

Original Paper

A Study on the English Translation of *Fond Memories of Peiping* from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics

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Abstract

The prose Fond Memories of Peiping portrays the unique impression of Peijing of the Chinese writer Lao She, highlighting deep affection and attachment to his homeland, which is of high literary and aesthetic value. This paper discusses the application of reception aesthetics' core concepts of "horizon of expectations", "fusion of horizons" and "indeterminacy" in the translation of prose, which takes Mr. Zhang Peiji's English translation of Fond Memories of Peiping as an example. It is found that Mr. Zhang Peiji's employs amplification and free translation methods to deal with culture-loaded words and idioms to meet the readers' expectations. Through the manipulation of rhetorical devices and the adaptation of sentence structures, the translated text is made more in line with the reading habits of the target language readers, thereby achieving "fusion of horizons". Zhang Peiji demonstrates subjectivity in the translation process to deal with "indeterminacy" in the original text, which effectively preserves and conveys the aesthetic value of the original work.

Keywords

Fond Memories of Peiping, reception aesthetics, Zhang Peiji, prose translation

1. Introduction

Chinese literature is part of the Chinese cultural tradition, playing an irreplaceable role in the process of going abroad. In the history of modern and contemporary Chinese literature, prose is a genre that stands alongside poetry, novels, and drama, characterized by loose form and tight spirit. Over time, vernacular Chinese has gained wide acceptance and use, laying a solid foundation for the vigorous growth and maturity of modern Chinese prose. Prose, as a literary genre, should be more understood and appreciated by more people for its vivid and profound thoughts and spirit it contains. The greatest challenge in translating prose lies not only in seeking truth but also in pursuing aesthetics on the basis

of truth, while achieving natural fluency and rich charm, allowing readers to immerse themselves in it (Zhou, 2015). Therefore, the translation of prose deserves attention in the field of Chinese literary research. The emergence of Zhang Peiji's *The English Translation of the Selected Modern Chinese Prose Writings* allows the world to have a deeper understanding of the Chinese ideological pulse and leads to the updating of domestic translation concepts (Zhu, 2000). The book includes a large number of profound works by outstanding writers since 1919. *Fond Memories of Peiping* is one of the representative works. Lao She is a famous modern Chinese novelist and the first "People's Artist" of the Republic of China. His works are popular with the public due to their simple language and flowing style. This classic prose work created by Lao She further showcases the unique charm of modern Chinese literature.

The paper takes *The Selected Modern Chinese Prose Writings* translated in English by Zhang Peiji as a case study, which analyzes and explores the translation methods adopted by him in the essay translation process from the perspective of reception aesthetics. It particularly focuses on the applicability of the three basic concepts "horizon of expectations", "fusion of horizons", and "indeterminacy" to the English translation of Chinese essays. The aim is to provide a beneficial reference for the translation of Chinese essays and even Chinese literature. This "reader-centered" translation theory has greatly aided in the translation of Chinese prose, to some extent narrowing the gap with Western readers. By doing so, it can help Western readers better understand and accept Chinese prose and literature, enhance the competitiveness of Chinese literature on a global scale, and promote the dissemination and development of Chinese culture.

2. Reception Aesthetics and Prose Translation

Reception aesthetics, also known as reception theory, emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Federal Germany, with literary theory based on hermeneutics and phenomenology. Proposed and advocated mainly by a group of scholars at the University of Konstanz in Federal Germany, including Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. His theory is mainly derived from the theory of Gadamer, while also being influenced by the formalist school, including structuralism. This indicates that his research is deeply inspired by the ideas of these two schools, providing a solid foundation for the construction of his theory. In comparison to traditional literary studies, this theory mainly starts from the reader's perspective, considering the reader as the central link in the creation of a work, emphasizing the reader's reading and acceptance effects of a work. Literary studies have shifted from "text-centered" to "reader-centered". Simultaneously, this places certain demands on translators. In the process of translating literary works, it is essential to consider the audience's expectations of the translated text in order to ensure its acceptance among readers. Furthermore, upholding consistency when translating text to ensure that the original charm is preserved without being compromised by excessive subjective interpretation. Finally, readers should be given ample room for thought to fully unleash their imagination. Due to varying cultures and time periods, people may interpret works differently, hence

translators need to understand the cross-cultural communication of literary works. In a word, in the translation of literary works from the perspective of reception aesthetics, it is necessary to take into account many factors.

