

Original Paper

The Dissemination of the Practical Value of *Chi Min Yao Shu* from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract

As an important part of China's excellent traditional culture, the agricultural classics holds an important position. As one of the representative works of agricultural classics, "Chi Min Yao Shu" condenses the great wisdom of China's ancient working people, records the agricultural and animal husbandry production experience, including natural disasters governance, sericulture technology, animal husbandry and other practical values, and its research will play an important role in foreign cultural exchanges. At present, there is a certain gap in the research of agricultural classics in China, and the research results are not fruitful. This paper will discuss the practical value of Chi Min Yao Shu and its dissemination in Western and Asian countries from the perspective of skopos theory, and explore its research significance and impact on our international communication with other countries.

Keywords

Chi Min Yao Shu, Agricultural Classics, international dissemination, Practical value, Skopos theory

1. Introduction

China is a major agricultural country, with thousands of years of agricultural civilization, a long history of development and a rich scientific heritage. In summarizing the experience of agricultural production, many scientists have written a lot of agricultural books. Among them, Jia's "*Chi Min Yao Shu*" shares the same fame with "*Comprehensive Treatise on Agricultural Administration*", "*The Book of Fan Sheng*", and "*Book of Agriculture by Wang Zhen*", which are known as the four major agricultural books in China. *Chin Min Yao Shu* is one of the masterpieces of Chinese agricultural classics, which can be called the ancient Chinese agricultural encyclopedia, and is the first complete agricultural book in existence. The book consists of ten volumes, covering agricultural cultivation, animal husbandry, food processing, disaster management and so on. At present, in the context of the new era, telling Chinese stories and spreading Chinese voices well is our main task. While we see our brilliant achievements, we should also

find that there are still certain limitations in our research on agricultural classics. It is mainly reflected in the research and dissemination of practical value. According to the results of the survey conducted by Yan and Wang (2018), only 67 papers were published in the decade from 2009 to 2018, on the subject of English translation of Chinese agricultural classics. Compared with other research fields, the research results of agricultural classics are not fruitful. The main focus is on the discussion of translation research, research status, significance and future prospects. In terms of translation research and meaning, many scholars have put forward their own views on the study of agricultural texts. Kong (2021) discussed the current status of translation research, existing problems, and prospects for the future. Yan (2018) believes that strengthening the study of agricultural classics can promote the influence of Chinese culture in the world. Zhou (2021) mentioned that promoting agricultural classics to go global is also conducive to enhancing the international status of ancient Chinese academia. Wang (2019) also put forward her own views on the international dissemination of agricultural classics. So, we can see there is a certain gap in this field. Most of them rarely delve into the practical value of agricultural texts. The reason why our agricultural classics can be spread around the world is because they condense the great wisdom and valuable experience of the ancient people. Disseminating excellent Chinese traditional culture will greatly enhance the influence of our Chinese culture, enhance cultural self-confidence, and enrich the content of English translations of classics. This article will focus on the international dissemination of agricultural classics, study the spread of the *Chi Min Yao Shu* in Britain and France, and explore the impact on recipient countries and China.

2. The Practical Value in “*Chi Min Yao Shu*”

2.1 Sericulture Technology

China was the first in the world to raise sericulture and began to develop sericulture technology, and silk products were once popular in Europe. The fifth volume of *Chi Min Yao Shu* focuses on the knowledge and technology of sericulture. It systematically summarizes and introduces the sericulture-related technology in his previous agricultural books and the new development of sericulture science and technology in 386-543, as well as Jia Sixun's personal cognition of sericulture. The content covers the entire silkworm production process from mulberry planting to silkworm cocoon treatment, mainly including three categories: mulberry cultivation and breeding technology, silkworm breeding and sericulture technology, and silkworm production supporting technology. These three types of technologies are interlinked. It introduces us to the cultivation management of mulberry trees, the management of mulberry orchards, silkworm breeding and breeding technology and silkworm cocoon treatment technology. For example, in planting mulberry trees, Jia proposed to choose good seeds, and also introduced the layer method and grafting method. At that time, this was the crystallization of the wisdom of the ancient working people, and had a significant impact on the cultivation of mulberry trees for future generations. In silk processing, in order to prevent silkworms from breaking through the pupae and to ensure the quality of silk, the salt pickling method is used.

