

〈論文〉

## *Sherlock Holmes in Shanghai:*

### The Attempt of Detective Fiction Writing in Late Qing China

余 致欣  
YU Wenhsin

#### Summary

Since the translation of China's first *Sherlock Holmes* series appeared in *Shiwu Bao* (時務報), intellectuals and elites used detective novels as a tool to enlighten the public, offering a model of scientific spirit and national enrichment.

Against the backdrop of Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* Series being the most popular translated detective fiction in late Qing China, Chen Jinghan (陳景韓, 1878–1965) and Bao Tianxiao (包天笑, 1876–1973) published four parodies entitled “*Sherlock Holmes in Shanghai* (歇洛克來華)” between 1904 and 1907. These stories narrated Holmes's repeated failure in Shanghai, satirizing the city's social conditions and literary world at the time, while also challenging Western detective fiction and the figure of the detective himself.

This study focuses on the “transition period (1905–1920)” of Chinese detective fiction, examining the role of *Sherlock Holmes in Shanghai* in the genre's development during the late Qing China. The discussion highlights differences in conceptions of detective fiction between these above parodists and mainstream writers such as Cheng Xiaoqing (程小青, 1893–1976) and Sun Liaohong (孫了紅, 1897–1958).

The author further analyzes how *Sherlock Holmes in Shanghai* absorbed both the characteristics of *biji xiashuo* (筆記小說, “note-form fiction”) and Western detective fiction. By creatively confronting the influence of Western models, the stories offered an alternative to the mainstream trajectory of late Qing detective fiction.

#### Keywords

Sherlock Holmes, Shanghai, detective fiction, late Qing China, parody

#### I. Introduction

In the nineteenth century, under the pressure of imperialism, China sought to catch up with

Western advancements in politics, economy, and culture. This aspiration spurred a wave of translated fiction. Among these, detective fiction quickly captivated readers with its engagement in political issues, scientific reasoning, and human emotions, while simultaneously addressing pressing social concerns. By dramatizing the struggle between good and evil and staging poetic justice, detective fiction resonated deeply with the dilemmas of late Qing society. The charismatic figure of the detective further enhanced the genre's popularity, with Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes achieving particular success.

Recent scholarship on the translations of Holmes stories in late Qing China has expanded from literary analysis to a broader cultural perspective. The concept of "cultural translation" has attracted significant attention. Eva Hung (1999; 2000) and Leo Lee (2004) have explored the ideological dimensions of these translations and their ties to modernization and enlightenment. Teruo Tarumoto (2001a; 2001b; 2006; 2008; 2016) has adopted a comparative cultural approach to investigate Holmes parodies, situating them within the media ecology of the late Qing.

China's first translated Holmes story, published in *Shiwu Bao* (時務報), gained the support of intellectuals and elites. Detective fiction was embraced as a vehicle for public enlightenment, scientific spirit, and national development. Within this context, Chen Jinghan (陳景韓, also known as 冷血, 1878–1965) and Bao Tianxiao (包天笑, 1876–1973) produced four parody cases of *Sherlock Holmes in Shanghai* (歇洛克來華) between 1904 and 1907. These narratives depicted Holmes's repeated failures in Shanghai, satirizing both metropolitan life and the literary world scene of the times. They also sought to challenge Western detective fiction and its archetypal detective.

This study examines *Sherlock Holmes in Shanghai* within the "transition period" (1905–1920) of Chinese detective fiction (2006: 1824), arguing that these works represent an important alternative to the mainstream development of the genre led by writers such as Cheng Xiaoqing (程小青, 1893–1976) and Sun Liaohong (孫了紅, 1897–1958). Particular attention is given to how Chen and Bao's work blends elements of traditional *biji xiashuo* (筆記小說, "note-form fiction") with features of Western detective fiction, creating a hybrid form that is at once satirical and socially engaged.

Methodologically, this study combines close textual analysis, comparative reading with Doyle's originals, and media-historical contextualization. It also draws on cultural translation theory to interpret Holmes as a transnational figure appropriated to address issues such as opium regulation, urban decadence, and the disillusionment of returning intellectuals. By emphasizing parody and satire, the study demonstrates that detective fiction during this transitional period functioned not only as a tool of social enlightenment but also as a medium of humor, cultural critique, and literary experimentation. In this way, it moves beyond earlier scholarship that emphasized the pedagogical role of detective fiction, showing that Sherlock Holmes in Shanghai marks a crucial moment when imported literary forms were reimagined to express both fascination with and ambivalence toward modernity.

