
Translation and Feminization in Yu Dafu's "Moving South"

LUYING CHEN
ST. OLAF COLLEGE

The name Mignon is often associated with the song "Kennst du das Land?" ["Know you the land?"]. Each of its three stanzas has six lines; each begins with the first-person speaker asking whether the addressee—you—know the place, returns to the question in the fifth line to ask whether the addressee truly knows the place, and ends with a call to go there together. Lines two to four in the first stanza describe a place with blossoming lemon trees, glowing golden oranges, a gentle breeze, blue skies, and myrtle and laurels that evoke "a calm setting somewhere in Southern Europe" (Curran 96). The corresponding lines in the second stanza depict "the house" with "roof pillars" that indicate a kind of temple, where "marble figures" gaze at the speaker, asking, "Was hat man dir, du armes Kind, getan?" ["You poor poor child, what have they done to you?"]. The third stanza describes the path leading "there."

The images of Mignon in the numerous musical settings of the song, including those by famous composers, often vary.¹ None of them can possibly capture the complexity of the character Mignon in the novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* [*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*] by Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832), where the song first appears.² Mignon is an egg dancer in a rope dance company who speaks a combination of French, Italian, and German. The protagonist Wilhelm Meister, who has rescued Mignon from her abusive master, guesses that Mignon's age is between twelve and thirteen. In Chapter 1, Book Three, Mignon sings the first of her four songs to Wilhelm. Wilhelm, who is feeling wronged by his fellow Germans, translates her Italian song into German. He knows the place Mignon sings of is Italy, but ignores her invitation to go there. Toward the end of the novel, it is revealed that Mignon had been kidnapped from her home country, Italy, and had always longed to return there. The interpretation of the song as expressing the "the plight of those who long for a homeland but are forced to live in exile" (Fetzer 202) considers this ending. At Mignon's burial, it is suggested that Mignon's spirit is going to heaven. Therefore, the "there" in the last line of the song gains a new reference to the celestial realm. Within the context of Goethe's novel, Mignon's song thus embodies three motifs: the

romantic longing for the foreign land, exile, and the longing to go to the world beyond this one.

Mignon has had many “sisters” in European literature and a German-American “brother” in the character Friedrich Bhaer in the *Little Women* trilogy by Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), many of whom sing Mignon’s song.³ She also has a unique Chinese “sister” in Yi Ren, the male protagonist of the seven-section novella “Nanqian” [“Moving South,” 1921] by Yu Dafu (1896-1945).⁴ Yi Ren is a Chinese student enrolled at Tokyo Imperial University in 1919. Following the recommendation of a male British missionary, he travels to a peninsula southeast of Tokyo Bay to recover from neurasthenia. During a Bible study led by another British missionary, Madam C, Yi Ren meets Miss O, a female Japanese college student who is also ill. In Section IV, Yi Ren and Miss O are taking a walk on the beach when Miss O starts to sing Mignon’s song in German. As she sings the middle stanza, Yi Ren translates the line with “the poor child” into Chinese and feels he has “turned into a Mignon” (77). In Section V, Yi Ren refers to Miss O as Mignon in his diary but ends up calling himself the “poor child” after dreaming of Miss O becoming M, a woman in Tokyo who had seduced and betrayed him. In the last section, Yi Ren delivers a speech on the Sermon on the Mount to a Christian gathering on the peninsula. Shortly after, Miss O’s illness worsens. The story ends with Yi Ren dying on a hospital bed, watched over by the two British missionaries.

A close examination of the function of the translation of Mignon’s song in “Moving South” compared with Wilhelm’s translation in Goethe’s novel reveals a dialogic interaction between the two narratives. Using what Naoki Sakai calls the “schema of cofiguration” (14), this reading first demonstrates how Goethe’s novel depicts the formation of a masculine German subject through cofiguring an Italian other as feminine and emotional who needs to be domesticated. Secondly, this reading shows Yu Dafu’s antithetical development of Goethe’s Bildungsroman in the feminization of a Chinese intellectual as a sentimental transnational who is unable to cofigure the Japanese Miss O as an other to be domesticated. A return to *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* also demonstrates how Yu Dafu weaves in Chinese classics as well as classic Western texts, such as *Dreamthorp: a Book of Essays Written in the Country* by Alexander Smith (1830-1867), the novel *Rudin* by Ivan S. Turgenev (1818-1883), *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), and the Gospel of Matthew, to evoke Yi Ren’s changing subjectivities and to go beyond the model of subject formation in Goethe’s novel. “Moving South” reveals a doubt in transnational Christianity as well as Yu Dafu’s deeper critique of European Romanticism which has been missed by scholarly studies on the author.

