

## Original Paper

# A Study on the Reception of *A Dictionary of Maqiao* Based on Online Reader Reviews

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### Abstract

*This study employs sentiment analysis techniques to examine English-language reader reviews of the English translation of *A Dictionary of Maqiao* on two major overseas platforms—Goodreads and Amazon. In this essay, I quantitatively analyze review data to present trends in star ratings and annual publication, generate word clouds of review themes and sentiment orientations, and identify predominant viewpoints in both positive and negative comments, as well as readers' evaluations of the translation and translator. This comprehensive approach assesses the reception of the translated work among overseas readers. The findings indicate that readers on both platforms generally respond favorably to Julia Lovell's English translation. Positive reviews highlight the novel's innovative structure and narrative style, rich and vivid character portrayals, unique historical and literary value, the author's philosophical reflections on the beauty of language, and the work's revelatory significance for contemporary Western literature. Conversely, negative reviews criticize the novel's linguistic complexity, reading difficulty, slow plot progression, dryness, and the high comprehension barrier due to insufficient cultural background. Based on the translation's reception overseas, the author proposes suggestions for the international dissemination of Chinese literary works.*

### Keywords

*Sentiment Analysis, Reader Reviews, *A Dictionary of Maqiao*, Translation Reception*

## 1. Introduction

Since the launch of China's contemporary literature "going global" strategy, the domestic translation community has actively responded to the national call, resulting in a flourishing momentum in research on translating Chinese literature into foreign languages. Studies in this field should not only focus on dissemination patterns, carriers, channels, and media, but also on the communication effect. In Lasswell's model of communication, the communication process is divided into five parts including

communicator, information, media, audience and effect, such five research fields provide a very good point of view to study the new media communication. The degree to which readers accept translated works is a crucial indicator of communication effectiveness. With the rapid development of network technology and the popularization and application of e-commerce, comments with subjective sentiments on various mainstream e-commerce platforms play a crucial role in improving product quality. (Hao Sun et al., 2019) Reader reviews serve as an essential mechanism for evaluating such effectiveness and provide key evidence for assessing book dissemination outcomes (Qiu Ling, 2020: 61). Strengthening research on the overseas reception of translated Chinese literature helps grasp the real-world impact of China's literary export efforts and yields valuable lessons to enhance translation studies in contemporary Chinese literature.

*A Dictionary of Maqiao*, presented in the form of a lexicon, depicts a fictional village—Maqiao in Hunan province. Through 115 headwords, Han Shaogong narrates vivid local stories, uncovering the history, culture, and mindset of Maqiao, thereby giving readers a vivid portrait of its social landscape. Since its publication in 1996, *A Dictionary of Maqiao* has become one of the representative works conveying collective national and generational memory. In 2003, British sinologist Julia Lovell's translation was released by Columbia University Press under the title *A Dictionary of Maqiao*, receiving widespread acclaim in the English-speaking world. In 2011, the work won the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature, further boosting its international visibility. Subsequently, domestic scholars have increasingly focused on translation studies of *A Dictionary of Maqiao* and Lovell's translation philosophy, exploring topics from the secondary-filter interpretation in literary translation, translation of culturally-loaded terms, translator-centred agency and responsibility, to translators' stylistic choices and strategies—drawing on theories such as polysystem theory, eco-translatology, and Toury's translation norms.

However, most scholars concentrate on the translated text's quality and stylistic analysis, emphasizing translation strategies and translator agency. Overseas translation reception research is not merely a linguistic translation issue. Contributions to translation reception often examine the readers' responses to binary translation solutions. Scant attention has been paid to the ethical causes of readers' acceptance of translated foreignness (Bei Hu, 2022). As the end consumers who ultimately evaluate translated works, reader reception has not received sufficient attention. Few scholars have conducted empirical studies focusing on overseas readers to assess the reception of the English translation of *A Dictionary of Maqiao*. Therefore, this study takes reader reviews of the English version of *A Dictionary of Maqiao* on two mainstream overseas platforms—Goodreads and Amazon—as its empirical corpus. Using Python-based sentiment analysis techniques, it examines its overseas dissemination and reception, aiming to provide a paradigm for studying the communication effect of Chinese contemporary literature translation and to distil effective recommendations for promoting the overseas presence of Chinese contemporary fiction.

