

# Howard Goldblatt's Three Treaties or Treatments of Translation

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**Abstract**—The paper is an introduction and discussion of Howard Goldblatt's three treaties or treatments of translations, i.e. 1. The translation is faithful to the original as an organic unity, 2. the translation is supposed to faithfully convey the images of the original, 3. Above all, he always takes the readers of his translation into first consideration. The first clause refers to Howard Goldblatt's rewriting of the original, to some extent, following western Poetics, which is loyal to the original as a whole; the second means to focus on rendering the original images to incarnate the original spirit, whose ultimate goal is to ensure the literariness of a translation; and the third one requires a translator, first of all, should put the readers of the translation in the first place, that is to say, reader-oriented, such as their aesthetic intent and interest, to arouse their resonance emotionally. By adopting the fore-mentioned principles, Howard Goldblatt's translations are recognized and acclaimed over the stage of world literature.

**Index Terms**—Howard Goldblatt, translating, organic unity, image, reader-oriented

## I. INTRODUCTION

How do China's literary classics go to global stage of world literature and become the commonly shared fortune by literary enthusiasts over the world? It is the ultimate goal for translators of China's classics, who have been laboriously questing for all the time? Of course, the translation of the classics toward overseas world is far from satisfaction, either in quantity or quality, compared with the works absorbed or introduced to China from the overseas world, we translators have to admit that it is an embarrassing fact. In the last century, there are more foreign translators than native Chinese, who are devoted to translating the classics to the world. And now, it is a different story about the translation of the classics. Among them, there are both Chinese and foreigners to contribute to it. Even so, the introduction and translation of modern and contemporary classics of China need more contributors. Faced with the dilemma, we have to say the work to translate and introduce the China's literary classics is a toil and trouble mentally and physically. However, in 2012, a piece of good news, which Mo Yan was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, spread over the world. That is to say, modern and contemporary literature of China is recognized and has gained its foothold in the international arena of literature.

Obviously, Mo Yan's award indicates that his translators are amazing and earth-breaking. For among the committee of Nobel Prize for Literature, nobody but Goran Malmqvist can understand Chinese, they can only study and judge a writer according to corresponding translations. No wonder, there is a rising voice that the translators are the winners hiding behind the Prize indeed. And, Howard Goldblatt, an American translator of Mo Yan, is regarded as the most outstanding and influential, and has kept the longest cooperation with Mo Yan. He began to pay attention to Mo Yan in 1985, and co-working in 1988, translating Mo's work into English since 1993, such as *Red Sorghum: A Novel of China*. Up to now, he has translated 10 of Mo Yan's works, totaling to 50 at least. Not only has he had large output of translation, but also spread his popularity among readers at home and abroad. Even some of his translations are adopted by other fellow translators, and used as chief sources in translating Mo Yan. His three translations, *Red Sorghum: A Novel of China*, *The Garlic Ballads*, *Life and Death Are Wearing Me out*, are finally taken as samples to understand and judge Mo Yan by the committee members of Nobel Prize for Literature; it is not only a fact, but a fame or fortune to Howard Goldblatt. Of course, also, there are other versions of translations in various languages, which help Mo Yan to gain the Prize, but, needless to say, Howard Goldblatt is the greatest contributor, who helps Mo Yan's successful approach to the world, global acclaim from fellow writers, and wide spread of China's modern and contemporary literature. We have no doubt to admire Howard Goldblatt's translations, but can't refrain from asking ourselves, what special are there in his translations? Motivated by the question, we intend to explore it in detail.