Like many intellectuals of the May Fourth period, a time often noted for progressive intellectuals' rejection of traditional Chinese culture in favor of Western ideals of science and democracy and Western literary models, Yu Dafu was educated in Confucian classics but also received Western learning. He attended middle schools influenced or run by Western missionaries and he went to a high school in Japan at the age of seventeen. Versed in classical Chinese poetry, Yu Dafu began to publish poetry in the classical style at a young age. He also read a large collection of European literature both in China and during his nine-year stay in Japan. While studying economics at Tokyo Imperial University in 1921, he and several friends founded the "Creation Society," a literary society that advocated European Romanticism. "Moving South" is the second piece in his collection of three novellas, *Chenlun* [*Sinking*] (1921). The first and eponymous piece immediately became a subject of controversy and has remained a canonical piece in modern Chinese literary history (Denton 107-110). Its unrestrained expression of the sexual frustration and identity crisis of an anonymous Chinese high school student in Japan and the young man's call for China to become a stronger nation earned the author various labels such as a Romanticist, a decadent writer, and a patriotic writer. By contrast, "Moving South" remains largely obscure. In his recent rereading of the entire collection, however, Leo Ou-Fan Lee concludes that "Moving South" goes much further than "Sinking" in the use of European Romantic texts, particularly in how the lyrical atmosphere of Mignon's song dominates the first half of the novella. Observing a crucial difference between the use of "child" for the gender neutral German word "Kind" in Yi Ren's translation of the one line and the use of "little girl" in a translation of the entire song attached to the novella, Lee argues that Yi Ren's translation marks the end of the lyrical mood and the turn to sentimentality in the novella (6). Even though Lee praises the cosmopolitanism of the novella in the end, the dominant message in the entire article remains that "Moving South" does not fully replicate Goethe's lyricism.

When we examine Yi Ren's translation and the nature of his sentimentality in comparison with Wilhelm's translation and subject formation in Goethe's novel, it is apparent that both Goethe and Yu Dafu are suspicious of lyricism. Rather than imitating Goethe, Yu Dafu's novella forms an active dialogue with Goethe's novel through depicting Yi Ren's feminization. Shumei Shi uses the term "feminization" and "emasculatation" interchangeably in her analysis of how Yu Dafu's stories of decadence, including "Moving South," demonstrates that the libidinal operates "as a metaphor for the national and the social" (115-123). I will return to Shi's thesis later, but I prefer "feminization" because "emasculatation" emphasizes the male experience whereas "feminization" can describe a sense of letting go of a

national subjectivity which can also be experienced by the female sex. The focus here is more on the text's depiction of Yi Ren's individual experience rather than on the story as a national allegory.

Yu Dafu employs implicit allusions to Chinese classics to indicate what Yi Ren tries to leave behind in his transnational journey and what he seeks to reclaim toward the end. In Section III, for example, Yi Ren appears oblivious to three allusions to Chinese classics. The first is in the section title, "Fu ping" ["Duckweed"]. "Duckweed" appears in several poems by Du Fu (c. 712-c. 770) to indicate aimless wandering and exile and has since acquired that association in the Chinese language.⁵ Its presence in the story evokes the Chinese poetic tradition of exile in which "the south" embodies a nostalgic lament for the nation.⁶ The introduction of the protagonist as "Yi Ren, a descendent of Yi Yin" when the young man arrives on the peninsula contains two more allusions (60). In numerous Chinese classics, Yi Yin's image is that of the devoted and successful servant of the Shang dynasty (1562-1066 BCE) who assisted King Tang in establishing the first Chinese dynasty.⁷ This ancestral lineage endows Yi Ren with the genetic identity of a Confucian idealist who chooses social and political commitments over reclusion. However, the allusion in Yi Ren's personal name immediately suggests his indeterminate and fluid subjectivity. The name echoes the term "Yiren" in a four-stanza poem "Qinfeng: Jianxia" ["Rush leaves"] from the first collection of Chinese poetry, the *Shijing* [*The Book of Songs*]. It literally means "that person," whose gender is ambiguous and who is admired by the poetic speaker but unapproachable.⁸ Yi Ren's obliviousness to these classics in Section III becomes meaningful when it is revealed later in Section V that he has been a poet well known amongst Japanese students of Chinese literature (84) and when he alludes to the *Analects* in his preaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

While "Moving South" alludes to many Western texts, Mignon's song is central to its structure, just as it is to the structure of Goethe's novel. Over two centuries after its publication, Goethe's rich and complex novel of eight books continues to generate new scholarly interpretations that complicate the classic interpretation of the text as the prototype of the European Bildungsroman, especially concerning the nature of Wilhelm's self-formation and socialization.⁹ However, the main plot remains Wilhelm's journey through his idealizations of and disillusionment with the theater to enter the stage of real life. In this novel the journey ends with his assuming fatherhood to his son Felix—born to his first lover Marianne without his knowledge—and his prospective marriage to the aristocratic German woman, Natalie.¹⁰ Wilhelm, the son of a bourgeois family who expects him to become a businessman, has a tendency to retreat to lyricism and solitude when he is

disillusioned. Unknowingly guided by a group of aristocrats called “the Brother of Towers” led by a French Abbé, he departs from several significant female “others” at the critical phases of his journey to reach the final stage of socialization. His departure from Marianne when he assumes she is seeing another man symbolizes the end of his romanticization of the theater, the first phase of his idealization. His farewell to Aurelia, who identifies with Ophelia, the role she performs to Wilhelm’s Hamlet, marks the end of his final stage of idealizing the theater, namely, using it for personal identification. His reading of the manuscript by the “Beautiful Soul,” whose writing of her spiritual journey occupies the entire Book Six, signifies his departure from following the path of seeking spiritual solitude. Wilhelm’s relationship with Mignon lasts the longest and is central to the structure of the novel. Mignon starts to address Wilhelm as “Father” at the end of Book Two when Wilhelm has just experienced disillusionment with his second idealization to run the theater in order to build the state. Mignon later falls in love with him; however, she starts to call him “Master” in Chapter 13, Book Five, after she witnesses the actress Philine climbing into his bed. Mignon dies at the moment she sees Wilhelm embrace Theresa, who addresses Wilhelm as “My beloved! My husband!” (VIII.5.333) and who is at the time about to marry Wilhelm.

