The Popularity of *Jane Eyre* in China

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Abstract

Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* has gradually achieved a great popularity among Chinese readers from its first introduction into China in 1917 to the 1980s when China introduced an open door policy. Therefore, millions of copies of various versions of the novel have been sold in China in the past 30 years. Though the interpretations of the novel change under different political and social circumstances, it is always fascinating to readers and academic scholars in China, for it not only possesses a literary and aesthetic charm of its own, but also has rich thematic meanings and implied moral teachings somewhat similar to traditional Chinese ethics, and gives Chinese readers resonance to life. It is so well appreciated by Chinese readers that it is recommended by the Chinese national education department as one of the fundamental compulsory reading books for primary and middle school students. In fact, it seems to have melt into the Chinese culture and may have far-reaching influence in China.

It is known to all that Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* has been read by millions of readers throughout the world after its first appearance in England in 1847. Nevertheless, according to theories of Reception Aesthetics, readers in different social contexts may have different understandings of it. In fact, Chinese readers’ interpretations of *Jane Eyre* go through a series of historical changes with the passage of time, and despite all these changes, *Jane Eyre*’s popularity in China is closely related to its own unique art as well as unique Chinese cultural context.

*Jane Eyre* in Today’s China

In today’s China, it seems that almost everyone knows about *Jane Eyre*. According to a survey, *Jane Eyre* was voted one of the top 50 books that have moved the People’s Republic in 1999. Later, it is recommended by the Chinese national education department as one of the fundamental compulsory reading books for primary and middle school students. During the period of 2000–2005, there are 41 complete translated Chinese versions and 41 abridged or compiled Chinese or English versions including comics produced by different translators and published by different presses, plus seven kinds of electronic audio–visual products on the Chinese book market (Feng 266–9). Appended are the book covers of different versions of *Jane Eyre* published during 2008–2010 (see Appendix). In 2008, Hangzhou Theatre of Yue Opera turned it into beautiful Yue opera (see Movies S1 and S2). In 2009, the National Theatre of China successfully adapted it into Chinese drama and performed it at the National Centre for the Performing Arts. The two Chinese characters, ‘简’ and ‘爱’, which sound like Jane Eyre and respectively mean simple and love, are widely accepted as the Chinese name of Jane Eyre. They are even used as names of some hotels, companies, and products (such as a kind of laptop made by famous Haier company) to attract customers.

In a textbook for Grade Six Primary school students produced by Jiangsu Education Press and used in many parts of China, there is an essay entitled ‘Little Grass and Big
Tree’, which tells the story of Charlotte Bronte’s life struggle. In the very beginning of the essay, the author Tan Yushan comments: ‘The English woman writer Charlotte Bronte, who is famous for her novel Jane Eyre, is a typical example for success out of adversity’. So teachers will definitely talk about Charlotte Bronte and Jane Eyre. For instance, a teaching plan on the internet shows that the teacher will introduce the text by telling the students:

In a time when man and woman were unequal, when the rich and the poor were unequal, female self-consciousness began to wake, poor people have to rely on their own diligence and wisdom, and there appeared a woman from a poor family, who announced through the mouth of a character under her pen: ‘Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – I have as much soul as you – and full as much heart!’ She is Charlotte Bronte. Let’s just step into her time and follow her footprints to explore her secret of success.

Searching on the internet, one can never fail to find a lot of comments on Jane Eyre written by readers of all age groups. A primary school student named Huang Guohang wrote: 'Jane Eyre’s unyielding spirit is worth our learning. She faced misfortune with no dread but courage. What an admirable person she is! I learn from her the value of dignity'. A middle school student named Duanxuyang wrote:

Jane Eyre makes me understand what true love is and brings me warmth and comfort. It is particularly suitable for single child in every family, who lives with material wealth and surrounded by spiritual love, to read and appreciate Jane’s spiritual world full of self-respect, self-support, tolerance, sympathy and love.

