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**ON THE STRATEGY OF CONTENT SELECTION FOR CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE LITERATURE --WITH "PAPER REPUBLIC" AS AN EXAMPLE**

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**ABSTRACT**

With the rapidly developing globalization, cultural communication between China and foreign countries is undoubtedly a trend. How to successfully spread Chinese contemporary literature has become a hot topic. The Paper Republic, established in 2007, is a new and important way for the overseas dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature. This paper studies the articles selected by the "Read Paper Republic campaign" and analyse their content, in order to know the content and topics that the English-speaking world readers are interested in, and their preferences for Chinese contemporary literature.

**Keywords:** Chinese Contemporary Literature; Paper Republic; Content; Cross-cultural Communication.

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

"Literature is the best medium to understand a country's culture"<sup>[1]</sup>. Contemporary Chinese literature, as an important part of Chinese literature, is a powerful driving force in promoting Chinese culture abroad. As China's economic, political and cultural strength increases, in addition to China's initiative to spread its culture abroad, foreign countries are also paying more and more attention to understand Chinese culture, especially Chinese literature. Although the main promoters of the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese literature are still the government and related organizations in China, platforms such as Paper Republic, which is the initiative to introduce Chinese literature, show us new ways and better prospects for cross-cultural dissemination.

"Paper Republic" was founded in 2007 by American translator Eric Braahmsen and a group of overseas translators with their passion for Chinese literature. It is committed to sorting out, translating, publishing and promoting English translation of Chinese literature, with a special focus on contemporary Chinese authors and their writing. Paper Republic is now a well-known network organization for the translation and promotion of contemporary Chinese literature in the English-speaking world. The website is rich in resources, including a database of over 140 translators and some of their translations, a database of contemporary Chinese writers and novels, and a database of information on publishers in China and English-speaking countries. The translators on the website, mostly from English-speaking countries, are largely free from China's official ideology. They choose texts and translation strategies based on the position and aesthetic needs of readers in their mother tongue countries. They fully consider the acceptance psychology of English readers, so that they can achieve good dissemination effect.

However, although such an important network platform has some popularity in China, the Chinese academic circle has little research on it. In the articles related to the overseas dissemination of Chinese literature, most of them simply mention "Paper Republic" to demonstrate the views such as "Chinese literature should take into account the reading preferences of Western readers in the process of going abroad", without analyzing and studying what Western translators and readers like specifically. There are very few studies that are directly based on Paper Republic to study foreign translators' preference of content and subject matter.

In 2015, Paper Republic launched the "Read Paper Republic campaign", which publishes a free short story or essay of a contemporary Chinese-language author every week. Currently, seven series have been published in the Read Paper Republic campaign. Apart from the first series, in which a total of 53 translations were published, the subsequent series are all mini-series. The first series lasted for a year and a half, and the translations published varied greatly in style and in topic. From the second series onwards, however, each series has had a clear theme. As some of the translations from the first series currently can not be found on the website of Paper Republic, this study will be based on the second and subsequent series. The content of the articles selected by Paper Republic will be analyzed in order to know the content and topics that the English-speaking world readers are interested in, as well as their reading needs and reading habits, and their preferences for Chinese contemporary literature.

## 2. AN OVERVIEW OF PUBLISHED WORKS IN THE READ PAPER REPUBLIC CAMPAIGN

In June 2015, Paper Republic launched its "Read Paper Republic campaign". The first series, the Original Series, featured 53 translated works. Starting from the second series, each series has a clear theme and collects several translations of Chinese literature with the same theme. The translations of the second to seventh series and their contents are summarized in Tables 1 to 6 below.

### 2.1 The second series of the Read Paper Republic campaign: Afterlives

In October 2016, Paper Republic published the second series of its Read Paper Republic campaign: Afterlives, whose theme is supernatural stories. It features six translated works, and the content involves mystery rape and murder cases, future fantasy, ghosts, etc.

**Table 1 The second series of the Read Paper Republic campaign: Afterlives**

Author	Chinese title	English title	Published time	Subject matter/ Content
葛亮 Ge Liang	龙舟	Dragon Boat	2016.10.27	Suspense Magic
张辛欣 Zhang Xinxin	龙的食谱	Dragonworld	2016.11.3	Fantasy
范小青 Fan Xiaoqing	我在哪里 丢失了你	Where Did I Lose You?	2016.11.10	Business card
黎紫书 Zishu Lai	国北边陲	The Northern Border	2016.11.17	Fiction Prophecy

麦家 Mai Jia	两位富阳 姑娘	Two Young Women From Fuyang	2016.11.2 4	Revolutionary history
糖匪 Tang Fei	自由之路	The Path to Freedom	2016.12.1	Fantasy Eschaton

## 2.2 The third series of the short reading program: Bare Branches

In November 2017, with the upcoming "Singles Day", Paper Republic published the third series of its Read Paper Republic campaign: Bare Branches, whose theme is single life. It has translated four works, and the topics include love, roommate conflict, loneliness and longing, etc.

