

# Study on the Translation and Dissemination of Howard Goldblatt's *Red Poppies* in UK and US

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**Abstract:** Chinese culture “going out” is a strategic goal of national development, and the translation and dissemination of Chinese literature is an important tool. *Chen Ai Luo Ding*, a classic novel by the famous writer Alai, was translated by translator Howard Goldblatt and his wife Sylvia Lin, under the title *Red Poppies*. In view of the strong influence of the novel, and standing on the perspective of medio-translatology, and the communication process principle in Harold Lasswell's communication model theory, this paper analyzes the interaction of the five elements of translation and communication model proposed by Ms. Bao Xiaoying (i.e., the subjects, contents, channels readers and effect of translation). The aim is to analyze and summarize the shortcomings of the study, to provide reference for scholars at home and abroad to do similar studies in the future, and to help the translation and dissemination of Chinese literature and culture in the future.

**Keywords:** The Model of Translation and Dissemination, *Chen Ai Luo Ding*, *Red Poppies*, The Effect of Translation and Dissemination.

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## 1. Introduction

Under the guidance of the strategy of “Chinese culture going out”, translation, as a cross-cultural communication activity with the nature of communication, can help Chinese literature go out and Chinese culture go out. However, for Chinese literature and culture to go out, it is not only the translation of literature but also the interpretation that is needed. The effect of translation is only when the translated text can enter the reading level of foreign countries and win the recognition of foreign connoisseurs and the response of foreign readers. Therefore, the effect of translation not only provides a reference for judging whether the translation activity is successful or not, but also has a certain reference value for measuring the effectiveness of Chinese literary works going out.

A Lai's novel *Chen Ai Luo Ding*, published in 1998, has been translated into more than twenty languages, and the sales volume of its translation has exceeded more than 1.5 million copies, and the English translation by Howard Goldblatt and his wife, Sylvia Lin, called *Red Poppies*, came out in 2002. This paper is mainly based on the translation model proposed by Ms. Bao Xiaoying as a foothold, by analyzing the influence of each element in the model on the translation effect and thus looking at the final dissemination effect, hoping to provide a reference for future research on the translation of similar text types.

## 2. Theoretical Basis

Accompanied by the “cultural turn” of translation research, translation studies have jumped out of the long-standing discussions on translation methods and standards, and placed translation in different literary, cultural and social contexts, paying more attention to the “communication” of the target text after it is produced. The effect of communication has always been a major concern in communication studies. As the end point of communication activities, the effect of communication is the yardstick for measuring the effectiveness of communication behaviors, and the study of

the effect of communication is based on both qualitative and quantitative analyses, and the results include the impact on the society as a whole. Harold Lasswell put forward the communication model in 1948, which includes “communication subject”, “communication content”, “communication channels”. The model consists of five elements: “subject of communication”, “content of communication”, “means of communication”, “reader of communication” and “effect of communication”. Literary translation is also a kind of cultural communication behavior, and it is also feasible to apply the five elements of Lasswell's communication model to literary translation, i.e., “subject of translation”, “content of translation”, “channel of translation”, “effect of translation”. However, there are various factors affecting the effect of translation and mediation, including mainstream ideology, poetics, diplomatic relations of the countries concerned, the cultural status of the source language, the choice of the translator, the choice of the translated content, the translation strategy adopted, the expectations of the readers, and the mode of communication, etc. In short, the effect of translation and mediation is not only a result of the translation process, but also a result of the translation process. In short, the effects of translation and interpretation are greatly influenced by the “subjects of translation”, “contents of translation”, “channels of translation” and “readers of translation”, and the “effect of translation”.

## 3. Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of the Translation of the Red Poppies

In 2002, Howard Goldblatt and his wife Sylvia Lin's translation of *Chen Ai Luo Ding* came out, and the title of the work was changed to “Red Poppies”. Between 2002 and 2003, the translation was heavily distributed by a number of publishers, including the world's leading publishers, Houghton Mifflin Company and Penguin. Between 2002 and 2003, the translation was widely distributed by a number of publishers, including the world's leading publishers, Houghton Mifflin Company and Penguin, and to date, more

than 1.5 million copies of the translation have been sold, making it the world's leading seller. Based on this fact, the translation effect of *Red Poppies* discussed in this section briefly analyzes the definition and influence of "subjects of translation", "contents of translation", "channels of translation", "readers of translation" and "effect of translation."

