

Cultural Variation and Cultural Creation in Chinese Biographical Writing and Carnegie's Work

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Abstract: In "Cultural Variation and Cultural Creation in Chinese Biographical Writing and Carnegie's Work" Weidong Zhou discusses the impact on Chinese biographical writing via biographies written in Chinese and translated from English about Andrew Carnegie's life and work. The interpretation of Carnegie's philanthropy includes Chinese traditional cultural concepts such as "righteousness," "cause and effect," and "self-cultivation" which constitute the unique understanding of "philanthropy" in modern Chinese literature. From a "moral model" to "successful person" the overall images following Carnegie can reflect the processes of acceptance of Western "individualism." Zhu argues that Carnegie's example was shaped as a "Youth Idol" in the May Fourth Movement from which the unique route of modernization in Chinese literature and culture can be traced.

Keywords: Cultural Variation; Biographical Writing; Andrew Carnegie; May Fourth Movement

The dissemination of biographies is an intuitive and effective means of cross-cultural communication. Through the translation of biographies cultural heterogeneity can be more directly represented, thus having a profound impact on the recipients. In the processes of "going global" in modern China, the translation and acceptance of foreign cultures involves the introduction and dissemination of foreign cultural figures and thus biographies sometimes serve as the main carrier of cultural exchange. At times, they can appear in the form of "sub-texts." Take the magazine *新青年* (La Jeunesse) published during China's May Fourth Movement as an example. Its predecessor, *青年杂志* (*La Jeunesse* is the same as that of *新青年*) selected cover figures such as Andrew Carnegie, Benjamin Franklin, Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev, etc., all of whom were given detailed biographical introductions in the magazine. All of these figures acted as vehicles for cultural transmission. Others, such as the Henrik Ibsen, is well known to Chinese readers because of the popularity of his plays, and his biographies are merely incidental information to the plays.

The study of pure biography often focuses only on the first type of biography, but if the focus is on cross-cultural exchange, then all reports, interviews, and profiles that include biographies should receive attention because they constitute the entire picture of cross-cultural exchange during a particular period. The writer Lu Xun had a strong sense of cultural shock when he read "Evolution and Ethics," because the translator Yan Fu had depicted Huxley's image in the text: "Oh, there is a person like Huxley sitting in his study and thinking a different way, and his thinking is so fresh" (306). This shows that some biographies, as "sub-texts," can still have a profound impact on their readers and are biographical literary resources which should not be ignored.

Starting with Cao Shunqing's theory of "cultural variation" we can see clues to cultural variation more clearly by examining the different versions of biographies of foreign figures. Compared to the cross-cultural variation of literary and theoretical works, biographies of people of the same era can reflect a country's imagination of the "world." In the case of modern China during the "going global" period, cultural variation reflected the ideological track of Chinese elite intellectuals towards "going global." The biographical data of US-American entrepreneur Andrew Carnegie in modern China is the subject of my present study. At that time Carnegie became a world-renowned figure for his enormous wealth and philanthropy and his experience of building a steel company from scratch represents the capitalist spirit. His concept of wealth and philanthropy, in turn, pioneered a new direction for capitalism. As Carnegie's biography began to spread in China, owing to the lack of a deep understanding of the cultural connotations of his life a large number of cultural filters and misinterpretations appeared in the biographical materials, which are themselves worthy of attention when studying the history of modern Chinese thought and the study of cultural variation. Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) was an outstanding entrepreneur and philanthropist. On the one hand, Carnegie was well known in the world because he was the representative of entrepreneur in the era of monopoly capitalism and founded a steel company. On the other hand, he invested 90% of his personal wealth in philanthropy before his death and is considered the creator of modern philanthropy. In addition to industry and philanthropy, Carnegie expressed his understanding of US-American politics and wealth

