Original Paper

The Translator's Dilemma: Howard Goldblatt's Translation Strategies in "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out"

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Abstract

Since the 21st century, under the backdrop of the "going global" strategy of Chinese culture, the international influence of Chinese literary works has been growing. Among them, Howard Goldblatt's translation of "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" is an outstanding representative of the English translation of contemporary Chinese literature. The translator Howard Goldblatt's masterful translation of the original work's national culture, linguistic form, and special structure is key to the success of the translation in overseas markets. This paper studies specific translation examples from Goldblatt's English version of "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" and analyzes the translator's translation strategies from the perspective of Polysystem Theory. It also explores the reasons from several angles, including the translating subject, content, strategy, and sponsors. The study finds that the translator Howard Goldblatt has seized the opportunity of Chinese culture "going global" and skillfully combined domestication and foreignization in the translation process of "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" effectively conveying Chinese cultural elements to readers while considering their reading interests and cultural backgrounds, thus making the translation more appealing to target language readers and promoting its effective overseas dissemination.

Keywords

Polysystem Theory, Howard Goldblatt, "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" English Translation, Translation Strategies

1. Introduction

"Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" is one of the representative works of Chinese writer Mo Yan, a novel that showcases the tremendous social and historical changes in China from the 1950s to the early 21st century. In 2012, Mo Yan was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, becoming the first Chinese writer to receive this prestigious honor. "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" is a structurally complex,

linguistically rich, and strongly regional work, the translation of which is a huge challenge. The English translation by American translator Howard Goldblatt is considered exquisite and has the greatest influence. As "the best translator of contemporary Chinese literature in the English-speaking world" (Julia, 2006, p. 196), Goldblatt is one of the most important disseminators of Mo Yan's works in the English-speaking world.

Since the release of the English translation of "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out," this translated work has attracted widespread attention from the academic community and has sparked numerous scholars to discuss from perspectives such as translator subjectivity, rhetoric, ecological translation studies, and postcolonialism. The field of translation studies has taken a cultural turn at the end of the twentieth century, which is of great significance in the theoretical research and development process of translation studies. As Xu Jun said: The increasing awakening of translational cultural consciousness and the gradual establishment of translational cultural views have pushed translation studies to new heights and depths, resulting in a number of important outcomes. (Xu, 2002, p. 223) In the novel "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" Mo Yan closely links elements of magical realism with Chinese cultural details. Translator Howard Goldblatt, through the precision and creativity of his translation, enables English readers to understand and appreciate this work.

Polysystem Theory, introduced by Israeli scholar Itamar Even-Zohar in the early 1970s and 1980s, is applicable to translation studies and has constructed a framework for understanding translation as an activity within cultural and literary systems. The theory refers to a multi-layered ensemble composed of various interconnected factors, which change and evolve through their interactions (Liu, 2009, p. 330). For Even-Zohar, a polysystem can be viewed as a heterogeneous, open structure. Thus, it is not a single system but a polysystem, composed of several different systems that intersect, partially overlap, offer different options at the same time, are interdependent, and operate as an organized whole (Even-Zohar, 2000, p. 20). Even-Zohar also proposes three pairs of opposing concepts that sustain the operation of this system: the opposition between canonized and non-canonized, the opposition between center and periphery, and the opposition between primary and secondary activities (Liao, 2004, p. 49). These relationships are not inherently existent but are artificially constructed by "sociocultural" and "ideological" factors and can transform into one another (Munday, 2008, p. 51). Even-Zohar particularly emphasizes the inclusion of translated literature within the literary polysystem, arguing that it has a significant impact and role in the synchronic and diachronic development of specific literatures (Edwin, 2001, p. 116). Placing translated literature in its corresponding historical and cultural context to study the translator's strategies is a fundamental approach of Polysystem Theory in translation studies. The theory posits that a system's behavior is related to its position within the polysystem. For instance, the position of translated literature within the polysystem can influence the translator's strategies. Even-Zohar suggests that when translated literature is at the center, it often participates in creation, even breaking the host country's traditional norms, focusing the translation strategy on "adequacy"; whereas when

translated literature is at the periphery, it often follows established patterns in the host country's literature, focusing the translation strategy on "acceptability" (Even-Zohar, 2002, p. 19).

This paper will analyze Howard Goldblatt's translation strategies for "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" from three aspects: national cultural characteristics, linguistic forms, and special structures, combined with specific examples from the English translation. It will also analyze the English translation process of "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" from the perspective of Polysystem Theory. Finally, it will analyze the successful factors of the English translation of "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" from several angles of interest to Polysystem Theory, including the translating subject, content, strategy, and sponsors.

