

# Europeanization, Mordenization: How the Syntax of Chinese New poetry Changed Influenced by the Translated Western Poems

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## Abstract:

The New Culture Movement of the early twentieth century promoted vernacular literature to construct a literature close to the people. However, the vernacular language was not used as an official language for a long time, resulting in its lack of complex structure and ability to express itself in refined ways. With the translation of modern Western poetry, their preserved modern Western syntax gradually influenced the creation of new poems, and the language of new poems was gradually Europeanized, with the emergence of many Europeanized syntactic features. Although this also resulted in the disadvantages of a strange and lengthy language and lower acceptance by the public, it provided a rich syntactic framework for the creation of new literature and adapted to the needs of modernization.

**Keywords:** New poetry; Chinese grammar; Europeanization; Translated literature; Syntax; New Culture Movement.

## 1. Introduction

The language of the new literature proclaimed and created by the vernacular movement which happened in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was not only folkloric but also translated. The modern Western language, especially with translated literature as a tool, had a great influence on the enrichment and construction of Chinese vernacular language. As an important event that really happened in China's social and cultural fields a hundred years ago, it strongly demonstrates the close relationship and mutual influence of language and literature, and the fact that language and literature are rooted in the broad political and economic contexts of the times, as well as being a notable illustration of cross-cultural communication. He Yang points out that the phenomenon of Europeanized grammar in modern Chinese is the result of indirect language contact, because the main way for Chinese grammar to receive Indo-European influences is through written translation, not through direct contact between Chinese speakers and Indo-European speakers, and there has never been any large-scale direct language contact between Indo-European languages, such as Chinese and English, which can affect the whole Chinese society. Nor has direct language contact between Chinese and Indo-European languages such as English ever occurred on a scale large enough to affect the entire Chinese-speaking community [1]. Xiong Hui argues that the translation of

foreign poetry is prone to produce new linguistic syntax and expressions, which leads to the innovation of the new Chinese poetry style and the improvement of expression [2].

The phenomenon of Europeanization in the development of modern Chinese is striking, but the sentences of Europeanized Chinese preserved in the new poems are more typical in terms of their degree of Europeanization. Therefore, in the early twentieth century, the Europeanization of the language of the new poems in vernacular language, which was just born and influenced by the language of the translated poems, is a more typical, deeper, and more richly documented microcosm of the phenomenon of the Europeanization of the modern Chinese language. Moreover, the study of the Europeanisation of the new poetic syntax is not only a historical review, but also an inspiration for the renewal of poetic style and expression. Modernist poetry favours the subversion of traditional syntax in pursuit of freer and more marvellous poetic expression, which is often very demanding of the poet's imagination and creativity, but the syntax of other languages is found to serve as a good source of reference.

It is worth noting that the degree of Europeanization of vernacular Chinese in the new poems is higher than the degree of Europeanization of modern Chinese in ordinary usage scenarios. Therefore, one cannot equate the degree of vernacular Europeanization in the new poems with the

degree of modern Chinese Europeanization. Without making this mistake, the influence of the language of translated Western poetry on the Europeanization of the language of new poems can indeed serve as a good entry point for observing the phenomenon of Chinese Europeanization and its manifestations and processes. The Europeanization of the language of new poems, and even of the Chinese language, is manifested in many aspects, such as vocabulary, composition, syntax, and discourse. This essay focuses on the Europeanization of the syntax of new poetry, and therefore does not deal with vocabulary, composition, etc., nor with its poetic style, content, literary genre, and other elements. The aim of this essay is to discover the typical Europeanized syntactic features and their examples that the Europeanized language of new poems absorbed under the influence of translated poems, to point out the key translations that had a greater impact in this process, as well as representative new poetic works with Europeanized language, and to briefly elaborate the significance and drawbacks of Europeanization, through a comparison of the Europeanized syntax of translated Western poetry and new poems of the early twentieth century.

## **2. Background and Contributing Factors to the Linguistic Europeanization of New poetry**

Behind the rise and Europeanisation of the vernacular language is the post-imperial, semi-colonial and post-colonial historical context of modern China. In the late Qing dynasty(1840-1911), faced with the dual pressures of internal and external problems, especially the Opium Wars(1840-1842, 1856-1860) and the signing of unequal treaties, China's traditional institutions gradually disintegrated and national sovereignty suffered serious erosion. The colonial expansion and economic exploitation by the Western powers intensified the rise of nationalist sentiments, and Chinese intellectuals began to reflect deeply on the adaptability of traditional culture and institutions in the process of modernization.