In spite of the novel’s ambivalence toward Mignon’s death and Wilhelm Meister’s development,¹¹ the trajectory in which their relationship develops makes Wilhelm’s translation of Mignon’s song a defining moment in the formation of a German subject through cofiguring an Italian other. Naoki Sakai uses the term “the schema of cofiguration” to refer to the “discursive apparatus that makes it possible to represent translation” (15). It is a means “by which a national community represents itself to itself, thereby constituting itself as a subject” (15). The “autoconstitution of the national subject,” argues Sakai, would “constitute itself only by making visible the figure of an other with which it engages in a translational relationship” (15-16). Germany was not a unified nation at the time Goethe wrote the novel, yet the consciousness of defining what is German runs throughout the novel. Various characters talk about building a German national theater distinct from the French and British theaters. When Wilhelm first mentions the idea of a German theater in his second idealization, he specifically talks about using the theater to construct the state and educate citizens (II.4.52). The novel complicates Sakai’s concept by associating nationality with gender and depicting Wilhelm’s socialization as the becoming of a German national by using Mignon, to borrow words by William Gilby, to symbolize “Wilhelm’s developmental predicament” (139). As Gilby succinctly puts it, Mignon “represent[s] demonic, irrational forces, the world of art, romantic yearning, and more—all of which is,

however, coincident with her basic function of reflecting such elements as they exist in Wilhelm” (139). In other words, Mignon possesses qualities that Wilhelm must grow out of in order for him to grow up.

Wilhelm’s transcription and translation of the song into German establishes the translator as one who is unemotional in contrast with Mignon the emotional singer. Mignon “intoned each verse with *a certain solemn grandeur*, as if she were drawing attention to something unusual and imparting something of importance” (III.1.83). She sings “Oh there, oh there!” with “longing.” She “modified the phrase ‘Let us fare!’ each time it was repeated, so that one time it was *entreating and urging*, the next time *pressing and full of promise*” (III.1.84). Mignon’s singing pleads emotionally to her listener, but Wilhelm remains detached:

The melody and the expression pleased Wilhelm greatly, though he could not make out all the words. So he asked her to repeat it, and explain it; then he wrote down and translated it into German. He found, however, that he could not even approximate the originality of the phrases, and the childlike innocence of the style was lost when the broken language was smoothed over and the disconnectedness removed. The charm of the melody was also quite unique. (III.1.83; emphasis added)

While the foreign is represented as charming, childlike, broken, and disconnected, the German translator is the calm scribe who domesticates the foreignness in the song by smoothing over “the broken language” and removing “the disconnectedness.” Wilhelm’s translation is a gesture of his differentiation from—rather than identification with—Mignon, as well as his distancing himself from Italy. When Mignon asks Wilhelm whether he knows “the place,” he answers, “Italy.” Instead of expressing an interest in going to Italy, which is Mignon’s intention, he questions Mignon about the source of the song. Even when Mignon asks Wilhelm to take her to Italy because she “is freezing here” (84), he ignores her request.

Translating Mignon’s song is a turning point in Wilhelm’s socialization within Germany as it distances him from the mysterious, the exotic, the lyrical, and the emotional. Before hearing the song, Wilhelm is distracted by these qualities in Mignon and the Harper, who is revealed at the end of the novel to be Mignon’s biological father. The first time he sees Mignon, Wilhelm “could not take his eyes off her” because “her whole appearance and the mystery that surrounded her completely absorbed his mind and feelings.” He was “so absorbed in contemplating her, that he lapsed into silence and became completely oblivious of the others” (II.4.54). To borrow Jane Curran’s words, Wilhelm’s fascination with Mignon’s foreignness, charm and above all, mystery, causes him to “lapse into a sort of dream world ... as though contact with Mignon provides a stimulus for his poetic imagination so that he withdraws from his tangible, prosaic surroundings”

(85). Indeed, Mignon distracts Wilhelm from engagement in the “real” world by deterring him from his planned business journey. That initial distraction develops into something threatening in an intense scene that occurs immediately before Mignon sings the song, when an extremely emotional Mignon even poses a threat to Wilhelm’s life. Hearing Wilhelm’s wish to leave her, Mignon gazes at Wilhelm, starts to quiver, and soon looks lifeless. When Wilhelm kisses her, Mignon responds with a cry and convulsive movements. When he “clasped her to his heart and covered her with tears,” she “became alive again.” However, she “threw herself around his neck, like a lock that sprang shut, while a deep cleft opened up inside her and a flood of tears poured from her closed eyes on to his breast” (II.14.81-82). In short, affinity with Mignon is dangerous for Wilhelm.

