

Localization of China's Creative Writing Knowledge System in the Context of Textbook Publishing

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Abstract

Creative writing emerged in the United States at the end of the 19th century, subsequently accelerating its spread across English-speaking countries and gradually gaining widespread global influence. Chinese universities began exploring creative writing instruction and program development around 2009. Over the past 15 years, the localization of creative writing textbooks has achieved remarkable success and accumulated rich experience. This study centers on textbook publishing to review the development of creative writing in China, trace its phased characteristics from introduction to localization, and summarize its practical achievements in China. It aims to provide valuable insights and pathways for the development of other disciplines.

Keywords: Creative writing; localization; textbook publishing; discipline development.

1. Introduction

Creative writing is an interdisciplinary, cross-domain comprehensive writing practice driven by "creativity." Rooted in the philosophy that "everyone can write," it emphasizes stimulating individual creativity and enabling self-discovery and self-expression through writing. This approach transcends the elitist nature of writing activities, restoring it to a universal and egalitarian creative endeavor. ¹Against the dual backdrop of contemporary liberal arts development and accelerated digital intelligence technology iteration, the significance of creative writing education has become increasingly prominent.

In January 2024, the "Introduction to Graduate Education Disciplines and Basic Degree Requirements" compiled by the Eighth Discipline Review Panel of the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council and the National Professional Degree Graduate Education Steering Committee was released. Notably, the secondary discipline of Chinese Creative Writing was added under the primary discipline of Chinese Language and Literature. This marks a major advancement in the development of creative writing as an academic discipline after 15 years of exploration by universities and relevant institutions nationwide. Yet this rapid advancement has sparked considerable debate and curiosity: Why did China establish a creative writing discipline system in just 15 years—a framework that took nearly a century to develop in Europe and America? What are the underlying reasons and driving forces behind this accelerated growth? Does this trajectory offer a set of experiences worth learning from and drawing upon? These questions form the core of this study's research focus.

2. The International Development of Creative Writing

The origins of creative writing as an academic discipline can be traced back to late 19th-century America, with its gradual development in Anglo-American countries during the early 20th century. Subsequently, the discipline accelerated its global spread, with its developmental trajectory broadly divided into

three phases: the embryonic stage, the maturation stage, and the period of vigorous expansion.

The formal introduction of creative writing emerged within the context of humanities reform. It aimed to break the limitations of traditional literary education, emphasizing the practicality and creativity of literary creation, cultivating creative talents, advocating the naturalness of literary writing and reading, and promoting the restoration of the attributes of literary writing. This reform not only propelled the transformation of literary education but also injected new vitality into the modern education system. Particularly after World War II, economic prosperity, the growth of the middle class, and the expansion of higher education provided fertile ground for creative writing.

Harvard University emerged as a pioneer in establishing the discipline of creative writing. It pioneered advanced writing courses, invited renowned writers and scholars as professors, and innovatively established the Center for Creative Writing. This initiative aimed to cultivate students' creative thinking and writing abilities while providing greater opportunities for exchange within the field. Decades later, creative writing programs proliferated across the United States. The University of Iowa Writers' Workshop evolved into the Iowa International Writing Program in the 1970s, becoming a global hub for creative writing and an ideal venue for international literary exchange².

Building upon the academic exploration and educational practices in creative writing pioneered by institutions like Harvard and the University of Iowa, an increasing number of countries and higher education institutions began prioritizing and participating in the development of this discipline. Statistics indicate that by 2004, the United States alone had over 350 academic departments dedicated to creative writing education. When undergraduate programs are included, the total reached 720. Fenzah described this as: This represents the most extensive literary support system for contemporary writers the world has ever seen³. Simultaneously, the creative writing education system continues to evolve globally, forming diverse educational models that span undergraduate, master's, and

doctoral programs, laying a solid foundation for the discipline's sustained development.

3. The Rise of Creative Writing in China

The introduction of creative writing to China—from the initial importation of theories and methodologies, the establishment of the discipline, to the relative refinement of its curriculum and talent cultivation systems, culminating in the formal establishment of the field—took merely a decade. This undoubtedly represents a remarkably rapid developmental trajectory⁴.

