



## The Dissemination and Reception of Contemporary Chinese Literature in the English-Speaking World: Historical Trajectory, Translation Mechanisms, and the Landscape of Reception

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### Abstract

Taking dissemination and reception as its core dimensions, this study constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework encompassing chronological trajectories, translation mechanisms, and readers reception landscapes. Drawing on translation theory and reception aesthetics, and grounding its analysis in primary translated texts and a wide range of documentary sources, this paper systematically traces the seventy-year evolution of the translation and dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature in the English-speaking world, with a view to assessing its actual communicative impact. This developmental history falls into four phases: state-directed translation during the Cold War, market-oriented transition in the reform era, large-scale dissemination in the early twenty-first century, and a diversifying landscape in the post-Nobel period. This chronological framework clarifies the developmental trajectory from unidirectional ideological output to multi-genre, market-driven bidirectional exchange. By analyzing structural constraints such as the imbalanced text selection, the over-concentration of premium translation resources on a few prominent writers, inadequate cultural adaptation, and ideological interpretation and incorporating the translation practices of translators such as Howard Goldblatt and Ken Liu, this study demonstrates the pivotal role of translator subjectivity and cultural negotiation in shaping the reception of translated texts. Meanwhile, through typical case studies of Mo Yan, Liu Cixin, and Can Xue, this paper compares the reception patterns of academic and general readerships. The findings suggest that digital media have created new opportunities for the global circulation of Chinese literature. However, to overcome communication barriers, redress the cultural deficit, and facilitate the deeper integration of contemporary Chinese literature into the global literary system, it is imperative to move beyond the unidirectional-output paradigm. A diversified, collaborative dissemination framework must be developed; empirical readers research must be strengthened; and a multi-dimensional evaluation mechanism must be refined—all with a view to fostering genuinely reciprocal cross-cultural dialogue.

**Keywords:** contemporary Chinese literature, English-speaking world, literary translation, cross-cultural communication, reader reception

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### 1. Introduction

The translation and dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature into the English-reading world constitutes a complex and uniquely nuanced cultural phenomenon within the broader context of twentieth-century international literary exchange. Unlike the centuries-long, slow, and fragmented translation of classical Chinese literature which relied heavily on foreign missionaries and sinologists, the English translation of contemporary Chinese literature emerged from a far more convoluted historical context, one in which postwar geopolitical realignments, domestic opening-up policies, and global market forces converged. This external communication system must not only serve the state's aspiration to project its cultural image and engage in cross-

cultural dialogues, but also adapt to the established commercial rules of the global publishing industry, whilst simultaneously contending with the long-standing reading aesthetics and cultural cognitive frameworks of English-speaking readers. In his monograph *Dissemination and Reception of Modern and Contemporary Chinese Literature Overseas*, Yang (2024) <sup>[13]</sup> systematically integrates and innovatively reconstructs the research paradigm for the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese literature. Moving beyond the conventional academic limitation of discussing the translation of contemporary literature in isolation, Yang connects the overall trajectory of modern and contemporary literature. He introduces comprehensive innovations across research boundaries, observational perspectives, analytical frameworks, theoretical systems, research paradigms, and interpretive discourses. Through this approach, he systematically maps out developmental trajectories, national discrepancies, imbalances in reception, cross-regional influences, the overseas construction of China's image, and external cultural communication strategies, thereby constructing a comprehensive, multi-dimensional knowledge system. The book critically reflects upon and refutes the biased perceptions of China generated under Western-centric perspectives, traces the translation histories of Chinese literature in Japan, Russia, Europe, and the United States across different stages, identifies the internal and external causes of overseas reception imbalances, quantifies cross-cultural communication efficacy through multi-dimensional evaluation, and analyses the intrinsic mechanisms through which literary narratives contribute to the overseas shaping of China's image. It also offers strategic reflections on the 'going global' of Chinese literature, its 'deep integration into overseas fields', and the construction of Chinese studies as an academic discipline. Furthermore, the study incorporates empirical cases of the overseas dissemination of classic works, such as Bei Dao's poetry and Mo Yan's novels, to substantiate its theoretical propositions with representative examples, thereby forming an integrated and mutually reinforcing research system of historical tracing, theoretical construction, and case analysis. This framework serves as the core analytical foundation and academic reference for the present investigation into the comprehensive dissemination and reception of contemporary Chinese literature in the English-speaking world.

Viewed from a multidisciplinary perspective, the discourse surrounding the dissemination and reception of contemporary Chinese literature in the English-speaking world has moved beyond the narrow confines of traditional translation history. It has evolved into an interdisciplinary research domain that fuses translation studies, reception aesthetics, cross-cultural communication, and world literature theory. The various critical discourses on contemporary Chinese literature generated within English-language academia serve, on the one hand, to define the evaluative coordinates of Chinese literature within the global literary canon, and on the other, to shape continuously the overseas public's imagination of Chinese society and culture. A comprehensive and systematic review of this issue not only enables an objective assessment of the achievements and persistent constraints of Chinese literature's overseas dissemination over the years, but also helps to extract the underlying operational principles of cross-cultural literary communication that have broader relevance. Ma (2013) observes that overseas sales and library holdings of translated works remain sluggish, with Western

readers often treating these works as socio-political documents while overlooking their intrinsic literary value. She further notes that the shortage of qualified translators, the uneven quality of translations, and entrenched Western aesthetic biases collectively constrain the overseas circulation of Chinese literature. Clearly, there remains considerable scope for further research in this area.

Using 'dissemination' and 'reception' as its two core analytical concepts, this study develops a three-dimensional analytical system that spans chronological evolution, multi-layered translation mechanisms, and differentiated reader reception landscapes. Methodologically, the study draws on foundational theoretical resources from translation studies and reception aesthetics. It cross-references primary materials, such as translated texts, book reviews in overseas media, and online reader reviews, with secondary research literature, including Chinese and international academic monographs and journal articles. It balances macro-historical phases with micro-level case studies of individual writers, achieving a synthesis of macro-narrative and micro-textual demonstration. The 'English-speaking world' as defined herein refers primarily to the United States and the United Kingdom—the two core literary markets—while also taking into account translation practices and readers responses in other Anglophone countries, including Canada and Australia. This ensures a comprehensive observational scope that covers the major English-language regions.