An anonymous person commented on Jane Eyre in English:

We remember her goodness … We remember her pursuit of justice … We remember her self-respect and the clear situation on equality … We also remember her striving for life her toughness and her confidence … God hadn’t given her beauty and wealth but instead God gave her a kind mind and a thinking brain [sic] Her idea of equality and self-respect impress us so much and let us feel the power inside her body.

These are just examples of feedback of ordinary Chinese readers.

As for academic study of Jane Eyre, one finds numerous papers and dissertations. Searching CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) database by keyword Jane Eyre, one can see 746 papers formally published during the period of 1994–2010, and 57 MA dissertations written 2003–2010. Chinese scholars have been applying many western perspectives or theories to the criticism of Jane Eyre. Some agree with the writer of ‘Discussion on Jane Eyre and Gothic Tradition’ who wrote:

The reason that Jane Eyre becomes a masterpiece of world literature is closely related to the Gothic techniques of Charlotte Bronte. She uses Gothic tradition to make the novel enveloped in somber, horrible, misery and bitter color, which arouses the horror and compassion of readers and increases the effect of the work … Gothic techniques highlight the personality of characters, glamorize the horrible atmosphere, deepen the theme of the work, thereby, make the work show unusual and unfailing artistic charm.

Some are like Liu Dan, who wrote in her MA thesis: ‘Jane Eyre is a typical bildungsroman in terms of its structure and intention. The novel shows originality in character setting, plot arranging, environment and narration’ (Liu 2005: ii). Some analyze the novel with psychoanalytic methods like Shi Rubo. Shi argues in the paper ‘Blindness and Shyness – A psychological Study of Charlotte Bronte from Mr. Rochester’s Blindness’, the
reason why Rochester lost his eyes and left hand in the end is neither for the need of the plot nor for Jane’s sexual fear of Rochester, but is the reflection of Charlotte Bronte’s deep mental tendency – it is the unconscious manifestations of her shyness and inferiority; some reinterpret Jane Eyre by colonial or post colonial theories. The abstract of Liu Jing’s MA thesis declares:

The thesis aims at carrying a postcolonial study of the novel by putting it in the frameworks of Edward W. Said’s Orientalism and Gayatri C. Spivak’s study of Subalterm. The study will focus on two issues: ‘Other’ identity and the ‘peaking’ of Subalterm. (Liu 2008: iv)

Some just discuss the religious and cultural factors of the novel, like the author of the paper ‘The Unity of Humanity and Divinity – On Charlotte Bronte’s Religious View’ which points out that the novel’s unique religious consciousness is different from traditional ones and can be seen clearly from Jane Eyre’s attitudes towards Helen and St. John’s view of religion, that is, she acknowledges love, tolerance, and endurance preached by them, but cannot give up her worldly desire like them; she admires their passion and devotion to religion, but is frightened by the fever to sacrifice everything for religion. She emphasizes humanity while she worships divinity. Under the pen of the author, Jane Eyre’s departure and return to Thornfield house is both a human choice and an instruction from God. Finally, she and Mr Rochester are blessed by God to obtain human happiness. Thus, Bronte displays a kind of unity of Humanity and Divinity (Zheng 2006: 234).

However, most critics would rather like to reinterpret Jane Eyre from the feminist perspective. They assert that Jane Eyre embodies the ideal of feminism which proclaims that women are born to be equal with men and encourages women to achieve their independence and freedom by subverting the patriarchy and by establishing an equitable world. ‘A Criticism of Jane Eyre’s Female Discourse Space’, ‘On the Polar Women in Jane Eyre’, ‘Rereading Jane Eyre from the Perspective of Eco-feminism’, ‘The Female Images: Jane Eyre and the Mad Woman’, ‘The Androgynous New Image of Woman: An Analysis of Jane Eyre’ and ‘Feminist Voices in Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights’ are only representative papers. Their analysis is somewhat similar to their western counterparts.