## II. Historical and Literary Context

In 1904, inspired by the success of Liang Qichao's *New Novel* (新小說, 1873–1929), Di Baoxian (狄葆賢, 1872–1939) established the *Eastern Times* (時報) with the support of Kang Youwei (康有為) and Liang Qichao (梁啟超). At its peak, the *Eastern Times* had a circulation of over 20,000 copies per issue, securing its position as a leading newspaper in Shanghai alongside *Shenbao* (申報, 1872–1949) and *Xinwenbao* (新聞報, 1893–1949). Several affiliated newspapers and magazines soon followed, including *Xiaoshuo Shibao* (小說時報, 1909–1918) and *Funü Shibao* (婦女時報, 1912–1917). Together, these publications created platforms for cross-promotion and advertising, forming Shanghai's first newspaper group (Huang 2020: 152).

Over the 16 years after its founding, the *Eastern Times* was shaped by its most prominent editors, Chen Jinghan and Bao Tianxiao, both from Jiangsu province, as well as its founder, Di Baoxian. This indicates a regional link between the founder and principal editors. With Liang Qichao spearheading magazine development in late Qing China, intellectuals such as Chen and Bao took on important editorial roles in major Shanghai publications. In 1904, Chen moved from *Dalu* (大陸) magazine to serve as editor-in-chief of the *Eastern Times*, and Bao joined the study in 1906 (Song 2010). The two later collaborated as co-editors of *Xiaoshuo Shibao* in 1909.

From its outset, the *Eastern Times* attracted readers with both incisive commentary on current events and engaging fiction. Its preface declared:

Every issue of our newspaper contains two types of fiction: original works and translations, presented either as serialized chapters or short stories, aiming to entertain and educate the public. However, only those works that bring benefit to society are included. (*Eastern Times*, June 12, 1904: 2)

本報每張附印小說兩種，或自撰或翻譯，或章回或短篇，以助興味而資多聞，惟小說非有益於社會者不錄

The final line echoes Liang Qichao's 1902 article, "The Relationship between Fiction and the Government of the Masses" (論小說與群治之關係), which emphasized the educational role, pragmatic standards, and ideological purpose of fiction. For example, Chen Jinghan, besides his own fiction writing, published an essay in the *Eastern Times* titled "The Relationship between Fiction and Society" (論小說與社會之關係). This shows that intellectuals at the time not only envisioned but also enacted theoretical frameworks for using fiction as a means to save China. These developments also contributed to the rise of short

story in late Qing literature (Zhang 2011, Xia 2015).

It was within this environment that Chen Jinghan and Bao Tianxiao authored the four *Sherlock Holmes in Shanghai* parodies, published in the *Eastern Times* between 1904 and 1907:

冷血戲作「(短篇小說) 歇洛克來遊上海第一案」

『時報』光緒三十年十一月十二日 (1904年12月18日)

(包)天笑「(短篇) 歇洛克初到上海第二案」

『時報』光緒三十一年正月初九日 (1905年2月12日)

冷(血)作「(短篇) 嗎啡案 (歇洛克來華第三案)」

『時報』光緒三十二年十一月十五日 (1906年12月30日)

笑(包天笑)作「(短篇) 藏鎗案 (歇洛克來華第四案)」

『時報』光緒三十二年十二月十二日 (1907年1月25日)

In 1904, the *Eastern Times* translated and published a short story titled “Huang Mian (黃面),” based on “The Yellow Face” (1893) from *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1894). Moreover, the editorial office received a letter from readers commenting on other Chinese translations of “The Yellow Face.”

A translator’s note, attached to the *Eastern Times* version of August 9, 1904, explained:

……For this work, I originally translated it from English. Later, I found a Japanese translation in the 13th issue of the 7th volume of the Japanese magazine *Taiyō*. By comparing the English and Japanese versions, I produced this translation for readers. Afterward, I received letters informing me that the story had been published in *Xiuxiang Xiaoshuo* (繡像小說) already…… (Eastern Times, August 9, 1904).

(前略) 此篇譯者始從英文中搜得，後又於日本《太陽》雜誌之第七卷第十三號上見有日文譯本，特兩兩對照譯出，以貢閱者，後承諸君函告，知《繡像小說》上已經譯行 (後略)

This note sheds important light on the reception of *Sherlock Holmes stories* in late Qing,

early Republican China. While previous scholarship has suggested that most translations of *Holmes stories* were rendered directly from English into Chinese, rather than through Japanese intermediaries, this case demonstrates a hybrid practice of cross-checking both languages.

However, the translator of “Huang Mian” noted that he had referred to his own earlier translation of “Saikon (再婚),” published in *Taiyō* in November 1901. Another version, titled “Shuang Fu Ni Nu An (孀婦匿女案),” appeared in *Xiuxiang Xiaoshuo* in 1903. This latter translation may have been rendered directly from the original English text or retranslated from the Japanese edition. Nevertheless, the translator’s explanation shows that “Huang Mian” was not only translated from English but also partially retranslated from the Japanese.