Historically, the rise of creative writing in China is closely tied to national cultural strategy. Strengthening international communication capabilities helps build a positive global image, enhance China's political influence, and elevate its voice in international discourse⁵. When "cultural soft power" was incorporated into national medium-to-long-term development plans and "telling China's stories well" became the overarching design for external communication, creative writing ceased to be merely an elective course in universities. Instead, it evolved into a systematic innovation spanning creative concepts to disciplinary structures, talent cultivation to industrial transformation. Against this backdrop, the deep integration of Chinese writers with higher education institutions further propelled the development of creative writing. Numerous renowned writers have taken up teaching positions in universities, bringing their rich creative experience and professional expertise into the classroom. This dual identity of "writer-scholar" not only elevates the quality of creative writing instruction but also injects powerful momentum into the discipline's development. The research work of these scholars played a crucial enlightening role at the time. Through a series of journal articles, they revealed the essence and value of creative writing, dispelling public misconceptions and thereby promoting its widespread adoption and deeper understanding.

The rise of creative writing in China resulted from the synergistic advancement of national cultural strategy and the development of new liberal arts. From theoretical introduction to the refinement of curricula and talent cultivation systems, remarkable achievements were attained within just a decade. This success stemmed from abundant traditional writing resources, profound cultural heritage, and the active participation of writers and scholars. The localization of creative writing represents not merely an adaptation of Western experiences but a creative transformation of traditional resources, embodying the interdisciplinary and cross-domain

nature of the new liberal arts. While driving reforms in literary education, it also injects vitality into the cultural industry, emerging as a vital force in serving national cultural strategies and effectively telling China's stories.

4. Achievements in Localizing Creative Writing Textbooks

In the field of creative writing, textbook development has yielded remarkable results, serving as a crucial component of localization achievements. From a macro perspective, the creative writing textbooks currently widely used in higher education institutions can be broadly categorized into three types: imported and translated textbooks, textbooks compiled by domestic universities, and industry-applied textbooks.

a. Imported and Translated Textbooks

Foreign creative writing textbooks entered China relatively early, primarily centered on classic materials from European and American university courses. These textbooks typically cover multiple aspects of creative writing, including but not limited to fiction writing, poetry writing, nonfiction writing, and screenwriting. They not only provide systematic writing techniques and methods but also emphasize the theoretical foundations and mental training of creative writing. By introducing and translating these outstanding foreign works, they have filled knowledge gaps in related domestic research fields and enriched academic resources.

Among them, the "Creative Writing Series" introduced by Renmin University Press stands as a representative example of systematic entry into the Chinese market. This series establishes a mature framework in narrative techniques, character development, and plot construction, offering systematic theoretical and practical guidance for China's creative writing field. Representative textbooks include Shirley Ellis's Start Writing series, Jürgen Wolf's Creative Writing Master Class, and Elaine Walker's Teaching Creative Writing: 50 Practical Methods.

These materials are not only suitable for teaching creative writing in higher education but also serve as vital references for self-learners passionate about the craft, becoming essential resources for aspiring writers. In China at that time, the mass publication of creative writing textbooks rapidly permeated all levels of society, igniting a writing craze. Creative writing thus entered a phase of widespread dissemination, contributing to the development of Chinese literary creation and fostering greater diversity and innovation in literary works.

Table 1: Early Imported Western Textbooks.

Textbook Title	Author	Publisher	Publication Year	Features
Start Writing! — Fiction Writing	Sherry Ellis	Renmin University of China Press	2011	Techniques for writing fiction, covering methods for crafting short stories, novels, and more
Story Craft: A Guide to Narrative Nonfiction Writing	Jack Heffron	Renmin University of China Press	2012	Nonfiction Writing Techniques, Emphasizing the Integration of Narrative and Authenticity
Fiction Writing: A Guide to Narrative Techniques	Janet Burroway	Renmin University of China Press	2012	Narrative Techniques for Fiction Writing, Covering Point of View, Time, Structure, and More

