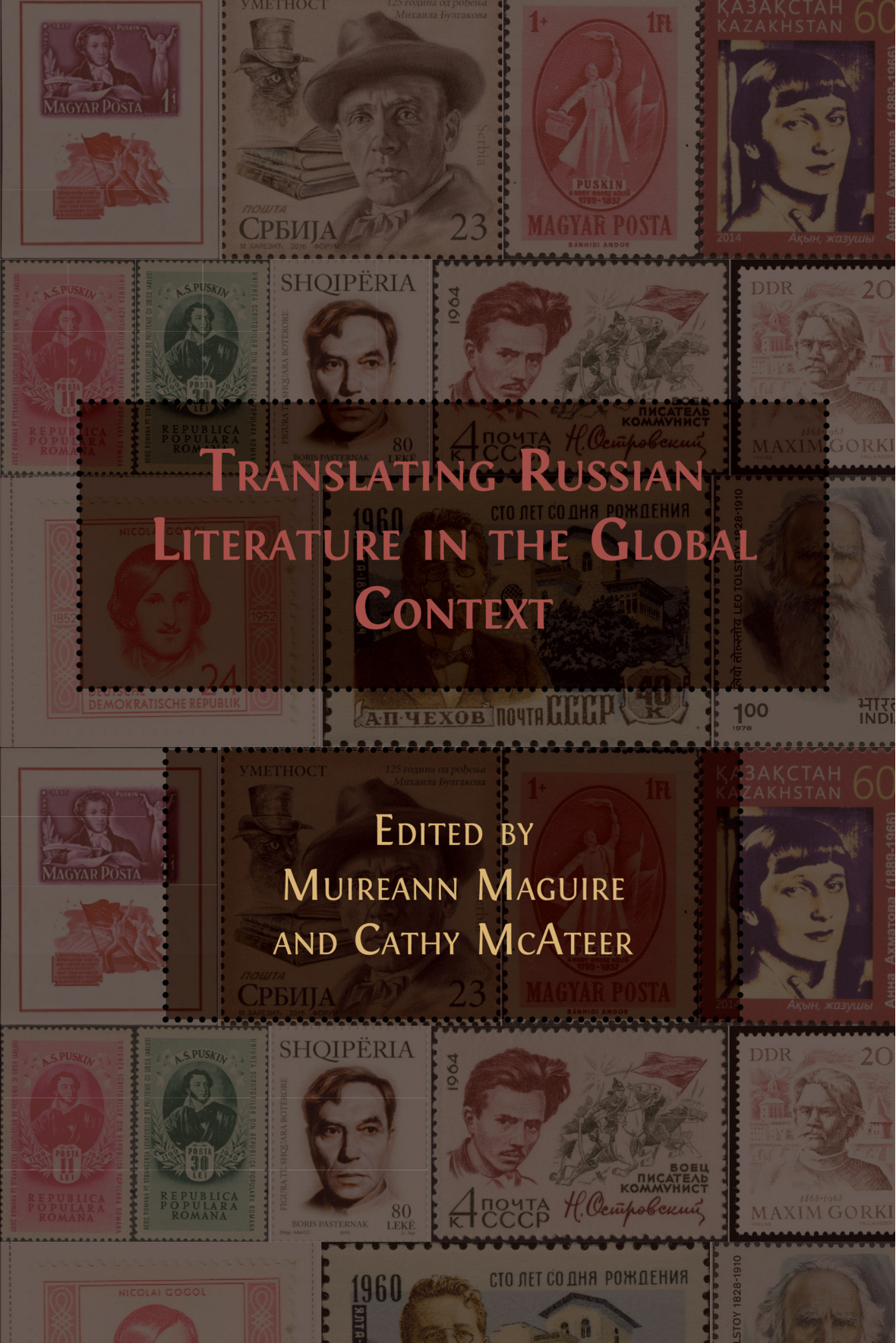

Translating Russian Literature in the Global Context

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China

The Reception of Dostoevsky in Early Twentieth-Century China[1]

Yu Hang

Introduction

The reception of Russian literature in China dates back to the early twentieth century: the first Chinese translation of Russian literature was three fables by Ivan Krylov published in 1900 in *A General Examination of Russian Politics and Customs* (*Eguo zheng su tong kao*), translated and edited by Ren Tingxu and Lin Lezhi. This book was intended to inform Chinese intellectuals about their Russian neighbour. Three years later, an abridged translation (made via Japanese as a pivot language) of Aleksandr Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter* (*Eguo qing shi: Simishi Mali Zhuan* or *Hua xin die meng lu*, 1903) appeared.[2] This initial stage of Chinese acquaintance with Russian literature lasted until the late 1910s, a period encompassing the fall of the Qing dynasty and the ensuing years of political chaos. The most important Chinese translation of Russian literature at this time was the 'nihilist'/'anarchist' novels translated by those sympathetic to political reform, describing late nineteenth-century Russian radical politics, which reflected some Chinese intellectuals' aspiration to overthrow imperial power. During this period, translations from Russian literature compared neither in quality nor scale to those from other European literatures, such as English and French. However, during the second stage (1919–49), a new tide in the translation of Russian literature began with the 'literary revolution' of the May

1 This article is an output of the case study, 'A Study of Dostoevsky's Thoughts of Modernity' within National Social Science Fund project No. 21FWWB012.

2 *The Captain's Daughter* (*Eguo qing shi:Simishi Mali zhuan* or *hua xin die meng lu*, 1903) was translated by Ji Yihui and published by Da Xuan Bookstore.

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Fourth Movement.[3] On this day in 1919, a large student demonstration in Beijing overflowed into violent protest against the humiliating conditions imposed on China by the Treaty of Versailles, as well as their acceptance by the Chinese government. May Fourth was based on the student-led New Culture Movement, impelled by intellectuals newly returned from abroad, all of whom expressed themselves strongly in favour of a new cultural orientation. They advocated for a 'New Literature' which would use colloquial instead of classical language, rebel against the Confucian value system, and allow curiosity about Western literature. Active translators of Russian literature in the first half of the twentieth century included Qu Qiubai (1899–1935), Wei Suyuan (1902–32), Cao Jinghua (1897–1987), and Geng Jizhi (1899–1947), of whom Qu Qiubai and Geng Jizhi were proficient in Russian and therefore able to translate Russian literary works directly from the original. At this time, major academic contributions to the study of Russian literature included Li Dazhao's 'Russian Literature and Revolution' ('Eguo Wen xue yu ge ming', 1918), Zheng Zhenduo's *A Brief History of Russian Literature* (*Eguo wen xue shi lue*, 1924) and Qu Qiubai's *Russian Literature Before the October Revolution* (*Shi yue ge ming qian de Eguo wen xue*, 1927). The early Chinese translation, transmission and interpretation of Dostoevsky occurred in this context of growing intellectual and political curiosity.

