

On Translator's Subjectivity as Exemplified in the Translation of *Shengsi pilao* by Howard Goldblatt

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Abstract: Mo Yan's novels are rooted in ancient Chinese civilization. With rich imagination and unique writing styles, he depicts in them what has happened in the rural and urban areas of China. That he became the first Chinese Nobel Prize winner was largely due to the English translation of his works by Howard Goldblatt, an American translator. This paper aims to analyze H. Goldblatt's subjectivity in his translation *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, and it finds that there are two forms of subjectivity: performance and suppression. On the one hand, Goldblatt has to consider the acceptance of his translation, but on the other hand he has been strongly influenced by his own ideology and poetics. Therefore, basing on Western culture, he has chosen domestication as his main translation strategy and employed other techniques such as deletion, addition, adaptation and annotation. All of the above has shown his subjectivity. In addition, Goldblatt has to take into account opinions of English editors, American publishers and critics. These subjects, to a certain extent, have limited his performance of subjectivity and made him consider other extra-text factors such as the aesthetic orientation of English readers, economic benefits, etc.

Keywords: Howard Goldblatt; *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*; translator's subjectivity

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1. Introduction

Mo Yan's works, rooted in ancient Chinese civilization, are showcases of rich, scientific and rigorous imagination. Innovative and unique, his writings have described the actual situation in China's urban and rural areas and enriched the overall landscape of contemporary literature. His works convey rich images, together with magnificent and spectacular symbols, which are extremely attractive for readers. "There appears to be no end to the turns and surprises he can bring to traditional literary techniques." (M. Thomas Inge 2000: 505–506) His novel, *Shengsi pilao* (Eng. *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*) has been awarded the 2nd Dream of Red Mansions Award by the Hong Kong Baptist University in 2008, the 17th Fukuoka Asian Culture Award (第17回福岡アジア文化賞) in Japan in 2006, and the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature in the United States in 2009.

Howard Goldblatt, whose Chinese name is Ge Haowen, is a famous American translator and sinologist. His bilingual competence is one of the essential reasons for his success. Xia Zhiqing appraised Howard Goldblatt as "the recognized chief translator of modern and contemporary Chinese literature". (Xia Zhiqing 2004: 63) John Updike wrote in *New Yorker* in 2005: "American translation of contemporary Chinese fiction appears to be the

lonely province of one man, Howard Goldblatt.” Given the success of *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, Howard Goldblatt and his translations have a huge influence on literary translation and cultural communication. Chinese language, for Westerners, is relatively hard to learn, which is bad for spreading Chinese culture. Thanks to translators like Howard Goldblatt, Chinese culture is spread more widely to the rest of the world, helping more people realize its extensiveness and profoundness.

2. Manifestation and Suppression of Translator’s Subjectivity in Howard Goldblatt’s *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*

2.1 *Manifestation of translator’s subjectivity*

2.1.1 *The author*

Howard Goldblatt respects the author and the original text and gives priority to fidelity in the process of translation. In his opinion, a translator should be faithful to the author and the text. Therefore, he has compared himself to shrimp and the author to fish, which means that the translator only plays a supporting role in the whole process. In order to be loyal to the author, lots of work has been done by Howard Goldblatt before and during the translating process. He and Mo Yan have exchanged more than a hundred letters and talked innumerable times over the telephone. The purpose of such frequent contact is to perfect the English translations. They often have heated discussion over a phrase or an object with which Howard Goldblatt is unfamiliar. Sometimes, Mo Yan has to call upon his primitive drawing skills to sketch something for him. From this, we can know that Howard Goldblatt is entirely responsible for his translation and has tried his best to get in touch with the author Mo Yan to have a better understanding of some puzzling points in the text.

