

# Echoes From the Sertão Across Linguistic Boundaries: A Study on the Chinese Translation and Reception of João Guimarães Rosa's Works (1949-2025)\*

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**Abstract**—This study examines the Chinese translation and reception of the works of the Brazilian literary titan João Guimarães Rosa. Employing a literature-based research approach that integrates academic research in both Chinese and Portuguese, historical translation data, publishing archives, and literary criticisms, it systematically charts the trajectory of the Chinese translations of Rosa's works from 1949 to 2025. Focusing on the socio-historical factors driving translation practices across different time periods, the analysis explores how different translators, publishing markets, and literary fields interact in the cross-cultural circulation of Rosa's works. By juxtaposing the distinctive linguistic features of Rosa's works with Chinese readers' reception preferences, this study reveals the changing logic behind the dissemination of Rosa's works in Chinese, from the single-title translation of *The Third Bank of the River* to their eventual canonization within the Chinese literary world. The study offers both theoretical insights and practical references for Sino-Brazilian literary exchanges and future research on the translation of Portuguese literature.

**Index Terms**—João Guimarães Rosa, literary translation, Sino-Brazilian cultural exchange, translation reception, translation history

## I. INTRODUCTION

Driven by the waves of globalization, economic, political, and cultural exchanges between China and Brazil have deepened steadily. Literature, a key medium for cultural interaction, has increasingly functioned as a bridge for enhancing mutual understanding and friendship between the two nations (Guerini et al., 2023; Xing et al., 2024; Zhang & Ye, 2025). Brazilian literature, distinguished by its unique regional-cultural identity and profound intellectual depth, has carved out a singular niche in the global literary arena, with its introduction into China through translation spanning over a century (Min, 2025). João Guimarães Rosa is unquestionably one of the major figures in Brazilian literature, internationally acclaimed for his penetrating portrayal of life in the Brazilian sertão (hinterland), his pioneering linguistic experimentation, and his deeply philosophical inquiries. However, compared to other Brazilian literary luminaries such as Jorge Amado or Clarice Lispector, the translation and scholarly examination of Rosa and his works in China remain relatively nascent. This phenomenon sits uneasily with both the deepening of Sino-Brazilian relations and Rosa's standing in world literature, rendering his case an anomaly in the history of Brazilian literature's Chinese translation.

At present, scholarship on Rosa is predominantly concentrated within Brazilian, European, and American academic circles, with a focus on his linguistic idiosyncrasies, narrative structures, and regionalism (Souza & Pereira, 2022; Rocha, 2023; Vital, 2022; Mandelbaum, 2021; Seligmann-Silva, 2009). Within Translation Studies, most research explores how translators interpret Rosa's works in the context of their global circulation (Mateus & Silva Júnior, 2023; Grossegeisse, 2021) and examines their reception within Anglo-American contexts (Borges de Faveri, 2009; Pisetta, 2020). What remains underexplored, however, are the socio-historical factors underlying the reception of Rosa's works across diverse cultural contexts. In China, despite the burgeoning interest in Hispanic and Portuguese (especially Brazilian) literature in recent years, scholarly attention has largely been confined to mapping the broader contours of their Chinese translations (Min, 2025; Lin, 2024; Lou, 2020). Research exclusively devoted to the translation and

\* This study was conducted as part of the Research Project RP/FLT-08/2022, funded by Macao Polytechnic University.

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reception of Rosa's works is still at an early stage, lacking a systematic account of how they have made their way into China and how they have been received by Chinese readers.

As Guerini et al. (2023) argue in their study of Sino-Portuguese literary translation, the process transcends mere linguistic conversion; it is an act of cultural transmission and exchange that necessitates a profound analysis of the cultural, historical, and social factors at work. Building on this insight, this study systematically charts the nearly half-century journey of Rosa's works being translated into Chinese since as early as 1977, thereby filling a critical research gap in the study of Rosa's Chinese translation and reception. By excavating the socio-historical factors behind various stages of translation practices and examining the roles played by translators, publishers, and literary critics in the process of receiving and canonizing Rosa's works, this study reveals the transcultural resonance between Rosa's linguistic characteristics and the Chinese cultural context, presenting fresh perspectives and theoretical insights for Sino-Brazilian literary dialogue.

This study is guided by three interrelated questions. First, what are the period-specific characteristics of the translation and reception of Rosa's works in China, and what are the socio-historical motivations behind each stage? Second, what roles do the Chinese translators, publishing houses, and literary critics play in the reception and canonization of his works, and through what mechanisms? Third, given the obvious distance between Rosa's distinctive language traits and the Chinese cultural-linguistic context, how has transcultural resonance been achieved, enabling Chinese readers to understand and appreciate his writings in depth?

