

Authors attend more global events, online literature rights sold more

中国文学的国际化道路:作家加强国际交流 网文输出增多

■ Qu Jingfan

In 2017, famous authors such as Liu Zhenyun, A Yi, Bi Feiyu, Ge Fei, Yu Hua, Cao Wenxuan and Feng Tang participated in a high number of international literary exchange activities; this has had a great effect on furthering understanding of Chinese literature with the overseas readers, literary world and publishing fields. At the same time, authors of online literature are becoming a new and vigorous force for Chinese publishing. *Hua Qiang* and *The Lost Tomb* are among online literary works the copyrights of which are continually being exported.

Head of international cooperation at the People's Literature Publishing House Liu Qiao states: "Exporting the copyrights for books to Western countries, especially rights for literary works is definitely not easy. However, in the past few years China has seen rapid economic and social development, arousing others' curiosity and desire to understand China, which has given us an opportunity."

Chinese publishers are working hard to organise authors to go abroad and participate in literary exchange activities, but at the same time, finding suitable foreign publishing houses is also very important. This can greatly increase the chances of authors and their works entering the international market, with excellent works in most spoken languages being translated into smaller language markets. Liu Qiao says that in the USA, Eileen Chang's works were previously published by The New York Review Books Publishing House (NYRB), which concerns itself with discovering classical works from all over the world, pub-

lished an English version of *The Invisibility Cloak* in 2016. After the Argentinian publisher Adriana Hidalgo (AH) saw that NYRB has published the English version, it decided to buy the global Spanish-language rights.

"This is how a brand is transmitted. Partnering with a high-quality English publisher is one of the best ways to spread the brand and have the power to be convincing."

The China Renmin University Press has succeeded in selling the rights for a number of works of online literature. Head of the publishing house's International Copyright Centre Liu Yehua agrees with Liu Qiao's viewpoint: selecting an appropriate partner is very important. CRUP pays great attention to the selection of its partners. Currently there are many foreign publishers looking to work with them, but CRUP conducts a review of each one's publishing resources and capabilities before agreeing to anything.

The China Intercontinental Press, with the support of government funding, has translated into Spanish the works of 10 winners of the Mao Dun Literary Prize including Mo Yan, Liu Zhenyun, and Mai Jia, as part of the "Belt and Road Initiative", with this project encompassing 32 literary works. Currently, the publisher has become the second biggest publisher of Contemporary Chinese literature in Spanish-language regions. Head of the CIP's international department Jiang Shan also believes that it's key to work with excellent partners—it's no matter if they're small, but they must have strict discipline on

publication and a sufficient publication capability.

Liu Qiao states that the PLPH has gone through a decade of experiencing, and has had successes in a number of areas as they have encouraged the promotion of Chinese literary works abroad. First, the PLPH has innovated a new model named the "Hawthorne Tree" model, which assist Chinese first-rate authors in taking their works abroad, in this way PLPH plays the role of rights agent for these writers even including non-contracted ones. Second, they work as hard as they can to protect the interests of Chinese authors, and expand their influence overseas. Third, they use all kinds of opportunities to take these authors abroad, working together with foreign publishers to conduct overseas publishing and marketing activities for Chinese writers and their works. Fourth, they use video micro-interviews and other technologies such as AR to make multi-format, three-dimensionalised moves for the "Going Out" plan.

Currently, more and more Chinese writers trust PLPH's brand, and hand over without worries their copyrights to PLPH as their overseas agent. PLPH also continues to select well-known native-language translators to render these books into other languages. For a number of years they have carefully chosen and trained a group of multilingual translators and sinologists that are passionate about Chinese literature, doing important work in taking Chinese literature to the international market.

(translated by Moy Hau)



Mai Jia, image by Dirk Skiba

Chinese writer Mai jia: a miracle in my life

中国作家麦家:我生命中的传奇

■ Mai Jia

the material to the London Book Fair, and introduced my book to other agents. In 2014, he returned to the LBF again, and sold 26 copyrights to the work all at once.

