

# A good translator does translate the feelings, style and atmosphere

好译者要传达作品的感觉、风格和氛围

"The readers don't care where a good book comes from, as long as it's well-written, has an interesting story and makes them learn something about a culture and gives them new ideas."

Questions: Qu Jingfan

Karin Betz, Literary translator, Germany

**What are you working on relating to the translation of Chinese books? What kind of categories do you have interest?**

Generally, I am interested in all kinds of fictions, but I always loved good Science Fiction. I read all the time, that's part of my job and life. Currently, I am translating Jin Yong's *Legend of the Eagle Shooting Heroes*, which means long and hard work, as you can imagine. But it's fun, full of Chinese cultural history and martial arts fantasy.

**What aroused your interest in Chinese language and Chinese culture?**

I started studying Chinese Studies (Classical and Modern Chinese language, history and literature) right after graduating from High School in 1987. I was fascinated by Chinese characters and culture - it seemed an exciting challenge for me. I have worked in different employments since my Master's Degree before I started working freelance.

**For an early Chinese-language learner in Germany, what suggestions will you give them? What books will you recommend to know more about China and Chinese culture?**

I would always recommend to read some classics (like 论语, 道德经, 庄子, 唐诗等, 西游记, 聊斋志异等), because they are still part of modern Chinese culture, but also modern classics like the works of Lu Xun, Xu Zhimo, Qian Zhongshu, Lao She and then just anything of modern fiction they like.

**Can you talk about the process and your feeling on the translation of *The Three-Body Problems*?**

The editor at Heyne asked me to translate the volume two and three of the series. And I was delighted to get the opportunity to translate a really interesting author. I've always loved Sci-Fi and it's great to have a Chinese author with groundbreaking new ideas and plots in that genre.

**How can one be a good translator?**

A good translator does not translate words, but



feelings, style, atmosphere ... Sometimes the most adequate solution for an expression seems very different from the original, but hits exactly the meaning. You need to understand Chinese culture and Chinese language conventions well, but first of all, you have to master your own language well, to be able to write good German that suits the needs of this novel and genre. Sci-Fi has a certain sound and Liu Cixin has a certain sound, both have to fit. Also, for hard Sci-Fi like this, you have to be ready to invest time in researching all the details of physics or astronomy, because they have to be accurate.

**Are there some Chinese contemporary fictions attracted you? How do you think of the Chinese contemporary fictions?**

I find many writers interesting, but the most important is what German publishers find interesting. The readers don't care where a good book comes from, as long as it's well-written, has an interesting story and makes them learn something about a culture and gives them new ideas.

Culture is no obstacle for a good writer. But of course the international taste for literature is dominated by American writers. It's time to change that! For a long time, it was difficult to sell Chinese novels in Germany

and publishers were reluctant to publish them. But the situation has changed and I think that is partly thanks to Liu Cixin who proved that Chinese literature can be a bestseller. As I said, I like Sci-Fi, but mostly hard Sci-Fi, not so much "fantasy". I personally like writers like Mai Jia, because he simply is a very good writer and storyteller. Many Chinese authors have good topics and stories, but sometimes their style or their quality of writing does not match international demands. Sometimes Chinese literature writers who write good stories have a strange hobby for vulgarity and violence that does not fit in their genre of literature. I think that's a cultural question. In Germany we make a big difference between "serious" and "entertainment" literature. "Serious entertainment" is of course the best. There are many young, promising writers in China, but we need good literary agents who sell them to the German market. German publishers trust their agents more.

**Do you often participate in the reading-aloud event in Germany? Is it widely attended in your country? What kind of book can join such promotion?**

I love to read in public and have often participated in events with or without the author. Depending on the type of event, there can be 30 people in a small bookshop or 200 in a literature festival. Of course, the more popular the book, the more readers attend an event. Most of the people who attend those events are a bit older, female and interested in literature and culture. But for Liu Cixin for example, attracts a huge crowd of young readers, thanks to the topic. Children's books are also popular and many libraries have reading events for children.

**Which book do you expect to be translated and read widely in Germany?**

I hope that Jin Yong's novel will become a popular read - there are many cultural obstacles, but I am doing my best to make the book enjoyable and understandable in German. Among my next projects are Wang Xiaobo's *Golden Era* and Can Xue's *The Last Lover*, both writers have never been translated to German and I am looking forward to introducing them. There is a young female writer Li Jingrui and Luo Yijun who I find interesting, but I really like to continue translating Liu Cixin's works.

(Continued from F06)

The central government fulfilled its promise of a further tax cut and reduced the tax rate of print books and e-books by 1% to 10% while exempting the value-added tax levied to wholesalers and retailers, which injected power into the competitiveness of publishing companies. Government also provides strong support for physical bookstores. For example, in 2018, Beijing invested 50 million yuan to support 151 physical bookstores. In 2019, the support fund will reach 100 million yuan.

Second, the government actively promoted the reform of textbooks and thus changed the pattern of the education publishing market. The textbooks of three subjects (Ideology and Politics, Chinese, History) compiled by the Ministry of Education were launched in the fall of 2017. In September 2019, they will be used nationwide in primary and secondary schools across China. This will change the pattern of the textbook publishing market. The market competition for

the selection of textbooks will be more intense, and the share of big publishing houses will be further expanded.

Third, under modifications of the government, the number of titles in the book market continues to shrink and publishers strive to achieve high-quality development by improving quality and efficiency. According to the data released by the State Administration of Press and Publication, the number of new books in China in 2018 decreased by 3.1% year-on-year to 247,000. At the same time, the number of reprinted books continued to grow rapidly in both volume and title, surpassing the new edition in the number of titles. The original book market is further heated up. The annual print-runs of 24 original literature and children's books exceeded 1 million, with an increase of 33.3% from prior year. The annual print-runs of 67 original children's books exceeded 500,000, with an increase of 39.6% year-on-year, accounting for 73.6% of the children's

books with print-runs of 500,000 and above. The balance of content industry has shifted from being comprehensive to being professional.

Fourth, with the support of the government, many listed companies actively explored the deep integration of industry and capital. At the same time, they actively carried out brand diversification and completed the evolution from book brands and publishing brands to cultural brands. The number of publishing groups with assets of more than 10 billion yuan has reached to 21, increased by 3 from last year.

Fifth, on the basis of mastering big data, publishers actively use new technologies to learn readers' real preferences and needs, and then to produce related products. Content production has realized a decentralized production mechanism. Publishers innovate in the mining of the publishing resources and upgrading of production methods, and have launched a number of new publications that incorporate new technologies.