From this perspective, Chinese readers likely had a basic familiarity with Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Sherlock Holmes stories* before encountering *Sherlock Holmes in Shanghai*.

Structurally, the four Shanghai parody cases consist mainly of dialogue and are approximately 1,000 words each. They clearly bear the characteristics of traditional note-form fiction. As Wu (1993: 3) explains,

In terms of descriptive content, it should depict the characters’ activities and include the necessary storyline, even if very simple. In terms of form, it should be written in literary language and remain concise in length.

在描寫內容上，它所記述、描寫的文字應該有人物活動於其中，有必要的故事情節，那怕是最簡單的；在形式上，它用於敘寫的文字應是文言，篇幅短小

The use of the note-form may also reflect Liang Qichao’s promotion of the short story as a new literary style. Furthermore, Conan Doyle himself considered short stories the most suitable format for detective fiction, given readers’ preference for concise, leisurely reading. The phenomenal success of his first short story, “A Scandal in Bohemia” (1891), confirmed this belief.

As noted earlier, the *Eastern Times* sought to engage a wide readership by publishing fiction. Yet the column that most strongly defined the newspaper’s reputation was its section of incisive commentaries on current affairs, known as “Shiping”(時評), established by Chen Jinghan. His social and cultural critiques addressed contemporary issues in late Qing China, appealing not only to the intellectual readership of the *Eastern Times* but also enlightening the broader public (Liu 2009: 92–93).

### III. Satirical Function and Cultural Critique

In the first case, titled “Sherlock Holmes in Shanghai: The First Case” ( (短篇小說) 歇洛

克來遊上海第一案) by Chen Jinghan, the narrative adopts the short story format (短篇小說 *duanpian xiaoshuo*), as the title suggests. However, the content still retains the character of commentary on current affairs.

The story begins with a Chinese guest visiting Holmes, who had just arrived in Shanghai. Upon meeting Holmes, the guest immediately exclaimed:

I have read your book before and know you are very skilled in the art of investigation, capable of deducing the past and future from the subtlest of clues.

久聞歇先生大名，前讀包探書，知先生善探人術，能發幽燭微，知過去未來事

The guest then challenged Holmes to recount “one by one, what I have done since last night (先生能舉我自昨夜來，知現在我所舉動，一一告我),” thereby testing Holmes’ detective skills. Holmes proceeded to detail the guest’s activities: that he had not been awake for an hour, had fallen asleep the previous night without waking, had smoked opium, and had spent the entire night gambling. However, as Holmes delivered his deductions, the guest laughed and claimed that he, too, could make deductions. He remarked, “You are human, you are not Chinese, you have a head, body, and limbs (我知汝是人；我知汝非我中國人；汝有頭、有體、有四肢),” and so on. Holmes acknowledged that all of this was “correct,” whereupon the guest declared his reasoning concluded.

Following this exchange, Holmes argued that the guest’s so-called “reasoning” amounted to nothing more than common knowledge, not genuine deduction. The guest retorted:

What you have said about me is nothing extraordinary and is common knowledge for the people of Shanghai. So, why do we need your detective skills?

汝所云，獨非我上海人尋常事，亦何用汝探？

At the end of the case, Chen commented: “Even with his reasoning abilities, Holmes would still encounter difficulties while staying in Shanghai (以歇洛克呼爾俄斯之能，而窮於上海).” Here, Chen drew on the popularity of the *Sherlock Holmes series* in late Qing China and on limited translated materials to craft the story. In particular, he skillfully juxtaposed Holmes as a foreigner in Shanghai with the “reasoning contest” against the Chinese guest, thereby offering both social observation and political critique.

The reasoning duel functions as a metaphorical dialogue, ultimately exposing the moral decline of Shanghai society through satire. Stylistically, the work resembles commentary more than fiction, aligning with Chen Jinghan’s broader objective in *Shiping* (時評): to deliver current content to readers in the most concise manner possible.

However, after completing the first case, Chen Jinghan did not continue the series. Bao

Tianshao subsequently took the initiative to write a sequel, retaining the content and narrative style of the original. In the preface to the second case, Bao explained:

When I first came across “Sherlock Holmes in Shanghai: The First Case” by Len Xie (冷血, Chen Jinghan) in the newspaper, I found the writing to be both stern and intriguing. It was evident to me that Len Xie would surely grace us with a second case. The literary world eagerly awaited it. As time passed, my anticipation grew. However, Len Xie still did not write a continuation. Therefore, I took the liberty of writing a sequel in jest, albeit with some audacity. I yearn for Len Xie’s third case, and I am certain that the readers of the newspaper share the same sentiment.

