cause an accident, for this I must prepare a ream of
Excuses, testimony. As well as water and sustenance for after the testimony
———This kind of thing always makes me collapse. Collapse and people forget
So, another crash isn’t far

My mouth silts too, always making people unhappy
Speaking and kissing can’t correct it any. Some say the kissing place is wrong
It likes those glowing brows
Those highlands charged thunder and lightening
Hard to predict when it might strike you

Without this mirror, the world should be fair
That is, without that person, the work is fair
Meeting him, I like to linger before the mirror, like a fool, someone afflicted
Meaning I keep on colliding
I know where I’m dead, but I’m not willing to write an
Autopsy report
茧

埋你，也埋你手上的茧
这茧你要留着，黄泉路又长又冷，你可以拨弄来玩
如果你想回头，我也好认得

爸爸，作茧自缚，你是知道的
但是你从来不说出
对生活，不管是鄙夷或敬重你都不便说出来

作为儿女，你可以不选择
作为儿女，我一辈子的苦难也不敢找你偿还
埋你的时候，我手上有茧

作为一根草，我曾经多少次想给你
一个春天
不赞你一伟大，但愿你以平安

不会再见了，爸爸，再见
一路，你不要留下任何标志
不要让今生一路跟来
Callus

Bury you, and bury the cocoon on your hand
This cocoon you want to leave, road to the underworld so long so cold, you can fiddle it along
If you want to turn head, I’m still well known

Daddy, entangled in a cocoon of one’s own making, you know it
But you never spoke out
In life, whether it’s disdain or reverence you’re all inconvenient to speak out

As sons and daughters, you can not choose
As sons and daughters, my whole life of misery I don’t dare look for you to make good
Burying you, I have a cocoon on my hand

As a blade of grass, I how many times wanted to give you
One spring
I don’t eulogize you mighty, if only you’ll at peace

Unable to goodbye again, daddy, good bye
One road, you don’t want to leave any mark
Don’t want to make the road of this life follow back
Cocoon

Bury you, and bury the calluses on your hands
When a word has double meaning, how does one achieve an economy of translation? What marks are missed? What white space is left and what does it leave room for?

This callus you want to leave, the road to Yellow Springs so long so cold, you’ll have something to play

If you want to return, I’m still easy to recognize

Daddy, entangled in a cocoon of your own making, that’s something you know
I can’t help but think of Plath: “You do not do, you do not do/Any more, black shoe/In which I have lived like a foot/For thirty years, poor and white,/Barely daring to breathe or Achoo,/Daddy, I have had to kill you./You died before I had time——/Marble-heavy, a bag full of God”

But you never spoke out
Didn’t God begin with a word? Language all the possibility to crack open and to create, to wrap up and confuse.
Constantly haunted by meaninglessness

In life, whether it’s disdain or reverence you’re all inconvenienced to say

As sons and daughters, you can not choose

As sons and daughters, my whole life of suffering I still don’t dare look for you to make good

As sons and daughters, you can not choose
does not mean you “cannot choose” but that it’s okay, it’s possible to not choose. Is this ever the case in translation?

As sons and daughters, my whole life of suffering I still don’t dare look for you to make good

Wikipedia tells me he was a writer, publisher, artist, and philosopher. On May 7, 1915 he
died aboard the 
RMS *Lusitania*
when it was sunk
by a German
submarine

Burying you, I have a callus on my hand
Is it strange that we’ve taken all of the labor out of death? Like
so many unpleasant things, we pay someone else to do it, and
death is thus no longer a part of our life

As a blade of grass, I wanted how many times to give you

One spring
Some of my students recently made the argument that spring
is the same as fall because the temperature is the same. This
lack of distinction made it impossible for them to understand
the symbolism of spring in the story

I don’t eulogize you to greatness, if only you’ll at peace
Can one ever be at peace with a translation? Perhaps
peace is not a place you arrive at but a state of being.
An active willingness to live with doubt

I won’t meet again, daddy, goodbye
再见, or goodbye, is literally “see again.” See you again. She can’t
再见, so what else is there to say?

