

## External Examiner's Report on the Dissertation of Ke Su:

### ***“Contextualized Study of History of Czech Literature in Chinese Translation: 1921-2020”***

**submitted in 2022 at the Institute of Translation Studies, Faculty of Arts, Charles University**

#### **I. Brief summary of the dissertation**

The presented dissertation thesis endeavours to map out and explain the translation history of Czech literature in Chinese, published in book form in mainland China between 1921 and 2020. It represents the very first attempt to research systematically and comprehensively Chinese interests in Czech literature which had not been translated into Chinese before 1921. The thesis is based in empirical research using quantitative and qualitative data, but it interprets the data (information about published translations and other) while using a vast scope of international and Chinese theoretical sources, empirical research studies and case studies in the field of Translation Studies. Its approach to the “material” consistently reflects the sociological turn in Translation Studies and, fundamentally, the polysystem theories introduced by Itamar Even-Zohar (1990) and developed by Gideon Toury (1995, 2012) and André Lefevere (2010). The thesis consists of analyses of “catalogues” and “corpora” built from data related to three distinguished periods of Chinese publication of Czech literature: 1921-1949, 1950-1977, 1978-2020. Chapter 7 is devoted to “Comparative textual analysis” – a case study that compares 4 translations/retranslations of *Good Soldier Švejk*, a work with a canonical status within Czech literature in Chinese translation, and the Czech original.

#### **II. Brief overall evaluation of the dissertation**

The achievement of this dissertation thesis is admirable. While the thesis applies the key research questions for any translation history project: “what”, “who”, “how” and “why” (Pym, 2014; Chesterman, 2000), it poses and answers very important questions about conditions of the sociopolitical and cultural contexts of the three studied periods determining the selection of Czech works for Chinese translations, the engagement of different types of translators, their translating strategies; and it also tries to trace, on the basis of accessible data, possible reasons for pinpointing Czech works suitable for publication in each of the three periods. Thus the thesis presents manifold depictions of features characterizing translations of Czech literature in each period. The focus on the „corpora“ of works, not on isolated texts enables such results; moreover, the contextual study gives precious, specific information (ideologies in book industry, institutions, censorship, types of translation, agents of translation publication etc.) about the history of mainland China in the 20th and 21st centuries. The discussion of direct and indirect translations not only in mainland China, but also in other European countries, together with the discussion of the translation communication between „central“ and „peripheral“ cultures and / or languages are revealing in a broader sense. The comparative case study of the 4 translations of *Good Soldier Švejk* is well researched, the compared extracts from one part of the novel, Part I: Behind the Lines (*Díl První: V zázemí*) are classified according to justifiable criteria – even though the study lacks, in my opinion, an analysis and comparison of some longer extract that could have shown the flow of the style of the novel, not just isolated features (abusive language, expressions related to taboo subjects).

### III. Detailed evaluation of the dissertation and its individual aspects

The thesis from Chapter 2 on works continuously with its key concepts relevant for Chinese translation history of Czech literature: ideology, direct and indirect translation, retranslation, as well as censorship, self-censorship and paratexts. The theoretical information in Chapter 2, in all respects, is so abundant and relevant that it could inspire Masters' diploma theses research in many ways. Not only does the author draw from many sources, but he also compares and contrasts views thus leading a theoretical discussion. For example, what is an extreme, but inspiring idea, especially in relation to Chinese translations of Czech literature, is the introduced view that "translation and censorship share certain common features, both involving selection, manipulation and rewriting. Translator and censor can also both be seen as gatekeepers, 'standing at crucial points of control, monitoring what comes in and what stays outside any given cultural or linguistic territory' (Holman & Boase-Beier 1999: 11)." This is proved, to a certain degree, in the case study devoted to *The Good Soldier Švejk* in Chapter 7, however, there is no back reference to this theoretical reflection.

The structure of the thesis is lucid, with Chapters from 4 to 6 devoted to each of the three historical periods and paying attention to the aforementioned key research questions.

Chapter 4 gives a catalogue of the Czech works published as books in Chinese between 1921-1949, and creates corpora according to genre, direct / indirect translation – always indirect in this period with no translators knowing Czech –, retranslation and the mediating language. The informative value of the variables organizing the corpora is great. They make it possible to uncover literary and translating norms and thus inform about the cultural character of the period. Among others, the fact that the mediating language for one third of translated Czech works was Esperanto (which disappears in the following periods) suggests a lot about the Republican China's global orientation (The Republic of China, 1912-1949), and its effort to take part in "the harmonization of the world" through the idealistic artificial language influential in the early 20th century. Yet already in this chapter (and already before and further) traces of the fragmentation of the structure of the thesis can be noticed. Some pieces of information are just incomplete, or partial, or implicit and they are elucidated only later: e.g. the mention of the New Culture Movement is first just fleeting (p. 91); only later (p. 94) – late with regard to the importance of literary interests discussed before – the information is elaborated.

