



Research Article

**TRANSLATION OF CHINESE NEW ERA FICTION
FROM THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY PERIOD OF VIETNAM***Nguyen Thi Dieu Linh**Ha Noi University of Education**Corresponding author: Nguyen Thi Dieu Linh – Email: ruanshimiaoling@gmail.com**Received: May 08, 2019; Revised: June 16, 2019; Accepted: July 10, 2019***ABSTRACT**

This article focuses on the situation of translation, publication, and introduction of Chinese New Era Fiction in Vietnam in the context of contemporary period of Vietnam. Translation of Chinese New Era Fiction has been seen as a puzzle piece in the big picture of literary translating of Vietnam. It is influenced by the tendency to focus on literary translation and peripheral culture of literature, and it also is an explanation for the connection related to the issue of new Chinese in the view of Vietnamese people.

Keywords: fiction, New Era, China, translation, Vietnamese, contemporary.

1. Introduction

“Chinese New Era literature” is a concept in which Chinese literary researchers refer to the literature from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. The new era of Chinese literature has formed and developed from the late 1970s, but due to some historical reasons (the Sino-Vietnamese War in 1979 which led to a break of 10 years between Vietnam and China), Vietnam has just begun to translate and introduce authors and works of this literary period in the late 1980s. Although diplomatic relations between any two countries become severed, this does not mean that all cultural and literary exchanges are completely stalled. During the American - Vietnam war from 1954 to 1975, Vietnamese still translated and introduced American literature such as the novels of Mark Twain, plays of Arthur Miller, or poetries of Walt Whitman. During 10 years of severing relations with China, Vietnamese still translated and introduced the poems of Du Fu, novels and short proses of Lu Xun. However, 10 years of severing still has a certain influence on the position of Chinese New Era literature in Vietnamese translation literature, the “contemporary” and the “timeliness” of the translation are still confined. My article is an attempt to identify the translation and introduction of the Chinese New Era Fiction (late 1970s - early 1990s) into the context of Contemporary period of Vietnam to explain the relationship between translating, publishing and receiving, transforming literature works in a new context.

2. Translation of Chinese New Era Fiction as a puzzle piece in the picture of translated literature in Contemporary Vietnam

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Chinese New Era Fiction translation is not an independent activity but a puzzle piece in the general picture of translating foreign literary into Vietnamese at that period. As a small country, the establishment and development of Vietnamese culture and literature depends greatly on how Vietnamese people interact, receive, and transform foreign elements. In ancient and medieval times, Vietnamese translated the literary works of China, Japan, and India. From early modern period, the translation of foreign literature in Vietnam has been influenced by the fluctuations of Vietnamese society. From the nineteenth century, Vietnam has approached and translated French, English, Italian and German literature. The second half of the twentieth century was high point in translating the literary works of Soviet and Eastern European countries. American, Latin America and African literary works also penetrated into Vietnam. The translation of foreign literary in Vietnam changed into pluralism in 1975, after the War ended, the Northern and Southern of Vietnam were unified and especially after 1986, the openness and renovation of Vietnam's economy. In a situation that literary works of all countries can be translated and published in Vietnam, and the position of Chinese New Era Fiction is and how it is recognized, which are problems are not easy to have an exact satisfactory answer.

Studies on the translation and publication of modern novels in Vietnam show that from 1989 (the year that the first two Chinese New Era novels were translated and published in Vietnam¹) to 2010, 43 novels have been translated and published (not included reprints). The authors who have the most translated works into Vietnamese are Mo Yan, Liu Zhen Yun, Tie Ning, Zhang Xian Liang, Feng Ji Cai, Jia Ping Wa, Han Shao Gong, Wang Meng, Wang Shou, Yu Hua, A Cheng, Can Xue, Chen Dan Yan, Chen Zhong Shi, Gu Hua, Ke Yun Lu, Lei Da, Li Rui, and Su Tong. Therefore, it can be seen that, Vietnamese translators, publishers, and readers have an interest in many generations of Chinese New Era literary authors, many different literary schools. On the other hand, there is also a tendency to focus on certain authors. Obviously, for each author and his/her work, it is possible to examine the entire process of how an author and his/her book was introduced in Vietnam. This will require an empirical research study².

