

Original Paper

The Dissemination and Acceptance of Chinese Science Fiction

Literature

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Received: January 29, 2024

Accepted: March 05, 2024

Online Published: March 15, 2024

doi:10.22158/eltls.v6n3p1

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/eltls.v6n3p1>

Abstract

Liu Cixin's works has received worldwide attention and brought Chinese science fiction into the vision of readers around the world. Among them, the Japanese translated version has been sold well all the way once it was released, becoming a new benchmark of Chinese science fiction literature in Japan. This paper focuses on the case of the dissemination and acceptance, analyzes the reasons for its phenomenal dissemination effect, and explores the replicable and effective path for the dissemination of Chinese science fiction, with a view to providing references for the overseas dissemination of Chinese literature.

Keywords

science fiction, Communication and acceptance

1. Introduction

In 2021, General Secretary emphasized in his speech at the 30th Collective Study Session of the 19th Political Bureau of the Central Committee that strengthening and improving international communication work and presenting a true, three-dimensional and comprehensive China are important tasks in strengthening China's international communication capacity building. In recent years, Chinese literature is gradually going global, and science fiction literature in particular has emerged as a major highlight on the international stage. In 2015, Liu Cixin won the Hugo Award for Best Long Novel for the English translation of the *Three-Body Problem*, triggering a boom in the translation of Chinese science fiction literature and accumulating a large number of fans. The sales exceeded 100,000 in less than a month, becoming a phenomenal translation in Japan. It is not only loved by Japanese science fiction literature fans, but also attracts a large number of people outside the science fiction circle, which marks a milestone step in the dissemination of Chinese science fiction literature in Japan. This paper is intended to take the dissemination and acceptance of the *Three-Body Problem* series in Japan as an

example, analyse and discuss the reasons why the Three Bodies series has been sought after in Japan, with a view to providing reference and reflection for other Chinese science fiction literature to go out of the country.

Nowadays, the domestic research on the translation of the Three-Body Problem is in the ascendant. Song and Xu (2023) analyze the translation process of the Three-Body Problem in English in the context of heterogeneous culture, and explore how Chinese science fiction literature is recognized and interpreted in the new cultural space; Feng (2022) examines the advantages of the Three-Body Problem in the process of overseas dissemination, especially in English-speaking countries; Wu and Chen (2020) analyzed and concluded that Liu Cixin's science fiction works can only be introduced to the outside world through multiple subjects such as translators, copyright exporters and publishing institutions, and integrate multimedia technology in the digital age to achieve significant results in overseas dissemination. The above research focuses on the translation and dissemination process of the Three-Body Problem series in English-speaking countries, and less on the translation and dissemination situation in Japan. In terms of Japanese translation studies, Lu (2022) mainly explained the formation of the Three-Body series' compound translation in Japan; Ye (2022) analyzed and discussed the Japanese translation of the Three-Body Problem through ecological transliteration; In addition, Guo (2022) analyzed the changes and causes of cultural images in the translation process of the Three-Body Problem by making comparison with specific cases. Therefore, domestic studies on the dissemination process of the Three-Body Problem series focus on English-speaking countries, while those on the Japanese translation of the Three-Body Problem series mostly stay at the translation level, and there are few studies on the dissemination of the Three-Body Problem series in Japan and the acceptance of the Three-Body Problem series by Japanese readers. Based on the above research status, this study adopts an interdisciplinary perspective combining communication and literature, analyzes Japanese audiences with specific data, and explores the reasons for the popularity of the Three-Body Problem series in Japan, with a view to providing reference for the dissemination of Chinese science fiction literature in Japan.

