

A Study of Overseas Readers' Comments and Dissemination Strategies of Novels in the Third Front Construction Period

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ABSTRACT : Based on overseas readers' reviews of Third Front Construction literature, this paper analyzes the attitudes, value recognition, and cultural dissemination of overseas readers' comments, to tap the influence of Chinese culture spreading overseas. This paper aims to analyze the current situation at home and abroad with the literature of the Third Front Construction as the entry point. Taking Under the Hawthorn Tree as an example, the paper analyzes the readers' positive and negative attitudes and acceptance of the work, explores the overseas translation practices and communication strategies of Chinese literature, and provides reference for Chinese culture going global, and enhances China's international communication ability.

Keywords: cultural outreach, literature of Third Front Construction; readers' comments; dissemination strategies

I. BACKGROUND

1.1 Requirements of relevant national development strategies

The concept of "Culture Going Global" was formally introduced in 2002. During the Fourth Plenary Session of the 16th CPC Central Committee, the "Going Global Strategy" was systematically enhanced, laying the groundwork for the "Outline of the National 11th Five-Year Plan for Cultural Development". Subsequently, there was an explicit articulation of the strategy of "Culture Going Global". This was complemented by a resolution during the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, which highlighted the imperative to expand cultural exchanges, bolster international communication capacity and foreign discourse systems, and advance Chinese culture on the global stage. In 2013, General Secretary Xi Jinping introduced "the Belt and Road" Initiative. In March 2015, a joint release from the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) outlined the "Vision and Actions for Promoting the Construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road," detailing the development concepts of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road. It delineates the development concepts of the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st-Century Maritime Silk Road," and provides detailed insight into the background, principle of co-construction, framework of ideas, key points of cooperation, mechanisms of cooperation, opening-up situation, and action plan pertaining to the Belt and Road initiative. The "culture going global" policy supports the dissemination of culture, while "the Belt and Road Initiative" establishes a strong historical foundation and practical conditions for cultural integration. National strategies now prioritize openness, cooperation, exchange, and integration. The promotion of culture, recognized as a form of soft power, not only fosters stronger identity and mutual trust between countries but also bolsters our international influence.

1.2 The current situation of "culture going global"

The "culture going global" strategy is closely tied to the global distribution of Chinese literature, the establishment of overseas markets, and the augmentation of China's cultural influence. On June 15, 2022, China Social Science News reported a recent upsurge in the overseas distribution of Chinese literature, marking a new trend in its development during this era. Literary translations and media have flourished, while cultural industries powered by literary works have thrived, resulting in a growing influence of Chinese literature beyond its borders. This has led readers from various countries to gain enhanced understanding and appreciation for China through literature. Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, there has been a diverse range of literary exchange activities, including increasingly frequent visits between Chinese and foreign writers, participation of

Chinese writers in international book fairs and literary forums, and the implementation of a series of foreign translations of Chinese literature. The support of these policies and activities has expanded the scope for the global dissemination of Chinese literary works.

1.3. Current Development of Overseas Dissemination of Literary Works on the Third Front Construction

The Third Front Construction culture is a unique cultural phenomenon that emerged during a specific historical period in China, exhibiting distinct characteristics and values. Given its significance to China's current economic and social development, researching and disseminating literature on the Third Front Construction culture is crucial. Foreign research on China's Third Front Construction is relatively scarce. The existing literature primarily focuses on the historical background of the Third Front Construction, macro-policy aspects, urban development, and its role in China's modernization and development. Comprehensive analysis reveals that while foreign countries have studied the background of Third Front Construction in film and television works such as *Qing Hong*, *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, *The Return*, and *The Intruder*, there is minimal research on the literature associated with Third Front Construction, let alone its dissemination and reception in overseas countries. Currently, domestic research on the overseas dissemination and acceptance of literature related to Third Front Construction remains inadequate. Thus, there is a practical necessity to bolster research on the literature of Third Front Construction and to promote the dissemination of Chinese culture.

II. RESERCH OVERVIEW

2.1 Synopsis of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*

The novel *Under the Hawthorn Tree* was penned by Chinese American author Ai Mi and subsequently adapted into a film by director Zhang Yimou in 2010. The book portrays a poignant tale set in the historical backdrop of China's Third Front construction. It revolves around a city girl named Jing Qiu, who, under the guidance of her teacher, accompanies her classmates to the countryside to gain life experience and compile educational materials. During this period, she crosses paths with Lao San (Sun Jianxin), who is also in the countryside working with an exploration team. Their relationship progresses from initial acquaintance to affection, ultimately culminating in a heartrending conclusion where they vow to never part from each other. The central theme of the movie revolves around the notion that during this particular era, emotions were stifled, yet there existed a love that transcended societal constraints and mortality. Jing Qiu's and Lao San's timid romance serves as a testament to the presence of the purest form of love amidst life's adversities.