Recently, some MA students even apply linguistic theories on the research of Jane Eyre. For examples, Zhao Yanli made a pragmatic analysis of the dialogs between Jane and Rochester to illustrate the change of their relationship; Gao Yang gave a detailed exploration of semantic structure from the perspective of Functional-Stylistics; Sui Xiaolei explained the personality of Jane Eyre in Light of the Appraisal Theory based on Halliday’s Systemic-Functional Linguistics. Nevertheless, the comparative literary studies of Jane Eyre and some classic Chinese literary works are much more interesting. For instance, both Den Na and Yu Hongling’s MA theses make a comparative study of Jane Eyre and Lin Daiyu (heroine of Chinese classic novel Red Mansion’s Dream), who are both orphans living under another’s roof but are unwilling to give up the right to fight for an independent mind and true love with their mighty heart despite different cultural backgrounds; Lv Jie’s paper focuses on Jane Eyre and Zi Jun (heroine of modern Chinese writer Lu Xun’s work Mourning the Dead) for they both are New Women fighting against old traditions in male-dominated society. Feng Xiaoli’s paper discusses the marriages of Mr Rochester and Zhou Puyuan (hero of modern Chinese dramatist Chao Yu’s work Thunder Storm), and regards patriarchal society as the root of all misfortunes.

Another unique study concerning Jane Eyre in China is directed to the translation versions. For examples, the paper ‘Comparative Study on the Image of Men and Women in the Two Translation Versions of Jane Eyre’ tries to reveal feminist consciousness and
the identity of the woman translator by comparing the female translator Zhu Qingying and the male translators Zeng Fanhai and Wu Jianghao’s translation of the images of men and women; the paper ‘An Analytical Comparison of the Translation of Rhetorical Devices in the Three Chinese Versions of Jane Eyre from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence’\textsuperscript{20} tries to prove that translators should not only recognize different rhetorical devices, but also understand their functions and stylistic features; the MA thesis ‘The Role of Ideology in Literary Translation—A case Study of Three Chinese Versions of Jane Eyre’\textsuperscript{21} makes a detailed comparative analysis of three Chinese versions of Jane Eyre appearing in different historic periods, comparing non-linguistic and linguistic aspects to testify to the role of ideology in literary translation on a micro level.

As Jane Eyre is so widely read and discussed, there also emerge some reflections on the acceptance of Jane Eyre in China in the 21st century. Feng Qian’s book British Heather In China – On the Spread and Influence of the Bronte Sisters’ Works in China, Liu Yafen’s MA thesis ‘A History of the Chinese Interpretation of Jane Eyre’ (parts of it are published later in The Journal of Changsha University), Xu Ju’s paper ‘On Jane Eyre’s Acceptance and Evolution In China’ and Gong Beifang’s paper ‘Jane Eyre and Cultural Filtration – View on the Acceptance of Jane Eyre in China from Translators’ Prefaces’\textsuperscript{22} all deal more or less with the research on Jane Eyre’s popularity in China, to which we shall return.

Jane Eyre in Previous China

It is believed that the first Chinese readers of Jane Eyre were those who studied in the schools sponsored by Christian missionaries or those who went to western countries at the end of the 19th century when the western armies smashed the door of the Chinese imperatorial Empire. Though the Chinese were proud of their traditional culture, they began to realize that they must ‘subdue the enemies by learning from their strong points’.\textsuperscript{23} In the early 20th century, more youth began to receive western education, and were involved in New Culture Movement by introducing modern western ideas through translation of a wide variety of western works to enlighten the people. Jane Eyre was probably imported to China during this period.

According to the obtained materials, the initial public approach to Jane Eyre in China was done by Lin Deyu who made a brief introduction of the Bronte Sisters in his article about Western Women Novelists published in a Chinese women’s magazine in 1917.\textsuperscript{24} In 1919, there appeared an overwhelming surge of humanism under the banner of ‘science and democracy’ in China and the self-consciousness of the ever marginalized female was evoked by it. No doubt, Jane Eyre with its distinguished female characteristics immediately caught the attention of the feminist supporters. In 1925, the Chinese abridged adaptation of Jane Eyre made by the Chinese translator Zhou Shoujuan appeared under the title Chong Guang Ji, which means to see light again (probably referring to Jane Eyre’s overcoming of dark period of life) (Feng 41). Ten years later, the Commercial Press published another abridged adaption by Wu Jianguang with the name Gu Nü Piao Ling Ji, which means a story of an orphaned girl, had been welcomed by so many Chinese readers that it had been reprinted seven times before 1948. Meanwhile, Shanghai Life Book Press also published the first complete Chinese translated version by Li Jiye under the title of The Autobiography of Jane Eyre in 1936. Later, Li Jiye’s translation was reprinted by Chongqing Cultural Life Press in 1945 and Shanghai Cultural Life Press in 1946 with the title Jane Eyre.

