A Study on the Reception of the Thoughts of Wang Fuzhi in English-Speaking World

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Abstract: The thoughts of Wang Fuzhi is an important part of Chinese Sinology, but the reception of them in English-Speaking world is not well understood by the academic circles. This article first analyzes the book reviews of professional readers of English books on Wang Fuzhi, and then uses the database (WorldCat) to obtain the global library collections of English works on him and the English translation of his books, aiming to attract more outstanding translators to participate in the promotion of Wang Fu-zhi’s thoughts to foreign countries and to provide a reference for the promotion of Chinese cultural classics to the world.

Keywords: Wang Fuzhi; English-Speaking world; reader acceptance
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1. Introduction

The thoughts of Wang Fuzhi is an important part of Chinese Sinology. It is not only the precious heritage of the Chinese people, but also the common intellectual wealth of all mankind. With the introduction and implementation of the “Chinese Culture Going Global” strategy, domestic academic circles have made useful explorations on the translation and introduction of Chinese cultural classics. However, the translation and dissemination of Wang Fuzhi’s thoughts in English-Speaking world and the existing problems has not fully been understood by the academic circles. This article mainly analyzes the book reviews of professional readers of English books on Wang Fuzhi and the global library collections of English works on Wang Fu-zhi and English translations of his books to study reception of

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Wang Fu-zhi’s thoughts in English-Speaking world.

2. An analysis of book reviews of English books on Wang Fuzhi by professional readers

“Book review is a kind of feedback behavior after a book is read. It is the most direct evaluation made by the reader on the content, form and value of a book.” [1] After Man and nature in the philosophical thought of Wang Fu-chih, the earliest book on Wang Fuzhi in English-Speaking world, was published in 1989, famous western journals published 6 book reviews of this book by renowned scholars.

Kandice Hauf published a book review in Ming Studies in the first issue of 1990. He believes that Black’s research is very meaningful because it compares Chinese philosophy with Western philosophy, and it is reiterated that Chinese cosmology and cosmology are inherently logical, but they are different from Western related theories. Professor Siu-kit Wong of the University of Hong Kong published an article in the 12th issue of Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews in 1990, claiming that the book was the deepest and most systematic study of Wang Fuzhi’s philosophy from a Western perspective at that time and that the publication of this book is of historical significance. A review of the book by Professor Benjamin Elman of the University of California, Los Angeles was published by The Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies (a journal included in A& HCI) was published in 1991. He believes that this book has taken an important step towards restoring Wang Fuzhi’s coherence and integrity as a pre-modern Chinese philosopher. The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (A&HCI indexed journal) published a book review by Columbia University Sinologist Morris Rossabi in 1991. Professor Luo Maorui commented that Blake’s work is very long, but readers who are interested in Chinese thought should insist on reading this book, because this book has a thorough analysis of Wang Fuzhi’s philosophy and a precise description of Wang Fuzhi’s thoughts. Columbia University professor John Reese published a book review of this book in The Journal of Religion (Journal of A& HCI) Press in 1992. He be-
lieved that Blake’s book is the most ambitious work among the more and more studies on Wang Fuzhi that had published in the past 20 years. He also pointed out that the second and fourth chapters of this book can not only help you better understand the neo-Confucianism of the seventeenth century, but also present a lot of original research on Song Dynasty themes, especially Zhang Zai. Professor Irene Bloom of Barnard College published a review of this book in *The Journal of Asian Studies* (SSCI indexed journal) in 1992. He commented: “As a comparative philosophy book, Blake’s book has many points worth recommending. This is a serious book with rich ideological supplements and inspiring comparisons with Western philosophy. ……For anyone interested in Wang Fu-zhi, this book is very worth reading.” [2] The well-known Chinese American philosopher Jeeloo Liu (2018) believes that this book “introduces Fu-zhi to future generations. The North American Fu-zhi scholars have a considerable influence... They have contributed to the development of Fu-zhi studies in North America.” [3]