Mignon’s song elevates Mignon’s dangerousness by combining lyricism with the lure of the foreign land—Italy.¹² At the time when Mignon sings the song, Wilhelm feels hurt by his fellow countrymen and has just heard a song about solitude by the Harper (II.14.78). He can potentially be the “poor child” in the song who is ready to escape from Germany to look for comfort “there.” The identity of the subject “I” in the song (the speaker) and the object (the addressee “you”) is not yet certain, just as the gender of the “poor child” is undecided. After translating Mignon’s song, Wilhelm’s and Mignon’s journeys take opposite directions that determine Mignon as the “I” in the song. Not identifying with the “poor child,” Wilhelm outgrows his feeling of having been wronged by his fellow Germans to continue his journey of socialization within Germany. He starts to “make decisions concerning his future on a more rational basis” (Gilby 145). More rational Germans—mostly male, but also Theresa and Natalie—will replace Mignon to exert influence on him. Wilhelm’s development parallels the domestication and feminization of Mignon to serve her German master’s development. Mignon becomes Wilhelm’s protector and turns into an angelic figure.¹³ Even her dead body is used by the Abbé as an art object to educate Wilhelm’s aesthetic taste,¹⁴ a process described by Marc Redfield as the “aestheticization” of Mignon (91). Finally, Mignon’s uncle tells the story of Mignon’s origin, in which a “true” Italy emerges as the place with a dark secret (VIII. 9). The place with blooming lemon trees, which conjures the romantic picture of Italy in Mignon’s song, once served as a bed for Mignon’s parents’ unnatural love. This de-romanticizing of the foreign ensures Wilhelm’s stay in Germany at a time when he is thinking about leaving Germany for the second time. Hereafter Wilhelm completely resigns himself to his role in German society as arranged by the Abbé.

To summarize, the translation of Mignon’s song is central to the structure of Goethe’s novel. The novel represents the translation in such a way to figure the

German translator as a rational masculine national subject through configuring Mignon as an emotional “other” who needs to be domesticated. The entire novel can thus be read as an extended metaphorical translation of Mignon’s song that transcribes Mignon as the “poor child” in her singing. Her relationship with Wilhelm changes from “lover” to “protector” and finally to “Father,” echoing the changed form of the addressee in each stanza of the song, with an ironic twist of the last two as Mignon eventually develops into Wilhelm’s protector. The domestication and aestheticization of Mignon endow Mignon’s song with three layers of meanings: the romantic lure of the foreign to Wilhelm, an expression of Mignon’s exile, and a promise of Mignon’s spiritual ascension to heaven.

These major motifs also exist in “Moving South,” where the translation of Mignon’s line is equally central to the story’s structure. First of all, Miss O and Yi Ren switch the positions of the feminine emotional singer and the masculine, unemotional transcriber in Goethe’s novel. Miss O is clearly the unsentimental performer while Yi Ren becomes the feminine, emotional transcriber. That Miss O is conscious of her performance of the emotion in the song is obvious when she inserts a comment after singing the first four lines: “Below is the refrain. I am afraid I cannot sing it well” (76). When she comments after Yi Ren’s translation that he is “indeed a sentimentalist” (77), it means she is not sentimental and is thus not like Mignon. By contrast, Yi Ren becomes sentimental and loses his subjectivity to the singing and the song. At the end of the first stanza, Miss O’s voice virtually causes him to lose his senses as her “sorrowful and trembling voice floats melodiously in the air of the dusky seaside” (77), a sign that Miss O and nature have joined and taken over his subject position. This loss of subjectivity intensifies in his reaction to the second stanza. As he hears the lines, “You poor poor child, what have they done to you,” he “suddenly remembers the lascivious woman who cheated on him last summer.” He then translates the line into Chinese. With the translation, he

feels as if he has turned into a Mignon, standing on the beach of a foreign land at dusk, alone, and helpless. The one who sings the tune in a sorrowful and mysterious voice is the Nymph and Mermaid from the tiny waves. Suddenly, he starts to feel sentimental. Two drops of tears, like pearls, roll down his cheeks. (77)

Yi Ren’s first reaction—remembering injury by another woman when hearing the line, “You poor poor child, what have they done to you!” in German—already suggests his identification with the “poor child.” Translating the line into Chinese continues that identification. The foreign—Mignon, Mignon’s song, and Miss O the Japanese singer—is also exotic and dangerous when the images evoked are the seductive nymphs and mermaids. Contrary to Wilhelm Meister’s translation, Yi Ren’s translation does not assimilate the foreign. Instead, it has the opposite effect

of taking away his rational subjectivity. The falling of tears signals his feminization, which is identifying with Mignon as an exile.

The contrast in Yi Ren's subjectivity before and after translating Mignon's line indicates that the first two meanings of Mignon's song in Goethe's novel occur simultaneously at the moment of Yi Ren's translation. That is, Yi Ren's feeling of exile is the end of his romanticizing the foreign. Before hearing Mignon's song, Yi Ren has overcome his sentimentality and melancholia through transformation into a solitary Romantic mediated by his remembrance of Alexander Smith's *Dreamthorp: A Book of Essays Written in the Country*. He arrives on the peninsula a melancholic who laments the miserable life of the socially downtrodden in Tokyo as well as those in his home country. His melancholy, traced back to lack of maternal love during childhood, has developed as a result of living alone in Japan, reading European books by authors "who have been defeated in the battleground of life" (60), disillusionment with the materialistic metropolitan city, and experiencing injury inflicted on him by a woman in Tokyo. Yet as soon as he breathes the air on the peninsula, Yi Ren "feels as if" the Dreamthorp from Alexander Smith's book "has been transplanted onto the peninsula" (61). Hereafter, Yi Ren's subjectivity reflects that of the narrator in Smith's title essay in that collection. To the narrator, "Dreamthorp" is a timeless village untainted by political and historical vicissitudes and the ultimate home the frequent traveler finds after searching around the planet. The solitary "I" interacts with the residents of Dreamthorp while always remaining content in solitary reflections on philosophical issues. Dreamthorp also renews the traveler's faith in love. Yi Ren's "Dreamthorp" is a new transnational home away from his home country as a result of his communion with nature. Nature cures his illness. His "deep-rooted learning" and multi-linguistic skills, especially those of European languages, win him admiration from those present at Madam C's Bible study. His friendship with the Japanese Mr. B transcends nationality through a mutual aversion to vulgar Christianity, represented by K, another Japanese man with poor English, and by B's admiration of Yi Ren's learning. Yi Ren's wish to live with the Japanese students instead of Madam C suggests his socialization with the Japanese community. Yi Ren too sees hope in love the moment he meets Miss O. His intimacy with Miss O reaches such a level that he starts to tell her his "history of misery in half a lifetime" (74), including social and personal injuries. From his solo journey to the south to find a soul mate, Yi Ren, the European Romantic, is truly taking the home of the Japanese students as his own home and becoming a man—the description of him observing the place where Miss O is resting and reading before their walk is from a masculine eye—until he hears Miss O sing Mignon's song and translates the most critical line.

