



Satirically Constructing Peripheries

A Woman Translating China(s) under the Portuguese Dictatorship during WWII

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Introduction: *Chinese Tales*' preface

Idealised China

Marco Polo
&
Fernão Mendes Pinto

Progressive China

Ancient women poets
&
Revolutionary, modern
female students

Why were two marginal images of China highlighted by a woman translator in 1944?

Knowledge about China

Lou Che Ngan (Chinese Diplomat)
La Chine, passé et présent (1937)

Other related actors

Editorial Gleba
Celestino Gomes (1899-1960)



Silvina de Troya Gomes

Theory & methodology

Agent between translator-functions

The translator occupies a position in the push-and-pull space between idealised translators created by ideological discourses within a polysystem.

Peritexts, actor-network & corpus

My main focus is on analysing the preface of *Chinese Tales* in context, while also linking actors related to Gomes.

Translations related to China

Chinese Tales (1944)
Marshal Chiang Kai Shek (1944)
Traditional Asian tales (1945)

Other creations


Poets of Coimbra (1939, comp.)
Indian Tales (1945)

Woman translator's (self-)irony

“But I advise, at least for the ladies, not to engage in scholarship. After all, it is all to be forgotten, and scholarship causes baldness.”
(Gomes 1945a, 11)

Universal patriarchal discourses linking translation and women

Gomes suggests that Cervantes and Chinese scholars believed that “even a woman has more useful things to do than translate tales” (1944a, 7). This echoes dictator Salazar's remark: “There has never been a good housewife who didn't have a lot to do.” (2015, 115).

A poet once said that she wrote her best poems while sewing. Gomes tried, but thought of this song... 

“Even a woman”: poet, translator, scholar

In the preface, four Chinese women poets are introduced with transliterated names and dates, and one poem from each is translated. In this way, Gomes is translating (and thus writing) poems. In fact, the title page of *Poets of Coimbra* indicates that Gomes, in addition to compiling these poems – a major academic undertaking – Gomes studied at the University of Coimbra before the 1940s.

Universalism versus supremacy

“For me, however, China is still the land of Marco Polo, of Fernão Mendes Pinto and of wonderful tales that you will read. But... as Li-Kin said, “When a woman talks to you, smile to her and don't listen.”
(Gomes 1944a, 17)

Narrating China, criticising Portugal

The preface extensively portrays China as an ancient exceptional civilisation with a recent development, which contradicts the official narrative of “China observed and known by a superior Western and Portuguese sensibility of our time” (China 1943, IX). Gomes also inserts her opinions to implicitly mock both the dictatorship and the hypocritical contempt of scholars for popular writing.

“Mending cultural fences” against fascism

Gomes evokes an idealised China in an attempt to revive the historical link between Portugal and China. Celestino laments that the Far East was “where our grandfathers wandered, loved and suffered”, while “for us [it's just] an almost inhuman being” (1945, VIII). This awareness may have come from anti-fascism: Celestino finds Japan “cruel” (1945, XVIII); Silvina Gomes's translation of a Chinese leader's biography also suggests support for China during the WWII.

Conclusion

Aware of social injustices against women and Asians, Gomes created two distinct portrayals of China, suggesting shifts happening in Western discourse on these issues. Moreover, by (re)introducing China(s), Gomes also seems to be constructing her various oppositional identities on the periphery of Portuguese patriarchal and colonialist society.

Bibliography

