# 3. Criteria and Strategies of Chinese Film Title Translation from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics

As a newly developed subject or branch of learning, Reception Aesthetics advocates turning to reading and reception of a literary text, from which great inspiration has been drawn. Translation studies make no exception. A brief introduction will be made to illustrate the fundamentals of Reception Aesthetics and its influence upon translation and on Chinese film titles translation in particular. Consequently, the audience-oriented C-E film titles translation approach is highly advocated.

## 3.1 Brief Review of Reception Aesthetics

Reception Aesthetics, a branch of literal critic theory, is based on the phenomenology and hermeneutic. It is an independent theory system with the reader’s reception action as basis. School of Constance first developed the Reception Aesthetics, with the representative person Jauss and Iser. The theory has a far-reaching influence on various philosophies and aesthetics.

Reception Aesthetics is commonly used to designate a school in literary criticism developed by professors and students at the University of Constance in West Germany during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Reception Aesthetics theory emphasizes the reader’s reception (also called audience reception) of a literary text. In literature, it originated from the work of Hans-Robert Jauss in the late 1960s. Reception theory was at its most influential during the 1970s and early 1980s in Germany and USA, amongst some famous work in Western Europe. This approach to textual analysis put emphasis on the scope for “negotiation” and “opposition” on the audience. This means that a “text”-be it a book, film, or other creative work-is not simply passively accepted by the audience, but that the reader or viewer interprets the meaning of the text based on their individual cultural background and life experiences. In fact, the meaning of a text is not inherent within the text itself, but is created within the relationship between the text and the reader.

Therefore a basic acceptance of the meaning of a specific text is likely to appear when a number of readers have a common cultural background and translate the text in similar ways. It seems that a reader and the artist have less shared heritage, the reader may not be able to recognize the artist’s intended meaning, and it’s thought that if two readers have different cultural background and personal experiences, their reading and understanding of a text will be very different.

Reception Theory does shed light on the long river of literary criticism and also proves reasonable and readily accessible, but is has its own limitations. It denies the objective basis and standard of criticism and cognition to some extent. Additionally, if a literary work is evaluated and reviewed, the reader’s role is probably overemphasized. Despite all these, it is very safe to say that the methodology of Reception Aesthetics has brought us significant enlightenment. We can assume that it will offer us more new study angles for translation study.

### 3.1.1 Reader’s Subjectivity（分成两段）

Placing readers at the center of the procedure of reading is the most prominent characteristic of Reception Aesthetics Theory. Readers and text are equally important, because the text only provides “stylized aspects”, but it is the readers that make the text become the aesthetics object. In Iser’s opinion, there are two poles in the literature work: the artistic pole referring to the author’s text and the aesthetic pole realized through readers’ reading process. The text is only a reading object, a language structure that belongs to the author. Only after being read by readers can the implied aesthetic be constructed. Applied to the film titles translation, the translated title is the text, and the audience is the reader of the text. The acceptance of the audience is the success of film titles translation.

### 3.1.2 Horizon of Expectation

The horizon of expectation is one of the important concepts in Jauss’s aesthetics of reception. He viewed the history of literature as dynamic system which is composed of the author, the work and the reader, and made research on it. Jauss uses this concept, namely, “the horizon of expectation” to explain the relation of reader’s reading process and the construction of the literary history.

The horizon of expectation is the potential preparation for a certain literary work, or can be said as a kind of mindset formed in a certain environment, which is the motive power of the readers’ participation and creation and is made up of a variety of factors, such as the reader’s personal interests, reading experiences, educational background and social environment. Jauss puts out three ways of forming the horizon of expectation. “First is the intrinsic poetics of the familiar standard or style; second is the potential relationship between the familiar literary works in the history of literature; third is the oppose movement between the invention and the reality, or between language’s poetic function and the practicing function.”

In his theory, Jauss puts forward the concept of the horizon of expectation in the process of elaborating and generalizing his dynamic history of literature, which gives the explanation for why the readers’ understandings of literary works can be changed or revealed in different historical periods. Jauss’s point of view is to round up literary works into a system in which these literary works can not only contrast with each other, but also make a comparison of themselves from the past, the present and future. Therefore, it can be viewed as a relatively full-range system which is featured by emphasizing the contribution made by readers’ involvement in creating of literature history.

### 3.1.3 Blank and Place of Indeterminacy（分成两段）

“Blank” or “place of indeterminacy” means the content that does not appear in the text but implied by the written words and plots. Iser holds the views that because of “blanks”, readers have opportunities to show their imagination and creativity, and at the same time, produce the meaning of the text. In Iser’s theoretical construct, “blanks” exists on three levels. First, “blanks” come from the inherent language structure of the text. Second, “blanks” exist between the prospect fragments made from languages. On this level, “blanks” link these prospect fragments up to be a complete and multi-layered prospect structure. So, “blank” is a positive constructive force for the smooth reading. Third, “blanks” also exist on the level of ideological value. When readers are reading a text, they are always restrained in the old cultural norms. These old cultural norms will be broken by reading problems and generate “blanks” on the level of values. Readers need self-correction in reading to fill in the blanks.

