

A Study of Goldblatt's English Translation of Big Breasts and Wide Hips from the Perspective of Rewriting Theory

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Abstract: One of the masterpieces of Mo Yan, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012, *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* is a novel that combines magical realism with China's social history, which opens up a new frontier of literary creation and attracts extensive attention from many translators. Goldblatt is one of them. He is a famous American biologist, and his translation of *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* can be regarded as a classic work of translated literature. Based on Lefevere's rewriting theory, this paper studies the English version of Goldblatt's *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* from three aspects: ideology, poetics, and patronage, to provide some ideas for the translation of China's literary works.

1. Introduction

Even if Mo Yan didn't win the Nobel Prize for Literature, his early works are a unique existence in China's literary world, and his novels have been widely praised since the 1980s^[1]. Most of Mo Yan's works are based on the long and profound Shandong culture, with rich characteristics of the times, depicting a social chronicle of China in the last century. Together with these works, Mo Yan has become one of the representatives of new schools such as New Historicism and China's magical realism. The related works of these writers have attracted the attention of the outside world one after another, and have been adapted into English versions by some biologists, thus appearing in the eyes of the foreign public. Among these biologists, Goldblatt, a famous American biologist, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in one fell swoop with the help of Goldblatt's translation of Mo Yan's works. In scholars' studies related to Goldblatt's translations, a lot of rewriting phenomena have been found, and *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* fully demonstrate the skills and advantages of rewriting theory.

2. Rewriting Theory

2.1. An Introduction to Rewriting Theory

At the end of the 1980s, there appeared a "cultural turn" in translation studies, which tended to interpret the texts from the macro level. Lefevere, a representative of the school of translation manipulation, put forward the rewriting theory in his book *Translation, Rewriting and Manipulation of Literary Fame*. He believes that "translation is the rewriting of the original text, and all rewriting, regardless of their intentions, reflects a specific ideology and poetic form and manipulates literature

to play a role in a specific society in a specific way”^[2]. Lefevere further pointed out that any translation activity could not be carried out in a vacuum, but was restricted by patronage, ideology, and poetics. Ideology is just like an invisible rule outside the literary system, which changes people’s behavior and determines the choice of the original text. Poetics is internal and has a lot to do with the translators. Sponsors are potential forces of literary creation and dissemination, including individuals or government departments, or some magazines and publishers. These three factors influence and restrict each other. Rewriting theory is different from the traditional translation theory. It gets rid of the previous form-based text translation, making the translation more free. It considers translation activities into the cultural system, no longer taking the equivalence between the original text and the translated text as the translation standard, but based on culture and starting from the political and social factors of the translated text ^[3]. Rewriting theory shifts the focus of translation research from the text itself to the macro-factors that affect the literary system, providing a new perspective on translation research methods ^[4].

2.2. Guidance of Rewriting Theory on Translation

With the rewriting theory put forward by American scholars and supported by other scholars, under the historical background of cultural globalization, rewriting theory gradually shows its advantages in translation activities, especially in the translation of some Chinese and English works ^[5]. Chinese is an ideographic language, while English is an epigraph, and there are essential differences between the two languages. Under such circumstances, it is impossible to present a perfect translation effect, not to mention retain the aesthetic meaning of the original. Mo Yan’s novels are unique in style and use a lot of defamiliarization, which is difficult to translate. The theory of rewriting adopts a descriptive method, which is very flexible and enhances the explanatory power of the translation phenomenon. Goldblatt is the one who fully utilized the rewriting theory in the translation of *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* to solve the problem of difficult translation.

3. Goldblatt and *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*

Big Breasts and Wide Hips is one of Mo Yan’s masterpieces and has been described by Zhang Qinghua as “one of Mo Yan’s best and most important works to date”. The timeline of the novel begins with the Anti-Japanese War and ends with the reform and opening up. It shows the great changes in rural areas of China in the 20th century and the love and admiration of human beings for life. At the same time, the author also brings readers a painful experience, which comes from the insight into human nature and the bystanders to society. They can see the greatness of motherhood, the brilliance of human nature, and the pursuit of the freedom of love, thus enabling readers to sublimate their spirit. It is very popular among domestic readers.

