

A Hundred Years of Sinicization: The Dissemination and Acceptance of Slovenian Literature in China

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In China, Slovenian literature is seen as part of Yugoslav literature within the wider framework of Eastern European literature, and its transmission and reception has spanned over a century. This process can be divided into three phases: before the mid-twentieth century, from the 1950s to the early twenty-first century, and from the second decade of the twenty-first century onwards. Each phase reflects shifts in China's social, cultural and political landscape, which are reflected in different approaches to translation and cultural activities. In the first phase, Chinese readers viewed Slovenian literature as "literature of small nations," resonating with its themes of social issues and national circumstances. In the second phase, Slovenian literature was regarded as "socialist literature" and "Third World literature," with translations focusing on social struggles and achievements. In the third phase, Chinese scholars began to re-evaluate the diversity of Eastern European literature, and Slovenian literary works gradually gained influence in Chinese society. This paper explores the processes of translation, adaptation and cultural exchange of Slovenian literature in China highlighting its significant role in promoting cultural understanding between China and Slovenia. It also emphasizes the need for future efforts to strengthen cultural exchange and cooperation between the two countries in order to promote global cultural diversity.

Keywords: Slovenian literature / reception / China / translation / cultural exchange / cross-cultural communication

Introduction

In 2012,¹ Slovenian poet Tomaž Šalamun, upon receiving the seventh Poetry and People Poet Award in China,² earnestly asked in his acceptance speech: “Why would a poet from a distant place, belonging to a small nation with its own language—Slovenia—garner the attention of Chinese poets and receive such an honor?” (X. Gao, “In Memory”). Šalamun’s answer was the power of poetry, but what he might not have realized is that this question is closely tied to the long-standing cultural exchange between China and Slovenia. This article explores the dissemination and reception of Slovenian literature in China, analyzing the process of its translation, interpretation and adaptation, and reveals the depth and complexity of the cultural exchange between China and Slovenia.

The history of cultural exchange between China and Slovenia is long, dating back to the eighteenth century. In 1739, Augustin Hallerstein (1703–1774), a Jesuit born in Ljubljana, arrived in Beijing and began his 35-year career in astronomy and cartography. His work was highly praised by scholars from both Slovenia and China and he is considered an important participant and promoter of eighteenth-century cultural exchange between China and Europe (Saje; W. Gao; Ke).

In the mid- to late nineteenth century, Eastern European literature began to enter the vision of Chinese translators. China’s understanding of Eastern Europe differed from its perception of “the West.” It was influenced by geopolitical, ideological, and traditional views, which made Chinese intellectuals of the time feel China has a lot in common with Eastern European countries, such as their history, cultural situation, and national character. Before the 1990s, the Chinese understanding of Eastern Europe included countries, such as Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Albania. Today, this region comprises 14 countries or regions, including Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Serbia, and Slovenia.

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² The Poetry and People Poet Award (*Shige yu ren guoji shiren jiang*) was established in 2005 and was renamed the Poetry and People International Poetry Award in 2014. It is a lifetime award for poets granted by the magazine *Poetry and People* (*Shiren yu ren*). In April 2011, Tomas Tranströmer received this award and was later honored with the Nobel Prize in Literature in October of the same year, bringing greater attention and respect to the Poetry and People Poet Award. It has since become one of the most influential international poetry awards in China.

In the 1920s, Chinese literary journals first introduced Yugoslav literature, which included the literature of various Yugoslav nations, such as Slovenian literature, marking over a century of literary exchange with Slovenia. During this period, Slovenian literature in China underwent multiple stages of transformation. How were these works translated, interpreted, criticized, and ultimately integrated into the Chinese cultural context? These questions provide important insights into understanding the depth and complexity of cultural exchange between China and Slovenia.

Despite present-day Slovenia's relatively small population and geographical size, Slovenian literature has been translated into multiple languages, such as English, Chinese, German, Russian, Spanish, French, Italian, Turkish, Croatian, Polish, and Hungarian, impacting audiences worldwide. Works by writers like France Prešeren, Ivan Cankar, and Drago Jančar—although they belong to three very different periods of literary history (as representatives of Romanticism, modern literature, and contemporary literature)—have resonated globally, enhancing the understanding of Slovenian history and culture. In the twentieth century, especially during the Cold War, Slovenian literature was often seen as a symbol of resistance to authority and the pursuit of freedom (Dovič 129).

Since Slovenia's independence, its global literary influence has been effectively expanded through translation strategies and cultural diplomacy. For example, translating literary works into German and English increased their visibility in the international literary market (Rozman 328–329). Financial support from the Slovenian Book Agency and the Trubar Foundation has encouraged the translation and international promotion of literary works, ensuring their acceptance in broader regions (Blatnik 117–118). Participation at international literary festivals such as the Frankfurt Book Fair has enhanced the international exposure of Slovenian literature, reinforcing its image as a transmitter of literature and culture. These strategies have not only improved international dissemination efficiency but also deepened global reader acceptance.

This article will explore how Slovenian literature gradually formed literary influence in Chinese society by analyzing its dissemination paths, translation practices, cultural events, and academic dialogues. Through these discussions, the article aims to reveal the process of acceptance and adaptation of Slovenian literature in China and demonstrate its important role in promoting cultural understanding and exchange between China and Slovenia and beyond.

Dissemination process

The May Fourth period usually refers to the May Fourth Movement that erupted on May 4, 1919, in response to China's dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. Initially a large-scale student protest, the movement quickly evolved into a broader social and cultural movement against imperialism and feudalism, marking the awakening of modern Chinese thought and culture. The May Fourth Movement promoted the spread of democratic and scientific ideas in Chinese society and had a profound impact on modern Chinese literature, educational reform, women's liberation, and language reform.

During this period, progressive intellectuals like Chen Duxiu (1879–1942),³ Li Dazhao (1889–1927),⁴ and Lu Xun (1881–1936)⁵ began actively introducing representative works of foreign thought and culture to break free from China's humiliating and oppressed status as a weak nation since the late nineteenth century.⁶ This period saw unprecedented achievements in translated literature in China, with about 250 translators translating 2,569 novels, nearly 100 poems, and over 20 plays (Guo 15).

³ A leading figure in the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement, Chen Duxiu was a key proponent of modern Chinese thought and one of the founding members of the Chinese Communist Party. He played a crucial role in advocating for the introduction of Western ideas and culture to challenge traditional Chinese values and push for modernization.

