

# *A Literature Review on Translator's Subjectivity in China Based on CiteSpace and CNKI (2000-2023)*

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**Abstract:** Based on CiteSpace (version 6.3.R1) and China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), employing bibliometric method and literature review method, this research conducts a visual analysis on translator's subjectivity in China from 2000 to 2023, utilizing a sample of 1795 journal articles collected from CNKI. The research reveals three stages in the development of studies on translator's subjectivity in China: initial exploration, rapid development, and stable growth. Currently, there is a scarcity of core authors in this field, and collaboration among different authors and research institutions is relatively loose. Research on translator's subjectivity in China mainly includes two levels: theoretical research and applied research. Theoretical research centers on constructing theoretical frameworks and defining concepts related to translator's subjectivity, as well as interpreting and analyzing translator's subjectivity through specific theories. Applied research mainly analyzes the embodiment of translator's subjectivity in literary text translation from the perspective of translation strategies or theories, and explores the embodiment of translator's subjectivity in specific translators' translation activities, with the translation activities of Ge Haowen and Xu Yuanchong representing the forefront of current research. The main challenges in current research on translator's subjectivity in China include a scarcity of publications in core journals, limited research methods, and homogeneity of research content.

## 1. Introduction

Traditionally, translation research focuses on the original text, emphasizes textual comparison and takes "equivalence" as the translation standard. Since the 1970s, western translation research has become more diversified, breaking through the traditional patterns of linguistics and literature. Scholars realized that in the actual translation process, "equivalence" is often an ideal state, and sometimes it is difficult to achieve complete equivalence between the original text and the translated text. Theories such as the "pragmatic turn", "polysystem theory" and "cultural turn" broadened the horizons of translation research. Especially in the 1990s, André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett co-authored the book *Translation, History and Culture*, bringing a great breakthrough to translation studies. In this book, the two scholars focused on the interaction between translation and culture, and the ways in which culture influences and constrains translation, such as how texts are selected for

translation, the role of translators in translation, the role of editors, publishers or sponsors in translation, and the criteria used by translators in selecting their translation strategies; and they referred to such a shift as the “cultural turn”[1]. Since then, scholars have turned their attention to various other factors affecting translation activities. Among them, the position and role of translators in translation activities have become more and more prominent, and the study of translator’s subjectivity has received more and more attention.

With the introduction of the translation concept of “cultural turn” into China, Chinese scholars have been conducting research on translator’s subjectivity since the 1990s. Early representative studies include two journal articles. In 1997, Gao Ning discussed translator’s subjectivity and analyzed the principles for establishing translation standards based on this exploration [2]. In 1999, Shu Qizhi and Yang Hua, starting from intertextuality theory, explored issues of translator’s subjectivity in literary translation, revealing that translators simultaneously embody the roles of “reader”, “interpreter”, and “author” in literary translation [3]. Since then, numerous Chinese scholars have extensively researched translator’s subjectivity from various perspectives, yielding substantial research outcomes. This research utilizes the CiteSpace visual bibliometric tool and the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) visual analysis function to analyze the data collected from CNKI on translator subjectivity papers. It summarizes the research results on translator’s subjectivity in China from 2000 to 2023, clarifies the research status, analyzes existing research shortcomings, and provides ideas for subsequent research. There are three research questions: (1) What is the trend of translator’s subjectivity research in China from 2000 to 2023? (2) What is the main research content on translator’s subjectivity in China? (3) What are the current challenges in the study of translator’s subjectivity in China?

