

English Online Book Reviews of Red Sorghum from the Perspective of Attitude System

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Abstract: This paper applied attitude system of appraisal theory to explore online book reviews of Red Sorghum. The results show that readers not only evaluate the story and the writer's writing prowess, but also the characters in the book and the Chinese culture included in the book. In general, reviewers give high appreciation for this novel, but there also are some flaws that affect readers' reading experience.

Keyword: Red Sorghum; Appraisal Theory; Attitude System

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the continuous strengthening of economic strength and increasing international status, China has become more and more influential in the world. In the process of globalization, culture has increasingly become an important part of the national soft power competition. In order to make the world have a deep understanding of China and its culture, greater process should be made in taking Chinese culture to the global stage. Chinese literature which contains rich traditional culture, is an important part of Chinese culture. Its overseas dissemination has attracted more and more attention. However, different countries may have different culture and ideology, Chinese literature may face many challenges in the process of international communication. Book reviews as comments on the content and author of the book contains a large number of readers' views, attitudes and emotions, which is of great help to study the overseas reception of Chinese literature. Mo Yan is one of the most influential writers in contemporary Chinese literary world, who is the first Chinese writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. His work Red Sorghum is the first and most representative novel in the 1980s.

2. Theoretical Framework

Appraisal Theory is a language appraisal system developed by Professor Martin, Professor White and their colleagues from the University of Sydney since the 1990s based on the meta-function of interpersonal meaning in systemic functional linguistics. "Appraisal theory is about evaluation - the various attitudes expressed by linguistic means in a text, the strength of the emotions involved, the ways in which values come from, and the ways in which readers and authors agree." (Martin J R, David R, 2003) According to Martin, attitude system can be specifically divided into three subsystems: effect, judgement and appreciation, which involve three different areas: emotion, morality and aesthetics. Affect refers to the expression of people's feelings, judgement refers to the evaluation of people's character and behavior, and appreciation refers to the evaluation of the value of things.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

Using UAM CorpusTool as an auxiliary research tool to annotate appraisal resources, and with collected book reviews on Amazon website as research data, the author aimed to explore the following contents:

- (1) What is the overall distribution of attitude resources of this book?
- (2) What is the readers' attitudes and opinions toward the work?

3.2 Research Data

This study uses readers' comments of contemporary Chinese writer Mo Yan's Red Sorghum in English translation as the research object. The data collected from the American Amazon website. After eliminating all languages except English, the total amount of book reviews is 107, including 42 five-star reviews, 28 four-star reviews, 14 three-star reviews, 9 two-star reviews, and 14 one-star reviews.

4. Research Findings and Discussions

Table 1. Attitude Resources Statistics

Category	Attitude			Total Amount
	Affect	Judgement	Appreciation	
Quantity	78	65	478	621
Proportion	12.5%	10.4%	76.7%	99.7%

Table 1 shows the annotation results of attitude resources. It can be seen that the total number of attitude resources in the book review is 621, among which the appreciation resources account for the highest proportion, reaching 76.7%, and the number of emotional resources and judgement resources is similar, respectively 12.5% and 10.4%. On the whole, the number of appreciation resources far exceeds the emotional resources and judgement resources, which fully reflects the characteristics of book reviews. Reviewers express their attitudes and opinions on books through appreciation words, which can make the comments more objective, so as to avoid reducing the persuasive of the comments due to strong emotional colors.

4.1 Affect system

Table 2. Affect Resources Statistics

Category	Affect			
	un/happiness	dis/satisfaction	in/security	dis/inclination
Quantity	19	45	12	2
Proportion	24.4%	57.7%	15.4%	2.6%

(1) This was a book I had to read for class and didn't finish in time because I found myself not merely reading, but savoring [happiness] the passages.

(2) I sure am glad [happiness] it was because it is an incredibly powerful book that presents a genuine Chinese viewpoint.

(3) After a while, I grew weary of [dissatisfaction] all the flashbacks and start to feel that the writer should've/could've wrapped up the saga in 3 or 4 novellas, instead.

(4) If this is the only reference you have of the Japanese invasion of China - you will finish the book very angry [dissatisfaction] at the Japanese. This is a part of world history very few Americans know anything at all about.

In the first example, the reader uses "savoring" to express his love for this book, which shows his interest and concentration in the process of reading. It often reflects readers like to read passages that are beautifully written, which may give them an enjoyable journey. In the second example, the reviewer is pleased to see the real Chinese life and authentic Chinese culture presented in the book, which reflects they have an open mindset that are willing to embrace different cultural conventions. In the third example, the reader thinks it is unnecessary to put too many flashbacks in the book which only cause confusion on readers. This indicate that many readers can't appreciate the writing techniques used in the novel. The last example shows readers' attitude towards the atrocities that caused by Japanese invasion. The reader knew about this history in the book firstly, and he lamented that many Americans were almost completely unaware of this historical event.