Becoming a Writer	Dorothea Brande	Renmin University Press	2012	Essential Qualities and Methods for Becoming a Writer, Covering Writing Habits, Psychological Adjustment, and More
Writing Tools: Making Your Words Concise and Powerful	William Zinsser	Renmin University Press	2013	Offers a wealth of writing techniques and advice, demonstrating how to distill complex subjects into clear, accessible language.
Creative Writing Master Class	Jurgen Wolff	Renmin University of China Press	2013	Comprehensive creative writing techniques covering multiple genres and creative approaches
Creative Writing Instruction: 50 Practical Methods	Elaine V. Volkel	Renmin University of China Press	2013	Offers 50 creative writing teaching methods, including classroom activities and writing exercises
Plot and Character: Finding the Balance in Great Fiction	Jack Heffron	Renmin University of China Press	2014	Explores techniques for balancing plot and character development in fiction writing
Writing Stories from the Depths of the Soul: A Guide to Nonfiction Writing	Susan M. Tiberghien	Renmin University of China Press	2014	A nonfiction writing guide emphasizing emotional expression and the exploration of authentic stories
45 Classic Character Archetypes: Mythic Models for Creating Unique Characters	Jack Heffron	Renmin University of China Press	2014	Character Archetypes and Role Creation Based on Mythological Model Analysis
How Good Screenplays Tell Stories	Jack Heffron	Renmin University of China Press	2015	Screenwriting Techniques: Emphasizing Story Structure and Narrative Pacing

b. Textbook for Chinese Universities

Since 2016, domestic scholars and writing instructors have engaged in deep exploration of core creative writing concepts and continuous experimentation with localized teaching practices. This has driven the development of domestic creative writing textbooks to exhibit distinct new characteristics, increasingly emphasizing localization while closely aligning with Chinese literary traditions and industry demands.

During this phase, universities have served as the core bastions of creative writing education, playing an irreplaceable constructive role. Numerous university faculty members and creative writing scholars have actively engaged in textbook compilation. Leveraging their profound academic backgrounds and extensive teaching experience, they have propelled a leap in both the quality and quantity of creative writing textbooks. Notable representative works include: Chen Ming's *Creative Writing: Fiction and Narrative*, Xu Daojun and Ge Hongbing's *Creative Writing: Foundational Theory and Practice*, Diao Keli's *Poetic Quest: Literary Creation and Appreciation*, Li Hua's *Writing Stories from the Depths of the Soul: A Guide to Nonfiction Creation*, and Xu Daojun's *Story Workshop*—all authored by university scholars. The publication of these

textbooks not only enriches domestic teaching resources for creative writing but also lays a solid foundation for the discipline's further development. The active participation of university scholars has systematized and professionalized creative writing education in China, providing robust support for cultivating a new generation of creative writing talent.

From a systematic perspective, these textbooks not only align with Chinese students' linguistic habits and cultural context but also integrate practical experience from Chinese literary traditions, online literature, and film/television production, providing robust support for localized creative writing instruction. Through the continuous exploration and innovation of university scholars, creative writing textbooks have been closely integrated with Chinese literary traditions and cultural contexts while incorporating practical experience from emerging fields, forming a creative writing teaching system with Chinese characteristics. This achievement not only provides important theoretical support and practical examples for domestic creative writing education but also lays a solid foundation for subsequent disciplinary development and textbook construction.

Table 2: Locally Published Creative Writing Textbooks.

Textbook Title	Editor-in-Chief	Publisher	Publication Year	Main Content and Features
Daydreaming: 9 Creative Writing Experiments to Expand Your Imagination	Qianzhuang	Zhejiang University Press	2016	Spark creative thinking through nine writing experiments.
Creative Writing	Ding Bohui, Li Meng	Higher Education Press	2016	Proposes the concept of "cultivating writing skills for ordinary people," emphasizing the exploration of personal experiences and creative thinking.
Creative Writing Practical Training Guide	Tian Zhonghui, Li Shuxia	Hunan Normal University Press	2017	Focuses on practical training in creative writing, tailored to local teaching needs.