To address these questions, the study primarily employs a literature-based research method by systematically collecting relevant academic monographs, scholarly articles, literary criticism, prefaces and postscripts of different translations, and publishing data. This approach allows for a thorough synthesis of Rosa's creative background, thematic concerns, linguistic features, and related research. Situating Rosa's Chinese translation and reception within the broader framework of Sino-Brazilian cultural exchanges, this study offers a rigorous analysis of the dynamics through which Rosa's works have been translated and received in China, laying a solid foundation for further research on the history of translation and reception studies.

## II. ROSA'S LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS AND THE INTERNATIONAL CIRCULATION OF HIS WORKS

### A. *Literary Characteristics: Sertão Writing and Linguistic Experimentation*

João Guimarães Rosa was born in 1908 in Cordisburgo, in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais. His literary style was deeply rooted in his experiences with the Sertão, the "hinterland" or "backcountry" of Brazil. In his childhood, he spent long hours in his father's grocery store listening to cattle herders, peddlers, and hunters recount tales of the wilderness, stories that would later find their way into his writing. As an adult, Rosa embarked on numerous expeditions into the sertão, navigating by canoe and trekking with cattle droves along riverbanks. He meticulously documented the flora and fauna, landscapes, folklore, and proverbs that he encountered in notebooks described as being "scarred and stained with cattle blood and horse sweat", raw materials that became the bedrock for much of his literary production.

Works such as *Grande Sertão: Veredas (The Devil to Pay in the Backlands)* and *Sagarana* are set against the backdrop of Brazil's northeastern sertão, depicting a rather mystical world of mountains, valleys, ravines, marshlands, and wastelands. In *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, Rosa follows the protagonist's wandering journey to reveal both the immensity and the enigma of the sertão, as well as the resilience and struggles of its inhabitants. His depictions of the natural landscape are strikingly precise and sensorial: "The sun, like an enormous ball of fire, hung above the endless wasteland, scorching the earth; every inch of land radiated heat, as if all things were on the verge of being reduced to ash." Such a distinct regional identity imbues his work with an evocative and quintessentially Brazilian atmosphere.

Linguistically speaking, Rosa is widely regarded as a radical innovator. He breaks with conventional Portuguese grammar, blending elements from multiple languages and various sertão dialects to create a vast corpus of lively neologisms, thereby forging a highly experimental mode of expression. In *O Léxico de Guimarães Rosa*, Martins (2021) catalogs many of these lexical inventions, including neologisms (such as *abelhar*, conveying the sense of "to give up," or *adormorrer*, a fusion of "to fall asleep" and "to die"), reduplicative formations (for example, *brisbrisar*, derived from *brisa*, meaning "a gentle waft of breeze"), creative reactivations of dialectal and archaic terms (such as *jagunço* and *vereda*, both specific to the backlands), as well as onomatopoeic constructions and semantic blends (for instance, *engenhingonça*, combining notions of ingenuity and makeshift crudity). These original terms do more than enrich Brazilian Portuguese; they endow the text with a profound poetic tension and vividly capture the lives and emotions of the sertão people, effectively conveying the unique nuances of their culture. The speech of Rosa's characters is imbued with a strong rural flavor - "That urge in my heart was like a flood bursting a dike; there was no containing it." Such vibrant, colloquial expressions bring his characters to life. In addition, his mastery of metaphor and symbolism lends his work deep philosophical weight. In *A Terceira Margem do Rio (The Third Bank of the River)*, for example, the river and the dugout canoe serve as metaphors for destiny, prompting the reader's sustained reflection on human nature and existence.

### B. *The Aesthetic Dilemma of "Untranslatability": Challenges in the International Translation of Rosa's Works*

Rosa was fluent in seven languages, literate in over ten, and had taught himself the grammars of a dozen more - endowing him with a remarkably acute understanding of translation (Lang, 2025, p. 4). In his correspondence with

translators, he frequently emphasized that translation is an arduous undertaking, particularly for his linguistically experimental works. While he acknowledged that certain sacrifices are inevitable for translators to preserve the core “poetics” of the original text, he also cautioned against oversimplification (Mateus & Silva Júnior, 2023). Writing to a German translator of his works, Rosa wrote, “Attempting to recreate the soliloquies of the sertão word-for-word, without losing an iota, would be an arduous and nuanced undertaking - of a Chinese-like extreme meticulousness (chinesamente minuciosíssimo). It is a difficult re-creation, costly, hazardous, and contingent” (Bussolotti, 2003, p. 113). The phrase “chinesamente minuciosíssimo” (meticulous to an extreme, in the Chinese manner) not only reflects his exacting standards for precision in translation but also suggests a keen insight into the profound differences between various linguistic and cultural systems.

Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa once described Rosa’s writing as “charged with power, ambition, and extraordinary linguistic genius - work that should have been won the Nobel Prize.” Yet it is precisely the radical linguistic experimentation and cultural specificity that make Rosa as one of the most authentically contemporary Brazilian writers that also pose formidable obstacles to the translation of his works beyond the Portuguese-speaking world (Mateus & Silva Júnior, 2023). Translators worldwide are frequently challenged by Rosa’s neologisms, idiosyncratic syntactic patterns, and dense regional references. Metaphors and symbols rooted in the lived realities of the Sertão, for instance, often lack ready equivalents in other cultural contexts, requiring translators to invest substantial effort in formulating strategies that balance the preservation of the original “flavor” with the readability required by the target audience. Broadly speaking, the international translation and circulation of Rosa’s work have been shaped by three persistent challenges: the rendering of region-specific cultural imagery (such as flora, fauna, and local customs of the sertão), the replication of linguistic experimentation, and the treatment of proper nouns, especially toponyms and anthroponyms.

In France, early translator Jean-Jacques Villard tended to reconstruct Rosa’s texts in standardized French, retitling *Grande Sertão: Veredas* as *Diadorim* and reducing the semantic density of key terms such as *Nonada* by translating them as *foutaises* or *bêtises*. Such choices resulted in the loss of the original’s rhythmic intensity and philosophical resonance (Faveri, 2009). By contrast, in later retranslations, Maryvonne Lapouge-Pettorelli followed Rosa’s own recommendations, prioritizing the preservation of the texts’ poetic and mythic dimensions and adopting a strategy of “French substitution plus annotation” for terms relating to flora and fauna. In Germany, Curt Meyer-Clason, working under Rosa’s personal guidance, sought to recreate the experimental quality of neologisms through syntactic restructuring, while nevertheless acknowledging that the rigidity of German grammatical norms constrained the transmission of certain effects (Mateus & Silva Júnior, 2023).

The difficulties encountered in Western translations of Rosa’s works resonate to a significant extent with those faced in the Chinese context. Chinese translators likewise confront the dual challenges arising from Rosa’s linguistic experimentation and deeply localized cultural references. On the one hand, dialectal expressions and neologisms rooted in the sertão often lack direct equivalents in Chinese (You, 2025, p. 303); on the other hand, Chinese readers are generally less familiar with Brazil’s sertão culture. Studies by Min (2025) and Lou (2020) both indicate that the Chinese translation of Brazilian and Latin American literature has long been shaped by the problem of “cultural distance”. The linguistic particularity of Rosa’s works further amplifies this challenge, which may help to explain, at least in part, the delayed reception of his works in China.

### III. THE HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY AND DRIVING FORCES OF THE CHINESE TRANSLATION OF ROSA’S WORKS (1949–2025)

#### A. *The First Stage (1949–1976): The Absence of Translation Within a Politicized Context*

##### (a). *The Translation of Spanish and Portuguese Literature Under Ideological Filtering Mechanisms*

From the founding of the PRC in 1949 until the end of the Cultural Revolution, the translation of foreign literature in China was characterized by a distinct “politics first” orientation. Song Binghui, a Chinese scholar of comparative literature, notes that foreign literature translation during this period was entirely state-led and characterized by a pragmatic attitude, with political ideology serving as the primary criterion for selecting works for translation. Within such historical context, works featuring prominent themes of class struggle or reflecting social revolution and people’s liberation were favored and became the primary subjects of translation (Song, 2007). Lou (2020) summarizes the Chinese translation of Latin American literature during this era as “politics-dominated”, where the core objective was to serve Sino-Latin American people-to-people diplomacy and ideological expression, and the selected translations focused primarily on realist themes involving anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, and anti-hegemony. Song and Lv (2007) point out that during this time, the translation of literature from “oppressed nations”, such as Spanish-speaking Latin American countries and Brazil, was included in national cultural development plans. Although works from Asia, Africa, and Latin America were translated on a considerable scale (covering a total of thirty-five nations), the selection criteria were highly ideologized, privileging texts with explicit political positions and strong elements of social critique. The translation of Jorge Amado’s works serves as a prime example. As a member of the Brazilian Communist Party, his works, such as *Cacau* and *Terras do sem fim*, focused on class struggle and resistance against dictatorship. These themes closely aligned with China’s political priorities at the time, leading to extensive translation and circulation of

Amado's works, making the writer an important window through which Chinese readers came to understand Brazilian society and literature (Xing, 2022, 2023).

By contrast, although Guimarães Rosa's writings offer profound portrayals of life in the sertão, they lack an explicit revolutionary narrative and adopt a relatively ambiguous political stance. They are more concerned with philosophical questions such as human nature and existence, rather than foregrounding class struggle, which was a core theme of the political discourse that dominated China at the time. His magnum opus, *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, for example, presents the customs, landscapes, and inner lives of the Sertão through a distinctive linguistic style and narrative structure, without directly addressing political themes such as class conflict. Compounding the situation, the 1964 military coup in Brazil brought Sino-Brazilian diplomatic relations to a halt, creating further obstacles to the translation and dissemination of Rosa's works in China. Under the combined effects of a highly politicized cultural environment and strained bilateral relations, Rosa's name was excluded from China's translation agenda, resulting in his almost total absence from the Chinese literary scene during this period (Zhang, 2023).