Yi Ren's feeling of exile and feminization after the translation begins the deformation of the subjectivity of a solitary transnational, in a process that can be described as de-romanticization involving a configuration of the foreign which not only cannot be domesticated, but is an aggressor. Yi Ren's representation of Miss O in his writing and in his dream and his self-invocation as Mignon in Section V indicate a failed acquisition of a masculine subject position through aestheticizing the foreign woman. Yi Ren attempts to aestheticize Miss O for the first time after his walk with Miss O on the beach, when he writes as if he wants to be in Wilhelm's subject position as a translator and transcriber:

He recorded *Mignon's* song in his diary, and also wrote down what *she* said, the scenery at sunset beach, the melancholic atmosphere, his tears, her slender hand, the smile of the Fuji mountain, the waves and the foot prints on the sand, all that he has seen, heard and felt in that afternoon. He wrote for about two hours, and the more he wrote, the more he found it interesting. After finishing writing, he read it again and again, revised it over and over, which took another hour. (78-79; emphasis added)

Referring to Miss O and Mignon interchangeably, Yi Ren attempts to transform Miss O into a Mignon as an object of aesthetic contemplation, which then would promise him distance from Miss O. For a moment he succeeds because the action of writing, reading, and revising gives him pleasure. However, Yi Ren fails to reduce Miss O into an aesthetic object. Instead he begins to look for Miss O.

His search for Miss O figures the dangerous lure of the foreign—Japanese women and Christianity—as aggressors that take away Yi Ren's rationality. Aggression first comes from Christianity. Before his dream, Yi Ren goes out to look for Miss O and is deterred by memory of Christ's teachings condemning lust: "But I say unto you, that whosoever looks at the woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (Matthew 5:28-30; Yu 79). The passage triggers inexplicable fear in Yi Ren. His rational thinking finally gives way and he succumbs to fear of the mysterious, which keeps him from moving forward. Instead, he has a haunting dream in which the pure Miss O is no different from the lascivious M:

After he went to bed, he felt there was a woman's voice calling him outside the door! He listened to it carefully; yes, it is indeed the voice of the one who sang Mignon's song! He ran out and followed her to the beach.... He looked at her.... She looked as pale as a dead person.... Then she turned around and walked to the woods. He immediately chased after her, but at the opening of the woods,

he suddenly saw that lascivious woman who cheated him last summer walking out of the woods. With a painful “Ah!”, he wanted to run home. But his two feet simply could not move! After some agonizing time, he woke up. A cold sweat set on his body. He could no longer go to sleep. He remembered what happened last summer.... (80)

The scene is first of all one of female seduction that originates from the lure of Miss O, who is referred to as “the one who sang Mignon’s song.” The next scene describing Miss O’s look in his dream vision represents Miss O as dying—her face looks lifeless. But unlike Mignon’s transformation into an angel, Miss O turns into the monster figure of the lascivious M, whom Yi Ren has been trying to forget and cannot. He wakes up to painfully relive the full details of his betrayal by M in Tokyo, the beginning of his dream of pursuing a materialistic life and his first moment of feminization: the first look by M turns her into “a victor” and leaves him effeminate, suggested by his shyness. Yi Ren is not entirely unwilling to have a relationship with M, but M is clearly the seducer who leaves him physically, financially, and emotionally broken. As Yi Ren repeats Mignon’s line that identifies him as the poor child, he remains a Mignon figure.

Shumei Shi argues that Yi Ren’s “passive retreat to melancholy” after hearing M making love to her husband is a sign of emasculation, “a symbolic castration of the Chinese male” conditioned by “national weakness” (116-119). Since Yi Ren’s memory of that earlier scene comes after his dream, which was triggered by the Bible verses, it is more precise to say that Yi Ren’s castration is specifically caused by Christianity. The dream ends Yi Ren’s ability to represent Miss O as the feminine and angelic Mignon. His second identification with Mignon thus means he cannot become a Wilhelm Meister. With the pure and lascivious female characters collaborating with a monstrous nature to diminish Yi Ren’s earlier confidence and calm, Yu Dafu’s novella fully spells out the harm of submitting to the lure of the romanticized foreign latent in Goethe’s novel.

