

Franz Kafka's Reception in New China: 1949-2010

Zeng Yanbing
(Beijing)

Abstract: A close examination of the contributions and problems of Kafka studies over the sixty-year period of New China can facilitate our research on foreign literature on the whole. While the earliest mention of Kafka in China was made by Shen Yanbing in 1923, Kafka studies, in its true sense, did not start until 1979. Being relatively late to initiate the work, China's Kafka studies demonstrate her own features. Firstly, the critics, from a scattered and broad range of backgrounds, are self-conscious and consistent. Secondly, the alienation theme and comparative methods have been given considerable weight. Lastly, since 1990s academics have borrowed various theories and methodologies from psychology, sociology, religious studies, narratology, semiology, structuralism, post-structuralism, and feminism, to analyse his fiction, creating a new climate in China's Kafka scholarship. However, there are also inadequacies in this area, namely, a lack of broad vision and limited, and sometimes even repeated, theses.

Franz Kafka (1883-1924), an eminent Austrian writer, is regarded as an "eccentric genius" in European literary world, a great master and an explorer of western modernist literature. Joyce Carol Oates (1938-), a contemporary American writer and critic, points out that Kafka is one of the best writers in the 20th century, "who has already become a legendary and saintly hero; as W. H. Auden said in 1941, Kafka stands in the same relation to his century as Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe do to theirs".¹ Owing to this brief remark on Kafka, later a few Chinese scholars keenly discovered and noted the outstanding writer. Generally speaking, the studies of Kafka in China could be divided into three stages: before 1949, 1949-1979, and 1979-2010; yet real substantial studies on him started in 1979.

1 Before 1949

For quite long Kafka was unfamiliar to Chinese readers. As far as I know, it was Shen Yanbing (沈雁冰) who first mentioned Kafka's name in his essay *Modern Writers in Austria* published in the column *News from Overseas Liter-*

¹ Joyce Oates, *Kafka's Paradise*, in: See Ye Tingfang (ed.), *On Franz Kafka*. Beijing 1988, p. 678.

ary *Arena*, *Fiction Monthly*. He wrote, “the authors, from the extreme modernists, to Paris von Guttersloh, Franz Kaffka (sic), Emil Alphons Rheinhardt, and to Franz Werfel, were all lyric poets and could be considered the founders of expressionistic operas”.² Apparently, Shen’s knowledge about Kafka was quite limited since he translated *Kafuka* (卡夫卡) as *Kasika* (卡司卡) and viewed him as a “lyric poet” and a “founder of expressionistic operas.” As one of the greatest writers in the twentieth century, Kafka was little known to the world and very little of his work was published during his life time. The first French edition of Kafka’s works was published in 1928, already four years after his death. After World War II, Europe, having had a nightmare, finally found Kafka’s value and significance, and a passion for reading and researching Kafka emerged. Under such circumstances, Chinese scholars and readers hardly had an opportunity to specifically note and study Kafka, except for occasionally mentioning him when introducing European expressionism. This was perhaps why Shen wrote about Kafka.

This situation almost continued for the next two decades. In Zhao Jingshen’s (赵景深) essay *The Latest German Literary Circles*, *Fiction Monthly* 21. 1. (1930), over 500 characters were devoted to Kafka. This time the writer’s name was translated as *Kafujia* (卡夫加), and there was still incorrect information. *The Trend of Modern German Fiction* written by Jacob Wassermann, a German writer, was translated by Zhao Jiabi (赵家璧) and published in *Modern* (现代, vol. 5, no. 2, 1 June 1936); in the section *Jewish Writer Kaofujia*, Kafka was rendered as *Kaofujia* (考夫加) and the introduction of him was unclear. In 1944, Sun Jinsan (孙晋三) published his essay *Starting with Franz Kafka* in *Times and Tide Literature* (时与潮文艺, vol. 4, no. 3, Chongqing), which could probably be the first essay specifically devoted to introducing Kafka. Kafka finally got his Chinese name – *Kafuka* (卡夫卡) – that has been used until now. Apparently, at this moment, the “Kafka boom” swept Europe and America had drawn Chinese attention, who had acutely sensed the value and significance of Kafka. From then on, China saw a few sporadic comments on Kafka without specialized articles, which could be ignored in terms of the studies on Kafka. In 1948, extracts from six entries from Kafka’s diaries, translated by Ye Rulian from French appeared in *Social Welfare Tientsin*.³ According to the materials available to me up to now, these entries, perhaps, were the earliest translation of Kafka, or the only translation before 1949.

² Shen Yanbing, *Modern Writers in Austria*, in: *Fiction Monthly*, 10 (1923).

³ Kafka, *Intimate Diaries*, in: Ye Rulian (translated and ed.), *Social Welfare Tientsin*, 110 (1948), p. 6.

2 1949-1979

During the thirty years from 1949 to 1979, there were few translations of Kafka or relevant studies in China. *A Brief History of German Literature*, edited by Feng Zhi (冯至), published by People's Literature Press in 1958, and a revised edition in 1959, did not mention Kafka. Years later, Yang Wuneng elaborated on this situation, "neither textbooks nor lectures for the undergraduates majoring in German mentioned his name at all; in an influential literary history book published in 1958, there was not even a word criticizing him".⁴ Regrettably, Kafka's name did not show in *European Literary History* (vol. 2) printed in 1979 either. The cause is primarily ideological or political. Since China was then most concerned about proletarian literature, socialist literature, and Left-wing literature, and Kafka was regarded as a representative writer of Western capitalist Decadentism, his value and significance was scarcely mentioned unless as a "negative example".

