



JGSS

International Journal of Geographical and Spatial Studies

JGSS Vol. 1, No. 1, 2026, pp. 162-170.

Print ISSN: 3105-1294; Online ISSN: 3105-1308

Journal homepage: <https://www.gssjournal.com>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64058/JGSS.26.1.15>



Harmonizing Disparities, Rejuvenating Translating Verve: A Review of the Chinese Version of *Topophrenia: Place, Narrative, and the Spatial Imagination*

李敏锐 (LI Minrui), 李 冕 (LI Mian)

Abstract: *Topophrenia: Place, Narrative, and the Spatial Imagination* is an important theoretical work by Robert T. Tally Jr., a leading American scholar in the field of spatial literary studies. Integrating spatial theory, literary criticism, and geographical philosophy, the monograph introduces several key concepts such as *topophrenia*, geocriticism and literary cartography, exerting significant influence in the field of spatial humanities. Its Chinese version translated by FANG Ying proves the reliable textual basis for accurately understanding Tally's spatial theory and intellectual framework. Adopting the Skopos Theory as the theoretical perspective, this paper offers a review of the Chinese version from three dimensions: the Skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule. The study finds that, in order to introduce Western spatial theory to Chinese readers, the translator generally adopts a strategy that prioritizes domestication while incorporating elements of foreignization, thereby achieving a balanced effect between the two approaches. Through strategies such as the systematic translation of theoretical terminology, the adjustment of syntactic structures, and the transformation of culturally loaded expressions, the translation version not only preserves the accuracy of the original theoretical concepts but also conforms to the conventions of Chinese academic discourse. While ensuring a high degree of readability, the Chinese version successfully reproduces the theoretical depth of the original work. In this sense, the translation provides a valuable reference for the introduction and translation of Western learning into the Chinese context.

Keywords: *Topophrenia: Place, Narrative, and the Spatial Imagination*; spatial theory; Skopos Theory; translation strategies

Author Biographies: LI Minrui (corresponding author) is an Associate Professor at the College of Foreign Languages, Huazhong Agricultural University (Wuhan 430070, China). His research fields include narrative theory, ethical literary criticism and comparative literature (Email: barocolmr@mail.hzau.edu.cn). LI Mian

Received: 25 Mar 2026 / Revised: 25 Apr 2026 / Accepted: 28 Apr 2026 / Published online: 30 May 2026 / Print published: 30 Jun 2026.

is a postgraduate student at the College of Foreign Languages, Huazhong Agricultural University (Wuhan 430070, China). Her research fields include narrative theory and literary translation (Email: alianna@webmail.hzau.edu.cn).

标题：“归异平衡，译韵新生”：《处所意识：地方、叙事与空间想象》中译本介评

摘要：《处所意识：地方、叙事与空间想象》是美国文学空间研究领军学者罗伯特·塔利的重要理论著作，该书融合空间理论、文学批评与地理哲学，提出了“处所意识”“地理批评”“文学绘图”等核心概念，在空间人文研究领域具有重要影响。方英教授的中译本为中国学者准确理解塔利的空间理论和思想提供了可靠范本。本文以功能主义目的论为理论视角，从目的法则、连贯法则与忠实法则三个层面，对中译本进行了介评。研究发现，为实现向中国读者引介西方学者空间理论的目的，译者在整体上采取了以归化为主、异化为辅的策略，最终实现了“归异平衡”的译介效果，通过术语系统化翻译、句法结构调整与文化表达转换等译介方式，使译文既保持了理论概念的准确性，又符合中文学术表达的习惯性。该中译本在保证译文很好的可读性同时，又较好地再现了原著的理论深度。一言以蔽之，此译著为“西学东译”提供了有益参考。

关键词：《处所意识：地方、叙事与空间想象》；空间理论；目的论；翻译策略

作者简介：李敏锐（通讯作者），华中农业大学外国语学院副教授，研究方向包括叙事学、文学伦理学批评和比较文学，电子邮箱为：barocolmr@mail.hzau.edu.cn；李冕，华中农业大学外国语学院硕士研究生，研究方向包括叙事学和文学翻译，电子邮箱为：alianna@webmail.hzau.edu.cn。