Xia Zhiqing calls Goldblatt “China’s chief contemporary translator” and is the foreign spokesperson for Mo Yan’s masterpiece *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* ^[6], which Goldblatt considers a translation to be a rewriting of the original work by the translator. In carrying out translation activities the translator is required to be faithful to the original text ^[7], but cannot escape the influence of a series of factors such as ideology, poetics, patronage, and so on in the target language culture. Goldblatt’s rewriting theory coincides with Lefevere’s. Both “rewriting” objectively and comprehensively consider the importance of cultural differences in literary translation, and strive to reconcile them ^[6].

4. The English Translation of *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* under Rewriting Theory

Lefevere’s rewriting theory has three major influences on the translator: Ideology, poetics, and

patronage.

4.1. Rewriting Based on Ideological Factors

Wang Dongfeng said: “Ideology is a product of a certain society and culture, and human beings have also produced ideology in the process of producing society and culture. As a kind of language and cross-cultural communication, translation has inevitably been branded with ideology from the very beginning”^[8]. Ideology, in layman’s terms, is a person’s understanding and perception of something. It is an individual’s feeling about something, and it is a collection of ideas, values, and other elements^[9]. Personal ideology is influenced by external factors, such as thinking ability and living environment. For Lefevere, ideology is a procedure to guide the translator’s translation strategy and to solve the problems related to the ‘discourse world’ expressed in the original text. Goldblatt, in the process of translating *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, has rewritten some particular ideologies.

4.1.1. Words Related to Traditional Chinese Culture

Example 1

(Original text) “Ni Men Xiang Xiang Bu Dao, Ta Shi Duo Me De Yu Zhong Bu Tong,” Qin Er Xian Sheng Yong Gao Sheng Ya Dao Zhong Ren De Yi Lun, Xian Shi Chu Ta Yu Fei Xing Jia Si Ma Ku De Te Shu Guan Xi, “Ta Zai Wo De Ye Hu Li, Zhuang Shang Le Liang Zhi Ha Ma! Hai You, Ta Men Cuan Gai Sheng Reng De Shu, Sheng Ren Yue “Ren Zhi Chu, Xing Ben Shan. Xing Xiang Jin, Xi Xiang Yuan. Gou Bu Jiao, Xing Nai Qian” Ta Zen Me Shuo Ne? Ni Men Shi Cai Bu Dao De, Ta Shuo “Ren Zhi Chu, Hu Che Dan. Gou bu Jiao, Mao Bu Nian. Yan Dai Guo Zi Chao Ji Dan. Xian Sheng Chi, Xue Sheng Kan.” Hahaha... Qin Er Xian Sheng Da Xiao Zhe, Jiao Ao De Kan Zhe Zhou Wei De Ren. (Mo 2012:197)

(Target text) “You folks cannot imagine how many ways he differed from the others,” Mi Qin said loudly to drown out the discussion around him and make a show of his special relationship with Sima Ku, a man who could fly like a bird (Goldblatt 2004:223)^[10].

A comparison of the original text and the translated version shows that Goldblatt omitted some meaning conveyed in the original text. In the original work, the author wanted to describe Sima Guang’s naughty and cleverness as a young man by adding detailed information about how he changed his teaching notes. Readers in China can quickly see the image of Sima Guang in their minds. However, the translator omitted detailed information in the Chinese version. As we all know, “Man on earth, Good at birth. The same nature, Varies on nurture.” comes from *Three- Character Canon*. For foreigners, this is an essential material for understanding China’s culture and language. As we all know, with the rapid development of China, it is becoming more and more active on the world stage and plays an important role. Confucianism and culture have been recognized and accepted by more and more Westerners and gradually penetrated people’s hearts. In the original work, Mo Yan rewrites the *Three- Character Canon* to portray the characters. If Goldblatt translated the original work without reservations, western readers would be confused. To avoid the conflict between the negative information transmitted in the original text and the positive image in the eyes of Western readers, it is reasonable for the translator to omit these expressions^[11].

