

A Critical Analysis of the Reception of Jane Austen's Novels in the Printing Market and Textbooks in China in 2021

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Abstract: *The Reception Theory argues that literary works are received against an existing horizon of expectations consisting of readers' current knowledge and presuppositions about literature, and that the meanings of works change as such horizons shift. Based on the Reception Theory, this essay explores how Chinese ordinary readers and scholars view Jane Austen through the study of the reception of Jane Austen's Novels in the printing market and textbooks in China in 2021. This essay believes that on one hand, the sales of Jane Austen's books and editorial evaluations proves that Jane Austen is an unquestionable canonical writer in the eyes of ordinary Chinese readers and it is her 'Englishness' – the "alien" and "exotic" feature of her writing – that makes her widely praised among the Chinese reading public. On the other hand, the absence or insignificant literary status of Jane Austen in the literary textbooks shows that she is not much favored by literary historians and this has much to do with the sociopolitical contexts and ideological imperatives which affect the literary aesthetics and literary historians' evaluation criteria.*

Keywords: *The Reception Theory, Jane Austen, Jane Austen's Novels in China*

1. Introduction

When Jane Austen let Caroline Bingley say 'I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading!', she might not have expected that the words, uttered by someone who has no interest in reading at all but pretends to share the same interest with a rich man whom she would like to hook as husband, will be printed on the ten pound note as her immortal words in praise of reading. No wonder the Guardian ridiculed the governor of the Bank of England not actually reading *Pride and Prejudice* ^[1]. The blunder of Jane Austen's quotation shows an interesting literary phenomenon: readers do not always interpret the text in the way the author wishes them to.

In this essay, I will explore how Chinese ordinary readers and scholars view Jane Austen's works, respectively. Rather than exploring the historical changes for a period of time, I set a fixed time (the year of 2021) so that my work can be more focused. The work will include the following three steps: The first step is to investigate the sale conditions of the published books to analyze the reception of Jane Austen's works among ordinary readers; the second step is to go through the literary textbooks which are still in use in the schools to check the reception of Jane Austen among the academic communities; the last step is to analyze the possible reasons for the findings of the first two steps. In this process, I will use the method of comparison to explore the literary status of Jane Austen. To be more specific, I will compare Jane Austen with other famous British writers such as Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, John Milton, Charles Dickens, the Brontë sisters, and Virginia Woolf to show how Chinese readers and scholars view them. Of course, the work will inevitably involve a comparison between Jane Austen and writers from other countries.

It is not an easy task to investigate the sale conditions of Jane Austen's works in China in 2021, even though the scope of investigation has been limited to her six major novels only. Theoretically, as the issuer of the CIP (Cataloguing in Publication) number, the "identification number" of a book issued in China, NPPA (National Press and Publication Administration) has all relevant CIP data, varying from the publisher, printer, distributor to the ISBN number, edition, printing times, and quantity of books printed. But the quantity of books printed does not equal the quantity of books sold, let alone the quantity of books sold in 2021. Of course, the publishing house must have the sales data, but they will not usually publish these core business secrets. Even if you can get access to this data from one or two publishing

houses, you cannot get the sales data of all the other thousands of publishing houses in China. Fortunately, NPPA, together with the publishing houses, has built an online platform, the National Publishing and Distribution Information Public Service Platform, to allow people to check the relevant sales data. Unfortunately, up to now, data services are only available to institutions, and individuals cannot check the data by themselves. However, it doesn't mean that we cannot get the sales data of Jane Austen's works from public sources. The Bestsellers List of the online bookstore is one of those sources. According to the '2021 Book Retailing Market Report Under Channel Evolution' released by the Beijing Openbook co., Ltd after analysing the sales data of more than 18000 online and offline bookstores, the proportion of online sales in the book retail market has grown rapidly year by year, and online sales accounted for nearly 80% in 2021^[2]. Therefore, to a large degree, the sales data provided by the online bookstores can reflect the general sales conditions of the whole publishing and printing market.

2. The Reception of Jane Austen's Novels in the Printing Market

Table 1: Bestsellers List of World Classics in 2021 in China.

