

The Translation and Research of A Lai in the US

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Abstract

This paper intends to sort out the history of translation and research of A Lai, the famous Sichuan contemporary writer in the United States, and then analyzes the characteristics as well as the current problems in the process of transmission. Finally the paper tries to puts forward some measures to strengthen the spread of A Lai's literary works in the US.

Keywords

A Lai; Translation and Research; The US.

1. Introduction

Under the strategic background of "Chinese culture going abroad", the Chinese government has set up a series of projects, such as the Chinese Translation Project and the Chinese Contemporary Works Translation Project, to introduce excellent Chinese literary works to the world. As early as the year 1993, A Lai, the contemporary Sichuan writer, has been introduced into the US with the translation and publication of his novel *The First Road* by Chinese Literature. In 2000, A Lai is the first Tibetan writer to win the fifth MAO Dun Literary Prize for the novel, *The Dust Settles* (originally titled *Red Poppy*, 1998). In 2018, A Lai wins the seventh Lu Xun Literature Prize with his novel *Mushroom Circle*. With the remarkable literary achievements in China, A Lai is one of the representative of contemporary Chinese literature. However, the study on the history of translation and research of A Lai in the US has not been carried out yet. This paper intends to sort out the travel path of A Lai's literary works in the US from the year 1993 to the end of 2021 and figure out the existing features and challenges so as to work out the measures to promote its transmission overseas.

2. Features in Translation of A Lai's Works in the US

Although, A Lai's work has been selected and translated by the Chinese Literature in 1993, yet no further translation activity has been followed until the year 2001. In fact, the translation activities of A Lai's works have been carried out from the year 2000 to the year 2012. This is because A Lai wins the fifth MAO Dun Literary Prize in 2000. In 2001, Herbert Batt translation of A Lai's novel "Wind over the Grasslands" is included in *Tales of Tibet: Sky Burials, Prayer Wheels, and Wind Horses*, published by Rowman and Little field. In the year 2002, Howard Goldblatt and Lin Li-chun's co-translation of "Red Poppies: A Novel" is published by Houghton Mifflin. Three years later, in 2005, Karen Gernant and Chen Zeping's translation of *Blood Ties* is published by Houghton Mifflin again. In 2007, "The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature", edited by Joseph s. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt, includes *The Fish* by A Lai. Then in 2012, *Today's Chinese Literature*, published by University of Oklahoma Press and Foreign Languages Press, includes A Lai's *King Gesar*. An Excerpt: *The Shepherd's Dream*, *The Hydroelectric Station*, *The Threshing Machine*.

As is listed above, it is evident that apart from the translation activity in 1993 which was carried out by the Chinese publisher, all the other translation is finished by the native English speaker

and published by local publisher in the US. It can be seen that the winner of the famous Chinese literature prize will spontaneously attract the attention of the American academic circle. And the effects of the famous literature prize usually last for ten years, the same as the Mao Dun Literature Prize effect. Although there has been no new translation and introduction of A Lai's works since 2012, yet in 2018, A Lai won the seventh Lu Xun Literature Prize, which may once again arouse the attention of a Lai in academic circle overseas. In this paper, the data on the translation of Alai's works in the United States were collected by the end of 2021. It is still difficult to make an accurate judgment on its future translation trend in the United States, but it is believed that with the accelerating pace of Chinese culture "going global", the number of translation of A Lai's works in the United States will continue to increase.