This chapter will begin with an overview of the translation of Russian literature and of Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (1821–81) in particular; followed by a focus on two translators, Geng Jizhi and Lu Xun, who respectively demonstrate the value of a microhistorical methodology in Translator Studies (Geng Jizhi) and the difficulty of assimilating Dostoevsky's philosophy to the Chinese cultural mode (Lu Xun). In the first half of the twentieth century, Dostoevsky's reception in China, including the publication and introduction of his short stories in newspapers, grew gradually. Originally, English translations, mainly by Constance Garnett, were the primary intermediary for Dostoevsky's works in China.[4] The first direct translation from Russian was not completed until October 1940. In the process of accepting Dostoevsky, Chinese scholars and readers creatively misread some of his ideas, and their adaptations of the Russian writer were influenced by their own social status and cultural milieu. A debate about the purpose and the essence of literature in China's unique social conditions, at a time of national crisis, ensued. One camp believed the essence

3 The May Fourth Movement in Beijing on 4 May 1919 was dominated by students, joined by citizens from other classes, who led demonstrations, petitions and strikes against the Northern Warlord government. In January 1919, the Allied powers decided to allocate Germany's former holdings in Shandon to Japan. China was one of the victorious countries that participated in the declaration of war on Germany, but the Chinese government accepted this decision. This diplomatic failure triggered the May Fourth Movement.

4 Ding Shixin, 'Tuosituoyefusiji yu er shi shi ji er shi nian dai de Zhongguo' ('Overview of Dostoevsky and China 1920s'), *Journal of Changan University* (Social Science Edition), 2 (2011), 82–86 (p. 83).

of any literature was the representation of real life; hence, literature should be used to arouse patriotism.[5] Others put more emphasis on the artistic function of literature. Though both camps had their supporters, the argument that literature should aim for verisimilitude finally won more support.

There is reason to believe that in early twentieth-century China, most readers considered that the main purpose of literature was to represent the reality of life rather than to showcase artistic skills or reveal transcendental value. Therefore, the dominant theme of literature during this period was gritty realism. Dostoevsky's reception in China originally developed in this context. Thus, he was positioned as "a realist writer depicting the reality of life",[6] and Chinese translators' choices served the very urgent principle of national salvation. Although many writers and scholars admired Dostoevsky's artistic talents, the acceptance, evaluation, and promotion of his works by the important Chinese author Lu Xun (1881–1936, pseudonym of Zhou Shuren) played a crucial role in the reception of Dostoevsky's works in twentieth-century China. His articles 'An Introduction to *Poor Folk*' (first published 1926)[7] and 'Something about Dostoevsky' (1926) laid the foundation for Chinese Dostoevsky research for a very long time.[8] Even today, Lu Xun dominates research on the reception of Dostoevsky, especially his famous discussion of Dostoevsky's "cold" artistic skills in response to the literary critic N.K. Mikhailovskii's famous 1882 essay 'A Cruel Talent' ('Zhestokii talant'),[9] which still deeply influences contemporary Chinese scholars' research on Dostoevsky.

5 Literature for the sake of life can be simplified as 'literature for life' which represented the ideological position that the main purpose of literature is to depict reality, not an ideal world or the transcendental sphere. 'Literature for life' can be seen as the Realist literature which prevailed in nineteenth-century China due to people's preoccupation with social conditions.

6 See Nikolai Konstantinovich Mikhailovskii, *Literary Criticism and Articles on Russian Literature from the Nineteenth Century to the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. by E. Melnikov (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1989), pp. 151–234.

7 Lu Xun, 'An Introduction to Poor Folk' ['Qiong ren xiao yin', 1926], in *Ji Wai Ji*, ed. by Lu Xun (Beijing: People's Literature Press, 1976), pp. 85–87. As *Ji Wai Ji* is a widely cited and authoritative version of Lu Xun's texts, I have cited Lu Xun's 'Introduction' and 'Something about Dostoevsky' from this source for convenience.

8 Lu Xun, 'Something about Dostoevsky' ['Tuosituoyefusiji de shi', 1936], in *Qiejieting Zawen Erji*, ed. by Lu Xun (Beijing: People's Literature Press, 1976), pp. 162–64. See note 7 above on source texts.

9 Zhou Zuoren, 'Russia and China in Literature' ['Wen xue zhong de Eguo yu Zhongguo'], in *Art and Life*, ed. by Zhou Zuoren (Shi Jiazhuang: Hebei Education Press, 2002), pp. 67–76 (p. 73).

The Early Reception and Translation of Dostoevsky in Twentieth-century China

Compared with that of other nineteenth-century Russian literary giants such as Aleksandr Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Lev Tolstoy, and Ivan Turgenev, the translation and reception of Dostoevsky in early twentieth-century China was long overdue. Apart from sporadic translations of some chapters from Dostoevsky's novels in newspapers and magazines, Wei Congwu's 1926 translation of *Poor Folk* (*Bednye liudi*, 1846), published by the Weiming She (Unnamed Society) in Beijing, was the first single-volume translation of Dostoevsky's works in China. Wei Congwu (1905–78), an Anhui-born graduate of Yanjing University (the predecessor of Peking University), was a member of the Weiming She, established in 1925 with the help of Lu Xun. This important literary society, which intensively promoted the New Culture Movement, focused primarily on translating and introducing foreign literatures. The New Cultural Movement played a significant role in the importation and reception of Dostoevsky;[10] and Wei Congwu's translation was warmly greeted by Lu Xun, one of the movement's key leaders, who wrote a brief introduction to it.[11] His text was based on Constance Garnett's version in William Heinemann's Modern Library edition. It was not until 1940 that the first direct translation of Dostoevsky's works from the Russian language was completed by the well-regarded translator Geng Jizhi (1899–1947). In the first half of the twentieth century in China, English was the main medium for transmitting Dostoevsky's works. *Zui Yu Fa* (1931) (*Crime and Punishment*; *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, 1866) by Wei Congwu and *Beiwurude Yu Beisunhaide* (1931) (*The Humiliated and Insulted*; *Unizhennye i oskorblyonnye*,1861) by Li Jiye were both translated from Garnett's versions, although they were proofread by scholars proficient in both Russian and Japanese. In fact, the translation and reception of Dostoevsky's works in early twentieth-century China was carried out with Garnett's English translation as the primary intermediary text. Among these English translations, those translated by Garnett were most respected and frequently chosen by Chinese translators. Since these translations were not directly translated from the original, some errors were inevitable. However, translators proficient in the English language checked their versions against Garnett's, compensating for this shortcoming.