One road, you don’t want to leave any mark
Is this the one road or just an one road? My ex
and her best friend used to think it was really
funny to use “an” when one should use “a”
and vice versa. *An buffalo. A orange. An road*

Don’t want to let the one road of this life come with you
Bury you, and bury the 茧 on your hands
When my father’s mother died I didn’t go to the funeral. The whole family was there except me. Family I rarely see and may never see again. I was in my last year of college, busy rubbing the callus of my importance. Anyway, no one said I should go

This 茧 you want to leave, road to 黄泉 both long and cold, you can something to do with your hands
Apparently my uncle made a joke at the funeral about How this is hell, this life we’re in on earth, offending some non-blood family. My brother told me later, and we both laughed

If you want to repent, I’m still well here

Daddy, entangled in a 茧 of one’s own making, that you understand
My brother’s mother was my father’s first marriage. This is his third. My parents separated when I was three. My mother says she didn’t know how to communicate her needs. My father seems to remember things fondly. I swear I remember him telling me as a child that he hoped we might all be back together again

But you never spake out
Memory is as steady as sand

In life, whether it’s disdain or reverence you’d always rather not say
I remember when I was little looking at postcards my brother sent that our father had stuck in a wooden strip circling the kitchen like the ghost of wainscoting. My brother lived in California then, where his mother is from. In particular I remember one of the postcards not because of the content, which said nothing special, but because my brother had written all of his S’s like dollar $ign$

As儿女, you can not choose
In high school I stopped spending every weekend across the river at my father’s

As儿女, my whole suffering life I still don’t dare look to you for redemption
When I was thirteen I thought about killing myself. I was being teased and it felt like no one was listening. I locked myself in my room with a pocket knife. My mother was home. I remember screaming and crying. I remember hearing her puttering in the kitchen. Eventually I came out on my own

Burying you, I have 茧 on my hands
Fifteen years later I would wonder what it might be like to put my head on the train tracks near the house I shared with my partner of four years. Were those trains too slow? It was only around then my father told me about his own depression. About not wanting to do anything. Wanting to utterly forget.

As a blade of grass, how many times I wanted to give you

One spring
After a long and improperly diagnosed illness, my father had emergency surgery this past spring. Things didn’t improve. In fact, they got worse.

I don’t eulogize you exalted, I wish you at peace
Not too long ago, during a yoga teacher training, I was trying to assess my life by asking how I would feel if I were to die right then. The only thing I could think to regret was not spending more time with my dad.

I can’t see you again, daddy, 再见
He’s a little better now, enough so his wife uses my presence to make him feel guilty about not doing more around the house. Still, he won’t pick up the phone to call me. No one on that side of the family is good about the phone. When my brother and I do see each other, we agree Dad likes to be unhappy. He likes to have something to complain about. I worry this is another thing he has bequeathed to me.

One road, you don’t want to leave any marks
But my brother says he’s just working through his own karma from past lives.

Don’t want to let this life’s one road come along
2.1 Notes on the Translations

In order to be more transparent about my own intentions and writerly biases as they directly manifest in the various translation treatments represented in this selection of Yu Xiuhua’s poetry, I include here a brief explication of each of the previous translations. I have indicated each translation by its Chinese title, its first English title, and its page range, following the order of their appearance. But before turning to each individual treatment, I would like to elaborate my own poetics and stylistic biases as a writer.

