

Study on the Cross-cultural Acceptance and Influence of Dickens' Literary Works

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Abstract: This research is entitled "The Reception and Effect of Charles Dickens' Works in cross-cultural Communication", which can analyze the reception of Dickens' works in China and its deep penetration into Chinese society, culture and literature in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China. Focusing on the period from 1895 to 1915, when Western ideas flooded into the land of China, Dickens, one of the leading figures in Western literature, whose passages were translated into China, immediately triggered profound reverberations. This paper begins with an overview of the initial transformation of Dickens' works in the Chinese environment, and studies the translation methods, publication history, and the reaction and experience of the early readers. Further, by depicting the Chinese society from 1895 to 1915, it reveals how Dickens's works interwoven dialogue with the ideological changes in China at that time, especially insight into how the intellectual elite reflected on and challenged the established social structure with Diellet's words, and further promoted social changes. Then this study also focuses on the localization process of Dickens' works in the Chinese cultural circle, focusing on the reshaping of themes, the adaptation of literary techniques and narrative techniques, and the driving force of these variations on the evolution of modern Chinese literature. Finally, individual texts such as *Oliver Twist* and *A Tale of Two Cities* are analyzed to deepen the insight of illusion and innovation in cross-cultural communication. The conclusion shows that China's absorption of Dickens goes beyond mere literary transaction, and actually reflects the confrontation and fusion of the blend of Chinese and Western. These imported works not only broadened the Chinese people's vision of literature and art, but also boosted the modernization of Chinese society and brought new vitality to the prosperity of Chinese literature. This study contributes a new view into the Sino-English cultural intersection in the late 19th century and early 20th century, and also provides a valuable reference for further research on the acceptance and influence of cross-cultural literature.

Keywords: Charles Dickens; Cross-cultural Acceptance; China; 1895-1915; Literary Influence; Social Change.

1. The Introduction of Dickens' Works in China

In the twenty years from the early 1900s to the 1920s, China was experiencing a profound social change. This historical moment marked the critical pass of Chinese civilization's transition from tradition to modernity. During this period, the import of Western culture was one of the distinctive signs of The Times. Charles Dickens, an undisputed giant in the British literary world, gradually introduced his works into the Chinese land by means of multiple ways and exerted a growing influence on the Chinese literary world. the earliest translation activities can be traced back to the end of the 19th century, when some missionaries and intellectuals began to translate Western literary works into Chinese, in order to promote cultural exchanges between China and the West and promote social progress [1]. Early translators of Dickens's works were mainly missionaries and some enlightened intellectuals. In the case of Lin Shu (1852-1924), an outstanding pioneer of Chinese translation in the late Qing Dynasty, he and Wei Yi jointly produced the first translation of *David Copperfield* (published in 1897), which was the first time Dickens's great work was presented in the landscape of China. Lin's translation is brilliant, and his exquisite preservation of the artistic rhythm and emotional level of the original text makes his translation highly sought after by readers. At the same time, such as Yan Fu, Zhou Guisheng and other translation masters are not outdone, one after another to show many of Dickens's masterpiece, such as "*Oliver Twist*" (published in 1903), "*A Tale of Two Cities*" (published in 1907) and other immortal chapters. Early

translators adopted different strategies when translating Dickens' works. Lin Shu prefers literal translation and strives to maintain the linguistic style and emotional expression of the original, which enables Chinese readers to feel the charm of Dickens' works more directly. Some translation practitioners tend to adopt the strategy of connotation translation, striving to deeply integrate the main meaning of the original text with the Chinese cultural context, so as to enhance the resonance and identification of local readers, and further improve the readability and acceptance of the translation. Zhou Guisheng's interpretation of *A Tale of Two Cities* is a good example. He cleverly reconstructs part of the narrative line and character dialogue to better conform to the reading expectation and cognitive framework of Chinese readers.

