

## Translation and Dissemination of Chu Ci in the West

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## ABSTRACT

*As a new style of verse mainly created by Qu Yuan, Chu Ci is the first anthology of romantic poetry in China. With deeper communication between China and other countries, Chu Ci, as an invaluable treasure in the history of Chinese literature, has been gradually translated, introduced and disseminated around the globe. This paper briefly examines the history and present situation of translation and dissemination of Chu Ci in English-speaking countries, aiming to strengthen the globalization of Chinese culture.*

**Keywords:** *Chu Ci*; translation; dissemination; English-speaking countries

## Introduction

*Chu Ci (The Songs of the South)* is the source of Chinese romantic literature, and *Shi Jing (The Book of Songs)* is that of realism. They are regarded as the zenith of pre-Qin dynasty poetry. *Chu Ci* originally referred to a new genre of poetry created by representatives of Chu elegies, such as Qu Yuan, Song Yu and other poets which had been based on the southern folk songs and combined with the ancient myths and legends. These Chu elegies were collected and edited by Liu Xiang to form the famous anthology of poetry called *Chu Ci* in the Western Han dynasty (He 2010).

As to the spread of *Chu Ci* in other parts of the world, some of its poems spread to the Korean Peninsula, Japan and Vietnam in the Tang and Song dynasties, and they had an impact on the literary development of these countries (Guo & Cao 2014). Until the middle of the 19th century, *Chu Ci* began to be introduced to the West. The dissemination of *Chu Ci* in the English-speaking world started in the late 19th century, which is much later than that in Japan, South Korea and other Asian countries. Zhou Jianzhong, an expert on the study of *Chu Ci*, believes that as an important part of the overseas study of *Chu Ci* and its foreign dissemination, the study on the translation of *Chu Ci* relatively lags behind the other branches of *Chu Ci* studies (Zhou 1990). As for the domestic research, although several English versions of *Chu Ci* had been published at the turn of the new century, the translation and dissemination of *Chu Ci* still remains to be promoted so as to expand the Chinese academic influence in the world and make Chinese culture achieve the strategy of “going global”.

According to the dissemination strength and influence of *Chu Ci*, it seems that the development of the translation and study of *Chu Ci* in the English-speaking world can be divided into three stages, namely, the beginning period from 1879 to 1920, the development period from 1920 to 1980, and the maturity period from 1980 to the present (Guo & Cao 2014).

Translation and Dissemination of *Chu Ci*: The Beginning Period

It is generally believed that the British sinologist E. H. Parker is the first person to introduce *Chu Ci* to England. In fact, this is not true. In 1874, the British sinologist R. K. Douglas, who served as the Chinese interpreter of the British Consulate in Guangzhou and the British Embassy in China, published an article in *The Academy* entitled “Comments on the ‘Li Sao’ of Le Marquis d’Hervey de Saint Denys”, which first introduced “Li Sao” (“Encountering Sorrow”) of Qu Yuan to English readers, and the translation of “Yu Fu” (“The Fisherman”) is the first selective translation of *Chu Ci* in the West (Chen & Xu 2012).

In 1879, E. H. Parker published an article entitled “The Sadness of Separation, or Li Sao” in *China Review*, a Hong Kong-based journal. This is the first full-length English version of “Li Sao” (Chen 2015). In 1884, the English sinologist H. A. Giles published his masterpiece *Gems of Chinese Literature* which includes the translations of some poems in *Chu Ci*, such as “Bu Ju” (“Divination”), “Yu Fu” and “Shan Gui” (“The Mountain Spirit”) (Chen 2013). Compared with the translation of Parker, the translation of Giles provides a more detailed introduction to *Chu Ci* and Qu Yuan, and compares Qu Yuan to the famous lyrical poet Pindar in ancient Rome. This shows that the influence of *Chu Ci* found its remarkable presence in the English-speaking world. Giles not only paid close attention to some of his translations, but also began to show his interest in their major original authors, and the scope of the canon’s dissemination had gradually been expanded (Guo & Cao 2014).

In 1895, the British sinologist James Legge gave a lecture of Chinese literary history at the University of

Oxford, and translated part of “Li Sao”. He used his translations in his Chinese literature teaching. After that, he organized his handouts into a collection of notes, which was named “Li Sao Poem and Its Author”, and published in the *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (Yan 2013). The first part of the article introduces Qu Yuan’s life experiences and background of his times, the second part of it is the review and appreciation of the poem “Li Sao”, and the third part of it is the original Chinese text and the English translation of “Li Sao”. Compared with the translations of Parker and Giles, the translation by Legge is more faithful to the original. As for rendering the proper nouns in the source text, Legge used the method of transliteration and annotation frequently, which cannot only retain traditional Chinese culture to the greatest extent, but also help the readers of the English-speaking world understand the connotations of the original poem better (Chen 2015).