Indeed, the Writers Publishing House published Kafka's *The Trial and Others* in 1966, translated by Li Wenjun and Cao Yong. Albeit this collection of fiction was then taken as a "negative example" "for internal reference only" – available only to very few professionals – it was the sole translation and introduction of Kafka in mainland China at that time. It consists of his novel *The Trial* and five short stories: *The Judgment*, *The Metamorphosis*, *In the Penal Colony*, *A Country Doctor*, and *A Report to an Academy*, *The Original Editor's Note* by Max Brod and *About Kafka* by Ge Ha and Ling Ke also included.

About Kafka, written in November 1965, should be the single essay about him in mainland China between 1949 and 1979. With the evident ideological connotation, its main idea appears so detached that it seems as if a whole generation has passed, but the historical significance and value of the essay should not be neglected. It states the point from the very beginning, "Franz Kafka (1883-1924) was a modern writer of Decadentism ... a founder of European and American modernist literature, who was crazily worshiped by European and American bourgeois literary circles in 1940s and 1950s." "Kafka's works are full of uncanny and weird things ... What he portrays are all his idiosyncratic imaginations, meaning the spiritual states of schizophrenia or fantasies in nightmares ... Considering all his writing, however bizarre and absurd are his plots, we can still see that he was totally a decadent writer, an extremely subjective idealist. Opposing to reason, he regarded the world as unknowable ... Against resistance and revolution ... he was extremely hostile to revolution and regarded the mass as the stupid ... He also viciously noted, 'at the end of each true revolutionary movement, a Napoleon would arise ... The flow becomes slow and turbid as it floods; after the

⁴ Yang Wuneng, *The Reception of German-language Literature in China: The Case of Kafka*, in: *Comparative Literature in China*, 1 (1990), p. 63.

tide of revolution, what is left is just the mud of new bureaucracy.” All in all, “in the fight against modern bourgeois literature and against modern revisionist literature, it is an important project to thoroughly criticise Kafka.”⁵

This collection of Kafka’s fiction was translated from the English version of “Penguin Books” by Li Wenjun and Cao Yong, two experts on British and American literature. As to the translation of this book, Li later recalled, “I learned Kafka and his significance through the works of the British poet Auden. I found a lot of things that were new, unique to us in Kafka’s writing, who was worthy to be introduced to China to broaden our horizons. But open publication of texts like his were not allowed in China then, so by following my advice we managed to publish that ‘yellow-cover book’⁶ by Kafka.” That is to say, Li knew about Kafka’s importance by reading Auden. Coincidentally, in 1982, Qian Mansu and Yuan Huaqing also quoted Auden in their preface (written in 1981) to their translation from English of Kafka’s novel *The Trial*: “Kafka stands in the same relation to his century as Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe do to theirs ... Kafka is of crucial importance to us, for his predicament is just the one of modern people”.⁷ W. H. Auden (1907-1973), paying a visit to China during the Second World War, expressed the notion in 1941 that Kafka could be compared to Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe, which was later quoted by Oates, and which had certain influence in China.⁸ Yang Wuneng later mentioned an interesting phenomenon: “the initiating translators of Kafka in China were not specialists in German culture like us, but those in British and American literature such as Li Wenjun, Tang Yongkuan (汤永宽) and Qian Mansu, by whom almost all the major works by Kafka were translated into Chinese. It was because that Britain and America attached earlier and greater importance to Kafka than German-speaking countries....” In other words, on entering China, Kafka escaped the notice of our scholars in German culture.⁹ To sum up, “on his arrival in China, Kafka registered at the entrance of Chinese literature world without being noticed, let alone notable impacts that he might have had.”¹⁰

⁵ Ge Ha / Ling Ke, *About Kafka*, in: *Franz Kafka, The Trial and Others*, translated and ed. by Li Wenjun / Cao Yong. Beijing 1966, pp. 394-399.

⁶ “Yellow-cover books” in 1960s and 1970s refer to those “for internal reference only” rather than open publications (translator’s note).

⁷ Qian Mansu / Yuan Huaqing, *Preface*, in: *Franz Kafka, The Trial*, translated and ed. by Qian Mansu / Yuan Huaqing. Changsha 1982, pp. 2-3.

⁸ Oates’s essay was translated into Chinese and published in *Foreign Literature and Art* 2 (1980).

⁹ Yang Wuneng, *ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

¹⁰ Ye Tingfang, *The Journey towards Kafka’s World*, in: *Literary Review*, 3 (1994), p. 115.