⁴ One of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, Li Dazhao was an influential thinker during the New Culture Movement. He was instrumental in promoting Marxist ideas in China and was a key figure in the intellectual circles that sought to reform Chinese society through the adoption of Western philosophies.

⁵ Considered one of the most prominent figures in modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun was a leading intellectual of the New Culture Movement. His works are known for their sharp criticism of traditional Chinese society and culture. Lu Xun's writings played a significant role in the development of modern Chinese literature and influenced many subsequent generations of Chinese writers.

⁶ In the mid-nineteenth century, China suffered a series of defeats in the Opium Wars (1839–1842, 1856–1860) against Western powers, leading to the signing of unequal treaties, territorial concessions, and significant indemnities. These events marked the beginning of China's "Century of Humiliation," during which the Qing Dynasty faced internal strife, foreign aggression, and economic exploitation. The resulting social and political instability prompted Chinese intellectuals to seek new ways to strengthen the nation, including the introduction of Western ideas and culture. This period of reflection and reform eventually gave rise to the New Culture Movement, which aimed to modernize China by embracing foreign philosophies and rejecting outdated traditions.

It was during this period that the attention of the Chinese literary world also turned to the “literature of small nations” represented by Eastern Europe. In modern Chinese discourse, the concept of “small nations” originated from Chen Duxiu’s 1921 article “The Pacific Conference and the Pacific Small Nations” (“Taipingyang huiyi he taipingyang ruoxiaominzu”), and was used to refer to marginalized nations like Indians and Poles. Subsequently, this concept was widely used in cultural and literary introductions, becoming a part of universal social discourse (Song 12).

The special issue of the journal *Novel Monthly* (*Xiaoshuo yuebao*),⁷ published on October 10, 1921, introduced the literature of Eastern European nations, including Ukrainian, Polish, Czech, Serbian, Croatian, and Bulgarian authors. In 1923, *Novel Monthly* published Milivoj S. Stanojević’s article “Modern Yugoslav Literature” (“Nansilafu de jindai wenxue,” translated by Pei Wei), which described the history and current situation of Yugoslav literature. In 1924, Zhao Jingshen’s (1902–1985)⁸ article “Modern Yugoslav Literature” (“Xiandai nansilafu wenxue”) was also published in *Novel Monthly*, further promoting the dissemination of Yugoslav literature in China. Scholars focused on translating and presenting works that depicted difficult lives of working people, showcased people’s struggles against oppression, and portrayed new ideals and ways of life.

In 1921, Yugoslav literary works began to be translated into Chinese, such as Svetislav Stefanović’s poem “Najveća sreća” (“Zui da de xiyue,” translated by Shen Yanbing) and Laza Lazarević’s novel *U dobri čas hajduci!* (*Qiangdao*, translated by Shen Zemin), as well as Croatian short stories. Slovenian literature was introduced slightly later than Serbian and Croatian works, the first standalone publication being Ivan Cankar’s novella *Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica*

⁷ *Novel Monthly* was one of the most influential literary journals in modern Chinese literary history. Founded in 1910, it was particularly active during the May Fourth Movement, serving as a key platform for disseminating new ideas and literature. The journal was published by the Commercial Press in Shanghai. The initial editors were Yun Tieqiao (1880–1949) and Wang Chunnong (1877–1951). In January 1921, Mao Dun (1896–1981) became the chief editor. The journal ceased publication following the January 28 Incident in 1932, when Japanese forces attacked Shanghai, leading to an escalation in the conflict between China and Japan and causing significant turmoil in the city.

⁸ Zhao Jingshen was a prominent Chinese writer, translator, and literary theorist. He was a key figure in the development of modern Chinese literature and drama. He was particularly known for his translations of foreign literary works into Chinese, as well as his efforts to promote the study of foreign literature in China.

(*Yelai de gongdao*). It was translated from English by the comic artist Wang Dunqing (1899–1990)⁹ and published by Shanghai Culture Publishing House in 1929.



Figure 1: *Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica* (*Yelai de gongdao*), the first Slovenian literary work introduced to China.

Cankar was not selected by chance, but because his novel reflected on social issues similar to those exposed by Chinese authors at the time. The translator pointed out that the novel was filled with “warnings about society and civilization” (Cankar, *Yelai de gongdao* 3), emphasizing that social justice ensures the survival and success of a nation. The introduction of Cankar was a product of China’s social and cultural transformation at the time and was a result of the social trend of awakening national consciousness and encouraging the people to resist invasion and oppression (Ding 187).

⁹ Wang Dunqing was one of the most active comic artists and theorists in China during the 1920s and 1930s. After graduating from the Department of Literature at St. John’s University in Shanghai in 1923, he engaged in creation and translation, using the pen name Wang Yiliu when translating Cankar’s works.

The second Slovenian literary work to be introduced to China appeared in 1956. From 1937 to 1949, China was engulfed in wars, experiencing both the War of Resistance against Japan and the Civil War. During this period, although there were sporadic translations of foreign literature, the overall introduction of foreign literature was essentially stagnant (Meng and Li 87–88). After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, relations with Yugoslavia were unstable, and cultural exchanges only began after formal diplomatic relations were established on January 2, 1955, several years later than with other Eastern European countries. Unfortunately, after 1958, relations between the two countries deteriorated again, significantly reducing cultural exchanges. During this period, the only Slovenian works published were *Selected Poems of France Prešeren* (*Pulieshelen shixuan*, translated by Zhang Qi et al., People's Literature Publishing House, 1956), Cankar's novella *Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica* (*Lao guan'jia yeernai*, translated by Huang Xingqi et al., People's Literature Publishing House, 1957), and a few stories in *Selected Yugoslav Short Stories* (*Nansilafu duanpian xiaoshuoji*, translated by Gao Jungang et al., Writers Publishing House, 1957).¹⁰ The literary magazine *World Literature* (*Shijie wenxue*) also published Prešeren's poems "Nezakonska mati" ("Weiceng jiehun de muqin") and "Ukazi" ("Mingling").