With the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the founding of the Republic of China, China entered a new post-imperialist and semi-colonial period. The May Fourth Movement of 1919 was not only a protest foreign aggression, but also a complete rejection of the traditional cultural constraints and a call for comprehensive cultural and political reforms. During this period, the vernacular language rapidly emerged as an accessible form of language and became an important tool for the expression of new ideas and progressive concepts, facilitating communication and understanding between intellectuals and the public. To introduce and learn advanced Western theories and culture

to save the nation, and to achieve the enlightenment of the people, the intellectuals advocated the abolition of the old literature, which was detached from the people, and the construction of a new literature in the vernacular language.

The vernacular language in China is not without a long history. Since about the Tang Dynasty(618-907), the popular language of the folk has shown a big difference in vocabulary and grammar compared to the written language, Wenyan, which has remained stable and classical, and this difference has been continuously expanded in the subsequent history. The new popular language from folklore remained updated and enriched, while the literary language, which was used for literary, historical, political and other written purposes and important occasions, continued to remain stable for a long time, and even showed a tendency to be retrofitted on many occasions. As a result, the difference between the mainstream literary language and the everyday language of the folk grew wider and wider, which led to the growing detachment of the literary language from the people, and literature became a literati game isolated from real life. Although vernacular literature has developed in the field of popular literature and has made achievements in literary genres such as drama and novel, with a more perfect narrative function, due to its long-term exclusion from literary fields such as lyric literature and argumentative essays, it is very poor in lyricism, artistry and logic, and is not enough to support the poetry and prose of the new literature. Therefore, to create new literature in the vernacular language, it was necessary to introduce the mature vocabulary, word formation, syntax, etc. of the modern Western language through direct translation, which was used to serve the creation of new literary poetry and prose.

In addition, unlike prose, the creation of new poetry faced a great poetic stylistic problem. The poetic form of classical poetry is manifested in the fact that it is very strict in terms of structure and meter, so the vernacular language, which is dominated by two-syllable vocabulary, would not be able to produce and develop poetry within the narrow space of the classical poetic form. This means that abandoning the classical Chinese poetic style is an inevitable requirement for the development of vernacular literature. And when the classical Chinese poetic style was abandoned, there was no style for vernacular poetry to use, and the final choice was to adopt the Western modern poetic style. The adoption of the modern Western poetic style also became a logical and coherent catalyst for the Europeanization of vernacular poetry. In this way, the style of the new poetry in the vernacular was Western, the language was Europeanized, and it was almost indistinguishable from translated Western poetry. The purpose of

the New Literature Movement was to solve the problem of classical literature being detached from the people, but such a new poetry, with its greatly westernized style, language, and content, became an island just as much as it was detached from the people, but because of this, it became a more closed testing ground for the Europeanization of the Chinese language.

### 3. Syntactic Characteristics of the Europeanization of New Poetry

Europeanization in a narrow sense refers to the changes that have taken place in the Chinese language under the influence of foreign languages (mainly Indo-European languages in this case) at the linguistic level. To put it simply, Europeanization is the process of borrowing and absorbing foreign factors such as Western grammar and vocabulary to create a modernized form of the written language that is adapted to the needs of the Chinese society [3]. The Europeanisation of modern Chinese is an inevitable effect of modernisation and its inevitable requirement. The former manifests itself in the natural influence of Western language in the process of learning knowledge and culture from the West; the latter is since modern literature requires a language that is more capable of fine description, efficiency and rationalism require a language that is more capable of accurate and logical expression, and the rule of law requires a language that is more objective and precise to serve law-making. All these abilities were possessed by the modern Western language, which adapted to the needs of modernisation earlier than the Chinese language, because it came from a place where modernisation had taken place earlier: Europe. Since English is much more widespread in China than other European languages, the Europeanization of Chinese is mainly an Englishization [4]. The typical Europeanized syntax of the new Chinese vernacular poetry of the early 20th century, which was influenced by the language of translation, includes updating and extension of attributive determiners, adverbial determiners shift, and the proliferation of linking words and the Clauses they lead, all of which reflect the syntactic features of English.

