

Rebels or Heroes: Recreating the Image of Beats in Chinese Translations of On the Road

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Keywords: *On the Road*; Beat Generation; Systemic Functional Linguistics; Paratext; Translation

Abstract: This article investigates the recreation of the image of Sal Paradise and the Beat Generation across three Chinese translations (1990, 2001, 2006) of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Employing a multi-level analytical framework, it reconceptualizes translation and its effects at textual, paratextual, and contextual tiers. At the textual level, it applies Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics to examine how specific linguistic strategies—realized through the experiential, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions—construct Sal's identity. At the paratextual level, it analyzes how narrative (re)framing strategies, such as front cover design and prefatorial articles, guide reader reception and recast the rebels' image. Finally, at the contextual level, it explores how socio-historical and ideological factors motivated these translational and paratextual choices, ultimately explaining the evolution of three distinct images of the Beats in China.

1. Introduction

This study investigates the recreation of Sal Paradise's image—as a representative of the Beat Generation—across three Chinese translations (1990, 2001, 2006) of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957)^[1], by examining linguistic features (including personal pronouns), paratextual elements, and relevant socio-historical contexts.

Jack Kerouac (1922-1969), the principal avatar of the Beat Generation, was born in Lowell, Massachusetts. *On the Road* is Kerouac's second book and has been hailed as the testament of the Beat Generation. It mainly concerns five parts, elucidating the back and forth trips between east and west of America taken by Dean, Sal, and other characters (Jack Kerouac is Sal in the fiction, while Neal Cassady is characterized as Dean), searching for the meaning of life and valid values.

Regarding the translation studies of *On the Road*, scholars have employed diverse theoretical frameworks, including Lefevere's manipulative theory^[2], Skopos theory^[3], and domestication and foreignization^[4]. Among these contributions,^[5] Zhang Xiaoyun's (2011) monograph *An Imagological Approach to Translation Studies: A Case Study of the Chinese Translation of Kerouac's On the Road* lays crucial groundwork by tracing the evolution of the Beat Generation's image in Chinese translations—from a target of political criticism to a culturally accepted literary phenomenon. However, while these studies offer valuable macro-level insights, they leave underexplored the specific linguistic and narrative mechanisms through which translators actively recast the “rebellious” figures into “heroic” ones. It is precisely this gap that the present study aims

to address. By applying Hallidayan metafunctional analysis to compare translational choices across different Chinese versions, this research systematically examines how and why the image of the Beats is modulated—whether sanitized into socially conformist heroes or preserved as authentic rebels.

Thus, the structure of this paper is as follows. Initially, the source text (ST) and its three Chinese translations^[6-8] will be analyzed with the aim of investigating how the experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings contribute to establishing the image of Sal (the Beat Generation) in the book. Then, it will discuss how paratextual matters have an impact on the image of the Beat Generation in different translations. Next, comments and further explanations will be provided regarding the comparison of the three translations through the aspect of context. At last, a conclusion will be given to sum up the whole study.

2. A Systemic Functional Perspective

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is an approach to linguistics that considers language as a social semiotic system. According to ^[9]Halliday (1978), all languages involve three simultaneously generated metafunctions: one construes experience of our outer and inner reality as well as logical relations between phenomena (ideational); another enacts social relations (interpersonal relations); and a third weaves together these two functions to create text (textual—the wording).

Functional approach refers to the concept that human beings use language in order to fulfill three functions referred to as metafunctions, namely, to represent, to exchange, and to organize experience. Technically, these metafunctions are termed as ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. The ideational metafunction is subdivided into two components: the experiential function, which construes what is going on, and the logical function, which links one happening to another.

Since function is equated with meaning, language is said to express four types of meaning: experiential, logical, interpersonal, and textual. Accordingly, the grammar of a language is described with reference to these four metafunctions. This means that the lexicogrammar of any language consists of experiential, logical, interpersonal, and textual dimensions.

2.1 Experiential Meaning: the Actor and the Sayer

Firstly, the experiential function refers to the grammatical choices that enable speakers to make meanings about the world around us and inside us: ^[9]Halliday (1978) put forward that it was through this process of humans making meaning from experience that language evolved.

