

The Tradition of Chinese-Dutch Literary Translation in the Era of Globalization*

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1. Introduction

To define the concept of "globalization" in connection with translation, I refer to Michael Cronin and Anthony Pym. Cronin uses the term "in the sense of critical theory of globalization that encompasses global movements and exchanges of people, commodities and ideas, and a politico-historical approach to changes in global processes" (Cronin 77), while Pym explains that

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globalization "results from a progressive reduction in the costs of communication and transport" and goes on "here, globalization will be no more than a set of things that can happen when distance becomes easier to conquer" (Pym 745). It seems that this is the kind of circumstance that the development of the translation of Chinese literature into Dutch has experienced and which will be discussed here in the context of Chinese studies in the Netherlands and the colonial background of the Dutch East Indies. Often the paratexts to translations, in particular the preface, introduction and afterword, reveal the motives for performing the translation. Against the historical context over a span of about three centuries, changes in the identity and aims of the translators and/or publishers can to some degree be detected as well as an obvious increase in accessibility to Chinese literature.

2. Dutch Translations of Chinese Literature

Although Sino-Dutch relations date back to the sixteenth century, it would take until the 1970s before the numbers of Dutch translations of Chinese literature finally increased to form a significant body. A collection of Confucian sayings entitled "Eenige Voornamen eygenschappen van de waren Deugd, Voorsichticheydt, Wijsheydt en Volmaecktheydt. Getrokken uit den Chineeschen Confucius, en op Rym gebracht" [Some major characteristics of true virtue, circumspection, wisdom and perfection, derived from the Chinese of Confucius and put into rhyming verse] published in 1675 is so far identified as the earliest Dutch translation of an original Chinese text. It was translated by Pieter van Hoorn (1653-1711) who had travelled to Peking from 1666-68 and when a friend of his presented him with a Latin collection of Confucian sayings containing largely statements from the *Lunyu* (論語, Analects), he translated a selection of it into Dutch verse. As eminent Professor Wilt Idema (1944-), translator and currently professor of Chinese literature at Harvard

University indicates, it did not make much of an impact and although "The Dutch during the eighteenth century were very much interested in Chinese material culture and chinoiserie, [but] very little was published about China" (Idema 2003 214).

2.1 Eighteenth and nineteenth-century educators

In 1767 a work identified as the second Dutch translation of the anonymous novel *Haoqiu zhuan* (好述傳, Pleasing history) was published under the lengthy title *Chineesche Geschiedenis, behelzende de lotgevallen van de heer Tieh-Chung-U en de jongvrouw Shuey-Ping-Sin. Nevens het Kort Begrip van een Chineesch Tooneelspel, eenige Chineesche Dichtstukjes, en eene Verzameling van Spreekwoorden der Chineezen* [A Chinese romance, about the adventures of the gentleman Tie Zhongyu and the young lady Shui Bingxin, together with a short summary of a Chinese play, some Chinese poems, and a collection of Chinese proverbs]. The identity of the translator is not known but sources show that the work was translated from an English version.¹⁾ The foreword by the Dutch publisher informs us that there was a genuine interest in Chinese works at that time and it puts an emphasis on its originality and the benefits of reading it.

Het gene 't volgende Werk inzonderheid waarde byzet, is gewisselyk de zekerheid dat het in China oirsspronklyk gesschreeven is. (..) Het leezen van dit Werk heeft dan zyne nuttigheid; en daarenboven heeft het ook zyne byzondere aangenaamheid. (...), het behaagt door zyne nieuwhed en vreemdheid. [A special asset to this work is that we can assure with

1) The English translation by Thomas Percy was published in 1761 in four volumes under the title *Hau Kiou Chooan or the Pleasing History, a Translation from the Chinese Language, to which are added, i. The Argument or History of a Chinese Play, ii. A Collection of Chinese Proverbs, and iii. Fragments of Chinese Poetry* [Cheung 29].

certainty that it was written originally in China. (...) Reading this work is useful and it has its pleasures too. (...), it is pleasing because of its novelty and peculiarity.] (Anonymous 3) ²⁾

Over the next few decades more relay translations emerged, both novels and philosophical works however, it took until 1896 when finally a direct translation was published. At this point the historical context is necessary to understand what led to it. In the former Dutch colony of Indonesia, Chinese immigrants had settled since the early seventeenth century. By the mid-nineteenth century, this Chinese population had grown to a total of 200,000, while their activities had increased and secret societies had been set up. The Dutch colonial administration, aware of the huge part of revenue that the Chinese were contributing to the nation's coffers and a growing assertiveness among the Chinese, raised the need for interpreters. Leiden set up a centre to train students to become Chinese interpreters, and consequently Chinese Studies was established in Leiden with Gustaaf Schlegel (1840-1903) appointed to the chair in 1874.

