

## Success of French Version of the Four Famous Works Comics from the Perspective of Translator's Subjectivity

Sisi Liu

Wuhan University of Technology, Wuhan, 430070, China

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**Abstract:** Translator is the concrete operator of translation activities. Traditional translation theory regards translation activities as a single act of language conversion, and translators must serve and be faithful to the original author and the original text. Since the mid-20th century, with the deepening and enrichment of translation theory and the emergence of “cultural turn”, translation activities have been greatly expanded in content and form. Therefore, the translator participates in all aspects of translation activities in various forms, which makes the translator's subjectivity more prominent. This paper will discuss how the translator's subjectivity plays an active role in the success of French version of the four famous works comics.

### 1. Introduction

From 2012 to 2015, the Paris FEI Publishing House, which was founded by Ms. Xu Gefei, successively introduced four famous Chinese classics, namely Water Margin, Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Journey to the West and Dream of the Red Chamber, to the mainstream French book market in the form of comic strips. It has aroused great repercussions among French cartoon circles, publishing circles and readers, gained great attention and gained a good reputation. This paper will discuss this success from the perspective of translator's subjectivity.

### 2. Success of French Comic Strips of Four Famous Books

Once published in France, the French versions of the four masterpieces have received wide attention and praise. Lauren Mellie, a famous French comic critic, said: “the form of” Water Margin “is the first time in French history. Reading it feels like walking through the Song Dynasty at the end of the 11th century.”<sup>2</sup>In October, 2012, the French version of “Water Margin” comic strip was published in France, which was supported by the French government. The first printing of 2,500 sets sold out in one and a half months. Such achievements are already excellent in the French comic book industry.

After the publication of Romance of the Three Kingdoms in France, more than 30 physical bookstores displayed it as a window display, and it was shortlisted for the “Classic Cultural Heritage” works of Angolan Comic Festival, one of the two top comic festivals in the world. Jean Levi, a famous sinologist who translated the literary version of Romance of the Three Kingdom in French, said: “Compared with the general comic book translation, the comic book of Romance of the Three Kingdom has reached the feeling of movie subtitles, which is very rare.” In October, 2013, the French version of Romance of the Three Kingdoms was first launched in France, which attracted wide attention from domestic and foreign media, and almost all mainstream French media reported the book. Senior officials of the French Ministry of Culture also specially met with the heads of publishing houses of China and France, and immediately offered financial support to FEI Publishing House, which introduced books.

In 2014, the French comic book Journey to the West was recommended as the classic book of the year and the best Christmas gift of the year by LE FIGARO LITTERAIRE. The article praised: “This comic book booklet is widely accepted by Western readers.”. The book was also funded by the General Administration of Publishing in France, with a total amount of 7900 euros. Other mainstream media in France also reported the French version of the comic book Journey to the

West. France's LE POINT selected it as the Top Ten Best Comics of the Year in France in 2014. TELERAMA, a famous French cultural magazine, selected this book into the annual series of recommended books. Other media, such as "Comic Book" (dBD), "Les Inrockuptibles", "Magazine des Arts", and "BD Zoom", have written articles and reported.

On the evening of November 5, 2015, the launching ceremony of the French version of the comic book Dream of the Red Chamber and the report on the 300th anniversary of Cao Xueqin's birth were held at the Chinese Cultural Center in Paris. Yin Fu, director of the Chinese cultural center in Paris, Hu Deping, president of Cao Xueqin Society, and Chinese and French cultural circles, media circles and "redology" enthusiasts attended. It can be seen that the publication of this book has aroused great concern in the literary circles of China and France.

To sum up, the French comic strips of the four famous books have not only achieved good sales in France, but also won unanimous praise from the French Comic Festival and Sinology, and attracted the support and attention of the French government and mainstream media in French society. It can be said that Chinese books are a success in French readers and book market.

Behind the phenomenon that the French comic strips of the four famous books have aroused enthusiastic response in France, there are many translation problems worthy of in-depth study. In this paper, the author tries to discuss this success from the perspective of translator's subjectivity.