前閱『時報』，有冷血新著「歇洛克初到上海第一案」，用筆峭冷，耐人尋味。亦冷血先生必有第二案出現，為小說界所歡迎也。乃翹盼至今，依然為金玉之闕。鄙人不揣冒昧，戲為續貂。脫冷血有第三案來，則又閱『時報』者所屬望也

Bao praised Chen’s piece as “stern and intriguing,” admiring its satirical commentary on contemporary issues. Anticipating a sequel but disappointed when none appeared, Bao ventured to compose one himself. His second case preserved the essence of the first but introduced a Shanghai intellectual elite as the protagonist.

At the beginning of the second case, Holmes reflected on his earlier experience and remarked, “I had heard that Shanghai was the hub of Chinese civilization. It is truly disheartening to encounter such unreliable individuals there (我聞上海為支那文明中心點，不信舉此輩人，良可憫嘆).” Watson, however, countered that not all the people in Shanghai were as dazed and absent-minded as the Chinese guest in the first case, pointing out that many young intellectual elites in the remaining were committed to reform and eager to protect the country. At that moment, a young Shanghai man, smartly dressed in a tailored suit and carrying a gold watch, arrived to visit Holmes and Watson.

Like the first Chinese guest, the young man requested: “I’d like to test your divine skills by asking you to deduce my recent activities one by one (姑就日來鄙人所行事，一試先生神技).” Holmes carefully observed the young man’s appearance and began his deductions:

You young people have just returned from studying abroad and are impatient to engage in social movements. I noticed that your shoes are brand new, but the soles are already torn, which shows you must have walked a great deal. Your sleeves are marked with candle wax and heavily wrinkled; you must have napped this morning after failing to sleep last night. I also see ink stains on your palm, which suggests you crumpled a page before the ink had dried. Since you arrived, you have repeatedly checked the watch in your pocket, so you must have an appointment

with a friend; perhaps you are running late.

君輩少年，方歸祖國，急思有所運動。我見君履制甚新而底已敝，知君必多行路故。君衣袖多蠟淚，又多皺紋，知君必昨失睡而今假寐故。又見君手掌有墨痕，是墨沈未乾而揉碎故。君來頻視囊中錶，則必與友人約，恐愆期故

From these observations, Holmes concluded: “You probably wish to campaign for the good of your country (君殆欲有所運動，以為祖國益).” He thus believed that the young man was indeed one of the intellectual elites recently returned from abroad to take charge of China’s future, just as Watson had described.

However, the young man scoffed at Holmes’ reasoning: “They say your investigation is divine, but in my opinion, it is no better than that of a valet in Shanghai’s Flower Houses (向我謂先生神於探案，今知實不逮上海書寓中一侍兒).” Holmes was puzzled, but the young man continued:

When I came back from Tokyo, I realized that the world was becoming increasingly chaotic. I lost all hope and now live only for wine and women. I have been in Shanghai for almost two months, spending my days at Zhang Garden and wandering there at night. I did not notice my shoes were worn out, which is why they caught your attention. Last night, I stayed up late playing mahjong with my friends. When I won a ‘Full Flush,’ I was so overjoyed that I jumped, knocking a candle over and spilling wax on my sleeve. That explains the marks. As for the ink stains on my palm, earlier at the Yi pin xiang, I invited a courtesan for drinks and rewrote the invitation after discarding the first draft before the ink had dried. Finally, the reason I kept checking my watch was that I had overslept on my opium couch and rushed here in a panic, worried I would miss a secret meeting with the woman I love.

我歸自東京，見世事益不可為，我已灰心，我惟於醇酒婦人中求生活。我來上海垂兩月，我日必至張園，夜必兜圈子，不覺履之敝，而使子屬目。我昨夜睡甚遲者，以與友人雀戰故。我和清一色，喜極躍起，燭撲於衣袖間，故又不覺蠟淚點點沾我袖。我掌中確有墨痕，頃在一品香，擬招某校書侑殤，已書局票，既而易之。想墨沈未乾，遂染指焉。至來時頻視時錶者，則在菸塌上朦朧睡去，醒時急起，恐誤我意中人某某之密約耳。

After the young man departed, Holmes remarked to Watson, “You can keep a record of this for me. This is the second time I have failed in Shanghai.”

The second case vividly captured the perceived “abnormality” of Shanghai society at the

time. Many elite intellectuals had gone abroad in the late Qing period to acquire knowledge to “save the country.” However, upon their return, they found the political situation irredeemable. Disillusioned, these elites abandoned reformist engagement and instead turned to alcohol, gambling, and other indulgences.

