

## Literature Review on *Folding Beijing*

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Received 16 August 2020; accepted 9 November 2020  
Published online 26 December 2020

### Abstract

As one of the contemporary writers in China, Hao Jingfang gains her reputation with her science fiction *Folding Beijing*. Translated by the Chinese American writer and translator Ken Liu, this novel was first published in American in an electronic magazine *Uncanny* and was awarded the Hugo Award for Best Novella in 2016. Since then, this novel has attracted great attention and interest of readers both at home and abroad, and the value of its source text as well as the motivation behind the successful dissemination of its English version has been gradually unearthed. Owing to that, various researches have been made on it, especially in China, involving the source text, translation strategies, introduction and reception overseas as well as the translator. This paper intends to make a systematic review of these studies according to the type, and to reveal the deficiencies of these previous studies, with an aim of finding out some rules and giving some implications for the “going out” of Chinese literary works.

**Key words:** *Folding Beijing*; Review of studies; Deficiencies; Implications

Ouyang, H. Q. (2020). Literature Review on *Folding Beijing*. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 16(4), 58-62. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/11901>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/11901>

### INTRODUCTION

Hao Jingfang, born in Tianjin in 1984, who received a master's degree in astrophysics and a doctorate in economics from Tsinghua University, is a contemporary

Chinese novelist and essayist. In 2016, she won Hugo Award for best novella in the 74<sup>th</sup> World SF Convention with her novel *Folding Beijing*, becoming the second Chinese writer to win the honor after Liu Cixin, the author of *the Three-body problem*. Hao has five novels, a collection of 14 novellas and short stories, including *Summer at My Grandmother's House*, which was nominated for Galaxy Award for Science Fiction in 2007. *Folding Beijing* was collected in the novel *In The Depth of Loneliness*, and was published as a volume for the first time along with several other science fiction novels in July 2016.

Unlike those science fiction of other writers, Hao Jingfang's works do not arrange special elements of science or imaginative plots but focus more on reflecting reality and human nature in the form of science fiction. She tends to connect the virtual space with the reality with simple and soft language. Just as she says, she prefers to name her novels “genre-free literature” that concerns real space, but expresses it through virtual space, telling the matters that are closely related to reality with surreal factors. What this genre of literature really cares about is not the virtual world, but the real world (Hao, 2016), which is actually a vague form of literature (Ren Dongmei, 2016: 47). The famous sci-fi writers Chen Qiufan and Han Song have also mentioned a literary writing style of “sci-fi realism”, that is, using the form of sci-fi as a method to reflect reality. Ren (2016) says in the paper that most “serious” science fiction falls into this category. Hao Jingfang's sci-fi works can be classified as this genre, among which *Folding Beijing* is a representative one.

*Folding Beijing* was officially published in 2014 in the magazine *Art style*, which did not gain much attention at that time. After translated by the Chinese American writer and translator Ken Liu and published in American electronic magazine *Uncanny*, it won the 74<sup>th</sup> Hugo Award for best novella in 2016. This novel is short and

concise, and the language is simple and warm, describing a future Beijing with rigid class and wide gap between the rich and the poor through inventing three virtual spaces. It reflects the reality of today's society and strongly triggers readers' thinking on the changes of society and human nature brought by advanced technology. Owing to the honor of Hugo Award and its special writing style, more and more studies have been made on it in recent years.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW ON *FOLDING BEIJING*

The researches dealing with this novel could fall into the following categories: studies on the source text, studies on translation strategies, studies on translation and reception, and studies on the translator. After sorting out these studies, the details of them can be summarized as follows.

### 1.1 Studies on the Source Text

#### 1.1.1 Studies on the Language

The language of *Folding Beijing* is plain and simple, but it contains rich connotations. The conceptual metaphors in the novel can be seen everywhere. For instance, the "three spaces" is a symbol of different social strata, and the protagonist, the waste worker "Lao Dao" is a symbol of those invisible men who devote themselves to the urban development. A case in point is the study made by Han Xiao (2019), in her master's thesis *How does Conceptual Metaphor Construct Textual Coherence in Science Fiction -- A Case Analysis of Folding Beijing*. In this thesis, Han takes the original text of *Folding Beijing* as an example to analyze the use of conceptual metaphors in the text on the basis of conceptual metaphor theory. It discusses the specific methods of constructing textual coherence, and puts forward that conceptual metaphor plays an important role in constructing textual coherence and provides a new perspective for the study of metaphors in science fiction.