## 2. Research Design

### 2.1. Research Tools

Professor Chen Chaomei from Drexel University in the United States developed the CiteSpace literature visualization analysis tool in 2004. It mainly applies Java language, based on co-citation analysis theory and path-finding network algorithm, to measure specific domain literature (sets), explore the key paths and knowledge inflection points of disciplinary domain evolution, and form an analysis of the potential driving force of disciplinary development and cutting-edge exploration through a series of visual mapping [4]. The visualization analysis function of CNKI refers to the system’s quantitative analysis of all search results or partial selection results based on literature search results. At present, CNKI supports visual analysis of four dimensions: indicator analysis, overall trend analysis, relationship network, and distribution. This research uses CiteSpace (6.3. R1 version) visualization analysis tool and CNKI visualization analysis function to conduct statistical analysis of research data on publication trends, authors, institutions, keywords, and other factors. Based on this, objective bibliometric visualization analysis is conducted on the study of translator’s subjectivity in China from 2000 to 2023, thus summarizing the relationships and trends between literature, identifying research hotspots, and discovering research directions. Using CNKI as the database, this research used advanced search methods to search journal articles with the theme of “translator’s subjectivity” from 2000 to 2023. Through manual reading, analysis, and screening of the obtained literature data, literature with low relevance to the research topic was excluded, resulting in 1795 valid sample data. Based on this, the data from CNKI was imported into CiteSpace in Refwork format for visual analysis. The literature search period for this research was from January 1, 2000 to December 31, 2023; all the data involved in this research are retained to two decimal places.

## 2.2. Research Results

### A. Analysis of publication trends of journal articles

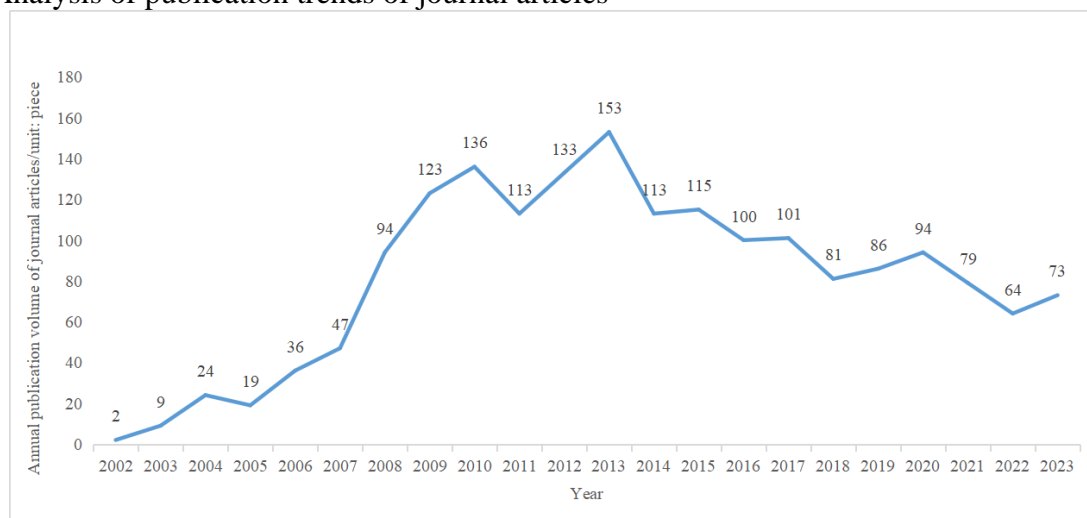


Figure 1: Annual Publication Volume of Journal Articles about Translator's Subjectivity Research in China

