

## Diffusion Dynamics and Differentiated Dissemination of Mao Dun Literature Prize-Winning Works in English Translation<sup>1</sup>

◎ WAN Haiyan

Sun Yat-sen University

**Abstract:** Despite the growing number of English translations of the Mao Dun Literature Prize-winning works, their international dissemination shows differentiated outcomes in both circulation and reception. This study examines such dissemination patterns by applying Rogers's diffusion of innovations (DOI) theory to translated literary works conceptualized as symbolic-cultural innovations within the target literary system. Drawing on data from 25 English translations, it develops a dual-dimensional framework that distinguishes dissemination breadth from dissemination depth. The analysis suggests that dissemination breadth is primarily shaped by visibility and accessibility of translations, as mediated through translator networks, publisher strategies, and reader communities. Dissemination depth, by contrast, depends more heavily on whether translations resonate with existing cultural and intellectual frameworks while also offering distinctive literary or thematic value, as evidenced in the evaluative practices of professional readers, including book reviews, academic research, and institutional recognition. By positioning DOI as a meso-level explanatory framework, the study elucidates the diffusion dynamics underlying differentiated dissemination patterns and offers both theoretical insights and practical guidance for the international promotion of Chinese literature.

**Keywords:** Mao Dun Literature Prize, English translation, diffusion of innovations, differentiated dissemination, cross-cultural circulation

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### 1. Introduction

The Mao Dun Literature Prize (hereafter “Mao Prize”), one of China's most authoritative national awards for fiction, serves as a vital repository of the most significant achievements in contemporary Chinese literature. In an era of intensified global literary exchange, the

dissemination of English translations of these prize-winning novels plays a crucial role in enhancing the visibility of Chinese literature and fostering deeper cross-cultural understanding. Although more than half of the Mao Prize-winning novels have been translated into English, increased translation output alone does not guarantee wide readership or sustained engagement.

Recent scholarship has examined the dissemination of Mao Prize translations from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives (Shao, “International Dissemination”; “Cross-Border Cultural Dialogue”; Ji and Hu; Wang and Xie), documenting significant disparities in circulation and reception while offering limited explanation of the mechanisms underlying such differences. To account for these disparities, this study draws on Everett M. Rogers’s diffusion of innovations (DOI) theory, conceptualizing translated literary works as symbolic-cultural innovations whose dissemination depends on processes of social perception, interpretive mediation, and institutional adoption. It develops a dual-dimensional model of dissemination breadth and depth and applies it to a corpus of 25 English-language monograph translations through a multi-dimensional analysis of dissemination and reception. By examining how innovation attributes interact with structural, social, and institutional factors, the study explains the variations in dissemination outcomes and offers practical insights into the global circulation of Chinese literature.

## 2. Previous Research on the Dissemination of Mao Prize-winning Works

Against the backdrop of China’s ongoing efforts to promote cultural exchange abroad, the English-language dissemination of Mao Prize-winning works has attracted growing scholarly attention. Research has developed at both macro and micro levels, combining broad analysis of overall patterns with in-depth case studies. These approaches offer valuable insights, yet notable gaps remain.

At the macro level, existing research has focused primarily on patterns of international circulation, multimodal dissemination, and the interactions among key cultural agents. Shao Lu analyzes digital data on translations and provides a broad account of internal and external factors influencing the reception of Mao Prize winners in English (“International Dissemination” 6–8). She further notes that “the market operations of Mao Prize-winning works’ English translations have varied considerably across different periods,” with state actors and market agents, both domestic and foreign, playing distinct roles in translation selection and dissemination (“Cross-Border Cultural Dialogue” 87). Extending this discussion beyond print publication, Ji Kun and Hu Mu find substantial variation in library distribution across different media types and conclude that “multimodal publishing strategies have a tangible effect on both dissemination and reception” (80). From the perspective of world literature, Wang Jinghui and Xie Ziwei compare translations of Mao Prize-winning works and Booker Prize-winning works, highlighting the roles of prize committees, authors, translators, publishers, and critics. They argue that stronger collaboration among these actors is essential for enhancing reception and fostering deeper cross-cultural understanding (58).

