

Review Article

On Cross-Cultural Reception of Contemporary Chinese Literature -- with the Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing as an Example

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Abstract: As an important part of Chinese literature, Chinese contemporary literature is a powerful force to promote Chinese culture to go out. However, in the cross-cultural context, the previous studies on Chinese contemporary literature focus on dissemination rather than acceptance. Domestic promoters are more important than foreign institutions. In view of this, this paper, based on The Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing, which is a world public welfare organization for the independent translation and introduction of Chinese contemporary literature, investigates the characteristics and preferences of the research centre in the selection of authors and works in the introduction of Chinese contemporary literature from a macro perspective, and explores the factors affecting the cross-cultural acceptance of these works based on the comments of English readers.

Keywords: Chinese contemporary literature, Overseas, Acceptance, "The Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing."

1. Research status of Cross-Culture of Contemporary Chinese Literature and The Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing

The historical development of the research on "cross-cultural Chinese contemporary literature" is vertical and intuitive. From the perspective of the research history, cross-cultural research on contemporary Chinese literature mostly focuses on its overseas communication field. Until the promotion of the national cultural policy in the 12th and 13th Five-Year Plans, researchers not only participated in the link of "Chinese literature going out" in terms of translation, but conducted detailed information collection and collation on the overseas translation of local works. Since then, the overseas communication of Chinese contemporary literature has actually entered the stage of acceptance research. The process of "identification" of Western readers is based on the long-term tracking of the overseas acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature. After they have a holistic awareness of the acceptance process, they have "generally experienced the transformation from 'local to overseas' translation, the aesthetic transformation from 'politics to art', and the transformation of The Times from 'lag monotonous to synchronous pluralism'" [1].

The research status of "cross-cultural acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature" is mainly related to the factors that restrict overseas acceptance, including production, circulation and readers' preferences. The first is the restriction of the production link led by the writer. What shape a good writer lie in the following points: the writer's popularity, writing level, writing language and writing style. Apart from the influence factors of writers, there are two reasons why the overseas acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature is not optimistic. First, there is a lack of excellent translators, who need to have a certain in-depth understanding of Chinese contemporary literature. The second is the lack of mature cultural agency mechanism. This cultural agency includes excellent translators, formal publishing institutions, etc., and people's attention to this series of problems should be aroused [2].

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From the perspective of readers, Western readers have two thinking patterns when accepting Chinese contemporary literature. One thing is to seek common ground, to seek something similar to their own literature, and to pursue mutual verification and mutual recognition between different literatures. The other thing is to seek for differences, to seek something completely new and different from their own cultural customs, and to pursue the complementarity of Eastern and Western cultures [3].

In a word, from writer's production to translator's translation and reader's feedback, these three links are indispensable in the process of cross-cultural acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature, whose quality greatly affects the trend of Western acceptance of contemporary literature. Based on the analysis of the current research status of "The Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing", through comparison, it can be seen that the existing researches have not been involved in the blank spots. At present, there are few researches on this subject, mainly related to the cross-cultural communication of Chinese contemporary literature, but not related to the international acceptance of it, especially for the acceptability of the target readers. Also, they mainly focus on the introduction of cross-cultural communication activities of Chinese contemporary literature and the examples of readers' acceptance without analyzing the deep causes and acceptance trends through phenomenon, therefore, there is still room for further research on the depth of cross-cultural acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature.

The above horizontal analysis of the research status provides innovative points and space for the research direction of this paper.