This has significant implications for translation studies. The introduction of reception aesthetics theory in translation studies has led researchers to shift their focus from the author and the work to the reader. The importance of the readers of translated texts in the translation process is now being recognized by translation scholars, who believe that the reception aesthetics of translated texts by readers is of significant importance and value in the literary works and their translations. The acceptance of the aesthetic perspective has not only triggered a revolutionary discussion in the fields of literary research and theoretical criticism but has also shed light on the realm of translation. This shift has also provided researchers and scholars with more insights and inspirations. Afterwards, many scholars in China have conducted extensive research on different types of translation texts from the perspective. For example, through an analysis of the English translation of *River-snow*, Nai Ruiua (2016) explored the aesthetic perspective of poetry translation, stating that “due to its special literary and aesthetic features, translators are also readers.” Furthermore, the application of reception aesthetics to the study of novel translation is also a hot research area where this theory is combined with translation studies. For instance, Wang Jing (2014) interpreted and analyzed the creative techniques of the American novel *The Da Vinci Code* from the perspective of reception aesthetics. And some scholars conducted research on the translation strategies of the English version of the Chinese martial arts novel *The Legends of the Condor Heroes*, suggesting that “translators should fully consider the knowledge level and aesthetic experience of the target readers of the translated work, helping martial arts novels to better reach the Western audience” (Li & Zhang, 2021). Also, Yin Hongtao (2021) compared and analyzed three English translations of the important Chinese classic *Mozi*, with the theory as a guide, and explored the reasons for their differences. Furthermore, some scholars have extended this theory to non-literary fields. For instance, Yang Yanqun (2011) studied film subtitle translation, while Chen Jiao (2013) analyzed the application of aesthetics in film title translation, proposing translation methods such as literal translation, a combination of literal and free translation, and free translation. Translators should fully consider the differences in Chinese and Western cultures, languages, and aesthetic habits, as well as the expectations of the target readers in translating tourism public relations advertisements (Hong, 2006). However, so far, most translation studies that adopt reception aesthetics theory focus on poetry, novels, tourism promotion, advertising, and other practical texts, with few scholars conducting research on prose texts from this perspective. Prose is an important literary form that expresses the author’s thoughts, emotions, and spiritual world in a unique style and charm. It possesses strong cultural appeal and aesthetic value, hence the significant application value of aesthetic theory in prose translation. Therefore, the theory has great application value in prose translation.

From the perspective of reception aesthetics, the aesthetic acceptance of the target audience is of significant importance in translation. Translators should specifically consider the expected perspectives

and aesthetic acceptance of the readers during the process of prose translation. This “reader-centered” translation theory has greatly assisted in the translation of Chinese prose. This approach can help Western readers better understand and accept Chinese prose and literature, improve the competitiveness of Chinese literature in the world, and to promote the spread and development of Chinese culture.

3. Case Analysis of the Translation of *Fond Memories of Peiping*

Fond Memories of Peiping is a prose written by Lao She in 1936. This prose vividly portrays Beijing (known as Peiping at the time) and reveals the unique impression of Peijing in his mind, demonstrating deep affection for his homeland. It is not just a praise for Peiping; the entire text also reveals the author’s strong patriotic sentiments and national pride, possessing a high aesthetic value. Mr. Zhang Peiji translated the essay into English and included it in the publication *the Selected Modern Chinese essays (1)*. Some scholars have utilized this essay as an example to analyze culture-loaded words and compare the cohesion of English and Chinese discourse. In addition, due to the relatively lengthy nature of the prose *Fond Memories of Peiping*, it is impossible to analyze the entire chapter. Therefore, the sentences containing culture-loaded words, idioms, ancient poems, and other characteristics will be served as critical examples in this paper. Subsequently, examples to analyze from the viewpoints of “horizon of expectations”, “fusion of horizons” and “indeterminacy” will be provided.