10 In September 1915, Chen Duxiu founded *Xin Qingnian* (*New Youth*) in Shanghai, marking the start of the New Culture Movement. Initiated by intellectuals, the New Culture Movement was an ideological liberation movement against feudalism. Its basic slogan was to support 'Mr. De' (Democracy) and 'Mr. Sai' (Science). Advocates of the New Culture Movement supported individual freedoms, criticised Confucianism, vigorously advocated new ethics while opposing the old ones and favoured new literature over classical Chinese works.

11 Lu Xun, 'An Introduction to *Poor Folk*', in *Ji Wai Ji* (Beijing: People's Literature Press, 1976), pp. 85–87.

Dostoevsky's *The House of the Dead* (*Zapiski iz mertvogo doma*, 1860–62) deserves special mention here. Although seldom discussed by researchers, this book gained a significant reputation in early twentieth-century China. In May 1920, when the first translation of Dostoevsky's 'An Honest Thief' ('Chestny vor', 1848) was serialised as 'Zei' in a supplement to the newspaper *Guomin ribao* (*National Daily*) in Shanghai, its translator Qiao Xinying listed in the foreword Dostoevsky's Gogolesque works, including *The House of the Dead*. In 1936, this novel was published in full in Chinese as *Siwu shouji* (published by Pinghua Cooperative and translated by Liu Zunqi), and was accompanied by another version, *Xiboliya de qiutu* (*Prisoner of Siberia*, published by Shanghai Modern Book Company), translated by Liu Man. As for other works by Dostoevsky, the translation of *Notes from the Underground* (*Zapiski iz podpol'ia*, 1864) by the left-wing writer Hong Lingfei was published in the 1930s as part of the 'World Literary Classic Translation Collection' organised by the Shanghai Hufeng Publishing House, which was established in 1931 as the publishing organisation of the League of Left-Wing Writers. Soon after, Hong translated *Du tu* (*The Gambler; Igrok*, 1866) for the same series, and his version was later republished by the Shanghai Fuxing Book Company in April 1937.

In the 1940s, although the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance (known in the West as the Second Sino-Japanese war) hindered progress in the translation field, the translation and publication of Dostoevsky's works continued resolutely. During this period, the Russophone literary translator Geng Jizhi made a huge contribution to Dostoevsky's Chinese translations. His most important achievement was *The Brothers Karamazov*, translated directly from Russian. In August 1940, Shanghai Liangyou Fuxing Book Printing Company published the first volume of this book as *Xiong di* (*Brothers*). Another achievement that should be mentioned in this period is Shao Quanlin's *Beiwurude Yu Beisunhaide* (1943–44) (*The Insulted and the Injured*; *Unizhennye i oskorblennye*, 1861). Although it had been translated via English, it gained great popularity in the 1940s and 1950s; by 1956, his translation had been reprinted in six editions. Shao used a highly emotional lexis, appealing to the tastes of Chinese readers. Shortly thereafter, the Pacific War broke out and Shanghai was captured, leading to the suspension of translation projects.

The choice of a mediating, or pivot, language for translations of foreign literature (including Dostoevsky's works) into Chinese was closely related to social conditions in China. In the early twentieth century, Japan had already embarked on an ultimately successful course of political and cultural transformation, aided by Western technology and by the absorption of Western thought in the Meiji reforms of 1868. During the 1910s, Chinese educated society was making its first steps towards the discovery of Western literature. Steadily increasing numbers of Chinese students went to Japan in pursuit of Western learning, relying on the mediation of a language they found relatively easy to master. Japanese soon became the second most common intermediary language for translations. With the deterioration of Sino-Japanese relations and the

success of the October Revolution in Russia, left-leaning Chinese intellectuals began to learn from another neighbouring country, Russia. The establishment of the League of Left-Wing Writers in February 1930 signalled the domination of Communism over a growing strand of Chinese literature. Many young people went abroad to Russia and as a result, more literature was directly translated from that language.

Among this younger generation, Geng Jizhi, a pioneer in translating Dostoevsky's works directly from Russian, played a significant role in the 1940s. He was the most prolific translator of Dostoevsky's works before 1949. When Mao Dun recommended *Xiong di* to Chinese readers, he remarked, "[this book] was translated from the original by Mr. Geng Jizhi. It is definitely a milestone in Chinese literary circles in recent years".[12] Geng's interest in Dostoevsky can be traced back to the late 1920s and early 1930s, when he submitted his translation of *Crime and Punishment* to the Shangwu Yinshuguan (Commercial Press) for publication. Sadly, however, both the Commercial Press and the manuscript were destroyed by fire during the Battle of Shanghai. Therefore this translation was never seen by readers. In the 1940s, however, Geng's efforts bore fruit as he completed his translations of *Xiong di* (1940) (*The Brothers Karamazov*; *Brat'ia Karamazovy,* 1879), *Bai chi* (1946) (*The Idiot*; *Idiot,* 1868), *Siwu shouji* (1947) (*The House of the Dead*; *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma*, 1860–62), and *Qing nian* (1948) (*The Adolescent*; *Podrostok,* 1875), all of which were selected for the 'Enlightened Literature and Art Translation Collection' book series. Geng's translation style was precise and literal. He aimed for meticulous fidelity to the original, while also making sentences appealing to Chinese readers.

Jeremy Munday underlines the value of archives, manuscripts, translator papers, and interviews—which used to be treated as mediated testimonies and seen as inherently unreliable by some historians—and the creation of microhistories of translators.[13] This method can be profitably applied to the study of the first translations and translators of Dostoevsky's works in China. Considering the huge difference between the Chinese and Russian languages and cultures, those primary sources can effectively reveal the vivid process of text conversion. Another reason is that early Dostoevsky translations in China coincided with a period of political turbulence: thus, my examination of primary sources from Chinese translators can locate the history of translation within a wider social and historical environment. As Munday points out, a microscopic analysis links the individual case study with the general socio-historical context. "If we are interested in finding out about the working and living conditions of a particular translator and relating this to a translating community, then

12 Xuan, 'Brothers' ['Xiong di'], *Sketches and Notes*, 6 (1941), 26–30. Xuan (玄) is another pseudonym of Shen Dehong (Shen Yanbing), who was mostly known as Mao Dun. He signed this article as Xuan.