2.2 Natural disaster Governance

Although “*Chi Min Yao Shu*” focuses on the summary of agricultural production technology, under the background of frequent disasters, its anti-disaster thinking is also the main content of the work. “Yao, Shun, and Tang are all foreseeing, although there are disasters in some years, but the people are not poor” (P210 of “How to Say No. 30” reflects the great importance that Qi Min Zhishu attaches to disaster prevention. In his book, he mentioned that compared with disaster resistance, disaster prevention is more preferred. So much attention should be paid to the prevention of natural disasters. It was also mentioned that disaster-resistant crops should be selected to ensure adequate food. High-yield crop soybeans should be selected for planting, and it is believed that high soybean yields can be prepared to combat hunger. In addition, the book also lists some drought-resistant and flood-resistant crops many times. For example, millet is more drought and flood resistant, and can ensure harvests regardless of drought and flood. He also mentioned that we should focus on crop diversity. This can largely avoid hunger, so that even in the face of natural disasters, some crops fail, but some crops can still be harvested normally, thus ensuring that food can be satisfied. At the same time, it is necessary to have the habit of storing food. Jia mentioned the word “saving” many times in the book, not only in grain, but also in breeding all feed should be saved, which can play a key role when disasters come. In addition, he suggested finding alternatives, such as some fruits, so that they could be used to combat famine.

2.3 Animal Husbandry

The animal husbandry in the “*Chi Min Yao Shu*” mainly describes horses and sheep, especially the breeding technology of sheep, and the achievements are very high, which has also had a significant impact on the sheep industry in later generations. In 386-534, sheep occupied a very important position in the daily life of people, especially nomads, and could meet people’s clothing, food and housing. He also summarized the breeding of sheep. In the book, he emphasized that the birth season and environment of lambs directly affect future growth and development, and that lambs born in the lunar month and the first month are generally of the best quality. For the shepherd, he should be docile and patient, care for the sheep, and ensure the sheep have a good life. In the treatment of diseases, if there are infectious diseases, they should be isolated separately to prevent contagion. The physical health of the sheep is also judged according to their jumping ability. It is enough to see that the major progress had made in breeding at that time. In terms of feed storage, a fence should be used in a dry place, and hay should be placed in the fence to allow the sheep to eat freely to prevent the sheep from stepping on and causing waste. In ancient Chinese agricultural books, horses, cattle, and pigs were the main ones on animal husbandry, but there were almost no monographs on sheep farming (Wang, Zhang, & Chai, 2004). It can be seen that the part of the sheep breeding in the “*Chi Min Yao Shu*” is very important and has a profound impact on future generations.

2.4 Agricultural Production

Jia summarized the basic experience of agricultural production in detail in “*Chi Min Yao Shu*” and proposed that agricultural production must follow a fundamental principle, that is, comprehensively consider the “timing, location,” on the basis of giving play to people’s subjective initiative and increasing agricultural output. First of all, agricultural production should adapt to the times. Jia pointed out that “spring birth, summer growth, autumn harvest, and winter storage are not easy to do at four times.” In the cultivation of crops, sowing seeds, watering, weeding and harvesting must follow the laws of nature, according to the seasons, which is should not be ignore. He mentioned in the book that a land, a characteristic, and the difference of land will also have an important impact on the growth of crops. At the same time, in the “*Chi Min Yao Shu*”, he also discussed in detail how the soil should maintain fertility and protect it by planting different crops. In terms of agricultural technology, Jia believes that “if you want to do good things, you must first sharpen your tools... And the equipment must be adjusted, so that it is fast. The tools of production are an important basis for promoting agricultural production. He attaches great importance to the improvement and application of agricultural production technology. He has conducted in-depth research in pest control techniques, farmland water conservancy, soil improvement and soil conservation, and ecological environmental protection. For example, “*Chi Min Yao Shu*” has a wealth of disease and pest prevention technology, using the characteristics of Artemisia wormwood supplemented by exposure to achieve the purpose of green insect control. It has greatly guaranteed the output of grain and promoted the improvement of agricultural productivity.