As I mentioned somewhat in passing in the introduction, my original desire was to find a Chinese poet who might represent an avant-garde style similar to the Gurlesque as it was introduced by Lara Glenum and Arielle Greenberg. I was looking for a poet who explicitly addressed themes of gender and sexuality in her writing, who did not shy away from violent images or camp, who challenged standard notions of what poetry could or should do, and/or who made readers uncomfortable and eschewed respectability politics. While my own writing does not necessarily fall into the category of the Gurlesque, I think of myself as a feminist writer and, for lack of a better word, an experimental writer. The tone and form of my work always varies and often falls outside of “standard” literary expectations. My first book, for example, works in a footnoted form that is meant to interrogate the power of the center and enact a constantly interruptive and yet essential “marginal” voice. I also have a short collection of poems written as a conceptual queer translation of Greek myths written in German, a language I do not speak, and my most recent book is a collection of speculative, short short fiction pieces. Although my stylistic choices vary, my writing always deals with the aforementioned themes of gender and sexuality as well as issues related to class and occasionally race. Unlike Yu Xiuhua, who
wants to slough off her various labels and write as nothing more or less than a poet, I embrace my labels (woman writer, queer writer) in order to make visible my particular experience and challenge normative views of authorship and poetry as well as normative constructions of gender and sexuality.

Certainly my own desire to make my identities visible in various ways has informed my theoretical and practical approach to translating Yu Xiuhua’s poetry. One could argue, too, that as she and I position ourselves differently in terms of the intersection between literary production and identity construction, she might not appreciate my approach to her writing. However, from pursuing her blog, it certainly seems to me that Yu is highly engaged with contemporary conversations about poetics, criticism, and identity. Moreover, reading her work online as it was originally presented and continues to be presented is not wholly different from reading my translations, because the blog space creates a hybrid collection of textual production that includes her poetry and also makes visible various contextual discussions, reading approaches, responses, revisions, and so on. The fact that Yu presents her poetry as part of this blog, which includes her critical contributions to literary discourse, discussions of her own poems in response to their circulation and critique, and personal entries about her life and experiences, indicates to me that she considers her poetry to be one of numerous ways to engage the things she finds important or one of numerous ways to draw a reader’s attention to what she thinks they should attend to. That in and of itself is a political act. Expressing the personal is a political act, particularly when the personal is not altogether aligned with normative identity construction or ideology. Therefore, just as the materiality of the internet as a very particular means of circulation and publication in
combination with the varied content of Yu Xiuhua’s blog inflects any reading of her poetry, so my translations also contextualize, recontextualize, situate, and unsettle her writing in English. Nevertheless, I address each poem and its individual treatment below.

我爱你, “I Love You,” p. 86-91

In this first treatment, which is the introduction to the translated collection, I am working with what might be considered one of my most basic strategies. Drawing on Schleiermacher’s call for an appreciation of different translations as they work together, supplementing, appending, championing, correcting, and countering each other, I attempt in this treatment to resist an authoritative, singular, final translation. Each of the four English versions or layers of the poem is slightly different, and as they vary, I purposely resist tracing a trajectory from less finished, “correct,” or “accurate,” to more finished, correct, and accurate. For example, I use foreignization at different moments in each layer, so that none of the poems read more smoothly or “English-ified” than another. I have even made certain to spread my personal favorite translations of individual lines and phrases out across the different versions, resisting my own favorite interpretation of the poem. Including the quote from Schleiermacher after the first version is intended to both clarify my approach in this treatment for the reader and to ensure that this approach is read most explicitly into this specific treatment; I felt that putting the quote before the poems might have set up the expectation that the book as a whole would follow this same exact logic throughout. Inclusion of the quote is also a way to make visible theory as it moves behind or within any translation.
I have chosen to translate this particular poem in this way because of how I struggled with its translation initially, finding some phrases difficult to translate into smooth English without becoming too wordy or potentially losing small turns of meaning in the Chinese. One example would be “陈皮,” or dried tangerine peel, which is more of a mouthful in English. The practice I chose here allowed me to move through variations of a translation that tries out including and excluding the “dried” element, as well as trying out the word “orange” instead of “tangerine,” since I find the sound better in English and do not think an English-speaking reader would have much of a sense of what the difference might indicate in a Chinese context. At the same time, I am interested in sticking more closely to the original image and meaning, so creating this visible ecology of “I Love You” made room for all these things to work together.