In other words, the second case exemplified the conflicting ideologies within Shanghai’s elite intellectuals of that era, dramatized through two different “deductions” drawn from the same clues. Holmes’ reasoning embodied the political ideals and reformist aspirations of these intellectuals, whereas the young man’s confession revealed their disillusionment and sense of powerlessness in confronting the realities of late Qing politics.

Following the second case, Chen Jinghan turned to a new theme in the third. Borrowing from the motif of Holmes’ “addiction” in the *Sherlock Holmes* attempt to purchase morphine in Shanghai. This narrative strategy not only reflects Chen’s penchant for metaphorical symbolism in his Shiping writings but also resonates with contemporary references to morphine in “Huang Mian” (Liu 2009: 94–95).

Weary from repeated failures in Shanghai and seeking relief, Holmes visited several pharmacies to obtain morphine, yet remained suspicious of the pharmacist’s behavior. His Chinese servant told the truth: “Master, are you an opium addict? Those so-called morphine pills are actually remedies used to help smokers quit opium.” This revelation led to a dialogue between Holmes and the servant:

Holmes: “Opium is a medicine. Why should it be forbidden?”

Servant: “Opium may be used as medicine in the West, but in China it is smoked to excess, leading to addiction, so it becomes a poison.”

Holmes: If so, why use morphine to cure opium addiction? Morphine itself is a poison.”

Servant: “Morphine can suppress the craving for opium. Though named as a cure, it is merely one poison replacing another. For this reason, local authorities strictly forbid morphine. Did you not see on the packet that it was labeled ‘without morphine’?”

呼爾俄斯曰：鴉片藥也，何用戒？華僕曰：鴉片在西為藥，華人吸之有癮而成毒矣。呼爾俄斯曰：然則，戒菸之藥亦多，何用嗎啡？嗎啡毒品也！華僕曰：嗎啡之力，可以替菸癮，名雖為戒，實則以此易彼也。故地方官府，亦嚴禁之。主人汝獨不見彼丸藥包上，非有所謂並無嗎啡者耶？

The notion of Chinese opium users falling into addiction, only to substitute morphine as a supposed cure, baffled Holmes. As Teruo Tarumoto (2001: 229–254) has argued, Chen’s episode highlights differences in perception and regulation of opium between Britain and China, and thus functions as a commentary on cross-cultural exchange. Yet the story

concludes with Holmes' bleak judgment: "Since even the regulations on opium and morphine in China are confused, how could any other policy be expected to fare better?"

This third case may therefore be read as satirical criticism of the Qing government's exploitation of ambiguity to obscure the true stakes of opium policy. For late Qing intellectuals like Chen Jinghan, the fight against opium and the promotion of smoking cessation were central to reformist agendas. The 1900s, when such propaganda and anti-smoking initiatives proliferated, marked a transitional moment between "Old China" and "New China."

At the state was not only individual health but, under the influence of Herbert Spencer's theory of the social organism and Yan Fu's translation of Social Darwinism, the survival of the nation itself. Smoking bans and moral exhortations became instruments for instilling the notions of *Xinmin* (新民, "innovating the people") and *gongde* (公德, "public virtue"), concepts championed by Liang Qichao as essential to the future of China.

After Chen's third case, Bao Tianxiao again extended the narrative. In the fourth case, he retained opium as the central theme but shifted the plot toward political unrest. The case opened with news that a rioter had shot and killed a police officer in Shanghai, a crime Holmes was confident he could solve. The following day, Holmes overheard two men in a hotel boasting, "Nowadays there are many people in Shanghai who possess firearms, and they are all of fine quality." Convinced they were implicated in the killing, Holmes also suspected that they were members of the Restoration Party (維新黨) and other factions stirring up civil conflict in Shanghai.

Holmes feared that if so many individuals were concealing firearms within the Shanghai Concession, public safety would be seriously endangered. Determined to investigate, he traced the trail to the mansion of the man mentioned in the overhead conversation. There, Holmes observed the owner leaving for a liquor store, where another figure awaited him at sunset, apparently with a "gun" in hand. Holmes immediately contacted the police, requesting a search warrant, before pursuing the suspect himself.

At the liquor store, Holmes found the man staggering about while smoking opium. Hoping to confirm suspicions of gun smuggling, he questioned him, yet their exchange revealed a comic misunderstanding:

Holmes: "What kind of gun are you talking about?"

Owner: "I don't know what kind of gun you are talking about either!"

Holmes then pulled a pistol from the man's package: "This is what I mean."