The development of a research field can be visualized from the change trend of the number of publications issued in the past years. Through the statistical analysis of the samples, this research derives the trend of change in the number of journal articles issued since 2000-2023 in the study of translator's subjectivity in China, and the specific trend of the number of journal articles issued is shown in Figure 1. From Figure 1, it can be seen that the study of translator's subjectivity in China can be divided into three stages: (1) initial exploration stage (2000-2007), (2) rapid development stage (2008-2013), and (3) stable development stage (2014-2023). In the initial exploration stage, the research on translator's subjectivity is still in its infancy, and the overall number of journal articles issued has shown a slow growth trend. The number of publications in 2002 and 2003 was only 2 and 9, indicating that the study of translator's subjectivity has not yet become a hot topic in translation studies. The overall number of journal articles published from 2004 to 2007 continued to increase. Although the number of journal articles published slightly decreased in 2005, it rebounded again in 2006 and increased to 47 by 2007. In the rapid development stage, the number of publications on translator's subjectivity research in China has shown a sharp increase trend. The number of publications has been rapidly increasing from 2008 to 2010, decreasing to 113 in 2011, rebounding to 133 in 2012, and reaching a peak of 153 in 2013. The data from this stage reflects the widespread attention of scholars to the study of translator's subjectivity. In the stable development stage, translator's subjectivity research has entered a relatively stable transitional stage. Although the number of publications has decreased and shown some fluctuations, it still maintains a stable development state. Between 2014 and 2015, the number of publications remained at around 100, with a slight decrease thereafter but still above 60. The data from this stage indicates that the study of translator's subjectivity has become a relatively mature and stable research field, with a slight decrease in academic attention to it. From the above analysis, it can be seen that the current research on the translator's subjectivity in China presents a trend of "initial exploration, rapid development, and stable growth".

### B. Analysis of research institutions and authors

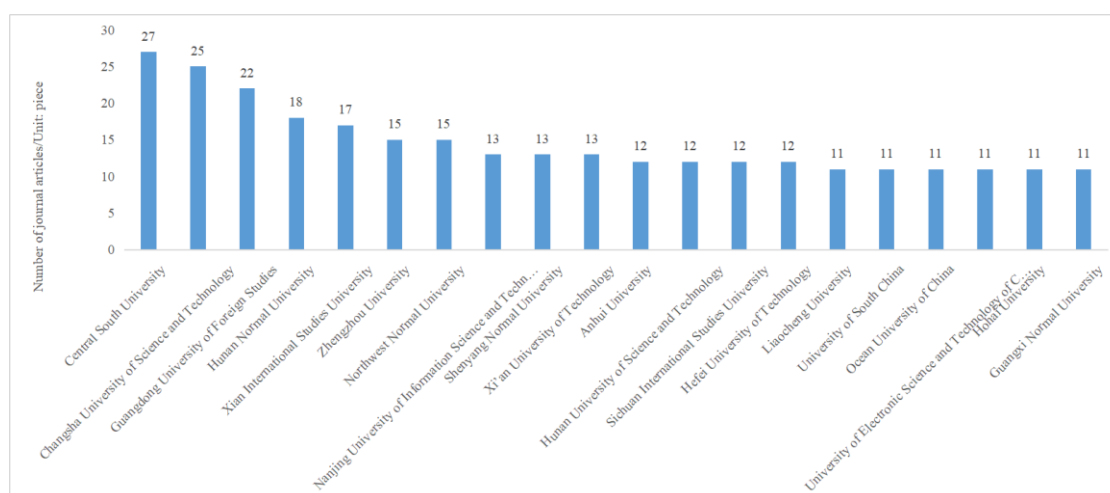


Figure 2: Publication Volume of Journal Articles by main research institutions on Translator's Subjectivity Research in China

Quantitative analysis of authors and institutions within the sample not only allows for a clear identification of authoritative scholars and institutions in the field of translator subjectivity research, but also enables a quantitative examination of their collaborative relationships. This research utilized the data statistics of “institutional distribution” from CNKI to make Figure to show the publication volume of journal articles by main research institutions on translator's subjectivity in China. According to Figure 2, institutions of higher education dominate current research on translator's subjectivity in China. Among these, the Schools of Foreign Languages of universities appear most frequently, indicating that they are the primary driving force in conducting research on translator's subjectivity in China. Among the specific institutions, the School of Foreign Languages of Central South University has the largest number of journal articles, with 27 articles; the School of Foreign Languages of Changsha University of Science and Technology is in the second place, with 25 articles; the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies is in the third place, with 22 articles; followed by the School of Foreign Languages of Hunan Normal University with 18 articles, and Xian International Studies University with 17 articles. However, at present, the academic links between the institutions of China's translator's subjectivity research are scattered. As a result, in the future, the research institutions should strengthen the “horizontal communication” and “in-depth cooperation” [5], so as to cooperate with each other to form a closer cooperation network and produce high-quality articles.

