

# Literature and Translation

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A Key Debate on World Literature:

Can translation account for  
various cultural traditions?

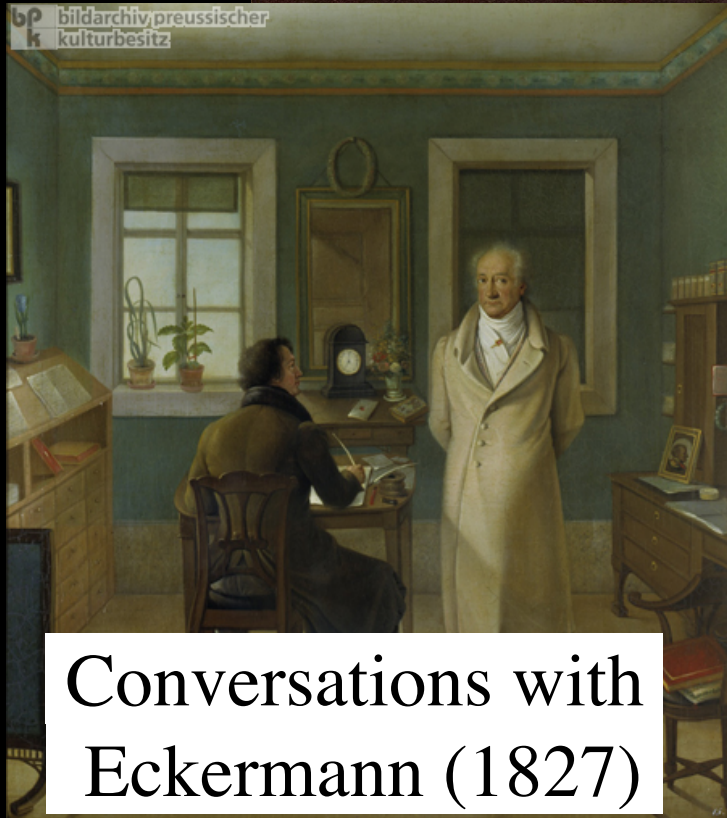
# Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749~1832)



1827



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Conversations with  
Eckermann (1827)



## Conversations with Eckermann

“We Germans are very likely to fall too easily into this pedantic conceit, **when we do not look beyond the narrow circle which surrounds us. I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations, and advise every one to do the same.** National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach... while we thus value what is foreign, we must not bind ourselves to some particular thing, and regard it as a model...if we really want a pattern, we must always return to the ancient Greeks, in whose works the beauty of mankind is constantly represented.” (1827)

World literature as a theoretical  
model for cross-cultural analysis

David Damrosch:

1. World literature as a “**phenomenon.**”

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1. World literature as a “**phenomenon.**”
2. “All literary works that circulate beyond their cultural origin, either in translation, or in their original language.”
3. Many centuries older than national literature.



Franco Moretti:

1. World literature as a “**system.**”
2. “A system that is *one*, and *unequal*; with a core, and periphery (and a semiperiphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality.”

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1. World literature as a “**system.**”
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3. Moretti’s example on the novels.

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1. World literature as a “**system.**”
2. “A system that is *one*, and *unequal*; with a core, and periphery (and a semiperiphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality.”
3. The **rise of modern novels** as a **compromise** between a **Western form** (usually of French or English) and **local materials.**

The idea of world literature is indeed very appealing but the question of translation always comes back to haunt us.



## Emily Apter:

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2. Points out the increasing attention and reliance on translation.

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1. World literature often assumes a **linguistic transparency** and **easy translatability**, thereby neglecting the **untranslatable elements** in each culture or literary work.
3. Points out the increasing attention and reliance on translation. **“Translational humanities”**.

## Dilemma of world literature:

1. **To what extent** can we account for a literary tradition through translated works?
2. Does translation **limit** or **expand** our understanding of literature?
3. How do we account for the relation between literature and translation? Does it have to be one between an **original** and a **replica**?

## Late 19th- and early 20th-century China

The rise of modern Chinese literature  
is conditioned and facilitated by  
a huge amount of translation discourses.



# Conventional explanation on the rise of modern Chinese literature

There is a **growing number of foreign literatures** that were translated and circulated in late 19th and early 20 century China which had eventually led to the May Fourth literary revolution (五四新文學運動).

## Other kinds of translation discourses

- The literary effects of non-literary discourses.
- The translation discourses in the fields of law, science, and sociology.
- The impact of these discourses on Chinese.

# My argument

1. These **scientific** and **sociological discourses** had created a new kind of **literary experience**.
2. These **scientific, sociological, and political discourses** also enabled Chinese to envision a new kind of **literature** that connects them to a bigger world.

