

Research on Integrating the Translation of Red Classics Into Japanese Language Teaching in Colleges and Universities: Taking *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* as an Example

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The Red Classics are significant cultural symbols in Chinese literature and began spreading to Japan in the early 1970s. This paper uses *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* to explore the significance of the revolutionary spirit and the role of the Red Classics in Sino-Japanese exchange. This novel depicts the heroic actions of the People's Liberation Army under the Chinese Communist Party and is featured in Chinese textbooks, gaining recognition through various media. After its Japanese translation by Kuroshio Publishers, it has been translated into several languages and is well-represented in Japanese libraries. Japanese scholars and readers interpret the story through their experiences, praising it as a work of revolutionary romanticism that highlights its characters and battle scenes. Research on the Red Classics is crucial for university education, particularly in Japanese language studies, as it can enhance cultural exchange and help students understand the revolutionary spirit while promoting Chinese culture abroad.

Keywords: Red Classics, literary translation, Japanese language teaching, revolutionary spirit

Introduction

The Red Classics have long been recognized as landmarks and unique cultural semiotics in the history of Chinese literature (Wang, 2020), which have garnered considerable attention from literary and academic circles.

The spread of Red Classics in Japan dates back to the early 1970s, after the founding of the People's Republic of China. At this time, even though China and Japan were still in a period of civil diplomacy, Japan can be recognized as the country that took the most initiative in translating and introducing Red Classics from China, and some of these Japanese translations became the earliest foreign translations (Ni & Li, 2021). It is clear that the translation and dissemination of Red Classics were extensive and profound in Japan in the late 20th century.

This study uses the classic work *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* to illustrate the connotation of the revolutionary spirit it embodies. It examines the translation and reception of the novel in Japan to explore the role of Red Classics in Sino-Japanese exchanges. The goal is to encourage college students to actively promote Chinese

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culture abroad through language, effectively communicate China's stories, inherit the "Red Gene", and advance the revolutionary spirit.

About *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Red Classics literary works gained popularity in literary circles. These included *Keep Red Flag Flying*, *Red Sun*, *Red Crag*, *Builders of a New Life*, *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*, *Defend Yanan*, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, and the series of *A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire*. Additionally, Red Classics work in theater and film, such as *The White-haired Girl*, *The Song of Youth*, and so on. They are also officially mentioned in the news and reports of media in China, like *People's Daily*, *Xinhua New Media*, *People's Liberation Army Daily*, and *Guang Ming Daily*.

One of the most representative works among Red Classics literature is the long novel, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, written by Qu Bo in 1954 and published by the Writers Publishing House in 1957. The novel is recognized as a landmark work in Red Classics. Drawing from his own experiences fighting bandits in northeast China's Mudanjiang area in 1946, Qu Bo vividly portrays the heroic deeds of the People's Liberation Army, led by the Communist Party of China. This work, known for its excellent narrative skill and gripping plot, plays an indispensable role in the "17 Years of Literature" and leaves a significant mark in the history of Chinese literature with lasting historical research value.

Tracks in the Snowy Forest has been reprinted and republished numerous times. Widely distributed in paperback, it is included as compulsory reading in many Chinese textbooks for primary and secondary schools by the Ministry of Education. The novel has also been adapted into various films and TV dramas, reaching a broader reader through newspapers, magazines, and mass media, thus further expanding its influence and popularity. Successfully crossing linguistic and cultural boundaries, it has become a leading work in foreign translations.

Translation and Dissemination of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* in Japan

Japanese Translation and Collection

Shortly after its release in 1957, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* was translated into several foreign languages, including English, Japanese, and Russian and other language. The earliest foreign-language translation of this work was the Japanese version, issued by Kuroshio Publishing House in Japan in 1960-1961 and translated by Okamoto Ryuzo. The publication of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* in Japan was nearly simultaneous with its release in China, reflecting the strong interest in Chinese literature at the time.