3 1979-2010

Since 1979 China has seen a golden age of the translation, introduction, research, reception, and spread of Kafka, with a long-lasting and continuously rising “Kafka boom”. The research results of Kafka in China since 1979 are as follows: translating and publishing *The Complete Works by Franz Kafka*, over 100 collections, and separate editions of Kafka’s texts; translating and publishing *On Franz Kafka*, a compilation of articles written by western commentators, as well as several other monographs by overseas academics; translating and writing about a dozen Kafka’s biographies; publishing over 10 monographs on Kafka by Chinese scholars; publishing over 1000 papers on Kafka and 420 master and doctoral dissertations; which sufficiently demonstrate that Kafka studies in China have become a distinguished field.

In 1979 *World Literature* published *The Metamorphosis* translated by Li Wenjun, as well as *Kafka and His Works* written by Ding Fang and Shi Wen. The latter should be the first essay in the mainland that appraises Kafka thoroughly, systematically, and objectively. It seems that the recent memory of China’s Culture Revolution still haunted the authors that they did not sign their real names. In fact, Ding Fang is Ye Tingfang, a leading Kafka expert in China, and Shi Wen is Li Wenjun. Ye said to me on April 7, 2001 that Kafka came to his notice in 1964. He wrote, “in 1964, serving as editor of *Modern Literature and Art Theories* for internal reference, I began to be aware of Kafka’s name. Then, however, not only Kafka’s writing but even the excellent works such as Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s *The Visit* were all published as ‘negative examples’, thus I hardly dared to explore them”.¹¹ With China’s reform and opening up since late 1970s, however, people, eager for fresh air, were no longer satisfied with the dominant realist literature, and found Kafka’s unique style startling and confusing. At this moment, to translate and study Kafka was undoubtedly to go along with the historical tide. The essay *Kafka and His Works* has four parts: *introduction of the writer, major works, a solitary person and a strange world, and stylistic features*; it aims at “a preliminary introduction of Kafka’s life and his major works.” Their evaluation of Kafka appeared merely as a tentative balloon: Kafka did not belong to traditional realism, hence we should not assess him by the traditional criteria. He “deepened the ‘excavation’ of social reality, and expanded the potential of art.”¹²

Since then, the translations of Kafka’s texts have appeared in the form of books and in all major magazines. *Selected Stories by Franz Kafka*, edited by Sun Kunrong, printed 9001 copies (Foreign Literature Press, 1985), and re-

¹¹ Ye Tingfang, *The Awakening of Modern Aesthetic Consciousness*. Beijing/Hefei 1995, p. 2.

¹² Ding Fang / Shi Wen, *Kafka and His Works*, in: *World Literature*, 1 (1979), pp. 242, 255.

printed 6700 copies two years later, contains 20 short pieces — almost all the major short stories by Kafka. In the preface Sun affirms Kafka's value and position in literary history: "Franz Kafka, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust are the founders of western modernist literature." Meanwhile, he points out, "admittedly, Kafka's fiction is of high cognitive values, providing us with a deep understanding of the inhuman, decayed part of western capitalist society. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the bourgeois ideology he advocated or showed throughout his works is completely incompatible with socialist spiritual civilization; as to his artistic means, we could never blindly copy or simply imitate him".¹³ The editor's note of "Social Issues Proposed by Kafka's Fiction" written by Paul Reimann, a critic from German Democratic Republic, published in *New Perspectives on World Literature* 12 (1980), said, "Kafka, an Austrian amateur author, unnoticed during his life time, has been attracting more and more attention from western literary world over the past three decades, now considered a great master of modernist literature and the greatest German writer in the twentieth century. In the first half of 1950s while the 'Kafka boom' was spreading over western countries, the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries resisted it. But after 1957 the 'east line' of Kafka boom was broken through; many Marxist critics have also given positive reviews on Kafka."¹⁴ In the same year, on his visit to China, Hans Mayer, a renown literary critic and literary historian from the Federal Republic of Germany, was asked who was the most important modern German writer in this century. Immediately responded him, "No. 1 Franz Kafka, No. 2 Thomas Mann, and then Brecht. ..." His claim electrified the audience.¹⁵ Later on, Kafka's soul showed everywhere across China, in all kinds of literary and art magazines. At the end of 1981, Qian Mansu's passionate essay *Franz Kafka's Arrival in China* claimed that after lingering over the world for over half a century, Kafka had finally "settled down" in China.¹⁶

Therefore, we can conclude that the studies of Kafka in China actually began at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s.¹⁷ During the period between

¹³ Sun Kunrong, Preface, in: Sun Kunrong (Hg.), *Selected Stories by Franz Kafka*. Beijing 1985, pp. 1, 19.

¹⁴ Paul Reimann, *Social Issues Proposed by Kafka's Fiction*, in: *New Perspectives on World Literature*, translated by Yu Kuangfu, 12 (1980).

¹⁵ Ye Tingfang, 1994, *ibid.*, p. 116.

¹⁶ Qian Mansu, *Franz Kafka's Arrival in China*, in: *World Books*, 12 (1981).

¹⁷ The translation and studies of Kafka started twenty years earlier in Taiwan than in the Mainland. At the end of 1950s, the students in the department of foreign languages at Taiwan University, such as Bai Xianyong (白先勇), Chen Ruoxi (陈若曦), and Ouyang Zi (欧阳子), introduced Kafka in their journal *Modern Literature*, with a special issue on Kafka in 1960. At that time Kafka came into the sight of Taiwan together with Sartre, Camus, and existentialism, but few outstanding achievements emerged in Taiwan's studies of Kafka.

