

## On the Translation of Folding Beijing From the Perspective of Horizon of Expectations

WANG Zhaoyu<sup>[a]</sup>; WANG Baoling<sup>[b],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup> Postgraduate, School of Humanities, Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, Beijing, China.

<sup>[b]</sup> Associate Professor, School of Humanities, Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, Beijing, China.

\* Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

In 2016, the success of *Folding Beijing* winning the 74<sup>th</sup> Hugo Award made Chinese science fiction attract the world literary circle again. Based on the reader's horizon of expectations, this paper gives a brief analysis of Ken Liu's translation of *Folding Beijing*. It also seeks to demonstrate Ken Liu's consideration for target language readers in the course of translating the Chinese expressions with connotation and the translation methods he adopts to reduce the cultural differences and achieve the reception and comprehension of the translated text among the target audience.

**Key words:** Science fiction; *Folding Beijing*; Horizon of expectations; Chinese expressions; Cultural differences

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### INTRODUCTION

Science fiction has always been a marginalized genre in Chinese literary circles, while western science fiction plays a dominant role in both film and literary works. The translation of foreign science fiction is the origin of Chinese science fiction literature. In 1900, Xue Shaohui and her husband Chen Shoupeng co-translated Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Following

that, the creation of science fiction appeared in China for the first time. In 1904, Huangjiang Diaosou published China's first science fiction, *Yueqizhimindixiaoshuo* (this is the Chinese phonetic alphabet of the novel's name). Henceforth, domestic science fiction developed slowly. In the 1990s, it ushered in the spring of creation, and the studies of science fiction translation in China have been rising in recent years.

In 2016, *Folding Beijing*, a novel by Chinese science fiction writer Hao Jingfang, translated by Ken Liu, won the 74<sup>th</sup> Hugo Award in Kansas. It was also the second time that a Chinese science fiction got the world's highest honor for science fiction and fantasy creation. *The Three-Body Problem* written by Liu Cixin, translated also by Ken Liu won the 73<sup>rd</sup> Hugo Award for the Best Novel in 2015. And in 2017, Ken Liu's translation won the Hugo Award for the third time. The source text is *Death's End (Remembrance of Earth's Past)* written by Liu Cixin.

*Folding Beijing* is one of Hao Jingfang's representative works. Born in 1984, Hao received her postgraduate degree from the Department of Physics and doctorate degree from the School of Economics and Management at Tsinghua University. Her professional knowledge in physics and rich imagination gives readers a vivid portrayal of the folding city. *Folding Beijing* takes the 22nd century's Beijing as background, and the city is divided into three "worlds" where the skyscrapers and constructions fold and unfold like Rubik's Cube in a forty-eight-hour cycle, but the population, living time, life quality and living space of these three "worlds" are different. The first "world" owns the half side of the city and 24 hours, while the other two "worlds" share the half side of the city and the third "world" only owns 8 hours in one cycle. *Folding Beijing* is an anti-utopian fiction work, which combines fantasy with reality by presenting a series of realistic social problems such as class differentiation, resource competition, and other unfair issues. However, behind these cruel and unequal factors, the warm human relationships and rich flavor of life in the folding city are

displayed to readers, which is novel and different from other anti-utopian science fiction.

The English version was translated by Ken Liu, a famous Chinese American writer and translator, who brought Chinese science fiction novels to the world and also contributed to the diversification of English-language science fiction. In this novel, there are a large number of scenes of daily life, dialogues between characters and descriptions of the appearance of ordinary people. The use of culture-loaded words, figures of speech and idioms can be seen throughout the book, which is full of Chinese characteristics. Therefore, this version is worth further studying and exploring.

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## 1. AN OVERVIEW OF KEN LIU'S TRANSLATION

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When it comes to the former research of the English version, there are more than forty studies related to the translation of this fiction in CNKI system. The research on this version is carried out from various perspectives with different theories. A large proportion of the studies analyze the English version from the perspective of the translator's subjectivity or personal style and different translation theories. For instance, Chen Yinlong (2017) studied Ken Liu's subjectivity from the perspective of the Hermeneutic Motion. He makes a case study of Ken Liu's translation from the perspective of the translator's subjectivity to explore the influencing factors to Liu's success in introducing *Folding Beijing* to the world, thereby confirming the significance of the translator's subjectivity and providing insights for more domestic translators. In 2018, Wang Shuqing (2018) studied the translation strategies in *Folding Beijing*. Based on Guo Jianzhong's standards for English-to-Chinese science fiction translation, the author explores the specific translation strategies or methods adopted by Liu from the case study of idioms, pure fictional contents and so on. Meanwhile, there are also some researches from different perspectives, such as the feminism, the culture-loaded words and the linguistics. For example, a paper written by Sun Lin and Han Caihong (2021) was published in *Shanghai Journal of Translators*. This study analyzed the translation effects of four types of culture-loaded words based on the Eco-translatology theory, aiming to provide enlightenment for the translation of culture-loaded words and help Chinese literature "go out".