### **3. Translator's Subjectivity and Translation Activities**

In the traditional view of translation, translation activities are basically equivalent to reading and understanding the text-re-expressing the text in the target language. In this process, the translator is subordinate, serving the original author, and is responsible for expressing the information in the original text faithfully in the target language. By doing this, the translator's task will be completed.

Since 1970s, with the deepening of translation theory research, new theories have emerged in other fields of humanities and social sciences. In particular, the influence of hermeneutics on translation theory and the "cultural turn" of translation studies have prompted translation studies to be placed under the background of cross-cultural communication instead of being confined to the language level, and influenced by various factors such as politics, economy, history, language and culture. These factors, either directly or indirectly, influence the whole process of translation activities (including translation selection, text understanding, translation strategies, translation publishing, etc.), that is, translators actively or passively influence their translation activities under the influence of the above factors.

From the perspective of hermeneutics, the translator is first and foremost the reader of the original text. However, the translator's understanding of the original text is not only the product of his language understanding level, but also the result of his own experience, literary accomplishment, aesthetic taste and ideology. "A thousand people have a thousand Hamlet." The translator's understanding of the original text is already "re-creation", which is deeply branded by the translator himself. As far as this link is concerned, the translator is no longer a pure servant, and his subjectivity has begun to appear. From understanding to re-expression, it involves subjective factors such as the translator's mastery of the target language, political factors, emotional factors, translation views and translation motives, so the translator's subjectivity is more prominent at this stage.

The cultural turn of translation is put forward by Lefevere and Basnet, two masters of translation studies. That is to say, translation studies should not only pay attention to language issues, but also start their own discussions in a broader historical and cultural perspective. Putting translation in the context of cross-cultural communication, translators' subjectivity is reflected in translation activities. For example, what role does the translator want to play in the source language culture and the target language culture; What criteria does the translator use to choose the target text? What is the purpose of the translator's translation of the text; What kind of intercultural communication purpose does the translator want to achieve? What is the translator's attitude towards the source language culture and the target language culture..

The translation and publication of the comic strips of the four famous works in French is not a

narrow translation activity in which language and characters are converted from Chinese to French, but a broad translation activity, involving the selection, understanding and publication of texts. This paper attempts to analyze the embodiment of translator's subjectivity in text selection and translation strategies from the perspective of translation activities in a broad sense, and to explore the success of French comic strips of four famous books.

#### **4. Translator's Subjectivity and the Choice of Translation to Be Translated**

From conception to selection of translated versions, translation, embellishment, revision and publication, Ms. Xu Gefei, director of Fei publishing house in Paris, and Si Mo and Nikolai, translators, have been taking the same translation concept as the point of agreement, and are responsible for all parts of translation activities, with the same purpose of cross-cultural communication as the translation mission. Therefore, in the whole translation activity of the four famous works published in France, they constitute a unified translator. Therefore, the translator's subjectivity discussed in this paper consists of two parts: Fei press in Paris and Si Mo and Nicolas.

Firstly, the choice of translation to be translated depends on the translator's translation motivation.

In his book on translation, Professor Xu Jun has devoted a special chapter to the influence of translation motivation on the translator's choice of the translated version. Different motivations will play a decisive role in the choice of different versions. Today's book market is full of mixed translations of good and bad, good and bad, but also the inevitable product of different translators driven by different translation motives. Correct translation motivation is not only the prerequisite for translators to maintain a serious attitude in the process of translation, but also the guarantee of translation quality. The distorted translation motivation will directly affect the translator's attitude towards the translated text, and the translated text is made in a crude way, even against the original author's intention, pointing the deer as a horse.

Translators of French version of four famous comic strips have expressed their translation motives on different occasions.

In an interview with Xinhua News Agency, Ms. Xu Gefei once said: "... people who learn foreign languages have the responsibility to be a bridge between China and the West ..." Ms. Xu Gefei positioned herself as a bridge, aiming to shoulder the cross-cultural exchanges between China and the West and let the Western world better understand Chinese culture.

It is precisely because of Xu Gefei's translation motivation of spreading Chinese culture that she set up FEI Publishing House with several French friends who love Chinese culture in 2009, aiming to introduce Chinese comic books to French readers.