2. Everything Starts with the Reader: A Study of the Translation of "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" from the Perspective of Polysystem Theory

2.1 Local Flavor: The Selection and Omission of National Cultural Characteristics

"Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" is a lengthy masterpiece by the renowned Chinese author Mo Yan. The novel, centered around the process of the wrongfully deceased landlord Ximen Niao experiencing the six realms of reincarnation, tells a story of joy and sorrow that spans over fifty years in the Northeast Township of Gaomi City, Shandong Province. It incorporates the writing technique of magical realism, presenting to readers a complex, noisy, and tribulation-ridden narrative of rural China that spans half a century and involves the fates of several generations. The renowned American Sinologist and chief translator of contemporary Chinese literature, Howard Goldblatt, published the English translation of "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" in 2008, which has made an outstanding contribution to the international dissemination of Chinese literature. Indeed, there is a significant cultural gap between the plot, character relationships, and usage of words and allusions in Mo Yan's novel and the cultural background of readers in the English-speaking world. As a Sinologist who is well-versed in Chinese culture, Howard Goldblatt was influenced by the ideological and poetic concepts of the target language culture as well as the sponsors in his translation work, while also demonstrating the passion and autonomy of a translator with a strong sense of responsibility. He effectively resolved the contradictions between the source language culture and the target language culture in the translation, allowing the translated work to be accepted by readers from different cultural backgrounds. In this section, the paper will analyze Howard Goldblatt's translation strategies from three aspects: the translation of personal names, the translation of pronouns, and the translation of culture-loaded words.

Mo Yan's "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" is renowned for its vast structure and vivid narration, as well as its pungent and dramatic linguistic style, long considered a "feast of vocabulary." The book encompasses dialects, colloquialisms, idioms, and antithetical phrases, as well as onomatopoeic words among various rhetorical techniques. In particular, the extensive use of vulgar expressions, pejorative terms, archaic Chinese usages, and contemporary popular expressions significantly influence the unique linguistic style of the novel, but all these present additional challenges for its translation. In Howard

Goldblatt's English translation, he faithfully reproduces the humor, satire, and rich linguistic style of the original text, but there is a conscious use of domesticating, foreignizing, and hybrid translation methods on the linguistic level. This is because, as a translator, he needs to combine his own "writing" style with consideration for the reading preferences and acceptance of the target readers.

Firstly, the novel involves a multitude of characters, including peasants, intellectuals, women from the old society, and even many nicknames for animals. Most of the names used have a distinct temporal mark, reflecting the era's background and the various relationships between people, posing a certain difficulty for translation.

Table 1. Example (5)

Example	Original	Translation
1	蓝脸	Lan Lian(Blue Face)
2	蓝解放	Lan Jiefang
3	黄瞳	Huang Tong
4	黄互助	Huang Huzhu
5	黄合作	Huang Hezuo

In Table 1, Lan Lian, known as the "Blue Face," is one of the most important characters in the novel. He was originally a cottier farmer for the landlord Ximen Nao and continued to work alone after liberation, becoming the only single household farmer in all of China who persisted to the end. Lan Lian is a hardworking and simple farmer who only knows how to cultivate and make a living on the land. After the land reform, he married the landlord's concubine, Yingchun. In Peking Opera, the blue facial makeup represents unyielding, brave, and loyal characters, and the image of this character in the book is similar to the image represented by the "blue face" characters in Peking Opera. "Colors are used to distinguish the identities of different characters" (Feng, 2009, p. 80). Howard Goldblatt, in the main character list at the beginning of the novel, translates this character as "Lan Lian (Blue Face)," which not only allows Western readers to understand the pronunciation of the main characters in Chinese but also highlights the differences between Chinese pinyin and English phonetics, bringing Western readers closer. At the same time, the translation "(Blue Face)" meets the needs of readers who have some understanding of Chinese culture and hope to read more authentic Chinese literary works. In the main text, the character's name is simply translated as "Lan Lian," making the translation more coherent and smooth, avoiding the impact on the reading experience caused by explanatory and annotative translation methods.

In Example 2, Lan Jiefang is the child of Lan Lian and Yingchun. His life is full of ups and downs. At several critical junctures in the novel, he chooses to follow his heart, demonstrating the humanistic brilliance of loving life and is the epitome of idealism in this book. Howard Goldblatt translates it as "Lan Jiefang," using a simple transliteration technique that avoids the profound meaning of the word

"Jiefang" in this character's name: it not only indicates the character's birth date (the evening of January 1, 1950) but also reflects the logic of ordinary peasant families naming their children at that time, a unique social phenomenon of that era. The same translation method is also reflected in Examples 3 and 4, where Goldblatt translates Huang Huzhu as "Huang Huzhu" and Huang Hezuo as "Huang Hezuo." This translation method omits the era background reflected in the names, reducing the reading threshold and comprehension difficulty for the target language readers, and improving the acceptability of the translation.