### 3.1. The Subjects of Translation

The subject of translation mainly refers to "the person who translates the project", i.e. the translator, although sometimes the author of the original text is also regarded as one of the subjects of translation, but the translator's role is not only to provide the translation, but also more importantly, to play the role of communication and coordination between the original author, who may not know the target language, and the editor, who may not know the source language. The degree of readers' identification with the translated subject is also particularly important for the reception and dissemination effects of the translation. Therefore when the degree of recognition and popularity of the translation subject is higher, the translation effect will be better.

The main translators of *Red Poppies* are Howard Goldblatt and his wife Sylvia Lin, a renowned American sinologist and literary translator who has translated a large number of contemporary Chinese novels, and is particularly known for his translations of the works of Mo Yan, the 2012 Nobel Prize winner. He is particularly known for his translations of the works of 2012 Nobel Laureate Mo Yan, including six of his full-length novels and novellas. Sylvia Lin, wife of Howard Goldblatt, is a Taiwanese-born translator who has collaborated with her husband on more than a dozen novels, including *Red Poppies*. Jia Pingwa's novel, *Floating Mania*, was awarded the Mobil Pegasus Literary Prize in 1989 for Howard Goldblatt's translation. His translations of *Wolf Totem*, *Riverbank* and *Rice* won the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2007, 2009 and 2010 respectively, and his translation of Zhu Tianwen's *The Wasteman's Handbook*, co-translated with his wife, Lijun Lin, won the National Translation Award from the American Translators Association in 2008. In 2008, *The Desolate Man's Handbook* won the National Translation Award from the Translators Guild of America, and *Fatigue of Life and Death* won the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature in the United States in 2009. Based on the combination of original authors who write primarily about Tibetan areas, as well as well-known sinologists and translators, both the original works and the translations appeal to English-speaking readers to a considerable extent.

### 3.2. The Contents of Translation

The content of translation focuses on the "what" of translation, so whether translated literature can be effectively disseminated depends, to a certain extent, on the choice of the author, the original text, and even the translation strategy. The question of "what to translate" is more important than "how to translate". However, the choice of content is not only the free choice of the translator, but also subject to various external and internal factors such as historical, social, cultural, political and aesthetic factors. With proper selection, the translated work will be welcomed by readers and achieve good translation results, while the opposite will be a failure.

Analyzing the translations in this study, first of all, A Lai, the original author was born in Maerkang County, Sichuan Province in the 1860s. Having lived in the Tibetan area since childhood and possessing a strong emotion for the human

background there, A Lai has insisted on writing stories about Tibetans and Tibetan culture for many years, and his works are characterized by local characteristics. *Chen Ai Luo Ding* is a book written in Chinese, which incorporates rich elements of Tibetan language and culture.

*Chen Ai Luo Ding* won the Mao Dun Literature Prize in 2000. Set in eastern Tibet in the 1940s, the novel chronicles the waning days of once-powerful Tibetan chieftains, and shows the unique Tibetan customs and the mystery of the chieftaincy system. Yet to most Western readers, Tibet is usually seen as a paradise on earth, and Tibet itself is synonymous with mystery. In one of James Hilton's very famous works, *The Vanishing Horizon*, he depicts Tibet as a serene and beautiful Shangri-La; in William Somerset Maugham's *The Blade*, Tibet is a spiritual highland and a place of seclusion.