#### 3.1 Updating and Extension of Attributive Determiners

Xie Junlan points out that the new poems not only show the relative improvement of sentence stem components such as subject and predicate, but also the further strengthening of modifying linguistic components such as determiners, especially the use of long determiners and the addition of the word “的”, which is a relatively obvious factor of Europeanization [5]. The attributive determiners in the new poetic syntax have indeed been enriched and

expanded, not only the vocabulary of attributive determiners has changed from monosyllabic words to bisyllabic words, but also multiple determiners and juxtaposed determiners are very common. Most importantly, new forms of attributive determiners that had not been used in vernacular literature, such as, the form of adding passive or progressive markers to verbs as determiners, appeared. Take Guo Moruo's translation of Shelly's Ode to the West Wind as an example:

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:  
What if my leaves are falling like its own?  
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies  
Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,  
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,  
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!  
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,  
Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth;  
And, by the incantation of this verse[6]...

Guo Moruo's version:

请你把我作为你的瑶琴如橡树林般样：  
我纵使如败叶飘飞也无妨！  
你雄浑的谐调的交流  
会从两者得一深湛的秋声，虽凄切而甘芳。  
严烈的精灵哟，请你化成我的精灵！  
请你化成我，你个猛烈者哟！  
请你把我沉闷的思想如败叶一般，  
吹越宇宙之外促起一番新生！  
请你用我这有韵的咒文 [7]...

In the third line of Guo Moruo's version, “你雄浑的谐调的交流”，there are two determiners: “雄浑的”(mighty) and “谐调的”(harmonious), to form a sentence with long determiners, which is not normal in the vernacular language in the past time. This syntactic feature, derived from translated Western poetry, was quite popular in the new poems in the vernacular language, and even grew to extremes. For example, “乾坤坎离环拱玄黄相互的太极图底国旗飘动了全场底空气 [8]”, “层层锁着的九嶷山上的白云哟！／微波着的洞庭湖中的流水哟！ [9]”, “我愿透着寂静的朦胧，薄淡的浮纱／细听着渐渐的细雨寂寂的在檐上激打／遥对着远远吹来的空虚中的嘘叹的音／意识着一片一片的坠下的轻轻的白色的落花 [10]”. Each central noun is preceded by four or five attributive determiners, which adds to the tedious difficulty of reading while constantly reinforcing the details and images. In particular, the widespread use of “的” has led to the creation of a large number of new modifiers, creating the conditions for the popularization of this Europeanized syntax of long attributive determiners. In addition, corresponding to the use of past and present participles as attributive determiners in English, the addition of “的” to the verb after adding “被” and “着” as passive and progressive markers has constituted a new form of attributive

determiners, which is also a typical Europeanized syntax.

### 3.2 Adverbial Determiners Shift

In the regular order of Chinese, adverbial determiners, especially those of degree, are usually placed before the predicate to modify the center of the sentence, or before the subject and the predicate, separated by a comma to modify the whole sentence, but seldom placed after the predicate. In new poems, adverbial determiners have become a favorite rhetorical device of poets. Take a stanza in Mu Mutian's translation entitled 《万雪白 (Ch. Van Larberghe) 的两首诗》:

到了晚上，  
些个黑色的天鹅，  
或是些个暗淡的仙女，出来从花里，从西东里，从我们里，  
这是我们的影子 [11]。

This stanza is very Europeanized, and the fourth line is completely Europeanized in terms of the way of expression, with the adverbial determiners “从花里”(from flowers), “从西东里”(from the east and west), “从我们里”(from us) placed after the verb “出来”(come out). In Chinese expression, it should be “from the flowers of our east and west come out,” but Mu Mutian has obviously adopted a direct translation of the poem. Xu Zhimo's translation of *A Woman*, which is a poem written by Sappho, retained such syntax as well:

像是那野绣球花在山道上长着的，  
让牧童们过路的脚踵见天的踩，见天的残，  
直到一天那紫拳拳的花球烂入了泥潭 [12]。

This syntax in these translations influenced the creation of new poems. For example, “回转头来，/只有你在那杨柳高头依旧亮晶晶地 [13]”，“黄金笑在橡树上，/赤金笑在橡树上，/白金笑在白皮树上 [14]”。Li Jinfa, on the other hand, has been influenced by French, enabling adverbial determiners in forms such as “朦胧的世界之影，/在不可勾留的片刻中，/远离了我们，/毫不思索 [15]”，“稀细的星光，闪烁在天之顶，夹点微笑向我们 [16]”。

### 3.3 The Proliferation of Linking Words and the Clauses They Lead

The frequent use of linking words in new poems also strengthens the logical relationship of syntax and increases the inferential effect, including prepositions, conjunctions, dynamic auxiliaries, etc., whose syntax is relatively fragmentary but their role in new poems is equally important [5]. As far as prepositions and conjunctions are concerned, since the clear grammatical structure of English requires the use of prepositions, the frequency of Chinese prepositions is also affected accordingly, for example, “在.....”，which indicates a place, is equivalent to “in, on, at” in En-

glish, and “当.....时候”，which indicates time, is equivalent to “when” or “while” in English.

