

## Abstract

Dissertation Title

### Zhou Zuoren and classical Japanese literature:

An examination of his translations of classical Japanese literature in the 1920s.

Name:

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This dissertation sets out to examine the modern Chinese literary figure Zhou Zuoren through a comprehensive and thorough examination of his translations of classical Japanese literature in the 1920s. Zhou Zuoren was the younger brother of Zhou Shuren (better known by the penname of Lu Xun). An acclaimed essayist, translator and literary theorist, Zhou Zuoren contributed greatly to the emergence of modern literature in China. He had a deep understanding of Japan and Japanese culture, and was widely regarded as one of the most prominent Chinese experts on matters Japanese.

The translation and research of Japanese classical literature in China began around the 1920s. Zhou Zuoren was a pioneer in the field. In the 1920s, he chose works that were of interest to him and selectively translated popular songs (*zokuyō*) from the Edo Era, the haiku of Issa, *senryū*, *Kyōgen*, *Essays in Idleness (Tsurezuregusa)* and *Kojiki* into Chinese. In the 1950s, he produced complete Chinese translations of *Kojiki*, *The Pillow Book (Makura no sōshi)*, *Nippon Kyōgenshū*, the first five volumes of *The Tale of the Heike (Heike Monogatari)*, *Ukiyoburo* and *Ukidoko*. As a literary scholar in the 1920s, Zhou Zuoren's work in translating and introducing classical Japanese literature not only guided the direction of the emerging new literature in China, but also determined the direction of his own subsequent literary work. Research on Zhou Zuoren thus far has failed to capture his relationship with Japanese classical literature through an examination of his translation work. The present dissertation is aimed at filling this gap in the research literature.

This dissertation is divided into two sections and ten chapters, each examining an aspect of the relationship between Zhou Zuoren and classical Japanese literature. Section One considers Zhou Zuoren's translations of classical Japanese literature through a detailed analysis of his translations and his promotion of these works. Each chapter is devoted to one literary work, and works are presented in the chronological order of *Kojiki*, *Essays in Idleness (Tsurezuregusa)*, *Kyōgen*, the works of Issa, popular songs and *senryū*. We examine how Zhou came to translate these works and the purpose/background behind translating classical Japanese literature. We discuss Zhou's own views on these works and his stance on translation methodology. We also scrutinise Zhou's reception of Japanese classical literature and the effect this had on

the genesis and growth of modern Chinese literature. Section Two develops the idea of Zhou Zuoren's reception of Japanese literature and draws on Zhou's translations to cast light on the following problems: his views on women, children, life and aesthetics; his own personal development; his development from translator to essayist; his intellectual change from being a staunch critic of tradition to being a traditionalist; the meaning and significance of translation and propagation of classical Japanese literature.

The first conclusion we reach is that Zhou Zuoren's choice of works for translation clearly reflected his ideology, opinion and taste in literature. Most of the works translated by Zhou were in line with his ideals of 'human literature' and 'everyman's literature'. Zhou's translations of waka, haiku, popular songs and senryū eventually came to be associated with the new Chinese movement in poetry: *baihua* (modern vernacular) poetry. Zhou's translation and propagation of kyōgen and popular literature from the Edo Era fit well with his call for an 'everyman's literature' to emerge. When Zhou translated the section on love and women in *Essays in Idleness (Tsurezuregusa)* he rendered it as 'a love story in *Kojiki*'. This had underlying connections with the ideas he believed in, such as women's liberation and freedom of choice in love relationships. His abridged translation of the 136th passage in *The Pillow Book (Makura no sōshi)*, as well as Issa's haiku and the haibun-style *Oraga Haru* tells us much about his desire to promote a literature that extols children. The translations also reveal how he views children. Zhou's selection of Japanese classics, especially the *Essays in Idleness (Tsurezuregusa)*, clearly reflects his outlook on life. One cannot underestimate the influence *Essays in Idleness* must have had on him in the 1920s, when he turned from criticising tradition to embracing an ideology of traditionalism.

Secondly, all of Zhou Zuoren's translations of Japanese classics in the 1920s were rendered in the modern vernacular (*baihua*) and were done with the methodology of literal translation. Before starting a work of translation, Zhou would characteristically gather as many different commentaries as possible and chose the one he felt the most affinity with as his source book. One can glean a great deal about his philosophy and interests from his translation methodology. For example, in his translation of *Essays in Idleness*, Zhou used not only the most standard commentaries, but also referred to more idiosyncratic, individualistic commentaries when they suited his sensibilities. He produced original translations very different from the work of his contemporaries. We propose that the character of his work was due to his views on issues like free choice in love relationships and women's liberation. Through his choice of commentaries, Zhou has given us a new portrait of Yoshida Kenkō, thus demonstrating that 'translation is half creative work'.

Lastly, we note that Zhou Zuoren's translations of classical Japanese literature not only revealed his views on life, women, love and children, but also contributed much to

his own emergence and growth as a writer. From 1924 Zhou Zuoren the literary theorist and translator reinvented himself as Zhou Zuoren the essayist; this was in no small part due to the influence he received from his dealings with Japanese classics. Zhou Zuoren is without peer in the world of modern Chinese prose, yet his work carries a strong Japanese flavour. From *haikai* works he was able to draw and incorporate into his prose the elements of idyllic rest, simplicity, suggestiveness, humour and the beauty of human empathy.