2.1.2 *Target readers*

“Reader” is a quite important notion in the reception aesthetics theory. Erwin Wolff put forward the concept of “intended reader”, i.e., readers that the author envisioned for his work, while Terry Eagleton mentioned a similar idea, the “implied reader”, which meant that receivers lurked in every creative work. Translation is also a kind of creation. Thus translator must choose appropriate translation strategies to meet the expectation of his or her “intended readers” or “implied readers”, so that his or her translated work can be recognized and plays a very specific role in the local cultural context. The translator exquisitely captures this new cultural information and selects some relevant works to translate, which “provides support for readers with a strong sense of change and prepares more cultural strength for revolution” (Zha Mingjian & Tian Yu 2003: 23). Howard Goldblatt once said that American readers paid more attention to the contemporary developing China. In addition to the articles in the newspaper, they would like to know more about how the litterateurs look at Chinese society. And Americans have a special interest in the works that satirize and criticize the government, and works with a discordant tune. (Luo Yu & Howard Goldblatt 2008: 121) This affects Howard Goldblatt’s selection of original work to some extent.

2.1.3 *The translator*

2.1.3.1 *Ideology*

Ideology refers to social and political ideas or world outlooks. Hermans held that ideology “governs the selection, production and reception of translation, together with the way translation is conceptualized at certain moments, provide us with an index of cultural self-definition”. (Theo Hermans 1999: 95) Ideology determines the

basic translation strategies the translator takes, which influences the interpretations of the target text to a great extent. Being the product of certain society and culture, ideology exists simultaneously with their appearance. "Translation, as a cross-language and cross-cultural communication behavior, has been inevitably influenced by ideology at the very beginning." (Wang Dongfeng 2003:17) Translation, as a cross-language and cross-cultural activity, will be involuntarily manipulated by the ideology of the target culture from the very beginning. Literary translation is a kind of cultural activity that will always be influenced by the target culture in ideology, literary concept, literary system, etc. The translator's comprehension and selection of the original works and the reception of the translated text will be influenced by the mainstream ideology. If the translator goes against the mainstream ideology, he will be blamed and lose target readers. Thus, in most cases, translators will follow the dominant ideology. The translation of *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* is no exception.

2.1.3.2 Poetics

Lefevere stated that "all writings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way" (Lefevere 2010a: preface). Translation poetics also plays an important role in a bigger social system, and the interactive relationship with other literature or semiotic system, whose study object is the relationship between the poetics of the original text and the target text. Poetics is "another concrete factor that determines the translator's strategy in addition to ideology" (Lefevere 2010a: 45). Once the dominant poetics is established, other systems will be prevented from infiltrating. Therefore, when Howard Goldblatt tries to introduce Chinese works to western literary system, he will definitely arouse the response of the western literary system and be affected by it in selecting and translating the original texts. So is the translation of *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*. It is not only influenced by the dominant poetics, but also manipulated by translator's personal poetics and aesthetic consciousness.

2.2 Suppression of translator's subjectivity

2.2.1 Editors

An editor means a person who edits or makes changes to documents, which can also refer to other specific roles. For example, editor-at-large is a special kind of journalist; editor-in-chief has final responsibility for a publication's operations and policies; contributing editor refers to a book-publishing or magazine title, sometimes honorary, with a variety of meanings; copy editor, or manuscript editor, makes formatting changes and other improvements to text; literary editor is someone in a newspaper, who deals with reviews or literary criticism. When translating Mo Yan's early works like *Red Sorghum*, *Garlic Ballads* and *The Republic of Wine*, Howard Goldblatt added something that did not exist in the original ones. "While translating *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, he deleted some explicit sexual descriptions" (Shao Lu 2011: 47). As for such situations, the translator should not be blamed for all the adaptation and deletion, as Howard Goldblatt once pointed out that "the favorite thing they (editors) like to do is deleting and adapting...Some have been deleted one-tenth, even one-eighth, which is not for me to decide, though I have tried my best to add a little back." (Li Wenjing 2012: 59)

