

# 来自东方的视角

莫言小说研究文集

## Chinese Perspectives

Essays on Mo Yan's Novels

蒋 林 金骆彬 主编  
蒋 林 李 艳 译



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## 内 容 简 介

本书收录了三十余年来来自中国大陆、香港和台湾学者的14篇论文。这些论文对莫言作品进行了深入的思考和探讨,从宏观、微观和比较三个方面给我们呈现了最具有启发意义的莫言小说研究成果。宏观的研究成果涉及的主题包括莫言与中国精神、莫言的启示、魔幻化与本土化、民间性等;微观的研究成果则围绕莫言创作的小说进行深入的剖析,涉及的小说主要有《透明的红萝卜》《生死疲劳》《红高粱家族》《丰乳肥臀》《酒国》《檀香刑》《蛙》等;文集最后一篇研究论文则比较了莫言与福克纳创作的作品在主题、形式和内在精神上呈现出的不同文化意蕴和个性风格。作为中国当代先锋派作家之一,莫言是用汉语写作并获得诺贝尔文学奖的第一位中国人。本书的问世,无论对中国文学界,还是对东西方文化的交流融合,都是一个蕴含深刻启示、具有广泛意义的重要事件。

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## *Introduction*

In recognition of his outstanding contributions internationally to literary production, Mo Yan was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012. Due to censorship, readers outside China often became familiar with his work faster than Chinese readers, and critics were initially hesitant to comment on his writing. While his works were initially controversial for their styles and subjects, he became widely read and discussed in China. Gradually, a large body of criticism developed, which often served as a springboard to discuss larger literary and thematic issues in Chinese society. Of course, once he received the Nobel Prize, his works flew off the shelves in China, literary study of his work became not only acceptable but expected, and he has become a source of great national pride.

Although western readers of the English translations of Mo Yan's works have various articles and commentaries available to them, few Mo Yan's readers have had the opportunity to learn what Chinese critics say about his styles, themes, and his relationship to the long canon of Chinese literature. Therefore, in consultation with various experts, we chose 18 of the best and most important essays on Mo Yan originally written in Chinese by Chinese scholars. And the Chinese volume edited by Jiang Lin and Jin Luobin was published by China Social Sciences Press in 2014. A year later after receiving permission from all of these authors to translate their works into English, we organized a translation team, including our colleagues Xia Jianxin, Chen Fangrong, and Tang Yanfang. Considering the length of the volume and some other factors, we have finally decided to translate 14 articles.

From September, 2014 onward, all the members of the team have been working together on the translation project. Though we

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encountered many translation problems such as differing styles of the contributors and some original Chinese texts that are really difficult to comprehend and transfer, we have finished all the translations by the end of May, 2015. In order to ensure fluid and accurate translations providing English-language readers with a panorama of Chinese criticism of Mo Yan and his works, we have invited Patrick D. Murphy, director of the English Department in University of Central Florida, to help review and edit some parts of the English volume.

We will be grateful to Mr. Murphy for his help and good suggestions. Our thanks also go to all members of the translation team. Without their full devotion and dedication to the work, the translation project would not have been completed. We believe that this volume, the first of its kind in English, will rectify the lack of access to readers outside China. Clearly, there is a need for a volume such as this one, for which there is no competition at this time, to bring a Chinese sensibility and analysis to the works of this living Chinese Nobel laureate.

