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Ken Liu's subjectivity in the English translation of *Santi* from the perspective of Eco-translatology[1]

ABSTRACT

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The Three-Body Problem, English version of the Chinese novel *Santi*, is the first translated novel to have received "Hugo Award for Best Novel", the world's best laurel for science fiction. This paper studies how the translator Ken Liu's subjectivity contributed to the success of the translation from the perspective of Eco-translatology. The study focuses on how Ken Liu adapted himself to the translational eco-environment and what translation strategies and skills he selected in the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. Moreover, the quality of the translation is evaluated with the criteria proposed in Eco-translatology. With the help of Python, a quantitative and qualitative analysis of readers' comments on *The Three-Body Problem* is conducted. The research finds that (1) In the adaptation stage, Ken Liu was not passively constrained by the translational eco-environment. His subjectivity based on his bilingual and bicultural competence satisfied both his own internal requirements and the external requirements of the translational eco-environment; (2) In the selection stage, Ken Liu creatively succeeded in achieving the correspondence between the source text and target text in the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions; (3) The English version of Santi has survived in the western translational eco-environment by way of a high degree of holistic adaptation and selection.

Keywords: *Santi* (*The Three-Body Problem*), Ken Liu, translator's subjectivity, Eco-translatology, selection, adaptation

1. Introduction

The Three-Body Problem is the English version of Santi, a Chinese novel written by Liu Cixin. In an imagined setting, the story revolves around the Earth's first contact with an alien civilization, provoking a storm of discussion on what the science and technology has brought to mankind, as well as on the existence and extinction of human beings. Following its publication in 2014 and hitting the jackpot in 2015, The Three-Body Problem embarked on its overseas circulation journey in more than twenty countries, garnering nine nominations for international awards and five awards. It is the first translated novel to have received "Hugo Award for Best Novel", the world's best laurel for science fiction. Ken Liu, English translator of the novel, contributed much to the success of the novel by way of his subjectivity. "Translation as adaptation and selection" and "Translator-centeredness in translating process", the core theories of Eco-translatology, lay a theoretical groundwork for us to study the translator's subjectivity.

2. Literature review

The Three-Body Problem has garnered international acclaim and is dubbed "the Chinese Star Wars" after its publication. Scores of book reviews showed genuine appreciation for the plot settings, characterization and translation of the book. *The New York Times* delivered the first review, in which the *Three-Body* series is credited with reviving a genre that is often marginalized by the literature community. Research on *The Three-Body Problem* flourished after it won the Galaxy Award and the Hugo Award, prestigious awards for sci-fi writings. According to CNKI database, more than 150 journal articles, theses and dissertations have investigated the translation from mainly two perspectives: translating strategies and communication effect. Such theories as hermeneutics, feminist translation theory, and reception aesthetics have been applied to the study of translation strategies adopted by Ken Liu (Zhang/Qin 2018; Lu 2017; Han 2019). Inasmuch as the novel achieved considerable success, some scholars brought into focus its translation model and communicative effect (Chen/Ma 2016; Liao/Bi 2016; He 2019; Li 2019; Wu/He 2019). By analyzing communication effects from award-winning overseas, sales volume, spread, and reviews, it is well-acknowledged that the book's accomplishment is attributed to the originality of conception, the competent translator, innovative international market strategies, and the Sino-foreign joint publishing model. When compared to academic achievements in the study of traditional serious literature, research articles on *The Three-Body Problem* received a meager number. Previous studies on the translator either exclusively focus on the text or emphasize the factors beyond the text, but few manage to provide a comprehensive account of the translator's subjectivity.

3. Eco-translatology and translator's subjectivity

"Eco-translatology views translation as a large-scale ecosystem in which concepts such as 'translation as adaptation and selection' and 'translation as a textual transplant' that promotes eco-balance are incorporated into a holistic vision" (House 2016: 38). This new approach originating in China makes a comprehensive and holistic study of translation from the ecological perspective.