4.1.2. Words Related to Politics

Example2

(Original text) Wang Yinzhi, Ni Zhe Ge Fan Ge Ming, Ren Min De Di Ren, Xi Xue Gui, Hai Ren Chong, Si Bu Qing Fen Zi, Ji You Pai, Zou Zi Ben Zhu Yi De Dao Lu De Dang Quan Pai, Zi Chan Jie Ji Fan Dong Xue Shu Quan Wei (Mo, 2003:477)

(Target text) Wang yinzhi, you counter revolutionary, you enemy of the people, you blood sucking

insect, you damned rightist, degenerate, class outsider, parasite, petty scoundrel tied to the post of historical disgrace (Goldblatt, 2004: 517) ^[10].

Because of the different social systems and concepts between the East and the West, politically sensitive words can cause some unnecessary disputes among readers from different societies. This may ruin the translation work. For this reason, Goldblatt omitted some words in his translation. The word “floating bourgeoisie” in this paper has no equivalent in English. He omitted information about the communist party people here, perhaps to avoid a conflict between the image of the communist party in the eyes of Western readers and the image in the text. Therefore, when translating a book that is needed abroad, the translator must make some compromises to meet the needs of the specific situation. There must be no ideological confrontation between the translation and the target language culture.

4.1.3. Words Related to Religious Colours

Example 3

(Original text) Pu Sa Xian Ling, Tian Zhu Bao You, Mei You Er Zi, Ni Yi Bei Zi Dou Shi Nu; You Le Er Zi, Ni Li Ma Jiu Shi Zhu.

(Target text) Bodhisattva, be here with her, Lord in Heaven, come to here side. Without a son, you will be no better than a slave as long as you live, but with one, you'll be the mistress ^[10].

In Mo Yan's original work, there is a reference to Bodhisattva. Many people in China believe in Buddhism, and when the concept of Bodhisattva was introduced to China, it was in the midst of a time of turmoil, when people longed for peace and stability, and they believed in the Bodhisattva, who was the savior of the poor and the needy and who, if they were in trouble, would help them to get through their difficulties if they just prayed in their hearts. Shangguan Lu prayed to Bodhisattva and god to have a boy, because the concept of Male-Preference was deeply rooted in her heart, and in feudal society, the idea was deeply rooted in people's hearts, so she prayed. The word “heavenly” means God in the West. In the West, God has supreme power. The translation of Bodhisattva adopts the phonetic notation, and God is not directly translated as “God” but as “lord in heaven”, retaining the meaning of the original work and is more conducive to the understanding of Western readers.

4.2. Rewriting Based on Poetic Factors

Poetics is one of the most important concepts in Lefevere's rewriting theory, which includes two aspects: first, the elements of literature, including literary techniques, themes, and symbols; Second, the role of literature, that is, the relationship between literature and the social system and the role of literature in the society. Poetic factors will not only affect translation at the level of words but also affect the rhetoric and overall style of translation. Influenced by the mainstream poetics of the target country and the translator's aesthetic taste, Goldblatt rewrote the language expressions of the original text in the process of translation.

4.2.1. Rewriting at the Word Level

Example 4

(Original text) Ta Zai Meng Ran Jian, Chong Xin Ting Dao Le Yi Ge Xuan Xiao De Ke Guan Shi Jie.

(Target text) In a flash, the crashing noises of the world rushed at her again ^[10].

Mo Yan's novels have a strong local flavor, but in the process of spreading abroad, they are still consistent with mainstream aesthetics. Goldblatt also tries to avoid the principle of remoteness in translation, hoping that the foreign translation of China's literary works can maintain its original aesthetic value. The original text describes a mother who suddenly had an epiphany. Under the

guidance of rewriting theory, the subject-predicate sentence pattern inherent in English is put into it, and the subject “she” is changed into “the crashing noises”, which completes the subjective feeling of the object, which conforms to the common characteristics of the world aesthetic art.