Although the success of Liu's translation attracted a lot of attention, there is a research gap on the analysis of translation from the perspective of Reception Theory.

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## 2. HORIZON OF EXPECTATIONS

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Horizon of expectations is one of the important concepts of Reception Theory. Reception Theory, also called

Aesthetic Reception, is a literary theory as well as an aesthetic theory. It originated in the late 1960s, which is based on Phenomenological Aesthetics and Hermeneutics, and the representative scholars are Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. Phenomenology, Formalism and Russian Formalism have a close relationship with this theory. Traditional theories hold that authors and texts are the main parts in the literary study, while readers are not as important as them. Audiences are required to follow some guidance so as to understand the texts. Reception Theory holds different ideas: actually, in the relationship among an author, a text and readers, readers are not passive. To Jauss's mind, Reception Theory "opened a view toward the possibility of renewing literary history, exhausted and mired in positivism, by giving it the task of seeking a new understanding of the history of literature as a communication process between all three parties, namely, the author, the text and the reader" (Jauss, 1982).

The core point of this theory is "reader-centered" or "reader-oriented", which holds that the readers' reading activities and acceptance degree play a decisive role on the literary works' meaning, value and historical value. The Reception Theory argues that any literary work is "uncertain", which means that any work is not a self-deterministic existence but a multifaceted and unfinished schematic structure. The existence of the literary work itself does not produce any independent meaning, but the realization of concrete meaning or value depends on the reader, that is, the reader's perceptual experience can fill up the blank of the work, so that the "uncertain meaning" of the work can be found, and finally achieve the goal of literary works.

As one vital point of Jauss's thought, horizon of reader's expectation was put forward based on Karl R. Popper's philosophy of science and assimilated the concept of "Pre-understanding" of Martin Heidegger and influenced by Gadamer's "Legal Prejudice". Jauss held that horizon of expectations was the thinking orientation or pre-existence structure formed by readers' experience (the experience may be previous reading experience or life experience and so on) before their reading a literature work, and was readers' directional expectations of the way how the literature work is shown before its reading. The expectations had a relatively definite boundary which defined the possibility of the reader's understanding or feeling. When specific to the literary acceptance in the literary reception activities, it refers to appreciation requirements and appreciation levels for literature works comprehensively formed by all kinds of experience, tastes, qualities and ideals existing in readers' mind. And in the specific reading, it is a kind of underlying aesthetic expectation (Zhu, 2004). Horizon of expectations was divided by Jauss into "narrow literary horizon of expectation" and "broad life horizon of expectation" (Jauss, 1982). "Narrow literary horizon of expectation" refers to the audience's understanding of literary history,

styles, aesthetics history, aesthetic tastes and attainment based on the previous reading experience. While “Broad life horizon of expectation” includes a reader’s world outlook, values, educational level, knowledge scopes and real-life experience and so on.

Horizon of expectations is of great significance to the readers’ reception. First of all, the “thinking orientation” or “pre-structure” formed by the underlying aesthetic expectation is the base for the readers’ accepting new opinion and culture. Meanwhile, the horizon of expectations of the reader is also the determining factor for readers to choose literature works, and what’s more, it determines the readers’ focuses in reading and also their attitudes and evaluation to literature works. Only when the text conforms to the thinking orientation or pre-structure of the readers can it attract readers and enter their horizon of expectation. On the other hand, a reader’s horizon of expectations can influence the result of reading, which is the direction of aesthetic recognition and understanding. Just as the saying goes, there are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people’s eyes. Due to the differences in world outlook, values, cultural knowledge and literary attainments, different readers will have different aesthetic understandings and feelings for the same literary work.