3. The Spread of “*Chi Min Yao Shu*” in Other Countries

In 1368-1912 were a period of large-scale exchanges between China and Europe. During this period, European countries expanded through overseas colonies, capital, and rapid economic development. Western missionaries represented by Matteo Ricci came to China to preach, bringing Western culture to China and bringing Chinese culture back to the West. Although in that periods, governments mainly concentrated in the fields of science and technology and literature, and agriculture was not dominant, many agricultural aspects also spread to Europe. They mainly brought agricultural products to Europe, translating and publishing relevant agricultural texts or documenting what they saw and heard in China in the form of letters.

According to Han (1999), many of the missionaries’ published works on China also introduced traditional Chinese agriculture. For example, in 1667, Kircher published *the Illustrated History of China*, which introduced many Chinese agricultural products such as rhubarb, tea and pepper. In 1735, Duhed used missionary epistolary information to publish the *four-volume General History of the Chinese Empire* in Paris. In 1791, with the financial support of the French government, *15 volumes of the “China Series”* were published, which talked about the Chinese emperor’s bowing ceremony and introduced that China had attached great importance to agriculture since ancient times. In 1737-1777, *the 13-volume General History of China*, translated by Feng Bingzheng and edited by Gorosi, was published in Paris, containing

much content on Chinese agricultural technology and products. In addition, *Philosophical Transactions*, the journal of the Royal Society, published some Chinese materials and research reports from 1666 to 1774, about 34 articles, book reviews, and commentaries on China were published. This article focuses on the spread of the *Chi Min Yao Shu* in England and France

3.1 In Britain

After the bourgeois revolution, the capitalist economy further developed, the British bourgeoisie also intensified the plunder of the domestic and colonial people, the process of primitive accumulation of capital was further accelerated. Besides, overseas expansion was further carried out, and foreign exchanges were expanded. The Royal Society has also sent members to China for scientific activities and maintained close contact with missionaries in China. After missionaries came to China, they often recorded in detail what they saw and heard in China based on their own personal experiences, and transmitted them back to Europe in the form of letters. From 1702 to 1776, these letters were edited and published as *the Collected Letters of the Jesuits*, a 34-volume collection that became the main source of information about China in 18th-century Europe.

Through the introduction of the Jesuits and Simon in China, Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882), a famous British biologist and the proposer of the theory of evolution, noticed the important agricultural work “*Chi Min Yao Shu*” and gave it a high evaluation, especially in the understanding of the principle of selection. According to Pan (1990), Darwin’s 1868 book *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication* repeatedly quoted the contents of *Chi Min Yao Shu* contained in the *Chinese Records*, such as Chapter 20 “*Artificial Selection*”: “Regarding sheep”, the book refers that the improvement of breeds consists in the careful selection of lambs intended for breeding, their good rearing, and the segregation of the flock. The same principle is applied to various plants and fruit trees. This passage is derived from Jin Jishi’s article “*Chinese Sheep*”. Or chapter 24: “The general experience of agronomists is of some value, and they often remind people to be cautious when trying to cultivate products from one place in another.”

