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FROM SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMA TO EARLY CHINESE CINEMA

AUTHORITY AND AUTHORSHIP IN LITERARY TRANSLATION AND FILM ADAPTATION

Yingjin Zhang

*And now am I, unhappy messenger ...
I am my master's true confirmed love,
But cannot be true servant to my master
Unless I prove false traitor to myself.*

Shakespeare, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

These opening lines (4.4.97, 101–102) come from Shakespeare's early romantic comedy, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (circa 1594),¹ in which Julia, knowing that her lover Proteus of Verona has betrayed her and left her behind, decides to cross-dress herself as a boy on a journey to Milan and eventually wins over his love despite his infidelity. Entrusted by Proteus to deliver a ring to Silvia, the daughter of the Duke of Milan, Julia here describes herself, now disguised as a page named Sebastian, to be an "unhappy messenger" doomed to be a "traitor" either to her "master" or to herself. Although Julia designs an inventive way of delivery without betraying herself, the very image of "traitor" in this tricky transaction echoes an all-too-familiar caricature of translation—*Traduttore, traditore*. Indeed, a mediator approximating a translator,² Julia betrays her master's intention, but her betrayal is vindicated ultimately in that it reverses a previous betrayal of her and thus proves beneficial to all parties concerned—the originator (Proteus), the mediator (Julia), and the recipient (Silvia) of the love message.

The ending of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in which Silvia's banished lover Valentine renews his lifelong friendship with Proteus by announcing a double wedding, "One feast, one house, one mutual happiness" (5.4.171), reveals the remarkable benefit of an intentional betrayal and the concealed agency of the mediator/translator. Here, we may reconsider Roman Jakobson's question regarding prospective losses and gains in translation:

If we were to translate into English the traditional formula *Traduttore, traditore* as “the translator is a betrayer,” we would deprive the Italian rhyming epigram of all its paronomastic value. Hence a cognitive attitude would compel us to change this aphorism into a more explicit statement and to answer the questions: translator of what messages? betrayer of what values?

Venuti 2004, 143

I take Jakobson’s differentiation of various messages and values in translation to imply a necessary shift of perspectives from the original text (as the indisputable source of *authority*) to the target context (as multiple sites of new *authorship*). In order to explore issues of authority and authorship, this article brings together translation and adaptation studies, two apparently separate but equally ‘unhappy’ disciplines—unhappy due to their long marginalized status in disciplinary hierarchies—that actually share a good deal in common in their efforts to reinvent themselves since the early 1980s, to deconstruct the dominant fictions of invisibility and fidelity, and eventually to “move from the margins to the center of contemporary media studies.” (Naremore 15) For decades, notions of fidelity and its equivalents (e.g., faithfulness and accuracy) governed the theory and practice of literary translation and film adaptation.³ In translation, the original was consistently prioritized over the target text; similarly, in adaptation, the literary source was given primacy over the film version. With prior authority vested in the original, the contradiction inherent in *Traduttore, traditore* made both translation and adaptation precarious processes of transaction, so theorists and practioners tended to hide behind a myth of fidelity or invisibility and gloss over the translator or the adapter’s own authorship. Recent developments in translation and adaptation studies have exposed such a myth and have advocated a paradigm shift to move against invisibility, beyond fidelity, and toward authorship. By comparing *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and its unlikely reincarnation as a 1931 Chinese silent film, this article also demonstrates that the kind of innovative cultural translation newly authorized by the ‘cultural turn’ in translation studies and the ‘sociological turn’ in adaptation studies since the 1980s had already surfaced in an earlier phase of cross-cultural encounter in China. A brief survey of recent turns in these two disciplines, therefore, serves to foreground the significance of an otherwise little-known Chinese screen projection of Shakespeare across intimidating linguistic, artistic, cultural, and sociopolitical divides.

AGAINST INVISIBILITY: THE CULTURAL TURN IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

The domination of concepts of fidelity in translation studies is unmistakable in the history of a discipline that struggled to secure its foundation as distinct from linguistics and literature. Norman Shapiro declares, “A good translation is like a pane of glass ... [that] should never call attention itself”; taking it as an articulation of the invisibility myth, Lawrence Venuti sets out to challenge “an illusionistic effect of discourse, of the translator’s own manipulation of English.” (Venuti 1995, 1) The ideal, yet idealistic, invisibility is similarly embodied in Eugene Nida’s concept of “dynamic equivalence,” which “aims at complete naturalness of expression” in the target language. (159) For Venuti, complete naturalness can only be accomplished through the violence inherent in “the reconstitution of the foreign

text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that preexist it in the target language, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality.” (Venuti 1995, 18) To combat the dominance of English and its Anglo-American values in contemporary translation, Venuti advocates a strategy of “foreignizing translation,” which positions itself as “resistance” by assuming “an ideology of autonomy, locating the alien in a cultural other, pursuing cultural diversity, foregrounding the linguistic and cultural differences of the source-language text and transforming the hierarchy of cultural values in the target language.” (308)

Venuti’s use of ‘manipulation,’ ‘resistance,’ and ‘ideology’ places him squarely in a recent paradigm shift known as the ‘cultural turn’ in translation studies. According to Mary Snell-Hornby, the cultural turn is traceable to the 1985 publication of a volume of essays entitled *The Manipulation of Literature*, which pursue “descriptive translation studies” and express basic assumptions later associated with the Manipulation School: “an approach to literary translation which is descriptive, target-oriented, functional and systemic; and an interest in the norms and constraints that govern the production and reception of translations, in the relation between translation and other types of text processing.” (Hermans 10–11) In 1990, Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, two contributors to the ‘manipulation’ volume, further advanced the descriptive approach and urged translation studies to move from ‘text’ to ‘culture,’ thereby marking a cultural turn in a field previously dominated by the scientific, linguistic approach.