At the micro level, case studies illuminate mechanisms shaping dissemination outcomes, particularly the negotiation between cultural specificity and target-language readability. Li Yang argues that the English translation of *The Jade King: History of a Chinese Muslim Family* simplified cultural differences and blurred historical background while foregrounding traditional

Chinese cultural imagery; however, ideological labeling, narrative style, and misaligned expectations among Western readers limited its reception abroad (127). By contrast, Zou Xiaowei observes that *The Last Quarter of the Moon* retained cultural particularities while incorporating moderate annotations, thereby respecting the source culture and enhancing readability, which contributed to its more favorable overseas reception (132). Retranslation research further reveals temporal variations in dissemination strategies. Zhang Zhuoya shows how two English translations of *Chenzhong de Chibang* (*Heavy Wings/Leaden Wings*) exemplify the adaptation of contemporary Chinese literature to foreign reading preferences (41). More broadly, existing studies suggest that successful dissemination often depends on balancing cultural specificity with accessibility through translation strategies, paratextual mediation, and collaborative publishing practices. For example, Cen Qunxia argues that the translator of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* combined foreignization with selective domestication, preserving Shanghai's cultural features and literary style while accommodating English-language readers (53). Similarly, Wang Huili and Wu Yun demonstrate that *Peach Blossom Paradise* relied on rigorous foreignization, extensive paratextual elucidation, and close collaboration among the translator, author, and editor to preserve cultural otherness and poetic qualities while reducing interpretive difficulties for foreign readers (91–92).

Taken together, micro-level findings complement macro-level analysis by showing how translation strategies interact with publishing mechanisms and broader cultural power structures to shape international reception. Nonetheless, two limitations persist. First, macro studies tend to quantify dissemination outcomes and offer only limited exploration of the mechanisms underlying dissemination disparities. Second, micro studies often focus on individual works, constraining cross-textual comparisons and reducing attention to lesser-known translations. To address these gaps, the present study adopts a meso-level perspective by comparing a set of English translations in order to identify mechanisms operating between macro patterns and micro cases. By integrating dual indicators of dissemination breadth and depth, it examines how translated works' attributes, interactions among dissemination agents, and target cultural contexts jointly shape stratified dissemination trajectories. In doing so, the study seeks to bridge the macro-micro divide and offer insights for the English-language dissemination of Mao Prize-winning works, as well as translated literature more broadly.

### 3. A DOI-Informed Framework

Rogers's DOI theory provides a useful framework for examining how translated literary works circulate within target cultural systems. By foregrounding the relationship between perceived innovation attributes and adoption processes, the theory offers a meso-level perspective for analyzing differentiated dissemination outcomes. Although originally developed in the context of technological innovation, DOI has subsequently been applied across diverse domains involving cultural and symbolic diffusion. The following discussion examines its applicability to literary translation, operationalizes its core concepts, and develops an analytical framework for the present study.

#### 3.1 DOI Theory and Its Applicability to Literary Translation

Rogers's DOI theory was originally developed to explain the adoption of technological

innovations, particularly within agricultural and communication contexts. As Raghu Raman et al. observe, DOI research focuses on “how innovations are introduced, disseminated, and adopted across phases to understand the diffusion process” (4). Recent bibliometric evidence further confirms the theory’s extensive application across disciplines, including media diffusion, digital communication, online consumption, and broader cultural circulation (Pamungkas et al. 1).

Literary translations, as culturally mediated symbolic forms, may function as innovations when they introduce unfamiliar narrative structures, aesthetic conventions, historical perspectives, or cultural imaginaries into the target literary system. According to Rogers, innovation is not restricted to technological invention; rather, he defines an innovation broadly as “an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (475). From this perspective, translated literature may acquire innovative status through socially perceived novelty within a given system. As James W. Dearing and Jeffery G. Cox argue, DOI provides “a ready set of concepts and approaches” for explaining how innovations gain acceptance and broader social reach (189). This expanded understanding of innovation provides an important basis for applying DOI theory to literary translation. What diffuses in literary translation is not technological utility, but symbolic and cultural meaning.

Like other forms of cultural circulation, translated literature moves through networks of publishers, translators, reviewers, platforms, academic institutions, and reader communities. Its dissemination depends not only on textual production, but also on visibility, accessibility, cultural recognition, and interpretive validation. At the same time, literary translations differ fundamentally from technological innovations. Their reception is interpretive, culturally mediated, and often nonlinear, involving symbolic negotiation rather than functional utility alone. Accordingly, this study does not apply DOI as a predictive model of reader behavior; rather, it adopts the theory as a meso-level framework for analyzing how perceived attributes of translated works interact with dissemination agents, publishing structures, and target cultural contexts to shape differentiated circulation patterns.

### 3.2 Innovation Attributes and Adoption Factors in Literary Translation

DOI theory distinguishes five key attributes of innovations that predict adoption rates: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, observability, and trialability (Rogers 15–17). In the context of literary translation, these qualities are understood as attributes whose significance is shaped by potential adopters rather than fixed properties of translated works. As Rogers notes, “It does not matter so much whether an innovation has a great deal of ‘objective’ advantage. What does matter is whether an individual perceives the innovation as advantageous” (15). Translators, publishers, critics, and platforms mediate how these qualities are perceived within the target literary system.

