Chinese Literature in Hungary: An Historical Overview of Translations

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Hungarians, being a people of Oriental origin, have always had a special interest in and sympathy for Eastern cultures. Of course, this interest must not be overestimated, but it is a fact that Hungarians have a tendency to pay somewhat more attention to the East than other landlocked Western people. Ever since the European Middle Ages, a significant number of Hungarian travellers have visited Asian countries, including China. The first Hungarian known to have reached China was a priest who went there in the 13th century.

Getting to know China

However, for centuries the Hungarian public had no accurate information about China. It was not until the 18th and 19th centuries that more or less reliable knowledge became available, when works by Western European authors reached Hungarian readers. The first book on China written by a Hungarian was *Itinerarium peregrini Philosophi*, *Sinis*, *Japone*, *Cocincina*, *Canada & Brasilia Definitum*, by Franciscus Szdellar S.J (Tyrnavae, 1702). This work describes a philosophical pseudo-journey, including dialogues between Greek and Chinese philosophers, and portrays China as being blessed with an ideal society and political system. Another book popular in Hungary in the 18th century was *The Oeconomy of Human Life* (translated from an Indian manuscript) published by the Englishman Robert Dodsley in 1751; it was a philosophical treatise said to have been found in China and translated into English by Dodsley, though in fact it was written by him. In any case, it appeared in a number

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of Hungarian translations in the 1770s. When the great Hungarian traveller of the era, Maurice Auguste Benyowsky, published his memoirs, *Les mémoires et voyages… en Siberie*, *Kamchatka*, *Japon*, *Chinese*, *… et Madagascar…* (London, 1790), they exerted a considerable influence on Hungarian thinking on the Orient, as well as on romantic literature. The 18th century was also the age of *chinoiserie*, the fashion for Chinese or Chinese-style artefacts; Hungarian aristocrats also followed this fashion, decorating their castles with Chinese (or believed-to-be-Chinese) objects.

The 19th century was the era of romanticism in Europe, and in the literature of the time China was described as an exotic and mysterious world. A number of Western and Hungarian paperbacks appeared with stories set in China, but these were really of no artistic value. No translations of Chinese works were published in Hungarian, except from some Chinese poems and short texts translated from Western editions. The first translator of Chinese poems was János Arany, one of the most famous Hungarian poets, but he too did his translations from Western languages. Hungarian scholars started to visit China in the second half of the 19th century, and published a number of reliable books on China's geography, traditions and customs, but they did not venture to publish Chinese translations of their own.

The first half of the 20th century

In the first half of the 20th century, especially between the two world wars, the romantic view of China still prevailed, even though reliable information on the country was already available for those interested. A large number of Western paperbacks appeared, as well as some more valuable works, such as novels by the Nobel-Prize winner Pearl S. Buck. Undoubtedly the most influential China-related author of these times, not only in Hungary but throughout Western world, was Lin Yutang 林

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语堂, who in the 1930s and 1940s was one of the best-selling writers in Hungary. His *Between Tears and Laughter* (*Tixiao JieFei* 啼笑皆非), *Moment in Peking* (*Jinghua Yanyun* 京华烟云), *A Leaf in the Storm* (*Fengsheng HeLi* 风声鹤唳), *With Love and Irony* (*Feng Song Ji* 讽颂集), *My Country and My People* (*Wuguo yu Wumin* 吾国与吾民) were published in huge numbers. Lin's best-known work, *The Importance of Living* (*Shenghuo de Yishu* 生活的艺术) reached nine editions between 1939 and 1947. From 1949 to 1989, Lin Yutang's books were not printed, but since 1989 new editions have circulated widely.

During this era there was no regular training in Chinese language in Hungary, so we lacked translators who could read Chinese works in the original, and as a result no authentic translations were published. However, a number of Chinese works rendered from English or German did appear. These included some basic philosophical works, such as *Lunyu* 论语, *Laozi* 老子, and *Zhuangzi* 庄子, and a few classical short stories and novels (for example *Shuihuzhuan* 水浒传). Hundreds of classical Chinese poems were also translated. One of the most famous Hungarian poets of the time, Dezső Kosztolányi, was especially fond of Chinese poetry, and translated large numbers of poems from different eras.