3.1. Key Concepts of Eco-translatology

3.1.1. Translational eco-environment

It is "the addition of all external conditions that affect the survival and development of subjects in translation", and the subject "covers any lifeforms relevant to translation activities, such as writers, translators, readers, patrons, sponsors, publishers, retailers, and so forth" (Hu 2013: 88). Absorbing the essence of ecology, the translational eco-environment stresses the importance of harmonic existence and balanced development. Subjects in the environment are interwoven and interact with each other. The translational eco-environment is hierarchical and can be interpreted at three levels: micro, meso and macro. At the macro level, the focus is on diverse linguistic, social, political, and translational policies across numerous linguistic classes, nations, and regions. At the meso level, even within the same region, the translational eco-system for literary translation varies by genre. At the micro level, the translation eco-environment is classified into the external world and the internal one, which encompasses the inner structure of translation studies that involve theories, applications, criticism, history, and so forth. Concerning the uniqueness of the translational eco-environment, emphasis is placed on translators' specialties, whose works leave traces imparted by their family, education, believes, and the era. Those who work for corporations are fettered by a shedload of rules, while freelancers are much more flexible but lack stability (Hu 2013: 89).

3.1.2. Selective adaptation and adaptive selection

Derived from Darwin's theory, *adaptation* and *selection* in Eco-translatology are dyed with metaphorical sense with the principle of natural selection that hinges on the ability of organic beings to survive by adapting to the natural environment. According to Hu (2004: 72–73), the process of translating comprises two stages. In the first stage, the translational eco-environment "selects" the translator, and the ST (source text) takes the central position. This reversible selection may be viewed as the translator's adaptation to the ST. In the second stage, the translator takes the central position since he selects or decides on the form of the final TT (target text). The translator's identity is critical for describing the translation

process in the translational eco-environment. The emphasis in the first stage is on selecting translators. In the second stage, his identity changes from a translator to *the* translator, and he has adapted to and accepted the constraints of the translational eco-environment. As an integral part of the eco-environment, the translator plays a dual role: a selectee and a selector.

3.1.3. Three-dimensional transformations

Transplanting an original text from one ecosystem to another is a tricky business. In typical cases, multi-dimensional transplantations are epitomized in three dimensions: linguistic, cultural, and communicative. Adaptive transformation from a linguistic perspective emphasizes the multifaceted transformation of linguistic forms. In the cultural dimension, highlights lie in conveying cultural connotation. "Adaptation in the communicative aspect requires translators, in the translation process, to achieve the original intention of the author in the context of the target language" (Hu 2004: 137–138).

3.1.4. Translator-centeredness

The translator is the dominator or master of the translation process, adapting first to the translational eco-environment and then choosing TT adaptively in response. Translation is a cyclic process in the charge of the translator who coordinates the writer, original text, target text, reader and other elements by adaptive selection and transformation. "Translator-centeredness" justifies the translator's subjectivity, creativity and authority in the process of translation.

3.2. Translator's subjectivity from Eco-translatology

Eco-translatology is an ideal framework for studying the translator's subjectivity. First, it can account for the operation of the translator's subjectivity as well as its constraints stemming from the translational eco-environment at both adaptation and selection stages. Second, "'post-event penalty', a metaphor of translator's commitment, referring to the judgment and disposition of the TT following the translation activity, comes into its own in Eco-translatology" (Hu 2013: 226). The translator as "the center" makes selection and adaptation according to the principles of "survival of the fittest" and "elimination of the weak", and the translator's "power of dominance" becomes more remarkable, and, correspondingly, his "responsibility" becomes greater as well (Venuti 2004: 290). Evaluation of the degree of holistic adaptation and selection is treated as the benchmark to assess the translator's performance.

Then, how is Ken Liu's subjectivity demonstrated in The Three-Body Problem? And how to evaluate Ken Liu's subjectivity from the perspective of Eco-translatology?

4. Ken Liu's subjectivity in light of Eco-translatology

The translator's subjectivity can be explored from his adaptation to the translational eco-environment and his selection in three dimensions.

4.1. Adaptation to translational eco-environment

The translator is required to fully adapt to and select the environment for his survival and development. Survival and realization of self-value is the motivation for the translator's initial adaptation. Meanwhile, to increase the "degree of holistic adaptation and selection", the translator chooses works that match his abilities. Liu's adaptation is in line with his survival needs and self-value realization, and his power is also fully adapted to the requirements of the translational eco-environment.