## 2. Sentiment Analysis Techniques and the Reception of Translated Chinese Literature

### 2.1 Principles of Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis, also known as opinion mining, refers to “the process of analyzing, processing, summarizing, and reasoning about subjective texts with emotional content” (Zhao Yanyan et al., 2010: 1835). Sentimental analysis is the emerging field in text mining where people’s feeling and emotions are extracted using different techniques (Umair et al., 2021: 304). By employing sentiment analysis, one can identify and comprehend others’ opinions and attitudes, enabling more effective engagement with opportunities and challenges brought by online information resources (Pang et al., 2008: 5).

Sentiment and emotion analysis has a wide range of applications and can be done using various methodologies. There are three types of sentiment and emotion analysis techniques: lexicon based, machine learning based, and deep learning based. Each has its own set of benefits and drawbacks. (Nandwani, 2021) Lexicon-based methods, in which the alignment of a document is determined founded on the sentiment polarity of phrases also words in the sentiment, and machine learning methods, in which models are constructed from labeled examples of readers or sentences (Trinh et al., 2016). These methods are fast and effective for known vocabulary but struggle with unseen words or domain-specific jargon.

On the other hand, machine-learning methods involve training classifiers on manually labeled corpora—such as K-nearest neighbors, maximum entropy, support vector machines, and naive Bayes models—and applying them to new texts (Li Han-yu et al., 2017: 52). Pang et al. (2002) demonstrated that these approaches generally outperform lexicon techniques in movie review sentiment classification, though their performance depends heavily on the quality and size of the training dataset.

Lexicon-based analysis depends on pre-built sentiment dictionaries like the General Inquirer lexicon, which provides sentiment polarity for roughly 3,600 words (1,614 positive and 1,982 negative). This allows rapid sentiment scoring using simple summation or weighted averaging, but its coverage is limited—especially with domain-specific or nuanced language. Machine-learning techniques offer more flexibility by predicting sentiment for any word, showing strong potential in sentiment analysis. However, they also face challenges related to the need for large, high-quality annotated data and complex parameter tuning.

Given that “an English translation of a literary work is, essentially, a book commodity” (Shi Chun-rang & Deng Lin, 2020b: 60), online reader reviews provide authentic insights into how general readers perceive these works. Applying sentiment analysis to these reviews—using either lexicon or machine-learning tools—allows researchers to quantify reader sentiment and extract viewpoints, thereby gauging a work’s true acceptance and impact. This method offers a valuable quantitative lens for understanding the market performance, audience feedback, and cultural influence of translated literary texts.

## 2.2 Current Applications of Sentiment Analysis in the Reception Studies of Chinese Literary Translations

In applying sentiment analysis techniques to the study of Chinese literature translation reception, a series of pioneering works have emerged. Zhang Lu (2019) was the first to apply Python-based sentiment analysis to overseas reader reviews of Chinese translated literature, examining the English translation of *The Three-Body Problem*. Her study quantitatively revealed readers' emotional attitudes towards the translation, showing an overall positive reception.

Li Shuying et al. (2020) used Python and visualization methods—including word clouds—to present overseas readers' evaluation, sentiment orientation, and thematic focuses in reviews of the English translation of the *Tao Te Ching*. In the same year, Shi Chunrang et al. (2020) applied sentiment analysis to online reviews by Western readers of eleven English translations of novels by Mo Yan, summarizing positive and negative opinions and exploring levels of acceptance among Western audiences.

Li Hao et al. (2022) employed text-mining techniques to conduct quantitative and sentiment-oriented analysis on reader reviews of the English translation of *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, providing a detailed assessment of its reception among overseas readers. Zhao Shuang et al. (2023) based their study on sentiment analysis of reader reviews for the English translation of the *I Ching*, combining theme modeling and sentiment polarity analysis to comprehensively consider the main influencing factors and reception effectiveness among Western readers.

Most recently, in 2024, Zhu Jiachun et al. utilized Python-driven word clouds and key-sentence sentiment analysis to vividly present overseas readers' reception of the English translation of the children's novel *Bronze and Sunflower*. In the same year, Zhou Xiaoling et al. conducted a composite analysis of acceptance effectiveness—encompassing library holdings, sales figures, academic citations, and reader reviews—for Bai Ruiwen's English translation of *To Live*, also leveraging sentiment analysis techniques.

