

# The Cross-culture Translation and Reception of *Shiji*: A Literature Review Based on the Research of Chinese Scholars

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## ABSTRACT

*Shiji* has been spread abroad for a long time, especially in Japan, Korea, Russia, France, Germany, the United States, and other countries. There are many translation versions and a series of achievements about *Shiji* made by overseas scholars and sinologists. Chinese scholars pay more attention to the overseas dissemination, translation, and cross-culture reception of *Shiji* than foreign scholars. A literature review based on those researches will be beneficial for the world to know more about *Shiji* of China.

**Keywords:** *Shiji*, translation process, Cross-culture Reception.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As the economic strength gradually increases, Chinese culture is getting more and more attention from all over the world. At the same time, the Chinese government can enhance its cultural soft power and let the world understand China. In recent years, the institutes like Confucius Institute surge in the world, which is one strategy the China government uses to promote the spread of Chinese culture. Chinese Bridge is also a crucial program China progresses. In this project, people from various countries communicate and compete. Of course, Chinese is the core of this project. China wishes this project can spread Chinese, the language in the world range. There are also massive strategies China uses to enhance its international influences in the world. Thanks to the great efforts, Chinese culture is more accessible in the world than it in the past.

When it comes to the spread of Chinese culture globally, we cannot ignore *Shiji*, which is one of the greatest historical and literary books in Chinese history. We also cannot ignore Sima Qian. He is the father of Chinese historiography and one of the greatest historians in the ancient world.

The *Shiji* began to spread overseas very early, especially in Japan, Korea, Russia, France, Germany,

the United States, and other countries. There are not only many translation versions but also a series of achievements in the study of *Shiji*.

Why did so many scholars from different countries pay attention to *Shiji*? Because *Shiji* was not only general history of about 3000 years of Chinese history but also world history. At that time, China had communications and exchanges with foreign countries in South Asia, East Asia, and West Asia. Those exchanges were all written in historical records. On the other hand, *Shiji* was a concentrated display of Chinese culture which had substantial content, attracting scholars from different disciplines such as history, literature, linguistics, etc. Therefore, *Shiji* has important cross-cultural research value[1].

In recent decades, Chinese scholars pay more attention to the overseas dissemination, translation, and cross-culture reception of *Shiji* than foreign scholars. Relevant studies are mainly published in Chinese. As a literature review, this paper mainly discusses the Cross-culture Translation and Reception of *Shiji*, based on the main achievements of Chinese scholars in this field in recent years.

## 2. THE TRANSLATION AND RECEPTION OF *SHIJI*

### 2.1. *Shiji* in America

On the translation process of *Shiji* in the United States, Wei Hong thinks the *Shiji*'s English translation as a process from fragmentary translation into large quantities of abridged translation and then to full translation, involving in the focus' shift from the readability and acceptability to the exactness and adequacy. The reception range is also a process from exploratory reception to the massive literary reception and then to the comprehensive reception. [2, 3]

More specifically, at the first stage, the scholars were likely to mention *Shiji* when they wrote the Chinese stuffs. Most translations in that time were done by churchmen who came from the U.S. and stayed in China. The reason why those churchmen translated *Shiji* into English was mainly because of their own interests in Confucianism. A great example of this stage is Bodde and his translations of *Shiji* that Bodde translated some paragraphs of *Shiji* related to Qin. These scholars and readers read and accepted those translations with curiosity. They didn't treat *Shiji* seriously but just treated it as a new path to know some interesting things about the mysterious eastern world.

At the second stage, around 1950 to 1980, the translation of *Shiji* began to increase, both on the amount and context, and most of them were equipped with literature rhyme. In this period, many versions were translated, interpreters focused on the literature part of *Shiji* but not the more historical and serious part. Translators translated *Shiji* for the common readers but not professional people. That strategy was essential to attract the readers and made *Shiji* more and more acceptable to foreign readers. The great translation that appeared in this stage was Burton Watson's version which is still adopted nowadays. His version had distinct characteristics, which had more context but less his personal understanding. Although this kind of translation would hurt some original context, it was received by lots of normal readers. But most researchers fell regret this version because it changed some parts of the original contexts. In other words, the second stage paved the base to the third stage. At the second stage, readers accepted both Bodde's and Watson's translations.