# The Opium Wars

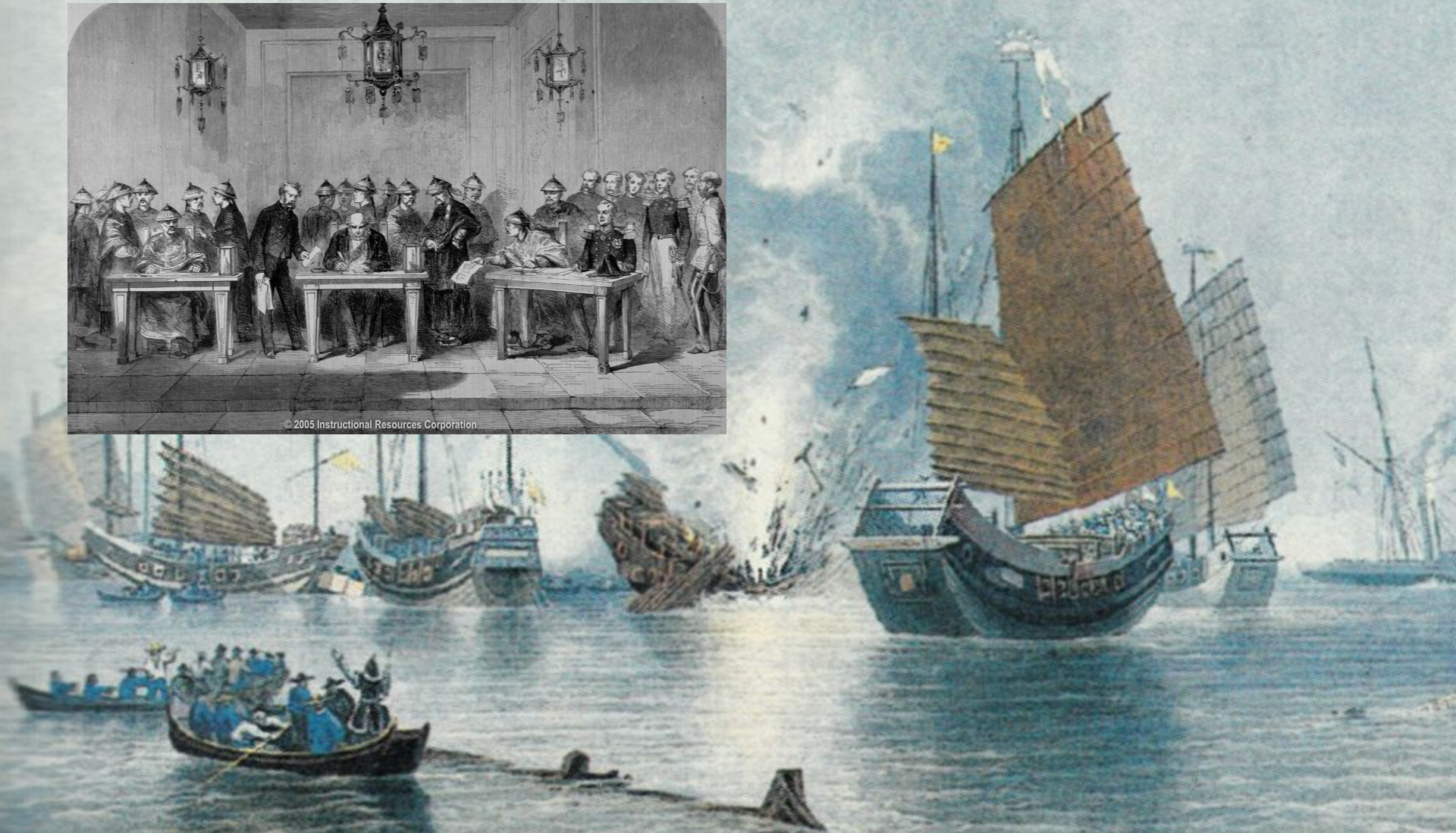
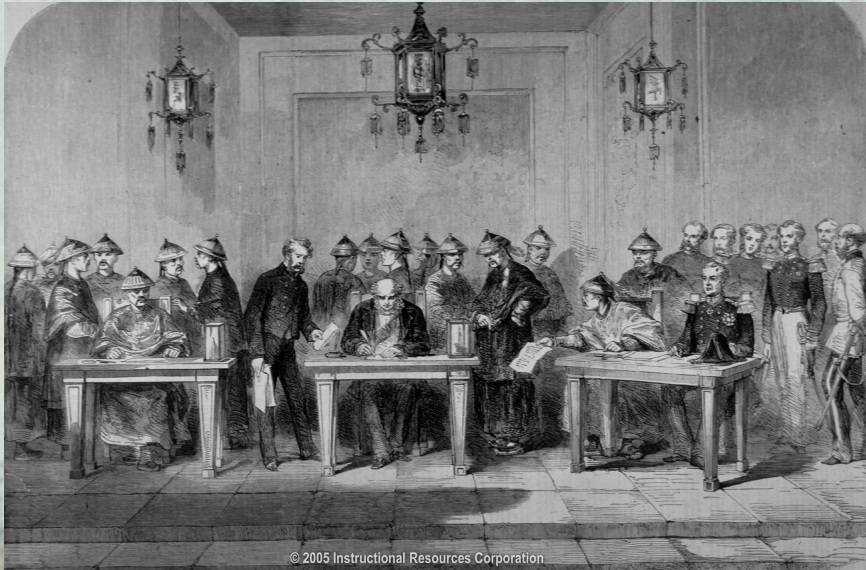
(1839~1842; 1856~1860)





