

Translation and Dissemination of Marxist Literary Theory by the Chinese League of Left-Wing Writers and Its Contemporary Value

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This paper intends to explore the historical practice of translating and disseminating Marxist Literary Theory by the Chinese League of Left-Wing Writers. It discusses the ways the league adopted from three aspects, namely, policy and institutional guarantee, literary selection and translation, as well as translation publication and review. It also finds out that the contemporary value of the league's dissemination of Marxist Literary Theory lies in strong vitality arising from the localization of the advanced theory and adherence to "people-centered" principle in literary and artistic innovation.

Keywords: the Chinese League of Left-Wing Writers, Marxist Literary Theory, translation and dissemination

Introduction

Chinese literature and art is the product of the sinicization of the Marxist theories of literature and art, and the literature and art of the people under the leadership of the CPC as well. After a hundred years of leading Chinese literature and art, the Party has accumulated rich experience and achieved fruitful results. The Chinese League of Left-Wing Writers, a revolutionary literary group led and founded by the CPC in the 1930s, is considered a legend in the history of literature and art in China.

The League's Exploratory Ways of Translating and Introducing Marxist Literary Theory

With the efforts of the CPC, the Chinese League of Left-Wing Writers was established in the early 1930s, which was the product of following the international trend in the leftist thoughts, as well as the result of domestic debates on revolutionary literature. And it also indicates that the CPC would lead Chinese literature and art ideologically and organizationally, with an attempt to break through the cultural encirclement and suppression by the KMT by means of striving for its propaganda positions and disseminating progressive ideas. Consequently, the league began its exploration of the ways to Chinese revolutionary practice with the guidance of Marxist Literary Theory.

Policy and Institutional Guarantee

A few days after the league's founding meeting, on March 10, the report on "the establishment of Chinese League of Left-Wing Writers" was published officially in Volume 1, Issue 3 of the magazine *Pioneer*. The report

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declared that seven standing members and two alternate ones were elected, and the theoretical program was adopted, which proposed that “Our theory should point out the correct direction of the movement and make it develop” and “It is necessary to introduce the achievements of international proletarian art and construct the theory of art”. In addition, its action program was also adopted, stating, “The purpose of our literary movement is to seek the liberation of the emerging stage and oppose all the oppression of our movement”. The league set up four research associations in particular, and then developed and expanded its organizational structure to seven committees, most of which were dedicated to the research on the development of Chinese proletarian literary theories and works, international proletarian literary works, as well as the study of Marxist Literary Theory. Later, in August 1930 and November 1931 respectively, the league issued documents and resolutions, emphasizing the new tasks of the proletarian literary movement and the importance of literature popularization route as well.

It can be seen that the league had a firm political stance, attached great importance to the creation of revolutionary literature, and emphasized that literature and art should follow the revolution and also serve the public, which provided a solid guarantee for the translation and dissemination of Marxist Literary Theory from the policy and institutional levels.

Literary Selection and Translation

The League of Left-Wing Writers itself did have distinct political attributes, which is also reflected in the choice and translation of Marxist theory works. The literary works of proletarian revolutionaries written by pioneers from Germany, the Soviet Union, Japan, such as Marx, Engels, Lenin, Lunacharski, Plekhanov, Fajeyev, Kurahara Korehito, Kobayashi Takiji, et al., became the focus of translation. Among them, “Reality—A Collection of Essays on Marxist Literature and Art” and “Lenin: Leo Tolstoy” edited and translated by the red translator Qu Qiubai included the most important works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin on literary theory. Qu was known as the first person who systematically translated and introduced Marxist Literary Theory and played an important role in promoting the conscious dissemination of Marxist Literary Theory in China. Lu Xun, the spiritual leader of the league, was dedicated to the exploration of revolutionary literature, which drove him to clarify Marxist historical materialism, the relationship between literature and revolution, the relationship between literature and class, through his translation activities. The first Soviet literature and art theory treatise he translated was “Literary Policy” formerly known as “Soviet Literary Policy”, and then he translated Lunacharski’s “Literature and Art and Criticism” and “Art Theory”, and Plekhanov’s “Art Theory”, all of which encouraged the introduction and dissemination of Marxist Literary Theory in China, and also promoted the league in the theoretical fruits of literature and art. In addition, other important league members were also involved in the translation and introduction of left-wing literary works, such as Feng Xuefeng, Yu Dafu, Xia Yan, Zhu Jingwo, Wang Renshu, Rou Shi et al. The general trend of the translation and introduction of Marxist literature by the league began with the translation of papers by writers from the Soviet Union, Japan, and other countries, for clarifying Marxist literary and artistic theories, and gradually moved to focus on the translation of works of Marxist classical writers (Ji, 1980).

From the perspective of translation strategy, translation had not yet developed into a discipline, and there were no unified translation principles and norms in China at that time. Liang Shiqiu once criticized Lu Xun’s “hard translation”, but the latter’s response to it was that the way of translation he adopted was an attempt to change the way of thinking among Chinese people and introduce foreign expressions to enrich the expressive power of Chinese with a dialectical perspective and pioneering action. The choice Lu made was fully in line with

his spirit of daring to take the lead and his great ambition to open up the wisdom of Chinese people. No doubt, Lu is considered the most rebellious but resolute one among the modern Chinese intellectuals endeavoring for the enlightenment of the fellowmen (Wu, 2016). As a core member of the league, Mao Dun worked hard on the translation and introduction of Soviet proletarian literature, and also served as the editor and publisher of the official journals. He claimed “literal translation” and criticized “distorted translation”. Qu Qiubai advocated the translation standard of “faithfulness and smoothness”, stressing that the translation should fully introduce the meaning of the original text to readers. On the whole, most of the translated works published in the 1930s were made with the adoption of literal translation, and the choice of translators was the result of the era environment, political positions, translation habitus, and academic character together.

