Analysis of the Influence of Cultural Conflict on Literature Translation—Take Howard Goldblatt’s Translation to Mo Yan’s *Death and Life Are Wearing Me Out* as an Example

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Abstract

The translation of *Death and Life Are Wearing Me Out* is an outstanding representative of the English translation of contemporary Chinese literature. It is the divine transference of the ecological, religious, social, and linguistic culture of the original work by the translator that is the key to the translator's success in the overseas market. Language is the expression of the personality of a social group and a means to identify the members of a social group according to its culture. In order to reflect their national consciousness, cultural tradition and other social characteristics, different languages will inevitably adopt different ideographic means to reflect their own cultural characteristics. Through the analysis of English translation examples, this paper indicates that translators can solve the obstacles caused by cultural conflicts in the context of the target language through translation methods like communicative meaning translation, free translation, substitution method cut method incremental translation method annotation method and so on, so that can make the translation closer to the target language readers and promote the effective overseas dissemination of translation work. We must attach attention to the social and cultural differences of different countries and different national cultural traditions, to put ourselves in the translation readers, considering whether they can get and we in the original reading that similar feelings, do not pay attention to the cultural differences, do not solve the cultural conflict caused by the differences, our translation cannot achieve the effect of foreign communication. It is difficult for Chinese literature to reach the world through this bridge.

Keywords

Cultural conflict, literature translation, *Death and Life Are Wearing Me Out*, Howard Goldblatt

Introduction

Mo Yan's novels care about and experience the changes of China's rural society from 1950 to 2000 through the eyes of various animals, and show the life experience of Chinese farmers since the founding of the People's Republic of China. The main participant of this novel is the farmer, and the social culture reflected is the Chinese local culture. Through the English translation of *Death and Life Are Wearing Me Out*, Howard Goldblatt spread the social culture in the original work to the Western world and foreign English readers. Mo Yan's simple and dramatic narrative style and Howard Goldblatt's accurate grasp of the essence of Mo Yan's novels are important factors in
the great success of the English translation of Death and Life Are Wearing Me Out.

In the process of literature from a nation to the world, translation plays a very important bridge. The translation is to transcend the obstacles caused by social and cultural differences and find translations that can have the same effect on the readers (Zhoufang Zhu, 1997). Therefore, it is not enough to just work hard on the language. How to adapt to the cultural conflicts caused by cultural differences cannot be ignored. Even the form and structure of language also accumulate the genes of traditional culture. If we do not understand foreign cultural traditions, we cannot master foreign languages, and we cannot produce excellent translations.

1. Cause of the cultural conflict

1.1 Values

Values refer to the principles, beliefs and standards that subjects evaluate and select according to the significance or importance of objective things to themselves and society. Because it is rooted in different social systems and has different cultural developments, there are many differences between the East and the West in values. Oriental values emphasize the overall interests of society, advocate collectivism, and encourage the sacrifice of the individual to help the greater individual. However, Western values pay more attention to personal self-development and individualism. Differences in values lead to differences in the perspectives of things, which often lead to misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication.

1.2 Social culture

Social culture is a collection of people's values, thoughts, attitudes, moral norms, customs, and social behaviors. It is a specific culture. People living in a certain society will inevitably form with the passage of time and have a broad impact on social groups. A nation's traditions, customs, lifestyle, characteristics, and forms of social activities all belong to the category of social culture. The interdependence of people and culture determines the social culture of a nation and its literary works (Changhong Zhai, 2019). The traditional Chinese culture emphasizes the hierarchical relationship between the young and the young and advocates the ethical norms of loyalty, filial piety, propriety, righteousness, and collectivist values. The social and cultural load words in Death and Life Are Wearing Me Out include "loyalty and devotion", "filial piety for the mother" and "great collective strength".

1.3 Language and Culture

Language and culture are the most basic culture. The emergence, application, and development of languages are rich in cultural phenomena, which are called "language and culture". Language and culture are expressed through logical ways and rhetorical devices. The language and cultural load words in the novel include idioms "help a tyrant to do evil", euphemism "green hat", sayings "men rely on clothes, horses by carved saddle" and so on.

1.4 Ecological culture

Gaomi County, Shandong Province, Mo Yan's hometown, is the prototype of the background of his works. Gaomi is a county-level city located in the middle of the Shandong Peninsula and the hinterland of Jiaonan Plain. Its climate is characterized by cold winter and summer and rainy summer. Howard adopted the method of being faithful to the original text, so as to well convey the ecological culture of the original work."Hot August, pig farms, ditches, old apricot trees, water logging, houses, sorghum straw" are full of Chinese local flavor, which enabled readers to have a better understanding of China in the second half of the 20th century, especially the geographical environment and climate characteristics of Mo Yan's hometown (Wu Guangjun, 2021). It can be said that Mo Yan satisfies the curiosity of the western world for the mysterious image of rural China in the form of literary creation, and Howard's translation provides the possibility for the spread of Chinese culture in foreign regions.