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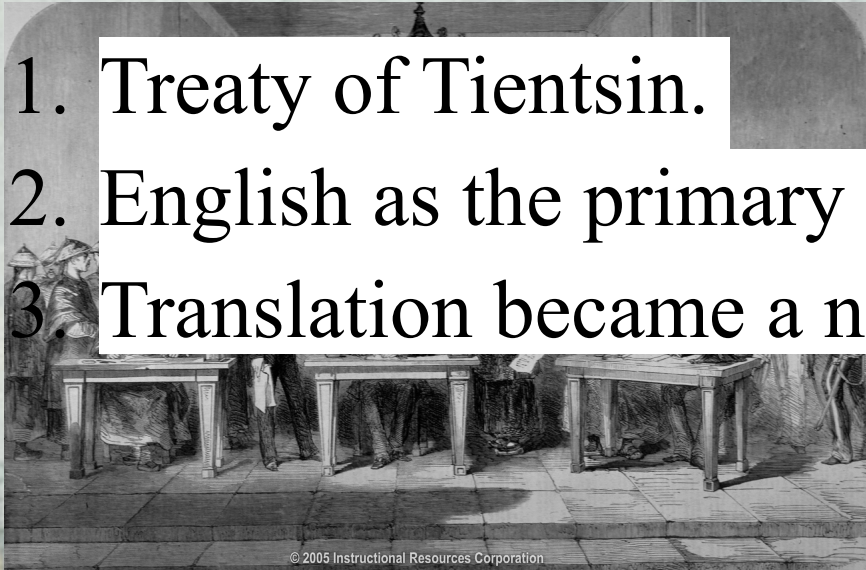