1979 and 2009, China has gained substantial accomplishments in this realm. Kafka is not only one of the most popular and influential of foreign authors for Chinese academics, but has a profound impact on China's creative writing in the new era. Besides, Kafka's fiction is included in the textbooks for middle school students, being read by thousands of common readers. As of now, Kafka has almost become a fashionable, modern, complex, and paradoxical culture symbol, appreciated, if not sought after, by numerous readers. This is, perhaps, beyond Kafka's expectation. I will elaborate on these materials one by one.

On the basis of sporadic and extensive translation of Kafka's works, *The Complete Works by Franz Kafka* (10 vols.), edited by Ye Tingfang, a distinguished expert of Kafka in China, was published by Hebei Education Press in 1996. This was the first "great event" in our Kafka studies, marking the depth and maturity of China's Kafka scholarship. Shanghai Yiwen Press came up with *The Works of Franz Kafka* (4 vols., 2002), and People's Literature Press *Collected Fiction by Franz Kafka* (3 vols., 2004). *A Great Artist One Day: Franz Kafka as a Pictorial Artist*, an album of pictures by Kafka, edited by Niels Bokhove and Marijke van Dorst, was translated and published by Beijing SDX Joint Publishing Company in 2010. Additionally, various translations of Kafka's texts have amounted to over a hundred.

Ye Tingfang had edited *On Franz Kafka* (1988) for eight years since early 1980s, "compiling the materials about Kafka written by overseas critics through 70 years"¹⁸, which is of great significance to China's Kafka studies since it lays the foundation of the latter. (It is a pity that over two decades we have not published any new compilation of papers from international Kafka studies.) During this period the scholarly books we translated and published are the following: D. V. Zatonyskiy, *Franz Kafka and Modernism*, Foreign Literature Press, 1991; Herbert Kraft, *Die Romane und Erzählungen Franz Kafkas*, Peking University Press, 1994; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* The first part of it is *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Zhang Zujian (张祖建), Hunan Literature and Art Press, 2007; Karla Reimert, *Kafka für Eilige*, trans. Ji Jianmei (姬健梅), Taipei: Business Weekly Publications, Inc., etc.

In 1987 China Federation of Literary and Art Circles Publishing House came up with a translation of the biography of Kafka by Ōki Mino¹⁹, a Japanese scholar, initiating the translation and publication of Kafka's biographies in China. Subsequently Kafka's biographies are as follows: Klaus Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, Beijing October Literature and Art Press, 1988; Ronald Hayman, *K, a Biography of Kafka*, China Writers Publishing House, 1988; Max Brod, *Franz Kafka*, Hebei Education

¹⁸ Ye Tingfang, 1988, *ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁹ Translated from Japanese with the original title unverifiable (note of the translator of this paper).

Press, 1997; Yoshihiko Hirano, *Kafka: Topos of the Body*, Hebei Education Press, 2002; David Mairowitz, *Introducing Kafka*, Culture and Art Publishing House, 2003; Daniel Desmarquest, *Kafka et les Jeunes filles*, Henan People's Press, 2005; Nicholas Murray, *Kafka*, International Culture Publishing Company, 2006; Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka: A Very Short Introduction*, Yilin Press, 2008; Steve Coats, *Franz Kafka (Beginner's Guide)*, Dalian University of Technology Press, 2008; Sander L. Gilman, *Franz Kafka*, Peking University Press, 2010, and so on. By the way, there have been three different translations of Max Brod's *Franz Kafka*.

Furthermore, Chinese scholars have also produced Kafka's biographies, for instance: Ye Tingfang, *Kafka: The Father of Modern Literature*, Hainan Press, 1993; Yang Hengda (杨恒达), *Searching the Castle at a Loss: A Biography of Kafka*, Shanghai World Publishing Corporation, 1994; Yan Jia (阎嘉), *Rebellious Character: Kafka*, Changjiang Literature and Art Press, 1996; Lin Hesheng (林和生), *The Tenderness in the Inferno: Kafka*, Sichuan People's Press, 1997; Yang Hengda, *Franz Kafka*, Sichuan People's Press, 2003. Yang Hengda et al. also edited an easy-to-understand book *The Metamorphic Castle: A Guide to Kafka's Works*, Shanghai World Publishing Corporation, 1999.

Academic monographs written by Chinese scholars are as follows. Ye Tingfang, *An Explorer of Modern Art*, Flower City Publishing House, 1986; *The Awakening of Modern Aesthetic Consciousness*, Huaxia Literature and Art Press, 1995; and *Kafka and others*, Tongji University Press, 2009. Jiang Zhiqin (姜智芹), *The Mirror of the Other: Kafka and Chinese Fiction in the New Era*, China Federation of Literary and Art Circles Publishing House, 2001. Zhang Tianyou (张天佑), *The Parable of Autocratic Culture: Interpreting Luxun (鲁迅) and Kafka*, Gansu People's Press, 2003. Zeng Yanbing, *Kafka and Chinese Culture*, Capital Normal University Press, 2006. Luo Fan (罗璠), *A Comparative Study of the Fiction by Canxue (残雪) and Kafka*, People's Press, 2006. Hu Zhiming (胡志明), *Phenomenology of Kafka*, Culture and Art Publishing House, 2007. Zhang Yujuan (张玉娟), *The Schema of Kafka's Art World*, Zhejiang University Press, 2009. Zeng Yanbing, *A Study of Kafka*, The Commercial Press, 2009. It is notable that Canxue, recognized as an eccentric female writer in Chinese Literary circles, published a great book specially devoted to interpreting Kafka, *The Castle of Soul: Understanding Kafka*, Shanghai Literature and Art Press, 1999. Plus informal writings about Kafka: Gefei (格非), *Kafka's Pendulum*, East China Normal University, 2004; Zhang Hong (张闳), *A Pendulum, or Kafka*, Fujian People's Press, 2010.

