

# Characteristics of Translation and Introduction in the Historical Context of Chinese Literature Going Out

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**Abstract**—Chinese culture going out is an inevitable manifestation of Chinese cultural confidence. This paper has conducted a long-lasting and diverse exploration on how to better "go out" from the national level to individual translators. Many scholars have also thoroughly discussed the motivation, strategy, and purpose of "going out". This article attempts to place "going out" in the historical context, introduces the theory of communication to analyze it, and tries to grasp the characteristics and ways of "going out".

**Keywords:** *Chinese literature, translation and introduction, communication*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the new century, China has raised the strategy of "Chinese culture going out" to the height of the soft power export. Literature is a major and important carrier of culture, and its Translation and Introduction should carry the banner of "Chinese culture going out". After the founding of the People's Republic of China, China began to "introduce Chinese literature and culture to the world consciously in an organized way and on a large scale" (Xie Tianzhen, 2014: 2). In 1951, the English version of Chinese Literature was founded, and then the French version was issued. In 1981, the Chinese Literature Publishing House began to publish "Panda Books", which mainly used English and French to introduce and translate Chinese contemporary, modern and ancient literary works. Unfortunately, due to many reasons, readers became fewer and fewer. These two "important channels for the translation of Chinese literature to the outside world by New China" (Xie Tianzhen, 2014: 2) have been shut down. "Chinese Literature" stopped publication in 2000, and "Panda Books" discontinued. In the new century, a huge project "Library of Chinese Classics" (Chinese-English) was issued, which comprehensively and systematically translated and introduced traditional Chinese cultural classics, aiming to spread Chinese outstanding literature and culture to the outside world. However, according to scholars' research, "except for a few selected topics that have been favored by relevant foreign publishing organizations to purchase copyright, most of the topics are confined to the domestic circulation, as if not really out." (Geng Qiang, 2010).

Looking back on the course of translation and introduction of Chinese literature after the founding of the

People's Republic of China, it can't help wondering. Why did these national-level, large-scale, high-quality Translation and Introduction activities not achieve the expected results, and did not really send Chinese literature and culture abroad to attract the attention of foreign readers? From 2012 to 2015, the French version of picture-story book of the four classic novels of Chinese literature published in France by the French FEI publishing house had aroused a huge response. The comic industry, book review industry and ordinary readers all praised this set of comics. At this point, the doubts deepen. Why can the French-version picture-story book of the four classic novels of Chinese literature achieve such a great success in France?

In recent years, the China's translation circle, even the literary circle and the media circle have begun to pay attention to the phenomenon that the "going out" of Chinese literature is blocked. They consciously discuss and study the translation and introduction of Chinese literature from the aspects of translation strategies and purposes. Professor Xie Tianzhen pointed out the "language difference" and "time difference" of the translation and introduction behaviors of "source translation" and "target translation". Professor Xu Jun proposed to "establish the historical view of translation". Professor Liu Yunhong proposed "stage" and "heterogeneity" of Translation and Introduction. These theories will undoubtedly help translators to grasp the characteristics of Translation and Introduction, and point out a clearer and feasible direction for Translation and Introduction of Chinese literature. Under the guidance of the above theories, this paper will explore the characteristics of Translation and Introduction of Chinese literature in the context of going out.

## II. STAGE

Translation is not only a simple transformation from one language to another, but also a reconstruction of the source language information in the target language. However, the source language information relies on the cultural system and writing system of source language, which is highlighted by the accumulation and precipitation of the long-term common history, culture, politics, economy, ideology, aesthetic habits and poetic ideas of the source language group, and is understood by the source language group. Once the cultural system and writing system of source language are separated