The golden age: the 1950s and 1960s

The situation changed when in 1949 the People's Republic of China was established, and Hungary also became a member of the communist bloc. The two countries established diplomatic relations immediately after the founding of the PRC, and political friendship led to the rapid development of cultural relations. Hungarian political leaders found it important to make China and Chinese culture better known in Hungary, so they supported the training of China experts and the publication of Chinese books. In 1950, the first group of Hungarian students travelled to

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China to study there. At the same time, the Department of Chinese Studies of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest was reorganized and its curriculum was revised along more regular and systematic lines. It is still the only institution in Hungary where students can major in Chinese studies. Thanks to these developments, a new generation of Hungarian sinologists swiftly emerged, who were the first well-trained translators of Chinese literature into Hungarian. It must be noted that a new phenomenon started with them: in Hungary, the group of translators and that of sinologists were and still are to all extents and purposes identical; people who are engaged in translation also conduct scholarly research. It can be said that there are no translators who are not scholars at the same time, and there are no China researchers who do not publish translations.

The 1950s saw the beginning of a systematic initiative intended to make the best of classical and modern Chinese literature available in Hungarian. Skilled sinologists and editors chose the works to be translated, and the work of translation itself was allocated to the best-qualified person in the field. As in the socialist system the demands of the market and considerations of speed did not really count, emphasis was put on quality. Poems were a special case: as many of the best Hungarian poets of the time could not publish their own work for political reasons, they were forced to make a living by rendering foreign poems, and many of them were involved in the translation of Chinese poetry. Sinologists provided them with raw translations, which they then put into poetical form. The results were philologically accurate translations of exceptional artistic value.

Some outstanding translator-sinologists of this era must be mentioned here. Barnabás Csongor specialized in *baihua xiaoshuo* 白话小说: his translations of *Shuihuzhuan* 水浒传 and *Xiyouji* 西游记 are of outstanding quality, and he also translated a large number of

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classical short stories and poems. Ferenc Tőkei published a three-volume compilation of ancient Chinese philosophical works, as well as classical Chinese treatises on aesthetics, many poems, short stories and some plays. Éva Kalmár specialized in the translation of the drama of the Yuan Dynasty, and has recently turned to contemporary short stories. Endre Galla made works by Lu Xun 鲁迅, Lao She 老舍 and other modern writers available in Hungarian. Péter Polonyi translated *Rulin Waishi* 儒林外史 and many other works in various genres. Pál Miklós also published a large number of translations, including Cao Yu's 曹禺 *Leiyu* 雷雨, Guo Moruo's 郭沫若 *Qu Yuan* 屈原, *Xuesheng Shidai* 学生时代 and *Shaonian Shidai* 少年时代, Lao She's *Luotuo Xiangzi* 骆驼祥子 and *Chaguan* 茶馆, and many others.

While the majority of Chinese works published during this era were directly translated from the Chinese original, some important works, the translation of which was not undertaken by sinologists, were translated from versions in Western languages. The most noteworthy of these is *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅, which was translated from German; this was the best-selling Chinese book in those decades, possibly because of its erotic content.

It can be said that in the two decades between 1949 and 1970, most of the representative works of classical and modern Chinese literature were published in Hungarian of very high quality.

1970s and 1980s: a setback

"The Cultural Revolution" in China led to the deterioration of relations between the two countries, and all activities that had anything to do with China—even cultural projects—were viewed with suspicion in Hungary. As a result, publishers were reluctant to commission or accept Chinese translations, and at the beginning of the 1970s the dissemination

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of Chinese literature suffered a serious setback.

In the 1980s most sinologists of the first generation retired and ceased publishing translations, though a few of them continued working. Several modern and contemporary works were published, including a selection of Wang Meng's 王蒙 short stories, Liu E's 刘鹗 *Lao Can Youji* 老残游记 and Gu Hua's 古华 *Furong Zhen* 芙蓉镇, translated by Péter Polonyi, and some of his short stories and novels, Li Yu's 李渔 *Rouputuan* 肉蒲团 (the latter was translated from the English).

From 1989 to 1990 Hungary became a liberal democracy with a free market economy, which had serious implications for the publishing industry. Market demand became practically the only factor determining what publishing companies were willing to print. The fact is that it is far more time-consuming (and therefore expensive) to translate a book from Chinese than from English, so publishers only rarely ventured to finance new Chinese translations. Many earlier works were, however, republished or reprinted (such as Ferenc Tökei's philosophical and other translations and Lin Yutang's novels). Relatively few new translations were made, such as some *chuanqi* 传奇 stories and Liu Zhang's 刘璋 *Zhong Kui Zhangui Zhuan* 钟馗斩鬼传 translated by Zsolt Tokaji. At the same time, a large number of low-quality China-related bestsellers flooded the market.

