

The Narrative Construction in the Translation of the Science Fiction *Santi*

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Abstract: Narrative analysis framework based on sociology and communication theory put forward by Mona Baker presents narrative as a solution to conflicts balancing in translation process, which views translation as a dynamic process affected and shaped by various narratives framing strategies. Science fiction is a literary form with various narratives and its translation needs exploration under the guidance of narrative analysis. *Santi* and its English version *The Three-Body Problem* are excellent examples in the genre of science fiction with many different narratives in terms of history, society, individual and space. This paper, based on narrative analysis framework, examines the translation process of a prominent case in science fiction sector *Santi* by Li Cixin and translated by Ken Liu via methods of intensive reading, case statistics and comparison. Through meticulous analysis, it is found that 1) the translated version *The Three-Body Problem* has been shaped by different narrative factors and narratives in source text have been retained or changed in target text, 2) ontological narrative, public narrative, concept narrative and meta-narrative play different roles in producing a translated version, and 3) *The Three-Body Problem*'s successful reception and communication within American literary world can be attributed to these strategic narratives effectively balancing Chinese characteristics with American aesthetic.

Keywords: Narrative Construction, Narrative Analysis Framework, The Science Fiction, *Santi*

1. Introduction

Science fiction, originated and being booming in the west, is regarded as a new branch in literature by many scholars across the world. According to Guo Jianzhong, a famous scholar of research on creation and translation of science fiction in China, a science fiction includes all the elements in a traditional fiction such as narrator, plot, background, characters, language and theme on one hand, as well as special elements such as scientificity and foreseeability on the other hand [1]. Besides, there are other foreign scholars like James Gunn and Isaac Asimov also mentioning the literary nature and category of science fiction.

For a long time, scholars in China introduced and studies foreign science fiction while indigenous science fiction couldn't make a success in terms of creation, publication or international reception. However, when it came to 2014, a

great transformation took place to China's science fiction. In November 2014, TorBooks, one of The world leading authoritative science fiction publishing companies, published Liu Cixin's novel *The Three-Body Problem* translated by Chinese-American science fiction writer Ken Liu. Within Three months of listing, the global sales volume has exceeded 20,000 copies. Ranked in the "2014 National Top 100 Books list", it can be called the phenomenon of Chinese science fiction works. Liu Cixin have won the Hugo Award, the Nebula Award, the John W. Campbell Award, the Prometheus Award and the Locus Poll Winners and many other science fiction world awards and nominations. Liu Cixin became the first Chinese writer to win the Hugo Award. So far, many of Liu Cixin's works have been published worldwide in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian and other foreign languages. *Santi* and Li Cixin mark a great success in Chinese science fiction literature and even Chinese literature on the globe. Thus, research on science fiction and its translation has

become a heated topic in literature and translation studies.

According to academic investigation and analysis, current research on science fiction at home owns the following four features. Firstly, current research mostly focuses on works winning awards at home and abroad with *Santi* in particular. Secondly, current research mostly focuses on the translator Ken Liu. Thirdly, a majority research focuses on Chinese translation of foreign science fiction compared with relatively less research on translation and international communication of Chinese science fiction. Fourthly, current research mostly focuses on translators, translation strategies and methods as well as translation reception in the west world. To sum up, research on the translation of *Santi* accounts largely in science fiction translation research in China.

Generally speaking, there are two types of research about *Santi*'s translation research currently. The first type is about research on the international communication of *Santi*'s translated version. Research of this type mainly focuses on the publication and reception of *Santi* in English world with USA in particular from the perspectives of communication, medio-translatology and translation studies. Researchers of this type explores various elements in *Santi*'s translational communication and concentrates on selection of content and translators, translation approach, translation strategies and methods in *Santi* [2-7]. Research of this type concerns both interior factors like the translator and his strategies and methods and exterior factors like reception preference and publishing mechanism in target culture. However, scholars of this type attach more importance to exterior factors in their studies. The second type is about research on the specific strategies and methods in the translation of *Santi*. Researchers of this type have studies different translation strategies and methods from such perspectives as skopos theory, eco-translatology, aesthetics of reception theory, hermeneutics and manipulation theory [8-11]. However, research on the translation strategies and methods from any perspective cannot make a full picture about *Santi*'s translation. Therefore, a descriptive approach to *Santi*'s translation studies is a must. This paper, based on narrative analysis framework, explores the narrative construction in the process of translating, aiming at getting a relatively objective picture about *Santi*'s translation.