and entered into the cultural system and writing system of the target language, it is inevitable that the rejection phenomenon similar to organ transplantation will occur, which will cause strong reading impact in the target language group. Its two levels are mainly embodied in "understanding gap" and "pleasant experience". Limited by the cultural system and writing system of their mother tongue, the target language readers are bound to be unable to fill in and completely restore the stripped cultural background knowledge of the source language. At this time, "understanding gap" arises. They read the words and sentences of the target language, but do not know the real meaning of the source language. Because "they (Western readers) lack a considerable number of readers who can easily read and understand literary works and academic works translated from China" (Xie Tianzhen, 2014:9). Looking back on the history of Chinese translation and introduction, it can find that the Chinese readers' receptivity to foreign literature and culture in Lin Shu's time is equivalent to that of the Western readers' receptivity to Chinese literature and culture. After that, through the translation and introduction of Western literature and culture in different historical periods, Chinese readers have accumulated rich knowledge of Western history, culture, geography, politics, economy, ideology, aesthetic habits and poetic concepts for a long time. Therefore, "Chinese readers can also easily read and understand the translated Western literary and academic works (Xie Tianzhen, 2014:9), and get the pleasant experience from reading close to that of readers who use the source language". From "understanding gap" to "pleasant experience", it is the "time difference" in different stages of foreign introduction and translation of Chinese literature. The history of consciously translating and introducing Chinese literature to foreign countries is very short. From the perspective of the world, western literature is still dominant, occupying the center of the stage, while Chinese literature has been wandering in the edge. The translation and introduction of Chinese literature to foreign countries is actually a kind of 'anti-trend' translation and introduction behavior from weak culture to strong culture" (Xie Tianzhen, 2014:8). In view of this, it is necessary to be aware of the stage of the translation and introduction of Chinese literature to the outside world, and recognize that it is now in the primary stage of the translation and introduction of Chinese literature. It should not be eager to achieve success, or dream of achieving it overnight. Professor Liu Yunhong quoted and elucidated the French Translator Berman's viewpoint in the "translation and introduction of Chinese literature to foreign countries and historical view of translation". First of all, there is a process in which foreign literary works are discovered and concerned by local readers. At this time, it has not been translated, but literary transplantation has begun. Secondly, if the conflict between it and local literary norms is too fierce, it is likely to appear with the form of "rewriting". Thirdly, there will be a kind of guiding introduction, which is mainly used for the research of this work. Then, it is the partial translation with the purpose of literature itself, which is usually not perfect. Finally, there will be multiple retranslation, and usher in the real and classic translation (Berman, 1995:56-57). The

translation and introduction of Chinese literature should also follow this stage rule. It will be a long and circuitous process from the beginning of Chinese literature and culture into the vision of Western readers, to a lot of reading related introductory text and accumulation of narrative habits, narrative characteristics, aesthetic temperament and interest, the acceptance of the poetics idea of China and Chinese literature, and to western readers' attention and appreciation on the literature itself. In the western world, it is an undoubted fact that ordinary readers are not familiar with and accept Chinese literature and culture, which is also an important feature of the primary stage of the translation and introduction of Chinese literature.

### III. HETEROGENEITY

The reasonable existence of "difference" makes the species in the objective material world different, co-existing and flourishing. Similarly, in the human-centered subjective spiritual world, the existence of "difference" makes every country, every nation and every individual stand on the stage of world culture in an independent and self-sufficient manner. Because of the difference, it highlights the value and significance and enriches the way of human perception, contact, transformation and coexistence with the world. At the same time, the existence of "difference" creates the literature and culture of different countries, more profoundly embodies in the literature and culture of different countries, and becomes the cornerstone of its existence and the brand of its identity. A single flower does not make spring, while one hundred flowers in full blossom bring spring to the garden. Because of the "differences" existing in literature of different countries, the world literary presents a lively scene of flowers blooming and competing for spring. Chinese literature and culture also have its "heterogeneity". The essence of Chinese literature going out is to let its "heterogeneity" go out and be understood, familiar, accepted, loved, appreciated and even studied by foreign readers. People can examine the historical process of the introduction of Western literature into China, that is, the process translation and introduction of Chinese literature. China will have a clearer understanding of "heterogeneity". At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the translators represented by Lin Shu at the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic of China had different degrees of abridgement or rewriting of western novels in the process of translation. "Sometimes, the form of the whole novel has to be transformed into the type of traditional Chinese novels with captions for each chapter, and each chapter has to be given a title of antithesis. At the end of each chapter, they have to write a sentence of "wanting to know what's going on, and listening to the next chapter." (Xie Tianzhen, 2014:9). In this case, the "heterogeneity" of western novels has been greatly eliminated. However, in the specific historical background at that time, it was the "heterogeneity" which was greatly eliminated that made the western literature quickly enter the field of vision of the Chinese readers and be easily read and absorbed. Lin Shu's translation of "La Dame aux camélias" was released, and ten thousand copies were sold (Chen Yan).