The five attributes are interpreted as follows: 1) relative advantage refers to perceived literary, cultural, interpretive, or symbolic value; 2) compatibility denotes the extent to which a translation aligns with the cultural expectations, reading preferences, or institutional agendas of the target readership; 3) complexity measures the perceived difficulty of accessing, understanding, or appreciating the work, due to stylistic experimentation, cultural references, or translation choices; 4) trialability concerns the availability of opportunities for prospective readers to sample a work before full adoption, such as through excerpts, online previews, or library access; and 5) observability captures the visibility of a translation within the public sphere, encompassing media coverage, online discussions, and recommendations by peers or institutions. Although

complexity is identified as a core innovation attribute in DOI theory, it is examined only indirectly in this study. In the context of literary translation, reader responses to linguistic, narrative, or cultural difficulty are often fragmented or impressionistic, making complexity less readily operationalizable in comparative dissemination analysis.

Contextual and structural factors modulate how innovation attributes are perceived rather than determining adoption directly. As DOI research makes clear, although adoption typically follows an S-curve, the rate of adoption “varies greatly and is dependent on numerous factors, to include a set of variables that reflect five perceived innovation attributes” (Young 706). According to Rogers, variables such as “the type of innovation-decision,” “the nature of communication channels,” “the nature of the social system,” and “the extent of change-agent efforts” shape adoption indirectly by reframing perceptions of key innovation attributes (265). In literary translation, translators’ linguistic choices, stylistic strategies, and paratextual decisions can enhance compatibility, reduce complexity, or highlight relative advantage. Communication channels enhance observability by making readership engagement visible; academic networks and reader communities reinforce perceived relative advantage and compatibility through social validation and scholarly attention; and publisher strategies, including diversified publishing and marketing strategies, not only improve trialability and observability but also indirectly enhance readers’ perception of the translation’s literary quality. The perceived value of literary translations is therefore continuously shaped through interactions among contextual, structural, and agentive factors.

### 3.3 Stratified Dissemination Outcomes

Dissemination outcomes vary considerably across translated works. To apply DOI theory empirically, this study classifies the dissemination outcomes of Mao Prize translations into three comparative tiers which reflect varying degrees of adoption and reception (see Table 1).<sup>2</sup> Since the present study focuses on variable dissemination rather than temporal diffusion trajectories, it does not employ formal diffusion-rate modeling or time-normalized statistical indicators. Instead, dissemination outcomes are assessed comparatively through converging indicators of accessibility, visibility, institutional uptake, critical attention, and reader engagement.

Table 1. Stratified Dissemination Outcomes of Mao Prize English Translations

| Tier   | WorldCat Library Holdings | Amazon Availability & Format Diversity                   | Goodreads Ratings / Reviews   | Number of Critical Reviews | Representative Works                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| High   | >300                      | Available in multiple formats (print, Kindle, audiobook) | >300 ratings; >50 reviews     | >5                         | <i>Frog</i> ; <i>Red Poppies</i> ; <i>The Song of Everlasting Sorrow</i> ; <i>Peach Blossom Paradise</i> ; <i>The Wedding Party</i> ; <i>The Last Quarter of the Moon</i>                                                                                                                                                        |
| Medium | 10–300                    | Available in limited formats                             | 10–300 ratings; 10–50 reviews | 1–5                        | <i>A Small Town Called Hibiscus</i> ; <i>Massage</i> ; <i>Someone to Talk to</i> ; <i>In the Dark</i> ; <i>Shadow of the Hunter</i> ; <i>The Jade King: History of a Chinese Muslim Family</i> ; <i>Heavy Wings</i> ; <i>Leaden Wings</i> ; <i>The Shaanxi Opera</i>                                                             |
| Low    | <10                       | Unavailable on Amazon or available in only one format    | <10 ratings; <10 reviews      | 0                          | <i>The Sons of Red Lake</i> ; <i>The Leading Wave</i> ; <i>The Book of Life</i> ; <i>The Sky Dwellers</i> ; <i>The Story of the Carefree Tea Mansion</i> ; <i>Eastern Concealment</i> ; <i>The Scenery of the Lake and the Mountain</i> ; <i>Spring in Winter (Volumes 1 &amp; 2)</i> ; <i>Son of Heaven</i> ; <i>Metropolis</i> |

In applying this classification scheme, some works displayed divergent performance across indicators; for example, high library holdings might coincide with low reader engagement. In such cases, greater weight was given to reader engagement and diversified accessibility than to institutional holdings alone, since WorldCat library holdings primarily reflect institutional coverage rather than active readership. Works unavailable on Amazon or lacking multiple publication formats were generally classified outside the high tier because such limitations constrain dissemination potential. For borderline cases, indicators were considered collectively, with works meeting most criteria for a higher tier classified accordingly.