4.1.1. Adaptation to internal and external needs

Ken Liu's internal requirements are as follows: First, earning money to support his family; Second, introducing Chinese sci-fi to the West, for he learned that "there was a lot of wonderful science fiction being published in China" but "almost none of it was accessible to Western readers due to lack of quality translations".[2] His affinity for sci-fi and appreciation for *Santi* is the inner need for him to translate the book. The novel, which is set against China's tumultuous history in the latter half of the twentieth century, contains fascinating speculation on physics, astrophysics, mathematics, and the possible forms of intelligent life. The translator states: "I'm excited by the opportunity, and I hope English readers enjoy it as much as Chinese readers have".[3]

The achievements in Chinese sci-fi writing are growing, so is its desire to enhance communication with the international sci-fi community. Sci-fi could be a robust ladder for Chinese culture "going out". Translating *Santi* is Ken Liu's adaptation to China's cultural strategy. The less-mentioned political issue, Cultural Revolution, and the copious description of Chinese culture render *Santi* an excellent choice for translating since the western readership has an intense curiosity about China's political material. Furthermore, sci-fi novels have long been warmly received by the western market, which would, to some extent, increase the acceptability of translated works in the same literary form.

4.1.2. Adaptation to bilingual and bicultural competence

Ken Liu, an American Chinese sci-fi writer, poet, lawyer, and computer programmer, has published his short stories in *F & SF, Asimov's, Analog, Lightspeed,*

2| https://www.kseniaanske.com/blog/2013/1/5/ken-liu-on-translation.html, accessed: 7.01.2020.

3| Ibid.

Clarkesworld, and other magazines, and several anthologies, including *The Year's Best Science Fiction*. Doubtlessly, Ken Liu's experience and achievements in sci-fi would make him the ideal candidate to translate *Santi*. Besides, the education he received in multidisciplinary fields helps him handle the interesting speculations on physics, astrophysics, math, and the intelligent forms life can take.

Born in China, Ken Liu has lived in the United States since the age of 11 and benefited from an inclusive upbringing. Unlike general Anglophone translators, his exposure to Chinese literature ranges from the classics to modern web serials. His dual nationality may enable him to leap over cultural barriers and examine diversified cultures from an objective and sensitive perspective. By and large, Ken Liu complies with the requirements of the translational eco-environment.

4.2. Ken Liu's Selection in Three Dimensions

Santi has a profusion of multidisciplinary scientific and technical terms, and Chinese culture-loaded expressions, which pose great challenges for the translator. The ultimate goal of translation is to facilitate contact in the communicative dimension, which is interwoven with linguistic and cultural dimensions.

4.2.1. Linguistic dimension

It is the great discrepancy between Chinese and English languages that brings a formidable challenge to the translator. "Being faithful to the original text" is a highly efficient strategy for Ken Liu's better adaptation to the translational eco-environment. The translator's polished translation techniques contribute much to achieving the same effects as the original through masterly treatment of the linguistic difficulties, such as coinages, vulgar words and four-character phrases in the ST. What is more, the translator fully exploits his subjectivity and adapts to the original textual environment to retain the ST's flavor.

One distinctive feature of *Santi* is the extensive use of new coinages and technical terms. Proper treatment of the new coinages and technical terms was essential to the success of the translation. The coinages "乱纪元", "人列计算机", "物种共产主义", "降临派", "智子", "三体人", "三日凌空" are aptly translated into "Chaotic Era", "Human-formation computer", "Pan-species Communism", "the Adventists", "Sophon", "Trisolaran", "Tri-solar Day" respectively, which demonstrates the translator's prowess. To translate the technical terms, Ken Liu consulted many books and turned to friends for help, some of whom are physicists and astronomers. "When translating technical words, translators had better look beyond the literal meaning of the terms and into the signified" (Yang 1986). For some obscure phrases, the translator immaculately renders them by adding annotations. His translation of technical terms is transparent and readable.

Vulgar language is generally prohibited to avoid offending or embarrassing people. In Santi, some vulgar words and phrases are used to achieve the dramatic