From 1979 on, over 1000 papers on Kafka published in mainland China have mainly focused on the following fields: the issue of Kafka's sense of belonging, the basic characteristics of Kafka's writing, studies on his major texts, Kafka's relationships to other writers, especially to eastern writers. Fredric Jameson, a contemporary American theorist, remarks that the subject matter of Kafka "seems generally to fall into one of the following options: the Oedipus complex or at least the guilt of subalternity; bureaucratic dicta-

torship or the dystopia of modernity; or, finally, God and our relationship to him or to his absence".²⁰ These three themes are also what Chinese reviewers have been concentrating on, merely with a slightly different order of concerns from their western counterparts.

Over the three decades a lot of Chinese scholars working on Kafka have emerged. There are senior experts, the first translators and researchers of Kafka in China: Ye Tingfang, Li Wenjun, Tang Yongkuan, Cao Yong, Sun Kunrong, Xie Yingying, Qian Mansu, Li Qi (黎奇), Hong Tianfu (洪天富) and so forth. There is also a passionate, persistent middle-aged group: Zeng Yanbing, Zu Guosong, Ji Tong (冀桐), Hu Zhiming, etc. Still others, promising young scholars: Jiang Zhiqin, Zhang Yujuan, Zhao Shankui and so on. Besides these professionals, some writers also love and study Kafka, such as Canxue, Yu Hua (余华), Gefei, and Lin Hesheng. In addition to their creative writing, they have produced a lot of essays and even books in a unique style commenting and interpreting Kafka. Also, a myriad of amateurs contribute their opinions and reviews on Kafka to newspapers and periodicals.

We may say that it is rather late for China to initiate its Kafka studies in the late 1970s, compared with the studies of other foreign writers, but we have already had a stable research team with a comparatively high starting point at a high level and from a wide range of backgrounds. Over the three decades China and even the world have witnessed our remarkable achievements in Kafka criticism. Generally speaking, China's Kafka studies have the following features:

First, the researchers, from a scattered and broad range of backgrounds, are self-conscious and consistent. They did not set up a so called "Association for Kafka Studies" and hardly organised any particular Kafka conference, but all tirelessly read and study Kafka in their own areas, gaining abundant results. There are mainly the following scholars who have been working on Kafka in a long term: Ye Tingfang, Sun Kunrong, Xie Yingying, Li Qi, Hong Tianfu, Hu Zhiming, Jiang Zhiqin, Zhao Shankui, Zeng Yanbing, etc. Ye Tingfang, a well-known Kafka expert in China, the editor of *On Franz Kafka* and of many other collections of Kafka's texts, has published a dozen papers and several books on Kafka since 1979. *The Complete Works by Kafka*, edited by Ye in 1996, marked the depth and maturity of China's Kafka studies. Ye's path of studying Kafka basically represents China's research process as a whole, from the initiation, development, to maturity. We may say that without Ye's ground-breaking work, it would be hard to imagine China's Kafka studies. For years, Ye "scrutinized each part that consists the whole Kafkaesque personality from the perspectives of ethnopsychology, history-culture, modern ethics, life philosophy, tragic aesthetics, among oth-

²⁰ Fredric Jameson, *The Modernist Papers* by Fredric Jameson, translated by Su Zhongle / Chen Guangxing / Wang Fengzhen. Beijing 2010, p. 145.

ers....” He also summarizes the general style of Kafka’s art expression: “real, detailed description in an absurd framework; visual symbols, fables, and metaphors; dream-recorded fantasies; remarkably eccentric renderings; ironic paradoxes; unshowy simplicity...”²¹