through his writings, which include *Triumphant Democracy* (1886), *The Gospel of Wealth* (1889), and *Problems of Today* (1908). Because of his legendary experiences and personal ideas, Carnegie became the quintessential representative of the "American Dream" and capitalist values. During Carnegie's lifetime, biographical works have appeared about him including James Howard Bridge's *The Inside History of the Carnegie Steel Company* (1903), Bernard Alderson's *Andrew Carnegie: From Telegraph Boy to Millionaire* (1902), and after his death subsequent versions of *Andrew Carnegie: From Telegraph Boy to Millionaire* appeared. Owing to Carnegie's global influence, modern Chinese media paid attention to Carnegie's story and biography from the very beginning. There were newspapers and magazines such as *Zhixin* newspaper, *Xinmin Series*, *Economic Series*, *Hunan Popular Speech*, *Mainland* newspaper, *The Globe Magazine*, *Anhui Baihua newspaper*, *Guofeng newspaper*, *Education Magazine*, *Oriental Magazine*, *Railway Association Journal*, *Chinese Industry*, *La Jeunesse* (the predecessor), and *Banking Weekly*, which introduced Carnegie's life and deeds through news reports, biographies, and cover features forming the basis of Carnegie's biography in China and documenting the process of Carnegie's acceptance in the country. Among the many news articles on him, the most influential is the translation of Carnegie's biography in *La Jeunesse* (the predecessor). The first issue of the magazine featured Carnegie on its cover and published an article translated by Peng Dezun entitled "The Hard Work of the Successful: A Biography of Carnegie," which summarized Carnegie's biography in ten chapters. Because of its influence, Carnegie received wider attention in China, and thus became a phenomenon worthy of attention in the study of the history of modern Chinese thought.

In Chinese news media of recent years Carnegie's life story is presented in diverse ways. Some introduce Carnegie directly in the form of his biography, such as "Carnegie the American Millionaire" published in *La Jeunesse* (the predecessor) or "Carnegie the American Millionaire" (1903) published in the "Personality Commentary" section of *Xinmin Series* newspaper or "Biography of Carnegie the American Millionaire" (1903) written by Xiangdong Yuzhe published in *Hunan Popular Speech* newspaper. There are also stories about Carnegie in the form of news and current affairs reports, such as Carnegie's Request for the Redemption of the Philippines in the "Recent American Events" section of *Zhixin* newspaper.

The introduction of Carnegie's life in the modern Chinese press is not purely "biographical literature," but a combination of various literary forms. For example, in *New Island News*, although the sources of information about Carnegie are basically valid, they are edited with a great deal of literary ornamentation and personal comments in addition to the translated text, thus giving the reader a wide impression. In another instance, Carnegie is regarded as a "mentor." Although most of the excerpts are from Carnegie's biography, the entire idea is dramatic and there are traces of the editor's imagination to add to the content. Even when *La Jeunesse* (the predecessor) publishes a biography of Carnegie in translation, the translator rewrites a great deal of it in the form of excerpts and many of the chapters are actually written by the translator making it difficult to determine which version the translator has adopted by collating the translated text with the original. Carnegie's biographies in contemporary Chinese media are not "biographical literature" in the sense of the usual definition in literary history and some of them are not even pure biographies. In certain circumstances, these texts also take on the form of "pure literature," because they include literary methods such as fiction and storytelling and can therefore be considered a "special" kind of biography.

The focus of my study is not a discussion of the ethical issues of biography as they have been understood in traditional biography studies, because the authors of such biographies are "unwittingly" involved in the construction of Carnegie's image. Rather, my focus is on how Chinese scholars and intellectuals perceive Carnegie's behavior when he appears in Chinese media as a news protagonist or a world celebrity and what kind of cultural variation he shows. Carnegie's philanthropic activities are often summarized and evaluated in China by the terms "righteous" and "righteous man," reflecting the way in which the Chinese understood Carnegie's philanthropic work at the time. In 1898 *Zhixin* newspaper reported on Carnegie's request to buy the Philippines, which was the earliest report on Carnegie in modern Chinese media. The headline of the report was "Carnegie asks for redemption of Philippine Islands," which headed a brief article under "Current Affairs in America" translated from the *Japan Times* of 23 March 1898. The journalist described Carnegie's donations to help the Philippines achieve self-governance after the Spanish-American War in 1898. The article reads as follows: "There is a