2.2 The Emotional Tendency of Overseas Readers' Comments

Online reviews are the expressions of consumers' positive or negative opinions regarding a product or service, based on their experiences, and are conveyed online in a review format (Zhao, 2019). Online reviews offer numerous advantages compared to offline reviews, such as increased interactivity, broader reach, and vast quantity of information. As a result, their impact is amplified (Lu & Feng, 2009). Online commenting enhances the effectiveness of information through various factors such as timing, length of comments, and the decision to add further comments. It encompasses evaluations and subjective opinions posted by online users in different forms such as text, ratings, pictures, videos, and other content on the Internet (Yan & Lv, 2018).

The popularity of books has been positively impacted by film and television, and *Under the Hawthorn Tree* is a prime example. Director Zhang Yimou is widely recognized in the international film industry for his distinct works with a Chinese cultural touch, such as *Red Sorghum* and *Qiu Ju Playing Lawyer*, which piques the curiosity of Western audiences and readers about the novel. The book's copyright was sold to 17 countries and regions, including the UK, France, Italy, Canada, Russia, Brazil, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Greece, Turkey, Israel, Japan, and South Korea. Through Python data processing and text mining, the readers' comments on *Under the Hawthorn Tree* from Amazon and Goodreads were gathered. After cleaning the data and reducing noise, it is evident that overseas readers and moviegoers expressed mixed opinions about *Under the Hawthorn Tree*.

A total of 165 positive emotional evaluations (65% of the total), 64 neutral emotional evaluations (25% of the total), and 25 negative emotional evaluations (10% of the total) were present in the readers' comments of the novel *Under the Hawthorn Tree*. Furthermore, the survey revealed that the book received a total of 1,900 ratings from overseas readers. Of these, 55% were given four or five stars, 30% were rated three stars, and 13% received one or two stars. Upon analyzing 109 comments exceeding 30 words in the positive category, specific points that were repeatedly praised by readers who enjoyed the book "Under the Hawthorn Tree" were identified.

2.2.1 Theme

Many readers appreciate *Under the Hawthorn Tree* for its intricate blend of history, geography, culture, realism, and romance, portraying the tale of two individuals from different societal backgrounds seeking pure

love within a distinct historical era. Readers are drawn to the pure love story in the novel and feel sorrowful for the tragic fate of the protagonists. As some readers commented: “Perhaps one of the most romantic novels I have ever read, Ai Mi’s *Under the Hawthorn Tree* gave me a strong story of what I always imagined true love to be, if such a thing existed to be, if such a thing existed” (Keefer). Numerous readers employed terms such as “sweet,” “pure,” “touching,” “selfless,” and “poignant” to depict the romance between the main characters. Simultaneously, they exhibited significant interest in the historical period, emphasizing the impact of the social milieu on the characters’ development and responsibilities. For example, some readers commented: “I really like the historical background. historical background” (Daniela).

2.2.2 Storyline Characterization

In the comments from readers, it’s evident that they are particularly satisfied with the storyline of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, as it receives the highest praise in their positive emotional assessments, followed by “characters,” and finally the narrative angle. Upon close examination of the readers’ comments, we noticed that they frequently used terms like “interesting,” “moving,” “tragic,” and “loyal” to portray their impressions of the book. For example, “At first, the story felt a bit slow and boring because everything was progressing very slowly, but as I continued reading, the story became more interesting and sweeter. The subtle romance between the protagonists is truly charming and at the same time, very tragic” (Yazmin Duran). The deliberate pacing of the narrative provides readers with a unique experience, gradually unveiling the emotional journey between the protagonists and culminating in a poignant denouement that elicits a fluctuation of emotions.

Several readers have also remarked that the story itself is riddled with misunderstandings until the final page. Several comments caught my attention: “the young people had their ideals deeply rooted, and anything that referred to ‘falling in love’ outside of the groups they were associated with or the appropriate age was seen as ‘betraying the system or succumbing to capitalism’. The innocence of the protagonist is unsettling” (Mariana). The readers are interested in the trajectory of the characters within the social environment and storyline, as they navigate through misunderstandings and disputes. This engenders anticipation about the eventual outcome of the story, specifically the resolution and conclusion.

2.2.3 History and Culture

The emotional evaluation of the historical and cultural perspectives of *Under the Hawthorn Tree* by readers tends to be neutral, yet some have made positive comments. The book was beautiful, interesting, fabulous, and I decided to read it. In the analysis of reader comments, it was evident that the majority of respondents used adjectives like “interesting” and “fabulous” to convey their positive views. This suggests that Chinese culture, history, and social life are perceived as captivating by readers, offering a distinctive oriental perspective that entices some to proactively engage with China’s historical narratives and immerse themselves in a distinct cultural experience.