## II. ORGANIC UNITY

Broadly speaking, we hold that the treaty or treat in Howard Goldblatt's translation, first and foremost, is characterized by organic unity as a whole. The organic unity refers to that, Howard Goldblatt always takes his

translation as an organic unity, which he views the structure of the translation as a whole to secure the structural faith of the translation to the original. His kind of faith is to adjust the translation's structure, and to make the translation be loyal to the original as a whole, but not the traditional loyalty or equivalence of word-for-word. We may take *Red Sorghum: A Novel of China* as an example to illustrate. From the structures of both the translation and the original to consider, we find that there are giant gaps between the two. The original is composed of 9 chapters, which each chapter has no topic. There is only one title "Red Sorghum" capitalized from Chapter 1 to Chapter 9 throughout the original. As to the translation, *Red Sorghum: A Novel of China*, it consists of 5 chapters, in which each chapter has a sub-topic of its own; they are listed as the subsequent, Chapter 1 Red Sorghum, Chapter 2 Sorghum Wine, Chapter 3 Dog Ways, Chapter 4 Sorghum Funeral, and Chapter 5 Strange Death. Apart from the curtailment and adjustment of Chapters, Howard Goldblatt has made combinations, changes, revisions and additions to some of the original chapters. He deleted some grotesque narration, which seems odd to some extent at one's first glance, cut off the length of Chapter 4, and rewrote the end of the original, etc. Though the translation of *Red Sorghum: A Novel of China* has changed much here and there, compared with the original, we readers of the translation can hardly feel the changes and gaps. On the contrary, we think that the translation is structurally loyal to the original; furthermore, the plots of the translation read smoother, the whole structure links more closely to each chapter, than the original ones. From the stance of the translation, the structure and thesis are more outstanding at first reading, the content more distinctive. Thus, the translation is objectively easier for those interested to make a final choice to buy. Here, the translator has not tried his great efforts to be faithful to word, clause, and paragraph, but structurally faithful to the text, i.e. a kind of textual loyalty. Robert de Beaugrande, an American linguist, has claimed that, the basic unit in translating is not word, not single clause, but text, which has solved the problem of the unit in translating; it is the text that are accepted as the unit to represent the meaning, theme and style of the original. (Wang, 2015) What Howard Goldblatt has dedicated himself to translating is identified with Beaugrande's theory. And then, anyone, who is keen to him, wants to know why he makes the changes. There are two possible reasons. First, what he made is to compose a better structure of the translation; second, he has to give in to readers' aesthetic intent and interest. The former refers to Howard Goldblatt attaches primary importance to whole structure of the translation. As to what are the rule and regulation to judge the structure are literariness, aesthetics and Poetics. If there is something impairing the literariness, absolutely, he would cut, curtail or rewrite it. Let's take *Red Sorghum: A Novel of China* as an instance, in Howard's eyes, the flashbacks, reminiscences and reviews in the original would hold up the plot fluency if he conveyed them in translation; besides that, there are also sub-plots conflicting against the main one, expressing the theme or delineating the characters loosely or insignificantly; and the end of the original would not be perfect, if it were evaluated by the western Poetics or paradigm. The entire phenomenon above listed are subjected to his changes; and that's why the translation is apparently different from the original. So far as to the rewriting or revision, Howard had remarks about them, "...without careful selections, some novelists have composed stories with raw materials. He has to check and correct his errors for all, but he is not always qualified to be an editor. Whoever is a literary talent or a renowned writer, he or she can't see his or her works in a fair and square way. Then, another pair of eyes is necessary, which can both find self-conflicting angle and roughly provide a new point of view. Habitually, an editor in China's press isn't entrusted the right to revise a piece of work, for which leaves the heavy hard load with translators or foreign editors." (Goldblatt, 2011, p.248) That is to say, in his eyes, some novels are imperfect with defects, which are not able to meet the needs of the western Poetics or literariness. He said he just acts as an editor. Surely, we find out either his deletion or change is a sort of western paradigm in the Poetics and literariness-oriented; the structural unity of his translation merely follows the suit of the Poetics. So, till here, we probably have better understanding of Howard's changes in translations. If we are familiar to Jean Piaget, a Swiss Psychologist, his claim of structure, i.e. every structure has a unity, the ability to shift and adjust to adopt itself, is a kind of good theory to help illustrate Howard. The unity refers to there are dynamic, organic connections among various parts in a structure as a whole; shift means the internal parts can be changed or moved to construct the structure; the last means the structure can adjust itself to adopt to the other, the structure has a set of self-regulations independent of other structure. (Zhu, 2009) So the translation with the changes can regulate itself in a new reader group dynamically, independently.