2.2.2 The publisher

The publication of translated works at present is no longer the simple option of the translator, among which the publisher plays an increasingly important role. When selecting the works, the readers first pay attention to the author and the translator, then the publisher. The better the publisher is, the higher the recognition will be. And out of profit, the publisher will come up with all kinds of ways, like advertisement, even speculation, to sell books. For example, the success of *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* is owing to the publisher's extraordinary

arrangement to some extent. “Some translated works have not entered the right commercial channels yet, and most of them are published in the research institutions, the university presses and literature organizations. The circulation may only be three or five hundred.” (Mo Yan & Wang Yao 2003: 262) Therefore, the wide spread and great success of Mo Yan’s works not only owes to the unique charm of his original works and the accurate interpretation of the translated ones, but also owes to the substantial support from the publishers. The Arcade Publishing, an independent trade publishing company that started in 1988 in New York, has already published five Mo Yan’s novels, that is, *The Republic of Wine* (2000), *Shifu, You’ll Do Anything for a Laugh* (2001), *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* (2004), *The Garlic Ballads* (2006), *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* (2008). Two of Mo Yan’s novels, i.e., *Red Sorghum* and *The Garlic Ballads*, have been recorded in the Penguin modern classic books, which also has a huge influence on the spread of Mo Yan’s works in the West.

2.2.3 Critics

A critic is a professional who communicates their opinions and assessments of various forms of creative work such as art, literature, music, cinema, theater, fashion, architecture and food. It means that critics refer to people who are well accepted and followed owing to their excellent assessments or good reputation. Many professional critics are paid to provide their opinions and comments for magazines, newspapers, televisions and other media. As for critics, there is one person who must be mentioned, that is, John Updike. He highly recommended Howard Goldblatt as the founding editor of *Modern Chinese Literature* and once wrote an article “Bitter Bamboo” to give a brief introduction to two novels from China in 2005. Howard Goldblatt has translated the works of more than twenty Chinese writers, but his exertions here are as nothing compared with those in translating Mo Yan, who sets a groaning table of brutal incident, magic realism, woman worship, nature description, and far-flung metaphor. Amy Tan, an American writer whose works explore a mother–daughter relationship, once predicted that Mo Yan’s voice would find its way into the heart of the American reader, just as Kundera and García Márquez have.

3. Translation Strategies and Skills in Howard Goldblatt’s *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*

Translating is the most important part of the whole translation activity, in which the translator’s subjectivity will be fully exerted. When translating, the translator also has other three identities, that is, reader, interpreter and re–creator. As translation is not a simple conversion between two languages but is communication and blending of two cultures. So the translating process will inevitably take on personal subjective color, that is, the manifestation of the translator’s subjectivity, which can be reflected in the selection of translation skills and strategies in translating *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*.

3.1 Translation strategies

3.1.1 Domestication

According to Venuti, domestication was “an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to the target–language cultural values, bringing the author back home” (Venuti 2005: 20). Marl Shuttleworth and Moira Cowie defined domestication as “a term used by Venuti to describe the translation strategy in which a transparent, fluent style is adopted in order to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for the TL readers.” (Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997: 43–44) The target–culture–oriented approach can avoid difficulties in understanding different lan-



guages and cultural conflicts. According to Howard Golodblatt, translation should be responsible to the author and original text, but most importantly, the readers (Ji Jin 2009: 46). Thus, as an experienced translator, who knows the expectations of the western readers well, Howard Goldblatt skillfully exerts domestication and regards it as the main translation strategy to best serve the target readers.

Example 1:

我身受酷刑而絕不改悔,掙得了一個硬漢子的名聲。(Mo Yan 2012: 3)

Not a word of repentance escaped my lips though I was tortured cruelly, for which I gained the reputation of an iron man. (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 3)

“硬漢子” is often used to describe someone who is firm and refuses to yield. Howard Golodblatt translated it into “an iron man”, whom the target readers are quite familiar with because of the American film *Iron Man* 2008. Thus the readers can have a vivid image of Ximen Nao. In this way, he perfectly leaves the readers in peace to a feasible extent and moves the author toward them.