2. Theoretical Basis

Narrative analysis framework put forward by Mona Baker views translation as a conflicting process, in which the translator can apply different narrative strategies to balance conflicts so as to produce a translated version universally accepted in the target language and culture. Baker's narrative analysis framework, taking translation, power and conflict as a combination in translation studies, actually injects new energy into translation research. Generally speaking, Baker's narrative analysis framework can be divided into two parts, namely, a typology of narrative and framing narratives in translation.

2.1. A Typology of Narrative

The typology of narrative is a very important foundation to this framework and further studies based on this framework. Based on Somers and Gibson's research on narratives [12], Baker divided narratives into four types – ontological narratives, public narratives, conceptual (disciplinary) narratives and meta-(master) narratives [13]. Ontological narratives are personal stories that we all tell ourselves about our place in the world and our own personal history. Public narratives are stories elaborated by and circulating among social and institutional formations larger than the individual. Conceptual narratives, or disciplinary narratives, are defined as concepts and explanations that we construct as social researchers. Meta-narratives, or master narratives, refer to those narratives in which we are embedded as contemporary actors in history and that show progress, decadence, industrialization, enlightenment, etc. Baker's categorization of narratives offers a fresh approach to the text analysis and even the world description.

2.2. Framing Narratives in Translation

On the basis of categorization of narratives, Baker pointed out the importance and necessity of narratives in translation. According to Baker, translators and interpreters can and do resort to various strategies to strengthen or undermine particular aspects of narratives they mediate, explicitly or implicitly [13]. In this way, translation is a dynamic process with powerful function in framing the world. According to Baker, there are four framing strategies in narratives, namely, temporal and spatial framing, selective appropriation of textual material, framing by labelling and repositioning of participants. Consciously or otherwise, translators and interpreters translate texts and utterances that participate in creating, negotiating and contesting social reality.

2.3. The Relevance Between Narratives Framing and *Santi*'s Translation

Santi is an excellent science fiction about the conflict between the earth and the three-body world, and this fiction boasts very great narrative background. In other words, this fiction combines China's characteristics and Western characteristics, and integrates current world with the ancient world and the future world via various narrative backgrounds.

In terms of characters, there are a lot of prominent characters in *Santi* with Ye Wenjie and Wang Miao the most important protagonists. The fiction describes these characters especially the two protagonists in a detailed way. The description is actually ontological narrative.

In terms of space-time setting, the fiction sets three different periods, that is, the Spring and Autumn Period in Chinese history (B.C. 770 – B.C.476), the period after the founding of The People's Republic of China and the current period. The three different periods are actually within public narrative since every period in history represents the social and institutional formation at that time. Moreover, the Three-Body world and its civilization also demonstrate its own public

narrative.

In terms of science, there are some notably disciplinary terms and knowledge in the story such as physics, electronics and astronomy. Both the author and the translator describe these terms and related knowledge in detail, which actually represent conceptual narrative, or disciplinary narrative.

To sum up, *Santi* is a science fiction with a lot of narratives, thus it is highly feasible for us to explore its translation based on Baker's narrative analysis framework. Then we can find out the way narrative framing in the process of translation.

3. Narratives Framing in the Translation of *Santi*

Narratives framing, also known as narratives constructing, can be taken as a dynamic process in which translators adopt certain methods to intensify or weaken or shift acceptable and appropriate narratives by the target language. In this part, the paper specifically analyzes the way the translator constructs the ontological narrative, the public narrative, the conceptual narrative and the meta-narrative respectively in his version.

3.1. Narratives Framing in the Ontological Narrative

As previously mentioned, ontological narrative refers to one's own personal story or experience. It is a character-based narrative in fiction and its version. In other words, ontological narratives in *Santi* are definitely reflected by protagonists and other characters in *Santi*. In terms of ontological narrative framing, there are some strategies the translator has adopted in his translating.

