

# Imitative Writing and Variation of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" in Modern China

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## ABSTRACT

In 1922, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" was translated and introduced by Zhao Yuanren to China. In the 1930s and 1940s, a series of Chinese-style "Alice" stories appeared. Writers borrowed from the plot structure and character images of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland", making it a work rich in Chinese national language and culture. This article uses the documentary method and comparative research to study the Chinese-style "Alice" stories, and believes that these stories consciously convey new literary concepts, shape children in the new era and become a part of modern Chinese children's literature.

**Keywords:** "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland", modern China, imitative writing, variation

## I. INTRODUCTION

The British writer Lewis Carroll's masterpiece "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" (1865) is a classic in the history of world children's literature. Since its birth, it has been well received and loved by readers. The first Chinese translation of this work was completed by Mr. Zhao Yuanren and published by the Commercial Press in January 1922. Subsequent translations include the episodes translation "Alice's Strange Dream" by Xu Yingchang in 1933, the paraphrase translation "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" by He Junlian in 1937, the English-Chinese episodes translation "Alice's Wandering Adventure" by Liu Zhigen in 1948, and the abridged edition "Alice's Sleepwalk in Wonderland" by Fan Quan in 1948, etc. In addition to translation, there are also some imitative writing versions. Among them, the most influential and most concerned by academic circles are Shen Congwen's "Alice's Travel in China" and Chen Bochui's "Miss Alice". In fact, there are more than these two imitative writing versions of Alice's story, which also includes Zi Qi's "Alice's Roaming in China" in 1935, Shanghai Puppet Theater's "Alice's Dream" in 1945, and the fairy tale "Alice's Sleepwalk in Wonderland" created by Bao Lei in 1948. Through imitating and adapting the story of Alice, modern writers interpret the story of Alice in different genres, different themes and styles.

## II. THE IMITATIVE WRITING OF "ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND" IN MODERN CHINA

"Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" tells about the dreamy experience of a little girl named Alice wandering in the underground wonderland. Since the work was translated and introduced to China, modern writers have also started to call on readers to follow the exotic girl Alice on a journey to China. In 1928, Shen Congwen created the fairy tale "Alice's Travel in China", which was originally published in *New Moon* from July to October 1928, Volume 1, Issues 1 to 8, and was published by New Moon Bookstore at the end of 1928. The first volume is about Alice's experience in Chinese cities. The 12-year-old Alice and the 45-year-old rabbit Nuoxi brought the "China Travel Guide" to China and experienced a series of events: they went out and met a thin beggar who failed to rob and begged to die, attended the welcome party of Dr. Starling, and then went to visit the gray stork they met at the welcome party. Alice wrote a letter to her aunt when she returned to the hotel. But when she woke up from her dream, she found that she was still with her aunt. In the second volume, Alice went to the magical and wild Miao Township under the introduction of brothers and sisters Yibin, and saw all kinds of local conditions and customs of Miao Township: everyone gambled; surrogate mother with more than 720 children sold children in the slave market... Finally, Alice returned to her country with all her incomprehension about China.

Shen Congwen's "Alice's Travel in China" is an imitative writing of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland". Zi Qi imitated Shen Congwen's work.

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"Alice's Roaming in China" was serialized in 1935 from Volume 7 Issue 25 to Volume 8 Issue 10 of *Sea King* magazine. In the story, Alice has grown into a girl, and she and the rabbit go to China, where "porcelain, silk, and tea"[1] are produced. They went to the Shanghai City God Temple and saw small plank houses and beggars everywhere. In Hangzhou, they visited the bankrupt silk factory, and went to Suzhou, Wuxi and other places to learn how to eat melon seeds and taste tea. On the way north to escape the summer heat, they saw the fair master settle the case. Just when Alice was angry at the unfair decision, she woke up, and it turned out that she was still dreaming on the beach.