### III. IMAGERY

The second treaty or treatment in Howard is to retain and render the original imagery faithfully. To fulfill the purpose efficiently, Howard Goldblatt has done bunch of works; among them there are four dimensions to be attentively focused on. 1. Name-translating, especially these names which indicate character's nature and plot's development, such as characters or places with something unique and projecting; 2. Setting-rendering, it refers to keep the original background faithfully; 3.Character image-rendering, it means to convey the character image vividly; 4. Rhyme or rhythm rendering, it refers to retain or represent the original beauty in acoustic sense. Broadly speaking, the imagery is a kind of mental picture occurring to a reader's mind in text-reading;(Zhang, 2012) strictly, it covers those uses of language in a literary work that evoke sense-impressions by literal or figurative reference to perceptible or concrete objects, scenes, actions, or states, as distinct from the language of abstract argument or exposition.(Baldic, 2000) And so, the image is an essential element to a literary text; without it, the text loses its ground to construct. In a way, the literary image is a rule to judge a piece of work. If the work is composed of life-like image, we say it's a great work, otherwise

it's not. Hence, a writer at all times and in all lands, highly stresses the importance of the imagery. Here, we find that Howard is no exceptional at all in translation as well, in which he tries to make them tangible, visible and discernible, including the imagery, setting, and characterization, as the original has done them well. In other words, with the similar sense in reading the original, his translations have rendered all types of imagery efficiently. The imagery in his renditions are performed successfully in the above-mentioned four aspects.

It's known to us that a character's name is more like the key touch in paint that brings a character to life, and a place name is like the paint clouds, which can set off the moon. That is to say, the name in literature is a big star of the players as well; so name-rendering is no small work at least. Fu Lei, a Chinese master of translation, once remarked, "Generally speaking, we can judge a translator is a new or old hand at translating from his rendering of character name or place name. In fact, the translation of proper term is a key link of literary translation....It is debatable for us that the literary terms should be turned into the same suit regardless of the atmosphere created and covered over the background, characterization and the portrayal of a role's image, and something significant alike." (Fu, 2006, p.96) Other translators probably will refute that what Fu Lei is talking about refers to the translation from foreign works into Chinese; but clearly, vice versa from Chinese into foreign works. Here are good examples of name-rendering given by Howard in *Red Sorghum: A Novel of China*.

Name	Translation	Remarks
罗汉大叔	Uncle Arhat	The translation represents a broad-minded, enduring character.
花脖子	Spotted Neck	The translation offers a ugly enough, tyrant rascal with ferocious feature..
曹梦九	Nine Dreams Cao	The translation is a good portrayal of very calculating image with wisdom.
曹二鞋底	Shoe Sole Cao the Second	Nine Dreams Cao's nickname stands out his eccentric instrument of torture--shoe sole.
美丽	Beauty	The translation is a sketch of charming wanton woman.
单五猴	Five Monkeys Shan	The translation is an outline of sketch of a shrewd fellow with a bag of bones.
余大牙	Big Tooth Yu	The translation offers a ugly, brutal bandit.
小白羊	Little White Lamb	The translation is a sketch of an attractive, timid, merry maiden
刘大号	Bugler Liu	The translation stands out a brave role's post and physique.
墨水河	The Black Water River	The translation stands out the feature of the River--background.
东北高密乡	Northeast Gaomi Township	The translation is a clear mark of the setting--the main battle field--and its size.