3.1 Horizon of Expectations

Based on Heidegger’s “pre-understanding” and Gadamer’s “pre-judice”, the concept of “horizon of expectation” was proposed by Jauss. When readers engage with translated texts, they often rekindle their prior reading experiences and memories. These resurfaced recollections and experiences may persist or transform throughout the reading process depending on the text’s genre or specific conventions. As posited by Iser (1978, p. 23), this phenomenon holds significant implications during the act of reading. According to Wang Zhongling (2012), “horizon of expectation” refers to the pre-existing understanding or knowledge that readers possess before reading literary works. Without these prior understanding or knowledge, readers will not be able to accept anything new. Also, the concept emphasizes the importance of readers’ preconceived understanding and knowledge, highlighting how readers’ personal life experiences or acquired knowledge will form a kind of foresight, which plays a crucial role in understanding and accepting new things. Before reading a work, translation readers are often influenced by past reading experiences and social backgrounds, leading to preconceived notions or cognitive patterns. These preconceived expectations directly impact the reader’s aesthetic appreciation of the work and whether the aesthetic value of the translation is effectively conveyed. The following will be analyzed from the two aspects of culture-loaded words and idioms.

3.1.1 The Translation of Culture-loaded Words

Culture-loaded words, also known as culture-specific words, refer to those words that carry specific cultural connotations and folk characteristics, which are typically concentrated in indigenous cultural

works. These lexical items play a significant role in language, conveying cultural information and reflecting the values and traditions of the nation. In this prose, there are numerous culture-loaded words. It is evident that in order to meet the readers' expectations, translators must flexibly utilize various translation methods to achieve the aesthetic experiences and expected perspectives of the target readers.

Example 1

ST: 是的，北平也有热闹的地方，但是它和太极拳相似，动中有静。

TT: There are also bustling places in Peiping, to be sure, but like the traditional Chinese shadow boxing Tai Ji Quan, the city retains its stillness in the midst of motion.

Analysis: In this example, the author employs uniquely Chinese vocabulary. “太极拳” originates from the traditional Chinese Confucian, Taoist philosophy of Tai Chi, and the dialectical concept of yin and yang. The traditional Chinese Tai Chi Quan encompasses multiple functions such as nurturing the mind and body, enhancing physical fitness, characterized by gentleness, slowness, agility, and a harmonious blend of firmness and flexibility. The translator has added “traditional Chinese shadow boxing”, where “shadow” reflects the “阴” in Taoism, while “boxing” represents the “阳”. It can be seen that Zhang Peiji's translation of “太极拳” can not only help Western readers better understand Chinese culture, understand the nature and characteristics of “太极拳”, but also make the translation more in line with the aesthetic preferences and expectations of the target readers. Beyond textual expression, this translation method can better bridge cultural boundaries, provoke responses and resonate with readers, thereby maximizing the aesthetic effects and experiences of the original text on the target readers. In the prose translation of Zhang Peiji's *Fond Memories of Peiping*, when translating culture-loaded words, he employs transliteration and amplification translation methods in a flexible manner to approach the original text style as closely as possible, meeting the aesthetic expectations of the readers.

3.1.2 The Translation of Idioms

Idioms are a unique form of vocabulary in the Chinese language, which is often difficult to directly correspond to target languages and cultures, making translation a challenging task. This linguistic phenomenon poses significant challenges for translators, requiring them to possess rich cross-cultural understanding and language skills. The translation of idioms affects the realization of “horizon of expectation” to some extent. Therefore, in order to make the translation successful among the readers, the translator must consider the reader's receptivity to understand and accept new things. The following will make a specific analysis from this aspect.

