

African Francophone Literature in China

YU Jingyuan

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, China

This paper delves into the current landscape of African Francophone literature in China. It begins by tracing the history of the French language in Africa and the emergence and development of African Francophone literature, and then provides an overview of the research achievements of African Francophone literature in China, including monographs, translated literary works and academic papers, highlighting the translation and research on the key African Francophone writers.

Keywords: translation, research, African Francophone literature, China

Emergence and Development of African Francophone Literature

French came to Africa in the footsteps of the French and Belgian colonizers, and was used only in sporadic trading posts and colonial settlements in the 17th century; in the 19th century, with the expansion of the colonial territory and the large-scale promotion of French language education by the colonizers, French gradually became the main lingua franca in North, West, and Central Africa, and it is still spoken today by about 140 million people in 31 African countries and regions. Among the African countries, French is spoken in Senegal, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Congo-Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, Rwanda, Central Africa, Togo, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Benin (formerly known as Dahomey), Niger, Burundi, Madagascar, the Comoros, Seychelles, Gabon (French, English), Equatorial Guinea (Spanish French, Portuguese), Chad (French, Arabic), Djibouti (French, Arabic), Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, Mauritius, and others.

The birth of Francophone African literature is relatively recent, having emerged mainly at the beginning of the 20th century, with the inaugural issue of the magazine *L'Université des Nègres*, published in Paris in 1934, marking the beginning of the history of Francophone African literature. Because the Maghreb region north of the Sahara and the French-speaking region south of the Sahara are quite different in terms of religious traditions, language, and culture, and the process of colonization and decolonization, the development of francophone literature in the two regions also presents a picture of interrelatedness, but with very different styles. Algerian literature, one of the most developed literature on the African continent, consists of both Arabic and Francophone literature.

Senegal and the Republic of the Congo have been colonized by France for nearly a century and 80 years respectively. France adopted the policy of assimilation and colonial domination of the local colonies, using French as a medium of transmission of French culture, promoting French education, and fostering local elites who are native speakers of French; therefore, the development of francophone literature in these countries is considered to be one of the most advanced in the African countries. Senegal is a country in Western Africa. It was first invaded by the Portuguese in the 15th century. In the 17th century, French colonizers also established a

YU Jingyuan, Ph.D., Institute of Foreign Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, China.

colony in the north, in Port St. Louis, and successively marginalized the Portuguese and took over the country, assigning it to French West Africa. It was not until August 21, 1960 that the country declared its independence. For historical, social, and geographic reasons, Senegal has long been a center of modern literature in Francophone Africa and in Black Africa as a whole.

General Study of Francophone African Literature in China

The only monograph on the general study of Francophone African literature in China is Peng Hui's *Biculturalism in West African Francophone Poetry: The Case of Léopold Senghor, Tchicaya U'Tamsi and Tati Loutard* (西非法语诗歌中的双重文化——以桑戈尔、乌·塔姆西和塔蒂·卢塔尔为例) (2021), which investigates the collision between traditional and foreign cultures, in the poems of the three Francophone poets, to feel their anxiety about the loss of language and their persistent struggle to build up their own cultural discourse, and to get a glimpse of the subtle psychological process, unique aesthetic interests, and avant-garde exploratory spirit of the people of sub-Saharan Africa represented by Senegal and the Republic of the Congo, so as to help readers better understand the unique cultural identities of the three poets.

Representative academic papers that center on the general studies of Francophone African literature include the following:

“Translation of Francophone African Literature in China” (Wang, 2015) points out that the Francophone African literature, as an important part of world Francophone literature, began in the first and second decades of the last century, and was introduced to China from the 1950s onwards. The translations of the 1950s and 1960s were clearly politically oriented and mainly served political propaganda. In the 1970s and 1980s, in addition to translations of anti-colonial literature, translations of collections of political essays and works by women writers also appeared one after another. Since the 90s, the translation of French literature has gradually declined in comparison with African English literature. Generally speaking, the translation of African Francophone literature in China has a wide range of achievements, but there is still the problem of lack and imbalance.