Topophilia: Place, Narrative, and the Spatial Imagination (China Social Sciences Press, 2025; hereafter *Topophilia*) is one of the representative scholarly works of Robert T. Tally Jr., a professor in the English Department at Texas State University. The book has attracted considerable attention in the academia since its publication. As a leading scholar in the spatial humanities, Tally's long-standing engagement with spatial theory has yielded a substantial and influential body of work. In this book, Tally systematically explores the complex relationships among space, place, narrative, and imagination, introduces several influential concepts, including *topophilia*, geocriticism, and literary cartography, and further develops the theoretical and methodological framework of spatial literary studies. Integrating Marxist criticism, phenomenological geography, and postmodern spatial theory, the book stands out for its conceptual rigor and theoretical depth. As such, it holds significant scholarly and practical value for understanding contemporary spatial thought. Translating such a theoretical work into Chinese and introducing it to the Chinese academic community is not only an urgent task for the development of spatial studies in China but also an important channel for fostering dialogue between Chinese and international scholarship. At the same time, such a task presents considerable challenges for the translator. Obviously, the Chinese translation version by FANG Ying offers a reliable textual basis for Chinese readers to understand and study Tally's theoretical ideas. Using Skopos Theory as the framework, this paper systematically analyzes and evaluates the translation strategies in FANG Ying's Chinese version of *Topophilia*. On this basis, it further explores the distinctive challenges posed by the translation of scholarly works and proposes potential solutions.

Introduction

Insightful thought and practical value

Topophilia unfolds around three core concepts: place, narrative, and spatial imagination, presenting a progressive structure that moves from “spatial theory and criticism” to “spatial representation” and finally to

“spatial imagination”. At the theoretical level, Tally reviews key concepts and ideas concerning space and place from both human geography and literary studies. In doing so, he introduces the key concept of topophilia, which describes the complex emotional and cognitive state subjects experience in relation to place. Through this concept, Tally emphasizes that literary space is not merely a backdrop for narrative events, but a crucial dimension that shapes characters’ experiences and structures of meaning. Proceeding to the level of spatial representation, Tally develops the analytical framework of literary cartography. This perspective investigates how literary texts organize and express space through narrative structure, symbolic imagery, and narrative perspective. For Tally, literary works function, in a sense, like maps: they select, rearrange, and present space through narrative means, thereby constructing what can be understood as a meaningful “spatial configuration”. Building on this foundation, Tally extends his inquiry to the realm of spatial imagination. Here, he explores how literature constructs imagined spatial worlds through genres such as utopian fiction, fantasy, and adventure narratives. These texts not only present deformations or projections of real-world spaces but also offer readers pathways for thinking about “thirdspace” and possible worlds.

In terms of its scholarly contribution and practical value, the book synthesizes insights from human geography, literary theory, and cultural studies. Through its core concepts: topophilia, literary cartography, and geocriticism, it advances spatial studies from abstract theorization to the concrete analysis of literary texts. To this end, Tally analyzes a wide range of genres, ranging from classical epics to contemporary novels, demonstrating the value and function of literary narrative in the construction of spatial meaning. In doing so, the work offers a distinctive approach to the study of space in Western literature, one that combines theoretical depth with rigorous textual analysis.

Stylistic features and translation challenges

As a work of spatial theory, Tally’s writing exhibits a dual character: it possesses the theoretical rigor of academic scholarship while incorporating the rhetorical expressiveness of literary criticism. This stylistic fusion contributes to a certain level of complexity in the text, both conceptually and linguistically.

First, the original work is characterized by a dense concentration of terminology, much of which is neologistic in nature. Throughout the work, Tally employs or coins a range of spatial-theoretical concepts, topophilia being a prime example. These terms retain clear etymological features, are often introduced for the first time in many instances, and embody specific theoretical perspectives. Therefore, the translator must not only convey their conceptual meanings accurately, but also preserve the systematic relationships among the terms and reflect their theoretical depth, which poses multiple challenges in translation.

Second, the syntactic structure is complex, featuring frequent use of long sentences and nested constructions. When elaborating on theoretical issues, Tally often develops his arguments through multiple subordinate clauses and parenthetical elements. While such structures are common in English academic discourse, they often require substantial syntactic adjustment, and sometimes even radical restructuring in Chinese translation to ensure both accuracy and readability.

Furthermore, the text contains numerous literary and philosophical allusions spanning diverse disciplinary and theoretical traditions, which are highly culturally loaded and pose significant challenges for translation. The translator must therefore attend not only to the faithful transmission of scholarly ideas but also to the relevant cultural contexts and Tally’s subtle authorial intentions. In light of these textual characteristics, this study draws on the framework of Skopos Theory to provide an assessment of the translation strategies employed in FANG’s Chinese version of *Topophilia*.