De-romanticization in the novella continues through cofiguring the Japanese men as nationalist subjects who reject Yi Ren as one of “them,” which further develops Yi Ren’s sentimentality. In front of a church community on the peninsula, the Japanese male, K, indirectly criticizes Yi Ren for pursuing Christianity to impress girls. Even worse, B, who has earlier sided with Yi Ren, sympathizes with K through the gesture of standing with his fellow Japanese man, forbidding a Chinese man to pursue “their” women. Yi Ren feels he “has been a Roudine” (93). “Roudine” is the French spelling for the title character in the novel *Rudin*, by Ivan S. Turgenev (1818-1883), who is an ardent follower of German idealism and Romanticism and who cannot be accepted by high-brow Russian society despite

their admiration for his learning. Identifying with Roudine suggests Yi Ren's feelings of rejection by the Japanese men and admission of his failure to become a Romantic transnational.¹⁵ His next subjectivity, in which he "feels the loneliness in Rousseau's *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* ... ebbing into his mind" (93), suggests that he is still unwilling to return to a national subject position. Identifying with Rousseau evokes Yi Ren's feeling of utter alienation from any society, a gesture that is clear at the beginning of *Reveries* and remains so toward the end of the text. In *Reveries*, Rousseau writes that he is now "alone on earth, no longer having any brother, neighbor, friend, or society other than myself" (1). He calls the entire society his persecutor and decides to withdraw completely from society because he has "nothing more to hope for or to fear in this world; and here I am, tranquil at the bottom of the abyss, a poor unfortunate mortal, but unperturbed, like God Himself" (5). Yi Ren's identification with Rousseau seals the end of a romantic socialization with the Japanese and leaves him in a sentimental subject position, as Rousseau is known for his sentimentalism.

Section VII, titled "Nanxing" ["Journeying South"], depicts Yi Ren's continuous search for transnational socialization, as the verb *xing* [journeying] in the title replaces the *qian* [moving] in the title of the novella. The "journey" mostly consists of Yi Ren's speech at a prayer gathering explicating the verse "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:1; Yu 93). Among the audience are poor workers, the Bible study group including Miss O, and the Christian missionaries. He speaks of two kinds of "poor in spirit," one which is caused by material lack and the other being pure spiritual suffering from loneliness. This division endows the sermon with two meanings: one an address to the general audience, and the other specifically to himself, Miss O, and his Japanese friends. On the surface, Yi Ren's sermon is conventional as he encourages both the rich and the poor to follow Christ and abandon wealth in order to enter heaven. His conclusion that Christianity is a religion for the poor and therefore cannot tolerate the interest of those "powerful who have no conscience" (95) is addressed to the poor and the powerless, echoing his earlier sympathy for the socially underprivileged and his criticism of the powerful both in Japan and in China. But the sermon also speaks to Miss O's and his own suffering by expanding Christ's definition of the poor in spirit to include lack of sexual love as another instance of material poverty. Considering his earlier fear of the Bible verses, the preaching of "Blessed are the poor in spirit" becomes a self-exhortation to abandon his desire for Miss O.

Yi Ren's use of "us" when discussing the "pure spiritual suffering" imagines a transnational community that should live up to the Christian ideal by integrating

Confucian values. At first, Yi Ren explains “the poor in spirit in the pure sense” by repeating the words in the Sermon on the Mount as “the ones who mourn, the gentle, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the peace-lovers, the merciful, and those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness” (95). The picture changes with the allusion to the Confucian *Analects*:

These are what *we Easterners* call “the virtuous.” The ancient one says “Virtue is not left to stand alone. *He who practices it* will have neighbors.” Now things are just the opposite. Those who persuade people to stop the war for the sake of peace are jailed. Those who side with the laborers out of righteousness become prisoners and are subject to hard labor. Those who rebel against the unreasonable laws and system of a country are burned. When we read of the burning of Puritans in European history and Luther’s persecution by the German emperor of the time, how could we not become furious! These who endure society’s persecution and yet are willing to sacrifice themselves for the people, they are the ones who are poor in spirit! No wonder Jesus said: “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (95)

What Yi Ren quotes comes from the *Analects* (IV:25). The literal translation of the quotation not only means that the virtuous will have neighbors, but also says that the virtuous should allow the existence of neighboring countries. The Confucian value Yi Ren quotes challenges European imperialism and contemporary Japanese militarism. By addressing his audience as “we Easterners,” Yi Ren momentarily identifies with the Japanese as “Easterners” with a shared Confucian legacy. Hiding Confucius’ name, Yi Ren is in fact affirming Confucian ethics as a value that should be recognized by Christians. What Yi Ren says next supports this interpretation when the next “we” calls for a community of all Christians. As he reminds the Christians of a history of Christian persecutions against the religious dissents, he asserts that “we” all would react in the same way to the persecutions of Luther and the Puritans. With this “we,” Yi Ren addresses all who are present as Christians and challenges all to live up to that ideal.

Any idealism, however, quickly disappears when Yi Ren immediately describes the existence of national boundaries in what appears to be his declaration to the college students with whom he had bonded earlier: “Lastly, there is another kind of poor in spirit, that is, those who have a pure heart. With a pure heart, this group of people wants to love people and things. But they cannot love like Jesus because of society’s traditions, the customs of a nation’s people, and inter-national prejudice” (96). He is clearly responding to the Japanese men who disapprove of his love for Miss O by subtly criticizing their national prejudices. Apparently, Yi Ren’s description of people with “a pure heart” advocates a Christian love that

transcends national boundaries while recognizing the reality of lack of such love. By saying they have “a pure heart,” he nevertheless extends a friendly gesture.

