



The Influence of Western Detective Fiction on the Formation of Modern Chinese Detective Fiction

Take The Sherlock Holmes Mysteries and The Hawthorne Mysteries for examples

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Abstract. At the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the People's Republic of China, detective novels originated in Britain and America became increasingly popular in modern Chinese society. Moreover, Chinese intellectuals did not stop at simply translating their creations but made characteristic localized creations based on imitation and borrowing. Among them, Cheng Xiaoqing created the influential *Hawthorne Mysteries*. Therefore, while exploring how Western detective novels were formed and spread to China, this paper analyzes and demonstrates the influence of Western detective novels on modern Chinese detective novels in terms of language style and characterization as well as the relationship between modern Chinese detective novels and the culture of legal system and fairness and justice in Western detective novels by comparing the part of the classic contents of Sherlock Holmes and Hawthorne's Detective Case. The study shows that modern Chinese detective novels have learned and imitated to a certain extent the language style and views on fairness and justice of Western detective novels, combined with their own national conditions, and made some innovations. However, overall, the development of Western detective fiction in modern Chinese detective fiction is limited and contemporary.

Keywords: detective fiction, fairness and justice, language styles.

1 Introduction

Before the arrival of the Western detective novel in China, China did not have the literary style of detective fiction. Since the late Qing Dynasty, many foreign detective novels have been introduced into China, with works such as *The Complete Detective Cases of Sherlock Holmes* as a representative, which had a significant impact on the development of ancient Chinese novels. Moreover, the most influential is the public crime novels. In ancient China, the theme of public case novels was to judge cases fairly and glorify upright people in power, represented by works like *The Case of Mr. Bao*.

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These public crime novels have storylines with twists and turns, focus on characterization, have light and simple language, and have social criticism. However, compared to Western detective novels, it lacks the suspense of a story. Consequently, with the popularity of translating Western detective novels and the favoritism of the public, public crime novels were influenced by Western detective novels and underwent a rapid and drastic change in content and form. Both of them mutually influence each other, and to a certain extent, with the May Fourth since the "enlightenment of the people" of the mainstream of modern Chinese literature convergence, and finally developed a detective novel with Chinese local features. At present, there are not many relevant studies on modern Chinese detective novels, and most of the papers are limited to the direction of Western detective novels. There are even fewer works that compare and contrast the two simultaneously. Meanwhile, detective novels have not been as outstanding as others in developing Chinese literature. However, with the fact that nowadays, reasoning novels and other suspenseful literary works are getting more and more attention from the public, detective novels have once again triggered people's discussion.

Therefore, this paper decides to go back to the time when detective novels just appeared to take Western detective novels and traditional Chinese public crime novels as a breakthrough, using textual analysis method, comparative study and other methods to explore and analyze the influence of Western detective novels on modern Chinese detective novels in terms of novel styles, characters, language, character portrayal, narrative structure and so on[1]. At the same time, this paper will also explore the culture of the rule of law in modern detective novels. The influence of Western detective novels on the development of Chinese novels is enormous, promoting the gradual modernization of traditional Chinese novels [1].

2 Case Presentation

2.1 The Sherlock Holmes Mysteries

The Sherlock Holmes Mysteries is a series of detective novels written by British author Arthur Conan Doyle, the first, middle book of which, *A Study in the Scarlet Letter*, was completed in 1886, while sequels such as *The Book of Returns* were not written again until 1927.

The narrative suspense of Sherlock Holmes detective novels is often based on science and rationality. In the face of long strings of logical reasoning and timelines, Conan. Doyle takes the setting up and solving of the suspense as the main narrative strategy, which runs through the whole narrative process as well as the plot, dialogues, scenes and other levels of narrative discourse so that the character of Sherlock Holmes is exceptionally well portrayed. However, it is not complicated and is easy to understand, thus stimulating the reader's interest in reading. Moreover, Holmes has become synonymous with the famous detective; his partnership with Watson and the typical word "sleuth" all have a very far-reaching impact on the later generations of detective novels, even more so for the end of the Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China has brought a new narrative technique.