Soon after the translated version came out, Jane Eyre aroused immediate attention from Chinese critics. According to Feng Qian’s study, they all agreed that Charlotte Bronte
had originality and uniqueness, a vivid realistic description of life. Charlotte Bronte was
deemed to ‘have too many desires and romantic ideas’ and ‘was determined to describe
the social reality’ by Jing Donglei in his Outline of English Literature (Jing 1937: 420); Jing
Shisheng, editor of Outline of European Literature, stated that Charlotte Bronte ‘paved
another way for love stories’ (Jing 1931: 326); Zhong Hua, editor of Women’s Magazine,
wrote that ‘among all the outstanding female writers in the history of English literature,
the Bronte Sisters are worth our attentions’ (Zhong 95).

However, little systematic academic study was taken in China in 1930s and 1940s due
to the historical and cultural context of China at that time when China was only a semi-
feudal and semi-colonial country. Oppressed by bureaucrats and trampled by the western
powers, most Chinese lived in hunger and misery; there were hardly any people who
could concentrate their minds on literary study. Even if there were such people, they
would rather focus on works of Byron, Tolstoy, Goethe, Hugo, etc. which had a strong
criticism of the ruling class, a forceful call for social reform and could be used to awaken
the Chinese people’s spirit of rebellion against feudalism, capitalism and colonialism.
Compared with these works, Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre, which had a romantic illusion
of love, seemed less significant. Though it may shed hope on the liberation of Chinese
women who were taught to desire nothing, to swallow other people’s misery and to eat
their own bitterness for thousands of years, it is impossible for women to follow Jane
Eyre’s example to gain their independence and freedom while both males and females
were enslaved in China.

It was not until the establishment of the People’s Republic of China that most Chinese
could enjoy a sound and happy life. The mass turned into masters of the country.
Women came out of their homes to work together with men. Most children go to
school to receive a formal education. According to an article on the influential Xinhua-
net, 80% of China’s total population of 550 million in 1949 is illiterate, but then 150
million people had been taught to read and write in all kinds of spare time schools or
evening schools by the end of 1960 in the literacy campaign advocated by the new gov-
ernment.25 Under this circumstance, Li Jiye’s translated version of Jane Eyre had mounted
to five reprints of 8,000 copies by April 1954. From April 1956 to January 1958, its
revised edition had tripled to a total of 16,000 copies (Liu 2002: 13). Many readers were
moved to tears. However, since the academic field had been controlled firmly by the
socialist government under the influence of leftist extremism which advocated that the
overriding criterion for the arts was to serve politics, the literary criticism of Jane
Eyre was seriously affected by political situation.

In 1955, in commemoration of the centennial death of Charlotte Bronte, a Chinese
magazine published only a report of the memorial articles on a British magazine The
Marxism Quarterly, which remarked that Bronte ‘might unconsciously turned out to be
the representatives of thousands and millions of the unfortunate and the oppressed’ (Liu
2002: 19). In 1958, there published a pamphlet entitled On Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre
which is a collection of three articles written by young teachers of Beijing University and
a Chinese translation of the Russian preface to the English edition of Jane Eyre published
in 1958 in the USSR. The basic tone of the pamphlet was to criticize the capitalist social
ideology conveyed in the novel in case that the Chinese readers may be corrupted and
distracted from the socialist construction. It declared, ‘It is hard for our generation to
comprehend the happiness of love which the writer described in the novel … We are
used to connecting the personal happiness with the collective and the whole society’
(Zhang et al. 1958: 19). Jane Eye, Rochester, St. John were respectively labeled as petty
bourgeois, oppressive landlord and accomplice of imperialists, and their conflicts with
working class would definitely lead to their reactions against the socialism. Even though it confirmed that ‘the author did expose the female’s miserable lives under capitalist system to some extent and tried to pave a new way for female liberation’, it continued to say, ‘Jane Eyre could never find the right way to solve female problems completely for she did not devote herself into the course of working people’, ‘the lack of connection between Jane and the working people led to her final compromise to the society’ (Zhang et al. 1958: 19). It seems that the critics at that time in China almost connected everything with class conflict.