Building upon these methodological advancements, our study further expands both depth and scope. By selecting online reader reviews of the English translation of *A Dictionary of Maqiao* on the Goodreads and Amazon platforms, and applying sentiment analysis methods, this research provides a comprehensive examination of its overseas reception.

## 3. Research Design

### 3.1 Collection of Review Data

The data set for this study comprises online reader reviews of Julia Lovell's English translation, *A Dictionary of Maqiao*, collected from Goodreads and the U.S. Amazon platform. Goodreads boasts a large, global readership, whereas Amazon's audience spans general readers as well as specialized and academic readers. Both platforms are widely used in English-speaking countries, making their review data particularly indicative of overseas reception.

Using Python, this study crawled reviews on September 26, 2024, capturing all reviews posted between

July 31, 2003, and June 10, 2024. In total, 62 reviews were obtained, amounting to nearly 7,000 words. The collected data included the reviewer's username, review content, and star rating. Review languages comprised 51 in English, 5 in Chinese, and one each in French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Vietnamese, and Polish.

### 3.2 Review Text Preprocessing

First, every crawled comment was cross-checked against comments visible on the two platforms to ensure none were omitted, including those hidden in collapsed sections.

Next, the dataset underwent manual cleaning: duplicate entries, empty or gibberish reviews (including garbled English), entries shorter than two characters, emoji-only posts, and unrelated comments such as packaging or logistics ads were removed. Non-English reviews were initially filtered using regular expressions, but languages using Latin script—such as Dutch and Vietnamese—required additional manual exclusion. A total of 7 reviews were removed during this stage.

Finally, the remaining text underwent noise reduction using Jupyter Notebook scripts: all punctuation (including Chinese punctuation) was stripped, extra whitespace and blank lines were removed, and tokenization was performed. Common stopwords such as “a”, “an”, and “the” were also eliminated.

### 3.3 Sentiment Analysis via TextBlob

The TextBlob toolkit was installed in the Anaconda environment and imported into Jupyter Notebook. The Pattern Analyzer—TextBlob's default lexicon-based sentiment component—was employed to evaluate the reviews. Pattern Analyzer matches review text against an internal sentiment lexicon and calculates polarity scores using a weighted average, producing robust results that are not sensitive to document length.

Polarity scores range from  $-1$  to  $+1$ , indicating extremely negative to extremely positive sentiment. Reviews scoring above 0 are classified as positive, those below 0 as negative, and those exactly 0 as neutral. By aggregating reviews into positive and negative categories, we extracted shared perspectives within each group and summarized the overall impression of *A Dictionary of Maqiao* among overseas readers.

## 4. Research Findings

### 4.1 Readers' Overall Evaluation of *A Dictionary of Maqiao*—Star Ratings and Annual Review Volume

Sentiment Analysis is vital because the customers can get an overview and understanding of reviews of the customers who have already purchased that particular product (Ganga et al., 2022: 334) So this study analyzed the distribution of star ratings (1–5 stars) for *A Dictionary of Maqiao* on Goodreads and Amazon, as presented in Table 1. Amazon reviews show a higher proportion of five-star ratings than Goodreads, and notably, no one-star ratings were recorded on Amazon—suggesting consistently high appraisal and affection among Amazon readers toward Julia Lovell's translation. Although Goodreads had a significantly larger volume of reviews than Amazon, both platforms reported the same average star rating of approximately 4.0. From these overall rating patterns, the English translation of *A*

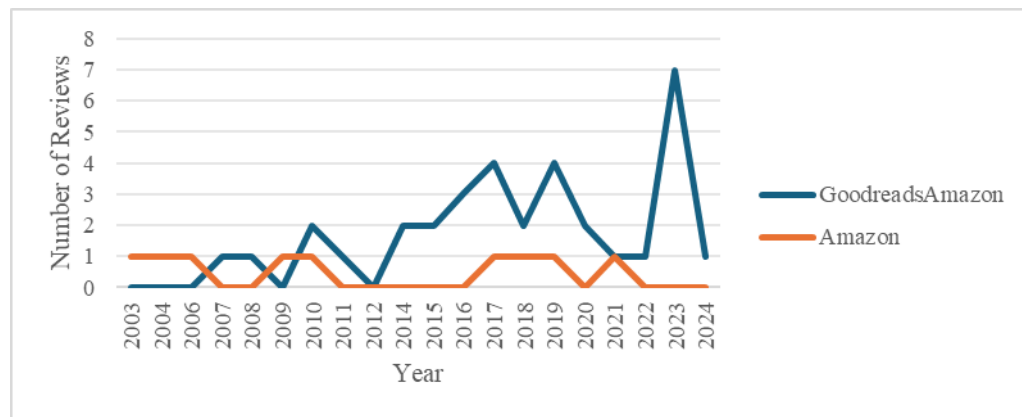
*Dictionary of Maqiao* appears to have been well-received overseas (average ratings cluster around 4.0 on both platforms).