Ranking	Country	Writer	Work	Total Editions	Total Score
1	United Kingdom	William Somerset Maugham	The Moon and Sixpence	11	1887
2	France	Antoine de Saint-Exupéry	The Little Prince	10	1750
3	Russia	Fyodor Dostoevsky	Crime and Punishment	8	1395
4	Russia	Gorky	Three autobiographical works	7	1336
5	United Kingdom	Emily Brontë	Wuthering Heights	7	1239
6	United States	Ernest Hemingway	The Old Man and the Sea	8	1102
7	Russia	Leo Tolstoy	Resurrection	7	1041
8	United Kingdom	Charles Dickens	A Tale of Two Cities	5	1033
9	France	Victor Hugo	The Hunchback of Notre-Dame	5	1028
10	United Kingdom	Jane Austen	Pride and Prejudice	6	1022
11	United Kingdom	Charlotte Brontë	Jane Eyre	6	882
12	Russia	Fyodor Dostoevsky	Anna Karenina	5	853
13	United States	Francis Fitzgerald	The Great Gatsby	5	841
14	United Kingdom	Charles Dickens	Oliver Twist	5	824
15	Russia	Fyodor Dostoevsky	War and Peace	6	812
16	United Kingdom	Charles Dickens	David Copperfield	4	788
17	German	Johann Wolfgang von Goethe	The Sorrows of Young Werther	5	734
18	Spain	Miguel de Cervantes	Don Quixote	5	714
19	Russia	Fyodor Dostoevsky	The Brothers Karamazov	4	696
20	Japan	Natsume Sōseki	I Am a Cat	3	679

On 18 April 2022, I investigated the bestsellers list of the "World Classic" on Dangdang, a famous online bookstore in China, and got the sales data of the top 300 books in the year of 2021. There are a total of 130 works by 92 writers from 16 countries included in the list, as a book may have more than one edition. In order to convert the ranking into a score, I set a score for each book (edition), and the total score of the book of different editions indicates its sales. The first-ranked book (edition) is assigned a score of 300 points, the second-ranked book is assigned 299 points, and so on, and the last-ranked book is assigned a score of 1 point. Then I add up the scores for the different editions of each book to get the total score for the book. So we can get the bestseller list by sorting the total score of each book in descending order. Please see table 1. Next, I added up the scores for each writer's work to get the total score for that writer. Then, I sorted the writers' scores in descending order to get a list of top-selling writers. Please see table 2. Finally, I added up the scores of authors in each country to get the total score

for that country, and then sorted in descending order to get the country list of bestsellers. Please see table 3. In order to further explore the status of Jane Austen and her works among British writers and their works, I selected Jane Austen's works and other British writers' works individually, and sorted them in descending order of their scores to get the ranking of Jane Austen's works among British writers' works (Table 4) and her ranking of British writers. (Table 5).

Table 2: List of Top-selling Writers in 2021 in China.

Ranking	Country	Writer	Number of Works	Total Score
1	United Kingdom	William Somerset Maugham	4	2985
2	United Kingdom	Charles Dickens	4	2747
3	Russia	Leo Tolstoy	3	2706
4	Russia	Fyodor Dostoevsky	5	2695
5	France	Antoine de Saint-Exupéry	1	1750
6	France	Victor Hugo	2	1616
7	Russia	Gorky	2	1419
8	United States	Ernest Hemingway	4	1354
9	United States	Mark Twain	3	1282
10	United Kingdom	Emily Brontë	1	1239
11	United Kingdom	Jane Austen	2	1189
12	Germany	Johann Wolfgang von Goethe	2	1026
13	United Kingdom	Charlotte Brontë	1	882
14	Japan	Natsume Sōseki	2	879
15	France	Jules Verne	3	863
16	United States	Francis Fitzgerald	1	841
17	France	Albert Camus	2	775
18	Spain	Miguel de Cervantes	1	714
19	France	Alexandre Dumas fils	1	668
20	United States	Louisa May Alcott	1	665

Table 3: List of Countries of Best-Selling Writers.

Ranking	Country	Number of Writers	Number of Works	Total Score
1	United Kingdom	16	25	11342
2	France	16	22	9056
3	Russia	11	19	8815
4	United States	22	28	8037
5	Japan	7	8	1899
6	Germany	5	9	1880
7	Austria	2	4	867
8	Spain	2	2	803
9	Ireland	2	3	710
10	Columbia	1	2	609
11	Italy	2	2	351
12	Norway	1	1	240
13	Czech	1	1	194
14	Cuba	1	1	146
15	Canada	2	2	130
16	Greece	1	1	71

Table 4: Ranking of Jane Austen's Works among British Writers' Works.