righteous man in the United States, Mr. Carnegie, a man of great wealth, who could not bear to shed blood for the fire and bullets, and who wanted to help the Filipino people realize the ideal of self-government, voluntarily donated twenty trillion dollars to the United States Government to buy the Philippine Islands" (Anonymous, "Recent Events," 12). At the end of the report, a comment from the translator was added, as was customary in the media at the time: "But Mr. Carnegie can be called the most generous and righteous man of his generation. If the world's people are willing to do what Mr. Carnegie did, there will be no incomprehensible hatred" (Anonymous, "Recent Events," 12). In addition, in 1900, under the headline "An American's Righteousness" in the "Foreign Affairs" section of the Qingyi newspaper, it was reported that Carnegie had donated a total of \$16 million to the Pittsburg Industrial School (Anonymous, "The Good Deeds" 134-35). In 1905, under "Essays of the Translator," *The Globe Magazine* presented the total number of US-American charities in 1903 as "The Total of American Philanthropy," with particular reference to Carnegie as the individual who made the largest donation. These articles all equate "charity" with "righteousness." In doing so, of course, some were aware of the differences in the cultural backgrounds behind the two as at the end of "Total American Philanthropy" where the editor adds the following comment: "In the ancient world, the relief of poverty was a natural and compassionate event. It is not necessary for all to have the same heart. Since the emergence of Christianity, the righteousness of the one Father has been the basis for the righteousness of the people and their compatriots. The mutual indifference between the people of Qin and those of Yue is decreasing, and the enthusiasm of the people of all nations for righteous acts is increasing. The hearts of those who solicited and those who gave were moved by the love of Christ, not by others ... If the Chinese view of righteous action is only to create one's own happiness and to accumulate merit in three lives, it is a far cry from that of the others" (Lin and Fan 23; Trans. Zhou Weidong).

Here, the commentators have noted the difference in cultural ideas behind "righteousness" and "charity." Included in "righteousness" are Chinese Confucian and Buddhist ideas and concepts such as "virtue" and "cause and effect" play an important role in the formation of the concept of "righteousness," which is mainly used to describe a certain form of

personal cultivation. "Charity" is the background of Christian culture, which includes the relationship between the individual and humankind. The commentator merely notes the difference, but there is no better way to distinguish the two. If we look at Carnegie's philanthropic work from today's perspective, the use of "righteous man" or "righteous deed" is mainly an affirmation of his philanthropy and there is a consistency between the two, but the traces of cultural variation are more obvious. Etymologically speaking, "righteousness" in Chinese is derived from "ritual," which emphasizes personal cultivation and is the way of a person. According to Xu Shen and Duan Yucai, 义 (Yi) is described in the following way: "Yi, one's own dignity ... The original instruction of Yi means that propriety and tolerance are appropriate" which refers to standardized behavior and manners (Xu and Duan, 43). Liu Xi's explanation of "righteousness" is "righteousness, appropriate, sanctioning things to make appropriate" (Liu 1). In other words, it means that righteous behavior is in accordance with etiquette, which makes the world more harmonious. Through more examples, Chinese cultural texts make the connotation of "righteousness" richer and more vivid, which essentially includes two main aspects. First, it is in line with etiquette: for example, in 左传 (Zuo Zhuan), "The king of Wu conquered the Shang dynasty and moved Jiu Ding to Luo Yi, but the righteous man still chastised him for it" (25). Another example is "Bo Yi, Shu Qi pulled the horse and admonished: 'Father died without burial, then start a war, this is considered filial piety? Is it benevolent to be a minister who kills the king?' Some soldiers wanted to kill these two. Taigong said, 'this righteous man too.' So he himself lifted them up and let them go" (Sima 281). The references to "righteous soldiers" and "righteous men" have to do with rituals and the act of "righteousness" is a criticism of the overthrow of the sovereign's rule by the vassal kings, which was considered to be inconsistent with the ritual system established in the Zhou Dynasty. The second is the act of financial generosity. For example, the back of a stone tablet of Cao Quan from the Han Dynasty reads as follows: "A thousand righteous persons and five hundred righteous persons were all generous with their money" (Zhai 10). At any rate, Yi Shi (the righteous man) is the person who donates his money and later, those who give money for charity are called Xin Shi. During the time of Emperor Taizong of the

Song Dynasty, the character for "Yi" (righteous) was changed to "Xin" (faithful) to avoid naming taboos. Nowadays, 信士 (Xinshi) is also called 义士 (Yishi) in the inscriptions of the Han Dynasty (202BC~AD220) where the "righteous man" referred to was a person who donated money generously for the public good.