The Foreign Literature Reference Book published in 1958 also pointed out that the characteristic of Jane Eyre was to display the individual’s isolated life in the capitalist world. In a widespread English text book first published in 1962 by Xu Guozhang, a famous professor of Beijing Foreign Language University, a text entitled ‘Life at Gateshead Hall’, which is an adaptation of the first chapter of Jane Eyre, was appended a note that

Jane Eyre is a long novel which is quite successful in description of Jane Eyre’s childhood. The heroine had a strong character in the beginning, but she gradually gave up her rebellion against feudal sexual discrimination and depended on the landlord Mr. Rochester by willingly being his wife. (Xu 77)

As many intellectuals were terribly persecuted in the Cultural Revolution – a violent mass movement in the People’s Republic of China starting in 1966 and officially ending with Mao Zedong’s death in 1976 – people were particularly cautious to speak out their own minds in public. Though thought control was slackened from the end of 1970s, literary critics still found it hard to free themselves from the constraints of formal dominating discourse. For example, in the ‘Bronte Sisters’ section in Biographies of Famous Foreign Writers, a two-volume book published in February 1979, one of the professionals of the Foreign Literature Study Institute of CASS, Zhu Hong, praised Charlotte Bronte for creating a new type of heroine who is a low born orphan but capable of the most sincere, delicate, and passionate emotions utterly distinct from the affected bourgeois ladies in popular novels; yet at the same time, she also criticized Jane’s victory, all the favorable outcomes for her, and the coincidences in the latter half of the novel as utter clichés of vulgar bourgeois novels. Yet for many ordinary readers, especially some people who suffered during the Culture Revolution, Jane Eyre always remained their favorite at their heart because they ‘in a sensitive and desirous age, feel the same with Jane Eyre, the loneliness, the pain, and the need to love and to hate’ (Liang 20).

The popularity of Jane Eyre was on a dramatic rise since the British film Jane Eyre directed by Delbert Mann was screened in China in 1979. People were moved by the theme of love and humanity especially after they had long been taught to sacrifice their personal feelings for the causes of proletariat revolution. Some influential newspapers and magazines like Guangming Daily, Xinhua Daily, Workers’ Daily, China Youth, etc. all published readers’ reviews of Jane Eyre. Before long, new translation versions of Jane Eyre flourished to meet the demand of the readers. Among them, Zhu Qingying’s (published by Shanghai Literary Art Press in 1980, 1988, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2001), Wu Junxie’s (published by People’s Literature Press in 1990 and 2002) and Huang Yuanshen’s (published by Yilin Press in 1993, 1994, 1997) are the most influential ones. Meanwhile, several original editions and Chinese-English versions for the English learners also came off the press, followed by the Kazakh version and Uighur version for the ethnic groups in China.

