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Research Article

## Thomas Hardy Reception and Reputaion in China

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Thomas Hardy has been one of the best-loved novelists to Chinese readers for nearly a century, which is an uncanny phenomenon in the circle of literature reception and circulation in China. It seems that Hardy has some magic power to have kept attracting Chinese literature lovers with his keen insight into nature, profound reflection on humanity and whole-hearted concern about human fate in the vast universe. Hardy's works saturated with nostalgic sentiments for the traditional way of rural life exert unusual resonance in Chinese readers in terms of receptional aesthetic. There is no denial that Hardy is rather loved and admired by generation upon generation of Chinese literates, which can find expression in his exceeding popularity among readers from all trades and walks, from all levels, which ranges from middle school students to professors. In China, his prestige ranks only after Shakespeare among English persons of letters. Together with Tennyson, Browning and Arnold, Hardy is acclaimed as one of the four giant Victorian poets<sup>1</sup> in *The Chronology of the Nineteenth-Century English Literature* edited by some renowned experts and scholars with Qian Qing<sup>2</sup>, the professor of literature in Beijing Foreign Studies University, as the chief editor. Fact shows that Hardy, as a well-known novelist, has the largest number of readers even today in the Era of Information when people would not like to care so much about literature as before. Many university degree seekers like to have their dissertations written about Hardy and his works. Each year large quantities of M.A. and B.A. dissertations are produced on his novels, and larger quantities of papers are published in various journals at all levels. This hot passion for Hardy seems to be lasting in the future.

In his paper 'Review and Analysis of Study of Hardy's Novels in New China in the Last 60 Years', Zhang Zhongzai, an established Hardy researcher, indicates that 'among all the British writers Hardy enjoys the largest number of readers in China. Ordinary Chinese readers seldom read Shakespeare, but they read Hardy'.<sup>3</sup> Harold Orel exclaims about the largest group of Chinese readers in *The Unknown Thomas Hardy: Lesser Aspects of Hardy's Life and Career*. He says "Hardy is the most widely-read English novelist in the People's Republic of China". "And Hardy is the best-known and best-

liked English novelist in India."<sup>4</sup> Hardy also enjoys a high reputation in Japan, whose Thomas Hardy Society founded in 1957 published *A Thomas Hardy Dictionary* in 1984. This statement can be strengthened by the large store of Hardy works and research books kept in college libraries. Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto is taken for example, where I did some research in 2005. It has almost all Hardy's works including his seven volumes of letters edited by Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate as well as a considerable number of research books on Hardy. All the information may lead to the conclusion that Hardy is one of the best-loved English novelists in Japan, too. In a sense, it can be seen as a miniature of the globalization of Hardy and it symbolizes the global fame of Hardy to some extent.

Hardy has been a familiar friend to Chinese readers, but Hardy personally knew little about China and almost no remarks about China can be found in all his works including poems, novels and stories, except two occasions where he mentions 'Chinese'. One is about Chinese Shadows<sup>5</sup> when he talks about *The Dynasts* in his letter to the editors of *The Times* in *The Times Literary Supplement* on February 19, 1904. The other is a rumor-like hearsay about the Chinese folk way of moulding infants into grotesque toys by continued compression for pleasure in *The Woodlanders*.<sup>6</sup> Chinese readers do not get to know Hardy within a day or two, but it has taken a century for them to get acquainted and become friends with him. It is a long twisted journey in heart and soul, and a ceaseless cross-cultural communication between England and China, West and East. This year of 2017 is a truly memorable time, for Hardy has mentally travelled in China for 100 years. Just as the saying goes, there is no story without coincidence. It was this year last century that Hardy was introduced into China and he has spiritually settled in this mysterious large eastern country since then. It is so thought-provoking that I got the inspiration and impulse to write something about this century-long friend of Chinese readers in response to the theme for this year's competition – Hardy and the Media – in honour of this close friend of ours.