Among the early students was Henri Borel (1869-1933), who finished his studies in 1892, left for Xiamen in China to study the southern dialects and was appointed in 1894 as Chinese interpreter in the Dutch colony of Indonesia. The duties of a Chinese interpreter mainly consisted of providing written and oral translations for judicial and administrative authorities, supplying information and advice concerning Chinese to the head of the local administration and accompanying heads during inspection visits. ³⁾ Borel, who appreciated the values of Chinese philosophy, recognized the need for the Dutch, especially those in the colonies, to read the Chinese classics. Hence, he

2) The translations of quotes are mine.

3) Later the duties were expanded and the post was renamed "Advisor for Chinese Affairs," including more complex social issues such as the investigation of Chinese secret societies and Chinese prostitution, the observation of Chinese labour and migration flow, and advice on appointing Chinese officers.

started his series "Chinese Philosophy for Non-sinologists" in three volumes. In the introduction of the first volume which included the *Daxue* (大學, Great learning), *Zhongyong* (中庸, Doctrine of the mean) and a selection of the *Lunyu* (論語, Analects), Borel explains:

Is het mij gelukt, daardoor deze leer [van Confucius] in hoofdzaak bij het groote publiek in ruimen kring zóó bekend te doen zijn, dat het goed kan begrijpen de moraal, de gewoonten en gebruiken van het chineesche element in onze koloniën, dan zal mijn doel bereikt zijn. [If I succeed in conveying the essence [of Confucian thinking] to the general public so that it may understand the morals, habits and customs of the Chinese in our colonies I have achieved my goal] (Borel 5).⁴⁾

At that time in the late nineteenth century, China was at a distance of two months by ship away, the image of China was created by telescopic view, and figures such as Borel were regarded as "China Experts."

2.2 From the early to mid-twentieth century: communicators of Chinese exoticism

For classical Chinese fiction in the early decades of the twentieth century, the Dutch audience was almost entirely reliant on renderings via other European languages. Popular were the novels adapted from the German version by the productive translator Franz Kuhn (1884-1961). His first title translated into Dutch was *Levenswijsheid uit China* (Life wisdom from China) and contains two short stories from the *Jingu Qiguan* (今古奇觀, Strange Tales Old and New) and a selection of *Dong-Zhou Llieguo Zhi* (東周列國志, Chronicle of the States of Eastern Zhou) published in 1928. Next was a Dutch rendering

4) Volume two was the complete translation of the *Daodejing* (道德經), which was published in 1897, while the third volume containing the near-complete translation of *Mengzi* (孟子, Mencius) was published in 1931.

of *Shuihu Zhuan* (水滸傳, Outlaws of the Marsh) which was in two volumes: *De roovers van het Liang Schan Moer* (The bandits of the Liangshan swamps) and *Soeng doolt naar de roovers* [Song Jiang joins the bandits], published in 1935 and 1936. Many of the poetry collections published in that period were also relay translations via French and German. An influential case was Dutch poet Jan Jacob Slauerhoff (1898-1936), who visited China as a naval medical official and published his poetry collection *Yoeng Poe Tsjoeng* (用不中, Of no use) in 1930. As Slauerhoff explains in the preface:⁵⁾

De verzen van deze verzameling zijn uit het Fransch, Duitsch, Engelsch, of rechtstreeks uit het Chineesche landschap overgebracht met vermijding van de zijden gewaden, rozen, maneglans, die men in andere zoo overvloedig vindt, met een voorkeur voor bitterheid van het leven, in China overvloediger gevonden en met meer nuchterheid beleden dan bij ons. Voor de liefhebbers van het poëtische, voor de dwepers met het Oosten is zij dus: Yoeng Poe Tsjoeng (van geen nut). [The poems in this collection have been rendered from the French, German and English versions, or directly from the Chinese landscape, avoiding the silk dresses, roses, and moonlight, which are found in such great quantity in other collections, and preferring the bitterness of life, encountered in greater quantity in China than elsewhere, and acknowledged there with greater common sense than in our parts. For lovers of things poetic and aficionados of the East, it is Yoeng Poe Tsjoeng. (of no use)] (Pos 9).

