



A Hermeneutic Exploration of Subjectivity of the Translator—With Multiple Chinese Translations of *Pride and Prejudice* as Examples

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ABSTRACT

The importance of translator's subjectivity exists objectively, as a subject in translation activities, translator's subjectivity cannot be underestimated. The translation theory, Hermeneutics and the representative figure of it, George Steiner and his translation theory "four steps of translation", namely trust, aggression, incorporation and restitution, is the best interpretation of the translator's subjectivity. Therefore, with the support of Hermeneutics and the theoretical guidance of Steiner's "four steps" in translation, this study will analyze different Chinese versions of *Pride and Prejudice*, focuses on and examine the embodiment of the translator's subjectivity in translation.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, Translator's subjectivity, *Pride and Prejudice*.

1. Introduction

Hermeneutics, also known as interpretation theory, is a philosophical theory of understanding and interpreting meaning. It originated in Ancient Greece and the medieval Christian period, and after going through roughly three stages of development, it became an independent discipline in the nineteenth century. In the first stage, hermeneutics was not yet mature and had not formed a systematic and complete theory. The second stage is marked by the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey. These two important figures further promoted the development of hermeneutics. According to Schleiermacher, understanding and interpretation are a form of deep empathy, placing oneself in the author's thoughts and achieving consistency with them. In contrast, Dilthey believed that understanding is different from explanation; it is an act of delving into an individual's inner world, such as understanding a painting, a poem, or a fact. This is not a scientific explanation but a grasping of the manifestation of life. The third stage of hermeneutics is characterized by an ontological orientation, also known as ontological hermeneutics or modern hermeneutics. Unlike the previous stage, understanding in this phase is not about empathy or grasping life's capabilities, but rather about grasping one's own existential possibilities within the context of one's life world. Understanding is a way of being-in-the-world (Xu, 2004).

The concept of translator's subjectivity has gained increasing attention due to the "cultural turn" in translation studies. Traditional translation theories and research often overlooked the importance of translators, treating them to some extent as "invisible". It was not until the 1970s, with the advent of this cultural turn, that translators emerged from their "invisible" status, and researchers began to focus on them. This shift is not without merit, as translators always play a subjective role in the translation process, from selecting the original text, interpreting its intended meaning, employing various strategies during translation, to the final transformation from the source language to the target language. All these aspects incorporate the translator's subjective thoughts. The hermeneutic four-step process proposed by George Steiner, which includes trust, aggression, absorption, and compensation, reflects the active role of the translator. Therefore, this study will adopt Steiner's translation theory.

Pride and Prejudice, written by the British author Jane Austen in the nineteenth century (hereinafter referred to as "P&P"), is considered an outstanding work in early 19th-century British literature and remains a classic to this day. With its realistic touch and profound insight into everyday life, it vividly reflects the customs and social life of British rural society at the time,

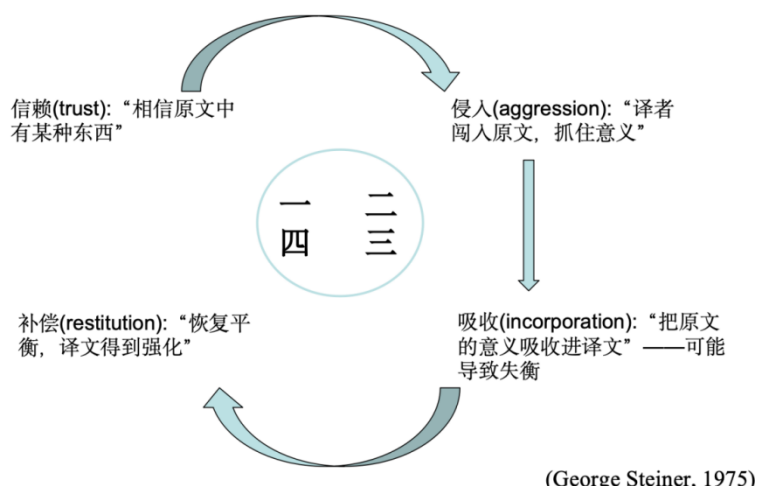
as well as the conservative and closed state of British rural life and social conditions from the late 18th to the early 19th century. The language is fresh and fluent, full of wit and humor.