'Benighted Travellers' was the first Chinese translation of Hardy's works as one of the fifty stories in *European and*

*American Short Novels III* which was translated and edited by Zhou Shoujuan and published by Shanghai China Bureau in 1917. The next decade was recognized in the academic field as the real effective period when Hardy was introduced on a certain scale into China. The story 'To Please His Wife', translated by Li Bai, was published in No. 11 edition of Volume 12 of *Fiction Monthly* on November 10, 1921. Attached to the story is a brief introduction of Hardy and the translator's comments about Hardy's philosophy and writing style. On November 10, 1923, two poems, 'Her Initials' and 'I Look into My Glass', appeared in the same journal. The translator is Xu Zhimo, a famous Chinese poet contemporary with Hardy. Since then, Xu's translation of the name Hardy as Hadai<sup>7</sup> has been used as the standardized Chinese name for Hardy. Afterwards another two poems translated by Xu, 'The Wound' and 'The Division', appeared in the same journal. Xu was studying in Cambridge University and admired Hardy so much that he managed to pay a respectful visit to Hardy, about which Xu wrote 'An Afternoon I Visited Hardy', an essay that is collected in an anthology of Xu's essays. Xu wrote some other articles to introduce Hardy to Chinese readers, for example, 'On Thomas Hardy's Poems' published in *East Magazine*, 'Hardy tired of the World' in *Morning Poems Supplement*, 'A Simple Analysis on Hardy's Works' and 'Pessimistic Hardy' in *Crescent Moon*. Thinking highly of Hardy and his works, Xu affirmed Hardy's great literary achievements in creating pastoral colors and exploring inner humanity. He emphasized Hardy's creativity, inspiration and artistic mastery in description of country landscape and in reflection of rural life in the special historical period when England was undergoing the seismic social transformation propelled by industrialization and urbanization. In Xu's time, some critics labeled Hardy as a pessimist, but Xu disagreed with them. Xu held that Hardy can rival Shakespeare and that Jude is so impressive a fiction character as Hamlet. In 1928, Xu timely reported the demise of Hardy and his funeral in *Fiction Monthly* and expressed his great regret for losing a friend and distinguished writer. In 1929, Guo Youshou translated *Jude* and got it published in *Golden Room Monthly* as the first Chinese version of Hardy's novels. In the late 1920s, some other stories by Hardy, such as 'Life's Little Ironies', 'Alicia's Diary' and 'An Imaginative Woman', were translated into Chinese and published.

The fact that Chinese readers gradually got to know Hardy is attributed much to the ceaseless enthusiasm and efforts of the early Hardy lovers. In the October of 1934, the Chinese version of *Tess* came out. It was translated by Lv Tianshi and published by the Chinese Book Bureau. In the following two years, *The Return of the Native* and *Tess* translated by Zhang Guroo were published by Business Publishing House in Shanghai. In 1937, *The Dynasts* was translated into Chinese by Du Heng. In 1944, the Great Age Press published *Jude the Obscure* translated by Lv Tianshi. In 1953, Zhang Guroo's version of *Tess* was printed four times with 14,800 copies by the Cultural Work Press and the next year, his version of *The Return of the Natives* was printed four times with 15,000 copies by Shanghai Culture and Art Press. The 1950s saw

some research papers focused on *Tess*, *The Return of the Native* and *Jude*, but the next two decades were almost a blank in foreign literature research for some reasons, particularly the political reason. That's just the times of the natural disasters and the Great Cultural Revolution, especially the latter which had a great impact upon cultural construction in the sixties and seventies. In the 1980s, Hardy reading and research entered a new hot age, in which most of Hardy's major novels had the Chinese versions – Shiheng and Shuqin's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1955), Zou Hailun's *The Woodlanders* (1988), Wang Zhenchang and Liu Chunfang's *Desperate Remedies* (2004), Wang Baihua and Zhou Rongsheng's *The Well-beloved* (1994), Yan Weiming and Qi Shouhua's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1994), Yu Shusheng's *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1981), Chen Yijun and Zeng Hu's *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1982), Lan Renzhe's *A Collection of Thomas Hardy's Poems* (1987), Zhang Chong's *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1997). In 2004 the People's Literature Press published *An Anthology of Hardy's Works* which is composed of six major novels, a selection of stories and a selection of poems. Zhang Ling and Zhang Yang are the translators and editors of the selection of stories. The selection of poems *Thomas Hardy – Selected Poems* was translated and edited by Zhang Xinmin. So far ten of Hardy's novels have had their Chinese versions, but the following four, *Two on the Tower*, *A Laodicean*, *The Trumpet-Major* and *Under the Greenwood Tree*, which are calling for Chinese translations.