(b). *The Marginalization of Brazilian Literature's "Latin American Identity" and the Shortage of Portuguese Language Expertise*

During this period, Chinese perceptions of Latin American literature were shaped primarily by works from Spanish-speaking countries in the region. In her discussion of whether Brazilian literature should be considered part of "Latin American literature," Min et al. (2019) contend that, due to linguistic barriers and limited channels of transmission, Portuguese-language literature occupied a marginal position within the circulation of Latin American writing. As the only country in Latin America with Portuguese as its official language, Brazil faced significant obstacles in the dissemination of its literary works. Within Chinese academia, research on and translation of Portuguese-language literature remained comparatively underdeveloped, and Brazilian literature was often subsumed under the broader rubric of Latin American literature, lacking independent scholarly attention and promotion.

Simultaneously, China faced an acute shortage of Portuguese-language specialists during this period. By the 1970s, only a few Chinese universities offered Portuguese courses, and the pool of professionally trained personnel was extremely limited (Zhang, 2020). This resulted in an extreme scarcity of professional translators capable of handling Brazilian literature. The challenge was further compounded by the linguistic experimentation of Rosa's writing, which places exceptionally high demands on translators' command of Portuguese. The prevailing practice at the time, i.e., translating foreign literature via intermediary languages such as Russian and English (Lou, 2020), was ill-equipped to convey Rosa's linguistic features, further exacerbating the difficulties in translating his works. As Song and Lv (2007) note, during the wave of translation of Asian, African, and Latin American literatures in China in the 1950s and 1960s, Brazilian literature did receive some attention, but the works selected were predominantly those with explicit political orientations and those more amenable to relay translation. Under these circumstances, Rosa's works struggled to enter the Chinese literary horizon, in contrast to those of Jorge Amado, which were frequently reprinted due to their leftist stance and themes of social criticism. Consequently, Rosa's distinctive literary appeal and cultural significance remained largely unrecognized and uncirculated in China during this stage.

B. *The Second Stage (1977–2000): The Single-Title Translation of The Third Bank of the River*

(a). *Rosa's Debut Translation in 1977: The Third Bank of the River and the Window Provided by World Literature*

With the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Brazil in 1974 and the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, Chinese society entered a new phase in which foreign cultural exchange gradually resumed. Following the launch of the reform and opening-up in 1978, Chinese translation of Latin American literature moved into a stage often described as a "return to literary values", in which political considerations waned and literary merit became the principal criterion for selection. It was also during this period that Spanish and Portuguese language education developed steadily, and a cohort of professionally trained translators began to emerge (Lou, 2020). In 1977, the journal *World Literature* (Shijie Wenxue) resumed publication, marking a key moment in China's re-engagement with foreign literature. Lin (2024) finds that, as the country's only core journal devoted exclusively to the translation of foreign literature at the time, *World Literature* functioned as a "bellwether" for the field of Latin American literary translation, as the works it featured often carried a distinctly pioneering significance. That same year, Wang Yangle's translation of *The Third Bank of the River* was published in this journal, marking the first time a work by Rosa was rendered into Simplified Chinese, thus initiating his journey of translation and dissemination in China.

Drawing on his professional background in English and French, Wang acquired Spanish, Portuguese, and Catalan through self-study and produced the translation via an indirect route. Although such an approach inevitably entailed limitations and could not fully reproduce the distinctive linguistic style and cultural density of Rosa's writings, Wang nonetheless succeeded in capturing the metaphors and emotional tension of the piece with admirable precision. In her translation, he hailed Rosa as "the most significant contemporary Brazilian novelist" (Wang, 1977, p. 103), a smart strategy aimed at capturing Chinese readers' attention by emphasizing Rosa's standing in the Brazilian literary canon, thereby establishing an initial foundation for the reception of his works in China. Moreover, the story resonated with Chinese readers upon publication, thanks to its relatively concise language and universal existentialist themes, making it something of a highlight in initial Sino-Brazilian literary exchange.

(b). *The Single-Title Translation Phenomenon: Repeated Anthologizing and the Limits of Circulation*

Before 2020, the Chinese translation of Rosa's works featured what Hu (2010) terms as the "single-title translation" phenomenon. *The Third Bank of the River* remained the almost exclusive translated short story by Rosa, and it was repeatedly anthologized in collections of short fiction from around the world. Notable examples include *The Third Bank of the River: Thirty-Eight Classics of Very Short World Fiction* edited by Yang Youli and Qiao Xiangdong in 1998, as well as *A Warm Journey: Ten Short Stories That Influenced My Life*, edited by the prominent contemporary Chinese writer Yu Hua. Beyond this single story, however, virtually no other works by Rosa were translated during the same period, resulting in a striking lack of systematic coverage.