## **2. Historical Trajectory: The Evolution from State-Coordinated Translation to Market-Driven Dissemination**

### **2.1. State-Coordinated Translation Practices during the Cold War Era (1949–1979)**

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the English translation of contemporary Chinese literature has undergone a history spanning more than seventy years. The translation activities of the first thirty years (1949-1979) took place entirely within the context of Cold War ideological confrontation. During this period, the primary mandate of translating literature for external circulation was to convey ideological narratives to overseas readers. In 1951, the English edition of Chinese Literature was launched, followed later by a French edition. Charged with the official task of systematically promoting contemporary Chinese literary works to English-speaking readers, the translations published in this journal carried a pronounced ideological orientation of the era. Consequently, the readership capable of accessing these translations was extremely narrow, confined to overseas sinologists, specialists in Chinese studies, and a small elite group interested in contemporary China, while the general overseas public had virtually no access to them.

The communication system during this phase can be characterised as a state-directed translation framework. The selection of works for translation and the criteria governing that selection were entirely determined and coordinated by official cultural institutions within China. The overall approach to translation phrasing and textual editing was subordinated to the overarching goals of external publicity, while circulation channels were restricted to state-sponsored foreign-language periodicals and a small number of overseas academic publishers that had official cooperative qualifications. Although this system laid the groundwork for contemporary Chinese literature to enter the English-reading world and established a symbolic cultural presence for

Chinese literature overseas during a specific historical period, it suffered from notable limitations in both breadth and depth of dissemination due to constraints in distribution channels, readership, and textual value orientations. It ultimately failed to foster genuine reciprocal literary exchange. In retrospect over the seventy-year trajectory, there is broad consensus in the field that the overseas dissemination of contemporary literature has undergone a clear paradigm shift: from state-coordinated ideological publicity to market-oriented, self-sustaining literary exchange. The translation practices of the three decades of the Cold War thus mark the starting point of this complete transition.

## 2.2. Transition of Translation Paradigms under the Reform and Opening-Up Policy (1980–1999)

The reform and opening-up policy fundamentally reshaped the landscape of China's external cultural exchanges and adjusted the circulation of contemporary Chinese literature in the English-speaking world. In the 1980s, as barriers to cultural exchange between China and the West gradually diminished, the English translation of literature moved beyond the singular output channel of official institutions. Overseas sinologists, bilingual literary translators, and researchers of Chinese literature at overseas universities actively participated in translation work, leading to a diversification of translation agents. However, this market-oriented transition was not accomplished overnight. There remained conspicuous chronological discontinuities in the external dissemination of individual writers; the short-term market popularity generated by a single writer or work could not easily be converted into sustained, stable overseas attention for contemporary Chinese literature as a whole. Consequently, the progression of translation and dissemination during this period remained intermittent and fragmented.

A milestone in the overseas dissemination of this period was the systematic translation of Mo Yan's works by sinologist Howard Goldblatt. In 1993, Goldblatt's English translation of *Red Sorghum: A Novel of China* was published simultaneously in the United Kingdom and the United States, marking the point at which Mo Yan's literary work transcended the narrow circle of sinological research and entered the everyday reading horizon of ordinary English-language readers (Jiang, 2018) <sup>[4]</sup>. Jiang (2018) <sup>[4]</sup> divides the chronological sequence of the translation and reception of Mo Yan's works in English-speaking countries into four distinct stages, identifying the period from 1993 to 1999 as a critical transitional phase in which his works moved beyond academic circles and reached the general readership. Goldblatt's translations dismantled the highly academic and elitist barriers that had long characterised the English translation of contemporary Chinese literature. A review of research on Goldblatt by Yin *et al.* (2018) <sup>[14]</sup> further substantiates that Goldblatt's translation practices reconstructed the foundational ecology of the overseas circulation of contemporary Chinese novels, providing a mature operational model for the subsequent market-oriented translation of other writers.

During the same period, English translations of Yu Hua's major works were gradually published. According to Yang's (2021) <sup>[12]</sup> doctoral dissertation *A Study on Yu Hua's Works in the English-Speaking World*, the English translation of Yu Hua's works can be divided into distinct phases: the period from 1990 to 2003 marked an early stage of sporadic

translations, during which *The Past and the Punishments* was the first to appear in English, while *To Live* and *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* were translated by professional sinologist-translators including Michael Berry and Andrew F. Jones, launched in mainstream European and American book markets, and steadily built Yu Hua's international reputation while establishing a foundation of overseas readership. When interpreting Yu Hua's texts, both researchers and ordinary readers in the English-speaking world found it difficult to detach themselves from their ingrained cultural cognitive frameworks. Most readers approached the texts with the expectation of observing an exotic land; their primary reading interest was to peer into Chinese social transformations and comprehend the modern and contemporary historical landscape through fictional narratives. The resulting interpretations and evaluative judgements diverged significantly from domestic literary criticism, giving rise to the cross-cultural phenomenon of 'two Yu Huas' in reception. This divergence between domestic and overseas evaluations, along with the interpretive mismatch, vividly illustrates the cognitive filters that readers naturally bring to cross-cultural reading, providing a highly instructive case study for the differentiated reception of contemporary Chinese writers overseas.

## 2.3. Large-Scale Advancement of Market-Driven Translation in the New Century (2000–2012)

Between 2000 and 2012, complete English translations of three of Mo Yan's major novels appeared in quick succession, steadily building his overseas reputation and laying a solid foundation of readership for his subsequent Nobel Prize in Literature and his recognition by the global literary mainstream (Jiang, 2018) <sup>[4]</sup>. During the same period, representative works by leading Chinese writers including Jia Pingwa, Su Tong, Wang Anyi, and Yan Lianke were successively translated into English. The range of writers represented in overseas translations expanded considerably, moving beyond the small circle of authors known for rural themes or avant-garde narratives.