Expanding Novel Writing Skills	Chen Ming	Renmin University of China Press	2016	Activates authors' writing potential, cultivating and enhancing their narrative impulses, sensibilities, and abilities
Creative Writing Tutorial	Ge Hongbing, Xu Daojun	Higher Education Press	2017	Centered on the core concept of "Creative Ontology," this work integrates local experience and emphasizes creative thinking training.
University Creative Writing Practical Training Tutorial	Jiang Bing, Huang Jianyun	Jinan University Press	2017	Tailored to university creative writing instruction with a practical training focus.
Essentials of Creative Writing	Li Min	Jiuzhou Press	2017	A systematic interpretation of the core concepts and methods of creative writing.
The World of the Mind	Wang Anyi	Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House	2020	Comprehensively covers all aspects of novel writing—from its essence, purpose, materials, and structure to language.
Creative Writing	Liu Haitao	Higher Education Press	2021	Reorganizes key teaching points for literary writing courses, builds a supporting teaching resource repository, and establishes a progressive reading and writing training system.
Creative Writing for Online Literature	Xia Lie	Zhejiang University Press	2017	Provides a detailed exposition on the definition, developmental trajectory, and distinctions and connections between online literature and traditional literature. Explores the dissemination methods, reader demographics, and market characteristics of online literature.
Twelve Lessons in Creative Writing	Ye Kai	Guangxi Normal University Press	2018	Guiding participants in how to engage in "creative writing" based on "deep reading." Content covers various writing genres including fiction, argumentative essays, narrative writing, poetry, critical essays, and letters.
Creative Writing Workshop Pedagogy	Diao Keli	Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press	2020	Systematically introduces the pedagogical philosophy, methods, and practices of creative writing workshops, demonstrating how interactive teaching can stimulate students' creative thinking and writing abilities.
Creative Writing and Chinese Culture	Zhang Qinghua	Beijing Normal University Press	2021	This book delves into the deep connection between creative writing and traditional Chinese culture, analyzing how Chinese literary traditions nourish and influence creative writing.
New Media Creative Writing	Yu Guoming	Renmin University of China Press	2021	Focusing on creative writing in the new media environment, this work explores the new characteristics, methods, and trends of writing in the new media era. Through specific case studies, it analyzes how to achieve effective creative expression and content creation on new media platforms.
Creative Writing in Science Fiction	Wu Yan	Chongqing University Press	2022	This book delves into the techniques and methods of science fiction writing. Using classic sci-fi works as case studies, it analyzes the generation of sci-fi ideas, story structure, world-building, and the integration of technological elements.
Creative Writing: From Theory to Practice	Ge Hongbing	East China Normal University Press	2023	Comprehensively outlines the theoretical foundations, core concepts, and practical methods of creative writing. Through rich case studies, it provides writers with comprehensive guidance from conceptualization to text completion.

c. Industry-Applied Textbook

As teaching practices mature and educational achievements gain broader influence, coupled with increased national and institutional investment in creative writing disciplines, the path integrating industry, academia, research, and application has become the inevitable direction for creative writing⁶. Against this backdrop, industry-oriented creative writing textbooks have emerged as a vital component of the discipline's educational framework. These materials emphasize practical applications in online literature, short videos, game writing, and brand copywriting—aligning with contemporary creative industry trends to deliver highly relevant, actionable writing guidance.

The emergence of industry-applied textbooks reflects the deep integration of creative writing education with the cultural and creative industries. Compiled by teams of industry practitioners or experts with extensive practical experience, these textbooks infuse vibrant industry elements through their keen insights into sector dynamics and hands-on expertise. For instance, *Tutorial on Writing Online Novels* (Crazy Xiaoqiang, Shenyang Publishing House, 2018) focuses on techniques for online novel writing, covering plot construction, character development, and genre-specific characteristics to meet the specific demands of the current online literature market. *The Guide to Creating Viral*

Short Video Scripts (E-commerce Education Editorial Team, China Water & Power Press, 2024) addresses content creation for short video platforms, explaining scriptwriting techniques, trending topic identification, and user psychology analysis to meet the industry's rapid content production demands. The publication of these textbooks not only provides students with practical writing skills and industry knowledge but also cultivates professionals with hands-on capabilities for the cultural and creative industries, further advancing the integration of creative writing education with industrial practice.