Experientially, the augmentation and enhancement of Sal's role as the Actor and the increase of his role as the Sayer in Wen's version both help sculpt Sal as an energetic persona eager for experience and life, desiring expression and exploration, comparatively speaking, closer to the original image in the novel. Whereas the images of the Beat Generation are less enthusiastic and expressive in Wang's version, the processes are vastly adapted to make the characters behave in "good behavior", omitting and transforming actions related to sex and drugs, which are one of the main inspirations in the exploration of the Beat Generation.

"Experience" is the key pursuit of the Beat Generation, and the whole novel delivers a story of experiencing life to love it and find valid values, while the images of the Beat Generation are shifted and not exactly the same in the three translations. The unique improvisational prose has been used to finish this novel by Kerouac. In the two Chinese translations, the choices of translating the actions did shift the meaning and sculpted different images. Wen tends to reveal the true spirits and pursuits of the Beat Generation through creative translation, thus making the images of Dean and Sal more consistent with the original ones. Whereas Wang has adapted the processes vastly in his translation to make the actions gentler and more attuned to the "good behaviors". Also, Tao & He's

translation has both effects. For instance:

Example 1:

Source Text: “Not only that, but a few months later Camille gave birth to Dean’s second baby, the result of a few nights’ rapport early in the year.” (Kerouac, 1957: 224)

Tao & He’s Version: “But several months later, Camille bore Dean a second child – the outcome of several nights of intimacy early that year.” (Tao & He, 1990: 245)

Wen’s Version: “Yet the matter remained unresolved: within months, Camille delivered Dean’s second child – a consequence of several nights of passionate entanglement at the year’s beginning.” (Wen, 2001: 258)

Wang’s Version: “However, the situation proved more complex: mere months later, Camille gave birth to Dean’s second child, resulting from their harmonious connection during several nights earlier that year.” (Wang, 2006: 316)

In one way, the transitivity here is shifted in all translations. In another aspect, the processes are chosen in very different ways. In Wen’s translation, the process is explicit and delivers the pursuit of sex experience of the characters and is closer to the original meaning, thus benefiting in sculpting the relatively authentic image of the Beat Generation’s body experience and experimentation. In Tao & He’s Version, the translation is similar to Wen’s but less furious. While Wang’s translation is more conservative and fails to convey the real meaning here, and may puzzle the readers, furthermore, the genuine image may be hard to demonstrate as well.

Example 2:

Source Text: “I said to myself, look (process) out now, and I hung on. You never saw a driving fool like that.” (Kerouac, 1957: 72)

Tao & He’s Version: “‘Yes,’ I told myself inwardly; leaning back in my seat, I gazed out the window. Never had I seen anyone drive so recklessly.” (Tao & He, 1990: 83)

Wen’s Version: “I muttered to myself, staring through the car window without another word. I’d never encountered anyone who drove like this madman.” (Wen, 2001: 84)

Wang’s Version: “I said to myself: ‘Better watch out now,’ and gripped the seat tightly. Never had I seen such a daredevil driver.” (Wang, 2006: 101)

In this example, the original English sentence exhibits a blend of verbal and mental processes within a highly informal, conversational style typical of Kerouac’s spontaneous prose. In Tao & He’s version, the clause “I told myself inwardly” retains the verbal process but internalizes it further (“inwardly”). The subsequent action “leaning back in my seat, I gazed out the window” introduces additional material and behavioural processes (“leaning”, “gazed”) that were not explicitly present in the source. This elaboration creates a more contemplative and less tense atmosphere, subtly reducing the immediacy and emotional intensity of the original. Wen’s translation opts for “I muttered to myself”, which preserves the verbal process but adds a manner adverb that conveys a tone of reluctance or annoyance. The phrase “staring through the car window without another word” introduces a behavioural process (“staring”) that emphasizes silent observation. This version enhances the sense of inner tension and vivid involvement, aligning more closely with the Beat Generation’s emphasis on intense subjective experience. Wang’s rendition “I said to myself: ‘Better watch out now,’” maintains the verbal process but incorporates a more cautious and complete lexical phrasing (“Better watch out”). The subsequent clause “and gripped the seat tightly” turns the original general action (“hung on”) into a more specific and physically vivid material process. While this makes the scene visually clearer, it also renders the narration more conventional and slightly diminishes the raw, impulsive tone characteristic of Kerouac’s style.