During this period, the communication mechanism underwent three major structural adjustments. Mainstream commercial publishers in the UK and the US became deeply involved in the planning, production, and marketing of translated Chinese literature. Translations were no longer released exclusively by overseas academic publishers or state-affiliated foreign-language agencies; the dissemination mode had shifted from unidirectional cultural promotion to market-oriented commercial enterprise. The brand recognition of translators themselves continued to grow, and senior sinologists who had long been committed to translating Chinese literature, such as Howard Goldblatt, became core selling points in book marketing. When purchasing translated works, overseas readers paid attention not only to the writer's creative style, but also to the market reputation of the translator's previous works. A professional readership gradually took shape, as Anglophone sinologists and mainstream book reviewers in the media produced a substantial body of criticism and academic scholarship on contemporary Chinese literature, creating a self-reinforcing professional reception ecology through the interplay of academic conferences and media reviews.

However, the structural contradictions inherent in the market-driven translation model also became apparent during this period. Overseas commercial publishing houses developed

entrenched thematic preferences, showing a pronounced inclination toward narrative texts that depicted rural life, modern and contemporary historical traumas, and radical social transformations. This thematic orientation, on the one hand, aligned with the exotic reading expectations long held by readers in the English-speaking world, and on the other, suited the stable commercial profit rationale of the overseas book market. This persistent, narrow selection criterion directly produced a structural imbalance in the thematic range of translated works. A large number of high-quality literary works with distinctive aesthetics, diverse narrative perspectives, and themes unrelated to rural life found it difficult to obtain opportunities for translation and publication overseas, making it challenging for overseas readers to construct a complete and multi-dimensional cognitive map of contemporary Chinese literature.

#### **2.4. The Diversified Landscape of Literary Translation in the Post-Nobel Era (2012 to Present)**

Mo Yan's Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012 marked a watershed moment in the overseas dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature. The award substantially boosted the sales and media exposure of Mo Yan's works in the English-speaking world, while simultaneously drawing unprecedented global media attention to the broader landscape of contemporary Chinese literature (Jiang, 2018)<sup>[4]</sup>. In the immediate aftermath of the announcement, significant controversy arose within overseas academic and media circles regarding Mo Yan's authorial stance. Early readers responses to his new works overseas carried a strongly critical tone, and ideological debates temporarily overshadowed the literary and aesthetic value of the texts themselves. Following the publication of the English translation of *Frog*, however, sharp political criticism gradually subsided, and evaluative writings returned to analysis of narrative structure, writing techniques, and intrinsic literary value (Jiang, 2018)<sup>[4]</sup>. Mo Yan's overall reception overseas demonstrates that while it is difficult to insulate literary interpretation entirely from the external ideological environment, literary works of mature artistic quality possess the intrinsic capacity to breach political interpretive filters and steer discussion back to the literary text itself.

Beyond Mo Yan's rural narrative mode, the overseas translation landscape of contemporary Chinese literature gradually diversified after 2012, with notable progress made in the cross cultural circulation of different literary genres, among which science fiction achieved the most representative success. The English translations of Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem* trilogy have long occupied the bestseller lists for Chinese literature in the United States, with both cumulative sales and global library holdings repeatedly breaking historical records for translated contemporary Chinese literature (Gu, 2017). Gu (2017) examines the intrinsic drivers of the translated text's global acclaim from three dimensions: translation process, translation strategy, and readers response. The success of the translation relied on three combined forces: a mature overseas market oriented publishing and distribution process; the translator Ken Liu's flexible strategy, which balanced exotic cultural elements with target readers' reading habits; and the text's universal science fiction themes and profound intellectual core. These factors collectively propelled the science fiction text beyond the conventional communicative

reach of serious literature.

In the domain of avant-garde literature, equally remarkable translation outcomes have been achieved. Can Xue is the most prominent representative of Chinese avant-garde writers in terms of overseas circulation, with her texts garnering sustained and high academic recognition in Anglophone academia. Xin (2026) conducted an empirical study across three dimensions: overseas distribution channels, differentiated reader responses, and long term academic influence. She notes that Can Xue's distinctive approach of downplaying concrete regional and rural symbols while focusing on the abstract spiritual world makes it easier for overseas readers to perceive her work as pure literary and artistic creation rather than as documentary material for decoding Chinese social reality. The contrast between Can Xue's limited readership among Chinese mass readers and her stable academic reputation in the English-speaking world challenges the linear assumption that domestic popularity directly determines the ceiling of overseas dissemination, proving that niche avant-garde literature also possesses considerable potential for cross cultural communication.

Beyond traditional serious literature and science fiction, online literature, or web fiction, has emerged as a new branch of overseas translation. Lai (2024)<sup>[5]</sup> notes that in November 2024, the British Library acquired ten Chinese online literary works. Works such as the fantasy novel *Lord of the Mysteries* have achieved remarkable popularity overseas, leading to a substantial expansion of the online literature readership in Europe. It is evident that popular genre literature continues to enrich the overall translation ecology of Chinese literature in the English-speaking world, and that the overseas dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature has moved decisively beyond a singular focus on serious literature, forming a composite circulation pattern driven by the synergy of multiple genres.

### **3. Translation Mechanisms: Text Selection, Translator Ecology, and Cross-Cultural Translation Strategies**

#### **3.1. Biases, Realistic Constraints, and Deep Structural Roots of Text Selection**

Overseas publishing houses have long maintained entrenched thematic preferences, favouring narrative texts that focus on rural life, modern and contemporary historical traumas, and radical social transformations. This value orientation is shaped by the entrenched exotic reading expectations of English-language readers and the commercial logic of the overseas book market. This persistent, narrow selection pattern has generated multiple obstacles at the level of dissemination. The common defects in the selection of Chinese literature for external translation include an overemphasis by overseas publishers of Chinese anthologies on grand social narratives, an readers positioning long confined to professional sinologists, and a translation style biased toward rigid literal translation. The accumulation of these issues has steadily raised the cross cultural reading barrier for ordinary overseas readers, further widening the reception gap between Chinese and foreign literature.