After that, the study of *Chu Ci* in the West remained silent for nearly twenty years, until the year of 1918 when the British sinologist Arthur Waley published his seminal work entitled *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*. This work includes the translation of “Guo Shang” (“Battle”) which comes from Waley’s book on the religious elements in *Chu Ci*, namely *The Nine Songs: A Study of Shamanism in Ancient China*. In 1919, Waley published another important book entitled *More Translations from Chinese* which includes the translation of Qu Yuan’s “Da Zhao” (“The Great Summons”). It can be seen from the translation that Waley tried to convey the meaning of the original text in English and aimed to make English readers achieve the same reading effect with Chinese readers (Guo & Cao 2014).

As far as the dissemination of *Chu Ci* in the West before the 1920s is concerned, the spread of the classic in this period is scattered and basically confined to the translation and introduction of “Li Sao” and a few other short stories in *Chu Ci*. The knowledge about Qu Yuan only appeared in the description of Sima Qian’s *Shi Ji (Historical Records)*. There were almost no insights on the canon. As for the translations, there are still some obvious misreadings, misinterpretations and mistranslations of *Chu Ci*. The Western scholars failed to have a deep understanding and study of the original text, which results in remarkable arbitrariness in the process of translation. In a word, the spread and reception of *Chu Ci* is very immature in the West in this period, the understanding of the classic is still shallow and skin-deep, and there is no in-depth research work on *Chu Ci*. However, the classic gradually entered into the vision of Western sinology during this period, which laid a good foundation for the later study of *Chu Ci* in the West (Guo & Cao 2014).

### Translation and Dissemination of *Chu Ci*: The Development Period

In 1929, Lim Boon Keng, the president of Xiamen University, published his book *The Li Sao: An Elegy of Encountering Sorrows*, which was published by the Shanghai-based Commercial Press, and Giles and R. Tagore wrote a preface to the book. This helps to establish a positive image of *Chu Ci* in the English-speaking world and plays a positive role in promoting the spread of *Chu Ci* in other countries (Wei 2014). In addition, Lim challenged the previous translation mode, and turned the simple textual conversion into the so-called “thick translation”, which means to focus on proper representation of the source text background information and extensive use of notes on difficult words and sentences with a strong Chinese cultural color. This approach enables foreign readers to understand the translated text better and faster. Lim’s translation of *Chu Ci* made a remarkable progress in knowledge and depth.

In 1949, the British sinologist Robert Payne published his masterwork *The White Pony: An Anthology of Chinese Poetry from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, which includes the translation of some poems in *Chu Ci*, such as “Jiu Ge” (“Nine Songs”), “Jiu Zhang” (“Nine Pieces”), “Bu Ju”, “Yu Fu”, “Zhao Hun” (Summons of the Soul”) and “Tian Wen” (“Heavenly Questions”) (Wei 2014). Payne’s work gives a relatively fair evaluation of the Chinese poetry and better reflects the common view of the scholars at that time. Its publication indicates that the English-speaking world gradually broken away from the influence of cultural chauvinism, and began to show their respect for Chinese culture and accept the mainstream ideas of Chinese academic circles.

In 1953, China’s famous translators Yang Hsien-yi and his wife Gladys Yang co-translated “Li Sao” and other poems in *Chu Ci*. Their translation published by the Commercial Press gave more details about Qu Yuan’s life according to the latest domestic research findings. At the same time, Guo Moruo’s historical drama *Qu Yuan* had also been translated into English and published at home and abroad. In the same year, the world’s memorial

conference on the four greatest cultural celebrities was held in Beijing in which Mao Dun read an article entitled “In Memory of the Great Chinese Poet Qu Yuan”, and introduced the life of Qu Yuan in detail to the international friends. This greatly promoted the spread of Qu Yuan and *Chu Ci* in other countries. With the continuous improvement of China’s international status, the Chinese government actively promoted the introduction of Chinese culture to the outside world, including the publicity of Qu Yuan, and the sinologists in the West gradually became interested in *Chu Ci*. Some of the translators began to go away from the introduction and translation of the classic to its research (Guo & Cao 2014).

In the same year, the famous British sinologist and translator David Hawkes completed his doctoral thesis at Oxford University entitled *The Problem of Date and Authorship of Ch’u Tz’u*, which is the first *Chu Ci*-related doctoral dissertation in the West (Hong 2008). In 1959, on the basis of his doctoral thesis, Hawkes published the first full-length English translation of *Chu Ci*, namely *Ch’u Tz’u: the Songs of the South*. This translation has the greatest impact in the West and has been recognized as an authoritative version of the English translation of *Chu Ci* (He 2010).

In addition to the above monographs, the introduction of *Chu Ci* in the English-speaking world had also appeared extensively in some literary history works. These works include *Early Chinese Literature* by Burton Watson in 1962, *An Introduction to Chinese Literature* by the Chinese-American scholar Wu-chi Liu in 1966, *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres* by Cyril Birch in 1974, and *Sunflower Splendor: Three Thousand Years of Chinese Poetry* by Wu-chi Liu and Irving Yucheng Lo in 1975. The publication of these literary history works helped English readers understand *Chu Ci* (Guo & Cao 2014).