**Table 2 The third series of the Read Paper Republic campaign: Bare Branches**

Author	Chinese title	English title	Published time	Subject matter/ Content
宋阿曼 Song Aman	四十九度	<i>Fourty-Nine Degrees</i>	2017.11.9	Love
蒋一谈 Jiang Yitan	说服	<i>Convince Me</i>	2017.11.1 6	Love
大斯 Da Si	超级玛丽	<i>Saint Marie</i>	2017.11.2 3	Flat sharing
吴君 Wu Jun	地铁5号线	<i>Metro Line Five</i>	2017.11.3 0	Desire

## 2.3 The fourth series of the Read Paper Republic campaign: China Dispatches I

In September 2018, China Dispatches I was published. It is a selection of non-fiction pieces chosen from the OWMagazine (单读). It included some of Paper Republic's favourite writers as well as some new voices, from different corners of China. The content covers American journalist Peter Hessler, small-town life, and the hometown.

**Table 3 The fourth series of the Read Paper Republic campaign: China Dispatches I**

Author	Chinese title	English title	Published time	Subject matter/ Content
吴琦 Wu Qi	三个关于何 伟的写作练 习	<i>Three Sketches of Peter Hessler</i>	2018.9.20	Reality People
李静睿 Li Jingrui	小城	<i>Small Town</i>	2018.10.1 1	Reality Hometown
欧宁 Ou Ning	致母亲书	<i>Letter to My Mother</i>	2018.10.4	Reality Relativity
颜歌 Yan Ge	平乐事	<i>The Spices of Life</i>	2018.9.27	Reality Hometown

## 2.4 The fifth series of the Read Paper Republic campaign: China Dispatches II

In October 2019, China Dispatches II was published. It is also a selection of non-fiction pieces, with eight translated works. The series includes working life in Beijing, a fortune-teller, a corpse protector, law school, etc.

**Table 4 The fifth series of the Read Paper Republic campaign: China Dispatches II**

Author	Chinese title	English title	Published time	Subject matter/Content
袁凌 Yuan Ling	沉默的孩子	<i>Silent Children</i>	2019.10.4	Reality Rural Children
袁凌 Yuan Ling	敬老院的右派	<i>The Nursing Home Rightist</i>	2019.10.11	Reality Person
卫毅 Wei Yi	莫言的国	<i>Mo Yan's Country</i>	2019.8.5	Reality Person
郭福来等 Guo Fulai, etc.	到北京去	<i>March on Beijing</i>	2019.6.28	Reality Worker
微尘等 Wei Chen, etc.	到北京去	<i>March on Beijing</i>	2019.6.21	Reality Worker
谢丁 Xie ding	一堂法学课	<i>Lessons in the Law</i>	2019.5.31	Reality University education
马金瑜 Ma Jin Yu	寻找殁尸人	<i>Searching for Bodies</i>	2019.4.18	Reality The Embalmer
梁鸿 Liang Hong	现代都市里的算命人	<i>A Fortuneteller in a Modern Metropolis</i>	2019.3.13	Reality Biography

## 2.5 The sixth series of the Read Paper Republic campaign: Epidemic

In May 2020, Epidemic, the sixth series of the Read Paper Republic campaign was published, with the theme of the Covid-19. This series is about how the epidemic and the disease have affected the lives of ordinary people, the social responsibility and humanism of people in the context of the epidemic.<sup>[2]</sup>

**Table 5 The sixth series of the Read Paper Republic campaign: Epidemic**

Author	Chinese title	English title	Published time	Subject matter/ Content
邓安庆 Deng Anqing	隔离在家一个月，我与父母的关系变好了	<i>Forty Days: Growing Closer to My Parents during Quarantine</i>	2020.5.21	Reality Relativity
巫昂 Wu Ang	宿志愿者日志	<i>Su Volunteers Diary</i>	2020.5.7	Reality Volunteer Diary
林白 Lin Bai	节气：春分	<i>Split Spring</i>	2020.4.30	Reality Poetry
阿乙 A Yi	我们所处的环境	<i>A Message Held to the Flame</i>	2020.4.23	Reality Reflections on the epidemic
韩冬 Han Dong	窗景	<i>View from a Window</i>	2020.4.16	Reality Segregation

**2.6 The seventh series of the Read Paper Republic campaign: Figures in a Landscape**

In January 2022, the seventh series of the Short Reads series was published. Figures in a Landscape has six translated works, covering rural folklore, female depression, marriage and family, etc.