In the scope of this article, the author has made a statistic of foreign literary works published in the journal "Foreign Literature" from the journal No.1, 1996 to No.6, 2012 (since the journal was released until the end of the publication) on the following categories: short stories and extremely short stories; novels (excerpts); short proses, journals and essays. Thereby, it can be seen that within 16 years, the journal has introduced literary works of 62 countries, 335 authors and 553 works (due to the capacity of journal, so most of the articles are short stories). In particular, the authors and the works that were introduced the most were from Russia, America, Germany, China, France, India and Britain. The statistical results show

¹ Two novels: "Half of man is a woman" of Zhang Xian Liang (translated by Phan Van Cac and Trinh Trung Hieu, Youth Publishing House and Labor Publishing House) and "Person, ah person!" of Dai Hou Ying (translated by Minh Dang Khanh and Ly Khanh Truong, Van nghe Publishing House) were both published in 1989. But the second one was translated from a Russian version. So I think that the first one should be considered as the sign of the beginning of Chinese New Era fiction translation in Vietnam.

² More details can be found in Nguyen Thi Dieu Linh, 2014 and 2016.

that the interest of Vietnamese in contemporary foreign literature mainly focuses on a number of countries that are closely related to Vietnam's history, society and contemporary culture. It is Russian literature, Western literature which is American, French, German, British and Oriental literature which is namely China and India.

Regarding the number of works, Chinese literature has 62 works, as the second position after Russian literature (76 works). There are 20 Chinese authors whose works are translated and introduced, less than Russian literature (43 authors), American literature (37 authors) and British literature (35 authors), more than French literature (16 authors), Indian literature (15 authors) and English literature (14 authors). Chronologically, they are Feng Ji Cai (1996), Jia Ping Wa (1997), Su Tong, Jin Yong, Qu You, Feng Meng Long (1998), Wang Meng, Wang Shou (2000), Tie Ning (2001), Shen Cong Wen (2002), San Mao (2003), Ba Jin (2004), Zhang Jie, Song Pu (2006), Liu Zhen Yun (2008), Yu Hua, Ma Yuan, Can Xue, Li Ji Xiang (2010), and Chen He (2011). It is clear that most of them are authors from New Era Literature. This shows the interest of Vietnamese on China – Contemporary period. Generally, it can be said that Chinese literature has an important position in the translation section of “Foreign Literature” journal. This is one of the focal points to attract attention of Vietnamese people who work or are interested in literary translation. It is also necessary to discuss translators and researchers, especially the two translators - researchers Pham Tu Chau and Le Huy Tieu.

The “Foreign Literature” journal which belongs to Vietnam Writers' Association has a small publication; limited readers in comparison with other literary circles. The operation of the journal is affected not only by the market rules but also by at least two other factors: the effort and excitement of editors, translators, and researchers and foreign support with translation and introduction of foreign literature in Vietnam. Therefore, the fact that the Russian literature has an important position in this journal is closely related to the team of editors, translators and literary researchers who have spent time studying in the Soviet Union. The irreplaceable position of English in the era of globalization has created ideal conditions for translation and introduction of British literary to the journal. The interest in American literature cannot be separated from the context of relation normalization between Vietnam and the United States from 1995 onward, with dense exchanges of literature between the two countries, especially for the inside war period literature. The position of French literature and German literature in the journal, to some extent is related to the activities of the L’Espace French cultural center and the Goethe-Institut cultural center in Vietnam. Overall, it can be seen that the position of Chinese literature in the “Foreign literature” mainly from similarities in contemporary context between Vietnam and China. Although there are several literatures that receive more attention from Vietnamese translators and readers than others, it is hard to find a literature that has more similarities between social background and characteristics of Vietnamese contemporary literature in this period (with two outstanding features: “literary innovation” and the tendency of “reflection”/ “rethinking”), with Chinese New Era literature.