Li Qi, Sun Kunrong, Xie Yingying, Hong Tianfu, among others, have also written weighty articles on Kafka. Li Qi, who later joined the foreign service and could hardly spare any time for more research work, wrote *A Primary Exploration of Kafka*, (*Foreign Literature Studies* 3) as early as 1980 and translated a large number of Kafka’s works with Ye Tingfang. Sun Kunrong wrote *Kafka’s Fiction*, *Journal of Peking University*, 2 (1983), and *About Kafka’s “The Trial”*, *Foreign Literatures* (国外文学) 4 (1984). Xie Yingying wrote *Realism in Absurd Fantasies: Kafka, a Controversial Modernist Writer*, *Foreign Literature* (外国文学) 2 (1981), *Kafkaesque: Kafka’s Works and Reality, Kafka’s Reception across the World*, both in *Foreign Literature* 1 (1996), as well as other influential Kafka papers in China. In 2005, she published *The Power Pattern in Kafka’s “The Castle”*, *Foreign Literature Review* 2. Hong Tianfu wrote *On Kafka’s novel “Amerika”* in 1982 and translated a lot of Kafka’s texts. After publishing *Being Stuck? On Kafka*, *Journal of Xiangtan University* 2 (1993), Zeng Yanbing wrote a series of papers on Kafka. Among the articles above, some points of Xie Yingying, who summarizes the unique art world Kafka created as “the Kafkaesque”, are especially impressive. She traces the etymology of the word “Kafkaesque”; “to sum up, Kafkaesque refers to Kafka’s writing style in the dimension of literature, besides which, it generally means that one, manipulated by an incomprehensible and uncontrollable power, finds herself or himself in an absurd and mysterious situation that could not be explained by reason or logic, full of fear, anxiety, confusion, and fury, but could do nothing and sees no way out; the manipulation power, in a random, ubiquitous, and shapeless manner, originates from the great, complicated institution, by which man is oppressed and to nowhere they could appeal”.²² In 1990s a new group of Kafka critics arose, such as Zeng Yanbing, Hu Zhiming, Zu Guosong, Ji Tong, Jiang Zhiqin, and Zhao Shankui, who all wrote series of Kafka papers, revitalising China’s Kafka scholarship.

In addition, Canxue, a contemporary Chinese woman writer, has come up with quite an idiosyncratic commentary on Kafka, intensively reflected in her influential book *The Castle of Soul: Understanding Kafka*. Canxue explains and demonstrates Kafka’s texts totally in a personal fashion, which lets readers surprise at her acuity, intelligence, and personality, and meanwhile doubt whether she is interpreting Kafka or constructing a Kafka in her own mind. After all, is she reading the fiction or writing a piece of that? Readers really get a bit puzzled by her book.

²¹ Ye Tingfang, 1994, *ibid.*, p. 119.

²² Xie Yingying, *Kafkaesque: Kafka’s Works and Reality*, in: *Foreign Literature*, 1 (1996), pp. 41-47.

Secondly, concentrating on comparative methods. We may say that from the very beginning comparative perspectives have been emphasized in China's Kafka studies, which is inseparable from the rise and development of China's comparative literature discipline. As early as 1982, in *A New Reflection on "The Cricket"* Fang Ping conducted a comparative study on Pu Songling's (蒲松龄) *The Cricket* and Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. The author points out, "the counterpart of 'man's metamorphosis into a cricket' can only be found in the twentieth century's European modern literature, that is, 'man's metamorphosis into a monstrous insect' in *The Metamorphosis*. The two echo each other, both uncovering the tragedy of man's 'alienation' in the unreasonably social systems." It is meaningful that Fang Ping's subtitle is *Comparative Literature is Comparative Thinking*.²³ Zhang Zhongzai (张中载) published *Zhuang Zhou's Dreaming of Becoming a Butterfly and Gregor's Transformation into a Monstrous Insect* in 1998. Since then comparative studies on Kafka have continued. About half of the research books on Kafka mentioned above are comparative studies, such as Jiang Zhiqin's *The Mirror of the Other: Kafka and Chinese Fiction in the New Era*, Zhang Tianyou's *The Parable of Autocratic Culture: Interpreting Luxun (鲁迅) and Kafka*, Zeng Yanbing's *Kafka and Chinese Culture*, and Luo Fan's *A Comparative Study of the Fiction by Canxue and Kafka*.

In the comparative study of *The Metamorphosis* and *The True Story of Ah Q*, Hu Runsen articulates that the two "remarkably share a common philosophical connotation—alienation; more remarkably, the two are different that 'The True Story of Ah Q' mainly a realist story, describes from an objective point of view man's alienated situation in society—Ah Q's alienation as a silly, indifferent peasant in the feudal village Wei—and *The Metamorphosis*, mainly an expressionistic tale, reveals from a subjective angle man's experience of self-alienation".²⁴ Hu Zhiming also does a comparative study of the two texts from the perspective of "fear".²⁵ Xie Jiaju compares *The Metamorphosis* with the *Book of Job*, arguing that the two vary in the following respects: forms of alienation; subjective feelings of the alienated; the writers' creative inclinations; artistic means "the former pursuing similarity in appearance versus that in spirit in the latter".²⁶ Comparing *The Metamorphosis* and *Rhinocéros*, Yang Rong says, "the former's alienation is partial, the latter's complete; the former shows a personal metamorphosis, without others', while

²³ Fang Ping, *A New Reflection on The Cricket*, in: *Reading*, 11 (1982), p. 126.

²⁴ Hu Runsen, *A Comparative Study on the Philosophical Connotations in The True Story of Ah Q and The Metamorphosis*, in: *Journal of Yantai University*, 4 (1991), pp. 80-86.

²⁵ Hu Zhiming, *Poetics of Fear: A Comparative Study on The Metamorphosis and The Diary of a Madman*, in: *Journal of Shandong University*, 6 (2000), p. 4-27.

