Self-translation, Rewriting, and Translingual Address: Li Kotomi’s *Solo Dance*

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**Abstract**

Drawing on Susan Bassnett’s critique of ‘self-translation,’ whereby the phenomenon is understood according to a binary source-target logic and the related notion of originality, this article examines three versions of a Li Kotomi novel: the Japanese original *Hitorimai* (独り舞, 2018), the Chinese self-translation *Du Wu* (獨舞, 2019), and Arthur Reiji Morris’s English translation *Solo Dance* (2022). Our focus is on how Li’s practice of self-translation and translanguaging muddles traditional boundaries between culture and language, and challenges binary notions of translation. Rather than viewing self-translation through source-target/original-translation binaries, we examine *Hitorimai* and *Du Wu* as a translingual, transcultural dialogue between Li (as author and translator) and her readers in a space of “translingual address” (Robinson). Furthermore, we discuss queer cross-cultural representations in Morris’s English translation and argue that, together, the Japanese text and the Chinese self-translation constitute the queer original of the novel.

**Keywords**

self-translation – Li Kotomi – *Solo Dance* – rewriting – translingual address
Introduction

Literary work by the Taiwan-born novelist Li Kotomi (李琴峰, り・ことみ), who has become a successful writer in her second language of Japanese and has been hailed as “an important queer voice from East Asia’s millennial generation” (Solo Dance, back cover), sheds light on the complex interplay between bilingual writing (Japanese and Chinese), translingual writing (since Japanese is not the author’s first language [Kellman]), self-translation, and queer writing. A particularly interesting case in this regard is her novel Hitorimai (独り舞, 2018). Originally written in Japanese, it was translated by Li Kotomi herself into Chinese as Du Wu (獨舞, 2019), with Arthur Reiji Morris subsequently producing the English-language translation, Solo Dance (2022), which was published for an international Anglophone audience.¹ The book is, moreover, queer in form and in content, combining cultures of Taiwan and Japan with Li Kotomi’s experience of being both bilingual and queer. This novel tells the story of Cho Norie, a 27-year-old queer Taiwanese woman doing an office job in Tokyo, and focuses on her unconventional life: her sexuality, the violence that caused her to move to Japan, and her particular fascination with death. It depicts an unambiguous story of the queer woman and her search for hope after trauma.

A presumably autobiographical debut novel, Hitorimai won the 60th Gunzo New Writers’ Prize (Gunzo Shinjin Bungakusho) for its emphasis on the young lesbian woman’s struggle to “find her place in a world that is hostile to her sexual identity” (Hussey). As Claire Maree notes, Hitorimai also illustrates “both the joys and anxieties of learning a language,” while her story crafts a non-linear retelling of the protagonist’s depression and coming out as a lesbian-identified woman. The novel’s autodiegetic narrator Cho shares many similarities with Li: she started studying Japanese as a teenager, decided to migrate to Japan, and gave herself a Japanese first name for her pen name.²

Having evolved from a Japanese original to a Chinese self-translation and then to an English allograph translation, the novel breaks through linguistic barriers—especially those related to languages of queerness—as well as the

¹ In this article, we use Hitorimai to refer to the Japanese edition, Du Wu to refer to the Chinese edition, and Solo Dance to refer to the English edition. Until 2022, when the English translation, Solo Dance, was published, Li’s novels had only been available in Japanese and traditional Chinese (which is standard in Taiwan, as compared to simplified Chinese, which is used in mainland China) and Japanese.

² For Li’s personal background, see: www.nippon.com/ja/japan-topics/g01180/?cx_recs_click=true; www.nippon.com/ja/japan-topics/c10403/?cx_recs_click=true. (Both accessed March 30, 2023.)
cultural barriers of coming out, of dealing with homophobia, and of sustaining hope after trauma. In *Hitorimai* and its translation, language inevitably plays a central role in representing queer voices and queer writing, and in rewriting queer identities and desires. It provides building blocks for our understanding of self-translation, translanguaging, and translingual address that are embedded in the context. Here, “translanguaging” refers to “the contingent and creative thrown-togetherness of languages, language varieties, registers, and semiotic modalities”; it means “going between and beyond languages” (Baynham and Lee 7–8). Meanwhile, “translingual address” is Douglas Robinson’s term for “the hermeneutical movement of a subject-in-transit,” which implies “empathic exposure to and experience of at least two cultures” and “the resulting ability to shift attitudinally and perspectivally, in moving from one to the other” (xi). The novel’s use of language also enables author, translator, and reader to negotiate linguistic questions in various ways and for numerous reasons, such as those related to personal and national identities and cultural differences.

Due to this linguistic difference, there is a distance between Li’s self-translation and Morris’s English translation in terms of both textual accuracy and queerness. Such distance adds complexity to an English translation that is already marked by cultural and linguistic differences. Brian James Baer’s identification of queer sexuality and translation as sexual and linguistic others of the modern nation is relevant here. Li Kotomi’s concern with queer sexualities is closely related to translation. We argue that Li’s *Hitorimai* occupies the queer borderlands of languages, since the novel reflects, as Baer observes, “a place of linguistic echoes, resemblances, and distortions, undermining the myth of monolingualism and the cultural capital it represents” (34).