This phenomenon was influenced by the broader environment of Latin American literary translation in China at the time. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Latin American "Boom" in literature generated intense enthusiasm in the Chinese literary market, with Spanish-language authors such as Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, and Mario Vargas Llosa taking center stage, while Brazilian literature remained largely marginalized (Min et al., 2019). The standardization process of the publishing market also significantly impacted Rosa's introduction into China. Following China's accession to the International Copyright Conventions in 1992, copyright awareness strengthened gradually, and the publishing industry shifted from a phase of "disordered competition" toward greater regulation and professionalization (Lou, 2020). As a result, publishers became increasingly cautious about introducing niche literary works. Due to the unique linguistic idiosyncrasies of Rosa's prose, the threshold for readership was inherently high, and the commercial risks associated with translation were difficult to assess. This further disincentivized publishers from translating Rosa's works, prompting them to focus their resources on established authors whose market appeal had been proven. In this context, *The Third Bank of the River* circulated in isolation during this period, without the support of Rosa's broader body of works that might have collectively constructed a more comprehensive image of Rosa's literary universe. Such isolation significantly constrained Chinese readers' potential to develop a more nuanced understanding of Rosa's world.

C. *The Third Stage (2001–2025): From Direct Translation to a Publishing Boom*

(a). *Xudong's Direct Translation: Portuguese Competence and the Breakthrough in Cultural Mediation*

From 2003 and 2005, Hu Xudong, then a professor at Peking University, served as a visiting scholar at the University of Brasília, where he immersed himself in Brazil's culture and developed a deep interest in Brazilian literature. After returning to China, he utilized his self-taught Portuguese to begin translating Rosa's work directly from the original language (Ueta, 2018).

Between 2009 and 2010, Hu published six translated stories from Rosa's *Primeiras Estórias* (First Stories) on his personal blog, including "The Margin of Joy", "The Notorious One", "Sorôco, His Mother, His Daughter", "The Little Girl from Over There", "The Dagobé Brothers", and "*The Third Bank of the River*". Although these translations originated from pure personal interest, they nevertheless blazed a trail for direct translation from Portuguese to Chinese and broke with the earlier reliance on intermediary languages. The posthumous publication of Hu's translated work in 2023, *Primeiras Estórias: Four Chapters of Short Stories*, further enriched the corpus of Rosa's Chinese translations and signaled the entry of Rosa's Chinese reception into a new phase of direct translation from the original Portuguese. Hu's work not only offered Chinese readers an experience closer to the source text, but also provided subsequent translators with valuable lessons and practical reference points.

(b). *The Translation Boom of 2025: Market Forces and Cultural Resonance*

The year 2025 witnessed an unprecedented publication boom of Rosa's works in Chinese. The People's Literature Publishing House released *Campo Geral*, translated by Chen Di; Jiangsu Phoenix Literature and Art Publishing House published *Primeiras Estórias*, translated by Lang Sida under the Chinese title *The Third Bank of the River*. The Shanghai People's Publishing House brought out a selected anthology of Rosa's short stories translated by You Yupin, drawing from four of his collections and also titled *The Third Bank of the River*. The near-simultaneous publication of these three volumes within a single year was no coincidence, but rather the result of multiple driving forces.

Regarding the publishing context, support from cultural diplomatic institutions and prominent intellectual figures served as a powerful catalyst. The Brazilian Consul General in Shanghai, for example, wrote a preface to the Chinese edition of *Campo Geral*. Yao Feng, a retired professor of Portuguese-Chinese translation from the University of Macau, assisted with Lang Sida's translation. Funding from the National Library of Brazil provided financial support for You Yupin's translation project, ensuring the smooth completion of both translation and publication. Meanwhile, publishers' strategic planning for the canonization of Rosa's works and the maximization of commercial interests also played a key role. *Campo Geral* was launched as part of a larger publication scheme orchestrated by The Shanghai 99 Reader (Jiujiu Dushuren). You Yupin's anthology features nineteen representative works from Rosa's peak period, encompassing fantasy, philosophical reflection, and psychological introspection, while is arranged in a mirror-like structure that balances thematic diversity with internal unity (You, 2025, p. 298). Lang Sida's translation curated twenty-one short stories with the aim of presenting a comprehensive view of Rosa's literary landscape (Lang, 2025, p. 3).

In terms of dissemination and promotion, endorsements by well-known writers like Yu Hua made a major contribution. Yu Hua famously included *The Third Bank of the River* in his hand-picked "*Ten Short Stories That*

*Influenced One's Life*" series, repeatedly recommending it to readers and students alike and generating widespread attention. His endorsement appeared prominently as a book cover blurbs for both Lang Sida's and You Yupin's translations. It is also noteworthy that the selection of *The Third Bank of the River* as a reading text for China's national college entrance examination (gaokao) dramatically boosted Rosa's reach and popularity among the general public and stimulated broader interest in the Brazilian writer's works. Furthermore, readers' resonance with existential themes is another important factor in driving up the sales of these translations. Rosa's profound inquiries into human nature and existence struck an emotional and intellectual chord with Chinese readers, fostering a desire to engage more fully with his works, a phenomenon that closely aligns with the rise of "diversified reading demands" among Chinese readers since 2013 (Lou, 2020).