²⁶ Xie Jiaju, *The Loss of Human Nature and the Motif of Alienation: A Comparative Study of the Book of Job and The Metamorphosis*, in: *Journal of Shanghai Institute of Education*, 4 (1996), pp. 26-30, 43.

the latter everybody's, not individual, metamorphosis; the former displays Gregor's personal transformation and pain, the latter a metamorphosis of society, that is, man's self-denying subjectivity, and without pain; the person who transforms in the former feels lonely, while in the latter the one without transformation lonely".²⁷ Comparing *The Castle* with *Fortress Besieged* (围城), Zeng Yanbing and Chen Qihong note that the two novels have strikingly similar themes, and that their differences reveal the two writers' utterly different life styles, personal characters, cultures, and modes of thinking of the East and the West.²⁸

Third, applying new theories and methodologies to Kafka studies from new perspectives. From the very beginning, unsatisfied with studies simply from social and historical angles, researchers usually directly borrowed Marx's "alienation" theory or other relevant theories for elucidation. With regard to *The Metamorphosis*, for instance, academics "generally think that it is an emblematic work, expressing the theme of 'alienation'".²⁹ "The value of *The Metamorphosis* is that it demonstrates both the literary technique of transformation and the theme of alienation, which, as a result, becomes the first work most vividly rendering this theme".³⁰ The most outstanding criticism in this aspect should be Ye Lang's *Kafka, an Illustrator of the Alienated Conception of History*, arguing that the essence of the "Kafka boom" in the West is an "alienation boom". Kafka is titled as a "literary genius", the "father of modern literature", and even as a "legendary hero" and a "saint"; most fundamentally because he is an illustrator of the alienated conception of history.³¹ Later studies, adopting the theory of alienation to interpret Kafka, could hardly surpass this one.

After 1990s, casting the theory of "alienation" aside, academics have borrowed various theories and methodologies from psychology, sociology, religious studies, narratology, semiology, structuralism, post-structuralism, and feminism, to analyse this novella, creating a new climate in China's Kafka scholarship. Some commentators attempt to interpret Kafka from the standpoint of psychology or psychoanalysis. According to Dong Hongjun, "we should first learn Kafka, the person, and his rich, characteristic inner world prior to understanding his works." "Neither to objectively reflect the

²⁷ Yang Rong, A Comparative Study on the Similarities and Differences between *The Metamorphosis* and *Rhinoceros*, in: *Foreign Literatures*, 4 (1996), pp. 72-77.

²⁸ Zeng Yanbing / Chen Qihong, A Comparative Study of Qian Zhongshu's *Fortress Besieged* and Kafka's *The Castle*, in: *Literature and Art Studies*, 5 (1998), pp. 60-69.

²⁹ Zi Wei, Seriousness Embedded in Absurdity: A Reading of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, in: *Foreign Literature Studies*, 1 (1980), pp. 101-104.

³⁰ Guo Xianggeng / Dai Jinglun, A Literature Review of Kafka Studies in China, in: *Foreign Literature Studies*, 2 (1983), pp. 132-135.

³¹ Ye Lang, *Kafka, an Illustrator of Alienated Conception of History*, in: Dept. of philosophy (ed.), *Studies on Humanitarianism and Alienation*. Beijing 1985, p. 186.

reality, nor to depict an ideal state, his writing purely aims to express his strong subjectivity and deep inner feelings".³² Undoubtedly, psychological trauma during his childhood played a vital part in the formation of Kafka's character. "His family life that constrained and defied the normal growth of children distorted and formed Franz's individual mind at different degrees; meanwhile, it shaped the author Kafka's mental modal with a sensitive temperament and lonely character".³³ For Zhao Shankui, "Kafka's *Letter to His Father* is a parasitical autobiography. Kafka's complicated understanding of the origin of his self-determines the deep structure of this work's narration".³⁴ Another recent paper in this respect is Zhou Hefa's (周何法) *Franz Kafka's Tendency of Masochism and Its Cause*, *Foreign Literature Review* 1 (2005).

Some academics illustrate Kafka from the standpoint of existential philosophy. Ang Zhihui, for example, says, "Kafka's fiction, aphorisms, letters, diaries and other writing could be summarized as a large work, focusing on the theme of man's living predicament in a loose form." Kafka "lived for proving the truth of life, the true form of life, and its meaning. Kafka performed his life as a book on existential philosophy".³⁵ Another reviewer argues what Kafka tried to prove was not so much life than death; he "upgrades the sense of death in literature to a new high in art through his special life experience and fictional literary interpretation." "His portrait of the sense of death is not only an exploration of his mental world, but also an indispensable inner part that consists his fiction's structure".³⁶ A third scholar straightforwardly concludes Kafka's writing experience as follows: "fear occupied his soul, solitude dissolved in his life, and death being his final 'nirvana'".³⁷

Still other reviewers perform Kafka studies from the standpoint of religious studies or religious culture. For instance, Sun Caixia discusses Kafka's relationship to Bible and Christianity in her papers *The Loss of Religious Spirit: On the Theme of the Irony of Bible in "A Country Doctor"*, *Foreign Literature Studies* 3 (2000), *Kafka's Religious Meditation in His Essay "My Talk with a Farmer"*, *Journal of Zhongzhou University* 2 (2004), and *A Fable of Last Judgment*:

³² Dong Hongjun, A Sharp Axe Breaking Up the Icy Sea in His Heart: A Brief Account on Kafka's Psychology and Writing, in: *Journal of Shanghai University*, 1 (1994), pp. 37-41.

