A Brief Analysis of the History and Present Situation of Overseas Yan’an Literature Research

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Abstract. In 1942, Mao Zedong’s Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art opened a new era in the development of Chinese literature. Through the brief description of the translation and spread of Yan’an literature in foreign countries, especially in Japan, Russia, the former Soviet Union and United States, the paper aims to outline the status of the Yan’an literature throughout the world, in order to emphasize the particular importance of Yan’an literature, to understand the relevant research status quo, therefore providing practical suggestions for future research.

Introduction

Mao Zedong’s speech at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art consists of two parts, one is the introduction part dated May 2, 1942, the other is the conclusion part dated May 23, 1942, which were both later officially released by the Liberation Daily on October 19, 1943 in Yanan, and were selected in the second volume of Mao’s Selected Works in 1953. In 1942, Mao Zedong's Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art created a new era of the development of Chinese literature and art. Around Mao’s talk, Liberated Area Literature was then called Yan’an literature. The popularization of literature in the period of Yan’an literature was the popularization of thought and the popularization of revolutionism. By praising the Anti-Japanese heroes, praising the Democratic Base Areas, literary creation became an encouraged and protected mainstream cultural activity, which was with the content of anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism and the propaganda of class struggle.

Foreign Studies on Liberated Area Literature started very early. In the early 1930s, scholars of the former Soviet Union were involved in Liberated Area Literature research. In the 1940s, Yan’an literature became the focus of Liberated Area Literature Research. It should be emphasized that Japan and the Soviet Union were in the forefront of other countries in the field of Yan’an Literature Research. Over the past half century, the main works of Chinese writers in Liberated Area (mainly Yan’an literature) have been translated and studied in Japan and the Soviet Union. Serious research has been made, and a number of world-renowned experts in Yan’an Literature Research have emerged. For example, Onokazu, Okazaki Toshio, and Николай Трофимович Фёдоров have all achieved fruitful results. Overseas study on Yan’an literature demonstrated that Liberated Area Literature, as a heterogeneous culture of "Three New" (New Era, New World, New Genesis – by Guo Moruo; New Life, New Character, New Thinking--by Sorokin), aroused the attention of foreign experts, who gradually reached a consensus in the collision and dialogue of eastern and western culture, therefore, their research findings deserve to be taken seriously.

The Translation of Liberated Area Literature (mainly refers to Yan’an Literature) to Foreign Countries

The Soviet Union was the first country to pay attention to the Chinese Liberated Area Literature. In April 1932, the Russian version of Xiao San’s Poetry was published by the Moscow State Press, and then began the translation of the works of Chinese Liberated Area writers. In 1938, the fifth edition of American New Creation translated Ding Ling’s short story 0 Enlistment. By then, the United States opened up the prelude to translate the works of Chinese Liberated Area writers.
As a writer of Chinese Liberated Area, Ding Ling was also introduced to Japan. Song Zi was translated into Japanese by Ono Nobuoro and published in Yamada literature Volume 12 No. 10 in October 1937. From then on, the Japanese scholars began the rendering of the works of Chinese Liberated Area Literature. Western Europe's translation of writers of Chinese Liberated Area began with Ding Ling in the early 30s of the last century. In 1933, the translation of Ding Ling's Water (translated by Xu Zhongnian) was published in the French edition Shanghai Daily in the column Chinese Literature Today. Great Britain was the first country introducing the works of Ding Ling. In 1936, The Living China—Modern Short Stories (Edited by Edgar Snow) was published in London, with Ding Ling's Water, Night, News and other works included.

The translation of Chinese Liberated Area Literature to Eastern Europe began in the late 40s and early 50s of the last century. In 1949, the Bulgarian Press published Ding Ling’s The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River in 1950, Hungary Budapest Press published Ding Ling's The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River and Zhao Shuli's Changes in Li Village.

The same year, Poland published The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River (Warsaw Books and Knowledge Press) and Changes in Li Village; Czech Writers Publishing House also published Changes in Li Village. In addition, Vietnam, North Korea, India and other countries in Asia, as well as Brazil in South America, at the beginning of 1950s in the last century, translated and published works representing the level of Yan’an literary works, such as Changes in Li Village, The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River, When I Was in Xia Village and so on.

In general, the translation and research of the Chinese Liberated Area Literature by Japan, Russia and the Soviet Union were in the forefront of the world's Sinology. They have made an important contribution to the spread of Chinese Liberated Area Literature in the world.

Within the half century from the beginning of the 1930s to the 1980s, Japanese translation of Ding Ling's works were more than 50 editions, of which When I Was in Xia Village was published 8 times with 8 versions; The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River was published 5 times with 4 editions; the works of Zhao Shuli were rendered 46 editions with Changes in Li Village published 5 times with 5 editions; Japanese translation of literary works of other writers in Chinese Liberated Area were nearly 80 editions, covering famous writers like Xiao Jun, Ouyang Shan, Zhou Libo, Ma Feng, Zhou Erfu, Xu Guangyao, Kong Jue, Liu Baiyu, Sun Li, Yan Wenjing and other famous literary theorists and the representative works of Xiao San, Ai Qing, He Qifang, Tian Jian, He Jingzhi, Li Ji, Ruan Zhangjing, Lu Li and so on.