3. Translating literary as a focal point in contemporary Vietnamese literature and a trend of “peripheralization”

Few years after 1975, there was a remarkable phenomenon in the Vietnamese literature: Vietnamese literature, which received strong support from readers during arduous period of North – South Vietnam War, but that day, after the utinity and peaceful of the country, the creating, publishing, and issuing become much easier than before, it seems to be ignored by the readers. At that time, readers seemed to change their attention and interest into foreign literary works, especially contemporary literature of the Soviet Union, European, American, and Latin American countries. Nguyen Ngoc once called this phenomenon “vacuum state” in Vietnamese literature (Nguyen Ngoc, 1991, p.9).

According to Itamar Evan - Johar's “pluralism system theory” (in the field of translation and literary research), the central position of translated literature in the pluralistic system of a country's literature was established in the following three cases: firstly, when the pluralistic system of a literature is in the formation stage, when the literature is still “young” and in the process of being established; secondly, when a certain type of literature is in a “peripheral” position (in a large literary system), or in a state of “weak”, or both; thirdly, when a literature appears turning-point, risk, or falling into a “vacuum” state (Itamar Evan - Johar, 2000, p.193-194).

After 1975, Vietnamese society experienced a great historical crisis, from war to peace, from division to unification, the whole life and psychology of people changed completely. Literature in domestic has not caught up with that pace of change, so it falls into what Nguyen Ngoc calls “vacuum state”, and leads to a rise in translated literature which attracts interest from readers. During this time, many authors and literary works of Russian, American, European and Latin American literatures were translated, introduced and resonated in Vietnam. Unfortunately, in the advantageous period for translating literary, Chinese New Era literature does not have a chance to penetrate into Vietnam. Until the end of the 80s of the twentieth century, when “literary innovation” of Vietnam was established, “vacuum state” in Vietnamese literature was “released”, the Chinese New Era literature began to be introduced in Vietnam.

“During the twentieth century, literature deserves to be considered as the most important form of spiritual activity of Chinese people.” (Wang Xiao Ming, 1997, p.7) After “the great cultural revolution” ended, following the transformation and reformation of Chinese society, Chinese literature also entered a new period of development. During a period of 10 years from 1979 to 1989, literature became an aesthetic form and subjects of enjoyment that occupied a dominant position in Chinese society, “scar literature”, “reflective literature”, or “root-seeking literature” which became the way that Chinese people (especially young people) visualize the world and human life.” (Yang Qing Xiang, 2009, p.3) Looking at contemporary Vietnamese literature, we could also make similar comments. For a long time, literature had a great influence on society and people, occupying a central position in the spiritual life. However, from the mid-1990s, literature gradually spread to the periphery, in other words, the trend of “peripheralization”. Thus, the Chinese New Era literature just penetrated into Vietnam less than 10 years, the position of “literature” which is

included “translation literature” in the spiritual life of Vietnamese society began to decline³. On the one hand, we can say that Chinese literature and Chinese New Era Fiction have “missed” the golden time to penetrate and influence in Vietnam. But on the other hand, the modern literary began to be translated and introduced in Vietnam when the “literary innovation” of Vietnam was shaped, when translation literature, following the trend of pluralism, took a strong position in Vietnamese literature, it can be considered as a favorable thing for the selection of authors, works and the reception of readers.

