

## Original Paper

# A Study on the English Translation of *Fu Ping* from the Perspective of Translator Behavior Criticism

Maozhou Zhang<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of English Studies, Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an, China.

Received: August 14, 2024      Accepted: September 2, 2024      Online Published: September 25, 2024

doi:10.22158/elsr.v5n4p67

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/elsr.v5n4p67>

### Abstract

*Fu Ping* is a Chinese novel written by Wang Anyi. It's a story of the country girl named Fu Ping, who settled down in Shanghai and found her true self. Taking Fu Ping's life as the perspective, the novel depicts a series of characters who have endured the hardships and yearned for the city life, thus painting a vivid picture of the mundane, delicate, and down-to-earth life of the lower class people in Shanghai. Using Translation Behavior Criticism as the tool, this paper analyses the translator behavior reflected in the English translation of *Fu Ping*.

The translation maintains the Chinese culture of the source language and respects the writing style of the original. At the same time, it considers the readers of the target language, producing a translation which is in accordance with the poetics of the target language.

The translation methods, translation strategies and translator behavior of Howard Goldblatt are described and presented on a whole by utilizing the theoretical framework of Zhou Lingshun's Translator Behavior Criticism.

### Keywords

Translator Behavior Criticism, Wang Anyi, *Fu Ping*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

Wang Anyi wrote many stories of civilians living in Shanghai after liberation. These stories happened in Shanghai after liberation are different from those happened before liberation which featured prosperity and risk-taking. New Stories of Shanghai written by Wang Anyi take civilians living in long-tangs as the starting point, describing their complex lifestyles and inner world.

Wang's many works described the romantic stories of beauties and deplored their lost youth. Compared with these works, the most prominent difference of *Fu Ping* is a kind of diligent, honest and simple

lifestyle. Wang didn't concentrate on the big house in downtown area but created a slum district named "Meijiaqiao". She admired the people and their life there. Finally, she made the female protagonist change her mind and settle down in this slum. In general, *Fu Ping* describes a country girl named Fu Ping how to settle down in Shanghai and find her true self.

The translator Howard Goldblatt said, "In almost all the works we have discussed, what initially resonates with readers is the theme of nationalism, but what gives them lasting appeal is their rural color." He emphasized the importance of nationalism and its rural color. Knowing the importance of the rural color, Goldblatt tries his best to respect cultural characteristics in the source text. However, due to language limitation and other out-of-language factors (intra- and extra-translation factors), he has to swing between "truth-seeking" and "utility-attaining", which means translating the original text wholly or partly for the sake of achieving the goal of utility attaining and translating based on wholly or partly seeking the truth of original text.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Previous Study on Translator Behavior Criticism

As the academia focusing more on the extra-language factors in the process of translation, translation studies and sociology has combined more tightly and new research theories and aspects occurred. Translator Behavior Criticism is one of these new theories, which was put forward by Zhou Lingshun for the first time.

As for the criticism of translation, "fidelity" is the principle and standard of translation before the Culture Turn. "Fidelity" or "faithfulness" and so on are all standards which focus on the translation itself and the intra-language factors. Extra-language factors were ignored. After the Culture Turn, extra-language factors were in consideration, which is a progress compared to the research before and is more diverse. However, these theories don't take the translator as an independent research object.

Translation studies can be divided into three stages according to different research objects. Before the Cultural Turn, the research object was the translation itself and its relationship with the original. In this stage, equivalence or fidelity is the necessity of a good translation.

After the Cultural Turn, researchers began to focus on the social factors affecting the translation, but did not take the translators as the stress.

Before the Cultural Turn, "fidelity" is the principle and standard of translator. However, if taking "fidelity" as the sole principle and standard of describing translation activities when valuing the quality of translation, the translation cannot be valued comprehensively and objectively. Traditional translation criticism only researches on original and translation, which is the utmost "truth-seeking". After the Cultural Turn, the research focuses on the relationship between translation and society, but the role of translator is not included. From the aspect of translation studies, these two stages focus on intra-language factors and outer-language factors influencing translation respectively. From the aspect of translator

behavior researches, these two stages focus on the role of translators in language aspect and social aspect. (Li & Zhang, 2023)

The new stage of translation studies is taking the translator as the central and researching on the interaction between translation and translator. “Studies on translators’ behavior is revolutionary for translation studies.” (Chen & Zhou, 2022)

## 2.2 Previous Study on Wang Anyi’s Novel

Wang Anyi’s novels have been the focus of the researchers for a long time. The novel which attracted the most attention of researches is *Chang Hen Ge (the Song of Everlasting Sorrow)*.