Example 2:

我睜開眼睛,看到自己渾身沾著黏液,躺在一頭母驢的腓後。天哪!想不到讀過私塾、識字解文、堂堂的鄉紳西門鬧,竟成了一匹四蹄雪白、嘴巴粉嫩的小驢子。(Mo Yan 2012: 8)

I opened my eyes to find that I was covered with a sticky liquid, lying near the birth canal of a female donkey. My god! Who'd have thought that Ximen Nao, a literate, well-educated member of the gentry class, would be reborn as a white-hoofed donkey with floppy, tender lips! (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 9)

It is the time when Ximen Nao is reincarnated as a donkey after his being shot to death. There exist two culture-loaded words, that is, “私塾” and “鄉紳”. “私塾” refers to a private early childhood institution for children in a family or a village in ancient China, while “乡绅” means the government official or intellectual in the village. The target text translates “讀過私塾、識字解文、堂堂的鄉紳” into “a literate, well-educated member of the gentry class”, which objectively presents the readers an educated landlord before his six reincarnations.

Example 3:

接手家業時雖逢亂世,既要應付遊擊隊,又要應付黃皮子,但我的家業還是在幾年內翻番增值…… (Mo Yan 2012: 10)

I had taken over the family business during chaotic times. I had to cope with the guerrillas and the puppet soldiers, but my family property increased... (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 11)

It is rather satiric that, as for the landlord, guerrillas have no differences with the Japanese army and the Collaborationist Chinese Army, who are all the reasons for civil strife and go against landowners. According to the dictionary, “黃皮子” means *Mustela sibirica* (i.e., yellow weasel), but in the source text, it humorously refers to the Japanese army and the Collaborationist Chinese Army in yellow uniforms. The target text vividly translates it into “the puppet soldiers”, which accurately conveys its implication.

3.1.2 Foreignization

Venuti defined foreignization as “an ethno deviant pressure on those (target-language cultural) values to register the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad.” (Venuti 2005: 20) It provides the target readers “an alien reading experience” and maintains the foreign linguistic forms and cultures in the translated works (Venuti 2005: 20). Fang Mengzhi regarded foreignization as the translation strategy, which meant to “accommodate the linguistic features of the foreign cultures and take in the foreign way of expressing” (Fang Mengzhi 2013: 3). Sun Zhili advocated foreignization and pointed out that “in the translation, the language can be transformed or even domesticated, but the distinguishing cultural features should not be

changed” (Sun Zhili 2002: 43). In translating *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, Howard Goldblatt exerted the foreignization appropriately to make up for the deficiency of domestication, which well preserved the splendid Chinese cultures.

Example 1:

閻王扔下一塊朱紅色的三角形令牌,用頗不耐煩的腔調說:“牛頭馬面,送他回去吧!”(Mo Yan 2012: 4)

Lord Yama threw down his triangular vermilion symbol of the office and, with what sounded like impatience, commanded: “Ox Head and Horse Face, send him back!” (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 4)

“牛頭馬面” refer to the traditional Chinese soul bringers, which is relatively similar to the images of “the Death” in the West. Therefore, Howard Goldblatt directly translates them into “Ox Head” and “Horse Face”. According to the word “commanded”, it can be known that “Ox Head” and “Horse Face” are the servants of “Lord Yama”.

Example 2:

“媽的,你的腦子裡灌水了嗎? 你的眼睛被禿鷲啄瞎了嗎? 你難道看不見他的身體已經像一根天津衛十八街的大麻花一樣酥焦了嗎?”(Mo Yan 2012: 5)

“What in damnation is your head filled with, water? Has an eagle plucked out your eyes? Can you really not see that his body is as crispy as one of those fried fritters on Tianjin’s Eighteenth Street?” (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 5)

Generally, “麻花” can be translated into “fried dough twist”, which is a bit different from Howard Goldblatt’s “fried fritter”. And “on Tianjin’s Eighteenth Street” only means its producing area and can hardly convey the cultural information and historical origin to the target readers. In fact, “Guifaxiang” 18th Street Fried Dough Twists, together with “Goubuli” Steamed Stuffed Buns and Ear-Hole Fried Cakes, are the three unique delicacies of Tianjin.

