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Research Article

Translingual, Transcultural, and Transboundary Sceneries: Aesthetic Ideas and Discursive Practice in Yu Dafu's Landscape Writing

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Abstract

The ways in which nature is watched and represented have changed rapidly alongside modernization in 20th-century China. This can be regarded as the product of an epistemological transformation led by the encounter of Chinese and Western cultures. One of the representatives in this transformation and fusion of seeing is Yu Dafu, who, although generally known for his fiction, penned many travel writings and descriptions of nature in the 1930s. Regarding Yu's travelogue as an embodiment of his translingual and transcultural reflections, this paper reviews previous studies on Yu's travelogue and investigates its latent creativity and antinomy. This article delves into the stylistic and aesthetic features of Yu's travelogue to uncover the conservatism and misogyny obscured beneath the seemingly value-neutral landscapes, arguing that Yu's travelogue is a twofold amalgamation of genres and aesthetics. On the one hand, his travel writing is an adaption and combination of the German Baedeker guidebooks and traditional Chinese travel notes (*Youji* 遊記). On the other hand, Yu's texts incorporate aesthetic criteria influenced by different natural concepts, demonstrating both his broad vision ahead of time and his conservatism. Yu's writing on nature and landscapes, as a discursive practice motivated by the emergence of tourism in his era, is a transboundary dialogue between literature and commerce, and the elite and the general public, while also implicitly denying the common people access to the scenery space. Through a close reading of Yu's frequently employed tropes—picturesque and feminized scenes—I establish an isomorphic relationship between his views on nature, art, and female. Finally, the antinomy inherent in Yu's landscape imaginary constructed by creativity and conservatism points to the ambiguity of the New Culture.

Keywords: modern Chinese literature, landscape, space, travel writing, cross-cultural communication.

1. Introduction

In European art history, the role of the landscape changed after the Renaissance to become an artistic theme in its own right, rather than a background for religious or mythical works. (Andrews, 1999, pp. 1-51). In Chinese culture, the landscape as an artistic theme emerged much earlier—landscape poems (*Shanshui* poems) appeared in the 4th century,ⁱ and landscape paintings (*Shanshui* paintings) emerged in the 5th (Sullivan, 2008). The paradigm of nature and its means of reproduction, however, changed rapidly in the 19th and 20th centuries. Kojin Karatani (1993) compares "landscape" to an "epistemological constellation" (p.22) between Asian and Western cultures and builds an isomorphic relationship between modern landscape and literature in his discussions of literary realism in 1890s Japan. Western epistemological elements, especially the

laws of perspective, stripped away the transcendental conception in traditional scenes and transformed the landscape from signifier to signified.ⁱⁱ According to Karatani's investigation of Japanese literature, Wu (2017) explains the importance of Yu Dafu's (1896-1945) travel writings in the construction of the modern Chinese landscape and puts these articles in a context of consumerism.

One of the most important writers of the New Culture Movement (*Xin wenhua yundong*) in the 1910s-40s, Yu Dafu was well-known for his stories *Sinking* 沉淪 (1921) and *Intoxicating Spring Nights* 春風沈醉的晚上 (1924), which are regarded as representative works of New Literature. Such achievements established Yu's literary reputation and social influence, and he was invited to write propaganda for local tourist attractions. He consequently turned his attention from fiction to travel writing in the 1930s.

Based on Jiang's (1996) and Wu's (2012; 2017) discussions of Yu's collaboration with authorities and commercial powers in his travelogues, this article will examine the stylistic characteristics induced by the new sponsor and mechanism of writing, as well as the aesthetics inherent in these works, which contribute to a new imaginary of nature in modern China. In contrast to Wu's (2012; 2017) assertion that Yu's travelogues are the product of Western cultural dominance, I would argue that these works demonstrate Yu's decreasing reliance on Western resources and increasing confidence in classical Chinese, which reflects a shift in Yu's language model underlying landscape presentation.ⁱⁱⁱ

Throughout this paper, "landscape" corresponds to Karatani's (1993) definition mentioned above, which refers to both physical sceneries observed by a subject and literary space to describe them, and thus embodies epistemic modalities of a modern subject. Writers like Yu tried to create a novel experience of nature through their writings in the nascent vernacular Chinese. Except for the introduction, this paper has been divided into four parts. The first gives a brief overview of Yu's personal working history and its relationship with other aspects of his life. The importance of official patrons, Chinese *Youji*, and German travel guides to the shift in his literary interest will be discussed. The second and third parts outline two major aesthetic models in Yu's nature writing: picturesque and feminized landscapes. The two patterns will be investigated in diverse contexts, including Chinese classic and English literature, art history, and gender issues. In the fourth, I reflect and draw conclusions on the biases and stereotypes of nature, gender and culture, and discuss conservatism behind these preconceptions.