**Table 6 The seventh series of the Read Paper Republic campaign: Figures in a Landscape**

Author	Chinese title	English title	Published time	Subject matter/ Content
曹寇 Cao Kou	龙	<i>Dragon</i>	2022.2.15	Absurdity
李樯 Li Qiang	星期五晚上干什么	<i>What's There to Do on a Friday Night?</i>	2022.2.8	Youth
韩东 Han Dong	在码头	<i>One Night on The Wharf</i>	2022.2.1	Humorous absurdity
曹寇 Cao Kou	母亲	<i>Mother</i>	2022.1.26	Marriage and Family
苏童 Su Tong	西窗	<i>West Window</i>	2022.1.18	Women
曹寇 Cao Kou	到塘村打个棺材	<i>Going to Tang Village to Build a Coffin</i>	2022.1.11	Rural folklore

### 3. FEATURES OF THE READ PAPER REPUBLIC CAMPAIGN'S SELECTION OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE LITERATURE

The six series of the Short Reads Project have translated 34 contemporary Chinese literary works, and the following are the main features of their selection.

#### 3.1 Rich in content and themes

By analyzing the content of the works translated by Paper Republic, we can see that they cover a wide range of topics. They include love, intimacy, suspense, post-apocalyptic, ghosts, future, the countryside, history, epidemic, flat sharing, village life, children, education, characters and so on.

For example, the articles in the fifth series of the Read Paper Republic campaign, Messages from China II, vary in their content. *Silent Children* focuses on the plight of children in urban and rural China; *Mo Yan's Country* outlines the main lines of Mo Yan's writing career; *March on Beijing* tells the story of working in Beijing; *Lessons in the Law* tells of the transformation of law teacher Zhao Xiaoli; *Searching for Bodies* focuses on the embalmers who mend, clean and dispose of the bodies of dead miners; *A Fortuneteller in a Modern Metropolis* is a short biography of Xian Yi, a fortune-teller.

#### 3.2 Focus on realistic themes

Among the 34 works studied, the content selection lays emphasis on realistic themes, revealing the translation stance and aesthetic choices of "Paper Republic".<sup>[3]</sup> Realistic themes are themes that reflect real life, choosing characters and events from real life and social change. According to some reports, China's realistic literature is rising rapidly and has become an important vehicle for writing Chinese stories.<sup>[4]</sup> Realistic themes can penetrate into the spiritual world of the people, touching the human soul and causing resonance in people's minds. Realistic themes can keep close to the times, sense the demands of the times, reflect the aspirations of the people, and promote the progress of society. Therefore, translating outstanding Chinese works on realistic themes will enable overseas readers to understand a more comprehensive, realistic and vivid China.

Taking some works as examples, *Silent Children* focuses on children. The author pays attention to the plight of children in rural China today, showing their living conditions, daily works and mental state. He listened carefully to the children's voices and finally completed a record of their lives and humanity.

*March on Beijing* records the life and work in Beijing. As strangers working in Beijing, they are not writers in the traditional sense, yet they come closer to capturing reality than many professional writers' works. Their words strike straight at the heart of our times and stir up the reader's sympathy. Their works show the lives of ordinary Chinese people in a clear and comprehensive way.

*Forty Days: Growing Closer to My Parents during Quarantine* tells the story of many minor matters that happened during his time with his parents after the outbreak of the epidemic in Wuhan. Deng Anqing, a native of Huanggang in Hubei, has been living in Beijing for many years. His values were further and further removed from those of his parents. He spent more than 40 days with his parents because of the pandemic. This is the first time he has spent so much time with his parents since he started working. Through one minor matter after another, he finally came to understand his parents' way of thinking and their behavioural patterns. It also makes readers think about their own relationships and ways of dealing with their parents and other family members.

In *Lessons in the Law*, the main writing object is law teacher Zhao Xiaoli. It illustrates the plight and transformation of the teacher Zhao Xiaoli, who transforms from a "tutor" to a "teacher". The author reflects the changes of the times with his personal circumstances. The transformation of university education from the elite to the masses has been the destiny of this era. It is inevitable that a generation will have to endure this transformation. The article reflects the truth of the times from the perspective of a small person.

### 3.3 Focus on real-life issues

In addition to realistic themes, Paper Republic also has fictional works. But these works also focus on realistic issues and reflect the problems that exist in contemporary society. For example, *Dragon Boat* is about a young man who emigrates with his family and his story with a outlying island of Hong Kong. The novel is filled with bitterness from beginning to end, eventually leading the reader to a terrifying rape and murder. *Dragon Boat* directly reflects the dark side of the hero's hearts. The author uses a concrete image of a woman in white to reflect the hero's demons. The story reflects that everyone in the city and living in the present must have a dark little universe in their heart even for a moment, that is, there is a secret self in their heart.