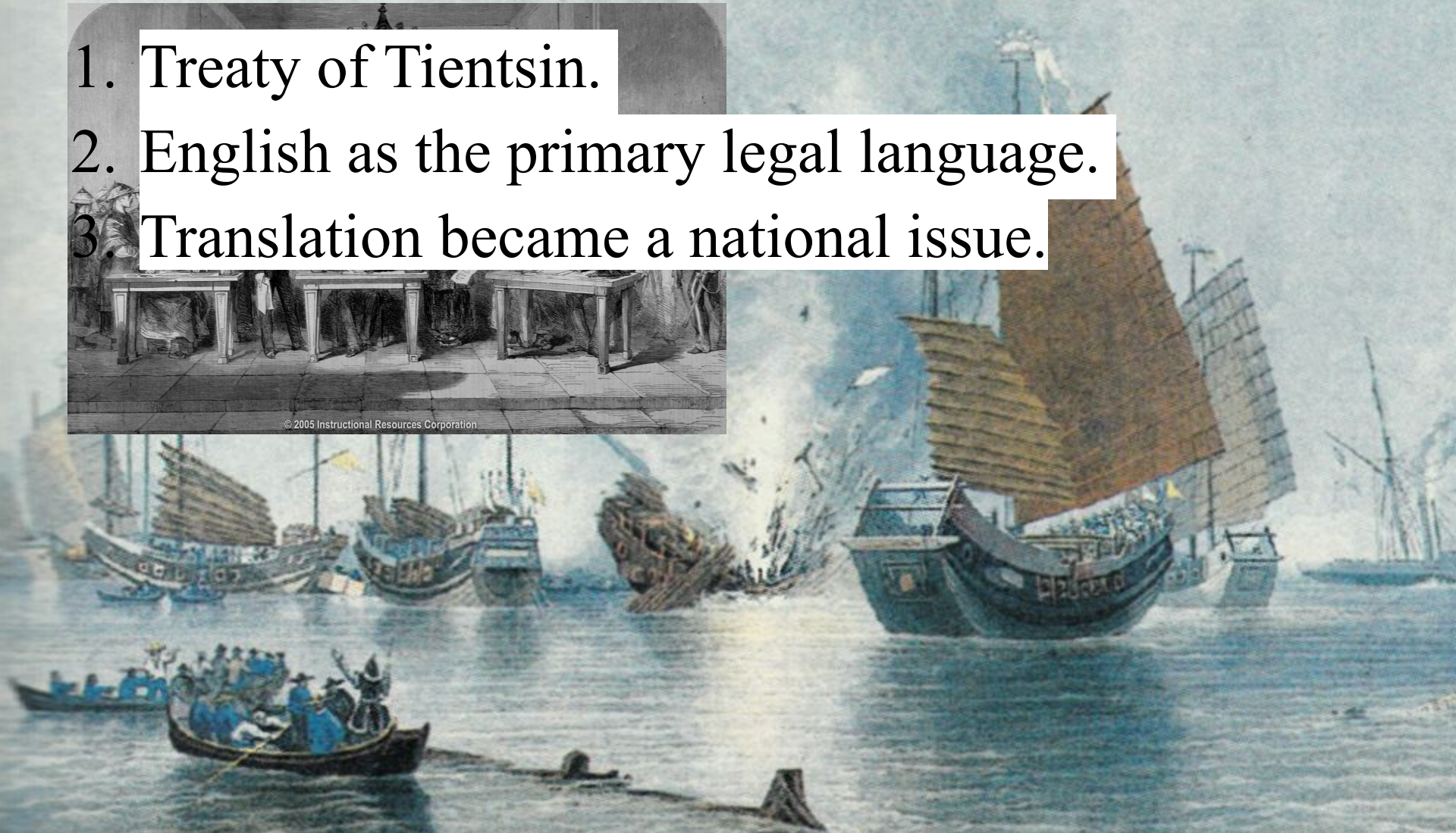
# The Opium Wars

(1839~1842; 1856~1860)

1. Treaty of Tientsin.
2. English as the primary legal language.
3. Translation became a national issue.



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# The Diplomatic (Linguistic) Challenge