Example 3:

Source Text: “I was a young writer and I wanted to take off (process).” (Kerouac, 1957: 10)

Tao & He’s Version: “I am a young writer; I need to travel.” (Tao & He, 1990: 11)

Wen's Version: "I am a writer, still young, and I yearn to hit the road." (Wen, 2001: 11)

Wang's Version: "I am a young writer, and I must embark." (Wen, 2001: 12)

"Hit the road" is more pertinent to the original meaning and vividly sculpted the life-loving image of Sal, compared to the translation "embark", thus appealing more to the readers, especially the young readers, the choices of the process do make a difference in meaning here and do work differently in profiling the images. Still, in Tao & He's Version, "travel" does not convey the original meaning exactly.

All in all, in Wen's Version, Beat Generation's images are more genuine and closer to the original ones, pursuing the meaning of life and letting off themselves. Whereas in Wang's Version, the processes are translated in a relatively conservative way, and images of these beat characters are less original and true. Also, Tao & He's version is in the middle.

2.2 Interpersonal Meaning: the Use of Personal Pronoun

Language is a two-way system to interact with other people, to exchange meanings, to establish and maintain appropriate social links with them. There must be aspects of the grammar that can be identified as enabling us to interact through language^[10].

In his seminal article "Functional diversity in language as seen from a consideration of modality and mood in English", ^[11]Halliday (1970) set out his concept of the interpersonal function of language. He defined it as the function by which the speaker intrudes on the discourse, takes up a position, and expresses his role in the speech exchange. Besides mood and modality, his concept of the interpersonal subsumes a broad range of phenomena, such as the vocative, deixis, attitudinal lexical items, uses of conjunctive items invoking the speaker's communicative role^[12](Halliday and Hasan 1976:240), as well as prosodic, intonational features.

This general notion of interpersonal meaning has proved influential beyond Hallidayan or systemic-functional linguistics — not only on the study of clause grammar, but also on discourse studies and research into language change.

In the original story of *On the Road*, the main characters possess the image of being free spirits and desire to explore everything to find their valid values and the passion for life. Also, they are used to hanging around the country and talking in a very natural and spontaneous way, with a half-academic way of speaking, thus appearing to be free and chatting-like to readers.

In the two versions of translated works, Wen fully understood the spirit of the Beat Generation and used more first-person narrative, appearing to be more talkative and relaxed. Wang's version applied more of a third-person narrative, making the texts less close to the readers.

Interpersonally, the image of Sal tends to be more dynamic and expressive in Tao & He's and Wen's versions in that more "I" or "You" is used, while in Wang's version, it's frequently omitted. For example:

Example 1:

Source Text: "At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver colored section, wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough light." (Kerouac, 1957: 163)

Tao & He's Version: "On a lilac-scented evening, I wandered through the 27th Street neighborhood in Denver's Black district, every muscle aching. I truly wished I were Black. To me, even the finest opportunities the white world offered felt inadequate – devoid of ecstasy, thrill, or joy." (Tao & He, 1990: 189-190)

Wen's Version: "In the violet dusk, I lingered at the intersection of 27th and Welton Streets in Denver's Black community. As lights flickered on, every muscle screamed in pain. I desperately

wished I were Black – nothing in the white world could intoxicate me. It lacked vitality, joy, mystery, music, and unforgettable nights.”(Wen, 2001: 189-190)

Wang’s Version: “Under a pale purple night sky, muscles sore, I roamed Denver’s illuminated Black quarter between 27th and Welton Streets, wishing I too were Black. The white world’s finest offerings failed to enthrall me – insufficient life, joy, excitement, sin, music, and darkness.” (Wang, 2006: 232)

In this example, Kerouac employs a highly personal and introspective narrative voice, rich in interpersonal meaning through direct subjective expression and emotional intensity. The repetition of “I” and the use of emphatic structures (“not enough...”) reinforce Sal’s personal yearning and inner conflict. Both Tao & He and Wen preserve this interpersonal engagement by explicitly translating the first-person subject and enhancing it with adverbial emphasis (“truly”, “desperately”). This strengthens the reader’s connection to Sal’s desires and frustrations. In contrast, Wang’s version uses a participial phrase (“wishing I too were Black”) which distances the narrator from the reader. The shift from a finite clause to a non-finite construction reduces the immediacy and emotional weight of the utterance, making the narrative feel more detached and less conversational. This aligns with Wang’s overall tendency to prioritize formal narrative coherence over the intimate, spontaneous tone of the original.