Ranking	Writer	Work	Total Editions	Total Score
1	William Somerset Maugham	The Moon and Sixpence	11	1887
2	Emily Brontë	Wuthering Heights	7	1239
3	Charles Dickens	A Tale of Two Cities	5	1033
4	Jane Austen	Pride and Prejudice	6	1022
5	Charlotte Brontë	Jane Eyre	6	882
6	Charles Dickens	Oliver Twist	5	824
7	Charles Dickens	David Copperfield	4	788
8	William Somerset Maugham	The Painted Veil	3	556
9	Robert Stevenson	Treasure Island	2	345
10	Jonathan Swift	Gulliver's Travels	4	312
11	William Somerset Maugham	Of Human Bondage	2	276
12	William Somerset Maugham	Cakes And Ale	1	266
13	Daniel Defoe	Robinson Crusoe	2	247
14	James Matthew Barrie	Peter Pan	2	236
15	William Golding	Lord of the Flies	3	214
16	Oscar Wilde	The Nightingale and the Rose	1	213
17	Aldous Huxley	Brave New World	1	193
18	Jane Austen	Sense and Sensibility	1	167
19	George Orwell	Animal Farm	2	162
20	William Shakespeare	The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark	1	139
21	William Shakespeare	Shakespeare's Tragedy and Comedy	1	119
22	Charles Dickens	Great Expectations	1	102
23	J.R.R. Tolkien	The Hobbit	1	65
24	George Orwell	Nineteen Eighty-Four	1	46
25	Sir Thomas Malory	Le Morte d'Arthur	1	9

Table 5: Ranking of Jane Austen among British Writers.

Ranking	Writer	Number of Works	Total Score
1	William Somerset Maugham	4	2985
2	Charles Dickens	4	2747
3	Emily Brontë	1	1239
4	Jane Austen	2	1189
5	Charlotte Brontë	1	882
6	Robert Stevenson	1	345
7	Jonathan Swift	1	312
8	William Shakespeare	2	258
9	Daniel Defoe	1	247
10	James Matthew Barrie	1	236
11	William Golding	1	214
12	Oscar Wilde	1	213
13	George Orwell	2	208
14	Aldous Huxley	1	193
15	J.R.R. Tolkien	1	65
16	Sir Thomas Malory	1	9

As can be seen from Table 3, the works of writers from European and North American countries occupy the vast majority of the market share of China's world classics in 2021, of which the four countries of the United Kingdom, the United States, Russia and France account for more than 70%. Compared

with other countries, European and American countries still dominate the field of Chinese world classics, and the cultures of European and American countries are still in a strong position. It is noteworthy that the United Kingdom tops the overall score with 25 works by 16 writers, and the score is much higher than that of France, Russia, and the United States. This shows that Chinese readers are very fond of the classical works of British writers.

Table 2 and Table 5 indicate how Jane Austen ranks among the world-famous writers and British writers. According to the data presented in Table 2, Jane Austen is ranked 11th out of 20 writers, being in the middle of the list. But if we consider all 96 writers, we can see that Jane Austen's ranking is very high. The first place in this list is British writer William Somerset Maugham, who has four works on the list. But the question of whether he is a canonical or a best-selling author is still open to further discussion. I have reservations about him being classified as a classic by Dangdang because none of the four current British literary history textbooks in China I investigated mention him or classify him as a classic. Except him, all the other writers preceding Jane Austen are unquestionable canonical writers such as Charles Dickens and Emily Brontë in the United Kingdom; Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Gorky in Russia; Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and Victor Hugo in France; and Ernest Hemingway and Mark Twain in the United States. On this table, we can see that Jane Austen scores are even more than some writers who can somehow even represent a certain country, such as Goethe in Germany, Dumas in France, and Cervantes in Spain. When it comes to British writers, Jane Austen ranks even higher. From Table 5, we can see that Jane Austen ranks fourth out of all sixteen writers. If Somerset Maugham is excluded, we can even say that Jane Austen is the second most popular canonical British writer after Charles Dickens, considering that the difference of the score between Emily Brontë and Jane Austen is not significant.