1. Zongli Yamen (總理衙門) (1861).
2. School of Combined Learning (同文館) (1862).



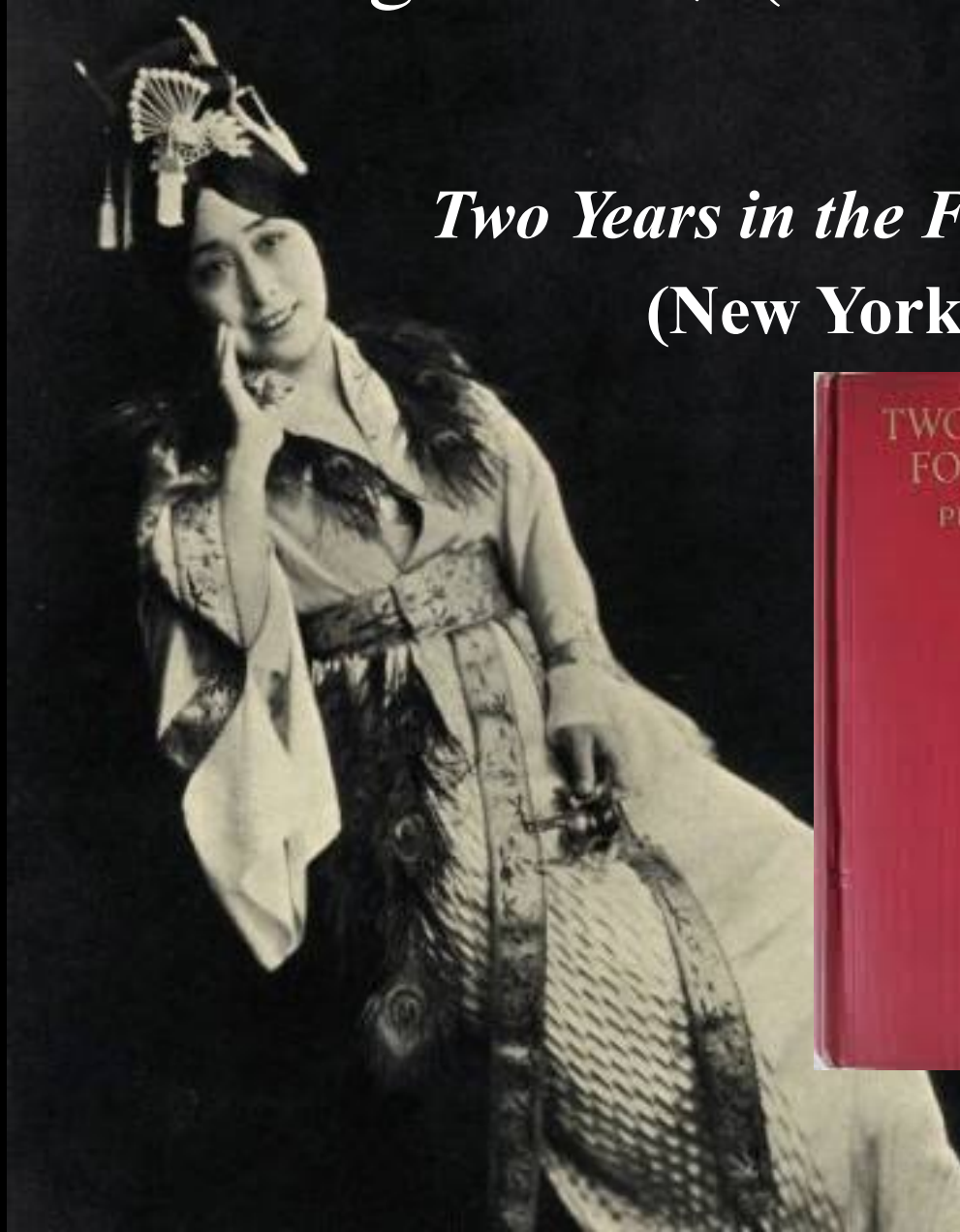


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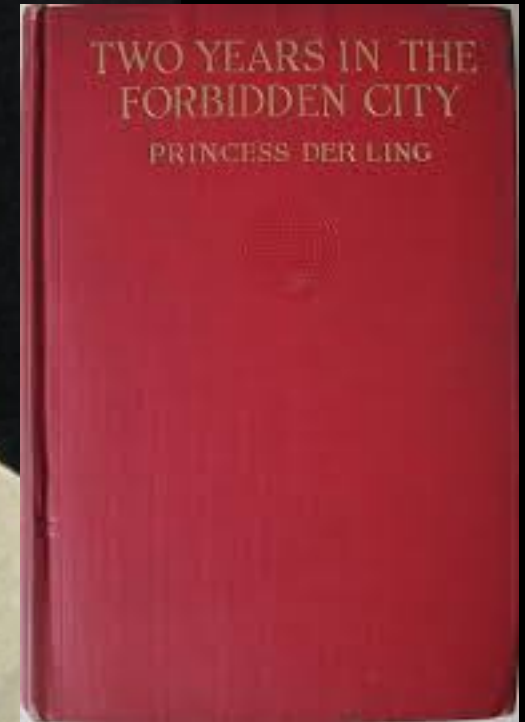
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2. School of Combined Learning (同文館) (1862).
3. Shanghai School for the Study of Foreign Languages and Scripts (上海學習外國語言文字學館) (1863).
4. Guangzhou School for the Study of Foreign Languages and Scripts (廣州學習外國語言文字學館) (1864).



# Princess Der Ling 裕德齡 (1885~1944)



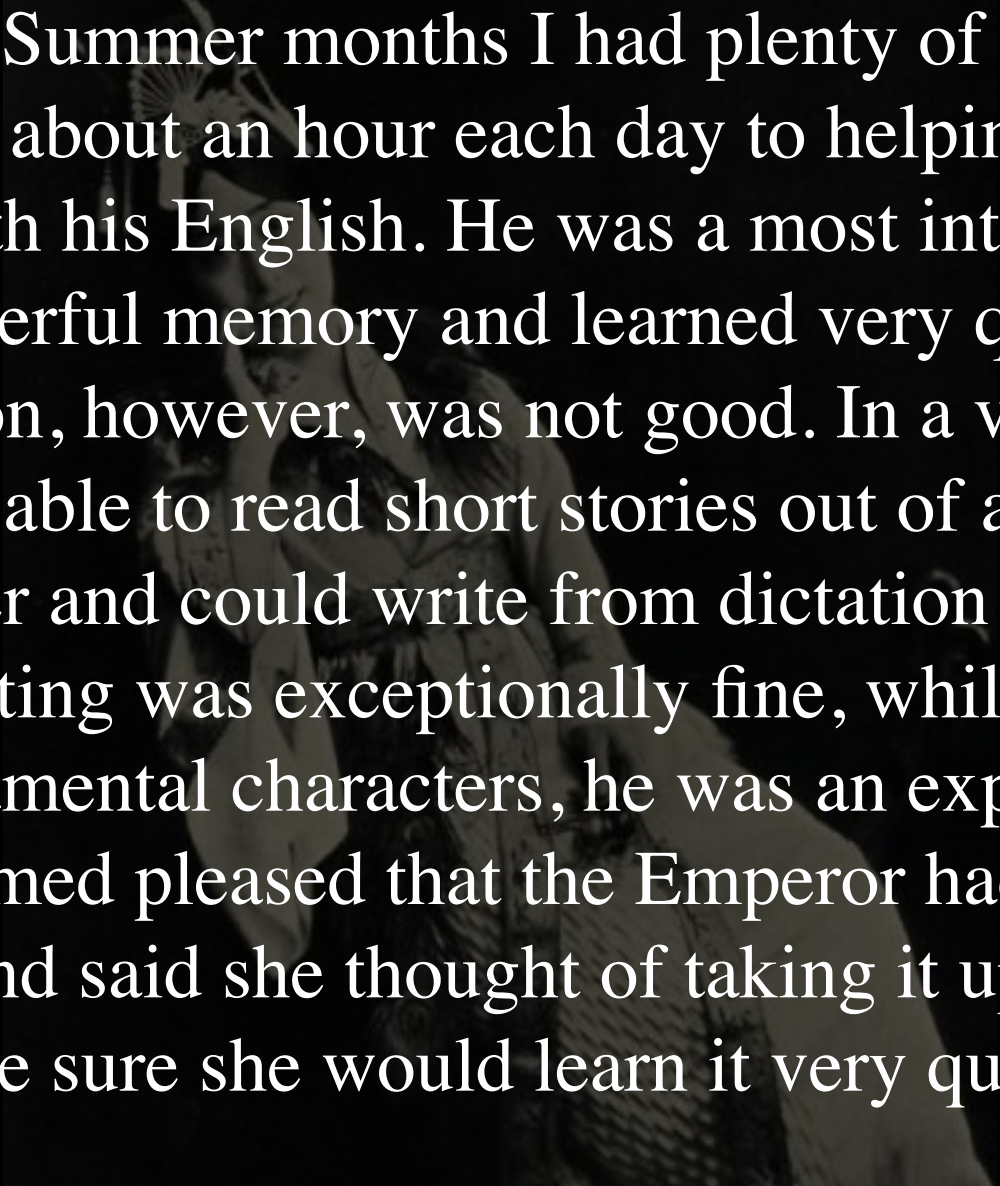
*Two Years in the Forbidden City*  
(New York, 1917)