Finally, this poem introduces the collection because I believe it most clearly and directly establishes the way an ecology of translation might work. It does not complicate this notion with additional theoretical approaches, and it includes a directly quoted piece of theory to help make visible the process at work. I have thus desired to enact my ecology of translation at the most basic level of the language of the translation itself first because it is one of the foundational approaches of this project and a more delicate way of introducing a reader to the project as a whole. With this first treatment, I have attempted to both clue the reader into how theory works in the translation of this poem and teach the reader to look for clues that will help guide an understanding of my approach in each succeeding treatment.
下午，摔了一跤, “Afternoon, a Fall,” p. 92-96

The treatment of this poem continues the notion of an ecology of translation, as per each poem included here, because it also moves through several versions of the poem in English. This second translation, however, also adds another layer of intervention. For one thing, I use a variety of translation software to produce different versions of the poem after my first translation. This is meant to speak to how publishing on the internet complicates authorship and the notion of a stable text. As poems are commented on, shared, and so on, the way they are positioned to be read and understood changes. Moreover, who is the author of, for example, a re-posted copy of a poem written by someone other than the person posting it? And how does one read, interpret, appreciate, analyze a poem that might change as the author edits it or it disappears altogether? In other words, on online text is not stable, nor is it ever fully uncontaminated by the particular nature of its vehicle of presentation. In addition, Yu Xiuhua’s online writing is variously contextualized by others’ comments as well as numerous other conversations about her, her writing, and writing in general, including online articles, others’ blog posts, and TV and radio interviews and news stories. Here is where the footnotes come in on the three versions of the poem that I ran through translation software. These footnotes are meant to speak to the way meaning is also constructed via wider discourses about poetry, authorship, and identity. The excessive footnotes are intended to be intrusive or annoying for the reader, so that even though they represent extra or auxiliary information, they exert a constantly disruptive, interpretative presence. I began with my own clean version and then moved through these more heavily manipulated versions to again resist a
trajectory that aims toward a clean, final draft and to instead visually move away from such a thing.

I selected to treat this particular poem in this way because I felt this poem was relatively simple and straightforward. It does not speak of violence or death, like many of Yu’s other poems, nor does it address issues related to gender or use unusual imagery. It does allude to the poet’s disability, but with a lighter tone. I wanted to take this seemingly simple poem and complicate it just as Yu Xiuhua’s writing is both considered to flow from her “naturally” and yet is infinitely complicated by the various online conversations about her identities and how they intersect with her poetics.

In terms of placement in the collection overall, I put this poem second because it addresses the important digital context of Yu Xiuhua’s writing and essentially acts as a vehicle for exposition, by which I mean it gives the reader quite a lot of insight into the various responses to Yu’s writing so that they immediately begin to have a deeper understanding of her reception and construction as a public figure in China.

我身体里也有一列火车, “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,” p. 97-99

This treatment speaks to the notion that Yu Xiuhua is “the Emily Dickinson of China.” Here, the first version of her poem is, in fact, Emily Dickinson’s “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain.” The second version of this poem is my translation of Yu’s poem, “I also feel a Train Inside my Body,” informed by Dickinson’s style and diction as it is manifested in “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain.”

My aim here was to demonstrate how absurd or inappropriate it is to make this comparison and in any way collapse Yu and Dickinson’s situations or poetics rather than
allowing them to both be women writers in their own right. First of all, Dickinson’s poem as a translation of Yu’s poem is an absurd and potentially offensive failure of translation and of acknowledgement. Secondly, even with my attention to Dickinson’s style in my translation, it is clear the Yu’s poem and her poetics more generally are quite different from Dickinson’s. At the same time, there is an echo of affinity in the titles of these poems, which is why I chose to translate this poem in this way.