Yi Ren’s final words and the responses to the sermon leave him at the subject position of a “fin de siècle diseased and weak idealist” who cannot be saved by Christianity in this world and who remains sentimental and feminine (96). First of all, the preaching leaves Yi Ren feminized. According to Yi Ren, the fin de siècle diseased and weak idealists are the ones who “know the will of God, the love of Jesus” and suffer because they “cannot follow the divine will” (96). They are “not satisfied with the present material and floating world and yet do not have hope to reach a joyful future world” (96). In a seemingly self-contradictory move, Yi Ren declares that “the future happy kingdom surely belongs to them” (96). The message is clear that this group of “poor in spirit” can only look to the world beyond the here and now. Even though Yi Ren declares the majority of the world are such people, he is clearly referring to himself and Miss O because the narrator invites the reader to follow Yi Ren’s “teary eyes” [“shui wangwang de yanjing”] to see their focus on Miss O’s round face in the audience (96). Yi Ren’s eyes have stayed on Miss O throughout the sermon. He still desires her, but they cannot have a love relationship. And he remains feminized, as the term “teary eyes” in Chinese has an almost exclusive association with femininity. Secondly, the sermon is followed by Yi Ren witnessing national and class divisions, which also ends with him in tears. On the one hand, B challenges Yi Ren by defending Japan’s social system and asserts that “we Japanese” are different from and better than “you Chinese” in terms of social systems (97), declaring that Christian love has not erased their national boundary. On the other hand, class differences divide the audience, as another Japanese youth fiercely argues with B for following the capitalists who are indifferent to the suffering of the laborers. Yi Ren walks into the night, away from the laborers, remembering Miss O’s claim that he is a sentimentalist. After the sermon, both Yi Ren and Miss O suffer from tuberculosis, an illness often associated with unrequited love. The text ends with the description of Yi Ren on a hospital bed with the two Christian missionaries at his side. A mocking narrative voice gives a final judgment which is unsympathetic with Yi Ren’s journey: “If ... the only red hue on his face as a result of fever and the weak breathing in his mouth are taken away,” it will be hard to tell “whether he is a wax figure or a real human body” (99).

Yi Ren’s feminization and his imminent death as a result of his journey to become transnational create an antithetical relationship between the novella and Goethe’s novel in the depiction of the romantic journey abroad and male subject formation. This antithesis first of all demonstrates Yu Dafu’s deep engagement

with and critique of European Romanticism. Whereas Goethe's novel is already ambivalent about Romantic lyricism, "Moving South" goes further in depicting Yi Ren's journey through three different texts of solitude by Smith, Goethe, and Rousseau. For Goethe, ending Romantic longing for the foreign is essential for Wilhelm's socialization in Germany. Yu Dafu's use of the complete translation of Mignon's song attached to the novella, which mimics the same schema of configuration in Goethe's novel by identifying the "poor child" as the feminine Mignon, demonstrates his awareness of this representation of the foreign for the formation of the national subject. However, Yu Dafu goes beyond Goethe in choosing the feminization of the male Chinese Confucian descendent in his journey to become a transnational. Unlike the Italian Mignon who has become the aesthetic possession of the Germans, Yi Ren has become an other to the Chinese and yet remains outside of the Japanese society and the Christian community. Thus, Yi Ren is his poetic "yiren" whose body cannot be possessed by the Japanese, whose soul cannot be saved by the European missionaries, and who remains forever in exile.

In the end, "Moving South" moves away from the framework of Goethe's novel to challenge Christianity. Yu Dafu critics tend to miss the author's agency in speaking to the West. One such example exists in Kirk A. Denton's analysis of the relationship between the subtexts of solitude and the theme of nationalism in "Sinking." Denton sees a fundamental difference between Chinese solitude and Western solitude and explains that the protagonist's anxiety and failure to achieve solitude results from the May Fourth writers' "lack" of "the philosophical and religious foundation upon which the models they sought to imitate stood" (116). "Moving South" proves that Yu Dafu could successfully "imitate" three European texts of solitude. Further, he demystifies the unified discourse of "Western Romantic solitude." Yi Ren's sermon also proves that Yu Dafu went beyond that "lack" to actively critique the Western philosophical and religious foundation as well the Western literary convention built on that foundation.

Critiquing the West does not mean Yu Dafu's works cannot transcend a nationalist hatred toward the West, such as Chenxi Tang suggests. In an otherwise enlightening comparison of the depiction of desire and authorship between Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* and "Sinking," Tang argues that the missionary school, where writers such as Yu Dafu acquired the English language, is "an institution that epitomizes the power disparity between China and the West" (172). Therefore, the "admiration of a Chinese writer for European authors can never be quite free of nationalist resentment" and that the Chinese texts produced as a result of reading European texts "is always inflected by institutionally induced

hatred and distrust” (172). “Moving South” does suggest the “oppression” of European texts on Yi Ren’s psyche and convey distrust in the Christian faith. The unsentimental narrative voice toward the end and the lack of any description of peace on Yi Ren’s face seem to mock Yi Ren’s remarks about entering God’s heavenly kingdom. However, Yi Ren’s criticism of killings and hatred in Christian history is not conditioned by a nationalist resentment toward Christianity. In other words, a Western Christian can also speak like Yi Ren. From a Christian believer’s perspective, it can be argued that Yi Ren is dying without peace precisely because Yu Dafu is not a Christian who can see that feminization can create a space for individual salvation through faith in God.¹⁶ Whichever perspective one chooses, the author of “Sinking” and “Moving South” is neither narrow-mindedly nationalistic nor naively cosmopolitan.

