

The Globalization of Chinese Culture and Goldblatt's Translation of Chinese Literature—A Case Study of *Big Breasts and Wide Hips**

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Abstract—In recent years, with the uprising of China in the stage of the world, it becomes more and more urgent for the globalization of the Chinese culture in order to boost the soft power of the country. This article argues about the importance of cultural globalization and the important role that the translation of literary works plays during this process. To provide a scientific interpretation and illustration of the methods of culture translation, the author chooses the Chinese version of *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* by Mo Yan and the English version translated by American scholar Goldblatt as the study case. This article compares the two versions and from which some examples of culture translation are discussed here. The conclusion of the article is that, in order to globalize the Chinese culture more effectively, the translator should put the reader as his first priority, know both cultures and languages well and try to reduce cultural mistranslation to the smallest degree.

Index Terms—Chinese culture, literature, translation methods, *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, with the rapid development of China's economy and the enhancement of its comprehensive national strength, there is a strong need to promote its soft power so as to boost the comprehensive power. The Chinese government has called on its people to make efforts to globalize Chinese culture. Many elites of the country believe that Chinese people have the capability to influence other peoples' thoughts and be received and respected by them, not merely cater to the others' taste passively. It is time to rouse the westerners and have them informed that they are not the only part of the world, and the world actually comprises another part, without which it could never be complete. Therefore it is time that they learn, or we teach them, to appreciate and respect this different culture of China. This process should be realized with the willingness and spontaneousness of people from other cultures, without their feeling of being forced or coerced. A culture should win the fancy, respect and recognition, which are the values contained in it, of another culture by its attractiveness and charm and only when it is in this way can the country have more powerful influence in the international society, which means it will have more powerful soft power.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE CHINESE LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Cultural globalization is highly important in promoting China's national image and establish its cultural confidence and consciousness because China needs to construct in cultural ways its image as a large country towering up through peaceful ways. To reach this goal, one of the most important and effective ways is to facilitate the introduction of its own literature to the world because literature is the carrier of culture. The relationship between the two is like that between body and clothes. No matter how beautiful and elegant the clothes of literature are, they could not exhibit their charm and styles without being put on the body of culture.

However, today both Chinese culture and literature are still in the brim of the world, both of which need and are trying to go out of the country and be known to other nations and peoples. In this progress they need to and could help each other, promote each other and win together. Without culture, literature is like a piece of wood without roots or a river without source and it is impossible to last long and stay energetic.

In 2012, Chinese writer Mo Yan won the Nobel Literature Prize, which means the western world is making progress in accepting Chinese culture. Although it is difficult for the globalization of the Chinese literature and culture, the hope has come, and the road is being setup, not very slowly.

III. HOWARD GOLDBLATT'S TRANSLATION THEORY

Mo Yan's success came with many years of help from the American translator and Professor Howard Goldblatt, who

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had been cooperated with him and translated many of his works into English and have them published in the USA. Thereby his works were translated into other languages and known to the world.

As to Professor Goldblatt's contribution to Mo Yan's utmost success, two different opinions stand out. Mostly he is praised. For example, Professor Xia Zhiqing honored him as the "Prime translator of modern and contemporary Chinese literature". He said that without Goldblatt, probably Mo Yan couldn't go out of China so fast. There are also negative remarks. German sinologist Gu Bin criticized that Goldblatt considered merely the viewpoint of America and the western world, without giving enough consideration to the original works. Therefore to a great extent he created not serious literature translation but popular translated books.

Obviously Goldblatt (2002) himself had his guidelines; he believed that translation is betraying and rewriting, but loyalty is always the first priority. Everything he did is to convey the original text loyally to the target readers. He said in the entire 20th century, what Chinese literature attracted foreign readers was its social political motives and application, not the literature value. Foreign readers read these works to know what has happened during this period more than to acquire aesthetic or entertaining value, because modern Chinese literature works reflect all the ups and downs in the political and ideological areas. Therefore the readers are composed of people who intend to know China, and compared with the textbooks literary works are much more interesting and easier to read. He said he turned good, bad, and indifferent Chinese proeses into readable, accessible, and even marketable English books.