On the other hand, another paper *The Research on Language Style of Hao Jing-fang Science Fiction Novel* written by Liu Wanqing (2018) probes into the language style of Hao Jingfang's science fiction by taking *Folding Beijing* as a case study. It makes a systematic description and analysis from the perspective of linguistic rhetoric in order to display its linguistic features and stylistic features. Besides, Liu also analyzes the causes of Hao's language style from the aspects of her life experience, her character, her pursuit of creation, as well as her choice of the theme of the text. And in the end of this paper, Liu compares Hao Jingfang's science fiction with Liu Cixin's, which is also the winner of the Hugo Prize, summing up the differences of language style between them, and making detailed analysis on the cause.

#### 1.1.2 Studies on the theme

In addition, more studies are made on the interpretation of the theme of science fiction realism reflected in this

novel. In *Folding Beijing: The Narration and Reality of Chinese Science Fiction*, Ma Yuhua (2016) describes three elements of realism in this novel in detail by first analyzing that the construction of the three spaces located in Beijing is the first element for the reason that it is miniature of our real life of great disparity in big cities, and then probing into the contradiction between the advanced mechanical automation and human beings displayed in this novel, which consists of the second element. The last part of Ma Yuhua's article is the third element that the third space is actually a reflection of reality between the unrealistic social construction in this novel and the author's promising faith for the future. Ma's study is of great value for laying foundation for the later studies. Ren Dongmei(2018) also analyzes the sci-fi realism style of *Folding Beijing* in the paper *Interpreting Folding Beijing through the Prism of Science Fiction Realism*, revealing the division of social class structure, social problems caused by the gap between the rich and the poor, and the influence of machines automation on the economy reflected in the novel.

Ma Yuhan and Cheng Kaiwei (2018) expound the significance of labor in the third space by starting with analyzing the distribution of labor among the three space and its meaning of existence in this novel, then interpreting the significance of the existence of the labor in the third space expounded in it, and finally concluding that the meaning of labor in the third space lies in the fact that it actually symbolizes the end of labor of human society. Admittedly, their article provides a new perspective for the studies on the text.

Besides, among the studies on the construction of the utopian society in the novel, *Realistic Care in the Dystopian Science Fiction World -- Comparing the Novel Folding Beijing and the Film In Time* written by Wen Lijia (2018) is one of them. By making comparison between the novel and the film, it is found that the two are similar with each other to some extent: both use sci-fi themes to depict future society to reflect the present society, and use space-time as a resource and standard to divide people into different classes to determine their living status. In *The Fantastic governance Allegory of Folding Beijing and Hao Jingfang's Utopian Imagination*, Zeng Jun (2016) also analyzes the future and the reality from the aspects of the connection between the people and the people, the people and the city, revealing the differences between the ideas implied in Hao Jingfang's work and her own utopian imagination for the future.

### 1.2 Studies on the Translation Strategies

The translation methods and strategies adopted by the translators are closely related to the success of *Folding Beijing* in winning the Hugo Award for best novella over other excellent works in the 74th World Science Fiction Convention.

### 1.2.1 Studies on Choices of the Translator

Xu Songjian and Sun Huijun (2018) make a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the effect of the management of the quotation in the original texts by the translator in translating. By sorting out the presentation of discourse of the language of translated text, it is found that the change of direct speech and indirect speech to free direct speech is the most obvious, which is closely related to the translator's pursuit of the acceptability of the translation.