Example 2:

Source Text: “I said to myself, look out now, and I hung on. You never saw a driving fool like that.” (Kerouac, 1957: 72)

Tao & He’s Version: “Yes, I told myself inwardly; leaning back in my seat, I gazed out the window. Never had I seen anyone drive so recklessly.” (Tao & He, 1990: 83)

Wen’s Version: “I muttered to myself, staring through the car window without another word. I’d never encountered anyone who drove like this madman.” (Wen, 2001: 84)

Wang’s Version: “I said to myself: ‘Better watch out now,’ and gripped the seat tightly. Never had seen such a daredevil driver.” (Wang, 2006: 101)

Here, the original text uses direct speech (“I said to myself”), imperative force (“look out now”), and a second-person address (“You never saw...”) to create vivid interpersonal engagement, placing the reader inside Sal’s immediate experience. Tao & He and Wen retain the first-person subject in the reporting clause and expand the narrative with additional behavioural processes (“gazed out,” “staring through the car window”), which enrich the depiction of Sal’s inner state and sustain the emotional rhythm. Wen’s use of “muttered” also adds a layer of attitude. Wang’s translation, however, omits the subject “I” in the second clause (“Never had seen...”), which is a significant departure from the interpersonal grammar of the original. This ellipsis, along with the choice of “gripped the seat tightly” as a material action, shifts focus away from Sal’s internal monologue toward external action, reducing the sense of shared experience between the narrator and the reader. The resulting tone is more observational than participatory, weakening the interpersonal connection central to Kerouac’s style.

To sum up, in Wen’s version and Tao & He’s version, Sal (the Beat Generation)’s image is closer to life and may be more appealing to readers, especially young readers, thus making it easier to convey their real pursuits and spirits. Whereas in Wang’s version, the images of them are shifted to become less real and more serious.

2.3 Textual Meaning: the Way he Talks

Systemic functional linguistics, according to Halliday, considers language as a system for expressing meaning in context. Most generally, it is applied to understand the quality of texts, the most authentic products of human social interaction: why a text means what it does, and why it is

valued as it is.

Textually, Sal talks in a more natural, consecutive, and closer-to-the-original way in Wen's translation, with an increase in textual, interpersonal, and marked topical themes. However, Wang's version saved most images and translated faithfully. To exemplify:

Example 1:

Source Text: "Somewhere along the line I knew there'd be girls, visions, everything; somewhere along the line the pearl would be handed to me." (Kerouac, 1957: 10)

Tao & He's Version: "During the journey, I would surely encounter pretty girls and novel experiences; perhaps this trip would bring me rare treasures." (Tao & He, 1990: 11)

Wen's Version: "Somewhere on the road, I knew I'd meet girls, amid fantasies, and everything would unfold; but on this path, I was certain to gain immensely." (Wen, 2001: 11)

Wang's Version: "Further down this road, I knew there'd be women, visions, all things; further down this road, the bright pearl would be placed in my hands." (Wang, 2006: 12)

Normally, both the marked (topical) and textual themes quite often serve as transitions in the texts, and thus provide the speaker with a means to guide the audience in interpreting the unfolding text by linking the current clause to its preceding or following clauses. However, in Kerouac's *On the Road*, he took up a unique writing style named improvised prose, which supplies very few textual themes because he wrote the whole scroll as an impromptu, just like a piece of bebop jazz music. Compared with the source text, Sal in the Chinese translation of Wen speaks in a more explicit and natural way, providing more textual themes. While in Wang's and Tao & He's version, the depictive images are preserved, and the translation is more faithful in style but less accurate in spirit, and the image of the characters is preserved.