“Challenging the Real With the Fictional: An Overview of Francophone African Literature in 2020” (Li, 2021) focuses on the Francophone African literature in 2020, where Francophone African writers have constructed their “African Imagination” with different ways of thinking and creation. Francophone African Literature in the last decade has been fruitful, and in 2020, Francophone Africa produced important literary works in over 10 countries and regions, by writers such as Youssouf Amine Elalamy of the older generation, as well as the new writers like Ga ële B ðem. The three hot topics in Francophone African literature are: novels reflecting on history and exploring the relationship between the present and the past; uprooted migration novels; and coming-of-age novels.

“Colonialism and Reconstruction of National Identity: A Historical Examination of Francophone Literature in Africa in the 20th Century” (Tian, 2022) analyzes Francophone African literature in the Maghreb of North Africa and in sub-Saharan Africa, pointing out that Francophone literature in both regions began under French colonial rule, and that the reconstruction of national identity is a common concern for both. However, due to differences in religious traditions, languages, and cultures, and the processes of colonization and decolonization, Francophone literature in the two regions presents an interrelated yet stylistically different picture. Starting from the expressiveness and influence of important writers, the paper examines the history of 20th-century Francophone literature in the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa, respectively, in a socio-political context, in an attempt to present an overview of the development of Francophone literature in Africa.

“Francophone Literature in Africa and the Changes in the World Literary System” (Yuan, 2023) discusses the relationship between Francophone African literature and world literature, pointing out that during the 100 years of the development of Francophone African literature, Francophone African literature has long been integrated into the world literary system. It has not only formed its own history, but also changed the face of the world literary system based on the historical and geographical dimensions in the past one hundred years. Francophone African literature is not a local literature created out of thin air; it is both a product and a symptom of the globalization of literature, and from the time of its creation to the present day, it has increasingly manifested itself as a phenomenon of the world. In its relationship with world literature, Francophone African literature is certainly far from the so-called center, but the border between the periphery and the center has been blurred by the impact of Francophone African literature.

Writers Study of Francophone African Literature in China

Specifically speaking, the important francophone writers that have transported into China include L'opold S'alar Senghor (1906-), the father of the Senegalese nation; Samb'ani Usman (1923-), a writer who denounced the evils of the African colonizers; and the poet David Diop (1966-), the first French-speaking writer to win the International Booker Prize; Mohammed Dib (1920-2003); Ferdinand L'opold Oyono (1929-2010), among others.

L'opold S'alar Senghor dominated the Francophone poetry scene in Senegal. As Senegal's founding father and leading poet, Senghor was an inspiration to generations of African writers and thinkers, and the “Negritude” movement, of which he was one of the main initiators. His literary works include *Chants d'ombre* (1945), *Hosties noires* (1948), *Éthiopiennes* (1956), *Nocturnes* (1961), and *Élégies majeures* (1979), etc. China has translated his collection of poems in the 1980s (Cao & Wu, 1983).

Ousmane Sembène is a Senegalese novelist and filmmaker, known as “the Father of African Cinema”, and has been widely translated in China. Sembène taught himself to read and write in French and in 1956 published his first novel, *Le Docker noir*; the works that followed were *Ô pays, mon beau peuple!* (1957), *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960), a volume of short stories titled *Voltaïque* (1962), *L'Harmattan* (1964), and *Xala* (1973). Sembène participated in the First Asian-African Writers' Conference in 1958 and came to China for a friendly visit, and his famous poem *Ô pays, mon beau peuple!* was introduced to China in 1961, translated by Li Xing and published by China Writers' Press, and *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* was introduced to China in 1964, translated by Ren Qisheng and Ren Wanying and published by China Writers' Press. His other translated poems were mostly published on *World Literature* in 1963 and 1964 (translated by Xie Zujun, Tie Xian, and Mei Shaowu, respectively).