To the credit of her Germanic perspective, Snell-Hornby discovers a precedent of the cultural turn in Hans Vermeer’s seminal work on Skopos theory in the early 1980s, which examines translation in terms of how it serves its intended *purpose* (in Greek, *skopos* means ‘purpose’, ‘aim,’ or ‘goal’). Vermeer distinguishes five types of translation: the interlinear version (word for word translation), the grammar translation (at the sentence level), the documentary translation (oriented toward the source), the communicative translation (oriented toward the target), and the adapting translation (the source as raw material for something new). With this dynamic skopos model, Vermeer envisions the possibility of “de-throning the source text” and appropriating it merely as a “means to a new text.” (Snell-Hornby 54)

The cultural turn since the 1980s has shifted the emphasis of translation studies from linguistic procedures to cultural contexts, from fidelity to the original text to functions in the target culture, from the indisputable authority of the writer to the concealed authorship of the translator. In her summary of “future perspectives” in the twenty-first century, Snell-Horn mentions new phrases such as “ideological turn” and “sociological turn” in translation studies, but she treats them as shifting viewpoints subsequent to the cultural turn rather than new paradigms per se. (172) Interestingly, a similar “sociological turn” has taken place in recent adaptation studies, which shares similar concerns with translation studies (e.g., target orientation, intertextual processing) and which now investigates “institutional and contextual issues” of adaptation in the expanded realm of cultural translation. (Palmer 259)

BEYOND FIDELITY: THE SOCIOLOGICAL TURN IN ADAPTATION STUDIES

Robert Stam resorts to passionate words to express his frustration with conventional adaptation criticism:

The language of criticism dealing with the film adaptation of novels has often been profoundly moralistic, awash in terms such as *infidelity*, *betrayal*, *deformation*, *violation*, *vulgarization*, and *deseccration*, each accusation carrying its specific charge of outraged negativity. *Infidelity* resonates with overtones of Victorian prudishness; *betrayal* evokes ethical perfidy; *deformation* implies aesthetic disgust; *violation* calls to mind sexual violence; *vulgarization* conjures up class degradation; and *deseccration* intimates a kind of religious sacrilege toward the “sacred word.”

Stam 2000, 54

Much of the fidelity myth is derived from what Stam calls three prejudices: seniority (the assumption of better quality in older arts), iconophobia (the Platonic and Neoplatonic depreciation of images), and logophilia (the valorization of the “sacred word”).⁴ However, as Stam argues, literal fidelity is both unlikely and undesirable to achieve because film adaptation involves the shift from a single-track, verbal medium to a multi-track medium that simultaneously plays with written and spoken words, theatrical performance, moving photographic images as well as music and sound effects. Simply put, the “essentialist” concept of fidelity does not work in film adaptation. (57–58)

Formulated in 2000, Stam’s proposal to move beyond fidelity is a belated response to Dudley Andrew’s call in 1984: “It is time for adaptation studies to take a sociological turn.” (35) For Andrew, the sociology of adaptation explores “the complex interchange between eras, styles, nations, and subjects,” (37) and he differentiates three types of film adaptation—borrowing, intersection, and fidelity of transformation, with increasing adherence to the original. Extending Andrew’s model, James Naremore endorses “a broader definition of adaptation and a sociology that takes into account the commercial apparatus, the audience, and the academic culture industry.” (10) Naremore distinguishes three key metaphors in the history of adaptation. The first is George Bluestone’s metaphor of *translation*, which observes the principles of textual fidelity, and valorizes the literary canon, but essentializes the nature of cinema.⁵ The second derives from the auteurist approach, which relies on the metaphor of *performance* but privileges differences over similarities between literary and filmic versions.⁶ The third is the metaphor of *intertextuality*, which Stam explicates in light of Bakhtin’s multidimensional dialogism and Gérard Genette’s five types of transtextuality (i.e., intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality, and hypertextuality). For Stam, “Film adaptations . . . are caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin.” (Stam 2000, 66)

Similar to Stam, Brian McFarlane draws on the notions of intertextuality and questions the primacy of fidelity in adaptation studies: “the fidelity approach seems a doomed enterprise and fidelity criticism unilluminating.” (9) In addition

to Andrew's categories of fidelity of transformation, intersection, and borrowing, McFarlane locates two other comparable typologies of adaptation strategies. First, Geoffrey Wagner distinguishes "transposition" (minimal transference) from "commentary" (alteration according to the filmmaker's intention) and "analogy" (departure for the sake of making another work of art). (222) Second, Michael Klein and Gillian Parker differentiate among (a) "fidelity to the main thrust of the narrative," (b) "reinterpreting or ... deconstructing the source text" while retaining the core of the narrative structure, and (c) appropriating "the source merely as raw material, as simply the occasion for an original work." (9–10)

Most of early Chinese screen adaptations of foreign literature fall under the category of borrowing, analogy, or appropriation. To foreground Chinese creativity in a new technological realm of "translingual practice,"⁷ Zhang Zhen proposes "cosmopolitan projections" as a medium-specific concept of adaptation: for such projections of "visual pleasure and cultural experience ... create a space in which the original and the adaptation coexist with tension," and "they generate a surplus of meaning that cannot be subsumed by either the source language/culture or the target language/culture." (Z. Zhen 2004, 146–47) A shift of attention from purely textual transactions to broadly contextual considerations thus makes room for the study of film reception, which is redefined as "reflective rather than reactive response... a response that is active, interventionist, or even aggressive" (Tsivian 1) rather than passively "reflecting" a certain reality. The horizon of reception, to a considerable extent, shapes the kind of translation or adaptation strategy a given project would take.

Zhang Zhen's work on film production, promotion, and reception illustrates the growing field of adaptation studies in the wake of its sociological turn. As we shall see in the next two sections, film adaptation of Shakespeare has increasingly taken an interventionist or aggressive stance on issues of authority and authorship. The compilation, performance, translation, adaptation, and dissemination of Shakespeare over the centuries have undeniably cut across a vast stretch of "eras, styles, nations" (Andrew's words) as well as a variety of forms, genres, and media.