Translation Strategies in the Chinese Version

The strong reception of FANG's translation, coupled with the rising interest in spatial criticism in Chinese academia, indicates that the translation has been highly successful. From a translation perspective, the success lies in the translator's clear grasp of the primary goal: to introduce Western spatial theory into the Chinese academic context in a systematic and accessible way, enabling Chinese readers to achieve a level of understanding and reading experience comparable to that of the original audience. This orientation aligns well with the core principles of Skopos Theory. Moving beyond the traditional focus on equivalence, Skopos Theory emphasizes the purposefulness of translation and is guided by three key rules: the skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule. (BIAN Jianhua, 2008). Within this framework, FANG flexibly employs a range of strategies, allowing these principles to work together in practice. Overall, the translation mainly adopts domestication to enhance readability and accessibility, while selectively incorporating foreignization in the rendering of key terms and core concepts so as to preserve the theoretical framework and academic norms of the original. In this way, it achieves a balance between domestication and foreignization. This approach not only ensures academic rigor, but also, as far as possible, retains the theoretical depth of the source text, demonstrating the translator subjectivity and creativity under the guidance of Skopos Theory.

Following the skopos rule: An overall translation strategy

The overall translation strategy adopted in FANG's Chinese version is clearly guided by the Skopos Theory. The translation purpose can be summarized in two aspects. First, it seeks to introduce Tally's spatial theory into the Chinese academic community in an accurate and systematic manner. Second, it aims to produce a readable and functional academic text that Chinese scholars can rely on for further theoretical discussion and research.

The former objective requires the translation to preserve, to a certain extent, the original work's academic terminology and theoretical framework, which necessitates the appropriate use of foreignization. The latter objective, however, requires the translated text to conform to the linguistic conventions and reading habits of Chinese readers so as to ensure clarity and comprehensibility; this, in turn, calls for the moderate use of domestication. Rather than favoring one approach over the other, FANG adjusts translation strategies according to different textual features. In the translation of key theoretical terms, foreignization is maintained to ensure conceptual accuracy. In dealing with complex theoretical sentence, domestication is appropriately employed to enhance clarity and readability. When handling culturally loaded expressions, multiple strategies are used to facilitate effective transmission of meaning. As a result, FANG's translation generally demonstrates a strategy of domestication supplemented by foreignization, ultimately achieving a balanced interaction between the two approaches. In this sense, the "fidelity" pursued in the translation does not lie in mechanical word-for-word correspondence, but rather in the reproduction of the original work's theoretical implications and academic spirit.

Adherence to the coherence rule: Strategies for ensuring readability

In Skopos Theory, the coherence rule requires that the translated text be comprehensible and acceptable within the target cultural context. In other words, the translation should conform to the linguistic conventions and cognitive expectations of the target readers. To achieve intratextual coherence, FANG adopts a strategy of domestication in the translation process. Through syntactic restructuring, adjustments in modes of

expression, and cultural transformation, the translation preserves the meaning of the original text while rendering it more consistent with Chinese linguistic and rhetorical conventions.

Example 1

ST: I map, therefore I am. (Tally, 2019, p. 1)

TT: 我绘图，故我在。(Tally, 2025, p. 1)

This sentence appears at the beginning of the book's introduction and serves as a crucial statement of Tally's conception of literary cartography. The original sentence clearly echoes René Descartes's (1596–1650) famous dictum “Cogito, ergo sum”, by substituting “map” for “think”, Tally underscores the fundamental role of mapping in human cognition of the world.

The challenge in translating this sentence lies in reproducing this philosophical intertextuality within the Chinese context. A literal translation such as “我制图，因此我存在” would convey the basic meaning but would obscure the connection to “I think, therefore I am”, making it difficult for Chinese readers to immediately recognize the parodic intent. FANG renders the sentence as “我绘图，故我在”，directly drawing on the familiar Chinese philosophical structure of “我思故我在”. Through this domestication strategy, the translation enables readers to readily associate it with the sentence written by René Descartes.