## *Two Years in the Forbidden City (1917)*

“During the Summer months I had plenty of leisure time and devoted about an hour each day to helping the Emperor with his English. He was a most intelligent man with a wonderful memory and learned very quickly. His pronunciation, however, was not good. In a very short time he was able to read short stories out of an ordinary school reader and could write from dictation fairly well. His handwriting was exceptionally fine, while in copying old and ornamental characters, he was an expert. Her Majesty seemed pleased that the Emperor had taken up this study, and said she thought of taking it up herself as she was quite sure she would learn it very quickly if she tried.”





The growing missionary schools in China

## The growing missionary schools in China

1. English as the primary language for instruction.
2. Fudan Public School (復旦公學).

# Hu Shi's class schedule at middle school (1905)

| Class Day | The 1 <sup>st</sup> | The 2 <sup>nd</sup> | The 3 <sup>rd</sup> | The 4 <sup>th</sup> | The 5 <sup>th</sup> | The 6 <sup>th</sup> | The 7 <sup>th</sup> |
|-----------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Mon       | Calculus            | Physical Educati    | Ethics              | History             | English Reading     | English Grammar     | Painting            |
| Tue       | Calculus            | Reading             | Geograp hy          | History             | English Reading     | English Geography   | English Recitation  |
| Wed       | Calculus            | Physical Educati    | Physics             | Calligrap hy        | Singing             | English History     | English Sentences   |
| Thu       | Calculus            | Writing             | Writing             | History             | English Gramm       | English Recitation  | Painting            |
| Fri       | Calculus            | Physical Educati    | Geograp hy          | History             | English Reading     | English Geography   | English Speech      |
| Sat       | Calculus            | Reading             | Physics             | History             | English History     | English Writing     | English Writing     |

Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854~1921)