From the third stage since 1990 until nowadays, the translation to *Shiji* has strengthened again and began to have systematic translation projects. The author called this period a complete translation period. During this period, interpreters translated *Shiji* for both common readers and professional scholars. The most notable project was the version translated by William H. Nienhauser, which had systematic translation steps and greatly influenced the others' research of *Shiji*. To be

different from Watson's version, Nienhauser's version was more focused on the academic study but not the readability, which had a large number of academic descriptions, which was the opposite of Watson's, which have a few descriptions. Thus, this version was very popular among researchers. The acceptance of *Shiji* also became diverse, more and more Americans began to know about China and its culture.

Wu Tao's paper focused on the three greatest reputations among American Sinologists of the *Shiji*, Burton Watson, Grant Hardy, and Stephen Durrant. They respectively wrote the three scholarly works lay the foundation for the further study of the *Shiji* in America and definitely deserve in depth research. Therefore, Wu's research made a brief introduction and review of these three books [4].

Although the literary translation of *Shiji* had been translated many times in the United States, the translation of Burton Watson and Nienhauser was the most important and the most recognized translation by all people. At the beginning of the article, it is stated that when American scholars translated in the previous several times, they all selected a few very vivid and characteristic articles for the translation and did not completely translate. Later, in the 1950s, Watson began to translate the *Shiji*. His translation was very interesting, and he selected more than 60 historical articles for translation. He considered that Western readers were not very receptive to *Shiji*, and they kept on their Western thinking. Therefore, to make Western readers better read *Shiji*, he did not use a very rigid translation. Instead, he began to connect other contents of *Shiji* into Legend in the Han Dynasty. Watson ever said he had never considered translating the entire *Shiji*. His interest was mainly in literature, and he had translated what he considered historical and interesting.

Grant Hardy's s translation of *Shiji* was not intended for literary experts but the general audience. His translation also reflected the value of *Shiji*, so his translation was very popular. However, in the 1980s, when Nienhauser began to translate *Shiji*, his team was very impressed with many experts. His translations were annotated in great detail, and he translated the New York Chronicles with scholarly care and accuracy. Zhang Leifu commented that his translations were better able to make readers worldwide appreciate the historical value of *Shiji*. The article also compared the translation of Nienhauser and Watson. Watson's translation was very classic and could be accepted and understood by the majority of readers. Nienhauser's translation was more literary, rigorous, and could be studied by experts. The study of *Shiji* in US literature was of great significance to US writers. Therefore, US scholars Allen, Hao Gerui, Li Naicui, and Stephen Durrant studied the contents, structure, and characters of *Shiji*, respectively. Stephen Durrant's academic research, *The Cloudy*

*Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian*, showed Sima Qian's complex inner world to Western readers through close reading and detailed semantic analysis. Jian Xiaobin from Ohio University studied the narrative structure and basis of the Historian Records from the perspective of space, which was a relatively new research method. *Shiji* had been translated and studied by many scholars and experts in the US and had been highly valued in the history of US literature.

## 2.2. *Shiji* in Europe

**The translation process of *Shiji* in France.** Lü Ying's research introduces the translation process of *Shiji* from the excerpted translation to the full-text translation, sorting out an overview of the research on the *Shiji* in France and expounding the significance of the complete French version [5].

The author discusses the translation process in three stages. Brosset Jeune published "Relation du pays de Ta Ouan" on *Nouveau Journal Asiatique* in 1828, which started the translation of *Shiji* in France. However, it is French Sinologist Édouard Chavannes who began to translate *Shiji* on a large scale. The French translation of *Shiji* was in the ascendant at the end of the 19th century, but it fell into a slow development in the 20th century. In the second period, although there was no large-scale translation, some scholars studying Chinese history, literature, philosophy, and even medicine selectively abridged some contents of *Shiji* for the need of thematic argument, which also played a certain role in promoting the French translation. Until the 1960s, the French translation of *Shiji* was only translated into nearly half of the original text. With the reprint of Édouard Chavannes's translated version of *Shiji*, some scholars have begun to continue the translation work, including Yves Hervouet, Dzo Ching-chuan, Eulalie Steens, Jacques Pimpaneau, and so on. In July 2015, the complete French translation versions of *Shiji*, *Les M é Moires historiques de Se-Ma Ts'ien*, was finally published in Paris. With the continuous improvement of the translation versions, the study of *Shiji* in France is gradually deepening, from the study of a character or a chapter to the study of the whole work.