But the owner raised his opium pipe with both hands, declaring: "And this is what I mean."

歇哨曰：君所言之槍何槍也？

主人曰：我亦不知君所言之槍何槍也！

歇探囊出披斯托爾曰：我言是物耳！

主人雙手舉鴉片菸槍曰：我言是物耳！

Holmes was baffled. Only then did he realize that the “guns” were not firearms at all but opium pipes. Curious, he asked why anyone would need so many. The owner burst out laughing and replied that “a gentleman official in China today, a man of status, requires as many pipes as he has family members.” This punchline, delivered through wordplay, elevated the fourth case into a biting satire of late Qing China’s opium epidemic, lampooning the excesses of officials and the absurdity of their habits.

Taken together, the four cases juxtapose the grim and often ludicrous realities of Shanghai society with Sherlock Holmes’ repeated failure in the city. Through parody and humor, they turn the figure of the world’s greatest detective into a lens for satirizing current affairs. While structured as short stories, their style more closely resembles commentary, consistent with *the Eastern Times*’ mission to deliver topical criticism in a lively and accessible form.

These works also reveal how detective fiction evolved in China from the late early Republican period. Strictly speaking, the stories do not conform to the conventional detective genre: they are not driven by logical deduction or mystery-solving. Instead, they are creative parodies that borrow the narrative framework of detective fiction while repurposing Holmes’ persona for cultural critique. As Chen Jinghan clarified in the preface to the first case:

Sherlock is a famous British detective. After “Watson’s Cases” (滑震包探案) was translated and published in *Shiwu Bao* (時務報), several publishers, including *Qiwen She* (啟文社), *Wenming Shuju* (文明書局), and *The Commercial Press* (商務印書局), issued further translations such as *Supplement to Watson’s Cases* (補華生包探案). *Xinmin Congbao* (新民叢報) even translated the first two stories of “The Return of Sherlock Holmes (歇洛克再生).” These are all distinguished works that inspire readers. My own writings are mere parodies, borrowing titles but bearing no relation to those stories. I hope readers will not mock me for blindly imitating.

歇洛克，係英國包探名人，前自《時務報》上譯行「滑震包探案」後，又有啟文社、文明書局等，繼譯華生（即滑震）包探案，又有商務書館，繼譯《補華生包探案》，又有《新民叢報》繼譯「歇洛克再生」第一案、第二案，均道歇洛克包探事，讀之大有趣味，大可發人心思，自是大家文字。若此作特遊戲耳，借題目耳，與前種種無涉，閱者不必笑我效顰。

The stories of the famed Western detective *Sherlock Holmes* were translated into Chinese and became a shared cultural resource. Adapted and reassembled, they appeared in modern Chinese newspapers and were not conventional detective fictions centered on deductions and mystery-solving. Instead, they can be viewed as creative works modeled on the narrative style

of detective fiction, produced by capitalizing on the genre's popularity and Holmes' fame in late Qing and early Republican China.

For example, the third case, where Holmes turns to morphine after repeated failures and disappointments in Shanghai, differs significantly from Conan Doyle's portrayal of Holmes, who uses cocaine out of boredom. In *The Sign of Four* (1890), Holmes offers Watson cocaine, but Watson refuses, explaining: "My constitution has not yet recovered from the Afghan campaign. I cannot afford to add any extra strain to it" (Doyle 1986: 121). By contrast, in *An zhong an* (案中案), the 1904 translation of *The Sign of Four* edited and published by The Commercial Press, Watson rejects cocaine for the opposite reason, stating, "My body is very healthy, and I do not need it (吾體殊健, 尚無需此)." Meanwhile, Chen Jinghan's third case reimagines Holmes as "weak and needing to use [morphine] to refresh the spirit (奈吾體弱, 賴此振刷精神)." (Doyle, trans. The Commercial Press 1904: 1).

In Chen Jinghan's adaptation, Holmes thus appears anxious about his abilities and misfortune after arriving in Shanghai, an anxiety absent from Conan Doyle's original portrayal. This literary move may be understood through the lens of comparative cultural theory, as proposed in Teruo Tarumoto's research. Alternatively, Chen and Bao Tianxiao may have used Holmes to satirize the disillusionment of intellectuals in late Qing China and early Republican China, or to project their own frustrations with the sociopolitical realities of their time.

In the broader trajectory of detective fiction, it is significant that both Chen and Bao later participated in the 1916 translation of *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (福爾摩斯偵探案全集). By then, their understanding of detective fiction had already been shaped by the Zhonghua Shuju (中華書局).