Okamoto Ryuzo, a graduate of the Chinese Department of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies with a background in modern literature, was deeply interested in China and had a positive outlook toward the country. He translated and edited several Chinese Red Classics, including *Morning in Shanghai* (1959-1964), *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, and *A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire* (1972). According to the National Diet Library, CiNii Research, and university library websites in Japan, Okamoto's translations are available in 15 public libraries, including the National Diet Library, Hokkaido Library, and Kanagawa Museum of Modern Literature, as well as in 17 university libraries, such as the University of Tokyo, Osaka University, Kyushu University, and Nagasaki University.

A Japanese version translated by Iizuka Akira was published by Heibonsha in 1962 as part of the Anthology

of Modern Chinese Literature and republished by Kawade Shobo Shinsha in 1970. Iizuka's translation is noted for its delicate and precise style, effectively conveying the original author's emotions. The 1962 edition is available in three public libraries in Japan, including the National Diet Library, and in 142 university libraries, such as Hokkaido University. The 1970 edition can be found in four public libraries, including Fukushima Prefectural Library, and in 144 university libraries, such as Gakushuin University. As shown in Table 1, Japanese translations of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* are held in prestigious university libraries, as well as in national and municipal libraries across Japan. Most libraries retain paper versions, while a few also offer electronic versions in response to the trend of digitalization, reflecting a commitment to providing diverse reading options and convenient access. Furthermore, the National Diet Library has included materials for visually impaired readers, further broadening the novel's accessibility.

Table 1

Selected Japanese Libraries' Collections of the Japanese Version of Tracks in the Snowy Forest

Name of library	Library availability	Japanese version	Types of collections
National Diet Library	P	P	Paper and electronic versions
The Oriental Library	P	P	Paper version
University of Tokyo Library	P	P	Paper and electronic versions
Kyoto University Library	P	P	Paper version
Osaka University Library	P	P	Paper version
Tokyo Institute of Technology Library	O	O	None
Tohoku University Library	P	P	Paper and electronic versions
Nagoya University Library	P	P	Paper version
Kyushu University Library	P	P	Paper version
Keio University Media Center	P	P	Paper and electronic versions
Waseda University Library	P	P	Paper and electronic versions
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies Library	O	O	None
Tokyo Metropolitan Library	P	P	Paper and electronic versions
Osaka Municipal Library	P	P	Paper version

Many libraries in Japan hold the Chinese version of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* alongside its Japanese translation. For instance, the National Diet Library, Kobe University, the University of Tokyo, Kyoto University, and 11 other libraries possess the 1958 edition published by Writers' Publishing House, as well as reprints from 1962 and 1964. 45 libraries, including the National Diet Library and the Tokyo Metropolitan Central Library, have the 1959 edition from the People's Literature Publishing House, along with reprints from 1964 and 1977.

As a significant Red Classic, the Japanese version has attracted international attention since its release, resulting in translations into over 10 languages, including English, Korean, German, Thai, and Spanish. Notably, the English translation by Sidney Shapiro was published by the Foreign Language Publishing House in 1962, with reprints in 1965 and 1978. The 1962 English edition is held in five Japanese university libraries, the 1965 edition in eight libraries, and the 1978 edition in three libraries. Additionally, the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies has a Mongolian version published in 1960, while Hokkaido University holds a Uyghur version published in 1978.

Evaluation and Acceptance

As the translator of the 1962 Japanese version, Iizuka Akira evaluated *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* from both a translator's and reader's perspective in the "Explanation" section of the Japanese edition.

Iizuka Akira positions *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* as part of "People's Literature" series depicting China's wars of liberation. He describes the novel as "revolutionary romanticism with a unique character", noting that it is "highly successful both ideologically and artistically" (1962b, p. 357). While he acknowledges "the author's limited artistic experience to some extent" (p. 361), he also appreciates the way "readers feel a sense of familiarity with the Water Margin-type characters unique to this work. In terms of story structure, each battle scene is distinct, with its own climactic moment" (pp. 358-359). He further comments, "The main characters' personalities are vividly portrayed. In my view, the simplicity of the characters within the story's context actually enhances the narrative" (p. 361). Iizuka emphasizes the "purity" of author Chu Po's intention, stating that "while narrating the experiences of the guerrilla detachment, the author aims to publicize the honorable deeds of his comrades" (p. 359). This sentiment, according to Iizuka, "appeals not only to Chinese readers but also to international readers" (p. 359), which he considers a distinct strength of the novel.