BETWEEN AUTHOR AND AUCTOR: SHAKESPEARE, ADAPTATION, AND TRANSLATION

Like adaptation studies in general, "the assumption that there are identifiable, singular authorial intentions behind the plays has, until comparatively recently, dominated Shakespeare film (and television) scholarship"; however, as Elsie Walker writes of a recent development by quoting from Kenneth Rothwell, "The preoccupation with 'what gets lost' in the translation from stage-play to film has given way 'to a more open and adventurous foray,' 'discovering that which is unique and special about each movie' in both aesthetic and sociological terms." (Walker 10–11) A glimpse of recent publications reveals such academic adventures as treating the reel Shakespeare as "alternative cinema" (Starks and Lehmann), "popularizing" or "reinventing" his works on film, TV, video, and DVD (Burt and Boose; Keller and Stratyner), and investigating "new wave Shakespeare" on and off screen (Cartelli and Rowe). Surprisingly, this recent development confirms Bazin's 1948 prescience: "it is possible to imagine that we are moving toward a

reign of the adaptation in which the notion of the unity of the work of art, if not the very notion of the author himself, will be destroyed.” (26) It is remarkable that Bazin’s little-known statement was made twenty years before Roland Barthes’s poignant announcement of “The Death of the Author.”

Theoretically speaking, the Author placed under erasure by poststructuralists like Barthes and Foucault is a relatively late construction. In fact, the word ‘author’ did not enter the English language until around 1550 when it was used as an alternate of ‘auctor’—the latter “a term from scribal culture designating a literary authority whose status as such is purely derivative” and who functions “not as an individual but as an apparatus, a collaborative nexus of textual production, transmission, and reception.” (Lehmann 10) Shakespeare fits this early modern concept of ‘auctor’ as his work is characterized by a composite process of writing, a feudal economy of patronage, and centuries of posthumous promotion and propagation. Long after the birth of the Author in the late eighteenth century—as an individual agent dealing with intellectual property rights in a market economy—generations of modern scholars worked laboriously to establish a mythology of ‘Shakespeare the Author,’ only to see what appeared to be the critical consensus on Shakespeare’s authority and authorship gradually dissipate since the 1980s. Quoting from Margreta De Grazia, Courtney Lehmann thus describes the recent change in Shakespeare studies: “over and against the anachronistic tradition of valorizing Shakespeare the Author, contemporary scholarship is devoted to a concept of ‘Shakespeare’ the apparatus, a view that proclaims Shakespeare to be the contingent effect of ‘the various stages of scripting, acting, printing, selling’” (11)—as well as projecting and screening, if we include film adaptation.⁸

Returning Shakespeare the author to Shakespeare the auctor, the *apparatus* view of authorship helps explain not only extensive alterations and inconsistencies in the Shakespeare canon itself but also diverse, often audience-directed strategies in its stage and screen adaptations. To cite one stage example: “By the time of the first recorded performance of *The Two Gentleman of Verona* (1762), the ideal of heroic friendship and the story that embodies it were so little known that Valentine’s offer of his bride could only be seen as an irritating oddity better got rid of in the performance text prepared by Benjamin Victor.” (Schlueter 18) From the perspective of the auctor, Victor’s momentous rewriting of the final scene—deleting Valentine’s egocentric offer to Proteus, “All that was mine in Silvia I give thee” (5.4.83) and whitewashing Proteus’ attempted rape of Silvia, “I’ll force thee yield to my desire” (5.4.59)⁹—was completely justified because Shakespeare had been known for his annexation of antecedent literary works, a practice of “literary appropriations” widespread in early modern Europe but “most troublesome” only to “our contemporary veneration of originality.” (Keller and Stratynner 2)

This notion of originality is likewise problematic in film adaptation. The first screen rendition of Shakespeare is already twice removed from the original as it represents William Kennedy-Laurie Dickson’s experimental takes, in widescreen 68 mm, of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree’s performance of *King John* in September 1899. (Rothwell 1–3) Now, over a century and hundreds of titles later,¹⁰ Shakespeare has taken all forms, genres, and styles conceivable on screens large and small, from faithful adaptation (e.g., “traditions of quality”) to auteurist

reinvention (Leitch 127–78), from realist production to postmodern parody (Lanier), from comedy and tragedy to teen romance (Balizet) and animation (Osborne), not to mention countless derivatives (Fernández), offshoots (Howard), spin-offs, and citations (Burt). More often than not, the reel Shakespeare looks blatantly *unauthorized*.

Similarly, Shakespeare entered twentieth-century China largely unauthorized as Chinese translations of him involve ‘treacherous’ cases such as multiple authorships, diverse linguistic registers, compulsive rewriting, and radical transformation. Shakespeare’s earliest incarnation in China was a 1903 book of ten plays, including *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, rendered by an anonymous translator in classical Chinese [*wenyan*] and based on Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), a popular prose rendition designed specifically for young children.¹¹ A year later, renowned literatus Lin Shu published his classical Chinese version of twenty Shakespeare stories, also based on the Lambs’ *Tales*, and Lin’s influential rewriting (*yishu* or ‘translational narration’) would become the prototype for some subsequent dramatic shorts. Not surprisingly, Lin himself did not understand English, and his rewriting was often based on his collaborators’ oral interpretation. (Hu 71–74) In 1916, Lin Shu worked in the same collaborative way and rewrote five Shakespearean plays, this time based on the original source. The earliest vernacular [*baihua*] rendition of Shakespeare came from Tian Han, a celebrated playwright who published his translations in magazines during 1921 and 1924. The majority of Chinese translations of Shakespeare, however, were done in prose, and only in 1929 did they start to appear occasionally in verse. From 1931 to 1944, two scholars attempted to translate all Shakespearean plays: Cao Weifeng’s collection of eleven plays appeared between 1942 and 1944, while Zhu Shenghao’s collection of twenty-seven plays was published posthumously in 1947, although his translation of four additional historical plays was excluded from the collection. (Zha and Xie 45–46, 157–60, 357–62)