In this article, we analyze the three published versions of Li’s novel: the Japanese ‘original’ *Hitorimai* (独り舞, 2018), the Chinese self-translation *Du Wu* (獨舞, 2019), and Morris’s English allograph translation *Solo Dance* (2022). Drawing on Robinson’s concept of translingual address and Susan Bassnett’s critique of the term ‘self-translation’ (15), we offer a critical reading of the ‘original’ Japanese text and its Chinese translation, focusing on Li’s practice of self-translation and translanguaging, which blurs the boundaries between culture and language and challenges some of the rigid, over-simplistic notions of translation (e.g. linguistic equivalence; binary models of author/translator). Moving beyond the binary understanding of source/target and original/translation, we examine the writing of *Hitorimai* in Japanese and *Du Wu* in Chinese as a translingual and transcultural dialogue between Li—as both an author and a translator—and her readers. This dialogue allows Li, as author, to engage directly with the uneasiness that monolingual Japanese or Chinese readers may feel when faced with the other cultural context, and to create a space for
translingual address and connection between two different linguistic, cultural, and historical contexts. We argue that the Japanese text and the Chinese self-translation should be taken together and considered the queer original of the novel. As Lori Chamberlain highlighted several decades ago, translation traditionally has strong metaphorical ties to power dynamics associated with a particular kind of heterosexual marriage: it is the ‘husband’ who creates the ‘original’ and the subordinate ‘wife’ who prepares a derivative translation, ‘copying’ the original as ‘faithfully’ as possible into another language. As in the famous tag les belles infidèles, this metaphor speaks to “a cultural complicity between the issues of fidelity in translation and in marriage” (456). We would rather not limit the creative possibilities of Li’s Chinese text by reinforcing this metaphor, defining the Chinese translation in terms of ‘fidelity,’ ‘faithfulness,’ or ‘beauty.’ Ideally, then, an English translation of Li’s novel would be carried out by a translator who is able to navigate both the Japanese and Chinese languages and cultures reflected in the existing versions of the book and produce an English text that is equally complex and hybrid rather than one posited on the Japanese version as the sole original. By comparing the Japanese and Chinese texts to the English, we are able to recognize the unique status of a self-translation as its own kind of original, while also appreciating the persistence of traditional nation-based frameworks that make such a hybrid translation virtually impossible for publishers to imagine.

Li Kotomi’s Influence on Tongzhi Literature of Taiwan

*Hitorimai / Du Wu / Solo Dance* has not received significant attention in literary and/or translation studies due to its relative inaccessibility and the lack of widespread international publicity. It is worth noting, however, that *Du Wu*, on its own terms, represents a significant contribution to *tongzhi* literature in Taiwan. *Tongzhi* (同志), often translated into English as “comrade,” is “the most popular contemporary Chinese word for lesbians, bisexuals, and gay people” (Chou 1). A genre “consisting of literary works featuring homosexuality” (Chi, “Tongzhi” 1609), *tongzhi* literature has been considered a main platform for LGBTQ+ representation, especially during the period of martial law (1949–1987) when homosexuality was taboo and any activism was forbidden (Chi “Tongzhi” 1609). In recent years, *tongzhi* literature has invited more inclusive voices and queer narratives. In her novels, including *Hitorimai*, Li not only showcases the cultural and linguistic uniqueness of Taiwan but also seeks to “把台灣文學向外開拓，尤其是台灣的同志文學。” [expand Taiwan literature, especially the tongzhi literature of Taiwan] (Ho 384). Chi Ta-Wei ac-
knowledges that *Hitorimai*’s contribution to *tongzhi* literature reinterprets the concept of Taiwan’s queer narratives that emerged in the 1990s. Chi argues that the novel, originally written in Japanese, “一方面回顧一九九〇年代英年早逝的作家邱妙津，另一方面展望二十一世紀的東亞同志人權運動” [looks back on the untimely passing of writer Qiu Miaojin in the 1990s while looking toward the *tongzhi* rights movements in East Asia in the 21st century] (“從「獨舞」到「眾愛」” 4).

Furthermore, as Yang Chia-Hsien argues, since *Hitorimai* is “embedded in a complex network of cross-references between contemporary Taiwan literature, Japanese literature, and classical Chinese literature,” it can be understood as partially Japanese literature and as “an extension of Taiwanese literature” (Yang 12). Sophia Huei-ling Chen points out that Li’s œuvre is “steeped in Japanese literature, especially in girl love or ‘yuri’ genre,” while she is “indebted to Taiwanese queer female authors such as Chen Xue and Qiu Miaojin” (236). *Hitorimai* not only pushes national and historical boundaries but also makes a distinctive mark in the history of queer literature across languages and cultures. Here, we see the importance of Li’s contribution to the translingual and transcultural exchange of *tongzhi* literature’s transnationalism.