From the perspective of writer distribution, overseas translation resources exhibit a pronounced concentration effect. A small number of writers, such as Mo Yan, Yu Hua, Su Tong, and Jia Pingwa, occupy the vast majority of translation channels and publishing resources, while a large number of young and middle aged writers and creators of

niche genres with distinctive literary value have long been denied opportunities for overseas translation. Furthermore, the overall translation effort lacks long term, systematic planning. The selection of titles for translation often relies randomly on the individual research interests of translators or the short term market judgments of overseas publishers, resulting in a process that is inherently fragmented and intermittent. This spontaneous and fragmented model of translation prevents overseas readers from constructing a coherent and comprehensive cognitive framework of contemporary Chinese literature.

The overseas dissemination of different writers shows wide disparities in popularity. The library holdings and online reader engagement data for English translations of internationally renowned writers far exceed those for lesser known authors, while some creators experience translation gaps spanning more than a decade, highlighting the unbalanced development of translation resources. To improve the current situation of imbalanced selection and fragmented dissemination, the translation model must shift from occasional, isolated individual translations toward systematic, long term planning coordinated by multiple agents. The relevant parties need not interfere with the freedom of literary creation or impose rigid translation lists; rather, they should build a balanced and sustainable overseas translation ecology by cultivating diverse translation agents and improving market oriented publishing coordination mechanisms.

### **3.2. Translator Group Categorization, Diversified Translation Models, and the Dynamic Generation of Translator Subjectivity**

Translators serve as the core agents in the cross cultural dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature in English translation. Differences in translators' identities and backgrounds have given rise to diverse translation models, while the evolution of communication contexts, readers expectations, and market forces has further driven translator subjectivity to take on dynamically generated characteristics. Based on professional backgrounds, translation field, and translation styles, the current community of translators of contemporary Chinese literature into English can be divided into different types, including professional sinologist translators and cross disciplinary translators. These various groups form a mutually supportive translation ecology, sustaining diverse approaches to textual translation.

Professional sinologist translators, represented by Howard Goldblatt, constitute the core force in the English translation of contemporary Chinese serious literature. Goldblatt's independent translation of Mo Yan's major novels has established a classic paradigm for the overseas dissemination of contemporary rural literature. Current academic research largely focuses on close readings of Goldblatt's translation techniques and linguistic styles, but pays less attention to the overseas circulation of the translations and the actual reception of differentiated readers. This creates a research limitation that over-emphasizes textual translation while underemphasising dissemination effectiveness, failing to capture fully the multifaceted value of translators in the cross cultural communication chain (Yin *et al.*, 2018) <sup>[14]</sup>. In fact, Goldblatt's translation practices fully reflect the dynamic evolution of translator subjectivity; he did not adhere to a single translation strategy, but continuously adapted and refined his approach under the constraints of the original

work's cultural core, the aesthetic preferences of English-language readers, and the commercial rules of the overseas publishing market. Feng's (2017) <sup>[1]</sup> diachronic quantitative study of 500 image discourses in Goldblatt's translations of five Mo Yan novels confirms that foreignisation strategies consistently pervaded his translation practices, with the retention rate of native cultural images in the translations remaining above 50 percent over the long term, and later translations focusing more on preserving the native cultural characteristics of the Chinese language to highlight Chinese cultural distinctiveness. At the micro level of image translation, Goldblatt focused on deepening foreignisation strategies without undergoing a fundamental strategic shift. However, when considering macro level external interventions, such as market oriented adaptations by publishers and ideological adjustments that led to textual cuts and structural changes, his translation practices overall exhibited a dynamic shift from seeking commonality to preserving difference. This fully demonstrates that translator subjectivity is not statically fixed, but dynamically generated and continuously shaped in accordance with the communication context.

Complementing professional sinologist translators, the rise of cross disciplinary composite translators has further enriched the diverse translation models of contemporary literature, adapting to the cross cultural dissemination needs of different genres. Translators from different backgrounds rely on their professional expertise to forge differentiated translation approaches, building a differentiated and diversified translation system. Among them, Ken Liu, the translator of *The Three-Body Problem*, possesses a cross disciplinary identity as both a science fiction writer and a computer programmer. He has a precise command of the narrative conventions and reader aesthetic preferences of the global science fiction genre, developing a professional translation model adapted to genre literature and effectively transcending the traditional communicative boundaries of serious literature (Gu, 2017). Allan H. Barr, the principal translator of Yu Hua's works, adopts a reader-oriented translation approach, lowering the reading threshold for ordinary overseas readers by simplifying complex narratives and refining textual expressions, thus balancing literary quality with public accessibility to meet the reading needs of general readers (Liu & Huang, 2024) <sup>[7]</sup>.

Overall, translators at different levels and with different backgrounds have developed distinct strengths. Professional sinologist translators delve deep into the literary text, accurately rendering the aesthetic connotations of the original work; cross disciplinary genre translators are familiar with the rules of segmented markets, adapting to professional and popular dissemination contexts; and writer translators excel in the creative transformation of cultural meaning. This clearly differentiated and mutually complementary translator ecology, coupled with dynamically adjusted translation models and continuously evolving translator subjectivity, has become a core pillar of the English translation system of contemporary Chinese literature as it matures and achieves large scale overseas dissemination.

### **3.3. Cross-Cultural Translation Strategies, Cultural Adaptation Paths, and the Intrinsic Rationale of Readers Expectation**

The translation of contemporary Chinese novels into English is essentially a cross cultural translation practice. When a text

moves from the Chinese cultural sphere to the English cultural system, a cross contextual migration of cultural connotations, aesthetic paradigms, and cognitive frameworks takes place. The core objective of all translation activities is to reconcile the cognitive differences between the two cultures. The translation process must contend with dialect, culture specific items, historical allusions, and other culturally marked linguistic features; how these culture-loaded words are handled directly determines the reception of the translation in the English-speaking world. Different translators develop differentiated adaptation strategies based on readers positioning and genre attributes. Allan H. Barr's translation practices clearly demonstrate representative approaches to handling cultural and rhetorical elements.