Hardy is an indispensable element of British literature studies as well as in foreign literature studies in China. *Tess* and *Jude* are in the list of books stipulated by Higher School Teaching Syllabus for English Majors. *Tess* is also included in the 100 books recommended by the Higher Education Bureau of the Chinese Ministry of Education. Hardy's novels, particularly *Tess*, are the compulsory content of the text books for both undergraduates and graduates in education of liberal arts in Chinese universities. Usually an excerpt of *Tess* follows a general biographical introduction of the author. Such is the normal way Hardy is presented in Chinese literature text books. The special Chinese Hardy complex makes this time-torn man an unavoidable part in foreign literature studies in China. Unfolding a panorama of rural England and its idiosyncratic life, Hardy's novels partially serve as the historical document and help Chinese readers learn about the rural society in the southwestern England in the nineteenth century. In his novels, they can go back into history and have a cross-century dialogue with his humble but optimistic workfolks in his remote but harmonious hometown where he almost spent all his lifetime. Like a conjuror, literature can break through the borders of time and space. It is this mysterious function of literature that makes it possible for people to meet their historical predecessors. They wander Hardy's half-real and half-dream world through his novels. They roam the forest of Chase, the Vale of Blackmoor, the woodland of Little Hintock, the Valley of Great Dairies and Egdon Heath; they tour the village of Marlott, the town of Casterbridge, the prefecture of Dorset and the Kingdom of Wessex; they visit the Malthouse, the Greenhill Fair, the

Hiring Fair, the Pure Drop, the Talbothays Dairy; they watch the maypole and gipsying dances, the carnival of Chaseborough, the bonfire celebration, the Mummer's plays, the Skimmington rides and the Midsummer Eve activities; they hear the melodious ballads of Spotted Cow, the Boy and the Mantle, the Sheep-shearing Song and the Banks of Allen Water. They browse the Stonehenge, the rainbarrow, the Ring (one Roman amphitheatre) and the Roman street. They get acquainted with many people with distinct personalities cultivated in and marked by the land – Clym, Eustacia, Henchard, Jude, Tess, Dick, Fancy, Bathsheba, Oak and Poorgrass. Together with those characters, they sense the festivities of Christmas, Harvest Home Suppers and Sheepshearing Feasts. Each time they read Hardy's novel they experience a heart-to-heart communication with both the author and his characters; each time they read Hardy's poem they feel a soul-to-soul interaction with the poet and his heroes. The more they read, the better-informed they get of England and its occidental culture. In this case, Hardy bridges the two nations in the form of literature.

Not only is Hardy widely-read, but he is also widely-researched in China. He and his works are the best-loved topics for literature scholars. Hardy research has achieved a bumper harvest. In 1937, the first book of Hardy research, *A Critical Biography of Hardy* written by Li Tianyi, was published by the Business Publishing House, which symbolizes a new stage of Hardy research in China. *A Collection of Hardy Studies* edited by Chen Taoyu was published by Chinese Social Science Press in 1992. A lot of influential books have been written as the key result of Hardy research. They are Zhang Zhongzai's *Thomas Hardy – Thought and Writing* (1987), Nie Zhenzhao's *A Melancholy and Staunch Novelist – A Study of Thomas Hardy's Novels* (1991), Wu Di's *Hardy Studies* (1994) and *New Studies in Thomas Hardy* (2009), Zhu Junqiang's *Hardy – A Cross-Century Giant* (1994), Zhang Ling's *Hardy* (2002), Yan Xuejun's *Studies on Hardy's Poems* (2007), Fang Liqing's *Thomas Hardy Studies* (2007)<sup>8</sup>, Din Shizhong's *An Ethical Study of Hardy's Novels* (2008), Gao Wanlun's *Marriage, Feminism, Novel: Thematic Studies in Hardy and Laurence* (2009) and He Ning's *Thomas Hardy Studies: a Critical Survey* (2011). Qi Shouhua and William Morgan co-authored in *English Voices in Tragic Harmony: Essays on Thomas Hardy's Fiction and Poetry* and got it published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press in 2001. A survey has been made on the number of Hardy research papers in the authoritative CNKI<sup>9</sup> and the result shows that about 830 papers with Hardy in the title have been published in various Chinese academic journals since 2001 and 138 papers with Tess/Tess in the title. Another one on the dissertations in the same data shows that there have appeared 186 M.A. dissertations and 3 doctorate dissertations with Hardy in the title and 162 M.A. dissertations with Tess/Tess in the title since 2001.<sup>10</sup> These statistics manifest how well-received Hardy is in China. Apart from that, some English papers written by Chinese researchers are published in foreign journals.