Example 2

ST: 真愿成为诗人，把一切好听好看的字都浸在自己的心血里，像杜鹃似的啼出北平的俊伟。

TT: If only I were a poet so that, with all the sweet and beautiful words at my command, I would sing of the grandeur of Peiping in as longing a note as that of a cuckoo!

Analysis: “杜鹃” is a beneficial bird, also known as “布谷”，or “子规”，and referred to as “cuckoo” in English. The sentence has a classic literary allusion: “其间旦暮稳何物，杜鹃啼血猿哀鸣”。 This is an expression from *The Pi-pa Player*, written by Bai Juyi. The idiom “杜鹃啼血” is quoted here, which

legend has it that the cuckoo sheds blood while crying, originally describing the genuine and poignant cry. Ancient poets believed that the cry of cuckoo was mournful, evoking a sense of homesickness in travelers who heard it. Zhang Peiji translated it as “as longing a note as that of a cuckoo” based on the context, because foreign readers are unfamiliar with the legend of the cuckoo crying blood in China, and a literal translation of “啼血” would make it difficult for foreign readers to understand the cultural connotation. Therefore, the translator translated it as “a longing note”, meaning “a voice of longing”, conveying the cultural significance of “啼血” through a free translation. This approach not only achieves better effects in linguistic expression but also in bridging cultural differences. Such a translation method can evoke readers’ resonance, allowing the aesthetic conception of the original text to be maximally generated in the minds of the translated text readers. Rather than literal translation, free translation is more advantageous in conveying the cultural meanings of idioms. Therefore, it can be seen that Mr. Zhang Peiji successfully took into account the expected perspectives of translation readers when translating the prose.

3.2 Fusion of Horizons

In different cultural backgrounds and learning environments, people will have different perspectives. Gadamer (2004) pointed out that Perspective refers to the range of everything that can be seen from a specific point. Building upon this, Jauss proposed the concept of “fusion of horizons”, which is one of the important concepts in reception aesthetics theory. It specifically involves the fusion of the translator’s expected perspective and the original text’s perspective, as well as the fusion of the target language reader’s expected perspective and the translated text’s perspective. Reception aesthetics theory believes that readers will form relatively stable oriented expectations of works based on their own values, aesthetic tastes, literary cultivation, etc. Works that align with readers’ thought patterns are more likely to attract readers and influence them, thereby achieving Gadamer’s “fusion of horizons” (Yang & Xiao, 2022). Therefore, in the process of translation, translators need to adopt appropriate translation methods and strategies to integrate the perspectives of the original text and the target language readers’ expectations. The following will be analyzed from two aspects.

3.2.1 The Translation of Rhetoric Devices

Rhetoric device is an effective use of language for communication, aiming to evoke specific emotions or thoughts in the audience’s mind in order to enhance the effectiveness of conveying information. In prose, metaphors can integrate the author’s emotions and thoughts into the description, thus increasing the artistic and persuasive qualities of the work. In *Fond Memories of Peiping*, there is a passage that contains a cultural metaphor. Due to the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, when translating rhetoric, translators need to fully consider the cultural context of the source language and the receptive ability of the target audience.

Example 3

ST: 以此类推，我所知道的那点只是“我的北平”，而我的北平大概等于牛的一毛。

TT: It follows that, in contrast with Peiping in its entirety, what little I know about it is probably a

mere drop in the ocean.

Analysis: In example 3, the author employed the idiom “九牛一毛”. This idiom originated from the work of Sima Qian during the Western Han Dynasty, indicating a minuscule amount within a vast quantity. Rooted in an agricultural civilization, Chinese culture commonly utilized cows for plowing, making them a familiar sight in households, which is the basis for the creation of this idiom. In contrast, Western countries belong to a maritime civilization. In the expression of cultural connotations, they do not use the same symbols to convey similar meanings. Thus, Zhang Peiji chose a common English idiom, translating “牛的一毛” as “a mere drop in the ocean”. By using a metaphor of a drop of ocean water, it aligns with the cognitive approach of Western readers. It can be concluded that Zhang Peiji adopted a strategy of metaphor substitution, replacing the culturally laden metaphor in the source language with a corresponding metaphor in the target language. Also, he selected vocabularies according to the target readers’ knowledge background and life experiences, aligning the readers’ perspective with that of the text, and strove to choose Chinese and English vocabulary that overlaps in meaning with the text. This translation cleverly bridges the cultural differences between the source language and the target language, enabling readers of the translation to experience the same reading feelings as readers of the original text. It achieves the goal of integrating perspectives and also demonstrates the translator’s profound translation skills from another perspective.

