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## **A Book Review of the Chinese Translation of *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space***

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**Abstract:** *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space* stands as the first authoritative and comprehensive reference that systematically surveys major research paradigms, theoretical frameworks, and methodological developments on spatial literary studies. It provides a rigorous synthesis of current scholarly landscape while illuminating emerging trends and future trajectories in literary geography and spatial criticism. The publication of its Chinese translation responds to the growing enthusiasm for literary and spatial studies in China while promoting academic exchange and dialogue between Chinese and the Western spatial literary criticism. This book review outlines the principal characteristics and contributions of the *Handbook*, examines the translation strategies adopted in the Chinese translation, and discusses the significance of the Chinese version in fostering dialogue between Chinese and Western literary geography.

**Keywords:** *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*; spatial literary criticism; literary geography

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**标题:** 《劳特利奇文学与空间研究手册》中译本书评

**摘要:** 《劳特利奇文学与空间研究手册》作为首部综合性的权威研究指南，系统梳理了文学空间研究领域的主要研究范式、理论框架与方法论进展。该书对当前的研究现状进行了严谨的综述，同时阐明了文学地理与空间批评领域的新兴趋势及未来发展方向。《手册》中文译著的出版，既回应了中国学界对文学与空间研究领域日益增长的研究热情，也促进了中西方文学空间批评的学术交流与对话。本

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文概述了《手册》的主要特点与学术贡献，分析了中译本所采用的翻译策略，并探讨了中译本在促进中西方文学地理学对话方面的重要意义。

**关键词：**《劳特利奇文学与空间研究手册》；文学空间批评；文学地理

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## Introduction

In the 1990s, the “spatial turn” in the humanities and social sciences triggered the explosion of literary geography and spatial criticism. Issues related to space (spatiality), place, and mapping have become forefront topics in literary and cultural criticism, leading to the emergence of many spatial theories. In this intellectual backdrop, *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space* (2017) emerged as a landmark volume, bringing together cutting-edge theoretical discussions and methodological approaches and establishing itself as an indispensable reference for this field. As the first comprehensive and authoritative work to explore spatial literary studies, this book offers a thorough review of the research approaches and methodologies in literary geography and spatial studies, while also providing a forward-looking perspective on the latest trends and future development of literary geography and space studies in the digital age.

In 2025, the Chinese translation of this book was translated by Professors LIU Ying and ZHANG Jianping, and published by China Social Sciences Press. As one of the first academic translations in the “Translation Series of Western Geographical and Spatial Literary Studies”, this book not only provides important theoretical resources for Chinese academic circles, but also responds to the growing enthusiasm for literary and spatial studies in China, further promoting academic exchange and dialogue between China and the West.

This article will examine the Chinese translation of the *Handbook* from three aspects. First, it will summarize the principal characteristics and contributions of the *Handbook*. Then, the translation strategies of the Chinese version will be analyzed, with particular attention to the rendering of key theoretical terms and related concepts. Finally, it will evaluate the significance of the Chinese version for the development of Chinese spatial criticism in the Chinese academic context.

## Characteristics and Academic Contributions

Over the past two decades, spatial criticism and spatial studies have exerted a profound influence on how we think about ourselves and the world. Nowadays, issues related to space and spatiality have become one of the mainstream discourses within and outside the humanities. The publication of *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space* came at a timely moment. Edited by Robert Tally, a leading scholar in international spatial criticism, this book brings together thirty-two top international scholars from eleven countries. For the first time, it systematically and comprehensively outlines the theoretical lineage and methodological practices of spatial literary studies, not only representing the latest academic reflections and explorations on literary geography and spatial studies, but also offering crucial guidance for the future trend of spatial criticism. The *Handbook* covers a wide range of topics, from spatial theories to specific cases of textual analysis, showcasing

its academic foresight and inspiration. Through in-depth discussions on multiple spatial dimensions, including geographical criticism, spatial philosophy, and digital spatial studies, the *Handbook* successfully positions spatial literary studies in the current academic landscape.

