



The Journey of *Chu Ci* in the Western World

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Abstract

Chu Ci is classic traditional Chinese literature. It has been spreading in the western world for more than one hundred years. At present, the dissemination of the gems in traditional Chinese culture is advocated. After a large number of relevant literature on the translation and dissemination of *Chu Ci* has been read and analyzed, the situations in various stages of its dissemination in the Western countries have been sorted out in this paper, and the quality and effect of the translation and dissemination have been introduced and evaluated. In this way, valuable experience can be found by summarizing and reflecting, so as to promote the current dissemination of *Chu Ci* in the Western world.

Keywords: *Chu Ci*; Dissemination; Translation; the Western World

1. Introduction

Chu Ci is a form of poetry created by poets in the state of Chu represented by Qu Yuan in the Warring States Period on the basis of Southern folk songs, integrating myths, legends, local customs and personal experiences. Later generations compiled poems created by Qu Yuan, Songyu and others as *Chu Ci*, an anthology. The most common means of disseminating these poems around the world is translation, some of which are surrounded by commentary. Among them, English, French, German and Italian translations are the most widely disseminated, with some being selective translations and some being complete translated works, the former being the majority.

2. The Stages in Germination of *Chu Ci* Disseminating overseas

Chu Ci was first translated into the Western world in 1852. The sinologist, German scholar Pfizmaier (1852) published "The Lisao and the Nine Songs: two Chinese poems in the 3rd BC" (Das Lisao und die neun Gesänge: Zwei chinesische Dichtungen aus dem dritten Jahrhundert vor der christlichen Zeitrechnung) in Memoranda of the Imperial Academy of Sciences (Denkschriften der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften) in Vienna as part of the third issue in this year. The two poems of Lisao and Jiuge (Nine Songs) were fully translated into German. Firstly, we must recognize the historical role of Pfizmaier's article. From then on, *Chu Ci* began to appear in the form of western language in front of the western public. *Chu Ci*, one of the Chinese literary classics, officially was brought to the westerners. Secondly, the translations of Lisao and Nine Songs are faithful and expressive, namely, they are faithful to the original, fluent and readable (Walker, 1949). But there are also ambiguities and errors in the transmission of cultural significance at the macro and micro levels. The influence of Pfizmaier's translation of *Chu Ci* is limited in the western world.

In 1870, Sinologist Le Marquis d'Hervey Saint-Denys translated the full text of Lisao into French with the source text. In the preface, the style and characteristics of Qu Yuan, *Chu Ci* and Lisao are briefly introduced, and some content of Qu Yuan Biography of *Records of the Grand Historian* is attached that readers can refer to (Saint-Denys, 1870). The translated Lisao of d'Hervey de Saint-Denys had little influence on the society at that time except from the aristocratic salon (Li, 2004). In 1886, Emile Blémont, a French poet, compiled and published the book *Poems of China* (Poèmes de Chine) in Paris, in which "Lisao" was selected and translated.

In 1874, Sinologist Robert Kennaway Douglas published an article on The Academy, whose title is "Comment on Le Marquis d'Hervey Saint-Denys' Lisao". And his translation of The Fisherman is first shown to English readers. In 1879, Edward Parker translated the full text of Lisao and published the

English version of the anthology—*Chu Ci* for the first time in London (Parker, 1879). Compared with the previous translation, the translation is preferable to convey the cultural meaning of the original text. But the translation is too free, just as Hawkes (1959) said, with more explanatory elements. Moreover, the translation lacks background introduction and annotations. For Western readers who lack Chinese cultural backgrounds, it is difficult to understand Lisao in an all-round way.

The first Italian translation of poems in *Chu Ci* was Lisao. In 1900, Nino de Sanctis translated the full text of Lisao from the French version of Saint-Denys and published it in Milan (Sanctis, 1900). The second Italian version of Lisao appeared in 1938 and was translated by Italian Catholic priest Allegra (1938). This version was published in Shanghai and its target readers were Italians who stayed in China.