On this basis, the 25 English translations of Mao Prize-winning works fall into three tiers. High-tier works (six titles) achieve strong reader engagement and broad accessibility: for example, *Frog* is held in 1,190 libraries, sold on Amazon in three formats (print, Kindle, and audio CD), and has 2,772 Goodreads ratings, 317 reviews, and 16 critical book reviews. Medium-tier works (nine titles) demonstrate moderate institutional and reader uptake. For instance, *In the Dark* is held in 63 libraries, sold on Amazon in two formats (print and Kindle), and has 110 Goodreads ratings, 12 reviews, and three critical book reviews. Low-tier works (ten titles) have minimal reach: *The Leading Wave* is held in only one library and absent from Goodreads and Amazon.

Some borderline cases help clarify how the classification criteria were applied. *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, though present in only 149 libraries, has 644 Goodreads ratings, 104 reviews, and nine critical book reviews. Its strong reader interaction indicators place it in the high tier. Conversely, *The Jade King: History of a Chinese Muslim Family* has good reader ratings but does not meet high-tier standards in library holdings, publication formats, or critical book reviews, and is therefore classified as medium-tier.

This empirical classification provides a basis for examining how different DOI attributes contribute to differentiated dissemination outcomes. Dissemination breadth is primarily associated with observability and trialability, whereas dissemination depth is more closely linked to relative advantage and compatibility. Although analytically distinguishable, breadth and depth remain mutually reinforcing in practice. Their realization is further mediated by contextual and structural factors, including communication channels, social networks, publisher strategies, and the efforts of translators, which shape how innovation attributes are perceived. Together, these interacting mechanisms help explain why some Mao Prize translations achieve broader and deeper international dissemination than others.

#### 4. Observability, Trialability, and Differentiated Dissemination Breadth

Observability and trialability are core innovation attributes influencing dissemination breadth. Evidence from the English-language dissemination of Mao Prize-winning works indicates that highly disseminated titles tend to overcome communication channel barriers through effective mobilization of these attributes, achieving relatively broad penetration in target literary markets. By contrast, medium- and low-tier works are often constrained by contextual and structural shortcomings that limit opportunities for initial engagement and public recognition. The following analysis examines translator networks, multimodal channel configuration, and reader community engagement as key sites through which observability and trialability are realized in practice.

#### 4.1 Translator Capital and Dual Empowerment

Translators, as cultural intermediaries, use their accumulated translator capital to facilitate trialability for first-time readers and to enhance the observability of translated works in public and institutional contexts. Through these dual mechanisms, translator capital plays a decisive role in shaping dissemination breadth. As Shao observes, “translators’ stakes constitute a form of cultural capital that can be quantified; when entering the translation field, translators cannot engage in struggles armed only with their habitus, but must mobilize various forms of capital in order to compete and acquire more capital” (“Myth” 127). Empirical evidence suggests that translators with extensive cross-cultural experience and substantial “stakes of translation” are particularly effective in expanding both the recognizability and accessibility of their translations in Anglophone markets.

Howard Goldblatt, a distinguished sinologist and veteran translator, exemplifies this dual empowerment effect. Hailed by John Updike as the “midwife” of contemporary Chinese literature (“Translator Goldblatt Hailed”), Goldblatt has introduced generations of English readers to a wide spectrum of contemporary Chinese writing. His translations preserve the literary qualities of source texts while employing strategies that ease comprehension for Western readers, thereby facilitating initial engagement with culturally unfamiliar works. At the same time, his long-standing collaborations with internationally recognized publishers, including Penguin and Houghton Mifflin, substantially enhance the institutional visibility of the translations. His solo translation of *Frog* and co-translation with Lin Li-chun of *Red Poppies* belong to the high tier, while his translation of *Heavy Wings* and joint translations of *Someone to Talk to* and *Massage* fall within the medium tier, demonstrating how translator capital and network resources can contribute to stronger dissemination outcomes.

Other translators actively cultivate trialable channels through targeted paratextual and promotional practices. Bruce Humes, translator of *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, first published his afterword, “From the Mountains to the Sea,” on his personal academic website, *Ethnic ChinaLit*, providing contextual insights into the cultural and environmental context of the Ewenki ethnic group. The website hosts ten entries related to the novel, including the afterword, multilingual translations, book reviews, academic papers, and other supporting materials. Together, these materials create multiple entry points for prospective readers while increasing the novel’s visibility in both digital and academic spaces. As Song Baoping notes, “The direct reason that *The Last Quarter of the Moon* entered the English-speaking world was the promotional efforts of the translator, Bruce Humes” (86–87). This observation situates Humes’s paratextual labor within a broader process of capital conversion that enhances trialability and public visibility.

