



Study on the Reception and Dissemination of the Brewitt-Taylor' English Translation of Sanguo yanyi

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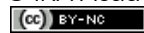
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ABSTRACT

Sanguo yanyi, a masterpiece among Chinese historical novels, boasts profound historical, cultural, and artistic value. By applying the theory of reader acceptance, we gain insights into how foreign readers perceive, interpret culturally, and emotionally experience the English translation of this novel. This understanding further uncovers the work's impact and potential in international cultural exchange. Our research utilizes the Octopus Collector to gather reader reviews of Brewitt-Taylor's English translation of the novel titled *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Subsequently, we employ KHCoder for data analysis, adopting a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach to examine high-frequency words and semantic graphs. The findings indicate that, overall, overseas readers hold a positive emotional attitude towards Brewitt-Taylor's translation. In terms of emotional analysis, readers highly rate the translator and characters, followed by the plot and narrative. This suggests that, for the international dissemination of classics, the ideological content and inherent values of the works themselves are crucial factors influencing reader acceptance. Consequently, studying overseas readers' evaluations and acceptance of "*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*" provides valuable insights for selecting translation strategies and promoting the international spread of Chinese literary classics.

Keywords: Sanguo yanyi; *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*; reader acceptance theory; qualitative and quantitative analysis; Octopus collector; KHCoder.

1. Introduction

C. H. Brewitt-Taylor (1857-1938) was the pioneer in producing a complete English translation of the Chinese historical novel *Sanguo yanyi*, which was published in two volumes titled "*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*" by Kelly & Walsh and became the standard foreign edition in 1925. Decades later, Tuttle released the translation in 1959 and reprinted it several times later. For nearly 70 years following Brewitt-Taylor's translation, his version remained the sole comprehensive English rendering of the novel. The "*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*" is notably included in authoritative reference works such as the *Encyclopedia of the United States* and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Renowned sinologist Herbert Allen Giles praises Brewitt-Taylor's translation, stating that it "has secured him a prominent position among contemporary sinologists and will be remembered by future generations."

Some scholars argue that "the role of readers in literary translation is often overlooked... It is only through the acceptance of reading that literary translation fulfills its purpose of literary communication and exerts its influence"(Xie, 2013, p.127). Reader reviews serve as a crucial indicator for assessing a translation's effectiveness. Book reviews directly mirror readers' psychological responses and aesthetic judgments towards foreign literature. By employing the theory of reader acceptance as an analytical framework, our study of foreign readers' reception of the English translation of "*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*" reveals a strong reader base and enduring appeal, providing a solid foundation for the broader international dissemination of this and other Chinese classics.

Amazon stands as the globe's premier book-purchasing platform, while Goodreads boosts by analyzing reader reviews of C. H. Brewitt-Taylor's translation of "*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*" sourced from both Amazon and Goodreads, employing a blend of quantitative and

qualitative methodologies, and utilizing data statistics alongside emotional discourse analysis, this study aims to delve into the reception and feedback of international online readers towards this seminal English translation.

The objective is twofold: firstly, to comprehend the characteristics and current status of reader evaluations and acceptance of "Romance of the Three Kingdoms"; and secondly, to identify the key factors influencing reader reviews of the book. By deepening our understanding of the overall situation and problem analysis concerning reader evaluations and acceptance, we can gain valuable insights from the perspective of readers' emotional tendencies.

This endeavor holds dual significance. On one hand, it facilitates a profound understanding of the differences and exchanges between Eastern and Western cultures, thereby promoting cultural exchange and mutual learning. By exploring the challenges and opportunities inherent in cross-cultural communication, we can foster greater appreciation and understanding between diverse cultural backgrounds.

On the other hand, this study aids in formulating more targeted promotion strategies. By understanding the preferences and expectations of international readers, we can better promote the dissemination of Chinese classical literature works on a global scale, thereby enhancing their international influence. Ultimately, this research endeavors to contribute to the broader goal of accelerating the introduction of Chinese literature to the world, fostering deeper cultural understanding and appreciation.

2. Research Design

2.1 Data Sources

For this study, we selected the complete English translation by Brewitt-Taylor, which holds a distinguished ranking on both Amazon and Goodreads. We systematically gathered reader comments from these platforms, amassing 201 comment entries from Amazon and an additional 542 from Goodreads, totaling 743 comments. Rigorous screening revealed 117 non-English comments, which were subsequently excluded, leaving us with a robust dataset of 626 valid comments for analysis.

2.2 Data Collection Tool

The Octopus data collector stands as an exceptionally potent utility for harvesting internet data. Tailored to user specifications, it permits the customization of scraping rules and target websites, ensuring highly efficient and precise data acquisition. This tool serves as an invaluable asset for researchers and enterprises engaged in market research, public opinion monitoring, and other analytical endeavors, offering robust support for informed decision-making.

In the context of this study, we leveraged the Octopus data collector to extract reader comments from the Amazon and Goodreads websites. Upon accessing each respective webpage, we initiated the data identification process, configured the page-turning functionality, and executed multiple rounds of collection and verification to ensure comprehensive capture of all comment data. Once the collection phase was completed, we meticulously cleaned the dataset, ultimately exporting the refined reader comment text data in an Excel format for subsequent analysis and utilization.

2.3 Data Analysis Tool

KHCoder is a highly sophisticated text analysis tool, specially designed to handle vast quantities of text data and offer an extensive array of analytical methods and visualization capabilities. By utilizing KHCoder, users can seamlessly execute diverse text data analysis tasks, including keyword extraction, cluster analysis, and co-occurrence network analysis. These functionalities facilitate a deeper understanding and interpretation of text data, proving invaluable in both academic research and business analytics contexts.