2. Travel Writing Motivated by New Patrons and the German Guidebook Genre

Though famous for his fiction, Yu increasingly turned to travel writing in the 1930s. Facilitated by the development of transportation and tourism in China during this period, Yu participated in multiple official travel activities and often wrote prose at the request of the railway bureau and the local government.^{iv}

Yu names these works as *Youji* 遊記, which roughly corresponds to travel writing/literature in English. Both of the Chinese and English phrases, however, are umbrella terms encompassing

diverse branches. In English, according to OED, "travel writing" refers to "a genre of writing in which authors describe places they have visited and their experiences while travelling."^v In Chinese, the authoritative dictionary *Comprehensive Chinese Word Dictionary* 漢語大詞典 defines *Youji* as a genre recording travel experiences,^{vi} while literary scholars in ancient Chinese studies are divided on the concept of *Youji*.^{vii} In this paper, I examine Yu's travel writing from the 1930s to the 1940s and argue that it is a hybrid of traditional Chinese *Youji* and German *Baedeker*, serving as both an account of Yu's outdoor voyage in nature and a commercial guide. Although there is a long history of travel literature in China,^{viii} Yu's work displays new features influenced by traditions from world literature. Such innovation fueled a renewal of Chinese travel writing and explored the possibility of cooperation between literature and its patrons.

One reason for Yu's transition to travel writing was that he had hit a creative block. Between 1928 and 1945, his output of fiction declined and ultimately ceased, while his production of travelogues simultaneously increased.^{ix} In 1928, Yu travelled around Wuxi and Yangzhou to avoid arrest by the authorities for political reasons. During this trip, he wrote *A Sentimental Journey* 感傷的行旅, which still assembles to his former styles in travel accounts in *An Account on the Smoke and Rain of Suzhou* 蘇州煙雨記 (1923), expressing intense personal emotions and psychological activities but hardly including dialogues with or guidance to the readers. In 1933, Yu moved with his family from Shanghai to Hangzhou, from where he travelled through sixty to seventy per cent of Zhejiang Province and wrote works such as *Records of a Brief Journey to Hangjiang* (Hangjiang Xiaoli Jicheng). In 1936, Yu moved to Fuzhou, where he worked as an official in the local department of culture. During this period, Yu wrote six pieces of prose in the series of *The Trifles of Fuzhou Journey* 閩遊滴瀝 (1936), which introduced local views and cultures to northerners. In 1938, while on the way to Singapore, he wrote *Travel Notes in Malacca* 麻六甲遊記 (1940). Towards the end of his life, he travelled to Indonesia, where he was killed by Japanese soldiers in 1945.

As a pioneer in New Literature, Yu Dafu unusually looked for inspiration from traditional documents in his travel writing. Yu cited plenty of historical records in these articles and was keen to check the accuracy of obscure books, which were sometimes unknown to the public. Yu himself and almost all researchers therefore directly refer to these travel texts as examples of the traditional Chinese genre *Youji* (travel notes). Hong (2006) present Yu's turn away from fiction and embrace of *Youji* as "a return to the world of traditional Chinese scholar-officials (*Shidafu*)" at a low point in his life (p. 702). However, as Wu (2012) proposes, in the context of the post-1920 development of Chinese travelogues, tourism and transportation, as well as the details featured in Yu's prose, Yu did not simply abandon modern literature and run back to tradition. Although there are similarities between Yu's travelogues and traditional *Youji*, his work is a product of influences from Western literature and the emergence of a new kind of patron. On the one hand, Yu's travel writing retains the same keen interest in Western literature as his early short tales with notable quotations, which I will explore further in the next section. Yu's travelogues, on the other hand, imply a conscious contemplation and introduction of the German genre *Baedeker*. In his first travelogue, Yu regards his work as a modification of traditional *Baedeker* guides:

"Days before, Zeng Yinqian, the director of Hangjiang railway traffic, asked a friend to invite me to travel around the East of Zhejiang Province. They requested that I write about

the scenery along the way, and introduce it to Chinese and foreign travellers. The railway from Hangzhou to Yushan has been finished and should be open to the public at the end of December. At the same time, the railway bureau hopes to collect my *Youji* in their forthcoming guidebooks, which would *alleviate and balance the vacuity and boredom of Baedeker guides*" [emphasis added]. (Yu, 2007, Vol. 4, p. 35)^x

The *Baedeker* guides that Yu refers to are travel guides named after German publisher Karl Baedeker (1801-1859). The first, *Rheinreise* (Rhein trip) was published in 1828, and later many other *Baedekers* were published, revised, and translated into French and English. They spread widely across Europe and became established as a new genre conditioned by tourism and publishing. A standard *Baedeker* usually provided an index of local information on, for example, accommodation, transportation, travel routes, and sightseeing. In this light, Yu's citation of *Baedeker* suggests his knowledge and reflection of this German genre.

With the growth of tourism, editors and the market placed new demands on travelogue authors. In a retrospective commemorating the tenth anniversary of *China Travel* 旅行雜誌,^{xi} editor Zhao Junhao (1936) outlined the following standards for manuscripts:

"While a travel writer must know how to write, draw, and shoot, it is more necessary to know how to guide subsequent travellers...We have received many travelogues that simply show the natural beauty and challenges of the voyage while forgetting the most important function of *Youji* [travel notes], which is to guide other travellers. Few writers are able to keep up with the demand. What a shame! "

Despite sharing the same name, Zhao's essay explicitly distinguishes between traditional *Youji* and modern travelogues. Readers and editors from ancient China will not consider travel instruction to be a necessary component of *Youji*, because long-distance travel is difficult, and the experience they seek from the text is more akin to "recumbent travel" (臥遊). However, Zhao's article implies that readers' demands had altered as a result of tourism and that most of the travel notes were unable to meet them. Yu's travel writing is valuable in this regard, given it consciously "guides" the reader, implying his awareness of the new expectation from readers.

