

Research on the Foreign Communication of Chinese Science Fiction Literature in the Perspective of Public Diplomacy*

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In recent years, China's public diplomacy has flourished, with literary exchanges and external communication undoubtedly becoming an essential part. Particularly with the progress of Chinese technology, science fiction literature has become a focal point both domestically and internationally. This paper investigates the background of the Chinese science fiction literature's national characteristics, the manifestation of these characteristics in works, and the advantages of communication from three aspects. It also explores new ideas for the external communication of Chinese science fiction literature from the perspective of public diplomacy, inspiring new pathways for the integration of Chinese culture with the world, and telling Chinese stories to the world.

Keywords: Chinese science fiction literature, national characteristics, public diplomacy, external communication

Introduction

When the words "China" and "science fiction" are put together, there will likely be a collision between two cultures. The former is easily a reminiscent of "red lantern", representing tradition, history and nationality, while the latter is reminiscent of "cyberpunk", representing the future, modernity and globalization (Wang, 2016). When the future meets tradition, seemingly unrelated elements collide, but gave birth to a unique Chinese science fiction literature.

Nationality is a unique feature of Chinese science fiction literature. In the past, most scholars stood in the perspective of literary analysis, deeply explored the characteristics of nationality, and lacked the influence of the nationality of Chinese science fiction literature on communication from a holistic perspective. Starting from the nationality of Chinese science fiction literature, this paper analyzes the influence of its nationality on the external communication of Chinese science fiction literature, and thoughts from the perspective of public diplomacy, expecting to provide ideas for the external communication of Chinese excellent culture.

The Background of the Generation of Nationality in Chinese Science Fiction Literature

The emergence of Western science fiction is considered to be one of the special cultural phenomena after the rise of European industrial civilization. In contrast, in China, science fiction is not nourished from its own culture,

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but the “exotic” brought in by foreign missionaries. This makes Chinese science fiction destined to show a unique national color since its birth.

The emergence of this nationality has the particularity of the times. Facing the guns and cannons of the modern Western world, some advanced intellectuals and the upper class of the ruling class in China have dramatically changed their attitudes towards Western scientific knowledge and actively introduced a large number of works related to Western scientific knowledge. From the Westernization Movement to the Reform Movement of 1898, the study of the West gradually deepened from artifacts to advanced scientific knowledge (Liu & Li, 2016). During this period, Chinese science fiction was not yet original, and the intellectuals were neither professional novelists nor receiving any scientific training. Thus they lacked a real understanding of science, which made them incapable of creating the kind of science fiction they had in mind that could educate the people of China. In fact, it seems that the idea of completing science education and ideological enlightenment by literature itself is debatable. Therefore, these literator mainly practiced their ideas by translating and publishing the existing science fictions from the West. Xue Shaohui, a female literati during late Qing Dynasty, translated *Eighty Days of Travel* written by Verne, a famous French science fiction writer; Bao Tianxiao translated *The Iron World* and so on.

In addition, before the Reform Movement of 1898, the Qing government’s ability to control ideology had been gradually weakened, and the public opinion environment of the novel was improved. It was the right time for Liang Qichao to put forward the ‘novel revolution’, which changed the novel from the original gradual mode to the sudden leap. Against this background favorable to the incubation of novels, there was a creative upsurge in all kinds of novels. The rise of science fiction has its contingency, but also has the inevitability of the times. The traditional agricultural civilization of China in the late Qing Dynasty was gradually defeated in the face of the attack of Western industrial civilization, at this time, science fiction, with science and technology as the direct source of inspiration, was endowed with the mission of saving the country and strengthening the people by some intellectuals in addition to its own literary and entertainment functions. They found different rules of social operation in Western science fiction and recognized the extraordinary role of this genre in enlightening the people, hoping to awaken the people to realize the independence of the nation.

In other words, the concepts of “future” and “science and technology” presented in Western novels attracted Chinese intellectuals to actively create and publicize science fiction. On one hand, the advanced science and technology of the West and the rise of modern civilization are shining and bringing people hope; on the other hand, they are reluctant to see China’s thousands of years of glory. Behind their passion for science fiction lies their reflection on the humiliating status quo and their urgent search for shortcuts that can lead China to light.

