

# The Approaches from National Literature to World Literature

Wensheng Deng

Dept. of Foreign Languages of Beijing Institute of Petro-chemical Technology, China

Fuyang Xia

Mingshan Junior High of Nan County, Hunan Province, China

Li Chen

Dept. of Foreign Languages of Beijing Institute of Petro-chemical Technology, China

**Abstract**—The paper explores the approaches from national literature to world one. The first approach to the world literature is literary translation and translated literature, the former refers to the faithful translation of original national works, and the latter means a creative treason of translation, or a kind of rewriting, based on the original text; the second is to gain the Nobel Award for Literature; The third is travel, exile or Diaspora of literature; and the last one is literary communication. In the end, the author stresses that the world literature is a literary garden of diversional and different dimension.

**Index Terms**—national literature, world literature, translation, travel, Diaspora

## I. INTRODUCTION

It is a trend and tide of times and history for national literature to go towards world literature; furthermore, it is also a natural appeal and desire of the peoples over the world to understand others psychologically. As to the idea, it is unnecessary to argue for it has been agreed with each other among the scholars concerned since Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a great German writer. But, as to the approaches how the national literature turns into the world one, the scholars related still hold diversional and different opinions, which are not reached a final answer and are open to discuss even today.

## II. THE APPROACHES FROM NATIONAL LITERATURE TO WORLD LITERATURE

Of course, if we calm down and think about the question carefully, it is likely for us to say translation is the bridge between the national literature and the world one. Yes, admittedly, translation is taken for granted to be the foremost means and method to it. We have to read works translated from original national text if we hope to appreciate the foreign works, for only quite few of us have grasped few foreign languages and can read the original text directly; however, for the majority of us, who are confined to the prison of native languages, we have to borrow the method of translation to fulfill our purpose. Here, the translation that we are talking about refers to the action, simply speaking, i.e. translating the work of a nation into the one of another nation, an activity of crossing-culture, crossing-nation and crossing-language. In fact, this kind of translation is literary translation, which is often regarded as a bridge between the national works and the world ones. It focuses on “faithfulness”, “expressiveness” and “elegance”, the standard of translated works; whether domestication or foreignization adopted in translation is the core to a translator. And so it pays to the language more than anything else, and is the fruit of Linguistic turns since the middle last century around. The benefits of the translation is to open a window for the national literary stage to see and introduce world culture, a channel to absorb and learn foreign works, including subject, theme, style, and genre and the like. Many writers have been influenced greatly by translated works, such as Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, John Milton, Lu Xun and Mao Dun. The name list can continue without end because there are too numerous examples in world history to exhaust them. To the national writers, on one hand, they have absorbed the nutrition from the foreign works; on the other hand, their works are rendered into other languages as well, and introduced to other nations throughout world. Thus, the national literatures have merged into the world ones by the literary translation. In the history of translation *Holy Bible* has been turned into more than 2,000 national languages, which is translated the most among any texts over the Earth. I think nobody can deny the *Holy Bible* is part and parcel of the world text. It is hard to measure the influence of the *Bible's* translation. Hence, we can say it is the translation that brings the *Holy Bible* into the world literature. The *Bible's* translation is a perfect model from national literature to world work.

The second approach is rewriting, which is neither a translation nor writing, or both to some extent. It is a rewriting or creating based on the original text by translators. As to the rewriting here, it is called “treason of writing or translation (Xie, 2007, p.69)”, different from the aforementioned “translation”, which is often referred as literary

translation by scholars related. We Chinese scholars may easily take Lin Shu, Hu Shi and Yan Fu, who are translators of the times, as good examples to illustrate the rewriting; and Lin Shu goes to further than both. Hu Shi's early writing and translating, Yan Fu's translations are what we refer as rewriting. Lin Shu has deleted freely the plots of the original text, which he doesn't think proper in the translation, and he has bravely added the imagination of his own to the translation. As a consequent, his rewritings are surprisingly popular at the time; both Qian Zhongshu and Guo Moruo once said they have enjoyed reading Lin Shu's works instead of the original, which are said to be slow and redundant. According to A Ying, a scholar of literary history, the rewriting of foreign works at the times of the late Qing Dynasty is magnificently great number indeed. There were nearly 400 kinds of translated novels in 1911 (A Ying, 2010, p.1). "The magnificence is a motivation or stir to China's writers at the transition of times between the old times and the new ones. Borrowing and imitating the rewritten works, and making comparison and contrast between the traditional national literature and the modern world one, breaking up the enclosed mentality, the writers have participated the dialogues of the world literature. And the participation necessarily has led to the transformation of the writers' inner literary structure; the advocates of literary revolution and the first generation of writers of new China almost have benefited from the works translated in the Late Qing Dynasty (Qian, Wen & Wu, 2004, p.4)."