This treatment follows the final footnote in the previous poem, which mentions the comparison of Yu to Dickinson. As this is also one of the ways in which Yu as a poet has been complicated and at the same time hemmed in by her various labels, I believe this treatment follows the previous explication of Yu’s discursive context nicely.

我养的狗，叫小巫，“Dog I Keep, Called Little Wu,” p. 100-105

This treatment is perhaps the most layered and functions in several ways. First, it plays explicitly with a discourse of foreignization, especially in the first version of the translation, as indicated by the quote in the interlinear note inserted under the title. This is drawn through the other two versions in different ways, for example by retaining in some places the Chinese characters altogether. Here is ultimate foreignization and a refusal to create an easily consumable English translation by playing with a bilingual approach that is not uncommon in the work of Latinx writers, or others who write in European languages, but generally avoided in a Chinese/English context because of the utter foreignness of the Chinese writing system. Beyond this foreignizing approach, however, this treatment also relies heavily on discourses of nonfiction both as interpretative acts of critique and as a mode of personal narration. The interlinear notes that proliferate in the
following two versions of this poem are inspired by the long history of this kind of editorial work in Chinese literature, and first make visible some of the interpretative thought processes that go on behind the scenes in translation, with particular attention paid to the theme of gendered violence that I see in this poem. In the second version, the translation of the poem itself also responds to these notes. For example, I at first translate the pronoun for the dog, 它/it, as “it,” but after musing on the connotations of this term in both English and Chinese, as well as how it does or doesn’t implicate the dog in the domestic violence described in the poem, the translation changes to “he.” Then, in the final version, the interlinear notes become a personal essay that is inserted between the lines of Yu’s poem, enacting my own personal and artistic response to her own writing. Partly, the desire here is to reach across difference toward empathy, but at the same time to acknowledge or make plain the different and in some ways incommensurable worlds that the poet and the translator inhabit. The translation of the poem itself subtly changes again in this final version as well, continuing to demonstrate the way different registers of engagement with the poem—here a very personal one—result in different translations.

I chose to this treatment for this poem because of how deeply the poem affected me. Although there are likely many things going on in this poem, it seemed to me to be very clearly about domestic violence and gendered power dynamics, and it made me think of the way these things are passed down from generation to generation. At the same time, I am aware that I cannot help but read the poem this way because of my own interests, my positionality, and my biases. Therefore I wanted to dig more deeply and visibly into my personal response through these nonfiction modes.
By this point in the collection, I hope that a reader is familiar with the discomfort and unfamiliarity that my approach to translation might cause. I have tried to build from the first version of this poem to the final personal-essay-version in order to guide the reader into this approach to reading. This treatment asks the translator and thus the reader to “listen” or to attend to the specificity of the language they are reading and to trust it. Ideally the reader of this translation is able to trust me, at least as much as they trust any writer, by this point. Furthermore, it is time for me to make my own more personal experience and biases known and to make myself vulnerable by giving insight into my own life.

在湖边散步的女人, PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK, p. 106-109

This treatment is somewhat more conceptual, if possible, than the previous treatments. I use the blank space here as it resonates with the content of the poem: “No one pays attention to a girl like an empty wine bottle.” I am also interested again in exploring the power dynamic between footnotes and the text they supplement. In translations, footnotes can include very important information, details necessary for understanding the meaning or significance of something within its original context, or they can be entirely left out because they do not fit genre expectations, for example in the context of reading literary works. In this translation where the footnotes refer to an invisible text and become the only translation of the poem, my aim is to interrogate the notion of where the meaning of a text lies and to question its basic transparency, by which I mean the idea that one ever reads a story or a poem and simply understands it in an uncomplicated way without calling on any other reserves of understanding or
processes of meaning making. I also hope that this visually subverts the authority of the original text, literally disappearing it, so that the translator’s secondary work, in this case work relegated to the literal margins of the page, becomes the only version while at the same time retaining its secondary position, thus embracing the secondary, feminine failure ascribed to translation.