The Characteristic Embodiment of Nationality in Chinese Science Fiction Literature

A Chinese writer always carries a large number of Chinese elements in the process of literary creation. However, nationality is not the same as the accumulation of simple cultural elements. The national characteristics of Chinese science fiction not only originates from the long Chinese culture, but also contains various possibilities for the future, which has diversified and distinctive features.

Unique emotion to homeland. In science fiction movies, when disaster strikes, how to save human beings from disaster is the common creative core of the East and the West. But the difference between the two is that

humans “go out” or “go together” with their homeland. In multiple Western science fiction literature, “saving humanity” means abandoning the earth and going to the universe to find a new foothold to replace the earth. This does serve the purpose of creation, but Chinese science fiction has given us a new way of thinking.

Taking *Wandering Earth* as an example, compared with human beings escaping from the earth, it chooses a more romantic “Chinese path”—escaping with the earth. This feelings to native land is the unique value of Chinese science fiction, which comes from the idea of “Attached to the Land and Unwilling to Move” in Chinese culture. Chinese people attach great importance to the concept of home. From a micro perspective, it refers to the family, but from a macro perspective, when all human beings become a community, this sentiment also extends to the nation and even the earth.

Collectivist heroes as protagonists. In Western culture, the protagonist emphasizes the “individual heroism”, while the protagonist in Chinese science fiction appears in the form of “group portraits”. Without the description of any one of the characters, the overall heroic image will be incomplete.

Taking *Star Trek* as an example, the whole story of saving mankind revolves around elite scientists, and the general public is the subject of salvation, but also the object to be blurred. In contrast, the behavior of human beings facing disasters in *Wandering Earth* draws on the traditional Chinese mythical story *Yugong Yishan*. There is no alleged superhero in it, and everyone is the protagonist of this “Wandering Plan”. Among them, there are numerous pioneers and leaders, but they lead tens of millions of people to fight for the common goal of “Traveling with the earth”. The masses are not only the subject being rescued and the subject doing the rescuing. There is no savior in the film, there are only tens of thousands of ordinary rescue team members, working together for future generations and homes. The human behavior displayed by *Wandering Earth* is quite oriental, and the collectivism spirit of “flame runs high if everyone adds wood to it” penetrates the film, which is the subversion and reconstruction of individual heroism by collectivism.

Ethical core under localized construction. The ethical culture formed in the Western Zhou Dynasty and continued to the late Qing Dynasty for more than two thousand years, with the family as the center and the blood relationship as the link. This is the difference between Chinese and the Western political ideology, that is, while acknowledging the role of institutions and rules in social governance, it also affirms the role of morality and ethics in social governance, and kinship is an important carrier of ethics.

The beginning of *Wandering Earth* shows that the whole “Wandering Plan” will last for 100 generations to integrate the concept of “inheritance” skillfully. At the end of the film, Liu Qi inherited the occupation of his grandfather Han Zi’ang’s heavy truck driver, and shouldered the historical mission of becoming a contributor to the “Wandering Earth” plan like his predecessors. This unconscious plot processing implies Mr. Fei Xiaotong’s concepts on Chinese-style family and career, that is, the family is on the one hand the carrier of blood continuation, on the other hand, it is also a “continuous career community”. The film connects the entire rescue operation with the ethical emotions of three generations of a family as a clue, reflecting the localized national characteristics of “Wandering Earth”. The key point of grasping the audience is that the display of emotion is specific rather than general, focusing on the portrayal of individual life, and systematically showing the contradiction between individual emotion, collective will, family ethics and homeland security.

Foreign Dissemination of Chinese Science Fiction Literature: Balancing Cosmopolitanism and Nationality

Generally speaking, the common theme of science fiction literature is to focus on the fate of mankind and think about what new possibilities the development of science and technology will bring to mankind. The most important feature of science fiction literature is transcendence, which refers to the temporal transcendence: it should be future-oriented, focusing on the problems that human beings may encounter in the future as well as the depiction of the future society, rather than limiting its attention to practical problems. It also refers to the spatial transcendence: science fiction should focus on the entire universe, rather than limiting itself to the earth. In this sense, science fiction is a worldwide literature, which is also one of the reasons why it has caused wide resonance. The Chinese cultural factors that are different from the West can satisfy the novelty and curiosity of overseas readers.