In *Dragonworld*, the dragon eats the fruits of human civilization in one big gulp, and even eats the human spirit and mind in the end. In this novel, the dragon becomes an angel who makes the earth come to life again, while the "century of mankind" disappears. It makes people think about today's human society. Nowadays, although we are more and more rich in material civilization, people's spirit is increasingly poor.

### 3.4 Chinese ethnic characteristics

Ethnic characteristics refer to the characteristics of a nation in terms of politics, economy, culture and art, as well as language and writing, customs and psychological qualities. The selection of works with ethnic characteristics is conducive to showcasing the diversity of Chinese culture. It also enables overseas readers to experience the unique charm of China's different ethnic cultures and to understand a more colorful and distinctive China.

*Small Town* and *The Spices of Life* have a distinctive Sichuanese character. The distinctive national character of the work can be found in the dialect.<sup>[3]</sup> For example, in *Small Town*, it says, "At that time, everyone in our village spoke in this very standard Pi County dialect. To speak Pi dialect you had to stretch your mouth, bulge it full of air, roll up your tongue and then, with a clack, out came the sounds that we recognized – only then was 'white' really white, 'black' really black, 'eating' really eating, and 'the state' really the state. Every so often someone from Chengdu would show up, pointing their tongue and flattening their mouth, coming out with things like "have some food" in their reedy voices, which had us all cracking up laughing."<sup>[4]</sup>

### 3.5 Focusing on the ordinary people scattered around China's remote corners

Among the works translated by Paper Republic, a very large number focus on the ordinary people. These works focus on those small potatoes scattered in different corners of China. Although they are ordinary, they precisely reflect the truth of the times. For example, *Convince Me* is about the love of a couple working in Beijing. Focusing on the fate of ordinary people, it enables readers to perceive more realistically and clearly the reality of Chinese people. *March on Beijing*, a collection of works by Guo Fulai and other working writers, tells the stories in the Beijing such as funny memories about a mouse in the house, the changes of a restaurant near downtown, the odd experience of a blind date, and so on. These stories give us a vivid

picture of strangers' lives in Beijing, a vivid picture of Beijing and contemporary Chinese society.

#### 4. REASONS FOR THE CONTENT SELECTION

When selecting original works for the "Read Paper Republic campaign", the director pays attention to the literary tastes of Western readers. The criteria for selecting material for the "Read Paper Republic campaign" is whether the work is highly critical, storytelling, and imaginative. Tao Jian, the founder of Paper Republic, has clearly explained his understanding of the reading interests of readers in the Western world: "If you ask a Western reader what subjects he likes, he will definitely say modern works, and works reflect the current state of people's lives. He may feel that it is closest to him." [2] Translator Ge Haowen points out that "American readers are more focused on the immediate, contemporary, reforming and developing China. In addition to news reports, they are more interested in knowing how literary scholars see Chinese society." [5] Luo Peng, a leading American sinologist, also points out that the reading interest of American readers is the works that can reflect the current state of contemporary Chinese society. [6]

#### 5. INSPIRATION FROM THE PAPER REPUBLIC

The translator of Paper Republic considers the content selection of Chinese contemporary literary translation in the context of the target language. They have a good understanding of Western literature and cultural traditions, readers' reading interests and aesthetic psychology. They judge which contemporary Chinese literary works are more promising to be accepted and recognized in the Western world from the logic of cultural development of the target language. [2] The content selection of Paper Republic undoubtedly has some implications for us.

When translating works, Paper Republic chooses diverse content; they favor works with realistic themes; they focus on realistic issues in China; they choose works with Chinese national characteristics; and they focus on the small potatoes in Chinese society.

Therefore, first of all, the content selection of contemporary Chinese literature for overseas dissemination should be more diversified. Second, we need to focus on works with realistic themes. Although the overseas translation of Chinese Internet literature and science fiction has been a hot topic in recent years, we should also focus on works with realistic themes when disseminating Chinese contemporary literature, so as to show a more comprehensive and vivid China to overseas readers. Third, in addition to literary scholars, artists and celebrities, we can also focus on the stories of ordinary people to show a more realistic China from their perspectives. Finally, we should pay attention to the dissemination of outstanding literary works with national characteristics, and attract overseas readers to understand China with the colorful national charm.

#### 6. CONCLUSION

The overseas dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature has the important cultural mission of telling the story of China, spreading the voice of China and constructing a good image of China. Paper Republic is an important way for the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese contemporary literature, and provides a good reference for the "going abroad" of Chinese contemporary literature, which deserves our extensive attention. We should select appropriate content on the basis of the lessons learned from Paper Republic, and further improve the quality of our translations to promote the overseas dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature.



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