Again, I chose to treat this poem in this manner because of the content, which I read as having to do with both a woman’s agency and her invisibility or illegibility. The poem appears at this point in the collection as a beat of silence after the previous poem’s final line about the speaker’s grandmother’s death and as a continuation of a gendered theme.

一个男人在我的房间里待过, “A Man Stayed in my Room,” p. 110-115

This treatment returns to a more language-based exploration of the challenges of translation somewhat along the lines of the very first poem and treatment, “I Love You” (我爱你). Instead of emphasizing a resistance to a final, fixed version, in this translation I make visible some of the issues specific to working with the Chinese language. Using Eliot Weinberger’s quotes, each version after the first draft attempts to make visible in the English some of the ways in which Chinese grammar functions differently than English grammar. Although this treatment moves from a relatively smooth, standard-style version, the final version is meant to engage Weinberger’s quote and retain a certain readability so that there isn’t a clear descent from polished version back through the liminal spaces of a translator’s process, but rather a palimpsestic effect.
This poem suggested this treatment only because as I was doing my preliminary translation I happened to be struck by the problem of articles, specifically the difference between sitting on “a stool” and sitting on “the stool”; in the Chinese this was not an issue. When I later ran across Weinberger’s quotes, I decided to return to this particular poem with its (in)definite stool to play with the issues Weinberger brings up.

I felt this poem also followed the small arc of gendered thematics that had begun to build in the last two poems, both extending the female speaker’s loneliness, but here in a more mundane, concrete way than in the previous poem, and expressing her desire for male companionship. As this treatment was somewhat less conceptual and more directly marked for the reader, it seemed like a timely break from the more difficult reading of the last two treatments and the one that follows.

与一面镜子遇见了, “Met with a Mirror,” p. 116-119

This translation engages purposefully with the poet’s image as it is presented on her blog page. I consider this digital paratext an important part of her writing since it is the first thing anyone who visits her blog sees. In the first version of the poem, the image is arranged alongside the translation of the poem somewhat akin to how it might appear on her actual blog, although of course the overall formatting of the page and of a web page are not the same. The second version is a translation of the text within the panel taken from Yu’s blog. This is a return to some of the ideas in the second translated poem, “Afternoon, a Fall” (下午, 摔了一跤). I am interested in how the materiality of Yu Xiuhua’s webpage influences how her poems are encountered, and I am interested in
bringing into these page translations some of the elements of the online experience. In the final version, the poem stands alone. Here the actual text of the translated poem is no different than in the first version, but my implied argument is that the removal of the image and accompanying information make it a different translation.

As this poem discusses the speaker’s thoughts on and experience of inhabiting a body with cerebral palsy and describes herself looking into a mirror, it seemed to make room for the author’s image. I especially liked how juxtaposing her picture, which is rather flattering, and the colors and familiar text of the blog graphic with such an earnest poem that ends on a dark note creates an uncomfortable tension. There is a sort of irony in this composition that I believe captures something about the nature of the internet with its partially unfiltered flood of images and information, the way I have suddenly come across a post by or about a dead friend in my Facebook feed in between political memes and ads for yoga pants. This poem also draws out the theme of the speaker’s desire for a man, although twisting how one sees and experiences her longing into a more felt, physical experience. Then through its last two lines the poem leads into the final poem in this selection which deals with another kind of death.

茧, “Callus,” p. 120-125

The treatment of this poem is essentially the same as for “Dog I Keep, Called Little Wu” (我养的狗, 叫小巫), although rather than focusing on a gendered thematic, this poem calls for listening and attending to duality or multiplicity of meaning and the intertwined duality of life and death. This was suggested to me by the title茧, which
means callus and cocoon, and is used in both ways in the poem. As a single character, I believe the title is meant to carry (at least a trace of) both meanings. The very personal, intimate voice of a daughter addressing her father inclined me to turn to my own personal narrative again, and while this is not meant to be the final translation, it becomes the final translation in this selection, ending on a note of vulnerability and uncertainty.
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