Based on the analysis of the horizontal and vertical trends of the research history, I noticed that on the basis of previous studies, there are still the following problems in the breadth, depth and related achievements of the research on the cross-culture of contemporary Chinese literature in China and The Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing. In terms of the research results of "Cross-culture of contemporary Chinese literature in China", predecessors pay more attention to dissemination than reception. In terms of the breadth and depth of the relevant research of The Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing, the predecessors are also better at dissemination than reception, focusing on the activities rather than readers' responses to them, paying too much attention to the surface and neglecting to discuss the underlying factors. Based on the above questions and blank points, the purpose and significance of the research of this paper are gradually clear. Therefore, based on the monthly author's translation responses in 2021 by The Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing, this paper will first list and summarize the popularity, praise and criticism of readers' book reviews, and then analyze the trend of Western readers' cross-cultural acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature with the common points of well-received and highly accepted works, so as to trace the source, analyze the influencing factors behind along with their interaction with subsequent trends. Finally, this paper discusses how to improve Western readers' acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature from the perspectives of authors and translators.

2. The Acceptance Trend of Cross-cultural Communication of Chinese Contemporary Literature is Discussed from Readers' Book Reviews

2.1 Data source for the research trend: Readers' book reviews

In a number of online activities conducted by The Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing, Book Club selects one author each month as the Best Recommended Author of the Month, providing access to him/her, including but not limited to sharing fragments of his/her works in English and opening readers' submissions to book reviews, publishing interviews with authors, translators and publishers, inviting writers and translators to share and discuss their works offline at the University of Leeds. Therefore, this paper will take the monthly author's translation response in 2021 as the data source, summarize the characteristics of the monthly author's English translation works from book reviews, list their similarities and differences, and then analyze the trend of cross-cultural acceptance.

2.1.1 A work with lots of favorable reviews: high responses and well received

Ji Dawei was the Monthly Author for June 2021. His *The Membranes* met with a large quality of reviews and was well received. Western readers found the author's story compelling, with a dystopian view that was a departure from classic American science fiction, and one that was "illustrated by scenes that have been seen in life before, like the canals of Venice". Meanwhile, readers said translator Ari Larissa Heinrich did a good job.

Jia Pingwa, the Monthly Author for April 2021, received the most attention from readers. His novels focus on the lives of ordinary people and have been published abroad before. His English translation, *Happy Dreams*, became one of 2021's best-received and hottest books. The book reviews were also full of praise from readers for translator Nicky Herman. Her skillful translation shows a deep understanding of the style and usage of the language in Jia Xuan's work. She even cleverly transforms the dialects, puns, jokes and even swear words in the original text into the corresponding English and slang words, bridging not only the semantic but also the contextual gap between the two languages.

Table 1: Distribution of commonalities and characteristics of Monthly Author

Book Club 月度作家			作品角度		作者角度						译者角度
			文学体裁/题材	时代背景	性别	台湾or大陆	留学经历	专业	有无出版英译版经验	有无跨文化传播意向	译者
Jan-21	李娟	/	“非虚构”小说	游牧文化	女	大陆	无	无	有	有	/
Feb-21	伊格言	/	科幻小说	/	男	台湾	无	中文	/	/	/
Mar-21	三毛	撒哈拉沙漠的故事 <i>The Story of the Sahara</i>	自传&旅行游记	/	女	台湾	有	哲学	有	有	Mike Fu
Apr-21	贾平凹	高兴 <i>Happy Dreams</i>	长篇小说	土地变迁后农民生存状态	男	大陆	无	中文	有	有	Nicky Herman
May-21	杨双子	/	历史小说	日本统治时期的台湾	女	台湾	无	无	/	/	/
Jun-21	纪大伟	膜 <i>the Membranes</i>	酷儿推理小说	在2100年的未来世界	男	台湾	有	英语&文学	/	/	Ari Larissa Heinrich
Jul-21		《酷儿台湾文学：读者》									
Aug-21											
Sep-21	骆以军	宙斯 <i>Zeus</i>	/	/	男	台湾	无	中文	/	/	Nicky Herman
Oct-21	张渝歌	荒闻 <i>the Whisper</i>	恐怖小说	当代台湾本土民间传说	男	台湾	无	医学	无	有	/
Nov-21	苏童	黄雀记 <i>Shadow of the Hunter</i>	长篇小说	1980年代中国城市社区	男	大陆	无	中文	有	/	James Trapp
Dec-21	沈阳	再见黑小孩 <i>More than One Child</i>	回忆录&自传	1980年代中国独生子女政策	女	大陆	无	英语	无	/	Nicky Herman