It is fair to argue that these factors have combined to help You Yupin's translation to go through two reprints within a month of its release and win the Tencent Good Book award for Outstanding Literary Translation of 2025. In a sense, the 2025 publication boom of Rosa's works marked the writer's transition from a figure primarily discussed within academic circles to one embraced by a broader reading public - a shift from the marginal to the mainstream, injecting new vitality into Sino-Brazilian literary exchange.

#### IV. THE DUAL VARIATION OF TRANSLATION AND RECEPTION: INTERACTION MECHANISMS OF MULTIPLE FORCES

##### A. *The Translator Community: From Indirect Translation to Academic-Style Direct Translation*

The Chinese translation history of Rosa's works reveals a clear evolution within the translator community. In the early stage (1977–2000), translators were rarely trained in Portuguese and had to rely on their proficiency in other foreign languages to produce indirect translations. Wang Yangle's 1977 translation of *The Third Bank of the River*, for instance, was completed indirectly through self-taught Spanish and Portuguese based on his professional training in English and French. Although such an indirect approach did contribute to the initial introduction of Rosa's work into China, it was inevitably constrained: information loss and cultural distortion were difficult to avoid, and Rosa's highly idiosyncratic linguistic style and sertão-specific cultural elements could not be fully reproduced.

After 2000, with the steady development of Portuguese-language education in China, a cohort of professionally trained translators with solid Portuguese competence began to emerge. Hu Xudong represents a pioneering figure in this transition. Following his academic stay at the University of Brasília between 2003 and 2005 and his sustained engagement with Brazilian culture and literature, Hu undertook direct translations of Rosa's works with his self-taught Portuguese. The six stories from *Primeiras Estórias* that he published on his blog marked a breakthrough in direct translation, overcoming the limitations of indirect translation and enabling Chinese readers to engage more closely with the linguistic and aesthetic qualities of Rosa's original texts.

The translation boom of 2025 further accelerated the professionalization of Rosa's Chinese reception. Translators such as You Yupin and Lang Sida, both graduates of the Portuguese-Chinese Translation MA program at the University of Macau, brought to their work systematic training in literary theory and translation studies. Supplementing their translations with postscripts, translator's notes, and scholarly essays, they actively guided readers' interpretation of Rosa's works. Such translatorial behavior closely aligns with Rosa's own view that translators should engage deeply in the process of recreation (Viotti, 2008).

In her postscript "Searching for *The Third Bank of the River*" (You, 2025), You Yupin candidly describes translating Rosa as "a battle destined to be lost," yet insists on striving, on the basis of fidelity and intelligibility, to recreate the author's linguistic experimentation and playfulness. Every lexical choice in translation, she notes, was subjected to repeated deliberation in an effort to preserve Rosa's stylistic traits while keeping the text accessible to Chinese readers. Lang Sida similarly remarks, "Translating a language master like Rosa is akin to exploring a labyrinth; it is a dangerous undertaking where one frequently feels that both one's Portuguese and Chinese are inadequate - yet one must translate first to allow for subsequent refinement and optimization" (Lang, 2025). In a sense, these translators are no longer mere converters of language; they function as cultural interpreters. Through in-depth research into Rosa's historical background, thematic concerns, and linguistic strategies, and through refined translational techniques, they mediate the cultural world of Brazil's sertão for Chinese readers, serving as vital bridges in cross-cultural exchange.

##### B. *The Publishing Market: From State-Led to Commercial-Driven*

The evolving role of the publishing market has been a critical pillar in the Chinese reception of Rosa. From 1949 to 1978, the translation of Latin American literature was dominated by state-owned publishers, with selections focusing on works with explicit political leanings. Rosa was excluded due to his failure to meet these criteria. Between 1979 and 2012, the academic journal *World Literature* served as the central platform for the introduction of foreign literature, and the publication of Wang Yangle's *The Third Bank of the River* helped establish an initial readership for Rosa (Lin, 2024). During this period, commercial publishers remained cautious about translating niche literary figures due to perceived market risks, and Rosa's works still lacked systematic introduction. After 2013, commercial publishers became the dominant force in foreign literary translation. Presses such as the Shanghai People's Publishing House assumed a decisive role in shaping the dissemination and reception of Rosa's works, with editorial selection and promotional strategies exerting a direct influence on market response.

During the publication boom of 2025, the respective translations by You Yupin (The Shanghai People's Publishing House) and Lang Sida (Jiangsu Phoenix Literature and Art Publishing House) demonstrated different selection logics and promotional approaches. You's edition selected nineteen representative works from Rosa's creative peak, drawing from collections such as *Primeiras Estórias*, *Estas Estórias*, *Tutaméia*, and *Terceiras Estórias*, balancing diversity, popularity, and story length. Lang's edition includes twenty-one classic short stories to provide a comprehensive picture of Rosa's creative landscape, showcasing features such as female monologues and indigenous cultural elements to offer readers a distinctive interpretive perspective. In terms of promotion, publishers made extensive use of author endorsements and social media marketing to enhance visibility. Furthermore, the diversification of publishing formats - such as the release of e-books to suit the habits of the new media era - has further accelerated the canonization of Rosa's works in China.