In addition to two Alice's travel notes to China, children's literature writer Chen Bochui wrote the fairy tale "Miss Alice" in 1931. In 1931, the "Elementary Students" magazine successively published "Miss Alice", which was published by Bei Xin Bookstore in the beginning of 1933. This work was about the third grade student Alice of elementary school and the kangaroo family together going to the Insect Kingdom Music Concert. On the way, they met Dr. Firefly, the slander money frog, the mantis broadsword team, the sandman judge, and the rice worm who stole food... Afterwards, Alice and the poet willow cicada answered the poem, and met a fortune-telling fraud gadfly. At the concert, Emperor Anaconda sent an army to seize the venue. Alice dared to die to defend the venue... After she woke up after a long battle, she realized that she had a dream.

In the 1940s, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" was put on the stage. In 1945, Yu Zheguang of Shanghai Puppet Theater composed a seven-act puppet show "Alice's Dream". On a snowy winter night, Alice dreamed that Santa Claus would take her to play in the beautiful and happy spring world. She left home to play truant to go to Candy Country. The King of Sugar asked the Fruit Man to hold a grand and lively welcome party for Alice... Later she was caught by the Demon of Greed and Demon of Laziness and was locked up. At the time of despair and regret in the dead of night, the Ant and Rabbit Brothers invited General Lead Soldier to defeat the devil, and everyone sang a triumphant song back home with Alice. At this time, Alice woke up from the dream. It turned out that the devil was a strange mask used by classmates to scare Alice, and all the toys became good friends who helped her in the dream. Santa Claus's gift became a new year's card from Dad, which reads: "Advise you to learn, make friends carefully, economize, and help the suffered." [2] Alice remembered her father's teaching from then on.

In 1948, the sixth volume of the first series of the children's literature magazine "Fairy Tales", "Sunday's Fairy Tales", published the 16-act script "Alice's Sleepwalk in Wonderland" by children's literature writer Bao Lei. One spring morning, Alice didn't want

to go to school because she was playful and didn't do her homework the night before. Dr. Wolf and Fox tricked Alice into going to the ant hole to steal bread. Alice who stole the bread was caught by the ants and locked up. Late at night, Firefly taught her to confess her mistakes to the ants. Alice, who regained freedom, met a pig on her way to school. The pig invited her to eat chocolate candy at the owner's house. Alice just ate and drank, and couldn't remember going to school anymore. At this time, the Wolf and the Fox caught Alice. Just when she regretted that she shouldn't be greedy, the Firefly appeared again. It taught Alice to use the paper knife in her schoolbag to cut the wooden door and escape. It turned out that the firefly was a fairy. The class bell rang, and Alice woke up from her dream.

The translation and dissemination of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" broadened the horizons of Chinese writers. Chinese writers were inspired to imitate the writing of the story. The absurd storyline and fantasy art characteristics of the metatext have been replaced and transformed, resulting in a deep variation of the creative concept of modern Chinese children's literature.

### **III. COMPARISON OF THE METATEXT AND THE CONTINUED TEXT OF "ALICE'S ADVENTURE IN WONDERLAND"**

"Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" is a story with dreams as the core plot. "With dreams as the medium, everything happens in dreams. The fantasy world is actually just a dream, not her real experience." [3] From "Alice's Travel in China", "Alice's Roaming in China" to "Miss Alice", to "Alice's Dream" and "Alice's Sleepwalk in Wonderland", the story of Alice in China also lays out the plot and portrays the characters based on the protagonist's dream experience. However, through the description of dreams, the writers told different stories, expressed different themes, and showed different artistic styles.

From the theme point of view, "Alice" is a representative of the absurd theme, and a heterogeneous world constructed by pure fantasy. The absurdity and fantastic fantasy of the story can give children and even adults the joy and happiness of reading infinitely. In China, the creations of modern writers still show many strange people and things through what the protagonist sees, hears, and feels, but the theme has turned from absurdity to reality. In Shen Congwen's "Alice's Travel in China", what makes Alice and Nuoxi feel novel and exciting is almost all the backward and obscure side of old China: beggars begging to die on the road due to famine, the mediocrity and shallow of hundreds of birds in the welcome party, and the gray stork's respecting ghosts and divination... The author satirizes society in a ridiculous way. Compared with Shen Congwen, Zi Qi's works are more realistic, and Alice's view of China is

even more incredible: a large number of silk factories have closed down; the poor have no clothes to wear; everyone says, "Above there is heaven and below are Soochow and Hangchow", but in fact, the "heaven" Soochow and Hangchow are full of beggars moaning in pain... It can be seen that Zi Qi's exposure and criticism of the dark status quo is more than that of Shen Congwen.