First of all, from the perspective of Western civilization, the intense sense of difference between Eastern and Western civilizations makes overseas readers have a curiosity about Chinese science fiction literature at the beginning. (Wu, 2021). For example, the shaping of the underground city in *Wandering Earth* adopts the traditional “Spring Festival” as the time node, and uses red as the general tone. On the one hand, it satisfies the reader’s expectation of Chinese culture, on the other hand, the integration of traditional elements into science fiction literature also brings freshness to readers. Secondly, Compared with the single image characteristics of superheroes from Western, Chinese science fictions usually form multi-dimensional characters. For example, Han Duoduo, one of the pioneers in *Wandering Earth*, was given multiple personalities, such as rebellion, crying, assertiveness and strong self-protection consciousness instead of being idealised by the author, retaining the shortcomings that adolescent children normally have. Many viewers have said that Han Duoduo’s scripts are too childish and embarrassing, but this approach precisely match with the age of middle school students. This is undoubtedly a breakthrough in Chinese science fiction literature to distinguish from the Western framework that the protagonist must be perfect.

The nationality of Chinese science fiction literature is created in the fusion of Chinese traditional culture and modern civilization. It is not only deepens the understanding of Chinese writers and readers on China’s own culture, but also enables the in-depth development of Western science fiction literature in China.

Reflections on the External Communication of Chinese Science Fiction Literature under the Perspective of Public Diplomacy

As an important path to enhance the country’s soft power, the role of public diplomacy in international exchanges has become increasingly prominent, meanwhile, cultural exchanges naturally become an indispensable part of it (Zhong & Wang, 2006). Compared with the government’s political activities, the convergence between literature and diplomacy seems to be more subtle in highlighting the humanitarian spirit. Literary creation shoulders a huge mission, like a bridge connecting the communication between Eastern and Western civilizations. In addition to giving full play to the role of science fiction literature communication in public diplomacy and paying attention to the internationalization and artistry of expression, we should also focus on giving full play to the unique advantages of universities in the field of cultural exchanges. Drawing on the

success of Shanghai Institute of Public Diplomacy, we will explore new mechanisms for cooperation between schools and associations, and provide a good platform for literary exchanges and communication.

The first is to improve the diplomatic mechanism of science fiction literature and help Chinese science fiction writers better safeguard their rights and interests when they go abroad to participate in literary activities. In this regard, we can learn from France, cultural and diplomatic institutions to form a top-down division of labor and cooperation, and set up a department specializing in foreign publishing, which is responsible for the export trade, copyright exchange and international cooperation of Chinese books (Lin, 2022). The second is to promote the docking between cooperation of Chinese and foreign science fiction literature. Through the organisation of literary exhibitions as well as exchanges in science fiction literature, the exchange and cooperation between Chinese and foreign science fiction literature will be accelerated. For example, colleges and universities cooperate with the government to hold international book fairs regularly, give full play to the cultural advantages of colleges and universities, promote Chinese excellent books, deeply understand the popular trends of Chinese published books in various countries, and promote the wider dissemination of Chinese excellent science fiction literary works. In this regard, the sound diplomatic mechanism and complete literary and artistic exhibition system of Chinese science fiction literature will play a huge role in promoting.

Conclusion

There is the infiltration of science and technology in the contemporary era. Science and technology have fundamentally changed our life, and the previous imagination is becoming a reality step by step. Therefore, science fiction literature needs to find new growing points. Chinese science fiction has a clear understanding of this trend. While all human cultures and technologies tend to be globalized, Chinese science fiction literature has its own unique development track. Its nationality is not so much deliberate as natural growth. From the perspective of public diplomacy, this nationality is the unique external communication advantage of Chinese science fiction literature, which provides a new idea for the external communication of Chinese excellent culture.

In the future, in the process of development, Chinese science fiction literature will show stronger inclusiveness and adaptability in the face of external culture, implement innovative ideas on the basis of traditional culture, and deeply explore the development of human spiritual culture, so as to promote Chinese science fiction literature to a broader path.

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