Table 1: Journal Publication Scale of Main Authors on Translator's Subjectivity in China

Serial number	Number of journal articles	Year of first publication	Author's Name
1	8	2013	Lin Xia
2	7	2003	Tu Guoyuan
3	7	2012	He Fang
4	7	2009	Tan Yunfei
5	6	2003	Zhu xianlong
6	6	2015	Li Huifang
7	4	2005	Liu Shumei
8	4	2011	Li Xia
9	3	2012	Yang Jinhua
10	3	2013	Li Linlin

This research used CNKI to create Table 1, journal publication scale of main authors on

translator's subjectivity in China. The data shows that Lin Xia has published 8 articles; Tu Guoyuan, Tan Yunfei, and He Fang each published 7 articles; Zhu Xianlong and Li Huifang have each published 6 articles, and these scholars are currently the prolific scholars in the study of translator's subjectivity in China. Tu Guoyuan and Zhu Xianlong are two scholars who have worked closely together. They co-authored five journal articles on translator's subjectivity from 2003 to 2010, all published in the core journals of Chinese foreign language studies (CSSCI and Peking University Core), covering the study of translator's subjectivity in the perspective of post-colonialism, the study of translator's subjectivity under hermeneutic theory, the study of translator's subjectivity in the process of Chineseization of Buddhism, and the analysis of translator's subjectivity in the case of Zhang Guoruo's translation activities. In addition, the partnership between Lin Xia and Li Huifang is more obvious, and the two scholars have published three journal articles on translator's subjectivity in non-core journals. The cooperation between the rest of the authors is not obvious, and most of the authors' research results are published in non-core journals. From the above analysis, it can be seen that there are few core authors specializing in the study of translators' subjectivity, and the cooperation between different authors and different research institutes is relatively loose, and close cooperation has not yet been formed.

### C. Analysis of keywords

Word frequency analysis is a scientific bibliometric method that reveals the research hotspots and cutting-edge dynamics of a particular field by detecting the frequency of occurrence of a particular keyword in the literature of that field. "Keywords are the distillation and condensation of the content of a paper, and if a keyword appears repeatedly in a specific literature over a period of time, the research topic characterized by the keyword is the research hotspot in the field" [6]. With the help of CiteSpace, the co-occurrence map of keywords on translator's subjectivity research in China (Figure 3) as well as the burst map of keywords on translator's subjectivity research in China (Figure 4) were drawn.

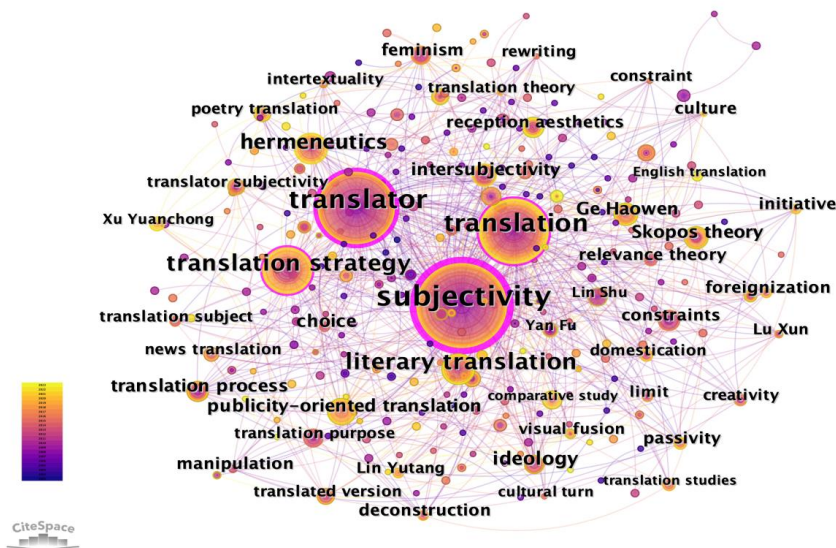


Figure 3: Co-occurrence Map of Keywords on Translator's Subjectivity Research in China