Hardy research in China witnesses a conspicuous imbalance in his novels and poems. Hardy's novels have been playing the biggest role, while his poems are taken as relatively obscure. Not every novel of Hardy is favoured; the major novels classified as Character and Environment Novels are the most favored compared with the lesser novels. The Hardy page on the Wikipedia site states that Hardy gained fame as the author of such 4 novels as follows.<sup>11</sup> *Tess* (No. 28) and *Far from the Madding Crowd* (No. 48), were listed in the top 50 on the BBC's survey [The Big Read](#).<sup>12</sup> *Jude* was NO. 111 and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* was No. 115. The Chinese situation is similar and *The Return of the Native* should be added to the list. *Tess* is the best-loved and most widely-read among Hardy's novels. *Tess* plays such an important role and is so popular with Chinese readers that it consecutively has new Chinese versions. Since it was first introduced into China by Lv Tianshi, it has kept its privilege with the largest number of Chinese translations, for it is regarded as the crown novel which represents Hardy's highest level in fiction creation and established Hardy as one of the most influential novelists in world literature. Nowadays it is no overstatement to say that *Tess* is a household artistic image in China somewhat like *Sister Lin* in *A Dream of the Red Mansion*, the best classic novel in China. He Ning, a renowned Hardy expert and professor in Nanjing University, discloses in his *Thomas Hardy Studies: A Critical Survey* the fact that research papers on *Tess* account for proximately 50% of the total academic papers on Hardy.<sup>13</sup> A survey was conducted about the number of the Chinese translations or versions, and the statistics can prove the well-established fame of *Tess* in China. It has over 20 different translations, in which the more important ones are those done by Lv Tianshi, Zhang Guroo, Wu Di, Sun Zhili, Zheng Damin and Qian Haishui, particularly Zhang Guroo's version which has had a big effect upon *Tess* reading and research. There are also many more transcribed and simplified versions such as those done by Zhang Ling, Wang Kangyi, Luo Jinxian and Pan Ming. In addition, English lovers can find some bilingual versions which are intended improve readers' English proficiency.

Chinese readers get to know Hardy mostly by reading his novels and research papers about him and his novels, but films have been another means since the film of *Tess* entered Chinese cultural market in the 1980s. The films enhance popularizing Hardy by increasing the number of ordinary readers and expand the range of influence. Many films adapted from Hardy's novels can be found in China and these visual forms break through the limitations of printed materials. They bring a visual impact upon Hardy readers and lovers. Usually these films keep the original English voices and are attached with Chinese words in order to help viewers understand better. In China, one can see the film of *Tess*, which was produced in France in 1979 and released by Umbrella Entertainment, and it starred Nastassja Kinski as Tess, Leigh Lawson as Alex and Peter Firth as Angel. Another version was produced in England in 1998, in which Justine Waddell acts Tess, Jason Flemyng acts Alec and Oliver Milburn acts Angel. *The Woodlanders* directed by Phil Agland

was introduced into China in 1997. It starred Emily Woof as Grace, Rufus Sewell as Giles, Cal Macaninch as Dr. Fitzpiers and Jodhi May as Marty. Chinese Hardy lovers can also watch *Under the Greenwood Tree* made in England in 2005 with Nicholas Laughland as the director. In general, many films on Hardy's major novels have been produced; most are accessible online in China. The 1960s and 1970s saw John Schlesinger's *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1967), BBC *The Woodlanders* (1970), BBC *Jude* (1971), BBC *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1978) and *Tess* (1979). The real prosperity occurred in the 1990s – the American version of *The Return of the Native* (1994), the British *Jude* (1996), *The Woodlanders* (1997) directed by Phil Agland, LVT television *Tess* (1998), a Granada *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1998) and LWT *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (2000).<sup>14</sup> The new millennium also sees new films such as ITV *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (2003) and Fox Searchlight *Far from the Madding Crowd* (2015).

