

EDGAR ALLAN POE IN CHINA: THE FIRST TRANSLATIONS OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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The article deals with the first translations of the works by the American writer Edgar Allan Poe in China. His writing was profound and innovative, and he is considered the inventor of the detective fiction genre. The first translations of his works were made in 1905; however, the peak of translations fell at the 1920s and 1930s, when both his individual stories and collections were published one after another. Some of his most popular stories (“The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Gold-Bug”) were translated several times. Interest in his works waned somewhat in the 1940s. Nevertheless, they influenced the formation of Chinese detective and psychological fiction.

Keywords: Edgar Allan Poe; Chinese literature; detective fiction; Chinese literature of the 20th C; detectives.

ЭДГАР АЛЛАН ПО В КИТАЕ: ПЕРВЫЕ ПЕРЕВОДЫ НАЧАЛА XX ВЕКА

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Статья посвящена первым переводам произведений американского писателя Эдгара Аллана По в Китае. Его сочинения были глубокими и новаторскими, а самого автора считают изобретателем жанра детективной фантастики. Первые переводы произведений данного писателя были сделаны в 1905 году; однако пик переводов пришелся на 1920-е и 1930-е годы, когда один за другим публиковались как его отдельные рассказы, так и сборники. Некоторые из его самых популярных рассказов («Сердце-обличитель», «Золотой жук») переводились несколько раз. Интерес к произведениям Эдгара Аллана По несколько угас в 1940-х годах. Тем не менее они повлияли на формирование китайской детективной и психологической фантастики.

Ключевые слова: Эдгар Аллан По; китайская литература детективные произведения; китайская литература начала XX в.; детективы.

The American writer of the first half of the 19th century Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) made a significant contribution to the development of the world

literature. His profound and even innovative writings have been studied for almost two centuries. Apart from the content of works, he also enriched their form – despite the fact that novellas were known long before Edgar Poe, he is considered one of the popularizers of this genre of short prose. His importance in the development of the detective fiction is also considerable. Moreover, precisely he is considered to be the inventor of the very genre of detective fiction [see: 1, 2, 3, 4], which, according to many researchers, began with Poe’s short story “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” published in 1841 in *Graham’s Magazine*.

The first translation of E.A. Poe was published in 1905 (by this time, the works by Arthur Conan Doyle were already widely known, and the name of his character – Sherlock Holmes – had even become generic). Then, the Chinese writer Lu Xun (鲁迅, 1881–1936), who had studied in Japan, read a Japanese translation of the short story “The Gold-Bug” and suggested to his younger brother Zhou Zuoren (周作人, 1885–1967) to translate it into Chinese. Zhou Zuoren did the translation. The story was published under the title 玉虫缘 (*Yuchun Yuan*, “The Fate of a Jade Bug”).

The next translation was published in the *Henan* magazine (河南) in 1908 – it was a translation of the short story “Silence. A Fable.”¹ The translator was again Zhou Zuoren, who took the pen name Duying (独应). He translated the title as 默 (*Mo*, “Silence”). The author’s name was rendered by Zhou Zuoren as 亚伦·坡 (*Yalun Po*). This translation was also included in “The Collection of Foreign Short Stories” (域外小说集, *Yuwai Xiaoshuo Ji*) published by him together with his elder brother Lu Xun. The collection was released in Tokyo in 1909 in two volumes. It included 16 short stories by foreign writers.² After that, no one translated Edgar Poe’s stories for almost ten years.

In 1917, the *Zhonghua* Publishing House (中华书局) published “The Collection of Short Stories by Famous European and American Writers” (欧美名家短篇小说丛刊, *Oumei Mingjia Duapian Xiaoshuo Congkan*) in three volumes. Each volume was devoted to the literature of a particular country. American literature, represented by Poe’s short story, was included in the third volume. It was “The Tell-Tale Heart.” The author of the translation was Zhou Shoujuan (周瘦鹃, 1895-1968), who worked at the *Zhonghua* Publishing House at that time.³ He transcribed the author’s name as 挨兰波 (*Ailan Bo*).

¹ Not to be confused with the poem “Silence.”

² In his letter to his Japanese disciple Masuda Wataru (增田涉, 1903-1977), Lu Xun wrote that the motivation for him and his brother to publish the collection was the desire to present correct translations of foreign short stories, as translations by Lin Shu, which had many mistakes, were especially popular at that time [5].

³ Zhou Shoujuan’s contribution to the development of the detective fiction of China is important, because he translated many of Arthur Conan Doyle’s short stories about Sherlock Holmes – “The Complete Adventures of Sherlock Holmes” (福尔摩斯侦探案全集, *Fuermosi Zhentan Anquan Ji*).

In early 1918, the *Zhonghua* Publishing House released an entire collection of short stories by E. Poe titled “Dupin’s Investigations” (杜宾侦探案, *Dubin Zhentan An*), which included 4 short stories by the American writer: “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (母女残毙 *Munü Canbi*), “The Mystery of Marie Roget” (黑少年 *Hei Shaonian*), “The Purloined Letter” (法官情简 *Faguan Qingjian*) and “The Gold-Bug” (this time, the title was translated as “The Bug with a Skull” 骷髅虫 *Kulou Chong*). Interestingly, the author was named 爱伦浦 (*Ailun Pu*) in the preface, while the cover and the back title page of the first edition had the name misspelled – 爱浦伦 (*Aipulun*) [6, p. 122].