There is a spiritual similarity in the modern media's use of the word "righteousness" to summarize Carnegie's actions. Carnegie's act of donating money to help the Philippines become self-governing is more in line with ancient Chinese righteousness of upholding the rules of etiquette, which is an action for the normal functioning of society (i.e., the world). Carnegie's act of donating money is very much in line with the meaning of generosity in the word "righteousness." Carnegie's philanthropic work reflects the second meaning of "righteousness." Therefore, from the point of view of translation, in the context of the Chinese people's lack of understanding and acceptance of "charity," "righteousness" is the most appropriate choice to summarize Carnegie's actions. Perhaps most importantly, the difference between "righteousness" and Carnegie's behavior is also obvious in that "righteousness" does not encapsulate fully the modern connotations of Carnegie's behavior.

As the founder of modern philanthropy, Carnegie's actions were pioneering even in the United States. Behind his philanthropy lies the redevelopment of capitalist civilization: after the experience of "wild capitalism," capitalists have a deeper understanding of the relationship between the "individual" and the "public." To sum up Carnegie's actions in terms of "righteousness" obscures the pioneering nature of Carnegie's philanthropy and carries with it a conservative connotation, since the system of propriety that "righteousness" upholds is the order that already exists in society and the association of "righteous men" with conservative characteristics is the exact opposite of Carnegie's behavior. Furthermore, Carnegie's charity was a product of modern society. His generosity was not simply a matter of helping others, but of realizing the perfection of society through individual acts, which was different from the righteous men of ancient China. Commentators noted the Christian spirit behind Carnegie's actions and recognized the difference between them and the Confucian spirit behind China's "righteous" culture. While this explains

cultural differences, it does not capture adequately the details of cultural variation.

Since 1903, when the "People's Review" section of the *Xinmin's Daily* published "Carnegie, the American Millionaire" (Anonymous), modern Chinese media began to pay attention to Carnegie's biographical information. Similar articles include: "Carnegie, the American tycoon" (*Economic Series*, 1903, Vol. 7, No. 27), "Carnegie, the American Tycoon and Steel Magnate's Outlook on Life" (*Mainland*, 1905, Vol. 3, No. 10), "Carnegie, the American Tycoon" (*Oriental Magazine*, 1911, Vol. 8, No. 4), "A Small History of the Development of the Steel Industry" (Casson), "Ten Kings of American Industry: Carnegie, the Iron King" (*China Industry*, 1914, No. 1), "Carnegie, the Hard Worker, the Successful Man" (*La Jeunesse*, the predecessor, first issue, 1915), "Miscellaneous: A Biography of Carnegie, the American Iron King" (*Bank Weekly*, 1919, Vol. 3, No. 31), and so on. Most of these articles were not biographical and the introduction to Carnegie's life focused on his individual charitable deeds. Only articles such as "The Life Experience of Carnegie, the Wealthy American Iron King," "The Hard Work of a Successful Man: A Biography of Carnegie," and "Miscellaneous Compilation: A Biography of Carnegie, the American Iron King" introduced Carnegie's life and personality in more detail to Chinese readers. The focus on Carnegie's entire life and personality traits is ostensibly the result of an increased interest in Carnegie in modern Chinese media. But in terms of the logic of modern Chinese cultural development, it represents a deepening of the Chinese intellectual community's understanding of Western culture. When the Chinese media began to report on Carnegie's work sporadically, it reflected the "hunting" mentality of modern Chinese intelligentsia towards Western culture. Whether Carnegie helped the Philippines achieve self-government or whether he donated his money to charity, the Chinese media at that time were impressed, but they did not fully understand the cultural connotations of his actions. The focus on Carnegie's life and personality represents a shift in at least two aspects of Chinese intellectual life: first, a change in the perception of "merchant." In traditional China, there was a strict hierarchical system of personal occupations, such as the "Four Min" in "Guanzi, Xiao Kuang": "The scholar (Shi), the peasant (Nong), the worker (Gong), and the merchant (Shang), the four people are the pillars