The researches on Wang’s novels can be divided into three types according to different focus, they are on her identity of Chinese writer, identity of a writer who prefer dialectic words and style, sexual identity of woman respectively.

Considering her speciality as a Chinese writer, researchers concentrate on the communication effect of the translation. Li and Sun analyzed the local and global nature of the work from the perspective of its reception effect, with a focus on the “literary” aspect of Russian formalism. It takes phonetic and semantic deviations as research objects to examine the reproduction of the literary quality of “Song of Everlasting Sorrow”, and from Bourdieu’s capital perspective, explores the sociological factors that contribute to the acceptance of the translation. (Li & Sun, 2021) Based on the three basic concepts of field, habitus, and capital, Ceng takes the field theory of French sociologist Bourdieu as the research perspective. (Ceng, 2019) Firstly, it explores the formation of Wang Anyi’s habits of writing Shanghai and her accumulation of field capital in the literary field. Then, it focuses on the formation of habitus and capital accumulation in the translation field of his representative work “Song of Everlasting Regret” by the English translator Bai Ruiwen, as well as the process of translation, publication, and dissemination of *Song of Everlasting Regret* on this basis.

As Wang prefers the use of dialectic words in her literary work, researchers pay attention to her dialectic feature and its maintainance in translation. Gu analyzes the unique feature of Wang’s use of Wu dialect (a kind of popular dialect in south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River) and its translation. He not only talked about the correctness of the dialect’s translation, but also the maintainance of beauty of dialect in translation. (Gu, 2021)

Due to the sexual identity of the writer, Wang’s novel is usually taken as the typical of feminist writer’s works. Among the research on her, some researchers talked about her sexual identity as woman. Li (Li, 2023) takes the sub texts in Wang Anyi’s works translated and published in France between 1987 and 2020 as the research object, and analyzes the multi-faceted reshaping of the author’s literary image by the translation subject from three perspectives: cover design, translation preface guidance, and back cover introduction: Shanghai spokesperson, female pioneer, and successor of realism.

These years, researchers notice the research value of *Fu Ping*. However, relevant researches from the perspective of culture and translation are not much in quantity. Therefore, this paper will pay attention to this work *Fu Ping* and its translation and analyze it from the perspective of translator behavior criticism.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1 Introduction to Translator Behavior Criticism

Based on the development of translation criterion and his theory research and practice, Zhou Lingshun put forward “Translation Behavior Criticism”, including the evaluation model of “truth-seeking and utility-attaining”. Translation Behavior Criticism focuses on the role played by the translator in the process of translating and his/her translation behavior pattern. “Truth-seeking” means that the translator seek the true meaning of the original completely or partly for the sake of utility. “Utility-attaining” means that the translator’s attitudes and strategies on the basis of getting the true meaning completely or partly. (Zhou, 2014) “Truth-seeking” belongs to language aspect while “utility-attaining” belongs to social aspect (extra-language aspect). Under the influence of the two factors, translators behave in different ways.

### 4. A Study on *Fu Ping* from the Perspective of Translator Behavior Criticism

#### 4.1 The Characteristics of *Fu Ping*

Wang’s literary works are famous for the gentle and delicate language style. However, in *Fu Ping*, she described people and conditions in loong-tang with a simple language style. Despite this change in language style, she kept her pursuit for local flavor, using many dialects in south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River to express the cultural characteristics there. At the same time, dialect can establish a connection between readers and the work because of its colloquial feature.