Yan Fu gave the phrase that "one chapter of *La Dame aux camélias* shake the Chinese hearts. It can be seen that Lin's translation of "*La Dame aux camélias*" was accepted and popular at that time. Mr. Qian Zhongshu wrote in the article "Lin Shu's translation" that "I only knew that the western novels would be so charming after contacting with Lin Yi." It can be seen that the translation of "heterogeneity" elimination brought a fresh feeling to the Chinese society when the country was forced to open after a long period of seclusion. The initial meeting of the two cultures will inevitably cause strong friction and collision. The translation strategy of "heterogeneity" elimination enables western literature to achieve a soft landing when it comes to the Chinese cultural context at the beginning, and smoothly adapt to the reception level and reading expectation of Chinese readers at that time, which has paved the way for the continuous introduction of foreign literature. As Berman said, there is no literary translation in strict sense, and cultural transplantation has begun. Chinese readers' acceptance of foreign literature and culture has been gradually cultivated and improved. For more than a hundred years since then, Chinese literature and culture, which are relatively backward and inferior, have consciously introduced various kinds of mighty Western cultural classics and theoretical works. China has spontaneously formed a relatively mature receiving group and environment for the "heterogeneity" of Western literature and culture (Xie Tianzhen, 2014:7). At this time, Chinese readers can no longer be satisfied with the Chinese-version translation of "heterogeneity" elimination, but look forward to the Chinese-version translation of retaining "heterogeneity", so that they can explore the "different" pleasure experience of foreign literature from the literary level. It can be seen that in the process of literary translation and introduction, the pursuit of "heterogeneity" is the ultimate goal. However, the process of presentation is not achieved overnight, but a dynamic, phased, hierarchical and gradual historical process. The western world, which is less familiar with and receptive to Chinese literature and culture, is like China in the period of Lin Shu. The level of Western readers' acceptance of "heterogeneity" of Chinese literature and culture should be fully taken into account in the translation and introduction of Chinese literature to foreign countries, so as to have an objective, dynamic and historical understanding of the "heterogeneity" of Chinese literature in the receiving process among ordinary western readers and help the western readers gradually discover, love and appreciate the "differences" of Chinese literature and culture.

#### IV. COMMUNICATION

Only when a literary work is read and understood by foreign readers through translation can it enter into another language and culture space-time, and its literary life can be expanded and continued in a new space-time. The purpose of Chinese literature going out is to let the Western ordinary readers contact, understand, be familiar with and even study Chinese literature, so as to change the current situation that Chinese literature is on the edge of the world literature, achieve the purpose of disseminating excellent Chinese literature and culture to the outside world, and then improve