Finally, *Chen Ai Luo Ding* depicts many cultural elements rich in Tibetan characteristics, which are the more important parts of the novel, Howard Goldblatt and his wife, when translating the novel, happened to choose the more important Tibetan cultural elements to be translated to attract the Western readers. For example, *Red Poppies* retains the mythological birth of the Maiqi Tusi family, which is said to have hatched from an egg, and the translator chose to retain the mystery conveyed by the original text to attract Western readers to read on. Secondly, the translator has retained the original text's portrayal of the marriage customs in Tibet, but as the customs are different from those in other places, this is also able to attract Western readers to a certain extent. In addition to the examples listed above, the translator has retained the unique Tibetan style of the original text in many other places, so it can be imagined that the original text itself, which is full of Tibetan color and mystery, has a special attraction for those Western readers who have a strong interest in and special feelings for Tibet. The translators have also translated the novel based on the content of the original to a large extent in order to cater to the reading interests and tastes of the target readers, which is expected to promote the effective dissemination and acceptance of the translated work.

### 3.3. The Channels of Translation

Translation channels mainly explore the channels through which translations are disseminated, and as one of the five basic elements in the process of communication, channels play an important role in the circulation and dissemination of literary works. The main channels are newspapers, magazines, books, television and so on, and the more channels and frequency of contact between English-speaking countries and translations, the more naturally it will help the dissemination of culture. Therefore, the number of ways of translation and the way of translation affect the contact time and effect of the receiving group to a certain extent, thus affecting the effect of translation. The more channels there are, the better the effect may be.

In China, the earliest version of *Red Poppies* is the 1998 version, which has a high Douban rating of 9 points and is widely praised by readers. In 2003, the novel was adapted into a TV series, which is better, but not as good as the original novel. Overseas, *Red Poppies* has been translated mainly through publishers or online bookstores, but the information we can obtain is still relatively single, so it is difficult to judge the influence of the translation channels on the translation effect.

Publishing house publication, as one of the important ways

of translation, plays an important role in the process of literary exchange among countries. In order to examine the influence of publishers on the dissemination effect of *Red Poppies* translated by Howard Goldblatt, this paper collects some publication information of *Red Poppies* in British and American countries. In the United States, *Red Poppies* is mainly published by three publishers, namely, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH Books): (ISBN-13: 978-0618119646); Mariner Books: (ISBN-13: 978-0547347141); and Tandem Library: (ISBN-13: 978-14417717255). HMH Books is a long-established publisher of textbooks, instructional technology materials, assessments, and reference books in the U.S.A. Mariner Books was originally an HMH Books imprint, and Tandem Library Books provides selections for libraries, publishers, and book wholesalers nationwide. and publishers and book wholesalers nationwide, providing selection, online collection analysis, cataloging and processing services, and customer support. In the UK, *Red Poppies* is published by two main imprints: the long-established British publisher Methuen Pub Ltd: (ISBN-13: 978-0413771834), and Penguin Group: (ISBN-13: 978-0670040322), one of the UK's leading trade book publishers. (ISBN-13: 978-0670040322). Although the editions of *Red Poppies* published by the two publishing companies are different and have different covers, there is no difference in content. Both the above American and British publishers are first-class publishers and publishing groups, enjoying high popularity and reputation. As they have won the trust of readers for a long time and have considerable market resources and rich market information, followed by selling different categories and forms of books, as an important communication channel they are able to promote the circulation and dissemination of books through various ways.

With the rise of the e-commerce industry, people begin to buy books online, and here we select the information about the sale of the translation by Amazon, the largest online e-commerce company in the U.S. It can be seen that whether it is in the U.K. or in the U.S. Amazon store, the version of this translation for sale is more adequate, including the hardcover and softcover, as well as the audio form, and the variety of sales also indicates that the readers have a corresponding demand, and the suppliers will choose to put the goods on the shelves. The variety of sales also indicates that there is a demand from readers, and vendors are choosing to put their products on the shelves, and the reverse sales model has greatly increased the dissemination of the translation abroad.

### 3.4. The Readers of Translation

The reader of translation mainly explores who the readers of the translated book are, and the reaction or evaluation of this group can be used as the basis for the effect of translation, and if the reaction of the reader is not good enough, then the corresponding effect of translation has not been achieved. Therefore, the readers of Howard Goldblatt's *Red Poppies* can be divided into professionals and general readers, and the concerns and reactions of professionals and general readers are analyzed here.