Translation Publication and Review

Apart from the translation magazine *Yiwen* initiated by Lu Xun and Mao Dun, the periodicals of the league published many translations of Marxist Literary Theory, promoting the development of Marxist literary thoughts in China, such as *Popular Literature and Art*, *Sprout*, *Pioneer*, *Literary Research*, *Art*, etc. According to statistics, among the translated works published in the journals of the league, there were 275 translations of theoretical works, accounting for about 48.8% of the total number, and the rest were literary works; the two were evenly matched (Zuo & Bi, 2005). Among them, the original texts for the translation works were primarily from the Soviet Union and Japan, due to the fine tradition and legacy of proletarian revolutionary literature and the active construction of proletarian literary theory in these countries, as well as those league members' education background of studying in those countries. At the same time, in the 1920s and 1930s, a number of new bookstores and publishing institutions emerged in Shanghai and Beijing, which also provided an important platform for the spread and development of Marxist Literary Theory in China, such as Beixin, Chunjiang, Jiangnan, Kaiming, Hufeng, Commercial Press, Liangyou Book Printing Company, etc., which published numerous literary creations as well as translations of foreign literary works by the members.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Chinese literary circle spared no effort to translate foreign works. Thus, the social psychology was that everything translated was “new”. Therefore, many journals published translations of foreign works indiscriminately, so as to cater to the public's reading psychology. In the 1930s, translated works were “flooded” for a time, and some works with poor translation quality appeared frequently, which was resisted by readers, and even a few journals refused to accept translated manuscripts for a while. On the contrary, excellent translation works were still recognized and welcomed. As mentioned above, the translations published in the official journals of the league were mainly from the league members. Most of their works, whether selected from the original or translated versions, were both of high quality, conforming to the standard of faithfulness and expressiveness. Those translated works had a wide audience and became classics.

The Contemporary Value of the Dissemination of Marxist Literary Theory of the League

The sinicization of Marxist Literary Theory is an important part of the sinicization of Marxism. It is to solve the problems faced in the construction of Chinese literature and art theory and its practical application, with the standpoint, perspective, and method of Marxist Literary Theory. It is a process of continuous integration of Marxist Literary Theory with Chinese literature and art, and also a process of gradually building a contemporary literary theory system with Chinese characteristics. The League of Left-Wing Writers did play an irreplaceable

role in the early stage of the sinicization of Marxist Literary Theory, which is of great value to the contemporary era.

Strong Vitality Arising From the Localization of the Advanced Theory

Since Li Dazhao, one of the central founders of the CPC, mentioned Marx's view of literature and art in his own paper in 1919, many pioneers, especially the early CPC members, began to learn Marxist Literary Theory and then translated many Marxist literary works and wrote relevant review papers, thus making Marxist Literary Theory more widely spread in China. At the same time, members of the league were also consciously or unconsciously influenced by Marxist Literary Theory in their own literary creation, all of which were the league's theoretical explorations in the Chinese paradigm of Marxist Literary Theory. But on the whole, especially in the early stage, the league mainly took the Soviet Union as a reference, and its exploration process was not well integrated with China's reality. But with the deepening of its practice and the exposure of more realistic problems, some changes were to be made and Marxist Literary Theory was combined with the development of Chinese revolutionary literature and art gradually. After the founding of the PRC, this kind of integration became more closely and harmoniously, and a theoretical system of literature and art with Chinese characteristics has been formed, from Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, to Xi Jinping's new era literature and art thought.

Adherence to "People-Centered" Principle in Literary and Artistic Innovation

Marx once said that the people had always been the only judge of the writers' sufficient qualifications and insufficient qualifications (Marx & Engels, 1961). Affinity to the people is the core of Marxist Literary Theory, which is also well interpreted in Chinese literary practice. In 1930 and 1931, the league launched general discussions upon the popularization of literature and art, the practice of which was an important attempt of its exploration in Marxist Literary Theory. Although it was concentrated on the theoretical aspects, it did stimulate the upsurge of mass literature and art creation. After the founding of the PRC, Chinese literature and art has always adhered to the principles of popularization and nationality. And the literary and artistic thoughts of several generations of leading collectives have always stressed the orientation of the people-centeredness, which has also been trusted and welcomed by the overwhelming majority of the people in China. Xi Jinping, President of the PRC, once pointed out in his speech that socialist literature and art, in essence, was the literature and art of the people and the fundamental direction of socialist literature and art was to serve the people and thus the voice of the people need to be heard. In Xi's talks, numerous world literary masterpieces are mentioned which indicate that China's literary and artistic works are not only produced for Chinese people, but also for people of the entire world (Wang, 2018).

Conclusion

As discussed above, the Chinese League of Left-Wing Writers indeed made great contributions in the formation and development of Marxist Literary Theory with Chinese characteristics through its efforts in the practice of translating and disseminating the theory. There is no doubt that the league was an active propagandist and brave advocate of Marxist Literary Theory, and a fearless pioneer of the practice of the theory in the Chinese context as well. Although the Chinese League of Left-Wing Writers has become history, its successful experience and failure lessons have important reference significance for constructing the Chinese paradigm of Marxist Literary Theory in the new era.

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