the competitiveness of China's soft power, win a friendly international public opinion environment, and enhance China's national cultural image. From this point of view, the essence of translation and introduction of Chinese literature is actually a communication behavior based on "translation", which has obvious characteristics of "communication". "Yi" refers to the translation and the important content of "introduction" is communication" (Bao Xiaoying, 2013:42). Therefore, the translation and introduction of Chinese literature in the context of going out is not only the translation at the linguistic level, but also the introduction from the perspective of communication. In view of this, it is necessary to introduce the 5W model of Harold Laswell, one of the four founders of communication, to examine the role of "introduction" in the process of Chinese culture going out from the perspective of communication. 5W mode refers to "who", "say what", "in which channel", "to whom" and "with what effect". In this mode, the communication channel is the intermediate link of the communication chain. If the channel is blocked, the information can't reach the target ("to whom"), let alone the success ("with what effect"). In the process of translation and introduction of Chinese literature to foreign countries, "channels" correspond to the translation and introduction channels, that is, by what means the translation reaches the hands of Western readers. The role of "introduction" is also clear at a glance, and is a bridge between the translation and the reader. The traditional language translation view holds that translation is the conversion of language symbols, and text equivalence is the key to be considered. It is impossible to see or underestimate the influence factors other than language that can restrict all aspects of the translation" (Geng Qiang, 2010:82). Under the guidance of this translation concept, from the founding of new China to the first decade of the new century, the vast majority of translation and introduction of Chinese literature led by the government, such as the English and French versions of Chinese Literature, Panda Books and so on, are hard to find in the foreign book market, "the worrying situation of overseas communication of Chinese literature is still an indisputable fact" (Liu Yunhong, 2015:1). The lack of attention to translation channels from the traditional view of language translation is the key reason behind the worrying situation of communication. How can Chinese literary translation reach the desk of Western readers? The importance of translation channels is self-evident. "From a certain point of view, the external dissemination of Chinese literature is an international book trade behavior, which must comply with the basic laws and principles of the book market" (Wu Zixuan, 2012:89). Publishing house is the main body of book trade. The objects of Translation and Introduction of literary works are foreign readers. The best leader of its publishing and distribution must not be domestic publishing house without smooth overseas sales channels, but a foreign publishing house with a thorough knowledge of the sales links, price system, market layout and distribution methods of overseas books. This paper has sorted out Chinese writers and works that are relatively well-known in the field of international literature in recent years, have more translations, and are more prominent in the international book market, such as "Decoded" by Mai Jia, "The Wolf

Totem" by Jiang Rong, and "Qingyi" and "Blind Massage" by Bi Feiyu, "Big Breasts and Wide Hips", "Frog", etc. by Mo Yan, "Wife and Concubines" by Su Tong, "Lifetimes

Living" by Yu Hua, "Just Go for It" by Yan Lianke, etc. It is found that they were all produced by large-scale publishing houses. (See "Table I").

TABLE I. WELL-KNOWN CHINESE WRITERS AND WORKS IN THE FIELD OF INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE

Author	Works	British and American Publishing House	French Publishing House
Mai Jia	Decoded	Picador	Robert Laffont
Jiang Rong	The Wolf Totem	Penguin Books	Le Livre de Poche
Bi Feiyu	Qingyi	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt	Philippe Picquier
Bi Feiyu	Blind Massage	Penguin Books Australia	Philippe Picquier
Mo Yan	Big Breasts and Wide Hips	Arcade Publishing	Philippe Picquier
Mo Yan	Frog	Penguin Books	Points
Su Tong	Wife and Concubines	Harper Perennial	Flammarion
Yu Hua	Lifetimes Living	Anchor	Actes Sud
Yan Lianke	Just Go for It	Grove Press	Philippe Picquier

## V. CONCLUSION

This reality shows the role of foreign publishing houses in the process of translating and introducing Chinese literature to the public directly and simply. If Chinese literature wants to go out, it can't achieve its goal only by relying on the power of Chinese people. "Jade can be polished by stones from other hills". By virtue of their familiarity with the domestic publishing market, their inherent advantages in accurately grasping the reading habits, poetic concepts, aesthetic tastes and ideology of their own readers, foreign publishing houses have built a more solid, convenient, eye-catching and applicable bridge between Chinese literature and foreign readers, and provide necessary media means for the spread of Chinese literature in the world.

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