13 Jeremy Munday, 'Using Primary Sources to Produce a Microhistory of Translation and Translators: Theoretical and Methodological Concerns', *The Translator*, 20 (2014), 64–80.

accessing and expressing the minutiae of the toils and tribulations of everyday life is important".[14]

The microhistory of Geng Jizhi can be partly pieced together from memoirs written by his wife, Qian Fuzhi, and some of his friends. In her memoir of Geng, Qian writes, "[w]hen translating, [Geng Jizhi] always strives to be faithful to the original, and makes the sentences fluent and convenient for reading by the majority of readers in China. I often see him pondering over a sentence or even a word."[15] She offers an extremely detailed picture of Geng's dedication to translation when Shanghai was occupied by Japanese armies between 1937 and 1941. According to Qian, late in 1937, the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party) troops withdrew from Shanghai, and then the entire city fell except the "orphan island" of the Anglo-French concession, and an atmosphere of terror enveloped even this island. As a relatively celebrated intellectual, Geng had to avoid being recruited by the Japanese puppet government; he "did not have a fixed place for working. However, no matter where he went, he never put aside his translation and literary research, for instance Gorky's *Russian Wanderlust* and *Family Affairs* (*Eluosi lang you san ji*) and Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (*Kalamazhufu xiong di men*) were translated by him in this extremely harsh environment".[16] She also mentioned his persistence in translating despite suffering constant illness, including high blood pressure and heart disease. Since Geng was a professional translator, rather than a writer or a scholar, very little research about him exists. Therefore, microhistorical study of existing primary materials helps us to compose a relatively complete picture of early Dostoevsky translation in China. Moreover, a microhistorical study of Geng's translating activity would yield valuable information about intellectual life in Shanghai during the Japanese occupation. Without such microdata, the details of working conditions of pioneers such as Geng would be lost.

In the three decades between the 1920s and the late 1940s, the Chinese translation of Dostoevsky's works experienced two surges. The first of these occurred in the early 1930s following the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Dostoevsky's death in 1931; the second came within three years of victory in the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance. These surges resulted in the production of both *The Complete Works of Dostoevsky* (*Tuosituoyefusiji quan ji*, 1947) and *The Selected Works of Dostoevsky* (*Tuosituoyefusiji xuan ji*, 1946–48) by the Zhengzhong and Wenguang Publishing Houses. Shangwu Yinshuguan, established in Shanghai in 1897, played a very important role in the early

14 Munday, 'Using Primary Sources', p. 75.

15 Qian Fuzhi, 'Reminiscing about Geng Jizhi during the Dormant Period' ('Hui yi gu dao shi qi de Geng Jizhi'), in Qian Fuzhi, *Memoir of Literature of Isolated Time in Shanghai* (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 1984), pp. 340–61 (p. 358).

16 Qian Fuzhi, 'Reminiscing about Geng Jizhi at a Time of Isolation', *Social Science*, 2 (1981), 119–21 (p. 119). *Russian Wanderlust* and *Family Affairs* (*Eluosi lang you san ji*) was published by Shanghai Kaiming Bookstore in 1943. *The Brothers Karamazov* (*Kalamazhufu xiong di men*) was published by Liangyou Fuxing Bookprinting Company in 1940.

dissemination of Dostoevsky's works in China. It published translations in series such as the 'Russian Literature Series' and the 'World Literature Series'. These translations were usually based on English intermediary texts. Thus, Dostoevsky's works first entered China primarily through the medium of English translation, with the exception of Geng Jizhi's work.

Generally speaking, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was no systematic academic study of Dostoevsky in China, and there were merely paratexual commentaries that accompanied translations. At this time, the evaluation of Russian literature and Russian writers was related solely to literary content, but intended also to facilitate an understanding of Russian politics and national character. Research on Dostoevsky supplemented the latter. The aesthetic qualities of Dostoevsky's works were not fully understood at this time, for various reasons. Firstly, there is a marked continuity between his gloomy and tedious style and a Chinese cultural characteristic that promotes gentleness and generosity in the form of aesthetics. Readers with some personal writing experience tend to draw a more nuanced interpretation. In this case, although Zhou Zuoren (1885–1967), Lu Xun's younger brother, an essayist and literary scholar, affirmed Dostoevsky's artistic achievements, he admitted himself "a little in awe... [that] I have never been able to read it easily, so Dostoevsky remains distant".[17] Likewise, although Lu Xun keenly observed Dostoevsky's revelation of the brilliance hidden behind the dark side of human nature, he thought that, for readers who preferred a warm style, Dostoevsky's work was too cruel—echoing Mikhailovskii's verdict.

Additionally, the reader's spiritual attitude often affects their aesthetic evaluation of literary works. Therefore, the Chinese preference for "writing for the sake of life" made Chinese readers and scholars elevate the practical content of Dostoevsky's works, while relegating his artistic skills. In fact, the reason for this reception, or lack of reception of Dostoevsky's aesthetic qualities, is that the reception of foreign literature in China at this time mainly served a pragmatic function. In other words, literature was regarded as an important means of social transformation. Thus, since Dostoevsky's reception in China at this time of great change coincided with the literature of the May Fourth Movement, his works came to be valued primarily for their portrayal of reality.

Still another reason for the partial neglect of this author is that the religious awareness crucial to Dostoevsky is relatively absent in the Chinese cultural framework. Put simply, the Chinese belief system is considerably removed from Western Christianity. Without this cultural background, Chinese readers struggled to understand the transcendence and redemptive spirit in Dostoevsky's works. Chinese traditional culture replaces religiosity with moral

17 Zhou Zuoren, 'European Literature' ('Ouzhou wen xue'), in *The Residual Light of Greece*, ed. by Zhong Shuhe (Changsha: Hunan People's Press, 1998), pp. 341–43 (p. 342).

feelings. Lu Xun used "ethics" instead of "religion" in 'An Introduction to *Poor Folk*' to interpret Dostoevsky's analysis of the human soul. This substitution illustrates how Chinese culture puts more emphasis on education about and regulation of reality, while distancing itself from Christian concepts such as sin, redemption, and kenosis. This difference in cultural worldviews problematises the Chinese reception of religious sentiment in Dostoevsky. Yet his religious thinking forms a key source for his aesthetic, especially his love for Orthodox iconography, based on the Byzantine tradition. Unfortunately, this gap between cultural aesthetics and psychology caused a certain dislocation in the early Chinese reception of Dostoevsky.