Example 2:

ST: Soja conceives of “thirdspace” as a way not only to bridge but also to transform and “Other” the divide between physical and mental spaces, which is to say, the “real” geography out there and the representations of space we carry in our minds (first- and secondspace, respectively). (Tally, 2019, p. 3)

TT: 索亚将“第三空间”(thirdspace)设想成弥合、转变和“他者化”的方式，作用于物理空间和心理空间之间的差异，即外在的“真实”地理和我们脑海中对空间的表征之间的差异(分别对应第一空间和第二空间)。(Tally, 2025, p. 4)

In translating Edward W. Soja's key theoretical statement, FANG demonstrates a clear sensitivity to the structural divergence between English and Chinese. This divergence is particularly evident in the contrast between English hypotaxis, which relies on explicit connectives to signal logical relations, and Chinese parataxis, which privileges semantic coherence and contextual flow over logical connectives. It is precisely in response to this difference that FANG undertakes a systematic restructuring of the source text, thereby effecting a shift from hypotactic to paratactic expression.

In handling the main clause, FANG restructured the original sentence “conceives of...as a way not only to...but also to...” into “设想成弥合、转变和‘他者化’的方式，作用于.....差异”，avoiding a direct replication of the “not only...but also...” structure and thereby creating a more natural rhythm. Regarding logical cohesion, the original's “which is to say” was rendered as a “即”，allowing the explanatory relationship to emerge naturally within the Chinese context and reducing reliance on explicit English connectives. In terms of verb presentation, the translator employed the parallel structure “弥合、转变和‘他者化’” to convey the original meaning and use Chinese commas to create a progressive semantic structure. Crucially, “Other” was translated as “他者化” rather than simply “他者”; the suffix “化” effectively highlights the dynamic process, accurately conveying the original's philosophical import.

Taken together, this translation reflects a strategy that combines domestication at the syntactic level with foreignization in the treatment of key terms. From the perspective of Skopos Theory, this approach primarily serves the coherence rule, ensuring readability and acceptability while preserving key conceptual meanings.

Example 3:

ST: This still spot—also known as Tuan's pause, or the site that delights, disturbs, enraptures, and haunts—is the place one might give a name to, investing it with subjective meanings while subjecting it to analytical scrutiny. (Tally, 2019, p. 27)

TT: 此处的静止点就是段义孚所说的停顿点,或是令人兴高采烈、惴惴不安和魂牵梦萦的地方,人们可以为它命名,对其进行观察研究的同时赋予其主观意义。(Tally, 2025, p. 22)

The source text uses four parallel emotional verbs—delights, disturbs, enraptures, and haunts—to describe the complex and layered relationship between people and place. The meaning moves step by step from pleasure to unease, then to intense joy and lasting attachment, showing how place can affect people in different ways. The main challenge in translation is how to deal with this series of verbs while keeping both the meaning and a smooth, natural style.

FANG handles this challenge in a skillful way. She turns these verbs into commonly used four-character Chinese expressions. For example, she combines delights and enraptures into “兴高采烈”, which keeps the sense of both happiness and excitement without sounding repetitive. She uses “惴惴不安” to translate “disturbs”, where the repeated form “惴惴” makes the feeling of inner anxiety more vivid and easier for readers to feel. For haunts, she chooses “魂牵梦萦”, which not only keeps the sense of something lingering in the mind but also adds a deeper emotional attachment in Chinese, fitting well with the strong connection between people and place. Overall, these three four-character expressions “兴高采烈”“惴惴不安”“魂牵梦萦” form a neat and balanced structure. This gives the sentence a clear rhythm and makes it more pleasant to read. Compared with the more straightforward listing in the original text, the translation becomes more expressive and more in line with Chinese writing style.

From the perspective of Skopos Theory, this example mainly reflects the coherence rule. By using natural and familiar Chinese expressions, the translation becomes easy to read and understand. Readers can clearly grasp the emotional meaning, while also enjoying the rhythm of the language. At the same time, the key meanings of the original text are well preserved. In terms of strategy, this approach is mainly domestication, as it adapts the expression to Chinese usage, but it still keeps the original meaning. In this way, a balance between domestication and foreignization is achieved.

Example 4:

ST: “You are a very fine person, Mr. Baggins, and I am very fond of you; but you are only quite a little fellow in the wide world after all,” to which Bilbo assents, “Thank goodness!” (Tally, 2019, p. 128)

TT: “但在广阔的世界中,你毕竟只是一个小人物而已。”对此,比尔博赞同道,“谢天谢地!”(Tally, 2025, p. 172)

This sentence is taken from *The Hobbit by Tolkien* and appears at the end of the novel, where Gandalf comments on Bilbo. Gandalf’s words show both warmth and appreciation, as seen in expressions like “very fine person” and “very fond of you”, while also gently teasing Bilbo’s identity as a “small” figure in a large world (“only quite a little fellow”). Bilbo’s reply, “Thank goodness!”, carries a light and humorous tone. It not only expresses his relief after returning safely from his adventure, but also shows his easy acceptance of being a “little fellow”.