Therefore, *Chu Ci* had been translated into German, French, English and Italian partly, which undoubtedly bridges it to the world. However, the Poems of *Chu Ci* are misinterpreted in early versions and lack sufficient annotations, which has little attraction to the target readers and has not caught westerners' eyes.

3. The Rising Period of *Chu Ci* Disseminating Overseas

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Western culture was introduced into China in large quantities, while “Eastern knowledge” attracted more attention from Western scholars. The lineup of Western Sinology was gradually growing. It is the sinologists such as Herbert A. Giles, James Legge, Arthur Waley and David Hawkes who really make *Chu Ci* begin to exert a greater influence in the western world. In addition, Chinese scholars also make some commitment to the spread of *Chu Ci*.

3.1 Western Scholars' Studies and Dissemination of *Chu Ci*

H. A. Giles published the book *Gems of Chinese Literature* in 1884. In the book, such chapters as The Diviner, The Fisherman, Nine Songs of *Chu Ci* are selected and translated. This book is well translated and full of artistic value. And it is the first systematic translation of Chinese literature into English, which opens the window of Chinese classical literature to the western academic circles (Giles, 1884). In 1923, the second edition of *Gems of Chinese Literature* was divided into two volumes: prose volume and poetry volume. Both volumes contain parts of *Chu Ci*. On the basis of the first edition, Those Who Died for Their Country and Summons to the Soul are added and translated (Giles, 1923). In *Confucianism and Its Rivals* (Giles, 1915), three English versions of The Great One, The Lord Within the Clouds and Those Who Died for Their Country are selected. As a diplomat stationed in China for more than 20 years, Giles has a profound understanding of Chinese language and Chinese culture. In addition, he has a strong interest in the study of Chinese classical literature. His translation of *Chu Ci* has high poetic value and aesthetic value, and has a far-reaching influence in the western world.

James Legge's “The Li Sao Poem and Its Author” was published in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* in 1895. Among the poems in *Chu Ci*, he selected and translated Encountering Sorrow, Those Who Died for Their Country, and Summoning the Soul, and introduced Qu Yuan in detail with reference to Wang Yi's *Chapters and Sentences of Chu Ci* (Legge, 1895). The annotations of related items are also very detailed (Hawkes, 1959). The detailed introduction of Qu Yuan by Legge undoubtedly opens up a new perspective for the study of *Chu Ci*, because this anthology is essentially about Qu Yuan poetry (Hawkes, 1967). Knowing more about Qu Yuan, readers will know more about this kind of Chinese poetry, and the less obstacles they will have when reading *Chu Ci*, so

that they can appreciate the rich feelings contained in it. The detailed introduction about Qu Yuan and excellent translation skills make his translation widely recognized in western Sinology circles.

Hawkes (1959) published *Ch'u Tz'u: Songs of the South*. In his preface, he shows that the book adopts the method of combining literal translation with free translation, and free translation is used more in the title than a literal translation. When it comes to the translation of flower names in *Chu Ci*, he mainly adopts the following methods: to create new English by imitation depending on the literal meaning of Chinese; to transfer Latin names to English; to adopt traditional translation methods; and to add specific words to similar English plant names. David Hawkes's emphasis on plant names indicates his concern for the cultural significance of plants, which is also a major difficulty in the process of translation of *Chu Ci*, for different nationalities have different national psychology and cultural backgrounds.