It has been found that variation in meaning, which is the result of translation shifts, mainly caused by the attitudes and the studies of translators on the book, leads to the recreation of different images of the Beat Generation characters and their spirits and pursuits in different translated texts. Experientially, the augmentation and enhancement of Sal's role as the Actor and the increase of his role as the Sayer in Tao & He's version and Wen's version both help sculpt Sal as an energetic persona eager for experience and life, desiring expression and exploration, comparatively speaking, closer to the original image in the novel. In Wang's translation, the portrayal of the Beat Generation appears more restrained and less vivid, as linguistic processes are significantly altered to present the characters as behaving in a socially acceptable manner. This involves omitting and rewording actions associated with sex and drugs—elements that were non-negligible when considering the Beat Generation's ethos and creative inspiration.

Interpersonally, the image of Sal tends to be more dynamic and expressive in Tao & He's Version and Wen's version, in that more "I" or "You" is used, while in Wang's version, it's frequently omitted. Textually, Sal talks in a more natural, consecutive, and closer to the original way in Wen's translation with an increase of textual, interpersonal, and marked topical themes. However, Wang's version saved most images and translated faithfully, while Tao & He's version stayed in the middle between the other two translations.

3. Paratexts and Images

Different images of the Beat Generation can also be seen through the paratexts of three Chinese translations, especially from the front covers and prefatorial articles.

A paratext is the threshold between a reader and a text. It presents and comments on the text and takes the form of verbal or non-verbal manifestations. French narratologist Gérard Genette brings attention to the importance of paratext, the very frame of the text, and what lies outside it. In his seminal work, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, he writes that paratext is "a privileged place

of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it.”^[13] (Genette 1997: 2) Paratexts, in this sense, mainly include book covers and sleeves, titles, blurbs, and prefatorial articles not composed by the author. I will focus on the front cover and the prefatorial article, the two key elements in the book’s very initial contact with the reader. Although the process of preparing these paratexts and the extent of the author’s participation in the process are never uniform or transparent, undoubtedly the publisher has an overall, if not sole, control over the front and back covers in between which the text is placed. They are the paratextual matters that belong to packaging and marketing, part of the distribution process that the publisher prepares.

3.1 Reading the Front Cover as Paratext

Although it’s frequently quoted that “do not judge a book by its cover”, the front covers of the three Chinese translations of *On the Road* do have an impact on the images and their reflections towards the readers. The importance of the book cover is approached and discussed from different perspectives in ^[14]Matthews and Moody’s *Judging a Book by its Cover: Fans, Publishers, Designers, and the Marketing* (2007). In this book, the critical role that the publisher assigns to the book cover is noted, as “reflected in the growth of the approval process for new designs,” apparently because the book cover has an impact on the overall sales of the book. Not only does the book cover influence the common readers in their purchases and readings, but it also shapes, as suggested in the same book, the views of cultural gatekeepers such as the judges of literary prizes. In short, the book cover has an impact on the reader’s response that cannot be underestimated.

Initially, the cover of the 1990’s version, translated by Tao & He, is colored in red and pink with a picture of five topless men and women on it. Apparently, these topless youngsters with tattoos and metallic necklaces represent the Beat Generation who disregard rules and pursue freedom, nevertheless, appearing to be “hooligans” back in the 90s when read by the Chinese readers. And along the picture, “the documentation of a group of peculiar American men and women’s wandering life” is captioned, which, combined with the photo, environs the book with a sense of rebellious and bizarre feeling.

Although published by the same publishing house, Lijiang Publishing House, the front cover of 2001’s version, translated by Wen Chu’an, is totally different and delivers another image of Beat Generation. On this cover, Jack Kerouac is sitting in a car, looking out through the car’s window into the readers’ eyes, smiling. Just like in *On the Road*, Dean always drives crazily, shifting through the West and the East in America, and the cars are the main vehicles and mediators for the beats to get on the road together, which could also be deemed as a tool for them to explore beliefs and values. Beside the car, a road sign with “east” and “8” on it can be seen, which directly specifies the significance of road trips in the book. Also, the upward arrow indicates a positive sense of searching and moving forward, which corresponds with the main ideas “nothing is behind me, but everything is in front of me” and “life is on the road”. This front cover gives more positive meanings and goes with the translator’s intention to clarify the misreadings towards the Beat Generation, as will be introduced in the next chapter.