When it comes to translation, horizon of expectation can guide the way of translating. Translation is also a two-way interaction process: the translator creates the version, the reader accepts, and the translation activity is composed of many elements: the original work, the translator, the translated work, and the reader. So, the translator is not only a reader of the original text (accepter), but also an interpreter of the original text, namely the second creator (Turnbull, 2010). Essentially the translation is for the reader.

The target audience of *Folding Beijing* is mainly the English-speaking reader. Compared with native Chinese speakers, different cultural and social backgrounds and various individual educational levels shape different expectation for literary works. The following is an analysis of how Ken Liu’s translation integrates with the target reader’s horizon of expectation.

### 3. LIU’S TRANSLATION UNDER THE HORIZON OF EXPECTATIONS

The protagonist of the fiction is a middle-aged man, Lao Dao, who is a garbage worker living in the third “world”. In order to enroll his adopted daughter Tang Tang into a relatively better kindergarten, Lao Dao ventures to deliver the token, which means he has to pass through two “worlds”. The city Beijing depicted in *Folding Beijing* is the political and cultural center of China, which contains profound cultural deposits. A large number of Chinese expressions with connotations appear in the novel, and the translation of Ken Liu of the novel has successfully

satisfied the readers’ horizon of expectation on the whole. In the following part, this paper takes *Folding Beijing* as an example to analyze how Ken Liu deals with these words or sentences in order to meet the expectations of target readers and reduce the difficulties caused by the differences between Chinese and English.

Example 1:

ST: 老刀四十八岁，没结婚，已经过了注意外表的年龄，又没人照顾起居，这一套衣服留着穿了很多年，每次穿一天，回家就脱了叠上。

TT: Lao Dao was forty-eight, single, and long past the age when he still took care of his appearance. As he had no one to pester him about the domestic details, he had simply kept this outfit for years. Every time he wore it, he’d come home afterward, take off the shirt and pants, and fold them up neatly to put away.

“没人照顾起居”, a word with exclusive Chinese connotation, is translated into “he had no one to pester him about the domestic details”. “Pester” is defined as “to annoy somebody, especially by asking them something many times” in *OALD* (Turnbull, 2010). In China’s traditional family, it seems natural for men to work outside to support their family and women to attend to domestic work and detailed chores at home. If the target audiences are Chinese, the word “pester” can be employed directly. While the target readers are English-speaking persons who are relatively keen on the gender equality. Instead of translating “照顾起居” in a literal manner which could risk annoying feminists, the translator adopts the annotation method, which is to choose to get the message through with a slightly altered connotation. With a slight change, the image of the wife turns from a traditional caregiver to a woman who is viewed on the same footing as the husband. This is more acceptable to English readers who pay more attention to fairness and human rights, and can meet their expectations.

Example 2:

ST: 食客……埋头在酸辣粉的热气腾腾中，饿虎扑食一般，白色蒸汽遮住了脸。油炸的香味弥漫。货摊上的酸枣和核桃堆成山，腊肉在头顶摇摆。

TT: ...their faces buried in bows of hot and sour rice noodles...mountains of jujubes and walnuts, and hunks of cured meat swung overhead.

In this example, the Chinese words with corresponding counterparts in English are literally translated. Since there is no direct corresponding name for “酸辣粉” in English, the translator interprets and translates the flavors, ingredients and forms of the dishes. In order to give readers a more intuitive feeling, the translator utilizes the substitution translation method to translate “粉” into “rice noodles(‘米粉’ in Chinese)”. The “酸辣粉” is made of sweet potato, the material of “米粉” is rice. Although the materials of those two kinds of noodles are different, they are identical in appearance. Meanwhile, according to the online data, the western market accounts for a large part of China’s overseas rice noodles sales

market, which shows that westerners can understand rice noodles in some degree. By substituting with a similar diet, the readers could more intuitively think that “粉” has the characteristics of being long and thin, soft and smooth, and may contain soup. In this way the English readers could understand the Chinese local food, and the version is in accordance with the pre-expectation of the readers for the description of the food leaves the space for imagination.

Example 3:

ST: 老葛又拿来半瓶白酒和两个玻璃杯, 倒上。

TT: Lao Ge also brought over a half bottle of *baijiu* and filled two glasses.