The ranking, unrelated to the writer's literary status or reputation, only matters the popularity of the writer among the Chinese reading public. We may have noticed that the ranking of William Shakespeare, perhaps the greatest writer in the English language and the world's greatest dramatist, on the list is not high, lower even than that of Robert Stevenson, a novelist and travel writer who can be regarded as being "celebrated" but far from being "great". What's more, we can see that the names of James Matthew Barrie, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Sir Thomas Malory appear on the list instead of Geoffrey Chaucer, John Milton, Thomas Hardy, or Virginia Woolf. It doesn't mean that the literary status or reputation of the former writers is higher than that of the latter. It's just because the genre of the novels and the content of fairy tales, adventures, and knights are more in line with the preferences of Chinese book buyers than the latter's epics, poetry, or the stream-of-consciousness literary style and themes that focus on harsh social reality or profound thoughts on humanity.

The ranking of Jane Austen's works among the world's classics and British classics can be seen from Table 1 and Table 4. According to the Bestsellers List of World Classics in 2021 in China, Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpence* and Exupery's *The Little Prince* come in first and second, respectively. These two books also have the most editions, with eleven and ten editions, respectively. There are six editions of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and the total score of the book ranks 10th out of all 130 works. Apart from the two above-mentioned works, other works ranking before Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* include Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Gorky's three autobiographical works, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, and Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, and Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* are basically at the same level as the scores are not much different. Overall, *Pride and Prejudice* ranks well among all the world classics on the list. Jane Austen's works will rank higher, if we only consider the works of British writers. As per Table 4, two of the twenty-five British writers' works on the list are Jane Austen's works which are *Pride and Prejudice*, ranking fourth, and *Sense and Sensibility*, ranking eighteenth. If Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpence* is not to be considered (reasons have been provided before), we can even say that Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is only second to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, as the score of *Pride and Prejudice* is almost the same as Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. In conclusion, whether from the perspective of the ranking of Jane Austen's works among works of British or world-famous writers, or Jane Austen's ranking among British or world-famous writers, Jane Austen is an unquestionable canonical writer in the eyes of Chinese readers.

There is no doubt that Jane Austen is a canonical writer based on the analysis of the sales data above, but what do Chinese publishers and readers think about her in detail? After completing the quantitative analysis, I think there is a need to do the qualitative analysis. Next, I will look at all six editions of *Pride and Prejudice* and the only edition of *Sense and Sensibility* on the list to analyze Chinese publishers' and readers' attitudes toward Jane Austen. Janine Barchas argues that 'cheap books make authors canonical' and, from her point of view, 'cheap and shoddy versions of Jane Austen's novels performed the heavy lifting of bringing her work and reputation before the general public' [3]. She is absolutely right when the

price difference between the low-quality “cheap” books and high-quality “expensive” books is large. But in China, both low-quality and high-quality books are very cheap. In the case that the price is not much different, readers will definitely give priority to high-quality hardcover books. Almost all six editions of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* are hardbacks with well-designed covers, fine papers, exquisite decorations and illustrations that are of both literariness and artistry. Different from many western countries, it is the high-quality “expensive” books that make Austen canonical in China. The publishing houses of these books are all top authoritative publishing houses specializing in translation and foreign literature in China. For example, Central Compilation & Translation Press is a national social sciences publishing house that mainly translates and introduces classic works and cutting-edge works in the world, and Shanghai Translation Publishing House is the largest comprehensive professional translation publishing house in China. The six versions of *Pride and Prejudice* are translated by five prominent translators: Wang Keyi, Sun Zhili, Luo Lianggong, and Li Jihong, of which Sun’s edition is widely regarded as the most outstanding one. As a translator, translation theorist, professor, and doctoral tutor at the Information Engineering University, Sun Zhili has translated all of Jane Austen’s six major novels, and his translations enjoy high prestige and popularity among Chinese scholars and readers. It is worth noting that the translation time span of these six versions is as long as sixty years. Wang Keyi’s version was first published in 1955, and Li Jihong’s version was in 2016. The constant re-translation and interpretation of Austen’s works shows the strong vitality of her works in China. The edition of *Sense and Sensibility* on the list is co-translated by the famous Jia Bothers: Jia Wenhao and Jia Wenyuan. Deviating from the style of previous translations, which is obscure and difficult to understand, their translation seeks to realize the goal of commonality without vulgarity. Their translation, highlighting the delicate emotions and British humour of the original work, is widely accepted by the general public. In addition to the beautiful binding and exquisite translation, most of these books also have copious annotations and long introductions by the translator or other authoritative scholars, which greatly enhance the academic quality of the books. For example, Luo Lianggong’s edition includes an in-depth interpretation of Wang Jing, a doctor of literature from Nanjing University, and Sun Zhili’s edition includes a special collection of articles commemorating the 200th anniversary of Austen’s death.