2. The Dissemination of the Three-Body Problem Series in Japan

The Japanese translation of the Three-Body series has caused a phenomenon craze in Japan since its release, and on July 4, 2019, all 10,000 copies of the Japanese translation of the Three-Body Problem were sold out on the first printing day, and offline major bookstores quickly ran out of stock. As of October 2023, the Three-Body Problem series has sold more than 850,000 units in Japan. According to book reviews published by readers on the note website, a social platform for Japanese writers, if a work sells more than 100,000 units, it can be called a bestseller, and the sales of the Three-Body Problem can become a legend. It can be seen that the Three-Body Problem series is undoubtedly the model of cross-cultural communication of Chinese science fiction. Of course, the dissemination of the Three-Body Problem series in Japan is not limited to the publication and sale of books, but also

includes the film and television adaptation of the Three-Body Problem, and the sales around the Three-Body Problem. Therefore, this chapter will introduce the current situation of the Three-Body Problem in Japan from two aspects of the publication and sales of the Three-Body Problem series books in Japan and the communication methods outside the books.

2.1 The Publication and Sales of the Three-Body Problem Series in Japan

The Three-Body trilogy has been officially released in Japan in five volumes in July 2019, June 2020 and May 2021 by Hayakawa Den, Japan's largest science fiction publishing house. According to official data released by Hayakawa Den Publishing House, the Three-Body Problem quickly rose to the top of the Japanese Amazon literary works category in less than a week, and the publishing house immediately announced an additional print of 60,000 to 80,000 copies. It sold more than 100,000 copies within a month, and by mid-August, it was in its twelfth edition. In 2020, "the Three-Body Problem II Dark Forest" hit a new high in sales, selling out all 140,000 books in four days, and then only accepting pre-orders, setting off a Nobel Prize-level boom in Japan. In 2021, "the Three-Body Problem III Death's End" was born, ranking first and second in Japan's honto list, and Japanese people evaluated it as the most impact work of this century. As of December 2023, the sales volume of the Three-Body Problem series still dominated the top five of the "Chinese literature" section of Amazon Japan, which is refreshed daily. It can be seen that the residual heat of the Three-Body Problem series in Japan continues to rise, and has a great impact on Japanese readers.

The Japanese translations of the Three-Body Problem series have not only been sought after by science fiction fans, but also attracted a wide range of non-science fiction readers. The book's price on Amazon's Japanese website was 2,052 yen, or about 130 yuan (at the exchange rate at the time), about five times the price of the Chinese version and far more than the average price Japanese pay for books. Despite this, the Japanese translation of the Three-Body Problem topped the Japanese Amazon literary works sales list on the day of its release on July 4, 2019, and ranked first in the Japanese science Fiction Sales list for 2021. The sales of the upper and lower volumes of "the Three-Body Problem II Dark Forest" and "the Three-Body Problem III Death's End" were also at the top of the sales in the year of release. As of January 2024, the sales volume of the Three-Body Problem Japanese translation trilogy still remains among the top five in the "Chinese Literature" section of Amazon Japan, which is refreshed daily. The popularity of the Three-Body Problem in Japan can be seen from its print publication and sales in Japan.

2.2 The Dissemination of IP Derivative Works of the Three-Body Problem in Japan

2.2.1 The Three-Body Problem TV Series hit Theaters in Japan

In October 2023, the Three-Body Problem TV series based on the novel was released in Japan and premiered exclusively on the WOWOW channel. In its promotion, the WOWOW channel used a number of exaggerated words to strongly recommend the film: "Special newspaper! This is great! Super big job! The pyramid of the modern SF! October release, letter decision!" In addition, WOWOW Channel also conducted a special project in conjunction with Hayakawa Den to conduct an in-depth

interview with the translator of the Three-Body Problem in Japan, Maki Omori. From the professional perspective of translating the original work, Mr. Omori deeply discussed the unique charm of the TV version of the Three-Body Problem, and made positive comments and recommendations on the series. WOWOW channels broadcast ten episodes per month over three months, which effectively lengthens the broadcast cycle of the work and thus enhances its influence. On WOWOW, the series was ranked first in the number of overseas shows watched in October 2023. This series of publicity activities reflects the extensive influence of Chinese science fiction literature in the process of cross-media transformation and its important role in international cultural exchanges.