During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the introduction and study of foreign literature were severely restricted, and the dissemination of Yugoslav literature in China was almost zero. In 1978, China's attitude towards foreign literature changed significantly, and with the relaxation of the political environment and the promotion of cultural pluralism policies, Slovenian literature began to regain attention in China. During this period, translated works included Cankar's autobiographical novel *Na klancu* (*Zai qiongren jie shang*, translated by Feng Yülü, Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 1982) and Ciril Kosmač's novella *Balada o trobenti in oblaku* (*Baiyun he haojiao de zange*, translated by Zhang Leili, Hunan People's Publishing House, 1985). Both works were translated from Russian. Collections of Yugoslav literature containing Slovenian works included *Selected Yugoslav Short Stories* (*Nansilafu duanpian xiaoshuoji*, translated by Gao Jungang et al., People's Literature Publishing House, 1978),¹¹ *Swan*

¹⁰ Includes 29 short stories by 22 Yugoslav writers from the late nineteenth century to World War II, with five Slovenian authors: Ivan Tavčar (one story), Ivan Cankar (four stories), Prežihov Voranc (one story), France Bevk (one story), and Ciril Kosmač (one story).

¹¹ This is a reprint of *Selected Yugoslav Short Stories* first published in 1957.

Girl: Folk Tales of Various Yugoslav Nations (Tiane guniang: nansilafu gezu minjian tonghua gushi, translated by Zhang Jinzhang, Guangxi People's Publishing House, 1981),¹² *Wedding: Selected Yugoslav Short Stories (Hunli: nansilafu duanpian xiaoshuoji*, translated by Fan Xinmin et al., Heilongjiang People's Publishing House, 1986),¹³ *The Death of Poor Maria: Selected Yugoslav Short Stories (Buxing de Maliya zhi si: nansilafu zhongduanpian xiaoshuo xuan*, compiled by the editorial department of *World Literature*, Baihua Literature and Art Publishing House, 1986),¹⁴ the short story collection *Five Hundred Steps (Wubaiji taijie*, translated by Gao Ren, Chongqing Publishing House, 1990),¹⁵ and *Selected Contemporary Yugoslav Fairy Tales (Nansilafu dangdai tonghua xuan*, translated by Ye Junjian, Hunan Children's Publishing House, 1982),¹⁶ as well as Prežihov Voranc's collection of short stories *Solzice (Linglanhua*, translated by Su Zhouxiong, People's Literature Publishing House, 1980). Except for *Selected Contemporary Yugoslav Fairy Tales*, which was translated from English, and Vitomil Zupan's short story "Utrujeni bogovi" in *The Death of Poor Maria*, which was translated from Bulgarian, all works were translated from Russian.

To gain a better understanding of translation of Slovenian literature into Chinese during the twentieth century, the number of translated literary works from Slovenia is compared with those from other countries. Between 1901 and 2000, China (excluding Hong Kong and Taiwan) published 26,143 foreign literature books with national attributions, including 17,836 from Europe. Among Eastern European

¹² Includes 18 fairy tales from Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Macedonia, with five Slovenian folk tales: "The Shepherd Boy" ("Mutong"), "The Dying King" ("Linsi qian de guowang"), "The Water Sprite" ("Shuigui"), "What Is Fear?" ("Shenme shi pa?"), and "The Story of Learning a Craft" ("Xue shouyi de gushi").

¹³ Includes 18 short stories by 14 contemporary Yugoslav writers, with two Slovenian writers: Anton Ingolič (one story) and Vitomil Zupan (one story).

¹⁴ Includes 24 short stories by 21 contemporary Yugoslav writers, with five Slovenian writers: Anton Ingolič (one story), Miško Kranjec (one story), Ciril Kosmač (one story), Vitomil Zupan (one story) and Beno Zupančič (one story).

¹⁵ Includes 11 stories by nine contemporary Yugoslav writers, with one Slovenian writer: Beno Zupančič (one story).

¹⁶ Includes five fairy tales by three authors, but the translator mistakenly thought the first two stories, "Hišica iz kock" ("Qiyi de fanguai kuai") and "Stara hiša št. 3" ("Lao fangzi san hao"), were by different authors. Both were actually written by Ela Peroci. Other stories were written by Leopold Suhodolčan: "Piko Dinozaver" ("Konglong Pihe"), "Krojaček Hlaček" ("Xiao caifeng Dingmu de gushi"), and "Kam se je skrili krojaček Hlaček?" ("Xiao caifeng Dingmu de xin gushi?"). Thus, the book should be titled *Selected Contemporary Slovenian Fairy Tales*.

countries, the most translated literature was from Poland (197 books, 10th in Europe), and the least was from Albania (32 books, 23rd in Europe). Yugoslav literature (including works from the seven countries formed after its dissolution) had 73 translated works (18th in Europe). According to statistics, there were only six standalone books by Slovenian authors published. Compared to other Eastern European countries, translation of Slovenian literature into Chinese was relatively modest in the twentieth century. However, it is worth noting that among 45 European countries, 13 had no standalone literary works published in China (He and Cai).

From 2001 to 2024, 67 Slovenian books were published in China,¹⁷ reflecting the growing interest of Chinese readers and academia in Slovenian literature. In 2001, three Slovenian works translated by Gou Chengyi (1955–) were published, marking the first introduction of Slovenian literary works in China since Slovenia's independence in 1991. These were Cankar's short story collection *Podobe iz sanj* (*Menghuan ji*), Josip Jurčič's novella *Jurij Kozjak* (*Kezhake chengbao*), and Ivan Potrč's novel *Na kmetih* (*Tudi he qingyu*). Unfortunately, Slovenian novels (excluding children's literature) did not reappear in China until 20 years later, with Vladimir Bartol's representative work *Alamut* (*Ying zhi chao*, translated by Tang Shanhua, Democracy and Construction Press, 2021).

Since 2014, eight poetry collections by four Slovenian poets have been published in China. Among them was *One Billion Homeless or Nothingness: Selected Poems of Tomaž Šalamun* (*Shiyi ge liulanghan, huozhexuwu: Tuomasi Salamon shixuan*), a collection of over 160 poems, which was translated by Gao Xing (1963–) and published by Flower City Publishing House in 2014. It was the first Slovenian poetry collection published in China in the post-Yugoslav era. Subsequently, the scholar and poet Zhao Si (1972–) compiled and translated two collections of selected poems by Šalamun: *Light-Blue-Pillow Tower: Selected Poems Of Tomaž Šalamun* (*Languang zhen zhi ta: Salameng shixuan*, Writers Publishing House, 2014) and *The Enormous Boiling Mouths of the Sun: Selected Poems of Tomaž Šalamun* (*Taiyang feiteng de zhongkou: Tuomasi Salamon shixuan*, Oriental Publishing House, 2016).¹⁸

¹⁷ Based on the search results from the official website of the National Library of China (<https://www.nlc.cn/web/index.shtml>) and *Douban Books* (<https://book.douban.com>), supplemented by searches on the Chinese search engine Baidu (<https://www.baidu.com>).

