Ryunosuke Akutagawa's "Pastel Dragon" (芥川龍之介「パステルの龍」)

—Classical China depicted through Imagism—*

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For the « Pastel Dragon » see attached text from page 5.

On Le Livre de Jade

The first edition, entitled Poems of the White Jewel (『白玉石書』), was published in 1867 by the Paris publishing house of Alphonse Lemerre. It included 71 Chinese poems from around the Qing period, translated into French and compiled by subject. Later, the title was revised to The Book Of Jade (『玉書』) and it was republished in 1902. The work was expanded to include 110 poems, and the original title of each remained in French, the author's name was accompanied by Chinese characters, in addition to the conventional romaji notation. This collection of poetry provided the original introduction of Chinese poetry to France, and was widely translated overseas.

1) The process of establishing "Moonlight" (「月光」) and "The Pottery Pavilion" (「陶器の亭」)

The received wisdom is that Akutagawa (芥川) was not proficient in French, so it is said that he read French literature entirely in English translation. It is therefore unclear whether or not Akutagawa (芥川) translated the poem based on the original French text of Le Livre de Jade (『玉書』). That said, Le Livre de Jade (『玉書』) was widely translated overseas immediately after announcement of its publication, and the descriptions of these translations are introduced in "Translation in Anthologies and Collections".

By the time "Pastel Dragon" (「パステルの龍」) as written in 1922, three English editions had been released. However, two translated poems, "Moonlight" (「月光」) and "The Pottery Pavilion" (「陶器の亭」) are only found compiled together within "Chinese Lyrics from The Book of Jade".

Judging from the fact that the translations of "Chinese Lyrics from The Book of Jade" and "Pastel Dragon" are quite similar, it seems extremely likely that Akutagawa (芥川) referred to...

* This is a tentative English version of the speech script of the author for OCU/UIUC symposium communication.
this book.

I offer my conjecture on the formation of "Pastel Dragon" below.

Chinese poetry → French translation Le Livre de Jade → English translation → Akutagawa's
translation

2) "Moonlight" (「月光」)

1. About the author

The revised 1902 version of Le Livre de Jade (『⽟書』) specifies Li-Oey (李巍) as the author of
the original poem "Moonlight" (「月光」). However, the existence of a poet named Li-Oey (李巍)
cannot be confirmed. I examined other translated poems in Le Livre de Jade for a relation to Li-Oey,
but it turns out that there is a discrepancy between the French notation in the first edition and the
later reprint.

The French notation "Li-Oey" does not appear in the first edition, but was introduced as part of
the modification to the 1902 edition. In Le Livre de Jade, Chinese character representations of
authors' names were added during the revision, but in subsequent revisions, there is no Chinese
character notation. It seems likely that Judith, who was not so proficient with Chinese characters,
was unable to accurately represent the authors' names.

2. On the Original Chinese Poems

After an investigation using the content of the translated poem as a guide, I found a poem called
"海上⽣明⽉" ("A bright moon rises over the ocean") by middle Tang dynasty poet 李華 (Li Hua)
which appears to be the original poem for Akutagawa's translation of "Moonlight" (「月光」).

Judith added a considerable degree of artistic license to this Chinese poem. However, if we
compare the original Chinese poem with its translation, traces of the Chinese original remaining in
the translation cause the profound affinity between them to quickly surface.

However, not all of the original poems were translated -- on the contrary, it is clear that verses
which did not appear in the original poems were added.

Where verses make reference to obscure ancient events, in most cases, they were not translated
into Le Livre de Jade. At the same time, a look at Judith's other poetic translations reveals other
examples where literary license was taken with verses from the original poems.

In light of this, it seems that Judith's mysterious poet, "Li-Oey," is in fact "Li Hua". The French
notation "Li-Su-Tchon" that appears in the first edition could have come from "Li-Xia-Shu," the Chinese-reading
of Li Hua's Chinese courtesy name.

Regarding the original poem, Judith omitted verses containing references to unfamiliar ancient episodes, which
seems to have allowed for further creative additions.
3) Translated Poems from *Le Livre de Jade* (『玉書』) to "Pastel Dragon" (「パス テルの龍」)

1. "About 80% Creation"

Taking the above into account and looking once again at this translated poem composed by Akutagawa (芥川), we can say that it is rather distant from the original Chinese poem. It seems that Akutagawa (芥川), having sufficiently recognized that point, boldly took the "translated poetry" of *Le Livre de Jade* and translated it further into Japanese. As to why, Akutagawa himself has the following to say.

Even when I look at translations of the poetry of Li Po (李白) or Du Fu (杜甫), they don't seem to be translated poems. About 80% should be understood as the Madame’s own creation.

While acquiring sustenance from Chinese poetry, it seems that Akutagawa (芥川) held a slight interest in what had passed once through the "Western" filter.

2) "At once China and yet not China"

Akutagawa himself made some rather remarkable statements about *Le Livre de Jade* (『玉書』).