Michael Berry, translator of Wang Anyi’s *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, similarly played a pivotal role in advancing the novel’s international dissemination through a different deployment of capital. Beyond his translation work, Berry promoted Wang’s literary voice within academic and literary circles, thereby reinforcing the novel’s institutional observability. In his translator’s afterword, he offered readers essential cultural and historical context, supporting deeper comprehension and facilitating scholarly engagement (Wang 431–439). In 2012, serving as a final judge for Hong Kong’s Red Chamber Literary Prize, Berry advocated Wang’s *Tian Xiang*, which subsequently won the award. In a Weibo post, he claimed *Tian Xiang* should be recognized as a “new classic” following *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, reinforcing the latter’s symbolic status

and reception. Berry further strengthened Wang's international profile by organizing academic events, promoting public appearances, and recommending her works for translation into additional languages. These multifaceted efforts illustrate how translator capital can operate across academic, prize-based, and other public domains to sustain observability over time.

In a similar vein, Canaan Morse, an original member of Paper Republic and co-founder of *Pathlight: New Chinese Writing*, where he served as the first poetry editor, drew on his influence and extensive professional contacts to introduce Ge Fei's *The Invisibility Cloak* to Jeffrey Yang at New York Review Books, leading to its English publication in 2016. This initial collaboration subsequently facilitated the publication of *Peach Blossom Paradise* by New York Review Books Classics in 2020 (Wang and Wu 90–91). In this case, translator capital functions primarily through network mediation, enhancing trialability by securing access to prestigious publishing platforms and increasing observability through association with an established literary brand.

By contrast, medium- and low-tier cases demonstrate how limited translator capital constrains dissemination. Although some domestic translators possess strong bilingual competence, their academic capital and professional networks are often confined to Chinese scholarly circles, restricting access to international mainstream publishers, literary agents, and influential critics. Even translations produced by native speakers may struggle to gain recognition. Without an established reputation or a record of successful dissemination, a translator's name alone cannot effectively signal quality or reduce uncertainty for publishers, platforms, and readers. As a result, opportunities for trial use remain limited, observability is weak, and dissemination breadth remains correspondingly narrow.

#### 4.2 Publishers' Strategies and Trialability

Publishers' distribution capacity and publication format diversification directly shape trialability, understood in DOI theory as the extent to which potential adopters can access a work at little or no cost. Evidence from Mao Prize translations shows that international commercial publishers and university presses, by adopting multimodal publishing strategies and leveraging integrated global distribution networks, most notably Amazon, substantially lower entry barriers for readers. By contrast, domestic presses and small independent publishers often rely on single-format publication and lack access to mainstream platforms, thereby restricting opportunities for trial use and limiting dissemination breadth.

Major international publishers typically employ integrated multi-format strategies that combine print, digital, and audio formats, enabling readers to engage with translated works through multiple points of entry. Amazon's integrated operations further amplify these effects by embedding sampling features directly into distribution channels. Penguin's publication of *Frog*, for example, includes print, Kindle, and audiobook editions. Readers could preview chapters and access sample audio content through trial mechanisms. Editorial recommendations and user reviews were embedded alongside purchasing options, encouraging exploratory engagement. This layered configuration of formats, sampling opportunities, and paratextual cues significantly enhanced trialability and contributed to the title's presence in over 1,000 library holdings.

A similar logic is evident in Amazon Crossing's publication of *The Wedding Party*. The publisher constructed a comprehensive trialability infrastructure by offering print, Kindle, and audiobook editions alongside flexible bundling options, discounted pricing, and access to second-hand circulation. Pre-sale mechanisms enabled early market exposure, creating a virtuous cycle of

sampling, word-of-mouth, and purchases. Since its release in 2021, this strategy likely contributed to over 306 library holdings and 324 Goodreads ratings, placing the novel within the high tier.

By contrast, low-tier works frequently exhibit limited format diversity and weak integration with mainstream distribution channels. Titles such as *The Scenery of the Lake and the Mountain*, *Son of Heaven*, and *The Leading Wave* were released exclusively in print, without e-books, audiobook editions, or sampling resources, and were absent from Amazon altogether. Other works, including *Metropolis*, *The Story of the Carefree Tea Mansion*, and *Spring in Winter (Volumes 1 & 2)*, were listed on Amazon but offered only in print form. The absence of multiple-format options, tiered pricing, and preview mechanisms constrained trial use and resulted in minimal reader engagement. Medium-tier titles face similar limitations: *The Jade King: History of a Chinese Muslim Family*, *A Small Town Called Hibiscus*, and *Heavy Wings* were likewise restricted to print editions, limiting their ability to progress toward broader dissemination.

### 4.3 Reader Communities and Observability

Observability refers, in DOI theory, to the extent to which the results of an innovation are visible to others (Rogers 258). Applied to literary translations, it encompasses the extent to which readers' evaluations, discussions, and interactions are publicly displayed, amassed, and circulated across platforms. Differences in how reader engagement is rendered visible help explain variation in dissemination effectiveness among English translations of Mao Prize-winning works.