Negative reviews offer valuable insights into Chinese literature dissemination. Some readers found the historical context obscure and deficient in illustrating its impact on the characters, making it challenging to continue reading. (1) Well, here in Costa Rica English language books are a little hard to somewhat sadly, the book itself does not contain a more detailed summary of the background. (2) It’s very badly translated and I even couldn’t finish the book. I think if I would read in the original language, it would be much better. The translation’s quality impacts readers’ experience, with some finding it dull and uninteresting. Additionally, some readers criticized the book’s packaging and the synopsis as problematic and unattractive. Overall, negative reviews were far outnumbered by positive ones, and the international distribution of *Under the Hawthorn Tree* had a beneficial effect.

III. COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

3.1 Translation and language localization

Currently, there are four main translation modes for rendering Chinese literature into foreign languages: those involving native Chinese translators, Western sinologists, joint efforts of Western sinologists and native Chinese translators, and overseas Chinese translators (Yan, 2016).

The primary objective of translation is to facilitate the comprehension of the source text by the readers of the target language. Furthermore, the artistry of the text is preserved based on its readability. Achieving this necessitates the translator’s profound understanding of the cultures in both the source and target language countries. Thus, among the four modes, joint translation by Western sinologists and native Chinese translators, as well as translation by overseas Chinese translators, are the preferred approaches (Hu, 2010).

Western readers are accustomed to reading naturalized translations of texts. Naturalization is primarily based on understanding the source text, and secondarily on familiarity with the culture of the target language country. Translators should moderately naturalize and supplement with alienation in their choice of translation strategies. Simultaneously, they must consider the cultural habits of the target readers and engage in appropriate

localization when necessary to improve readability. The translated text is easy for readers to understand while preserving the cultural connotations of the source text (Ji, Ma, Yu, & Lu, 2023).

3.2 Focus on the feedback of translation effect

The communication effect is the information conveyed by the communicator through the media to the audience, which is then acknowledged by the audience. This effect is pivotal in evaluating the success or failure of communication behavior. The feedback mechanism represents the audience's response to the information conveyed by the communicator. It comprises opinions communicated back to the communicator by the audience and serves as a vital basis for adjusting the communication strategy of the communicator (Zhang, 2018).

The effectiveness of translation is gauged by the level of acceptance and feedback received from the target audience, serving as a measure of success. Feedback from the target audience serves as a yardstick for evaluating the success of the translation process. This is often evidenced by the response of general readers and the critical assessment of professional articles in the media. Upon reaching the target market, it is crucial to monitor the reception by foreign audiences, establish a feedback mechanism for the target audience and adjust translation strategies accordingly, including the content and approach of translation.

Analyzing the feedback from international readers of *Under the Hawthorn Tree* suggests potential enhancements to the themes, storyline, character portrayal, and the integration of history and culture within the work. For instance, expanding the depiction of the historical context, incorporating cultural elements relevant to the target audience, and intensifying the emotional expression in the narrative.

3.3 Utilization of new technology and new media

After ushering in the new media era, the methods and habits of reading have undergone significant changes. The traditional approach of reading physical books is no longer entirely suited to today's accelerated pace of work and life. Instead, fragmentation and convenient dissemination have become the prevailing trend. Against the backdrop of the rapid development of intelligent terminal equipment, the proliferation of network connection databases, and the continuous expansion of artificial intelligence, the overseas dissemination of Chinese cultural works should manifest in various forms – namely, electronic, braille, audio, and video versions. Additionally, it should leverage more intuitive platforms such as film and television for the publicity of Chinese culture (He, 2023).

3.4 Organizing cultural activities and interaction between translators and readers

Interaction between translators and readers takes place through internet platforms, enabling translators to enhance their translations based on readers' feedback and engage in active discussions about encountered translation issues. Additionally, translators can assist readers in expanding their knowledge and comprehension, thereby fostering trust. Furthermore, apart from discussing translation activities, emotional exchanges between translators and readers are also facilitated. Readers can convey their emotional responses towards the work directly to the translator, thereby significantly boosting the translator's motivation to translate (Tang, 2020).

IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, the Third Front Construction literature holds significant historical and cultural value. However, its English translation encounters difficulties in reaching a wider audience internationally. By analyzing and studying the feedback from international readers of *Under the Hawthorn Tree* and conducting case studies on the translated version, we gain insight into the emotional response of overseas readers towards the book. Readers are drawn to the theme, characters, storyline, and the historical and cultural aspects of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, demonstrating its successful conveyance of the essence of Chinese culture to international readers. Although receiving predominantly positive feedback, the translation quality remains a crucial factor influencing the reading experience. Through evaluating the pros and cons of the international distribution of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, we can draw lessons from the overseas promotion strategies of Chinese literary works, thereby enhancing the global presence of Chinese culture and expanding its international influence.

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