Therefore, this study takes the English novel “P&P” as an example and selects three Chinese translations—the translation by Wang Keyi (hereinafter referred to as the Wang version), the translation by Sun Zhili (hereinafter referred to as the Sun version), and the version by Fang Huawei (hereinafter referred to as the Fang version)—as research materials to explore the role of translator’s subjectivity under the hermeneutic translation theory. The Wang version was published earliest and is considered “a better translation, especially notable for its vivid and lifelike portrayal” (Sun, 1983). The Sun version is fresh and elegant, natural and fluent, accurate and vivid, with a lively and fresh touch, capturing the essence of the original work, and has been widely praised. (Xu, 2010) The Fang version was published by Yilin Press in 2011 and, although not as well-known as the previous two versions, is also very readable.

2. George Steiner’s Hermeneutic Translation Theory

In the development of hermeneutics, many influential figures have emerged, such as Schleiermacher, Heidegger, Gadamer, and George Steiner. As one of the important representatives, Steiner’s academic work *After Babel* is hailed by the Western academic community as a “milestone work” and “the first systematic study of translation theory and process since the eighteenth century”. Supported by Heidegger’s hermeneutic ideas, Steiner proposed that “understanding is also translation”. In this book, Steiner suggests that the process of translation is a process of interpretation, which includes four translation steps: trust, aggression, absorption, and compensation (Wang, 2019). These four steps are also referred to as the operation of interpretation, and they form the core of Steiner’s translation perspective.

The Hermeneutic 阐释的运作



2.1 Trust

All translation activities must begin with trust. Due to differences in political, economic, and cultural factors, translators must first fully exercise their subjective initiative to select the original text, choosing texts that are suitable for their own translation. The first step a translator takes before engaging in translation activities is "trust," trusting that the chosen text has certain value and that it contains content that is worth understanding and can be understood. Trust can

also be referred to as “selection” as translators always choose meaningful original texts; otherwise, they would give up (Liao, 2002).

2.2 Aggression

The second step in Steiner’s hermeneutic four-step process is aggression. This step is akin to capturing a prisoner, where the translator breaks through the linguistic shell to delve into the core of the original text and extract its central ideas. In the process of interlingual translation, the translator’s understanding and comprehension of the original text is akin to a necessary offensive action. The spiritual essence that the original text aims to convey is the target to be captured, and this step emphasizes through metaphor that communication requires understanding, and understanding is translation (Liao, 2002). Furthermore, during the process of aggression, the translator always exercises their subjective initiative and moves forward with their own understanding. In the collision and sparks that occur between two different languages and cultures, the translator makes appropriate modifications to the original text, seeking to find its essence.

2.3 Absorption

The third step is absorption. This step follows the second one and deals with how to handle the “spoils of war” after “capturing” them, which means transforming the meaning and form of the original text into the target language. This is the stage of expression after understanding and is the focal point of the translation process (Liao, 2002). In translation activities, two extreme phenomena may arise: one is considered “complete domestication”, where the translation gains a complete status in the target language, and the other is the corresponding “persistent alienation and marginalization” (Steiner, 1975). Steiner believes that different types of assimilation will occur during the process of “absorption”, but these various types of assimilation always lie between the two extremes mentioned above. For translators, it is necessary to grasp the differences between the two languages, deeply analyze the cultural connotations that the original text intends to convey. On the other hand, this process is also a double-edged sword. Due to differences in culture and other aspects, there will inevitably be some impact on both the original text and the translation. Therefore, translators need to rely on their cultural background and understanding abilities, fully exercise their subjective initiative, and appropriately adopt some domestication and alienation translation strategies.

2.4 Compensation

The fourth step is compensation, which refers to the process where translators restore the balance that has been disrupted between the original text and the translation. Compensation is the focal point of the hermeneutic operation because translation begins with an imbalance. “Trust” brings the translator closer to the original text, but subsequent actions such as aggression can lead to linguistic imbalances or disorders. Therefore, the fourth step of “compensation” is essential. Since the original text and the translation differ in many aspects, such as structure, grammar, and culture, it is inevitable that some cultural elements and imbalances will arise during the translation process. Steiner believes that the imbalance mainly manifests in two ways: one is degradation, which means insufficient interpretation, and the other

is exaggeration, which means over-interpretation (Steiner, 1975). Thus, in the hermeneutic act, only through compensation can this imbalance be remedied. Compensation is an embodiment of the translator's full exercise of subjective initiative, and the main measures for presenting the original text include paraphrasing, amplification, or selective translation, omission, etc.

