

How to Facilitate International Communication of Contemporary Chinese Literacy Works

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ABSTRACT

The dissemination of English translations of contemporary Chinese literature is crucial to enhancing China's cultural soft power and international image. Despite significant progress since the early 2000s, such as increased government support, international awards for Chinese writers, and a wider selection of literature, a number of challenges impede wider foreign acceptance. These include the complexities of translating literature between vastly different cultures, limited and ineffective communication channels, and dissatisfaction among foreign audiences. This paper reviews the historical development of the international dissemination of Chinese literature, identifies the main obstacles to its influence, and proposes solutions. Recommendations focus on selecting works with universal themes that resonate globally and adopting translation strategies that balance fidelity to the original text with readability for the target audience. By addressing these issues, Chinese literature can move from simply going global to truly going international, fostering deeper intercultural understanding and expanding its influence in the global literary landscape.

KEYWORDS

Contemporary Chinese Literature; Contemporary China; Literature Translation; Chinese Communication; Chinese Literature History; Translation Communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture is the soul of a country and an important element of its competitiveness. In today's complex and ever-changing international situation, the strength of a country is reflected not only in its political, economic, and military power but also in the attractiveness and influence of its culture. To a certain extent, the competition among countries today is also a game of cultural soft power [1]. As an important part of Chinese culture, the successful dissemination of contemporary Chinese literacy works in English translation overseas is of great practical significance in presenting the image of contemporary China and enhancing the soft power of Chinese culture.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in the 21st century, significant progress has been made in the foreign dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature in English translation, which has played an indispensable role in the construction of a positive and open image of China and the enhancement of China's cultural soft power. However, the translation and dissemination of Chinese contemporary literature in the English-speaking world face many problems, such as the lack of excellent translators, the single form of communication, and the unsatisfactory effect of dissemination [2]. In this sense, It is necessary to review the current situation of the dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature in English translation and reflect on the problems that exist in the dissemination of Chinese literature overseas. Based on this, countermeasures can be put forward to help contemporary Chinese literature 'go out to the world' more effectively. In this way, the

international communication of contemporary Chinese literature can, to a large extent, advance the dissemination of Chinese literary works and promote intercultural exchanges and mutual understanding in order to expand the influence and appeal of Chinese culture.

To articulate analysis outcomes, this essay is divided into five sections. The first section introduces the research background, research objectives, and the outline. In the second section, the translation and overseas communication of contemporary Chinese literary works are reviewed, whereas the third section discusses the possible problems hindering the international communication of Chinese literary works. Based on those problems, feasible suggestions are proposed in the fourth section for more efficient international communication of Chinese literature and Chinese culture. Lastly, the main points are summarized in the conclusion.

2. REVIEW OF TRANSLATION AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE LITERARY WORKS

The dissemination of Chinese contemporary literature in English translation can be divided into two stages chronologically: the first stage is after the reform and opening up to the beginning of the 21st century. The second stage is from the beginning of the 21st century to the present.

2.1. The First Stage: from Reform and Opening up (1978) to the Early 21st Century

At the first stage, from Reform and Opening Up (1978) to the Early 21st Century, the most active translation bodies were the Chinese Literature magazine led by the State Administration of Foreign Languages and Panda Books, launched in 1981 [3]. Panda Books is published and translated on the initiative of Yang Xianyi, editor-in-chief of Chinese Literature. The series systematically translated the best works of Chinese literature into English and French in the form of single volumes. According to statistics, since its launch in 1981 and its closure in 2000, Panda Books has translated and published a total of 195 literary works in the past 20 years, including 145 novels, 24 poems, 14 folk legends, 8 essays, 3 fables and 1 drama [4]. Voluminous outstanding contemporary Chinese literary works have been introduced to the English-speaking world, including works by Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Bajin, Lao She, Bing Xin, Ye Shengtao, Shen Congwen, Ding Ling, Shi Tiesheng and others. It can be said that "Panda Books" covers the important works of almost all important contemporary Chinese writers and poets and has had a significant impact overseas [5].