The first one comes a list of characters. In the source text, there aren't a list of characters before story, however, all the characters are unveiled in the development of the story. In other words, readers of the source text should learn about the characters from the context. But in the target text, the translator provides a list of character, helping the target readers get a better understanding of the translated version, which is the most prominent case for ontological narrative framing in translation. Here is the list of characters added by the translator in Table 1.

Table 1. List of Characters in *The Three-Body Problem*.

Name	Introduction
Ye Zhetai	Physicist, professor at Tsinghua University (The Ye Family)
Shao Lin	Physicist, Ye Zhetai's wife
Ye Wenjie	Astrophysicist, daughter of Ye Zhetai
Ye Wenxue	Ye Wenjie's sister, a Red Guard
Lei Zhicheng	Political commissar at Red Coast Base (Red Coast Base)
Yang Weining	Chief engineer at Red Coast Base, once a student of Ye Zhetai
Yang Dong	String theorist and daughter of Ye Wenjie and Yang Weining (The Present)
Ding Yi	Theoretical Physicist, Yang Dong's boyfriend
Wang Miao	Nanomaterials researcher
Shi Qiang	Police detective, nicknamed Da Shi
Chang Weisi	Major-general of the People's Liberation Army
Shen Yufei	Japanese physicist and member of the Frontiers of

Name	Introduction
Wei Cheng	Science Math prodigy and recluse, Shen Yufei's husband
Pan Han	Biologist, friend/acquaintance of Shen Yufei and Wei Cheng, and member of the Frontiers of Science
Sha Ruishan	Astronomer, one of Ye Wenjie's students
Mike Evans	Scion of an oil magnate
Colonel Stanton	U. S. Marine Corps, commander of Operation Guzheng

According to Table 1, the translator Ken Liu has listed a very brief but clear introduction to the major characters in the story. Firstly, Ken Liu has divided all the characters into three categories, namely people from the Ye's family, people in the Red Coast Base and people at present. Categorization in this way clearly show characters according to various time nodes and spaces, which conforms to the narrative features in science fiction. Secondly, Ken Liu has provided a brief introduction to their relationships such as teacher - student relationship, mother - daughter relationship, boyfriend - girlfriend relationship. These names and relationship introduction are actually ontological narratives framing by the translator. The ontological narratives framing greatly contribute to readers' understanding of background at pre-reading stage, plots at while-reading stage and story prediction.

The second one comes to specific framing of individuals. Generally speaking, there are two protagonists and a few other non-protagonists in the story, however, the translator has paid attention to narratives framing for nearly all the characters in the story. Here are some examples for individual ontological narratives framing in Table 2.

Table 2. Some Examples for Individual Ontological Narratives Framing.

Character	Source Text	Target Text
Ye Wenjie	“你呢，咪咪？肉肉？不，你妈妈说了，不要吃那么多肉肉，不好消化的，吃鱼鱼好吗？看奶奶买回来的这么大的鱼鱼……”	“How about you, Mi Mi? You want some meat-meat? Oh, no, your mom told me that you shouldn't eat so much meat-meat, not easy to digest. How about some fishie instead? Look at this big fishie Granny bought...” Wang Miao suspected that he was meant to overhear the conversation between the officers. Maybe they intended to show him that they were different from that rude cop; or maybe they wanted to make him curious about their mission.
Wang Miao	Without Source Text	
Shi Qiang	警察	cop/police officer/policeman/police

According to Table 2, three typical examples are selected for three characters with distinctive features.

In terms of Ye Wenjie, she used a lot of reduplicated words in order to make kids understandable, which is not in line with the grammatical rules in Chinese. The translator has completely retained the expression in English version and created a new word “fishie” to make the target text the same as the source text in style and in language. Additionally, when Ye called herself “奶奶”, the translator has applied causal word “granny” rather than formal word “grandmother”. Ye Wenjie

in the source text is depicted as a benign lady and her image is intensified in the target text by the translator, successfully framing Ye's ontological narratives.

In terms of Wang Miao, a nanomaterials researcher and another protagonist in the fiction, the translator has also applied narratives framing on him. The example about Wang Miao is an addition in translation since there is no corresponding sentences in the source text. The addition, followed by the comparison between Shi Qiang's attitude and other two officers' attitude toward Wang Miao, is about Wang Miao's mental activity and implies a mysterious mission, paving a way for narrative in the following chapters. The translator has framed a mysterious mission and an intelligent scientist for the target readers.