In 2003 Idema made a remark about the influence of Slauerhoff to the effect that his poems "still shape their expectations concerning Chinese poetry. Due to Slauerhoff's liberal infusion of violent sentiments into his sources, they often experience other translations as insipid and flat" [Idema 2003 225]. This

5) At the time of writing this paper the original poetry collection by Slauerhoff was not at hand. The quote is from a compilation entitled *Dronken in de Lente: de Chinese gedichten van J. Slauerhoff* dating from 1993, which contains the poems with the original Chinese version and other translations as sourced by the editor.

seems to imply that Slauerhoff's poems exude an exotic flavour which more recent translations lack, as they are more loyal to the original.

In the 1940s, after the end of World War II and the Indonesian struggle for independence, the intake of new students was low. In an interview for *China Nu* (China now) (1999) renowned Dutch sinologist Professor Erik Zürcher (1928-2008) recalls the circumstances of his switch from Egyptology to Sinology in 1947:

De overgang viel niet zwaar, want ik kon mijn fascinatie voor hiërogliefen inruilen voor een nog exotischerschrift en een bijna net zo oude cultuur. En ik had het vooruitzicht althans één lotgenoot te hebben, want door mijn komst was het aantal eerstejaars verdubbeld. Het tweede jaar was niet veel groter, en het totale aantal studenten zal niet meer dan vijftien zijn geweest. (The transition was not difficult at all as I was able to exchange my fascination for hieroglyphics for another even more exotic script and a culture almost as ancient. I also had the prospect of having at least one companion, because my arrival would double the number of first year students. The number of second year students was about the same, and I estimate that the total number of students would not have exceeded fifteen.) (China Nu 4)

During the mid-twentieth century, from the 1940s till the 1960s relay translations continued to appear. Among the many poetry collections was Hart van Jade [Heart of Jade], published in 1959. The translator Willem Brandt (1905-1981) indicates in the afterword that he based his renderings on English and German versions by Robert Payne, Arthur Waley, S. Obata, Hans Bethge and Klabund. In the third expanded edition which was published in 1978 ⁶⁾ the preamble indicates:

De dichter Willem Brandt heeft bijna dertig jaar in het Verre

6) An expanded second edition had been published in 1964.

Oosten doorgebracht. Zijn poëzie is als resultaat daarvan sterk door oosterse motieven beïnvloed. Zijn aanrakingen met Chinagaven hem het gevoel van een bijzondere affiniteit ten aanzien van de klassieke Chinese lyriek, waarvan hij vele verzenherdicht heeft. Volgens deskundigen komen zijn herdichtingen het origineel op onnavolgbare wijze nabij. De criticus Jan Elemans schreef o.a. in het Eindhovens Dagblad: "Wie van literaire verfijning houdt zij deze uitgave met warmte aanbevolen: het is een bres in de Chinese muur." (The poet Willem Brandt has spent almost thirty years in the Far East. Hence his poetry is heavily influenced by Asian themes. His contact with China gave him a special affinity with classical Chinese lyricism and he has reworked many poems. According to experts his adaptations follow the original inimitably closely, e.g. critic Jan Elemans wrote in the Eindhoven Daily: "This collection is warmly recommended to those who enjoy literary refinement: it is a niche in the Chinese wall") (Brandt 1978).

The fact that Brandt's poetry collection was reprinted twice shows its good reception. Like Slauerhoff, Brandt also contributed to increased access to Chinese poetry. Idema points out 'Chinese poetry was not only appreciated for the beauty of its images but also because it was believed to provide access to the wisdom of the Orient' (Idema 2003 226). It was this exotic beauty and mysterious wisdom that made Chinese poetry popular, and this was introduced mainly through relay translations during this period.

2.3 Literary specialists from the 1980s till present

From six new students in 1970 to 39 in 1980, the number reached a peak in 1986 with 90 new students at Leiden. This was probably the result of China opening up in the 1980s, which offered the opportunity to study and travel in China, and the shift from classical Chinese to an increased focus on modern China in Leiden's curriculum.