The above is Steiner's explanation of the four steps of hermeneutic operation, which is also the core part of his translation theory. Additionally, in Steiner's translation view, from "understanding is translation" (one of Steiner's translation views) to "hermeneutic operation steps", everything is approached from the translator's perspective, emphasizing the translator's agency. The era in which the translator is situated, as well as their own knowledge, abilities, personal experiences, and so on, will all have a certain impact on their understanding. In short, during the translation process, the translator must inevitably exercise their subjective initiative in translation.

3. The Application of Hermeneutic Four-Step Process in the Translator's Subjectivity of Multiple Translations of *Pride and Prejudice*

3.1 *The Manifestation of Translator's Subjectivity*

3.3.1 Trust

As mentioned above, *Pride and Prejudice* is widely regarded as one of the most important works in the history of British literature, and it ranks second on the BBC's list of the greatest 100 novels. It holds significant value in literary history and has a profound impact and meaning in society. Through ingenious plot arrangements and delicate psychological descriptions, Austen allows readers to deeply feel the contradictions within characters' hearts and the ups and downs of their emotions. At the same time, Jane Austen uses her unique writing style to create vivid character images, revealing social issues of the time. By criticizing social customs and marriage concepts, she exposes the flaws and injustices of the feudal society, enabling readers to appreciate the author's wisdom and insight into human nature. It is a rare good book that has reading value for readers. However, in the early days, there was no translation in China, and to fill this gap and familiarize Chinese readers with this famous foreign novel and its author, some scholars conducted translation studies on *Pride and Prejudice*. Translators believed that introducing this book to Chinese readers was extremely valuable, and thus trust was established.

Mr. Wang Keyi was an excellent translator and a versatile one, as evidenced by the wide range of genres he translated, including literary novels, poetry, and prose. Out of "trust" in the original author Jane Austen and *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Wang chose to translate it. This "trust" was also closely related to the era in which he lived. From the founding of the People's Republic of China to before the Cultural Revolution, the focus of foreign literature translation in China was mainly on introducing works from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. For literature from Western capitalist countries like Britain and America, the principle was "to serve the revolution and to serve creation", emphasizing the introduction of some classic works and contemporary works with progressive significance. (Littlemore, 2001) Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* falls into this category of literary works, and Mr. Wang's choice to translate it aligned with the purpose of literary translation in the early years after the founding of the People's Republic of China. This choice fully reflects the exercise of the translator's subjectivity.

Professor Sun Zhili is the Chief Professor and Doctoral Supervisor at the PLA University of Foreign Languages, a renowned translator and translation theorist in China, a member of the China Translators Association, and a member of the Translation Theory and Teaching Research Committee, as well as a standing director of the China Association for English and Chinese Language Comparison. He has translated about 30 British and American literary works. Professor Fang Huawei is currently a professor of English at the School of Foreign Studies, Soochow University, a famous literary translator and translation theorist, acclaimed by UNESCO's International Federation of Translators as "the most productive literary translator in contemporary China", and selected as a representative figure in the field of literary translation (the only one in China); he has published more than ten million words of original and translated works. The choice of these two scholars to translate *Pride and Prejudice* was indeed out of "trust" and love for the work. Professor Sun Zhili once said, "As a literature enthusiast, my favorite book is *Pride and Prejudice*, and as a translation enthusiast, my greatest wish is to translate this classic". Therefore, the choice of these two scholars to translate *Pride and Prejudice* was not a matter of chance, but rather the result of years of accumulated profound knowledge, solid translation skills, and "trust" in outstanding British and American literary works.