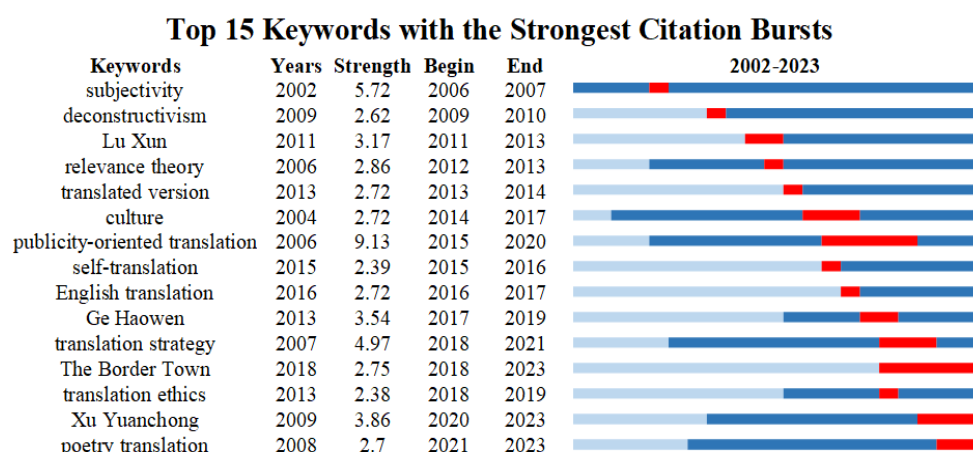


Figure 4: Burst Map of Keywords on Translator's Subjectivity Research in China

As shown in Figure 3, “translator”, “subjectivity”, “translation strategy”, “literary translation”, “hermeneutics”, and “publicity-oriented translation” are the main keywords in China’s translator’s subjectivity research; “translation process”, “Skopos theory”, “reception aesthetics”, “relevance theory”, “poetry translation”, and “Ge Haowen” are secondary keywords in China’s translator’s subjectivity research. It can be seen that the research on translator’s subjectivity in China is mainly divided into two aspects: one is to explain translator’s subjectivity in the light of a certain theory, and the other is to analyze how translator’s subjectivity is embodied in specific texts from the perspective of translation strategies. The burst keywords are the keywords that receive greater attention in a short time, which can reveal the research trend as well as the research frontier. As shown in Figure 4, “the bold line” represents the time period of keyword mutation, “Year” represents the time when the keyword appeared, “Strength” is used to indicate the strength of mutation, and “Begin and End” indicates the time interval in which the burst word exists” [5]. Based on the trend of translator’s subjectivity research on “initial exploration, rapid development, and stable growth”, it can be inferred that the burst keyword for the initial exploration stage is “subjectivity”. The burst keywords of the rapid development stage are “deconstructionism”, “Lu Xun”, “relevance theory”, and “translated version”, indicating that the main research focus of this stage is to combine a certain theory to explain translator’s subjectivity and analyze translator’s subjectivity reflected in different translated versions. The burst keywords in the stable growth stage are concentrated in “publicity-oriented translation”, “English translation”, “translation strategy”, and “poetry translation”. The translation activities of Ge Haowen and Xu Yuanchong are currently the cutting-edge theme of translator’s subjectivity research in China.

### 3. Research Content

Given that CiteSpace and CNKI visualization tools are primarily suited for quantitative analysis, their support for qualitative research is relatively limited. These visualization tools are unable to merge and classify specific translation concepts involved in the research sample. Therefore, textual analysis is also employed in this research. According to research, the study of translator’s subjectivity in China is mainly divided into two levels: theoretical research and applied research. The following text elaborates on the specific content of translator’s subjectivity research at the two levels.