IV. OTHER TRANSLATION THEORIES

As to the translation method of contemporary literature, scholars in this field have been arguing for many years. Sun Zhili (2002) held that in the 21st century, the translation of Chinese literature should use more foreignization and the purpose of this method is to transmit to the greatest extent the different element of the original text. Specifically, the special cultural characteristics of another country, another language form and the different writing method of the author should all be conveyed to the utmost. While other Chinese scholars hold that domestication should be advocated. For example, Hu Anjiang (2010) said that domestication should be adopted to make Chinese literature come near to the western readers, and then come near to the mainstream of western culture. Only when they have learned some of our cultural routines and thinking patterns can further changes and influence of the western writing mode be possible afterward. He also said translation studies are like translation practice, in which the distinctness of another culture should be respected and its complicated part annotated.

Concerning culture in translation, Venuti (1995) said the Anglo-American culture, as well as the English language, has a global domination and complacency in its relations with other cultures, which can be "described as imperialistic abroad and xenophobic at home". There is a trade imbalance that decreases the cultural capital of foreign values in English by limiting the number of foreign texts translated and submitting them to domesticating revision. Therefore, English translators tend to use more domestication.

V. THE CHOICE OF CASE STUDY

This article is going to focus on Goldblatt's translation version of one of Mo Yan's novel *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* and have a tentative study, as far as culture is concerned, of the principles he followed, the artistic characteristic and aesthetic tendency of his translation, whether he retained or changed the image to and the effect on the target language readers. The author intends to find out whether his principle is to put the reader or the original work at the first place, whether he is respectful, casual, uncomplimentary toward the culture in the original work or uglify it, whether he used foreignization or domestication, and whether he adjusted according to the reader's preference or fancy or retained the features of the original works. Examples from this popular novel has been chosen and used as illustrations in the following chapter.

VI. FIVE CATEGORIES OF CULTURE

Culture is a most complicated part of a society and difficult to analyze. This chapter will be based on the five categories of culture advocated by American translation theorist Eugene Nida (1997): ecology culture, material culture, social culture, religion culture and language culture.

A. Ecology Culture

In most cases the translator used domestication to translate the ecology culture, for example, he put "灵芝草", a very rare plant and very efficient in improving people's health and curing some diseases, directly into "my grass of miracles", which is perfectly good in conveying the effect on the reader of the original text and retains the aesthetic beauty of the figures of speech. "Miracle" expressed very well of the effect of hope and awe.

B. Material Culture

Goldblatt, as a native America and translator, obviously knows Chinese culture very well and tries to make it as easy to accept to the target reader as possible. For example, in the original text, there are several occasions in which the characters talk while *sitting on the threshold* (坐在门槛上). A threshold is a piece of wood or stone placed beneath a

door. There is a flat and smooth top surface. At the time and place the story happened, people put wide and high wooden threshold, which could be as high as an average person's knee, beneath the door of a house and it usually stays there whenever the door is closed or open. So it is very convenient for someone of the family to sit casually on and face the house when talking to another family member, who is probably cooking, because the cooking place is usually near the doorway. It is also handy to sit with the back to the house when talking to someone in the court. While the translator didn't translate it directly, he put it as "sitting in the doorway". Maybe he thought it not proper for someone to sit on a threshold, or the reader will be confused because they don't have this and therefore not act like this in their culture.