The process of translating and publishing Chinese New Era Fiction in Vietnam is also in the period when Vietnamese translators and researchers began to pay more and more attention to the issue of translation theories. The “translated literature and literature translation” section in the journal “Foreign Literature” published many translations and articles on translated literary issues, literary translation, translation theory, reception theory. Literary translation has also become a topic for many conferences and seminars. Until now, for the Vietnamese literary circle, the Chinese New Era Fiction works are still classified as “serious literature”, with “literary value” in Vietnam. However, the translation of Chinese literature also faces with the non-answered problem of translated literature in Vietnam at this time about the relationship between literature and marketability, between quality of translation and compensation for translators, between the needs of a small number of readers and the needs of the majority of readers, and the like. For example: by the time of translating and publishing in Vietnam, the novel “Liu Hui Fang” of Wang Shou was renamed to “The Last Kiss”, “Disease Phase Report” of Jia Ping Wa was renamed “Love”. At first glance, it is not too rare for a translator or editor to change the name of a work in a translation. However, if being considered at a deeper level, the above changes are related to the overwhelming trend of “popular literature” with “serious literature” in this period.

4. Chinese New Era fiction and the “Chinese image” in the point of view of Vietnamese people

As we all know, Chinese New Era fiction entered Vietnam in a special situation. Before the end of the 80s of the twentieth century, the translation of this literary in Vietnam was still a new area, while documents introduced about it were politically and critically. Since the late 1980s, translating and publishing of Chinese New Era literary works has become diversified, the dominance of politics and criticism on the aspects of introduction and researching was also abolished. This is closely related to the image of China in the perspective of Vietnamese people.

Before the relationship between the two countries entered the process of normalization, Chinese novels were not allowed to be translated and published in Vietnam. Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, the image of new China through different methods gradually formed in Vietnamese people. In my opinion, there are three most important methods: first is direct contact, second is orthodox propaganda, and third is a

³ This conclusion was drawn from considering the articles from “Foreign Literature” journal, some conferences and seminars, especially the seminar “Chinese Literature Translation in Vietnam” in 23/9/2009.

number of Modern literary works which are translated and introduced in Vietnam. Direct contact is increasing with every step of normalized relations between the two countries. Orthodox propaganda information is associated with the same social regime and the reform process that both countries are undertaking. Literature is the most important method in the spiritual life of the people of the two countries at that time. What are the characteristics of the image of the new Chinese which is created by literature in the eyes of Vietnamese people from the 1990s onwards?

Explaining the reasons for a literary work being translated and published in another country cannot be based not only on literary factors, but also on the historical, social and political, cultural factors. Especially in case of Chinese New Era fiction in Vietnam, this is very clear. At that time, Vietnamese understanding of contemporary China, including China before the Reform and Opening and China after that, was quite limited. Chinese novels used the literary form to record, replicate and describe China in these two periods. Through reading the literary works, Vietnamese people are satisfied their curiosity and Modern Chinese image is started to form in the eyes of the Vietnamese people. On the one hand, through thousands of years of history, as Vietnamese people perceived, Chinese has been formed in association with traditional oriental culture (big country, long history, Confucianism, etc.). From early modern to contemporary, great historical fluctuations and complex developments in relations between the two countries made the China and Chinese in the view of Vietnamese people is “ugly” and “extremism”. On the other hand, after a 10-year period of the breaking off cultural exchange, Vietnamese people have a curious and waiting for the “new China”. It is “new China” after the great cultural innovation and liberation reform. Vietnam at that time had just undergone great historical changes and also undergoing renovation and opening market, making this expectative psychology become stronger. All of these factors have influenced the choice of translator, the introduction and interpretation of critics, the reception and feedback on the work of readers. Literature (as an important form of consciousness of the Vietnamese society's spiritual life in the 1980s and 1990s) - herein only literary products - can give Vietnamese readers understandings which are more comprehensive, fresher about “new China”. Therefore, on the diverse and even heterogeneous translated literature “market” in Vietnam at that time, the Chinese New Era literature which has just published attracted the attention of many people. In 1989, when Zhang Xian Liang “Half of man is a woman”, the first Chinese New Era novel was translated and published into a book in Vietnam, “It has been a long time since I read read such a meaningful work of contemporary Chinese literature” and this is probably not just the sensation of only translator Phan Van Cac⁴.

