

The Image of Anne in Chinese Readers' Eyes: Reflections on the Popularization of Canadian Literature in China

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Abstract: *Anne of Green Gables*, one of Canada's best known children's books, has gained popularity all over the world. Anne has become a household name in the children world. The paper analyses the image of Anne in Chinese readers' eyes: a romantic, imaginative, loyal, self-spirited and loveable girl. The author of this paper also reviews a brief history of Canadian literature's acceptance in China, and offers some constructive suggestions for the effective popularization of Canadian literature in China.
Key words: Anne; Canadian literature; popularization; children's literature

INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of *Anne of Green Gables* in 1908, this classic work along with its 7 sequels has touched the heart of children all over the world. *Anne of Green Gables* is not only a cultural heritage to Canada, but also a rich literary heritage to the whole world. As Mark Twain put it: Anne is "the dearest, most loveable child in fiction since the immortal Alice" (Waterson 13).

ANNE IN CHINA

Anne of Green Gables was first introduced to Chinese readers in 1987 by an undergraduate student in Nanjing University, Ma Ainong. She translated this children's classic work into the Chinese language in her fourth year under her grandfather's guidance, an aged famous translator in China. Ma Ainong later has become a renowned translator at the People's Literature House and translated the *Harry Potter* series. This year she is visiting Ryerson University in Toronto as an international visiting scholar.

Anne of Green Gables has become a best seller in China in the last decade. Since 2002, over ten publishers in China have translated this book and launched it in the market. And other publishers have shown great interest in publishing this book. The China National Library has collected 5 versions of *Anne of Green Gables*.

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Chinese readers are very fond of the heroine ---- Anne Shirley (her first name spelled with an E!) ---- an orphaned girl with red hair and freckles. Most Chinese readers of *Anne* are school students aged between 11 and 16. They are very interested in Anne and her friends' school life in Canada. Meanwhile, *Anne of Green Gables* has been an interesting topic for academic study in China.

In Chinese readers' eyes, Anne was intelligent. Though the adopted girl didn't have much education and training when she arrived at Marilla's house, Anne's intelligence was soon realized by her guardian: One evening, under Marilla's request, Anne prayed to God, which made Marilla "only preserved from complete collapse at Anne's extraordinary petition"(51-52). She knew that Anne had never said any prayers before! At school, Anne was a top student in her class. She studied hard at Queen's class for the important exam and she finally passed it and came in first. Chinese students have very competitive school life. In China, students take very important and competitive exams at certain stages. They are very interested in Anne's school life. The image of Anne fits their value ---- right success comes from diligence. Anne sets a positive model for students. Parents in China encourage their children to read *Anne* for this reason, because she is a diligent and intelligent student.

Anne was romantic and imaginative. Anne lost her parents when she was a baby. She had a difficult life at the adopted families and the asylum. She didn't sink in the darkness of her life, but constantly comforted herself with imagination. She never lost hope and enthusiasm for life even in the depth of despair. She had many hardships and difficulties before coming to the Green Gables, but she overcame them all. She liked the Green Gables, for "There was scope for imagination" (30). Her limitless imagination bestowed the ordinary earthly world with poetic meaning. Imagination is a lubricant for her to overcome hardships; imagination is a fuel for her productive writing; imagination is her treasure. In today's education system in China, students are under great pressure of exams, and the mechanical teaching and the examination-oriented education are to some extent depriving children of their imagination scope. For this reason, many parents recommend *Anne* to their children, hoping their children keep imagination and creativity like Anne Shirley.

We now live in a restless material world, and children's innocent spirits seem to be caught up in it, becoming unfocused, even withered, which adults worry about a lot. In this sense, the image of Anne provides valuable and active inspiration in countering the burden malaise.