3.2.2 The Adjustment of Sentence Structures

On a syntactic level, English and Chinese exhibit significant differences in sentence structure. English emphasizes morphology, while Chinese focuses on semantics. English often constructs sentences are used to explicit cohesive devices such as relative pronouns and conjunctions, relying on inflectional changes in words to convey meaning, and frequently employing function words like articles and prepositions. In contrast, Chinese places more emphasis on coherence of meaning, typically organizing sentence structures based on semantic relationships between words, with logical connections between sentence elements primarily presented through implicit cohesive means. Thus, in the process of translation, translators need to flexibly utilize various translation strategies and techniques, such as sentence splitting, word order adjusting. The aim is to adjust the sentence structure appropriately so as to achieve the desired integration of the original authors and the text readers, thus increasing the audience’s appreciation of the work and experience.

Example 4

ST: 北平在人为之中显出自然，几乎是什么地方既不挤得慌，又不太僻静；最小的胡同里的房子也有院子与树。

TT: In Peiping, one always finds the natural in the midst of the artificial. The city as a whole is neither too crowded nor too secluded. Even houses tucked away in very small lanes have their own courtyards and trees.

Analysis: In the example, “Peiping” in the original text serves as the subject, but in the translation by the translator, it is transformed into a prepositional objective phrase. At the same time, based on the

logical semantic relationship, the true subject of the sentence is extracted and “one” is added in the translation. This translation method enhances the clarity of the logical relationship between the various parts. Furthermore, in Zhang’s translation, when dealing with the last two clauses of the original text, implicit information within the clauses was excavated, the omitted parts of the clauses were restored and “even” was added. He combined meaning with form, transforming the implicit into the explicit, in order to make the translation more clear and understandable. Furthermore, the term “tuck” here is translated into passive voice, vividly adding a visual effect to the translation, allowing readers to seemingly visualize many houses hidden in a secluded alley. By appropriately adjusting the sentence structure, the translated text’s anticipated perspective merges with the readers’ anticipated perspective, thereby enhancing the readers’ aesthetic acceptance and aesthetic experience of the work. This adjustment is not only the application of translation skills but also the recreation and interpretation of literary works, enabling the works to be better understood and appreciated by readers in cross-cultural communication.

3.3 Indeterminacy

Building on the research of Ingarden, Iser, as a representative figure in aesthetics, proposed the concept of the textual evocation structure. In his works, Ingarden (1973) emphasized the limitations of textual depiction, arguing that “indeterminacy” is one of the important characteristics of the depicted object that has not been precisely defined. This definition highlights the inability of the text to fully capture the qualities of the object, proposing uncertainty as a concept that exists between the text and the object. Literary works contain many uncertainties and gaps, primarily stemming from the lack of meaningful direct connection between the objects depicted in literary works and the real world (Iser, 1994). This uncertainty stimulates readers to explore the text, enabling them to perceive the context created by the text and understand the meaning contained within it. Translators, as the audience of the original text, will interpret the key points of the original text based on their own understanding and make the meaning of the work in the translation process more concrete. At the same time, due to differences in personal experiences and imaginations, readers of translations will also have unique interpretations of the meanings in the translation. In literary works, when dealing with words or phrases in the original text that have uncertain meanings, translators usually adopt two different approaches. One is to maintain the original author’s intent, allowing the translation to retain the uncertain meaning as well. Another approach involves providing specific details for the blank spaces in the original text, transforming uncertain meanings into clear expressions. Thus, translators need to carefully consider how to better convey the original work’s meaning and emotions during the translation process (He, 2023).

