

Peng Qiao

University of Leeds

Is Translation Integral: World Literature in the Digital Communications Circuit

“Network” is affirmed to be a fundamental character of world literature based on Goethe (Strich, 1998). Precisely, world literature is defined as “a mode of circulation and of reading” (Darosch, 2003). Darosch (2003) further reified this multiculturalist concept into circulation, translation and production, which are depicted as components of the communications circuit by Darnton (1982) from a book historian’s perspective. In these discussions of literature, paper editions seem to be the main carrier of literary content in the Gutenberg Era when printing free knowledge exchange globally. The key question, however, is if the printing – based literary tradition is still stable in face of the technological waves, especially the invention of the “Internet network”.

Taking the examples from Chinese Internet literature (CIL), this paper argues that translation, together with other literary adaption means, form an integral cross – cultural character to world literature and that book translation alone cannot fulfil the task of literary representation. CIL is mostly written by the general public with the majority as genre fiction. The lowered threshold for writing, reading and translating brought CIL the carnivalesque feature in contrast to the elite writing traditions in China after the May Fourth Movement of 1919. Not only literature is exhibited in digital forms, but all reader reviews are inserted between the lines through hyperlinks. These paratextual laughter/hate – oriented reviews are considered to be an inseparable part of CIL whereas none of them has been translated. On the other hand, many of CIL’s international readers are attracted by its adaptive mangas and drama first. It seems that all the digital literary adaptation means together idealise the perception of world literature and that the traditional gatekeeper roles to decide which is canonical and worthy is depressed to some extent.