In addition to China's official foreign translations, more and more sinologists also devoted themselves to the translation and study of contemporary Chinese literature during this period. In terms of the number and influence of translations, the most famous one is Howard Goldblatt, an American sinologist [6]. He translated many works written by esteemed Chinese writers, including *The Field of Life and Death*, *Tales of Hulan River*, *Selected Stories of Xiao Hong*, *HeavyWings*, *Red Sorghum*, *The Garlic Ballads*, *The Republic of Wine*, and *Rice* [6].

2.2. The Second Stage: from the Early 21st Century to Present

Entering the 21st century, the translation and dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature has entered a period of rapid development. The Chinese government has attached unprecedented importance to the international dissemination of Chinese culture, elevating it to the level of national strategy [6]. First, a number of Chinese writers have won international awards: Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012; Yan Lianke won the Kafka Prize for *The Four Books* in 2014; Cao Wenxuan won the International Hans Christian Andersen Prize in 2016, and Ge Haowen won the Mobil Literary Award for his translation of Jia Pingwa's works [7]. To a certain extent, these awards have increased the visibility of contemporary Chinese literature in the international

community, which has led to more and more attention being paid to excellent Chinese literary works and also confirmed the enhancement of the reputation and influence of contemporary Chinese literature in the world literary system.

Secondly, the selection of translated works has become richer. In addition to traditional novels, science fiction literature, espionage literature, and Internet literature have also begun to enter the Western perspective. In 2014, the English translation of Liu Cixin's science fiction novel "Three Bodies" was ranked No. 1 on Amazon's "Asia's First Day Sales List" on the day of its release, was included in the "2014 U.S. Top 100 Books", and was awarded the Hugo Award, the highest honor in the world of science fiction literature, in 2015 [7].

Finally, the mode of dissemination is becoming more and more diversified. The traditional way of disseminating Chinese contemporary literature overseas is mainly through paper books, but in the 21st century, with the help of the Internet and new media platforms, English translation platforms for Chinese online literature, such as Paper Republic, Wuxia World, and Gravitational Novels, have begun to appear [1]. In the digital age, they have become a new force in translating and disseminating Chinese contemporary literature as private organizations.

3. PROBLEMS IN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Chinese literature 'going out' does not only mean translating and publishing Chinese literary works to enter overseas markets but more importantly, 'going in,' that is, the translated and published Chinese literary works can have better dissemination and influence overseas and be recognized and accepted by foreign readers. That is to say, the translated and published Chinese literature can have better dissemination and influence overseas and be recognized and accepted by foreign readers. From the founding of the People's Republic of China to the 21st century, the translation and publication of contemporary Chinese literature have made some progress, but over the past few decades, translated works of Chinese literature have not been easily accepted by the native English-speaking public [2]. Three main challenges have arisen in the international dissemination of Chinese literary works, including the complexity of literature translation, flat communication channels, and unsatisfactory communication effects.

3.1. The Complexity of Literature Translation

Literary translation is not only the transformation between two languages but also the communication and understanding between different cultures. Compared with the translation-in behavior, the foreign dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature belongs to the translation-out behavior, and the target-language countries have not yet generated a strong internal demand for Chinese literature and culture, not to mention the formation of a more mature receiving group and receiving environment [4]. The English translation of Chinese literature should not only consider the literary character of the translated works but also take into account various cultural, social and political factors affecting and restricting the translation activities in the socio-cultural context of the target language, such as the literary concepts, poetic traditions and ideologies of the English-speaking countries, as well as the target readers' aesthetic interests, reading needs and reading habits. Translations that really go out should not only pay attention to language skills but also consider these complex external influences.

Successful translations of contemporary Chinese literature into the English-speaking world require excellent translators with profound attainments in both Chinese and English who are well-versed in both the East and the West. For example, the vigorous development of Chinese Literature could not have been achieved without the hard work of a large number of excellent translators such as Yang Xianyi, Dai Naidian, and Sidney Shapiro. Translators can be categorized as local or overseas translators according to their nationality. At present, most of the contemporary Chinese literature on the foreign market is translated by overseas sinologists who are proficient in the Chinese language

and have a deep background in sinology. Overseas translators can even be regarded as the leading force in the dissemination of Chinese literature abroad [3]. Examples include Ge Haowen, translator of Mo Yan's novels; Bonnie S. McDougall, translator of Bei Dao's poetry; and Olivia Milburn, translator of Mai Jia's works. Local Chinese translators have not yet been seen in the market of overseas best-selling translations. At present, there is a lack of Chinese and foreign translators, and the quality of translation is not high. Therefore, in order for Chinese literature to go global, there must be a team of translators with profound attainments. After all, the number of translators engaged in translating Chinese literature in the English-speaking world is limited, and the dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature to the outside world requires the participation of more excellent local translators.

