

Research on Novel's Overseas Translation Model and Strategy: A Case Study of the English Translation of Red Sorghum Family

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Abstract: In the process of globalization, the overseas translation of Chinese literary works is imperative to promote excellent culture to the world and show the charm of Chinese culture. At present, Chinese literature enjoys great popularity in the world. Nevertheless, except Mo Yan's novels that have been successful in translation, other excellent Chinese literary works have not been known because of various factors. It is undeniable that the successful translation and communication of Mo Yan's novel results from a combination of factors. This paper attempts to comprehensively consider the relationship between the translator, the aesthetic of the text from the aspects of accuracy, artistry, beauty reconstruction as well as literary circulation to explore the unique connotation presented by the English translation of Red Sorghum Family.

Keywords: Chinese Literature; Literary Works; Overseas Translation; Red Sorghum Family.

1. Introduction

Red Sorghum Family is a classic work written by Mo Yan, the characters created are vivid and respectable, and the profound literary charm is even more memorable. Gaomi, a land full of dreams and deep feelings, with many heroes passionately release their unruly souls. Hard times cannot strike down the vigorous life, and the spirit of breaking through the feudalism is also indispensable (Wang Xueqian, 2022: 87) [1]. Under the upsurge of Chinese culture's going out, the research ideas of many scholars have also opened. It is no longer limited to explore the art of the translator by choosing the words and sentences from a cultural or linguistic perspective, but introduces the concept of promoting Chinese culture to the world and gradually becoming a mainstream cultural system.

Among many literary works in China, Red Sorghum Family is the most numerous and influential work that has been translated overseas currently. The reason why it can successfully enter the English-speaking world is that Ge Haowen's translation plays an important role, and the effect of other factors in translation should not be underestimated. The successful translation and communication of Red Sorghum Family has certain reference value for the dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature, and also makes the Chinese people have high hopes for Chinese culture to go global. Through the English translation of Red Sorghum Family, this paper analyzes the factors of successful spreading Mo Yan's works and the strategic choices of translator Ge Haowen, hoping to advance the dissemination of other Chinese novels to the outside world.

2. Principles of Translation

Chinese literary works are immersed in China's rich cultural heritage and have a strong artistic attraction. However, these are not enough to make the national culture shine internationally, and it is necessary to keep up with the pace of the times and add vitality to the work through translation.

Meanwhile, the external translation of literary works is not only the embodiment of Chinese culture's charm, but also the reflection of the country's image. In order to better interpret the essence of Chinese culture to the West, the following principles must be observed.

2.1. Accuracy

Accuracy is the foundation of literary translation and the moral literacy that translators need to follow. In the translation of literary works, accuracy is not only reflected in words and sentence patterns, but also in the description of events, which means translator cannot casually change or fabricate anything that is inconsistent with the work itself. After reading Red Sorghum Family, Gao Mi's simple customs, human feelings as well as many vivid characters such as Yu Zhanao, Dai Fenglian, and Luo Han are showing in the writing. Behind the good things is the brutal aggression of the enemy, and many details are vividly displayed in the novel. In fact, no matter how skillful the translators are, foreigners will never fully understand Chinese works, because they have not experienced the Cultural Revolution, the War of Resistance Against Japan, or the reform and opening up policies of recent years (Goldblatt, 2004: 219) [2]. In order to convey relevant information to the audience more accurately, Ge Haowen translated the “鬼子” into “Jap”, because “鬼子” is a unique term given by China to the Japanese aggressors. Moreover, the translation of “ghost” would confuse Western audiences, and “Jap” can faithfully reveal the despicable behavior of the enemy's invasion.