#### 3.1. Theoretical Research

The theoretical research on translator’s subjectivity in China mainly concentrates on two aspects:

firstly, the early theoretical research on translator's subjectivity focuses on the establishment of theoretical frameworks, the exploration of methodology and the definition of concepts, reflecting a shift in translation studies from text to translator; secondly, later on, the theoretical research mostly utilizes diversified theories to explain translator's subjectivity, presenting a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of its essence, which promotes the in-depth development of theoretical research on translator's subjectivity.

One the one hand, at the end of the 20th century, the concept of translator's subjectivity was introduced into China, but there was no widely recognized definition. Since scholars have not yet clarified the definitions and differences between the concepts of translation subjectivity, translator's subjectivity, and translation subject, the descriptions of the above concepts in academic journals are confusing and ill-defined. In 2003, starting from the marginalization of the cultural status of translators, Zha Mingjian and Tianyu defined the concept of translator's subjectivity. They believe that "translator's subjectivity refers to the translator as the subject who, while respecting the translation object, demonstrates subjective initiative in the translation process to achieve the translation goals. Its fundamental characteristics include the translator's conscious cultural awareness, humanistic qualities, cultural and aesthetic creativity [7]. In the same year, Tu Guoyuan and Zhu Xianlong stated that "translator's subjectivity refers to a kind of subjective initiative that the translator shows in translation activities to meet the cultural needs of the target language under the influence of the marginalized subject or the external environment and his own vision, and it has the characteristics of autonomy, initiative, purposefulness, creativity and so on" [8]. In 2006, Zhong Weihe and Zhou Jing optimized this definition on the basis of summarizing the research results of the previous researchers. They fully agree with the viewpoints of Zha Mingjian, Tu Guoyuan and others, and believe that translator's subjectivity is also characterized by passivity [9]. The above three studies have defined the concept of translator's subjectivity theoretically and authoritatively, laying a solid theoretical foundation for the subsequent researches related to translator's subjectivity.

One the other hand, as research advances, the theoretical study of translator's subjectivity continues to progress. Some studies interpret translator's subjectivity by using specific theories, while others analyze the internal and external relationships of translator's subjectivity. The theories involved in translator's subjectivity research mainly include hermeneutics theory, feminist translation theory, reception aesthetics theory, manipulation theory, relevance theory, translation ethics, eco-translatology, and adaptation theory. For example, Tang Pei bases his analysis of translator's subjectivity on hermeneutics theory, examining trust, aggression, incorporation, and restitution as manifestations of translator's subjectivity in the translation process. This illustrates how selecting translations, clarifying translation purposes, determining translation strategies, and interpreting works are specific expressions of translator's subjectivity [10]. Xu Lai explores the significance of feminist translation theory in the study of translator's subjectivity, revealing that feminist translation theory incorporates gender factors into the study of translator's subjectivity. This approach raises awareness within academia regarding issues of gender discrimination in traditional research, thus opening up a fresh gender perspective for translator's subjectivity research [11]. Wang Yingpin explores the significance of adaptation theory in guiding translation and influencing the expression and constraints of translator's subjectivity from four perspectives, namely contextual correlations of adaptability, structural objects of adaptability, dynamics of adaptability, and salience of the adaptation process [12]. In recent years, there has been an innovative trend in the theoretical study of translator's subjectivity. Jia Ru uses Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of reflection as a theoretical basis, taking the bi-directionality of translator identity as a premise, and elaborates on the manifestation of translator's subjectivity in reflection hermeneutics from both internal language factors and external cultural factors [13]. Simultaneously, from the perspective of knowledge translation studies, Cui Lingxiao and Li Shuhua interpret the expression and constraints of translator's subjectivity in the knowledge

translation process, and propose constructive suggestions for enhancing translator's subjectivity through aspects of "translator competence, translator ethics, and translator aesthetics" [14]. The introduction of these innovative theories brings a fresh perspective to translator's subjectivity research.