Yu's literary awareness stems from his extensive reading of Western works, particularly *Baedeker*, which he mentions. As stated, Yu disliked *Baedekers* because he found them boring. This criticism reflects his awareness of the links between *Baedekers* and his own writing, which was an endeavour to modify the Western genre. At the same time as he expressed his intention to "alleviate and balance the vacuity and boredom of *Baedeker* guides," he introduced this new genre to the Chinese leadership. *The Scene in the East of Zhengjiang* (浙東景物紀 Zhedong Jingwu Ji), from which the preceding quote was taken, was part of the Guidebook Series published by the Hangjiang Railway Bureau. This volume includes photographs and maps, and also lists railway stations and accommodation (see Figs. 1 & 2), bestowing its practical value on travel. Furthermore, *The Scene in the East of Zhengjiang* is a collective effort including other writers' articles besides Yu's, similar to *Baedeker*, which normally invites specialists to gather information and give modifications (Mendelson 1985). These features effectively differentiate the book from conventional *Youji* and transform it into a Chinese *Baedeker*. In a larger context, *The Scene in the*

East of Zhengjiang embodies a period in which the Chinese *Baedeker* began to thrive. More than 400 Chinese Baedeker guides were written between 1912 and 1937 when China's transportation infrastructure was upgraded and its mass tourism industry began to develop (Zhao, 2017).^{xii} In this light, even though Yu publicly rebuked Baedekers, he yet contributed to the publishing industry by default, given that his stellar literary reputation is the best advocacy of the scenic spots and the genre in general.

[illegible]

Figure 1: Hangjiang Railway Fare Table, *The Scene in the East of Zhengjiang*, 1933, p. 161.

金華芳	人和館下水門外三	天和館下水門外三	諸暨悅來館下水門外三	四季春新市街二	鴻運樓市心街一	蕭山新新樓市心街一	所存地名
里半	里小洋二角	里小洋二角	里小洋二角	里小洋二角	里小洋一角	里小洋一角	碼頭
五校	一元六角	一元六角	一元六角	一元六角	一元六角	一元六角	離站距離
三	二	二	二	二	二	二	由車站人力車價電
二	二	二	二	二	二	二	三十號
一	一	一	一	一	一	一	話

(141)

Figure 2: Information on Local Accommodation, *The Scene in the East of Zhengjiang*, 1933, pp. 140-1.

Yu took aim at *Baedeker* again in his travelogue *Hangzhou*, which was published in 1934. After introducing the city's citizens, customs, history, natural scenery and suburbs, he states: "My description will not discuss the daily life and diet in Hangzhou, since I do not write *tour guides* of West Lake [emphasis added]" (Yu, 2007, Vol. 4, p. 93). In issuing this dismissive observation, Yu

sought to establish distance between his works and the *Baedeker* guidebooks. In doing so, however, he inadvertently reiterated the considerable amount that they had in common. The lines between them are pretty blurred. Yu's self-contradiction raises the question of precisely what he hoped to achieve by drawing this distinction repeatedly.

The answer can be traced back to the character of the *Baedekers*. Their rapid spread from Germany to France and then to England can be attributed to their standardized mode of production. On the one hand, they formulaically listed essential information about a place, removed the editor's personality from the text and presented each book in a uniform style. After the 1890s, "the handbooks' prose grew more efficient and compressed," as Mendelson (1985) elaborates, and "Baedeker used the parenthesis most often as a rapid indicator of the quality of hotels and restaurants." That explains why Yu criticized *Baedeker* as "boring." On the other, *Baedekers* were typically anonymous or signed in the (symbolic) name of Karl Baedeker. In 1913, for example, *Northern Italy* was published by the Baedeker Company under the name of Karl Baedeker, in apparent ignorance of the fact he had died in 1859. This attested to the fact that *Baedekers* had no real interest in the author or editor, which elicited consternation from Yu, who expressed his concern that they presaged "the death of the author."^{xiii}

Yu overcame his fears by using resources from the traditional genre *Youji*. After accepting the Hangjiang Railway Bureau's invitation, he wrote a series of articles that advertised the scenery along the newly-built railway. These articles portray the author's experience in detail, simultaneously give geographic information from historical records and are adorned with diverse literary quotations and legends. The itinerary Yu provided for travellers is usually based on his journeys, and the quotations depend on his reading preferences. These approaches from *Youji* give Yu's guidance unique personalities, which differentiate his articles from the *Baedekers*. In contrast to *Baedeker*, *Youji* is characterized by individuality, lyricism and a disregard for practical information about places.^{xiv} As Tian (2011) comments, Chinese travelogues display their strong personalities from their very beginnings:

"Rather than impersonally cataloguing local sites, products, and customs, many of these new travel accounts record personal experiences during these journeys. Crystallized in first-person anecdotes as well as in descriptions of movement through specific places at specific times, the individualized element of these travel writings does not aspire to give an "objective" account of what there is to note, but rather presents the world as seen through the eyes of a historical subject, an individual person." (p. 3)

Influenced by the requirements of tourism, Yu's travelogues catalogue "local sites, products, and customs" from an "objective" perspective, which makes them different from traditional *Youji*. On the other hand, he employs *Youji* approaches to counter-balance the commercial character and openness of the *Baedekers*. In doing so, he reasserts the literary character and authorship of his writing. This insistence on individuality in guidebooks can perhaps be better explained by referring to *A Guide of the Lakes* by Wordsworth, a poet whom Yu deeply admired, and who makes frequent appearances in his work. At the beginning of *A Guide*, Wordsworth (1835) comments:

"It was the Author's principal wish to furnish a Guide or Companion for the Minds of Persons of taste, and feeling for Landscape. [For] the more sure attainment, however, of this primary object, he will begin by undertaking the humble and tedious task." (p. i)

Wordsworth therefore posits a dialectical relation between aesthetic pursuit and writing practice in the production of a new landscape. Both Wordsworth and Yu anticipate and sustain their assertion of the author's subjective consciousness in their travel guides.