¹⁸ The translator compiled and translated 221 poems in the first poetry collection, accompanied by a 15-page translator's afterword which provides an in-depth analysis

Liang Lizhen (1974–)¹⁹ compiled and translated four poetry collections: Aleš Šteger's *Einsteinov stolp* (*Aiyinsitan de ta*, 2014), *Na drugi strani rane* (*Cong Shangkou Lingyiduan*, 2019), and *Moje telo je centralni komite* (*Wo de shenti shi yi ge zhongyang weiyuanhui*, 2019), as well as Andrej Medved's *Razlagalec sanj* (*Meng de yizhe*, 2020). Except for *Moje telo je centralni komite*, which was published by Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, the other three collections were published by East China Normal University Press. The latter also published Šteger's essay collection *Berlin* (*Mianbao yu meigui–Bolin gushi*, 2019), translated by Liang Lizhen. Regrettably, all of those works were translated from English, with the sole exception of Srečko Kosovel's *Integrali '26* (*Zhengshu 26*), which was translated directly from Slovenian by the young translator Yuan Fan (1993–)²⁰ and published in 2017 by the People's Literature Publishing House, the most authoritative publisher in the Chinese literary community.

The remaining 54 works are all picture books for children, written by 14 Slovenian authors. In China, the most popular Slovenian children's literature author is Helena Kraljič, who has had 18 works translated into Chinese. Examples include *Dogodek v Mestnem logu* (*Conglin fengbo–bie xiangxin chuanyan*, Fujian People's Publishing House, 2016), *Veliki strašni volk* (*Kuai pao a, lang lai lei!*, Hayan Press, 2018), and *Moj očka* (*Wo de baba*, Beijing Publishing Group, 2020). Lila Prap is also highly regarded and has been called a "Slovenian

of the poet's themes, style, and ideas. In the second poetry collection, the translator selected 206 poems, along with a 19-page preface titled "The Boiling Mouths of the Sun" ("Taiyang feiteng de zhongkou"), which offers further study on the poet and his works. Additionally, the collection includes a 58-page research article by the Slovenian poet, critic, and eulogist for Šalamun, Miklavž Komelj, titled "On the Poetic Methods of Tomaž Šalamun's Recent Poetry" ("Salameng houqi shizuo de shige fangfalun").

¹⁹ Liang Lizhen graduated from the School of International Studies at Peking University in 1996 with dual bachelor's degrees in English Language and Literature and Law. She later lived for an extended period in the United Kingdom and Slovenia.

²⁰ Yuan Fan graduated in 2015 with a bachelor's degree in Chinese Language and Literature from the School of Chinese Language and Literature at Beijing Foreign Studies University. From 2012 to 2014, she took elective courses in Slovenian, and in 2013, she participated in a three-week summer school at the University of Ljubljana. Her graduation thesis, titled "Artistic Expression and Poetic Images of *Integrali '26* by Slovenian Poet Srečko Kosovel," analyzed the avant-garde artistic techniques in Kosovel's *Integrali '26*. Notably, under the guidance of Metka Lokar, a Slovenian studies professor at BFSU, she translated all 155 poems from *Integrali '26* into Chinese, which were included in the appendix. In 2015, Yuan Fan went to Columbia University to pursue a master's degree in the Department of Arts and Humanities. She currently resides in New York.

national treasure” by Chinese media (“Lila Prap”). She has had ten picture books published in China, including *1001 pravljica (1001 ge gushi)*, *Dinozavri?! (Konglong?!)*, and *Radi štejemo (Women ai shushu)*, which were supported by the Slovenian Book Agency and published by Guangxi Normal University Press in 2021.

Manica K. Musil also has ten Chinese translations. Jiangsu Phoenix Art Publishing House published four of her works in 2016: *Koza Cilka (Shanyang Saixiya)*, *Koza Cilka in kdo je popil vodo (Shei heguang le wo de shui)*, *Pobalinska pujsa (Daodan xiaozhu)*, and *Čarobna školjka (Moli beike)*. Modern Press and Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House each published three more works by Manica K. Musil in the following years. Aksinja Kermauner’s *Žiga špaget gre v širni svet (Miantiao Qiao chuang shijie, 2017)* and two other picture books were published in China. Two works by Tatjana Pregl Kobe were published by Beijing Children’s Publishing House in 2016. Similarly, in 2017, Writers Publishing House published two works by Cvetka Sokolov. Since 2014, Bina Štampe Žmavc, Žiga Gombač, Maja Kastelic, Nina Mav Hrovat, Mojca Osojnik, Andreja Peklar, and Peter Svetina each have one children’s picture book published in China. It is worth noting that, apart from five works by Lila Prap translated from Slovenian into Chinese by Bao Jie (1988–), a former Slovenian language teacher at Beijing Foreign Studies University, the rest are primarily translated from English.

In addition to standalone publications, Slovenian works have been included in series such as *Best European Fiction* which was edited by Aleksandar Hemon and translated into Chinese. These collections feature Drago Jančar’s novel *Prerokba (Yuyan, 2011, first series)* and Mirana Likar Bajželj’s “Nadin prt” (“Nada de zhuobu,” 2013, third series). In 2012, Ningxia People’s Publishing House released *Modern European Poets Reader (Ouzhou xiandai shiren duben)*, compiled and translated by Dong Jiping (1962–).²¹ It includes 14 poems by Srečko Kosovel and Edvard Kocbek, “the most important figures of twentieth-century Slovenian poetry” (Dong 121).

