# A Study on the Chinese Translation of Typical American Under Narratology

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*Abstract:* In the context of interdisciplinary research, classical narratology plays an i8mportant role in literary translation. To some extent, translation and narration have something in common. The previous studies on Chinese translation of Typical American mostly focused on the perspectives of relevance theory and mythological prototypes, leaving room for in-depth study from narratology. The author takes the Chinese translation of Typical American by Wang Guanglin as the case study object, finding that the implicit transcendence in Typical American can be accurately expressed through the narrative perspective and voice in translation, as well as metalepsis, which greatly improve the quality and fluency of literary translation.

## 1. Introduction

Translation theorist Mona Baker proposed that translation is the process of retelling.[1] Narrative perspective, tone, method, and style all affect the literary significance of the text. In translation practice, the translator needs to be faithful not only to the content, but also to ideas embodied in the text. The ideas of source text are precisely conveyed through narrator, narrative speech, and so on. Starting from the difference in narrative perspective between the source text and the target text, this study explores the impact of narrative perspective and narrative voice on literature in translation.

Typical American consists of five parts. It depicts the process of Ralph, Helen, and Theresa, the first generation of Chinese Americans in the United States, pursuing their own American Dreams. The protagonist Ralph completely separates his Chinese identity from the United States one at the beginning, in order to demonstrate his pride as an authentic Chinese: he judges everything with Confucian traditional morality; He tries to communicate in Mandarin as much as possible; Chinese Pinyin often appears in the text, which reflects the strongest emotional support when facing difficulties. But finally he is willing to become a "typical American", deliberately imitating American behaviour and actively integrating into mainstream American society. This novel takes the American Dream as the main theme, and takes the ups and downs of the Zhang family in the process of realizing the American Dream as the clue, exploring whether there is an eternal conflict between family cohesion, values, and "typical Americans". Gish Jen relies on object symbols and uses a large number of witty and lively descriptive narrative words such as understated statements and irony as support, presenting readers with the expectations, struggles, and release of the first generation of Chinese emigrants in integrating into American society. She breaks the stereotypical

impression of Asian Americans in the mainstream white society of the past, recognizes the changes in ethnic minority attributes, and actively fights for the right to interpret history.

In recent years, narratology in translation has directed towards the study of politics and ideology. In this context, "translation", "conflict", and "activism" have become key words in Western translation narratology.[2] In *Typical American,* the main conflict lies in the cohesion and values of the family, as well as the extreme allure of pursuing the American Dream.

The research on *Typical American* mainly focuses on theme analysis, narrative strategies, and character analysis, while its Chinese translation research emphasizes the perspective of relevance theory and mythological prototypes, analyzing from the lexical level of hybrids, culturally loaded words, and polysemy, lacking discourse analysis. The analysis of its Chinese translation from narratology also focuses more on the interpretation of the original form, imagery, post-colonialism, culture, and identity. Therefore, there is much room for in-depth exploration of the Chinese translation research.

## 2. Narrative perspective and voice

There are a large number of load words that exist in the form of direct discourse, indirect discourse, free direct discourse, free indirect discourse, etc. in Typical American, expressing the protagonist's emotions, homesickness, determination to stand out. The author uses different language to convey content and ideas based on the relevant functions of communication and expression. The translator is expected to fully recognize the communicative and expressive functions of each mode of expression, and be able to make necessary contextual adjustments in different language situations. The main storyline "American Dream" in Typical American has different narrative perspective points in different periods. The first stage is the protagonist's perspective from an internal focalization, depicting the entire story from their own standpoint, personality, and values. In this process, the deep meaning that the author wants to express is conveyed through the implicit author's perspective. This not only maintains the fluency and simplicity of the entire work, but also highlights the depth of the work. The second stage is set off by secondary figures such as Theresa and Helen, who react or evaluate the protagonist's words or actions from the perspective of a witness, forming a contrast, contradiction, and dialogue relationship between them. This narrative or reaction is more objective and effective in shaping the complete image of the main characters. From their perspective, we can see the changes in the main characters and the internalization of their cultural identity.

Example 1:

ST (Source Text):

(1) Now let's take a look at his rescuer Theresa. Her story contains the sad truth that Ralph grew up almost equal to her, and she was Ralph.

(2) Her reflection in the window is fragile and rigid, and a piece of glass separates her from a more vibrant world. At the center of her image, the red shoes had seemed to pulse, like her own true heart.

(3) By this time, Helen was getting quieter. She became her resourceful self, but instinctively she was also a weight in Ralph's activities—a fixed center.

