

[Translation Studies]

The Application of Lasswell's Communication Model in the Study of Chinese Literature "Going Global"

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Abstract: To make China's literary works accessible to non-Chinese readers and promote mutual understanding between China and other countries, the Chinese government has put forward the "Going-Global" strategy. However, in the process of promoting the "Going-Global" strategy, China has encountered several obstacles which enormously strangle the acceptance of modern Chinese literature all over the world. Thus related national institutions must take some effective measures to boost the accessibility of China's literary works overseas and strengthen the understanding between China and the outside world. This article endeavors to discuss the problems propping up in our bid to carry out the "Going-Global" strategy — mainly our bid to translate modern Chinese literature. By analyzing four major obstacles which hinder the transmission of Chinese literature from Lasswell's communication model, the article intends to put forward relative suggestions to related institutions to further promote Chinese literature overseas.

Keywords: Chinese literature; translation; communication; Lasswell's communication model

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Introduction

"Going – Global Strategy", which was put forward on the Sixth Session of the Seventeenth Central Committee of the China Communist Party, represents one of China's new cultural moves in the new period. The strategy mainly focuses on the promotion of Chinese culture. It pointed out, "we should carry out multi-channel and multi-level cultural exchanges and actively participate in the dialogue with world civilizations, promote mu-

tual cultural reference from each other and enhance the appeal of Chinese culture across the world". Furthermore, it stressed the implementation of the "Going-Global" Project—namely the transmission of Chinese cultural products and services. Under the guidance of this strategy, multi-layer governments and institutions have made forays into the promotion and communication of diversified China's cultural products.

National literature is a typical representative of the culture of a country, and it usually conveys the specific national voice through national languages. "There is also general agreement that literature foregrounds language, and uses it in artistic ways" (Karnik & Sheikh, 2015, p.1). In this way, Chinese writers utilize their pens to create a type of art form which symbolizes the Chinese language and is the prototype of Chinese culture. Thus, Chinese literature "Going-Global" is placed on the list of priority in China's agenda. For several decades, governments and related institutions have launched campaigns to help promote Chinese literature "Going-Global", such as "Jin Shuiqiao Plan", "Chinese Books Going Global", "Classic China International Publishing Project" and "Silk Road Scholarship Project". However, as several scholars (Wang, 2010; Ma, 2013; Liu & Zhu, 2015) pointed out, the effects are not entirely satisfactory. Although a few Chinese writers did win some world-class literature awards (for example, Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2015 and Liu Cixin won the Hugo Award for Best Novel in 2015 for *The Three-Body Problem*), Chinese literature still could not enjoy good reputation and have great influence in the overseas book market. Liu Yameng and Zhu Chunshen (2015) suggested that a barely satisfactory translation version of Chinese literature is to blame. That is to say, the translation quality is one point that hinders the transmission of Chinese literature. Ma Huijuan (2013) held that Chinese literature does not appeal to overseas audiences because the literature itself is not so attractive as that of western works. The readers abroad want to read more than the story itself, and the common state of mind emanating in literature is of great importance to these readers. Han Jianmin and Xiong Xiaoming (2018) found that before we promote the Chinese literature "Going Global", "we need to know which Chinese themes are favored by the international book market". To sum up, the promotion of Chinese literature "Going Global" is about translation and communication. Considering all these factors hindering the translation and communication of Chinese literature, this article analyzes the difficulties Chinese literature is faced with and puts forward several suggestions to the related institutions from the perspective of Lasswell's communication model.

1. Five Factors Influencing the Translation and Communication of Chinese Literature

The promotion of Chinese literature is closely related to communication studies as this process can be regarded as the activity of conveying meaning to the outside world. In other words, communication is the activity of conveying meaning through a shared system of signs and semiotic rules. In this sense, we tentatively hold that the promotion of Chinese literature can be discussed under the theory of communication. Lasswell's model of communication was developed by American political scientist and communication theorist Harold Lasswell in 1948 while he was a professor at Yale Law School. In his article "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society" published in 1948, Lasswell (1948) describes that an act of communication is to answer the following questions: Who; Says What; In Which Channel; To Whom; With What Effect. Specifically speaking, in Lasswell's model, "Who" refers to transmitters who can be human beings, entities, or institutions and are responsible for collecting and delivering messages. "Says What" refers to the contents that transmitters communicate and deliver. "In Which Channel" means the medium through which information is transmitted, and

the channel could be newspapers, radios, TV, and other emerging electronic devices. “To Whom” refers to the audience and communication objects. “With What Effect” means the extent of the audience’s acceptance of the information.

Literature translation is a way of cultural communication. That is to say, Lasswell’s five communication models could also be applied to this process. Therefore, the factors influencing translation and communication of literature consist of:

- 1) The subjects of translation and communication of literature;
- 2) The contents of translation and communication of literature;
- 3) The channels of translation and communication of literature;
- 4) The audience of translation and communication of literature;
- 5) The effects of translation and communication of literature.