1.5 Religious belief

Religious culture refers to the culture formed by the national religious consciousness and belief, and the culture formed by the influence of foreign religions, such as Christianity, Catholicism, and Islam. The development of Chinese traditional culture, with Buddhism and Taoism, has the deepest cultural foundation in China. Taoism was born in China, advocating the ideas of "immortality" and "emergence into immortals", and advocated "the worship
of nature" and "the worship of ghosts and gods". Buddhism originated from ancient India, advocated the idea of "the cycle of life and death" and "karma", and believed in the three treasures of "Buddha, Dharma, and monk". Death and Life Are Wearing Me Out as a landlord Simon make six cycles as the main narrative clues, through Buddhism throughout, such as "reincarnation" reincarnation "past" and "reincarnation", etc., but Taoist culture is also very common, such as "the Jade Emperor", worship hero-god "Guandi Temple", worship land god "Land Temple" and originated from the Taoist charm culture "amulet", etc.

2. Translation strategies for dealing with cultural conflicts

2.1 Communicative meaning translation

Example 1: Although the names of the two ghost soldiers are "Niutou" and "Ma Mian", they do not really grow cattle heads and horse heads on human bodies as we see in the pictures about hell.

Translation: Despite the fact that the attendants were called Ox Head and Horse Face, they bore no resemblance to the underworld figures we are used to seeing in paintings: they have human bodies one with the head of an ox, the other the face of a horse.

The concept of the underworld is the product of the combination of the Chinese Taois, the theory of Yin and Yang and the Buddhist concept of hell. According to Chinese folklore, the soul after the death entered in the underworld, and the King of Yama according to his good and evil, sentenced to its reincarnation, or under 18 layers of hell, or stay in the underworld. Although the functional structure of the underworld and the division of ghost pawn responsibilities are unique cultural concepts in China, the translator did not elaborate on the translated semantic communication, but directly borrowed English underworld to express the meaning of the underground residence of the lost soul, and simply convey the cultural image of the source language. Although the cultural image is slightly different, it is a desirable means.

2.2 Free translation

Example 2: "We never engage in such a vulgar relationship, such as godmother and wet mother."

Translation: Nominal mother, normal mother, those vulgar views of relationships never played a role in our family.

In the original text, "godmother and wet mother" belongs to a deliberate expression, mostly used for satire. "Wet mother" is a word newly created by Mo Yan according to the context, and it has no corresponding word in English. To avoid dyslexia, Howard Goldblatt gave full play to the main role of the translator, boldly rewrote the expression of the original text, adopted the method of the Italian translation, translated into "Nominal mother, normal mother", and used the naturalized strategy but still conveyed the shape and god of the original text. In the article, some cultural load words are also translated by Italy, such as "Taisui" to "wandering god", "Taisui" to "gavel", "hades" to "bowels of hell" and "Guan Yu Temple" to "the God of war temple".

2.3 Substitution method

Example 3: They are free and unrestrained, have romantic behaviors, spend money like dirt, and make friends widely.

Translation: They were carefree and willful, spending money as if they had it to burn, and enjoying a large circle of acquaintances.

Language is the carrier of culture. Different historical and geographical factors in China and the West have created unique fixed expressions such as idioms and idioms. In translation, the alternative method can be used to shorten the heterogeneous cultural distance with the expression method familiar to the translation nation. In this case, "spend money like water" means spending money like throwing dirt, which wastes money. In English, there are two phrases used to express the meaning, namely spend money like water (money is like water) and have money to burn (money is spent everywhere). Here, the translator selects the second phrase to show the meaning of the source language through the alternative method to make the text more intimate.

2.4 Cut method

Example 4: Chen Nai, the head of the county, loves me so much that I will never forget.
Translation: The deep affection that Chen, the head of an entire county, held for me is something I'll remember to the end of my days.

The Chinese phrase "remember as long as one lives" refers to the old teeth, which will never forget, and describes a lifetime unforgettable. In Chinese, "no teeth" is the result, and "old age" is the cause, so it belongs to the concept of the result generation caused. There is no such formal and economic idiom in English, so Howard simply abandoned the source metaphor and only translated the reason of "nonsense", which is the result of the metonymically thinking. Therefore, the translation and the corresponding items of the original text also constitute the relationship of the cause.

Example 5: “If anything happens to my donkey, our affairs will be endless.”
Translation: If anything happens to my donkey because of this, you'll pay, and pay dearly."