Example 3:

走資派陳光第,這個混進黨內的驢販子,反對大躍進,反對三面紅旗,與高密東北鄉頑固地走資本主義道路的單幹戶藍臉結拜兄弟,充當單幹戶的保護傘。(Mo Yan 2012: 133)

Capitalist-roader Chen Guangdi, a donkey trader who wormed his way into the Party, opposed the Great Leap Forward, opposed the Three Red Banners, is a sworn brother to Lan Lian, Northeast Gaomi Township’s independent farmer who stubbornly hews to the Capitalist Road, and acts as the independent farmer’s protective umbrella. (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 157)

This sentence contains six major culture-loaded words, that is, “走資派”, “黨”, “大躍進”, “三面紅旗”, “資本主義道路” and “單幹戶”. The literal translation is used here to maintain its literal meaning without further explanations, as it would cost lots of words and space to give specific meanings to each phrase, which would be likely to reduce the readability of the target text.

3.2 Translation skills

During the translation process, Howard Goldblatt insists on taking the target readers’ acceptability as his over-riding standard and sometimes uses similar representations instead of native wording to increase the translated work’s readability. He has employed four significant methods in the translation of *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, namely omission, addition, adaptation, and annotation.

3.2.1 Omission

Taking the readability of the translated work into consideration, Howard Goldblatt fully exerts his translation's subjectivity by rearranging the translated texts and simplifying some special culture-loaded words. Translation is more than just word for word correspondence, and the original texts may have a totally unique culture background that cannot be translated. Therefore, with the permission of the author Mo Yan, Howard Goldblatt deleted some contents in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* to increase its readability and make it reader-friendly. For example, some sentences mentioned in Chapter Three, Book One have been deleted, like “人走時運馬走膘, 兔子落運遭老鷹”, “螃蟹過河隨大溜”, “識時務者為俊傑”.

Example 1:

想不到她竟然有一條那樣好的嗓子, 想不到她竟然能演唱那麼多的樣板戲片段。她唱阿慶嫂的唱段, 我哥就唱郭建光的唱段。她唱李鐵梅的唱段, 我哥就唱李玉和的唱段。他們兩人真是珠聯璧合, 一對金童玉女。(Mo Yan 2012: 163)

That she had a fine voice and knew the music from so many revolutionary operas took everyone by surprise. (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 194)

“阿慶嫂” and “郭建光” are the characters in “Shajiabang”, a classical Beijing Opera, while “李鐵梅” and “李玉和” in “The Red Lantern”. For those who are familiar with model operas, the author's intention is quite clear, that is, to emphasize that Huzhu and Jinlong act in harmony and make a perfect couple. But for those who are not, it would be rather confusing to mention these characters, so the translator deletes them. And according to the context, to be specific, Huzhu makes a hat for Jinlong, and Lan Jiefang admits his infatuated fantasy for Huzhu. We can also see the relationship between Huzhu and Jinlong.

Example 2:

……但一個二十多歲就當了縣級領導幹部的人, 和農村姑娘結婚的可能性幾乎是零, 無論她貌如西施還是色比嬋娟。(Mo Yan 2012: 166)

... but there was no chance that a leading country-level cadre in his twenties would ever actually marry a peasant girl, no matter how pretty or fetching she might be. (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 197)

“西施” and “嬋娟” are famous for their beauty and become a synonym for beauties. However, for target readers, that kind of contextual assumption does not exist. Howard Goldblatt adapts to the cognitive context of the readers and chooses to delete these words and replaces them with “pretty and fetching”, which is semantically equivalent.

Example 3:

刁小三眼睛放出綠光, 牙齒咬得咯咯響, 它說: 豬十六, 古人曰: “出水才看兩腿泥! 咋們騎驢看帳本, 走著瞧! 三十年河東, 三十年河西! 陽光輪著轉, 不會永遠照著你的窩!” (Mo Yan 2012: 247)

Diao Xiaosan's eyes flashed green; his teeth ground noisily. “Pig Sixteen,” he said, “the old saying goes, ‘You don't know your legs are muddy till you step out of the water.’ The river flows east for thirty years and west for thirty years! The sun's rays are on the move. They won't always shine down on your nest!” (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 273-274)

There are four old Chinese sayings in this example. The latter three almost share the same meaning; thus the translator chooses to translate two of them, which avoids the repetition of the same meaning and makes the whole image vivid and clear.