Most of the editors and publishers don’t give their opinions on the literary reputation of Jane Austen directly when they introduce her. Instead, they choose to quote the comments from other celebrated writers or critics to show their praise. The most-quoted comments printed on the back cover of the books are Edmund Wilson’s: ‘There have been several revolutions of taste during the last century and a quarter of English literature, and through them all perhaps only two reputations have never been affected by the shifts of fashion: Shakespeare’s and Jane Austen’s.’ Another famous comment is William Somerset Maugham’s: ‘What makes a classic is not that it is praised by critics, expounded by professors and studied in schools, but that large numbers of readers, generation after generation, have found pleasure and spiritual profit in reading it.’ It is an interesting thing to see the quotation of a very popular (at least in China) but not absolutely outstanding writer being referred to as an endorsement for the work of a prominent writer who can be regarded as “great”. In contrast, the quotations of Walter Scott or Charlotte Brontë, indispensable when commenting on Jane Austen in the Anglo-American world, are rarely mentioned in China. However, not all editors are lazy to give their comments. Sun Zhili’s edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, published by the Xi’an Jiaotong University Press, is an exception. In the part of ‘Editor’s Recommendation’, the editor writes, ‘Austen is a woman who lives interestingly without a man. She has a room of her own with books, paper, and pens. Being female is more or less a limitation of life, but she did not bury her talent’^[4]. From the perspective of the editor, Jane Austen is a gifted writer who lives interestingly with her books, paper, and pens even though she didn’t marry during her whole life. The comments made by the editor or quoted from other writers or critics show that Jane Austen is highly respected by Chinese editors and publishers, and her literary status as the canonical writer is unquestionable audience.

3. The Reception of Jane Austen's Novels in the Text Books

The truth of Jane Austen’s popularity among ordinary readers is beyond all doubt, as the sales of Jane Austen’s books and editorial evaluations have already proven it. But how about her reputation in the circle of education? Do the authors and editors of literary textbooks hold the same positive views? Before answering this question and examining the teaching of Austen in China, I think it would be better to give a brief introduction of the Chinese education system and curriculum first. At the current moment, there are three levels of the Chinese education system: the primary level, the secondary level, and the higher education level. At the primary and secondary levels, the curriculum that might involve Jane Austen’s works is called Yuwen, a word literally meaning language and word, or language and literature, or

language and culture, aimed at the teaching of students to read and write. To a certain extent, the curriculum of Yuwen can be simply regarded as the course of “Chinese”. At the higher education level, Jane Austen might appear in three kinds of courses. The first is the college Yuwen, available to all college students of different majors. The second is the “History of Foreign Literature”, aimed mainly at students majoring in Chinese. The last one, which is also the most important one, is the “History and/or Anthology of English Literature”, a compulsory course for almost all English majors.