Moreover, Yu's grasp of genre dates back to his early work. Wang (2021) explores how Wordsworth's poem *The Solitary Reaper* inspired the environmental background and narrative structure of *Sinking*, demonstrating the novella's genre complexity. Contrary to Wang's assertion that Yu ceased writing fiction that embodies various genres following *Sinking*, Yu's reflections and experiments with Youji and Baedeker in travelogues indicate his continued interest and self-consciousness of the literary genre.

In addition to adopting an increasingly stylized approach to travel writing, Yu's reading materials during his journey were also beginning to change subtly. Yu's early writings, as compared to travel notes from the 1930s, mention Western literature far more frequently than Chinese novels when depicting nature. In *A Sentimental Journey* (1928), when Yu visits the ancient Chinese cities of Wuxi and Yangzhou, he advises his readers to bring a "German travel book" (Yu, 2007, Vol. 4, p. 4), which also demonstrates that Yu reads *Baedeker* often. In his earlier short story *Sinking*, the hero, on being confronted by wild Japanese scenery, oddly quotes a Wordsworth poem about the British landscape to express his feelings (Yu, Vol. 1, pp. 39-75). As Wang (2021) examines, Wordsworth's poem *The Solitary Reaper* is critical to the natural setting and narrative construction of *Sinking*. Additionally, as Lee (2006) elaborates, Yu's another early novella, *Journey South* 南遷 (1921), incorporates German Romanticism into its structure. Confronted with the picturesque coastline of a Southern Japanese island, the characters sing and discuss Goethe's *Mignon*, a song from the novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. These early writings before the 1930s demonstrate an odd correspondence between the physical environment and its linguistic portrayal.

In contrast, Yu's later travel guide writings from the 1930s draw on a diverse range of history books, maps and local products, and air concerns from public perspectives. Yu's diaries in Fuzhou, for example, show that he did not begin his travel writing until after collecting and reading books that included *Fujian Poems*, *General Chorography of Fujian*, *Records of the Products in Fujian*, and *Wuyi Chorography*. The majority of these texts are historical and geographical literature, or poems by unknown poets, which defy the literary criteria Yu and other intellectuals upheld and turn Yu's reading and quoting into a form of textual discovery. Yu's discovery of local documents closely is his preparatory collection work for the *Baedeker* edition and embodies his personal history of reading.

Yu's trust in classical Chinese represents a shift in his language ideal. As Levan (2012) examines, in Yu's early short stories, classical Chinese is "imagined as linked directly" to the experience; in contrast, foreign literature is viewed as the ideal vehicle for expressing contemporary experience, in which linguistic vision reflects the semantic predicament Yu and many other intellectuals met in the transitional period. However, in Yu's 1930s travelogues, Western quotations gradually decrease, while classical Chinese references become increasingly

important. This is not a straightforward return to pre-modern Chinese, but rather a departure from Yu's earlier linguistic model. In this sense, Yu's use of ancient literature re-establishes a connection between classical Chinese and contemporary experience, and it is through travel that Yu discovers the significance of Chinese history's overlooked texts.^{xv} Ancient books, in this light, not only guide Yu to new spots but also point to a new way of experiencing and representing the world, causing a vibration of a linguistic and epistemological shift and partially resolving the semantic conundrums in modern vernacular Chinese literature that Levan (2012) mentions.

The personalities of these travel writings stretch them beyond commercial incentives and integrate Yu's desire to learn about and engage with the world at a time when his literary career was stagnating. This gives Yu's travel writings a dual nature. Because they render an intense consciousness of authorship, his *Baedeker* writings do not simply list local information, but also encapsulate his aesthetic ideal; and because *Baedekers* were produced to speak to the public, Yu's travel writings do not simply express his personal views and sentiments. In general terms, these writings reflect his interpretation of the public interest and also represent an attempt to engage the public in dialogue. The transformation of the relationship between reading and practice eventually influenced Yu's other travel accounts that were written without the support of a patron. Over time, the outside incentives from patrons and tourism were internalized, and in the end, contributed to a paradigm shift in how people understand and write about nature.

3. An Ideal Model of Nature: The Picturesque Landscape

In the tropes Yu used to describe the landscape, his ideal scenery can be divided into two aesthetic patterns: picturesque and feminine. Yu's travel texts usually employ the tropes of paintings and females to extend beyond simply stating facts and listing information. As a consequence, the subject comes to appreciate the landscape in the same way he/she appreciates a piece of art and/or a woman.

Yu's landscape, as Wu (2012) investigates, illustrates a preference for comparing natural scenes to Western paintings. In his early works, like *Sinking* and *Journey South*, Yu shows a keen interest in nature. Yet discussions about these works often overlook the fact that descriptions of landscape in prose, rather than in verse, was not prevalent in fiction until the New Literature Movement. In other words, the origins of the prosaic landscape in fiction are interwoven with new literature (Nakazatomi, 2017). Apart from introducing Western Romanticism (Lee, 2006), the trope of Western paintings implies Yu's peculiar perspective in viewing and writing about the scenery. *Sinking* praises a beautiful view of a Japanese field as being "like a picture" (Yu, 2007, Vol. 1, p. 61), compares the view from a mountain to "Millet's pastoral landscape paintings" (p. 65), and renders scenery as a picture revealed by God, which compels the narrator to feel compassionate and tolerant towards the world.