Last but not least, the cover of 2006’s version, translated by Wang, is of no specialty, colored in yellow. Contrary to the other two versions, the front cover of this version has no picture on it, and the readers can barely get any information through this front cover; it could be stated that basically no attitude is expressed through this front cover.

To sum up, the 1990’s version, translated by Tao & He, reiterates the image of a group of decadents and peculiar youngsters through the front cover. For Wen’s (2001) version, more positive

meanings and the importance of road trips are pointed out, while Wang's version (2006) hardly expresses anything on the front cover, and the attitude may be neutral and hidden.

3.2 Reading the Prefatorial Article as Paratext

Different prefatorial articles with the translators' attitudes and understandings can also have an impact on the readers, and the images of Sal, of the Beat Generation, are partly influenced by different translations' prefatorial articles.

In Tao & He's translation, the prefatorial article is titled "a rebellious millstone along the afar", and the translator stated that the reason for the Beat Generation to be "Beat" Generation is that they are beaten and lost, and they are just a bunch of decadent and loose youngsters gathering together. This short but thesis-statement-clearly-stated prefatorial article reinforces the image of decadent and rebellious beats.

However, in Wen's translation, the prefatorial article titled "Beat Generation, Kerouac and *On the Road*" tries to prove that the Beat spirits, searching for freedom in mind and valid values in life, will go on and on, influencing future generations. Wen Chu'an, as a scholar studying the Beat Generation, especially went to America to collect materials of Kerouac and added a lot of daily life photos of Kerouac and the Beat Generation as illustrations. In the prefatorial article, he holds that the Beats' images have long been misunderstood, and the values of the Beat spirits should be discovered.

Last but not least, in Wang's version, no prefatorial article is given except for the direct translation of the original English prefatorial article written by Ann Charter, an American scholar researching Kerouac.

In short, different and contrasting front covers and prefatorial articles do help sculpt different images of the Beat Generation.

4. Contextual Considerations

As the study has found, Wen's version tries to make the image of the Beat Generation more positive and true to themselves, as the justification of the Beat Generation has been chosen to be one of the main drives during his translation. However, Wang's version makes the images of them more deviate from the original ones, with their actions being corrected to be "good behaviors" and the Beats as less rebellious but neutral, as many original processes being deleted or transformed. Still, Tao & He's version stayed in the middle.

The reasons behind can mainly be divided into two parts: one being the ideological and historical factor, and the other being the translator's personal attitude.

4.1 Tao & He: Rebels and Decadents (1990)

Since this is the earliest version among the three and back in the 1990s, the intended readers didn't have a full-rounded understanding of the Beats, and the translators were also holding a distant attitude. From a systemic-functional perspective, Tao & He's translation occupies a middle ground between Wen's and Wang's versions; yet, through its paratext and context, it still frames the Beat Generation as decadents and rebels. Since the publication in 1957, *On the Road* has been a controversial composition, and domestic research on Jack Kerouac and *On the Road* started in the early 1960s from a general introduction of the Beat Generation. In the 1990s, people in domestic environments may still find it peculiar to understand the Beats' seemingly wasted way of living, for instance, going on the road repeatedly, overdosing, heavily drinking, etc.

4.2 Wen: Heroes and Cultural Icons (2001)

When the translator's attitude towards the novel is taken into consideration, Wen Chu'an believes in the spirit of the Beat Generation and translated *On the Road* with the faith of justifying it.

As the first full translation of *On the Road* was published in the Chinese mainland, which gave domestic readers a panoramic view of the novel, the translator Wen Chu'an corrects the name of the novel through the subtext and the specific translated text, clarifies the misreading caused by the conservative and rigid literary concepts in the past, and highlights the positive significance of the novel. Due to the adoption of a domestication translation strategy in line with the target language norms, and the "recreation" of the original in order to meet the readers' expectations, Wen's translation has been warmly sought after among the readers.