However, Li’s decision to write her novels in Japanese is linked more to her fondness for Japanese contemporary culture than to the way Taiwanese literary scenes has developed since the early 20th century. Modern cultural commodities were brought to Taiwan in the early years of Japanese coloniza-
tion, leading to the production of original artistic works that are meaningful to Taiwan specifically (Kimura and Lin, “Friend and Foe” 173; Kimura and Lin, “Taiwanese Fashion” 351). Taiwan’s literary originality is not merely a tributary of Chinese literature. It may have its origins in Taiwanese opinion pieces and literary magazines such as *Taiwan Seinen* (Taiwan Youth, 臺灣青年, est. 1920), but Japanese soon became more dominant as it enabled Taiwanese voices to travel further in the official language of the expanding Japanese empire. According to Watanabe, the concept of Taiwan as a united island and a distinctive culture began to emerge through literature in Japanese. Japanese became the only language permissible for publication in Taiwan in 1937, due to the rise of Japanese nationalism; but by the late 1940s, Mandarin Chinese had supplanted it as the official language due to the arrival of the Kuomintang and its promotion of Mandarin Chinese under a martial law regime that lasted until 1987. In fact, distinctively Taiwanese literature has been written in various languages, such as Mandarin Chinese, Hakka (Taiwanese), and Japanese, and it has not been uncommon for Taiwanese authors to write novels in any of the languages they are fluent in and/or in multiple languages. Examples abound of Taiwanese authors who grew up speaking Japanese during the colonial era in the first half...
of the 20th century but later wrote in Mandarin Chinese (Matsunaga 326–27). Long Ying-Zong wrote his debut novel *Papaya no aru Machi* (The Town That Planted Papaya Trees) in Japanese in 1937. By the 1980s, when he wrote *Du Fu zai Chang’an* [Du Fu in Chang’an, 杜甫在長安], he was using Mandarin Chinese.

It is worth noting that Long was bilingual not by choice but as a consequence of first imperial and then nationalist authoritarianism. Unlike Long and other Taiwanese writers who wrote in Japanese, such as Yang Kui and Lu Heruo, Li’s bilingualism is a choice. As she explains in the afterword to *Du Wu*, her decision to write *Hitorimai* in her second language rather than her native tongue was “既是偶然，也是必然” [incidental and inevitable] (*Du Wu* 217). She accounts for this apparent contradiction by explaining that, had the Japanese verb ‘死ぬ’ [die]—as opposed to the Chinese equivalent ‘死’—a substitution she found “語言上的趣味” [linguistically interesting]—not struck her on the commuter train one morning, then *Hitorimai* would never have been written (217). In an interview with the translator Arthur Reiji Morris, Li Kotomi adds: “[B]ecause that first word came to me in Japanese, I decided to write it in Japanese too, and it became the first novel I had ever written in the language” (Li and Morris).

In addition to Li, there are other contemporary authors of Taiwanese background who write in Japanese, such as Higashiyama Akira and Wen Yuju, and thereby contribute to disseminating Taiwanese sentiments and feelings to a wider audience. However, Higashiyama and Wen, along with historical writers from the colonial era, were educated in Japanese. Li is unique in that she was born in Taiwan, has no ethnic ties to Japan, and studied in Taiwan until finishing her bachelor’s degree. She later moved to Japan for postgraduate studies, remained there for work, and eventually became a novelist while still living in Japan (Nojima).

**Li Kotomi as a Self-Translator**

Self-translation, as practiced by Li Kotomi, involves not only the presence of at least two languages and cultures in the process of writing, rewriting, and producing another version, but can also be said to produce, in effect, a new original. Thus, it “confronts and plays with both conventional literary practices and translational norms” (Klimkiewicz 190). The critical potential of self-translation to deconstruct the binary understanding of translation is at least two-fold. First, as Susan Bassnett proposes, the term ‘self-translation’ is problematic in itself, primarily because it “compels us to consider the problem of the
existence of an original” (15). Second, self-translation can be analyzed as the production of bilingual, parallel texts, in which case the binary notions of ‘original’ and ‘translation’ become “simplistic and unhelpful” (15), as there are many bilingual authors who shift between languages.