³³ Yuan Qingfeng, Kafka: Solitude, Sensitivity, Creation, in: *Journal of Hengyang Normal University*, 2 (1996), pp. 64-67.

³⁴ Zhao Shankui, Writing Autobiography through "Father": An Interpretation of Franz Kafka's *Letter to His Father*, in: *Foreign Literatures*, 2 (2010), p. 151.

³⁵ Ang Zhihui, A Soliloquy of an Unyielding Soul: On Kafka's Attempt of Proving Life, in: *Foreign Literature Review*, 4 (1996), pp. 69-76.

³⁶ Zu Guosong, The Consciousness of Death in Kafka's Fiction, in: *Academic Exchange*, 2 (1997), pp. 109-111.

³⁷ Zhou Dingyu, Fear Occupied His Soul, Solitude Dissolved in His Life: On Kafka's Mental Course of Writing, in: *Journal of Xiangtan Normal University*, 5 (1999), pp. 78-81.

A Biblical Reading of Kafka's "In the Penal Colon", *Foreign Literature Studies* 4 (2005). In Sun's opinion, "a non-Christian as Kafka was, he was quite familiar with Christian thoughts ... His attitude towards Judaism and Christianity influenced his creative writing, that is, he blended the thoughts from the Old Testament and those from the New Testament when borrowing bible stories, and reflected in his works his meditations on religious questions".³⁸ There are also Kafka studies from the perspectives of Judaism and Jewish culture: eg. Che Cheng'an (车成安), *Jew Complex in Kafka's Thought and Writing*, *Journal of Jilin University* 2 (1999); Zeng Yanbing, *The Singer of the "Mouse Kingdom": On the Relationship between Kafka and Jewish Culture*, *Foreign Literature Review* 1 (2003); Hu Zhiming, *An Extraordinary Original Sin: On the Origin of Jewish Culture in Kafka*, *Journal of Shanghai Normal University* 4 (2005); Feng Yalin (冯亚琳), *"Der Verschollene": A German Bildungsroman and a Jewish Historical Story*, *Journal of Sichuan International Studies University* 2 (2008), etc.

There are studies aiming at Kafka's narrative style and features from the angle of narratology. In the eyes of Huang Liaoyu, "the mystery of Kafka lies in his clear, peaceful, and tedious narration with a kind of thrilling and intriguing overtones, namely, the art of implication, such as symbolization and irony." The "overtones" actually refer to Kafka's "self-projective writing" and "tragicomic writing".³⁹ Analyzing *The Metamorphosis* in the dimension of narratology, Yan Baoping claims that the narrative structures of this novella mainly comprises: vertical structure, horizontal structure, language structure, and compound structure. "As one of the basic narrative forms, following the development of things happening in time order, vertical structure delineates the realist tragedy of the protagonist Samsa, uncovering the social fact that capitalist production relations change man to pure accessories to material life and finally completely discard them." "Horizontal structure, with an order of characters' action in different spaces, is the externalization of the narrative subject's consciousness and a way of releasing the subject's spirit." "The fundamental crux of thinking activities manifested in the language structure of Samsa and Kafka is the split between subjective and objective worlds, and the division between spirit and practice." "Compound structure, as the overall form of the narrative structure of the text, is a unity compounded of time, space, life, and art, intertwining with each other, and is a spider-structural mode filled with distinctive narrative language".⁴⁰ Luo Fan's *Kafka and the Presentation of Narrative Dimensions of Modern Fiction*, *Foreign Literature Studies* 3 (2006), is another study in this category.

³⁸ Sun Caixia, *Western Modernist Literature and the Bible*. Beijing 2005, pp. 206-207.

³⁹ Huang Liaoyu, *Kafka's Overtones: On the Narrative Style of Franz Kafka*, in: *Foreign Literature Review*, 4 (1997), pp. 60-66.

⁴⁰ Yan Baoping, *A Commentary on the Narrative Structures of The Metamorphosis*, in: *Foreign Literature Studies*, 3 (1992), pp. 128-131, 45.

In conclusion, Kafka's impact on contemporary Chinese readers and writers is deep and comprehensive, which, of course, has driven China to translate and study him, which has further promoted Kafka in China as well. Initially, Kafka's influence on Chinese writers was his art world, an absurd and realistic world; then, Chinese writers were soon interested in his idiosyncratic ideas and artistry; and then, people came to see his personal experience and character, finding that his character integrating into his works; at last, Chinese scholars found that Kafka had long been yearning for Chinese culture, who read a lot about Chinese culture and also wrote about it, so Chinese authors have a sense of *déjà vu* toward Kafka. Over the past three decades, despite considerable fruits in China's Kafka scholarship, there are many problems, such as the unstable group of researchers, limited and sometimes even repeated topics, a relatively lack of broad vision and of original points, and so forth. Nonetheless, since within 30 years Chinese scholars have developed the studies of Kafka to a certain scale, made our voice heard to the world, and won a place for ourselves, there is every reason to believe that we will overcome our inadequacies, deepen and evolve China's studies on Kafka in the long run.

(Translated by Hu Qiuran)