2.2 The Hawthorne Mysteries

The period from the Opium War in 1840 to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 is a stage in China's modern history. During this period, Cheng Xiaoqing's novel *Lights and Shadows with Hawthorne* as the character was selected in a novel essay competition organized by the Shanghai News Supplement in 1911 and was well accepted by readers after its publication. In 1919, his novel *The Swallow of Jiangnan* was made into a movie by the Shanghai Friendship Union Company, which was again a great success. From then on, Cheng Xiaoqing's "The Hawthorne Mysteries" appeared frequently in the public eye.

It can be said that *The Hawthorne Mysteries* is a rare and representative work of modern Chinese detective fiction. Cheng Xiaoqing, known as "Conan Doyle of the East", not only studied and borrowed the story structure of *Sherlock Holmes' detective novels* but also transplanted his novel narrative techniques into his creations, focusing on plot creation, especially in the first-person in-focus, flashbacks, and the opening of the dialogue scene, and more. However, in imitating *The Sherlock Holmes Mysteries*, he was able to root his work in modern Chinese social life. As the perfect detective figure in his writings, Hawthorne is quick-witted and has not only Western scientific and democratic thinking concepts but also traditional Chinese moral concepts lurking in his body.

3 The Influx of Western Detective Novels

In the 19th century, the replacement of urban industrial civilization and radical social change staggered across Europe, and while despair ran rampant, some of the extremists took pleasure in crime. The corresponding powers-that-be are unable to eliminate crime at its root and have to resort to science, technology and social organization to counter the growing number of urban criminals, thus giving criminals and anti-criminals an unprecedented technological dimension. Moreover, while newspaper capitalists, who also benefited from the city's growth, were quick to realize that crime-related news could drive circulation [2], crimes that would interest their readers could not happen daily. As a result, serialized novels depicting crime became the most suitable substitute for newspapers that needed regular circulation to ensure profitability, and *The Sherlock Holmes*, written by British author Conan Doyle, was born at such a time when urban legends and super-sleuths were needed.

At the same time, China was suffering from serious violations by the Western imperialist powers. However, to a certain extent, this has also objectively promoted the development of modern capitalism in China and driven the growth of the urban economy [2]. The detective novel itself was a product of the complicity of modern urban life and print capitalism, with China's modernization laying the groundwork for the acceptance of such a new literary form. Meanwhile, the people of China, who had been oppressed by feudalism for a long time, were also forced to undergo a certain "benign" transformation. In addition, some awakened intellectuals began to go out into the world and learn about Western culture. Under the influence of the overall social situation, ordinary citizens also gradually accepted modern utilitarian values, and the mentality of getting

rich under commercialization further demanded that there be systems and laws to protect their power and property [3]. Moreover, this psychological need fits right in with the theme of detective fiction that depicts the defense of justice and the law.

Consequently, at the beginning of the twentieth century, detective novels launched a boom in China, and the number of works translated during this period is conservatively estimated to be four hundred. The most popular of these is Conan Doyle's *The Sherlock Holmes* series. With the increasing popularity of extra-territorial novels in China, Chinese novel writers have gone from passive translations at the beginning to creating detective novels with local characteristics by combining ancient public crime novels. Cheng Xiaoqing, "the first person of Chinese detective novels", was under the impact of Conan Doyle, learning and borrowing the story structure and narrative techniques of the *Sherlock Holmes* detective novels, and created "*The Hawthorne Mysteries*". However, on the basis of imitation, he was able to root in the social life of modern China, focusing on exposing the shortcomings of the old society and the depiction of China's local style [4].

4 Influence of Western Detective Novels on Modern Chinese Detective Novels in Terms of Language Style and Characterization.