The emergence of industry-applied textbooks not only supplies the cultural and creative industries with a large pool of writing professionals equipped with specialized skills but also offers new perspectives and directions for the diversified development of creative writing education. Moving forward, industry-applied textbooks should strengthen collaboration with universities and research institutions to incorporate more theoretical research findings, enhancing their academic rigor and systematic coherence. Through these improvements, such textbooks will better serve the localized development of creative writing, providing robust support for cultivating creative writing talents with both international perspectives and local innovation capabilities.

Table 3: Industry-Applied Textbooks.

Textbook Title	Author/Editor	Publisher	Publication Year	Main Content and Features
Guide to Writing Web Novels	Crazy Xiaoqiang	Shenyang Publishing House	2018	Focuses on writing techniques for online novels, covering plot construction, character development, and genre-specific literary characteristics, tailored to meet the demands of the contemporary online literature market.
21 Days to Becoming a Web Novelist	Big Fat Sheep	Xinhua Publishing House	2018	Offers a 21-day online literature writing training program emphasizing hands-on practice and quick mastery, ideal for newcomers to the field.
Screenplay Writing Techniques	Jiang Xiao	Sichuan University Press	2019	Comprehensive and systematic content covering fundamental steps to specific techniques, providing a complete guide to screenplay creation.
Concise Tutorial on Creative Applied Writing	Zeng Jun	Huazhong University of Science and Technology Press	2024	Focusing on applied writing genres, this course emphasizes "daily application documents," "academic paper writing," and "promotional planning documents." It incorporates traditional industry-specific documents such as "Party and government official documents" and "business management and legal documents" into the curriculum for targeted instruction.
Creative Copywriting for E-commerce	Yu Hongyan	People's Posts and Telecommunications Press	2020	This comprehensive guide systematically covers foundational knowledge, practical writing techniques, and methods for crafting various types of copy, offering a structured approach to creative writing.
How to Write Viral Short Video Copy	Yutao	Democracy and Construction Press	2022	This book teaches creators how to target specific audiences, identify a product's unique selling points, and categorize them to create deeper brand recall. It offers practical copywriting techniques for short video creators.

Guide to Creating Viral Short Video Scripts	E-commerce Education Editorial Board	China Water & Power Press	2024	Tailored for content creation on short video platforms, this guide covers scriptwriting techniques, trending topic identification, and user psychology analysis to meet industry production demands.
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5. Reasons for the Successful Localization of Creative Writing Textbooks

a. Policy Support and Shifting Educational Paradigms

In recent years, the state has introduced a series of policies centered on deepening the integration of creative writing with national cultural strategies, positioning it to play a vital role in building a discourse system with Chinese characteristics. Through policy guidance, creative writing has become not only a key vehicle for cultural dissemination but also a critical pathway for constructing China's discourse system and showcasing Chinese wisdom and cultural confidence. This process highlights the unique mission of creative writing in cultural inheritance and innovation, establishing it as a significant force in promoting China's outstanding traditional culture and advancing cultural self-confidence and self-strengthening.

Within this macro-context, institutionalized academic interactions in the creative writing field have shown significant growth. Continuous high-level academic conferences, such as the "China Creative Writing Annual Conference" and the "World Chinese Creative Writing Conference" hosted by the Creative Writing Professional Committee of the Chinese Society of Writing, have become pivotal nodes for observing the interactive mechanisms among national policies, educational paradigms, and disciplinary evolution. Their function extends beyond gathering domestic and international scholars and industry stakeholders; more importantly, they serve as intermediary platforms where policy discourses from national cultural strategies—such as "telling China's stories well" and "enhancing cultural soft power"—are translated into actionable disciplinary agendas and talent cultivation models.