(4) Now, all of a sudden, the balance is gone; Energy is no longer a constant. He had notebooks, index files, tables, charts, maps.

(5) Ralph dug through his old papers, sneezing as he explored one box after another; somehow they'd grown dusty in the move. He could still envision Grover, the morning mist, the taxi door slamming. He could still hear the door slamming too, and there, that clatter, that was the muffler pipe.

TT (Target Text):

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| (1) Xian zai wo men lai kan kan ta de jie jiu zhe Theresa. Ta de gu shi bao han zhe zhe yang yi ge bei tong de zhen li: Palph zhang da zhi hou jiu deng tong yu ta, er ta ben jiu shi Palph. |
| (2) Ta zai chu chuang li de ying xiang ji cui ruo you jiang zhi,yi kuai bo li jiu zhe yang ba ta he mou ge geng fu huo li de shi jie fen ge le kai lai.Zai ta de xing xiang zhong, hong xie zi si hu zai chan dong, jiu xiang ta zi ji zhen zheng de xin tiao. |
| (3) Dao le ci shi, Helen si hu bian de yue lai yue an jing. Ta cheng le ta zu zhi duo mou de zi wo, dan shi cong ben neng shang lai shuo, ta ye shi Ralph huo dong de fa ma-yi ge gu ding de zhong xin. |
| (4) Xian zai, ping heng tu ran zhi jian mei you le; neng liang zai ye bu shi yi ge chang shu. Ta you le bi ji ben,zhi shu juan zong, biao ge, tu biao, di tu. |
| (5) Ralph zai jiu zhi dui zhong fei li de xun zhao zhe, yi ge xiang zi you yi ge xiang zi, zhao de ta zhi da pe ti. Bu zhi zen me hui shi, zhe xie dong xi zai ban jia zhong dou bian zang le. Ta yi jiu neng gou xiang xiang chu Grover, chen wu he chu zu che guan men de qing jing. Ta yi ran neng gou ting dao guan men de sheng yin, hai you na ka da ka da xiao yin qi guan de sheng yin. |

Analysis: In these five sentences, there are three narrative perspectives: omniscient mode, transformational internal focus, and multiple internal focus. The three narrative switches show explicit and implicit boundaries. Specifically, from a narrative perspective, this case is narrated from the perspectives of the protagonist and the witness in both omniscient and internal perspectives. (1) The sentence is from an omniscient perspective, which evaluates the protagonists Ralph and Theresa in this article from the perspective of God. This is their new life state in the United States - a typical Chinese style family education. At this time, the "American Dream" was still the "Doctoral Dream" and the "Patriotic Dream". (2) It is from the perspective of witnesses, namely Ralph's sister Theresa, to subtly reflect Ralph's changes. At this moment, Ralph, after talking to his typical American friend Grover, attempted to break through the seemingly insurmountable gap between Chinese and Americans for the first time. His first stage of "American Dream" seemed less firm. (3) It shows implicit information from the perspective of witness Helen, Ralph's wife. After Helen and Ralph got married, she kept her interests tightly hidden, even precise enough to control her breathing. This is almost identical to Ralph's initial state in the United States, where he set several guidelines to achieve his own American Dream and tightly controlled his desires. Now Helen presents her interests to everyone and refuses to be Ralph's leverage. This also implies a change in Ralph's mindset. (5) It is from the perspective of the protagonist reveals explicit transcendence. Ralph remembered the details of his conversation with Grover so clearly, indicating that he had been greatly touched. From here on, he began to transition towards the second stage of the "American Dream", which is the "Dream of Wealth".

In terms of the narrative sound, there were three transitions. In sentence two, the narrative voice is produced by the narrator Theresa, which is the second narrative voice. As one of the main narrators of the entire book, Theresa embodies the sense of oppression brought about by the inseparable blood relationship. In sentence three, the narrative voice is voiced by the narrator Helen, reflecting Ralph's choices and influence in pursuing the American Dream.

## 3. Metalepsis

Genette defines metalepsis as a contradictory and mixed concept that distinguishes the world being told from the one being told.[3] It refers to any unauthorized entry into the story space caused by a narrator or the subject outside the story. Faced with differences in structure, culture, and

expression between Chinese and English, translators bear the responsibility of translating a text that is equivalent in meaning, structure, or style to the original text. The author will discuss the guiding role of paraphrasing in translation from three types: adaptation, substitution, and adaptation.