The most influential film is Polanski's *Tess* made in 1979. To represent the real primitive setting of the novel, Polanski shot the film in rural France where a landscape could be found closer to Hardy's intact Dorset than the industrialized countryside in Britain. Nastassia Kinski, a German actress, was sent to England for over four months to learn the Dorset accent as well as experience the way of local life there in order that the product could create a real social picture closer to what is reflected in the novel – the Victorian rural England. This meticulous way of the director resulted in a great success of the film, which is the most-liked Hardy film with a largest number of viewers in China. In 1982, it was dubbed into Chinese by Shanghai Film Dubbing Studio and got Huabiao Award.<sup>15</sup> The image of Tess on screen with her gorgeous beauty and distinct personality captures tens of thousands of Chinese Tess fans. It is a pity that no film or drama has been made in China based on one of Hardy's novels except those small-scale acts in school cultural activities. Besides, Electric books are a great contribution to literature reading and spreading thanks to the hi-tech strategies of media. The video of *Tess* was produced by Yunnan Audio-Visual Press in 1997. The e-book of *Tess* was released by Beijing Science Sea Electric Press in 2002. Besides, there are some publications in the form of MP3 as a kind of audio materials for literary appreciation. Digitalization and network enrich the ways of reading Hardy and one can read Hardy without carrying the paper book.

Today Hardy's major novels in both English and Chinese can be found in most university libraries and most big bookstores even in the remote and backward Xining city on Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. I am an English teacher and Hardy lover and I find each year several English majors in my college will write their dissertation on Hardy for their bachelor's degree. The students may not know Faulkner but they must know Hardy. Hardy left the world with a precious literary legacy and he belongs not only to England but also to China and the world. Hardy has been dead for more than a century, but his marvelous achievements are timeless. His great contribution to world literature will be cherished forever. It is hoped that Hardy will

continue to enjoy an enduring prosperity in the future. At the juncture of the Chinese Belt and Road project in international cooperation, it is of more significance to reflect on the Chinese complex on Hardy. It is a small window which gives the big vision of the cultural communication between China and England.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Qian Qing, ed. *The Chronology of the Nineteenth-Century English Literature*, (Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2005), p.141.

<sup>2</sup> All the Chinese names are scribed in the Chinese way, that is, the given name follows the family name, in this essay.

<sup>3</sup> Zhang Zhongzai, 'Review and Analysis of Study of Hardy's Novels in New China in the Last 60 Years', *Foreign Literature* (2011, No. 3), pp. 49-55.

<sup>4</sup> Harold Orel, *The Unknown Thomas Hardy: Lesser Aspects of Hardy's Life and Career* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Hardy, 'To the Editors of *The Times*,' *The Times Literary Supplement* (February 19, 1904), p. 53.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1920), p. 60.

<sup>7</sup> Hadai (哈代) is the Chinese spelling for the name of Hardy.

<sup>8</sup> It is the unique book on Hardy Studies written in English in China.

<sup>9</sup> He Ning, *Thomas Hardy Studies: A Critical Survey* (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2011), p. 285.

<sup>10</sup> CNKI is the short of China National Knowledge Infrastructure; it is the most authoritative data and offers the biggest digitalized network.

<sup>11</sup> Cedric Watts, *Thomas Hardy: 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles'* (*Humanities – Ebooks*, 2007), pp. 13, 14.

<sup>12</sup> BBC – The Big Read. BBC. April 2003, Retrieved 16 December 2016. The Big Read was a survey on books carried out by the BBC in the U.K. in 2003, where over three quarters of a million votes were received from the British public to find the nation's best-loved novel of all time. The year-long survey was the biggest single test of public reading taste to find readers' favorite books.

<sup>13</sup> The two surveys here mentioned were conducted at the end of May, 2017, offering the latest statistics of journal papers and M.A. dissertations with Hardy and Tess/Tess in the title.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia Ingham, *Thomas Hardy* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 223.

<sup>15</sup> Huabiao in Chinese culture is an ornamental pillar erected in the public place to symbolize nobleness and greatness. Huabiao Award is one of the highest awards in honour of the great achievements in film industry.