The composition of the following chapters keeps the pattern of "what", "who", "how" and "why". Yet the answers contain a different range of problems. The author's periodization of the Chinese translation history of Czech literature proves to be very helpful for delineating and researching three very different sociopolitical and cultural contexts and their interconnection with translating as such and translating Czech literature specifically. Chapter 5 examines the translation practices in the communist People's Republic of China (1950-1977) including the "Cultural Revolution" (1963-1977, with no translations at all). Because of the pursued sociological interests of the thesis, one gains a thorough and precious insight into the institutionalization, regulation and political control of translating that, for example, resulted in the prevalent choice of Russian as a mediating culture and language including paratexts; or in translators' team work on short-term tasks that seemed to reflect the political imperative of people's collaboration in all kinds of work. André Lefevere's term (2010) "patronage", i. e. social agents inspiring and / or requiring translations, is very usefully applied both in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 – with contrasting results: Unlike the politicized and centralized patronage (with the hierarchy of institutions and agents, those in state-owned publishing houses being at the true operational level) between 1950-1977, the patronage in China of 1978-2020, developing towards liberalization, was getting more and more differentiated. The translating activities became influenced by single publishers following both the dictates of the freed market, and the literary qualities, as well as by the initiating translators themselves.

In answering the questions of „what“ was translated in different periods, the author proves his range of knowledge of Czech literature – in Chapter 5, in his analysis of excerpted data about published Czech titles in this period, he works with three well chosen variables for characterization of the titles: He gives well-sorted information about the ratio of published classics (Čapek, Němcová, Mácha) and socialist realist works (e. g. by Majerová, Zápotocký, Pujmanová, Otčenášek) which were never republished or retranslated in China). He also discusses knowledgeably authors / works that are in between the two categories (e. g. Jirásek).

Chapter 6 elucidates the process of liberalization in China in many ways – the focus on translations of texts by Milan Kundera, Bohumil Hrabal and Ivan Klíma (the fact that Chinese translations of Kundera, done before the Czech ban on publishing his texts was lifted, is valuable for the author’s comparison of the Chinese and Czech communist cultural histories) is pursued through importantly chosen Chinese categories of “non-translation” (in fact a ban on translation), “partial translation”, and “full translation”. All the process ending up in “full translation” of high status in this period, definitely in the case of Kundera’s works, and in all these writers entering the prestigious book series, illustrates the cultural climate of liberalizing China. Moreover, Kundera becoming a “literary model” is documented in publications of his works, in paratexts and in the series into which his works came out as well as in the numbers of their sold copies. The “Kundera craze” is usefully explained with the help of Even-Zohar’s theory (1990) about „a turning point in literatures“ in the sense of literary orientation after 1977 – all that preceded during the previous period of People’s Republic of China was being criticized and extinguished, with the result of „vacuum“ in literature; new „literary models“ via translation were accepted, with Kundera, Borges, and Márquez being the cases.

Chapter 7, a comparative textual analysis of five texts including the original Czech text of *The Good Soldier Švejk*, which became a canonized translated and retranslated work in the Chinese context, effectively supports the explanations given in the preceding chapters. The units of comparative analysis are the parallel textual segments translated from Part I: Behind the Lines. The indirectly translated Chinese target text (Xiao 1956) and its mediating English text (which is a direct translation, Selver 1930) are “partial translations” showing self-censorship strategies. The directly translated versions in Chinese (Liu 1983) and in English (Parrott 1973) are very faithful full translations. In general, the analyses prove the process developing towards the direct and adequate (Toury 1995, 2012) translation in the course of time.

### ***Personal contribution to the subject***

The objectives of the thesis were met, in all respects. There is not enough space in this report to discuss the valuable pursuit of the changing aspects of indirect / direct translation between Czech and Chinese during the three periods, or their relevance to “the development of a globalized system of transmission of texts that are mediated by dominant literary systems” (Marin-Lacarta 2012: 6). These are very important issues; also other valuable pursuits of the thesis could not be pointed out. However, thanks to them and those discussed before, the thesis is a great achievement and an important contribution to international Translation Studies.

#### IV. Questions for the author

- Can the surprising number of retranslations of Viková Kunětická's story "Husy" in periodicals of the first researched period be taken as a sign of the prominent reception of the author without discussing the content of the story?
- This is a statement from the thesis: "The ageing of translations is one of the most common arguments in reviews and media discourse in favour of new translations (Paloposki & Koskinen 2010: 30)". However, there are no cases of retranslations for this reason mentioned in the thesis. Can the retranslations in the first and the the third periods in question be explained in other terms, with regard to their significant numbers?
- Ad/ Translation of sexual taboos: In example one, if Liu's text is translated into English correctly, there is a substantial change of meaning???:

*Odešla však za týden, poněvadž nemohla se smířit s myšlenkou, že má nadporučík kromě ní ještě asi kolem dvaceti jiných milenek, což zanechalo jisté stopy ve výkonnosti ušlechtilého samce v uniformě.*

*But she left after a week, because she could not reconcile herself to the idea that the lieutenant had about twenty other mistresses besides her, and that they had all left traces of their handiwork on the noble male's uniform.*

#### V. Conclusion

I provisionally classify the submitted dissertation as *passed*.

August 20, 2022

PhDr. Eva Kalivodová, PhD.