In terms of Shi Qiang, a police officer and an important character in the fiction, the translator has translated his profession “警察” into different versions like “cop” “police officer” “policeman” and “police”. Fundamentally speaking, different versions stand for different purposes to frame ontological narratives of Shi Qiang. For example, at Shi Qiang's first presence, his rudeness was annoying, thus the translator used “cop” to frame him an informal image; however, when Shi Qiang and Wang Miao became familiar with each other, the translator used “police officer” to frame him a respectable image. Therefore, different versions for “警察” produces different ontological narratives for the same character.

3.2. Narratives Framing in the Public Narratives

As previously mentioned, public narrative refers to stories elaborated by and circulating among social and institutional formations larger than the individual. It is a society-based narrative in fiction and its version. In other words, public narratives in *Santi* are definitely reflected by the general setting and historical background. In terms of public narratives in *Santi* and its version, there are generally three types of public narratives, namely China's Contemporary Narrative, the Santi Game Narrative and the Santi Society Narrative. Among the three public narratives, the first one carries Chinese features, the second one is about China's ancient periods and the third one is about extraterrestrial civilization. Due to wide differences between China's narratives and Western narratives, the paper selects the first one for discussion.

The contemporary period, a special period in China's history that greatly influenced politics, economy, culture and society at that moment, is a typical public narrative in the fiction. The version *The Three-Body Problem*, starting from Ye Wenjie's family's experience in that period, unveils a picture of China's society to the target readers. However, the target reads, American readers in particular, who don't know China's history or China's national condition must find it very difficult to understand expressions with profound Chinese cultural connotation. Thus, the translator Ken Liu play a crucial role in reshaping these expressions indicating China's public narratives.

1) ST: 中国, 1967 年。“红色联合”对“四·二八兵团”总部

大楼的攻击已持续了两天.....[14]

TT: China, 1967. The Red Union had been attacking the headquarters of the April Twenty-eighth Brigade for two days. [15]

The case is from the first chapter of the version. In source text, it is an independent long sentence while in the target text translator has made some adjustment. Firstly, the translator has moved the place and the time “中国, 1967” within the source text out of the target text as an independent title, which is conducive to highlight the place and the time of the story and can help the target readers understand the Chinese society in 1967. Secondly, “四·二八兵团” in the source text has been translated into date “the April Twenty-eighth Brigade”. Since there are a lot of special terms produced from that period, the translator must fully consider the narrative meaning of these terms, framing the public narrative of China's then society for target readers.

2) ST:.....与诞生于 1966 年初、经历过大检阅和大串联的“红色联合”相比要稚嫩许多。[14]

TT:...compared with the veterans, which was formed in early 1966. The Union had been tempered by the tumultuous experience of revolutionary tours around the country....[15]

There are two distinctive words “大检阅” and “大串联” in the source text, which are culture-loaded words in the history of China. The two words indicate the large scale and the high level of the activity. The translator has explained the two words in English and highlighted the scope and the nature of the activity, making the target readers understandable. The translation strategy adopted help the readers frame the public narratives at that time in China, thus the public narrative has been faithfully brought into target context.

To sum up, public narratives are very important in production and reproduction of a text since a certain public narrative greatly contribute to the interpretation by text readers. The translator Ken Liu has applied various strategies such as form adjustment, name change and terms explanation to transform an unacquainted historical background into a public narrative understandable to target readers in English world.

3.3. Narratives Framing in the Concept Narratives

As previously mentioned, concept narrative refers to concepts and explanations that we construct as social researchers. Thus, it can also be defined as the stories and explanations that scholars in any field elaborate for themselves and others about their object of inquiry. The concept narrative, also named as the disciplinary narrative, highlights various fields based on a certain narrative. In terms of concept narratives in *Santi* and its version, the words and expressions indicating celestial bodies, physics and other sectors related to science are important markers.

In science fiction, coined words play a very important role in highlighting sense of science and fantasy, therefore they are directly related to the quality of the fiction and the experience feeling of readers. *Santi* is a science fiction about the conflict between the earth and the Santi galaxy, in which some coined words contribute to the framing of extraterrestrial narratives.

Here are some typical coined words in Table 3.