With the political and economic development of China since the 1980s, Chinese people became increasingly connected with the world, and they were eager to communicate
with the western countries. The new upsurge in English language and culture learning promoted research on *Jane Eyre* which turns to be what Liu Yafen claimed in the abstract of her thesis:

The period from 1987 to 2000 witnessed the vigorous introduction and application of modern western critical approaches and theories. The interest in *Jane Eyre* found its full expression in the first, and so far the only, academic meeting for *Jane Eyre* and Wuthering Heights in Shanghai in December 1987, attended by 37 participants from more than ten universities. In that very year, the monopoly of the traditional sociohistorical approach was abruptly broken by feminist criticism and the study of biblical influence. From then on, Marxist criticism is primarily found in literary textbooks of various kinds and levels. Feminist criticism assumed the major role in the following 5 or 6 years, though its influence never ceases to be. In the first 7 years, with the heated introduction of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s feminist criticism of *Jane Eyre*, the madwoman was in the spotlight and was the topic of the majority of the scholarly papers. In addition, feminine consciousness, biblical influence, deconstructive reinterpretations of Jane Eyre and Rochester, and comparative studies of characters, authors or works, etc. add to the vigorousness of the study. (Liu 2002: iv–v)

The changed tone of Zhu Hong is a good example. In 1987, she wrote a paper entitled ‘Jane Eyre and Feminist Awareness’ to point out that *Jane Eyre* showed a feminist awareness by revealing the oppression in the male-dominated world and by creating some positive strong-minded female images to resist the mode of ‘Angel in the house’.

She criticized Rochester as an oppressor of women and sympathized with the madwoman Bertha. In 1988, Han Mingzhong’s paper ‘Feminist Literary View: On Madwoman and *Jane Eyre*’ brings Chinese critics directly into attention of *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Han also wrote ‘Jane Eyre Who Sits on the Window sill’ to reveal Jane’s marginalized status and her penetrating mental discernment through the interpretation of the window sill which she believes symbolizes Jane’s humble social status.

Accordingly, the dominating textbooks on foreign literary history began to reevaluate *Jane Eyre* too. The book edited by Zhu Weizhi and published in 1985 praises *Jane Eyre* develops a school of its own in writing about Women’ (Zhu 343); the book edited by Zheng Kelu and published in 1999 regards *Jane Eyre* is a classic not only in British literature but also in world literature’ (Zheng et al. 1999: 246); the book edited by Li Funing and published in 2001 confirms *Jane Eyre* describes ‘a unique character who struggles hard against heavy emotional and spiritual burden of life without yielding’ (Li 2001: 274); and the book co-edited by Hou Weirui and Li Weiping published in 2005 declares Charlotte Bronte ‘displays the particular writing gift of a talented woman writer … and brings a kind of strong self-consciousness to English novel’ (Hou and Li 326).

*Factors Related to the Popularity of Jane Eyre in China*

Why has Jane Eyre been so popular in China in the past decades? One cannot provide an answer in a word or two. According to Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser’s reception theory, the reader is a decisive factor and an active subject in the history of reception of the text. So the Chinese readers’ special reading background should be taken into account.

First, all human beings have common concerns about humanity as they may have some similar life experiences in different human societies. Therefore, themes like morality, religion, social class, gender relations, love and passion are permanently discussed in all literary works and welcomed by readers of different time and space. Hence, *Jane Eyre*, which
illustrates these themes quite well in a unique way, attracts readers at home and abroad. In the case of Chinese readers, they are particularly interested in themes like individual development, romantic love, and women’s liberation under their special historical and social background. For instance, until the beginning of the 20th century, young people still could not base their marriage on love, but on parents’ decision under the constraints of the feudal social system in China; women had no say at home, let alone in society for thousands of years; the Chinese cultural tradition advocates collectivism instead of individualism; under the extreme leftist communists’ political control in 1950s and 1960s, people could hardly maintain their personalities. When they finally come across Jane Eyre’s story of romantic love, personal struggle in life and unique development of personality, they cannot suppress their emotion any more. They admire Jane’s courage for pursuit of love and happiness, and wish to follow her example. Thus, they read and reread the stories and spread it quickly among their friends.

