

The Purpose of Writing is Communication

Dong Xi

Someone asked García Márquez, a Colombian writer and the author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, “Why do you write?” His answer was “In order to let my friends have more interest in me”. Though he modified the reason of his writing later on, the first answer slipping off his tongue probably complied with the intention of some writers, for example, me. I have been eager to make friends in the name of writing.

I was born in a village called Guli in the northwestern part of Guangxi at the edge of Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. There we have green mountains and misty fog. The mountain ranges are just like the waves of the sea in the cloud and fog, so beautiful. However, during my adolescent years, the mountain village I lived had no electricity and roads leading to the outside; the mountains on four sides separated us from the external world. The big mountains and continuous forests made me feel negligible and lonely. The tunes from pedestrians once in a while were symbols of civilization and they drench my soul like the raindrops. When I was 11 years old, in order to go to the town to see a film, I, together with a young friend of mine, even walked 12 kilometers of mountain paths for a round trip without having supper by hiding the truth from my parents. The danger was not the long distance and hunger, but the fact that when we started to go back after seeing the film, we found there was no star light above and the path leading to our homes was flooded by pitch-dark. We could hear the sound of the wild animals treading in the depth of couch grass on both sides of the path and also the frightful cries of night birds. At the age of 11, I even took the risk of being injured by wild animals or falling down the hillside due to a slip or being beaten by my parents to enjoy a spiritual feast. What spirit is this? It is a deep love for art. Just as Wang Yisheng, the protagonist of *The Chess Master* written by a Chinese writer named Acheng, who wandered from one village to another with the purpose of finding a person to play chess with after he was sent to live in the countryside; and José Arcadio Buendía in the book *One Hundred Years of Solitude* who tried to open a road connecting the external world from Macondo surrounded by marsh; and that ghost who was eager to take revenge in the novel (when he found his foe after innumerable hardships, he only wanted to say a word to him unexpectedly). So, in that evening, what I did was more about my desire to play chess or open a road or speak with the external world than seeing a film.

Because of the confinement, I often stood on the mountain looking to the far distance, imagining that my gaze could pass through the ridge, forest, river, cloud and sky to reach Beijing. Later on, I wrote about this special function of gaze in a novel titled *You can See an Ever-farther Place*. It is not to extol the gaze, but express a soul having illusion because of longing. This soul is lonely, so lonely that I gathered a blind person, a deaf person and a mute person in one family cold-heartedly in a novel titled *The Life without Language*. The father could not see, the son could not hear, and the daughter-in-law could not speak. The normal communication was cut off completely.

Communication has remained a difficulty and it began from my mother. In 1990, I took my mother to live together with me in the city where I worked. My friends in distant places often made phone calls to me and they spoke standard mandarin basically. When I was not at home, my mother would take the telephone receiver to answer it. Because she was illiterate, she could not understand mandarin. In most cases she would give an irrelevant answer. When she watched TV sitting by me, we two would get two different stories from what we saw. Because she could not understand their language, she could only guess the meaning. We can say she was fabricating a story according to her thinking while watching TV. The relation between the story on TV and my mother was just like a detail in *The Life without Language*: The blind Wang Laobing asked his deaf son Wang Jiakuan to buy a cake of soap, but Wang Jiakuan came back with a towel. The reason was that the soap and towel were all rectangular and both could be rubbed against the body. At first, I often corrected my mother's wrong understanding. But with the passage of time, I allowed her mistaken understanding to run its course on the grounds of being busy. Then she lived in her imagination and was contented with her own understanding. This is the life without language. It is the same case between countries/writers, between the writer and reader/the teacher and student. If there is no communication, misunderstanding and even indifference may occur.

British writer Daniel Defoe published his river novel *Robinson Crusoe* for the first time in 1719. The protagonist called Robinson Crusoe encountered a storm while sailing on the sea, and then he floated to a barren island alone, beginning his lonely life lasting as long as 28 years and 2 months plus 19 days. Robinson, who came to the desert island alone, faced the problem of survival at first. But after this problem was solved, he was most longing to speak with someone. We will die without food, but what if there is no one to talk to? *Robinson Crusoe* got the inspiration from the true story of Alexander Selkirk in its creation. According to the report of a British magazine at that time, in April 1704, Selkirk turned a traitor on the sea, so he was deserted on an island over 900 kilometers away from the Chilean coast by the captain. After 4 years and 4 months, he even forgot his language and became a savage unable to speak when he was found and rescued by the seamen. That is to say, there is no language without exchanging. Shūsaku Endō presented such a description in his river novel *Silence*: "He heard a voice at last from the distance. Even if that meant the warder began to interrogate himself from then on, it was better than the ice-cold darkness like the blade. The priest held his ear against the door in a hurry, eager to hear that sound." Why was the priest eager to be interrogated? This was because he was jailed in a single cell for a long time, lonely, anxious and afraid. This Portuguese missionary called Roderigo came to Japan in the era of Edo Shogunate prohibiting religion. The authority ordered him to abandon religion, but he chose to insist on it. Finally he was imprisoned alone. So, he was longing to speak to someone, and even the inquest with cruel torture was talk and communication in his eyes. In my river novel *The Regrets*, the protagonist even asked an "escort girl" to listen to his narration by paying her. It is obvious that communication is mankind's instinctive aspiration. When this kind of aspiration is strong enough, people will spend money to engage a person as the audience.

