 CHAPTER 5

Literature in the Name of National Harmony

Translation as the Method

On returning to Manchukuo in late 1933, Ōuchi found work in Mukden.¹ In February 1935 he moved to the capital, Shinkyō, and resumed employment at the Shinkyō Daily News. It was around this time that his enthusiasm for Chinese literature began to show through. He maintained that “although I had started paying attention to Chinese literature a long time before, it was then [1935] that I made a decision to devote myself to it.”² Ōuchi claimed to have attempted to establish a monthly literary journal while working at the Shinkyō Daily News, and to have invited Chinese writers to participate. He even submitted a written request to the authorities. However, his dream was thwarted because he could not obtain the necessary periodical publication permission.³ It was from 1935 that Ōuchi started to demonstrate extraordinary enthusiasm for Chinese literature and translation. He spent most of his time translating Chinese works into Japanese in Manchukuo.

Among the anthologies translated and published by Ōuchi, the most noted include The Wilderness, The Dandelion (Ch. Pugongying and J. Tanpopo 蒲公英), and Selected Short Stories of Contemporary Manchurian Women Writers (Gendai manshū joryū sakka tanpen senshū 現代満洲女流作家短編選集). In addition, Ōuchi also translated many collections of short stories by individual authors, including Gu Ding’s Sand Beach (Pingsha 平沙), Liang Shanding’s (梁山丁 1914–1997) Green Valley (Lüse de gu 绿色的谷),⁴ Shi Jun’s (石军 1919–1949) Fertile Land (Wotu 沃土). Some of his translations were first published in Manchurian Romanticism (Manshū roman 満洲浪漫), a literary journal which was established by a group of Japanese writers, most of whom worked for the Manchurian Film Company.⁵

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¹ Ōuchi, Manshū bungaku nijūnen, 194.
² Ibid., 199.
³ Ibid., 310.
⁴ Liang Shanding was the pen name of the Chinese writer Liang Menggeng (梁梦庚). Liang was an active writer during 1930s and 1940s when he participated in the debate on the native literature of Manchuria. He was persecuted after 1957 and was not allowed to resume writing until 1979.
⁵ The Japanese character “曼” (rather than “漫,” which was the accepted equivalent for “romanticism”) was selected for this journal’s title. Most of the writers in Manchurian Romanticism
Literary translations and literary critiques formed a publishing peak for Ōuchi’s career. There were two peaks associated with Ōuchi's contributions to Manchurian Review. One was between 1932 and 1933, immediately before he was repatriated to Japan, and the other was from 1937 to 1942, when many of his literary translations and reviews were published. This period also witnessed his involvement in various literary associations. When the Manchuria Literary Academy (Manshū bunwakai 満洲文話会) was established in 1937 in Dalian, Ōuchi was listed on the committee. After its Shinkyō branch was founded later, he became a committee member there as well, partly in conjunction with his influential role in the head office. He was also a committee member of the Association of Manchurian Artists (Manshū bungeika kyōkai 満洲文藝家協会) established in 1941. He became head of the censorship department when the Association of Manchurian Artists underwent a reorganisation in 1943. This ascendancy within the power structure of the Manchukuo cultural administration overlapped with a period of prolific output of translation.

There are divided opinions, however, with regards to Ōuchi’s works of translation. The Japanese researcher Okada Hideki expresses the view that most of his translations were rendered objectively with little sense of Japan’s colonial mastery. However, the Chinese writers active during this period have begged to differ. Li Min who worked directly under Ōuchi’s supervision in the Manchurian Film Company still retained many years later a concrete image of his former colleague: “He was a taciturn person, translating on the job and drinking off it. He was suspected by many to be a spy for the Kwantung Army.” Liang Shanding, whose Green Valley was translated by Ōuchi, presents a rather negative evaluation of Ōuchi’s translation:

were opposed to being identified as writers of the romantic school. The journal was not simply an extension of the Japanese romantic school to Manchuria. However, since there is no better word by which to translate 浪曼, I have coined the name “Manchurian Romanticism” in this study, while fully recognising the limitations of its use. Kimberly T. Kono used “Manchurian Novel” in her book. The translation of 浪曼 as “novel” may be in recognition of its meaning in German. Yet, there is no clear evidence of German influence on the journal.

7 An interview with Li Ming, 20 August 2003, quoted in Liu Xiaoli 刘哓丽, “1939‒1945 nian dongbei diqu wenxue qikan yanjiu” 1939‒1945 年东北地区文学期刊研究 [A Study of Literary Journals in Northeastern China Between 1939 and 1945] (PhD diss., East China Normal University, 2005), 57. Okada also referred in his article to the suspicions Li Min had over Ōuchi’s role as a spy. See Okada, “The Realities of Racial Harmony,” 76–77. Li Min was a novelist and poet in the Manchukuo period. He studied in Japan from 1936 to 1939 and worked for the Manchurian Film Company upon his return to Manchuria. He was persecuted during the Chinese Cultural Revolution.