This picturesque view of the landscape is also reflected in Yu's travel writings. Upon being confronted by the landscape in Zhuji, a small town in Zhejiang Province, Yu was reminded of illustrations of the Rhine and Danube rivers, and Heine's poem *Die Lorelei*, which he had read in a textbook (Yu, Vol. 4, pp. 35-53); upon witnessing the glaciers in Yuchuan, he claimed: "With

mountains and water, along with a water wheel, a mill, a fishing dam, a stone cliff, a water gate, and a causeway, everything necessary to decorate the scenery in a Chinese painting or watercolor is present" (pp. 54-68). He also likens the landscape of Mount Tianmu to "extremely dedicated traditional Chinese Fine Brushwork" (pp. 69-87) and a "Green *Shanshui*"^{xvi} painting by Li Zhaodao" (pp. 69-87). Such vivid imagery, which compares the scenes to paintings, recurs dozens of times in his travel writings.

This raises the question of what exactly Yu was trying to present when he compared a landscape to a painting. He described Tianmu Falls, for instance, as "indeed a fine view, like a picture." What kind of scenery can be read as "a picture?" Yu himself never defined the standards of the picturesque, but in his texts, the word "picturesque" undoubtedly represents the beauty of nature and expresses the pleasure of the beholder. According to the examples above, Yu's picturesque standard generally derives from two broad painting styles: pictures with western techniques and Chinese *Shanshui* paintings.

As previously stated, Yu's changing emphasis on different resources reflects his shifting language ideal. In this sense, I would argue that Yu's citations of western paintings are not simply "borrowing" Western values to signify indigenous nature or producing simulacra of Western sights (Wu, 2012), but rather an attempt to remake a modern language through cultural blending, which, as Levan (2012) elaborates, is motivated by cosmopolitanism rather than Eurocentrism. The increased use of traditional Chinese texts in his travelogues signifies Yu's growing confidence in the classical language as a means of expressing modern experiences.^{xvii} What lies underlying Yu's varied references is rather an ideal vision that transcends existing cultural schemata. When Yu stands in front of Dalongqiu Fall, he feels as if the surrounding inscriptions, the works of ancient literati collected in the local gazetteer, and even his prose are dwarfed by the "true view." (*The Autumn Moon over Mount Yandang*, pp. 147-8). Additionally, Yu considers the best artworks per se to be a part of "nature:"

Wordsworth's natural poetry, Millet's pastoral paintings, and Beethoven's stormy music are all facets of nature, which is completely ingenious and devoid of any hypocrisy (Yu, 2007, Vol. 10, p. 58)

In this sense, the analogies between the immediate and referential scene indicate the asymmetry between language and reality, as well as the distance between the subject and nature, which finally constructs an aura of the landscape. If the Western painting symbolizes the spatial distance between scenery and picture, the model of *Shanshui* can be said to illustrate temporal distance. Indeed, as W. J. T. Mitchell (2002) observes, distance is a prerequisite in a landscape:

"The landscape imperative ["Look at the view!"] is a kind of mandate to withdraw, to draw out by drawing back from a site. If a landscape, as we say, 'draws us in' with its seductive beauty, this movement is inseparable from a retreat to a broader, safer perspective, an aestheticizing distance, a kind of resistance to whatever practical or moral claim the scene might make on us." (p. viii)

On the other hand, as Wu (2012) points out, Yu's transcendental ideal can distort reality in ways other than through imitation of Western arts. In Yu's picturesque perspective, the beholder experiences reality through pre-existent conceptions, and the ideal picture form becomes the

criteria by which reality is evaluated. The precise meaning of a "good view" is already determined before the observer settles his/her gaze in nature. The supposed "discovery" of the landscape could, therefore, to some extent, be better described as verification of prejudgments. When appraised through the picturesque gaze, the scenery that is worth describing must match the transcendental aesthetic form. The real scene must consequently be modified and reconstructed if it is to be a qualified object of appreciation. Yu provides an example of this when he suggests how a view of Tiantai Mountain should be modified to meet a picturesque standard. He comments:

"The eaves of the Tanhua Kiosk in the Middle Fangguang Temple that extrude from the forest above the fall are neither exquisite nor ethereal. But if someone were to slightly modify the roof angle and add some red and yellow paint to the scenery, it would be an unparalleled picture." (Yu, 2007, Vol. 4, p. 135)

Though the picturesque ideal seems to resonate well with Yu's landscape writing, a tension remains between this ideal and the demands of tourism. It has already been observed that Yu's travel writing is not simply an individual record but also aspires to emulate *Baedeker*, and therefore seeks to enhance the understanding of the most general readers. The landscape that Yu constructs should therefore be universally accessible to the public. The picturesque aesthetic in Yu's articles, however, imposes highly cultural demands on readers. Yu himself was aware of this incongruity. After eulogizing the sights in Xixi, he observes:

"Indeed, the scenery in Huawu, especially in places like Qiuxue Nunnery and Jiaolu Nunnery, is elegant and tranquil. Those without a knowledge of the Southern School of Painting or Wang Wei and Wei Yingwu's poetry will, however, draw a blank in these places." (Yu, 2007, Vol. 4, p. 93)

The Southern School arose and the two poets lived both in Tang Dynasty (618–907). In Yu's opinion, an eligible viewer of the picturesque landscape must paint a natural picture in his/her brain, by drawing on literary and artistic scholarship. As a discursive practice, Yu's construction of natural space, therefore, excludes the masses who lack education about traditional culture. Even if they physically visit these places, they will be aesthetically rejected by the landscape.