In another paper *On the Translation of Science Fiction from the Dimension of Linguistics, Culture and Communication -- A Case Study of Ken Liu's Translation of Folding Beijing*, Xiu Wenqiao and Jiang Tianyang (2018) analyze the strategies adopted in the translation of *Folding Beijing* from the aspect of transformation among language, culture and communication, highlighting the importance of the adoption of appropriate strategies in the sci-fi translation. Based on systemic-functional linguistics, Zhang Shengxin (2017) in his paper *Mutual Construction of Interpersonal Meaning in Ken Liu's Translation of Folding Beijing* analyzes the special translation strategies adopted by the translator in the novel from the levels of mood system and modality system by making comparison between the original text and the translated text. At the end the article, Zhang comes to conclusion that the translated text achieves the bidirectional construction of interpersonal meaning by changing the mood system and modality system of language.

Similarly, Ye Xinru (2018) analyzes the translator's approach to dealing with the vocabulary, syntax and figures of speech in the translated text of *Folding Beijing*. Wang Shuqing (2018) discusses the translation strategies and techniques adopted in the English translation of *Folding Beijing* from the aspects of the literacy value, science factor, and plain language proposed by Guo Jianzhong in the book *Studies of Sci-Tech Translation*.

### 1.2.2 Studies on Different Perspectives

Both Luo Xinyu & Zeng Xu (2018) and Tao Yuehan (2019) explore the translator's choice of translation strategies and methods from the perspective of the three principles of Skopos theory. Both of their studies make detailed analyses of the change of the language in the translated text when explaining each principle to achieve the aim of being accepted by overseas readers. Similarly, in the paper *Translation Study on Figurative Rhetoric in Folding Beijing From the Perspective of Skopos Theory*, Ren Rui, Guo Zhili, Zeng Jiali, & Zhang Lele (2018), based on the translation on the figurative rhetoric in *Folding Beijing*, certifies the strategies and methods adopted by the translator under the guidance of Skopos theory.

In another paper *Research on Chinese -- Specific Expressions in Folding Beijing: Guided by Venuti's Foreignization Theory*, Yan Jingqi (2017) makes a micro-analysis of the translation strategies involved in the expression of the Chinese culture and its characteristics

in *Folding Beijing* under the guidance of Venuti's foreignization translation theory. Yan finds that the translator adopts the translation method and translation aim dominated by the foreignization principle, and that there is a close relationship between the acceptance of the translated works and the differences of the two cultures as well as the translator's attitude towards them.

Chang Tingting (2018) takes the English version of *Folding Beijing* as the case study, exploring the embodiment, conflict and accommodation of the ethical models in the translation of sci-fi from the perspective of the five ethical translation models, and summarizes the translation strategies in the translation of this novel. Tan Xiao (2019) makes an attempt to conduct a research on culture-loaded words of the translated text in the paper entitled *Ken Liu's Translation of Culture-loaded Words in the Perspective of Communicative Translation Theory -- A Case Study of Folding Beijing* by focusing on material culture-loaded words, social culture-loaded words and language culture-loaded words translation in this book to explore Ken Liu's translation strategies and styles. It comes to the conclusion that in the process of translation, the translator tends to keep the features of the Chinese culture-loaded words in the original works while conveying the essential intention of the original works in the most concise and simple language.

Guided by Verschueren's theory of adaptation, this paper and based on the analysis of the original text and the translated text of *Folding Beijing*, Li Cheng (2017) probes into the process of adaptation in translation from the perspectives of communicative context and linguistic context, pointing out that the best contextual effect can be obtained from the adaptation of the source language to the target language. At the end, Li finds that Ken Liu's translation is greatly appreciated by the TT readers through adopting adaptation strategies.

In addition, Ma Ming (2018) also makes exploration into the translation of this novel in the master's thesis *On the Translation of Chinese Culture in Folding Beijing from the Perspective of Hybridity Theory*. Based on the analysis of the aspects of linguistics and culture, Ma finds that Ken Liu's choice of domestication and foreignization strategies actually deconstructs the binary structure of the dominant culture and the weak culture, maintaining the diversity of culture.

### 1.3 Studies on the Translation and Reception

To explore whether a Chinese literary work really goes out, studies on its translation and reception overseas are of great importance. However, due to the increasing complexity of collecting overseas materials and the fact that the novel *Folding Beijing* is a short novel of science fiction realism, it has not been able to create such a strong Chinese sci-fi trend among western readers as *Three-Body Problem*, thus the studies on its translation and reception are relatively limited.