Cultivating high-caliber talent capable of effectively telling China's stories through creative writing has become a vital objective in education. This not only serves national cultural strategy but also lays a solid foundation for the localized development of creative writing. This demonstrates how policy support provides external safeguards for creative writing, while shifts in educational philosophy drive its implementation in teaching practices. These two elements complement each other, jointly propelling the sustained development of creative writing as an academic discipline.

b. Textbook Development and Localization

As an imported discipline, Chinese scholars recognized early on the importance of integrating creative writing with local culture and educational practices, actively advancing its localization. In this process, scholars not only introduced Western creative writing concepts but also combined them with traditional Chinese ideas and cultural resources, forging a uniquely Chinese development path for the field.

Representative works include University Creative Writing by Ge Hongbing and Xu Daojun, Creative Writing Teaching and Communication by Zhao Hongqin, and Wang Chengjun's Creative Writing: Fiction and Narrative in Novels and Screenplays, Xu Daojun's Story Workshop, White Pencil's The Magic Book of Writing: Engaging Creative Writing Exercises, Li Hua's Writing Stories from the Depths of the Soul: A Guide to Nonfiction Creation, and Liu Weidong's Fundamental

Theoretical Issues in Creative Writing. By integrating China's indigenous cultural resources and educational practices, these works provide robust theoretical foundations and rich practical guidance for the disciplinary development, pedagogical promotion, and creative practice of creative writing.

This demonstrates that it is precisely through the commitment to localizing teaching materials that creative writing has achieved remarkable success in China's disciplinary development, educational promotion, and creative practice. These works provide a solid theoretical foundation for the localized development of creative writing, driving its disciplinary construction and practical exploration within the Chinese context. By deeply integrating China's indigenous cultural resources and educational practices, they not only offer robust support for the theory and practice of creative writing but also propel its widespread dissemination and profound development in China. This successful experience demonstrates that the localization of creative writing is precisely achieved through the localization of teaching materials.

c. Diverse Practices in Interdisciplinary Collaboration and International Exchange

The successful development of creative writing has led to its flourishing growth domestically, driven by its proactive expansion across interdisciplinary and international dimensions. Interdisciplinary collaboration has opened new perspectives for creative writing, enabling deep integration with fields such as literature, art, film and television, and new media. This transcends the limitations of disciplinary boundaries, thereby revitalizing the field with renewed vitality. International exchange prevents creative writing from becoming insular, enabling it to promptly and accurately grasp global intellectual innovations and academic frontiers.

Interdisciplinary collaboration involves breaking down the inherent boundaries of traditional disciplines by deeply exploring commonalities and synergies across different fields, thereby achieving effective knowledge integration and innovation. As a highly comprehensive discipline within literature, creative writing exhibits particularly pronounced interdisciplinary attributes. The multifaceted integration it fosters lays a solid foundation for constructing a truly new liberal arts system in creative writing, driving comprehensive innovation and development at both theoretical and practical levels. Through interdisciplinary collaboration, attention is focused on meaningful connections between disciplines. By leveraging the mutual permeation and intervention of knowledge across fields, resources from diverse disciplines are integrated, and experiences from multiple domains are drawn upon. This provides a solid foundation for theoretical innovation and practical application within the discipline.

Driven by both interdisciplinary and international dimensions, the field of creative writing is progressively establishing a theoretical and practical framework with distinctive Chinese characteristics. Looking ahead, as more interdisciplinary collaborative projects advance and international exchange platforms are established, creative writing is poised to play an increasingly significant role across education, culture, and other

domains, contributing substantially to the advancement of Chinese literary and cultural endeavors.

6. Conclusion

Looking ahead, creative writing in China retains vast potential for growth. In talent cultivation, creative writing will focus on developing versatile professionals with international perspectives, innovative thinking, and solid writing skills. These talents will become vital forces in building a cultural powerhouse, injecting continuous momentum into the advancement of Chinese literary education. Simultaneously, through deep engagement with cultural industries and social services, creative writing will expand its application scenarios, fostering deeper integration between creative writing professionals and cultural industries to provide robust support for talent-driven industrial development.

We collectively anticipate that creative writing will play an increasingly significant role in the future—not only within literary education but also across all dimensions of building a cultural powerhouse, fostering cultural industry prosperity, and advancing talent-driven industrial development—demonstrating its unique value and potential.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design and performed the data collection and analysis. Author B drafted the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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