of the state" (144). With 士农工商 (Shi, Nong, Gong, Shang) there is not only a parallel structure, but also a hierarchical system, with Shang being the last class. In the theory of social classification "Three Religions and Nine Streams" "merchant" is also a relatively inferior category, although versions vary. Nevertheless, it is a fact that this prejudice has become entrenched in traditional Chinese society. The modern Chinese media's focus on Carnegie's personal story as a businessman suggests that the intellectual community has broken down this professional bias. Second, the question of the value of the individual has been re-examined. The Chinese cultural tradition of "history and biography" also stimulates individuals to achieve moral or professional success, but the overall emphasis in Chinese culture is on "self-denial and obedience" and does not overemphasize the value and significance of the individual. In Carnegie's life, whether it was starting from scratch to become the "Iron King" or giving away his fortune to charity, he used his personal power to benefit society and promote the progress of industrial development. The attention paid by Chinese intellectuals to his personality marks the acceptance of pluralistic individual values in Chinese society. As far as Carnegie's personal and cultural message is concerned, his pioneering significance for capitalist society cannot be highlighted without attention to his entire life history. Carnegie's life had two different phases, one was the phase of creating wealth from nothing which reflected the spirit of capitalism at the time. During this period, Carnegie was shrewd and capable and even showed the characteristics of a "robber baron" while in his later years he was philanthropic and used his wealth for various charitable causes. This shows the individual's concern for social justice and development after the completion of the capitalist phase.

Unfortunately, however, the authors and translators of Carnegie's biographies did not fully grasp the coherence and unity of the different phases of Carnegie's life, especially the tremendous pioneering significance of his later turn to philanthropy, but instead focused on the first half of his life's hardship and entrepreneurial experience. The article, "The Young Life Lessons of Carnegie, the American Tycoon and Steel King," published in *Continental Magazine*, a modern newspaper article that focuses on Carnegie's charisma. The article is divided into five sections: 1) a young man's heart must not be without an ideal hero; 2) self-defense methods

for youth against temptation; 3) the value of self-reliant youth; 4) ways to do well in business; and 5) youth's failures need not be minded. The article offers Carnegie's words of warning to young people, but the content is mostly taken from a number of Carnegie's remarks, which are also mixed with a great deal of fabricated content by the editor. For example, in the opening chapter Carnegie says: "Young people, we live in a world where the reading of literature and the reading of history are not to be despised" (Anonymous, 4-8). The term "historical biography" may refer to a biography of a person in general, but in Chinese culture it has a special connotation of conveying the values of Confucianism, which does not correspond to the cultural background in which Carnegie grew up. In this article, the image of Carnegie is one of a "successful man" based on his career achievements, and he is referred to as the world-renowned "Iron King." The fact that Carnegie is regarded as a mentor to young people in modern Chinese media suggests that Chinese values are beginning to develop in a pluralistic direction. The theme of the entire article is how young people can achieve business success, and the content mainly focuses on Carnegie's life experiences before he turned to charity, which reflects his accumulation of courage, focus and enterprising spirit, the essence of the Darwinian idea of "natural selection, survival of the fittest," which is widely accepted in modern China.

Carnegie's biography published in *La Jeunesse* (the predecessor) is the most complete introduction to Carnegie in modern Chinese media. Translator Peng Dezun has translated ten chapters from Carnegie's biography, interspersed with his personal reflections. The biography covered Carnegie's early years as an entrepreneur and his later years as a philanthropist. The text is divided into ten chapters: I. the poor circumstances of Carnegie's youth and his journey to the United States, II. Carnegie's Labor Experiences, III. Carnegie as a Railroad Clerk, IV. Carnegie in the Caravan Business, V. Carnegie in the Kerosene Industry, VI. Carnegie in the Steel Industry, VII. Causes of Carnegie's Success, VIII. Carnegie's Ideals of Wealth, IX. Carnegie's Ways of Making Donations, and X. Carnegie's Hobbies and Family. The first six chapters recount the first half of Carnegie's life struggles, in chapter seven the reasons for Carnegie's success are summarized, in chapters eight and nine Carnegie's philanthropic goals and public causes are clarified, and in chapter ten there