With the growing popularity of Dickens' works in China, many publishers are competing to release various translations, forming a Dickens craze. Such a boom has not only swept Shanghai, Beijing and other metropolises, but also become a trend throughout the country. Dickens's initial fans, composed mainly of intellectuals, students and a portion of the urban population, became the first pioneers of this cross-cultural reading feast. These readers have a strong interest in Western literature and hope to broaden their horizons and understand the world through reading foreign literature. The rich social content and profound humanistic concern in Dickens' works have created a strong resonance among Chinese readers. Many intellectuals spoke highly of Dickens's works [2]. Dickens's literary legacy has been observed to be praised for both artistic excellence and profound social influence. People of insight, such as Liang Qichao, often quote Dickens in his

discourse, and regard him as a "social analyser" that cannot be underestimated. Dickens's works pointed out the dark side of the capitalist system with his sharp insight, and played a key role in the ideological enlightenment of the social change movement in China. In the school education of the time, Dickens's works were also widely used in teaching. By reading these works, many students not only improve their English, but also enhance their understanding of Western culture. Some student societies have also organized reading clubs to discuss the themes and characters in Dickens's works, forming a good academic atmosphere. In the city, Dickens's works are also popular with ordinary residents [3]. These narrative chapters, with their vivid and fascinating plots and vivid characters, are widely favored by readers and make Dickens's works popular. Local bookshops and libraries often launch reading exchange activities and academic forums on Dickens, which often attract the enthusiastic participation of many citizens, and further significantly promote the wide spread of Dickens's literary legacy in China.

2. Acceptance in a Sociocultural Context

2.1. Social Conditions in China from 1895 to 1915

Dickens's narrative art, with its vivid plot and full portrayal of characters, is deeply loved by readers, and further leads to Dickens's works becoming popular at that time. Study activities and academic forums on Dickens' works are often conceived in libraries and literary platforms across the country, and such activities frequently attract a large number of enthusiasts, significantly promoting the extensive and far-reaching penetration of Dickens' literary legacy in China. The period from 1895 to 1915 marked a turning point in China's history, a time of tremendous social, political, economic, and cultural transformation. The internal and external social conflicts intensified, and the encroachment of external forces came one after another, forming a dual crisis of the country. Although the reform of the Hundred Days' Reform was not finished, it also showed the initial signs of the awakening of the Chinese intellectual class in seeking the path of national revitalization. The subsequent storm of Xinhai broke out in 1911, and the fall of the Qing Court and the birth of the Republic of China were inevitably accompanied by continuous conflicts and turmoil. In this era, Chinese society was performing a grand drama of breaking and reconciling, with the old imperial system fading away and new social structures and interest groups emerging [4]. With the rapid pace of urbanization, the industrial and commercial industries in Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and many other big cities have sprung up, with skyscrapers and factories springing up like bamboo shoots. Meanwhile, the gap between urban and rural areas and the problem of rural lag have become increasingly prominent in this turbulent change. With the spread of Western learning to the east, China's thinking mode and value orientation experienced drastic changes [5]. The establishment of new educational institutions, the surge of overseas study and the creation of various newspapers and magazines have greatly promoted the wide spread of new ideas. At this time, the intellectual community began to advocate the ideas of science, democracy and freedom, and resist superstition and autocracy. A large number of Western literature, philosophy and scientific documents were translated and translated, which brought innovative vitality to

Chinese society.