**The translation process of *Shiji* in Germany.** Li Xiuying introduced the German translation process of *Shiji* in her article [6]. In the mid-19th century, Austrian Sinologist August Pfizmaier translated and published 24 volumes of *Shiji* into German, the earliest German translation. Since then, other scholars, including Erich Haenisch and Fritz Jagger had translated some chapters of *Shiji*. In general, the translation and research of *Shiji* in Germany are far less than that in France. Interestingly, the German translation versions are mainly translated from the Warring States period in *Shiji*. Maybe it was influenced by the German society environment in the 19

century. We can find from the essay that most of those translations are made after World War II. At that time, German is divided into two parts by the Soviet Union and the United States. So, German's nationalistic thoughts may influence Germany's academic field and lead them to begin finding ways to solve this problem. In addition, the Warring States period of China is like Germany situation. All of them are divided into different parts and competing with each other until one side rule all the country. Of course, this is just speculation.

**The collection and translation process of *Shiji* in Russia.** Liu Ruomei's article discussed this issue [7]. The first part is about the collection of *Shiji* in Russia. In the 18th century, the Russian government sent several trade caravans to China and bought ancient Chinese books. Except that, the Russian Science Organization also sent scholars to collect ancient Chinese books. Doctor Ф. Л. Елачич was a classic example of this stage, who bought *Shiji* from China. In the 19th century, the Eastern Orthodox mission played the main role in collecting Chinese Literatures, which they collected several versions of *Shiji* and got them back to Russia separately. In the 20th century, the sinologists of the Soviet Union mainly bought *Shiji* from the Chinese. Nowadays, the National Library of Russia collected most of the Chinese books Russia owned, including *Shiji*.

The second part is about the translation process of *Shiji* in Russia. It also started in the 18th century. At first, the Russians were interested in Chinese culture and history because of the trade routes between Russia and China. During 1786-1788, М.И. Веревкин published Joan Joseph Marie's essays related to China which including *shiji*, and that's the start of Russian sinology. In the 19th century, the Eastern Orthodox mission again played an important role in translating. During the time of the Soviet Union, В. М. Алексеев leads to translate *Shiji*. His translation style pays more attention to literariness. Although the whole translating plan of В. М. Алексеев was forced to stop because of political factors. It created a positive atmosphere for Soviet sinology. The following scholars were focused on the reformation of laws and the peasants' rebels in Chinese history. During the 1950s, Р. В. Вяткин began to translate the whole *Shiji* to Russians. His style was more academic, and he communicated a lot with the Chinese scholars and European or American scholars, so his translation owned a wider horizon.

## 2.3. *Shiji* in East Asia

**The translation process of *Shiji* in Japan.** The paper of Chen Lingling introduced the research on Sima Qian and his *Shiji* in Japan since the 20th century [8].

In the first half of the 20th century, the Japanese wanted to study Chinese culture. Undoubtedly, *Shiji* is a great sample to study Chinese culture. Scholars and writers like Toyohati Fujita and Nakajima Atsushi wrote a number of books to describe Sima Qian. In 1943, Takeda Taijun, a so-called postwar writer, wrote *the book of Sima Qian*, which contains the records of Sima and the author's reviews. Takeda showed his attitude and the metaphor that he was similar to Sima. In 1947, Okazaki systemically introduced Sima Qian to the Japanese, hoping the Japanese to accept Chinese and Confucian culture again. After the failure of the aggression against China, the Japanese began to deliberately understand Sima Qian.

When the time comes to the 1970s, the research of *Shiji* went to the first climax. A number of scholars published essays about Sima Qian. In the first half of the 1970s, the Japanese focused on the basis studying of Sima Qian. In the latter half, they converted to applied research of Sima Qian and *Shiji*, which was applying Sima's knowledge and talent to daily life and modern society.