None of Jane Austen’s works are mentioned in the textbooks of primary and secondary schools. The teaching of works by foreign writers is also important, even if the main educational aims of Yuwen at the primary and secondary levels are to teach students to read and write Chinese. One of the goals of the Chinese Curriculum in Ordinary Senior High Schools is to ‘pay attention to the inheritance of human cultural heritage, respect and understand multiculturalism, pay attention to contemporary cultural life, learn the analysis of cultural phenomena, and actively participate in the dissemination and exchange of advanced culture’^[5]. To explore the use of Jane Austen’s writings in textbooks and schools, I investigated twenty three volumes of the Yuwen from grade one to grade twelve, covering the whole period of primary and secondary levels of education. The result is that none of Jane Austen’s works are mentioned. According to the statistics, articles by foreign writers account for around fifteen percent of all articles, of which articles by American writers are the most with a total of 31 articles, followed by the works of Soviet, French, and Russian writers, including 14, 12 and 10 articles respectively. British writers contribute 9 articles of the total, including Shakespeare’s plays, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, Francis Bacon’s prose, *On Study*, John Keats’s poem *The Grasshopper and the Cricket*, and Jonathan Swift’s novel *Gulliver’s Travels*, etc. It is not difficult to understand the reason for Jane Austen’s absence in primary and secondary textbooks. As Devoney Looser says in her *The Making of Jane Austen*, ‘we’ve overestimated the extent to which Austen’s established critics served to create her legacy in schools and elsewhere’^[6]. The textbooks of Yuwen don’t equal the specialized literature history or monographs, which only consider the literary values of the works or writers. Literary textbooks, as the combination of instrumentality and humanity, shall also take into account the educational and social values of the articles.

There are three possible reasons why Jane Austen is not mentioned in the literary textbooks. Firstly, in terms of the literary genre, Austen’s novels seem to be not very suitable for an article of the textbooks. It is not easy to find the balance between the lengthy, connected excerpts and selections, and the abridged and simplified editions, which curtail the conversations, shorten the descriptions, and solely describe the characters and plots. By contrast, the genres of drama, prose, poetry, or even speech are much more suitable in terms of their length and that is probably why Bacon’s prose and Keats’s poetry are selected. Secondly, the topics Austen’s novels focusing on, i.e. love and marriage, might be a little bit earlier for students in primary and secondary schools to talk about. The educational aims of this level are to help children to develop their imagination, explore the nature, learn about the world, evoke their love, grow their knowledge, or to cultivate young teenagers’ characters and educate them to cherish time, love life, and be brave to face the difficulties. It seems that Jane Austen’s novels do not fit these requirements well. Of course, under the veil of the “two inches ivory”, we can find a whole world in her novels of “limited scopes”. But the world and humanity behind the novels also seem a little bit hard for students at this level to understand. Another reason why Austen’s works are not chosen might be that her novels are not typical enough in terms of their literary nature. At the primary and secondary levels, the main aim of the course of Yuwen is to teach students to read, analyze, and understand the text in order to lay the foundations for the further evaluation and criticism. What students really need during this period is the basic and typical literary knowledge of narrative, argumentative, or expository essays, or the fairy tale, fable, or the myth, rather than the comparatively higher-level literary features of Austen’s novels, such as parody and burlesque, irony, and free indirect speech.

Jane Austen’s name is not mentioned in any of the college Yuwen textbooks either. The college Yuwen course, which is a continuation of the Yuwen at the primary and secondary levels, is not long, lasting only one semester, but it has a broad coverage because it is a required course for almost all majors at the university. Jane Austen’s absence from the Yuwen textbooks means that most of the students in China actually do not know her at all if they only focus on the textbooks.

The students majoring in Chinese do know Jane Austen, but they will never classify her among the great writers. In the textbook of the “History of Foreign Literature”, Jane Austen’s name is mentioned with only a few lines in the general introduction of the Romantic Period. By contrast, the editors of the book devote an entire chapter introducing writers like Shakespeare, Milton, Fielding, Dickens, and Hardy. From the editors’ perspective, ‘William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was a giant of the European Renaissance and a master in the history of world theatre and is considered one of the few greatest writers

of all time'^[7], and 'Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was an outstanding British novelist in the nineteenth century, second only to Shakespeare among British classical writers.' While regarding the literary status of Jane Austen, they only mention that 'her writing plays a link between the eighteenth-century English novels and the nineteenth-century critical realism'. Apart from the reason that the book covers multiple countries, spans a long time, and can only mention a limited number of authors, Austen is not taken seriously by literary historians, I think, is also caused by her ambiguous literary status. As Elinor Shaffer puts it, 'Jane Austen is a period puzzle, for she is coeval with "the Romantics", yet the description hardly fits'^[8]. Anthony Mandal points out that some European critics found that Jane Austen's literary position is difficult to fix: 'an inheritor of the Neoclassicists, a contemporary of the Romantics, a precursor of Victorian realism - and yet none of these'^[9]. One goal of the literary history is to provide readers with a clear timeline of the literary trends and development, and a distinct literary position is essential. Chang Yaixin, the author of *A Survey of English Literature*, explains his principles of writing the history of English literature: 'the 26 chapters here offer a sketch of the major writers with some mention of those, though minor in stature, who have made a scratch on the rock of time in their way'^[10]. Apart from the major writers, the authors of literary history also pay attention to those whose literary reputation might not be high but can represent a literary school or period. Obviously, Jane Austen does not have the clear positioning or characteristics that can impress literary history editors and make them write a lot about her in the book.