are some snippets of Carnegie's private life. Roughly, the first six chapters account for about 45% of the total, chapter 7 for 15%, chapters 8 and 9 for 30%, and chapter 10 for 10%. The theme of the first six chapters, "Struggle" and the theme of the eighth and ninth chapters "Public Work" are the two elements that make up Carnegie's image of a "successful man" and the image of a "hard-working achiever." Compared to the Carnegie biographies published previously in China, this article has the most comprehensive understanding of Carnegie's "successful man," i.e., no longer limited to business success, but also in the sense of personal accomplishment. However, as the title suggests, despite the emphasis on Carnegie's philanthropy, the entrepreneurial spirit of "hard work and can-do attitude" remains the focus of the text.

As mentioned earlier, one of the most important aspects of Carnegie's worldwide influence is his philanthropic achievements. Although Carnegie was also the world-renowned "Iron King," others such as Rockefeller, Morgan, and Franklin were also monopolists. Modern Chinese biographies do not pay attention to Carnegie's philanthropic ideas in his later years, which demonstrates a great lack of cultural significance for him. From the perspective of variation, default is also an important manifestation of cultural variation - the intentional or unintentional omission of some information from the source culture. Although the culture being transmitted is not greatly altered, the culture as a whole is. Modern China also began to focus on industry after the "Self-Strengthening Movement" producing a number of "hard work and can-do attitude" of private entrepreneurs, but due to the system, culture, and other shortcomings, no one was able to copy Carnegie's success. The importance that modern Chinese media attach to Carnegie's entrepreneurial spirit is related to a period in which China is pursuing its own national self-improvement. Since the late Qing Dynasty, China has been plunged into an increasingly serious national crisis, and "self-improvement" has become the theme of the times. The Xinhai Revolution and the May Fourth Movement all had "self-improvement" as their banner. In such a historical context, the creation of a new country with new institutions and new culture was the concern of the intellectual elite, and the questions over how to make society perfect was the proposition of the next stage. Therefore, the spirit of Carnegie's "hard work and can-

do attitude" from Scotland to the United States became the subject of attention within Chinese intellectual circles. It even served as an inspiration for the younger generation.

Carnegie's public acceptance in modern China entered in the form of "current affairs," which conveyed a cultural message closer to his cultural influence in the Western world. On the one hand, his great success in business represented the transition of capitalism from free competition to monopoly. On the other hand, his great contribution to philanthropy marked the progress of capitalist behavior. These are two of the most important concerns of the Chinese media in modern times. Nevertheless, Chinese intellectual circles were unable to accept the cultural values underpinning Carnegie's life and philanthropy: they could not accurately grasp his cultural connotations and they only expressed "amazement" at his success. His philanthropic work can only be understood through the Chinese culture of "righteousness" resulting in an obvious cultural mistranslation and misinterpretation. As the Chinese understanding of Carnegie deepened, Carnegie's charisma began to draw the attention of the Chinese media, which led to the second phase of Carnegie's acceptance by the Chinese intelligentsia. During this phase, Carnegie's most influential philanthropic work was ignored, and his success became the object of intense intellectual propaganda, thereby creating a special angle of focus in modern China. From the perspective of modern Chinese intellectual history, the changing focus of Carnegie's attention in modern Chinese media reflects a stronger sense of subjectivity in the intellectual community. However, ignoring Carnegie's overall contribution to capitalist civilization would limit modern China's imagination of change and self-improvement. On the whole, the history of Carnegie's transformation in Chinese society is part of the history of modern Chinese thought, reflecting the journey of modern China's "going global" mentality. Whether it is a sense of bewilderment or the lack of conscious choice, the history of the spiritual growth of the Chinese people can be seen through these cultural variations.

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