effect, and more often, these obscene expressions occur in day-to-day conversations between characters. These expressions present a challenging and intriguing task for the translator. On most occasions, Ken Liu does not translate the vulgar expressions literally but renders them according to the context and the cognitive model of the target readers. "警方算个狗屁", which literally means the police are dog's shit, illustrates the helplessness of the police in the face of the three-body organization. Contrary to the traditional contempt and derogatory signification of "狗" in Chinese culture, dog, as a loyal and friendly companion of humankind, is highly regarded and appreciated in the West. Ken Liu shows respect for the TL culture while preserving as much of the ST as possible by rendering the vulgar expression into "The police are *worthless*". In the sentence "一个娘们儿把她丈夫的那玩意割下来了", "娘们儿", a disparaging address to women, shows the speaker's male chauvinism and disrespect toward women, and "那玩意", literally meaning something, is a euphemism for the male's reproductive organ. Ken Liu freely translates the sentence into "Some *bitch* cut off her husband's *family jewels*" to achieve a great stylistic equivalence. The translator endeavors to retain some vulgar words in the ST, which benefits characterization in the TT. Another example is "我……我他妈说不下去了". The vulgar expression "他妈" literally means "his mother", but functions as a modal particle, sharpening the speaker's consternation. Thus, the sentence is translated into "I…I…can't *fucking* talk about this anymore".

Chinese four-character phrases are generally simple in form and literal meaning, and most of them are figurative expressions. Rather than reproduces the phrases' literal meanings, Ken Liu grasps their figurative meanings and seeks equivalence in the target language. When translating "咱俩是难兄难弟" (We're in the same boat), instead of conveying the underlined phrase's literal meaning "brothers in misfortune", the translator uses an equivalent collocation in the target language "in the same boat", which could be well-accepted and easily- understood by the readers. In Chinese, "鸡毛" literally means chicken feather, and "蒜皮" refers to garlic husks. Tellingly, the four-character phrase "鸡毛蒜皮" contains two metaphors, portraying something not necessary or not worth considering. Ken Liu reproduces the underlying meaning rather than stiffly conveys the literal meaning of the phrase by translating "还有其他一些看上去是鸡毛蒜皮的事儿" into "… and other apparently *trivial* matters".

4.2.2. Cultural dimension

Santi is set against the Cultural Revolution, so there are many discourses concerning the special event in the source text. Ken Liu, in most cases, literally translates the phrases about the revolution. For example, "红卫兵", "革命小将", "复课闹革命", "要文斗不要武斗" are literally translated into "Red Guards", "revolutionary youths", "Return to Class, Continue the Revolution", "rely on

eloquence rather than violence" respectively. And "大串联" and "又红又专" are freely translated into "Chinese Revolution" and "both technical acumen and revolutionary zeal". The above phrases were popular during the Cultural Revolution. For readability, Ken Liu adds no explanation or background information but follows the original expressions. Compared with "文革" and "红卫兵", "大字报", "牛棚", "返城知青" etc. are less-mentioned in Chinese history, and let alone in the English-speaking world. When rendering these phrases, Ken Liu adopts literal translation plus footnotes to retain the flavor of Chinese culture. For example, "大字报" is literally translated into "big-character posters" with a note that "Hand-written posters using large Chinese characters have become associated with the Cultural Revolution in the popular imagination. They, however, have a long history in China as tools of propaganda as well as protest both before and after the Cultural Revolution." "牛棚" is also literally rendered into "cowsheds" with the footnote that "'Cowsheds' were locations set up by work units (factories, schools, towns, etc.) during the early phases of the Cultural Revolution to detain the counter-revolutionary 'Monsters and Demons' (reactionary academic authorities, rightists, the Five Black Categories, etc.) at the work unit." Ken Liu attempts to restore the eco-environment of the original text to benefit the text's survival in the target eco-environment.

To translate culture-loaded expressions about material is no easy task. Different from the Western catering culture, a significant part of Chinese cuisine is made with animal's organs, such as hearts, stomachs, livers, kidneys and so forth. When translating those expressions, Liu places culture-reservation first, pursuing readable and marketable translation on the premise of being faithful to the ST. For instance, 爆肚, a popular traditional course, is prepared with pig's, cow's or sheep's stomachs. The name "quick-fried tripe" suggests its material and preparation method. Usually, alcoholic drinks are good company for quick-fried tripe. "二锅头" is rendered by transliteration into er *guo tou*, and the translator compares 二锅头 to a well-known vodka in the west in the annotation, which helps readers grasp the connotation that the alcoholic drink is time-honored, economical, and popular among the Chinese low classes. With no doubt, the translator's towering translation strikes a balance between retaining the flavor of Chinese culture and the translation's readability.