2.2.2 Sales of the Three-Body Problem Peripheral in Japan

Hayakawa Publishing, the publisher of the Three-Body Problem in Japanese, focuses on science fiction, and its brand Hayakawa Factory is committed to integrating elements of science fiction into the daily lives of consumers, shortening the distance between readers and their favorite works by making peripheral products such as T-shirts and tote bags in daily life. Previously, Hayakawa Factory has turned works such as George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four, Raymond Chandler's The Long Goodbye, and Kurt Vonnegut's Palm Sunday into merchandise with relatively successful responses. After the Three-Body Problem series became popular in Japan, Hayakawa Factory teamed up with the cover designer of the Japanese edition of the series to launch a Three-Body Problem themed T-shirt. As soon as the products went on sale, many Japanese readers posted photos of themselves wearing them online and expressed their love for the T-shirts. Hayakawa Factory's use of the Three-Body IP to launch related products not only reflects the huge fan base of the Three-Body Problem in Japan, but also explores a new path to effectively combine literary works with commercial value, providing a valuable case study for the cross-media communication and marketization of literary works.

A series of products derived from the Three-Body Problem IP, whether it is a TV series or a T-shirt, have been sought after by the public, which shows that this cultural product transcends its original medium and transforms into a widely popular pop culture symbol. "The Three-Body Problem" not only achieved success in book sales, but also achieved brand extension in the field of cultural goods, which is a clear proof of its successful cultural adaptation and communication strategy in the target market. In addition, the active participation of fans and the interaction on the Internet demonstrate the powerful community effect, which is a part of modern communication that cannot be ignored. Through these T-shirts, The Three-Body Problem not only spreads the story, but also becomes a symbol of identity and culture, profoundly affecting the audience's consumption behavior and cultural identity.

3. The Reception of the Three-Body Problem Series in Japan

The Three-Body Problem trilogy has received a total of more than 15,000 reviews on Amazon Japan, and each book has a reader rating of more than 4.4 points out of 5 points, which is significantly higher than the average rating of Chinese literary works in the Japanese market. It not only highlights the widespread popularity of the Three-Body Problem series among Japanese readers, but also reflects that

the series has been widely recognized in quality, and its popularity and evaluation are far beyond the general level of Chinese literary works in Japan. In this chapter, we will explore the reception characteristics of the Three-Body series among Japanese audiences, based on specific data.

In this paper, reviews about the Three-Body Problem series on Bookmeter, (Lu & Shao, 2021) the largest book review website in Japan, were selected. Python crawler technology was used to collect data, multi-dimensional analysis was carried out through information extraction technology, and the characteristics of reviews were quantitatively studied. A stacked bar chart was created based on the top 20 keywords (see Figure 1). Based on the figure below, it can be seen that Japanese readers' evaluation of the Three-Body Problem series presents the following characteristics:

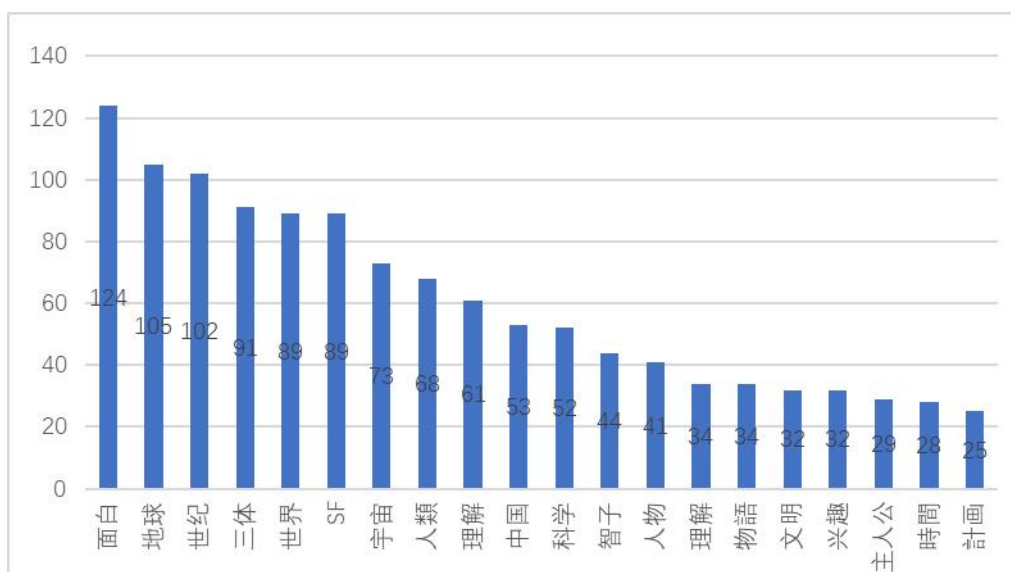


Figure 1. Bar Chart of high Frequency Words in Readers' Comments of the Three-Body Problem Series

3.1 Focus on the Character Plot

As shown in Figure 1, among the top 20 high-frequency words extracted from the evaluation and analysis of the Three-Body Problem series, the keywords related to character construction and story plot occupy a high proportion, including: “earth”, “Three-Body Problem”, “world”, “universe”, “human”, “wise son”, “protagonist” and “time”. This phenomenon reveals the depth of Japanese readers' attention to the character development and storyline of the series, and shows that readers are attracted by the complex character relationships and well-woven story lines. From this, it can be inferred that one of the key drivers of the Three-Body Problem series' wide spread in Japan is its engaging character development and story design.

3.2 Pay Attention to the Background of Creation

Through the analysis of the bar chart of frequent words commented by ordinary Japanese readers of the

Three-Body Problem series, we can find a number of words closely related to the background of the novel, such as “China” and “century”. This shows that Japanese readers not only show a strong interest in the storyline of the Three-Body Problem series, but also show significant attention to the creative background behind it. This attention not only stems from the literary value of the novels themselves, but also reflects that Japanese readers regard the Three-Body Problem series as a unique perspective to observe and understand the social and historical changes in China, showing that they are eager to deepen their understanding of Chinese history, culture and social development through literary works. In the narrative of the Three-Body Problem, the historical events and social background depicted in the novel not only provide readers with a contextual historical framework, but also provide a meaningful reference point for their understanding of contemporary Chinese society.

3.3 The Subjective Emotion Tends to be Positive

On the whole, the comments expressing “subjective feelings” among the high frequency words commented by the general audience in Japan showed a positive trend. According to Figures 1 and 2, the word “white face” (funny) is frequently mentioned in the comments of the Three-Body Problem series, ranking first among the most frequently mentioned words. It shows that ordinary Japanese readers are interested in this science fiction novel. In addition, words such as “understanding”, “expectation” and “interest”, which appear in the cloud map of high-frequency words commented by ordinary readers to express subjective feelings, all show that ordinary Japanese audiences have a high degree of recognition of the Three-Body series, and their subjective emotional evaluation is mostly positive.

To sum up, at present, Japanese readers’ acceptance of the Three-Body Problem series focuses on the character plot, the creation background, and the overall subjective emotion tends to be positive. This acceptance reflects not only the engaging narrative skills and profound character development of the works themselves, but also the interest of Japanese readers in the broader cultural and historical context behind the series, and the success of the Three-Body Problem series.

4. Reasons for the success of the Three-Body Problem in Japan

4.1 Enhanced cultural exchanges between China and Japan

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the Central Committee has attached great importance to promoting the international dissemination of Chinese culture. The report to the Party’s 20th National Congress stressed the need to enhance the global influence of Chinese culture, “tell China’s stories well, spread China’s voice well, and present a credible, lovely and respectable image of China.” Actively promote Chinese culture to the world. In this context, literary works, especially science fiction literature, have played a vital role in promoting Sino-Japanese cultural exchanges. In view of the rich historical and cultural exchanges between China and Japan, modern literature, especially science fiction such as The Three-Body Problem, not only provides a platform for cultural and ideological exchange between the two countries, but also deepens mutual understanding and cognition. The unique position of the Three-Body Problem in promoting cultural mutual learning between China and Japan highlights

the important role of literature in cross-cultural dialogue.