## 3.2 Criteria of Chinese Film Titles Translation

As the standard and principle of translation activity, translation criteria serve as the guideline and yardstick to direct the work. It is also the goal that every translator must spare no efforts to achieve. Criteria are consistently regarded as the nucleus issue of translation theory. Some foreign translation theorists have had in-depth research and discussion on the criteria of translation. At the end of the 18th century, Alexander Tytler advanced three principles of translation, namely 1) A translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work; 2) The style and manner of writing should be of the same character as that of the original; 3) A translation should have all the ease of the original composition. Many translation experts and scholars hold that the establishment of a uniform standard for translation is of great importance and significance to the practice. As is known to all, faithfulness and expressiveness are basic requirement to translation. However, that is not enough for Chinese film titles translation. A higher level of demand is the style and vividness of translation. The criterion of vividness requires the translator to transfer the beauty of Chinese film titles into English in translation. That’s to say, the TT should not only convey the original content but the feeling, artistic conception, style and flavor, etc. in order that the TT is as impressive as the original title.

To the nature of beauty, many scholars from home and abroad have made so many definitions, from which a more general and representative is from a well-known scholar Wang Zhaowen: “Beauty is the embodiment or reflection of the essence and regular pattern of social life, which could arouse specific affection response. Therefore, as to the nature of beauty, it’s an objective social value or attribute.”

### 3.2.1 Form Beauty

Form Beauty lies in the symmetrical, alliteration, assonance or rhyme. In order to achieve the form beauty in film titles translation, the translator needs endeavor to make the translated version musical in sound. It is known to all that languages are grouped together into language families on the basis of shared features which have been retained during a process of divergence from a common ancestor. English belongs to Indo-European language family that is the biggest of all the language families in the world. And it is an intonation language, which can also create aesthetic rhythm by using different tones or stresses. While Chinese falls into Sino-Tibetan language family, which is the second number of speakers. It has been mentioned above that Chinese is a tone language that has contrasting pitches or tones by using the pitch of individual syllables to contrast meanings. It has four linguistic pitches or tones. Thus it can produce a kind of phonological beauty through the arrangements of different pitches. While translating film titles from Chinese into English, translators should take advantage of features of these two languages, and the change of pitch to achieve a kind of musical effect in Chinese. Alliteration is commonly used in C-E film titles translation in phonological level. It is also frequently seen in original English film titles such as *Beauty and the Beast* 《美女与野兽》, *Pride and Prejudice* 《傲慢与偏见》, *Sleepless in Seattle* 《西雅图夜未眠》, *The Fast and the Furious* 《速度与激情》, *Guardians of the Galaxy* 《银河护卫队》, *Revolutionary Road* 《革命之路》 and *Gone Girl* 《消失的爱人》. The using of alliteration in C-E film titles translation enhances the aesthetic value of the translated film title, makes it easy to read and easy to remember. 《精武门》is a 1972 Hong Kong martial arts film, the title is translated into *Fist of Fury*, the English version achieves a special sound effect by alliteration, which is a perfect connection of art and commerce. *Beijing Bicycle*, the English version for the film《十七岁的单车》uses the alliteration, thus creating the phonetic beauty. Another example is《女人四十》*Summer Snow*. Examples also can be found using the method of assonance or rhyme: 《顺流逆流》*Time and Tide*, 《我的父亲母亲》*The Road Home*,去掉 《不见不散》*Be There or Be Square*, 《奇谋妙计五福星》 *Winners and Sinners* etc.

Furthermore, the adoption of rhetorical device in film title can achieve beauty in sound and the vividness of the image presented thus to entertain the audience aesthetically. Different rhetorical devices can create different effects on the audience. However, they all aim at one goal: to bring aesthetic enjoyment to the audience. For example, the use of repetition can help to accelerate forces in the speaker’s speech and producing a rhythmical effect, as in 《不见不散》*Be There or Be Square* and 《有情饮水饱》*Love Me , Love My Money*. What’s more, the English version *Love Me, Love My Money* is adopted from the famous saying love me, love my dog.

### 3.2.2 Content Beauty

The reader-centered Reception Aesthetics holds that reader’s role is by no means passive, but active. Accordingly, the paper puts forward the criterion for beauty in content, which is of primary importance in the research. The criterion of beauty in content means that the translations offered in C-E film titles are faithful to the original Chinese film titles and expressive in rendering, which may give pleasure to the reader’s sense or to their minds. Metaphor, personification and oxymoron are often used in C-E film titles translation to give expression to the beauty in content. The English version for the film 《金陵十三钗》is *The Flowers of War*, the word “flower” is often used to representing woman in both Chinese and western culture. In this film, the flower implies the fearless Chinese women. In the film 《我的兄弟姐妹》*Roots and Branches*, the title uses the relationship between root and branch to express the theme of the film which is to find the lost relatives. In the film 《满城尽带黄金甲》 *Curse of the Golden Flower*, golden is a colorful metaphor for the royalty and golden flower implies the rebel in royalty. In the film 《那些年，我们一起追的女孩》 *You Are the Apple of My Eye*, the apple of one’s eye implies something or someone very precious or dear. An oxymoron is a literary device where two words or concepts are put together that are opposites. Oxymoron is usually used to put two contradictory words in film title and make a strong impact to audience. Applications can be found in *Dear Enemy* 《亲密敌人》, *Summer Snow* 《女人四十》, *Expect the Unexpected* 《非常突然》, *He’s a Woman, She’s a Man* 《金枝玉叶》. *Love Speaks* 《意外的恋爱时光》uses personification to translate the title, so the same is in the film *Murmur of Youth* 《美丽在唱歌》.