Goodreads, one of the most influential reader-review platforms, exemplifies how observability is embedded in platform design. The site displays author and translator profiles, edition details, synopses, related works, and reader-generated reviews, while allowing users to like, comment on, and recommend individual reviews. This aggregation transforms dispersed reading experiences into quantifiable and publicly accessible indicators of reception, generating emergent public consensus. Opinion leaders, such as users with a large number of followers or recognized literary authority, play a particularly important role by amplifying visibility across interconnected networks, often linking Goodreads activity to social media platforms or curated reading lists.

Publishers increasingly integrate pre-release strategies into this ecosystem to stimulate early observability. For instance, many collaborate with NetGalley, a platform that distributes advance copies to selected readers, whose reviews are subsequently posted on Goodreads and other platforms. The effects of Goodreads-based visibility also extend beyond the platform itself. Ratings and review data are displayed on Amazon and WorldCat, allowing reader engagement generated on Goodreads to circulate across commercial and library infrastructures, thereby expanding the visibility of reader reception.

High-tier works demonstrate the cumulative impact of these dynamics. In Liu Xinwu's *The Wedding Party*, 14 of 85 Goodreads reviews explicitly acknowledged receiving advance copies, illustrating how pre-release circulation and early feedback contributed to heightened visibility. Ge Fei's *Peach Blossom Paradise* generated active discussions, with reviewers posting detailed and engaged comments that attracted numerous likes. Several of these reviewers are users possessing substantial network visibility, including users with over 400 followers and reviewers who were themselves authors. Observability was further amplified through cross-platform spillover. In the case of Humes's translation of Chi Zijian's *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, one reviewer not only posted a full-length review on Goodreads but also published it on a personal website, extending visibility beyond the confines of the platform.

A more recent case, *The Shaanxi Opera*, points to emerging observability within the medium-tier. The title has already accumulated 35 ratings and 12 reviews on Goodreads, with five reviewers explicitly acknowledging receipt of advance copies. This pattern likely reflects the dynamics of a newly published title, where early circulation and platform-mediated feedback stimulate initial visibility, though its long-term impact remains to be seen.

By contrast, medium- and low-tier works show markedly weaker observability, largely due to limited or absent reader feedback. Titles such as *Massage*, *Heavy Wings*, *Spring in Winter (Volumes 1 & 2)*, and *Eastern Concealment* had minimal engagement, while *The Leading Wave* and *The Book of Life* were absent entirely from the platform. In the absence of visible evaluations or discussions, potential readers are left without cues to guide adoption, encouraging cautious or risk-averse behavior and constraining dissemination breadth.

## 5. Compatibility, Relative Advantage, and Differentiated Dissemination Depth

Whereas dissemination breadth generally captures the accessibility and visibility of translated works among general readers, dissemination depth largely reflects the adoption, evaluation, and symbolic validation of these works within professional and scholarly networks. Within this framework, professional readers function as gatekeepers: their evaluative practices mediate a work's transition from initial exposure to sustained interpretation and symbolic recognition. The differences in dissemination depth largely reflect differing levels of engagement among professional readers, whose reviews, academic publications, and award or honor decisions both guide interpretation and provide observable evidence of how compatibility and relative advantage work in the target cultural field.

### 5.1 Book Reviews and Initial Filtering

Book reviews play a pivotal role in signaling the relative advantage and compatibility of a translated work as it enters the target-language context. As Dearing and Cox observe, after an initial awareness, potential professional adopters “may engage in a secondary search for the evaluative judgments of trusted, expert, and accessible others—that is, opinion leaders—who are more discriminating and less susceptible to influence” (185). In the context of literary translation, professional book reviewers serve precisely as such opinion leaders. Their reviews “shape the international reading public's perception of the value of translated literary works and to pre-structure its experience of reading” (Liu and Zhu 5). A systematic survey of professional reviews of Mao Prize translations reveals a clear hierarchical pattern closely aligned with dissemination effectiveness. High-tier works such as *Frog* and *Red Poppies* each received more than ten critical reviews, while nine additional medium- to high-tier titles, including *The Wedding Party*, *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, *Massage*, *Peach Blossom Paradise*, *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, *In the Dark*, and *Someone to Talk to*, attracted two or more reviews. By contrast, 14 low- to medium-tier works received few or no critical reviews. This uneven pattern demonstrates how influential reviews act as an initial filtering mechanism that selectively foregrounds works perceived as possessing relative advantage and compatibility.