"/" indicates unknown information

2.1.2 A work with a mix of positive and negative reviews: intense responses but middling received

In December 2021, the Monthly Author--Shenyang's English translation of *Goodbye Black Children: More than One Child* received many reviews, mostly neutral and critical. On the one hand, most readers approved and praised the translator Nicky Herman, but on the other hand, they found the author's writing vague and uninteresting and "difficult to immerse in".

2.1.3 A book with few reviews and a lot of praise: low responses but high acceptance

The Monthly Author for November 2021 is Su Tong. His humorous depiction of life in China's urban communities in *Shadow of the Hunter*, in the style of Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango Street*, has been well received by readers. But on the other hand, translator James Trapp's translation is flawed, with many footnotes affecting the reading experience, and he doesn't get the domestication strategy right.

The Whisper, by Zhang Yuge (October 2021), is a horror novel that, although set in contemporary Taiwan, has ghostly elements that are linked to the country's history of Japanese colonization, a period of deep social conflict between Japanese colonizers, Han Chinese locals, and the island's original inhabitants, the Taiwanese indigenous people. In terms of religion, spirituality and superstition, the novel intercepts elements from Taiwan's native folklore and mixes them with cultural influences from the Japanese colonial period.

2.2 The influence of translators, works and authors on acceptance trends

2.2.1 The level and popularity of translators influence Western readers' acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature

According to Table 1, it is not difficult to find that several of the most popular works in the 2021 were written by the same translator. Faced with Chinese contemporary works that are also unfamiliar, readers are more likely to choose the translations of their previously recognized translators to read. Meanwhile, high-level translators are better at adapting their translations to the psychological preferences of target readers, such as Nicky Herman, the translator in April and December, so these translations are more likely to receive warm responses and praise. Vice versa, the plot of *the Sparrow* in November was highly sought after by readers. However, due to translator James Trapp's poor translation of cultural differences in the translation process, and the excessive footnotes affected the reading experience, Western readers received *the Shadow of the Hunter* in a moderate way. Therefore, according to the data of April, September, November and December, it can be concluded that the acceptance trend of works is often closely related to translators. In the other word, it is the level of translators, or the degree of recognition of translators that has a great influence on Western readers' acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature.

2.2.2 The historical background and cultural characteristics of the works affect readers' cross-cultural acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature

In terms of the works themselves, compared with the literary genre and person, the historical background of the works has the greatest influence on readers' cross-cultural acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature. Most of the well-received titles in 2021 are set between the 1950s and 1980s and tell stories of different classes and people as China pursues different policies.

In terms of time, contemporary Chinese literature refers to literature since the country's liberation in 1949, while for much of the Western world, the ideology of post-liberation China is contradictory. Therefore, the selection of contemporary Chinese literature by the West will inevitably be constrained by ideology, so that they are more inclined to accept or even pursue those works that expose the darkness of contemporary society, the suffering of Chinese people and the degradation of social ethos.

Or out of curiosity, Western readers prefer to read contemporary literature that talks about Chinese system, local features, folklore and other contemporary literature in line with Chinese characteristics and culture, so as to understand China, feel the cultural diversity and appreciate the differences between China and the West.