Thus, it is the rewriting of the foreign works that has brought about the pregnancy, birth and growth of modern literature in China; or in other words, China's modern literature is greatly influenced by the translated works, which actually are typical fruits of "hybridization", of cultural communication with hetero-genes, i.e. the cultures of China and Occident. Broadly speaking, it is the impinges of the hetero-genetic cultures between China and Occident that have helped take shape the special characteristics of Comparative Literature in the third stage; so we hold that the third phase of crossing hetero-genetic cultures is a totally brand-new era in the development of Comparative Literature. By rewriting and introducing the foreign works, China's writers or translators have found the foreign literatures at home, and the foreign factors have become the genes in China's modern literatures. In the meanwhile, the Chinese literary elements began to have impinged upon the foreign works; this is a type of mutual communication of cultures between China and Occident, not cultural subversion done by one nation against another. The new type of communication is the spectacular expected by the community of the world literature.

Chinese culture have been spread in the Occident and done impinge upon the Occidental literatures. As early as in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century there is a widespread China's Fever in Europe. Chinese culture is most welcomed in England, France and Germany. For instance, the play "*The Orphan of Zhao Family*", written in the Yuan Dynasty, had been adapted as *The Chinese Orphan* by Voltaire, and it is especially popular. Till the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Goethe even reminds of his country fellows to jump to the outside circle of national literature, to look around other surrounding neighbors and pay more attention to foreign literature, but not to be confined by a particular one as a model (Goethe, 2010, p.5~8). Goethe is concerned with the Oriental culture, especially the Chinese one. He has written *East-west Divan* (1819), which is an embodiment of his Oriental complex. And in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, American poet, Ezra Pound shows his strong tendency to the Oriental cultures, in particular, to the ancient Chinese poetry. He follows the Chinese poetry; and has started a revolution in Anglo-American poetry, which is redundant, wordy and sentimental. He strongly advocates some rules, i.e. direct treatment of poetic object, simple sentence, musical, natural rhyme. The new revolution is called Imagism in literary history, which has brought about a fresh wind to the Occidental literature. To the stage, the Western literature is indebted to the Oriental. Both the Oriental literature and the Occidental contribute to the community of the world literature.

The third way to bridge between the national and the world literature is the Nobel Award for Literature, which is taken as the most sanctified ritual by writers internationally, or as a special testing field for literature to gain and to define the name to be universally recognized, in the first place. The hope, response, influence and belief, annually aroused by the nomination and announcement of the Committee of the Nobel Awards, have repeatedly proved literature is worldwide after the Award. Though some people have remarked that the standard for the Nobel Award is unfair, that it holds certain bias in judging the works, more favorable to the European or Western works, relatively unfavorable to African works or Asian ones, that the Committee is disturbed and affected by ideology, and so on, the author believes that the Award is most recognized among the literary awards over the world nations. A survey of the Award is a good demonstration to its fairness and square; almost two-thirds of the questionnaires admit that the Award is successful; and only one-third think it is not, but they think it a reasonable mark (Espmark, 1992, p. 223). To some extent, it shows the Award is fair so far. In the second place, the international view of point adopted by the Committee of the Award provides the national literature with a best most immediate opportunity to the world one.

The will left by Alfred Nobel records, "What I want to mean clearly is that the Awards should go to the fittest candidate without taking his nationality into consideration, i.e. whoever is Scandinavian or not (Espmark, 1992, p. 248)." That explains why the Awards are presented to the peoples beyond the Scandinavian Peninsula as well. As a matter of fact, the works, offered the Nobel Prize, are recognized as classics in the world literatures by so far from the history of the Awards, which is not only an honor to the national literature of a winner, but also a most authorial organization to certify the national texts to be welcomed by the community of the world literature. Unfortunately, there is only once for a writer to gain the Prize per year; and there are too many national classics to be offered it, which is a great channel to make them known to the world. So, it is not wise enough for us to measure a work by the criterion laid down by the Committee of the Prize. Apart from it, the core for the national texts to gain the world recognition is the