3.2. Flat Communication Channels

Forms of discursive communication include material and symbolic forms, where the former refers to multilateral or bilateral meetings or other related events, such as academic conferences, while the latter refers to textual forms, including written and oral forms, and multimodal forms, like visual and photographic materials [8]. At present, the dissemination of English translation of Chinese contemporary literature is still mainly in the form of symbolic text media, with less use of multimodal forms such as images and pictures. Although some contemporary Chinese literary works have been adapted into movies and TV dramas, the audiences of these movies and TV dramas are basically domestic audiences.

Moreover, the number of English translations of contemporary Chinese literary works adapted into movies and TV dramas is small, which has not yet formed a large-scale effect and has weak influence overseas. The number of picture books, comic books, and related movies and TV dramas in English translation of contemporary Chinese literature specifically for overseas audiences is even rarer. In addition, the dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature in English translation rarely takes a material form. Although academic conferences on the English translation and dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature are often held in China, most of the participants are domestic scholars, translators, publishers, and related practitioners, and well-known foreign scholars are seldom invited to participate; academic conferences on contemporary Chinese literature are seldom held in the English-speaking countries, and book promotions and meetings with readers are seldom organized for books translated from and into English by contemporary Chinese literature.

Most of the government-funded Chinese literature translation projects share a common feature regarding publication and distribution: they are translated and published by domestic publishing houses, then sold by Chinese book distribution organizations or a few overseas distributors. The drawbacks of this mode of publication and distribution are obvious: the dissemination and influence of the books are not comparable to that of the British and American book distributors, and it is difficult to realize effective dissemination and promotion of the works. In addition, there are also problems with the publishing and distribution channels of contemporary Chinese literature published overseas. Although the works of writers like Mo Yan and Liu Cixin have won the favor of foreign commercial publishers, most of the works of Chinese literature in English translation are published by foreign university presses. These works of contemporary Chinese literature by academic publishers are often used for Sinological studies and are classified as academic and specialized niche categories, making it difficult for them to enter the mainstream market and have a positive impact on the general readership [5].

3.3. Unsatisfactory Communication Effects

Currently, the main bodies of English translation and dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature are mainly state organizations and foreign publishing houses, while civil society and academia are also involved, but their role is still limited. Although the aforementioned Chinese

Literature and Panda Books have translated and exported nearly 1,000 works of contemporary Chinese literature to overseas countries as the main means of translation by state organizations, the dissemination effect is not satisfactory, and many of the translated works are often unread.

The reasons for the cold reception of contemporary Chinese literature in the English-speaking world are manifold. On the one hand, it is inextricably connected to the very different literary traditions of the East and the West. McDougall once pointed out that Anglo-American countries have a tradition of anti-intellectualism. This kind of thinking is embodied in literature as ,opposing the educational function of literature‘ and ,literature is for the enlightenment of the masses‘, emphasizing the independence and non-utilitarianism of literature. On the other hand, since ancient times in China, there has been the saying that ,literature serves the way of the road‘, and in contemporary times there is the idea that ,literature and art serve politics‘ [9]. Influenced by the creative principle that ,literature and art serve the people and socialism,‘ Chinese literature, in addition to its literary character, often has a more prominent political function, which makes many Western readers think that contemporary Chinese literature is a ,political megaphone,‘ thus resisting it [10].

What is more, The obstruction of the dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature is also not unrelated to the ideological factors in the Western world. Because of the deep-rooted and historically formed ignorance, misunderstanding, and prejudice of Western readers towards China, foreign publishers, when translating contemporary Chinese literature, often tend to publish ,banned works‘ involving social issues and disaster narratives in order to satisfy the readers‘ curiosity and to cater to the values of the mainstream poetic tradition [7]. Such a practice ignores the literary value of the works themselves, and is likely to cause English readers to have a distorted interpretation of contemporary Chinese literature. In addition, there is still room for improvement in the translation of Chinese contemporary literature, especially in the selection of translation contents and translation strategies. Some of the Chinese literary works selected for translation are not necessarily welcomed by the target language readers, especially native English readers, and there are serious problems with the quality of the translations, which even include translations of works published by some famous publishers [11].

4. SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE LITERARY WORKS

In response to the current problems of contemporary Chinese literature, Chinese officials can adopt a flexible communication strategy, which mainly includes two aspects in its implementation.

4.1. The Selection of Works

The choice of subject matter for translated works should be emphasized. In terms of the choice of subject matter, contemporary Chinese literary works of common value and global significance should be selected for translation. In addition to their national character, excellent literary works should also possess the common qualities of world literature to bring them closer to Western readers. The emotions, aesthetics, and viewpoints expressed in the works should have a global vision and be able to resonate with overseas readers, touch their souls, and then be recognized and accepted by readers so that contemporary Chinese literary works have truly gone global.

Specifically, one of the most important reasons why Mai Jia's novel *Decoded* was so well received overseas is that it tells the story of a Chinese hero who overcomes human weaknesses and limitations with the power of his will and elevates 'faith' to a spirit and character that bridges the East and the West and transcends time and space, which is the most important force that impresses readers of both Chinese and Western cultures [5]. The novel *Wolf Totem* explores the eternal theme of how man and nature, man and animals, can get along during an ecological crisis. The fact that the novel set the highest record of foreign sales of contemporary Chinese novels highlights the literary and artistic

charm and market value of this subject [5]. In addition, Mo Yan's works embody the spirit of the Chinese vernacular but also the Marguez-like expression of world literature and art, whereas Liu Cixin's works focus on the development of science and technology and the destiny of humanity. Their works are the unity of nationalism and cosmopolitanism and have received international attention and recognition.

4.2. The Adoption of Translation Strategies

As far as the English translation strategy of Chinese literature is concerned, there have always been different voices in the academic world. Some believe that the translation should be based on alienation and supplemented by naturalization, that is, the translation strategy of retaining as much of the elements of the source language and transferring them into the target language in their original form [8]. Others believe that the naturalized translation strategy of ,localization,' which does not allow readers to feel any culture shock while reading, pays attention to the ,acceptability' of the target readers and shortens the psychological distance between the audience in the target country and the translated text, is actually the first choice in the process of literary dissemination and acceptance [12]. According to the viewpoint of new historicism, texts are inextricably tied to historicity. Any literary work is produced in a certain historical context, is a product of a certain history, and is characterized by a specific era, society, and history [8]. So is the translation of literary works. Therefore, translators have to take into account the degree of cultural intermingling between the East and the West, the characteristics of the target language readers, the purpose of translating Chinese literary works, and other factors when translating.

It can be seen that at present, in order to gain the recognition of readers in the English-speaking world, contemporary Chinese literature must retain the literary value and characteristics of the original work while minimizing the heterogeneity of the translated text, avoiding the raw expression of redundant Chinese mindsets, alleviating the cultural strangeness and impact brought by the translated text to the readers, and increasing the reading friendliness and intimacy of the translated text. Suppose translators follow the original text and emphasize fidelity to the original text while ignoring the reading habits and acceptance psychology of the target readers. In that case, the dissemination of literary works in English translation will certainly be hindered.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as an important part of world literature, the foreign dissemination of Chinese contemporary literature in English translation is of great significance in promoting Chinese culture 'going out' and enhancing China's cultural soft power. Since China's reform and opening up, the international communication of Chinese contemporary literature in English translation has achieved certain progress and results. Undeniably, as a cross-lingual, cross-cultural, cross-regional, and cross-time practical activity, the foreign dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature in English translation has faced a lot of problems and challenges, such as the lack of excellent translators, the single form of dissemination and the unsatisfactory dissemination effect.

In view of these problems, Chinese officials can adopt flexible communication strategies in the future, emphasize the selection of texts, and the advancement of translation strategies in order to improve the breadth, depth, and effectiveness of the dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature in English translation and promote the transformation of Chinese literature from 'going out' to 'going in.' In doing so, the transformation of Chinese literature from 'going out' to 'going in' will be promoted.

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