High-tier works demonstrate these qualities not only in the number of reviews they attract

but also in the depth and diversity of interpretive engagement. Review activity surrounding *Red Poppies* created a multidimensional interpretive field and reinforced the novel's distinctive value across three levels. First, the appearance of reviews in leading review journals such as *Booklist* and *Publishers Weekly*, major newspapers including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* (in the "Book World" supplement), and scholarly platforms such as *World Literature Today* and *MCLC* signals the work's compatibility with established Western evaluative institutions, as well as its relative advantage in attracting professional attention within a competitive review economy. Second, reviewers constructed complementary interpretive frameworks informed by their professional backgrounds, thereby translating the novel's cultural specificity into terms legible to Western critical discourse. Julia Lovell, a British historian, sinologist, and translator, highlighted the novel's linguistic and historical dimensions, noting that "Alai offers Western audiences a new and thought-provoking perspective on Tibetan history" (9). She further emphasized that Alai's choice to write in Chinese rather than Tibetan made his work more accessible to readers in both China and the West. Third, review activity spanning pre-publication promotion and sustained post-publication engagement indicates that the novel's relative advantage was not exhausted at initial release but continued to generate interpretative interest, while its compatibility with developing critical agendas enabled its integration into longer-term reception trajectories. This body of reviews not only enhanced visibility but also laid the groundwork for subsequent scholarly inquiry, confirming that compatibility, understood as alignment with prevailing interpretive frameworks, and relative advantage jointly determine initial dissemination momentum.

By contrast, low-tier works frequently fail to pass through the review filter due to limited compatibility or insufficient relative advantage. *The Sons of Red Lake*, for example, received only a single professional review by David Hebblethwaite on the Sinoist Books website. While the review noted that "the characters are engaging, the plot turns interesting ways, and there's a sharp examination of the potential effects of tourism (for good and ill) on a rural community," it did not situate the work within broader interpretive frameworks or articulate a distinctive evaluative claim that might invite further critical engagement. More typical are over ten low-tier works, including *Spring in Winter (Volumes 1 & 2)*, *The Leading Wave*, *Son of Heaven*, *The Story of the Carefree Tea Mansion*, which received no professional reviews and were therefore absent from this initial stage of interpretive negotiation. The scarcity of critical reviews constrained subsequent institutional adoption, such as library acquisition, and limited sustained scholarly attention.

## 5.2 Scholarly Reception and Validation

Scholarly attention reflects a deeper level of dissemination, signaling both the relative advantage and compatibility of translated works within Western academic discourse. A search of the Web of Science Core Collection database conducted on 15 August 2025 identified 30 research articles on English translations of Mao Prize-winning works. These publications are highly concentrated: 13 focus on *Frog*, six on *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, five on *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, four on *Red Poppies*, and one each on *Heavy Wings* and *The Shaanxi Opera*. This uneven distribution indicates a secondary filtering process driven by the degree to which works can be productively integrated into established theoretical frameworks.

At the scholarly level, works tend to attract sustained attention when their themes and conceptual concerns can be productively connected to existing critical conversations. *Frog* has attracted such attention because its thematic value can be readily integrated into existing Western

discourses on reproductive ethics, bodily autonomy, and biopolitics. This alignment has generated 13 academic articles and facilitated transnational theoretical dialogue. *The Last Quarter of the Moon* has been taken up primarily within ecocriticism, where its depiction of Ewenki ecological wisdom aligns with concerns such as sense of place and ecological holism. Du Lanlan situates the novel within ecological literary traditions, arguing that “non-Western understandings of the relationship between human and non-human nature have made significant contributions to the ecocritical discourse” (787). Additionally, the novel’s feminist themes, aligned with Western feminism, further attracted scholarly interest.

Other works gain scholarly attention through specific theoretical affordances. *Heavy Wings* provides a productive case for feminist translation studies. Meng Lingzi examines how the translator reconstructs gender in translation, revealing a paradox in which feminist discourse coexists with linguistic sexism embedded in the English language (1). *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* has been analyzed through feminist and urban studies. Xiao Jiwei examines Wang Anyi’s handling of narrative detail and ideological construction, noting how female characters are caught between allegorical representation and individual subjectivity (513).

Relative advantage is reflected in a work’s capacity to sustain diverse and heterogeneous scholarly readings. *Red Poppies* offers an insider perspective on Tibetan narratives that supports multiple analytical approaches. Yue Gang explores how its narrative strategies transcend the dominant Western “Shangri-La myth” through a cross-cultural narratology lens (543), while Nimrod Baranovitch interprets the literary and political dimensions from a socio-political perspective (170). The ability of a single text to generate heterogeneous, well-cited interpretations demonstrates its strong relative advantage within academic discourse.

Importantly, scholarly reception and book reviewing exhibit a reinforcing effect. Reviews establish an initial “opinion matrix” that orients interpretative approaches, while scholarly interpretation stabilizes a work’s relative advantage and consolidates its perceived cultural compatibility. Together, these mechanisms facilitate deep dissemination and contribute to the gradual canonization of widely circulated translations.

### 5.3 Awards, Honors, and Institutional Endorsement

Literary awards and honors constitute the most institutionalized form of validation, confirming both compatibility and relative advantage within dominant evaluative systems. Unlike individual reviews or scholarly readings, awards confer symbolic capital that accelerates canonization and amplifies dissemination effects.