**Table 1. Distribution of Five-Star Ratings on Goodreads and Amazon**

Platform/Rating	5 Stars	4 Stars	3 Stars	2 Stars	1 Stars
Goodreads	36%	37%	15%	6%	2%
Amazon	51%	13%	22%	14%	0%

Figure 1 illustrates the temporal trend of review volume on both platforms from 2003 to 2024. Though the total number of reviews is modest, Goodreads shows a distinct upward trajectory, while Amazon exhibits relative stability in annual review counts. Notably, following Han Shaogong's receipt of the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature in 2011, there was a clear surge in review activity on Goodreads, peaking sharply in 2023 before declining rapidly thereafter.

The overall low volume of posts indicates limited dissemination of the work; however, evaluating reception requires examining the sentiment behind the reviews. It is undeniable that *A Dictionary of Maqiao*, as a representative of contemporary Chinese rural literature, has successfully entered the mainstream Anglophone literary sphere to some extent. Still, whether this presence can be sustained and continue influencing English-speaking readers remains an open question.



**Figure 1. Annual Distribution of Review Volume on Two Platforms**

#### 4.1.2 Word Cloud of Reader Reviews

Word clouds are a data visualization technique that showcases a subset of words from a body of text in a cluster form, where a word's font size encodes some measure of its relative importance—typically frequency—in the text. This technique is primarily used to help viewers glean the most pertinent information from long text documents and to compare and contrast different pieces of text (Kevin Feng et al., 2022: 5). This visual form enables immediate identification of central themes or sentiments in

qualitative data such as reader reviews. By displaying word size and layout, word clouds facilitate intuitive understanding of semantic emphasis in commentary.

Taking the entire dataset of reviews for *A Dictionary of Maqiao* as the base, we generated separate word clouds for different analytical dimensions, such as overall word frequency, nouns, and adjectives/adverbs (see Figures 2-4). Specifically: An comprehensive word cloud was generated from all comments combined to capture the most commonly mentioned terms; Separate noun-based word clouds and adjective/adverb-based word clouds were created to highlight key thematic and evaluative language respectively.

This multi-level approach allows for a clearer visualization of dominant terms across different grammatical categories and helps interpret readers’ core topics and sentiment-bearing descriptors.



### Figure 2. Comprehensive Word Cloud



### Figure 3. Noun-based Word Cloud



### Figure 4. Adjectival/Adverbial Word Cloud

From the comprehensive word cloud, since our primary data set consists of reviews of the English translation of *A Dictionary of Maqiao*, terms like “Maqiao,” “language,” “dictionary,” and “book” prominently feature—indicated by their larger font sizes. Additionally, many comments focus on the work’s content and the author himself, with frequent mentions of words such as “culture,” “story,” “people,” “village,” and “Shaogong.” This suggests readers regularly engage with both thematic and authorial elements.

Cultural elements embedded in the narrative also appear prominently: “local,” “dialect,” “Mandarin,” “Chinese,” and “China.” Words relating to the translation itself—“translates” and “term”—also feature, reflecting attention to translation quality.

In the noun-specific word cloud, “Shaogong” and “Maqiao” again rank highest, aligning with the overall cloud. The presence of other frequently occurring nouns such as “China,” “village,” “revolution,” “culture,” and “language” suggests that *A Dictionary of Maqiao* is a multi-layered, multi-dimensional work—addressing rural tradition, dialect, history, politics, social change, and modernization. Its unique narrative style conveys the rich history and personal destinies within a village, while portraying broader societal transformations in China. The high frequency of “translator” further indicates readers’ interest in translation quality and awareness of the translator’s role.