aesthetic quality permeated throughout the text, that is to say, whether the aesthetic concern is universal or not. And the national classics generally express shared idea, common feelings of times, nation, ethnics or class, by breaking through the prisons of its own; the readers of the works can't resist understanding, appreciating, getting insights and instructions from them whatever the times, the nation, the ethnics or the class they belong to. The genuine classic goes beyond the limits, and is full charm to anyone who loves it. Of course, we don't deny that the national works have not any special local colors. Just on the contrary, we stress that the national texts should be characterized of the national, regional or local colors. As Lu Xun has remarked, "...and now literature also has such a tendency, those work, whichever is filled with local colors, becomes easier to be worldwide, i.e. to be noticed more easily by other nations (Lu, 2005, p.81)." There are numerous examples like that over the world literary circles. Like William Faulkner's Yoknapatapha County, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Macondo Town, Mo Yan's Gaomi County, they are full of regional colors of their own nation, which help them to be universally welcomed. Hence, the national color should be preserved well in the course of the world literature, and it is not nationalism to ignore the ultimate concern to human beings; humanist care and concern are the focus in any literary text. If we see the works from another perspective, not the Prize, there are still great masters, though they have not been offered the Prize, they hold unshakable standings in the treasure of the world literature, such as Balzac, L. Tolstoy, Goethe, Lu Xun, etc. They have combined national colors with humanism in their writings. A great writer like them not only belongs to his own country, but also to the world, that is, his works have both national and international significance, who will finally be a member of the Republic of the World Literature. To the point, the author believes that the national is international; the more individuality they have; the more global wholeness they have in the end; the literary globalization agrees with the national literature. The literary development proves the saying, "the more national it is, the more international it becomes."

The fourth channel is Diaspora or exile. In the last several decades the literature about Diaspora or exile has been in the community of the world literature. The most prestigious ones of the writers in literature about Diaspora or exile are Saul Bellow, I. B. Singer, Milan Kundera and Gao Xinjian, etc., just a few of Nobel Prize winners here, and the name list may go on endlessly so as to give us a surprise, if we are going to exhaust them. Certainly, there are more of them, who are no winners of the Prize, such as Vladimir Nabokov, Ha Jin; they have not only gained the recognition in the country they immigrated to, but also in the world. For the writers in the Diaspora or exile, who are forced to leave their home country for various reasons, they are very familiar with the culture of the home country; they have adopted the language of the country they immigrated while writing works; and their works are called Diaspora or exile literature by fellow writers. The Diaspora or exile literature successfully opened a new channel to the world literature for the national literature, whose process of the recognition is painful but splendid.

Of course, we have to mention the following writers, worldwide known for their revolution or originality in writing, or their broad-mindedness and unique living style, for instance, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett. James Joyce, nominated as a candidate of the Nobel Prize, is a pioneer of modern fiction; his *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are revolutionary in form and structure of the fiction writing; the latter is still unknown to the world even today, which just echoes to the comment given by Joyce, "I want to make it (It refers to *Finnegans Wake here*.) unknown to the readers for three hundred years." As to Samuel Beckett, the winner of the Prize, apart from his writings which are easy to read but not to understand, he is noted for his exiles as well. His exiles have helped him build his reputation. If we say James Joyce is revolutionary, Rudyard Kipling is a kind of profiteer from British colonization over the world. Compared with other genius among the fellow writers, Kipling goes to the global by making more use of British power rather than the power of his writings. So, the author of the paper would boldly remark that the policy of colonization does Kipling something good in spreading his literary fame. In a word, the national power and the Diaspora or exile are important factors to promote the national literature toward the world one.

As the Internet times has befallen to the Earth, it is more convenient and more frequent for the nations to communicate, and the Internet provides us a newer, faster means and method to circulate literature. On one hand, all kinds of organizations and governments can mobilize the utmost efforts to publish and propaganda the national works towards other nations, for the purpose of spreading national culture, arousing foreign nations' interest to ours, attracting literary fellows over the Earth to know us, and gradually, both or multiple sides will learn from each other after more contacts. By utilizing the hi-tech, the best means up to now, the national literature goes towards the global world swifter than ever before. On the other hand, more and more writers just upload the works online for peoples to read, to appreciate, to comment. At present, literary lovers can read the world texts of diversified nations online, which are full of either excellent or shabby ones so the readers have to judge them more cautiously. And whatever, we have to admit the Internet times, a most immediate pusher, will promote the pace of the world literature.

### III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is an old topic with long history of several thousand years that the national literature develop or evolve into the world one; but some scholar points out that the spread and practice of the world literature happened several thousand years ago (Damrosch, 2013, p. 4). And there are obvious phenomenon about the practice: we know that there are similar myths among the nations over the Earth, for example, different and diversified versions of Genesis, the flood, the Savior, and the like, which are interesting and fantastic to anthropologist. Now we can interpret the phenomenon. Because the nations have their modes of thinking alike, they have evolved their imagination or idea about the nature or the life; and

the most essential factor the author holds to the myths is, the nations in the time immemorial have emigrated constantly, for their emigrations different peoples have more chances to contact, communicate, exchange the stories of one's own with each other. Hence, the early ethnic myths actually share some common core. The emigration has promoted greatly the early ethnic myths, folksongs, stories, poems, etc. to spread, though they are a kind of oral works. The exchanges to cross nations, hetero-cultures probably have started before the characters were invented, and survived after they are employed to record the life. Based on the above analysis, it is a truth that the national literature and the world one have interacted in the course of the national contacts.