Self-translation is not entirely new in Chinese-language literature. As Cordingley and Stenberg note, Chinese is “typically the source language in self-translation” where “the author and translator of a published work are one and the same” (90–91). Indeed, according to Hung and Wakabayashi, self-translation is embedded in literary traditions throughout East Asia due to shared knowledge of Classical Chinese, and the fact that self-translation “came very naturally to the elite educated in Classical Chinese” (25). For example, the rarefied cultural and intellectually elite Lin Yutang, author of *The Importance of Living* (*shenghuo de yishu*, 生活的藝術) and *My Country and My People* (*wuguo yu wumin*, 吾國與吾民), wrote in both Chinese and English and also self-translated his work. An example is “My Giving Up Smoking” (*wo de jie yan*, 我的戒煙), an essay thought to have been originally written in English and then self-translated into Chinese (Chu 49). Similarly, the Chinese writings of Eileen Chang, such as *The First Brazier* (*diyi lu xiang*, 第一爐香), reflect her extensive reading in classical Chinese literature and are considered by Leo Ou-fan Lee to be “covert bilingual writing” (128). Meng Hui takes a more nuanced view, pointing out that Chang represents a “somewhat awkward betweenness and reluctant metamorphosis in her self-translation and reveals her disinclination in bringing forth the conciliations between her Sinophone and Anglophone writings” (3). Like Chang’s, Li’s self-translation practice seriously undermines binary models of translation that are rooted in notions of ‘original’ and ‘translation,’ as her self-translation involves a transcultural perspective that extends well beyond Anglophone discussions of identity, lived experience, and sexuality to Japanese and Chinese linguistic contexts. As someone who writes in both Japanese and Chinese, Li regularly shifts between languages and therefore claims to feel uncomfortable leaving the Japanese-to-Chinese translation of her books to anyone but herself. The binary notion of original/translation cannot account adequately for a writing/translator practice like Li’s that leverages the fluid translinguaging of the author to deepen engagement with and comprehension of complex texts and contexts. If, as André Lefevere suggests, the boundary between self-translating and rewriting is nonexistent, then Li has effectively rewritten her work. She operates in a dialogic way with what might be termed an ‘original’ while acknowledging an impulse driven by issues of identity as she reworks what she has written, thus creating another original.
Rewriting *Hitorimai*

Li Kotomi’s self-translation of *Hitorimai* is complex: on one hand, it involves rewriting across languages and Li’s experiments with languages and translingual engagements perhaps in hope of finding an authentic voice and establishing her own identity, while on the other hand readership plays a vital role in writing and self-translating the novel. As Aurelia Klimkiewicz (189–90) notes, self-translation deconstructs the full range of core translation studies concepts, such as ‘author’ and ‘translator,’ ‘original’ and ‘translation’/’copy,’ and even source-target ‘readership.’ In challenging these boundaries, *Hitorimai* queers the borders between languages and provocatively situates itself in Baer’s in-between territory of terminological “linguistic echoes, resemblances, and distortions” (34). As such, Li’s text destabilizes what Baer calls “the myth” and prestige of monolingualism (34), and her practice can be understood as an instance of translingual address.

Adding to the blurring and muddling of boundaries between nation, history, culture, and language is Li’s practice of translanguaging and self-translation, where her two languages mix, mingle, and bleed into each other. Indeed, in Li’s Japanese text, we can see what Baynham and Lee call “embodied translanguaging,” where the communicative affordances of the body interact with language “on the boundary of language and the body” (13). Li’s footnotes and afterword in editions across two different languages highlight the significance of her emotional involvement with different readers, which may help the author/self-translator preserve the particularities of her culture, languages, and readers. Sometimes Li includes Chinese and English terms and phrases in her Japanese text along with partial yet coherent explanations to enhance clarity and reader accessibility, such as using the Chinese character 書 (shū) in the personal name 李書柔 (Li Shurou), which can be pronounced sho in Japanese (*Hitorimai* 17), and adding background information as footnotes on literary texts such as Qiu Miaojin’s *Last Words from Montmartre*. Li also includes the names of the authors Eileen Chang (張愛玲), Qiu Miaojin (邱妙津), and Lai Xiangyin (賴香吟) in Chinese. Qiu and Lai influenced Li and her writing enormously, as she explains in the epilogue added to her self-translated Chinese edition (*Du Wu* 216). In Chapter 5 of *Hitorimai*, she opens a dialogue with Qiu Miaojin and Eileen Chang (the latter known particularly for her self-translations and bilingual writing) and provides a footnote explaining a quote in Chinese “我祝福您幸福健康” [I wish you happiness and health], while the
main body of the text is in Japanese.\textsuperscript{3} Du Wu includes introductory essays by Chi Ta-Wei and Yang Chia-Hsien along with Li's postface entitled “濃密黑暗裡的一縷微光——《獨舞》繁體中文版後記” [A Flash of Dim Light in Pitch Darkness: Afterword of the Traditional Chinese Edition Du Wu].

Writing with a particular readership in mind, Li's self-translation highlights the importance of readership, which plays a fundamental role in shaping the content of self-translation. The example that follows can be illustrative: in the Chinese text's description of neon lights at a night market in Taiwan, a certain harshness of light is added to the description of the blinding neon signs in the market by the addition of a new phrase, “龍蛇混雜” (long she hun za, dragons and snakes jumbling together) and a new clause, “像一個失手把妝化得太濃的熟齡女子” [like a mature woman who has accidentally put on too much makeup]. In the Japanese version, the neon signs are described simply as “毒々しく光っていた” [glowing toxically]. Li's use of vividly figurative language in the Chinese version shifts the emphasis from the lights themselves to the projection of a mixture of highly articulated conceptions. In the Chinese text, a sense of inescapable disgust is deeply embedded in the phrase “long she hun za” [dragons and snakes jumbling together], which refers to a chaotic mishmash of the good and the bad, the wise and the unwise, and creates a jumble of love, loathing, and disgust, an irreconcilable mixture. This image reminds us that Li would rather maintain a certain distance from the “the glory of Taiwan” (tai wan zhi guang, 台灣之光), a label that has been given to her by the Taiwanese media (Du Wu 242). At the 2021 media conference marking her receipt of the Akutagawa Prize (芥川龍之介賞), Li declared in Japanese:

自分自身以上のものを——例えば国家とか、日台友好とか、祖国の繁栄といったものを——、私は背負うつもりがないし、背負いきれないのです。（Li, “Ikinobiru tame no Kiseki”)

[In no way do I plan on shouldering the responsibility of anything beyond myself— such issues as my state, the friendship between Japan and Taiwan, the prosperity of the motherland—even if I want to take such responsibilities, I am incapable of doing so].\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{3} This translation is taken from the English translation of Qiu Miaojin's Mengmate Yishu, Last Words from Montmartre, by Ari Larissa Heinrich. See: Qiu Miaojin, Last Words from Montmartre, trans. by Ari Larissa Heinrich, NYRB, 2017, p. 146.

\textsuperscript{4} The English translation is ours.
Here she clearly expresses her reluctance to be seen as a spokesperson for or representative of a culture from which she feels personally detached.

Further, the insertion of the striking simile “像一個失手把妝化得太濃的熟齡女子”[like a mature woman who has accidentally put on too much makeup] suggests that there may be more at stake than what a woman’s surface maturity and excess makeup suggest. With respect to Li’s translingual engagement with readers, this image marks a shift that is tied to excess: we would argue that, while seemingly responding to the depiction of drinking and eating binges in the previous paragraph (Li, *Du Wu* 66), the image ultimately reproduces stereotypes of gender, sexuality, and desire presumably designed to appeal to Taiwanese readers. However, Ho (378) argues,

李琴峰對台灣雖有不少批評，但在日文原文中只是點到為止，並未長篇大論，似乎不想在日本讀者面前把家鄉寫得太醜陋不堪，以免破壞日本人過去對台灣的好印象。...然而，到了中譯本她就沒有這些顧慮了。

[It seems that Li Kotomi has no intention to make her hometown too ugly so as not to ruin the good impression of Taiwan that Japanese people have had. She simply makes a point without going into full details at tedious length even though she is quite critical of Taiwan. ... However, in the Chinese translation, she does not express these concerns.]

For the Taiwan-born Li, Ho contends, readers of the Chinese edition are “自家人”[members of the same family] (378). Here we see a clearer connection between *Du Wu* and its potential to be, in Chi’s words, “a representative of contemporary tongzhi literature of Taiwan” (“Tongzhi” 4). Shifting between languages generates an abundance of alternative imaginaries and potential correspondences. It is also indicative of Li’s important dual role in making sense of her own lived experiences in Taiwan and Japan, offering new insights into how ideas are formed in different contexts and languages through a complex process of cultural negotiation.

In Li’s case, the choice of languages seems to be driven by issues of identity. Immersed in the surroundings in which she places herself and her work, she evinces a natural sense of belonging in both Chinese and Japanese. *Hitorimai* and *Du Wu* are two versions of the same novel written in two languages, with each version having its own set of significations, identifications, and fabulations. The question about where ‘originality’ lands in relation to these two texts arises because the Chinese edition is a translation of *Hitorimai* and the translator is the author herself. The bilingual author/translator creates her own artis-
tic originality, and therefore, the self-translated Chinese text should be considered an original as well. However, in an interview with her English translator, Arthur Reiji Morris, Li acknowledges “the different idiosyncrasies” (Li and Morris) of writing in Japanese and Chinese and the extreme difficulties that resulted when translating her own work into Chinese. For Li, self-translation is both difficult and “rather intriguing” (Du Wu 216), because it exposes the subtle differences between the two languages (Japanese and Chinese), the two identities (author and translator), the two cultures (Taiwan and Japan), and the two different moral projects: the somewhat stereotypical representation of Taiwan for Japanese readers and the reworking of symbols, images, and experiences of Taiwan to meet the needs of Taiwanese readers of the Chinese edition.

In exploring the self-translation of Li’s novel Hitorimai, it becomes evident that there is a certain relationship between the Japanese and Chinese texts, which is a creative reworking where the author chooses to rewrite material for a new readership. On the one hand, we must consider the role played by the different Japanese and Chinese readerships; on the other hand, we must also consider other factors that are linked to Li’s own creativity, such as the translingual and transnational history of Taiwan. The deep influence of Japanese online subcultures, such as yuri Boys’ Love manga, ensures that the relationship between the Japanese and Chinese texts remains an ongoing dialogue. For example, for the Japanese readership, Li included many annotations on Taiwanese culture in the Japanese version to help clarify allusions to Taiwanese author Lai Xiangyin, to Qiu Miaojin’s Notes of a Crocodile (e’yu shouji, 鱷魚手記) and Last Words from Montmartre (mengmate yishu, 蒙馬特遺書), and to Taipei’s Yelin Boulevard. Interestingly, considering the fact that Taiwanese readers are familiar with the references, she omitted these annotations in her self-translated Chinese edition, as she revealed in an interview with the Unitas editor Chou Chao-fei (Li and Chou).