Second, readers are usually fond of reading a novel when they find the moral values it conveys are somewhat similar to theirs. Though the heroine Jane Eyre is a British girl, she has virtues which are in accordance with traditional Chinese ethics. For instance, Chinese people cherish friendship and will risk their lives for the sake of their friends. Jane Eyre just does exactly the same like most Chinese when her best friend Helen is isolated for sickness. She manages to be at her bed and hugs her all night regardless of the possibility of getting infected. For another instance, Chinese people are taught by their ancestor Confucius, one should show their love, benevolence, sympathy, charity, humanity and kindness to every human being. ‘Only a benevolent person is able to like or dislike people who deserve to be liked or disliked’.33 Jane’s clear love and hatred, her fight against John Reed’s violent tyrannies, and her aversion straight to Aunt Reed all prove she is a benevolent person. Though she is poor, she has a noble soul of self-respect, self-confidence and self-reliance. She even dares to contradict the peremptory headmaster and never yields in her early years. She says to Helen

If people are always kind and obedient to those who are cruel and unjust, the wicked people would have it all their own way: they would never feel afraid, and so they would never alter, but would grow worse and worse. When we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard; I am sure we should- so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again. (Bronte 57)

She never attempts to be Rochester’s mistress for the sake of money. When she knows that he has a mad wife, she runs away from Rochester. She behaves just as Chinese people usually believe: one should sometimes restrain their love for some moral considerations. After she inherits a large sum of money, she shares with her cousins. She certainly reminds Chinese people of their true hero who ‘neither riches nor honors can corrupt him; neither poverty nor humbleness can make him swerve from principle; and neither threats nor forces can subdue him’.34 So, it is not strange at all that Jane Eyre becomes a favorite fictional figure for Chinese readers.

Third, a good novel must be a real work of art. The particular settings, interesting plots, dramatic development of climax, unexpected endings, are all very important for readers. With a realistic style, gothic characteristics, implied modern Cinderella fairy tale structure, Charlotte Bronte wrote a completely new fascinating love story with rich meanings. The first person narrative, which presents a candid self-revealing of the heroine, just exerts a highly enjoyable intimacy and sincerity on the readers who are driven by the power of her language, which is simple but forceful, impressive and beautiful. Take a look at some sentences and expressions like the following ones:
If all the world hated you, and believed you wicked, while your own conscience approved you, and absolved you from guilt, you would not be without friends. (Bronte 69)

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (Bronte 111)

Such remarks are especially appreciated by Chinese readers not only because of their eloquent arguments but also because of their distinguished linguistic style. The neat and parallel sentence structures consequently meet Chinese’s aesthetic expectation, for the traditional Chinese writings like Tang Poems and Song Lyrics are all formally structured and profoundly imbricated with graceful rhythms. In particular, when these sentences were translated and broadcasted over the radio by emotional Chinese dubbing actors and actresses in 1979, millions of Chinese audience were ready to imitate. Compared with Jane Austin’s ironic writing style in *Pride and Prejudice*, Bronte’s direct words are more welcome to most ordinary Chinese people.

Fourth, good translators and adaptors are always helpful for the spread of foreign literary works. In the case of *Jane Eyre*, the Chinese translators’ efforts are obviously of great significance, since most of the readers only read the translated Chinese versions, and it is known to all, translation is a creative work of translators who have their own unique understandings of the original text and whose mastery of two different languages may lead to completely different results. As the Chinese translators together with the Chinese writers take Confucian Literary Views of Utilitarianism for granted and consider it their responsibilities to diffuse culture, change people’s ideas and world views through their writing of literature, they are very consciously instead of unconsciously to work under the influence of their own social ideologies. As a matter of fact, research of literary translation by western scholars shows, the translations are somewhat the products of translators’ manipulation according to the source text under the effects of target cultural ideology. Lefevere in his work ‘Beyond the Process: Literary Translation in Literature and Literary Theory’35 argues that literary systems do not occur in a vacuum, but within the ‘ideology’ milieu of an era. He regards ideology as a set of discourses wrestling over interests that are in some way relevant to the maintenance or interrogation of power structures central to a whole form of social and historical life. He says,

Perhaps the link between ideology on the one hand and strategies for solving Universe-of-Discourse and linguistic problems on the other is as obvious as in the justifications used by translators to maintain in their translations some of the linguistic and cultural differentiations. (Lefevere 48)