Anne was free spirited. Her thought and behavior didn't conform to the traditional image of pretty, obedient and quiet girls. She was naughty and behaved out of rule. In contrast to her friend Diana, a clean and beautiful girl with white skin, free-spirited Anne has left readers a Tom-boy-like image. Anne's red hair is a sign for freedom, independence, and equality. For teenager readers, during their puberty, they have more likelihood to deviate from the "right" path. They seek for independence and equality. In East Asia, school students are confined with strict discipline, and teachers generally have a superior power to their students. Therefore, students there have an even stronger wish to get free from strict discipline and strict supervision. Anne Shirley in their inner hearts actually becomes a "representative" to fight against hierarchy system and struggle for freedom. This is an important factor that accounts for Anne's popularity among teenager students in China.

Love is a theme throughout the story. In Chinese readers' eyes, Anne was a girl longing for love and caring for others. As an orphan, Anne lacked love in her life. She was seeking love. After Matthew's death, Marilla was in a difficult condition, and Anne gave up the opportunity for further education and decided to stay to do teaching while looking after Marilla. She had a strong sense of responsibility. When in need, she just offered selfless love to others.

Anne is a popular character in China, and Chinese readers get *Anne of Green Gables* & the 7 sequels through the following sources:

(1) They find the book at bookstores by chance.

(2) The book is introduced by friends or relatives. The author interviewed two students on a bus; one of them had read *Anne of Green Gables* and she was going to introduce this interesting book to her cousin. The author's nephew, a middle school student aged 15, made a survey in his class in Jinchang City of Gansu Province. Ten students in his class had read *Anne of Green Gables*; other students, influenced by these ten, were eager to buy a copy of the book to read.

(3) Some students get to know Anne through the Internet when they search for classic works fit for students.

(4) Recommended by teachers. For teenagers, their teachers' influence is very strong. Many teachers in China think Anne's story is a literary nutrition that will nourish their students.

(5) The school library. Some primary schools in China put some books at a corner of the classroom, and students can read them during breaks. A student interviewed by the author in Lanzhou City discovered Anne of Green Gables this way.

In summary, no matter how readers get the *Anne* series, the story always captures readers' hearts. The extraordinary qualities that made Anne a brilliant girl set positive and instructive models for Chinese students. Anne always had optimistic attitude toward the world around her. Chinese readers are greatly moved by her perseverance for a better life.

REFLECTIONS ON THE POPULARIZATION OF CANADIAN LITERATURE IN CHINA

Canadian literature is an integral part of the world literature. It has gained more and more interest in China. The acceptance and popularization of Canadian literature in China has experienced several stages. The paper discusses this issue in several aspects.

Translation of Canadian literary works

Translation is an important and main means by which Canadian literature has been introduced to China. Separated by the great Pacific Ocean, lack of fast and convenient traffic means in the past, the cultural communication and exchange between China and Canada were limited prior to the mid-20th century. Consequently, the Canadian literature was introduced to China at a relatively late age. In the 1940s, a famous Chinese translator ---- Professor Xiaoqian bought Stephen Leacock's works of wit and humor in Europe. He introduced Leacock's works in a Chinese magazine in 1957. Before 1980, very limited Canadian literary works were translated into Chinese. According to the *Contents and Abstracts of Translated Foreign Literary Works from 1949 to 1979*, only 16 works of 5 Canadian writers were translated and put in print during this period. At that time, Chinese readers were not familiar with the literature of this young nation.

After 1980, with Chinese scholars conducting academic research in Canada, more and more Canadian literary works have been introduced to China. From 1980 to 1990, the Canadian Embassy in China sponsored Canadian Research Centers in some Chinese universities. The embassy also set some programs to sponsor Chinese scholars to visit Canada and undertake academic research. The programs include FRP, FEP, CCSEP etc. (Luo 116) At the same time, the Chinese government also strongly supported visiting scholars by providing funds for them. The visiting scholars brought Canadian literary works back to China. From 1980 to 1992, 60 Canadian literary works were translated, an obvious increase in quantity. In the new century, with the process of globalization, the number of translated Canadian literary works has been on the increase in China. Today, Seton's animal stories, Leacock's works of wit and humor, *Anne of Green Gables* etc. are popular with readers.