Liu (2025)<sup>[6]</sup> uses five of Barr's translations as a research corpus to examine his translation characteristics and methods for reconstructing the literariness of the original works from two dimensions: idiom translation and rhetorical figure conversion. In idiom translation, Barr primarily employs free translation that discards the original imagery. This method is mainly applied in three scenarios: when the original idiom imagery has weak cross cultural adaptability, when the associative meaning of the idiom deviates from the context, or when the conciseness of the translation needs to be guaranteed. However, this approach tends to weaken the cultural distinctiveness and literariness of the original text. At the same time, he does not discard imagery indiscriminately. He also employs literal translation, translation by equivalent idiom, and free translation that retains imagery to preserve exotic cultural characteristics and restore the style of the original idioms as faithfully as possible. In the translation of rhetorical figures, Barr mainly employs four methods: converting rhetorical cognition to conceptual cognition, omitting rhetorical cognition, and converting to similar or different rhetorical cognitions. Because conversion and omission can easily damage the rhetorical and literary texture of the original text, he focuses more on converting rhetorical cognition to similar or different rhetorical cognitions. He also converts conceptual cognitive discourse into rhetorical cognitive discourse to compensate for rhetorical loss and enhance the literary effect of the translation.

The selection of translation strategies is not merely a technical linguistic operation; it also entails deep seated cultural negotiation and cultural politics. The reconstruction of the image of Chinese literature through translation, together with the diverse interpretations generated by overseas readers, constructs the comprehensive psychological cognitive map that overseas societies form of Chinese literature. The restoration of literariness and the interlingual reconstruction of local cultural images in the translation of contemporary Chinese novels into English have also become among the most widely discussed topics in the field of translation studies in China. Yin *et al.* (2018)<sup>[14]</sup> use Goldblatt's translation of Mo Yan's works as a case study to systematically examine the handling techniques and translation strategies for various cultural images in translated texts. When dealing with images such as rural colloquialisms, folk metaphors, and regional cultural symbols, Goldblatt flexibly switched between the two basic strategies of domestication and foreignisation, making dynamic choices based on the informational weight of the images. Rural dialects and highly regionalised images were often translated literally through foreignisation to preserve exotic textures, while common idioms and obscure cultural concepts were

rendered with paraphrasing, substitution, and other domesticating methods to lower the reading threshold for Western readers. For narrative cultural images, he simplified the text by reorganising the narrative chronology and adjusted redundant descriptions to maintain narrative fluency. His creative treason was not an unprincipled rewriting; rather, it respected the spiritual core of the original work as a baseline and moderately adjusted the expression of cultural images to balance cross cultural communication effects. Goldblatt's handling of cultural images was consistently guided by target language reception, balancing the transmission of local cultural characteristics with the aesthetic preferences of overseas readers. It is evident that the translation process is essentially a continuous act of cross cultural negotiation. The translator must simultaneously account for the original cultural core and the receptive limits of overseas readers, seeking a balance acceptable to both parties between these two poles. The degree of success in this negotiation directly determines the dissemination ceiling and the overall reception of the translation in the English-speaking world.

#### **4. Reception Landscape: Academic Reception, Mass Readers, and a Comprehensive Assessment of differentiated Communication Effects**

##### **4.1. Academic Reception System and Multi-level Rationale of Professional readers**

Overseas sinologists, comparative literature scholars, and researchers in Chinese studies collectively constitute the professional readership for contemporary Chinese literature in the English-speaking world. The academic papers, in-depth book reviews in mainstream media, and university teaching produced by this group together constitute the foundational cognitive and interpretive framework for deciphering contemporary Chinese literature overseas.

Tracing the chronological development of academic research on Yu Hua in the English-speaking academy, one can observe a clear shift in interpretive perspectives. Early sinological research overseas largely adhered to a socio-historical reading logic, treating Yu Hua's novels and, more broadly, contemporary Chinese literary texts as documentary materials for observing modern and contemporary Chinese social transformations, ideologies of specific historical periods, and the living conditions of the populace (Yang, 2021, pp. 27–31)<sup>[12]</sup>. The research focus was heavily concentrated on extrinsic social issues such as violence, death, and historical trauma, while intrinsic literary elements such as language, multi layered narratives, symbolism, and temporal and spatial construction remained at the margins of research for a long time and were not fully or systematically explored (Yang, 2021, pp. 70–74)<sup>[12]</sup>. As multilingual translations of Yu Hua's works continued to appear and the overseas sinological discipline gradually matured, Western researchers began to apply a range of professional literary theories, including narratology, existentialism, gender studies, and comparative literature, to conduct close readings of the texts. Research outputs focusing on literary dimensions such as novelistic style, narrative technique, and aesthetic construction continued to grow, becoming a mainstream branch of overseas scholarship (Yang, 2021, pp. 84–98)<sup>[12]</sup>. However, the extrinsic interpretive paradigm based on ideological frameworks has not entirely disappeared. The divergence in evaluations of Yu Hua's works at home and abroad precisely confirms this dual research landscape.

Overseas sinologists and professional researchers often bring entrenched Western stereotypes of Chinese society and exotic observational perspectives to their analyses, and the interpretive logic and value judgments generated by their research form a fundamental cognitive divide from the domestic modern and contemporary literary criticism system. Following Mo Yan's Nobel Prize win, the series of controversies that erupted in overseas academic circles directly manifested the inherent tension between literary aesthetic judgment and ideological prejudice in the reception process of professional readers. Some overseas scholars held preconceived expectations regarding the political stance of Chinese writers; when a writer's position deviated from their preset standards, they tended to downplay the literary and artistic quality of the text itself and exaggerate political dimensions to advance biased critiques. Following the publication of the English translation of *Frog*, overseas criticism gradually returned its focus to literary content such as narrative structure and writing techniques, and sharp political commentary receded. This evolution demonstrates that the artistic and aesthetic power of literary texts can, to some extent, disrupt rigid ideological interpretive filters, although the process of overcoming prejudice is often marked by delays and detours.