As for why comic strips are chosen for translation, the translator Si Mo once said: "The four famous Chinese books are huge in length and numerous in characters, and Westerners know little about ancient Chinese life. Therefore, few people are interested in the translation of the four famous books in the French market, and the common law people can't chew such a big man."

Under the impetus and guidance of clear translation motivation and translation purpose, they began to select the translated versions. There are many versions of comic strips of the four famous books in the domestic market, but they are mixed. Xu Gefei finally decided to introduce and translate *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Dream of the Red Chamber* published by Shanghai renmei, *Water Margin* published by Beijing renmei and *Journey to the West* published by Hebei renmei.

These four sets of comic strips are classics in the history of Chinese comic strips. These sketched works with obvious Chinese characteristics have been praised by French artists as "flowing and beautiful." A good translation to be translated is not only a good foundation for spreading Chinese culture, but also a basic guarantee for the translation to be well received in the French market.

Secondly, the choice of the target translation also depends on the translator's grasp of the reading habits of the target readers.

As the head of FEI Publishing House, I choose comics as an art form to broaden the target audience market, so as to achieve the purpose of spreading Chinese culture (four famous works).

Xu Gefei said that the favorite form of books for French readers is comics. Si Mo also said in an interview with Xinhuanet reporter: “Antique paintings can make Westerners have a more intuitive feeling of ancient Chinese architecture and costumes.”

First of all, comics are a popular form of books for French readers. France is even the second largest comic book market in the world. In France, comics are called the “Ninth Art”, which is juxtaposed with traditional art forms such as painting, music, dance and poetry. There are 5,000 comic books published in France every year, with annual sales exceeding 500 million euros. From these data, we can see that the number of French cartoon readers is huge. Choosing the form of comics is more beneficial for the four famous books to enter ordinary French readers, not just the French who are interested in Chinese culture or the scholars who study China.

At the same time, because comics are presented in the form of pictures, they can shorten the distance between readers and stories and lower the reading threshold of readers. Compared with thousands of pages and difficult literary words in the translation, comics have great advantages of intuition and indirectness. Si Mo once said: “China’s four famous books are large in length and numerous in characters, and westerners know little about ancient Chinese life, so few people are interested in the translation of the four famous books in the French market, and the common law people can’t chew such a big man ... Although France is a big comic country, it knows very little about Chinese comic strips. From the perspective of cultural exchanges, the illustrated form of Chinese comic strips is most suitable for Westerners to understand ancient Chinese stories. “Easy-to-understand and approachable cartoons can win more French readers for the four famous books and stimulate their interest in Chinese traditional culture.

Thirdly, the characteristics of comics can also make up for the Chinese traditional culture and image which are difficult to convey by words, and reduce the difficulty for readers to understand Chinese culture in reading. Every culture is a special product under the mutual influence of historical, political and economic background, which can’t be expressed in other cultures or belongs to “Cultural deficiency” in other cultures. At this time, the picture can describe it directly and vividly, and the reader can see it at a glance. The reader can have a basic grasp of the “Cultural deficiency” visually without a large text annotation.

## 5. Translator's Subjectivity and Translation Strategies

French comic strips of the four famous books have achieved great success in France, but due to their large size and limited space, this paper cannot analyze them one by one. However, the French comic strips of the four famous books were published and translated by Ms. Xu Gefei’s FEI Publishing House and the translators Si Mo, and their translation strategies are consistent. Therefore, the author takes the first two volumes of the French comic book *Journey to the West* as examples to analyze the embodiment of translator’s subjectivity in translation strategies.

### (1) Simplified method

*Journey to the West*, as a novel by Shinhwa, contains many place names in the Buddhist classics system. For example: Dongsheng Shenzhou, Nanshan Buzhou, Xiniu Hezhou, etc. These place names neither promote the development of the storyline nor have any implied meaning. When dealing with these place names, translators do not stick to the translation of every word or seek for precise Buddhist translation, but popularize them so that French readers can read them easily and enter the story smoothly, instead of stopping at strange and difficult place names.