3. Features in the Research History of A Lai in the US

By the end of 2021, five academic journal papers and One doctoral dissertation related to Alai published in the United States have been collected. Nimrod Baranovitch's doctoral dissertation *Literary Liberation of the Tibetan Past: The native Voice in Alai's Red Poppies* (2010) analyzes how the novel *Red Poppy* (now renamed *As The Dust Settles*) changes people's stereotype of Tibet within the traditional Chinese language from the perspective of post-modern historiography and through a method of close reading of the text. An important feature of post-modern historiography is to literalize historiography. It is believe that man cannot use reason to understand his own world nor find the truth of history. History is not a thing of the past at all, but a historical discourse written down for people to read. Only when archives and historical materials are "incorporated into a meaningful structure" can history become "history". There is no such thing as unprocessed material; Once an object or document is identified as historical data, it has profoundly reflected a cultural system (Yang Gongle, 2003). One of Dr. Baranovitch's key words "historiography" refers to historical compilation under the impact of post-modern historiography. He argues that there is no single fixed truth to history, and that people's perception or interpretation of history is governed by the way historical material is arranged, which is determined by the broader cultural context. Dr. Baranovitch sorted out the descriptions of Tibet by mainstream media from the 1980s to the end of the 20th century, such as People's Literature Publishing House, People's Daily, provincial and national museums, and found that "old Tibet", that is, Tibet before 1950, had long been described as "hell on earth". Later, with the deepening of reform and opening up, the image of Tibet gradually was changed, but it was always mysterious, wild, religious and primitive. By the mid-1990s, the image of Tibet had undergone fundamental changes. In many films and television works, Tibet had become the "paradise" and "yearning place" in people's minds. Dr. Baranovitch claims that A Lai's book, *The Dust Has Settled* (1998) precisely "humanizes" people's impression of Tibet. The uniqueness of Baranovitch's doctoral thesis lies in that he discusses the social and historical significance of *The Dust Has Settled* from the perspective of post-modern historiography. The images of Tibetan characters in A Lai's works are no longer the brutal, savage and mysterious impression solidified in the minds of most people, especially the Han people. By describing specific events, A Lai "incorporated them into a meaningful structure", making the pre-1950 Tibet of the novel "history". Just as post-modern historiography emphasizes that there is no unprocessed material in the world, A Lai's description of Tibet reflects the Tibetan cultural system, but his success lies in integrating Tibetan culture into the traditional Chinese cultural background through his creation in Chinese language, presenting the "old Tibet" different from their inherent ideas to Han readers.

Apart from the doctoral dissertation, the other five academic journal papers are Whipple, Mary (2003) "Red Poppies by Alai: pre-occupation Tibet, a brutal world", Howard Y.F. Choy (2005)

Historiographic Alternatives for China: Tibet in Contemporary Fiction by Tashi Dawa, Alai, and Ge Fei, Howard Y.F. Choy (2008) In Question of an Identity and Idiocy in Alai's Red Poppies, Yiyuan Wang (2013) The Politics of Representing Tibet: Alai's Tibetan Native-Place Stories, and D Dayton (2019) Growing New Forms of Literature: A Conversation with Tibetan Writer Alai. The five papers are all written by famous scholars in the US, and the researches focus on the following three aspects.

Firstly, the studies focus on the comparison between the description of Tibetan geographical and cultural history in Alai's works and the image of Tibet in the imagination of Chinese culture. In *Red Poppies* by Alai: pre-occupation Tibet, a brutal world (2003), Whipple found that Alai's description of Pre-liberation Tibet caters to the stereotyped impression of Chinese culture. It is mentioned in the novel that the master's father in order to keep their own power is very brutal with the traitors and even had their flesh split open, eyes digged, ears cut off. It portrayed the Tibet as a cruel world before the liberation. And Whipple asserted that was why the novel was popular in China.

A similar study was conducted by Howard Y.F. Choy in 2005. In *Historiographic Alternatives for China: Tibet in Contemporary Fiction* by Tashi Dawa, Alai, and Ge Fei, Choy, through close reading, makes a comparative analysis of three texts describing different historical periods of Tibet, which are from Tibetan writer Dawa, Tibetan writer Alai and Han writer Gefe. It is found that the history of Tibet by writer Dawa is actually his own imagination which happened in regions between the Han people, Tibetan and the English. Dawa borrow the jaws of a Tibetan monk to describe the relations between China and Britain and considered Tibet as a buffer to balance the power struggle in the UK and China. Similarly, Choy found Ge fei set the real historical events as the story background and depicted a huge network with misunderstanding. The interpretation of history arose from the various and complex perspectives of different characters. Choy believed that by describing the changes that a family went through around 1950, Alai expressed the meaning of the word "liberation" to all kinds of Tibetans. The uniqueness of the paper lies in that Choy arranges the three texts from the perspective of post-modern historiography, and thus presents an alternative Tibetan history, in which various characters stand at different positions to understand the major historical events around 1950, and the historical truth lies in the readers' own understanding.