Undoubtedly, Shakespeare existed in China in various literary forms—in digest, in excerpts, in classical prose, in vernacular prose or verse—and most of them bear little resemblance to the original. The same is true for the stage performance of Shakespeare in China, which began with an amateur theater in abridged form. By the late 1930s, however, Shakespeare’s authority was so well established in China that famous movie stars like Zhao Dan would eagerly take the role of Romeo. However, a significant development in the 1940s was the Sinicization of Shakespeare on stage. Li Jianwu transformed *Macbeth* into the Chinese historical drama *Wang Deming* in 1944, and Huang Zuolin staged this play as *Hero in a Turbulent Time* [*Luanshi yingxiong*] in Shanghai in 1945. In the meantime, *Romeo and Juliet* was transposed into regional Chinese operas and embodied in star performances, as Yuan Xuefen delivered a Yueju version in Shanghai in 1942 and Jiao Juyin staged a Peking opera version in 1948. (Zha and Xie 362) This tradition of rewriting Shakespeare in literature and drama and restaging his plays in regional operas forms a distinctive cultural background against which we should evaluate an early Chinese film adaptation of Shakespeare.

In a comprehensive catalogue of a hundred years of Shakespeare on film, Eddie Sammons finds only two adaptations of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*—a

“modern version of the play” from China in 1931 and a “fairly faithful adaptation” made for TV, from West Germany in 1963—and attributes the scarcity of adaptations to “the peculiarities and the light-weight nature of the play.” (164–65) Nevertheless, as illustrated below, the Chinese version demonstrates a heightened sense of authorship and transforms the comedy into a popular film animated with intertextuality and performance, relevant to both traditional Chinese culture and contemporary Chinese life.

A SPRAY OF PLUM BLOSSOMS:

SHAKESPEAREAN INTERTEXTUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

Scripted by Huang Yicuo (Y. C. Jeffrey Huang) and directed by Bu Wancang (Richard Poh),¹² *A Spray of Plum Blossoms* (Yijianmei, 1931) owes its inventive adaptation strategy to the general trend of *domesticating* (i.e., Sinicizing) Shakespeare for the benefit of a Chinese audience. Since a contextual study of this film has been done elsewhere by relating it to Chinese literary translation on the one hand and, on the other, the changing Chinese film industry and its rising nationalist as well as cosmopolitan aspirations (Z. Zhang 2004), in this section I will focus on issues of intertextuality and performance and pursue the topics of rectifying names and relations, crafting a Sinicized narrative, delivering embodied performance, and projecting bilingual intertitles.

Rectifying Names and Relations

A Spray of Plum Blossoms begins with a Shakespeare quotation: “All the world’s a stage / And all the men and women merely players.” (*As You Like It*, 2.7) Among the players in this modern-dressed drama are two pairs of Chinese lovers, Hu Lunting (Valentine) and Shi Luohua (Silvia), Bai Lede (Proteus) and Hu Zhuli (Julia). Derived from approximate transliteration, the Chinese names carry no clues to the hidden meanings of the English names—Valentine being the patron saint of lovers, Proteus being a Greek sea god known for changing shapes (hence, a synonym for deceit), Julia derived from the hot summer month July and connoting passionate temper, and Silvia referring to the woods and foreshadowing the pastoral setting near the play’s ending. (Schlueter 52–53) Yet, certain words in the Chinese names manage to hint at appropriate personality traits: *lun* in Lunting (Valentine) highlights ethical integrity, and *le* in Lede (Proteus) reveals indulgence in pleasure while the surname *Bai* implies his ultimately abortive effort. The most fitting name is Diao Li’ao (Turio), who is transformed from a typical but defeated rival in the original to a cunning, arrogant schemer who embodies total evils in the film.¹³

Absent from the Chinese lineup of characters are three prominent comic figures in the original: clownish servants Speed and Lance and the latter’s dog Crab. One reason for their absence is the difficulty of translating wise or foolish comments and generating instant humor through short intertitles; another is that their hilarious side shows, amusing as they were to the early modern English theater audience, would be too distracting to the core narrative (so much so that the Lambs’ version has also removed these characters). The film, nonetheless, manages to transfer some clownish traits to Proteus (played by Wang Cilong),

who repeatedly puts on exaggerated facial expressions and, as typical of silent film's embodied performance, uses hand tricks to entertain Julia (played by Ruan Lingyu) and Silvia (played by Lin Chuchu).

The Chinese film, on the other hand, adds kinship relations to its characters: Valentine (played by Jin Yan) and Julia now become brother and sister, while Proteus and Silvia are cousins. The added kinship creates a situation in which Valentine owes a favor to Proteus after Proteus writes a letter of introduction to his uncle, General Shi, the military governor of Canton (equivalent to the Duke of Milan). Furthermore, Valentine entrusts his sister to Proteus's care, and that favor kindles Proteus and Julia's romance in Shanghai, where they exchange rings before Proteus leaves to join Valentine in Guangdong. Subtly intertextualized, the 'kinship' between Shanghai and Canton, China's two largest treaty ports, is evoked in the "domestication" (Z. Zhang 2004, 153–54) or Sinicization of Shakespeare's play.

Crafting a Sinicized Narrative

With the added kinship relations, *A Spray of Plum Blossoms* reduces Shakespeare's emphasis on the early modern European discourse of male friendship (Carroll 3–32), and instead plays up the intrigues of heterosexual romance and gender performance. Three tactics are adopted to craft a Sinicized narrative: the masculinization of the new woman, the infusion of nationalist sentiment, and the embellishment of plum symbolism.