Since Slovenia’s independence, translation of its literature in China has shown new characteristics in terms of themes and types. Firstly, the continuation of the twentieth-century preference for realist themes is evident, with the reintroduction of early twentieth-century authors, proving that Cankar is not only the earliest introduced but also the

²¹ Dong Jiping is a renowned poet and writer. He won the International Canada Studies Award in 1991 and was honored with the title of Honorary Writer by the University of Iowa in 1993. He has translated dozens of foreign poetry collections and essays.

most translated Slovenian writer in China.²² There is also a greater focus on poetry, with translations of works by contemporary poets like Šalamun, Šteger, and Medved, highlighting reflections on history, the pain of transition, and thoughts on the future of post-Yugoslav Slovenia. Lastly, compared to other genres, children's picture books have become the most common form of Slovenian literature introduced to China.

Overall, the century-long translation of Slovenian literature into Chinese can be divided into three distinct phases, each with its unique social and historical background, reflecting changes in Chinese domestic values and social perceptions.

The first phase started before the mid-twentieth century. Both China and Eastern European countries had suffered from the invasions and oppression of Western powers, leading Chinese literary critics to view Slovenian literature as one of the representatives of "small nations' literature." During this period, Slovenian literature was introduced to China mainly because its works reflected on similar social issues and national situations, resonating with Chinese national sentiments. From the 1920s to the 1930s, China began translating and introducing Slovenian literature, but the number of works was relatively small and concentrated only on a few authors.

The second phase lasted from the 1950s to the early twenty-first century. With the establishment of the People's Republic of China and the formation of the Cold War pattern, Eastern European literature, including Slovenian literature, was treated in China as "literature of socialist countries" (*Shehuizhuyi guojia wenxue*) and "Third World literature" (*Disan shijie wenxue*). The literary translation during this period was closely centered around the dual themes of "revolution" (*geming*) and "construction" (*jianshe*), with works mainly focusing on social struggles and achievements in construction. Although Slovenian writers, such as Prešeren, Cankar, and Kosmač, were active in earlier periods, their works were translated into Chinese because they aligned with the revolutionary and construction needs of Chinese society during the Maoist period (1949–1976). Although China's literary circles gradually lost their ideological color after the reform and opening up in the late 1970s and the changes in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, the stereotype about Slovenian literature persisted into the first decade of the twenty-first century. For example, in the 1995 Chinese book

²² The most popular Slovenian works in China today are those by Slavoj Žižek, but he is considered a philosopher rather than a writer.

about twentieth-century European and American literature, one-sixth of the chapter on Yugoslav literature was dedicated to Ivan Cankar who was mainly described as a critic of the “capitalist exploitation system” (Zhang and Li 350) and a “true proletarian revolutionary” (351).²³

The third phase is from the second decade of the twenty-first century to the present. Around 2010, Chinese foreign literature researchers gradually realized that stereotypes seriously hindered the understanding and acceptance of Eastern European literature and could have a significant negative impact on China’s literary development. Some scholars proposed that history should be viewed dialectically and that the diversity of Eastern European literature should be re-examined. Romanian literature researcher and editor-in-chief of *World Literature* Gao Xing called for China to understand the “Blue Eastern Europe beyond the Red” (X. Gao, “Red Classics”) and launched the series *Blue Eastern Europe (Lanse Dong’ou)*, introducing works of Eastern European literature, including Slovenian literature.

Therefore, from the beginning of the twenty-first century, classic Slovenian works, such as Cankar’s *Podobe iz sanj*, Jurčič’s *Jurij Kozjak*, and Potrč’s *Na kmetih*, were introduced to China. At the same time, since the mid-2010s, postmodern and contemporary literature represented by poets like Šalamun, Šteger, and Medved have been actively translated and presented. This phenomenon occurred with the deepening of the reform and opening-up and the acceleration of China’s modernization process. Chinese readers have shown great interest in contemporary existential conditions, especially the situation of the loss of human subjectivity once again. Slovenian writers’ reflections on various new situations and problems in postmodern society resonated with Chinese readers, evoking cultural empathy and providing new perspectives.

By analyzing these three phases, it can be seen that the dissemination and reception of Slovenian literature in China is a dynamically developing process, deeply reflecting the changes in China’s social, cultural, and political environment.

²³ It is noteworthy that both Cankar and Lu Xun, though contemporaries from different countries and cultures, used their literary work to critique social injustices. This parallel is interesting as Slovenian readers of Lu Xun often perceive similarities between his writing style and that of Cankar, despite their distinct cultural backgrounds.

Background and choices of translators

By “Sinicization” of Slovenian literature, we refer to the process through which Slovenian literary works are adapted or interpreted in a way that aligns with Chinese cultural, political, or social contexts. This process often involves subjective choices by translators and publishers, who may emphasize certain themes or aspects of a work while downplaying or even omitting others, based on the prevailing political climate, market preferences, or anticipated reader responses in China. This can lead to a recontextualization of Slovenian literature that is not entirely faithful to the original works, but rather tailored to fit Chinese sensibilities and expectations. As a result, the perception of Slovenian literature in China may differ significantly from how it is understood in its native context, leading to instances where authors and works are either undervalued, overemphasized, or overlooked altogether.

The academic background, language proficiency, and literary inclination of translators greatly influence their choices. According to statistics, as of 2024, there are fewer than 20 professional translators proficient in Slovenian in China. Most works are translated through English, Russian, Serbian, or other languages. These translators are mostly teachers or scholars from universities and research institutions rather than professional translators. In addition, China has a strict publication censorship system, and universities and research institutions place a strong emphasis on ideology, subjecting scholars’ translations and research outcomes to rigorous scrutiny. This directly affects the selection of works and alterations made during the translation process. For example, when translating Jurčič’s *Jurij Kozjak*, the translator “toned down certain depictions imbued with intense religious hatred” (Jurčič 176), which led to some distortion of the translation. Similarly, in the translation of Bartol’s *Alamut*, critical discussions on religious doctrine (such as “the Quran is the product of a muddled brain”) and questions about religious leaders (such as calling the Prophet “a man with a confused mind”) were likely considered offensive to religious beliefs and could spark controversy. As a result, the translator had to delete significant religious content in chapters 6, 12, 16, and 18,²⁴ compromising the narrative integrity and coherence of the work, which greatly diminished the reader’s experience.²⁵

²⁴ This was found by comparing the Chinese translation with the English translation by Michael Biggins (see Bartol, *Ying zhi chao* and *Alamut*).

²⁵ On *Douban Books*, China’s most comprehensive and active book website, most readers criticize the inconsistent narrative pace and abrupt plot transitions in *Alamut* (“*Ying zhi chao*”).