A particular example: For the Vietnamese people, “China's Cultural Revolution” has always been a remarkable historical phenomenon. Before the new period of Chinese literature entered Vietnam, in the consciousness of Vietnamese people, China's Cultural Revolution associated with “Maoism”⁵, the critique of the cultural revolution was

⁴ Phan Van Cac Interview (appendix 2) in Nguyen Thi Dieu Linh, 2012.

⁵ More details can be found in Nguyen Thi Dieu Linh, 2012, p.33-46.

inseparable criticism of “Maoism”. It is not uncommon for Chinese novels in the first new period of modern Chinese literature translated in Vietnam mostly revolves around the topic about problems after Cultural Revolution: “Half of Man is Woman”, “Mimosa” of Zhang Xian Liang, “Person, oh Person!” of Dai Hou Ying, “Educated Youth” of Ye Xin, “Hibiscus Town” of Gu Hua... In addition, other novels such as “Turbulence” of Jia PingWa, “To live” by Yu Hua, “The Butterfly and Other Stories” of Wang Meng, “The Garlic Ballads” of Mo Yan... described vividly the fluctuations of China from early modern period to contemporary, including Cultural Revolution. These novels provide a source for Vietnamese people to have a better understanding of China's social history and spiritual appearance during that period, thereby building the image of China within and after the Cultural Revolution. The above works not only describe but also conduct reflection on the great revolutionary culture, which has a strong impact on how Vietnamese people see and interpret this historical event.

Looking back on the whole process, we can say that the Chinese New Era fiction was translated and introduced in Vietnam not only to satisfy the curiosity of Vietnamese readers in the first period, but in the different stages, through the works of many authors, of many different literary schools, have met the different needs of Vietnamese literary and readers. From the late 1980s to present, the works which belongs to the schools of “scar fiction”, “reflective fiction”, “root-seeking fiction”, “reform fiction”, “new realistic fiction”... have been translated and spread in Vietnam and contributed significantly to creating a new and vivid Chinese image.

Discussing the translation of Chinese New Era literature in Vietnam and “Chinese image” in the eyes of Vietnamese people, it is also impossible to ignore the unique relationship between literary works and the spread of cinema and television. Many New Era literature introduced in Vietnam have been adapted into movies or dramas, gaining popularity both inside and outside China. “Hibiscus Town” of Gu Hua, “Red Sorghum Clan” of Mo Yan, “To live” of Yu Hua, “Wives and Concubines” of Su Tong... are some typical examples. In many cases, when literary works are translated into Vietnamese, publishers and translators pay great attention to this when writing the introduction. Translation, publication, introduction and reception of literary works are closely related to the prevalence of cinema and television. For example, when Su Tong's novel “Wives and Concubines” was translated and published in Vietnam in 2002, the name of the product was changed to “Raise the Red Lantern”. It is also the name of the movie adapted from this novel.

The 1990s was one of the peak periods of dramas in Vietnam. Many Chinese dramas have made a big echo in Vietnam during this period. First of all, the TV series adapted from famous novels of the Ming Qing period such as “Romance of the Three Kingdoms”, “The Water Margin”, “Journey to the West”, “Dream of the Red Chamber”. In addition, there are many dramas that subject to contemporary life such as “Desire”, “Educated Youth”, “Zhou Jiang Love”... The above films were broadcast on Vietnam Television, get empathy and love of the masses. The daily life, the stories touching people's hearts and the harmony of individual people among the fluctuations of history are all very suitable factors for the psychology of the Vietnamese masses at that time. Therefore, receiving literature