Hawkes comments on *Chu Ci* in "Quest of the Goddess". He fully affirms that *Chu Ci* conforms to certain linguistic rules and that each chapter has common features and differences. "Ci" is not a literary genre, because "辞" is the same as "词". The collection of words can be poetry and prose in oral and written forms. This broadens the readers' understanding of *Chu Ci*, which is not only written (Hawkes, 1967). This point of view has important implications for our current translation of *Chu Ci*, and multimodal interpretation will become a choice. The author also compares Li Sao with The Lord Within the Clouds, and analyses their influence. He believes that the magic-making journey appearing in the theme of Li Sao is closely related to the ancestors of Shaman. Shaman has an important influence on the imagination of Chinese literature and makes it more poetic. Qiuge (The Nine Songs), the summon poems (eg. The Summons of the Soul and The Great Summons) and Tian Wen (The Heavenly Questions) are typical shamanistic poems. The difference between the traditional closed cosmology in ancient China and the cosmology embodied in Lisao is contrasted by him (Ibid.). A remarkable feature of this paper is to analyze and appreciate *Chu Ci* by comparative method, and to introduce and evaluate *Chu Ci* from various angles such as shamanism, cosmology and literary influence, which increases the research dimension of *Chu Ci* and deepens the research depth.

Arthur Waley, a British sinologist, published One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems in London in 1918, which included Qu Yuan's poem The Martyrdom of the Kingdom (Waley, 1918). In 1919, another book, More Translations from the Chinese, was published, in which Great Summons was selected and translated (Waley, 1919). In 1923, Lisao and Nine Arguments translated by Waley were edited in The Temple, and Other Poems, which were published both in Britain and the United States (Waley, 1923). In 1955, Waley's research translation The Nine Songs: A Study of Shamanism in Ancient China, was published (Waley, 1955). It is the first integration of full translation and comment of Nine Songs by Western sinologists. Waley creatively explored the Shamanism culture in *Chu Ci*, which is his great achievement. While translating, not only did Waley pay attention to the imitation and preservation of literary aesthetics in the style and connotation of the original text, but also focused on the creation of rhythmic aesthetics, which is very readable. The translation of Nine Songs as a group of poems that means the translator takes full account of the independence of the theme and ideology of *Chu Ci*. Based on the translation of *Chu Ci*, this paper introduced anthropological methods to carry out in-depth research on social religion and culture, which represents a new landmark of the translation and dissemination of *Chu Ci* in the West, and a major breakthrough in both the target of translation and the research methods.

In addition to Giles, Legge, Hawkes and Welay, other sinologists have also made important

contributions to the spread of Chu Ci in the western world. For example, Launcelot A. Cranmer-Byng, a British sinologist, published an anthology of Chinese ancient poetry, *A Lute of Jade* in London in 1909, which focuses on Lisao. The book also has an impact in the West. The *Anthology of Chinese Literature: From Early Times to the Fourteenth Century* compiled by Cyril Birch, a sinologist, was published in New York in 1965. The editor himself translated 13 poems of Chu Ci. Although this collection of poems did not combine all of Chu Ci, it can show that more and more sinologists translate Chu Ci in their works, which also shows that its acceptance of it by Western readers has gradually increased. In 1976, John Turner, an English sinologist, published *A Gold Treasury of Chinese Poetry* in Hong Kong, in which *The Mountain Spirit in Nine Songs* were selected and translated (Turner, 1976). The translated poem is poetic and magnificent, which can be called a fantastic text, and is one of the best in literary translation (Wang, 2006). Burton Watson's translations of *The Lord Within the Clouds*, *The God of the Yellow River*, *The Mountain Spirit*, *Those Who Died for Their Country*, and *Encountering Sorrow* were collected in *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry* published by Columbia University Press in 1984. In 1931, German scholar August Conrady translated *Tian Wen* and published it by Leipzig Daya Publishing House, entitled *The Oldest Document on Chinese Art History: T'ien-Wen, the "Heavenly Questions" of Qu Yuan (Das älteste Dokument zur chinesischen Kunstgeschichte: T'ien-Wen, die "himmelsfragen" des K'üh Yüan)*, with a long textual research. He explored the inner information of myth, history, astronomy and geography in *Tian Wen*. This provides more perspectives for the interpretation for Western readers and also presents the diversified culture of ancient Chinese poetry. There is no doubt about its value and academic significance. Eduard Erkes, a German sinologist, published the translation of *Calling the Hermit Back* in 1915 and *Death of Ancient China* in 1917 in the *Asia Major*, among which two poems in *Nine Songs* were selected and translated. Later, he published "*Sung Yü's Chiu-pien*" in *T'oung Pao*, an *International Sinology* magazine in 1935. Erkes's translation of Chu Ci, just as Hawkes thought, was more difficult to read and more suitable for the readers who studied the original text of Chu Ci. The full translation of Chu Ci by French sinologist Rémi Mathieu, published in France in 2004, is another great achievement in the study of Chinese classical literature and culture in the western Sinology circles. Gopal Sukhu published *Songs of Chu: An Ancient Anthology of Works by Qu Yuan and Others* in 2017, this is latest translation version of Chu Ci.