Among the increased number of graduates were translators who were able to translate directly from Chinese into Dutch. The dominance of relay

translations slowly decreased in the 1970s until eventually in 1988, the number of direct translations exceeded relay translations (Heijns 251). This fact was also reiterated by Wilt Idema and Lloyd Haft in their Chinese Letterkunde, Inleiding, Historisch Overzicht en Bibliografieën [Chinese Literature: introduction, historical overview and bibliography] which provides an overview of the history of Chinese literature:

Dit boek is geen bloemlezing, het feitenrelaas wordt niet verlevendigd door vele excerpten in vertaling. Zelfs lezers die zich tot Nederlandse vertalingen moeten of willen beperken, kunnen tegenwoordig via directe vertalingen kennis nemen van werken in uiteenlopende genres. [This book is not an anthology; this factual recount is not enlivened with excerpts from translations. Even readers who must or wish to limit themselves to Dutch translations can in present day time become acquainted with a wide range of genres from direct translations] (Idema & Haft 16).

It is striking how they put the emphasis on the availability of direct translations implying the previous lack of it. This excellent introduction to Chinese literature fulfilled a long-term need and was translated into the English language and published as *A Guide to Chinese Literature* in 1997. An updated edition in Dutch entitled *Chinese letterkunde: een inleiding* was published in 1996 and was reprinted in 2005.

Besides the increased output of anthologies of short stories and poetry in the 1990s, other factors such as the annual Rotterdam International Poetry Festival to which Chinese poets are invited, popular Chinese movies and the prestigious Martinus Nijhoff translation prize awarded to Wilt Idema in 1992, contributed to a wider exposure to Chinese literature. In 1996, sinologists from the Netherlands and Belgium initiated the publication of the literary journal *Het Trage Vuur* (Wenhua 文火 or The slow fire), which aimed to provide readers of the Dutch language as well as Dutch publishers with a sample of Chinese literature without bowing to commercial exoticism, relying instead on literary

quality alone. In the introduction to issue 0 (1996) the editors explain:

Er verschijnen de laatste tijd steeds meer Nederlandse vertalingen van Chinese literatuur, maar desondanks is die literatuur grotendeels nog onbekend terrein voor het Nederlandse publiek. Het Trage Vuur hoopt daar enige verandering in te brengen: het tijdschrift wil de Vlaamse en Nederlandse literatuurlijefhebbers in hun eigen taal rondleiden door het Chinese literaire landschap. [Although in recent years an increasing number of Dutch translations of Chinese literature have appeared, Chinese literature is still unfamiliar territory to the Dutch public. Het Trage Vuur hopes to change that: its aim is to guide the Flemish and Dutch lovers of literature into the Chinese literary landscape in their own language] (Het Trage Vuur 3).

In the introduction of issue 1 (October 1996) the title *Het Trage Vuur* is explained as a time-consuming and complicated Chinese culinary preparation of ingredients like bear feet, adding that the literal meaning of the character wen is "literature" and "literary" hence the title embraces the aim of the literary journal: "to keep a modest but steady Chinese flame simmer in Dutch and Flemish literature." It is worth noting that this indicates integration in the local culture.

As Idema notes in his introduction to his anthology of classical Chinese poetry *Spiegel van de klassieke Chinese poëzie* [Mirror of classic Chinese poetry] published in 1991, we not only learn about a foreign cultural tradition through translation, we also become more aware of our own:

Wie de moeite neemt zich vertrouwd te maken met de eigenaardigheid van een andere culturele traditie, wordt zich tevens beter bewust van de eigenaardigheid, en dus beperktheid, van de eigen culturele traditie. De zin van vertalingen ligt voor mij niet in de bevestiging van de eigen culturele traditie maar in de doorbreking daarvan. [Those who make the effort of familiarizing themselves with the peculiarity of another cultural tradition will at the same time become more aware of the peculiarity and

thus limitations of their own cultural tradition. To me the purpose of translation is not the confirmation of our own cultural tradition but rather the breakthrough of it] [Idema 1991 14].

