Language, Migrancy, and the Literal: Ha Jin’s Translation Literature*

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Abstract
This article discusses translation literature in Ha Jin’s writing. It starts by examining the obvious disjunction between subject matter and language in Ha Jin’s writing. What is unique about Ha Jin is that his idiosyncratic use of English destabilizes some key concepts that are so relevant today, such as exile, diaspora, national identity, and language-based literature. Then, I venture to argue that he carves out a unique place in the field of émigré Chinese writing, and creates a form of what I would call translation literature. The literalness in Ha Jin’s play with languages not only creates a defamiliarizing effect and a sense of humor for his readers, but also reveals the absurdity of imprisonment of a language. Laying bare the linguistic confinement and, by extension, political constriction caused by a language, translation literature foregrounds the importance of migration of languages and deterritorialization of them, and thus destabilizes the categorization of national literatures that is still largely based on linguistic determinism. In all, Ha Jin’s writing provides us with a salient sample through which to reflect on literary production in an age so marked by border-crossings of all kinds.

Keywords
Ha Jin, translation literature, migrancy, language, literal

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