

Western Fiction in Translation in the *Shenbao* 申報 (1872-1919): The Contribution of the Chinese Press to the Advent of Literary Modernity in China.

So far, fiction has proven to be the most fertile field for studying the cultural vanguard and long repressed modernities that took place around the turn of the twentieth century (Wang Der-Wei 1997). Among the fictional writings published in the late Qing period, translations of foreign works were a significant part of the entire production (A Ying 1937: 1; Chen Pingyuan 1989: 43). As demonstrated by several studies (Gunn 1991, Wang Li 1943, Liu Lydia H. 1995), literature in translation contributed to promoting gradual changes in the language, narrative structures and themes of Chinese fiction at the turn of the 20th century.

As for the medium that contributed to spreading Western fictional literature, late Qing periodicals played a very influential role, in their constant attempt to satisfy the growing demand of the Chinese readership for leisure literature and entertainment. Consequently, late Qing fiction often appeared in reputable newspapers, tabloids and magazines (Wang Der-Wei 1997: 2). Among them, the *Shenbao* was one of the earliest periodicals to publish translations of foreign fiction (Hanan 2001; Vance Yeh 2015).

This research aims at indexing, classifying and analysing Western literary works in translation published in the *Shenbao* and its literary and illustrated supplements, from 1872, when it was founded, to 1919, when modern Chinese literature was officially inaugurated. In so doing, my aim is to enhance our knowledge and understanding of the extent to which Western literary works in translation may have stimulated the modernization process which preceded the May Fourth Movement, both as concerns narrative structures and the subjects of fictional literature, in particular as related to the social and utilitarian role assigned to fiction (Denton 1996). In addition, this research aims at formulating some preliminary hypotheses on the formative role of the selected works that originated from the moral or ideological goals pursued by translators, as expressed in the prefaces or final comments of their translations, which grew along with the increased attention to socially useful fiction (Wong Wang-chi 1999: 27).

The non-homogeneity of the original sources and the lack of detailed information on the origin of serialized fictional works are the main problematics of performing the collection and analysis of collected works of fiction. Nevertheless, the research I am proposing may lay a useful foundation for other studies concerning the long-neglected role of the periodical press in the Chinese transition from tradition to modernity.