The present situation

At the end of the 1990s, a new generation of young sinologists started to publish their works, including translations. Around this time, the Hungarian book market began to find its feet again, and some prestigious publishers became willing to finance Chinese translations. A growing interest in China and Chinese culture also contributed to what seems to be a revival of Chinese translations.

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In recent years, sinologists have produced new translations that are related to their own fields of research. For example, Imre Hamar published a number of Chinese Buddhist writings, a genre that was previously almost unknown in Hungary. Texts of other religious and philosophical schools have been translated by Gábor Kósa and Sándor P. Szabó.

A renewed interest in contemporary Chinese literature has led to the publication of a number of novels and short stories. Klára Zombory, a young translator, compiled a volume of short novels by Su Tong 苏童, Yu Hua 余华, Liu Zhenyun 刘震云, Han Shaogong 韩少功 and Ma Yuan 马原. Imre Hamar and Gergely Salát edited a selection of previously unpublished 20th century Chinese short stories. Dai Sijie's 戴思杰 two novels, translated from the French, Su Tong's 苏童 *Wo de Diwang Shengya* 我的帝王生涯, translated from the English, also appeared, together with a great deal of popular literature such as the works of Anchee Min (Min Anqi 闵安琪) and Amy Tan (Tan Enmei 谭恩美).

In 2008, China was the Guest of Honour of the International Book Festival of Budapest, which gave a new impetus to translations. Klára Zombory translated Jiang Rong's 姜戎 *Lang Tuteng* 狼图腾, Marcell Kiss rendered Gao Xingjian's 高行健 *Lingshan* 灵山, Éva Kalmár edited a representative selection of 20th century short stories, and Endre Galla published *Zhaohua Xishi* 朝花夕拾 by Lu Xun 鲁迅. There was even a volume of Chinese science fiction which came out as a special issue of a sci-fi magazine.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the overview above, many of the representative works of classical and modern Chinese literature—in other words, writings mentioned in any modern general textbook in the history of

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Chinese literature—are available in Hungarian, mostly in translations of high quality. There are, however, some exceptions: *Sanguo Yanyi* 三国演义, *Fengshen Yanyi* 封神演义, products of the Ming Dynasty drama (such as *Mudan Ting* 牡丹亭) and 19th century literature are missing, and we still lack a good selection of *Shiji* 史记.

As for contemporary Chinese literature, a number of works are available, but they cannot represent the rich world of literature of China today. This segment of the book market is still dominated by cheap paperbacks, translated from English. It is to be hoped that the new generation of China experts that is now emerging will continue the work of their predecessors, so that Hungarian readers will always be in a position to obtain and read the best of Chinese literature.

Appendix I: List of most noteworthy translations from Chinese to Hungarian

This list does not include philosophical works, minor publications, socialist realist literature from the 1950s, Lin Yutang's writings, or popular literature with no serious artistic value. The authors and titles of classical Chinese literature are written with traditional characters, those of modern literature with simplified ones.

Chinese author and title	Author and title in the Hungarian edition	Translator/Editor	First Hungarian edition
《白居易诗选》	*Po Csü-ji versei*	Barnabás Csongor, Sándor Weöres	Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1952
《屈原诗选》	*Csü Jüan versei*	Ferenc Tőkei, Sándor Weöres	Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1954
茅盾:《子夜》	Mao Tun: *Hajnal előtt*	Ferenc Kemény	Új Magyar Könyvkiadó, 1955

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Chinese author and title	Author and title in the Hungarian edition	Translator/Editor	First Hungarian edition
《杜甫诗选》	*Tu Fu versei*	Barnabás Csongor et al.	Új Magyar Kiadó, 1955
老舍：《骆驼祥子》	Lao Sö: *A tigriskisasszony meg a férje*	Pál Miklós	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1957
巴金：《家》	Pá Csin: *A család*	Kató Lomb	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1957
《诗经》	*Dalok Könyve (Si King)*	Ferenc Tökei et al.	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1957
郭沫若：《屈原》	Kuo Mo-zso: *Csü Jüan: Tragédia öt felvonásban*	Pál Miklós	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1958
茅盾：《春蚕》	Mao Tun: *A selyemhernyó*	Sándor Józsa	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1958
《卖油郎独占花魁》、《灌园叟晚逢仙女》、《钱秀才错占凤凰俦》、《金玉奴棒打薄情郎》	*Az olajárus és a kurtizán: Négy elbeszélés a Csin ku csi kuan gyűjteményből*	Katalin Kemény	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1958
关汉卿：《窦娥冤》、《救风尘》	Kuan Han-csing: *Tou O ártatlan halála; Csao Pener, a mentőangyal*	Ferenc Tőkei, Pál Miklós	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1958
曹禺：《雷雨》	Cao Jü: *Zivatar: Színmű négy felvonásban*	Pál Miklós	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1959
老舍：《黑白李》、《月牙儿》	Lao Sö: *Fekete Li és Fehér Li; A holdsarló*	Kató Lomb	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1959
鲁迅：《故事新编》	Lu Hszin: *Régi mesék mai szemmel*	Ferenc Tőkei	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1959
巴金：《长生塔》(童话集)	Pa Csin: *Az örök élet tornya*	István Pálos	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1959
屈原：《离骚》	Csü Jüan: *Száműzetés*	Ferenc Tőkei, László Nagy	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1959