C. Social Culture

Social culture is a very large and complicated category, which can be further divided into many smaller categories. In this article the author will only involve four types as follows:

1. psychology culture

People from different cultures have different psychology culture and the same thing may be acceptable to this culture and not acceptable to another one. A typical example in this aspect is after the stiff birth of the twins, Mother was bleeding and it could not stop. It seemed that the three of them had no chance to live. Some Japanese soldiers came and killed Mother's father-in-law and her husband, as well as several other people who came to help the family. Afterward a Japanese doctor came to the room, saved the two stiff born babies and stopped the bleeding therefore three lives were saved. During the process a Japanese journalist was taking photographs, which appeared in Japanese newspapers back in the country the next day as an evidence to show the friendliness between Japan and China. Then the author wrote "the Japanese killed my father and grandfather, while they also saved the three lives of Mother and kids (日本人杀了我的爷爷和父亲, 但也救了我们母子三人的命①)". The author has explained that the doctor did this just as an act to show his people that they were kind and friendly to Chinese people. This sentence is ironical. Actually in the family, the grandparents and father were very cruel toward mother. If they didn't die and the grandmother didn't go out of her mind and found out the twins were not her grandchildren, it is hard to say whether they would let the mother and twins live. This event is a significant turning point in Mother's life, from then on she would not be bullied by her parents-in-law and became the master of the family. Therefore the sentence is a narration of the fact. It has double meanings and alright for Chinese readers to accept and understand.

However this sentence was omitted and not translated. The translator may think it not proper and dignified for someone some of whose family members have just been killed or for any one whose country has been ravaged and fellows killed to show gratitude, which in not what meant by the writer, toward the brutal invaders.

2. traditional culture

When Malory cursed Mother's uncle, Mother stopped him and said "他对我有大恩大德!" In Chinese culture, people are taught since they are young to have a thankful heart. If one is offered a little help when needed, he should multiply the repayment when he has the chance. This moral standard of being grateful from the bottom of a person's heart is admired as respectful and it is deep rooted in the Chinese culture.

The translation is "I'll forever be in his debt", which is domestication and an objective expression in English to show that one owes another something. It doesn't convey the deep subjective gratitude and feeling of sincere thankfulness of the speaker. This undertranslation is according to the reader's tradition and therefore acceptable for a popular novel.

3. behavioral culture

On the 100th day after I was born, Mother took me and my twin sister to see Malory, who was our father. I was biting a finger and letting out some blurring sound (我含着一根指头, 让嘴里发出呜呜哇哇的声音②), which although not hygienic, was a fact and very common among babies at the time and parents usually didn't try to stop them. This act is a comparison between the twins, with one well fed and developed and the other lack of nutrient and very weak and quiet. But the translator changed it into "Grabbing hold of one of his fingers, I began to gurgle③." The translation makes the baby boy more adorable, although not consistent with the context because it was the first time for priest Malory to see us, and it was not possible that he gave me a finger to grab or just gave me one while not gave my sister.

4. Folk culture

In this novel, "茂腔" is a very popular form of entertainment for local people, which is a type of opera, an art like Beijing Opera, although not as famous. Goldblatt substituted it with "cat's meow", probably because "茂" has similar pronunciation as "猫" in Chinese, and thus comes "猫腔", meaning sending out sounds like the cat's meow. The translator may substitute this on purpose, and he is probably to make this form of art sound interesting and fanny to local people. However, as an important folk art in north-eastern Shandong Province, this opera has large influence and a lot of fans in history and still does today. There is obvious culture loss here. The proper translation method should be the filling-up translation (literal translation with notes), and render it as "Mao Qiang Opera", in which way the original culture will be well saved.

D. Religion Culture

When Shangguan Lu invited Aunt Sun to the house to help her daughter-in-law with the delivery, Aunt Sun questioned whether she or Fan Three was asked to do the job, Shangguan Lu used the term "您这尊神" to express her respect and scrupulousness, as well as irony, making Aunt Sun sound more awesome and at the same time showing that

they are far from being friendly with each other. Goldblatt translated it as “such an eminent personage”, which altered the religious factor “神” into an ordinary term which explains the meaning of the original term. Although there is cultural loss here, it is easy to understand for the target reader.