### 3. The global library collection of English books on Wang Fuzhi and English translation of his book

“The global library collection is an important criterion for measuring the effectiveness of overseas translation.” [4] The online joint bibliographic database (WorldCat) is the world’s largest online bibliographic record database provided by the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) of the United States. The database covers 170 countries and 72,000 libraries, and can quickly retrieve the collection data of books in libraries around the world. The author retrieved a total of 238 global library collections of *Man and nature in the philosophical thought of Wang Fu-chih* through WorldCat database, including 189 in the United States, 13 in Canada, 8 in Australia, 8 in Germany, 7 in the United Kingdom, and 3 in France. 3 in the Netherlands, 3 in New Zealand, 2 in Switzerland, 1 in Sweden, and 1 in South Korea. This shows that the translation effect or the reception of this book in English-Speaking world, especially in the United States, is good, attracting many readers’ attention. Another early introduction to Wang Fuzhi’s thoughts was Ian Mc-
Mullen’s *A Passionate Realist: An Introduction to Wang Fuzhi’s Life and Political Thought* that published by Hong Kong Sunshine Book Company in 1992. There is no book review on this book, and the global library collection is small, 5 in the United States, 3 in the UK, 5 in Germany, 1 in Denmark, 1 in the Netherlands, and 2 in France. It can be seen that the acceptance of this book is not ideal. Of course, this is related to the reading needs of the author, publisher and English readers. The latest English book on Wang Fuzhi’s thoughts is *Neo–Confucian ecological humanism: an interpretive engagement with Wang Fuzhi (1619—1692)* that published in 2017. The publication of this book and the previous English books on Wang Fuzhi spans as long as 25 years, which may be a result of the fact that the study on Wang Fuzhi’s in English-Speaking could not find new research perspectives. The global library collections of this book retrieved from the WorldCat database are as follows: Paper books: 49 in the United States, 4 in Germany, 3 in Canada, 1 in Australia, 1 in Poland, 1 in France; e-books: 359 in the United States, Canada 21 companies, 5 in the Netherlands, 3 in Australia, 3 in the UK, and 2 in Sweden. Jeeloo Liu (2018) commented that “The publication of this book is a very exciting new phenomenon for the study of Fu-zhi in North America. The author combines Wang Fu-zhi’s philosophical thinking with contemporary morphology, and gives Wang Fu-zhi a fresh face. The narration of this book is clear. The argument is credible and has a good interpretation of Wang Fuzhi’s thinking.”[5]

Another English book with a strong focus on Wang Fuzhi’s thoughts is *Neo–Confucianism: Metaphysics, Mind, and Morality* published by Wiley-Blackwell Press in 2017. Professor Jeeloo Liu are summarized three major parts of her book with Wang Fuzhi’s philosophy, thoroughly establishing Wang Fuzhi as the master of Song and Ming Confucianism. Collections retrieved from the WorldCat database are: 101 in total, including 79 in the United States, 5 in Canada, 4 in Germany, 3 in the United Kingdom, 3 in Australia, 2 in the Netherlands, 1 in New Zealand, 1 in Italy, 1 in Switzerland, and 1 in Azerbaijan Home. The famous American Sinologist Professor Philip J. Ivanhoe published a review of this book on Amazon.com. He commented: “*Neo–Confucianism: Metaphysics, Mind, and Morality* conducted a deep investigation and analysis of the core philosophical views of the most interesting and influential philosophers in the Song and Ming Dynasties...”
have learned a lot from this book. Reading this book is a great enjoyment. I strongly recommend this book. “[6]

As a well-known thinker in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, Wang Fu-zhi has written a lot of works throughout his life. There are 73 works in 401 volumes. However, the translation of Wang Fu-zhi’s works in the English world is very limited. Notes on poetry from the ginger studio is the only English translation of Wang Fuzhi’s books. This translation was published earlier Man and nature in the philosophical thought of Wang Fu-chih, but it has attracted far less attention than the latter. There is only one related book review in the academic circle. And WorldCat database retrieves a total of 53 collections of it, including 33 in the United States, 6 in Germany, 4 in Australia, 2 in Canada, 2 in the UK, 2 in New Zealand, 1 in France, 1 in the Netherlands, and 1 in Singapore.

4. Conclusion

“There are many factors that affect the effect of literary translation and introduction. In a nutshell, the effect of translation and introduction is deeply influenced by the subject of the translation, the content of the translation, the means of translation, and the audience of the translation.” [7] Through the analysis of book reviews and global library collections, the author found that English works on the thoughts of Wang Fuzhi are well accepted by readers in the English world, but the reception of the English translation of his book is not ideal. The national culture department should take measures to attract more excellent translators to participate in the translation of Chinese cultural classics and to construct an effective translation model so as to promote Chinese cultural classics to the world.

Notes

[1] Miao Jia, Yu Xiaoyan. The survey and enlightenment of the acceptance of Maijia’s “De-
cripted” overseas reading——Based on the data analysis of the “Reader’s Book Review” on Amazon.com[J]. Contemporary Literature. 2019, Issue 2, p. 93


