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## Works of V.P. Astafiev in China

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*This article is devoted to a brief analysis of the study and translations of Russian literature in China. The article describes the main stages of the study of Russian literature in China, from the origins to the present day. Particular attention is paid to the works of the Siberian writer V.P. Astafiev in modern Chinese translated literature. As an example, the Chinese researchers specified their comments on his books having researched the peculiarities of his works and felt that his original language was complicated.*

*Keywords: Russian literature, translation, the Chinese language, Cultural Revolution, the policy of "reform and openness", the "Chinese trap", Astafiev's works.*

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### **Point of view**

#### **A short introduction about the study and translation**

#### **of Russian literature works in China**

*Early stage of the study  
and translation of Russian  
literature works in China*

The history of translation and study of Russian literature in China consists of several periods in the formation of which, above all, historical and political factors play a decisive role.

Relations between China and Russia in the sphere of literature emerged only in the early XX century. There is an interesting fact that translating of Russian works in China began later than that of Chinese works in Russia. The book "Chinese thought" (Saint-Petersburg, 1772-1775) was the first Chinese book met by Russian readers, the translation of which was made by

sinologist A. L. Leontiev. In the XIX century only the translations from Chinese into Russian were published. But in the XX century, Chinese translators of Russian literature took over and gradually surpassed their Russian colleagues with both the number of translations and the scale of them.

The first Chinese translations of Russian literature emerged in the early XX century. The order was as follows: first, I. A. Krylov, later A. S. Pushkin, I. F. Turgenev, M. U. Lermontov, A. N. Tolstoy, A. P. Chekhov and others. It all started with the classics, but gradually the works of modern authors began to be translated. The first Chinese translators chose the most prominent Russian writers and selected the masterpieces of their many works, thus allowing them to present to their contemporaries the reliable and extensive picture of Russian literature within a very short time (about 10 years).

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A characteristic feature of the initial period of perception of Russian literature in China is the fact that the translations were not always directly from the Russian language, but mostly through Japanese and English. In addition, a part of the translations was made into the ancient Chinese (wenyan).

Since 1919, a new phase of Russian literature study began. In China, there was a cultural process, called “May, 4<sup>th</sup> Process”, whose goal was a departure from the Chinese feudal culture and the assimilation of Western democratic ideology. The ideas of the French Enlightenment, the theory of German Marxism, and Russian literature are in the basis of this drawing. During this period, China’s “new literature” was emerging and its development is closely linked with the development of translations of Russian literature in China. The founders of the new Chinese literature served as the translators of Russian literature. Lu Xun was a pioneer translator and researcher of Russian literature and made the first distribution of Russian literature in China. He translated the works of N. V. Gogol, A. P. Chekhov, A. M. Gorky and other Russian writers.

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, thanks to the “fraternal friendship” between China and the USSR, the study and translation of Russian literature in China reached unprecedented proportions. Millions of Chinese people studied the Russian language and read the Russian literature with interest and respect. In a short time, no more than 10 years, almost all the classics of Russian literature and Soviet literature masterpieces were translated into Chinese. We can say that an entire generation of Chinese readers was formed under the strong influence of Russian (and Soviet) literature, which is still an important factor of cultural experiences and the memories of those living in this generation.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976), which in fact is regarded as a ‘Cultural Destruction’ by most Chinese people, all the works of foreign literature, including Russian, were considered “forbidden books”, and all attempts to translate foreign literature were outlawed. Many translators and scholars- the specialists in Russian philology – suffered because of their work or even simply because of their profession. This gap in the period of the development of Chinese culture and the period of stagnation in the translation and study of Russian literature in China occurred simultaneously.

*Current stage of the study  
and translation of Russian  
literature works in China*

After the launch of “reform and openness” in China in 1978, the policy of openness to the world extended not only to the economy, but also to culture. China has experienced and is experiencing the most powerful cultural influence, greater than that of any other country. The works of foreign writers were translated in large quantities. During this time, work on translations and the study of Russian literature was resumed by the translators of the older generation and their younger colleagues. The old translations have since been republished and the new ones appear one after the other. From M. U. Lomonosov and N. M. Karamzin to I. A. Brodsky and V. V. Erofeev, and even V. O. Pelevin’s Russian books are actively translated into Chinese. Previously, China had only 2 – 3 publishers of Russian literature translations, but now the number of the publishers is over two dozens. Some classical works such as “Resurrection” and “Anna Karenina” by A. N. Tolstoy, “Eugene Onegin” and “The Captain’s Daughter” by A.S. Pushkin, “Hero of Our Time” by M. U. Lermontov and “Crime and Punishment” by F. M. Dostoevsky have up to ten variants of the translation, and

the N. A. Ostrovsky's novel "How the Steel Was Tempered" – has even twenty. Since the beginning of the "policy of opening" the study of Russian literature in China regained its official status, new journals of Russian literature appeared, new scientific papers on the life and works of Russian writers have been published and the Association of Chinese scholars of Russian literature has been formed.