From this perspective, there exists a contradiction between the accessibility of these emerging tourist attractions and the latent isolationism of the knowledge hierarchy. In this way, Yu's descriptions of nature became the fulfilment of cultural orders, which may have challenged those patrons who wished to attract more tourists, as well as Yu's 1928 advocacy for the massification of literature and art, claiming that good work should be "[b]y the people, for the people, and of the people" (Yu, 2007, Vol. 10, p. 450). These contradictions result from the integration of genres and artistic concepts in Chinese and Western cultures. Yu's genre is balanced between *Baedeker* and *Youji*, and the archetype of his picturesque scenery combines his artistic imagination with traditional Chinese aesthetics in *Shanshui* paintings and poetry, Western books and arts, and European sites he had never visited, which sometimes existed for him as landscape paintings rather than reality.

4. The Feminized Landscape and the Landscaped Female

Another ideal model Yu constructed in his guides was the feminized landscape. As Wang (2021) argues, in *Sinking*, nature is synonymous with women and religion to the protagonist, and the relationship between nature and reality indicates a struggle between spirit and flesh. In a subsequent short story titled *Sunset* 落日 (1923), Yu paints the sunlit autumn sky as bright as “a virgin’s eyes” (Vol. 1, 297), also reinforcing the connection between nature and females.

Yu’s travelogues from the 1930s take this symbolic imagining of nature a step further, crystallizing the illusion about women through races and personalities. In his landscape writing, nature automatically takes on female characteristics, and different types of scenery are anthropomorphized as different kinds of women. For instance, Yu describes Qingdao “as like a lady from a well-bred family. If the city has her nationality, she is a beautiful woman from southern Europe, satisfying her lust and *hiding her real identity*” [emphasis added] (*Journey to Qingdao, Jinan, Beiping, and Beidaihe*, Vol. 4, p. 151). Here, a woman’s noble identity contrasts with her lust. If she does not wish to behave well as “a lady,” then she should hide her nobility.

In Yu’s imagining, the greatest tribute that can be paid to a female landscape is giving it the characteristics of purity and passivity. This sort of nature is obliged to have few artificial decorations or modifications, and it should always be open to the sight of male beholders, in the expectation it will be discovered and possessed by them. In instances where the landscape fell short of such expectations, Yu deployed vicious tropes. His strong dislike of Hangzhou, for example, led him to compare its landscape to a woman wearing heavy make-up. He observes:

“It has been said the character flaws of Hangzhou people are to be blamed for the *over-beautiful sceneries*. The West Lake in Hangzhou is like *a fox spirit*, in the shape of a young beauty with a soft and charming body. They say this is why Hangzhou can never cultivate good men. Well this opinion, to some extent, holds water” [emphasis added]. (Yu, 2007, Vol. 4, p. 91)

Yu’s simile comparing an evil place with a bad woman is a tacit admission of the similarities between a location and a woman. The comparability derives from their common status as objects. In Chinese mythology, the fox spirit (*huli jing*) can acquire human forms. It usually metamorphoses as a beauty, tempts men to indulge their feelings of lust, and finally murders them. In daily discourse, the fox spirit is usually used as a metonym of a gorgeous but evil female. As Lu Xun (1918) criticizes, the emphasis on female chastity is a Confucian legacy; whereas the femme fatale, as McLaren (1994) states, signifies “a counter-model to the Neo-Confucian paragon of passivity and submission” (p. 2). For Confucian moralists, glamorous women who tempt men are considered hazardous and immoral. In presenting the scenery as a she-devil, Yu made an oblique reference to the idiom that a *femme fatale* is “one who devastates city and state” (*qing cheng qing guo*)^{xviii} and thus added an ethical filter to a landscape he already despised. Indeed, such a perspective perpetuates Yu’s intrinsic misogyny in his literary works. As Xu (2009) illustrates, female characters in Yu’s fiction are always portrayed as non-human and devoid of free will. Earlier in 1916, in a letter to Chen Bicen, Yu described “women in the world” as “the embodiment of demons” and vowed to stay away from them for the rest of his life (Vol. 6, 10). Following his second marriage, Yu depicts females with even greater hostility and viler curses in his fiction *The Stray Lamb* 迷羊 (1927) and *She Is a Weak Woman* 她是一個弱女子 (1932), in which women with uncontrollable sexual desire induce men’s impotence (Xu 2009). Additionally, Yu repeats the “four main stages” of traditional

femme fatale plot structure proposed by McLaren (1994, pp.12-3) in *She Is a Weak Woman*, emphasizing the retribution and calamity that is symbolized by the Japanese army's rape and murder of the heroine, Zheng Xiuyue. In this regard, Lu Xun's and Yu Dafu's diametrically opposed attitudes toward virginity exemplify Hong's argument that Yu's creations lack a true sense of modern consciousness while embodying the perception of contemporaneity (p. 689).