Both Chen and Bao were later associated with the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School (鴛鴦蝴蝶派), which promoted popular literature and actively developed the detective fiction genre. Their writing combined an educational purpose with a strong emphasis on imagery and readability, ensuring broad appeal. In doing so, they not only sparked widespread enthusiasm among readers in late Qing China but also sustained the genre's vitality well into the Republican era (Liu and Chen 2006: 113–114)

#### IV. Conclusion

This article has analyzed *Sherlock Holmes in Shanghai*, the first parody of the *Sherlock Holmes Series* in China. In particular, this work reflects an understanding and an absorption of the theories of Western detective fiction, while also incorporating elements from traditional Chinese fiction to produce a distinct detective narrative. As a result, detective novels of this period primarily functioned as utilitarian texts; their entertainment value was not absent, but incidental to these didactic purposes.

After the *Eastern Times* serialized *Sherlock Holmes in Shanghai*, other parodies depicting Holmes' failures were created and enjoyed as popular entertainment by contributors and readers of newspapers and magazines. At this stage, Holmes' Shanghai adventures, marked by repeated features, were intended more to amuse readers than to function as conventional detective stories. It may therefore be argued that Sherlock Holmes was initially received by Chinese readers as a comic literary figure, before his character was firmly established through the *Canon of Sherlock Holmes*. These creations, regardless of whether they depicted failures, stand as evidence of Holmes' growing popularity in China.

In addition to *Sherlock Holmes in Shanghai*, the period also witnessed other works, such as *Shenqian yin* (深淺印), published by Xiaoshuolin She (小說林社) in 1906 under the guise of Watson's notes and translated by Yuan shui bu yin ren (駕水不因人). Bai Luhong's (白侶鴻) 1907 translations included *Fuermosi zuihou zhi qi an* ([偵探小說]福爾摩斯最後之奇案) and *Sha fu qi yuan* ([偵探小說]殺婦奇冤), which appeared in *Shun Pao* (申報). All of these were pseudo-translations and parodies that borrowed the name of Holmes, often coincidentally situating him in Shanghai to exploit the city's unique geographical and political context.

It is also noteworthy that Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes Series was still being serialized when these parodies appeared. This aligns with the explanation of Chinese literary scholar Guo Yanli (郭延禮, 1937–), who observed that “in the modern world of translation, detective fiction ranks among the best of all categories in terms of volume of translation, scope of translation, and speed of translation” (Guo 1998: 140).

Shanghai, which opened its port after the Opium War, became a hub for the importation of foreign technology and capital. As a result, printing houses, newspapers, and publishing firms flourished, leading to an unprecedented expansion of periodical culture. At the same time, the traditional literati, who had once pursued official careers through the imperial examination system, now turned to new professional opportunities as journalists and novelists. While fiction was often serialized in newspapers and magazines, the direct publication of single-volume works was not uncommon, given the rise of publishing institutions and professional authorship. This phenomenon extended to the translation of the *Sherlock Holmes Series*. Consequently, Holmes' arrival in late Qing China was soon followed by parodies centered on the theme of failure.

These developments illustrate how *Sherlock Holmes* series, through works such as *Sherlock Holmes in Shanghai*, was reimagined in late Qing cultural life. The nature of the authors behind these parodies, the editorial practices of publishers, and the interests of the newspapers and magazines that promoted them all point to a broader shift. Holmes was transformed from an instrument of enlightenment into a figure embedded in popular culture, a trajectory this paper has sought to demonstrate.

#### Acknowledgments

This research was supported by the K. MATSUSHITA FOUNDATION.

## Note

This paper is a revised and expanded version of a part of the author's doctoral thesis, with additional translation and proofreading.