4.2 The Charm of the Work Itself

The Three-Body Problem blends interest, history and reality. With its grand narrative mode, rich imagination and superior professional knowledge, the Three-Body Problem showcases a social picture with rich Chinese cultural flavor, which attracts the attention of Japanese readers. Japanese readers admired its exquisite plot setting, gripping narrative style, and sense of reality mixed with illusion. Many readers wrote on Japan's largest book review website, "Good pacing, intense, very entertaining entertainment." It also contains a lot of knowledge about Chinese history, physics problems and science and technology, which is very valuable to learn." "SF elements fill the lines, and the work also includes science, religion, aliens, ideas, ideals, and so on. All the plots are cleverly linked together." The changing narrative perspective of the Three-Body Problem series, the logical arrangement of inverted cause and effect, and the illusuous illusion of alternating time and space arouse readers' interest under the convoluted plot of the work. The artistic charm of the Three-Body Problem series is the intrinsic factor that enables it to go out.

4.3 Excellent Translation Quality

The translation and dissemination of Chinese literary works is an important means to assign literary value and export culture. Compared with the lack of pure literature in the Japanese market, the Japanese translation of the Three-Body Problem has become a new benchmark for foreign translation of Chinese literary works. The Three-Body Problem was first translated from Chinese into Japanese by Mitsuyoshi Sakura et al., and then modified according to Japanese habits by Omori, a famous Japanese science fiction translator and book reviewer, so as to adapt to the reading habits and aesthetic needs of target readers. Considering that the target audience of the translation is Japanese readers, Omori pays great attention to the modification of words. The translation is placed in the specific cultural context and the context of time and space, and the cultural differences between China and Japan are measured macroscopically. Through many word changes and word order adjustments, the smooth but less undulating original text is made more detailed and delicate after the translator's relay, which is more in line with the reading and aesthetic habits of Japanese readers. At the same time, the Japanese translation of the Three-Body Problem won the "Japan 51st Nebula Award for Best Overseas Length" and the Seventh "Book Journal" Book Award, which is enough to prove the excellent translation effect of the Japanese translation of the Three-Body Problem.

4.4 Media Communication

In the process of the dissemination of the Three-Body Problem series in Japan, the marketing of the publishing house and the participation of the mainstream media have always played an important role in promoting the dissemination and acceptance of the Three-Body Problem series in Japan. Hayakawa Den, who is responsible for selling the Japanese version of the Three-Body series, expanded the market with diversified integrated marketing methods. First of all, in the design of covers, posters and slogans, pile up symbolic capital to enhance the persuasive effect and attract potential audiences. For example,

the cover of the Three-Body Problem is full of recommendations from Japanese industry leaders, and the propaganda slogans such as “Asia’s first Hugo Award work” and “China’s superpopular science fiction work” are printed on the waist cover and posters of the novel. At the same time, Hayakawa Den Press combines online social media with offline book fairs, reader meetings and other activities for publicity and marketing to expand the scope of audience and stimulate reader participation. In addition, Japan’s mainstream media also actively reported on the Three-Body Problem series from many aspects, expanding the dissemination scope of the novel.

5. Conclusion

The successful dissemination of the Three-Body Problem series in Japan provides an effective model for the promotion of Chinese science fiction literature in overseas markets, and provides a reference for the external dissemination of Chinese science fiction in the future. For example, in terms of communication content, choose works that are both cosmopolitan and Chinese. In terms of translation methods, translators who are skilled in the translation of science fiction works and familiar with the Chinese culture and the language habits of the target countries should be selected, and the translation mode of multi-person collaboration can be considered. In terms of publicity, the use of online and offline integrated marketing methods to expand the scope of audiences, mobilize the interaction and sharing enthusiasm of communication participants, and so on. Through in-depth analysis of the communication effect of The Three-Body Problem in Japan, we can better promote the global dissemination of Chinese science fiction literature and even the overall literary works, which not only promotes the cultural exchanges between China and Japan, but also provides strategies and directions for the influence of Chinese literature in international cultural exchanges. It is expected that more Chinese science fiction works will go to the world in the future, showing the diversity and charm of Chinese culture.

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