This can be seen quite clearly from the different Chinese translations of *Jane Eyre* that appeared in different historic periods and by translators of different background. For example, Jiang Xiaojuan in her paper ‘The Reproduction of Gender Identity in Translation – Comparative study of Three Chinese Versions of *Jane Eyre*’ compared the female translator Zhu Qingying’s version in 1988 with two different male translators’ version in 2006 and praised Zhu for her strengthening of the female awareness in the original works while the two male translators sometimes continued to show men’s superiority over women in their translation.36
As to the various adaptations of the novel including simplified Chinese versions, simplified English versions, cartoons, radio, film, and opera, they help make the original story of the novel available to people of all age groups and of different tastes. In the example of the Yue opera version, the adaptor combined the traditional Chinese singing art with modern dance and stage technique, thus adding new aesthetic value to the novel and making it ever more attractive in China.

Fifth, the upsurge of English language and culture study contributes greatly to the popularity of *Jane Eyre*. Ever since the 1980s, with the increase of social, cultural and economic communication between China and English speaking countries, the Chinese government began to attach professional promotion to a person’s language skills and to emphasize English teaching in schools. At present, many Chinese children began their English learning at the kindergarten, and all primary school students are required to learn English. University students who cannot pass the national Standard English test cannot get their degrees. In this circumstance, *Jane Eyre* with its various English adaptations suitable for different levels of English learners comes into being. University English majors are encouraged by their teachers to read the original novel of *Jane Eyre* and instructed to write theses on it. As a result, the academic teaching and research reinforce *Jane Eyre*’s world classic position.

Finally, the booksellers are faced with a huge market for the consumption of various versions of *Jane Eyre*. Of course, they can hardly lose the opportunity to earn large profit at a low cost, because the novel has already expired copyright protection. Some of them are serious about the adaptations for different reading groups and produce audio or video texts to help English learners; some of them unscrupulously hire anyone to retranslate it by copying some of the existing translated versions. Anyhow, their commercial sales promotions more or less help the spread of the novel.

Whether *Jane Eyre* with its originality in theme and art will continue to appeal to Chinese readers in the future remains a question. But right now, it seems to have integrated within Chinese culture, and may have far-reaching influence in China.

**Supporting Information**

Additional Supporting Information may be found via the following website links:

**Movie S1.** The burning down of Thornfield.

**Movie S2.** Rochester’s courtship of Jane.

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**Short Biography**

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Notes

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1 The result of the survey was published on Guangming Daily, 24 September 1999, and can also be seen on web version of People's Daily, a nationwide comprehensive newspaper run by the CPC Central Committee. Web 24 September 1999 from: http://web.peopledaily.com.cn/zdxw/21/19990924/1999092422115.html.


6 Web 29 June 2009 from: http://oshu.edu.cn/e/20090629/4b8bcbdec32d.shtml.


11 See Shi Rubo. 'Blindness and Shyness – A Psychological Study of Charlotte Bronte from Mr. Rochester's Perspective.' MA thesis, Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, P. R. China, 2004. [徐宇琴.‘简爱和呼啸山庄里的女性呼声,硕士学位论文.]

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23 See Han Mingzhong. ‘Jane Eyre Sitting on the Windowsill.’ [韩明忠. 简爱坐在窗台上.]

24 See Zhu Hong. ‘The Bronte Sisters.’ [朱虹. 布朗特姐妹.]


28 The popularity of the film in China is closely related to the successful translation and dubbing. In 1979, most Chinese people could only hear the record of the film over the radio instead of seeing the film in the cinema.


31 See Han Mingzhong. ‘Feminist Literary View: On Madwoman and Jane Eyre.’ [韩明忠. 女性主义文学观: 疯女人与简爱.]


33 See Confucius Analects Book IV, Chapter III. ‘唯仁者, 能爱人, 能恶人. ’ [《论语·里仁》.]

34 See Meniscus, Book VI, Chapter II. ‘富贵不能淫, 威武不能屈, 贫贱不能移’. [《孟子·滕文公下》.]


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