Wen's translation is of great significance. It is the first complete translation of *On the Road* in the Chinese mainland, which shows the whole picture of the novel to domestic readers. As Wen holds great appreciation and is exactly a researcher of Beat literature, he possesses sympathy and deep understanding towards the spirit and pursuit of the Beat Generation, who has mainly been trying to find the valid values of life and passion towards life under the absurdity of modern life and world. Their experience is like the adventure of exploring life itself and the spontaneous prose and jazz writing of Jack Kerouac are highly recommended by Wen. The greatest contribution of the translated version lies in clarifying the misreading of the novel caused by the conservative and rigid literary concepts in the past, and striving to shape the original as a serious literary work. Therefore, it is regarded as "a turning point in the re-positioning of *On the Road* and Kerouac". Although the translation is not fully recognized by the academic circles and critics, it is still open to question in terms of specific translation processing, but its popularity among readers has laid a solid foundation for the canonization of *On the Road*.

4.3 Wang: Neutrals (2006)

The last translation of *On the Road* we discuss here is by Wang Yongnian. The publication of Wang's version has aroused a series of repercussions from readers and all walks of life, which has finally established the classic status of the novel *On the Road* in China's translated literature system. However, as Wang Yongnian personally disagrees with the lifestyle and pursuit of the Beat Generation, he made a series of adaptations in regard to the processes, the wording, especially in the sex and drugs experience and experimentation. The original meaning and images are partly lost and scattered, making the image of the Beat Generation appear more neutral.

5. Conclusion

Firstly, based on the theoretical framework of systemic functional linguistics, this study analyses the images reconstructed in three Chinese translations of the same novel from three perspectives: experiential, interpersonal, and textual. According to the analyses, the shift of meaning happens in all translated works and the images are respectively sculpted to possess different traits, with Wen's being more genuine and true to the original characters, Wang's being more dignified and corrected, making them "behave", while Tao & He's version stays in the middle in terms of this aspect.

Experientially, Wen (2001) and Tao & He (1990) expand Sal's roles as Actor and Sayer, foregrounding his hunger for motion and self-expression and keeping the original stimuli of sex, drugs and jazz. Wang (2006), by contrast, attenuates or rewrites these processes, recasting Sal as a more cautious, almost domesticated figure.

Interpersonally, Wen and Tao & He preserve the high frequency of first- and second-person

pronouns, sustaining the direct, confessional tone of the source text. Wang's persistent omission of "I" and "you" flattens the immediacy of Sal's voice and distances the reader from the Beats' emotional urgency.

Textually, Sal talks in a more natural, consecutive, and closer to the original way in Wen's translation with an increase of textual, interpersonal, and marked topical themes. However, Wang's and Tao & He's versions saved most images and translated faithfully.

To be next, paratexts, especially the front cover and prefatorial article, are taken into consideration. In this aspect, the image of the Beats turns out to be decadents and rebels in Tao & He's version, to be explorers and cultural icons in Wen's version, and in Wang's version, the front cover remains mute and neutral and does not necessarily convey anything, also with no prefatorial article at all.

These divergent images stem from the translators' situated readings of the source text and from the historical-ideological climate of their times. Tao & He's version was published at the earliest time among the three, when most readers were not that familiar with the book, and the image of the Beat Generation tended to be rebels and decadents. Wang, while technically competent, distances himself from Beat values and tones down their subversive charge. Wen, as a long-time Beat scholar, actively rehabilitates Sal and Dean, arguing for their authenticity and generational appeal. He tries to justify the book, and the image of the Beat Generation appears to be more authentic and energetic, thus appealing to young readers and transmitting the real spirit of the Beat Generation.

The cumulative result is not a single Chinese *On the Road* but three distinct cultural artefacts, each negotiating what it means to be young, restless, and free in contemporary China.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to Professor Wang Minqin for her unwavering support and guidance, and to Professor Yu Hailing for her inspiring instruction in the academic writing course. This research was conducted with the generous support of Hunan Institute of Engineering. My heartfelt thanks also go to my family, friends, and colleagues for their encouragement throughout this project. Finally, I sincerely appreciate the editors and reviewers for their constructive comments and suggestions. Any remaining errors are my own.

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