Ken Liu flexibly renders the Chinese ancients' names. Placing the target readers in the first position, he follows the current widely disseminated names overseas, and transliterates the less renowned with supplementary information in the foot notes. 秦始皇 is transliterated into Qin Shi Huang, accompanied by an annotation "the first emperor". In contrast, 周文王 and 纣王 are transformed into King Wen of Chou and King Zhou of Shang respectively with annotation. As the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang unified the six countries and established a centralized and unified multi-ethnic country. Thus, Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor, is enough to

articulate who he is. In contrast, King Wen of Chou and King Zhou of Shang are less famed internationally. If supplementary information is absent in the TT, the audience would almost sink into bafflement. Ken Liu's flexible translations are also applied to translating 墨子 and 孔子. As the founder of Confucianism, 孔子 is a familiar figure named "Confucius" in western countries. In the TT, Ken Liu follows the conventional address of 孔子, namely, Confucius. For 墨子, the founder of a less popular school Mohism, Ken Liu provides additional information to enhance the chance of survival of the translated text. The event of 坑儒 happened in 212 BC when different schools of thought clashed during the Spring-Autumn Period and Warring States Period (770 BC–221 BC). After unifying the six countries, Qin Shi Huang issued ideological and cultural policies to stabilize feudal autocracy, one of which is "killing Confucian scholars". In this incident, "more than 460 scholars were buried alive who disagreed with the first emperor politically" (Chen 2011). The translator offers background information about the event, suggesting his consideration to the readership. By and large, these instances retain the communicative effect while somewhat falling short of preserving the cultural diversity.

4.2.3. Communicative dimension

The higher requirement for translators is to realize communicative transformation, an extension of both linguistic and cultural transformations (Hu 2013: 138). The translated text should echo the original communicative intention in order to ensure that the communicative effect can be achieved by the target readership.

Ken Liu moderates the alienness of the translation by virtue of reader-friendly information, which fulfills preliminary adaptation to readerships. *Santi* portrays multitudinous characters that connect loosely or closely, also embracing some historical celebrities, which could be a handicap for the target readers to follow the plot. The translator makes a grouping of characters, and a list of characters is added at the beginning of the TT. The characters' jobs and interpersonal relationships are clearly illustrated in the list. Male-centered depictions in *Santi* collide with the social climate in the West where feminine consciousness has awakened and cast a surging influence on the cultural market. When rendering the Chinese expressions with patriarchalism, Ken Liu knowingly understates them to ensure smooth communication between the translation and the translation readers and, as presented in the translation, bias against women is erased. For example, the original "女作家", "科学女性", "女孩子", "女性" are respectively rendered into "the author", "a scientist", "a kid", "people" instead of "the female writer", "a female scientist", "a girl", "a woman". Allowing for the Western context, Ken Liu blurs the gender difference when rendering some Chinese words or phrases that are loaded with bias against women. These purposeful alterations, which indicate the translator's high caliber in selection and adaptation, contribute much to the translator's success in the communicative dimension.

In the postscript in the English version, Ken Liu talks about the principles by which he produces the translation. First, Ken Liu announces his intention of adding footnotes. *Santi* contains many paragraphs about the Cultural Revolution and allusions to Chinese historical events, which without a doubt complicates the translation. Compared to 12 footnotes in the ST, 36 more footnotes are provided in the English version, and 30 out of the 36 notes involve Chinese cultural background information. According to Ken Liu, to make the translation fluent, he has kept the footnotes to a minimum and the relevant changes are the outcome of his consultation with Liu Cixin, the author of the novel. Second, the translator explains why he adopts narrative techniques different from the original. In comparison to what American readers expect, the Chinese literary tradition shapes and is shaped by its readers, resulting in different emphases and tastes in literature. Ken Liu observes that, in certain instances, he attempts to adapt the narrative methods to those more familiar to American readers, and in other instances, he has left them alone, assuming that it is preferable to keep the original's flavor. Third, Ken Liu tells the readers his goal: "When I translate, my goal is to be a faithful interpreter, preserving as many of the nuances of meaning in the original as possible without embellishment or omission" (Liu 2014: 433). The above are the translator's adaptation and selection in the communicative dimension.

4.3. Translation Evaluation from Eco-translatology

"There is a necessity for the translatology theory to be equipped with assessment criteria for translation" (Graham 1985: 26). In Eco-translatology, "the evaluation benchmark of translated works is the degree of holistic adaptation and selection, which is mainly composed of three points, namely, the degree of multi-dimensional transformations, reader's feedback, and translator's quality" (Hu 2004: 148). In this section, Ken Liu's *The Three-Body of Problem* is evaluated with the help of these three criteria.