3.2 In France

After the formal formation of the French nation, France has successively experienced the Capetian period, the Valois period, and the Bourbon period. During the succession of three periods, the French feudal absolutism gradually developed, eventually reaching its peak under Louis XIV of Bourbons. Modern European countries are committed to commerce and pursue lucrative commercial profits. France is no exception, at the end of French feudal society, due to the development of the commodity economy, capitalist factors still arose. In the sixteenth century, capitalist relations in industry were already budding, and until the eighteenth century, the commodity economy developed and mercantilism prevailed. The French minister Louis XIV Körber had asked for an investigation of Chinese production, and his successor Loire also encouraged scientific and technological investigations in China, with the state paying a certain fee. The French Royal Academy of Sciences once drew up a list of Chinese problems,

including Chinese history, science and technology, flora and fauna, weapons and printing, and the use of the compass and so on. These scientific activities had a lot to do with French missionaries in China. Pan (1990) pointed out that from 1776 to 1814, a large series of books on China, mainly based on the letters and manuscripts of the Jesuits who came to China in 15-16th centuries, “*Records of the Beijing Jesuits on the Chinese History, Science, Technology, Customs, Habits, etc.*” (referred to as “Chinese Records”), 16 volumes of *Mémoires concernant les Chinois* were published in Paris, many of which came from the “*Chi Min Yao Shu*”. In 1864, Jin Jishi’s article was annotated by Eugène Simon (1829-1896), a French sinologist and agricultural expert in China, and republished in the *Bulletin de la Société d’Acclimatation* in Paris. Simon also introduced the *Chi Min Yao Shu* in his essay on Chinese agriculture and praised it.

4. The Dissemination of *Chi Min Yao Shu* from Perspective of Skopos Theory

The author believes that the international dissemination of “*Chi Min Yao Shu*” can be better understood under the framework of skopos theory. From the perspective of skopos theory, the purpose of any translation action and how to translate or translate the mode is the result of the translator’s communication with the translator’s client or the client of the translation act, so the translator acts as an expert in this translation process and has a higher right to decide how the translation is presented and the method of translation (Vermeer, 2000, p. 221). In the process of translating or disseminating the “*Chi Min Yao Shu*”, readers or audience groups in other countries are the translation clients, so the translator and the translation act client must have full communication, and the translator should consider how and in what way and language can express to meet the expected goals of the translation client, and how to enable readers in other countries to understand the great wisdom contained in the “*Chi Min Yao Shu*”.

Within this framework, the source text greatly reduces its status and does not enjoy supremacy, but merely becomes a reference. Vermeer argues that this is because the source text is created for the source language reader in the specific context of the source culture, and translation activities are a cross-language and cross-cultural act, and simply “transcoding” or “shifting” the source text into the target culture does not necessarily produce a well-suited communication tool. In other words, if we only blindly pursue equivalence with the source language, translation is not necessarily a successful translation. Therefore, the key criterion for measuring the quality of a translation does not depend entirely on the source text, but the purpose of the translation, which plays a key role in the act of translation. Therefore, in the process of translating “*Chi Min Yao Shu*”, the translator can enjoy a great degree of freedom, and make appropriate adjustments and changes to the source text to ensure the realization of the translation purpose and the success of the translation act. So this agricultural work can be better accepted by readers and show the great wisdom of the ancient Chinese working people.

In addition, skopos theory holds that the translation and the original text diverge in two ways. One is the way the content is expressed and distributed, and the other is the intended purpose. Take “*Chi Min Yao Shu*” as an example, the book mainly records the agricultural and animal husbandry production

experience of working people in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River, disaster management and other methods, which belongs to scientific and technological classics, and some agricultural proverbs will appear in the book, such as: 欲知五谷，但视五木；天气新晴，是夜必霜；冬天麦盖三层被，来年枕着馒头睡 and so on. Among them, the language in this book mostly appears in the form of ancient classical Chinese, and the book is divided into ten volumes and ninety-two articles, which are presented to the public in a systematic and classic way. The purpose is to sum up the experience and enlighten future generations. In the process of translating this book, we must consider how to translate it so that the target readers can understand and meet the expectations of readers, whether we use it for scholars' research or present it to the public in the form of popular science books; Whether to maintain the style of the original text, or to present it to the general reader in a more popular way. It is precisely because of the difference in the status, intended purpose, and intended audience of the source text and the target text in their respective cultures that determine the differences between the translated and the original text.