Example 5

ST: 采菊东篱下，在这里，确是可以悠然见南山的；大概把“南”字变个“西”或“北”，也没有多少了不得吧。

TT: An ancient Chinese poet by the name of Tao Yuanming says aptly in one of his famous poems,

“Plucking chrysanthemums under the eastern hedge, I calmly view the southern hills.” To adapt it to life in Peiping, I might as well substitute the word “western” or “northern” for the word “southern” in the line.

Analysis: In Example 5, “采菊东篱下” is derived from the poem *Drinking Wine* by the Eastern Jin Dynasty literary figure Tao Yuanming. The original text reads, “采菊东篱下，悠然见南山”. Tao Yuanming’s works typically express a yearning for a simple and natural way of life, while Lao She utilizes this line of poetry to depict the comfort and leisure of life in Peiping. In the context of this quotation, the scenario depicted by the poet serves not only to enrich the artistic conception of the work, but also to guide readers to a deeper understanding of the thoughts and emotions expressed in the text. The use of such scenarios provides readers with a more intuitive and profound cognitive approach, allowing them to more comprehensively appreciate and experience the profound connotations contained in the poetry. Mr. Zhang Peiji supplemented the poet’s name, era, and other relevant verses to deepen Western readers’ understanding of this ancient poetry. It indicates that the translator possesses a high degree of flexibility in the English translation process, while also effectively conveying the meaning of the verses by translating “To adapt it to life in Peiping”, not only fully considering the readers’ expectations, but also better preserving the aesthetic sense of the original text.

From the above analysis, Mr. Zhang Peiji utilizes amplification and free translation methods to translate culture-loaded words and idioms in order to fulfill the readers’ anticipations. Through translation of metaphor and modification of sentence structures, the translated content is rendered more congruent with the reading preferences of the target language audience, thereby achieving “fusion of horizon”. Moreover, Zhang Peiji showcases subjectivity throughout the translation endeavor by providing extensive contextual details to deal with the “indeterminacy” in the source text, effectively keeping and conveying the aesthetic significance of the original composition. From the perspective of reception aesthetics, the analysis of his translation reveals that Mr. Zhang Peiji’s English version not only stays faithful to the original text but also takes into consideration factors such as reader reception. In addition to conveying the surface meaning of the original text, he also preserves the aesthetic appeal and value of the original text to some extent.

4. Conclusion

From the perspective of the reception aesthetics, this paper explores the English translation study of Zhang Peiji’s translated prose *Fond Memories of Peiping*, using the three core concepts of “horizon of expectations”, “fusion of horizons”, and “indeterminacy”. The analysis focuses on the suitability of reception aesthetics theory in prose translation. Research shows that the core viewpoints embodied by these three concepts emphasize the reader-centered concept advocated by aesthetics. Mr. Zhang Peiji vividly demonstrates this idea in his translated essays by adopting translation methods and principles. Translators should deeply understand the aesthetic value of the original text during the translation process, analyze the aesthetic experience of the translated text readers, and choose appropriate

translation methods to meet readers' aesthetic expectations. When considering the "indeterminacy" in the text, translators should flexibly apply suitable translation strategies, retain the meaning gaps of the original text, or specify them while considering the readers' aesthetic acceptance and experience. It has been found that integrating reception aesthetics into translation studies helps translators gain a deeper understanding of the aesthetic value of the original text. Prose is renowned for its free and flowing writing style, diverse and flexible forms, and varied structures. From a perspective of reception aesthetic, the translation of prose is not only about conveying the original meaning and the emotions and thoughts of the author but also about transmitting a unique aesthetic experience. Currently, literary works have become one of the important means for China to enhance its cultural soft power and international influence. Therefore, in the process of applying aesthetic theory to the English translation of prose, it can not only promote the aesthetic cognition of translated works by readers, but also help enhance the reputation of Chinese literature internationally.

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