Table 1 Translation of Place Names in French Comic Book *Journey to the West*

东胜神州 Dongsheng Shenzhou	L’Est du continent sacré
傲来国 Aolai Kingdom	Le petit pays d’Ao Lai
南赡部洲地界 Nanshan Buzhou	Le continent méridional de Jambu
西牛贺州地界 Xiniu Hezhou	Le continent occidental de Godanya

Table 2 General Translation of Four Place Names in Buddhist Classics

东胜神州 Dongsheng Shenzhou	Purvavideha
傲来国 Aolai Kingdom	Le pays d' Ao Lai
南赡部洲地界 Nanshan Buzhou	Jambudvipa
西牛贺州地界 Xiniu Hezhou	Aparagodaniya

The above two tables show the difference between the translator's translation method and the general translation method in Buddhist classics. Why do translators choose popular translation instead of general translation of Buddhist classics? Translator's subjectivity plays a decisive role: translators consciously choose translation strategies that are more consistent with their translation purposes. Ms. Xu Gefei said in many interviews: "I hope to help French readers ... understand Chinese stories and culture through comics." Under the guidance of this translation purpose, the translator chose to weaken the Buddhist connotation of place names, thus reducing the difficulty of reading, so as not to distract French readers, so that they can better follow the main line of the story and immerse themselves in the magical world of ancient China.

## (2) Deletion method

The form of comic strips limits the length of the translation. The meaning conveyed by a Chinese character often needs several French words to express, and words composed of letters take up more space than Chinese characters. A four-character idiom often needs one or even several French sentences to translate. So, how to control the translation length and keep the layout of French and Chinese comic strips unified, which is in line with the habit of French readers reading comics? On the premise of keeping the translation faithful and fluent, the translator simplified some words and phrases, that is, "deletion method".

Table 3 Sentences Deleted (Untranslated) by the Translator

灵台方寸山,斜月三星洞 Lingtai Fangcunshan, Xieyue Sanxingdong
你运气真好 You're lucky

"Lingtai Fangcun Shan, Xieyue Sanxing Dong" is the name of the cave engraved on the Dongfu, the founder of Bodhi, the first teacher of Sun WuKong. In ancient China, there were many plaques on the gates of large houses, which indicated the entrance. If only ten words are translated into French, they will not only occupy a huge space, but also lose their charm. In the original work, "Lingtai Fangcun Shan, Xieyue Sanxing Dong" has not much practical significance except to bring readers aesthetic experience of Chinese language. Therefore, the translator deleted it, which did not cause any reading obstacles to French readers, but was more suitable for their comic reading rhythm.

When other disciples of Bodhi's ancestor learned that the master had taught you how to avoid the three disasters, they said, "Wukong, you are lucky. The master taught you how to avoid the three disasters. How is your practice now? ..... "You're lucky" is omitted in the translation, and only the part that is really meaningful is translated. First, due to the limited space, the second is because the impact of this sentence on the integrity of the story is almost zero, which does not affect the French readers' understanding of the story.

Table 4 the Translator Simplifies the Translation of Words and Sentences

扫地锄园,养花修树 Sweep the floor and hoe the garden, raise flowers and repair trees	s'affairait aux tâches ménagères et à l'entretien du potager
打破盘中之谜 Break the mystery of the plate	décrypter le message du maître
踏云霞而去 Tread away from the rosy clouds	marcher sur les nuages

After Sun WuKong visited the Bodhi ancestors, he "swept the floor and hoe the garden, raise flowers and repair trees" every day. "Intertextuality" is a rhetorical device in Chinese: the upper and lower sentences or two parts of a sentence seem to say two things each, but in fact they echo each other, explain each other, complement each other and say one thing. Rhetorical method to express the meaning of a complete sentence by interweaving, permeating and complementing context. Therefore, the translator only translated the first half of the sentence, and "Raise flowers and repair

trees” was not translated, which did not affect the transmission of the original meaning.

Bodhi's father told Sun WuKong the time and place when he was granted the method of immortality in code, but Wukong really “Break the mystery of the plate”, realized the time and place and kept the appointment on time. “Breaking the puzzle” is the same as “breaking the casserole and asking the end”, which belongs to the visual expression of Chinese. If literally translated as *briser le disque mystérieux*, French readers will be confused: which plate is *le disque*? On the contrary, it adds obstacles to the reading of French readers. Therefore, in order to read clearly and smoothly, the translator chooses free translation, which is concise and clear.