If translated works cannot get to the audience and be accepted by them, the communication process is unsuccessful, and the communication action is meaningless. As for the translation of Chinese literature, we can view this process from these five aspects accordingly and get enlightenment from the following analyses.

1.1 The subjects of translation and communication of Chinese literature

The subjects of translation and communication of Chinese literature refer to translators of literary works. The functions of translators are to offer the translation version and negotiate and communicate among the original author, the editor, the patron, and so on. Pym (2012) believed that translators should be like “an intermediary” to coordinate various relations. Choosing the subjects of translation and communication of Chinese literature is one of the determinants that impact the final effects for Chinese literature going global. However, as Hong Yi (2012) put it, the lack of translation talents has been the biggest hindrance in the transmission of Chinese literature. For a long time, the local translators, namely the Chinese translators, have undertaken the translation of Chinese literature. However, most of the local translators do not have a good command of literature expressions in English. What’s more, they are not so familiar with the reading habits and market of the publication abroad. Therefore, it is difficult for them to translate Chinese literature properly into English, and foreign literature specialists and readers will not easily accept their translation works. In this sense, more suitable translators are needed during this process. Huang Youyi (2010) mentioned that a sinologist serves as the communicational bridge of the translation of Chinese literature. As the subjects of the translation, the sinologists will form a kind of prestige among readers abroad and will be easily accepted by readers. However, at present, there is a serious deficiency in the number of sinologists around the world.

1.2 The contents of translation and communication of Chinese literature

The contents of translation mean to translate “what”, which includes the choice of original Chinese literary works and translation strategies. Xu Jun (2002) believed that what should be translated is the most important compared with how to translate.. If one selects proper content to translate, the translated texts will win favor with a wide range of readers. Otherwise, the transmission of the translated texts will meet with indifference and fall flat.

Currently, China’s translated works going abroad are mostly ancient Chinese classical books. Thus the type of Chinese literature is not so diverse. According to Liu Yi (2013), “to achieve the effect of intercultural communication, the translated work should at least possess two essential elements: universal value and regional char-

acteristic”. In this sense, the works selected for translation and recommendation should also have these two considerations. First, it should fully reflect the Chinese people’s ideas in the globalization process of the world today and their views on current global hot issues. Secondly, reflecting on the academic voices of China will enable readers in the target language to have a whole picture of a real China.

1.3 The channels of the translation and communication of Chinese literature

The channels of translation and communication of Chinese literature are to handle “in what ways to communicate”. The variety of channels of Chinese literature going abroad decides at a certain time the likelihood the readers receive the cultural messages emanating from Chinese literature. If translated works have access to the overseas market, the more channels the sender possesses, the higher frequency the readers will accept translation works; the longer the time lasts, the more easily the effect will be met with.

For several years, as Geng Qiang (2010) pointed out, how the Chinese literature transmits is too simple. It mainly consists of domestic publications and domestic book fairs. Having access to the world’s communication system is far from enough. The primary bottleneck of the transmission of Chinese literature is poor overseas marketing channels. How to exploit the overseas markets and establish an international publishing industry with Chinese characteristics are considerable factors in cultural communication between China and the outside world.

1.4 The audience of the translation and communication of Chinese literature

The audience of translation and communication of Chinese literature means “to whom to translate”. The effects of the translation are evaluated by the readers’ reflections on the translated Chinese literature. The communication will produce no effect if the receivers cannot accept the senders of messages. The audience is the object of the translation activities and the embodiment of translation effects. Thus, an intensive study on the audience of translation is quite necessary, and accordingly, we adjust to the contents and channels of translation to achieve satisfactory effects.

In the process of the transmission of Chinese literature, Zhao Fan (2012) believes that the related institution in charge just sells the overseas copyright to the publisher abroad and signs an agreement without considering the need of the readers. To know about the audience of translation and adjust to the transmission strategies accordingly are major concerns in the transmission of Chinese literature.

2. Suggestions for the Transmission of Chinese Literature

From the above analysis, this paper has already indicated the problems existing in the process of the transmission of Chinese literature from the perspective of the communication mode. The effects of “Going Global” of Chinese culture depend on the whole process of translation and communication, not on a certain link. “To obtain a good effect, it is necessary to pay attention to the various elements in the communication process”. (Yin & Wang, 2021: 50) Correspondingly, some suggestions are listed about the five factors in the communication mode. We tentatively believe that some related cultural institutions and agencies could ponder on the following suggestions.

2.1 The choice of translators

As to the choice of translators, just as Huang Youyi (2010) recommends in one report if one Chinese work

has two translation versions, one by Chinese translator and the other by sinologist, he recommends using the latter one as the first translation version. For as in the process of Chinese literature translation, the translator needs to know a lot about the cultural background of the target language. The sinologists, after all, have a good command of the cultural phenomena of their own country, and they can make exact judgments on some difficult cultural points when translating Chinese literature into the target language.

Some sinologists still have difficulty understanding the original Chinese texts due to a lack of language and cultural background. This is the time when Chinese translators bring their advantage into full play. We suggest that the local translators (Chinese translators) cooperate with sinologists (translators whose mother tongues are not Chinese) to complement each other to create better Chinese literature of various language versions.