Some Japanese readers interpret the novel based on their personal experiences. For instance, in the article "A Manchurian Experience", Ohara Shinichi who served as an interpreter in Manchukuo, cross-references the "Commander-in-Chief" in novel from the 1934 Tulong Mountain Incident and the "Kuomintang bandit chieftain", connecting the fictional "Xie Wendong" with the historical figure, and reflects on a fight scene where Yang Zirong faces the bandit chieftain wielding a "Japanese saber", noting that "for Japan, it's insufficient to view them simply as saber-wielding villains" (1982, p. 30). This perspective reflects a deeper introspection on Japan's colonial policies.

Regarding general Japanese readers, on the Japanese Amazon website, two users reviewed Okamoto Ryuzo's 1960 translation. One described the novel as "very interesting", while the other noted that "*Tracks in the Snowy Forest* is also popular as a comic book adaptation in China". On the popular Japanese blogging site *Ameba*, a blogger with an interest in Chinese literature commented under the title *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, saying, "Overall, the story is concise and enjoyable, which makes it appealing to a broad reader. The Communist characters are portrayed with personality and charm, and from a Chinese perspective, there are no elements to criticize" (2015).

The Integration of Red Classics Translation and Japanese Language Teaching in Colleges and Universities

To Explore the Revolutionary Spirit Contained in "Red Classics"

The study of the revolutionary spirit found in the literature of the Red Classics is a primary task for all college students, including those studying foreign languages. It is even a prerequisite for the reform and innovation of ideological education programs in colleges and universities.

Through various art forms—texts, photographs, films, music, dance, and architecture—the Red Classics vividly depict the historical processes of the Communist Party of China and the people's struggle for national independence and liberation. These works act as carriers of cultural memory, allowing us to relive the revolutionary spirit of heroic predecessors during the Chinese revolution. *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* highlights the story of Yang Zirong, a lone hero who infiltrates the bandits' lair. In the modern Peking Opera *The Taking of Tiger Mountain*, the People's Army led by regimental chief of staff Shao Jianbo, alongside Yang Zirong and Gao Bo, bravely fought in the snowy plains of northeastern China at the beginning of the Liberation War. Yang Zirong

is depicted as both wise and courageous. He disguises himself as Hu Biao, the bandit leader's adjutant, and through his intellect and bravery, he gains the bandits' trust, ultimately destroying their lair and securing victory for the revolution. The characters in the novel exemplify the struggle, revolutionary will, and spirit of sacrifice inherent in the Communist Party of China's "red gene".

Through the interpretation and study of the Red Classics, students can experience the indomitable spirit and strength of revolutionary martyrs, as well as the rich revolutionary ethos and significant historical and cultural connotations of these works. In integrating the teaching of the Red Classics with Japanese and other foreign languages in colleges and universities, certain principles should be upheld prior to dissemination. Understanding the revolutionary martyrs' struggle for socialism with Chinese characteristics allows us to adopt their virtues and morals into our beliefs and actions, enabling us to share these ideals globally through our professional abilities.

Research on the Dissemination of Red Classics Overseas

Research on the translation and dissemination of Red Classics literature in Japan, and beyond is a crucial aspect of foreign language teaching and the ideological curriculum in higher education. It also represents an opportunity to "know yourself as well as the enemy", meaning understanding both oneself and the outside world.

This study investigates the overseas dissemination of Chinese Red Classics to discern the tendencies of foreign readers while integrating the historical perspectives and revolutionary spirit of the Chinese Revolution. The aim is to explore effective strategies for utilizing literary works to convey Chinese narratives and disseminate the voices and traditional culture of China on a global scale. In Japan, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* has two notable translations: the original by Okamoto Ryuzo and a more influential version by Iizuka Akira. Both translations are housed in numerous national and public libraries, university libraries, underscoring the novel's significance as a conduit for exchanging Chinese revolutionary culture and facilitating research on modern Chinese literature.