Social and Cultural Conditions Impacting Dostoevsky's Reception, Transmission, and Misreading in China

As mentioned earlier, compared with other literary masters of Russian literature, Dostoevsky's works were translated comparatively late in China. An undeniable fact here is that Chinese readers were far less interested in Dostoevsky than in other writers of the same era such as Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Anton Chekhov. Moreover, most of the translated works and fragments of works of Dostoevsky won the hearts of translators and readers mainly because of the theme of poverty. In contrast, the other genres written by Dostoevsky, such as his more fantastic work, were neglected. For example, *Er chong ren ge* (*The Double*; *Dvoinik*, 1866) was not translated (by Zhong Jue) until 1958 (when it was published by Xinwenyi Chubanshe's New Literature and Art Press), and *Qun mo* (1978) (*Demons*; *Besy*, 1871) was not translated in full until the 1970s.

From the above analysis, we can see that Chinese translators were selective about Dostoevsky's works, and mainly influenced by their contemporary social and cultural context. His fiction entered China as part of the dissemination of Russian literature, especially nineteenth-century Russian Realism, which was particularly influential. Specifically, on one hand, certain characteristics of Dostoevsky's art strongly influenced Chinese readers, and played a certain role in promoting the development of a Chinese "literature for the sake of life". On the other hand, the utilitarian needs inherent in the development of Chinese New Literature enabled the common characteristics of Russian Realist literature to conceal some of Dostoevsky's other unique artistic characteristics, thus strengthening his status as a realist writer. 'Dostoevsky the Realist' is still a widely accepted and understood reference point in China.

Therefore, Dostoevsky was represented as a writer dedicated to describing the realities of life. In the minds of Chinese readers, Dostoevsky seemed better-qualified than Tolstoy, Turgenev, Ivan Goncharov, and other aristocratic and wealthy writers to act as a spokesperson for the so-called lower classes.

It was Dostoevsky's social realism that resonated with Chinese readers. For instance, the critic Zhou Zuoren has noted that "we can see that [Dostoevsky's] characteristics are society- and life-oriented. Russian literary critics from [Vissarion] Belinsky to Tolstoy mostly advocate the art of life".[18] Elsewhere, he adds: "Russian literature is always a kind of ideal realism, which is because the relationship between the environment and temperament of the Russians cannot be set aside from social problems [...] we call it the literature of life".[19] This view was popular among Chinese readers. Many other pioneers of the New Literature Movement also agreed, and for a time the aim of depicting life and propaganda such as "the cry for life"[20] became synonymous with Russian literature, and its connotations included literary (but not dark psychological) realism. In this context, Russian writers of various styles, such as Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Turgenev, all belonged to the same 'for life' type in the eyes of Chinese literary circles. Consequently, their unique artistic characteristics, ideological tendencies, and artistic techniques were largely overlooked.

Let us take Dostoevsky's *The House of the Dead* as an example. Translator Liu Zunqi wrote in his preface to *Siwu shouji* (Pinghua Cooperative, 1936) that this book was based on Dostoevsky's five-year confinement in a Siberian prison camp. Other translators and critics also regarded it essentially a documentary, overlooking its fictional elements. In other words, *The House of the Dead* was generally accepted as "literature for the sake of life" in early twentieth-century China. This reception aligns with the general historical and social context of Dostoevsky's introduction in China. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) felt strongly that literature should be contextualised holistically for maximum comprehension of an author's contribution.[21] As we have seen, Dostoevsky was first translated and accepted in China during the May Fourth Movement in 1919, and thanks to the national spirit of "seeking new voices from other countries", he received the support of the New Cultural Movement. Translations and introductions of foreign literature in the first few issues of *New Youth*, an important magazine in the New Cultural Movement, occupied an important position. Moreover, Russia's 1917 October Revolution made the influence of Russian critical realism on China's New Culture Movement stand out from other European literatures. As a Communist revolutionary and literary critic, Li Dazhao (1889–1927) emphasised in his article 'Russian Literature and Revolution' (1918) that the characteristics of Russian literature were "a wealth

18 Zhou Zuoren, 'Russia and China in Literature', p. 73.

19 Zhou Zuoren, 'The Requirement of New Literature' ('Xin wen xue de yao qiu'), in *Art and Life*, ed. by Zhou Zuoren (Shi Jiazhuang: Hebei Education Press, 2002), pp. 18–24 (p. 19).

20 The propaganda of "the cry for life" aims to expose the darkness of real life and advocates the artistic technique of shaping typical characters.

21 See Pierre Bourdieu, 'Principles for a Sociology of Cultural Works', in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. by Claud DuVerlie (Columbia, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 176–91 (p. 181).

of social concern" and a "development of humanism", both of which could increase the momentum of the revolutionary trend.[22] It was in this general environment that the reception of Dostoevsky in China was ultimately achieved. Lu Xun once aptly summarised Chinese readers' common understanding of Russian literature: "Russian literature, since the time of Nicholas II, has been 'for life', no matter whether its doctrine is exploring or solving [problems], or falling into mystery and decadence, the main undercurrent is still for life".[23]

From a historical perspective, a work entering another cultural context risks encountering regional differences, as well as 'dislocation' across historical time and space. History constitutes a prerequisite for understanding a text and produces the foundations for bias and misunderstanding. Because of its strong humanist insights, *The House of the Dead* was interpreted as a prophecy of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia by Chinese scholars and readers.[24] For example, a promotional advertisement for the version translated as *Prisoners of Siberia* (*Xiboliya de qiutu*) believed that it "analyses the psychology of the prisoners, presents the cruelty of the rulers, and exposes traditional class differences".[25] The editor's notes to the Wenguang Bookstore's edition claimed that it "finally saw that people who were cut off from society are no worse than those outside prison, and most of them are innocent victims of a corrupt political society".[26]

Contemporary Dostoevsky scholars, however, often consider Dostoevsky's idea of the brilliance of human nature in convicts as more related to his religious thinking, especially kenosis. Precisely because they are closer to traditional culture, the convicts can retain traditional Russian virtues that Westernised intellectuals lose. Besides his empathy, Dostoevsky's description of political prisoners in this novel reflects their separation from the foundation of the traditional Russian religious culture. Therefore, the interpretation of 'corrupt political society' in China can be described as a misunderstanding based on the acceptance system of Chinese culture. However, this misunderstanding offered

22 Li Dazhao, 'Russian Literature and Revolution', *People's Literature*, 5 (1979), 3–8 (p. 3). In this article, Li Dazhao emphasised two characteristics of Russian literature, namely, its strong social concern and its humanism. He argued that the prohibition of people's political activities and the deprivation of people's freedom of speech by the authoritarian system make Russian literature pay special attention to social issues. Meanwhile, the Russian religious tradition also affected the humanitarian sentiment in literature. This article was originally intended for publication in the magazine *New Youth*, but was withheld by the editor Hu Shi, and did not appear (in the journal *People's Literature*) until May 1979. The manuscript is currently in the collection of the Institute of Modern History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

23 Lu Xun, 'The Preface of *Harp*' ('*Shu qin* xu'), in *Nan Qiang Bei Diao* (Beijing: People's Literature Press, 1973), p. 13.