### C. *The Literary Field: Cross-Cultural Dialogue and Interpretation by Chinese Writers*

The interpretation and creative adaptation of Rosa's works by Chinese writers have constructed a dynamic "literary field" for his reception in China (Bourdieu, 1993). According to Bourdieu (1993), a literary field is a space of objective relations where agents (writers, critics, translators) compete for symbolic capital. In this context, the "consecration" of Rosa by leading Chinese authors has functioned as a powerful mechanism of cultural mediation. Yu Hua, a pivotal agent in this field, included *The Third Bank of the River* in his influential collection *Ten Short Stories That Influence a Person's Life*. By praising Rosa's "concise yet tense narrative that reveals the essential predicament of human nature," Yu Hua effectively transferred his own accumulated symbolic capital to Rosa, directly boosting the Brazilian author's legitimacy and popularity among the Chinese public. Furthermore, Yan Lianke's interpretation of Rosa emphasizes the "spiritual truth" embedded in his works, arguing that Rosa "allows us to experience shared, authentic emotions and sorrow within entirely impossible stories... a form of true spiritual realism where the writer abandons the logic of life to pursue the truth of the soul." These readings have offered Chinese writers new creative pathways, inspiring greater attention to the inner world and the spiritual dimensions of human experience. Echoes of Rosa's influence can also be discerned in the works of writers such as Ge Fei and Su Tong. Ge Fei's fiction frequently employs metaphors of fate and explorations of human nature that resonate with Rosa's existentialist reflections, while Su Tong's evocative depictions of regional cultures and his nuanced portrayal of emotional life similarly recall elements of Rosa's narrative practice. By domesticating Rosa's literary concepts within their own creative practice, these Chinese writers have built a bridge for cross-cultural dialogue, strengthening the acceptance of Rosa within the Chinese-language literary field and exerting a profound influence on the Chinese literary scene.

## V. AN UNFINISHED JOURNEY: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF THE CHINESE TRANSLATION OF ROSA'S WORKS

### A. *Sustained Engagement With Linguistic Challenges: Strategies for Translating Neologisms and Dialects*

The dense concentration of dialectal expressions and self-coined neologisms in Rosa's writing constitutes one of the most formidable linguistic barriers in the translation process. The language of Brazil's sertão as represented in his works is saturated with region-specific cultural meanings, compelling translators to negotiate a delicate balance between foreignness and readability. One possible direction for future practice lies in a more systematic use of paratextual aids - such as annotations, glossaries, and cultural introductions - to mediate between Rosa's experimental language and the expectations of Chinese readers. As Rosa himself suggested, "translation requires sacrifice, but the core must remain". In other words, translators should be flexible in deploying a range of translation techniques to enable readers to experience the distinctive appeal of Rosa's writing within a Chinese linguistic framework, while preserving the central ideas and cultural substance of the original texts. In practice, for example, when rendering Rosa's neologisms, translators may consider retaining the original terms in the main text while providing detailed explanations of their meanings and usage in a glossary. Such an approach can allow readers to consult these explanations as they read, deepening their understanding of Rosa's linguistic creativity without interrupting the narrative flow.

### B. *Perfecting the Translation System: From Fragmented Introduction to Systematic Construction*

Despite the 2025 publishing boom, certain gaps remain in the Chinese reception of Rosa. Most notably, his magnum opus, *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, has yet to see a full Chinese translation - a conspicuous absence that severely limits any comprehensive understanding of his literary universe. Acclaimed as a "Brazilian Ulysses" and reputed to be a "virtually untranslatable volume", the novel's labyrinthine narrative structure, idiosyncratic style, and profound philosophical inquiry present a supreme challenge to any translator.

Constructing a comprehensive Chinese translation system for Rosa requires the establishment of sustainable Sino-Brazilian academic collaboration mechanisms and joint translation projects. Brazil possesses a wealth of scholarly resources and expertise in Rosian studies, while China boasts an expanding readership and a burgeoning cohort of translation professionals. Through institutional cooperation, both sides could jointly overcome linguistic and cultural hurdles to ensure translation quality. For example, scholars and translators from both nations would benefit from convening symposia to exchange pedagogical experiences and refine translation strategies. Moreover, greater emphasis should be placed on the training of Portuguese-language literary translators, strengthening their professional competence and intercultural communication skills (Zhang et al., 2024). Although the number of Chinese universities

offering Portuguese programs has increased in recent years, specialized training in literary translation still remains insufficient. Chinese universities could address this gap by introducing related courses and inviting experts from home and abroad to contribute to teaching, thereby providing intellectual support for the future translation of Rosa's works.