Since the second decade of the twenty-first century, the cultural content and themes of translated works must align with China's social reality and cultural values, becoming the main consideration in translation choices. During this period, the continuous increase in China's newborn population created a huge demand for quality children's literature. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, between 2010 and 2020, the number of newborns in China reached approximately 185 million. Thus, the market's demand for quality children's literature was enormous, leading to the introduction of a large number of foreign works for children. The support of Slovenian authorities for the overseas promotion of children's literature further propelled this trend, making children's literature the most translated genre in China.

Translation is not merely a conversion of languages but also an exchange and interaction of cultures (Bassnett and Trivedi 162). In the process of translating Slovenian literary works, Chinese translators face challenges with culture-specific elements, such as historical backgrounds, place names, and customs unique to Slovenia. For instance, when translating Cankar's works, translators not only need to accurately convey their literary value but also explain the unique historical events and social environments of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Slovenia.

However, these culture-specific elements are carried by the Slovenian language, and when translated from other languages, information loss or even errors inevitably occur, which in turn affects the transmission of literary work's aesthetic value. For example, Dong Jiping translated lines 3 and 4 of Kosovel's poem "Kons: XY" ("Ne obesi bolesti na veliki zvon! / Ona se smehlja: cin cin cin.") as follows: "Bu yao cong fangding shang dajiao chu ni de beishang! / Ta zai weixiao: qiaoxiang yi zhi lingdang" ("Don't shout out your sorrow from the rooftop! / She smiles: ringing a bell; Dong 443). In contrast, Yuan Fan's direct translation from Slovenian reads: "Bu yao zai dazhong shang xuangua tongku! / Ta xiaodao: ding ding ding" ("Don't hang your pain on the big bell! / She smiles: ding ding ding"; Kosovel 38). In Dong's translation, the expression "shout out your sorrow from the rooftop" does not faithfully convey the original metaphor of the "bell," and the handling of the emotion is rather direct, weakening the cultural nuances implied in the poem. While "ringing a bell" communicates the sound, it loses the lightness and rhythm of the original onomatopoeia. By comparison, Yuan's direct translation remains more faithful to the original metaphorical structure, preserving the "bell" as a symbol, capturing the

subtlety in the expression of pain, and reintroducing the rhythmic beauty of the onomatopoeia with “ding ding ding,” enhancing the musicality of the poem. This comparison highlights the importance of translating directly from the source language, avoiding the loss of cultural elements in intermediary translations, and more accurately conveying the aesthetic value and cultural essence of the work.

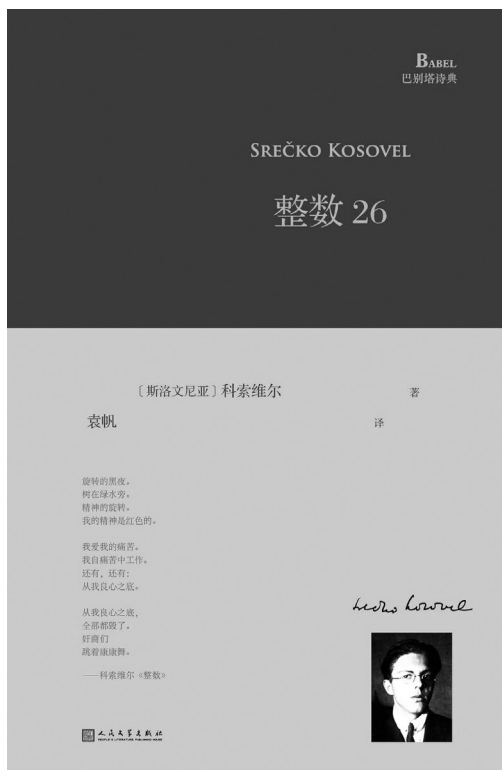


Figure 2: *Integrali '26* (*Zhengshu 26*), the first poetry collection translated from Slovenian into Chinese.

Typically, Chinese translators include prefaces or afterwords in the text to provide background information, rather than using footnotes or endnotes. This is partly because translations from Russian assume that Russian readers are more familiar with Slovenian history and culture, thus requiring fewer annotations on historical context, place names, and customs. However, the prefaces and afterwords in Chinese translations tend to focus on broader historical narratives, with less precise handling of Slovenia’s national symbols and culturally specific elements. For

example, the Chinese translation of Cankar's *Podobe iz sanj* includes 56 short stories and essays, but there are only 12 annotations, of which ten are brief background introductions and two are explanations of Greek mythological figures (see Cankar, *Menghuan ji*). This approach somewhat weakens the acceptability and readability of the works, reducing opportunities for cultural resonance with Chinese readers.

Despite many challenges, some translators strive to retain the content and style of the original works, conveying their aesthetic value. For example, when translating Kosovel, who used various modernist techniques, translator Yuan Fan showcased Kosovel's avant-garde experiments, including onomatopoeia, coinages, the use of scientific terms, and innovative visual effects. At the age of 22,²⁶ Yuan Fan keenly observed Kosovel's use of onomatopoeia and attempted to restore the aesthetic meaning of the original text. For example, her translation of lines 6 and 7 of the poem "Moj črni tintnik" ("Cvili s svojo zlato violino! / Da, da, da.") reads: "Yong ta de jinse de xiao tiqin zhi zhi jiao! / Da, da, da" (Kosovel 23). She translated *da* as the Chinese onomatopoeia *da* and noted that in Slovenian, *da* means "yes" or "agree." Similarly, she rendered the last four lines of the poem "Predmeti brez duš" ("Smeh kralja DADE / na lesenem konjičku. / Hi, hi. / Pum.") as follows: "Zai muma shang / Guowang Dada de xiaosheng. / Hei, hei. / Ping" (Kosovel 27). *Hi* was translated as the Chinese onomatopoeia *hei*, and the translator explained in the footnote that in Slovenian, it refers to "laughter or the sound of riding a horse." This translation method ensures the integrity of the original information and restores the poet's intent.