4.3.1. Degree of multi-dimensional transformations

The translator adapts to the translational eco-environment and, meanwhile, makes decisions from multiple dimensions when selecting translation by employing translation strategies and skills. In the linguistic dimension, Ken Liu exercises his subjectivity fully and flexibly when rendering coinages, technical terms, vernacular words and four-character phrases to achieve linguistic consistency with the ST. In the cultural dimension, the translator manages to convey "foreignness" of the ST, representing Chinese culture as thoroughly as possible. Concerning the communicative dimension, the translator endeavors to realize the intentions of the ST. Taking the readers' reception into account, he has done much at the communicative level. Ken Liu's adaptable application of translation strategies is viable and valuable as a model for future literary works. Besides, the

three dimensions are interwoven, and Ken Liu strikes a good balance between factors of each dimension based on comprehensive analysis.

4.3.2. Readers' feedback

The Three-Body Problem is assessed with the readers' feedback on the website of Amazon.com.[4] Quantitative and qualitative analyses of readers' comments are conducted with the help of Python, a programming language. After data cleaning and noise reduction, the quantitative data systematically presents readers' star rating,[5] emotional attitudes, and word cloud. Meanwhile, comments are selected to make a further qualitative study on readers' specific emotional attitudes and concern for the quality of the translation. The analyses include the following procedures:

1. Acquisition of data: a general algorithm is coded to collect relevant reader comments on Amazon. The title link, thumbnail, avatar, etc. are deleted, and the reader's name, comment date, high influence index (like count), and review text are collected. A total of 2301 data are obtained.
2. Data cleaning: manual deletion of non-English text comments, duplicate texts, no text comments, irrelevant content, and pure emoticons, etc., leaving 2300 valid texts.

As of 31st May 2020, there are 3516 ratings on *The Three-Body Problem*, and the translation wins 4.3 stars on a scale of 1–5. According to automatic website classification provided by Amazon, the intelligent analysis of emotional tendencies has been conducted based on 2301 readers' comments. It turns out that there are 1726 positive comments and 575 negative ones. Readers' 5-star ratings and 4-star rating account for 67% and 19% respectively.

Python filters out useless text information by setting stop words and drawing a cloud map of readers' comment topics. The word cloud image can present the "keywords" that frequently appear in the evaluation texts. The evaluation keywords are divided into two categories. One is about the text itself, and the other is reading experience.

Many readers believe that it is the elegant and straightforward lyrical English that subtly conveys philosophical propositions and conceptualized concepts found in a science fiction novel: "I could feel the pattern of that language under the translation, but the reading was smooth and easy" (an anonymous Amazon customer, 2019, February 11). Though it is originally a Chinese work,

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4| https://www.amazon.com/-/zh/Three-Body-Problem-Cixin-Liu/product-reviews/07-65382032/ref=cm_cr_dp_d_show_all_btm?ie=UTF8&reviewerType=all_reviews, accessed: 23.10.2022.

5| Amazon assigns star rating to products using machine learning models rather than the mean value of raw data. The model considers a variety of factors, including the score's age, whether it came from a confirmed purchaser, and factors indicating the reviewer's reputation.

the impeccable translation makes it easily accessible for English-speaking readers, straddling the conversion into idiomatic English when needed. "Awesome book. Translation from Chinese is very smooth and readable. If you like Sci-Fi, you will like this first book of the trilogy. Interesting take in the future and aliens" (Ronald Brown, 2019, October 10).

Among this book's readership, there are plenteous bilinguals who rate the English version high:

> Having read the whole trilogy several times, I got a chance to refresh it through Ken Liu's translation. The translation is impeccable: precious, faithful, and beautiful. I can see why some readers may not enjoy it that much (Zachary, 2014, October 17).