3.3.2 Aggression

"Understanding is also translation" (Steiner, 1975). In the process of appreciating and understanding the original text, translators are inevitably influenced by the era they live in, as well as their own reading habits, knowledge structure, and aesthetics. They approach the original text with their own "pre-understanding". No translator begins with a blank slate; their translations are influenced by factors such as their language skills, life experiences, and social backgrounds, resulting in different translations. This is a manifestation of the translator's subjectivity. (Wang, 2019)

Example1: Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice... She (Mrs. Bennet) was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. (Chapter 1)

Wang's version: 班纳特先生真是个古怪的人，他一方面喜欢插科打诨，爱挖苦人，同时又不苟言笑，变幻莫测...她是个智力贫乏、不学无术、喜怒无常的女人。

Sun's version: 贝内特先生是个古怪人，一方面乖觉诙谐，好挖苦人，另一方面又不苟言笑，变幻莫测...她是个智力贫乏、孤陋寡闻、喜怒无常的女人。

Fang's version: 贝内特先生是个性情古怪的复杂人物，既喜欢讽刺嘲笑说风凉话，又显得态度矜持，真是变幻莫测...她智力低下、孤陋寡闻、喜怒无常。

Analysis: This is the opening passage describing the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. Both Wang and Sun's versions make extensive use of four-character idioms. The simple two-word phrases in English are transformed into powerful four-character phrases in Chinese, making the reading experience smooth and coherent. Although Fang's version also uses four-character words, it employs a more straightforward tone and adds some transitional words, such as "both, also, truly, even", making it equally coherent. Moreover, considering the different historical and social contexts in which the translators lived, there are certain differences among the versions. Mr. Wang Keyi's era was influenced by classical Chinese, so his translation contains traces of classical Chinese, such as "joking and jesting". In contrast, Mr. Fang Huawei's version was published in the

21st century, when classical Chinese is no longer a common language of daily communication, so he uses words that are more accessible to the general public. From this perspective, the translators have fully exercised their subjective initiative, influenced by the era in which they lived.

Example 2: It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. (Chapter 1)

Wang's version: 凡是有财产的单身汉，必定要娶位太太，这已经成了一条举世公认的真理。

Sun's version: 有钱的单身汉总要娶位太太，这是一条举世公认的真理。

Fang's version: 单身汉如果手中拥有一笔可观的钱财，势必需要讨房妻室，这已成为举世公认的真理。

Analysis: This sentence is very famous, but in fact, it is an "irony" with a satirical meaning. Considering the social reality at the time, it was not that "wealthy single men needed to marry wives", but rather that all women without money needed to marry wealthy men. All three translations adjust the word order, placing "universally acknowledged truth" at the end of the sentence, which aligns with Chinese logical thinking and avoids the sentence being top-heavy. The difference lies in the fact that Wang's translation uses "all, must, has become", and Fang's translation uses "if, must, has become", which strengthens the tone of the sentence, making readers believe that this is an unquestionable "truth". As the saying goes, "a thousand readers have a thousand Hamlets", while Sun's translation has a slightly weaker tone for this sentence, which is also determined by the reader's own understanding, fully reflecting the subjective initiative.

3.3.3 Absorption

Hermeneutics posits that texts contain the author's original horizon, while the interpreter brings their own horizon, shaped by the specific era and atmosphere in which they live. There is a gap between these two horizons, caused by temporal distance and changes in historical context. *Pride and Prejudice* is a detailed novel that is rich in the social characteristics of its time. For translators with different cultural backgrounds, accurately translating this novel and understanding its word choice, language culture, and social background requires considerable effort. Over-domestication may lose the original charm of the work, while over-foreignization may leave local readers confused. Therefore, striking the right balance is crucial.

Example 1: "Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia, we may draw from it this useful lesson: that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable, that one false step involves her in endless ruin, that her reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful, and that she cannot be too much guarded in her behaviour towards the undeserving of the other sex". (Chapter 47)

In this passage, the novel highlights the societal views on female reputation and morality during the time period in which it was set. Translators must carefully navigate these cultural nuances to ensure that the translation conveys the same depth of meaning and social commentary as the original text.