### 3.2. Applied research

The main content of applied research on translator's subjectivity in China consists of two aspects: first, most studies analyze the embodiment of translator's subjectivity in a specific type of text by means of single-translation analysis or multiple-translation comparison; second, some studies concentrate on individual cases of translators' translation activities, analyzing the embodiment of translator's subjectivity in the translation activities of specific translators. These studies not only promote the academic understanding of translator's subjectivity, but also provide useful reference and guidance for translation practice.

For one thing, researchers mostly interpret the specific manifestations and constraints of translator's subjectivity in literary text translation by combining translation strategies or translation theories, among which the hot research genres are novels and poems. Additionally, the manifestation of translator's subjectivity in public announcements, movie and TV subtitles, news, political texts, medical texts and others also attracts the attention of scholars. For instance, based on translator's subjectivity and the concept of discourse marker, Zu Lijun comparatively analyzes the translation strategies of the discourse marker "I think" in Huo's translation and Yang's translation of *Dream of Red Mansions*, and concludes that the translator's subjectivity is the "fundamental motive that causes the same or different translation strategies of the discourse marker 'I think' in the two translations" [15]. Xu Tingting analyzes the translator's subjectivity in the English translation of the red novel *New Biography of Heroes and Heroines* by Sidney Shapiro. The research shows that Shapiro's English translation is a product of the translator's flexible use of strategies such as "literal translation, omission, and adaptation" under the influence of dynamic factors such as the historical environment and political background, exerting initiative and coordinating the relationship between the translator's subjectivity and intersubjectivity [16]. Furthermore, taking medical texts as an example, Zhou Kailin and others analyze the translator's subjectivity in translating traditional Chinese medicine, suggesting that translators should "transform passivity into initiative by leveraging their subjectivity". This study also recommends that when translating traditional Chinese medicine texts, the translation should be simple and easy to understand [17].

For another, some researchers have analyzed the translator's subjectivity in specific translators' translation activities, with research subjects including Zhang Guroo, Lu Xun, Yan Fu, Bing Xin, Zhang Ailing, Ba Jin, and others. For example, Zhou Chunyue conducts a case study on Ba Jin's translator's subjectivity in his youth by analyzing his personal translation stance in his articles and the translation strategies in his translated work *Ye Wei Yang*. This study presents the translation stance and impulses of young Ba Jin, with findings indicating that his translator's subjectivity "gradually developed through personal choices and historical evolution" [18]. Since 2017, the translation activities of Ge Haowen and Xu Yuanchong have become a frontier topic in current research on translator's subjectivity, reflecting a shift in Chinese translation studies from "translating the world" to "translating China". For instance, from the perspective of eco-translatology, Hu Weihua and Guo Jirong, conduct a thorough analysis of Ge Haowen's translation activities in text selection and translation strategies. The research finds that Ge Haowen's translation activity fully adapts to the ecological environment of translation, not only reflecting his own translation philosophy and aesthetic preferences, but also fully considering the actual conditions of the target language, balancing the agency and passivity of translator's subjectivity [19]. Tao Xiaoyu and Feng Qinghua construct a

parallel corpus and combine sentiment analysis to study Xu Yuanchong's Chinese translations of Shakespearean plays. They delve into Xu Yuanchong's emotional tendencies in these translations, summarize the characteristics of his translator's subjectivity in translating emotional words, and explore the reasons for the formation of relevant characteristics from factors such as social environment and translator's translation views [20].

#### 4. Research Shortcomings

There have been three main challenges in China's translator's subjectivity in research. Firstly, existing research is mainly published in non-core journals, with a relatively small number of journal articles in core journals. Out of 1,795 research samples, core journals were searched for "Peking University Core", "CSSCI", "CSDI", and "AMI". After excluding literature with low relevance to the research topic, only 196 articles, accounting for 10.92%, were obtained. However, the number of journal articles published in non-core journals is 1,599, accounting for 89.08%. Among non-core journals, the top five in terms of publication volume are Overseas English (8.25%), English Square (3.96%), Science and Technology Information (1.62%), Journal of North China University of Technology (Social Sciences Edition) (1.17%), and Journal of Zhengzhou University of Aeronautics and Astronautics (Social Sciences Edition) (1.06%). To address this issue, on the one hand, universities can encourage researchers to publish their articles in core journals by establishing reward mechanisms and providing project funding. On the other hand, given that core journals have higher requirements for research quality, researchers should strengthen their abilities in research design, data analysis, and paper writing to improve research quality and increase opportunities for publication in core journals.