But compared with the period before the Cultural Revolution, the share of Russian literature in the overall volume of translated foreign literature in China has decreased, now in first place are translations from English – Chinese readers have since become more interested in the literature of Europe and America. According to translator of Russian children's literature Xu Yongping, a teacher of Taiyuan Pedagogical Institute, the real connection in the literature between China and Russia broke down in the past ten-plus years (Xu Yongping).

It is important to note that in socialist China, literature has always been regarded as an ideological weapon. Given the political influence of the Soviet Union on the formation of a new Chinese society, the study of Russian literature in China has been a clear trend towards the politicization and an influence of Sociology. These trends in the study of Russian literature in China have existed there for quite a long time. In China the policy in the field of literature and art was almost identical to that of Soviet Union: "the only" creative method in Soviet Union was "socialist realism", and in China – the "revolutionary realism". Recently, these trends, according to many Chinese critics, are much less evident: due to the development of social democracy and economic reform, combined with the emergence of a new generation of translators and researchers, the study of Russian literature in China is now more and more focused on the artistry and the aesthetic aspects of literature, as

well as more attention being paid to the scientific and independence of literary studies.

Chinese specialists in Russian philology at different times focused on various aspects of Russian literature. In recent decades, Chinese researchers draw attention to topics such as "village" prose, "Humanism in literature", literature "after the collapse of the Soviet Union" – "other" prose, postmodernism, and many others. According to a renowned Chinese literary critic, Russian philologist and translator, Yu Yizhon (professor of Nanjing University) "Chinese readers have a special interest and love for Russian literature, they want it to catch a whiff of the modern history of Russian people who along with us have experienced the same stages of historical development, and benefit from it, the new Russian literature, experience and lessons learned" (Fu Xuan; Yu Yizhong).

In the 1980's, one of the leading trends in Russian literature became focused on the study of time – historical and current, the change in the spiritual world of people, a focus on the study of the phenomenon of life in its moral aspect. The word "life" is no longer synonymous with "ideal" and "beautiful", the post-war optimistic outlook on life has gradually transformed into a critical outlook. The new generation of writers is not only looking for an explanation of the social order or other phenomena of life, but also attaches the highest importance to the study of the moral aspect of human nature.

*Research and translations  
of Siberian writers V. G. Rasputin  
and V. P. Astafiev in China*

Chinese scholars have a strong interest among creative Siberian writers – V. G. Rasputin and V. P. Astafiev. They both become well known to Chinese readers as traditional writers in the early 80's (Chinese researchers call them the classics of modern Russian literature). Almost

all the works of Rasputin have been translated into Chinese. Great interest was aroused by the stories “Money for Maria”, “Deadline”, “Farewell to Inveterate”, “Live and Remember”. As the researcher of Russian literature Phu Xuan (Associate Professor of the Institute of Foreign Languages, Yunnan University): “Heroes of Rasputin’s works embody a profound awareness of the disintegration of traditional forms of life, loss of morality, existential crisis. These concepts are well understood by Chinese readers (Fu Xuan, 73).

One of the recent translations of V. G. Rasputin in Chinese “Daughter of Ivan, Ivan’s mother” had a hot author’s response. In the words of Chinese (and Russian) readers, entitled “Chinese trap”, V. G. Rasputin, with unconcealed pain, writes that “Russia holds literature in a perfectionist and chaste taste, and dispelled it into the wind so quickly, if not had great skill in and content of the XIX century, and then three-quarters of the XX century», and that “Western world, recently defining the subtle tone in the literature, has lost it without any regret”. And in the fact that, namely, China, translates and publishes the books, “written in the old manner, according to the precepts and norms of those times when A. N. Tolstoy and F. M. Dostoyevsky, Ch. Dickens and W. Faulkner, as well as Chinese Lu Xun and Lao She have sermonized” V. G. Rasputin sees a concrete sign: “In China, nearly one and a half a billion people, of whom not less than a billion readers, and if all of them brought up on good and sound examples, compassionate and love for hard work, the beauty of nature and beauty of the human soul, the wise and profound language, with examples of love for their land and its traditions – on a lot beautiful and instructive in the literature! – And if a billion Chinese were brought up on it, and millions, not yet fallen under the power of evil in Russia, and some of the survivors in the West, and the Great East, and so

considerable the rest world – namely This would be a New Civilization, proactively rejected the evil in books and in all other arts! After all, we know: evil is powerful, but the love and beauty are more powerful” (Rasputin,1996).