Taking readership into consideration, what is being negotiated in Li’s rewriting is not only an ‘original’ text but also the simplistic notion of originality, one that is based on the binary between a fixed point of origin and of translation as an end point. To avoid validating the heterosexist link between translation and heterosexual marriage, we will not distort Li’s self-translation by referencing conventional ideas of fidelity, faithfulness, or beauty. Her Chinese translation is not only a rather accurate rendering of the Japanese text but also deploys the Chinese language to explore the assumptions that underlie the cross-cultural, transnational engagements between the Japanese and Chinese texts. Her translation strategy, as she claimed in the Chinese edition of 五つ数えれば三日月が [Count to Five and the Crescent Moon], was to remain as close as possible to the ‘original’ text in order to preserve the explanations of
Taiwanese customs written in Japanese. However, the Chinese edition reveals a text that grapples with a complex process of cultural negotiation and is rewritten through omission, addition, and generalization.

Together, *Hitorimai, Du Wu, and Solo Dance* offer a collection of highly personal experiences and emotions, many of which voice Li’s desire to enact the stories that she has told herself in an overdetermined sociopolitical context. Because of her added hybridity—as seen in the mishmash of dragons and snakes, family and nation—animated by personal feelings, Li may have felt that the new clause (mentioned earlier) was needed in order to undo and redo the same passages of the previous text in Japanese. Given that translation is a creative activity that connects us to the idea of authorship, it is “no longer seen in traditional terms as a reproductive and derivative activity, a copy (often bad) of an ‘original’ or ‘authorial’ discourse transported from one language to another, but as a creative operation, authorial in its own terms” (Baldo 192). As for self-translation, we can say that Li’s Chinese translation is part of a larger original written in both Japanese and Chinese. Originality and authorship thus become illusions at the intersections of writing and creativity and of doing and undoing in transcultural contexts.

Translating *Hitorimai* into English: *Solo Dance*

Li admits that she is “not very skilled at English”; her only option, therefore, was “to leave the [English-language version] to another translator” (Li and Morris). *Hitorimai* was thus translated into English as *Solo Dance* by Arthur Reiji Morris, a translator of Japanese texts, who may not have the intimate knowledge of Taiwanese cultural narratives that is needed to decipher the cross-cultural complexities with which Li plays in her two originals. Indeed, her self-translation effectively constitutes a new ‘original’ of her own text. However, it is worth noting that all acts of translation involve negotiations of cultural contexts, at the local and transnational levels, and of the ways of understanding gender and sexuality. Allograph translations, nevertheless, by contrast, are characterized by additional layers of difference: that of the writing subject (the translator, who is not also the author), which reflects different attitudes toward culture, gender, and sexuality. In what follows, with textual examples, we demonstrate how the English translation unveils multiple layers of meaning in relation to culture, gender, and sexuality, allowing us to move beyond a reductive reading of *Solo Dance*.

Morris’s English translation, *Solo Dance*, manifests the influence and complexity of transcultural exchange in fascinating ways. Li Kotomi is somewhat
more critical of Taiwan in the Japanese version. For example, in Li’s Chinese edition *Du Wu*, the bustline scene of the night market is the object of criticism and a symbol of Li’s unsettling experiences in Taiwan. In both the Japanese and English editions, however, the critique is weaker:

**Japanese:** 夜市に着いたときにはすっかり夜になっていて、あちこち乱立するネオンの看板が毒々しく光っていた。(Li, *Hitorimai* 56–7)

*[When [they] arrived at the night market, it was already nighttime; the neon signs scattered throughout the market were glowing toxically.]*

**Chinese:** 到達目的地時夜幕已取代黃昏，夜市裡龍蛇混雜的各色霓虹店招閃爍著刺眼光芒，像一個失手把妝化得太濃的熟齡女子。（Li, *Du Wu* 67).

*[By the time [they] arrived at the destination, night had replaced dusk, and the neon signs in the night market were glittering like a mature woman who had accidentally put on too much make up.]*

**English:** By the time they got to the market it was already growing late, and the scattered neon displays gave off a distasteful glow. (Li, *Solo Dance*, trans. by Morris 73.)

Both the Japanese and English versions are much less vivid and disparaging than the Chinese self-translation, but it is not clear why Li introduces into her self-translation the lurid comparison between the lights and an aging woman with too much makeup.