The academic characteristics of the *Handbook* are firstly reflected in its profound theoretical depth and broad academic vision. The book focuses on space (spatiality), place and mapping, addressing cutting-edge topics in the field. The structure of this *Handbook* is divided into five sections: “Spatial theory and practice”, “Critical methodologies”, “Work sites”, “Cities and the geography of urban experience”, and “Maps, territories, readings”. These sections encompass a wide range of important topics, from new interpretation of Henri Lefebvre’s spatial philosophy to the application of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) in digital humanities, as well as exploring significant issues such as the literary representation of island space and the spatial politics of some cities around the world. Through the comprehensive discussion of these topics, the *Handbook* effectively demonstrates its multidimensional and timely nature of spatial literary studies, which has a lasting inspiration in the current academic trend. In particular, with the advent of the digital age, the *Handbook*’s exploration of digital literary maps, particularly through the application of GIS technology, has further promoted the deep integration of digital humanities and spatial humanities, opening up new research paths for spatial criticism. Tally also pointed out that the combination of digital humanities and spatial humanities is a new field that literary geography may explore in the future. (FANG, LIU, & Tally, 2021, p. 9). This combination, especially in the context of the current popularity of digital humanities research in China, provides valuable insight.

Additionally, the *Handbook* breaks through the traditional types of spatial studies and systematically discusses the island spatiality for the first time. As a spatial type with unique cultural and social significance, the island is reinterpreted in its spatial literary representations and cultural connotations. By studying island spaces and island spatiality in the works of European and American writers, scholars not only discuss the literary function of the island as a utopian space, but also reveal its close connection with spatial politics. Moreover, the *Handbook* also makes initial exploration on the non-Western spatial experiences, and discusses the multi-sensory dimension of spatial experience, such as emotions and hearing, which is in line with the current academic trends of decolonization of knowledge production, non-representational theory and the emotional turn, thereby enhancing the global vision and intercultural dialogue of spatial literary studies.

Thirdly, while each chapter reflects its specific academic tendencies, the overall structure maintains a dialectical and open stance. Different views from scholars on the research methodologies and topics are interwoven, advancing a more diverse and open understanding of literary space criticism. This dialectical nature is reflected not only in the reinterpretation and innovation of existing spatial theories, but also in the introduction of new concepts and phenomena. Although the *Handbook* incorporates articles contributed by numerous scholars and covers diverse topics, each chapter stays closely focused on the theme of literature and space, forming an organic and cohesive whole. Notably, some core concepts are discussed across multiple chapters and this intertextual reference within the book provides readers with clues for in-depth reflection, enhancing its academic value and practical utility.

The *Handbook* not only summarizes the latest research achievements since the spatial turn, but also provides new direction for future research. Its interdisciplinary nature and conscious theoretical innovation

will undoubtedly offer new theoretical resources and ways of thinking for Chinese spatial studies. The publication of Chinese translation will also encourage Chinese scholars to reflect more deeply on how to position their research within the global academic context. As globalization, digitization, and ecological crisis continue to evolve, spatial literary studies will inevitably continue to develop in a more interdisciplinary and globalized way, and the publication of Chinese translation is undoubtedly an important reference and theoretical support for Chinese scholars in this ongoing process.

### **Main Characteristics of Chinese Version and Translation Art Analysis**

The Chinese translation of the *Handbook* marks an important progress in promoting the intellectual dialogue between Chinese academic community and the international field of spatial literary studies. By introducing a systematic reference of key theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and interdisciplinary perspectives, the Chinese translation provides a shared platform where different traditions of literary geography can meet, exchange perspectives and engage in reciprocal learning. The *Handbook* covers the ideas from numerous scholars and literary figures, spanning fields such as philosophy, geography, sociology and literature, while addressing cutting-edge and complex concepts. Given the complexity of theories involved and the density of conceptual discussions, accurately conveying these topics and effectively transmitting the underlying meaning of these new concepts in Chinese will undoubtedly have a profound impact on the acceptance and understanding of the cutting-edge developments in spatial studies. How these concepts are translated and articulated will inevitably shape the ways in which cutting-edge spatial theories are received, interpreted and further developed within the Chinese academic context. To render this highly theoretical work in a fluent and accessible way for Chinese readers is not only a challenging task but also an important academic contribution.

The translators, Professor LIU Ying and Professor ZHANG Jianping, have undertaken this demanding task with notable scholarly competence, demonstrating their strong theoretical background and the immense effort invested in studying and understanding relevant materials. LIU Ying has long been committed to research in spatial criticism and literary geography. She is the Principal Investigator of several China National Social Science grants. One of them is “The Historical Research and Disciplinary Construction of American Literary Geography”. It is also worth noting that Robert T. Tally Jr., the editor of the original English *Handbook*, serves as the leader of one of its sub-projects. His participation has not only made significant contributions to the project but also further strengthened the intellectual exchange between Chinese and Western literary geography. Such academic collaboration thus adds a revealing dimension to the translation and enriches its significance.