In Yu's travel writing in the 1930s, the landscape and women are conjoined in an isostructural chain through analogies. Yu's prose implies that both should embody an aesthetic ideal—they should be gentle, quiet, and stripped of their desires. His description of Huawu, a place that had particularly impressed him ten years prior, is typical in this regard. He writes:

"If I shall compare Huawu to a person, it is like the wife of a Xunyang merchant who plays the lute alone.^{xix} If I shall compare Huawu to a flower, it is like a peach, which has faded after its blossom and awaits the spring. If I shall compare Huawu to a dish, it is made of mushroom and tofu, light but tasty." (Yu, 2007, Vol. 4, p. 161)

In Yu's memory, Huawu is a delightful spot because it is simple and elegant, like a married middle-aged woman whose libido declines, or a fragrant dish that lacks rich flavor. Nevertheless, to Yu's surprise, Huawu had been transformed by tourism and transportation and had become more commercial and crowded by the time he visited again. This change irritated Yu, and he described the effects of commercialization on the town as "an unadorned and naïve, sedate and demure young girl, suddenly raped and abandoned by a wealthy man" (Yu, 2007, Vol. 4, p. 163). Yu criticized these social changes through the phenomenon we now call slut-shaming, and he transplants Freud's (2001, pp. 179-190) Madonna-whore complex into nature.

Contrary to the hateful landscape described as *femme fatale* or raped females, Yu imagined the beautiful scenery (or woman) as a Madonna-like redeemer of existential crisis. By this logic, Yu's landscape is a place of rehabilitation,^{xx} an antidote to urban diseases or the darkness of human nature,^{xxi} and even a site where life ends in death. Such views of nature and females also appear in Yu's work before his travel writing. In the story *Smoke Shadows* (煙影) (1926), he states: "For Zeng Pu, life or death is not a big deal. But since one is doomed to die, he hopes to die in a beauty's arms, or at least to die in the ocean waves on a calm night, alongside the moon and wind" (Yu, 2007, Vol. 1, pp. 401-2). Remarkably, this expression restricts beautiful women and landscapes to an abstract model and purpose by imaging them as ideal life destinations. In this manner, both nature and female lose their power and become passive recipients of the male gaze.

Based on the observations above, Yu's female landscape embodies a gaze imbued with male desire and traditional ethical restraints, which require female compliance in issues of sexual politics. The model of the female landscape implies a mirrored relationship between women and nature: the female is objectified to describe an ideal landscape, in which process she is also watched as one. Nature is thus refracted through the female body and presented as a landscape.

The virginal and picturesque ideals are not unique in Yu's descriptions of landscapes—they can also be found in his fiction. Further, the two models are interconnected when Yu employs a picturesque perspective to evaluate the landscaped woman:

"Miss K was sixteen years old, with the beautiful face of a chaste virgin, wearing the black uniform of a medical school for girls. When Zhifu met her, she reminded him of *the icon paintings of the Renaissance*" [emphasis added]. (Yu, 2007, Vol. 1, p. 193)

Here, the subject of the icon should be Madonna. Yu reiterates the virginal perspective, as he does in his descriptions of landscapes, and invokes the virgin by referring to "icon paintings." In this trope, he employs the ethical schema of Christianity to female morality and behaviour. Another example is provided in Yu's novella *The Stray Lamb*, in which he describes the beautiful heroine as the kind of lady he "has only seen once or twice, in French albums" (Yu, 2007, Vol. 2, p. 119). Again, like in his observations of the landscape, the association between beauty and albums establishes a clear parallel between watching a woman and looking at a picture. Here, the exoticism and distance hidden in the landscape reappear and present themselves in the picturesque scenery.

Yu's landscape imaginary comprises unfrequented places, chaste ladies, and painting styles that merge Chinese and Western techniques and angles. These three elements thus interact with each other in an isomorphic structure, invoking a common natural ideal—an ethical, virginally pure, and essentialist model. The landscape that does not correspond to any of them is deemed "filthy" and unworthy of artists' attention.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the scenery in Yu's travel writing of the 1930s assumes a twofold amalgamation and antinomy. On the one hand, it is both a result and a rejection of modern commercial society. Developing alongside the prosperity of modern vernacular Chinese, transportation, and tourism, these texts differ from traditional Chinese *Youji* and take on qualities of the German *Baedeker* guidebook genre. It viewed landscapes in an unprecedented way and created public space in the suburbs. Unlike Yu's early style, these works contain few political concerns or points of individual distress.

On the other, two major aesthetic patterns—the picturesque and feminized landscape—imply both Yu's global vision and lack a true sense of modern consciousness. While well educated in Western arts and literature, Yu absorbed more traditional Chinese influence at this stage of his career. His integrated aesthetics from Chinese and Western painting visions in his works occasionally presented an insurmountable artistic barrier to the public. The glaring stereotypes in Yu's feminized landscape confirm conventional sexual politics and objectify women as scenery. Such viewing patterns assume the readers and landscape viewers to be male intellectuals, endowed with a deep comprehension of Chinese and Occidental knowledge. All other people present in nature, such as Buddhist pilgrims, peasants, rickshaw drivers, tourists who are ignorant of Wang Wei's poems, and women, are merely part of the landscape. They are simply waiting to be discovered, gazed at, and framed in the picturesque scenery. This displays anxiety typical of the cultural hegemony: if everyone has the right to appreciate and actively engage in the landscape, the established landscape discourse will be challenged, and the space that male intellectuals have carved out will be threatened. In this sense, Yu's writing violates the original

intention of the May Fourth Movement to develop the literature of common people (平民文學) and his promise of mass literature and art (大眾文藝) in 1928.