Translation is not only an important mean of cross-cultural communication but also a crucial approach to cultural understanding and recognition. Translation practices significantly enhance Chinese readers' understanding of Slovenian culture and society. Through translated literary works, readers gain insights into Slovenian history, politics, social structure, and cultural values, which were often unknown to the Chinese public before translation. As David Damrosch pointed out, world literature gains new meaning and depth through translation (Damrosch 289). Translation is not merely converting a text from one language to another but embedding it into a new cultural context, increasing its cultural and literary value. With the continuous

²⁶ It may not be a coincidence that Kosovel (1904–1926) was only 22 years old when he passed away, and Yuan was also 22 years old in 2015 when she translated his poetry collection into Chinese.

deepening of Sino-Slovenian literary exchanges, future translation practices will further enrich cultural exchanges and understanding between the two countries.

Academic research and cultural exchange

The academic achievements in the study of Slovenian literature in China reflect the emphasis and in-depth understanding of scholars and critics. While popularizing Slovenian cultural knowledge, these studies guide readers to appreciate Slovenian works and highlight unique Chinese perspectives and viewpoints. However, the study of Slovenian literature in China is mainly discussed as part of Yugoslav literature within the framework of Eastern European or Central and Eastern European literature. For example, *The History of Eastern European Literature* (*Dong'ou wenxueshi*, edited by Institute of Foreign Literature of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Chongqing Publishing House, 1990), *The History of Twentieth-Century Western Literature* (*Ershi shiji Oumei wenxueshi*, edited by Zhang Yushu and Li Mingbin, Peking University Press, 1995), *The History of Contemporary Eastern European Literature* (*Dong'ou dangdai wenxueshi*, edited by Lin Hongliang, Central Compilation and Translation Press, 1998), and *The History of Twentieth-Century Foreign Literature* (*20 shiji waiguo wenxueshi*, edited by Wu Yuanmai, Yilin Press, 2004) all introduce Slovenian literature as part of Yugoslav literature.

Regrettably, there has not yet been an independent research work on Slovenian literature in China. Relevant studies only appear in general histories of foreign literature, Euro-American literature, and Eastern European literature. The only work that evaluates Slovenian literature in independent chapters is Zheng Enbo's (1934–) *Contemporary Yugoslav Literature* (*Nansilafu dangdai wenxue*, Northern Arts Publishing House, 1988), but its research scope is limited to works published between 1945 and 1988. Zheng Enbo studied in Yugoslavia and Albania and wrote *The History of Eastern European Drama: Yugoslav Volume* (*Dong'ou xijushi-Nansilafu juan*, Beijing United Publishing Company, 2018), which traces the development of Slovenian drama from the eighteenth century to the present.

According to the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI),²⁷ there is only one research paper dedicated specifically

²⁷ CNKI is the largest comprehensive academic resource database in China, providing access to journal articles, dissertations, conference papers, and other academic resources.

to Slovenian literature, and no master's and PhD thesis have yet been focused on it. The only paper was written by Zhang Ziqing (1939–)²⁸ and published by *Foreign Literature* (*Waiguo wenxue*) in 2010. It explores the reasons for Tomaž Šalamun's success in poetry, attributing it to “his rich cross-cultural background, profound historical and political experience, absorption of diverse cultures, innovative artistic techniques, and strong sense of social responsibility” (Zhang 34).

Overall, Chinese literary critics tend to focus on general overviews and introductory discussions of Slovenian literature, lacking systematic presentation of the overall literary development. For example, there is no discussion on the development of Slovenian literature after 2000, and the content is too brief, lacking necessary background knowledge and explanations. Additionally, the research is biased towards novels and poetry, neglecting other literary forms such as drama, and lacks in-depth analysis of representative writers and works, evaluations of their literary value, ideological connotations, and artistic features, as well as detailed literature research and analysis.

World literature is not just a parallel display of literature in different languages but also an interaction and understanding across cultures (Damrosch 298). Although China's translation and research on Slovenian literature are currently lacking, related cultural and academic activities have, to some extent, compensated for the shortcomings in literary exchange, promoting the popularization and understanding of Slovenian literature in China. For example, in 2014, Aleš Šteger became a resident poet at the Capital Normal University,²⁹ the first foreign poet to achieve this honor. During his residency, he engaged in poetry writing and research and actively participated in dialogues with students, providing Chinese readers and scholars opportunities for direct interaction with Slovenian writers, showcasing the diversity and depth of Slovenian literature.

Sino-Slovenian literary exchange activities also include author interviews, public lectures, literary seminars, work readings, and cultural

²⁸ Zhang Ziqing is a scholar, translator, and professor at the Institute of Literary Studies, School of Foreign Languages, Nanjing University. He is the author of the three-volume *History of 20th-Century American Poetry* (*20 shiji Meiguo shige shi*).

²⁹ Capital Normal University's resident poet program (*Shoudu Shifan Daxue zhuxiao shiren xiangmu*) started in 2002, making it the first university in China to implement such a program. The program aims to promote poetry writing and research and to enhance the literary atmosphere on campus by inviting outstanding poets to reside there. Subsequently, other universities such as Renmin University of China, Peking University, Beijing Normal University, Hainan University, and Shandong University of Technology also implemented the resident poet system.

exhibitions, attracting wide participation. For instance, on May 8, 2018, at a reading session in Shanghai titled “Commonality and Diversity of World Literature” (“Shijie wenxue de gongxing he duoyuan”) Barbara Korun discussed with poets from Mexico and France whether poetry could be translated. On November 22, 2023, Goran Vojnović and the 11th Mao Dun Literature Prize winner Liu Liangcheng had a dialogue in Chengdu, discussing the relationship between humans and nature.

The Slovenian Embassy in China often organizes various literary exchange and dialogue activities, providing a platform for Chinese readers to understand Slovenian literature, especially contemporary works. For example, on December 3, 2022, the Slovenian-Chinese poetry reading attracted Esad Babačić, Anja Zag Golob, Gregor Podlogar, and Karlo Hmeljak, along with Chinese poets. On May 26, 2024, the Slovenian Embassy in China invited avant-garde theater director Dragan Živadinov to visit China, showcase his project *Projektil Noordung 1995–2045*, and have a dialogue with Chinese director, writer, and curator Zhao Chuan (1968–).