As to the evolution of the national literature into the world one, the research can be traced back to the thesis put forward by Herder, Goethe, Karl Marx and F. Engels over 100 years ago. The concept of the national literature is defined first by Herder, he thinks that the national literature should be national, characterized by its uniqueness, so, the researchers must seek out the origin of the national literature (here he refers to German literature) in the starting of German literature instead of the ancient classics; he also remarks that the national literature and art are tied internally up with the national customs and civilization, there is a clear line. Being broad-minded viewpoints of the world, Goethe has predicted boldly that a new type of European or even global, world literature will come into being (Goethe, 2010, p.5~8) ... Marx and Engels have the passage, most frequently quoted, about the world literature as the following:

*The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. .... They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature (Marx & Engels, 1969, p.98~137).*

The analysis, given by the giants of the letters, philosophers, shows us a picture of the development of the national literature towards the world literature, for the expansion of world economy.

And if we take a careful and comprehensive look at the past and present of the literary history, we can be bound to find that literary travel, exile and intercourse by old and modern means available, facilitate the national literature to gain popularity over the world, George Gordon Byron, a Romantic poet, have finished scheduling, drafting his *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold* when he is exiled in Europe. And such kinds of cases are just easy to be found in the history of national literature.

The growth and expansion of the world economy and market, information and communications, more frequent interacts, contacts and communications of culture and economy, every individual nation will turn eyes to other nations far beyond the territory of one's own; in particular, the Internet draws every nation closer, and turns the world into a global village, the citizens over the Earth are the fellow villagers; nowadays, the national communications go wider and further to every quarter of the Earth, which break through the fence of nations or countries. Just under the globalization, the literary development will follow the suit of the economic expansion, which has jumped over the limits of regional exchanges, to stride towards the great goal of the world literature in the end. Nevertheless, the authors of the thesis also stress that the garden of the world literature is not a garden teemed with just a few dull flowers, but one with thousands kinds of varieties, which agrees with what Aamir R. Mufti, an American scholar of Comparative Literature, has remarked, "The concept and practice of the world literature don't mean canceling the national languages, literature and forms of cultural recognition (Mufti, 2013, p.178)..." What he said is a clear note to the literary history and reality; literary unanimity is no way in the least.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] A, Ying. (2010). *The History of Fiction in Late Qing Dynasty*. Nanjing: Jiangsu Literature and Art Publishing House: 1.
- [2] Damrosch, David. (2013). *Theory and Practice of World Literature: An Introduction*. In *Theory of World Literature: A Reader*. Damrosch, David, Liu, Hongtao, & Yin Xing. (ed.). Peking: Peking University Press: 4.
- [3] Espmark, Kjell. (1992). *Classical Works of Nobel Literary Prize Winners*. Li Zhiyi. (trans). Guilin: Lijiang Publishing House: 248,223.
- [4] Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. (2010). *Goethe's Remarks About World Literature*. Cha, Mingjian. (trans). In *Comparative Literature in China* (2): 5~8.
- [5] Lu, Xun. (2005). *To Chen Yanqiao (19/4/1934)*. Lu Xun Anthologies (Vol.13).Peking: People's Literature Press: 81.
- [6] Marx, Karl. & Engels, F. (1969). *Selected Works of Marx & Engels* (Vol.1).Moscow: Progress Publishers: 98-137.
- [7] Mufti,Aamir R. (2013). *Orientalism and System of World Literature*. In *Theory of World Literature: A Reader*. Damrosch, David, Liu, Hongtao, & Yin Xing. (ed.). Peking: Peking University Press: 178.
- [8] Qian,Liqun, Wen,Rumin & Wu,Fuhui. (2004).*The Thirty-Year History of Modern Literature in China* (revised). Peking: Peking University Press: 4.
- [9] Xie,Tianzhen.(2007). *Media-translatology: An Introduction*. Peking: Peking University Press: 69.

**Wensheng Deng**, born in Anhua County of Hunan Province of China in 1967, received his M.A. in literature from Central South University, China, in 2002, and was further trained his academics as a higher visiting scholar at Harding University of U.S.A. from 2007 and 2008. And now, he is an associate professor of Anglo-American literature in Dept. of Foreign Languages of Beijing Institute of Petro-chemical Technology, China. His studies cover Comparative Literature, Translation Studies, popular culture, film comments and Politics.

**Fuyang Xia**, born in Yiyang City of Hunan Province in 1990, received her Bachelor's Degree in 2013, from Shaoyang College, China. Now she is a teacher of English in Nanxian County of Hunan Province. Her major studies are English teaching, literature and translation.

**Li Chen**, born in Shandong Province in 1977, received her M.A in Linguistics from Dalian Maritime University in 2002. She's been working in Dept. of Foreign Languages of Beijing Institute of Petro-chemical Technology, China, as a lecturer since then. Her studies cover foreign Linguistics, language and culture, and literature.