Meanwhile, when she wrote the story and described the people there, she inevitably needed to use the cultural concepts with local flavor there. In fact, she respected these local concepts and was willing to use them. In *Fu Ping*, these local concepts are expressed by culture-loaded words and common sayings. Besides, she created a lot of characters with local feature. These people live in Shanghai and speak in a dialectic tongue. They are Fu Ping who independently comes to a big city and find the true self, Fu Ping’s grandmother who has a strong ability and ambitions and many people who have distinctive traits of this time. Through describing these people’s disposition and interaction, the feature of that age and area can be displayed.

Therefore, this paper will focus on the retention and changes of the language feature, the local flavor and the changes of people in the process of translation. Owing to the limitation of space, this paper will mainly focuses on the language feature and local flavor, and these two are intertwined in a sense.

#### 4.2 Translation of Language Style

In *Fu Ping*, there are many colloquial words in the original. In language transfer, these colloquial words with local flavor are easier to lose compared to other language features due to language limitation. However, in the translation of *Fu Ping*, Goldblatt tried to maintain the true meaning of these colloquial words in the target language based on the principle of utility-attaining.

As for language style, Wang carries on her writing habit of using the dialects in south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River. These duplication dialects can be divided into two types, type “abb” and type “aabb”.

### (1) Type “abb”

The original: 但这一回做梦，却做到了老家乡下，水汪汪的，几座红艳艳的砖房。他离开有多久了啊！(But this time, he dreamed of his hometown. There is rippling water and several redbrick houses. How long has he been away!)

The translation: This time he dreamed of his home in the countryside, with its rippling water and a few redbrick houses. He had not been home in a long time. (trans. Howard Goldblatt)

In this context, uncle of Fu Ping has been Shanghai for a long time and didn't come back to his hometown Yangzhou. Seeing Fu Ping, his niece comes from Yangzhou, his memories of hometown have been evoked. After one day's work, he fell asleep and dreamed the landscape in his hometown. Considering the need to describe the landscape in south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, the writer uses colloquial words with local dialectic flavor, such as “水汪汪” “红艳艳”. However, in the translation, these two words were transferred into “rippling water” and “redbrick houses”. As for “rippling water”, it transferred the landscape that the water shines with brilliant points of light like stars under the sun. However, as for “redbrick house”, it transferred the essence of the houses which are built with the red bricks. But the description of the red color “yanyan (which means gorgeous and bright)” lost. In dealing with the two words, the translator takes different methods, maintaining or deleting the truth meaning of the original. The common aspect in the two methods is omitting the colloquial duplication.

### (2) Type “aabb”

The original: 可戚师傅兴兴头头地来，兴兴头头地说他的如意算盘，这未免有些欺人了。(But Qi came with excitement and told her his idea that's only beneficial for him and his wife. That's bullying.)

The translation: But he had come, filled with excitement, and had eagerly related the plans he and his wife had hatched. This was to all their advantage, not hers. (trans. Howard Goldblatt)

In this context, when Fu Ping's grandma was young, she had an extramarital affair with a man named Qi whose wife is unable to produce offspring. When the grandma was pregnant, Qi and his wife wanted her to give birth to the child and sent the child to them. Qi thought that this good idea can give the couple a child and give the illegitimate child a home, so he felt excited to tell the grandma the idea. In the original, the writer uses the duplication “兴兴头头” twice to describe the condition of the man. However, in the translation, the translator explains the meaning of “兴兴头头”. The first one was explained as of excitement and the second one eagerness, both colloquial features are lost in the process of translation.

The original: 她们躲在篱笆底下那些嘁嘁喳喳的私语，原来都是有含意的。富萍有些看不起她们。但是，听到她们的动静，她们叽叽嘎嘎的笑声，她又心软了。(These girls talked in a low voice on the other side of the fence, making sound of “qiqi-nongnong”, was suggestive. Fu Ping looked down upon them to some extent. However, sensing their movements and hearing their laughter sounds like “jiji-gaga”, she became soft-hearted.)