At first glance over the table, we can see the corresponding rendering of the names is literal translation, which shares with the original the same or similar mode of the signifier; the images and the nature of characters are both rendered and depicted fully, the features of the setting as well. (Chen, 2005) The mode is a conducive to a reader to get the images of the characters. Howard Goldblatt is a path-finder and his mode confirmed us that he is successful in name-rendering for he has retained the literariness to the most.

Apart from the full retain of the literariness in name-rendering, Howard Goldblatt has done a very admirable job in setting translation as well, which has vividly reproduced pictures and concrete images as the original. Here is the evidence.

Eg. 1 父亲知道，墨水河底淤泥乌黑发亮，柔软得像油脂一样。河边潮湿的滩涂上，丛生着灰绿色的芦苇和鹅绿色车前草，还有贴地爬生的野葛蔓，支支直立的接骨草。（《红高粱家族》，p.5）

*He knew that the muddy riverbed was black and shiny, and was spongy as soft tallow, and that the banks were covered with pale-green reeds and plantain the colour of goose-down; coiling vines and stiff bones grass hugged the muddy ground, which was crisscrossed with tracks of skittering crabs. (Red Sorghum: A Novel of China, p.41 )*

Here there are various clear images in the translation, in which a reader feels the sense of the original images. For instance, visual images are rich colors like "black and shiny, pale-green, the color of goose-down", sensory image like "spongy as soft", dynamic images like "covered, coiling, hugged, crisscrossed, skittering"; besides there are concrete clear substance like "muddy riverbed, tallow, reeds and plantain, vines, grass, tracks". By making use of all the above-listed means, the translation has conveyed the setting images faithfully.

It is known to us that characterization is the most challengeable in creating a work. A writer must be familiar with the character, i.e. typical speech, action, to represent the life-like image. However, Howard's translation is just equivalent to the original in sense and in effect to characterize. Let us see the subsequent.

E.g.2 咪咪咪咪，未曾开言道，先学小猫叫。

俺娘说，老虎满嘴胡须，其中一根最长的，是宝。谁要是得了这根宝须，就能看到人的本相。娘说，世上的人，都是畜生投胎转世。谁如果得了宝须，在他眼里，就没有人啦。大街上，小巷里，酒馆里，澡堂里，都是牛呀，狗啦什么的。咪咪咪咪。娘说，有那么一个人，闯关东时，打死一只老虎，得了一件宝须.....（《檀香刑》，p.73）

The excerpt in Chinese is a discourse in the original, addressed by Zhao Jia, Junior, who is the son of Zhao Jia, an executioner in Qing Dynasty (1616-1911). When he got to know the story of tiger's whisker, he expected to get a whisker on a tiger so earnestly that he should have had one in his dream to see clearly the nature of human being. In the extract there is an expression "娘说(niang shuo)"---which means my mummy said---quoted for three times; the modes of Zhao Jia, the Junior's discourse, denotes he always relies on his mom and is childish though he is grown-up; and his

short, naive, simple dictions show he is mentally simplistic, for all which he tells us indicates he has very low IQ of a stupid boy. By reading the description, the original offers us an image of strong but stupid character life-like. And, we may wonder that, whether the translation is also a good equivalent one to the original to represent the stupidity as well. Here is the translation in the following.

*Meow, Meow, I learned how to sound like a cat before I could talk. My niang said that the longest whisker on a tiger is precious, and anyone who owns one can carry it on his body and see a person's true form. All living humans, she said, are reincarnations of animals. If a person gets one of those precious whiskers, what he sees are oxen, horses, dogs, cats, and the like. Meow Meow. There was once a man, Niang said, who traveled east of the Shanhai Pass where he killed a tiger to get one of those whiskers.*

(*Sandalwood Death*, p.56)