2.2. The Interaction between Dickens' Works and the Social Trend of Thought in China at That Time

The spread of Dickens's works in China was closely related to the social trend of thought at that time. These works not only satisfied the curiosity of Chinese readers for Western literature, but also had a profound interaction with China's social reform and ideological enlightenment [6]. The literary works of Charles Dickens are famous for their exquisite social analysis and strong humanitarian care. *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* and other great works have clearly exposed the class differentiation and judicial inequality under the capitalist system, which has a profound contrast with the situation of some Chinese society. Many intellectual elites have given elegant literary evaluation to Dickens's brushstrokes, and praised the profound social meaning carried by his works as a tool to analyze the current situation and stimulate social reform. The humanitarian spirit in Dickens' works also coincides with the benevolence thought in Chinese traditional culture. For example, the profound analysis of human nature and the celebration of the spirit of sacrifice in *A Tale of Two Cities* have inspired Chinese readers to think about the good and evil of human nature. Many intellectuals combined these views of Dickens with the Confucian idea of benevolence and advocated humanitarian-based social reform. From the late Qing Dynasty to the early 20th century, the Chinese intellectual class advocated scientific rationality and opposed obscurantism as the mainstream trend of thought. Charles Dickens's brushwork often contains the essence of realism, and he demonstrates the authority of science and reason with subtle social analysis. His works revolutionized the thinking paradigm and expression strategy of the Chinese intellectual elite, and further catalyzed the penetration of scientific thinking in China. Through the interpretation and practice of Dickens' literature, Chinese enlighteners reflected their insight into Western civilization and their ambition to promote social evolution. Dickens's chapters, like a critical prism, are regarded by many advanced elements as a tool to subvert the status quo and drive social change. Liang Qichao's generation paid tribute to Dickens repeatedly in their works, used his words to lash out at the decadence and bias of the system in the late Qing Dynasty, and firmly believed that Dickens's literary legacy could enlightens the public to see the root of social ills and stimulate the vitality of reform. Dickens's unique narrative skills and sincerity in depicting the world have deeply influenced the Chinese literary world, and many local writers have adopted his realistic style and turned to depict the life of the grassroots, just as Lu Xun's *The True Story of Ah Q* is to some extent indebted to Dickens. By portraying the image of a small character Ah Q, this novel expose social inequality and the fragility of human nature. Dickens's classics also had a place on the school platform and were widely integrated into the educational practice of the time. Many schools incorporate these works into their textbooks to develop critical thinking and humanistic literacy through reading and discussion. Some teachers also organize students to conduct reading clubs and seminars to discuss the themes and characters in the works together, forming a good academic atmosphere.

3. The Localization Process of Dickens' Works

3.1. Adaptation of Literary Style and Narrative Technique and its Influence

In the translation and dissemination of Dickens' works in China, local translators and authors have implemented targeted adjustments to his narrative art and style in order to resonate with the aesthetic tendency and cultural context of the Chinese audience. In the early translation practice, translators often made careful transformations to the rhythm of Dickens' words. When Lin Shu introduced David Copperfield into Chinese, he cleverly reshaped the original work with elegant classical Chinese forms, which not only preserved the artistic soul of the original work, but also adapted to the reading habits of contemporary Chinese readers. With the rise of the New Culture Movement, the translation community tends to adopt approachable spoken language to help a wider audience understand the meaning of the work. For example, Zhou Guisheng's translation of *Oliver Twist*, published by the Commercial Press in 1903, is faithful to the main line and character development of the original work, while subtly adjusting some plots to suit the reading expectations of Chinese readers. He localized some of the unique British cultural background to make it easier for readers to understand. In terms of narrative techniques, Chinese writers draw on Dickens's realistic techniques in their creation, but they also make innovations according to their own needs. For example, in *The True Biography of Ah Q*, Lu Xun showed the living conditions of the people at the bottom of society through the portrayal of Ah Q, a small figure, which was inspired by Dickens's realism to some extent. At the same time, Lu Xun also combines traditional Chinese satire and humor to make his works more Chinese. The incisive analysis of human nature in *A Tale of Two Cities* and its discussion of reverence for the spirit of sacrifice have prompted Chinese readers to reflect deeply on the moral poles - good and evil. Through the historical narration of the Warring States period, Guo Moruo's drama *Qu Yuan* successfully points out the brilliance of human character and the tragic side of historical change, and its artistic expression technique evokes the resonance of *A Tale of Two Cities* to some extent. In terms of structural arrangement, Chinese translators and writers will also make appropriate adjustments according to the reading habits of Chinese readers. For example, some long novels are divided into multiple short pieces when translated so that readers can digest and understand them more easily. In addition, some works will add annotations and background introductions when translated to help readers better understand the background and cultural connotations of the story. David Copperfield's depiction in the context of individual development, especially in his subtle elaboration of how to shape family ethics and interpersonal interactions, deeply resonates with the Chinese cultural view of the family. Many readers have experienced David's journey as an inspiration to maintain a positive attitude and perseverance in the face of life's challenges.