Julia, who defies social—albeit not dramatic—convention with her cross-dressing intervention, becomes a perfect model for the emergent new woman in China. At her first appearance in the film, she is identified as “a model of the modern maidens” or, literally translated from Chinese subtitles [*chaoyue shidai de modeng nüxing* (ZDZ 2135)], “a modern woman transcending her time.” Typical of the cinematic code, she is enclosed in a domestic space and serves as the object of male gaze in an exhibitionist mode (singing and dancing). Her act of tearing up Proteus's love letter and then picking up the pieces to read after the maid leaves is an exact replica of Julia's in the play: “*love-wounded Proteus*” (1.2.113)—this originally highlighted phrase is given spotlight in the film's close-up shot of the ‘wounded’ letter.¹⁴

However, just as the “devaluation and displacement of love and aesthetics by revolution and national salvation initiated a masculinizing tendency” (Y. Zhang 1996 206) in Chinese films of the early 1930s, so does *A Spray of Plum Blossoms* distance itself from Shakespeare's play and recast romance in an ambivalent light. What is almost unique in this film, furthermore, is its gender reversal, whereby male characters become deplorable, even desperate victims of love. Proteus's indulgence in romance has earned him the nickname ‘perfume general’ [*zhifen jiangjun*] before his graduation from a Shanghai military academy (ZDZ 2135) and subsequently drives him to betray his lover, friend, and uncle, to the point where he almost commits suicide in shame at the film's end (an action absent from the play). Even though he does not change as dramatically in the film as in the play from a detractor of romance—“a folly bought with wit / Or else a wit by folly vanquished” (1.1.34–35)—to a captor of love—“I have done penance

for condemning Love, / Whose high imperious thoughts have punished me” (2.4.127–28), Valentine has to be banished from Canton and become a “love-wounded” bandit chief.

Modern women, on the other hand, seem to embrace masculinization willingly and endure it less traumatically than their male counterparts. Silvia is characterized as “a maiden with the spirit of masculinity” or *jinguo zhong you zhangfuqi* in Chinese (ZDZ 2138) when she first appears in the film, on her way to a horse ride in the open country. Once Julia arrives in Guangdong to investigate her brother’s banishment, she is quickly transformed from a weeping abandoned lover to a determined military aide who helps Silvia expose Proteus’s betrayal and reclaim justice for Valentine. Significantly, the sartorial code of Julia’s maturation into a new woman is not male drag as in Shakespeare’s play, but her androgynous disguise in military uniform, which compensates her reduced individuality with a newfound sense of collective mission. The transformation of “fair ladies” Julia and Silvia into new women thus carries rich intertextuality in early twentieth-century Chinese film and fiction. (Y. Zhang 1996, 186–207; Hu)

Despite the glorified image of ‘militant’ new women, the masculinizing tendency in Chinese cinema hides a disturbing gender bias, which Valentine articulates as he is sworn in as the new bandit chief. Two simple lines in the original—“Provided that you do no outrages / On silly women or poor passengers” (4.1.70–71)—are elaborated as three rules.¹⁵ Whereas “We aid the poor, relieve the distressed” [*jiuku jipin*] and “The weak be helped, villains be suppressed” [*chuqiang furuo*], reminiscent of both Chinese martial arts narratives and the Robin Hood legend, are readily accepted by the bandits, the third rule—“Pay the fair sex respect and be blessed” [*buxu tiaoxi funü*]¹⁶—meets resistance and requires Valentine’s rationalization: “Woman is a bad thing for us bandits.” Yet the Chinese intertitle is more vivid in misogynist imagery: *nüse hairen, shenyu daoqiang*, or “woman injures man more severely than a sword or spear.” (ZDZ 2145) The conviction that women are ‘ruinous’ to man’s profession is anticipated on graduation day when Valentine advises Proteus against the latter’s talent of knowing girls better than soldiers: “This is time for us to serve the country; we should refrain from being ruined by perfumes and girls.” (ZDZ 2135)

The film’s infusion of nationalist sentiment is further intensified in three cases of Sinicization. First, with an intertextual reference to Chinese martial arts pictures of the 1920s (Z. Zhang 2005, 199–243), Valentine acts as an archetypal knight-errant who roams around in disguise, assisting the poor and needy, and punishing villains like Turio who becomes head of the military police through a backdoor connection and whose subordinates bully people all the time. Second, “the military prowess of the hero” (Schlueter 29), which was subsequently added to the play’s performance texts, is projected in vibrant detail in the film. Like a valiant knight-errant, Valentine leaps to the rooftop with ease and throws flying arrows at targets with precision. Third, consistent with the masculinization program, Silvia’s military skills enhance her profile as a modern woman: she commands male soldiers with authority, and she single-handedly fights off two sexual assaults by Proteus and Turio consecutively. The film’s final scene, in which two pairs of lovers supervise marching soldiers on horseback, departs drastically from

Shakespeare's romantic vision of "one mutual happiness" for four lovers; instead, it places four protagonists in solidarity and conveys to its audience a desirable sense of power at a time when China faced an imminent threat of invasion after Japan had occupied Northeast China (Manchuria).

The film's Sinicization by way of 'militant' nationalism, nonetheless, is balanced by its elaboration of plum symbolism. In lieu of Shakespeare's trope of letter writing, the film invents a scene in which Valentine and Silvia take turns composing a poem set to the tune of "*Yijianmei*" ["A spray of plum blossoms"] and grace a giant garden rock with their calligraphy of verses and an ink-drawn plum blossom. Serving as a witness to their literary skills as well as their mutual affection, this rock will become a reminder of their love a year later when the separated lovers are reunited. As an intertitle announces earlier, the plum blossom's connotation of "fragrance and purity" [*lengyan qinggao*] resembles Silvia's character. (ZDZ 2140) In a flourish of cinematic excess, Silvia's living quarters are saturated with plum symbols: "in an industrially designed glass door and window frame, in sofa pillows" (Bao 218), in huge wall and floor designs, and in Silvia's chest pin, which she refuses to give away, as Turio requests, but gladly fastens to Valentine's military uniform.