One of the major challenges in the translation process is achieving a balance between fidelity and fluency. The *Handbook*'s style alternates between philosophical reflection and close textual analysis. In facing such diverse content, two translators have maintained consistent academic rigor while ensuring the language flows smoothly. Particularly in translating complex academic terminology and theoretical references, the translators have put considerable effort into making them clear, without sacrificing their depth. Their deep academic foundation and commitment to precision have ensured that the translation faithfully reflects the original work's

academic rigor while maintaining strong readability, offering a clear and understandable academic language to readers.

The success of the Chinese translation lies not only in its faithful transmission of the original work's academic ideas but also in its accurate translation of various key terms, its precise grasp of language, and its adjustment of specific terms and concepts to fit the cultural context. The translation fully reflects the advantages of scholarly translators: both translators have demonstrated their strong academic background and rigorous research attitude throughout the process. Before the translation, certain key concepts in spatial theory had already been thoroughly analyzed in Chinese academia. For these well-known concepts, the translators followed established conventions to provide their Chinese equivalents, thus avoiding confusion among readers. For less familiar or newer concepts, the translation provided accurate and appropriate equivalents, taking into account both the author's intended meaning and the actual reading experience of the target audience.

One notable achievement is the successful treatment of certain emerging concepts in the Chinese translation of the *Handbook*, especially where clusters of closely related terms require fine semantic differentiation rather than mechanical equivalence. For example, in chapter one, LIU Ying consistently preserves conceptual distinctions that are often blurred. "Literary geographies" is rendered as "文学地理", establishing it as a relatively independent interdisciplinary field which emphasizes the study of literature through methods of geography. "Geographies of literature", by contrast, is translated as "文学的地理", which places geography at the center and foregrounds geography as the analytical frame applied to literature. By employing the possessive particle "的", LIU's translation captures the relational meaning of "geography belonging to literature." Another example is the distinction between "imaginary geographies" and "imaginative geographies". The former stresses geography as an imagined construct. LIU Ying's translation "想象中的地理", with the character "中" (in/within), precisely points to a state of existing "within imagination". While "imaginative geographies" were introduced by Gregory, referring to the imagination itself and "the representations of other places—of people and landscapes, cultures and 'natures'" (Brosseau, 2017, p. 13). It highlights the imaginative mode of producing geography. The Chinese translation "想象地理" emphasizes it as a dynamic activity of geographical imaginative construction.

What's more, the title of this chapter "In, of, out, how, with and through: new perspectives in literary geography" is another difficult translating challenge. The lengthy string of prepositions is translated as clear Chinese expressions: "文学中的", "文学的", "文学之外的", "如何与文学对话和通过文学进行研究". This translation faithfully preserves the original structure while translating it into more comprehensible Chinese. All those distinctions pose a severe test for any translator. However, these Chinese translations demonstrate the translators' profound understanding of Western lineages and their sophisticated technique in translating these terms within Chinese linguistic context.

Another noticeable and successful translation lies in the rendering of "atopia" into "特应性", which reveals a remarkable instance of cross-disciplinary resonance that enriches its reception in China. "Atopia" derives from the Greek prefix  $\alpha$ - (without, deprived of) and  $\tau\acute{o}\pi\omicron\varsigma$  (place), denoting a space antithetical to habitable place, or manmade environments that poses less tangible dangers to human identity (Carroll, 2017, p. 159). In the medical context, "atopy" is also a core term referring to a hereditary allergic disease characterized by an abnormal and excessive immune response to environmental substances. Coincidentally,

in medical terminology, “atopy” is also translated precisely as “特异性”. ZHANG’s decision to translate it with the same term creates an intriguing parallel with this established medical usage. Whether this choice was a conscious borrowing remains uncertain. Yet the medical resonance does not distort the spatial concept but amplifies it, enriching its original meaning.

While the Chinese version of this book excels in conceptual translation, there are still areas for further improvement. The explanation and analysis of certain new spatial concepts could benefit from a more thorough discussion. An additional section discussing the translation of certain key words at the end of the book could allow translators to expound their translation and engage readers more deeply, which often help readers quickly and accurately grasp the main ideas of the original text.