The description of Austen in the textbook of the course of "English Literature" aimed at English majors is much longer. There are mainly four types of English literary history textbooks used in Chinese universities and colleges now, edited or written by Wang Shouren, Chang Yaixin, Liu Bingshan, and Wu Weiren, respectively. Despite their similarities, the four versions of the literary history each have a different focus. Wang's version focuses on the introduction and interpretation of Austen's works. In addition to *Pride and Prejudice*, which is also mentioned in the other three versions, Wang also analyses Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Emma*. Instead of merely giving general statements, he endeavors to unite the introduction of plots and characters with critical analyses to provide students and scholars a variety of critical approaches to further their studies. Chang's version also stresses the combination of the introduction and interpretation, but it pays more attention to the overall evaluation of Jane Austen. Chang argues that 'among her numerous strengths are her exquisite, compact prose, her moral judgment, her wit, and her vivid character portrayal'. Regarding the "limitation" of Austen's fiction, he believes that Austen's fictional world, being a 'microcosm of the world at large', confined as it may be, is not parochial at all. Compared with the other three versions, Liu's version is the shortest in the description of Jane Austen. Only a meager page is allocated to introduce Austen's life experience and works. Wu's version is a combination of history and anthology. It is mainly composed of four parts: introduction of the writer and major works, summary of the work (when the work is excerpted), excerpts, and annotations. Different from the other three versions, Wu's version centers on the literary excerpts rather than the history. In this version, the first two chapters of *Pride and Prejudice* are excerpted for close reading and detailed analysis.

Jane Austen and her works are valued by authors or editors of all four versions of literary history, but we cannot assume that Chinese literary historians will believe that Austen's achievements are comparable to those of Shakespeare or Dickens. Insisting that 'William Shakespeare is the greatest and most influential writer in the history of English literature', Wang uses the sixteenth pages of five chapters to introduce Shakespeare's historical plays, comedies, tragedies, legendary plays and sonnets in great detail. By contrast, the section dedicated to introducing Jane Austen only takes four pages. Similarly, Chang allocates twenty-five pages to expound Dickens's life experiences, works, and critics' evaluations but only uses one page to introduce Jane Austen. The preference of Chinese literary historians for Dickens is evident.

Sociopolitical contexts and ideological imperatives do affect the literary aesthetics and literary historians' evaluation criteria. Compared with Austen's quiet and peaceful brilliance, Dickens's class struggle and Byron's worship of liberation are more suited to China, a country which had experienced one and a half centuries of war, revolution, and dramatic social changes, and was once dominated by the literary aesthetic of socialist realism. Against the background of socialism and capitalism confrontation, Chinese readers, editors of textbooks, and literary historians are more likely to value Dickens's works, which demonstrate the inadequacies of capitalist regimes and criticize capitalist exploitation, instead of Austen's works, which "propagandize" the happiness of graceful ladies and gentlemen of the British gentry in capitalist society. A similar phenomenon also appears in certain historical periods in Soviet Russia, East Germany, and other places affected by socialism. With the collapse of the socialist ideology in eastern Europe and the opening up of China, the impact of the ideology on literary aesthetics declines, and the values of private life and intimate relations return gradually. But, in the area of textbooks, perhaps

the most conservative place from which the national are “educated”, the ideology’s influence still lingers. It’s unsurprising that Austen is less appealing than Dickens. We can’t assume that the influence of ideology on literary aesthetics is unique to “tyrannical” and “oppressive” socialist countries, while “democratic” and “free” capitalist societies are completely free of it. Isn’t Charles Laughlin’s appreciation to Mo Yan, the Chinese novelist who won the 2012 Nobel prize in literature, due to the fact that ‘Mo Yan’s fiction satirizes the inhumanity of self-serving and hypocritical government officials [...] [and] indicts the One-Child Policy and forced abortion’?