The translation: Realizing that their whispering on the other side of the fence was suggestive, Fu Ping lost her respect for them, at least to some degree. But then, when she sensed their movements on the other side and heard their giggles, she softened her view. (trans. Howard Goldblatt)

In this context, “嘁嘁啾啾 (qiqi-nongnong)” and “叽叽嘎嘎 (jiji-gaga)” are onomatopoeic duplications. “nongnong” is a duplication of prominent Shanghai feature. However, in the translation, the feature can not be maintained so the translator seeks the true meaning of the original. Therefore, “qiqi-nongnong” is translated into “whisper”, maintaining the essence of the original, emphasizing loudness of the voice. As for “jiji-gaga”, it sounds like “giggles”, emphasizing noise produced by these girls, partly maintaining the voice feature of the original.

### (3) Modal particles

Instead of “abb” and “aabb”, there is another local feature, modal particles in *Fu Ping* become the focus of attention. There are many kinds of modal particles in Chinese, and they are more diverse and commonly seen in dialects. However, Chinese modal particle has no equivalent part of speech in English. (Wang, 2005) Therefore, in the process of translating, translators take different approaches to deal with these modal particles.

The original: 小君流连在这里的时候, 富萍却被零头布店吸引了。那些布头就堆在铺板上, 因被人大肆地翻拣着, 或绞着, 或团着, 乱着, 散着, 更显得花团锦簇。这些零头布, 大多差那么一点点, 才够做衣服或者裤子, 可是耐心挑呀, 就能挑到正好合适的。还可以拼呀! 拼得巧的话, 可真是好。

The translation: While Xiao Jun lingered there, a shop that sold fabric remnants caught Fu Ping’s attention. The goods were piled upon a bed board, picked over until it was a colorful jumble of twisted, folded, carelessly strewn cloth. The bulk of the remnants were too small to make tops or pants, but by diligent rummaging, you might find something that would work. Patch them, and if you did it right, it would turn out fine.

In this paragraph, there are some modal particles in the original. But in the translation, there is no trace of modal particles. In the original, these modal particles don’t have any actual meaning but two effects. The first one is adding some dialectic features to the original and the second one narrowing the distance to the readers and making the readers closer. In the translation, the translator can not keep the dialectic feature due to language limitation, but he maintains the effect of original by using second person pronoun for the sake of utility-attaining.

#### 4.2.2 translation of Cultural Flavor

In *Fu Ping*, the cultural characteristics are mainly divided into two types, they are colloquialisms and culture-loaded words. As for cultural characteristics in the original, the translator takes “truth-seeking” as main approach, maintaining the cultural essence in a flexible way.

##### (1) Colloquialisms

In *Fu Ping*, because main characters are poorly educated, colloquialisms become a main approach to express their thinking. The translator take word-for-word translation approach, which not only can maintain the image in translation in accordance with that in the original, but can show local conditions and customs there.

The original: 喝水不忘掘井人. (When one drinks water, he would not forget people who dug the well)  
(A man will always bear others' kindness in his heart)

The translation: He wrote back, with a line that said, When one drinks from the well, one doesn't forget the well digger. (trans. Howard Goldblatt)

In this context, when the grandson funded by the grandmother (also called nainai) writes to ask for more money, he will add this saying at the end of letter. That not only showcases his gratitude for the grandmother who had funded he and his family, but also implies that he will show filial obedience for the grandma when she retires and goes back home in the future. Although he is educated, he uses the common saying when writing to the under-educated old woman. When translating his letter, the translator maintains the image of colloquialisms. That can imply the readers that the story happened in a place with water wells and described the profile of the grandson who knows how to fawn on his grandmother well.

The original: 世上没有不透风的墙. (Walls have ears) (A secret will be put on the street one day.)

The translation: But there is no wall in the world without holes. (trans. Howard Goldblatt)

In this example, the original means that a secret will be known by others one day, which just like wind can pass through the wall. In the translation, considering the foreign readers may not understand the meaning of it, the translator added the image of "holes" to the original. In this way, the reader can imagine the wind penetrates the wall through the holes on it. That is a balance between "truth-seeking" and "utility-attaining".

In these two examples, we can conclude that the translator takes a word-for-word translation approach. As for them, we can find that the translators achieved a balance between "truth-seeking" and "utility-attaining". The former is maintaining the image of colloquialisms and the latter is explaining these images to the target readers. As for the first example, the translator maintains the images of water, well and digger, but explain the connection of them and emphasize the gratitude implied in it. As for the second example, the translator maintains the images of wall, but replaces the image of wind with holes, which can help the readers understand better. Those methods respect the original and consider the feeling of readers, embodying "truth-seeking" and "utility-attaining".