The following instances of translating sexuality illustrate the need to reconsider (self-)translation in terms of alterity and identity. Manifested in behaviors, desires, identities, and discourses, sexuality is ubiquitous in texts and in everyday life (Santaemilia 12), and the process of translating sexuality—including terms and phrases related to queer culture—is therefore tied not only to the translator’s linguistic, ideological, and sociocultural attitudes toward sex, sexuality, and gender but also to underlying cultural values and social norms. In Chapter 6, in a conversation between “she” (the narrator) and Xiaoxue (Li, *Hitorimai* 44), Li refers to “the times of Lazi” when Qiu Miaojin’s *Notes of a Crocodile* first became a touchstone of contemporary Taiwanese lesbian fiction (Martin, “Situating Sexualities” 224). Qiu is “Taiwan’s best-known lesbian author” (our emphasis) and her books have frequently been cited as...
classics (Martin, “Stigmatic Bodies” 177). This is particularly the case with Notes of a Crocodile, “the first novel in Taiwan’s modern literary history to be written by an author commonly known to be a lesbian that takes erotic relationships between women as its central theme” (Martin, “Stigmatic Bodies” 177). Li was in fact reading Notes of a Crocodile while writing Hitorimai, as she recalls in the postface of the Chinese self-translation. In all three editions, Qiu Miaojin’s sexuality—and the suffering she endured because of it—is mentioned, but the English translation leaves the nature of Qiu’s sexuality open.

Japanese: 「拉子」は邱妙津の小説『鱷魚手記』の主人公であり、同性への愛欲で苦しむ邱妙津自身の化身でもある。(LI, Hitorimai 40)

[“Lazi” is the main character of Qiu Miaojin’s novel Notes of a Crocodile as well as the image of Qiu herself, who suffered from same-sex lust.]

Chinese: 「拉子」是邱妙津《鱷魚手記》中女主角的名字，同時也是為對同性的愛慾所苦的邱妙津自身的化身。(LI, Du Wu 51)

[“Lazi” is the name of the female protagonist of Qiu Miaojin’s Notes of a Crocodile, and it is also the embodiment of Qiu Miaojin who was suffering from the desire for same sex.]

English: “Lazi” was the name of the protagonist of Qiu’s Notes of a Crocodile; the character was said to be a representation of Qiu herself and the suffering she endured due to her sexuality. (LI, Solo Dance, trans. Morris 54)

By translating Li’s graphic fragment “同性への愛欲” (same-sex lust) simply as “her sexuality,” Morris produces a more distanced narrative voice not only through the toned-down choice of the neutral term ‘sexuality’ but also through the passive construction “was said to be,” which contrasts with the active constructions in Japanese and Chinese.

Morris’s elision of Qiu Miaojin’s queer sexuality—and of the overall sexual and queer gender dimensions of the novel—can be observed in other passages of his translation as well. In Chapter 8, for example, Morris translates “彼女” (the female third-person pronoun, which can also mean girlfriend) and “小雪” (Koyuki, Little Snow, the Chinese name of the novel’s female protagonist)

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5 Ruby characters are provided in Japanese by Li. Without them, the Japanese readers would be unable to understand the title of the novel that is written in Chinese.
simply as “they.” By focusing less on the text’s content than on its context, these elisions arguably almost amount to a case of “misrecognizing translation,” to use Marc Démont’s term (157). Furthermore, they seem to have the opposite effect of what Kwame Anthony Appiah refers to as a “thick translation,” where translation “seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context” (817). By removing the clear indications of gender in the Japanese and Chinese texts, Morris’s translation effectively suppresses the queer imaginary behind the two female names and the feminine pronoun (and potentially the social and sexual identity of “girlfriend” implied by this pronoun in Japanese).

While the queerness of the Japanese term "彼女" [she, her, or girlfriend] lies in its ambiguity and the coexistence of multiple layers of meaning in relation to sexual identity, the pronoun “they” seems overgeneralized. However, it is the chosen pronoun of many queer-identified persons who use the English language, which would seem to make it a viable option when translating into English. Moreover, when used in the singular, “they” also reflects ambiguity and conveys multiple layers of meaning in relation to sexual identity. Nevertheless, in this example, the translation elides the incongruity of the cultural contexts in which the Japanese and Chinese terms are understood. In translation studies, such misrecognitions of queer gender and sexual dimensions are not entirely surprising. Many translated queer texts have been subject to the heteronormative power of translation. In his analysis of three modes of translating queer literary texts—“the misrecognizing translation, the minoritizing translation, and the queering translation”—Démont shows, for example, how Álvaro Armando Vasseur’s 1912 translation of poems by Walt Whitman turned sexual love between men into homosociality (157). Such misrecognition serves as a reminder to be alert to gender and sexual differences in translation, the analysis of which can “provoke new sites of knowledge production, as well as stimulate significant shifts in social identities and categories” (Spurlin 173). When working across languages and cultures, the role of those translating queer texts like *Hitorimai* includes, as Spurlin argues, paying attention to the transgressions, slippages of signification, and differences of terms and phrases related to gender and sexual identities (173).