Academic research

Through the database CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), the author has made a survey of academic papers on the topic of Canadian literature, as an index of the academic study of Canadian literature in China:

Doctorate degree theses

There is 1 doctorate thesis in the database, which is “Research on Frye’s Studies of Literature Anthropology” (Liu Haili, Shandong Normal University, July of 2008). A few published doctorate degree theses have been collected by some libraries.

Master degree theses

Through searching, 61 master theses about Canadian literature are found in CNKI. Among them, 42 are about Margaret Atwood, 4 about Margaret Laurence, 4 about Northrop Frye, and 1 concerning both Atwood and Lawrence. The authors of these theses mainly come from universities with Canadian Research Centers. It is obvious that the instructors, who take prestigious positions in Canadian Research Centers at those universities or have achieved fruitful academic achievements in the field of Canadian literature, have influenced their students greatly.

Journal papers

The published papers in the database CNKI outnumber the doctorate and master theses, with 247 journal papers published on this topic from 1949 to 2010. However, publications in the core academic journals such as *Foreign Literature Studies* and *Foreign Literary Studies* etc. are limited.

Canadian literature in the Chinese classroom

Chinese scholars with academic research experiences in Canada have played an important role in the popularization of Canadian literature in China. Since the 1980s, Canadian literature has been systematically introduced and popularized in China, when visiting scholars finished their work and returned to their mother country. Nanjing University is the first university that has set Canadian Literature as an independent course in the classroom. Professor Huang Zhongwen, a returned visiting professor, initiated a course in Canadian Literature at the Foreign Language Department of Nanjing University in the 1980s. Professor Huang drafted a series of textbooks for this course: *Canadian Literature in English* (1981), *Canadian Literature in English: An Introduction* (1986), *Selected Readings in Canadian Literature* (1986), and *A Brief History of Canadian Literature* (1991). After 1992, some other textbooks or dictionaries have been published, such as *A Dictionary of Canadian Literature* (1995), *A Brief History of Canadian Drama in English* (1999) etc. They mainly serve undergraduate teaching and learning. In the 1990s, Nanjing University, Shandong University, Sichuan University, Sichuan Foreign Language University, and Lanzhou University set Canadian literature courses in master programs (Lan 21).

STRATEGIES FOR THE POPULARIZATION OF CANADIAN LITERATURE IN CHINA

For an effective popularization of Canadian literature in China, the author suggests the following strategies:

The importance of visiting scholar programs

In the popularization of Canadian literature in China, visiting scholar programs are an important channel through which Chinese scholars bring back Canadian literary works and introduce them to Chinese readers. The author himself as a visiting professor at Brandon University in Canada, donated 8 works of Di Brandt and Dale Lakevold, award-winning authors of Brandon University to the National, Provincial and School libraries in China, as an contribution to enrich the collection of Canadian literature in these libraries. The author also translated a collection of animal stories of Ernest Thompson Seton in 2008. Dr. Reinhold Kramer of Brandon University wrote a scholarly preface for that book. The author visited the Seton Center in Carberry and the former house of Margaret Laurence in Neepawa, creating potential opportunities for

future cooperation. Undoubtedly, the visiting scholar program is an effective way for Chinese visiting scholars to get to know more organizations and more works of Canadian literature.

Canada is a young nation, and the popularization of its literature is a gradual process. For example, Canadian animal stories are famous all over the world. With Seton's *Wild Animals I have Known* (1898) and Charles G. D. Robert's *The Kindred of the Wild* (1902), a new genre was formed, the realistic animal biography (Egoff and Saltman 12). Seton and Roberts are both well-known Canadian writers. But in China, Seton's animal stories are exceptionally popular, but Charles G. D. Roberts seems to be a new name to Chinese readers for lack of popularization. The author bought several works of Roberts in Canada and hopes to introduce them to China.

English versions

Before 1980, Chinese readers, except English professionals, appreciated Canadian literary works mainly through translated works. Translation takes time, and translators choose works according to their personal interest. As a result, Chinese readers only read very limited part of Canadian literature then.