Beyond his fiction, Rosa's essays and correspondence - which also hold significant literary and cultural value - should be incorporated into future translation agendas. His essay collection, *Tutaméia (Terceiras Estórias)*, reveals his facets as both a diplomat and a philologist, while his correspondence offers intimate insights into his creative thoughts and personal experience. Moving beyond the present reliance on short fiction and pursuing a comprehensive translation of Rosa's diverse writings would enable Chinese readers to engage more fully with this major literary figure and would further deepen Sino-Brazilian literary exchange.

### C. Potentials of Further Transcultural Circulation: From Literary Text to Cultural Symbol

Rosa's works possess considerable potential for cross-media dissemination. His fiction is replete with fantastical plots and original characters, offering rich material for film and television adaptation. For instance, the father's enigmatic canoe journey in *The Third Bank of the River* and the mystic tales narrated by the semi-literate storyteller in *My Uncle the Jaguar*, both exhibit a powerful visuality. If adapted for the screen, such narratives could attract wider audiences through the immediacy of visual language, thereby extending the cultural reach of Rosa's works. Audiovisual reinterpretation can also allow the sertão culture embedded in Rosa's writings to be presented to Chinese audiences in a more dynamic and accessible form, fostering deeper cultural exchange and mutual understanding.

In terms of cultural studies, similarities between Brazil's sertão culture in Rosa's works and Chinese rural culture offer fertile ground for comparative research. Both contexts are marked by distinctive regional traditions and sustained reflections on the relationship between humans and nature, the endurance of the human spirit, and the transformations of society. Comparative inquiry may reveal both the convergences and divergences across different cultural settings, thereby opening new avenues for cross-cultural research. For example, juxtaposing Rosa's portrayals of the resilience of backland communities with depictions of farmers' tenacious vitality in Chinese rural literature can illuminate a shared pursuit of human dignity and moral strength under differing historical and cultural conditions.

In educational contexts, Rosa's works may be incorporated into university-level Portuguese literature curricula as teaching materials aimed at fostering college students' literary appreciation and intercultural awareness (Lin, 2024). Instructors can guide students to analyze the linguistic features, narrative structures, and cultural dimensions of Rosa's writing, enabling them to experience the richness of Brazilian literature while deepening their understanding of Brazilian culture. As a significant symbol in Sino-Brazilian cultural exchange, Rosa's works - sustained by their reflections on human existence and existential inquiry - will continue to provide vital intellectual inspirations for cross-cultural dialogue, promoting deeper intellectual engagement between the two peoples.

## VI. CONCLUSION

A review of the Chinese translation trajectory of João Guimarães Rosa's works from 1949 to 2025 reveals a complex and nonlinear path: from prolonged absence under a highly politicized cultural context, to the initial breakthrough marked by the single-title translation of *The Third Bank of the River*, and finally to a publication boom driven by market forces in 2025. This trajectory not only charts the gradual rooting of Rosa's writings in a foreign land, but also constitutes a revealing microcosm of the evolving Sino-Brazilian relationship, the transformation of China's translation ecology, and the shifts in cultural and aesthetic sensibilities.

From the perspective of socio-historical forces, factors such as political ideology, diplomatic relations, and cultural perception exerted significant influence over the Chinese translation and reception of Rosa's works at different stages. In the early stage, ideological filtering mechanisms and fluctuations in Sino-Brazilian diplomatic relations excluded Rosa from the field of translation. Over time, the normalization of bilateral ties, the restoration of cultural exchange, and readers' changing preferences combined to create more favorable conditions for Rosa's introduction. In the contemporary period, various market dynamics, endorsements by influential writers, and readers' resonance with existential themes collectively propelled Rosa's work beyond academic circles and into wider public readership.

The translator community, the publishing market, and the literary critical circle all played pivotal roles in Rosa's reception and canonization in China. Chinese translators gradually moved from indirect mediation to direct translation, continually negotiating linguistic and cultural barriers in an effort to recreate the unique aesthetics of Rosa's work. Publishers, through careful selection and strategic promotion, balanced scholarly value with market considerations and facilitated wider dissemination. Chinese writers' interpretations and creative appropriations of Rosa's work, in turn, constructed bridges of cross-cultural dialogue and reinforced his presence within the Chinese literary field.

Inevitably, this study has its own limitations. Owing to methodological constraints and challenges in data collection, it has not been able to investigate in depth the concrete processes and feedback involved in readers' reception of Rosa's works. Future research could combine methods such as close analysis of publicly available reader reviews, questionnaire surveys, and interviews to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the readers' responses and evaluations, thereby enriching the study of Rosa's reception in China.

As Sino-Brazilian cultural exchange continues to deepen, the Chinese translation of Rosa's works is destined to achieve further progress. Through refining the translation system, optimizing translation strategies, and expanding

dissemination channels, Rosa's works will continue to serve as a vital symbol of Sino-Brazilian cultural dialogue, providing shared humanistic values and intellectual inspirations that will sustain cross-cultural dialogue and propel Sino-Brazilian literary exchange to new heights.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was conducted as part of the Research Project RP/FLT-08/2022, funded by Macao Polytechnic University.

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