The main challenge in translation lies in how to render the colloquial expression “Thank goodness!”. On the one hand, a direct translation such as “感谢上帝” conveys the basic meaning, but the word “上帝” carries strong Christian connotations, which do not fully fit the simple, natural life of the Hobbits. On the other hand, a version like “真是太好了” sounds too plain and loses the light, humorous tone of the original. The translator therefore needs to find an expression that matches both the character and the expectations of Chinese readers.

FANG translates it as “谢天谢地”, which proves to be a good choice. First, this is a common spoken expression in Chinese, often used to show relief or gratitude, which fits well with Bilbo’s feeling after his journey. Second, compared with “感谢上帝”, it carries a more natural and down-to-earth tone, closer to traditional Chinese ways of expression, and matches the Hobbits’ simple and nature-loving lifestyle. In addition, its short and rhythmic form helps to recreate the light tone of “Thank goodness!” in the original.

From the perspective of Skopos Theory, this example reflects the coherence rule. By using a natural and familiar Chinese expression, the translation reads smoothly and feels appropriate in the target context. Readers can easily understand Bilbo's emotion and sense the humor in his response, achieving a reading experience similar to that of the original audience. In terms of strategy, this is a clear case of domestication. The expression is adapted to Chinese usage to improve readability, while the original emotional meaning is preserved. As a result, the translation achieves a good balance between naturalness and faithfulness.

Observing the fidelity rule: Strategies for reproducing the style

Within the framework of Skopos Theory, the fidelity rule requires that the translation maintain a necessary semantic and textual connection with the source text, while still serving its intended purpose. For academic works, this kind of fidelity is not limited to the accurate transfer of information; it also involves preserving the system of key terms, cultural images, and ways of thinking found in the original text. *Topophobia* brings together literary allusions, philosophical ideas, and culturally loaded expressions, and its language shows a clear academic and rhetorical style. Therefore, in the process of translation, the translator needs not only to convey the meaning of the text, but also to retain, as much as possible, its underlying structure of thought and its mode of expression within the Chinese context.

Example 5:

ST: topophilia; topophobia; topophobia (Tally, 2019, pp. 22-24)

TT: 恋地情结; 处所恐惧; 处所意识 (Tally, 2025, pp. 14-16)

In the book, the author develops a set of closely related concepts about place and emotion, such as topophilia, topophobia and topophobia. Sharing the common root "topo- (place)", these terms respectively point to love, fear, and consciousness. While distinct in meaning, they are also internally connected. More specifically, topophilia refers to a positive emotional attachment to place, topophobia describes feelings of fear or rejection toward place, and topophobia captures a more complex psychological state that combines an awareness of place with a sense of spatial unease. Together, these terms form a coherent conceptual network.

In translation, FANG handles this system in a careful and consistent way. Topophilia is rendered as "恋地情结", following an established translation in existing scholarship, which helps readers recognize and trace the concept. Topophobia is translated as "处所恐惧", forming a clear contrast with "恋地情结" while retaining the shared core element "处所". Topophobia is rendered as "处所意识", where the relatively neutral term "意识" captures its multiple meaning and leaves room for interpretation. Overall, what matters here is not just the equivalence of individual terms, but the preservation of the relationships within the conceptual system. The sequence "love-fear-consciousness" allows readers to clearly see both the differences and connections among the three concepts, and thus better understand the theoretical framework of the original work.

From the perspective of the fidelity rule in Skopos Theory, this approach successfully maintains the conceptual coherence of the source text. At the same time, in terms of translation strategy, the translator combines domestication and foreignization. On the one hand, established translations and natural expressions are used to improve readability; on the other hand, the shared root and structural relations among the terms are preserved. In this way, a balance is achieved between accessibility and academic rigor.

Example 6:

ST: A writer's country is a territory within his own brain; and we run the risk of disillusionment if we try to turn such phantom cities into tangible brick and mortar. (Tally, 2019, p. 27)

TT: 作家的乡土是他自己头脑中的一片领土; 如果我们试图把这些虚构的城市变成真实可触的砖块和水泥, 我们就冒着幻想破灭的风险。(Tally, 2025, pp. 22-23)

This sentence uses a set of spatial images to connect literary creation with the idea of space. A writer's "country" is not a real geographical place, but a kind of imagined mental territory. The contrast between "phantom cities" and "brick and mortar" further highlights the tension between imagined space and physical reality.