Austen’s quintessential ‘Englishness’ and her unique linguistic characteristics don’t deny her translation and popularity in China. As explained by Brian Southam, Austen’s ‘Englishness’ mainly refers to her characteristic of being ‘anglocentric, narrowly and specifically concerned not with Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, but only with England, the English and Englishness’^[11]. Austen’s limited focus on the country lives of upper-middle classes or gentry in Georgian or Regency England, being untranslatable somehow due to the lack of cultural equivalence, does impede her popularity in some countries. For example, Beatrice Battaglia argues that the limited interest of Italian readers in Austen was caused by the unsatisfactory Italian translations, and an important reason for the bad translations is that ‘no Italian equivalent of the novels’ social setting exists’ and ‘it is futile and misleading to search for their Italian equivalents’ because the characters are ‘rooted in the originality and uniqueness of their social setting’^[12]. Huge cultural differences caused by different eras and countries, to which readers and protagonists belong, do affect the smooth translation of Austen’s works from English to Chinese (Isn’t the meaning of the translation to break the cultural barriers and build the bridge of communication?), but different from their Italian counterparts, Chinese translators seem to be more proficient in dealing with the cultural obstacles. The complex inheritance law based on primogeniture, which has caused the economy of the Dashwood and Bennet sisters, is one of the many issues which Chinese readers are not familiar with. Fortunately, Chinese translators always make explanations at appropriate times in the critical introductions and annotations, whose subjects cover nearly all aspects of eighteenth-century England: food, clothing, housing, transportation, education, work, marriage, custom, morality, law, and religion. For example, when Mr. Collins claims that he has never read novels in *Pride and Prejudice*, Sun Zhili, the translator, makes the following explanatory annotation:

At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, due to the influence of feudal consciousness, an evil trend of anti-fiction emerged in Britain, especially among the feudal aristocracy, who openly regarded novels as a boring or even harmful pastime and spurned them.

The “faithful” translation of Austen’s irony, wit, and humor is anything but an easy work. Beatrice Battaglia asserts that ‘Austen’s witty comedy requires a precise language indeed, clear but at the same time natural enough to run unnoticed without obstructing the appreciation of wit and irony’. In terms of the language and style, Chinese translations, most of which are made by Austen scholars or professors of Anglo-American literature, do meet Battaglia’s requirements. Most Chinese translators are sophisticated enough to translate the text faithfully without in language that can be represented uncouth or unpleasant to read. Therefore, Austen’s ‘Englishness’ and her unique linguistic characteristics didn’t deny her translation and popularity in China. Quite the contrary, it is her ‘Englishness’ – the “alien” and “exotic” feature of her writing – that makes her widely praised among the Chinese reading public. Speculating on the cult of Austen, Deidre Lynch points out that ‘the passage of time, though putting more distance between her era and readers’, has increased the intimacy of the author–reader relation’^[13]. And this is quite true in China. Despite the fact that the popularity of the screen adaptations has promoted “Austenmania” across the world, including China, as far as I’m concerned, it is her ‘Englishness’ that fundamentally sustains her popularity.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, two things are certain regarding the reception of Jane Austen's novels in the printing market and textbooks in China in 2021. The first is Austen’s popularity among Chinese ordinary readers. The second is her absence or insignificant literary status in the literary textbooks. This essay believes that on one hand, the sales of Jane Austen's books and editorial evaluations proves that Jane Austen is an unquestionable canonical writer in the eyes of ordinary Chinese readers and it is her ‘Englishness’ – the “alien” and “exotic” feature of her writing – that makes her widely praised among the Chinese reading public. On the other hand, the absence or insignificant literary status of Jane Austen in the literary textbooks shows that she is not much favored by literary historians and this has much to do with the sociopolitical contexts and ideological imperatives which affect the literary aesthetics and literary historians’ evaluation criteria. ‘She is a miniaturist, but never two-dimensional,’ E. M. Forster writes, “All

her characters are round, or capable of rotundity'. Austen's characters are round, full of complexities and contradictions, just like Austen herself in China. Contradictory facts do exist in reality. She is round rather than flat.

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