## References

- Doyle, Arthur Conan. *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories Volume I & II*. New York: Bantam Classic, 1986.
- Guo, Yanli. *Zhongguo Jindai Fanyi Wenxue Gailun*. Wuhan: Hubei Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1998. (郭延礼『中国近代翻译文学概论』湖北教育出版社、1998年。)
- Huang, Xuanzhang. "Shenmo yu Qimeng: Qingmo Minchu 'Xin Xiyouji' Xuyan zhong de 'Qumei' yu 'Fumei'." *Taida Zhongwen Xuebao* 70 (2020): 139-190. (黄璿璋「神魔與啓蒙：清末民初『新西遊記』續衍中的「祛魅」與「復魅」」『臺大中文學報』第七十期(2020年)、139-190頁。)
- Hung, Huiyi. *Fanyi, Wenxue, Wenhua*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999. (孔慧怡『翻译·文学·文化』北京大学出版社、1999年。)
- Hung, Huiyi. "Huan yi Beijing, Huan yi Gongdao: Lun Qingmo Minchu Yingyu Zhentan Xiaoshuo Zhongyi." In *Fanyi yu Chuangzuo: Zhongguo Jindai Xiaoshuo Fanyi Lun*, edited by Wang Hongzhi, 88-117. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2000. (孔慧怡「還以背景、還以公道—論清末民初英語偵探小說中訳」王宏志編『翻译与创作：中国近代小说翻译论』北京大学出版社、2000年、88-117頁。)
- Li, Oufan. "Fu'ermosi zai Zhongguo." *Dangdai Zuoji Pinglun*, no. 2 (2004): 8-15. (李欧梵「福尔摩斯在中国」『当代作家评论』第2期(2004年)、8-15頁。)
- Liu, Xia. "Fengge Duoyang, Suishi Fuxing: Chen Leng Shibao Shiping de Yishu Tese yu Xiezu Shoufa." *Luoyang Shifan Xueyuan Xuebao* 28, no. 1 (2009): 92-96. (刘霞「风格多样、随事赋形：陈冷《时报》时评的艺术特色与写作手法」『洛阳师范学院学报』第28卷第1期(2009年)、92-96頁。)
- Liu, Yongwen, and Chen Xiaoming. "Shibao: Poju Shidai Tese de Xiaoshuo Chuanmei (1904-1911)." *Jiangnan Luntan* 2006, no. 2 (2006): 113-117. (刘永文、陈晓鸣「《时报》：颇具时代特色的小说传媒(1904-1911)」『江汉论坛』2006.2(2006年)、113-117頁。)
- Song, Sanping. "Shanghai Shibao de Gaige Chuangxin yu Huang Yuansheng de Chengming." *Nanchang Daxue Xuebao (Renwen Shehui Kexue Ban)* 41, no. 2 (2010): 114-118. (宋三平「上海『时报』的改革创新与黄远生的成名」『南昌大学学报(人文社会科学版)』第41卷第2期(2010年)、114-118頁。)
- Tarumoto, Teruo, ed. and trans. *Hōmuzu Bankoku Hakurankai Chūgoku-hen: Shanhai no Sharokku Hōmuzu*. Tokyo: Kokushokankōkai, 2016. (樽本照雄編・訳『ホームズ万国博覧会中国篇：上海のシャーロック・ホームズ』国書刊行会、2016年。)

- Tarumoto, Teruo. *Kan'yaku Hōmuzu ronshū*. Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 2006. (樽本照雄『漢訳ホームズ論集』汲古書院、2006年。)
- Tarumoto, Teruo. *Seimatsu Shōsetsu Kenkyū Gaido*. Tokyo: Seimatsu Shōsetsu Kenkyūkai, 2008. (樽本照雄『清末小説研究ガイド』清末小説研究会、2008年。)
- Tarumoto, Teruo. “Gansaku Hōmuzu Shippai Monogatari: Chin Keikan, Hō Tenshō kara Ryū Hannō, Chin Shōchō e.” *Ōsaka Keidai Ronshū* 52, no. 1 (no. 261) (2001b): 229-254. (樽本照雄「贗作ホームズ失敗物語：陳景韓、包天笑から劉半農、陳小蝶へ」『大阪経大論集』第52巻第1号(通巻第261号)(2001年)、229-254頁。)
- Tarumoto, Teruo. “Kan'yaku Konan Doiru shōshi.” *Ōsaka Keidai Ronshū* 51, no. 5 (2001a): 175-203. (樽本照雄「漢訳コナン・ドイル小史」『大阪経大論集』第51巻第5号(2001年)、175-203頁。)
- Wu, Liquan. *Zhongguo Biji Xiaoshuo Shi*. Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1993. (吳禮權『中國筆記小説史』臺灣商務印書館、1993年。)
- Xia, Xiaohong. “Liang Qichao yu Wanqing Duanpian Xiaoshuo de Fasheng.” *Lingnan Xuebao*, New Series, nos. 1-2 (2015): 109-117. (夏曉虹「梁啓超與晚清短篇小説的發生」『嶺南學報』復刊号(第一、二輯合刊)(2015年)、109-117頁。)
- Xie, Xiaoping. *Zhongguo Zhentan Xiaoshuo Yanjiu: Yi 1896-1949 Nian Shanghai Wei Li*. Master's thesis, Department of Chinese Literature, National Dong Hwa University, 2006. (謝小萍『中國偵探小説研究：以1896-1949年上海為例』國立東華大學中國語文學系碩士論文、2006年。)
- Zhang, Lihua. *Xiandai Zhongguo Duanpian Xiaoshuo de Xingqi: Yi Wenlei Xinggou wei Shijiao*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2011. (張麗華『現代中國短篇小説的興起：以文類形構為視角』北京大學出版社、2011年。)