*Jiang Lin and Li Yan*

## *Preface*

Since late 1990s, I have been working as a professor engaged in teaching and researching on translation theory and practice. During my pursuit of a doctoral degree at Nanjing University from 2005 to 2008, I found myself increasingly impressed by researches on Chinese translators, which inspired me to compose my doctoral dissertation on Liang Qichao's "Haojie Yi," which was later published by Shanghai Translation Publishing House in January, 2009. Thereafter I gradually turned to studying English translations of works created by modern and contemporary Chinese writers, focusing on exploring the translation, transmission, acceptance as well as the influence of their works overseas. On my own part, I relish works by such Chinese writers as Mo Yan, Yu Hua, Su Tong, and Ma Yuan. As far as I'm concerned, an increasing number of Chinese literary works have been translated into foreign languages, while a very limited number of them can really find a chance to spread into the target-language culture. Yet the above mentioned avant-garde writers have played an exemplary role in this aspect, having their works translated one after another into different foreign languages, which have won for them a considerable number of readership in addition to a high profile. Undoubtedly, studies on the English translations of those writers' creations have aroused more and more concern in academic circles. It was just based on this knowledge that I began to supervise three of my graduate students majoring in Translation Studies to make a preliminary study respectively on the English translations of Yu Hua, Su Tong, and Mo Yan's creations from 2009.

Since Mo Yan was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012, I have been pondering on how to make a further exploration on his creations and their translations by taking full advantage of

my translation profession. Over the past two decades, the English world has witnessed the prosperity of the translation and study of Mo Yan's works. In that case, what is critical for me is to find a promising starting point for my research.

It happened that in February, 2013, after more than a year of hard work, I completed my translation of a collection of academic theses entitled *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy* edited by two well-known American scholars Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, which includes 12 representative papers about the study of western ecofeminist literature. I was doing the third revision of my translation when I was inspired by the structure and design of the book: Why don't I draw on the experience of it to edit a collection of papers about the study of Mo Yan's novels and have it translated into English for publication? After all, according to the information I have obtained, what Chinese scholars have studied about Mo Yan is not well known by the academic circle of English-speaking countries.

For that reason, I began to systematically collect and sort out research papers amounting to 1,500 about Mo Yan and his works over the years, among which I perused 150. Considering the capacity of the collection, I made careful comparison and contrast of these papers and only chose 18 representative ones with their arguments ranging from macroscopic, microscopic to comparative views. Altogether there are 8 papers written from the macroscopic view, like "Mo Yan and the Chinese Mind," "Originality and Transcendence: What Mo Yan Has Enlightened Us," 9 papers are from the microscopic view, mainly about Mo Yan's novels such as *Red Sorghum*<sup>1</sup>, *The Transparent*

1 It is a novel of family, myth and memory set during the fratricidal barbarity of the 1930s when the Chinese fought against both Japanese invaders and each other. The narrator "I" tells the stories of his father Douguan; his granddad, the most ruthless bandit and guerrilla commander in the region; and his grandma who falls in love with the commander when they have outdoor sex in the sorghum field only three days after her arranged marriage. *Red Sorghum* was first published by PLA Literature and Art Publishing House in 1987 and adapted into a movie in the same year directed by the well-known director Zhang Yimou. The movie with the same name won the Golden Bear Award in the 1988 Berlin International Film Festival.

*Carrot*<sup>2</sup>, *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* and *Sandalwood Death*, and finally there is one paper about the comparison and contrast between Mo Yan and Faulkner. As for the principle and standard adopted for my collection concerning the theme and the depth of research, I never confronted any trouble that other experts might encounter. In fact, after attaining the basic information of the authors contributing to my collection, I hugged myself for my “acute” academic insight.

After all the contributors of the 18 papers authorized their copyright to me, my colleague Li Yan and I set up a translation team of experience, whose members include my colleagues Xia Jianxin, Chen Fangrong and Tang Yanfang. We made clear each member’s task and time schedule. Due to the fact that most of the papers collected are abstruse, and that the academic standards of China for the past 20 to 30 years are totally different from those in the West, it is inevitable that we confronted a lot of difficulties in the course of translation. However, with arduous efforts, we only spent one month completing the translation of 6 papers with a high quality. In addition, I also invited Patrick D. Murphy, Director of the English Department in University of Central Florida to work as a co-editor, and we together were responsible for the checking and revision of all the original translation. In the light of the length of a book, only 14 of all the 18 translated papers were included in the book. In the meantime, quite a few publishers like University of California Press and Palgrave Macmillan have shown a great interest in the publication of the translation version. However, we finally decided to have it published by Tsinghua University Press.