24 See Tie Qiao, 'Cold Eyes' ('Leng yan'), in *Oriental Magazine*, 17 (1920), 100–05 (p. 103).

25 *Tsinghua Weekly*, 42 (1934), 1–5.

26 'Editor's notes', in F. M. Dostoevsky, *Xiboliyade qiutu* (*The Prisoner of Siberia*), trans. by Wei Congwu (Shanghai: Wenguang Bookstore, 1950), p. 2.

many Chinese readers a new way to understand the social environment of tsarist Russia as portrayed in *The House of the Dead*.

Thus, Dostoevsky's humanism attracted numerous Chinese readers, many of whom were famous writers in the history of modern Chinese literature. For instance, the nationally renowned writer Ba Jin (formerly Li Tangrao, 1904–2005) described himself as the one Chinese writer most influenced by foreign literature, especially Russian literature. It was widely believed that Ba Jin had composed his pseudonym from the first syllable of the name 'Bakunin' and the last in 'Kropotkin'. In his collection of essays, *Memoirs* published in 1936, Ba Jin singled out three great writers who, as he put it, had helped him become "a real human being".[27] They were Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Mikhail Artsybashev—writers whom Ba Jin ranked higher than Shakespeare, Goethe, and Dante.[28] Nevertheless, Dostoevsky's humanism was not the kind typically advocated by scholars and readers at that time; most preferred to attribute the roots of suffering and misfortune to socio-economic and political structures. In their opinion, misery and misfortune was often caused by poverty, oppression, bullying, and ignorance. But Dostoevsky feels that suffering and misfortune have a broader and deeper meaning, rooted in the paradox of human existence. Dostoevsky believes that it is impossible for humans to end poverty and ignorance by increasing material wealth, or to end suffering and misfortune with the creation of paradise on earth. As far as human nature is concerned, people might even prefer to indulge in suffering, rather than rationally pursuing happiness, as optimistic and superficial advocates of utilitarianism propose. Only by questioning the mystery of man in the mysterious relationship between man and God can the power of salvation be found through individual rather than social efforts. However, most Chinese readers at that time missed this line of thought, or struggled to concede this point about human experience. Therefore, for a long time, Dostoevsky's humanitarian spirit unfortunately remained absent from the Chinese cultural sphere.

The Role of Lu Xun and his Acceptance and Representative Evaluation of Dostoevsky

Generally speaking, in the early twentieth century, only Lu Xun, Yu Dafu (1896–1945), Ba Jin, and a very few others had an entirely literary relationship with Dostoevsky's thoughts and art. The most important of these figures is Lu Xun (formerly Zhou Shuren). An eminent writer, he was also a reader and translator

27 Ba Jin, *Memoirs* (*Hui yi lu*) (Shanghai: Wenhua Shenghuo Press, 1936), p. 172.

28 Mark Gamsa, *The Chinese Translation of Russian Literature: Three Studies* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2008), p. 136. Also see Olga Lang, *Pa Chin and His Writings: Chinese Youth Between the Two Revolutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 232–33.

of foreign literature, most notably Russian literature. Due to his early experience of studying in Japan, he translated Russian literature primarily via Japanese. For instance, in 1931, he used a Japanese bridge text to translate Aleksandr Fadeev's *The Rout* (*Razgrom*, 1926). Lu Xun's close acquaintance with the blind Ukrainian poet Vasilii Eroshenko (1890–1952) is also a popular story in the history of Sino-Russian literary relations. In 1922, Eroshenko came to Beijing, taught Esperanto at Peking University and lived in the Badaowan residence of the Zhou brothers. During Eroshenko's time in China, he and the Zhou brothers established a sincere friendship. In the mid-1920s, Lu Xun translated many children's tales by Eroshenko, including those published as *A Collection of Eroshenko's Fairy Tales* (*Ailuoxianke tong hua ji*, 1922).

Lu Xun had extensive access to Dostoevsky's works and to critical literature about the writer. According to his own diary, he bought a Japanese copy of *Crime and Punishment* on 8 August 1913. According to *Lu Xun's Handwriting and Collection Catalogue* (compiled and printed by the Lu Xun Museum in Beijing), he not only collected many German and Japanese versions of Dostoevsky's original works, but acquired European books on the study of Dostoevsky in Japanese translation too, such as André Gide's *Dostoevsky* and Dmitri Merezhkovskii's *Tolstoy and Dostoevsky*.[29] He edited many journals that published translations of Dostoevsky. The first Chinese version of *Poor Folk* was completed with his support and participation. Not only was he funded to compile this translation as part of the Weiming Series, but he also compared the Japanese translations by Bai Guang himself, and distinguished many ambiguities. According to Mark Gamsa:

> One of the books in the Weiming series, a pioneering translation of Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk* by Wei Suyuan's younger brother Wei Congwu, had been rendered from the English (of Constance Garnett), but was only allowed into print in June 1926 after Lu Xun had checked it against a Japanese translation and Suyuan had compared the manuscript with the original Russian.[30]

Lu Xun's methodology of translation had a great impact at that time. Nevertheless, later in the 1920s, he was criticised for so-called 'Ouhua' ('Europeanised language') translation, which he preferred to call "direct", or even "hard/stiff" translation ("zhiyi" or "yingyi"). Lu Xun and his followers in the 'direct translation' camp chose to reproduce the "strangeness" of the foreign text, and even the word order of the English or German sentence. As he himself explained, his translations displayed complete fidelity to the source text because

29 According to Lu Xun's diary, he wrote, "On December 13, 1924, I went to the East Asia Company to buy *Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky*." See Lu Xun, *Lu Xun's Diary* (Beijing: People's Literature Press, 1976), p. 448.