3.2.2 Addition

On account of some specific considerations, Howard Goldblatt skillfully uses the method of omission. How-

ever, he also employs addition to supplement extra information that improves the translated work's readability and removes certain cultural barriers for the target readers. It is almost impossible to be complete fidelity to the original text in the translation process. So Howard Goldblatt makes additions to polish the translation in order to conform to the Westerners' reading habits.

Example 1:

後來我們還與一支踩高蹺的隊伍相遇,他們扮演著唐僧取經的故事,扮孫猴子、豬八戒的都是村子裡的熟人。(Mo Yan 2012: 7)

After that, we encountered a group of men on stilts who were reenacting the travels of the Tang monk Tripitaka on his way to fetch Buddhist scriptures. His disciples, Monkey and Pigsy, were both villagers I knew, and... (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 7-8)

The target text does not give explanations to the background information of *Journey to the West*, one of the Four Great Classical Novels. But the translator puts the word "disciple" before "Monkey and Pigsy", which declares the relationship between them and the Tang monk Tripitaka.

Example 2:

……舌頭鮮紅、牙齒潔白、目光炯炯有神。(Mo Yan 2012: 7)

Their tongues were bright red, their teeth snowy white, their gleaming eyes like awls. (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 8)

"炯炯有神" is often used to describe people or animals that are very energetic with bright eyes. In the target text, bright eyes are compared to awls, which leads to the same aesthetic and stylistic effect.

Example 3:

她那幾句話通俗易懂又語重心長,她說:當家的,你把她收了吧!肥水不流外人田!(Mo Yan 2012: 12)

... with a comment that was easy to understand and filled with heartfelt sincerity. She said, "Lord of the Manor [that is what she called me], I want you to accept her. Good water must not irrigate other people's fields." (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 14)

"當家的", as well as "當東家的", is a kind of local dialect in rural areas in North China, which is translated into "Lord of the Manor". "That's what she called me" is added to give an explanation for "Lord of the Manor", which reflects his family statue.

3.2.3 Adaptation

Adaptation, which is much different from omission and addition, means that the translator rearranges the original text for some specific purpose or effect instead of just omitting or adding certain information. In *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, the translator rearranges some original sentences or paragraphs to make the translated work much more fluent and acceptable. It should not be recognized as disloyalty to the original work.

Example 1:

那時候我可謂少年得志。(Mo Yan 2012: 9)

Back then I was on top of the world. (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 10)

"少年得志" is a folk adage in the source culture, which means "to think too much of one's success in early days". But if translated in that way, its lingering charm is lost. Therefore, the translator uses "on the top of the world" to express his early success. Though quite different in form from the source text, they share a similar meaning, which is also an acceptable kind of functional equivalence.

Example 2:

民國三十五年春天被我收了房。(Mo Yan 2012: 12)

In the spring of 1946, she became my concubine. (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 14)

“民國” refers to the period from 1912 to 1949, which is also called the Republic of China. According to that, we can know “民國三十五年” is 1946. It is the information with less importance in that part, so the translator does not spare much effort to explain the meaning of “民國”.

Example 3:

幾乎所有的女人在初產時都要呼天搶地,悲慘嚎叫,但我的迎春生養時,產房裡竟然無聲無息。據接生姥姥說,在生產的過程中,迎春的臉上始終掛著神秘的微笑,宛如做著有趣的遊戲,弄得接生婆心裡十分緊張,生怕從她的產道里鑽出妖精。(Mo Yan 2012: 12)

Most women cry out in anguish the first time, but my Yingchun had her babies without making a sound. According to the midwife, she wore a mysterious smile from start to finish, as if having a baby was a form of entertainment. That gave the poor midwife a case of nerves; she was afraid that monsters would come shooting out. (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 14)

“呼天搶地,悲慘嚎叫” expresses the sound effects when pregnant women are giving birth to babies and their psychological factors at that time. The translator simply translates “接生姥姥” into “midwife” without other explanations. “產房裡竟然無聲無息” does not mean the delivery room is totally quiet, but means that Yingchun does not make a sound when she is having her babies. Howard Goldblatt delivers this information correctly. The word “poor” makes the image of the midwife vivid in front of us. The slightly indecent words “從她的產道里” are deleted.