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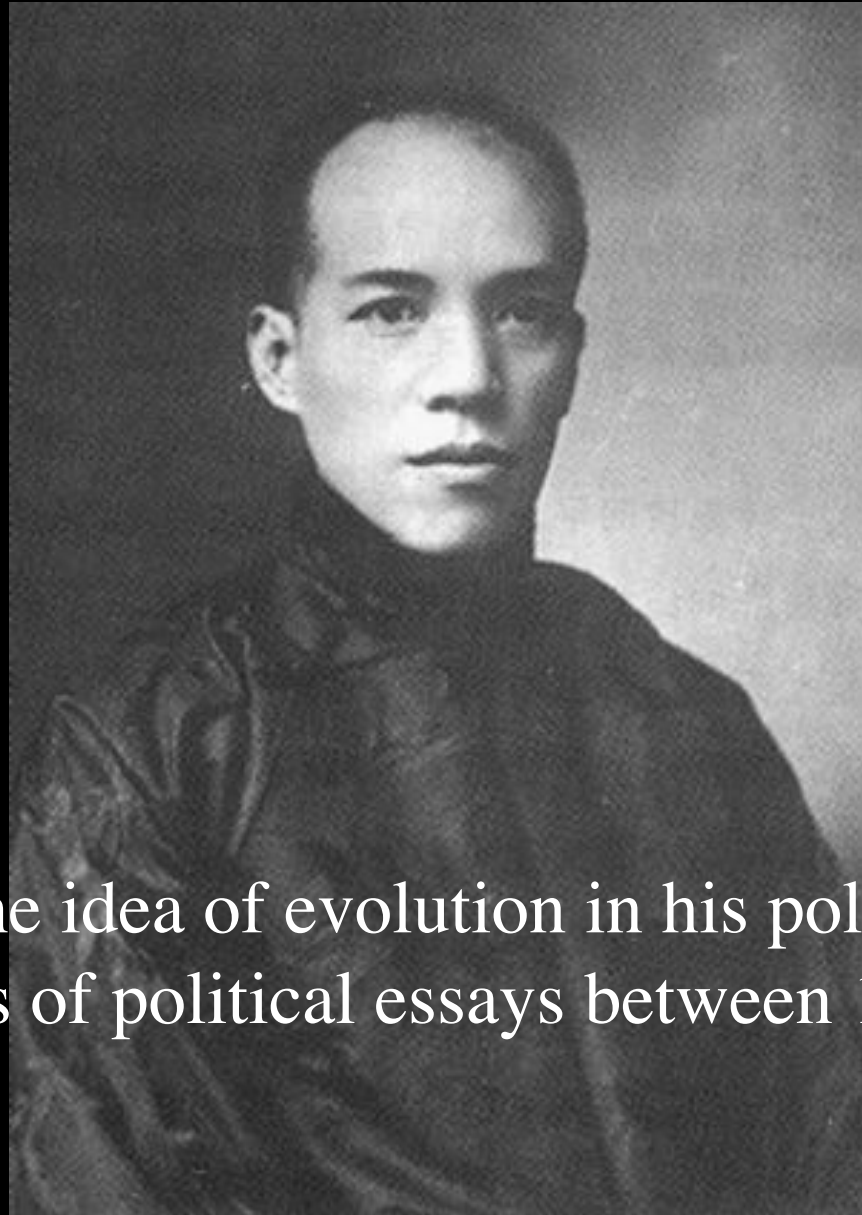
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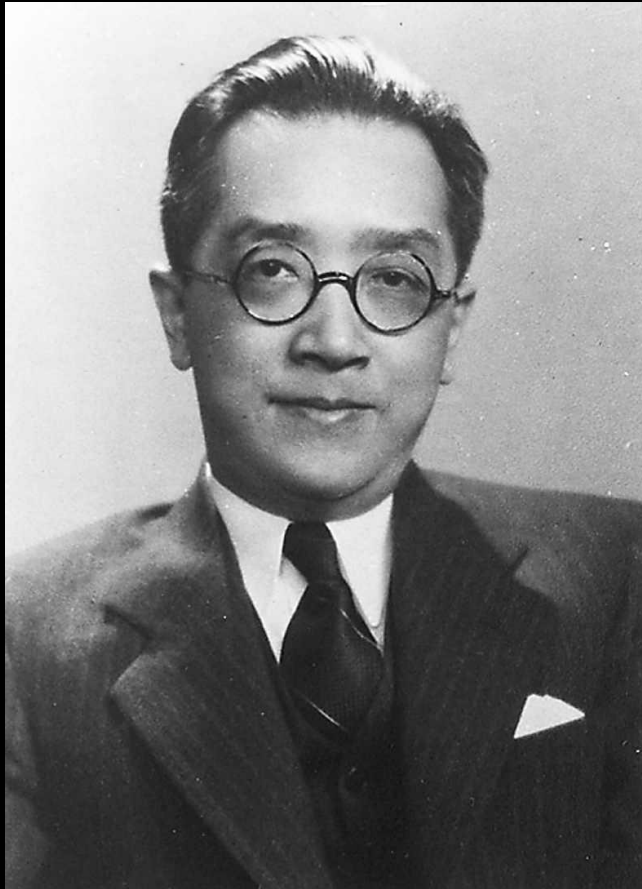
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# Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873~1929)



- Emphasize the idea of evolution in his political works.
- Write a series of political essays between 1896 and 1902.