5. The Significance of the External Dissemination of “*Chi Min Yao Shu*”

1) The external dissemination of “*Chi Min Yao Shu*” will greatly enhance the international influence of our Chinese culture, establish cultural self-confidence, and improve the soft power of Chinese culture. As one of the representative works of agricultural classics, “*Chi Min Yao Shu*” embodies the great wisdom of China's ancient working people, reflects ancient Chinese agricultural thought, and is of great significance to the development of Chinese agriculture and even world agriculture. The practical value will directly reflect the development of agriculture and animal husbandry in China at that time, so that the world can better understand the agricultural thinking and wisdom. Therefore, promoting this book to go out will greatly enhance China's cultural influence and enhance cultural self-confidence.

2) It can enrich the objects and contents of English translation of classic books and promote the perfection of translation talents. Wang (2011, pp. 11-12) pointed out that at present, there is a serious shortage of talents for English translators of classic books in China, and translators are facing the problem of aging structure, and there is a fault line in the translator team. Therefore, this study will promote the cultivation of translation talents in related agricultural fields, alleviate the embarrassing situation of lack of classic translators, and attract more translators to invest in the English translation and international dissemination of agricultural classics. In addition, it is also proposed that the scope of translation is narrow, mainly concentrated in the field of literature, and other fields are less involved, so it is necessary to expand the scope of English translation to the fields of classical Chinese law, medicine, economics, military, astronomy, geography and works of ethnic minorities. In the thousands of years of development of Chinese civilization, many agricultural classics have appeared, but the research on the English translation of agricultural classics is relatively weak, and few people are engaged in the research of English translation of agricultural classics. Therefore, promoting the “*Chi Min Yao Shu*” to go out can enrich the research objects of classic translation, expand the English translation content of agricultural classics, and promote the development and progress of agricultural classic research.

3) It is also of reference significance for the study of English translation of other agricultural texts. China has a long history of agriculture and rich agricultural classics, according to statistics, there are about 472 kinds of ancient agricultural documents, and 224 species exist (Wang, 1989, p. 37). As an encyclopedia of ancient Chinese agriculture and one of the four major agricultural books, the importance of “*Chi Min Yao Shu*” is self-evident. The study of the English translation of this book will also attract other scholars to the study of other agricultural books. Therefore, as one of the representative works of agricultural classics, its English translation research will also provide reference significance for the research of other agricultural classics.

4) Provide experience for promoting agricultural development in other countries. The book consists of ten volumes, covering agricultural planting, animal husbandry, food processing, and disaster management. Each country will have its own livestock and agriculture, and natural disaster management and protection, which are also important for all countries. China’s agricultural experience can provide experience to other countries that grow the same crop, and at the same time provide methods for disaster management, thereby greatly promoting agricultural development in other countries. In addition, Zhang and Wu (2006, pp. 236-248) also believe that the results of the “Western Transmission of Middle School” to Europe by the Jesuits in China also contributed to the rise of French physiocrats. In France, from the time of Louis XIII to Louis XIV, a mercantilism policy was pursued, and the interests of peasants were seriously damaged. Chinese agricultural books and agricultural ideas were introduced to France through missionaries, which also greatly eased social contradictions and promoted social progress.

6. Conclusion

The study of international communication and translation is not only the collision between words, language and culture, but also the communication between knowledge and civilization, which determines the expression of translated texts and different translation strategies. Agricultural classics are not only a book that records the development of ancient agriculture and agricultural ideas, but also condenses the great wisdom of the ancient working people in China, and is an important carrier for spreading Chinese culture. Therefore, spreading the “*Chi Min Yao Shu*”, bringing the practical value more countries, so that more people can understand this agricultural work and know the labor wisdom in it, will be of great significance to the development of world agriculture and world civilization, not only can improve the influence of Chinese culture in the world, establish cultural self-confidence, but also promote the development and progress of related industries in other countries.

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