The infusion of the spirit of feeling sorry for the time and worrying about the country made the two Chinese travel notes of Alice lose the color of children's literature. In the writing of children's literature writers, Alice's absurd experience was rewritten as an educational story. "Miss Alice" emphasizes Alice's status as a third-grade elementary school student and integrates the knowledge of the textbook throughout the whole text. In "Alice's Dream", Santa Claus and Spring God told Alice to study hard. Alice was later caught by the Demon of Greed and Demon of Laziness, which more vividly and directly warned the children of the dangers of gluttony and laziness. In "Alice's Sleepwalk in Wonderland", Alice was playful and gluttonous and delayed school and was punished for it. After being fooled again and again and suffering loss, Alice also realized her mistake. Both scripts have an important educator — ant workers and fireflies. They are tolerant elders and guides who teach the protagonist step by step to recognize and correct mistakes. From this perspective, the story and character settings of the two scripts are more like "The Adventures of Pinocchio". Therefore, the two scripts mainly follow the core plot of the heroine and dreaming of "Alice", but the story direction is very different from the metatext.

From the perspective of characterization, "Alice" is an extreme release of imagination, and it is the vigorous vitality of children. The story is based on the children's narrative perspective and the world of experience, and the image of Alice then becomes more vivid and true. When the lively and lovely Alice arrived in China, her image characteristics also changed. Shen Congwen's Alice is an exotic girl who wants to travel to China. She has innocence of ignorance in her. Alice is also very kind, taking out the chocolate candy she brought to the hungry beggar, and sympathizing with the grey stork family. During her travels, Alice always observed Chinese society with a calm attitude and was endowed with a rationality beyond children. Alice described by Zi Qi traveled all the way through China with doubts. Therefore, in the two Alice's travel notes to China, the story level and the discourse level are separated. Rather than saying that Alice travels to China, it is better to say that it uses the simple and kind-hearted foreign girl Alice's eyes to satirize the social status quo of the Chinese rulers at the time when the Chinese rulers admired foreigners and flattered foreigners, and the people had no means to live, thus constructing an image of a poor and weak China.

Compared with the two Chinese travel notes of Alice, the image of Alice created by the children's literature writers seems to be closer to the characteristics of children. The Alice in Chen Bochui's work is just and kind, but careless and has a bad memory. Finally, facing the invasion of the Emperor Anaconda, the smart and kind Alice resolutely shouldered the heavy responsibility of defending homeland. In the puppet show "Alice's Dream" and the fairy tale "Alice's Sleepwalk in Wonderland", the protagonist has the shortcomings common to children: greedy, playful, lazy, afraid of doing homework, easy to be deceived, but very sincere and kind, knowing mistakes and correcting them. The metatext "Alice" is attractive because the work restores the image of an innocent and lovely child. Readers can perceive a world full of childishness through her experience. While in the imitation text, the image of Alice has either become a critic of social reality, or a hero who kills enemies, or a tool to infuse adult education thoughts, which is far from the purport of the metatext.

In the history of the development of world children's literature, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" represents a relaxed and happy road to fairy tale literature. However, such a pure fantasy literary work has been imitated by modern Chinese writers, resulting in variations in subject matter, style and character image.

#### **IV. REINCARNATION AND VARIATION: THE CHINA TOUR OF ALICE**

To explore the variation of the imitative writing of "Alice", it's necessary to start with the realistic context, the main trends of children's literature in this period and the writer's personal writing style.

"Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" was born in the Victorian period of England, which was an era full of vitality, courage to take risks, full of crisis and shock. "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" has absorbed the new science, new ideas and new narrative methods of the new era and has become a classic of fantasy stories. Half a century after the publication of the work, during the "May Fourth Movement" in China, the Literary Research Association launched the "Children's Literature Movement" and translated a large number of excellent foreign children's literature works. "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" is one of them. In the 1930s and 1940s, when a series of imitative writing versions of Alice's stories appeared, China was facing national danger and the Comprehensive Anti- Japanese War. China's spirit of the times is closely related to "revolution and salvation." The survival and destiny of children is placed in the development and survival of the entire nation. In March 1933, the Ministry of Education of the National Government selected the "Children's Books Catalog". "The Adventures of

Pinocchio", "Coral Island", "Words of the Moon", "Peter Pan", "Soviet Fairy Tales" and other foreign children's literature works as "correct reasons and progressive thinking"<sup>1</sup> are included in the fifth and sixth grade reading material catalog. But "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" was not included. Therefore, the reason why the childlike Alice story is rewritten into realistic and educational works is due to the social context.

From the perspective of the development of children's literature, the main reason why the story of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" is widely accepted is that it is a strange flower bloomed by the budding imagination, allowing readers to see a beautiful and interesting heterogeneous world. It combines symbolism, philosophical reason, absurdity and aesthetics, and is an open and dialogue text. The image of Alice has also become a relaxed and cheerful cultural symbol, transcending the limitations of time and space, and still exuding residual warmth. It is true that modern writers also try to continue the artistic style of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland". Shen Congwen used anthropomorphic techniques to shape images, such as Mr. Rabbit Nuoxi, dung beetle pulling a dung cart, a hundred birds arguing at the welcome party, the river that talks with Alice, the talking grasshopper... Chen Bochui described an Insect Kingdom similar to human society and also created an absurd atmosphere. It is worth mentioning that "Alice's Dream" created a wonderful world "Candy Country", with cake houses, cookie fields, honey cake stone steps, bread mountains, fruit people... These are enough to see the efforts made by the writers to construct a fantasy art style. However, in the development of children's literature during this period, opposing wars of aggression and striving for independence are the core themes. Against the background that the realistic utility of literature is emphasized, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" will undoubtedly go through the process of cultural filtering of being selected, transformed and transplanted. The writers mainly retained the well-known character and sleepwalking structure of Alice, while the works were given themes such as patriotism and love for the people and being an excellent child.

At the same time, the writers' acceptance of Alice's story is also in line with their own aesthetic taste and creative style to choose, give play to and create. The two Alice's travel notes of Shen Congwen and Zi Qi use the perspective of foreigners to depict a country of mixing right and wrong and value inversion. This is also constructing an irrational world, but this world is an exaggerated reflection of social reality. Chen Bochui embodies the childlike innocence in Alice's story, and also shows his observations of reality: the rice worm

<sup>1</sup> In March 1933, the Kuomintang Government elected the "Children's Books Catalog" and listed the selection criteria for the catalog in the "Introductory Remarks" section.

who colluded with the police judge, the candy store that wrote "Neither the old nor the young will be cheated" asked the price randomly, the swaggering Emperor Anaconda... Under the theoretical purpose of "literature that educates children", the educational meaning of "Miss Alice" is inevitable. The two plays also convey educational intentions through the growth of the protagonist. The cover of the puppet show "Alice's Dream" is printed with "Citizen Education Story". The preface of "Alice's Sleepwalk in Wonderland" also points out that the play's "colorful phantom" is an educational drama under experiment."<sup>[4]</sup> Compared with novels and fairy tales, the audience of fairy tale dramas is more targeted — to perform for the majority of children. Therefore, guiding children to establish healthy and upward thinking is one of the goals of the director.

## V. CONCLUSION

As a foreign literary work, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" has been selected, filtered and absorbed in modern China, which is a re-creation activity that combines the spirit of the time, the main trend of literary creation and the writer's personal style. The literary text reproduces the world for children and also reproduces the position of children in the world. If the way of reproduction is convincing, it will become a child reader's cognition of the world. The 1930s and 1940s when the imitative writing versions of Alice's story appeared was a period of violent turbulence and transformation in Chinese society. Facing the invasion of foreign enemies, what society needs is no longer a heterogeneous world away from the earth, but to save the nation and resist external humiliation. Therefore, although modern writers have constructed a paradise for children's literature and art, they still remain firmly in the real world. It can be said that the process of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" being accepted in modern China is a process of giving new life and cultural meaning to the work. A series of new Alice stories consciously convey new literary concepts, shape children in the new era, and become a part of modern Chinese children's literature.

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