2.2. Artistry

Unique language often forms a distinctive writing style, which is an important factor that cannot be ignored in literary translation. With the purpose of conveying the artistic conception of the original work in another language, readers can be inspired, moved and get a sense of beauty when reading the translation as reading the original work. Certainly, the artistic reproduction of the original text mainly depends on the translator's bilingual ability and the grasp of cultural

imagery. In this case, the role of the translator cannot be overemphasized (Hu Anjiang, 2010: 6) [3]. Stiff translation will make Western readers feel obscure. In order to make readers better feel the charm of novel, Ge Haowen deeply studied the background, emotions and ideas contained in the work, strives to overcome the differences between two languages, and make the translation consist with the original in language and art.

Example: 河里的水流到灯影里, 黄得像熟透的杏子一样可爱, 但可爱一霎霎, 就流过去了, 黑暗中的河水倒映着一天星斗。

Translation: When water flowed into the halo of light, it was the cordial yellow of an overripe apricot. In the surrounding darkness the water reflected a starry sky.

This sentence delicately interprets the dynamic and vibrant beauty of things, and “黄得像熟透的杏子一样可爱” uses the rhetoric of metaphor, which makes the original text seem ingenious and innovative. Literature pursues aesthetic feeling beauty, so sentences always contain similes or metaphors. However, some metaphorical objects are difficult to find appropriate expressions in English, and foreign readers are not familiar with Chinese culture, so literal translation at the word level will make readers confused. Therefore, the original text can be reproduced by paraphrasing on the basis of being as faithful to the original text as possible, and Ge Haowen finally chose to translate this into “it was the cordial yellow of an overripe apricot”. In addition, in order to make words concise and natural, translators should delete expressions that have no substantive meaning in the original text when translating, and just need to translate specific objects. For example, the translation of “可爱一霎霎, 就流过去了” is not reflected in the translated text, only to use “flowed into” to express the state of river.

3. Recreation: The Reconstruction of Beauty

3.1. Translation of Dialects

As we all know, different countries have different cultural, backgrounds, customs and ideological concepts. The translation of Chinese literary works is not only the transformation between text 's content, but also the exchange of two countries' cultures. Red Sorghum Family combines a large number of regional elements such as dialects and customs, making it difficult to translate them into English (He Li, 2014: 270) [4]. Therefore, in order to eliminate the barriers of understanding caused by cultural differences, dialects are particularly important in the translation. Nowadays, many translators directly translate dialects according to the literal meaning of the translation, completely regardless of the difference in context, so it is a challenge to express the uniqueness of the dialect, let alone the original humorous meaning of the dialect. Mo Yan mostly uses Shandong dialect, which is reflected in vocabulary (Feng Quangong, 2019: 207)[5]. Ge Haowen synthesized local characteristics to produce authentic translations on the basis of fully understanding the meaning of dialects and spares no efforts to allow Western readers to better experience customs of different regions.

Example: 哑巴是余司令的老朋友, 一同在高粱地里吃过“抻饼”的草莽英雄。

Translation: Mute was one of Commander Yu's old bandit friends, a greenwood hero who had eaten fistcakes in the

sorghum fields.

“抻饼”is a unique delicacy in Gaomi that requires both hands to squeeze into the mouth when ate, therefore, local people in Gaomi call it “抻饼”. Many Chinese readers only learned about this delicacy after being exposed to Mo Yan's work. However, if “抻饼” is not translated well, foreign readers who are not familiar with Gaomi's unique cuisine will feel confused. There is no relevant translation of the word “抻饼” in the dictionary, and then Ge Haowen creatively translated it into “fist cakes” by combining the translation strategy of foreignization after carefully considering the characteristics of “抻饼” and the receptivity of Western readers. Firstly, translating “饼” into “cakes” makes readers understand that “抻饼” is a type of food like cake. Secondly, “fist” has the meaning of“拳头”、“紧握”, which can be used to contrast with the brave and bold image displayed by heroes.

3.2. Translation of Four-word Phrases

With the characteristic of concise, four-word phrases are deeply loved by literary authors and increasingly applied. Mo Yan's Red Sorghum Family presents a large number of four-word phrases especially when depicting the scenery of Shandong. The beauty of the subdued voice not only makes the translation perfect, but also carries the gorgeous Chinese character culture of the Chinese nation. Inevitably, the translation of four- word phrase is a difficulty that requires translator devoting time to thinking, and its translation strategy is mainly the merger method and split method.