#### 4.2. Reading Habits and Intrinsic Emotional-Cognitive Structures of General Mass Readers

Mainstream overseas online book platforms such as Amazon and Goodreads have accumulated a large number of authentic reader reviews from ordinary readers. By drawing on mature empirical techniques such as big data text mining and quantitative sentiment analysis, researchers can effectively overcome the limitations of traditional qualitative research and examine the actual reading experiences and cultural cognitive patterns of general readers in the English-speaking world. This provides abundant and objective primary data for the study of overseas readers of contemporary Chinese literature. A comprehensive review of the extensive reader review data on these platforms reveals that the reception of contemporary Chinese literature among overseas mass readers does not exhibit a single, uniform attitude. Rather, it is characterised by an interweaving of praise and criticism, diverse cognitive levels, and markedly differentiated reception patterns.

Existing quantitative empirical studies based on online book reviews generally indicate that the overall reception of Mo Yan's novels among mass readers in the English-speaking world is positive. Favourable evaluations are heavily concentrated on his highly recognisable style of hallucinatory realism and the distinctive narrative background rooted in modern and contemporary Chinese social transformations and historical developments (Shi & Deng, 2020). From the perspective of readers composition, the overseas mass readership of Mo Yan's novels exhibits clear characteristics of stratification and diversification. The readers spans a broad spectrum of groups, including professional enthusiasts who delve deeply into sinology and have long studied Chinese culture, core fans who consistently follow all his translated works and maintain stable reading preferences, and a large number of introductory readers who encounter contemporary Chinese literature for the first time and lack a foundational cultural understanding of China. This broad and comprehensive readers reception demonstrates conclusively that Mo Yan's literary works have moved beyond the niche

academic circles of sinological research and entered the everyday reading horizon of the general public in the English-speaking world, achieving a popular and wide reaching overseas dissemination.

In terms of genre specific reception, the public response to rural-themed literary works exhibits the most prominent divergence, which is also a key factor leading to polarised reader evaluations. Ordinary overseas readers naturally possess a curious interest in China's distinctive rural life, folk culture, and social conditions. However, the vastly different cultural contexts, historical legacies, and life experiences of the East and the West create an inevitable cross cultural reading barrier, which readily leads readers to misinterpret textual connotations, narrative logic, and value expressions, ultimately resulting in contrasting evaluations. In contrast, literary works that combine distinctly Chinese narrative characteristics with a focus on universal human concerns, life dilemmas, and emotional resonances can effectively lower cross cultural cognitive barriers, making it easier to garner sustained positive reception and market recognition among overseas mass readers. This reception pattern also provides a practical and empirically grounded reference for contemporary Chinese literature as it seeks to optimise its overseas translation narratives, avoid cross cultural communication misunderstandings, and narrow the aesthetic and cognitive gap between Chinese and foreign readers.

#### 4.3. Comparative Analysis of Representative Writers

##### 4.3.1. Mo Yan: From the Sinological Community to the Mainstream Global Literary Field

Jiang (2018)<sup>[4]</sup> divides the chronological sequence of the translation and reception of Mo Yan's works in English-speaking countries into four progressive stages: (1) from 1988 to 1992, when the circulation of translations was confined to overseas university sinology classrooms and niche academic circles; (2) from 1993 to 1999, when, through Goldblatt's translations, his works moved beyond the academic ivory tower and reached ordinary English-speaking readers; (3) from 2000 to 2012, when multiple new works appeared in succession, steadily building his global reputation and laying the groundwork for the Nobel Prize; and (4) after 2012, when his works entered a post-Nobel phase characterised by a more complex reception logic.

Mo Yan's attainment of global mainstream recognition relied on three indispensable conditions: a long term, stable, and textually consistent supply of complete translations; decades of uninterrupted overseas publication; and the opportunity of an internationally influential literary award. This case demonstrates the dialectical relationship between literary value and international recognition. The mature literary and aesthetic value of Mo Yan's works was already established before he won the Nobel Prize; the award merely served as an external driving force that accelerated the global dissemination process, while large scale overseas circulation in turn consolidated the consensus evaluation of his literary value within the international academic community.

##### 4.3.2. Liu Cixin and *The Three-Body Problem*: Cross-Cultural Circulation of Science Fiction

The English translation of *The Three-Body Problem* trilogy broke two historical records for contemporary Chinese literature overseas, namely sales volume and global library holdings, establishing a distinctive circulation path that diverges from traditional rural or avant-garde serious

literature (Gu, 2017). Gu (2017) examines the internal factors underlying the translation's success from three dimensions: translation process, translation strategy, and readers response. He identifies three layers of collaborative forces. First, multiple market entities participated throughout the planning and overseas distribution of the translation, channelling it into standardised, market oriented operational processes. Second, editors made adjustments to the narrative content. Third, the translator, Ken Liu, retained the original work's cultural core while flexibly reconciling cultural differences to suit the reading preferences of English-language readers. Finally, the text itself combined mature literary narrative with a grand science fiction vision directed toward all humanity, possessing intrinsic universal value that transcends cultural boundaries. Extended research employing paratextual theory further suggests that internal and external paratextual elements, such as translated book covers and media promotional materials, formed a collaborative dynamic system with the main text, collectively facilitating the text's acceptance by overseas readers. Science fiction as a genre inherently possesses advantages for cross cultural circulation. The global science fiction readership has long established a practice of reading translated works, demonstrating greater tolerance for unfamiliar cultural elements and greater acceptance of the inevitable loss of cultural connotations in translation. This positions science fiction as a key point of entry for contemporary Chinese literature to achieve large scale external dissemination.