As one of the six distilled liquor in the world, “白酒” is a kind of liquor peculiar to China, which has a long history. Here, Ken Liu adopts the transliteration method, translating “白酒” into “Baijiu”, instead of dealing with such similar expressions like “spirits” or “liquor”, and using italics to indicate foreign words. And some foreign authoritative journals, such as *Wall Street Journal*, also adopted the same usage: In 2011, Diageo became the largest single shareholder in premium baijiu producer Shui Jing Fang. Thus, it can be seen that although the translator adopts the transliteration method, the translated version has a precedent in the target language, which not only retains the characteristics of Chinese culture, but also meets the need of the reader’s aesthetic view, and finally attracts their attention and interest.

Example 4:

ST: “你真是作死,”彭鑫说.....

TT: “What are you working so hard for?” Peng Li asked...

“作死” is an old saying, from which comes one of the Chinese poetic drama works in the Yuan Dynasty. In recent years, a popular internet phrase, “no zuo no die”, has emerged. In everyday use, the expression of “作死” is often used to describe a person who has brought trouble to themselves, getting themselves into a particularly difficult situation. This word is widely used in northeastern dialects, Beijing mandarin, Cantonese dialects. Since its specific meaning is very flexible in different contexts, it is impossible to find the corresponding English words directly. In the original text, the sentence appears in a conversation between Peng Li and Lao Dao. Peng Li could not understand why Lao Dao would go through all the hardships to the second world, so Lao Dao gave his explanation that he wanted his daughter to enter a better kindergarten. This shows the cruel reality of the society in which education is difficult, class gap is large and money is omnipotent. Through paraphrasing the deep implication of “作死”, the version not only conveys the meaning of Peng Li clearly, but also indicates that Lao Dao’s journey is hard, which successfully achieves the purpose of communication. Meanwhile it caters to the target readers’ language habit and aesthetic view. Ken Liu uses the

translation method of paraphrase and omits its rhetorical device as a saying, making the translation clearer and more concise.

Example 5:

ST: 稍微好一点的幼儿园招生前两天, 就有家长带着铺盖卷在幼儿园门口排队, 两个家长轮着, 一个吃吃喝喝拉撒, 另一个坐在幼儿园门口等。

TT: For schools with decent reputations, the parents had to show up with their bedrolls and line up a couple of days before registration. The two parents had to take turns so that while one held their place in the line, the other could go to the bathroom or grab a bite to eat.

“吃喝拉撒” is a Chinese traditional expression full of cultural connotation which means the daily basic necessities and needs of people. This phrase comes from *The Yellow Storm* written by Lao She. In this context, Ken Liu translates it into “go to the bathroom or grab a bite to eat”. By reducing the relatively general concept “吃喝拉撒” into more specific activities and omitting the unnecessary content, this method vividly reflects the haste and anxiety of those parents in their scramble for a seat for their children in the kindergarten. And in this case, the final part “另一个坐在幼儿园门口等” was omitted by Liu for the foregoing part was translated to “the two parents had to take turns so that while one held their place in the line” which already fully conveys the meaning. The omission reduces the repetitive process of reading. Concretizing an abstract concept rather than translating it literally makes the translation closer to the reader’s expectation of horizon. The method of omission conveys the information perfectly and reduces the trouble in reading.

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## 4. CONCLUSION

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In accordance with a comparatively exhaustive investigation of Ken Liu’s translation of *Folding Beijing* via the presentation of specific examples in both the source text and target text, Ken Liu adopts some translation methods to meet the target readers’ horizon of expectation and transmit Chinese culture especially when translating the Chinese expressions. When translating the expressions of Chinese diet, Ken Liu uses substitution method and transliteration method to promote Chinese food culture and meet readers’ expectations. The Chinese expressions with connotation and idiom are translated by annotation, paraphrase and omission. These translation methods eliminate ambiguity from different aspects and make readers understand these words or phrases. In general, in order to spread Chinese literary works to the world, it’s essential to use some translation methods and put the target readers in the guiding position in the process of translation. In some degree, readers’ horizon of expectation plays a guiding role in translation.

This study is a primary attempt to reveal the

significance of the readers' horizon of expectation for the translation of cultural expressions in the literary works. As to the needs of theme and the limitation of coverage, this paper only studies the translation of Chinese expressions. Therefore, this study is far from satisfactory. It's worthy of further study to probe into more potential significance of the horizon of expectation to the translation studies. On the other hand, some other translation methods adopted by Ken Liu are not mentioned, which need deeper study in the future.

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