Looking at adjectives and adverbs, the majority express positive sentiment. High-frequency terms include “Chinese,” “cultural,” and “local,” demonstrating readers’ deep engagement with the work’s cultural nuances. Words such as “many,” “much,” and “standard” imply favorable evaluation of the translation’s quality and abundance. The frequent appearance of “unique” conveys Western readers’ sense of novelty at encountering *A Dictionary of Maqiao*, while “different” highlights both variance across English-language translations and divergent interpretive angles on the original text.

#### 4.2 Sentiment Analysis of Reader Reviews

Using TextBlob, we computed sentiment polarity scores for all collected reviews and classified each as



positive ( $> 0$ ), neutral ( $\approx 0$ ), or negative ( $< 0$ ). On Amazon, all reviews were non-negative—71.4% were positive, 28.6% neutral, and none were negative. On Goodreads, 60% of reviews were positive, 28.6% neutral, and 8.5% negative. Overall, both platforms show a strong skew toward positive sentiment, with positive reviews far outnumbering negative ones—indicating that Julia Lovell’s translation of *A Dictionary of Maqiao* is generally well-received by overseas readers. These thresholds align with the typical TextBlob polarity interpretation, where scores range from  $-1$  to  $+1$ , with values  $> 0$  indicating positive sentiment,  $< 0$  negative sentiment, and  $\approx 0$  neutral.

**Table 2. Number, Percentage, and Mean Rating of Each Review Category on Amazon and Goodreads Platforms**

Metric	Positive Sentiment		Neutral		Negative Sentiment	
	Amazon	Goodreads	Amazon	Goodreads	Amazon	Goodreads
Number Of Reviews	5	21	2	11	0	3
Proportion	71.4%	60%	28.6%	31.4%	0	8.5%
Average Sentiment	0.275	0.369	0	0	0	-0.233
Polarity						

Next, we isolated the positive and negative review subsets from both platforms and performed opinion mining to extract representative viewpoints. The key themes and illustrative quotes are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3. Main Points of Positive and Negative Sentiment Reviews**

Positive Views	Negative Views
Highly Innovative Structure and Narrative Mode	Linguistic Complexity and Reading Difficulty
Rich and Vivid Characterization	
Unique Historical Importance and Literary Appeal	Plotless Structure and Perceived Tedium
Philosophical Reflections on the Beauty of Language	
Reflection on Contemporary Western Fiction	High Cultural Knowledge Threshold

#### 4.3 Major Positive Evaluations from Readers of *A Dictionary of Maqiao*

##### 4.3.1 Highly Innovative Structure and Narrative Mode

*A Dictionary of Maqiao* disrupts conventional novelistic form by adopting an innovative dictionary-like structure, offering readers a fresh reading experience. This format represents not only a formal innovation but also a profound literary exploration. Many readers expressed fascination with this distinctive “dictionary” organization—its nonlinear, fragmented structure is visually and cognitively striking. Through precisely arranged 115 entries, the novel constructs a layered, multi-perspective

narrative space: each entry functions as an independent story unit while interweaving to portray the full panorama of Maqiao village. Readers are able to traverse through time and space freely, enjoying the pleasures of nonlinear storytelling. Some remarked that reading felt immersive—almost as if they were personally witnessing the village’s historical evolution and cultural development.

#### 4.3.2 Rich and Vivid Characterization

Characters in *A Dictionary of Maqiao* leave a vivid impression—each personality unfolds like a finely crafted painting. Readers generally believe the author successfully creates individuals imbued with Chinese cultural specificity: personalities and backgrounds intertwine to form a richly dimensional social microcosm. Although some note that the nonlinear development of characters may initially disorient readers, this nonlinearity is considered a defining feature that enhances depth and complexity, rendering characters more realistic and relatable. This literary choice allows readers to perceive a vibrant, heartfelt village full of life. The character portrayals reflect not just individuals but broader social and historical perspectives: their stories mirror reflections on an era or society, resonating emotionally while prompting deep reflection.

#### 4.3.3 Unique Historical Importance and Literary Appeal

Readers widely appreciate *A Dictionary of Maqiao* for its profound cultural backdrop. The novel vividly reconstructs the atmosphere of China during the Cultural Revolution while detailing how this tumultuous period profoundly affected the cultural and daily life of a remote rural village. Through depictions of local dialect and expressive language, readers are guided into the layered complexity of a specific region and historical period in Chinese society. Some reviewers highlighted the work’s localization, arguing that true comprehension depends on understanding the embedded cultural context—only then can one appreciate the text’s rich meaning and depth. Several comments noted that reading the book deepened their grasp of a particular period in Chinese history by offering Han Shaogong’s perspective, presenting a valuable cultural lens through which to view villagers’ lives and broader societal conditions. This blend of personal narrative and historical backdrop endows the novel with unique historical value and literary charm—it becomes an important window into China’s social transformation, allowing readers to sense both historical weight and cultural subtlety.