30 Gamsa, *The Chinese Translation of Russian Literature*, p. 284.

of his commitment to preserving its "original atmosphere" and his refusal to domesticate, or Sinicise, it by using a more fluent and idiomatic language. Gamsa has convincingly pointed out that there were far more ideological than aesthetic factors behind Lu Xun's choice. As many literary reformers argued, vernacular Chinese needed to be enriched with the capacity for precision that classical Chinese lacked (but which European languages possessed). For "the lack of precision in our language proves the lack of precision in our way of thinking—we are muddle-headed".[31] While this process might be painful (Lu Xun acknowledged that readers of his "hard" translations were bound to become "frustrated, disgusted and outraged"),[32] the reader ought to admit that the linguistic revolution was being undertaken for their own benefit. "For better or worse, written Chinese underwent substantial 'Westernization' in the course of the twentieth century, a process on which the translation of Western literature, as practiced and promoted by Lu Xun, made an undeniable impact".[33]

The well-known translator Geng Jizhi's translations of Dostoevsky's works echo Lu Xun's above-mentioned views on hard translation. Geng knew that only by introducing expressions from Western languages could the development of Chinese be promoted; hence his translations of Dostoevsky also reflected this trend. His translation in *Bai chi* (*The Idiot*) is an example. The original text reads "уж как это к тебе не идет, говорит, если б ты знал, как к корове седло".[34] Geng translated it as "You have to know that this method is not very suitable for you, just like a saddle on a cow."[35] In Chinese, the corresponding idiom would mean "Donkeys' lips are not right for a horse's mouth". Even if the translator's idiom remains opaque to Chinese readers, they can still guess the meaning from the first half of the sentence. Therefore, Geng succeeded in producing a literal translation while retaining the original cultural connotation. Here, by preserving the 'strangeness' of the original by rendering it into an idiom half-way between that of the author and his own language, the translator enriches the target language with a new manner of perceiving the world. Geng translated this novel in the early 1940s, when the cultural exchange between China and Western countries (including exchange of languages) had been going on for a

31 Lu Xun, 'A reply to Qu Qiubai (1931)', trans. by Leo T. H. Chan, in *Twentieth-Century Chinese Translation Theory: Modes, Issues, Debates*, ed. by Leo Tak-hung Chan (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 2004), pp. 158–61 (p. 159).

32 Gamsa, *The Chinese Translation of Russian Literature*, p. 154.

33 Ibid., p. 168.

34 Fedor Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by V. G. Bazanov, 17 vols (St Petersburg: Nauka, 2019), VIII (2019), p. 194. An equivalent English translation is, "This really doesn't become you at all, if you only knew, it's like a saddle on a cow." See Fedor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. by Alan Myers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 221.

35 Fedor Dostoevsky, *Bai chi* [*The Idiot*], trans. by Geng Jizhi (Shanghai: Kaiming Bookstore, 1946), p. 272.

long time. In Geng's case, combining the translation methods of foreignisation and domestication infused his translation with a mixed characteristic. It was precisely because of the combination of the two languages and even the two cultures that his new form of language had a stronger expressiveness and vitality. Expressing a deep understanding of this phenomenon, the linguist Wang Li has commented: "[t]he most dramatic changes have taken place in Chinese society during the past hundred years, mainly due to our contact with Western civilisation. [...] In the wake of new things have followed a great number of new words and new ideas [...]. Many new ways of organising statements have been added [to our Chinese language]".[36]

Lu Xun wrote 'An Introduction to *Poor Folk*' to accompany Wei Congwu's translation of the novel; it was one of many articles on Dostoevsky he wrote during the inter-war period. Lu Xun also wrote an article titled 'Something about Dostoevsky' for the popular edition of the *Complete Works of Dostoevsky*, printed by the Mikasa Bookstore in Japan. Lu Xun mentions Dostoevsky or his works at least fifty times throughout his critical writings, letters, and diaries. He also showed a strong interest in Dostoevskian literary styles. He once said: "My novels are all about dark things. I have admired Dostoevsky for a while. From now on, my novels will probably still be about dark things. What can be bright in China?".[37] The Russian Silver Age writer Leonid Andreev (1871–1919), whose works Lu Xun particularly admired, was also influenced by Dostoevsky. Lu Xun was Andreev's first Chinese translator, and he attributed to him an influence on many of his own stories such as 'Yao' ('Medicine').[38] Lu Xun's two articles on Dostoevsky, however, played a pivotal role in the history of Chinese Dostoevsky studies. They demonstrate the resonance between these two cultural giants of China and Russia as well as their dialogues across time and space. In the next section, I will focus on 'An Introduction to *Poor Folk*'.

In this essay, with remarkable intuition and inspiration, Lu Xun grasped the main preoccupation of all Dostoevsky's fiction, namely, the profundity of human nature. He dialectically and progressively analysed how Dostoevsky shows both the good and evil sides of the human soul. He writes:

> The interrogator lists the convict's crime in the court, and the convict states his own morality. The interrogator exposes the corruption in the soul, and the convict clarifies the hidden brilliance in the exposed filth. So in the very deep human soul, there is no such thing as cruelty, let alone compassion.[39]

36 Wang Li, *Essentials of Chinese Grammar* (*Zhongguo wen fa yao lue*) (Shenyang: Liaoning Education Press, 2002), p. 5.

37 See Lin Xianzhi, *Lu Xun In His Life* (Hefei: Anhui Education Press, 2004), p. 571.

38 Chen Jianhua, *Sino-Russian Literary Relations in the 20th Century* (*Er shi shi ji Zhong E wen xue guan xi*) (Beijing: Higher Education Press), p. 67.

39 Lu Xun, 'An Introduction to *Poor Folk*', p. 86.

Many of Dostoevsky's characters are in a state of conflict, internal or external, like Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* and Ivan Karamazov in *Brothers Karamazov*. Therefore, even criminals have their own morality, and likewise the limited and emotional soul of man has its own sacredness. Lu Xun vividly refers to the dual structure of man's mind as described by Dostoevsky in his statement that "putting men and women in unbearable situations to test them, not only strips away the whiteness on the surface and tortures out the sin hidden underneath, but also tortures out the true whiteness hidden under the sin".[40] He believed that this exemplified Dostoevsky's famous concept of "realism in the higher sense".[41]

Since Dostoevsky believed that evil was an integral part of human beings, it follows that evil and pain originate within us. Therefore, to eliminate them, we must first face and admit our own sins. This spiritual journey was recognised by Lu Xun. As he remarked (drawing perhaps on Mikhailovskii's notion of Dostoevsky as a "cruel talent"), "digging through the depths of the soul, people have suffered mental torture and wounds, and from the wounds and healings, they discard their suffering and embark on the road of recovery".[42] Moreover, Lu Xun realised that the spiritual torture experienced by the characters in Dostoevsky's works was a reflection of the author's personal experience. He commented that even as a young man, Dostoevsky had begun the process of wilful mental self-torture that would last his whole life.[43] However, it is not certain whether Lu Xun had read Dostoevsky's very famous letter of February 1854 to a benefactress, N. D. Fonvizina, in which he undertakes, given the choice between Christ and the truth (*istina*), to choose Christ over truth if they differ.[44]