### Example

#### *Research and translations of V. P. Astafiev’s works in China*

V. P. Astafiev could sign under these words as well. He often met with his Chinese translators, and conducted an active correspondence with them. He visited China and was very interested in distributing his works in this country.

His foreword to the publication of the book “Zatesi” in 1990 (V. P. Astafiev,1990), to date one of the most recent translations of his works into Chinese, is full of disturbing reflections on the fate of Russia, the Russian people and the arts. He wrote bitterly that “the great Chinese neighbour”, i.e. Russia, “struck, disconnected and brought to its knees“, “where the majority of the population has lost interest in work, where the history of the native homeland is crucified, where the centuries-old foundations of family are destructed, where more rarely is the one who remembers his pedigree more over then grandfather, where the human lives and blood is devalued, and it is difficult to regain faith in anything, including Faith in God”. But a country whose people, “in the eighties generation esteemed a great poet and thinker Confucius cannot be either suppressed, or converted into a herd”. There are 17 years between V. P. Astafiev’s and V. G. Rasputin’s thoughts, but unlike his younger contemporary, V. P. Astafiev believed that the country still retained power, “capable of resurrection, not everywhere and in every Russian more memory and the need for education and self-improvement are extinguished”. “And the Russian literature that is always sensitive, nicely captures the mood of their people,

variations in their life, constantly looking for ways of rapprochement with its readers, gaining their attention, defends the right attention to this". A modern writer, according to V. P. Astafiev, must first become a companion to the reader – "Anyone always needs an interlocutor, otherwise he/she will be crushed by the terrible disease of the Century – loneliness". V. P. Astafiev hoped that he "can find my listeners and interlocutors among Chinese readers. The Great literature and the Great culture of the country in which the lyrical prose and poetry, as in Russia, has always been desirable to the reader, give me that hope" (V. P. Astafiev, 1990). Indeed, in the face of Chinese readers V. P. Astafiev found grateful listeners. His work is under the scrutiny of Chinese researchers and translators.

One of the modern critics of V. P. Astafiev's works is Chen Shuxian, a famous translator and professor of Russian literature of the Philological Faculty of Nankai University. When in the early 90's the famous Chinese publishing house "Baihua" decided to release a series of prose of writers of the world, Chen Shuxian proposed to include the V. P. Astafiev's works in it. So along with the masterpieces of A. S. Pushkin, M. U. Lermontov, I. F. Turgenev, K. G. Paustovsky, M. M. Prishvin in Chinese, the V. P. Astafiev's works "Zatesi" and "Ode to Russian garden" were also published.

Chen Shuxian discovered for herself the works of V. P. Astafiev in the late 80's and admired them so much that she even made a translation of his "Zatesi" and "Ode to Russian garden". V. P. Astafiev himself wrote the preface to the Chinese edition of his works.

As the translator Chen Shuxian says, in V. P. Astafiev's works she mostly liked his modesty, humanity, and love for the common people: "We can name only a few works, where Nature is described so beautifully and poetically as in the miniatures "Zatesi" and "Ode to Russian garden".

Mapping the subtleties of this is a bit like Chinese painting" (Chen Shuxian, 2006).

However, it is worth noting that only a few works of V. P. Astafiev have been translated into the Chinese language, such as "Shepherd and Shepherdess", "The Tzar Fish" (translated by Xia Zhongyi in 1982), "Starfall" (translated by Feng Yuli in 1985), "Sad Detective" (translated by Yu Yizhong in 1989), "Zatesi", "Ode to Russian kitchen garden" (translated by Chen Shuxian, Zhang Daben in 1995), as well as some short stories. This is undoubtedly due to the difficulties of translation of Astafiev's works, the ambiguous and difficult language, abundant dialect, nonce words, author's neologisms, etc. As the translator of "Zatesi" Chen Shuxian said: "The translation of the original author – is the real test. Not every Russian knows, for example, that "zaplot" is a fence, and "zhalitsa" – a nettle growing underneath, it leaves too much for a foreigner to guess (Chen Shuxian, 2005).