Another similar example is “十八辈子祖宗” used as the object of a verb indicating about sex. In the original culture, this term is used by some vulgar men to insult someone else when they are very angry with this person. It is virtually a very vague usage, mainly to insult the person’s ancestors, which is worse and ruder than insult the person himself because Chinese people respect their ancestors and usually wouldn’t bear it when their ancestors are humiliated, not to mention their eighteen generations of ancestors. The translation is “the eighteen generations of women”. Here “women” is used to make the term specific and clear. The readers of translation may not be able to understand the significance of the word ancestor is to Chinese people. As a word to curse someone, it is not necessary for the translator to explain in detail to the readers. This translation could also have the effect of insulting and the impact understood by the readers from any culture. This is an example of alteration.

E. Language Culture

The title of the original work “丰乳肥臀” caused great dispute among people of all walks and was severely criticized when it was first published because at the time this language was vulgar, not popular and acceptable in orthodox Chinese culture, although things have greatly changed now and many people have get accustomed to hearing it and even talking about it. The literal translation “big breasts and wide hips” can be received easily in the target culture because this type of figure of a woman is highly admired and can be talked about openly and freely.

On the contrary, another term “小舅子” is also literally put into “my little uncle”. But here there is a misunderstanding of culture. In northern China, this term is used indirectly to refer to the youngest brother of the wife, while not an address to him face to face. This actually is a sort of euphemistical term to insult someone, meaning, usually jokingly, the speaker has taken advantage of the other person’s sister. So this term has nothing to do with “little uncle”. It is a typical example of mistranslation.

CONCLUSION OF THE EXAMPLES IN CHAPTER 6

Culture category	原文	译文	翻译方法	考虑因素	译文效果	对文化传播的影响	
Ecology culture	灵芝草	grass of miracles	alteration	reader aesthetic	good	positive	
Material culture	门槛	doorway	domestication Alteration	reader	good	loss	
Social culture	psychology	①	omission	reader		No loss	
	traditional	大恩大德	in his debt	Domestication undertranslation	reader	good	loss
	behavioral	②	③	Domestication alteration	reader	good	loss
	folk-custom	茂腔	cat’s meow	Domestication alteration	reader	unknown	loss
religion culture	神	an eminent personage	Domestication alteration	reader	good	loss	
	十八辈子 祖宗	the eighteen generations of women	Domestication alteration	reader	good	loss	
Language culture	丰乳肥臀	Big Breasts and Wide Hips	literal	reader	good	No loss	
	小舅子	My little uncle	literal	mistranslation	Not good	loss	

VII. CONCLUSION

From the analysis and the table above, we can see clearly that Goldblatt put the reader as the first priority and it comes before all the other factors. Most of his methods dealing with the translation of culture are to make his work readable and acceptable to the reader. To some degree he even omitted or rewrote the original text to make it suitable to the target readers. In this aspect Mo Yan completely respected his decision and gave him total right to make whatever alterations he liked. He tried to lessen the load of new information on his readers and make his work easy to read and understand. Although there is loss in details, it is more familiar and genial for the target language readers. This is the precondition of the globalization of the literature and culture.

When there is cultural difference, the translator should always be careful of not mistranslating, which can be difficult to avoid. There are two types of mistranslation: conscious and unconscious. To reduce the possibility of both types, the translator should know both cultures and languages well, and before the publication of the work, native speakers of the original language who are also good at the target language should be invited to proofread it, reducing mistranslation to the smallest degree.

To globalize the Chinese culture, the Chinese people should get rid of the feeling that their culture is the quintessence

and keep a positive attitude of going out first, without dwelling too much on the details of loss and gain and give more consideration to the reproduction of the aesthetic values of the Chinese literature in the big picture. If the difference does not influence the theme, domestication can be applied to lessen the reader's information load and make the literature easier to accept. When it does affect the expression of the theme, however, foreignization or literal translation would be more proper.

However, if the translator alters or modifies the original text and culture without restraint and only caters to target language readers and critics, merely to secure business success, he then betrays the original work and at the same time deceives the reader. Therefore this translation couldn't be regarded as good translation.

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