#### **4.3.3. Can Xue: Overseas differentiated Reception of Avant-Garde Abstract Literature**

Can Xue is the most prominent representative of Chinese avant-garde literature in terms of overseas translation effectiveness. Xin (2026) <sup>[11]</sup> conducted a comprehensive empirical study across three dimensions: overseas circulation channels, reader responses, and long term academic influence, identifying the principal reasons for Can Xue's recognition in Anglophone academia. First, her texts downplay concrete regional and rural symbols and focus instead on the abstract spiritual world, which makes it easier for overseas readers to approach her work as pure literary and artistic creation and to avoid the biased interpretation that equates the text with social documentary material. Second, overseas publishers and sinologists have consistently pursued the translation and research of her various works, building a stable and long term chain of academic attention. Can Xue's circulation case presents a striking contrast. While her works have a limited circulation among Chinese mass readership, they have sustained and high academic recognition in the English-speaking world. This phenomenon challenges the linear assumption that domestic market popularity directly determines the ceiling of overseas dissemination, demonstrating that avant-garde and abstract works occupying a marginal position within the Chinese literary field also possess the intrinsic potential to cross cultural boundaries and gain global recognition.

#### **4.4. Dimensional Analysis of Dissemination Effects**

From a quantitative perspective, the total volume of English translations of contemporary Chinese literature published over the past two decades has steadily increased, with the annual output rising from a few works in the early years to dozens. However, the proportion of translated works exported remains extremely low compared to the total

volume of original works produced in China. Furthermore, the overseas translation market is severely imbalanced. The United States remains the dominant market, while the dissemination reach in other English-speaking regions, such as the UK, Canada, and Australia, shows a significant gap. Simple growth in the number of translated works cannot resolve the structural problems of over-concentration on a limited number of writers and genres. Against this quantitative backdrop, Han (2023) <sup>[3]</sup> moves beyond the traditional research framework that equates the 'English-speaking world' with the inner circle countries of the United States and the United Kingdom. Drawing on World Englishes theory, Han proposes that post colonial outer circle countries, including India, African nations, and Southeast Asian countries, constitute a new 'English-speaking world', thereby broadening the research horizon for the dissemination of translated Chinese literature. Currently, the English translation of Chinese literature has formed a dual track dissemination pattern across the old and new English-speaking worlds. The old Anglo-American world remains the primary arena but presents communication barriers, such as what may be termed the Western 'acceptance screen'. Meanwhile, the new English-speaking worlds of India and African nations possess stable reader bases and local publishing capacities, with local academic circles calling for the introduction of Chinese literature to dismantle Eurocentrism. This pattern offers new insights for optimizing translation and dissemination. There is no need to cater blindly to Anglo-American linguistic preferences, as translations that carry distinct Chinese characteristics hold communicative value. Concurrently, cooperation should be established with local publishing institutions in the outer circle countries to break the monopoly of Anglo-American distribution channels.

From the perspective of long term cultural influence, the overall global exposure of contemporary Chinese literature increased substantially after Mo Yan and *The Three-Body Problem* won prestigious international literary awards. However, viewed within the broader map of world literature, contemporary Chinese literature remains situated at the periphery and finds it difficult to integrate deeply into the mainstream literary systems of English-speaking countries. The cultural deficit in the bidirectional circulation between Chinese and foreign literature has not been fundamentally reversed. The actual influence of contemporary Chinese literature's overseas dissemination still lags behind China's vast volume of literary output and deep literary tradition. Objectively acknowledging this developmental gap is a prerequisite for optimizing subsequent circulation strategies and reducing the cross cultural communication imbalance.

### **5. Existing Barriers to Dissemination and Optimized Developmental Paths under the Digital Media Environment**

#### **5.1. Multi-Level Structural Barriers Obstructing Overseas Dissemination**

The primary barrier is the lack of long term systematic coordination in translation work, which leads to fragmented text selection and intermittent dissemination patterns. Currently, most overseas translation activities are driven spontaneously by the personal interests of translators or the short term market judgments of overseas publishers, lacking a long term coordinated framework that covers writers, themes, and genres. Consequently, some high quality writers

experience translation gaps spanning more than a decade. This intermittent circulation rhythm is detrimental to the sustained accumulation of a writer's overseas reputation and prevents overseas readers from constructing a coherent and comprehensive cognitive map of contemporary Chinese literature as a whole.

In the cross cultural translation process, practical barriers to cultural adaptation persist over the long term. Contemporary Chinese literature carries a large volume of historical, folkloric, and rural cultural connotations that are unique to the local context. Translators constantly struggle to find a balance between fully preserving native cultural characteristics and lowering the reading threshold for overseas readers, resulting in a persistent contradiction between these two demands. Furthermore, the domestic reserve of professional literary translators is insufficient, and natural barriers between Eastern and Western language systems and cultural frameworks persist. The accumulation of these multiple factors constitutes a fundamental barrier to the translation of Chinese literature for overseas readers.

The third barrier is that external circulation channels have long operated in a unidirectional and rigid manner, lacking bidirectional feedback and assessment mechanisms. For a long time, the overseas circulation of contemporary Chinese literature has followed a single export model of domestic creation, translation, and unidirectional delivery abroad, lacking regular and bidirectional dialogue with the overseas literary community, publishing markets, and reader groups. Publishers rarely conduct systematic research on the socio-cultural environments, book market operational rules, and differentiated readership of target English-speaking regions. Consequently, circulation strategies often fail to align with the actual demands of the overseas market, thereby weakening the textual richness and communicative depth of cross cultural literary exchange.

The implicit barrier running through the entire dissemination process is that overseas textual interpretations are easily hijacked by rigid political cognitive frameworks. Readers in the English-speaking world have long formed a fixed 'imagination of Chinese society', and they habitually prioritize political and socio-historical perspectives when reading literary texts, exaggerating the sociological and historical documentary attributes of the texts while overshadowing the literary and aesthetic values inherent in the works. This preset cognitive framework distorts the full internal connotations of the texts, preventing Chinese literature from achieving cross cultural circulation as pure literary creation.

## 5.2. Brand New Developmental Opportunities Spurred by the Digital Media Ecology

Online literature has created a new channel for China's external cultural circulation. After more than a decade of large scale overseas development, the circulation of online literature has evolved from the translation of individual novel texts to the co-construction of a comprehensive cultural ecology. The global dissemination of online literature not only exports original novel texts and distinctive Chinese narrative elements to overseas markets, but also encourages overseas creators to actively draw on the mature narrative models of Chinese online literature in their own writing. The circulation logic has shifted from unidirectional output of individual texts to a new pattern of bidirectional interaction and collaborative creation between Chinese and foreign

creators, offering a fresh perspective for the overall overseas circulation of Chinese literature.