3.2.1. Merger Method

Chinese emphasizes conjunction and the structure is loose, so translator needs to appropriately adopt the merger method in order to better interpret the literary color of the original text, which mainly refers to use conjunctions, participles, preposition and attributive clauses to merge two or more sentences into one long sentence according to the concise and condensed language style of English.

Example: 月亮般的车轮飞速旋转, 黄土飞腾。

Translation: The moon-shaped tiers spun so fast they sent clouds of yellow dust soaring into the air.

The four-word phrases in the original text are “飞速旋转” and “黄土飞腾”, these two words have the sequential order, it is precisely because of the rotation of the wheel that the road appears dusty. For the translation of these two four-word phrases, Ge Haowen translated them into a long sentence through the merger method, which not only effectively avoided the occurrence of complicated sentence patterns and lengthy situations, but also made the translation more authentic.

3.2.2. Split Method

Split method is another concept corresponding to the merger method. Normally, most of the neat, rhythmic four-word phrases in Chinese become different lengths and hierarchies in English. If compulsively make the form consistent with the original form, it will lead the translations become loose and bulky that not conforms to the habits of expression. In this case, the original sentence needs to be recombined to produce a satisfactory translation by splitting.

Example: 高粱高密辉煌, 高粱凄婉可人, 高粱爱情激荡。

Translation: Tall and dense, it reeked of glory; cold and graceful, it promised enchantment; passionate and loving, it was tumultuous.

Original sentence uses the rhetorical device of parallelism, which is mainly reflected in “sorghum... sorghum...”. This sentence pattern uses “it” to describe “sorghum”, “sorghum” can be used as a typical scene in this novel, symbolizing the Gaomi people's brave and unyielding vitality and national spirit. If it is directly translated into three short sentences according to the sentence pattern of the original text, the language will lack momentum, so Ge Haowen uses the splitting method to translate. “Sorghum” as the subject in all three places, which not only reflects the order and consistent sentence structure of the original text, but also reveals the solemn emotion.

3.3. Readers' Acceptance

Cultural differences between China and the West are inevitable, which makes translators shift their focus to readers' consciousness. Fundamentally, translation is a communicative process, and the ultimate communicator is the reader, so reader's awareness should run through the translation process (Li Wei, 2001: 51) [6]. The translation of literary works, especially novels with local characteristics, if just blindly adopt the method of literal translation, it will make the whole text appear blunt and monotonous, and translator can't obtain the correct original information. If there are no readers, what is the value of literary works? In view of the difficulties in translation, translators should not be bound by limited translation thinking. Everything needs to be innovative and translation is no exception, so complicated translation problems require translators to respond flexibly and realistically. Goldblatt is using his work to explain what is a good literary translation (Jia yanqin, 2016: 227)[7]. With the purpose of making the translation more acceptable to Western readers, Ge Haowen incorporated his unique insights on the basis of translation strategies such as addition, deletion, omission and rewriting.

Example: 父亲对我说过, 任副官八成是个共产党, 除了共产党里, 很难找到这样的纯种好汉。

Translation: Father told me that Adjutant Ren was a rarity, a true hero.

This sentence uses the translation strategy of paraphrasing. Actually, the word “共产党” is not translated, because in addition to expressing that Ren's adjutant is a Communist Party, the author also highlights the precious and rare heroic image of the character. From the perspective of politics, “共产党” is an important political party in China, and it is necessary to have certain political considerations when translating to foreign countries. Moreover, Ge Haowen does not translate “很难找到” into “hard to find”, but uses the word “rarity” instead. As a special language, English is always clear and unnecessarily lengthy parts should be appropriately cut or rewrite. Overall, the translation of this sentence gives people a feeling of brevity and power.