Conan Doyle's *A Study of the Scarlet Letter* is a very good Western detective novel. The novel's varied language style and bumpy, twisty storyline leave a lasting impression on the reader. In the chapter "*A Study of the Scarlet Letter*" describing "Travelers in the Desert," the author's characterization is classic. He compares people's appearance to ghosts and spirits in a desperate situation and their torn clothes to big pockets, which not only vividly highlights the horror of the "old man's" face and his skinny bones but also sideways writes about people's poor living conditions. Metaphorical techniques like this are widely used in *A Study of the Scarlet Letter*, which also provides a reference for the language style of modern Chinese detective novels [5]. In addition, the characterization in *A Study of the Scarlet Letter* is distinctive. In the work, there is Watson, who is curious about new things, and Gresham and Lestrade, two detectives who are naive and even a bit silly, but all these characters are portrayed to emphasize the cleverness and resourcefulness of the protagonist, Sherlock Holmes [5]. Holmes's character traits of intelligence and eccentricity are emphasized through the portrayal of secondary characters.

The Hawthorne Mysteries is a famous modern Chinese detective novel written by Cheng Xiaoqing. The language and characterization therein are unique based on borrowing from Western detective novels. "The Hawthorne Probe" is most notably characterized by its emphasis on "lexical diversity" and its advocacy of the "vernacular." The introduction of Western detective fiction has made the language in *The Hawthorne Mysteries* more scientific and diverse. For example, using words such as experimental, philosophical, and pistol are more modern [6]. Meanwhile, due to the socio-political influence of the time, the vernacular language gradually emerged, and most of the author's earlier novels were written in the literary language, with breakthroughs and more

emphasis on the use of the vernacular language in *The Hawthorne Mysteries*. The author's portrayal of the protagonist "Hawthorne" draws on the portrayal of Sherlock Holmes in *A Study of the Scarlet Letter*, using the supporting characters to set off the protagonist, thus highlighting Hawthorne's image as an intellectual. The introduction of Western detective novels significantly impacts the content, language and characterization of modern Chinese detective novels [6].

5 Fairness and Justice and the Culture of the Rule of law in Western and Modern Chinese Detective Fiction.

Detective fiction, based on its purpose of bringing criminals to justice, is inevitably "law" as a keyword. However, when it comes to "law", it is difficult to avoid "fairness and justice", but the law does not represent absolute fairness and justice.

For example, in *The Return - The Milverton Case*, the victim, Mill Warden, is one of the book's most dangerous criminals in London, collecting hidden information about others and using it to extort money. At a time when reputation was of paramount importance, the "social death" caused by the destruction of another person's reputation was perhaps worse than a natural death. However, legally, they can only be held accountable for the crime of extortion and civil liability for invasion of privacy, and the crime is not punishable by death. The laws of the time could not accurately and timely sanction Milverton's crimes, and ultimately, the man in question had to heal his mental wounds by way of revenge. Moreover, Holmes writes in his reply to his refusal of Inspector Lestrade's invitation to co-investigate the murder of Milverton - "When the law fails to do justice to the parties involved, private vengeance is from this moment justified and even noble" [7].

This could mean that, as a private detective outside the system, Holmes' understanding and defense of justice is skewed compared to the law. He was often caught in a dilemma because the judicial system at that time was not perfect, and the law could not guarantee the implementation of justice, Whether it was to uphold the law or to do justice. When faced with a choice, Holmes often has a set of his own principles of disposal and sometimes even goes so far as to use illegal means to obtain evidence, to a certain extent, overstepping the law. To put it another way, the justice brought about by the law may not carry enough weight in Holmes' eyes [8].