4.2 Judgement System

Table 3. Judgement Resources Statistics

Category	Judgement				
	normality	capacity	tenacity	veracity	propriety
Quantity	10	33	7	4	11
Proportion	15.4%	50.8%	10.8%	6.2%	16.6%

(1) Mo's genius [+capacity] is telling a compelling tale involving complex, three-dimensional characters in a style which is direct and gritty but also mystical and rich with symbolic imagery.

(2) It was so masterful [+capacity] how Mo Yan wove together all of the characters and time periods, as he moved from chronologically back and forth.

(3) If there is a message to be culled from this work, it seems to me to be that humans are deeply and fundamentally flawed [-normality], but are just as deeply robust in their ability to persevere [+tenacity] .

In the first and second example, reviewers praise Mo Yan is a talented writer who can perfectly depict a complicated but compelling story. It reflects readers think highly of writer’s competence and writing skills. In the third example, the reader comments on the characters of the story, and he admires the profound characters in the book. The tenacious spirit and willpower of characters deeply impressed him. This reflects readers pay attention to the personality of characters and desire to see some powerful characters that will affect them positively.

4.3 Appreciation System

Table 4. Appreciation Resources Statistics

Category	Appreciation		
	<u>reaction</u>	<u>composition</u>	social-valuation
Quantity	<u>323</u>	<u>79</u>	76
Proportion	<u>67.6%</u>	<u>16.5%</u>	15.9%

(1) The graphic [+composition] and honest [+composition] portrayal of the blood and gore is remarkable [+reaction].

(2) Red Sorghum is a frank [+reaction] and disturbing [-reaction] history of a period no one else has recorded in such detail [+composition] and with such brutal non-judgemental honesty [+reaction].

(3) Mo Yan’s use of magical realism to depict China’s tortured history in the long 20th century penetrates me deeply [+reaction]. I am left with a mysterious sense of intimacy with another civilization’s history [+reaction].

(4) The plot was engaging [+reaction] but damaged [-composition] by chronology of its telling.

In the first example, “graphic” and “honest” are readers’ comments on the language of the novel and also their appreciation for the author’s writing prowess. And “remarkable” fully reflects readers’ admiration of the linguistic details describing the bloody plot in the story. This showcases readers not only comment on the plot of novel, but also its writing features and specific detail description. In the second example, the reader used the words “frank” and “disturbing” to comment on the story of the book, which shows it’s a straight and worrisome story, but the use of “detail” and “non-judgemental honesty” confirm that it is the carefulness and bare honesty of the author in his writing that make this novel a unique and valued one. This not only expresses reader’s appreciation for the work and author, but also stimulates the interest of other potential readers. In the third example, the reader uses “penetrates me deeply” to express a strong resonance and emotional response to the story to show that it is an insightful and heart-moving book. And the reader used “left with a mysterious sense of intimacy with another civilization’s history” to express he has affected by Chinese civilization unconsciously. And that also shows that readers have a strong tolerance to embrace foreign cultures. In Example 4, “engaging” expresses readers’ appreciation and affirmation of the novel. However, “damaged” shows that readers are affected by the jump in narrative time and think this weakens the charm of the novel. This reflects the possibility that some readers may be confused by Mo Yan’s narrative style and thus reduce their interest in the novel, which also poses obstacles to the dissemination of such literary works.

5. Conclusion

This paper gives a brief study on book reviews of Red Sorghum from the perspective of attitude system of appraisal theory. With the help of UAM Corpus Tool software, the attitude resources are annotated and calculated. The statistics shows that, in an overall distribution, appreciation resources accounted for the highest proportion, followed by affect resources and judgement resources. Through reading and exploring readers’ attitude about the novel and its author, the author finds that reviewers not only appreciate Mo Yan’s excellent writing skills and wonderful novel plot, but also are very glad to learn about Chinese culture and convention. At the same time, the author finds that some readers are confused about the narrative style and this may damage their reading attention, which may lead to incomprehension of the novel. And this is also a challenge for global dissemination of literature.

This research shows that there are many opportunities and challenges in the process of the dissemination of literary books. And more efforts can be made to improve this process to bring an environment that is friendly for international-readers and a more bright future for Chi-

nese literature.

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