In specific cases, award recognition reflects close alignment between a work’s core qualities and Western evaluative criteria. *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, noted for its nuanced portrayal of a female protagonist navigating a turbulent society, received an Honorable Mention from the Lois Roth Award (2008). It was also longlisted for the Best Translated Book Award (2009) and cited as a candidate for the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature. Its continued recognition, culminating in Wang Anyi’s longlisting for the Man Booker International Prize (2011), highlights its thematic alignment with Western literary standards and its narrative distinctiveness. *Frog*, benefiting from Mo Yan’s Nobel Prize status, was included in *The New York Times*’s Top Books of 2015 and named a *Washington Post* Notable Book, reinforcing its thematic value and narrative daring. *Peach Blossom Paradise* was shortlisted for the National Book Award for Translated Literature (2021), with the National Book Foundation highlighting that it “expands to encompass national

and universal themes of utopian renewal and shifting gender roles,” with Morse’s translation “deftly [capturing] the tonal richness of Ge Fei’s prose, from the lofty to the earthy” (National Book Foundation). *The Wedding Party* was longlisted for the ALTA National Translation Award (2022) and featured in *The New Yorker*’s “Briefly Noted” section which highlighted its portrayal of life in a Beijing *siheyuan* amid the city’s rapid transformation.

From the perspective of recognition type, awards and honors collectively affirm a work’s compatibility and relative advantage across different dimensions. Media honors, such as newspaper book lists or notable mentions, signal compatibility with popular literary taste and market readability; professional awards indicate alignment with elite evaluation standards centered on literary quality, translation skill, and intellectual depth; and author-centered prizes, such as the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature, generate halo effects that elevate the perceived value of individual works. Crucially, these awards and honors trigger a strong amplification effect, interacting positively with reviews and scholarly research to create a reinforcing cycle. Authoritative endorsement not only enhances visibility but also strengthens relative advantage, encouraging library acquisitions, course adoption, and reader engagement, thereby converting symbolic capital into tangible dissemination breadth and depth.

## 6. Conclusion

This study applies DOI theory to construct a dual-dimensional framework of dissemination breadth and depth, revealing the stratified effects and synergistic mechanisms in the English-language dissemination of Mao Prize-winning works. The analysis demonstrates that differentiation in dissemination effectiveness arises from the interaction between innovation attributes and the structural and social context of reception.

Dissemination breadth is primarily shaped by innovation attributes of observability and trialability, which are enhanced through the interaction among translator capital, publisher strategies, and active reader communities. Translators use their cultural and social capital to increase a work’s visibility and accessibility, while publishers expand trialability through diverse publication formats, flexible pricing, and integrated distribution channels. Reader communities further amplify observability by providing measurable feedback, reviews, and discussion across platforms such as Goodreads and Amazon. High-tier works, benefiting from this combination of structural and social supports, achieve broad circulation, whereas low- and medium-tier works, constrained by limited translator networks, narrow communication channels, and minimal reader engagement, remain restricted in reach.

Dissemination depth depends more heavily on whether translated works can be integrated into existing cultural and intellectual frameworks while maintaining distinctive literary or thematic value. Book reviews, scholarly research, and institutional recognition consolidate the perceived compatibility of a work, while the distinctiveness of its narrative or thematic content conveys relative advantage. Works that align with target-culture expectations and offer unique value tend to attract sustained engagement from professional readers, resulting in deeper reception. By contrast, works with limited compatibility or weak relative advantage rarely engage these gatekeepers effectively, leading to shallow or sporadic dissemination.

This study demonstrates the analytical applicability of DOI theory to literary translation by conceptualizing translated literary works as symbolic-cultural innovations circulating within target literary systems. The findings suggest that strategic investment in translators, stronger international publishing collaboration, and sustained engagement with both general and professional readers can enhance the global reach and cultural impact of Chinese literature in English translation. Future research may further extend the application of DOI theory to literary translation through longitudinal and case-based investigations of how translated literary works accumulate visibility, interpretive legitimacy, and readership across different cultural contexts over time.

## Notes

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2. Table 1 presents a three-tier classification of the dissemination effectiveness of 25 English full-length monograph translations of Mao Dun Literature Prize-winning works. Of the 32 prize-winning works translated into English, only full-length monographs are included, given their greater textual completeness and analytical comparability. The classification is based on four main indicators: WorldCat library holdings, Amazon sales availability and format diversity, Goodreads ratings and reviews, and critical book reviews. All data are current as of 15 August 2025. Amazon reader reviews are excluded because their purchaser-based sample is considerably smaller than that of Goodreads, which better reflects broader reader engagement. For methodological reference, see Shao (“International Dissemination” 3).

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