Table 3. Some Typical Coined Words in *The Three-Body Problem*.

Words in Source Text	Words in Target Text
三体世界	Trisolaris
三体人	Trisolaran
三体文明	Trisolaran civilization
三体舰队	The Trisolaran Interstellar Fleet
智子	Sophon

According to Table 3, there are 5 coined words by the translator Ken Liu. For the first four words, they have something in common, namely they are all made based on the Chinese characters “三体”. However, Ken Liu didn’t adopt Pinyin “Santi” but coined new word “Trisolar-”. In this word, “Tri-” represents three and “solar” means the sun with the implication of the distinctive feature in the Santi galaxy. The new word “Trisolar-” highlights a mysterious sense, attracting target readers and contributing to frame concept narratives in astronomy discipline. For the last word, “Sophon” is another completely new word coined by Ken Liu. “智子” is an important physical concept in the fiction Santi, referring to an artificial intelligence particle like a proton in size. In terms of the coined word “Sophon”, its former part “soph-” is from Greek, meaning wisdom or being smart; its latter part “-on” is from English, meaning proton. Therefore, the coined word is actually a combination of a Greek word and an English suffix, conveying the author’s meaning in the source text on the one hand and retaining the effect of pun in the source word form. What’s more, the coined word has contributed to the literary style of a science fiction, offering the target readers a sense of science and technology and helping to frame concept narratives in physics discipline. Additionally, there are other coined words and expressions that are crucial to narratives framing.

To sum up, concept narratives are very important in production and reproduction of a text since a certain concept narrative is conducive to shaping discipline atmosphere that is in line with the style of the fiction and the intention of the translator. The translator Ken Liu has coined some new words and expressions to effectively retain the scientific and technological elements into the target readers in English world.

3.4. Narratives Framing in the Meta-Narratives

The meta-narratives, also named master narratives are defined as narratives in which we are embedded as contemporary actors in history such as progress, decadence, industrialization and enlightenment. In other words, the meta-narrative must be a narrative that has temporal and physical breadth, as well as sense of inevitability or inescapability. Thus, the meta-narrative is of generality in society.

For the famous fiction *Santi*, its theme, plots and development of story are in line with the contemporary social development across the world, namely the development of physics, the development of science and technology especially the development of nanotechnology and other new materials, the exploration to the universe, the cooperation among different countries on universe exploration and the conflicts between the earth civilization and the extraterrestrial

civilization, which can be regarded as the meta-narrative in this fiction. For the famous translation *The Three-Body Problem*, the successful communication of these elements in English world is a test for the translator. Ken Liu has reproduced and even intensified these elements in the meta-narrative through various strategies such as highlighting the themes of science, conflicts and international cooperation, depicting vivid characters in his translation, and rearranging the chapters and titles in the translated version.

In addition to what have mentioned above, there is another example to demonstrate good communication of the meta-narrative, namely the selection of the translator, the translation publisher and the translation acceptance country. Firstly, as is Known to all, Ken Liu is an excellent science fiction writer and translator and have a sound mastery of readers’ expectation in English world. Thus, he is the most appropriate person for *Santi*’s translation and international communication. Secondly, as is known to all, the USA is a leading country in science fiction in terms of creation and publication in the world, and the USA is also a leading country in science and technology including universe exploration and physics. Thus, the USA is very good place for the translation and international communication of *Santi*. In this sense, the translator Ken Liu and the US publisher TOR are definitely two contributors for meta-narrative framing in the translated version *The Three-Body Problem*. In other words, *Santi*’s success in English world is largely attributed to successful framing of meta-narratives in English world by both the translator and the publisher.

4. Conclusion

Narrative analysis framework put forward by Mona Baker in the framework of sociology and communication theory provides a new perspective for research on *Santi*’s translation, since translation is closely associated with narrative in terms of research and practice. It is found that the translation of *Santi* is shaped by four types of narratives and these narratives can balance the transcultural conflicts in the process of translating and communicating the Chinese science fiction *Santi*. Thus, transcultural translation is fundamentally a process in which the translator adopts appropriate strategies to construct or reconstruct narratives in the translated version in order to make the version acceptable in target culture. these findings could contribute to the translating of other Chinese science fictions and to the studies of transcultural translation in general.

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