In Example 3, Huang Tong is a negative character in the work. Mo Yan, through the description of Huang Tong's various actions across the entire timeline, depicts a character who is opportunistic, bullying the weak, lazy and gluttonous, and living off others' labor. In Chinese culture, there is a way of giving people insulting and discriminatory nicknames or names by exaggerating their physical defects and certain prominent features to belittle and mock them. Mo Yan's naming of this character as Huang Tong, to some extent, adopts this method, implying contempt and disdain for the character. Howard Goldblatt translates Huang Tong as "Huang Tong," using the same transliteration method, which reduces the reading difficulty for readers of the target language. Moreover, in modern Chinese, such insulting names are considered extremely disrespectful and discriminatory, and are unacceptable in modern society. The translator's approach is undoubtedly modern in today's linguistic context.

Secondly, the novel involves a multitude of personal pronouns, including many complex local expressions, dialects, and colloquialisms. The language in the novel "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" has a distinct characteristic of regionalism (Wang, 2012, p. 65). There are quite a few differences in the structure of interpersonal and family relationships between Chinese and Western societies, especially between Chinese and English cultures. These differences are clearly reflected in language expression, particularly in the use of personal pronouns. Chinese personal pronouns place great emphasis on expressing the hierarchy of social relationships and the closeness or distance between people, often using specific terms of address rather than general "he" or "she." In contrast, English tends to be simpler when referring to family members, using common terms without distinguishing between generations or degrees of closeness. Additionally, in the use of third-person pronouns, English mainly relies on gender and number to differentiate. In summary, Chinese personal pronouns reflect the deep recognition of family relationships and social hierarchy in Chinese culture, while English expresses a simpler and more egalitarian communication style characteristic of Western culture. These differences are not only reflected in language but also profoundly influence the different manifestations of social interaction, family values, and social structure in the two cultures. The differences in personal pronouns between Chinese and English are even more complex in "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out," posing a certain challenge to the translator Howard Goldblatt.

Table 2. Example (18)

Example	Original	Translation
6	**老嫂子**，大喜了！(莫言，2012: 299)	How happy **you** must be!(Goldblatt, 2012: 299)
7	**老嫂子**，怎么没看到蓝大哥呢？(莫言, 2012: 299)	Why isn't Lan Lian here?,**ma'ma**?(Goldblatt, 2012: 299)
8	嫌**老娘**迷人，那你就去弄瓶镪水，给**老娘**点上一脸麻子(莫言, 2012: 27)	If you are afraid of **I** am too attractive to men,go get some sulfuric acid and ruin **my** face.(Goldblatt, 2012: 29)
9	你这是拿**老娘**开涮呢，一百元就想打发我！(莫言, 2012: 564)	"You no-account prick!"she cursed."You're not getting away that easy,not for a measly hundred yuan!"(Goldblatt, 2012: 533)
10	兴盛烧酒锅的**掌柜**田贵(莫言, 2012: 31, 192)	Tian Gui,the onetime **manager** of a flourishing liquor business(Goldblatt, 2012: 33)
11	**掌柜**的，你迟早要败在这个妖精手里。(莫言, 2012: 40)	You're **the head of the household**,she said angrily,but one of these days that witch is going to be your undoing!(Goldblatt, 2012: 43)
12	**掌柜**的，别跟人家叫板。(莫言, 2012: 62)	You're **the man of the house**,but why must you always sing a different tune than the others?(Goldblatt, 2012: 69)
13	**老掌柜**的心地良善，怎么能生出这么一个歹毒的儿子呢？(莫言，2012: 183)	"How," he wondered, "could **the landlord**, a good and decent man, sire an evil son like that?"(Goldblatt, 2012: 201)
14	烧酒锅的**掌柜**田贵(莫言, 2012: 192)	**Tian Gui,who had run** the distillery.(Goldblatt, 2012: 209)
15	"问问老**掌柜**的去吧。"(莫言, 2012: 522)	"Go ask **the old gentleman**."(Goldblatt, 2012: 491)
16	"老**掌柜**的" 许大爷说(莫言, 2012: 522)	"**Sir**, " Master Xu said(Goldblatt, 2012: 491)
17	老**掌柜**的，你确实是冤死的啊！(莫言, 2012: 537)	Old **Master**, you shouldn't have died the way you did(Goldblatt, 2012: 503)
18	"**掌柜**的，你也去吧。"(莫言, 2012: 543)	"You can go too, **Master**. "(Goldblatt, 2012: 510)

All the examples mentioned are Chinese terms of address found in the novel. Since there are no equivalent expressions in English, from the perspective of polysystems theory, Howard Goldblatt mostly

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adopts a domestication strategy in translation, applying established patterns of address from his own country, focusing on the acceptability of the translated text.