Of course, none of you present today was invited here with money. I believe you, as writers, have the same aspiration for communication and for being read as me. French writer Albert Camus said in his article *Riddle* that "Some people said they are not writing for being read, but we must not believe that remark since a writer just writes in order to be read to a great extent."

In my hometown, there is a sentence in the lyric of a folk song: What can travel around without feet? The answer in the past was "big ship". But now, my answer is "language". Language can travel around without feet. A lot of foreign writers have never been to China, but their works have been translated into Chinese; some Chinese writers have never been to a certain country, but their works have been translated into the language of that country. Writers make a living with language and maintain confidence by communication. Once communication does not work, the writing fails. Rockefeller, the American oil magnate, said emotionally that "If interpersonal communication ability was a commodity like candy and coffee, I would like to buy this ability with a price higher than that for the most precious thing under the sun." Mr. Rockefeller does not know that the writers are more concerned about the issue of communication than him.

Please get back to my novel and get back to the life of that family consisting of three members. Though they were blind or deaf or mute, they realized effective communication relying on the healthy organ of the other side eventually and even gave birth to a healthy child. We can draw a conclusion from their story, that is no communication fails in this world. The difference is that they relied on the healthy organ of the other side, but what we rely on is great language.

"Distance will not hinder understanding and all can be neighbors surpassing the distance." This was a poem written by Zhang Jiuling in the Tang Dynasty of China and it is also the greatest wish in my writing.

写作，是为了沟通 东西

有人问哥伦比亚作家、《百年孤独》的作者加西亚·马尔克斯，你为什么要写作？他的答案是：为了让我的朋友更喜欢我。虽然后来他对写作的原因做了一些更正，但这个貌似脱口而出的回答，想必也符合某些创作者的心意，比如我，一直都在渴望以写作的名义交朋友。

我出生在广西西北部一个名叫谷里的乡村，地处云贵高原边陲。那里山青青，雾茫茫，远远看去一浪又一浪的山形，在云雾里仿如大海的波浪。美极了。但是，在成长的少年时期，我的山村不通公路不通电，四面大山，信息不畅。宽远的高山和连绵的森林让我感到渺小和孤独。偶尔飘过行人的歌声，那就是文明的符号，像雨点打湿我的心灵。11岁那年，我和一位少年朋友为到乡政府看一场电影，竟然瞒着父母，在没吃晚饭的情况下来回走了12公里的山路。山高路远和饥饿不是问题，问题在于看完电影后出来，我们才发现头上没有星光，回家的小路已被漆黑淹没，路两旁茅草深处不时传来野兽行走的声响，并伴随夜鸟吓人的怪叫。11岁，我竟敢冒着有可能被野兽伤害，有可能脚底打滑摔下山坡，有可能被父母暴揍的危险，去享受一场精神盛宴。这是什么精神？热爱艺术的精神。就像中国作家阿城在《棋王》里塑造的王一生，他插队到了农村后，一个村庄一个村庄地游走，其目的是找人下棋；也像《百年孤独》里的何塞·阿尔蒂奥·布恩迪亚，他试图从满是沼泽的马孔多开出一条与外界联接的道路；也像小说中那个一心想要复仇的鬼魂，当他千辛万苦找到仇人之后，竟然是想跟他说一句话。所以，那个晚上，与其说我是去看一场电影，还不如说我是想下棋，想开辟一条道路，想跟外面的世界说话。

因为封闭，我常常站在山上瞭望，幻想自己的目光穿越山梁、森林，河流、云层和天空，到达北京。后来，我把目光的这种特殊功能写进了小说，标题就叫《目光愈拉愈长》。这不是歌颂目光，而是在表达一颗因渴望而产生幻想的心灵。这颗心灵是孤独的，孤独到我在一篇名叫《没有语言的生活》的小说里，毫不留情地把盲人、聋人和哑人凑到一个家庭里。父亲看不见，儿子听不到，儿媳妇说不出。正常的沟通被活活切断。