Lu Xun also examined the aesthetic psychology of Chinese readers at length. He used his own reactions as a model for their mentality, noting that when reading Dostoevsky, although admiring his greatness, "they often want to discard the book".[45] In addition to explaining the negative aesthetic characteristics of Dostoevsky's works such as tediousness and gloominess, Lu Xun also mentioned key cultural and psychological factors in Chinese readers' reception and processing of Dostoevsky, writing that "as a Chinese reader, I am still not familiar with Dostoevskian tolerance and obedience, which is true tolerance with sudden adversities. In China, there is no Russian Christ. In China,

40 Ibid.

41 In notes for his *Writer's Diary* (*Dnevnik pisatelia*) in 1881, Dostoevsky famously refers to himself as "lish' realist v vyshchem smysle, to est' izobrazhaiu vse glubiny dushi chelovecheskoi" ("[I am] only a realist in a higher sense, that is, I depict all the depths of the human soul"). See Fedor Dostoevskii, 'Dnevnik pisatelia: 1881', in Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by V.G. Bazanov and others, 30 vols (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972–90), XXVII (1984), pp. 5–174 (p. 65).

42 Lu Xun, 'An Introduction to *Poor Folk*', p. 86.

43 Ibid., p. 87.

44 Fedor Dostoevskii, 'Pis'mo N.D. Fonvizinoi, February 1854', in Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, XXVIII [I: Pis'ma 1832–59], (1985), pp. 175–77 (p. 176).

45 Lu Xun, 'An Introduction to *Poor Folk*', p. 87.

the dominant idea is 'rituality', instead of God".[46] He added, "When a person only has moderation, it is true that he has no danger of falling into hell, but he may not enter the kingdom of heaven either".[47] Specifically, the Chinese cultural tradition (which is dominated by Confucianism) lacks the Christian concept of sin or belief in the immortality of human souls. As we saw earlier, this makes some religious concepts in Dostoevsky's works unfamiliar or even inaccessible to Chinese readers.

Lu Xun's attitude towards Dostoevsky in the article he published a decade later, 'Something about Dostoevsky' (1936), was very different, and reflected a shift towards admiration, and even joy, as if he were welcoming an old friend. He not only acknowledges the greatness of Dostoevsky's "interrogation of the soul", but also fully considered the Russian author's thoughts on Christian brotherhood. Lu Xun concludes: "How pure the love is, and how the heart was disturbed by the curse! Given that the author was only twenty-four years old at the time, it is particularly amazing. The heart of a genius is indeed broad".[48] However, he remained dissatisfied with Dostoevsky's Christianity. Not only did he admit that he "[could not] love" Dostoevsky's practice of "torturing the soul", he also believed that even if "endurance and obedience" exist, "Dostoevskian in-depth exploration, I am afraid, is still hypocritical".[49] At the same time, he ruthlessly stated the potential damage caused to society by "Dostoevskian obedience": "hypocrisy is evil to the oppressed, but moral to the oppressor".[50]

This kind of emotional alienation is closely related to Lu Xun's own ideological transformation in 1927. Many scholars have shown that after 1927, Lu Xun shifted his personal views to fit in with the new political environment. Chiang Kai-shek's massacre of Communists made him soberly aware of the realities of Chinese social conflict, and led him to prioritise a utilitarian approach. This made him a leader in left-wing literary circles. Owing to these factors, his literary stance became more politicised and pragmatic, while his sensitivity to psychological realism was attenuated. Inevitably, he came to interpret Dostoevsky's art and thought from the perspective of sociological and Marxian class theory. In the postscript of *Qiejieting Essay*, Lu Xun stated his original intention in writing the article: "'Something about Dostoevsky' fulfilled a commission by the Mikasa Bookstore, and it was an introductory article written for new readers, but I am here to explain that the oppressed are either slaves or enemies to the oppressor. They must never become friends. Therefore, the morals of each other are not the same".[51]

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46 Lu Xun, 'Tuosituoyefusiji de shi' ('Something about Dostoevsky'), in *Qiejieting Zawen Erji* (Beijing: People's Literature Press, 1973), p. 163.

47 Ibid., p. 164.

48 Lu Xun, 'An Introduction to *Poor Folk*', p. 86.

49 Lu Xun, 'Something about Dostoevsky', p. 163.

50 Ibid.

51 Lu Xun, 'Postscript to *Qiejieting Zawen*' ('*Qiejieting Zawen* Hou ji'), in *Qiejieting Zawen Erji* (Beijing: People's Literature Press, 1973), p. 196.

Conclusion

The central argument of this article is that Dostoevsky's reception in early twentieth-century China was greatly impacted by the cultural system, national psychology, and social historical context of his Chinese readers. Three areas of analysis were chosen to reflect the extent of his impact, namely, the basic situation of translation and research of Dostoevsky's works at that time, the social and cultural conditions impacting Dostoevsky's reception, transmission, and misreading in China, and finally, Lu Xun's reception of and commentaries on Dostoevsky and his role in the study of Dostoevsky in China.

Dostoevsky's Chinese reception is a very complicated phenomenon. This article has attempted a detailed analysis of that process from the 1920s to the 1940s, investigating the translation, publication, and transmission of Dostoevsky and his influence on Chinese writers' works. I have also examined where and in what format Dostoevsky's works were published in China during the 1920s and 1930s. The reception of Dostoevsky became intertwined with the contemporary historical background, the particular cultural moment in China, and several competing literary ideological trends there. As we know, the victory of the October Revolution in 1917 came as an unprecedented shock in Chinese society. Central to the introduction and reception of Russian literature in China was the idea of "learning from Russia". Since the early twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals, following the revolutionary developments in Russia, had become intent on overthrowing imperial power in their own country. When Chinese intellectuals turned from European literature to Russian writing, they focused on the description of social reality and humanism to be found in the latter, as Li Dazhao explains in 'Russian Literature and Revolution'.[52] Most twentieth-century Russian literature reflected Socialist Realism. Chinese readers recognised Dostoevsky sympathetically as a Socialist Realist *avant la lettre*. By accepting his fiction as "literature for the sake of life", they appreciated some essential parts of his works, while overlooking his Christian ideology and misreading his deep, complicated, and paradoxical revelations about the human soul. I hope this discussion will inspire and even facilitate deeper exploration of Dostoevsky's reception in China.

52 Li Dazhao, 'Russian Literature and Revolution', *People's Literature*, 5 (1979), 3–8.