The translation, introduction and dissemination of *Chu Ci* in this period are no longer scattered and superficial, but systematic and profound. Many works focused on the *Chu Ci* translation had appeared, and they gradually turned from pure translation into academic research. However, the overall research of this period is still relatively traditional, and basically speaking, it does not break away from the research model of traditional *Chu Ci* studies. In other words, the research method is relatively simple, and the theme of research is relatively lack of new ideas. Therefore, the *Chu Ci* study in the West in this period is still at the initial development stage.

### Translation and Dissemination of *Chu Ci*: The Maturity Period

After the 1980s, with the rise of China’s international status and the implementation of the opening-up policy to the outside world, China began to actively promote the dissemination of Chinese culture in other parts of the world, so the translation, introduction and dissemination of *Chu Ci* has entered a new stage in the English-speaking world.

In 1980, Laurence Schneider published his pivotal work on *Chu Ci* entitled *A Madman of Ch’u*. In terms of the content, Schneider is not only familiar with the poems of *Chu Ci*, but also knows a lot about the important research works on the canon. What is more valuable is that he has published some profound views, which shows that the sinologists in the West have become mature in the understanding of *Chu Ci* (Guo & Cao 2014).

In 1982, Galal Walker completed his doctoral thesis *Toward a Formal History of the Chuci* at Cornell University. From the theme of the study, the author’s study of *Chu Ci* had in some ways broken away from the influence of *Chu Ci* studies in China and opened up a new path for the study of *Chu Ci*, which is the maturity sign of *Chu Ci* studies in the English-speaking world (Guo & Cao 2014).

In 1985, Hawkes added some content to his monograph published in 1959, and published it again with the title being *The Songs of the South*. Compared with the 1959 translation of *Chu Ci*, the 1985 version is more detailed and has a deeper understanding of the original, which not only indicates that Hawkes’ understanding of *Chu Ci* tends to be mature, but also shows that the sinologists’ understanding of the classic is becoming mature in the West.

In addition to the research of sinologists on *Chu Ci* in Western countries, Chinese translators and cultural publishing departments have also actively published English versions of the canon, including the translation of *Chu Ci* by Xu Yuancong, which was published in 1994 and 2009 respectively by the Hunan People’s Publishing House and China Translation Publishing Company, *Selected Poems of Chu Yuan* by Sun Dayu, which was published in

1996 and 2007 by the Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, and *Library of Chinese Classics: The Verse of Chu (Chinese-English)* by Zhuo Zhenying, which was published in 2006 by the Hunan People's Publishing House (Wei 2014).

In 2010, as an epoch-making Chinese literary history work in the West, *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* was published. The work was compiled by Harvard University's famous sinologist Stephen Owen and some other leading sinologists. In the volume one of the book, Stephen Owen's introduction to *Chu Ci* shows that the Western scholars have accepted the views of the Chinese academic circles on most issues, which is the result of intercultural integration after the East-West collision and which is manifested in a more equal dialogue. It also shows that the spread of *Chu Ci* has achieved remarkable success in the West (Guo & Cao 2014).

During this period, the study of *Chu Ci* in the West has fully absorbed some authoritative research achievements in China and referred to some contemporary theories. These achievements on the study of the canon no longer rigidly adhere to the viewpoints in the previous studies, but constantly make breakthroughs and innovations. This shows that the study of *Chu Ci* has become mature in the West.

### Conclusion

The translation, introduction and dissemination of *Chu Ci* in the West has a history of more than 100 years, and the classic has increasingly shown its charm in Europe and America. Its dissemination in the West basically follows the pattern of shifting from the initial pure translation and introduction to the current comprehensive and in-depth study.

With the continuous progress of science and technology and the continuous development of society, the intercultural spread of *Chu Ci* has turned from a pure translation-based one to a diversified one, including the spread via newspapers, periodicals, interpersonal communication and organizational meetings. As for the digital construction of *Chu Ci*-related literatures, we can establish a foreign language database for *Chu Ci*, and establish an English website for the spread of *Chu Ci* culture, and produce *Chu Ci*-related audio and video materials in order to spread *Chu Ci* culture abroad.

Zhou Jianzhong (1990) has put forward nine branches of *Chu Ci* studies in his article "Outline of the Development of Contemporary *Chu Ci*", one of which is the study of *Chu Ci* in other countries. It takes the translation, dissemination and research of *Chu Ci* in foreign countries as the research object, and uses the translation theory, influence study and cultural comparison to study the translation, introduction and dissemination of *Chu Ci* and its culture. The research methods of *Chu Ci* studies are diverse, varying from early textual research and translation introduction to later course teaching and academic debate, as well as current commemoration of Qu Yuan and compilation of the relevant literary history. At the same time, there are three distinct characteristics in overseas *Chu Ci* studies: nationalization, time period and discreteness (Zheng 2014). These features have been partially described in the above sections.

Mastering and understanding the history of the translation, introduction and dissemination of *Chu Ci* in the West will help domestic scholars continue to promote the culture of *Chu Ci* to the outside world, and in that way they can continue to expand its influence abroad. This cannot only make Chinese culture better "go global", but also find out the similarities and differences between Eastern and Western cultures, and promote the better integration of East and West civilizations.

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