2.2.3 The author's liberal arts background, English level, experience in publishing English translations and the intensity of cross-cultural communication intention affect the readers' acceptance trend of his works

From the perspective of the Monthly Author in 2021, four major factors such as the author's major, overseas study experience, whether the author has published English translation experience and the intensity of his cross-cultural communication intention unconsciously reflect the future readers' acceptance trend of his works. Five of the 2021 Writers of the Month studied in the Chinese Department and two graduated from the English Department, which can be used to verify the literary level and professionalism of the authors to a certain extent. At the same time, it can be seen that 20% of the scholars have overseas study experience, indicating that they have a certain level of English, which is helpful for the translation process before overseas dissemination. Nearly half of the monthly writers have had the experience of publishing their works in English translation, and have a strong desire to spread their works to the Western world across cultures. Zhang Yuge, the Monthly Author in October, gave up medicine for literature. Compared with academic writers, his professionalism is inevitably lacking, and he has never published an English translation experience, but his works have been accepted by Western readers at an above average level. The reason for his interview is that among the 2021 audience, he has the strongest communication intention, seizing every opportunity and eagerly looking forward to the overseas dissemination of his works. Therefore, the author's literary academic background, English proficiency, relevant experience in publishing English translations and the intention of cross-cultural communication all have a positive impact on the trend of his works being accepted by readers.

However, the difference of gender and region of origin has little influence on readers' acceptance trend of their literature. The number of Taiwan and mainland authors, male and female authors is roughly equal, all showing an open distribution of 64.

3. The Factors Influencing the Reception of Chinese Contemporary Literature in the Cross-cultural Context

3.1 The well-known translators and the holistic view of "domestication" translation are helpful to the cross-cultural acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature

The translator has mastered the circulation link of Chinese contemporary literature in the process of spreading overseas, so his translation ability, in-depth understanding of the background of the original story and Chinese culture are of great importance. In the process of translation, when the cultural status of the translated work is inconsistent with the cultural standpoint of the translator and the nationality to which the translator belongs, the translator should follow the rule that "When in Rome, do as the Romans do". By adapting the naturalized translation strategy skillfully, translators are responsible for helping readers better understand the translation as well as enhancing the readability and appreciation of the translation, so that Western readers can enjoy the reading process. In the case of Nicky Herman's translation of Jia Pingwa's *Happy Dreams*, her clever choice of words and tone and the same meticulous attention to detail (translating these dialects, puns, jokes, and even swear words into English) not only closed the semantic but also the contextual gap between the two languages, thus improving the reader's reception of the translation.

At the same time, it is also essential for translators to have a deep understanding of the style and usage of the language in the author's works, which shows the grasp of the literary nature of the works and the penetration of the application of Chinese culture. The differences between Chinese and Western ideologies tend to make translations more political than literary. In different stages of history and in different countries, despite the influence of traditional views on translation, translators are generally required to be faithful to the original work as much as possible and fully convey the content of the original work. However, due to the direct or indirect intervention of ideology, there are often deletions and changes in translation. (Xu Jun) [4]. On the premise that translators understand Chinese society and culture in an overall and comprehensive way, understand literature and art, and do not delete the original text at will, the cross-cultural acceptance effect of contemporary Chinese literature by Western readers will be increasingly improved.

3.2 The comparability with western works and Chinese characteristics of the works themselves contribute to the cross-cultural acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature

Analogical thinking is a factor that cannot be ignored behind the process of acceptance. The acceptance of cross-cultural literary works is often based on the pursuit of things similar to one's own literature, so as to seek

understanding and resonance in the similar literature. There are three modes of thinking about the overseas dissemination and acceptance of Chinese literature: story thinking, analogical thinking and circular thinking. Among them, analogy thinking can be said to prevail in readers' evaluation and acceptance of foreign literature. Monthly Author Ji Dawei (June 2021) depicted the present from vivid scenes seen in life before in his book *The Membranes*, making Western readers imagine images like canals from a Venice film. After reading Su Tong's *Shadow of the Hunter*, Western readers seem to feel the style of Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango Street* through its humorous depiction of life in a Chinese urban community.