Wang's version: 此时对于丽迪雅固属不幸，但亦可作为我们的前车之鉴。大凡女人家一旦失去贞操，便无可挽救，这真是一失足成千古恨。美貌固然难于永葆，名誉亦何尝容易保全。世间多的是轻薄男子，岂可不存不留神？

Sun's version: 这件事对莉迪亚虽属不幸，但我们也可由此引以为鉴：女人家一旦失去贞操，便永远无可挽回；真可谓一失足成千古恨；美貌固然不会永驻，名誉又何尝容易保全；对于那些轻薄男子，万万不可掉以轻心。

Fang's version: 这件不幸的事情虽发生在莉迪亚身上，但咱们大家都可引为前车之鉴。女儿家一旦失身，就再也无法挽救，正所谓一失足成千古恨。要想保住美貌不是件容易的事，而保全名节亦为艰难。对轻薄的男儿，万万不可掉以轻心。

Analysis: This passage is spoken by Mary, the third sister, in response to the elopement of her youngest sister, Lydia, with Wickham. Instead of offering comfort to her family, her immediate reaction is to express her views on chastity. Austen portrays Mary as an unpopular character due to her lack of empathy and her tendency to use pretentious words inappropriately to show off her intelligence. In this passage, the use of multiple "that" clauses creates a parallel structure that reflects Mary's character in the novel. Translators need to ensure that this character trait is conveyed in the translation.

All three translations use four-character phrases to highlight Mary's "richly meaningful" character, such as "a cautionary tale", "chastity", "one false step leads to eternal regret", and "to take lightly". There is also a subtle sense of irony, which aligns with the novel's satirical style. Therefore, the translators' handling not only fits the character setting of the novel but also matches the novel's implicit satirical tone. Additionally, all three translations appropriately employ domestication strategies, using phrases that reflect Chinese cultural connotations. This fully demonstrates the translators' subjective initiative in considering the readers' factors.

Example2: "My dear Mr. Bennet", replied his wife, "how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them". "My dear, you flatter me. I certainly have had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now. When a woman has five grown-up daughters, she ought to give over thinking of her own beauty." (Chapter 1)

Wang's version: "我的好老爷，"太太回答道，"你怎么这样叫人讨厌！告诉你吧，我正在盘算，他要是挑中我们的一个女儿做老婆，可多好！""我的好老爷，你太捧我啦。从前也的确有人赞赏过我的美貌，现在我可不敢说有什么出众的地方了。一个女人家有了五个成年的女儿，就不该想到自己的美貌啦。"

Sun's version: "亲爱的贝内特先生，"太太答道，"你怎么这么令人讨厌！告诉你吧，我在琢磨他娶她们中的一个做太太呢。""亲爱的，你太抬举我啦。我以前确实有过美貌的时候，不过现在却不敢硬充有什么出众的地方了。一个女人家有了五个成年的女儿，就不该对自己的美貌再转什么念头了。"

Fang's version: "我亲爱的老爷，"贝太太说道，"你怎么这样不开窍！实话告诉你吧，我正在盘算着怎样嫁一个女儿给他做太太哩。""亲爱的，你过分抬举我啦。我以前的确算得上个美人，可现在人老珠黄，没有什么出众之处了。五个女儿都已长大成人，我就更不该炫耀自己的脸蛋了。"

Analysis: These two sentences are spoken by Mrs. Bennet in a conversation with Mr. Bennet. Compared to narrative text, dialogue can more "directly and subtly" reflect the characteristics of characters (Ji, 2007). The term "directly" refers to the fact that dialogue to some extent reduces or even conceals the voice of the original author, allowing the characters themselves to have the right to speak. The term "subtly" means that since the original author loses the opportunity to speak directly in the dialogue and cannot easily narrate the characters' traits through their own ideas, they must rely on "subtle" ways, supplemented by descriptions of details, to elucidate the characteristics of the characters. For translators, it is necessary to accurately grasp the nuances