The translation is beautiful, preserving a prose style that is just alien enough to the ear of the English-speaking audience but offering them the tremor of Chinese. Some comment that while reading it, they feel as though they are reading something foreign, which is a perfect thing and fresh experience. Ken Liu's utmost cultural fidelity to Chinese characteristics exemplifies the translation's accuracy. The addition of footnotes to gloss much of the cultural context makes this story rooted in a foreign culture approachable for American readers: "Translation was very smooth, with good translator's notes in footnotes and a helpful list of characters at the beginning" (CarlB, 2017, May 8). While a few readers think that too many footnotes would break reading fluency, the overall appreciation of this cultural commentary was overwhelming. Along with annotating Chinese culture, the translator also annotates some untranslatable elements in Chinese, such as puns. From the feedback, most readers were satisfied with this form of translation compensation:

> Great book. Fantastic translation. I think the translator achieves his goal of a well written book that retains enough Chinese to be clear it wasn't originally written in English. Translator makes excellent but restrained use of footnotes to explain cultural references and certain untranslatable content like puns (Shane Mayer, 2016, January 17).

Readers also appreciate the translation postscript as a marvelous window to understand Ken Liu's motivation and aims while translating:

> I even enjoyed the postscript written by the book's English translator! I never considered the challenges that confront a thoughtful translator that wishes to faithfully convey the spirit, beauty, and truth of a foreign-language text they feel deeply about (Mr Trisuit, 2019, February 1).

We have found such negative comments as "choppy", "stilted", "clunky" and "off-key". For instance, some criticize translated conversations are stilted and prosaic, like remarks from robots. Meanwhile, we find that some readers dissatisfied

with the translation also hold a negative attitude towards the ST on closer inspection. "Many times the story was choppy, short sentenced and stilted, at others it flowed much better with some hint at what I think is the originals style" (Darren: 2017, May 24). Such kind of negative comments should not, actually, be aimed at the translation.

4.3.3. Translator quality

Propped up by "translator-centeredness", "Eco-translatology accentuates the bond between the holistic degree of adaptation and selection and the translator's quality (such as achievements, experience, capability, credibility, and popularity, etc.). Generally speaking, the former is directly proportional to the latter under normal circumstances" (Hu 2004: 154). How about Ken Liu's quality? Ken Liu's attainment in sci-fi is proven by his books' popularity and his reputation in the field. His short story *The Paper Menagerie* won the Hugo Award and became a hit in the American Science Fiction world in 2012. In the same year, his novelette *The Man Who Ended History: A Documentary* (hereinafter referred to as *Documentary*) was nominated for the Hugo Award and the Nebula Award. Since the documentary depicts crimes conducted by Japanese Unit 731 during World War II, it is less mentioned, especially in western society due to its political implication. His short story Mono No Aware won Hugo Award (2013) and was nominated for the Locus Award as the best short story. Ken Liu, a past master at translation, translated 18 Chinese sci-fi novels into English from 2011 to 2014. The translation principle he adheres to is "being faithful to authors and original texts." What's more, his bilingual and especially bicultural identity is a boon to him. His sensitivity to the cultural conflicts and linguistic differences is conducive to his selection and adaptation.

Generally, Ken Liu is qualified enough in terms of bilingual competence, cross-cultural awareness, background knowledge, and especially translation experience. The translator quality is exceptional enough to enhance the degree of holistic adaptation and selection in the translation of *Santi*.

5. Conclusion

In the adaptation stage, Ken Liu and the translational eco-environment are interactive. The achievements made by the Chinese sci-fi field are growing, so is its desire to communicate with the world's sci-fi literature. High-caliber Chinese-English translators are in urgent need to interpret and export the Chinese literary works. Ken Liu chooses *Santi* to translate, which is in accordance with his literary taste and aspiration of self-challenge. In the selection stage, Ken Liu's subjectivity is radiated in striking eco-balance in linguistic, cultural, and communicative aspects. His selections and adaptations are the outcomes of taking careful consideration.

The survival of *The Three-Body Problem* resulted from fitting the translational eco-environment. Ken Liu's selections and adaptations are competent to fulfill the multidimensional transformations. His adjustments, such as adding a list of characters, annotations, and a postscript, are well-welcomed by most western readers. Commendation and critical comments from the readers prove the success of the translation. So, *The Three-Body Problem* is an excellent translation in light of Eco-translatology.

Ken Liu is in the central position of his translation process of rendering *Santi* into *The Three-Body Problem*. He adapts himself to the translational environment well, enabling him to choose translation strategies and methods flexibly. Based on the analysis, it is sound to draw a conclusion that Eco-translatology offers a persuasive theoretical interpretation to Ken Liu's translation, and the explanatory power of the theory is strong and justified.

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