Despite these minor issues, which in no way undermine the academic value of the translation, the overall effort is highly commendable. The translators have managed to preserve the original text’s scholarly depth while making it accessible to a Chinese-speaking audience, and they have succeeded in providing a comprehensive and thoughtful translation that contributes significantly to the academic field of spatial criticism.

### **The Significance of the Translation in Promoting the Exchange of Chinese and Western Literary Geography**

The publication of the Chinese version must be understood in conjunction with the current state of spatial criticism in China. While Chinese scholars have increasingly engaged with spatial theories over the past two decades, such engagement has often been fragmentary, mediated through individual monographs or selective translations of key theories.<sup>1</sup> The availability of a comprehensive handbook changes this situation in important ways.

The publication of the Chinese version of the *Handbook* marks a successful “travel of theories”. Since Edward Said proposed the concept of “traveling theory”, academic translation has transcended its role as mere linguistic conversion. It now represents the adaptation, transformation, and even alienation of theories within new social and academic contexts (Said, 1999, pp. 138-159). In this process, the theory itself not only undergoes testing and selection in the new environment, but also reshapes the academic landscape of it. The translation and introduction of the *Handbook* is a successful embodiment of this “travel of theories”, which not only brought the latest research achievements to the Chinese academia, but also contributed to the construction and localization of the theoretical system of Chinese spatial literary studies.

Firstly, the publication of the Chinese version responds to the increasing interest of Chinese academia in spatiality and spatial criticism, and it also fills the gap in the field of Chinese spatial criticism. Its highly interdisciplinary nature provides new insights for Chinese spatial criticism, demonstrating that spatial criticism, as a dynamic and open research method, can continuously incorporate new topics and respond to real-world spatial experiences. Its fresh literary perspectives, theoretical frameworks, and research methods urge Chinese scholars to consider how to integrate cutting-edge Western spatial criticism with China’s

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1. For example: Tally, Robert T., Jr (2021). *Spatiality*. (FANG Ying, Trans.). Peking University Press.

particular social realities and cultural characteristics, thereby promoting the localization of Western spatial criticism theories. For example, the discussion of digital spatial research and the application of GIS technology into literary analysis allows spatial literary studies to deeply integrate with digital humanities, further expanding the scope of Chinese spatial criticism.

In addition to facilitating the introduction of new academic concepts, the Chinese version also serves as a broader platform for fostering dialogue between Chinese scholars and the international academic community. As Chinese spatial criticism continues to evolve, its theoretical system has begun to integrate global academic insights while forming its own distinct characteristics. This Chinese version plays a vital role in expanding the academic horizons of Chinese scholars, especially in light of the current challenges such as globalization, digitalization and ecological crises. It not only allows Chinese scholars to engage with Western theoretical advancements but also prompts them to reconsider the positioning of Chinese literature and spatial research in the global academic discourse, thereby enhancing China's intellectual presence in the international academic scope.

Despite providing valuable academic resources for Chinese academia, the *Handbook* still has certain limitations, especially in its treatment of non-Western perspectives and unique spatial issues of China. Among the thirty-two articles, there are only a few chapters that explicitly take non-Western world literature as the object of analysis, and there is little discussion of Chinese literary experience. The vast territory, rich culture, and distinct social and historical background of China have led to the development of a unique tradition in spatial literary criticism, which have not yet received sufficient attention in global academic research. The explorations by Chinese scholars in fields such as literary geography, spatial narrative, spatial aesthetics, ecological criticism, and urban studies should be recognized within the global landscape of spatial literary studies. For this reason, the publication of the Chinese version provides an important opportunity for Chinese scholars to reflect on and construct a localized theoretical system.

With the further development of globalization, digitization and ecological crises, spatial literary studies will undoubtedly continue to develop in a more interdisciplinary and globalized direction. Emerging fields such as digital humanities and ecological criticism present new opportunities, and spatial literary research, with its inherent openness and diversity, has great potential to respond to these developments. The publication of the Chinese translation undoubtedly provides valuable inspirations for Chinese scholars, promoting engagement with international discussions while also encouraging reflection on Chinese spatial literary criticism. The Chinese translation of the *Handbook* provides a meaningful space for dialogue and mutual learning between Chinese and Western spatial literary studies. In the continuous exchange and dialogue between Chinese academia and that of the world, its enduring value will be further revealed.

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