Notes

¹ According to Jack Stein, a 1952 count shows eighty-four musical settings of the song by composers including Beethoven, Schubert, Liszt, and Tchaikovsky, with varying images of Mignon (Stein 125-146). By 2003, the song had been set “over a hundred times” (Doyle 58).

² References to *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* follow the order of book, chapter and page numbers in Blackall’s translation (Goethe, Blackall, and Lange).

³ The term “sister” echoes the title of *Goethes Mignon Und Ihre Schwestern: Interpretationen Und Rezeption* [*Mignon and Her Sisters: Interpretations and Reception*], a collection of essays on Mignon in Goethe’s novel and the Mignon figures in European texts. John F. Fetzer analyzes French composer Ambroise Thomas’ famous opera *Mignon* (1866), which features, among many revisions, a happy ending of Mignon and Wilhelm going to an idyllic Italy. Germans called Thomas’ work “a desecration of the Mighty Goethe” (218). See also Gerhart Hoffmeister’s “Mignon in Spanien?” for Mignon in the Spanish context (Hoffmeister 225-236). In *Little Women*, *Little Men*, and *Jo’s Boys*, Friedrich Bhaer sings Mignon’s song twice, first by himself and later with the heroine Jo. Friedrich maintains his German accent and German habits and is clearly a “man,” not a feminine figure (Doyle 57-59).

⁴ References are to *Yu Dafu wenji. Vol. 1*. The English translation of “Moving South” is mine.

⁵ See for example, “Once Again, to Sir Dou” [“You cheng Doushi jun”] and “On Zheng Shiba’s Writing” [“Ti Zheng Shiba zhuzuo zhang”] in Du Fu and Zhida Guo (Vol. 23, 376; Vol. 19, 312/45).

⁶ In the Hsin Yu (or Yu Xin) poem “Ai jiangnan fu” [“The Lament for the South”], the poet, who was captured by invaders and forced to serve another emperor, remembers his homeland in the south and mourns the end of the Southern Dynasty (Graham and Yu). See also the lyric songs by the last emperor of the Southern Tang, Li Yu (937-978) (Liu and Lo 301-302).

⁷ *Mencius* in particular places Yi Yin in a discussion of an individual’s choice between social commitment and reclusion, characterizing Yi Yin as always willing to adapt himself to the situation to serve (535-537; 799-806). For other accounts, see He Zhihua (11-13; 55-56); Sima Qian, “yin ben ji” in *Shi ji* (91-110).

⁸ Arthur Waley's translation of "Yiren" uses the masculine third-person pronoun, following the Confucian allegorical interpretation of the poem as an expression of the learned gentleman's wish to serve the right lord (101-102).

⁹ György Lukács' reading remains the classic view of the novel as depicting the conflict between idealism and disillusionment (97-143). For challenges to the classic interpretations, see Marc Redfield's discussion of irony in the novel's deconstruction of the Schillerian notion of *Bildung* through an aesthetic education (63-94) and Thomas Pfau's analysis of the presence of "play" that "permeates virtually every moment of Wilhelm's progressive socialization" (570). Pfau discusses how each book of the novel "playfully" explores "a specific set of aesthetic, narrative, and expressive conventions" including sentimental romance (Book I), travelogue (Book II), opera buffa (Book III), and the confession (Book VI). With these features, argues Pfau, the novel "already hints that a conclusive account of *Bildung* as the formation of an autonomous subject may, in fact, be impossible" (570-572).

¹⁰ In *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* [*Wilhelm Meister's Travels*] (1821/1829), a sequel to the *Lehrjahre*, Wilhelm does not appear to have married Natalie but will instead journey on, first to Egypt.

¹¹ Wilhelm loses subjectivity toward the end of the novel. Watching Mignon's embalmed body, he could not stand up to "marvel at this semblance of life" as he "could not think about what he was feeling, for every thought seemed to shatter what he felt" (VIII.8.353). Because of Wilhelm's resignation to his social role, Franco Moretti sees irony in his final expression of happiness at the prospect of his marriage: "the coercive goodwill of the Society of the Tower forces Wilhelm's 'happiness' on him: a social role, a home, a wife, even a child" (178).

¹² Marc Redfield also implies this conclusion when noting the Italian origin of Mignon, Wilhelm's grandfather's art collection and the Harper (89).

¹³ Mignon nurtures Wilhelm when he is injured at the end of his third idealization of the theatre (IV. 5) and helps guide him away from an obsessed identification with Hamlet in his final stage of engagement with the theater.

¹⁴ The Abbé's lecture on the cultivation of taste contains a subtle criticism of Wilhelm's attempts to pursue the utilitarian functions of the theatre and his tendency to be emotionally drawn to arts.

¹⁵ Idealism and cosmopolitanism are two of Rudin's most important character traits in the novel (219-222).

¹⁶ My reading differs from Lewis Steward Robinson's interpretation, which argues that the final scene affirms Yu Dafu's faith (169).

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