3.2.4 Annotation

Annotation means supplement necessary information with extra notes, which is another translation skill employed by Howard Goldblatt. It can reduce the reading difficulties for readers and express the translator’s personal understanding and comments. Howard Goldblatt thinks the notes should better be put in the preface or at the end of the book rather than be inserted into the translation. Therefore, he encloses a list of principal characters and a note on pronunciation at the very beginning of the book to provide some pre-knowledge of work. Just like Howard Goldblatt once said in an interview, “I declare clearly that those names with special meanings need to be translated instead of transliteration, like ‘瞎子阿木’ or ‘瘸子某某’. It will be funny to transliterate them only.” (Li Wenjing 2012: 58-59)

Example 1:

我聽到從高高的大堂上,從那高高大堂上的輝煌燭光裡,傳下來閻王爺幾近調侃的問話:“西門鬧,你還鬧嗎?”(Mo Yan 2012: 3)

Then, from high in the hall above me, somewhere in the brilliant candlelight in the hall above me, somewhere in the brilliant candlelight in the hall above, I heard a mocking question from Lord Yama himself: “Xi-men Nao, whose name means West Gate Riot, is more rioting in your plans?” (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 3)

Ximen Nao, one of the narrative characters in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, has suffered six reincarnations. Howard Goldblatt uses Pinyin to transliterate his name, together with the annotation “West Gate Riot”, which clearly express both its literary and implied meanings.

Example 2:

第二年初春她就為我生了龍鳳胎,男名西門金龍,女名西門寶鳳……(Mo Yan 2012: 12)

The following spring she gave birth to a boy and a girl, what they call a dragon and phoenix birth. So we named the boy Ximen Jinlong, or Golden Dragon, and the girl Ximen Baofeng, Precious Phoenix... (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 14)

“龍” and “鳳” have strong cultural meanings, which represents power, honor and luck. In the target context, “dragon” means “evil” and “Phoenix” means “rebirth”. So both Pinyin and annotations need to be used to clarify the meaning.

Example 3:

這兩個女孩,長名互助,幼名合作。(Mo Yan 2012: 17)

The first one out was named Huzhu–Cooperation and her sister was called Hezuo–Collaboration. (Howard Goldblatt 2012: 21)

Names often mean good hope and are used to provide essential clues for the characters’ future development. After new China was founded, people have been following a cooperative road. So the names “互助” and “合作” are not coincidences, but the result of a commercial and agricultural cooperation.

4. Conclusion

Of course, the writer’s overseas reputation faces a major problem, i.e., the necessity of translation. Inevitably, some things may be lost: the specific stylistic rhythms of the original language, denotations and connotations that cannot be carried over into the target language, figures of speech, idiomatic expressions, and cultural-specific symbols – all these a writer can master to create a distinctive literary voice. What can be carried over, however, are many of the things that engaging reading in any language: plot, characterization, dialogue, narrative, and point of view. It is precisely because of Howard Goldblatt’s flexible translation strategies and skills, coupled with his creativity and subjectivity that the translated work *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* is widely accepted by the target readers and achieves a great success. The translator’s subjectivity has been manifested in many aspects from selection to translation. The paper studies the translator’s subjectivity in Howard Goldblatt’s translation of *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, and discusses its performance and suppression factors during translation, as well as its translation strategies and skills. As an important factor in translation, the translator’s literary knowledge and writing ability are reflected in his choice of words, his adaptation and other aspects. The translation process is no less than the author’s creative process. In the translation process, Howard Goldblatt gives full play to his imagination and super bilingual ability to create outstanding works that spread Chinese culture to the West. Therefore, when it comes to translation, the translator’s status and subjectivity need to be envisaged.

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