Scholarly exchanges between Slovenian and Chinese academics play a bridging role in these cultural activities. By organizing joint seminars and academic conferences, scholars from both sides have opportunities to share research findings, discuss literary theories and critical methods, thereby deepening mutual understanding of each other’s literature and culture. For instance, in 2009, the Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Slovenian Society of Aesthetics, and the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Primorska jointly hosted an academic seminar in Koper titled “Philosophical Issues of Literary Art: China–Slovenia,” discussing various literary and aesthetic topics. Chinese poet and scholar Wang Jiixin (1957–) attended the Slovenian International Literary Festival in Ljubljana in 2012 and in 2014. Brane Mozetič participated at the third Beijing International Poetry Festival (Beijing Guoji Shihui), sharing his insights on literary creation and answering questions from Chinese students about Slovenian literature and culture. These exchanges not only promote academic cooperation but also open new paths for teaching and research of Slovenian literature in Chinese universities.

Currently, the influence of Slovenian literature in China mainly relies on cultural and academic activities. These activities, based on continuous academic cooperation and cultural exchanges, have fostered and promoted the introduction, presentation, and translation of literary works. For example, before Aleš Šteger became a resident poet at Capital Normal University in 2014, he had already taught at the

Sichuan University and had been invited several times to poetry festivals in Beijing, Shanghai, Yangzhou, and Chengdu. His influence in China is significant: in 2014, he published his first poetry collection, and in 2019, he published both a poetry collection and an essay collection, making him the most influential Slovenian writer in China after Cankar and Šalamun.

When Slovenian writers like Šteger participate in literary activities in China, they also engage with writers from China and other countries, not only promoting the sharing of literary resources but also enhancing the cooperation and influence of both sides in the international literary community. In the long run, such sustained cooperation will further deepen the mutual understanding and respect between China and Slovenia in the fields of literature and culture.

In the future, China and Slovenia should continue to strengthen cultural exchanges and literary mutual learning, promoting the translation and publication of more Slovenian literary works in China. By hosting more literary activities, academic seminars, and author exchange programs, the literary relationship between the two countries will further deepen. This will not only enrich the reading experience of Chinese readers but also promote comprehensive cooperation between China and Slovenia in cultural, educational, and academic fields. Continuous cultural exchanges and academic cooperation will enable China and Slovenia to better understand and appreciate each other's literature and culture, thereby making positive contributions to the promotion of global cultural diversity.

Conclusion

Political ideology, national power, and linguistic intermediaries (including direct translation or translation through a third language) have indeed influenced the literary exchange process between China and Slovenia to a certain extent. However, these factors are not the core factors or sufficient and necessary conditions determining literary relations. The history of cultural exchange between Eastern Europe and China over the past century has shown that there is no direct proportional relationship between literary translation and its influence and reception (Song 253). As Christiane Nord pointed out, translation is an action performed for a specific target situation, where the target text should meet the intended or required function, that is, the purpose of the translation (Nord 32). The real factors determining the translation

of foreign literature lie in the conscious translation and evaluation by the Chinese acceptance subjects for their own cultural construction and literary creation needs, which can have a substantial impact on Chinese literature.

The significance and acceptance of Slovenian literature in China depend not only on the quantity of translations but also on whether it integrates into the creative practice of local culture and becomes part of Chinese national literature. For example, since the 1980s, China's preference for translating foreign literature has shifted towards Nobel Prize winners, leading to the diminishing voices of small nations and small language literature that have not won the prize. Meanwhile, the works of Milan Kundera have sparked a widespread trend in China, despite him not winning the Nobel Prize. According to reception aesthetics theory, the acceptance and understanding of literary works in different cultural contexts depend on the readers' prior knowledge and cultural expectations (Jauss 23–24). Kundera's success lies in his special resonance with Chinese literature and cultural context, triggering the conscious response of avant-garde intellectuals: his Eastern European national identity, unique critique of extreme leftist regimes, and the close integration of political and sexual themes all stimulate the sensitive nerves of Chinese literature.

From historical destiny, cultural situations, and national character, there are many similarities and compatibility between Slovenia and China. Slovenia has a wealth of excellent literary works that offer significant insights for China's current social trends, cultural development, and literary innovation in terms of ideas, aesthetic meanings, and expression methods. By strengthening current cultural exchanges and literary mutual learning, and discovering Slovenian literary writers and works that meet Chinese cultural needs and have an impact similar to Kundera, it is not impossible.

In the field of philosophy, Slavoj Žižek is already a successful example in China. According to searches on CNKI, there have been 1,199 journal and thesis papers about Žižek in China from 2002 to 2024. Žižek has gained widespread attention and recognition in the Chinese academic community and among readers for his profound philosophical thoughts and unique cultural criticism perspectives. This success indicates that further promotion and acceptance of Slovenian literature and thought in China is possible and has a great potential.

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Sto let sinizacije: širjenje in recepcija slovenske književnosti na Kitajskem

Ključne besede: slovenska književnost / literarna recepcija / Kitajska / prevodi / kulturna izmenjava / medkulturna komunikacija

Slovenska književnost je na Kitajskem obravnavana kot del jugoslovanske književnosti v širšem okviru vzhodnoevropske književnosti, njen prenos in recepcija pa sta trajala več kot stoletje. Ta proces lahko razdelimo na tri faze: obdobje pred sredino 20. stoletja, obdobje od petdesetih let 20. stoletja do začetka 21. stoletja in obdobje od drugega desetletja 21. stoletja naprej. Vsaka od faz odraža spremembe v kitajski družbeni, kulturni in politični krajini ter različne pristope k prevajanju in kulturnim dejavnostim. V prvi fazi so kitajski bralci slovensko književnost dojemali kot »književnost majhnih narodov«, ki je odsevala tedanja družbena vprašanja in nacionalne okoliščine. V drugi fazi je bila slovenska književnost obravnavana kot »socialistična književnost« in »književnost tretjega sveta«, pri čemer se je prevodna dejavnost osredotočala na dela, ki so prikazovala družbene boje in dosežke. V tretji fazi je začela kitajska literarna veda na novo vrednotiti raznolikost vzhodnoevropske literature, slovenska literarna dela pa so postopoma pridobivala vpliv v kitajski družbi. Članek raziskuje procese prevajanja, prilagajanja in kulturne izmenjave slovenske književnosti na Kitajskem ter poudarja njeno pomembno vlogo pri spodbujanju kulturnega razumevanja med Kitajsko in Slovenijo. Poudarja tudi potrebo po prihodnjih prizadevanjih za krepitev kulturnih izmenjav in sodelovanja med državama, ki bodo spodbujala globalno kulturno raznolikost.

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