However, a great deal of fairness and justice, as well as the concept of the rule of law, can be found in modern Chinese detective fiction. The narratives of law and justice in the works of Western detective novels have inspired the creation of modern Chinese detective novels. In Cheng Xiaoqing's *The Hawthorne Mysteries*, readers can find that in the face of evil forces, homicides and various problems and disputes, from the aristocrats down to the commoners, they must turn to the police, detectives, and other people. Both show trust and reliance on the law [9]. This greatly highlights the important role of law in society at that time, the popularization of the concept of the legal system for society at that time, not only to strengthen the common people's awareness of legal rights but also to maintain social stability of the tool. Chinese modern detective novels imitate Western detective novels, and the reference to the social reality of China at the

time presented under the legal society has the reality. Modern Chinese detective novels have been innovative in borrowing the narrative of legal issues from Western detective novels. Modern Chinese detective novels choose materials based on social reality, through the novel, to reflect the lack of fairness and justice in real society. The work is drawn from life and reflects social reality [9].

In *The Hawthorne Mysteries*, readers will also find issues such as the inadequacy of the legal system, which allows the wicked to escape the law or the loopholes in the law that the wicked will utilize for ill-gotten gains. Though the wicked ultimately go unpunished. However, *The Hawthorne Mysteries* is still popular, to a certain extent, because of the plot twists and suspenseful settings of the detective novels themselves, but also because the detective novels are based on real life and reflect social reality. Chinese detective novels also reflect, to a certain extent, the legal system problems that existed in society at that time [9]. The police officers in the society succumbed to the evil forces, and instead of fighting for justice for the underprivileged, they oppressed and bullied the common people, which led to the rise of private detectives in the society at that time [9].

Literature comes from social reality. The rise of Western and modern Chinese detective novels is largely because people do not receive fair justice in real social life. To understand the state of the legal system in modern Chinese society and people's legal awareness, *the Hawthorne Mysteries* is of great significance. Writers also express their longing for a society based on the rule of law and fairness and justice through their works [10]. The emergence of detective fiction is associated with social justice, but it is not the only decisive condition [11]. With the popularity of detective novels, writers have a routine for the creation of detective novels: "crime occurs, looking for the real killer, the most annoying arrested or dead" [12]. Western detective novels and modern Chinese detective novels in the legal culture have a certain educational significance for people, but also cause people to think about fairness and justice in society.

6 Conclusion

The creation and development of literature is inextricably linked to society, and the novel is no exception. Chinese detective novels have absorbed the local Chinese public crime novels' excellent aspects and incorporated Western novels' characteristics into their own development, gradually coming to maturity. The introduction of Western detective novels is of great significance for the liberation of people's thinking and innovation of the material of the work. People will read Chinese detective novels as a kind of spiritual support for the common people under the social reality at that time. Society could not realize fairness and justice, and people could only indulge in literature. People are mesmerized by the ideal world constructed by literary works, which is also the reason why Chinese detective novels can develop and grow.

Chinese detective novels still have shortcomings in the process of development. This is also the case with most works, which are just exposures of the dark social reality without offering solutions to the problems. Based on the original intention, the works in question operate within a limited scope of subject matter and content, primarily

crafted to explore detective themes. This constraint inherently limits the potential for extensive development within these works while also implying the feasibility of substituting alternative literary creations for such novels. When considering the enduring appeal of the detective narrative, it becomes evident that this particular piece lacks inspiration. In conclusion, the introduction of Western detective novels greatly influences the development of Chinese detective novels. However, a literary style cannot always rely on foreign works; it must continue to innovate with its own characteristics to keep up with the trends of the times.

This paper mainly analyzes and discusses the inflow of Western detective novels, the developmental similarities and differences between Chinese and Western detective novels, and the issue of fairness and justice in detective novels. During the research, this paper also suffers from a few research deficiencies. These include a smaller number of selected works, the selection of the two most typical works in China and the West, but only two works do not fully represent the characteristics of Chinese and Western detective fiction. In addition, this paper only selected three perspectives to analyze and study; the research perspective is also narrow, and many issues remain to be further thought and research.

Author's Contribution

All the authors contributed equally, and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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