## (2) Culture-loaded words

In *Fu Ping*, the story context is lower reaches of Yangtze River, where the opera art is popular. And there are many old woman who are opera lover in the story. The culture-loaded words are mainly opera-related. The popular opera here is mainly Shaoxing opera. In *Fu Ping*, Wang mentioned some features of Shaoxing opera, involving singing style, facial makeup, costume and salaries of actors.

The original: 越剧的艳丽的头面、服装; 娇俏的做派、唱腔; 还有私情故事, 都使她们入迷。

The translation: The actors' bright painted faces and costumes, their stylized movements and singing, and the romanticized stories fascinated them.

The original: 上面是两个小妖精, 披珠挂翠, 再裹上一条毛巾毯作水袖, 咿咿呀呀地学着越剧的腔唱戏。

The translation: ... for a pair of little imps, draped with jewelry and towels that served as wide, flowing water sleeves, to mimic performers singing opera.

The original: 她曾经在一个越剧女老生家里做过，女老生是拿包银的，收入颇丰。

The translation: She once worked for a Shaoxing opera actress who was under contract to play old women roles, for which she was given a regular, substantial salary.

As for these culture-loaded words, “头面” “做派” “唱腔” “水袖” “包银” are translated into “painted faces” “movements” “singing” “wide, flowing water sleeves” and “a regular salary”. From these translation of culture-loaded words, we can see that the translator tries to find a balance between “truth-seeking” and “utility-attaining”. “头面” means the make-up. The translation “painted faces” maintains the essence of make-up and emphasizes the make-up is heavy and colorful. “做派” means the posture of the actors. The translation “movements” maintains the essence of “moving” but loses the feature of different opera types. “水袖” is a kind of sleeve dance costume, and the translation maintains the flowing feature of the sleeve and add “water” to the translation, making the reader imagine that the soft sleeve is like water.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the translator Howard Goldblatt swings on the continuum of “truth-seeking” and “utility-attaining”. In *Fu Ping*, as for translation of language style, the translator takes the approach of mainly utility-attaining. Some dialectic features without actual meaning are lost. As for translation of cultural flavor, mainly colloquialisms and culture-loaded words, the translator achieves a balance between “truth-seeking” and “utility-attaining”. As for colloquialisms, the images are kept for the sake of truth-seeking and these images are explained to the target readers for the sake of utility-attaining. As for culture-loaded words, important culture features are kept for the sake of truth-seeking and other features are lost. In different contexts, the translator takes different approaches, respecting the original and considering the readers.

## References

- Cen, Q. X. (2019). A Study of English Translation and Communication of Shanghai Culture in The Song of Everlasting Sorrow from the Perspective of Field Theory. *Journal of Beijing International Studies University*, 41(4), 48-62.
- Chen, J., & Zhou, L. S. (2022). New Progress and New Thoughts of Translator Behavior Studies: An Interview with Professor Zhou Lingshun. *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching*, 43(1), 1-11.
- Gu, X. H. (2021). The Wu Dialect Expression in Wang Anyi's Novels and its English Translation Strategies. *Contemporary Writers Review*, 4, 185-192.
- Li, L. X. (2023). The “French Triptych” of Wang Anyi: Construction of Chinese Writers' Image in the Paratexts of Translation. *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, 6, 90-94.



- Li, Y., & Sun, H. J. (2021). The Translation and Reception of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* in the West. *Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages*, 44(2), 66-73.
- Li, Z. S., & Zhang, D. (2023). The Development of a Theoretical Framework for the Criticism of Translator Behavior: A Historical Perspective. *Chinese Translators Journal*, 44(4), 22-28+191-192.
- Wang, F. H. (2005). The Approaches of Translating the Modal Particles in Chinese Classic Works into English. *Journal of Shangrao Normal University*, 2, 92-96.
- Zhou, L. S. (2014). *A Theoretical Framework of Translator Behavior Criticism*. Beijing: The Commercial Press.