“Rosy clouds” in “Tread away from the rosy clouds” is translated as *nuage*. In Chinese, “rosy clouds” is a comparatively literary language, which often appears in literary works such as poetry and novels, rendering a poetic atmosphere. Its essence is cloud. With the help of the translator's accurate understanding of the original text, the translator helps French readers to build side branches and keep the backbone, thus choosing a translation that is easier for French readers to understand. Whether it is a Chinese comic book or an internationally known cartoon, it is an art form with pictures and words, which is quite different from traditional literary works. The former pays more attention to promoting the story through the dialogue of characters, while the latter is indispensable for a large number of descriptions to create different artistic conception and atmosphere. Comic book or cartoon is a popular reading material, and it is more appropriate to choose common words than poetic words.

### (3) Adding words

When dealing with some sentences, the translator did not translate them directly, but appropriately added the translator's understanding of the original text, so as to adhere to some differences between Chinese and French cultures and avoid reading shock and discomfort caused by cultural differences. In this way, from the perspective of French readers, the translation becomes more logical and easier for French readers to understand and accept.

Table 5 Sentences Translated By Adding Words

来去才不过三里远近,又落在面前.It's only three miles away, and then I fall in front of me.	Fier de lui, il exécuta un aller, retour de trois lis avant de se présenter à nouveau devant le patriarche.
直奔前去 go straight ahead	Vers les lueurs dansantes
一听此情,不好推脱.Upon hearing this, it is not easy to shirk.	Devant l'audace de Wukong, il n'osa protester.

Sun WuKong has been practicing hard every day since he got the 72-change formula taught by the Bodhi ancestor, and he is becoming proficient and quite complacent. One day, his ancestor asked him to show his ability of driving clouds, and he immediately Tread away from the clouds. There is no “Fier de lui” in the original text of “it's only three miles away, and then I fall in front of me.”. In order to highlight the contrast between Wukong's complacency and poor learning skills, the translator added Fier de lui, which strengthened French readers' perception of this contrast and helped French readers to establish a distinctive image of Sun WuKong in the limited translation space.

Wukong learned to return to water curtain cave in Huaguoshan, and after the advice of the old monkey, he went into the sea to borrow weapons from the Dragon King. After entering the water, I saw the front shining and thought it was Crystal Palace, so I said “go straight ahead”. In the original text, “Qian” refers to the glittering crystal palace. It is a simple and intuitive translation method for the translator to translate the true meaning of “Qian” directly. French readers can tell Sun WuKong is leaving for the Crystal Palace at a glance.

Wukong reported his name when he saw the Dragon King, went straight to the topic, explained his purpose, and specially borrowed treasures. In the phrase “it is not easy to Shirk” of the Dragon King, Chinese words are euphemistic, and “this feeling” actually means that Wukong borrows treasure boldly. Aren't “bad” and “shirking” the embarrassing expression of the old Dragon King who wants to refuse but doesn't know or dare to refuse? On the basis of a correct understanding of

the original text, the translator abandons the euphemism in Chinese, and presents Wukong's boldness and Dragon King's refusal directly to French readers, thus making the characters in cartoons clearer.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper discusses the translator's subjectivity from the process of translation activities. Through analysis, we find that translators are deeply involved in all aspects of translation activities, especially the selection of the target translation and translation strategies. Translator's subjectivity is not a free play without boundaries, but a play of subjective initiative influenced and restricted by many factors such as translation purpose, translation motivation and reading habits of target readers. The choice of the target translation reflects the translator's translation purpose and motivation. The choice of different translation strategies reflects the translator's full analysis and respect for the reading habits of the target readers. Giving full play to the translator's subjectivity can make the translation closer to the target readers, and make the source works more effectively accepted and disseminated by the target countries. So as to better achieve the purpose of promoting literary and cultural exchanges among countries through literary works and complete the sacred mission of translation.

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