## 3.1 Modulation

Modulation refers to the use of translation strategies that are different from the source and target languages, involving ideological manipulation rather than grammatical manipulation. Therefore, when performing translation operations, translators cannot only pursue grammatical correctness while neglecting the effects of style and meaning, in order to avoid the occurrence of translation tone and obtain a translation that is acceptable to readers.

Example 2;

ST: "Your father would like to give you this," she told him at the dock. As his father stared off into the Shanghai harbor—at the true ships in the distance, the ragtag boats by the shore—she slid a wristwatch into Yifeng's hand.

TT:

> Zai ma tou bian, ta fu qin xiang shanghai gang fang xiang ning shi zhe, ning wang zhe yuan chuzhen zheng de da chuan, hai you an bian na za luan wu zhang de xiao chuan. Zhe shi, ta jiang yi kuai shou biao sai jin le Yifeng shou zhong. "ni baba xiang song ni zhe ge." Ta gao su ta.

Analysis: The scene here depicts Zhang Yifeng or Ralph, the protagonist of the entire text, who is about to go to the United States to obtain his doctoral degree in anticipation of his parents. This watch appears multiple times throughout the text, not only as an item, but also as a spiritual support for the glory of their ancestors. This high expectation is not only heavy in the eyes of the speaker ( his mother), but also in the eyes of Zhang Yifeng. However, Chinese people, especially those who received traditional education in the 1940s, tended to use implicit expressions. Therefore, from an omniscient perspective, the translator first translated "ta jiang yi kuai shou biao sai jin le Yifeng shou zhong." separately from an outsider's perspective, and then shifted the perspective back to the mother's perspective, directly translating "Your father would like to give you this," to "ni baba xiang song ni zhe ge",which obtains a sense of equivalence. However, the author believes that translating "hold" as "gao su" is not very accurate, but changing it to "zhu fu" would be more appropriate. Because the perspective here has shifted from first person narration to omniscient narration, the word "zhu fu" better reflects the heavy mood of parting and the expectation of a successful son. This also drives the development of the storyline, making the subsequent plot more reasonable, laying the groundwork for Zhang Yifeng to set six guidelines for himself after boarding the ship, as well as the recurring doctoral degree in the text.

## 3.2 Transposition

Example 3:

ST: Of course, in the end, Yifeng did come to the United States, anyway, his stomach burbling with fool hope. But it was privately, not through the government, and not for advanced field training, but for graduate study.

TT:

> Dang ran, Yifeng zhong yu lai dao le mei guo, huai zhe yi du zi sha hu hu de xi wang. Dan shi si xia jiao yi, mei you tong guo zheng fu, ta ye bu shi lai can jia xian jin de zhuan ye pei xun.

Analysis: The author believes that translating "government" as "zheng fu" here is not very accurate. The 1940s were the period of civil war between the two domestic parties, the Kuomintang

and the Communist Party. Based on the situation of Ralph's visa problems caused by the collapse of the Nationalist government in the following text, it is the Kuomintang government that supports Ralph's study in the United States. Therefore, the term "government" here needs to be translated specifically as "guo min zheng fu".

## 3.3 Adaptation

Adaptation is a type of oblique translation and a translation strategy. Adaptation involves a large amount of rewriting, adding translations, subtracting translations, and paraphrasing, which is the largest point of translation.[4] When there is a mismatch in the target language and a translation tone appears in the source text, the translator can use an adapted translation strategy to accurately and vividly translate the meaning or connotation of the original text.

Example4:
ST: The problem sets got harder.
His lamp turned out to have a short in it.
His problem sets started to come back red.
More red.
TT:

> Wen ti bian de yan zhong le.
> Ta mai de na zhan deng yuan lai shi zhi huai deng.
> Ta de wen ti bian de yan zhong qi lai.
> Yue lai yue yan zhong.

Analysis: The cultural imagery of "red" in English is associated with blood, while its cultural imagery in China is associated with festive and good luck. Based on the previous text, it can be seen that Ralph has encountered visa issues, and the misfortunes do not come singly. The light he bought only broke, so translating it as "yan zhong" is accurate.

## 4. Conclusions

The scope of translation narratology research is more complex, filling the limitations of a single discipline. Classical narratology, with its focus on the internal aspects of the text, has a strong guiding role in implicit transcendence in translation research. This article takes the difference in narrative perspective transformation between the source text and the target text as the starting point, and finds that through the transformation of narrative perspective and narrative voice after translation, as well as the adjustment, substitution, and adaptation in cross-border narration, the implicit transcendence of the original text can be accurately expressed, thereby reproducing the narrative effect of the original text.

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