The author uses a lot of words and phrases that contain cultural factors when describing the length of *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*. For example, the word “Lian Jin” originally means a kind of kinship, but Goldblatt translate it as “related to them”, which not only clearly expresses the meaning of the original work but also does not make it difficult for the readers to understand. This not only clearly expresses the meaning of the original work, but also will not increase the difficulty for the readers to understand. To follow the narrative style of translation culture, Goldblatt describes some obscure culture-loaded words of the original text in the simplest way.

4.2.2. Rewriting at the Rhetorical Level

Example5

(Original text) Yi Pi Ma Xing Huang, Yi Pi Ma Zao Hong, Yi Pi Ma Cong Lu. San Pi Ma Pang Du Du De, Xiang La Su De Yi Yang.

(Target text) One of the horses were apricot yellow, one date red, the other green of fresh leeks. Fat, sleek, and fascinating, they seemed made of wax ^[10].

The original text is a metaphorical sentence, comparing horses of different colors to wax figures. The horses are the subject of this metaphor. They regard wax as a metonymy. In his translation, Goldblatt changed the sentence structure of the original text and made the obvious metaphor implicit. Although the translator changed the structure of the original text, its meaning is still clearly conveyed, and the original metaphorical meaning was completely preserved.

4.3. Rewrite Based on the Patron Factor

Among the factors that affect translation put forward by Lefevere, patrons are also indispensable. The sponsors he mentions mainly include some investors, institutions, and other external forces. The most notable is the involvement of the publisher. Market demand orientation is the source of power for publishers to carry out their work. When a publisher publishes and distributes a work, he will make a rough forecast of its sales volume after publication. Only when there is a great demand from the public will publishers promote it. Lefevere’s definition of the sponsor is “a kind of power (person, institution), similar to the power that can promote or prevent the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature ^[12].” According to Lefevere’s point of view, a patron can be a person, a group of people, or an organization, who helps or prevents the writing, rewriting, or publication of a literary work. Patron is composed of three parts, namely, ideology, economy, and a status, which have an impact on the literary system^[12].

The patron plays a restrictive role in the translator’s choice of form and theme. Ideology has also been used to regulate professionals. The economic component is related to the remuneration of writers and translators to some extent and may be influenced by specific groups with a certain social status. At the same time, patrons are usually more interested in literary ideology than poetics. In other words, it is easier for sponsors to focus on professionals in poetics.

Mo Yan, a famous writer in China, made his debut on the international stage with his work *Red Sorghum*, and his patrons, after appreciating the great attraction of the combination of magical realism and folklore, were eager for further contact with this writer and his work.

This series of factors also drove the publisher’s desire to launch his work. On the other hand, when translating *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, the publishing house put forward some requirements for Goldblatt before the translation and deleted some long narratives and cultural revolution topics out of the need of conforming to the current social norms, catering to reader’ aesthetic psychology and

having certain market prospects. As a translator, Goldblatt had to submit to the manipulation of sponsors and other “external forces”.

5. Conclusion

Any work is a product of the time, which conforms to the ideology and aesthetic habits of the public. *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* is a literary work with Chinese characteristics. Contemporary Chinese culture is increasingly attracting extensive attention from the world, and there are numerous foreign translations of Chinese culture. Through the guidance and intervention of the rewriting theory, Goldblatt's *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* achieved the purpose of spreading China culture to a certain extent, and at the same time, it also showed the powerful charm of China literature. The success of Mo Yan and Goldblatt has provided scientific and effective translation ideas for contemporary translators. Objectively, it provides an important reference for studying the heterogeneous relationship between the first and the second text. However, it is undeniable that the English version is not satisfactory in the process of expressing and transmitting the original text. This phenomenon also shows that there is still a lot of room for development in the export of China literature. Only by using correct strategies can China's culture go abroad better, thus enabling China to realize the transformation from a cultural power to a cultural power.

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