The success should also attribute to another legendary piece of this miracle in my life—English translator Olivia Milburn (米欧敏). She was born in England, and grew up in a literary family that was a multilingual, international family. She travelled continuously around the Middle East, and by the time she was 18 years old, she had learned six languages. She attended Oxford University, completing her PhD over the course of eight years.

In 2012 she came to visit the World Expo in Shanghai, at the airport she bought a copy of *Decoded*. She bought the book because firstly, it was noted on the cover that it had won the Mao Dun Prize, second, it was a book about code breakers. She wanted to see if Chinese code breakers were similar to the code breaker she knew (her grandfather had been a code breaker, a colleague of Alan Turing). We know that Turing cracked the Enigma code at Bletchley Park in England, saving twenty millions of lives and shortening the war by two or three years. After Milburn finished reading *Decoded*, she was quite excited. She returned to the bookstore and found *In the Dark*, and took it on the plane with her. After she arrived in Korea, she read my novel over and over. After she read it the third time, she decided to make a sample translation of a chapter from *In the Dark*, Huang Yiyi's story to show to her grandfather.

When she went back to England for a break, she had a discussion with her PhD classmate, English sinologist Julia Lovell (蓝思玲). Lovell knew that I had great influence in China, and she had good relationship with Penguin Random House. She gave the sample of Huang Yiyi's story to a publisher at Penguin. The editor liked it very much, and through online searching found Tan

Guanglei's copyright information for my works. I'm so lucky that a chapter of my work was finally translated for free by a stranger, then it was able to embark on the path to the international market.

After the contract was signed, Penguin made an analysis of my books and decided to publish *Decoded* first. The head editor of Penguin Classics recommended my book to the head of FSG, who loved the book very much and gave it a great review: "This is an extremely exciting novel, one that tells a heart-breaking story." Finally the book was included in the Penguin Classics.

For this reason, on the eve of the 2014 London Book Fair, Tan Guanglei was able to sell 26 copyrights. Penguin paid me a very large advance—50,000 USD.

Overall, when I look back, I fear for how things could have gone different. If Milburn's flight hadn't been delayed at the airport, today everything might still be in the dark. I want to thank her for "saving my life" with the translation of my book. Without a translation, whether your book contains true enlightenment or just rubbish, nobody will understand it. I believe that the best translations are those from the original text. Of the thirty-three languages the book has been translated into, seven or eight were based on the English edition. The end result isn't as good as if they were directly translated from Chinese. Additionally, the cover of the book and promotion are also quite important. When *Decoded* was published in Spanish by the Planeta Publishing Group in 2014, I went to Spain and Argentina on a promotional tour, and found the press had done a lot of publicity, such as advertisements for my book on public transportation. A number of bookstores displayed the new books, and 107 different media interviewed me. When I visited in Spain and Argentina, the book went to No. 2 on the bookseller list, and sold 25,000 copies in total in Latin America. (translated by Moy Hau)

In my life, I've encountered some miracles. I've met with some unexpected difficulties, and also some unexpectedly nice scenes. My work *Decoded* took me 11 years to create, and was rejected 17 times. *Decoded* also went through a number of unexpected twists and turns on its way to entering the international scene.

I started to write it in 1991, and in 2002 it was finally published by the China Youth Press. After it was published I won eight awards including the National Book Award, and was quickly noticed by the Chinese literary world. After that, it took 12 years for *Decoded* to go international, and be published in English. 11 years of difficulty in creation, and 12 to go abroad—maybe this was a hint. For a Chinese author, having your book go abroad is even harder than writing it.

Over the period I met five agents from HK and Japan, until in 2011 Taiwanese agent Tan Guanglei came to Hangzhou to visit me. He saw that my novel *In the Dark* won the seventh Mao Dun Literature Award in 2008, and a film based on my book *Sound of the Wind* was quite popular throughout China, so he told me that he wanted to become my agent. He spent a huge amount of effort in making a 40-page publishing proposal. In 2012, he took