David Diop was Senegal's most talented poet of the 1950s. *Coups de pilon* (1956), his only surviving collection, was introduced into China in 1964, translated by Zhang Tiexian and published by China Writers' Press.

Mohammed Dib was an Algerian novelist, poet, and playwright, known for his early trilogy on Algeria, *La Grande Maison* (1952), *L'Incendie* (1954), and *Le Mâtier à tisser* (1957), which were introduced into China by translators Zhou Yangxi and Hao Yun in 1959. Dib's later novel *Un Été africain* (1959) was selected, translated, (by Lü Jing) and published on *World Literature* in 1960.

Ferdinand Oyono was a French-speaking Cameroonian writer whose two best-known works—*Une Vie de boy* (1956) and *Le Vieux Nègre et la m'aille* (1956) were introduced into China in the 1950s and 1980s (the

former has two translations, one by Chen Boxiang in 1984, the other by Li Shuangqiu in 1985; the latter was translated by Wang Chonglian in 1959).

Apart from the above mentioned writers, there are other writers whose literary works were translated into Chinese, such as Mamadou Coloco's *Storm Over Africa* (An, 1964) and *What I Love* (Lan, 1980), Malek Haddad's *La Dernière impression* (Shi, 1962), Assia Djebar's *Les Enfants du nouveau monde* (Xiao, 1978) and *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (Huang, 2013), Mouloud Mammeri's *L'Opium et le bâton* (Ding, 1985), Tahar Ben Jelloun's *La Nuit sacrée* (Huang, 1988), *Le premier amour est toujours le dernier* (Ma, 2011) and *L'Homme rompu* (Wang, 1984), *Allah n'est pas obligé* (Guan, 2011) by Amadou Kourouma from The Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, *L'attentat* (Miao, 2016) by Algerian writer Yasmina Kadeha, *Meursault, contre-enquête* (Liu, 2017) by Algerian writer Kamal Daoud and *2084* (Yu, 2017) by Boualem Sansal, Congo writer Alain Mabanckou's *Mémoires de porc-épic* (Liu & Wen, 2020) and *Demain j'aurai vingt ans* (Liu & Wen, 2017), *Petit Pays* (Zhang, 2018) by Gaëlle Faye, *Batouala* (Li, 2018) by René Maran, *Les Veilleurs de Sangomar* (Wang, 2022) by Fatou Diome, *Afrique, nous t'ignorons* (Fei, 1958) by Benjamin Matip, *L'Enfant noir* (Huang, 1984) by Camara Laye, *Une si longue lettre* (Wang, 2019) by Mariama Ba, etc.

Djibril Tamsir Niane is the specialist in the history of the Malian empire; his major literary achievement is the *Sundiata* (1960). There are two translations of *Sundiata* in China; one is translated by Li Yongcai (2003), and the other by Li Zhenhuan and Ding Shizhong (1965).

Representative academic papers on the representative African Francophone writers include the following ones: "Mariama, Une Si Longue Lettre" (Zhan & Pin, 1982), "Literary Jazz Musician Léonora Miano" (Zhou, 2018), "Women Fighters in the Shadows: Mariama Ba" (Wang, 2019), "A Test of African Poet Senghor's Rhetorical and Aesthetic Borrowings From the Greco-Roman Canon" (Shi, 2020), "Amadou Kourouma's Cultural Identity: An Example from *Allah n'est pas obligé*" (Yu, 2021), and "Images of China in Congo Inc." (Dai, 2022).

Conclusion

The study of African Francophone literature in China started late, but has developed rapidly in recent years, and a number of excellent scholars and research results have emerged. Chinese scholars mainly focus on the aspects of general study and writers study and have made fruitful achievements today, with numbers of monographs, academic papers, and translated literary works increasing. However, the study of African Francophone literature is still in its infancy in China, with the shortcomings of relatively few research results compared with African Anglophone literature, the restricted research perspectives, and the limited number of translated works.

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