It is worth mentioning that in the 50s and 60s of the last century, Japan published seven or eight versions of the Japanese translation of Mao Zedong’s Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art, which was named as The Direction of Chinese Literature and Art and Speech on Art and Literature respectively. At the same time, Mao Zedong’s thought and Creation Method—the 10th Anniversary Commemorative Collection of Yan an Literary and Artistic Speeches compiled by Mao Dun and Guo Moruo was translated and published in Japan. The above shows the importance that the Japanese experts attached to the new Chinese literature and the direction of its development.

The related theories and works of Yan’an literature were translated into the United States very early. Taken Mao Zedong’s Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art as an example, as early as 1950, the United States International Press published "the Talk" in English; previously, New York Worker's Daily published the abridged translation of "the Talk". In 1980, McDougall Bonnie, S in the United States published Mao Zedong’s Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art: A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary, in which, "the Talk" was fully translated into English with the author's comments as well. McDougall Bonnie, S’s work still has an important position in the current study of Yan’an literature. With regards to relevant literary works, as early as 1938, Chinese Liberated Area Literature was translated into the United States. American scholars have done research on Zhao Shuli, Ding Ling, Zhou Libo, Ai Qing and other writers of great depth.

Foreign Scholars' Holistic Views on Yan’an Literature

As an advanced form of human social consciousness, literature and art is an internal form of social
consciousness. Therefore, Yan’an literature is a kind of "reaction" or "expression" of the ideology of Chinese Liberated Area. While for those foreign researchers, especially the researchers of countries with different social systems, since their world outlook, values, political views and literary and aesthetic values were different from the research object, to what extent could they accept this different and novel ideology has become the key to the problem. Facts have proven that foreign researchers could overcome the possible prejudice and fetters of ideology with their foresight and gave, relatively speaking, an objective and fair judgment to Yan’an literature.

American expert Yi-Tsi Mei once criticized some Western critics, who often indiscriminately concluded that political beliefs would necessarily reduce the quality of literature. And to the question of what kind of impact the writer’s political belief of communism would have upon a creative talent, Yi-Tsi Mei seriously pointed out that ideology as a term itself had completely self-Ideologized. She pointed out that “ideology” should be used as a neutral term in the analysis of the literary works, with the exclusion of its political, perhaps somehow contempt meaning. If we don't regard ideology as an evaluation standard, it will become an objective rational tool for objectively investigating and describing the contents and finding out the relationship between various factors, which would tamp the theoretical foundation of the researcher in order to correctly evaluate the literary and artistic works of Yan’an. Using this "rational tool", foreign researchers have made a macro grasp and rational analysis of Yan’an literature.

Russian and Soviet scholars, in the perspective of Marx's view of literature and aesthetics, generally included the Chinese Liberated Area Literature in the grand system of the May 4th New Culture Movement which was taken as the starting point of the new Chinese literature. They believed that the Chinese Liberated Area Literature carried forward the fine tradition of Lu Xun's fighting, profoundly understood and grasped the national literary heritage and folk oral literary creation, and created a new type of people's literature full of modern content on the basis of traditional style. Japanese scholars also considered the Chinese Liberated Area Literature as the "people's Literature", which, with Zhao Shuli as its representative, was a "third transition" of Chinese new literature. This "third transition" was named because of two main characteristics by comparison with the previous literature: one was unprecedented revolutionism, the other was its popularity with people. They believe that if one did not understand the Eight Route Army, one could not grasp the spirit of the Chinese anti-war literature (China -Review of Modern Literature, the World, April 1952).

Onokazu pointed out that the writers in Chinese Liberated Area created popular literature with common people as the object, described the historical facts and rural construction in Liberated Area; that "it is not the 'dark exposure' but 'bright hymn', successfully won the readers" (Tokyo, 1979).

Foreign Scholars' Case study of Yan’an Literature

Foreign researchers pay special attention to the microcosmic study of the works and details. Their research focuses on several representative writers: Ding Ling, Zhao Shuli, Ai Qing and Zhou Libo.

Ding Ling with her great creations, distinctive artistic personality, extremely long and bumpy career and life experience, became a target for all foreign researchers. According to incomplete statistics, for half a century, about more than 200 Presses over the world published 345 Ding Ling’s literature research works and papers. There are three masterpieces: Introduction to Ding Ling ([Japan] Osaka Tokushi), Ding Ling's novel ([America] Yi-Sci Mei) Ding Ling's track ([Japan] Nakajima). These works and papers had a wide range of research, almost with touch to every field of Ding Ling's creation, and went deep into the space of Ding Ling’s thought as the core writer of "Communist Literature Circle". Although the scope of research was broad, the focus was prominently mainly focused on Ms. Sha Fei’ Diary, When I Was in Xia Village, Water, Thoughts on March 8th and The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River.