As the translation version is going to be published, I would extend my sincere thanks to all the contributors. Without their authorization

2 It is a novella written by Mo Yan, which was first published in *Chinese Writers* in 1985 and was later collected in a book named *The Transparent Carrot* together with some other novellas and short stories of Mo Yan in 1986. It talks about a twelve-year-old dark-skinned boy who pulls a carrot in a vegetable patch beside the construction site he is working out of extreme hunger but is immediately caught by the keeper and escorted to the site to be criticized and denounced bitterly.



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of copyright, the translation and publication would be impossible. I would specially appreciate Mr. Li Jingze from the Secretariat of China Writers Association, Professor Guo Jie at South China Normal University, Professor Cheng Guangwei at Renmin University of China, Professor Zhang Ning at Beijing Normal University, Professor Chen Guo'en at Wuhan University, Assistant Professor Wu Yaozong at City University of Hong Kong, and Professor Zhou Yingxiong at Chinese University of Taiwan (I am sorry for being unable to list every author of each paper), who have given me their great support and encouragement. I am particularly grateful to Mr. Zhao Jianying, president and editor-in-chief of the China Social Sciences Press, and Professor Li Guicang, dean of College of International Education at Zhejiang Normal University, who have shown their warm hearts and kindness in helping me collect the Chinese papers. Finally I would express my heartfelt thanks to all members of our translation team. During the past years, we have consistently been devoted to the work of introducing and translating the Chinese literary works so as to spread them to foreign countries based on the principle of earnestness and modesty, as well as the pursuit of preciseness in translation.

As a college teacher at the Department of Translation and Interpretation, I think that in the background of Chinese culture "going out" to the world, we should undertake the historical mission entrusted by the times and bridge the communication and exchange between Chinese and Western cultures, just as what I wrote to the authors of the original Chinese papers, "Mo Yan becomes the first Chinese winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature. Therefore, I think it is our responsibility to make the West, especially English-speaking countries know more about the Chinese writers and their works via translating their creations and related researches on their creations. Disseminating Chinese academic achievements into foreign countries is not only a key component for spreading Chinese culture to the globe, but also the translators' responsibility of our time."

Jiang Lin

May, 2015

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# Mo Yan and the Chinese Mind<sup>1</sup>

Li Jingze

## I

Mo Yan has been “canonized.” His huge appetite and tremendous energy, his joy and ruthlessness, his broad horizon and glamorous variety, and even his eccentricity have been the most important spectacles in the past two decades of modern literature written in the Chinese language.

Although he has enjoyed perhaps the highest literary renown and undergone repeated, sometimes even over-interpretation, he is not among the most favored or detested writers. In China, a reader might detest Wang Shuo<sup>2</sup> for the latter’s offensiveness; or he might show his unrestrained admiration for Wang Anyi<sup>3</sup> for she has offered him a way to visualize his experience and existence. However, it seems quite unlikely that he would treat Mo Yan with similar passions. It is true that Mo Yan, born in an era of intense cultural conflicts, has been encountering prejudice, misunderstanding, and determined opposition. But it is hard, for either his protesters or his admirers, to adopt a simple and consistent attitude toward him. Mo Yan’s broad horizon makes any definition elusive.

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1 Source: *Fiction Review*, 2003(1): 72–76, translated by Xia Jianxin.

2 Wang Shuo (1958– ) is a Beijing school Chinese writer. His works are noted for the presentation of rebellious behaviors on the part of the culturally confused generation after the “Cultural Revolution.”

3 Wang Anyi (1954– ) is a Shanghai school Chinese woman writer. She usually gives vivid and detailed descriptions of ordinary city dwellers in her works.

We somewhat restructure our world outlook and define ourselves by means of admiring or detesting some writers. In this sense, a writer helps build the society's self-awareness and he himself will definitely be classified and revised by social consciousness. This is a Borgesian scene: Books are produced one after another and piled up in a huge, dim library where librarians scurry like apparitions, shredding most of them after a brief glance and shelving the rest through a labyrinth of corridors.

Hence the question: Where should we shelve Mo Yan's works? This supposed question indicates the complicated relationship between Mo Yan and his time, between his contemporary readers and literature.