#### 4.3.4 Philosophical Reflections on the Beauty of Language

Han Shaogong’s deep exploration of language’s essence resonates strongly with readers. Through Maqiao’s dialect, he examines language not merely as a communication tool but as a terrain of cultural transmission and power struggles. The philosophical insights scattered like pearls across the text illuminate how language is fluid and dynamic, and how its rigidification may strip it of vitality and creativity. Some readers described this profound interpretation of language as spiritually moving—as though they embarked on a journey exploring the soul of language. They felt enriched by the experience of language’s beauty and potency, and began to perceive the inextricable link between language and human destiny.

#### 4.3.5 Reflection on Contemporary Western Fiction

For readers fatigued by the conventional aesthetics of contemporary American or British novels, *A Dictionary of Maqiao* offers a refreshing perspective. Specifically, its differences in language, structure, and cultural expression—especially when contrasted with standard Western narrative approaches—provide a novel reading experience. One reader noted that if one feels weary of modern English-language fiction, this book offers a different perspective and underscores the importance of cross-cultural literature; it serves as a reminder to maintain vitality in the translated-book marketplace. This suggests that the work not only offers insight into the complexity of Chinese culture and language, but also reflects a broader yearning for new literary experiences within Anglophone readers. The success of *A Dictionary of Maqiao* aligns with a current literary trend: writers increasingly pursue cross-cultural, multilingual narrative techniques to break down cultural barriers and facilitate intercultural exchange.

#### 4.4 Major Negative Evaluations from Readers of *A Dictionary of Maqiao*

##### 4.4.1 Linguistic Complexity and Reading Difficulty

Many reviewers mention the considerable linguistic challenge posed by *A Dictionary of Maqiao*, citing its rich cultural terms, dialect expressions, and philosophical reflections on language as significant obstacles for readers without a Chinese background. The complexity lies not only in the vocabulary but also in the cultural and historical connotations behind these dialect words. Abstract philosophical discussions—such as language as a tool of power or its temporal dimensions—require readers to possess linguistic or cultural knowledge. Some comments described the reading process as feeling “like work,” rather than a leisurely experience—echoing concerns documented in literary discussions of the novel’s experimental format Chinese book reviews.

##### 4.4.2 Plotless Structure and Perceived Tedium

Numerous readers observed a lack of narrative momentum, noting that the dictionary-like and nonlinear structure sometimes made the experience feel disjointed or even dull. While entries occasionally interconnect, the overall narrative remains loosely structured, making it difficult for readers to fully engage or trace a cohesive plot. Some described the reading pace as slow and admitted to getting mentally disengaged. The necessity to re-read passages to grasp the overarching intention of the work further impeded narrative immersion. The fragmented character portrayals—where characters disappear for several entries before reappearing—sometimes prevented readers from forming a clear impression, resulting in a distancing effect that impeded emotional involvement—an issue highlighted both by readers and critics.

##### 4.4.3 High Cultural Knowledge Threshold

Rooted deeply in a specific cultural and historical milieu—particularly the Cultural Revolution in rural China—*A Dictionary of Maqiao* challenges readers unfamiliar with this context. Reviewers frequently noted that dialect words encapsulate metaphors tied to local customs and historical sentiment, requiring knowledge of Chinese social and historical background to fully appreciate. Without such insight, many

subtle cultural allusions remain obscure. Philosophical reflections on language and power relations are also tied to specific historical occurrences, increasing the interpretive demand placed on non-Chinese readers. Most reviewers suggested that familiarity with China's Cultural Revolution and rural culture significantly enhances comprehension of the text's broader meaning

Literary Theory and Criticism.

#### 4.5 Reader Commentary on the Translation

A combined search and manual review identified 7 reader comments addressing the translation itself: 5 positive and 2 neutral, with no outright negative remarks. Reviewers praised Julia Lovell's translation as "impressive" and "beautifully written," noting that her work retains Han Shaogong's linguistic style and cultural richness—even recreating the village's unique ambiance (e.g., "makes the village feel familiar and real").