3.2 Chinese Scholars' Translation and Dissemination of Chu Ci

The first published translation of Chu Ci by a domestic scholar is an English version—*An Elegy on Encountering Sorrow*, by Chu Yuan. Lim Boon Keng, the second president of Xiamen University, translated it and published it in Shanghai Commercial Press (Lim, 1929). In 1944, Lin Yutang, an outstanding writer and translator, translated the poem *The Great Summoning* in *The Wisdom of China and India* (published in London). The famous translator Yang Xianyi and his wife Gladys Yang first translated *Li Sao (The Lament)* into English in 1938 in a cooperated way. On the basis of this translation, they added other works of Qu Yuan later, which titled *Li sao and Other Poems of Chu Yuan* published by Foreign Languages Press in Beijing in 1953. In the early time, compared with western scholars, Chinese scholars were not as good as them in translating Chu Ci to the western world. However, since the 1950s, Chinese translators and cultural publishing departments have taken the initiative to translate and publish Chinese classics into English, including Chu Ci. In Xu Yuanchong's book *On Chinese Verse in English Rhyme Lisao (excerpts)*, *The Lord Within the Clouds*, *The Lord of the Xiang River*, *The Lady of the Xiang River* and *Those Who Died for Their Country* are selected and translated in 1992

(Liu,1999). Xu Yuanchong also published the complete English version of Chu Ci in 1994 and 2009, respectively. Zhuo Zhenying published Greater China Library: Chu Ci (Chinese-English Contrast) in 2006 and Sun Dayu published Selected Poems of Qu Yuan in 2007. During this period, whether the translation of Chu Ci or the commentary works about it were numerous, and the research perspective has been expanded, which further excavates the value of Chu Ci.

4. Conclusion

It is found that Chu Ci has been translated in the western world for more than 160 years. In the early stage, the majority of communicators of Chu Ci in the western world are western scholars, mainly translating some part of this work. With the knowledge of Chu Ci known more by western scholars and target readers, the number of translated texts gradually increases, and sinologists translate and publish the complete version of it. The research perspective is not confined to the translated versions. The critical works on Chu Ci have brought about new research perspectives, such as excavating Chu culture and transferring the cultural significance of plants in Chu Ci. Since the 1950s, Chinese scholars have also played an important role in the translation of Chu Ci. More and more translations have appeared successively. As far as the effect of communication is concerned, the works of sinologists Giles, Legge, Hawkes and Welay on Chu Ci have attracted more attention from western society. Through the analysis, it can be found that these sinologists, firstly have strong bilingual competence, so their translation of Chu Ci is of high quality. Secondly, they take the target language readers into consideration. Previewing the reading obstacles they may encounter, these translators introduce sufficient background information and make some annotations in their works so that the target language readers can better understand and appreciate the translated poems. Thirdly, these sinologists have launched a multi-dimensional study of Chu Ci, which is easier to stimulate readers' interest in reading and improve their reading experience. As one of the classics of China, Chinese have the responsibility to translate, interpret and disseminate Chu Ci more effectively. Successful translation experience should be learnt, the advantages of current globalization can be made full use of, and Chinese cultural effect can be improved by effective dissemination of Chu Ci.

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