After 1980, with the rapid improvement in English teaching and learning, more and more readers read literary works in the original versions. China will soon become the Number one country in the world with the most English speakers. Canadian publishers should pay attention to this phenomenon and cooperate with Chinese publishers by launching instructive literary works of the original version into the Chinese market.

Government support

Government support is inseparable for the effective popularization of Canadian literature in China. Both the Canadian government and the Chinese government have made great efforts in popularizing Canadian literature in China. As mentioned above, the Canadian Embassy in China has set programs for Chinese scholars to teach Canadian literature or do academic research in this field. The Chinese government each year provides visiting scholars with sufficient fund for their study in Canada.

Aboriginal literature in English

Aboriginal literature is an integral part of Canadian literature. So far, the popularization of Canadian Aboriginal literature in China is very limited. Chinese readers are exceptionally interested in Aboriginal lifestyles and cultures in Canada. The Inuit stories of Michael Kusugak and other Inuit writers would be very popular with Chinese children. It is suggested that the Canadian government set some grants for Canadian authors to popularize their works abroad in publication, which is not limited only to French-English & English-French translation grants, for Canada is a multi-cultural and multi-lingual nation.

What's more, the popularization of Canadian literature in China will potentially bring more tourism revenues to Canada. The Green Gables on Prince Edward Island, with the popularity of *Anne*, will attract Chinese travelers for a visit. The Spruce Woods, the Assiniboine River and many places mentioned in Canadian animal stories might become hot traveling spots in the future.

CONCLUSION

Canadian literature, as a branch of world literature, has gradually gained popularity in China. Through the efforts made by the governments and the people in both countries, more and more works of Canadian literature will be introduced to Chinese readers for appreciation. *Anne of Green Gables* and other classic works will become permanent memories in the minds of Chinese readers.

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BELOW IS A NEWSPAPER REPORT FOR MY VISIT AT THE SETON CENTRE. *CARBERRY NEWS-EXPRESS* MARCH, 2008

Visiting scholar at Seton Centre



MEETING THE PRESS – Prof. Shangwu Wang (right) takes time from his tour of the Seton Centre to talk to the News-Express reporter, John McNeily, as Cheryl Orr-Hood, chair of the Seton Centre, and Dale Lakevold of Brandon University's English Dept. watch.

by John McNeily

On Tuesday, the Seton Centre was host to a visitor who had made quite a special effort to be present; Shangwu Wang, an associate professor of English from the Lanzhou Commercial College(Present name: Lanzhou University of Finance and Economics) in China. As he explained, the College has an enrollment of 10,000, all of whom are required to learn English. His particular emphasis is on business English.

Professor Wang is here because of a special personal interest he has discovered in the works of Ernest Thompson Seton. Back in 1999, a publisher of English works in translation asked him to look at some of the stories in "Wild Animals I Have Known." His first encounter with the works of Seton was the story of "Lobo, the Wolf." It's usual for a translator to read the whole of a book over a few times before starting on the work of translation, but Shangwu relates how he was so taken by Seton's tale that he started in on the translation right from the first page, and translated as he read the story, so it kept being new to him as he worked. By the time he reached the emotional conclusion of the tale, he was in tears.

Professor Wang went on to translate six of Seton's stories for the Chinese publisher, and applied for a sabbatical year to do more work on the subject. With the full support of the China Scholarship Council, he was able to come to Brandon University as an International Scholar, and has translated another six of Seton's stories, and is planning a book introducing Seton, the "father of world animal literature" and his work to readers of the Chinese language. He is particularly happy to spend the time in the area which Seton considered the home of his golden age as a naturalist and writer.

Canadian Literature is gaining more and more interest in China. Shangwu Wang points out that this part of Manitoba is doubly blessed with figures from Canadian Literature; interest in Margaret Lawrence is becoming more and more popular in his country. In June, he will be going to the University of Toronto as an international scholar in Canadian Studies there.

Professor Wang, and Dale Lakevold, a colleague from Brandon University's Department of English, spent Tuesday being shown through the Seton Centre's collection of manuscripts and artefacts by the Seton Centre's board chair, Cheryl Orr-Hood.