

100 Chinese translations of foreign publications which had strong influence in China

by Thomas Kampen

Between 1840 and 1949, millions of Chinese students, academics and politicians were influenced by Chinese translations of Western books. But for a long time it was difficult to find details about the publication of these translations and biographical data of the translators.

In 1996, the Chinese scholar 鄒振環 Zou Zhenhuan (Fudan University, Shanghai) published a book introducing one hundred Chinese translations of foreign publications that had strong influence in modern China (影響中國近代社會的一百種譯作 Yingxiang Zhongguo jindai shehui de yibai zhong yizuo, Beijing: Zhongguo duiwai fanyi chuban gongsi, 1996). This book provides important information for studying Western influences in China as well as literary, philosophical and political trends in modern China.

Contents

The book includes an impressive selection of novels (Defoe, Dumas, Scott), detective stories (A.C. Doyle), plays (Schiller, Shakespeare), poems (Byron), as well as historical, religious, sociological, philosophical and political studies (Einstein, Huxley, Kropotkin, Marx, Nietzsche, Rousseau). Most of the original works are from Europe and about Europe; there are about a dozen Japanese books, but most of these are also based on western publications; there is also a small number of Western books about China, including Pearl S. Buck's Good Earth and Edgar Snow's Red Star over China.

Zou Zhenhuan provides information about

- the original works and authors,
- the Chinese translations and translators
- the impact of the translations in China.

Languages

The original works were published in several countries and languages (English, French, German, Japanese and Russian). Zou does, however, show that most of the Chinese translations -

including those of German and Russian books - were based on English versions; a small number of European books were first translated from Japanese versions. Translations published in the late Qing and early Republican periods were often incomplete and inaccurate. (In many cases more accurate and complete translations were later published in the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.)

Translators

Many of the translators of the works discussed here were well-known journalists, poets and officials. They include some of the most prominent intellectuals and politicians of the 19th and early 20th centuries (Chen Duxiu, Guo Moruo, Liang Qichao, Liang Shiqiu, Lin Shu, Lu Xun and Yan Fu).

Significance

Most of the works discussed in Zou Zhenhuan's study - including Goethe's Faust and Werther, Nietzsche's Zarathustra and Shakespeare's King Lear - would have been expected in this kind of compilation; they might also appear in similar lists of translations published in Japan or Korea. There are, however, numerous interesting surprises - including works which were not particularly popular in their original versions. There is a substantial number of minor novels and text books. One important aspect of this compilation is the fact that Zou discusses publications and topics which are often avoided or ignored in PRC publications, such as works on anarchism, religion, etc. The number of leftist or communist publications is relatively small.

Availability

While most of the original works studied by Zou Zhenhuan are easy to find in Western libraries, it is very difficult to find the translations he mentions. Firstly, Western libraries rarely buy Chinese translations of Western books; secondly, the Chinese translations published in the 19th and early 20th centuries are difficult to obtain. But as more recent, correct and complete translations do not indicate what Chinese readers read in the Imperial and Republican periods, it is very important to study the early translations.

More than ten years ago, the Institute of Chinese Studies in Heidelberg has started to collect the early translations and has already acquired a substantial number of works, including early

translations of Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, MacKenzie's *Nineteenth Century*, Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Storm's *Immensee*. More will be bought in the near future.