沟通，一直是个难题，从我的母亲开始。1990年，我把母亲带到我工作的城市与我一起生活。常常有远方的朋友打电话到我家，他们基本上都操一口标准的普通话。我不在家的時候，母亲会提起话筒。她不识字，更听不懂普通话，经常是答非所问。有时她坐在我的身旁看电视，一个故事会被我们母子俩看出两个故事。因为她听不懂，所以只能靠猜，也可以说她一边看电视一边在根据她的思维虚构。电视里的故事和我母亲的关系，就像《没有语言的生活》里的一个细节：盲子王老炳叫他失聪的儿子王家宽去买一块肥皂，但王家宽却买回来一张毛巾，原因是肥皂和毛巾都是长方形的，都可以放到身上搓洗。起先我常常对母亲错误的理解进行纠正，但久而久之，我以繁忙为理由，一任她的理解错误下去。于是她便生活在想象之中，自得其乐，自以为是。这就是没有语言的生活。而国家与国家之间，作家与作家之间，作家与读者之间，老师与学生之间何尝不是这样，只要不沟通，难免会产生误解，甚至于漠不关心。

1719年英国作家丹尼尔·笛福首次出版了他的长篇小说《鲁滨逊漂流记》，那个名叫鲁滨逊·克鲁索的主人公在海上航行时遇到风暴，只身漂流到荒岛，开始了长达28年2个月又19天的孤独生活。只身漂流到荒岛上的鲁滨逊，首先面对的是生存问题，但当生存问题解决之

后，他的最大渴望却是有人说话。没有食物我们会死，但没人说话会出现什么情况？

《鲁滨逊漂流记》是从亚历山大·赛尔柯克的真实故事获得的创作灵感。据当时的英国杂志报导：1704年4月，赛尔柯克在海上叛变，被船长遗弃在距智利海岸900多公里的一个岛上，4年零4个月，当他被航海家发现获救时，他竟然忘记了他的语言，变成了一个不会说话的野人。也就是说，没有交流就没有语言。日本作家远藤周作在他的长篇小说《沉默》中有这样一段描写：“终于听到远处有人声传出。纵使那是狱吏从现在起要审问自己，也胜过忍受这如刀刃般冰冷的黑暗。司祭急忙把耳朵贴到门口，想听清楚那声音。”为什么司祭渴望审问？因为很长一段时间他被关押在单独的囚室里，孤独，焦虑，害怕。这个名叫罗德里哥的葡萄牙传教士，在江户幕府禁教时代来到日本，当局要他弃教，但是他一直坚持，最终被单独关押。所以，他渴望有人说话，哪怕是带着酷刑的审问，那也是说话，也是交流。我的长篇小说《后悔录》，主人公曾广贤为了倾诉自己的后悔，竟然用钱请“三陪女”听他讲述。可见，交流是人类本能的渴望，当这种渴望强烈之时，甚至可以花钱请人来做听众。

当然，今天的各位朋友不是用钱请来的。相信各位作家和我一样也有交流的渴望，也有被人阅读的渴望。法国作家阿贝尔·加缪在《谜语》一文中说：“有一些人说自己不是为了让别人读才写文章的，但我们一定不能相信，因为在很大程度上，一个作家就是为了被人读才写作的。”

在我的家乡，山歌里有一句唱词：什么无脚走天涯？过去的答案是“大船”。但现在，我的答案是“语言”。语言无脚走天涯。许多外国作家没有来过中国，可他们的作品被翻译过来了。有些中国作家没有去过某个国家，但他们的作品被翻译到那个国家去了。作家以语言为生，靠交流维持信心。一旦沟通失效，写作也就失效。美国石油大王洛克菲勒先生曾发出如下感慨：“假如人际沟通能力也是同糖和咖啡一样的商品的话，我愿意付比太阳底下任何东西都珍贵的价格购买这种能力。”洛克菲勒先生不知道，在沟通方面作家们比他还着急。

请回到我的小说，回到那一家三口的生活中去。虽然他们一盲一聋一哑，但最终他们借助对方的健康器官，达到了有效的沟通，甚至还生养了一个健康的孩子。从他们的故事里可以得出一个结论，那就是在这个世界上没有完成不了的沟通，只不过他们借助的是对方的健康器官，而我们借助的是伟大的语言。

“相知无远近，万里尚为邻。”这是中国唐朝诗人张九龄的诗句，也是我写作的最大愿望。