Through the study of foreign academics, it is found that in front of professionals, many Western commentators take *Red Poppies* as an example to analyze Alai's novels so as to carry out in-depth research on Alai, or take this translation as an example to explore the relationship between politics and literature in the text based on the unique Tibetan culture in the novels. For example, the article "Literary Liberation of the

Tibetan Past: The Alternative Voice in Alai's *Red Poppies*" is a superficial exploration of the genre of the novel, but in essence it focuses on the political issues in the novel. The article, for example, "Literary Liberation of the Tibetan Past: The Alternative Voice in Alai's *Red Poppies*", ostensibly explores the genre of the novel, but in essence focuses on the politics of the novel. Secondly, some commentators have also seized upon Tibetan literature as an entry point to explore the many problems of national cultural transformation. For example, the article "Where is Tibet in World Literature?" explores whether the process of textual conversion (Tibetan-English) has an impact on the original culture of the text.

Secondly, for the general public, due to the development of online bookstores, people can not only buy the books conveniently and quickly, but also can even give reviews, and the readers' feedback information has an influence on the judgment of the translation effect to a certain extent. By reading the Amazon readers' comments, we can know that more than half of the readers gave 5 stars to this work, but some of them gave 4 stars, in comparison, the readers who gave 5 stars were much more than other readers, which to a certain extent can understand that most of the Amazon readers are satisfied with this work. Most of the reviews are "highly recommended", "inspiring", "great", "so interesting", and only a few are "not so good". A few are "not so good" and "not understandable". Through these comments, we can know to a certain extent that the readers are very interested in the content of the work, especially in the unique culture of the Tibetan area. Besides, the readers can also catch the main content of the text and the meaning that the article wants to express from the English translation, which shows that the translation is also quite effective. (See the figure below for details)

## 4. The Effect

Translation effect, as a criterion for judging whether a work has a certain influence in the readers population, is affected by multiple factors. According to the translation and dissemination model adopted in this paper, it is concluded from the analysis of the previous section that the translator of this translation of *Red Poppies* has a greater attraction to the majority of the readers to a certain extent, because the translator's own honor as well as the translator's adoption of a variety of strategies in the process of translation can help the readers to understand and promote the The effect of translation. Secondly, in terms of translation content, the original *Chen Ai Luo Ding*, as an award-winning work of Mao Dun Literature Prize, is not only excellent in its own right, but also has a strong attraction to readers in the United Kingdom and the United States because of the Tibetan culture contained in the content of the article. Thirdly, there are various ways of translation, but it can also be seen that the first-class foreign publishers, as well as the largest online bookstores are shelving the work as a means of helping the dissemination of the work itself, which is expected to improve the effect of translation. Finally, there is the response from both types of readers, with both professional research on the translation and favorable comments from the general public showing that the work has been translated well.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the theoretical foundation of translation and mediation and the research framework of the translation and

mediation communication model proposed by Ms. Bao Xiaoying, this article explores the effect of *Red Poppies* translation and mediation in English-speaking countries. Based on the study of the article's author and translator as well as the content of the work, we can see that the two translators, Howard Goldblatt and Lin Lijun, take the readers' needs and expectations into full consideration when translating *Chen Ai Luo Ding*, and use different translation methods to make the translation easier to be understood and accepted by the target readers, so as to make the version clear, natural, and culturally comprehensible. Secondly, the real-time ratings and comments of readers in online bookstores can also be examined to understand that the translation is more acceptable to the majority of readers. Finally, by mainly investigating the publication information of the books of the two countries, it can be realized that the first-class publishers can help the translation of the works, and on the contrary, the effect of translation can also be proved by the publishers' choice of publications. Therefore, through the above investigation, it can be known that the book is welcomed by British and American readers and its dissemination effect is generally satisfactory. Although there are still many shortcomings in this study, it is enlightening to know that the study of translation effect can also help to enhance the influence of the work from the side, but moreover, it is hoped that this study can provide some new perspectives for the theoretical study of contemporary Chinese translated literature, and some new revelations for the practice of translation and dissemination of Chinese literature.

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