An additional spin on the already elaborate plum symbolism is accomplished through naming Valentine's self-disciplined bandit group '*Yijianmei*' and their hideout 'Plum Blossom Village,' where their cave is decorated with two plum blossom banners. The plum motif thus links Valentine's integrity intertextually to Silvia's, and his "rebellious spirit" finds further legitimation in his quest for social justice. (Qin 94–158) Somewhat unexpectedly, such legitimation is extended on a national scale as the plum blossom had newly acquired political significance after it was proclaimed the national flower and around 1927 was featured in the national anthem. (Bao 230) The plum symbolism, a self-authorized Chinese invention in this film, thus functions as a compelling example of "cosmopolitan projections" as it combines, in distinctive *hybrid* form, Chinese political authority with cosmopolitan aspirations, traditional aesthetics with art deco mise-en-scene, ideological legitimation with rebellious stance, and nationalist sentiment with personal dedication.

Delivering Embodied Performance

Perhaps due to its flaunted hybridity, *A Spray of Plum Blossoms* is criticized by an official Chinese film history as "an awful mediocre picture in which certain characters wear bizarre [*qixing guaizhuang*] clothing." (Cheng et al. 153) Presumably referring to the film's "militant fashion" (Z. Zhang 2004, 154), this criticism captures precisely the effect of cultural hybridization authored by Chinese filmmakers through intertextual performance. Not only is the film a cinematic reinvention *à la* Shakespeare, it borrows conceptually and visually from early American cinema as well: "while the female soldiers with long, permed hair and military uniforms (jacket, skirt, and boots) look like sisters of Pearl White from *Pearl of the Army*, which was widely popular in China around 1922, the male lead... plays a Robin Hood figure modeled on the American male adventure films that circulated between 1922 and 1925." (Bao 218) Valentine's "bizarre" bandit

outfits (tattered jacket and leather boots) and, when in disguise, his black hooded long cloak simultaneously reference the Robin Hood legend and the Chinese knight-errant tradition.

At once Chinese and Western, cultural hybridity enhances rather than diminishes the film's bilingual, bicultural appeal. While Pearl White's intertext provides a framework for appreciating Julia and Silvia's performance as new women, the convergence of Robin Hood and knight-errantry promises the best of both "chivalry and romance" [*xiayi aiqing*] genres, as the film was advertised in *Film Magazine* in October 1930. (*Yingxi zazhi* 369) Indeed, the film's complete title would be *Qingdao Yijianmei* ['A passionate bandit named A Spray of Plum Blossoms'], and its popularity was testified by comments in contemporary magazines. Some viewers waited two hours in the rain to get tickets in Nanjing (Z. Zhang 2004 158), and a writer enthusiastically links the full-house showings [*manzuo*] to the film stars' "embodied, nuanced" [*titie ruwei*] performances. (Dai 1202)

According to performance theory, "the body is textualized and the text is embodied." (Lehmann 15) This is particularly true of silent film, which relies on the textualization of both the face and the body to deliver embodied performance on screen. In *A Spray of Plum Blossoms*, Ruan Lingyu's facial expressions cover a wide range, although not quite reaching the tragic depth her future roles would demand of her. (Meyer) In her role as Julia, Ruan stares at Silvia with burning hatred when she thinks the latter has stolen her lover; she bites her lips in tears behind a screen when Proteus betrays their love in front of Silvia; and she blossoms into a radiant smile when Valentine gladly recognizes her without her military cap. Lin Chuchu's performance, on the other hand, involves the body more as she displays horse-riding skills, leads soldiers in drills, and fights off her unworthy suitors' assaults. Just as a high level of physicality is vital to Lin's embodied performance of the new woman, so is physicality crucial to a male star. Early on, Valentine impresses Silvia when he elegantly takes his horse to jump over a fence while Turio fails twice in humiliation. Jin Yan's able-bodied performance here and elsewhere contributes to the textuality of his star appeal.

Indeed, Jin Yan's textualized body has taken on a new dimension of cross-cultural signification: as a "Valentino look-alike" (Hansen 16), his performance as Valentine in this film becomes all the more meaningful. Upon scrutiny, Jin's defiant posture when he is charged with treason and dragged away by two soldiers from the general office—"What crime have I committed?" (ZDZ 2144)—resembles Valentino's posture when the latter's character is arrested in exotic adventure films like *The Son of the Sheik* (dir. George Fitzmaurice, 1926). Sure, Jin's body is not yet subjected to masochistic tortures as in many Valentino films, although he would soon perform in exactly that masochistic mode in the dungeon scene of *Big Road* (*Dalu*, dir. Sun Yu, 1934). After all, the cross-cultural intertextuality of Valentino-Valentine-Hu Lunting-Jin Yan would only add to the cosmopolitan profile of *A Spray of Plum Blossoms*.

Projecting Bilingual Intertitles

Cosmopolitanism embodied in Jin Yan's performative intertextuality is

likewise evident in the film's projection of bilingual intertitles. With Chinese words above English ones, the film's intertitle cards seem to deliver parallel textual performances: whereas monolingual readers could choose to view the film as a Chinese story or a Shakespearean adaptation, bilingual readers might discover a different viewing experience that approximates a simultaneous reading of the original and the translation. Bilingual intertitles, therefore, merge translation and adaptation into the same composite process.