Zhao Shuli's works, with its "novel theme" and "novel narration", have attracted much attention from Japanese researchers. Japanese scholars believe that Zhao Shuli’s literature is a new type of "people's Literature". It is the representative of Yanan's "Northern Literature", and develops the "third transition" of Chinese new literature. The famous American scholar Cyril Belcher had very
unique insights of the works of Zhao Shuli, such as *Xiao Erhei Get Married* and *Rhymes of Li Youcai*. He said that *Xiao Erhei Get Married*, published in the northwest region of China in May 1943, “was a modern historical event representing two aspects of both literature and politics”.

Russian media, readers and critics had a great interest in Zhao Shuli's short stories, which were described as "humorous" and "great artistic charm" and "really reflecting the artistic talents". Since *The Far East* translated Zhao Shuli's *Changes in Li Village* in 1949, in the Soviet Union, *Literary Newspaper, New Era, Culture and Life* and other newspapers and magazines launched one after another another comment on Zhao Shuli and his works. Russian scholars generally believed that Zhao Shuli had created a harmonious combination of artistic and ideological work.

Zhou Libo was considered as "expert" of long and short stories and therefore won great respect from the Russian scholars. His novel *Mighty Storm* was awarded the Third Prize of 1951 Stalin Prize for Literature. Russian readers and scholars generally considered that the *Mighty Storm* as an excellent work. Its literary value lies in that Zhou Libo uses vivid artistic images to show the Chinese (rural) revolutionary movement. The American scholar John Hutres in the introduction of *Chinese Revolutionary Literature* called Zhou Libo “one of the most outstanding writers after 1949". In addition, Russia and Japanese scholars have many profound and exquisite comments on Wei Wei, He Jingzhi, Liu Baiyu, Ma Feng, Xiao Jun, Sun Li, Li Ji and other writers and poets.

**The Influence and Enlightenment of Yan’an literature on the Western World**

Yan’an literature is the product of the Chinese revolutionary war. In a sense, it is a kind of war literature, a war literature of aggression and anti-aggression, a kind of revolutionary literature that oppresses and oppresses. This type of literature often has a strong ideological color, or, in itself, it is "a powerful ideology".

For such a literature, sinologists in different social systems and different ideology countries, breaking through the shackles of ideology, translating and studying it persistently, finally give an objective and fair evaluation, which, to be frank, was not an easy task. Perhaps it is because of the different ideology of Yan’an literature itself that it attracted scholars’ interest in such a heterogeneous culture—a "foreign land". It is however a nature of Westerners to explore "strangeness" and "difference". After World War II, most of the Democratic intellectuals in the western countries were very confused about the future of human beings. It was urgent to find the "self" in the "foreign land". But where is the most "ideal" place to find the "self"? On this issue, American scholar Jonathan Spence gave a very clear answer. He pointed out that most western writers began to study China, for feelings of insecurity and anxiety among Westerners, "China became their way out or retreat to a certain extent" (*Cultural Similarities and Cultural Utility*, Peking University Press, 1997). This may be one of the reasons for the western scholars to study the literature of Yan’an.

**Summary**

Foreign Study on the Yan’an literature shows the following trends and characteristics: 1, Sinologists, experts and scholars engaged in the study of Yan’an literature generally had precise understanding of China; most of them had long time stay in Chinese, and some researchers even gained precious raw materials in China; 2, The relevant research mostly started in 1940s and 1950s, 1960s witnessed the research peak and gradually after 1960s, the research declined, then in 1990s, again relevant research showed a prosperous trend; 3, researches in the cultural collision and dialogue, from multiple perspective of "Literary", "aesthetic" and "political" aspects, provide different research ideas for China scholars; 4, case studies of Zhao Shuli, Ding Ling, Zhou Libo, Ai Qing and other writers were very profound.

The insufficiency of research on Yan’an literature abroad is also evident: 1, because of the lack of historical vision of literature, Yan’an literature has not been deeply explored nor the profound influence of Yan’an literature on China contemporary literature has been fully described; 2, the evolution of literary thoughts in Yan’an was in the static and partial observation, therefore, the final
analysis was often one-sided, lack of dialectical view; 3, no research tried to explain the status of
the Yan’an literature in the context of world literature, and objective description ever related "left
wing" trend of thought in literature with Yan’an Literature, which was clear evidence of lack of a
"world view";

Therefore this paper suggests that a more systematic and all-around and in-depth reflection on
Yanan literature should be done perhaps from the perspectives of communication and ecology,
media, communication system, communication mode, disseminator, audience and text content; and
at the same time, researches should explore how Yan’an literary and its artistic creation influenced
the evolution of world literature from the above variety of aspects, and then re-recognize and
evaluate Yan’an literature.

References


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