



From right: Hu Zongfeng, Jia Pingwa and Robin Gilbank discuss book's translation. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LITERATURE OPENS A DOOR ON CHINA

Veteran translator believes literary works by Shaanxi authors will be attractive to UK readers and convey region's unique charm

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The prosperous and the fast development of China will underpin how our nation's culture and literature reaches the rest of the world," says famous Chinese translator Hu Zongfeng.

Hu, professor of literature and translation at Northwest University in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, is one of the translators behind *Mountain Stories*, a collection of novellas by best-selling Chinese writer Ye Guangqin. The English version of Ye's book will be published by Valley Press, a UK-based independent publisher, in July.

Following Ye's *Mountain Stories*, Valley Press will also publish six more translated titles over the next two years, all by authors from Shaanxi province in Northwest China. These will include *The Earthen Gate* by Jia Pingwa, *How Old Dan Became a Tree* by Yang Zhengguang, *Hometown* by Hong Ke, *The Blood Red Sun* by Wu Kejing, *The Language of Sunshine* by Fang Yingwen and *The Sun Palace* by Ye Guangqin.

The publisher, based in Scarborough, North Yorkshire, has confirmed that the project is well underway. The company's founder, Jamie McGarry, said in an interview with *The Bookseller* trade magazine that Valley Press holds world rights for all formats (in English) of the seven titles.

"(British) readers might not have heard of Shaanxi before, or be particularly familiar with the best-selling Chinese-language authors who

"It (literature translation) should be a means of transmitting culture and spirit through words."

HU ZONGFENG
translator

call that province their home, but they soon will be. We've signed an agreement to publish a whole series of titles from the region's finest authors, translated with great care by a team at Northwest University in the city of Xi'an, then edited and proofread by native English scholars," McGarry told the *Bookseller*.

"These books offer an astonishingly fresh literary experience for UK readers — and for us at Valley Press. It's something genuinely new for us to get to grips with and, as you can probably tell, I'm very excited by the whole idea."

Xi'an, in the center of the Guanzhong Plain in Northwest China, is now the capital of Shaanxi province. Before the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), it was known as Chang'an. Xi'an is one of the China's four great ancient capitals. It

has been the cultural and political center of several empires in Chinese history, including the Zhou, Qin, Western Han and Tang. Xi'an is believed to have been the starting point of the ancient Silk Road, and is the home of the Terracotta Army of Emperor Qin Shi Huang.

Hu, also chairman of the Shaanxi Translation Association, believes the unique charm of literary works by Shaanxi authors makes them attractive to Chinese and Western readers alike.

"More and more people would like to know Chinese culture and literature as the country becomes stronger in economic growth," Hu says. "Shaanxi province, as the cradle of Chinese culture, has established a high cohesion for Chinese writers and poets. Their works can somehow represent the high-level creations of Chinese literature."

Hu began to translate Shaanxi literature as early as 1986, when he was a postgraduate student. Encouraged by his teacher, the US author and poet Bill Holm, he translated some of Jia Pingwa's essays. In 1997, he proposed a project called Shaanxi Authors and World Literature, gaining support for translating many Chinese literary masters, including Jia and Chen Zhongshi, the author of *White Deer Plain* and the winner of the Mao Dun Literature Prize, China's highest literary award of its kind. In 2010, Hu's translation of Jia's novella *Country Wife* was published by the Kansas City-based journal *New Letters* in the United States.

"That was a starting point, and the friendship and understanding with writers really took hold then," Hu says. "With the cooperation

of Dr Robin Gilbank, assistant to the dean of Northwest University's School of Foreign Languages, we have set up a workshop to undertake translation work. Ye Guangqin's long literary work, *Green Wood Riverside*, translated by our team members Gao Minna, Liu Dangling and Du Lixia, was her first work to appear in English in 2012."

Two of the novellas from Ye's *Mountain Stories* — *Big Fu the Tiger* and *On Camera* — were translated by Hu and Gilbank, who also edited the whole book. The translation of the other stories in the collection was done by team members Doctor Zhang Min and He Longping.

"The translation workshop is based in the Shaanxi Translation Association. The team consists of researchers and teachers working on literary translation and English education in several universities in Shaanxi province, including Northwest University, Xi'an Jiaotong University, Xi'an International Studies University and Shaanxi Normal University. Most of the translators have devoted years of their lives to translating works written by local writers, and want to introduce them to Western countries.

"The work on Ye's *Mountain Stories* started two years ago," Hu recalls. "Dr Gilbank, who has been working with our workshop since 2008, picked out some short stories or novellas that contain a distinct impression of the Qinling Mountains or are full of Shaanxi characteristics from Ye's popular works, and passed them on to the translators."

Hu is proud of what he has accomplished in recent years. Many people believe only translations created by native English speakers have the potential to be published and accepted by readers. However, Hu and his team members' experience proves that the cooperation between two sides can be compelling. Literary translation requires an in-depth knowledge of the original authors. Hu says his team members have cooperated closely with many Shaanxi writers over the years, and "the connection and understanding between the writer and the translator must play a major role in any project".

The workshop has translated many works of famous Shaanxi writers, including Jia Pingwa, Chen Zhongshi, Wu Kejing and Fang Yingwen. A number of them have already been published overseas. In addition, Hu has translated more than 60 works from English into Chinese, including *The Eagle and the Dragon: China and American Politics* by Russell Duncan, *Disappearance* by David Dabydeen and *China At Last* by the late world-renowned Sinologist Burton Watson.

Hu and Gilbank will serve as the series editors for the seven books to be published by Valley Press. "Literature translation is more than a simple repeat, or using a language to replace the original one, but also a process of literary re-creation," Hu says. "It should be a means of transmitting culture and spirit through words."

"Some British people, including ordinary readers, writers and book reviewers, have read the draft of *Mountain Stories*, which focuses on telling Shaanxi stories related to local customs and ecological protection. They found the stories both interesting and attractive. They can grasp the cultural connotations."

"Western readers' interest in Chinese contemporary literature was spawned by their curiosity about this ancient Eastern country, which has a long history and has witnessed fast economic development in recent years," Hu says, adding that he also realizes his own responsibility to identify the best works and introduce them to Western reader.

"Our work will open a path for the world to know our country, especially modern China, which is in its most glorious days."

Hu quotes Jia Pingwa's saying: "The interpretation of the stories of China is to let people know that these are the stories of China. From the stories we can read how China is today, how Chinese people are living and what they are thinking. From the words and characters, we can also read the Chinese style, smell the country and understand its significance."