3.2. The Inheritance and Innovation of Realistic Techniques and Humanitarian Themes

The deep spread and acceptance of Dickens' works in China not only broadens the literary cognition of Chinese

readers, but also leaves a profound imprint on the literary process within the boundaries of modern Chinese culture. His realistic concept has undoubtedly contributed a driving force that cannot be ignored for the progress of Chinese modern and contemporary literature. Many Chinese writers have drawn on Dickens's realism in their works, reflecting social problems and expressing their expectations for social reform through detailed descriptions of social reality. For example, MAO Dun's *Midnight* and Ba Jin's *Home* were all influenced by Dickens's realistic techniques to some extent. *Oliver Twist* has a profound influence on the creation of modern Chinese literature. Many writers have drawn on this work's realistic approach and profound revelation of social issues in their creation. Lao She's masterpiece *Camel Xiangzi*, with its profound depiction of the protagonist Xiangzi's hardships, reflects the sad picture of the people at the bottom of the feudal society, which can be compared with the plight of the poor class revealed in *Oliver Twist*. At the same time, there is no shortage of echoes of *Oliver Twist* in the field of children's literature, advocating the concept of children's well-being and the ardent hope for justice. The humanitarian thought contained in Dickens' classic works has become a persistent source of inspiration in the boundary of modern Chinese literature, which has catalyzed many writers to dig deeper into the dimension of humanity and to enlarge the concept of humanism in their works. For example, *Camel Xiangzi* shows Xiangzi's life path in detail, which not only exposes the plight of the bottom of society, but also praises the brilliance of human nature, inadvertently echoing the humanitarian feelings in Dickens's works. *A Tale of Two Cities* has also exerted a profound influence on the creation of modern Chinese literature. Many writers draw on the historical background and narrative skills of this work in their creation, and explore the complexity of human nature and social changes through the description of historical events. For example, Guo Moruo's *Qu Yuan* shows the brilliance of human nature and the tragedy of history through the description of historical events in the Warring States period, which is similar to *A Tale of Two Cities*.

The variety and innovation of Dickens' works have also inspired Chinese writers. Many writers have made bold innovations while drawing on Dickens's literary forms and techniques. For example, Zhang Ailing's *Red Rose and White Rose* not only has the shadow of Dickens' works but also has a unique personal style in narrative technique and language style. *David Copperfield* has also exerted a profound influence on the creation of modern Chinese literature. Many writers draw on the theme of growth and narrative skills of this work in their creation, and explore the true meaning of life and social changes through the description of the protagonist's growth process. For example, Ba Jin's "Home" shows the complexity of family ethics and social changes through the description of three generations of the Gao family, which is similar to *David Copperfield*. In addition, some bildungsromans and autobiographical novels are also inspired by *David Copperfield*, emphasizing deep reflection on personal growth and criticism of social reality. Through the case analysis of Dickens' masterpieces such as *Oliver Twist*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *David Copperfield* in the Chinese context, it is not difficult to find that Dickens' pen and ink play a crucial role in the matrix of Chinese cross-cultural communication. These works not only broadened the literary horizon of Chinese readers, but more importantly, they resonated deeply with the flood of social change and cultural

demands in China. In the continuous process of acceptance, interpretation and re-creation, Chinese academic pioneers and literati implemented innovative interpretations and local transformations of these foreign classics in order to adapt to the artistic tastes and cultural soil of Chinese readers. Such examples of cross-cultural communication vividly point out the power of literature to cross national borders and penetrate various cultural contexts, and catalyze the integration and dialogue of Eastern and Western civilizations.

4. Conclusion

From 1895 to 1915, the experience and response of Charles Dickens' works in China was a microcosm of multicultural integration, which not only broadened the literary and artistic horizons of Chinese readers, but also catalyzed the progress of Chinese society and the evolution of local literature. In this way, the research in this paper can contribute to different insights into the interaction between Chinese and British

civilizations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and hopefully provide a valuable reference for the topic of cross-cultural literary acceptance and influence.

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