The 1920s became a turning point for the spread of E.A. Poe’s works in China, as the number of translations of the writer’s works increased considerably at that time. Mostly, these translations were either published on pages of magazines or included in various prose collections.

Some works were translated several times: different translators tried to do their own translation. For example, one of the most popular stories – “The Tell-Tale Heart” – was published in ten various translations. The second most popular short story among translators was “The Gold-Bug.” After translations by Zhou Shoujuan and Chen Diexian, *The Chinese Weekly in English* (中华英文周刊 *Zhonghua Yingwen Zhoukan*) published this short story with parallel texts – in English and in Chinese – in several consecutive issues in 1921 and 1922. Another work by Edgar Allan Poe that was popular in the 1920s was the short story “The Masque of the Red Death.” The first translation appeared in 1928 on pages of the magazine *Modern Prose* (现代小说 *Xiandai Xiaoshuo*) and was made by the translator Lin Weiyin (林微音, 1904–1955), who rendered the author’s name as Ailun Po (哀伦坡) and translated the title as 红死的面具 (*Hong Si De Mianju*). During the same period, the short story “Assignation” was translated twice. The first one was made by Lin Weiyin and published under the title “The Secret Tryst” (幽会 *Youhui*) in 1928, and Zhu Weiji (朱维基, 1904–1971) made the second one under the same title. In the same 1920s, translations of some other short stories by E.A. Poe were published, but they did not arouse much public interest.

In the thirties, Edgar Allan Poe’s popularity in China increased again. Not only were his short stories printed in various newspapers and magazines, but collections of his stories were also published. During this period, the short story “The Tell-Tale Heart” still enjoyed the greatest love among translators. In 1935, two translations of the short story “The Black Cat” were published – one made by Qian Gechuan (钱歌川, 1903–1990) in the collection of the same name, and the other one made by a translator under the pen name Sanlang (三郎) in the magazine *Yellow Bell* (黄钟 *Huang Zhong*).

In the same 1930s, translations of the short stories “The Oblong Box”¹ (translated by the famous essayist and poet Yu Pingbo (俞平伯, 1900–1990) and his two cousins), “The Premature Burial”² (the author of the story was specified as 亚玲玻 *Ya Ling Bo*), “The Pit and the Pendulum,”³ “The Spectacles”⁴ were published. In addition, in 1935, a separate book with three short stories by E.A. Poe under the common title “The Black Cat” [7], which included “The Masque of the Red Death,” “The Black Cat” and “The Oval Portrait,” was published; all translations in it were made by Qian Gechuan, who also inserted E.A. Poe’s annotated biography at the end of the book.

With onset of the 1940s, interest in translating Edgar Allan Poe began to wane. During this period, only a few of his short stories (“The Oblong Box,” “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains,”⁵ “Hop-Frog”⁶) appear in collections. As before, translations of the short story “The Tell-Tale Heart” are published most often – for example, a translation made by Mao Dun was republished twice (in 1941 and in 1946).

Apart from that, two books were published in 1949. The first one is “The Selected Tales of Poe” (爱伦坡故事集 *Ailun Po gushi ji*)⁷[8], and the second one is a translation of the only complete novel by Edgar Allan Poe “The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Rym”⁸ [9].

Thus, it may be noted that the peak of translations of Edgar Allan Poe fell at the 1920s and 1930s. Mostly, they were published either in magazines or in collections of short stories – only a few separate books were released. Besides, there were not as many translated stories (about twenty), as there were translations. For example, “The Tell-Tale Heart” was the most actively translated story (about ten translations were made), while “The Gold-Bug” was the second most popular work. This probably evidences that most of E.A. Poe’s works did not arouse much interest among translators. It may also be noted that in China, detective and adventure stories by E.A. Poe appeared first, and they aroused the initial interest in his writing, whereas translations of psychological and gothic stories appeared later. Interestingly, even before translations of Poe appeared in China, the works by poets and writers (Dostoevsky, Baudelaire, Arthur Conan Doyle), who were interested in and inspired by E.A. Poe’s works, had already been popular there. This in itself aroused translators’ interest in Poe. Thus, Edgar Allan Poe’s stories found their way

¹ 长方箱, *Changfang Xiang*.

² 太早的埋葬, *Tai Zao De Maizang*.

³ 坑与摆, *Keng Yu Bai*.

⁴ 眼镜, *Yanjing*.

⁵ 大荒山的故事, *Da Huang Shan De Gushi*.

⁶ In Chinese, the story was titled 跳蛙 *Tiao Wa* (“Hopping Froglet”).

⁷ It included the short stories “The Black Cat,” “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” “The Gold-Bug” and “Lionizing” (in Chinese translation – 登龙, *Deng Long*).

⁸ In Chinese translations – 海上历险记 *Hai Shang Li Xian Ji* (“Notes on Adventures at Sea”).

to China and were actively translated and printed in the 1920-30s. They also influenced the formation of Chinese detective and psychological fiction.

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