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Chinese author and title	Author and title in the Hungarian edition	Translator/Editor	First Hungarian edition
蒲松龄:《聊斋志异》(选集)	Pu Szung-ling: *Furcsa históriák*	Ferenc Tőkei	Magyar Helikon, 1959
《乐府诗选》	*Zenepalota* (*Jo Fu*)	Ferenc Tőkei et al.	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1959
老舍:《茶馆》	Lao Sö: *Teaház*	Pál Miklós	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1960
《曹植诗选》	*Cao Cse versei; Cao Cao és Cao Pi verseiből*	Ferenc Tőkei et al.	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1960
《今古奇观选》	*Mostani és régi idők csodálatos látványai* (*Csin ku csi kuan*)	Katalin Kemény	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1960
李行道:《灰阑记》	Li Hszing-tao: *A krétakör*	Ferenc Tőkei	Magyar Helikon, 1960
王实甫:《西厢记》	Vang Si-fu: *A nyugati szoba*	Ferenc Tőkei	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1960
贺敬之、丁毅:《白毛女》	Ho Csing-cse, Ting Ji: *A fehér hajú lány*	Endre Galla, Imre Molnár	Magyar Helikon, 1961
曹禺:《北京人》	Cao Jü: *Pekingi emberek: Dráma három felvonásban*	Vilma Mészáros	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1961
郭沫若:《少年时代》	Kuo Mo-zso: *Ifjúkor*	Pál Miklós	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1961
鲁迅:《野草》	Lu Hszin: *Vadfüvek: Versek prózában*	Ferenc Tőkei	Magyar Helikon, 1961
《李白诗选》	*Li Taj-po versei*	Barnabás Csongor et al.	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1961
施耐庵:《水浒传》	Si Naj-an: *Vízparti történet* (*Suj hu csuan*) *I-II.*	Barnabás Csongor	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1961
郭沫若:《学生时代》	Kuo Mo-zso: *Egyetemi éveim*	Pál Miklós	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1962.

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Chinese author and title	Author and title in the Hungarian edition	Translator/Editor	First Hungarian edition
巴金:《憩园》	Pa Csin: *A nyugalom kertje*	István Pálos	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1962
《中国古代小说选》	*Klasszikus kínai elbeszélések*	Barnabás Csongor et al.	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1962
吴敬梓:《儒林外史》	Vu Csing-ce: *Írástudók*	Péter Polonyi	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1966
《中国古代诗词选》	*Klasszikus kínai költök I-II.*	Barnabás Csongor, Ferenc Tőkei et al.	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1967
溥仪:《我的前半生》	Pu Ji: *Az utolsó kínai császár voltam*	Sándor Józsa	Kossuth, 1969
吴承恩:《西游记》	Vu Cseng-en: *Nyugati utazás avagy a majomkirály története I-II.*	Barnabás Csongor	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1969
《中国古代美学著作选》	*A szépség szíve: Régi kínai esztétikai írások*	Ferenc Tőkei	Gondolat Kiadó, 1973
《李白、杜甫、白居易诗选》	*Li Taj-po, Tu Fu, Po Csü-ji válogatott versei*	Barnabás Csongor et al.	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1976
石君宝:《秋胡戏妻》、郑廷玉:《看钱奴》、武汉臣:《生金阁》	*A fej nélküli szellem: Régi kínai komédiák*	Éva Kalmár	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1978
董悦:《西游补》	Tung Jüe: *Ami a Nyugati utazásból kimaradt*	Barnabás Csongor	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1980
老舍:《猫城记》	Lao Sö: *Macskaváros krónikája*	Endre Galla	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1981
《鲁迅文学社会理论作品选》	*Lu Hszün: Irodalom, forradalom, társadalom: Válogatott irodalom-publicisztikai írások.*	Endre Galla	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1981