and details, capture the character images, and present them to readers. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Bennet is portrayed as a talkative, money-loving, and shallow person. To highlight this, translators need to fully display the character's design. The phrase "I am thinking of..." in the original text, if translated literally as "I think", would not reflect Mrs. Bennet's money-oriented and people-oriented characteristics. Therefore, Wang and Fang translate it as "calculating", which fully reflects the character's shrewd and slightly cunning traits. Sun's translation of "pondering" is less intense compared to the other two versions but matches the literal meaning of the original text. Additionally, regarding the address to her husband, Wang and Fang's translation of "master" is a more authentic Chinese term from the past, humorous and witty, while Sun's translation of "Mr. Bennet" aligns with the foreignization strategy, allowing readers to approach the author and maintain the "original flavor". The different choices made by translators are determined by their own subjectivity. It should be noted that another characteristic of Fang's version is not being bound by the structure of the original text but making appropriate additions and deletions. This retains the connotations of the original text while catering to the readers' reading habits. For example, the sentence "do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now", Sun adds it as two clauses, translating it as "past one's prime, with nothing extraordinary", which is a domestication strategy and also adds some vocabulary, absorbing the meaning of the original text intends to convey while catering to the reader group.

3.3.4 Compensation

The ability of *Pride and Prejudice* to enter the Chinese readers' horizon and achieve a certain response is thanks to the efforts of these translators. There are many differences between the target language and the source language, and it is inevitable that some translation losses will occur during the process. After the three steps of "trust, aggression, and absorption", translators need to try their best to restore the balance between the original work and the translation so that the translation can survive in a completely new cultural environment. Therefore, it is necessary to use the method of adding annotations as compensation. In this way, the original work achieves a higher status in the target language culture through the translation, and also realizes the balance between the translation and the original work.

Example 1: But suspecting them to be playing high, she declined it... (Chapter 8)

Wang's version: 可是她恐怕他们输赢很大, 便谢绝了。

Sun's version: 她怕他们玩大赌, 便谢绝了。

Fang's version: 可她害怕那伙人赌注下得太高, 于是便谢绝了。

Analysis: For the phrase "playing high", both Wang and Fang translated it literally as "betting heavily" and "placing high bets", which allows readers to immediately understand that it refers to playing card games. Sun translated it as "gambling big", which may be less familiar to readers. To avoid ambiguity, the translator added a footnote: "At that time in Britain, gambling was very prevalent, and both men and women often played big, sometimes losing hundreds of pounds in a single game", making it clear to readers.

Example 2: "But consider your daughters...Indeed, you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit him, if you do not." (Chapter 1)

Wang's version: 看女儿们分上吧。只请你想一想...你的确应该去一次, 要是你不去, 叫我们怎么去。”

Sun's version: “可你要为女儿们着想呀...你真应该去一次，要不然，我们母女就没法去见他了”。

Fang's version: “可你得照顾一下女儿们的情面呀...总而言之，你必须去一趟。没有你去铺路，我们无法和他接近。”

Analysis: This sentence is Mrs. Bennet persuading Mr. Bennet to visit the male protagonist, Mr. Darcy. Only Sun's translation adds a footnote, “According to British customs at the time, before female family members could visit a new neighbor, the male head of the household had to visit first”. Therefore, readers can understand why Mrs. Bennet says, “we won't be able to see him”. The other two translations do not add footnotes, but considering the traditional Chinese custom of “men being in charge outside the home and women inside”, this concept still lingers in the readers' minds. Thus, these two translators have also exercised their subjective initiative, believing that readers can grasp the meaning of the text by combining it with their own social environment. Furthermore, since *Pride and Prejudice* is a rich novel with many characters and names of people and places, such as “Lizzy” being the nickname for the heroine Elizabeth, and “Gretna Green” being a village in southern Scotland, all three translators have added annotations to help readers clarify the relationships between characters and increase their understanding of foreign geography and culture.

Conclusion

Translators are the subjects of translation activities. It is through their initiative and the arduous process they undergo that readers are presented with a unique world (Tang, 2003). Therefore, translators are not “invisible” figures; translator's subjectivity is a factor that must be considered in translation activities. Guided by hermeneutic theory and using Steiner's four-step hermeneutic translation process, this paper has conducted a multi-version analysis of Jane Austen's world-renowned novel, *Pride and Prejudice*. During the translation process, all three translators fully exercised their subjectivity, analyzing the characters and linguistic features of the text to present what they believe to be the best expression. Their efforts to convey the spirit of the original work are highly commendable. However, for the rich topic of translator's subjectivity, this paper only provides a preliminary exploration. Moreover, there is no definitive translation, and excellent translations can still be improved upon. (Ji, 2007) It is hoped that further in-depth exploration of the subject of translator's subjectivity will continue.

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