Several comments acknowledged the formidable challenge Lovell faced in translating dialect, cultural-specific terms, and philosophical language—calling the novel "almost untranslatable." Engagement of translation is concerned with its essence endowed with diversity and dynamism in interactions with translation environment (Liu & Xu, 2016, p. 97). Despite this, her sensitivity to linguistic nuance and depth of cultural understanding allowed many subtle elements to be conveyed in English, helping retain the work's distinct flavor. Some reviewers even stated Lovell's translation makes *A Dictionary of Maqiao* appealing to non-Chinese readers, turning it into a "shared literary treasure," and suggesting that a high-quality translation can serve not only linguistic but also cultural transmission.

## 5. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of globalization, the international dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature has attracted growing attention, and it is increasingly evident that successful literary translation must move beyond merely "opening the gateway" to actually "walking in" and sustaining engagement with foreign audiences. The global value of such literature lies not only in presenting China's cultural diversity and authentic perspectives, but also in how literary translation can dismantle linguistic and cultural barriers to foster meaningful cross-cultural dialogue.

By applying text-mining techniques to analyze reader reviews of *A Dictionary of Maqiao* on Goodreads and Amazon, this study conducted both quantitative and qualitative assessments of the translation's reception among overseas audiences. The overwhelmingly positive tone of these reviews—where positive sentiments significantly outnumber negative ones on both platforms—demonstrates a generally favorable acceptance of Julia Lovell's translation. Through chapter-level and sentence-level sentiment and opinion mining in both positive and negative review categories, we identified common themes and concerns, quantifying the overseas reception of the translation.

Positive feedback frequently emphasizes the work's innovative dictionary-like structure and vivid character depictions, which contribute to a compelling reading experience. Additionally, reviews

highlight the novel's unique historical context set during the Cultural Revolution and its deeper philosophical reflections on the beauty of language—elements that lend significant literary merit. Moreover, the nonlinear narrative structure is seen as offering a fresh alternative to contemporary Western fiction, prompting reflection within Anglophone literary sensibilities.

On the other hand, negative reviews consistently reference the high linguistic difficulty—exacerbated by cultural-spanning vocabulary, dialect, and philosophical complexity—along with a perceived lack of narrative drive and slower pacing. These concerns often link to the high cultural background required to fully appreciate the novel, especially for readers unfamiliar with Chinese history or rural Cultural Revolution contexts.

From the skilled balance of appreciation and critique, several insights emerge. First, the selection of literary works for translation should strike a strategic balance between universal themes with cross-cultural resonance and distinctive national characteristics rooted in cultural specificity. As Julia Lovell herself observed, *A Dictionary of Maqiao* succeeds because it is simultaneously international and firmly rooted in its regional context. This duality enhances both reader interest and cross-cultural impact.

Second, translators working with culturally rich and emotionally textured texts should adopt a method of “faithful recreation,” supplementing fidelity with cultural glosses and occasional, ethically justified additions. Lovell's approach exemplifies this principle in her rendition of *A Dictionary of Maqiao*, demonstrating how embedding interpretive cues directly into the translated text enhances readability and cultural accessibility without sacrificing authenticity.

Third, thorough collaboration between translator and author is vital to negotiate the tension between foreignness and readability. Lovell's practice of discussing deletions and structural adaptations with Han Shaogong ensured that the translation remained both faithful and readable. This joint decision-making process, supported by the author, imbued the translation with legitimacy and helped maintain a balance between preserving differences and ensuring engagement.

Admittedly, this study also faced limitations. The unique nature of the text and its readership meant the review sample size was relatively modest, which constrains statistical robustness. Nonetheless, the objectivity of the findings and the effectiveness of the methodology remain intact, and the combination of sentiment analysis and opinion mining proves a powerful tool for evaluating the overseas reception of translated literature.

Looking ahead, fully realizing the global potential of Chinese literary works—truly “worlding” Chinese literature—requires sustained experimentation, translation, and research. This study contributes to that endeavor by offering an effective model for measuring reception, uncovering reader motivations, and making informed translation choices. It is hoped that more non-Chinese readers will engage with Chinese literature, thereby enriching their understanding of a vibrant and authentic China.

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