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Chinese author and title	Author and title in the Hungarian edition	Translator/Editor	First Hungarian edition
王蒙:《悠悠寸草心》、《最宝贵的》、《蝴蝶》、《说客盈门》、《春之声》	Vang Meng: *A csirizgyár igazgatója*	Péter Polonyi	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1985
刘鹗:《老残游记》	Liu O: *Öreg Can kóborlásai*	Péter Polonyi	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1985
古华:《芙蓉镇》	Ku Hua: *Hibiszkuszháza*	Péter Polonyi	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1987
莫应丰:《难与人言的故事》	Mo Jing-feng: *Túl szép a menyasszony*	Péter Polonyi	Kossuth Kiadó, 1987
谌容:《人到中年》	Sen Zsung: *Az élet derekán*	Márton Krasznai	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1989
田汉:《咖啡店之一夜》、《南归》、《洪水》、《江村小景》	Tien Han: *Egyfelvonásosok: Dokumentumok a kínai polgárháború korszakából, az 1920-30- as évekből.*	Ildikó Ecsedy, Ferenc Tőkei	MTA Orientalisztikai Munkaközösség, 1991
寒山	Han San: *A bölcs vigyor*	Zsolt Tokaji, Barnabás Csongor, Amy Károlyi	Terebess Kiadó, 1997
《柳宗元选集》	Liu Cung-jüan: *Megszeretem a szám űzetést*	Ildikó Ecsedy et al.	Terebess Kiadó, 1997
蒲松龄:《聊斋志异》(选集)	Pu Szung-ling: *A templom démona*	Zsolt Tokaji	Terebess Kiadó, 1997
裴铡:《裴航》、《昆仑奴》、《聂隐娘》、《陈鸾凤》、《崔炜》	Pej Hszing: *A déltengeri rabszolga*	Zsolt Tokaji	Terebess Kiadó, 1999
刘璋:《钟馗斩鬼传》	Liu Csang: *Csung Kuj, az ördögűző*	Zsolt Tokaji	Terebess Kiadó, 1999

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Chinese author and title	Author and title in the Hungarian edition	Translator/Editor	First Hungarian edition
苏童:《妻妾成群》、余华:《世事如烟》、刘震云:《一地鸡毛》、马原:《虚构》、韩少功:《爸爸爸》	Nők egy fedél alatt: *Mai kínai kisregények*	Klára Zombory	Európa Könyvkiadó, 2003
《中国近当代短篇小说选》	*Modern kínai elbeszélők: Tanulmányok és fordítások Galla Endre 80 születésnapjára*	Imre Hamar, Gergely Salát (eds.)	Balassi Kiadó, 2007
姜戎:《狼图腾》	Jiang Rong: *Farkastotem*	Klára Zombory	Magvető, 2008
《中国20世纪短篇小说选》	*Huszadik századi kínai novellák*	Éva Kalmár (ed.)	Noran-Kiadó, 2008
高行健:《灵山》	Gao Xingjian: *Lélek-hegy*	Marcell Kiss	Noran Kiadó, 2008.
鲁迅:《朝花夕拾》	Lu Hszün: *Hajnali virágok alkonyi csokorban*	Endre Galla	Európa Könyvkiadó, 2008

Appendix II: Some important Chinese works translated from a Western language to Hungarian

Chinese author and title	Author and title in the Hungarian edition	Translator/Editor	First Hungarian edition
鲁迅:《阿Q正传》(小说选集)	Lu Hszin: *A-Q hiteles története: Válogatott elbeszélések*	Vali R. Bakonyi et al. (from Russian)	Új Magyar Könyvkiadó, 1956
曹雪芹、高鹗:《红楼梦》	Cao Hszüe-csin, Kao O: *A vörös szoba alma I-II.*	György Lázár (from German)	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1959
《好逑传》	*Virágos gyertyák avagy egy jó házasság története*	Ilona Varga (from German)	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1959

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Chinese author and title	Author and title in the Hungarian edition	Translator/Editor	First Hungarian edition
曾朴：《孽海花》	Ceng Pu: *Virág a bűn tengerében*	Gyula Háy (from German)	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1962
《金瓶梅》	*Szép asszonyok egy gazdag házban* (*Csin Ping Mej*)	Tamás Mátrai (from German)	Európa Könyvkiadó, 1964
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