## II

Mo Yan rarely expresses his views on his own era directly. The novella *Shifu, You'll Do Anything for a Laugh* is perhaps the most ambitious attempt to catch a contemporary event, which is certainly a failure. In the story, the old laid-off worker has to make a living in a quite ironic manner—to run a small trysting place in a backwoods for dating lovers. This plot construction implicitly transforms the social issue of unemployment into a comedy of desire—excreting (the idea of the love tryst was inspired by a pay toilet), peeping (Shifu kept watch outside the hut, glancing), flesh and cash (the two reinforce each other), center vs. border (to protest at the municipal hall or to survive on the outskirts), lawful vs. illegal (the love tryst may be illegal as it encourages illegitimate desires; it may be licensed—through the bribery of some expensive cigarettes). This series of subplots show that “Shifu tends to do anything for a laugh.”

The novella is, after all, of Mo Yan's own making. The society has its own schedule, so does a writer. Mo Yan drives, quite willfully, the train of his story onto his own track. He is often arbitrary and willful. He has the self-confidence to handle everything under whatever circumstances. However, in the case

of *Shifu, You'll Do Anything for a Laugh*, although he has grasped with ease all of the major points, he fails to develop them; as if he were unfortunately trapped in a narrow world and had to squeeze through it to hastily bring his writing to a close. This feeble story is a rare specimen of his works.

A writer's weakness usually constitutes the lower limit of his power. Once Mo Yan steps out of the love tryst and turns back at the end of a certain century, walking all the way toward the fields and the past, his strength will be regained. I am not talking about his subject matter, but pointing out the fact that Mo Yan's innate artistic building is of a lofty nature, i.e. his vision is an integrated and panoramic one. He is capable of perceiving what is happening but not why it happens. Such a writer is not to be evaluated in isolation. He needs to be grudgingly given the freedom of ethical and aesthetic judgment. All the human weaknesses, perceptions and experiences come and go like grass in a cycle of flourishing and withering, like the bursts of thunder and lightning, like rain and dew. All the human beings share the equal existence of glory, and defy any outside judgment.

Therefore, although Mo Yan is best known for *Red Sorghum*, he has prepared all the building blocks of his world in an earlier work *The Transparent Carrot*. The novella was seen as a sort of scandal by the mainstream literary circles at that time, but a bold challenge or a raid by the writer and his supporters. Today it presents its tenderness and beauty to us. Only when we are aware of the fact that the boy wandering in the field needs no justification can we realize the danger the story's truth posed at its appearance—a spirit needs no justification at all.

Similarly, the characters in *Red Sorghum* and *The Way of Dog* do not think; they just perceive and act. Their worlds are presented but not interpreted or judged. The Japanese soldiers in *Red Sorghum* may still be deemed as "evil" in some historical contexts. In *The Way of Dog*, "evil" is just one of the natural forces and attributes. The way of dog is the way of heaven; the way of heaven is the way of human beings. No justification is needed for human's struggling and fighting.

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Such an "everything-is-equal" perspective reaches its deepest level in *A Long Race Thirty Years Ago*. A group of "rightists" took great delight in a race as if they were taking part in a carnival. Their ideology was distilled by the past thirty years, and they entered into some country legend. Each of them became a fictional character from *Creation of the Gods*, equipped with unique craftsmanship and temperament. A comparison between this tale and the then prevalent narratives about those categorized as "rightists" or the ones about the "Cultural Revolution" will reveal that in the latter there is a presupposed historical logic that can account for each character's action and provides a pivot for meaningful interpretation, although such interpretation cannot always be applied to each character.

We may have to understand the exaggeration, sentimentality, and simplification in those dominant narratives. Nevertheless, the persistent attempt to justify a person's action in some historical context indicates and reinforces some bias in the Chinese mind—"A hero is the one who has succeeded while a villain is one who has failed." The startling joy and hodgepodge in *A Long Race Thirty Years Ago* demonstrate Mo Yan's protest against history's domination over life. Although finally the "history" interferes with this long-distance race—the police come and take some of the racers, it is more like one of the incidents recurring in life, an "accident," or a wonderful surprise, or a revelation of some secret. Even "history" cannot deprive us of life, joy, rich experiences, and vitality, in which Mo Yan has placed a trust as immense as the great earth.