The China in Judith Gautier's poems is at once China and yet not China. It is said of Katsushika Hokusai's (葛飾北斎) illustrations in *The Water Margin* (『水滸畫傳』) too, that by the same means he was able to capture something like the true China. That being the case, this bright-eyed poetess, and this short-haired, aged artiste, the voiceless poem and the voiced image, embroiled and entangled into that so-called China—or rather, should we see them as joyously sauntering about the backside of a daydream, playing to their hearts' content in some otherworld? That otherworld is one of life's happinesses.

The "China" of *Le Livres de Jade* (『玉書』) is a China-like utopia Judith created as "China." Is this not what Akutagawa meant when he said, "At once China and yet not China"? We may say that just as Judith transformed her "backside of a daydream" into an "otherworld" called *Le Livre de Jade* (『玉書』), Akutagawa (芥川) has his Akutagawa-like "otherworld," and in it he "sauntered about."

4) Making Sense of "Pastel Dragon" -- Eastern Chinese Poetic Tradition ("Dragon") Drawn in Western Imagism ("Pastel")
"Pastel Dragon" begins as follows:

This was translated while I was sick, staying in Shanghai (上海). The transition of British and French poetry from Symbolism to Imagism may be glimpsed in the works of these two poetesses.

When comparing and contrasting Symbolism and Imagism in "From Whitman to Sandburg in American Poetry," he says 'The serpent of Symbolism and the Chinese dragon of Imagism'. The 'serpent' here is a snake, a word likely to evoke Satan's transformation in the Bible, clearly giving a deeply Western connotation in comparison with 'Chinese dragon'. There can be no question that Symbolism emerged wholly from the French soil, yet in contrast Imagism contains a mixture of East and West.

It seems to me that Akutagawa's decision to translate five poems that all portray China was his way of offering a piece of evidence that he too had "moved from Symbolism to Imagism".

And to be sure, the scenes depicted in the translated poems could not be any less "Chinese." However, these were ultimately recreations, reconstructed through "Imagism," that concept affiliated with the categories of Western literature. In other words, these translated poems originally in French drew scenes from the world of ancient Chinese poetry ("Dragon") into a Western literary context ("Pastel"), just as indicated by the title "Pastel Dragon".
パステルの龍

芥川龍之介

これは上海滞在中、病間に訳したものである。シムボリズムからイマジズムに移って行った、英仏の詩の変遷は、この二人の女詩人の作にも、多少は亀ふ事が出来るかも知れない。名高いゴオテイエの娘さんは、カテユウル・マンデスと別れた後、Tin-tun-Lingと云ったりはくとせうりょうふ支那人に支那語を習つたさうである。が、李太白や杜少陵の訳詩を見ても、訳詩とはどうも受け取れない。まず八分までは女史自身の創作と心得て然るべきであろう。ユニス・テイツチエンズはずっと新らしい。これは実際支那の土を踏んだ、現存の亜米利加婦人である。日本ではエミイ・ロウエル女史が有名だが、テイツチエンズ女史も庸才ではない。女史の本は二冊ある。これは一九一七年に出た、二冊目のPROFILES FROM CHINAから訳した。訳はいづれも自由訳である。

月光

――Judith Gautier——

満月は水より出で、
しろがね
海は銀の板となりぬ。
ひとびとさかづき
小舟には、人々盞を干し、
月明りの雲、かそけきを見る。
ただよ
山の上に漂ふ雲。

人々あるひは云ふ、——
ささき
皇帝の白衣の後と、
あるひは云ふ、——
あまかけぐくひ
天翔る鶴のむれと。
陶器の亭

人工の湖のなか
緑と青と、陶器の亭一つ。
かよひぢは碧玉の橋なり。
橋の反り、虎の背に似つ。

tanaza

亭中に、綵衣の人たち。
さすしきさけさかづきのし
涼しき酒、盃に干し。
ものがたりまたし
物語り又は詩つくる、
たかだかそこで
高々と袖かかげつつ、
さまほうかづ
のけ様に帯頂きつつ。

水のなか、
明かにうつれる橋は
碧玉の三日の月めき、
さいいひと
綵衣の人たち
さかさまさけ
逆様に酒のめる見ゆ、
陶器亭のもなかに。

夕明り

乾いた秋の木の葉の上に、雨がぱらぱら落ちるやうだ。美しい狐の娘さんたちが、小さな足音をさせて行くのは。
洒落者

――同上――

かれのみどりの絹の服を着ながら、さもえらさに歩いてゐる。彼は緑の絹の服を着ながら、さもえらさに歩いてゐる。彼の

二枚の上着には、毛皮の縁がつとってある。彼の天鵞絨の靴の上には、の

彼の爪は非常に長い。

朱君は全然流行の鏡とも云ふべき姿である！

その華奢な片手には、これが最後の御定まりだが、竹の鳥

籠がぶらついてゐる。その中には小さい茶色の鳥が、何時でも驚いたやうな顔をしてゐる。

朱君は寛かれた微笑を浮べる。流行と優しい心、と、この二つを二つながら、満足させた人の微笑である。鳥も外出が必要ではないか？

作詩術

――同上――

二人の宮人は彼の前に、石竹の花の色に似た、絹の屏風を開いて

ある。一人の嬪妃は跪きながら、彼の硯を守つてゐる。その時

泥酔した李太白は、天上一片の月に寄せる、激越な詩を屏風に書いた。

（大正十一年一月）