In addition to attention to the transgressions of the language of gender and sexuality, consideration to various historical periods and cultural contexts helps us to further complicate ruptures in meaning other than smooth rendition between languages. An analysis of *Solo Dance* reveals the contradictions involved in the translation of cultural references in *Hitorimai*, which poses another challenge for the English translator. As the novel contains numerous references to Chinese classic literature with which the majority of Anglophone
readers would not be familiar, Morris made several interpolations into the text to ensure clarity and coherence. These additions are adroitly managed to provide information about Chinese classics that English-speaking readers can easily understand (Elliott Bay Book Company) without marring the flow of the narrative. Morris's translation offers no additional insights into Japanese and Chinese concepts, however. This may be due to constraints placed on Morris by his editors or publishers; inserting comprehensive footnotes into Anglophone translations can, for instance, undermine readability. However, in Chapter 9 of Du Wu Li provides a translator's footnote to explain that, in Japanese, “赤紙” [akagami, red paper] (83) refers to the military draft cards that were sent to adult males during World War II. Readers are thus better able to understand the important image subsequently described in the Japanese version: “赤紙はいらない。青い鳥を下さい。” [We don't need red papers; give us the blue bird instead] (73). In Morris's translation, the corresponding fragment is rendered as “We don't need red papers; give us a blue bird instead” (93) without any note on the historical significance of red papers, and the sentence appears in italics for reasons that are not apparent. Furthermore, because “blue bird” is introduced by “a” instead of the definite article, the historical significance of blue bird is not conveyed to the English audience. “Blue bird” refers to Maurice Maeterlinck's The Blue Bird, in which siblings seek unrealistic happiness that does not exist, in the same way that the eponymous “blue bird” of the title is nonexistent. The English translation's exclusion of the reference to Maeterlinck's well-known play may be explained by the fact that the play is more familiar in East Asia than in the English-speaking world. Morris's translation also omits portions of the Japanese texts, a practice that combines translation with other practices such as editing. Although this does not usually result in a significant departure from the source text, there are notable exceptions. In the first chapter, for example, the English translation does not catch the humor associated with Cho Norie introducing herself to her new Japanese colleagues. Where the Japanese text reads “Cho norinori no Cho Norie desu” (超ノリノリの趙紀恵です), which can be translated literally as “I am Cho Norie, as my name tells I’m super upbeat/exciting” or “I’m super (cho) upbeat (norinori), so my name is Cho Norie” (Li, Hitorimai 10), Morris simply writes: “my name is Cho Norie” (Li, Solo Dance 13). Cho's humorous wordplay becomes invisible. Morris's omission of the comic dimension of her name can be seen as an attempt to ensure readability, but it also has the effect of masking a significant, if not vital, element of character development and fun in the original.

If, for Morris, gaps, elisions, and interpolations in the English text are necessary concessions to the prevailing social context of Anglophone readers, then the syntactical and discursive disparities between the Japanese text and the
English translation may reveal what Lawrence Venuti calls “the ideological significance of the translator’s work in relation to the hierarchy of linguistic and cultural values in the receiving situation” (ix). Ultimately, translating the novel into English—the dominant international language of the 21st century—not only plays a decisive role in the global promotion of the book but also contributes to making Li’s first and second languages visible as part of her identity as a writer and rewriter. Such a translingual practice challenges simplistic assumptions about writing and rewriting, authorial subjectivity, and the translator’s visibility. As our analysis has shown, a translation of *Hirotami* into further languages would therefore ideally draw on both the Japanese and Chinese texts by a translator who knows both cultures and their queer subcultures.

**Conclusion**

Our textual analysis of Li Kotomi’s self-translation and translingual address in writing a text in one language and rewriting it into another language demonstrates the vital importance of a transitional subjectivity in the practice of self-translation. When Li writes and translates, she challenges long-established translational norms, whereby the ‘original’ work is lawful, natural, and authoritative, and translation is dutiful, domesticated, and secondary. Li, who was born in Taiwan and moved to Japan as an adult, has an empathic, intimate experience of the two languages and cultures. She is open about her bilingual and bicultural positionality, although much less so about her practice of self-translation. Her Japanese texts have been written and rewritten/self-translated, blurring the boundaries between writing and rewriting and making it unclear which text can be considered “original.” Her practice—an approach that does not posit the Japanese text as the sole original to the Japanese audience—reveals her mixed engagement with different audiences and thus strongly suggests an unstable transition between and beyond the traditional translation studies dichotomies of ‘original’ vs. ‘translation,’ ‘author’ vs. ‘translator.’ This may be common to all bilingual self-translating authors; however, Li’s case is distinct as she has consistently written about women who belong to sexual minorities.

All self-translation is profoundly shaped not only by the authors’ lived experiences but also their national and sexual positionings, which are intertwined and interrelated. Consequently, insights from the emerging field of queer/ing translation, such as Spurlin’s, Baer’s, and Robinson’s, are highly relevant to self-translation research. Incorporating Asian languages, cultures, and contexts into self-translation scholarship reaches far beyond the task of bringing visibil-
ity to queer-identified Asian authors and queer texts (and their self-translations or third-party translations). It also illuminates “the textualization of our identities and desires” (Santaemilia 13) and offers new analytical perspectives and approaches for understanding queer texts such as Hitorimai.

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