In the process of cross-cultural communication and acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature, the communication of China to the outside world is often based on its own needs, while the acceptance of Chinese literature by the West is often based on the consistency of values to practice the doctrine of adoption. This kind of analogy thinking is quite common, because it is a kind of reading inertia and thinking set to compare the works of writers familiar with one's own literary tradition to Chinese literature. However, it is not advisable to blindly pursue analogical thinking. If you only seek something similar to your own literature, it is very likely to lead to the dislocation and wrong distance in the understanding of foreign literature. Therefore, although analogical thinking inevitably affects Western readers' acceptance orientation of Chinese contemporary literature, in the prevailing background of "seeking common ground", the pursuit of mutual proof between different literatures, and the role of "seeking differences" of Chinese native culture in the cross-cultural acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature should not be underestimated.

The essence of seeking differences is to seek something completely new from the standpoint of one's own culture, which is different from one's own cultural customs, and to pursue the complementarity of Eastern and Western cultures. Due to fundamental differences in ideology, contemporary literature based on China's unique policies, Sino-Japanese relations and cross-Straits relations is more in line with Western readers' pursuit of seeking differences. Whether Chinese or foreigners, if they want to truly understand Chinese local culture, related history and feel the cultural differences through a literary work, they need to restore and transcend the specific historical context in the novel based on the current view of development. Whether seeking common ground or differences, after experiencing cultural collision and integration, Western readers' preference for Chinese contemporary literature is often derived from the desire to incorporate Chinese literature into their own cultural framework. Infused with new insights and new horizons, Chinese contemporary literature is more likely to be favored by Western readers and regain vitality in a foreign country.

3.3 The author's strong intention of cross-cultural communication contributes to the cross-cultural acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature

In the cross-cultural process of Chinese contemporary literature, the author not only plays the role of producer, but also his communication intention, self-marketing, English ability and good communication degree with translators in circulation all have great influence on the selection and subsequent acceptance of the works that are disseminated to the Western world. In the offline activities of The Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing, the invited writers often have a strong desire for cross-cultural communication, and bring their new English translated works to further spread and promote their works through two-way communication with the feedback of Western readers, so as to improve their acceptance in the West.

Based on the perspectives of translators, readers and authors, we can draw the influencing factors behind the cross-cultural acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature. First, translators with high level and popularity and the overall view of naturalized translation under the background of Chinese culture are easier to be accepted by readers in the circulation of Chinese contemporary literature works abroad; Secondly, the analogy between Chinese literature itself and the works of traditional western literary writers, and the literature related to Chinese culture, political era and local customs, stimulate the thinking of seeking common ground and seeking differences in the reading process of Western readers, and accelerate the cross-cultural acceptance of Chinese contemporary literature by Western readers. Thirdly, the stronger the author's intention of cross-cultural communication, the more positive the acceptance effect of cross-cultural communication of his works. The reason is the effect, and the positive response of Western readers in turn acts on their preference for these factors, leading to more recommendation of such literature.

4. CONCLUSION

In the cross-cultural context, the author's grasp of the production link in the cross-cultural communication of literature cannot be ignored. By means of the author's selection of texts and construction of the historical background, contemporary Chinese literature contains the political environment, social development and people's life of different times in China, thus becoming a medium through which overseas readers can understand China. From the perspective of global vision, the author closely links the literary value and ideological connotation of his works with the nationality, cosmopolitanism and times in the process of material selection. Also, it is necessary to cross the cultural gap and realize the cultural identity in the cultural exchange and collision [5]. In the following circulation link, the author should

strengthen the cooperation with the translator and maintain a good relationship, which more or less affects the cooperation preference of the future translator.

In addition, translation is the only way for Chinese contemporary literature to communicate abroad. Because of its cross-cultural attributes, translated literature is the constituent element of national image. Translators shoulder the circulation function of spreading Chinese contemporary literature overseas. Therefore, their cultural translation strategies, cross-cultural ability, language expression, in-depth understanding of the background of the original story and Chinese culture are of great importance in translation practice. The translator should have regular communication with the author on the factors that affect the reception abroad, such as the subject matter and the preferences of the target audience, and discuss whether to adapt the work if necessary. At the same time, if the author has a good English level, the translator's translation practice will undoubtedly play the icing on the cake.

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