Let's make a contrast and comparison between the translation and the original. First, both share similar sentences. The source text has 8 sentences, the expression “娘说(niang shuo)” 3 times; Correspondingly, the translation has 6 sentences, and “My niang said” twice and one “she said”; the original sentences are relatively longer than those of the translation, for which are subjected to English grammar and usage. Second, both have similar tone and way of story-telling; it is easy for an English speaker to distinguish from the sentence pattern “There was once a man...who”. Furthermore, Howard adopted literal rendering of “Niang”, i.e. transliteration, to keep the original style, which has not affected or impeded upon a reader's understanding in the least. And onomatopoeic words “*Meow, Meow*” are vivid imitations of a cat's sounding, too. In short, we find that the sentence constructions, figures of speech, the way of story-telling in the translation are faithful to the original like an organic unity as whole; not only are the contents conveyed accurately but also the image of the character.

The most challengeable work to keep the literariness, for a translator, is how to render the beauty of the original rhythms, because two different language systems have distinctive rhyme. But, if he can convey the rhythmic beauty, his work is bound to shine the similar beauty as the original. Let's see how Howard has tried his best efforts to make it.

E.g. 3 太阳一出红彤彤，（好似大火烧天冬）胶州湾发来了德国的兵。（都是红毛绿眼睛）庄稼地里修铁路，扒了俺祖先的老坟茔。（真真把人气煞也！）俺爹领人去抗德，咕咚咚的大炮放连声。（震得耳朵聋）但只见，仇人相见眼睛红，刀砍斧劈叉子捅。血仗打了一天整，遍地的死人数不清。（吓煞奴家也！）到后来，俺爹爹被抓进南牢，俺爹爹给他上了檀香刑。（俺的个亲爹呀！）——猫腔《檀香刑·大悲调》（《檀香刑》，p.4）

The above-quoted Chinese extract is a short piece of *maoqiang*, a special opera in Gaomi County Shandong Province. Here are the song characters of the unique opera. There are rhymed characters, such as “彤(tong)—东(dong)—聋(long)—红(hong)—捅(tong)”, “兵(bing)—睛(jing)—茔(ying)—清(qing)—刑(xing)” “声(sheng)—整(zheng)”, so the original is pretty beautiful with the rhymed characters and rhythms. And so, the key point to render the piece is how to make sure the similar rhymed effect, which is a challenge to every translator, particularly between Chinese and English. We know that there are 23 rhymed syllables in English, less than 106 equivalents in Chinese. Therefore, it is almost an impossible work to preserve the original rhythmic beauty. To our amazement, Howard has done it well. The following translation is good evidence.

*The sun rose, a bright red ball (the east sky a flaming pall), from Qingdao a contingent looms. (Red hair, green eyes.) To build a rail line they defiled our ancestral tombs. (The people are up in arms!) My dieh led the resistance against the invaders, who responded with cannon booms.(A deafening noise.) Enemies met, anger boiled red in their eyes. Swords chopped, axes hewed, spears jabbed. The bloody battle lasted all day, leaving corpses and deathly fumes. (I was scared witless!) In the end, my dieh was taken to South Prison, where my gongdieh's sandalwood death sealed his doom. (My dieh, who gave me life!)------Maoqiang, Sandalwood Death, A mourning aria*

(*Sandalwood Death*, p. 3)

In the above rendition there are rhythmic words, like “ball—pall”, “looms—tombs—booms—doom”, besides that, “chopped, hewed, jabbed” share the same consonant /id/, which also produce a kind of beauty of unity. As a whole, the rendition is well done enough to convey the meaning, but also rhymed cleverly with rhythm, which can be regarded as a tie with the original both in meaning and in rhythm, if we say it is a game between the original and the translation. As to the problem to render the rhyme, Howard Goldblatt (2013) remarked, “Chinese rhyme is easier than English. For example, in China's drama-performing, almost every line, short or long, is rhymed. In the course of my rendering the tunes of dramas, to find right rhymed words, I am really racked my brains and exhausted all my efforts to retain the essential element of the original meaning.” (p.9) The remark clearly indicates the rhyme-rendering is harsh hard indeed. What Howard made in the rhyme-rendering is a good lesson for fellow translators to follow, i.e. he has to have a great number of rhymed words first, and then he tries to rhyme on the condition of conveying the original meaning. To fulfill the goal, he may add some words, which just help add the fluency and beauty of the translation.