Furthermore, major libraries in Japan have curated collections of translations in various languages, which have contributed to the widespread dissemination of Chinese Red Classics and the promotion of Chinese revolutionary history and culture. This multilingual approach fosters cultural exchanges and mutual understanding among nations. The readership for *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* in Japan primarily comprises researchers focused on China and general readers with an interest in Chinese literature. Many readers have noted the novel's ambitious backdrop, engaging narrative, and positive tone, acknowledging its literary merit. Additionally, Japanese scholars have highlighted its historical significance, prompting deeper reflection on Japan's mainland policy. This initiative not only enhances global awareness and goodwill toward China but also fosters pride in Chinese literature and culture among college students, thereby bolstering their cultural self-confidence.

To Practice Text Translation of Red Classics Works

After studying the background of the creation of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* and its overseas dissemination, practicing the translation of "Red Classics" literature becomes an important aspect of ideological and political education for college students.

When discussing the translation practice of Red Classics, it is crucial to ensure that the translated text transcends the boundaries of language and culture, enabling effective communication and deep understanding between different cultures. Taking *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* as an example, the book contains many scenes that use dialects and "jargon", making the choice of translation strategy particularly important. For instance, the

phrase “Mushroom, which way? What price?” (p. 208) is an expression within a specific linguistic context that reflects the characteristics of the characters and the regional features of the era in which the novel was written. A direct translation of this phrase could lead to misunderstandings. In fact, this expression is a so-called “jargon joint”, which means “Who is it and where is it going?”

If translators utilize the northeastern “jargon” of “蘑菇，溜哪路？什么价？”，Japanese translation would be “キノコ、どこの？ 値段は？ (Mushroom, which way? What price?)”. However, since Japanese readers may be unfamiliar with the novel’s local Chinese dialects, direct translation could lead to confusion about the storyline. It is crucial to guide college students in employing a careful translation strategy. They should thoroughly study the original work’s cultural context and language habits, adapting the dialect and jargon into a form that aligns with Japanese readers’ cultural customs for better understanding and acceptance. For the jargon, one possible translation could be “何者だ？ どこへ？ (Who are you? Where are you going?)” or by adding an explanatory footnote. At the same time, we can learn from the Japanese versions, such as Okamoto Ryuzo’s translation: “きのこ、どこの山だ？ 何番目だ？ (原注……なにもものだ？ どこへいくか？ の意、訳者注……原注は大意を伝えたもの。「きのこ」は「仲間」か？「何番目だ」は匪賊の席次の意味か？ どこの親分のどこのやつだ？ といった意味と思われる) (Mushroom, from which mountain? Which number? (Original note: it means ‘Who are you?’, ‘Where are you going?’ Translator’s note: the original note conveys the main idea. ‘Mushroom’ means ‘fellow’, ‘Which number’ means ‘the ranking of bandit’? Which one of you is the boss of which one))” (p. 31) and Iizuka Akira’s translation: “きのこ、どこの山で、いくらでえ？ (だれだ？ どこへいく？ の隠語) (Mushroom, from which mountain, how much? (a cloak for ‘who is it? Where are you going?’))” (p. 232). This practice enhances our understanding of literary translation and helps Japanese readers appreciate the linguistic phenomena in a cultural context, highlighting the unique characteristics of Chinese literature. Through mutual cultural learning, translation acts as a bridge, promoting dialogue and facilitating exchanges between China and Japan.

Conclusion

Tracks in the Snowy Forest is a representative work of Red Classics literature that has been widely disseminated globally, with the earliest complete translation being the 1960 Japanese version. Numerous university libraries, as well as national, prefectural, and local public libraries, hold collections of this work in many languages.

Japan’s initiative to translate and introduce Chinese Red Classics reflects a deep understanding and high regard among Japanese scholars for China’s social development, as well as their respect for Chinese cultural inheritance and change. Furthermore, the translation of Red Classics literature serves as an academic bridge between China and Japan, fostering cultural exchanges and mutual understanding, while offering the international community a unique perspective for comprehensively understanding China’s modern and contemporary history and culture.

As neighboring countries, literature has historically facilitated positive exchanges between China and Japan. Over 60 years since the publication of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, its revolutionary spirit remains vibrant. Key topics for future foreign language teaching reform in universities include how to convey the “red gene” in foreign communication, how to introduce Red Classics to international readers, and how to ensure that Chinese literature flourishes abroad.

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