3.4. Comprehension of Emotional Connotation

Literary works contain the subjective emotions of the author, and the expression of such emotions is indirectly conveyed through language. If translators want to impress readers through translation, they must read the original text deeply and ponder it repeatedly, so as to have a strong emotional resonance with the author. If they detach from the original text and cultural background, and just blindly translate sentence by sentence, then the translation will be empty and superficial. Ge Haowen is a famous American

sinologist who has not experienced the heroic resistance of the characters in the novel, nor has he experienced the rich and simple customs of Shandong. Therefore, in order to reproduce the emotional connotation of the work, he deeply realized the charm of the original work and felt the delicate emotions of the characters in the novel.

Example: 父亲第一次发现, 两行泪水, 从爷爷坚硬的脸上流下来。

Translation: For the first time in his life, father noticed two trickles of tears slipping down Granddad's hardened face.

This sentence is the description of Yu Zhanao's demeanor by author after the death of grandma Dai Fenglian. Yu Zhanao was a hero who dared to resist Japan and had national righteousness; however, he will also show his vulnerable side like ordinary people when his lover dies, and such an expression makes people feel regret and sympathy. The biggest difficulty in translation is how to convey this sadness to Western readers, and the “眼泪流下来” and “坚硬的脸” in the original text are translated by Ge Haowen as “two trickles of tears slipping down” and “hardened face” respectively, which means “tears flowing slowly” and use the state of progress to enrich the emotions. In addition, “in his life” means that in the years since his father was young to the present. Although grandpa Yu Zhanao has experienced many tribulations, these have not made him cry strongly, which reflects the depth of pain that grandma's death brought to him.

4. Circulation Channels of Novels

4.1. Sponsorship of Foreign Universities

The reason why Mo Yan's novels can shine internationally is first of all the unique style and profound cultural heritage of the novel itself, which left a deep impression on Ge Haowen. Out of love for Red Sorghum Family, Ge Haowen translated it into English, and sent a trial translation of Red Sorghum Family to the publisher in 1993, which was the beginning of Mo Yan's works to enter the English-speaking market. In 1994, Penguin Publishing House in New York came out this book with a circulation of more than 20,000 copies, which is by far the widest distribution of Mo Yan's novel in the United States (Liu Guozhi, 2022: 59) [8]. In addition, with its own literary value, the publishing houses of some famous foreign universities also become an important driving force for the external propaganda of Mo Yan's novels, and the English translation of Red Sorghum Family has been circulated to foreign universities and listed as teaching textbooks. Compared with the single introduction of Chinese readers in oral form, the explanations of works by foreign university teachers can produce better communication effects because they will always use richer teaching methods and more acceptable explanations for the audience. While arousing students' interest in reading, more and more literary researchers are committed to deeply digging into the connotation and value contained in the novel.

4.2. Literary Critics

With the popularization of information technology, the sponsorship of literary critics plays an increasingly important role in the circulation of Mo Yan's works. On the world's largest online reading website good reads, it was found that some readers will leave messages under the platform after reading the novel, and many literary critics will give in-depth answers to certain views, and even the wonderful comments of authoritative critics will make many literary lovers who

have not read the original work eager to try. In case of the complex and diverse literary market and the lack of effective understanding of Chinese literature, literary critics rely on their rich knowledge to build a bridge of cultural exchange between novels and readers, so that readers can better understand the emotions and charm of novels. It can be seen that the sponsorship of publishing houses and literary critics not only promote the prosperity of the literary market, but also improves Chinese literature to better reach the world.

5. Summary

The successful translation of literary works is not achieved overnight, and the aesthetic differences between Chinese and Western readers make it essential for translators to devote a lot of time and energy to translation. The quality of the translation greatly affects the external communication of Chinese culture, only with quality of the translation as the mainstay, supplemented by the communication channels and media, and then the combination of various factors can produce the best effect of communication. Careful scrutiny of language, art and emotion can enhance the accuracy and readability of translation. The foreign translation of Chinese literary works will surely find the right way to make more Chinese works shine on the international stage.

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