In his most recent poetry collection *Transparante Tranen* [Transparent tears], Idema claims that though he is addicted to translation, at the same time he finds his translations are for the reading public:

Ook al is die voortdurende drang om te vertalen vooral een persoonlijke behoefte, toch wil ik de resultaten van mijn vertaalwerk daarna ook publiceren: individuele zelfbevrediging verandert daardoor op slag in maatschappelijke dienstverlening, omdat de hoogtepunten van een vreemde literatuur toegankelijk worden gemaakt voor Nederlandse lezers.[Although this constant urge to translate is a personal craving, I do wish to publish the results of my translation work: individual self-gratification therefore at once turns into a social service because the peaks of a foreign literature are made available to the Dutch reader] (Idema 2008 8).

However, Idema also stresses that it is his hope that each poem ‘will contribute in its own way to a more thorough and deeper knowledge of classical Chinese poetry’ (Idema 2008 9). It is clear that as translator and literary specialist, Idema attaches great importance to the wider understanding of Chinese literature—classical poetry in particular.

After decades of a regular flow of Chinese literary works to the Dutch public, in an age where access to information is readily available and the travel distance to China is reduced, the Dutch reader has the chance to appreciate Chinese literature for its literary quality.

3. Globalization

From the early narrow telescopic view of China, the public now has a

much broader view of China and Chinese literature. Over time an increasing number of new translations in Dutch have been published, turning Chinese literature from an exotic ‘curio’ into a literary item intended to keep a Chinese flame simmer in Dutch and Flemish local literature.

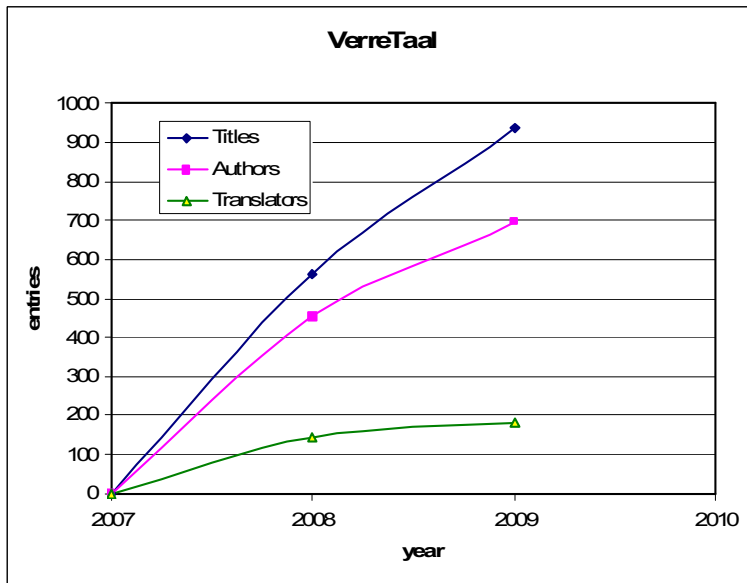
In addition to this, VerreTaal—an online database of Chinese literature in Dutch translation—was launched in March 2008, jointly undertaken by the Department of Chinese Studies and the Sinological Library at Leiden University, and the Research Centre for Translation at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.⁷⁾ As stated on the opening page of the website:

Using English as the interface language, it [the database] aims to provide a research tool for translation studies, (comparative) literary studies, (inter) cultural studies and area studies, Chinese studies, and other academic fields, and last but not least, the general reader and library user. The database lists Dutch-language, direct and relay translations of works originally written in Chinese (VerreTaal).

The database, which included only book titles when it was launched, is updated regularly and journal entries have also been added. It contains Dutch and Chinese data and is operated in the English language so as to increase accessibility and invite people from all over the world with different languages to use and contribute to it. Since the launch its contents have increased significantly as shown in the following chart: ⁸⁾

7) The Department of Chinese Studies, Leiden University provided technical support to set up the database and financial aids for the editor to travel to Leiden to discuss the project. The RCT provided duty leave to the editor to visit Leiden and time to do research and gather data for the database.

8) These figures were obtained from the database in August 2009.



The number of title entries has grown from 561 to 934, while the number of authors has increased from 451 to 694. There has not been a huge increase in the number of translators, 181 up from 144 as new translations are often done by established translators who have published before and hence their names were already included in the database.