2.2 The choice of the translated texts

In the past, as Bao Xiaoying (2015) calculated, “less than 1500 kinds of Chinese books were translated into the West from 1900 to 2010”. The subject matter of translated works should be more diverse and not limited to the traditional and classic literary fields. For instance, nowadays, many westerners still believe that China is a backward and ignorant farming-centered country. This is partly due to the long-standing material superiority of Western countries and their ignorance about China. They form such a judgment only by looking through some Chinese literary works depicting China’s rural areas. On the other hand, Liu Yi (2013) holds that the contents of the translated works need to meet these two elements: universal value and regional characteristic. When choosing what kind of works to be translated, the related institutions had better focus on the texts reflecting the issues our world is faced up with and the common conceptions all mankind share, or some texts reflecting Chinese profound culture and value, which are also the most interesting issues that overseas readers concern most. In this way, enlightening viewpoints on world issues by Chinese scholars could be heard by the overseas audience and improve the discourse ability of the Chinese publishing industry on the interpretation of the world.

2.3 The transmission channels

In the circulation process of translated works, the related institutions should broaden their horizon to enlarge their medium of circulation and know more about the foreign market. After about 100 years of development, the prosperous western countries have already formed a sustained, systematic copyright management chain, which is mediated by copyright agents helping authors of the original work (the one who creates the original literature) make copyright agreements with foreign publishers (publishers outside China). In this way, the use of the copyright is enlarged from the domestic market to the international market. In the future, the publication of the Chinese literature should also pay attention to the promotion of such a management chain.

Secondly, the transmission of Chinese literature also relies on an international platform such as the Frankfurt Book Fair and Book Exposition of America, in which we can expand publishing channels further and enhance cooperation with the outside world. Some of China’s Translation Grand Programs could build cooperation with foreign publishers through these international book fairs. As Han & Xiong (2018) pointed out, “our ultimate goal is to establish a publishing value system that not only conforms to the international mainstream publishing values but also demonstrates Chinese characteristics”. In this way, translated works published by these publishers could be more easily accepted by foreign readers.

Finally, with frequent cross-cultural communication nowadays, it is far from enough to rely solely on off-line platforms for cultural translation and communication. With the advent of the Internet era, network platforms

have played an increasingly important role. With the advantage of low cost and wide coverage, the internet could be a novel way for the transmission of Chinese literature. Related governmental and non – governmental institutions and agencies should give impetus to the field of online Chinese literature and explore the feasibility of relying on online platforms. To sum up, “China should follow the development trend of the global press and publishing industry, and actively promote the planning of integrated publishing, overseas investment, talent training and other special areas of the building of China’s publishing international communication capacity”(Wang & Li, 2020).

2.4 *The attention of readers’ needs*

Translated works get truly transmitted only when they get to readers and be accepted by readers. Therefore, it is essential to know about the reading habits and preferences of overseas readers. When Chinese literary works go global, related institutions and agencies should learn more about the reading needs of overseas readers and select proper works to get translated. For translators, they need to better understand the reading interest of readers and choose the proper translation strategies to get their translation works done. Furthermore, before distributing literary works, China’s related departments should conduct enough marketing research in the product planning and organization phase. In the process of editing, publishing, marketing, and distribution, every related entity should be imbued with audience-centered concepts and operates the projects based on the actual needs and reading preferences of overseas readers.

3. Conclusion

To strengthen the transmission of the Chinese literature is based on two considerations: one is the weak position the Chinese literature occupies in the international literary markets; the other is the initial phase the transmission of Chinese literature lies in the international literary circle. These current situations determine that when considering strategies, we should focus on the acceptance of target culture in terms of the translator’s choice, translated texts, channels of transmission, and readers’ needs. Specifically, we need to promote the cooperation between sinologists and local Chinese translators, choose diversified and proper translated texts under the needs of the overseas audience, and expand online and offline publishing channels. Only by constantly studying the translators, the contents, the channels, and the readers in detail and their interactive relations, can we finally get appropriate ways to promote the transmission and distribution of Chinese literature.

Notes

1 The Sixth Session of the Seventeenth Central Committee of the China Communist Party was held on October 15, 2011, in which after the deliberation, the Chinese government passed a resolution to promote the overseas transmission of Chinese culture, and the term the “Going-out” strategy was clearly defined.

2 The author could not find an official English version, and most of the contents of the documents are translated by the author.

3 The plan was put forward by the State Council Information Office to fund the foreign publishers publishing some Chinese literature works.

4 The project is promoted by the State Council Information Office and China Foreign Language Publishing Administration to sponsor the publication of Chinese books overseas and donate books to foreign libraries.

5 The project is put forward by National Press and Publication Administration to encourage and support the publication of outstanding export-oriented Chinese books that meet the needs of foreign markets

6 The programs are promoted by National Press and Publication Administration to promote the copyright export and co-publishing with foreign institutions of translated Chinese literary works

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