The problems in V. P. Astafiev's works are very close to the Chinese reader. The big resonance among the Chinese literary critics and writers called the Chinese translation of the novels "The Tzar Fish". Modern Chinese writer Liu Xinglong called this book "Scripture Villages" (Liu Xinglong, 2005). Chinese critic says that V. P. Astafiev is, first of all, the creator of lyrical prose and a true humanist, whose "imagination is always imbued with spirituality". Analyzing "The Tzar Fish", Liu Xinglong first notes free composition and brushwork, which helps the author of "wilfully interpret social facts, express his own inner experiences". The critic of the Russian writer calls it "a brilliant description", and in his opinion, the author's arguments combine "lyricism and philosophic". For the external dissimilarity of stories belonging to "The Narrative", Liu Xinglong saw an intimate relationship due to issues and the general idea of the work: "they are all devoted to the problems of

man and nature, which are discussed in different ways with dissimilar perspectives and different parties, so the stories, united together among some dispersion, reveal some connection and organize a single global point of view – What is the World heading”? The Chinese researcher denotes a symbolic value of the novels “The Tzar Fish”. The relationship between man and nature reveals its essence. The looting of nature leads to a “human degradation and loss of love”, but to changing attitude to nature – “the way of man perfection”. “The Tzar Fish” leads Liu Xinglong to disappointing deduction: “People dream of a “fun and easy life”, this desire runs through the centuries, and today is no exception. Therefore, man transforms nature in order to control and conquer nature, but in the end people lose a lot: they lose clean air, pure water, natural treats, amazing scenery, the joy of communion with nature, they lose their calm ... and even great feeling.” The Chinese researcher is well aware that the problems posed by the Russian writer, are the pressing problems of humankind, as are all problems regarding the future of all life on Earth.

### **Result**

The important place of Russian literature in China is widely acknowledged. The amount of Russian literature translations in China in comparison to other foreign literature translations has varied greatly during different periods of cultural interaction between China and Russia. In 50-60-s Russian literature was translated more than that from any other country and that was due to the significant influence of the Soviet Union on “The New China”. There were also periods of total oblivion of Russian literary works (The Cultural Revolution) and periods of rebirth of

Russian literature during which it was newly brought to Chinese researchers and readers. Over the last decades the research interests of Chinese scientists have been addressed towards such subjects as “rural” or “country” prose, humanism in literature, “post-soviet” Russian literature – a “other” prose, post-modernism and other.

V. P. Astafiev was the most widely translated Siberian writer. His works have been published in many foreign languages. The first time his work was published abroad was in Warsaw in 1961- this was the story ‘Starfall’. Over the next 40 years his works have been translated in 28 countries into 22 languages worldwide.

V.P. Astafiev’s works, as well as other Siberian writers, are available to the foreign reader. But there is one problem: the unique original vocabulary of V. P Astafiev have been translated with great difficulties into foreign languages. One way of solving this problem seems to be the analysis after the translation of the V. P. Astafiev’s works and, above all, the creation of a special dictionary of extra-literary vocabulary of the writer.

Therefore, the perspectives of studying the V. P. Astafiev’s work in Chinese literary are rather extensive. Only a few Chinese philologists have attempted to make a comprehensive analysis of his legacy. The work of the last period (1990 – 2001 years) and the non-fiction of the writer, as well as the V. P. Astafiev’s works in the context of the world literature are studied not deep enough and extensively.

The study of translations of V. P. Astafiev’s works into the Chinese language and analysis of his work in China gives grace material for a researcher, enabling a deeper understanding of the author and identifying the points of agreement of not such similar, but close in spirit cultures.

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## **Произведения В.П. Астафьева в Китае**

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*Статья посвящена анализу изучения и переводов русской литературы в Китае. В статье рассматриваются основные этапы изучения русской литературы в Китае от истоков до наших дней. Особое внимание уделено творчеству сибирского писателя В. П. Астафьева в современной китайской переводной литературе. В качестве примера анализируются работы китайских исследователей творчества В. П. Астафьева.*

*Ключевые слова: русская литература, художественный перевод, китайский язык, Культурная революция, политика «реформы и открытости», «Китайская ловушка», произведения В. П. Астафьева.*

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