In a word, Howard Goldblatt concentrates on continuing the original signifying, sentence style, rhyme and rhetoric strategies to keep the original image.

#### IV. READER-ORIENTEDNESS

As to the reader-orientedness, it refers to that Howard's translation is directed by his readers, i.e. the readers' aesthetics is a primary dimension for him to fit or suit. If anything in the original doesn't meet the aesthetics, he would

rewrite or revise it. Like *The Garlic Ballads*, *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, *Wolf Totem*, Howard made revisions in them. Huijun Sun, professor of Howard Goldblatt studies, explains about the revisions, “Howard made some adjustments and revisions in translating Mo Yan because he knows more about his readers’ intent and aesthetics than Mo Yan does, and is clear to represent Mo’s novels to attract the readers.”(Sun, 2016, p.40)Sun’s remarks help us learn more about Howard’s revisions. And Howard Goldblatt has made his ideas clear as well, “What the most significant to a translation is worthy of its readers, but not the author.”(Goldblatt, 2009, p.220) In short, his organic unity in translation is reader-oriented. For he knows it well, his translation would be meaningless without readers’ recognition. These remarks partially justify his popularity among the western readers, response and echoes. From the reader-oriented concept, we see Howard is different from traditional translators; for he thinks that the translation is supposed to face its readers first, is a cross-cultural communication. Because, he knows that, if no reader is willing to read his works, his translation will have no chance to communicate with others over the world, no chance to influence upon them at all. Let alone spreading China’s culture among them. Thus, not only has he exhausted his wits and wisdom to render the original, but also paid great attention to the readers’ interests. First, what he picks up to translate is what he and readers like most. (Sun, 2016) Second, his rewriting is based on what the western Poetics demands; the redundant content, loosen plot and unnecessary image are cut or revised in translation. For example, *The Garlic Ballads*, *Turbulence*, *Red Sorghum: A Novel of China*, *Wolf Totem*, *Life and Death Are Wearing Me out*, *Three Sisters*, are made changes in respective translation. What’s more, the translations are even bestowed with prizes over the world. His practice of translation is the best approval of his theory; for him, the translation, which is accepted only by readers, is good. And it reminds us that the traditional idea of translation, source-text-centered or author-centered, is a sort of incomplete. At present, we translators of China can learn something from Howard’s treatments or treaties in spreading China’s culture to foreign nations.

#### V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

What Howard Goldblatt gives us is versatile. The organic unity as whole to be faithful to the original, refers to translating is a rewriting or creating based on the original; retaining the image is to keep the original image, which is essential to literature, and “to arouse the reader’s emotional resonance.” (Goldblatt, 2016, p.14) Actually, the resonance is an echo to what Walt Benjamin has remarked, “the sympathy of the source text and the target text”; (Cheng, 2005) his reader-orientedness stresses that translation is a crossing cultural communication, as Howard remarked, “a translator is creating a communication among foreigners in his own tongue; when he sets up fancy and fantasy, he should not destroy and disrupt the words or sentences, which are easy for readers to accept, otherwise the imagination will be shattered easily as well. ” (Goldblatt, 2016, p.14)According to him, a translator is taking important responsibilities on his shoulders among global communication and contact of cultures, “he is a disseminator, an interpreter, a key link of the chain of international contacts.” (Goldblatt, 2016, p.15) Therefore, if we want to tell China’s stories to the world, to spread China’s great culture to benefit the world, we must follow the aesthetics, discursive modes of the others first, only by doing so can China’s classics be accepted by the others over the world and go to global.

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