Intermingling creation and conservation, and oriental and occidental cultures, Yu's travel writing is a unique window into 1930s China; the amalgamation and clash it contains depict a segment of the complexity of modern Chinese literature.

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Endnotes

ⁱ *Shanshui* usually refers to the genres concerning nature, whereas the word *Fengjing* 風景 is used to translate "landscape." Tamaki (2017) analyzes the usage and etymology of the Chinese word *Fengjing* (pp. 13-49). On *Shanshui* poems in medieval China, see Xiao (2018) and Obi (2014)'s work.

ⁱⁱ Controversially, Jackson (1984) proposed to understand the landscape from the field instead of documents, and he opposes interpreting it as a personal or private metaphor since the landscape should be a public and sharing space.

ⁱⁱⁱ The key arguments and evidence in Wu's (2012; 2017; 2018) three essays are similar. Wu recognizes a new mode of creation based on collaboration between writers and commerce, but continues to consider the aesthetics and discourses in Yu's early short stories and 1930s travelogues as a whole, omitting Yu's creative crises and the consequent shifts in Yu's literary pursuit during this period, which I will clarify in this paper.

^{iv} Jiang (1996) has a detailed retrospection of Yu's travel writing from his Japanese period to his death and also mentions the cooperation between Yu and the bureau, while she confused Yu's journey to Hangjiang in 1933 with another one to Mount Tianmu in 1934.

^v Oxford English Dictionary. (n.d.). Citation. In *OED.com dictionary*. Retrieved October 9, 2021, from <https://www.oed.com>

^{vi} Comprehensive Chinese Word Dictionary. (n.d.). Citation. In *Hanyudacidian.com dictionary*. Retrieved October 9, 2021, from <https://www.hanyudacidian.cn>

^{vii} For the debates on the definition of *Youji* as a genre, please see Wang (2008, pp. 6-30) and Hargett's (2018, pp. 4-6) discussion.

^{viii} On the development of *Youji* in history, this paper mainly refers to Obi's (2014) and Hargett (2018)'s work.

^{ix} Yu writes to Du Heng, the editor of the journal *Modernity*, in a letter sent in 1933: "There isn't any way to get out of this situation. I'm afraid I'll have to offer you a blank exam paper for the upcoming issue because I'm unable to generate anything." (Yu, 2007, Vol. 6, p. 236) This letter reveals Yu's predicament at the moment. It is noticeable that just one month after this letter, Yu started his invited journey to Hangjiang and shifted his interest to travel literature.

^x In this paper, when not alternately noted, translations from Chinese texts are by the author.

^{xi} *China Travel* is a seminal publication in the field of Republican travel literature. It was created in 1927 by Chen Guangfu and has published numerous travelogues by prominent writers such as Yu Dafu, Zhang Henshui, Hu Shih, and others. For more information on its origins, see Zhu (1927).

^{xii} Another example is *Travel Notes along the Pingsui Railway* (1935), which is also a Chinese *Baedeker* with contributions from well-known writers such as Bing Xin, Gu Jiegang, Zheng Zhenduo. It was also an official trip organized by the director of Pingsui Railway Bureau, Shen Chang.

^{xiii} Eggert's (2011) paper has further investigations on the authorship of the *Baedeker*.

^{xiv} Hargett (2018) has also pointed out the personal features of *Youji*.

^{xv} Yu's re-discovery of ancient Chinese texts is comparable to Fanon's (1986) practice in this regard. There is also a trajectory of his language conceptions in *Black Skin, White Masks*, from learning and admiring colonial language – French – to criticizing the admiration, and finally to reclaiming his cultural identity through repressed Black narratives and Black tones of speech.

^{xvi} The Green *Shanshui* (*Qinglv Shangshui*) is a traditional landscape painting style, which mainly uses blue and green colors to depict natural scenes.

^{xvii} Apart from the increased use of classical Chinese references, Yu incorporated more of his own classical poetry into his travelogues, whereas such poems were previously more private and appeared less frequently in Yu's vernacular creations (Hong, 2006). For instance, *Diaotai de Chunzhou* (1932) contains one of Yu's classical poems, *Hangjiang Xiaoli Jicheng* (1933) contains four, and *Xiyou Rilü* (1934) contains five.

^{xviii} For investigations into the relationship of *femme fatale* and the phrase, see McLaren (1994, pp. 1-16). For other studies on Chinese fox-fairy stories, see Monschein (1988) and Huntington (2020).

^{xix} This is a female figure in Bai Juyi's *Pipa Xing* 琵琶行 (AC 815). The woman was a renowned lute player in the capital. Years later, however, her beauty faded and she lost all her customers. She was eventually forced to lower herself and married a merchant from Xunyang.

^{xx} For Yu, it seems self-evident that natural scenery will cure physical illness. Whether living in Japan or China, Yu sought healing in nature. This expectation is also frequently rendered in his fiction.

^{xxi} For example, he attributed corruption and the failure of political faculties to officials' ignorance of nature. See: *The Appreciation on Shanshui and Natural Scenery*, 山水及自然景物的欣赏, Yu, Vol. 11, pp. 227-232.

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