Secondly, the research analyzes how does Alai view his own cultural identity as a Tibetan writer writing in Chinese Han language. In *Question of an Identity and Idiocy in Alai's Red Poppies* (2008) argues that Alai uses the "fool" to discuss the interaction between the Han culture and the Tibetan culture, and the "fool" happens to reflect the "wise man still looks foolish" in the Han culture. Alai did this to facilitate his reflection and search for his Tibetan cultural identity in the novel. As a Tibetan writer writing in Chinese Han language, Alai reflects on the relationship between Tibetan culture and Han culture in his writing. The protagonist of the novel, a fool, was born without the qualification to inherit the chieftain in the local traditional concept because he had half Han blood rather than pure Tibetan blood, so he also survived the dispute for the chieftain position. The half-brother of a fool, however, colluded with various forces for the position of chief and was finally killed. The Fool ended up taking over a new chieftain. The plot of the novel also precisely reflects the "Tao Te Ching" in the "husband only does not fight, so the world can not fight with him."

Thirdly, the study talks about the orientation of minority literature in modern and contemporary Chinese literature. D Dayton (2019) talks with Alai about the issue of create new literature in new languages. Alai expresses that If a writer is always confined to the native minority language, the lack of abundant vocabulary and expression will adversely affect the writing itself, even though the writing language is simple and simple. The innovation of the language lies in the expression and selecting of words. Some expressions may not be a Chinese habit of expression, or may not exist in each ethnic minority languages. Only when the native

writers are aware of their native language, he or she will be able to show unique ethnic culture. On the other hand, writing enables Han readers to experience and gradually accept the diversity of culture and life, and the understanding and identification of the cultural differences between Han and Tibetan can eliminate the barriers between regional cultures.

The researchers engaged in the study of A Lai and his works in the United States are university teachers, Chinese studies researchers or translators. For example, D Dayton is a translator, scholar of contemporary Chinese literature and comparative scholar of native Poetry in East Asia and North America, so as Howard Y.F. Choy. Out of their own professional sensitivity to language and culture, the studies on A Lai center on Cultural identity, language and translation, Tibetan culture and Han Culture ect.

4. Existing Problems and Countermeasures

Generally speaking, A Lai and his works are in a state of prosperity at home and cold abroad. The scope of overseas research on A Lai needs to be expanded. Most of the studies focus on the interpretation of *The Dust Settles*, the representative work of A Lai, and does not pay enough attention to other works, let alone the overall Tibetan literature or minority literature. As is known to all, the general law of literary acceptance is to bring, to take it voluntarily. Only when the western cultures feel the urgency to learn from the east, will the westerners be willing to translate, to read and to accept the eastern literatures, including Chinese literature (Y.Q. Cui, 2014) . Since the COVID-19 broke out in 2019, it has stricken all parts of the world for the last two years. The superiority of medical care system and emergency control measures of Chinese government have changed the image of China worldwide. Gradually, there would be more and more youngsters have interests in China and Chinese literature, so it is important to increase capital input for the translation and publication of contemporary literature to meet the upcoming demands. Recently, As the policy “to tell a good story of China” has been advocated by the government, it is very important to local government to promote the translation of A Lai. As A Lai’s works depict the new image of Tibet and the communication between Han and Tibetan Cultures, it is a great Representative to demonstrate the willingness of government to guarantee the harmony between ethnic minorities. Moreover, it is necessary to subsidize modern and contemporary writers, including A Lai to participate in international academic exchanges. It provides regular opportunities for modern and contemporary Chinese writers to communicate with internationally renowned scholars. To a great extent, it can promote many excellent translations of Modern and contemporary literature in the United States. Lastly, Colleges and universities at home or abroad can invite Chinese writers and American translators to join regular dialogues and communications, which will deepen the correct cognition and understanding of Modern and contemporary Chinese literature by American scholars, and create powerful conditions for the translation and research of modern and contemporary Chinese literature in the United States.

Acknowledgments

This study was supported by the 2019 project from the Center for American Studies, Southwest Jiaotong University, Item No.ARC2019004.

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