## 3.3 Strategies of Chinese Film Titles Translation

The ideas of horizon of expectation are useful in explaining the value of domestication and Foreignization. On one hand, when entering into the process of reading the translated film titles, the audience bring with their own previous aesthetic experience (directed expectation). Domesticating strategy can provide audience with what they are familiar, which meet their directed horizon of expectation and help them understand the basic information of the film. On the other hand, foreigners bring their creative expectations. They expect to see something new, foreign or strange in the translated film titles. Foreignization strategy can provide them what they are unfamiliar with satisfying their creative expectations. Therefore, these two opposite translation strategies can respectively satisfy the two kinds of expectations of readers.

### 3.3.1 Domestication

Domestication refers to the strategy bringing the foreign culture closely to the target language audiences and making the text full of foreign culture color. Directed expectation could be understood as a pre-orientation of audiences’ experience, and it’s a cultural and literary habit already existing in the audiences’ mind and formed by the fusion of the dimensions of audiences’ horizon of expectations, such as audiences’ world view, cultural accomplishment, aesthetic experience and appreciation capability. During the process of reading the film title, it functions as selection, orientation and finding out familiarity. Thus it helps audiences well understand the film.

For example, 《无间道》is translated to *Infernal Affairs.* From the above in Chapter 2.2, the word “无间”is a Buddhism term which similar to the word “hell” in western culture. If the title literal translated to Avici, the western audiences may hard to know the implied meaning due to the culture difference between East and West. So the title actually translated to *Infernal Affairs* which is closer to western culture. So the same as 《南京！南京！》,《王的盛宴》 and 《东邪西毒》, comparatively speaking, western audiences may not familiar with the massacre in Nanjing, the feast at Hong Gate(鸿门宴) and the original novel *The Legend of the Condor Heroes*(《射雕英雄传》) written by Jinyong. So the title translated to *City of Life and Death*, *The Last Supper*, *Ashes of Time* which are close to the western expression. Furthermore, audiences may interested in what the Chinese last supper is. And the art beauty in the film 《东邪西毒》is perfectly match the title *Ashes of Time.*

### 3.3.2 Foreignization

Foreignization means presenting the audiences foreign culture directly and give them the feeling of freshness and strangeness. The concept of horizon of expectation is useful in explaining the value of Foreignization. Jauss thought poorly of the work that completely accords with the horizon of expectations of readers. He says, “when the new horizon of expectations has achieved more general currency, the power of the altered aesthetic norm can be demonstrated in that the audience experiences formerly successful works as outmoded, and withdraws its appreciation”. Thus for translation, the ones which completely accord with audiences’ horizon of expectation are of little aesthetic value. What audiences want is not the translation that they are completely familiar with, but translation carrying foreign elements. As Zhu Guangqian says, “the things that we see every day seldom bring aesthetic experience because they are so practical and so close to us that they undermine our aesthetic experience”. The domesticating translation tries to be natural and fluent, and replace linguistic and cultural features of source language with the ones in target language. Thus the translated title is too familiar to the audiences. Foreignizing translation tries to keep the linguistic and cultural features of the original text, which are strange to the target language audiences. These strange elements will arouse audiences’ imagination and create for them a kind of fresh aesthetic experience.

《卧虎藏龙》 *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is a Chinese film directed by Ang Lee, the film won 73rd Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 2001. Due to the difference between the cultural meaning of “dragon” in the eastern and western, the word “dragon” usually translated to “tiger” to achieve cultural equivalence, such as Four Asian Tigers(亚洲四小龙). However the film title literally translated to *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. In fact, in the situation of increasingly frequent cultural exchanges, Chinese traditional culture has been appreciated all over the world, the cultural of Chinese dragon has been accepted by western countries. When they read the film title, they will not link the “dragon” to a fire-breathing evil creature. And the name of film title is a Chinese idiom which describes a place or situation that is full of unnoticeable masters. It is from a poem of the ancient Chinese poet Yu Xin’s that reads “暗石疑藏虎,盘根似卧龙”, which means “behind the rock in the dark probably hides a tiger, and the coiling giant root resembles a crouching dragon.” This translated film title, reach, even beyond audience’s “horizon of expectation” and accepted by western audience, contribute to success of the film.