The 1990s was the second climax. In that period, 18 essays and 6 treatises related to Sima Qian were published. The essays are historical(7), literary(5), comparing research(3), and other essays. Those results reflected the outbreak of *Shiji* research in the 1990s based on the accumulation in the last 20 years. Also, it somehow predicted the new research of Sima: Sima Qian's influence on modern Japanese society.

In the 21st century, the research on *Shiji* was more diverse. People from different regions and countries worked together to study *Shiji* in various ways, which is corresponded with the theme of the modern world.

**The translation process of *Shiji* in the Korean Peninsula.** On the Spread and Influence of *Shiji* in the Korean Peninsula, the research of Yang Shaogu and Fu A'min mainly tried to answer this question which used some Korean documents from the standpoint of national literature and national history [9].

First of all, the paper discussed *Shiji*'s historical culture situation, which mentioned that we must know that in ancient times China has enormous influence on the ancient Korean peninsula, whether in culture or political power. Ancient Korean leader chosen to study *Shiji* was mainly because of two reasons. The first reason was that they wanted to study better culture. On the other hand, they thought they had the same blood relationship with China. Then, it discussed *Shiji*'s published in the ancient Korean period, which found out that there are mainly two published versions in the Korean peninsula, the official published version and the folk published version. Both of them showed that in ancient times, Korean Peninsula, whether is in the official field or the folk field, people were paid a lot of

attention to *Shiji*. It also mentioned some ancient documents of the Korean Peninsula, which have some notes about *Shiji*. Those notes are mostly about some common sense about Chinese culture and some locations mentioned in *Shiji*. However, there was a special chapter in *Shiji*. The *biographies about commerce* needed to pay more attention to it because of lots of explanatory notes and head notes made by ancient Korean people. Why was this chapter so special to ancient Korean people? The paper gave the possible answer that this chapter included some knowledge about commerce and how to become richer. Maybe ancient Korean people believed that if they can figure out this chapter, they could know how to become richer. In addition, the paper mentioned that almost all the published versions that existed in ancient Korea were different from the original version and became more acceptable to Korean culture. The paper also discussed the image of Sima Qian and his *Shiji* in Korean people's minds. Most of them are very adoring to Sima Qian and *Shiji*. In addition, most Korean people who came to China in the ancient period would compare the real situation in China with the situation written in *Shiji*.

In a word, *Shiji* was introduced through the purchase of Korean literati and official gifts from Chinese dynasties. Early circulation was in the form of a codex. It was only during Lee's Korean dynasty that the engraving versions appeared. It is useful for understanding the history of the people on the peninsula, literati learn writing experience, and the ruling classes to learn from their experience. To a certain extent, the introduction of *Shiji* impacted the textual research, historiographer system, and prose writing of *Shiji* in the peninsula, and ancient Korean literati evaluated *Shiji* and its author Sima Qian as well.

According to a quantitative study of Wang Jianhong, the research results of *Shiji* in South Korea have been on the rise from 1980 to 2019. In the recent ten years, the number of master and doctoral theses, journal papers, and monographs has exceeded that of the past 30 years. At present, South Korea has formed a relatively stable research team of *Shiji*, and the research talents have basically realized the transformation from *Chinese training* to *local training*. The backbone of the study of *Shiji* in South Korea basically has the experience of studying or visiting in Taiwan, which has a close academic relationship with the universities in Taiwan. South Korea pays attention to the translation and introduction of Chinese scholars' research results of *Shiji*. Although there are many achievements of domestic scholars, rigorous academic works are still lacking, and popular works account for a large proportion [10].

### 3. CONCLUSION

The translation and cross-culture reception of *Shiji* had experienced a long and complex development process. Generally speaking, its translation depended on the expectations of translators and readers. At first, the translations were simple and short, which activities were mainly out of curiosity. The early translation and acceptance of *Shiji* in foreign countries are segmental and partial. With the deepening of research, the whole and almost completed translation of *Shiji* gradually increased, from fragmentary translation into large-scale translation. Holistic translation contributes to academic reception, contrastive reception, and pluralistic reception.

Under the cross-cultural background, the future study of *Shiji* should pay more attention to the cooperation between Chinese and foreign scholars and enhance the exchanges of theoretical basis, version literatures, and research methods between them. In this way, it will be easier to produce new research results, help Chinese culture move to the world and promote the sharing and common prosperity of world culture.

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