# Yan Fu's influence on May Fourth intellectuals

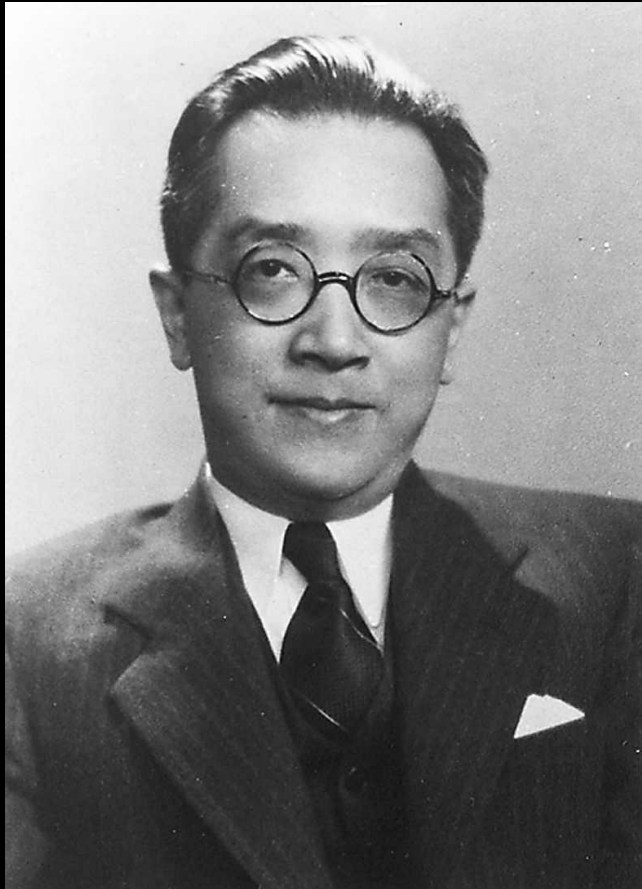


Hu Shi  
(1891 ~ 1962)



Lu Xun  
(1881 ~ 1936)

# Yan Fu's influence on May Fourth intellectuals



Hu Shi (1891 ~ 1962)

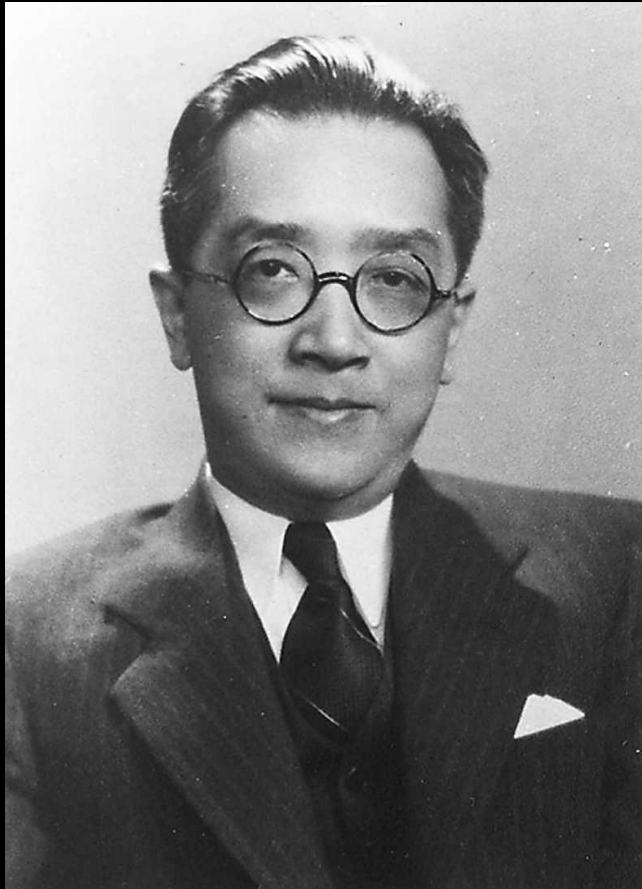
“我有兩個同學，一個叫做孫競存，一個叫做楊天擇。”

“I have two classmates. One is called Sun Jingcun. The other is called Yang Tianze.”

~ Hu Shi 胡適



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# Liang Qichao's political writings



Liang Qichao (1873 ~ 1929)

“Breathtaking and soul-stirring, a word is worth a thousand golds. He writes in a way that no one can, but speaks to the mind of every man. Even a cold-hearted person shall be moved. The power of words, since the ancient times, has never achieved this height.”

驚心動魄，一字千金，人人筆下所無，卻為人人意中所有，雖鐵石人亦應感動。從古至今，文字之力之大，無過於此者矣。

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“Were it not for the pen of Liang, even there were hundreds of Sun Yat-sens and Huang Keqiangs, could the success [of the Xinhai revolution] arrive so soon? A recent poet [thus] wrote, ‘Revolution begins when words start to reveal their power.’ Only Liang can be the true example of this.”

使無梁氏之筆，雖有百十孫中山，黃克強，豈能成功如此之速耶？近人詩“文字收功日，全球革命時”，此二語惟梁氏可以當之無愧。

~ Hu Shi (1891 ~ 1962)

“His Bianfa tongyi [General discussions on the reform of laws] was serialized on the Shiwubao [Contemporary news]. His writings are sharp in argument, clear in reasoning, overflowing with emotions, and are thoroughly satisfying to read.”

他寫的《變法通議》在《時務報》上連載，立論鋒利，條理分明，感情奔放，痛快淋漓。

~ Mao Zedong (1893~1976)