In translation, FANG largely preserves this way of expression, allowing the spatial imagination of the original to carry over into Chinese. The word "country" is rendered as "乡土", which conveys not only a sense of space but also emotional and cultural belonging. "Territory within his own brain" is translated as "头脑中的一片领土", maintaining the spatial way of expression. At the same time, "phantom cities" and "brick and mortar" are translated as "虚构的城市" and "砖块和水泥", clearly reproducing the contrast between imagination and material reality in the source text. By retaining these images, the translation keeps the overall logic of the original expression so that readers can naturally follow the author's thought and understand literary space as a kind of "mental map".

From the perspective of Skopos Theory, this example mainly reflects the fidelity rule. Instead of simplifying or rewriting the original, the translator keeps its form of expression as much as possible, thus maintaining a close connection in both meaning and style. In terms of strategy, this approach leans toward foreignization, as it preserves the original images and structure, while still keeping the language clear and natural where needed. In this way, a balance between foreignization and domestication is achieved.

Example 7:

ST: Like so many Dantes, exiled from our metaphysical or actual homes, we subjected subjects often find ourselves in a *selva oscura*, quite unable to take pleasure in the visceral sensuality of the place or to marvel at its supernal beauty. (Tally, 2019, p. 21)

TT: 我们这些受制的臣民/主体 (subjected subjects) 就像一个个“但丁” (Dantes) 那样, 都被逐出了我们形而上的家园或现实的家园, 常常发现自己处于一片“黑暗森林”之中, 无法对地方产生发自内心的感官愉悦, 也无法对超凡之美感到惊叹。(Tally, 2025, p. 11)

This sentence is characterized by literary expression. It draws on the well-known image of the *selva oscura* from the opening of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, where it represents a state of spiritual confusion and loss of direction. In the Western literary tradition, this image carries rich cultural meaning. Building on this, Tally likens modern subjects to exiled "Dantes", using the image to convey a sense of disorientation in both spatial and existential terms.

In translation, FANG handles this allusion appropriately. "Dantes" is rendered as "但丁" with quotation marks, preserving its symbolic function, while *selva oscura* is translated as "黑暗森林", which retains both the original image and its cultural associations. By contrast, if FANG rendered "selva oscura" as "困境" or "迷失状态", the meaning may be more immediately accessible, but this translation would reduce the literary depth and theoretical force of the original. The translation "黑暗森林", however, preserves a clear sense of spatial reference, turning an abstract state into a concrete spatial experience. In this way, it aligns more closely with the book's central concern with space and place.

From the perspective of Skopos Theory, this example mainly reflects the fidelity rule. By preserving key literary images, the translation remains close to the source text in both meaning and expression, maintaining its cultural context and intellectual depth. In terms of strategy, this approach leans toward foreignization, retaining the original's cultural features while relying on context to ensure basic readability, thus achieving a balance between fidelity and accessibility.

Conclusion

The above analysis shows that FANG, in translating *Topophilia*, consistently takes the accurate transmission of Tally's spatial theory and thought to Chinese readers as her primary goal. Guided by this objective, she adopts a flexible combination of translation strategies. Overall, the translation leans toward domestication while incorporating elements of foreignization, achieving a balance between readability and academic rigor. As a result, the Chinese version retains the theoretical depth and expressive nuance of the original, while conforming to the conventions of Chinese academic discourse, thus realizing a balanced and effective mode of translation.

From the perspective of the three rules of Skopos Theory, the translator's choices reveal a clear internal logic. Under the Skopos rule, the translation is oriented toward the introduction of theoretical knowledge, with particular emphasis on accuracy and consistency in terminology and conceptual expression. Under the coherence rule, syntactic restructuring and adjustments in expression enhance readability while maintaining academic precision. Under the fidelity rule, key terms and cultural images are selectively preserved, ensuring that the theoretical framework and cultural context of the source text are retained.

Overall, the translation successfully balances accuracy and readability, enabling Tally's spatial theory to enter the Chinese academia in a relatively complete form and contributing to the development of spatial criticism in China. In this sense, the monograph not only provides an important resource for Chinese scholarship, but also offers a useful reference for the translation of academic theoretical texts.

Funding: This research was supported by the project of the Humanity and Social Sciences of Huazhong Agricultural University (Grant Number: 2662025WGPY004).

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ORCID

LI Minrui ^{ID} <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7449-8399>

LI Mian ^{ID} <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7284-8332>

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(校对编辑: 陈玮宾 林诗丛)