Significantly, translation works in two directions in this film, from English to Chinese and vice versa. Sometimes, Shakespeare's lines are quoted almost verbatim from the original, as in Valentine's initial criticism of Proteus's indulgence in love: "living dully sluggardized at home, / Wear out thy youth with shapeless idleness." (1.1.7–8) In the film, these lines are transposed to Julia, with slight variations, when she encourages Proteus to take up a post in Canton: "You must not wear out your youth in idleness at home." Interestingly, this Shakespearean quotation is not translated into Chinese; instead, the intertitle adopts a Chinese axiom and distinguishes Julia from 'ruinous' women by having her urge Proteus to serve the nation: "Man's aspirations are boundless [*nan'er zhizai sifang*] ... You must not ruin your future for my sake." (ZDZ 2140) While the word 'ruin' here intertextually connects Julia and Valentine in their warnings against Proteus the perfume general, the word *nan'er* motivates Proteus to an improbable show of bravery a few scenes later. He arrives in Canton on a small airplane following a poetic Chinese intertitle—*Chengfengyu, chongxiaohan, zheng nan'er deyi zhishi* (ZDZ 2141),¹⁷ which conjures up an image of the man's delight in traveling above the clouds against the winds and rains but which is translated into prosaic English—"Like an eagle soaring up the sky, Proteus feels as if he is sitting on the top of the world."

The loss of Chinese poetic cadence in English translation is so apparent that when Valentine and Silvia are composing a poem in the garden, the effort to translate their verses is abandoned altogether. The perceived *untranslatability* of Chinese poetry, nevertheless, might not disturb those versed in English because the mise-en-scene of the romantic rendezvous in the garden functions as an adequate *visual translation* of their blossoming love. In fact, the mise-en-scene of poetry writing serves as a substitution for a deleted Shakespeare scene in which Silvia devises an ingenious way of indirectly expressing her love for Valentine by asking him to write a love letter and then forcing him to keep it: "And when it's writ, for my sake read it over ... / Why, if it please you, take it for your labour." (2.1.120, 123) While Valentine is confused as to whom the letter is truly intended, his quick-wit servant Speed states the obvious: "O excellent device, was there ever heard a better? / That my master, being scribe, to himself should write the letter?" (2.1.129–30) The removal of this scene, arguably, has more to do with the film's acquiescence to the ideology of masculinization than with its avoidance of potential untranslatability.

Sometimes, perceived untranslatability could be circumvented with recourse to comparable allusions. In the play, Julia reproaches her maid, who has just taken the initiative of accepting Speed's delivery of Proteus's love letter, for being "a goodly broker." (1.2.41) In the film, Proteus himself asks Julia's maid to be such a broker,

but the maid does not understand his Chinese allusion to Hongniang—a clever, aggressive maid who delivers love messages and facilitates the consummation of her mistress's love with a scholar in the Chinese drama *Romance of West Chamber* [*Xixiang ji*], which was adapted into a film of the same title by Hou Yao in 1927. (Harris) In response, Proteus explains in a Chinese intertitle, "Hongniang is a very beautiful angel [*xianzi*] specialized in delivering letters for others" (ZDZ 2137); rather than the culturally loaded "Hongniang," the English intertitle brings in Cupid and defines him as "the God of Love ... a very beautiful angel who delivers letters for others." The cultural equivalence of Hongniang and Cupid as the angelic 'brokers' of love is thus established, although a slight difference still persists in that the former is earth-bound whereas the latter mythological.¹⁸

The co-existence of the comparable images of Hongniang and Cupid in the bilingual intertitles brings us to what Abé Mark Nornes calls "an abusive subtitling." For Nornes, conventional subtitling is "a corrupt practice" because it glosses over the violence of domesticating translation. Rather than shying away from the inevitable violence, Nornes calls for an even more aggressive measure, "a subtitling that engages today's sensibilities with a violence which is not corrupt, but abusive." (463) The translation of 'broker' to Hongniang or Cupid may be abusive in that it is either too domesticating or too foreignizing, but this act of abusive violence yields a positive result. "Abusive subtitles circulate between the foreign and the familiar, the known and the unknown," and Nornes further envisions the in-between space as one in which "both the original and the translation are simultaneously available, as if they were *en face*." (467)

The relevance of Nornes's theorization to *A Spray of Plum Blossoms* is obvious. By projecting translation as two-way traffic and making both the original and the translation simultaneously available on screen, bilingual intertitles help construct rich layers of intertextuality in this Shakespeare-inspired drama, and their sequential projection delivers an impressive on-screen performance of cultural translation that offers the audience a Sinicized narrative spiced up with an appropriate dosage of foreignness.

A NON-ZERO-SUM VIEW OF AUTHORITY AND AUTHORSHIP

To return to the questions of authority and authorship in this concluding section, we should now consider Bazin's advice: "one must first know to what end the adaptation is designed: for the cinema or for its audience." (21) Bazin's concern with the audience and the *purpose* of adaptation reminds us of the target-oriented Skopos theory in translation studies; but his options of either/or may be too rigid for an inventive film like *A Spray of Plum Blossoms*, which works simultaneously to attract an audience and to enrich the cinema. For that double purpose, the film does not conceal its hybridity of authorship but rather flaunts its auctor apparatus, revealing its mechanisms from narrative through mise-en-scene to performance.

Sure, one is frequently confronted with the question "Whose film is it anyway?" (Walker 8) The fidelity myth may entail a dismissal of *A Spray of Plum Blossoms* as a betrayal of Shakespeare's original, as a case of "plagiarism" [*chaoxi*] not worthy of critical scrutiny. (Cheng et al. 153) Nonetheless, as my analysis demonstrates, *A Spray of Plum Blossoms* can yield insights into literary translation

and film adaptation. Its Sinicization effort fits the target-orientation in the recent development of the two disciplines, and its bilingual intertitles claim benefits of both domestication and foreignization in translation practices. Rather than treating these two as mutually exclusive, *A Spray of Plum Blossoms* underscores the possibility of a Shakespearean vision of “one mutual happiness” whereby tensions generated by binary concepts (e.g., source/target, fidelity/betrayal, submission/resistance) are played off against each other to a productive end. In fact, domestication and foreignization may coexist in the same text, sometimes even in the same frame, as in the abovementioned case of Hongniang and Cupid.