Among the limited studies, in *Chinese Science Fiction in the English-speaking World*, He Shuangzi (2016), by taking *Folding Beijing* as the case study, firstly praises Ken Liu's contribution to the success of the translated text of this novel, and points out that it is the translator's nearly perfect translation that helps the original text gain popularity overseas. Then He makes a specific analysis of the translation principle and strategies adopted to adapt to the TT readers. In the end, He explores the translation and dissemination and acceptance of the translated text by roughly analyzing the target readers of science fiction, publishing information and some comments on the Internet. Finally He concludes that the process of the novel going abroad is a process of "meaning multiplication". Liu Lili and Chen Xinru (2017) use the form of questionnaire survey to explore the relationship between the four factors including Chinese education, time dimension, literary events, literary characteristics and the overseas acceptance of Chinese literature, and concludes that in the process of being accepted by the overseas readers, this novel gives some enlightenment for the change from value, meaning, to inner value of Chinese science literature.

Regarding the elements of dissemination, Han Lijuan (2019) publishes the paper *On the English translation of Chinese Sci-fi Literature from the Perspective of Folding Beijing*. Based on the translation of *Folding Beijing*, this paper analyzes the influence of the three main factors, namely, subject, channels and audience of communication. In the end, it is suggested that more attention should be paid to the selection of these elements in English translation of literary works, for that they play important roles in the English translation of Chinese sci-fi Literature.

#### 1.4 Studies on the Translator

There are some researches on the translator of this novel. Like *Studies on the Translator's Subjectivity in Folding Beijing* written by Chen Yinlong (2017) and *Translator's Subjectivity from the Perspective of Cultural Export: A Case Study of Folding Beijing* by Yao Bingxu (2019). Both studies make analyses of factors of the translator's subjectivity in the English translation of this novel by quoting concrete examples. Chen explores the factors of translator's subjectivity behind Ken Liu's translation, and validates the significance of the study of translator's subjectivity through concrete examples, while Yao finds that in translating, Ken Liu takes full advantage of the translator's subjectivity and adopts various translation strategies, such as transliteration, transliteration plus interpretation, literal translation plus interpretation and free translation, so as to preserve the "Chinese flavor" of the original text, greatly promoting the successful translation and introduction of *Folding Beijing* abroad.

Besides, Li Yanhui (2018) attempts to explore the invisibility and visibility of the translator from

deconstruction theory and the way to identify these two terms through analyzing the process of Ken Liu's translating this novel. It is concluded that Ken Liu chooses to be invisible when he tries to bring the Chinese works into English-speaking countries while he decides to be a visible translator when he attempts to make the original text more attractive and exotic.

As for the translator's thoughts on translation, Liang Yue and Sun Huijun (2018) expound Ken Liu's translation thoughts by taking the translation of *Folding Beijing* as a case study. In this paper, they make some comparison between the source text and the English version of this novel, concluding that Ken Liu tries to keep the flavor of the original work but does not excessively pursue the word-to-word translation. He applies his techniques of creating science fiction to the translation of *Folding Beijing*, making the translation more readable and acceptable among overseas readers.

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## CONCLUSION

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To sum up, the above review of *Folding Beijing* demonstrates that most of the studies mainly focus on two aspects -- the source text and the translation strategies. Thus, we can assume that most scholars show their interest on the literary value of the source text and the translation strategies of the translated version of this novel. As for the translator, Ken Liu, has not been well known to Chinese scholars and readers until he translated *the Three-body Problem*. Therefore, the studies on his translation of Chinese literature as an ethnic Chinese is not comprehensive enough. While the researches on the macro level of translation and introduction and reception in English-speaking countries of this novel are quite limited owing to some reasons, for example, it is a demanding job to get overall understanding of overseas publication only through Internet resources, and it is a great challenge to sort out available information that is relevant to our papers. With regarding to the significance of its English translation as a case study for the "going out" of Chinese literature, it is necessary to make further studies on this field.

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