In this sense, Mo Yan is our Whitman, who with a huge appetite and a great stomach, seems capable of digesting everything. His vigorous, coarse, and sweeping writings demonstrate the broader side of the Chinese mind—one of experience, perception and flesh as well as of something transcendental, and ultimate, beyond one's ego and the logic of history.

In *Joy*, the young villager, who has failed the College Entrance Examination several times, roams in the field. He is, of course, greatly depressed and exhausted. We may well take his case for

an investigation into society, history, or his personality. The story can be seen as a psychological file on the interaction between the Chinese examination system and an educated country youth. However, in Mo Yan's world, a character's destiny projects itself onto the wild richness and decay of nature, and vice versa. Such projection is not only a poetic metaphor, but also a definite judgment—whether alive or dead, one has to accept or give up everything. This is the truth of life as well as the arrangement of nature. In the world created by Mo Yan, self-pity is the last sentiment a person would resort to.

So our Whitman does have his own limitations. He is after all a writer of myths. ("Myth" was a derogatory term in his time, though.) His works, in their essence, present the vast self-images of the Chinese people. It is hard to decide if the term "myth" is positive or negative. Perhaps Mo Yan does not care. What matters is the transcendence of the anxiety caused by the modernity and history. The Chinese people, while mentally fatigued from such anxiety, can achieve a kind of freedom in these works. The freedom is intended for the good, for the evil, for whatever.

Therefore, Mo Yan is particularly incapable of handling themes like unemployment as it implies moral problems involving various boundaries that modern urban dwellers are confronted with, such as trivialization, complexity, and ambiguity. Although he made an arbitrary attempt to impose his schedule on *Shifu, You'll Do Anything for a Laugh*, he was doomed to fail when he began to make a descriptive analysis of the hero's situation, as it brings a world of diverse "justifications" that blow like dust, baffling people's understanding. This is too much for him. He can digest everything except dust.

### III

1. *Sandalwood Death* is a great masterpiece. I am fully aware of the weight the word "great" carries and have begrudged all the living Chinese writers the word. Nevertheless, I will put aside my



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principle and follow my judgment. *Sandalwood Death* will not crumble under the word.

2. The first sentence of the novel seems a poor one: "That morning it never occurred to my father-in-law that he would be killed by me in seven days." It echoes too much the first sentence of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. We can see it, so could the writer. But he deliberately put down the sentence as if he were recommending himself by foregrounding his blood tie with hallucinatory realism.

This is a sign of homage as well as farewell to Gabriel Garcia Marquez. From the second sentence onward to the very last, Mo Yan withdrew himself as far as thousand miles and, on a startling scale and in a revolutionary determination, brought his narration back to his hometown Gaomi, to the ears and lips of the Chinese people, and to the horizon of our great classical and rural tradition.

3. *Sandalwood Death* is the first major Chinese novel of the 21st century. Its appearance embodies the beautiful symmetry of history.

The 20th century witnessed the modernization of Chinese novels. The Chinese writers learned to think, experience and narrate against a global background. At the same time, either in a joyful or painful way, they payed a price—they cut their own roots and abandoned their own tradition, silencing a voice that had echoed for thousands of years.

*Sandalwood Death* indicates a major turn. Also against the global background, the Chinese writers begin to engraft themselves onto their roots, recovering their tradition and redefining their everlasting cultural characteristics.

4. Mo Yan claimed that he had written about voices—the voice of the train and *Maoqiang* arias (*Maoqiang* is a local melody that is mainly sung in the eastern part of Shandong Province.) of the local Gaomi opera. *Sandalwood Death* is also a voice of history. Its story took place in 1900 when the Eight-Power Allied Forces (the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary, the United States, Russia, and Japan) invaded Beijing. The ancient Chinese