A Spray of Plum Blossoms compels us to rethink the power dynamics of authority and authorship in literary translation and film adaptation. Here, seeking insight from a sociological theory of power may further develop the sociological turn in both disciplines. In Antony Giddens’s reading, Talcott Parsons questions a “misleading and one-sided” view of the nature of power, which is labeled—after game theory—as the ‘zero-sum’ concept, according to which one party wins to the degree that the other necessarily loses. Parsons then suggests a *non-zero-sum* view that conceives of power as “a relation from which both sides may gain.” (Cassell 212–13) In adaptation studies, Stam similarly challenges a prevalent view of adaptation as a zero-sum game in which the “inter-art relation is seen as a Darwinian struggle to the death rather than a dialogue offering mutual benefit and cross-fertilization.” (“Introduction” 4) In light of Parsons’s non-zero-sum theory, the power traditionally ascribed to authority and authorship in translation and adaptation is *relational* in nature, and a gain in translation and adaptation may not necessarily mean a loss in the original, and vice versa. Early Chinese filmmakers have certainly gained distinct authorship in projecting *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* on the Chinese screen, but in so doing they have both acknowledged and added to Shakespeare’s authority by providing him with one of very few screen incarnations in China.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Here and elsewhere, numerical designations of acts, scenes and lines in the play refer to the edition compiled by Carroll.

² Goethe highlights the proximity of the translator as mediator this way: “Translators are like busy matchmakers who praise a half-veiled beauty as being very lovely: they arouse an irrepressible desire for the original.” (Nornes 447)

³ In the Chinese context, *xin* [‘fidelity’] appears as the first of three oft-cited principles in translation studies, the other two being *da* [‘fluency’] and *ya* [‘elegance’]. For a recent critique of these terms, see Yip.

⁴ Stam later expands the list to include other “roots of a prejudice” against adaptation: dichotomous thinking (a bitter rivalry between film and literature), anti-corporeality (distaste for the film’s ‘obscene’ materiality), the myth of facility (films are suspectly easy to make and pleasurable to watch), class and gender prejudice (the vulgar working class, dreamy women), and the charge of parasitism. (“Introduction” 3–8)

⁵ An improved inter-arts model is provided by Kamilla Elliott, who acknowledges Bluestone’s pioneering work and rethinks the novel-film debate by way of analogies to related arts.

⁶ Outstanding Western auteurs of Shakespearean films include Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Grigori Kozintsev, Franco Zeffirelli, and Kenneth Branagh, who serve as “stand-ins for Shakespeare” and fulfill the “author-function” in cross-media textual reproduction. (Worthen 60) For discussions of these five directors, see Jackson 163–238. For Akira Kurosawa’s spin on Shakespeare, see Dawson.

⁷ To quote Lydia Liu’s explication, “the study of translanguaging practice examines the process by which new words, meanings, discourses, and modes of representation arise, circulate, and acquire legitimacy within the host language due to, or in spite of, the latter’s contact/collision with the guest language. Meanings, therefore, are not so much ‘transformed’ when concepts pass from the guest language to the host language as invented within the local environment of the latter.” (*Practice* 26) Nonetheless, I still prefer the standard terms “source” and “target” because in cultural translation, a larger field than purely literary translation, the sheer asymmetry in geopolitical power and cultural hierarchy in the global context oftentimes makes the guest behave more like a colonial master imposing his cultural products (e.g., Bible translation, Hollywood films) regardless of the host’s will. In other words, the presumed guest-host etiquette is frequently dismissed or violated in cultural translation. For more discussions of cultural translation in modern China, see Liu, *Tokens*.

⁸ Similar to Zhang Zhen’s “cosmopolitan projections,” Lehmann seeks a medium-specific metaphor and contends: “Shakespeare’s plays have always been ‘screen plays,’ or, plays that function as screens for our projections—cultural, psychological and, more recently, cinematic.” (x)

⁹ In addition to deleting and whitewashing these two controversial moments, some early productions invented a scene where Proteus rescues Silvia from the outlaws; this was apparently to rehabilitate Proteus morally and make his subsequent repentance more acceptable to the audience. (Carroll 92–104)

¹⁰ As of 2000, some forty sound films were made of Shakespearean plays (Jackson 2), whereas up to 500 silent movies had drawn on Shakespeare (Rothwell 1).

¹¹ The Lambs offered their *Tales* to the young readers for multiple purposes: as “enrichers of the fancy, strengtheners of virtue, a withdrawing from all selfish and mercenary thoughts, a lesson of all sweet and honourable thoughts and actions, to teach courtesy, benignity, generosity, humanity.” (ix)

¹² Huang Yicuo, who owned interests in the printing business, was a co-founder—

together with Luo Mingyou, Lin Minwei (Lai Man-wai), and others—of Lianhua Film Company (or United Photoplay Service). Huang also served as editor of the company's trade magazine, *Yingxi zazhi*, in the early 1930s. For Lianhua, see Y. Zhang, *Cinema* 60–62.

¹³ For simplicity, I use only the English names (except for General Shi) in discussion hereafter.

¹⁴ To modify Proteus, the film's Chinese phrase *weiqing suochuang zhi* (ZDZ 2135) is more concise than Zhu Shenghao's Europeanized rendition, *shouchuang yu aiqing de*. (131)

¹⁵ The word 'silly' here means 'simple, innocent' (Carroll 238), but was removed from the Lambs' *Tales* lest it cause any misunderstanding. (81)

¹⁶ In uncanny intertextuality, this last bandit rule sounds exactly like a contemporary rule governing the Communist Red Army in China, a group designated as 'bandits' in the Nationalist parlance.

¹⁷ The poetic imagery here is typical of an international trend, "the increasingly prolix, florid intertitles of later silent films." (Elliott 86)

¹⁸ Zhu Shenghao's descriptive translation of 'broker' into *qianxian de* (128)—the one who connects the threads—misses much of the cultural flavor in the film's inventive reference to Hongniang.

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