Many Chinese idioms come from life customs. The "unexpected misfortune" refers to the coffin not being covered because the coffin is just a box made of three long boards and two short boards. Coffins are used to hold the dead, so "long and short" often refers to death. In the daily spoken English of Chinese people, people are taboo to talk about death directly, but gently use "three long and two short" instead, so this is a typical euphemism. In the process of translation, if it is self-defeating. Therefore, Howard directly translated the goal meaning of the idiom "anything (unfortunate)".

Example 6: Just when I was lost and didn't know where to go, the smell that had been lost appeared again
Translation: I lost all my senses and didn't know what to do when that lost odor suddenly reappeared.

Taoism refers to the gods who dominate the heart, lung, liver, kidney, spleen, and gallbladder as the "Six God", while there is no such god in the cognitive world of English readers. At this time, the idealized cognitive model of the conceptualization and categorization of the world in English and Chinese readers collided. Therefore, Howard abandoned the source metaphor and adopted the superior category of "Six God", "all perceptual organs", to translate the source language, so that the translated term and the corresponding term of the original text constitute the metonymical relationship of "the upper category refers to the lower category".

2.5 Incremental translation method

Example 7: The next morning, you took part in the labor for the first time—ploughing. We use a wooden plough, whose share is as bright as a mirror. It is the product of Anhui sand maker. The production brigade has eliminated the wooden plough and used the Fengshou brand iron plough. We wear earth cloth, we use home-made tools, we use bean oil lamps, and we use flint and fire sickle to make a fire.
Translation: You went out to work the next morning for the first time—plowing the field. Our plow was made of wood, its blades, which had been forged by a blacksmith in Anhui, shiny as a mirror. Wooden plows like ours were no longer being used by the production brigade; they had been replaced by Great Harvest brand steel plows... Our clothes were made of the local fabric, we made our tools, and we used kerosene lamps and flints for fire.

This is a paragraph from chapter 16 of the second part of Mo Yan's original work, Ximen made the second reincarnation into a cow. The "you" here is the Simon cow, the next day it takes the first fieldwork; "we" means the blue face of father and son. The tools of labor production here, wooden plows and iron plows are the representatives of typical agricultural production materials, and readers can see the current situation and characteristics of non-mechanized agricultural production in China at that time. Through the clothing characteristics of "Homespun cloth", readers can personally feel the clothing conditions of ordinary Chinese farmers at that time. "Bean oil lamp" and "Flint and sickle" indicates the use of daily necessities in rural China at that time.

In addition to the literal translation, the Italian translation and incremental translation are also used. Take the translation of "we wear home fabric" as an example, "homespun fabric", also known as "coarse cloth" or "home fabric", is mostly made of full cotton fiber materials, woven by manual looms, slightly rough. "Homespun cloth" is a material image reflecting the characteristics of Chinese culture. Howard's translation of "Our clothes were made of local fabric" uses the translation strategy of Italian translation and additional translation, which can be translated as "our clothes are woven from local fabrics".

2.6 Annotation method

Example 8: I saw Hong Taiyue's stiff lines suddenly calmed down. He said, "You know your family's history in the Spring Festival.
Translation: I saw the tautness in Hong Taiyue's face fall away. Like a man climbing off his donkey to walk
downhill, in other words, using her arrival as a way forward, he said: “Yingchun, I don't have to rehash your family history for you.”

The original text uses the idiom "Take advantage of the situation." Based on favorable terrain, to push something off, or stop by reason. In translation, the translator first translated the literal meaning of "like a man climbing off his donkey to walk downhill", and then translated the part of the annotation into "using her arrival as a way forward" through the method "annotation", fully presenting the cultural meaning of "Find yourself a step down" expressed in the original text (Wensheng Deng, 2019). The annotation methods that can be used in the translation include in-text annotation methods and out-of-text annotation methods (footnotes, tail notes, etc.). In the case that the literal translation cannot fully present the original meaning, the translator can supplement it with the annotation method.

Jane Walls, an English literary theorist, has a paragraph worth thinking about. He pointed out that "the narrow and blind pursuit of words may disappointingly affect students' interest in Chinese poetry and force them to go elsewhere, mostly in European literature to seek satisfaction. There, has formed a more flexible and practical traditional translation of verse and poetry, only to a certain extent, the original "," if the translation is purely to provide readers with art, or as only literary works can do is to move the reader, so there is no doubt that as long as achieve this purpose, you can use any of the means needed, there is no need to stick to loyal to the structure". Although this paragraph is a bit extreme, we can still get inspiration from it, especially when the English translation of Chinese literature is rarely widely welcomed by British and American readers (Qiannian Sun, 1988). The translation is undoubtedly to consider cultural differences and should strive to convey the essence and essence of the original with the expansion and development of international cultural exchanges, with the literature of different countries and different nationalities mutual contact, understanding, and blend, people will be more and more tolerant to accept and accommodate other countries' culture, literature, and language of different expression.

References