In the present study, we employed KHCoder to clean and segment the reader comment data. Subsequently, we utilized its operational tools to generate a word frequency list and a keyword semantic map. This approach enabled us to gain profound insights into readers' focal points and emotional preferences, thereby fulfilling the research objectives.

3. Analysis of High-Frequency Words

After collecting and organizing the comment data, we saved it in an Excel file format for storage. Next, we opened the KHCoder text analysis tool and created a new project, importing the Excel file. We then proceeded with data preprocessing to ensure the data was ready for analysis. Following the data display processing, we selected the 'Extract Word Frequency List' option from the toolbar to reveal the data pattern, as illustrated in Figure 1. The resulting word frequency list was neatly organized into a tabular format, as depicted in the same figure.

#	词汇	POS / Conj.	频
1	a	Noun	1
2	it	Noun	
3	book	Noun	
4	story	Noun	
5	three	Noun	
6	chinese	Noun	
7	kingdom	Noun	
8	it	JJ	
9	character	Noun	
10	as	Adv	
11	wa	Noun	
12	so	Noun	
13	time	Noun	
14	there	Noun	
15	read	Noun	
16	like	Verb	
17	as	Noun	
18	cao	ProperNoun	
19	an	ProperNoun	
20	some	Noun	
21	who	Noun	
22	was	Adv	
23	translation	Noun	
24	many	JJ	
25	their	Noun	
26	can	Verb	
27	history	Noun	
28	be	JJ	
29	be	Verb	
30	more	Noun	
31	have	Verb	
32	which	Noun	
33	name	Noun	
34	battle	Noun	
35	it	Verb	
36	read	Verb	

Figure 1: High-frequency Words in Reader Reviews of the English Translation of *Sanguo yanyi* by Brewitt-Taylor

By conducting an index operation to individually analyze the high-frequency keywords, we discovered that the reader comment keywords could be primarily categorized into three groups:

(1) Names and character portrayals, including terms such as "The Romance of the Three Kingdoms" (whole, kingdoms), "Cao Cao" (Cao), and "characters" (character). This indicates that the influence of "The Romance of the Three Kingdoms" extends beyond the realm of literature, captivating foreign readers and serving as a bridge for understanding Chinese history and culture worldwide. Its dissemination to Korea during the Ming Dynasty and subsequent translations into various languages further underscore its global reach.

(2) Evaluation themes related to the work itself, encompassing keywords like "translation," "Chinese culture," "war" (battle), and "historical events" (history). This suggests that readers are able to grasp the ideological connotations and distinctive features of "The Romance of the Three Kingdoms" through its translations.

(3) Themes related to the reading experience, including "favorite" (like), "excellent" (good), "reading" (read), "books" (book), and "times" (time). These keywords reflect readers' positive evaluation and personal reading experiences.

However, some comments have highlighted issues that readers encountered during their reading process. Keywords such as "some," "many," and "name" have emerged as high-frequency terms, indicating difficulties for readers. Specifically, comments like "everyone has many different names, and it's not easy for westerners to keep track" and "there are some basic grammar errors in the translation" reveal that the complex names and intricate story background details have caused confusion for some overseas readers. Additionally, due to the translation norms of the time, the Brewitt-Taylor translation, which was done a century ago, utilizes the Wade-Giles (WT) pinyin system and a linguistic style that may pose certain challenges for modern readers.

4. Semantic Graph Analysis

In this study, the collected review data were meticulously stored in an Excel spreadsheet and subsequently imported into the KHcoder text analysis tool. A fresh project was initiated within KHcoder, and the spreadsheet data underwent comprehensive pre-processing. Upon completion of data processing, the pertinent options in the toolbar were carefully selected to extract the vocabulary. This was followed by the execution of hierarchical clustering analysis, ultimately culminating in the generation of a semantic map representing the reader comments (as depicted in Figure 2).

translation for its tense shifts, which they found confusing, and pointed out noticeable printing errors.

5. Discussion

As a vital conduit for cultural exchanges between China and the international community, translation has always shouldered the historic mission and societal responsibility of facilitating cross-cultural communication. While translators may possess varying interpretive perspectives and aesthetic sensibilities, and readers may have diverse reading experiences and aesthetic perceptions, these differing voices collectively contribute to the work's ongoing rejuvenation, aligning it with the characteristics of the modern era in foreign lands. Ultimately, the true sentiment, feedback, evaluation, and reception of the work by its audience are the decisive factors shaping its destiny.

In the realm of translating cultural classics, it is imperative to heed the aspirations of the target audience, their actual needs, and the inspiring relevance of these classics to contemporary readers. Consequently, policymakers must thoroughly study the target readership, their reading preferences, and requirements. The translator, in turn, must select an appropriate translation strategy, ensuring the accuracy, readability, and acceptability of Chinese literature translations.

Through the triumphant translation and introduction of Chinese novels abroad, it becomes evident that the aim of cultural exportation is to bridge the gap between diverse audiences, fostering a sense of admiration and kinship among readers. To enable a broader understanding of China, we may contemplate leveraging the widespread appeal and allure of popular or traditional culture as a catalyst for cultural exports. As it is aptly stated, "The flourishing of civilization and the advancement of humanity are unattainable without the pursuit of commonalities amidst differences, openness and inclusivity, as well as the exchange and mutual learning of civilizations."

To this end, we must actively engage in facilitating the "going out" and "bringing in" of contemporary Chinese literature through the collaborative efforts of translators, readers, and publishing houses. By doing so, we can ensure a smoother path for the integration and promotion of Chinese literature on the international stage.

Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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