Also in the year 2008, the translator scholar Mark Leenhouts (1969-) published an overview of modern Chinese fiction in his *Chinese Literatuur van Nu: aards maar bevlogen* (Chinese literature today: earthly yet impassioned). It is written in a readable style for general readers, with Western parallels to relate to the work or author under discussion, e.g. he compares *Shen Congwen's* (沈從文) (1902-1988) nostalgic descriptions of his travel experiences with William Faulkner's writing, and refers to the authors *Zhu Tianwen* (朱天文, 1956-) and *Zhu Tianxin* (朱天心, 1958-) as the "Taiwanese Brontë sisters." The book also contains a list of selected titles of Dutch translations of Chinese fiction and refers to the URL of VerreTaal for other

titles.

In response to these developments, publishers increasingly invest in publications of translated Chinese literature and have signed contracts with translators for new titles that are forthcoming in the next few years, many on the initiative of the translator(s). On the list of new books to appear are the complete translation of eighteenth-century novel *Honglou Meng* (紅樓夢, The dream of the red chamber] by *Cao Xueqin* (曹雪芹, 1715-1763), the novel *Weicheng* (圍城, Fortress Besieged) by *Qian Zhongshu* (錢鐘書, 1910-) dating from 1947, the travel records *Lao Can Youji* (老殘流記, The travels of Lao Can) by Liu E (劉樵 1857-1909), the modern novel *Xiongdi* (兄弟, Brothers) by Yu Hua (1960-) and possibly a new translation of the *Lunyu* (論語, The analects) by Confucius. Also expected is a Dutch translation of the latest novel by Mo Yan (茅言 1955-) *Shengsi Pilao* (生死疲勞, Life and death are wearing me out), which probably is a relay translation from the English. As Mark Leenhouts points out a project such as *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is undertaken on the initiative of the translators "which shows that they can function as intermediaries not only between different languages and cultures, but also between the academic world and society at large." (Leenhouts 2008b). Again this confirms that the identity of the translator has become "literary specialist." They select works and make a proposal to the publisher not because the works are exotic or commercially viable, but purely because they are of high literary quality or because they are considered a Chinese classic. From this list of forthcoming titles it is encouraging to note that a wide range of works is to be published, both ancient classics and modern fiction, and the prospects for the future look promising.

4. Conclusion

This paper has examined the connection between Chinese literature in

Dutch translation and globalization. The development of Chinese-Dutch translations in social and historical context shows that "globalization," interpreted as "a set of things that can happen when distance become easier to conquer" influenced the identity of the translators since the eighteenth century until now and greatly increased accessibility to Chinese literature.

The early translations with a purpose to educate and introduce "novelty and peculiarity" have laid a foundation for a basic understanding of Chinese literature. The second phase has brought along a sense of exoticism of Chinese literature to the Dutch reader. The third phase building forth on the existing, earlier translations focuses on introducing Chinese literature mainly for literary quality alone.

Since the number of Chinese-Dutch translations has grown into a significant body, Chinese literature has shed its "curio" identity and as the number of translators that can translate directly from Chinese into Dutch has increased, works for translation are mainly selected on the basis of their literary merits.

Access to Chinese literature has recently been facilitated by an online database of Chinese literature in Dutch translation and the publication of an overview of Chinese modern literature. New translations of Chinese literature are under contract and are due to appear in the next few years. It will be worthwhile to maintain a close observation and report on the future developments of Chinese literature in Dutch translation.

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Het Trage Vuur [see www.tragevuur.com]

VerreTaal [see unileiden.net/verretaal]

[Abstract]

**The Tradition of Chinese-Dutch Literary
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The main focus of this paper is on the evolving identity of Dutch translators of Chinese literature over the period of the late eighteenth century till now. Roughly they can be divided into eighteenth and nineteenth-century educators of Chinese classics with a relatively clear purpose of informing the reader; early to mid-twentieth century communicators of Chinese culture were mainly "relay" translators who translated via other European languages to introduce the Chinese 'exotic' culture to the Netherlands which previously had good reception abroad; and most recently an increasing number of specialists who are introducing works merely for their high literary quality without considering their commercial or exotic value. To probe into the connection between Chinese literature in Dutch translation and globalization, this paper analyzes its development in the social and historical context, illustrated with paratexts from the translations.

▶ Key Words: Chinese literature, Dutch translation, globalization, paratexts, relay translation

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