Secondly, the existing research methods are relatively single, dominated by qualitative research method and deductive method. Regarding the theoretical research on the translator's subjectivity, pure narrative and exploratory methods are mostly adopted; regarding the research on the specific manifestations and constraints of the translator's subjectivity, the method of analyzing multi-translated books or single-translated books is often adopted [21]. On the whole, existing studies are mostly based on qualitative research method and deductive method, with less application of empirical research method, quantitative research method and inductive method. In terms of innovation in research methods, for example, Lin Fei uses the empirical research method and qualitative research method to analyze the translator's subjectivity of English majors under the framework of the correlation translation theory; and the research shows that despite professional training in translation, English majors still encounter issues in comprehension and expression during translation, with the emergence of intentional mistranslation precisely being a specific manifestation of translator's subjectivity [22]. Using empirical research method, Zhang Su Min verifies that the effect of "continued translation" on translator's subjectivity is related to different word processing, and "continued translation" can enhance translator's subjectivity [23]. Subsequent studies should adopt more empirical research methods, quantitative research methods and inductive methods in order to explore the study of translator's subjectivity from different angles and enrich the research perspectives.

Third, the existing studies are characterized by homogenization and lack of innovation. From the perspective of research content, existing studies often combine specific translation theories to explain the expression of translator's subjectivity in literary texts, while some authors focus on the manifestation of translator's subjectivity in the translation of political texts, medical texts, film and television texts, tourism texts, and other texts. However, overall, only a few scholars have expanded and innovated on the research content. Among the numerous studies on the translator's subjectivity in literary texts, there is repetition in research subjects and a tendency towards similar content, often

limited to the analysis of translation strategies in specific translation cases, lacking innovation. From a research perspective, current studies often combine feminist translation theory, hermeneutics theory, eco-translatology, translation ethics and manipulation theory to interpret the connotation of translator's subjectivity, lacking integration with new theories and tools. Subsequent research can explore diverse texts and also study first-hand information of translators, such as translator's translation manuscripts [24], contracts between translators and publishing institutions, translator's manuscripts, etc. At the same time, innovative research on translator's subjectivity can be conducted by combining emerging theories and tools such as corpora, psycholinguistics, and cognitive science.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, the research on translator's subjectivity in China presents a trend of "initial exploration, rapid development, and stable growth". There are relatively few core authors in translator's subjectivity research, and the cooperation between different authors and research institutions is relatively loose. The research on translator's subjectivity can be divided into two levels: theoretical research and applied research. Early theoretical research focused on the construction of the theoretical framework and the definition of concepts about translator's subjectivity; as research deepens, some theoretical studies use various theories to explain the translator's subjectivity. The research on the application of translator's subjectivity mainly involves the interpretation of the embodiment of translator's subjectivity in text translation by combining translation strategies or translation theories, among which the main research texts are literary texts; part of the applied research focuses on individual cases of translator's translation activities, exploring the manifestation of translator's subjectivity in specific translator's translation activities. At present, there are three main challenges in the study of translator's subjectivity in China, namely, a scarcity of journal articles in core journals, limited research methods, and homogeneity of research content. To address these problems, subsequent research should increase the number of journal articles published in core journals, expand diversified research methods, and incorporate new texts, theories, and tools, so as to expand the depth and breadth of the research on translator's subjectivity. It is believed that with the solution of these challenges, the study of translators' subjectivity in China will usher in a broader space for development and make more important as well as significant contributions to the internationalization of Chinese translation research.

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