and receiving movies and dramas in this period was inseparable. For example, in 1997, the novel “Educated Youth” of Ye Xin, translated by Trinh Trung Hieu, and published by the The World Publisher, is closely related to the drama “Educated Youth” which was welcomed by Vietnamese audiences at that time. In the article “About ‘Educated Youth’” published in the 39th issue of Van Nghe newspaper (September 26, 1998), Phac Can especially emphasized: the drama that is broadcasting in Vietnam is adapted from the novel “Educated Youth” by Ye Xin. Phac Can also introduced an article written by Ye Xin when this drama was broadcast in Shanghai, so readers and audiences of Vietnam could understand more about this novel and the film. Another typical example is the “Desire”, translated by Tran Dinh Hien and Nguyen Van Toan, published by Labor Publishing House in 1995. “Desire” is the name of a drama that was completed in 1990, broadcasted in China in two years 1990 and 1991, and immediately resonated throughout the country. The novel “Desire” was written on drama scripts by Deng Wan Long and Li Xiao Ming in 1991 published by Beijing Publishing House. Very quickly, almost immediately after the famous time in China, this drama was broadcasted on VTV in Vietnam in 1992 and 1993, receiving a strong welcome and sympathy from a large audience. “Desire” was translated and published in Vietnam in 1995 is clearly inseparable from the success of the drama “Desire”. This is also the only New Era novel which was adapted from the drama was translated and published in Vietnam.

We know that the relationship between literature with cinema and television is an integral part of popular culture. From the 90s of the twentieth century, along with the establishment and development of the market economy in Vietnam, the influence of popular culture on every aspect of life has been deepened. Therefore, the relationship between Chinese literature in modern period and Chinese movies and dramas in Vietnam is not difficult to explain. This deep relationship clearly has the effect of promoting the translation of modern period literature in Vietnam, while promoting the understanding of Vietnamese people with contemporary Chinese images. Literature, like cinema, is the arts that can provide a comprehensive and honest view of social fluctuations as well as the spiritual faces of people in those fluctuations. The translation and introduction of the Chinese New Era fiction cannot be separated from the “Chinese image” in the eyes of Vietnamese people in different historical periods.

5. Conclusion

It can be said that, the similarities in the contemporary social history, especially the Cultural Revolution in China, the war and the division of the country in Vietnam and the opening up of the the two countries are an important focal point to consider explaining the translation of Chinese New Era literature in Vietnam from the context of contemporary Vietnam on one hand. On the other hand, historical causes have made the Chinese New Era fiction penetrate Vietnam “slowly” 10 years. This has a significant impact on the translation process as well as the relationship between products with contemporary Vietnamese literature.

“Innovation” or “Reform” is the most important point when discussing the relationship between Chinese New Era literature and contemporary Vietnamese literature.

Vietnamese literature innovation is a premise for Chinese novels to penetrate Vietnam, and to a certain extent, decide the choice of translators and publishers, the introduction and research of literature reviewers. In contrast, the strong “reform” spirit in the Chinese New Era fiction is a valuable reference for contemporary Vietnamese literature. This is also the main reason for the Chinese New Era fiction of establishing a firm position irreplaceable in the context of Vietnamese contemporary culture and literature.

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DỊCH THUẬT TIỂU THUYẾT TRUNG QUỐC THỜI KÌ MỚI TẠI VIỆT NAM NHÌN TỪ BỐI CẢNH VIỆT NAM ĐƯƠNG ĐẠI

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TÓM TẮT

Bài viết xem xét tình hình dịch thuật, xuất bản và giới thiệu tiểu thuyết Trung Quốc Thời kì mới tại Việt Nam từ bối cảnh Việt Nam đương đại. Dịch thuật tiểu thuyết Trung Quốc Thời kì mới được nhìn như một mảnh ghép trong bức tranh văn học dịch ở Việt Nam, chịu ảnh hưởng của xu hướng chú trọng văn học dịch và xu hướng ngoại biên hóa của văn học, và được lí giải trong mối quan hệ với vấn đề hình ảnh Trung Quốc mới trong con mắt người Việt Nam.

Từ khóa: tiểu thuyết, Thời kì mới, Trung Quốc, dịch thuật, Việt Nam, đương đại.