Taking one of the most famous translated poems in the history of modern Chinese literature as an example, which the translator Hu Shi believed that it established the epoch of his own new poetry, as follows:

I said, “I have shut my heart  
As one shuts an open door,  
That Love may starve therein  
And trouble me no more.”  
But over the roofs there came  
The wet new wind of May,  
And a tune blew up from the curb  
Where the street-pianos play [17]...”

Hu Shi's version:  
我说，“我把心收起，  
像人家把门关了，  
叫爱情生生的饿死，  
也许不再和我为难了”。  
但是五月的湿风，  
时时从屋顶上吹来；  
还有那街心的琴调  
一阵阵的飞来 [18]...”

In his translation, Hu Shi kept many of the linking words in the original poem as well as the clauses they lead to. He translated “as...” in the second line of the original poem to “像...”，“but...” in the fifth line of the original poem to “但是...”，“And...” in the seventh line of the original poem to “还有...” and so on. The syntax of these translations had a great influence on the new poems, such as “你的一双大眼，/笼罩了全世界。/但也隐隐的透出了/你婴孩的心 [19]”；“因为你身上的香泽，/调理了我底呼吸，/并且因为你底额儿是这般的秀美 [20]”；“我俩虽半年不见，/在冷冰冰的冬夜，我却连续梦见你 [21]”。

## 4. Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, the Europeanization of the language of new poetry had a profound background and reasons of the times. To create a rich and improved new literature in the vernacular language, it became the choice of the time to introduce and use the syntax of modern Western languages to enhance the expressive power of the vernacular language. The impact of this choice on the Chinese syntax in the new poems has already been discussed. This modification of syntax has its realized functions; however, it also has certain disadvantages. For example, the use of long attributive determiners, on the one hand, greatly expands the space for new poems to contain information and improves the ability to display details; on the other hand, the uncontrolled misuse of modifiers creates the disadvan-

tage of cumbersome and lengthy verses [5]. And the use of such Europeanized syntax is not in line with the reading habits of Chinese people, which may cause greater reading pressure and weird reading experience [22]. The information density of the Chinese language, especially the literary language, is very high, capable of conveying a large amount of information in a relatively short sentence, while the vernacular language, which has long been used only as a daily language in history, has a very simple syntactic structure, although many polysyllabic lexemes lead to a reduction in its information density. Thus, the use of Western syntax in vernacular languages is a matter of organizing longer words in more lengthy and complex syntax, resulting in a massive increase in sentence length, causing memory pressure and integration pressure that Chinese people hardly ever encounter in traditional reading. In addition, changes in the position of some sentence components can lead to a confusing and bizarre reading experience. To summarize, the Europeanization of the new poem's syntax made the new poem's stanzas seem complicated and somewhat bizarre to the readers of the time, a flaw that limited the spread and influence of the new poem and added resistance to its goal of reaching the people.

However, these shortcomings are obviously not the main facet. Europeanization was the best option to make the early twentieth-century vernacular language realize in a short period of time to adapt to the needs of modernization, that is, to adapt to the needs of richer and more detailed literary expressions, to the needs of clearer logical expressions, and to the needs of more precise legal texts. Therefore, the Europeanization of the modern Chinese language is, overall, positive, a growth and improvement of the modern Chinese language. In addition, the language of poetry is different from common written or spoken language, and the expression of poetry is more artistic and musical, which requires more diversified syntax, and the addition of Europeanized syntax precisely meets this need. In most other situations, the degree of Europeanization of modern Chinese is relatively much lower, limited by factors such as popular acceptance and the demand for efficiency of expression. Moreover, the language system is highly adaptable and self-repairing. In the past century, as the function of modern Chinese has been improved by adapting to the requirements of modernization, the language of new poems no longer seems to be as Europeanized as it was in the early twentieth century. The vernacular syntax applicable to the construction of new literature was finally formed in the combination of the triple forces of the sustenance of Europeanization, the characteristics of the nation, and the actual needs of modernization.

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