Artificial intelligence translation technology has reshaped the production model of literary translation, significantly reducing the time, labour, and financial costs of text translation. A large number of literary works can undergo basic linguistic conversion quickly, thereby expanding the overall supply of translations for overseas markets. The digital media environment has catalysed a new online English reading ecology, prompting academia to reconsider traditional translation strategies and evaluation criteria for translator selection. The intervention of artificial intelligence in the translation process not only affects the efficiency of translation production, but also prompts academia to establish multi dimensional benchmarks for translation quality and cross cultural acceptability.

Multi modal digital circulation channels, such as short video platforms, online book review communities, and digital e-books, have fundamentally disrupted the single, linear circulation model of traditional print publishing. Writer interviews, in depth interpretations of translated works, and film and television adaptations expand the channels available through digital and visual media (Shao, 2022) <sup>[9]</sup>. These channels can reach a large number of ordinary overseas readers directly through digital media, establishing a diversified global circulation network that spans different age groups and reading communities, and continuously expanding the boundaries of contemporary Chinese literature's overseas readers.

## 5.3. Systematic Developmental Paths for Optimizing the Overseas Circulation of Contemporary Chinese Literature

At the level of translation value orientation, external literary communication must first move beyond the entrenched mindset of unidirectional cultural output and embrace a new communication paradigm centred on equal dialogue within world literature. When applied to the selection of texts for overseas translation, evaluation criteria should focus on the distinctive literary and aesthetic value of the texts themselves, downplaying purely promotional orientations and engaging in the co-construction of the global literary ecology from a stance of equal exchange.

After establishing the core communication paradigm of equal dialogue, it is also necessary to refine the operational vehicles through multi tiered circulation paths. This entails constructing a composite communication network collaboratively formed by translators, professional overseas publishers, literary agents, overseas sinological teaching and research institutions, and foreign media, while balancing governmental macro policy guidance with market oriented independent operations. On the one hand, multi channel overseas promotion should be expanded, systematically tracing the full development trajectory of writers' overseas translations and facilitating long term, stable cooperation between Chinese writers and senior overseas translators. On the other hand, multiple departments and social entities should be coordinated to forge effective coordination, building a sustainable, long term operational mechanism for overseas translation that addresses the persistent problem of fragmented, short term, and unsustainable communication efforts that previously relied on a single entity.

Regarding readers reception studies, empirical research methods such as big data text mining and quantitative

sentiment analysis should be actively promoted to capture with precision the reading preferences, cross cultural reading barriers, and evaluation criteria of differentiated readers in the English-speaking world. Relying on quantitative empirical data, researchers can provide objective and rigorous evidence for selecting texts for translation, adjusting translation strategies, and optimizing overseas book marketing plans. The majority of current studies in China on Mo Yan's translations are confined to traditional qualitative close readings of texts, lacking large scale quantitative empirical analyses of the extensive overseas reader reviews. This existing research pattern, which overemphasizes translated texts while neglecting readers reception, needs to be addressed and supplemented without delay. Only by consolidating the empirical foundation of readers reception research can various circulation optimization strategies move beyond vague and idealistic discourse.

Regarding the evaluation system for circulation effectiveness, a multi dimensional and comprehensive evaluation framework should be developed, moving beyond the narrow logic of measuring circulation effectiveness solely through book sales or international literary awards. Multi dimensional indicators, including total global library holdings of translated works, the frequency of courses offered in overseas universities, the volume of related research outputs in international journals, the extent of regular exchanges between Chinese and foreign writers, and the long term reputation among diverse readerships, should be comprehensively integrated to assess the academic reach, literary aesthetic influence, and overall cultural impact of contemporary Chinese literature in the English-speaking world. This will prevent overly simplistic evaluations that focus exclusively on sales figures or Nobel Prizes, facilitating a more objective and complete understanding of the true developmental state of Chinese literature's overseas circulation.

## 6. Conclusion

The overall chronological development of the English translation of contemporary Chinese literature can be divided into three major stages: state coordinated translation practices during the Cold War, which served ideological publicity; the market driven transition of translation paradigms following the reform and opening up; and the diversified circulation pattern of multi genre coexistence in the digital media era. The participating translation agents, text circulation vehicles, and readers communities have continuously grown and diversified, while the media exposure and market presence of Chinese literature in the English-speaking world have maintained a steady increase. Objectively reviewing this developmental process, it is clear that multiple interwoven structural barriers still exist, hindering the deep integration of contemporary Chinese literature into the mainstream English literary field rather than merely facilitating the external transfer of texts.

Producing high quality translations and building long term, systematic circulation mechanisms are merely conditions for development. The deeper breakthrough lies in moving beyond the rigid framework of unidirectional cultural output and actively engaging in the co-construction of the global world literature system from a stance of equal literary dialogue.

The overseas circulation of writers such as Mo Yan, Liu Cixin, and Can Xue demonstrates convincingly that literary works rooted in pure literary ontology and embodying universal spiritual concerns can transcend East West cultural barriers and garner broad recognition on a global scale. The core issue that the industry and academia urgently need to address is how to broaden the coverage of overseas translations of high quality, diverse literary works spanning various themes and creative styles, thereby ameliorating the inherent problems of over-concentration on a limited number of prominent writers and the long term structural imbalance in text selection.

In the current era of deep integration between globalisation and digitalisation, the English translation and cross cultural circulation of contemporary Chinese literature stand at a critical transitional moment. Whether we can seize the new opportunities spurred by digital media and gradually narrow the long standing cultural deficit in the circulation of Chinese and foreign literature depends on whether academic circles and industry practitioners can achieve comprehensive and systematic innovations across four dimensions: core translation concepts, multi-level circulation channels, empirical readers reception studies, and multi dimensional circulation effectiveness evaluation systems. This issue is not merely a scholarly concern within translation studies, but also a practical one concerning how Chinese literature and culture can achieve complete, multi dimensional, and objective self presentation and equal cultural dialogue on the global stage.

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