In Chinese, the term "老嫂子" has several different uses, and who it specifically refers to depends on the context and regional culture. In traditional northern dialects, "老嫂子" is often used to address someone else's wife, especially a married woman who is older or of a higher generation than oneself. The character "老" here carries a sense of affection and respect, and does not necessarily indicate age. In some social contexts, "老嫂子" might also be used as a casual, even somewhat affectionate term for "elderly women," similar to colloquial expressions like "big sister" or "auntie." There is no direct equivalent in English that can accurately correspond to the usage of "老嫂子" Within specific communities, there might be similar affectionate terms among acquaintances, but these are related to the culture and habits of the community and are not expressions commonly used in English. In Table 2, Goldblatt simply translates "老嫂子"as "you," using a domesticating translation method that indicates only the personal relationship in the dialogue and omits the speaker's cheerful tone present in the source language. Subsequently, in Example 7, the translator creatively uses the term "ma'ma," expressing the intimate relationship between the two individuals.

The term "老娘" in Chinese has a unique usage and carries certain emotional connotations, which are closely related to the context and the person it refers to. Some women might use "老娘" as a self-reference, expressing confidence, self-reliance, or even with a tone of self-mockery or deliberate exaggeration. In this context, "老娘" conveys a strong sense of self-identification. There is no direct equivalent in English for the term "老娘." In English, women might use "I" to refer to themselves. Of course, in informal or specific situations, they might use expressions like "this girl" or "yours truly" to convey independence or confidence in a self-deprecating or exaggerated context. To express emotions and attitudes similar to "老娘," English speakers might rely more on context and tone to convey the message. Therefore, when translating or finding equivalent expressions in English, it is necessary to adapt according to the specific context and tone. In Example 8, Howard Goldblatt continues to adopt a foreignizing translation strategy, only translating the personal relationship and omitting the speaker's strong sense of pride in the original language. In Example 9, the translator creatively uses the term "ma'ma," expressing the intimate relationship between the two people, avoiding the untranslatability caused by cultural differences.

In the novel "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out," the term "掌柜" is one of the most frequently used terms of address, with over thirty occurrences throughout the book, generally used to refer to respected middle-aged and elderly male figures. In Chinese, "掌柜" often refers to the person in charge or manager of a shop, inn, restaurant, or similar commercial establishment. For instance, the novel mentions "the shopkeeper of the distillery, Tian Gui" twice (Mo, p. 31, p. 192), and in these instances, Howard Goldblatt translates it as "manager of a flourishing liquor business" (Goldblatt, p. 33) and "who had run the distillery" (Goldblatt, p. 209). Sometimes, the character "old" is added before the term to express respect for the other party's rich experience and seniority, a usage more common in dialects. For example, in this

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novel, the term is mainly used among family members as a respectful address for husbands, fathers, and other venerable men. The characters Ximen Nao and Lan Lian best fit the aforementioned criteria. In Table 11, "Shopkeeper, you will sooner or later be ruined by this demoness." (Mo, 2012, p. 40), the term "shopkeeper" here expresses Bai's reminder to Ximen Nao to be cautious when taking concubines, emphasizing family values and serving as an admonition. Goldblatt emphasizes this meaning here, translating it as "You're the head of the household" (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 43), considering the cultural background of the target language readers and using a domesticating method to convey the implied meaning of the characters in the text. The same approach is seen in Table 12, "掌柜的，你迟早要败在这个妖精手里。" (Mo, 2012, p. 62), which describes a time in the 1950s when China implemented the agricultural production cooperative system in rural areas, but Lan Lian insisted on refusing to join and continued to work alone. Faced with her husband's behavior against the trend, Yingchun reminds him to prioritize the family's interests. Here, Goldblatt translates it as "the man of the house" (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 69), conveying the author's profound meaning and compensating for the lack of "collective consciousness" culture in the target language readers. Even more so, Goldblatt reflects the characteristics of the times through different translations of the term "掌柜" as seen in Examples 13, 17, and 18, all of which are Lan Lian's addresses to Ximen Nao. "老掌柜的心地良善，怎么能生出这么一个歹毒的儿子呢？" (Mo, 2012, p. 183), "老掌柜的，你确实是冤死的啊！" (Mo, 2012, p. 537), "掌柜的，你也去吧。" (Mo Yan, 2012, p. 543). In the work, Lan Lian is a stubborn farmer who, in turbulent times, adheres to his own values. When addressing the former landlord Ximen Nao, he always includes respect and gratitude towards Ximen Nao. The three translations are respectively "How," he wondered, "could the landlord, a good and decent man, sire an evil son like that?" (Goldblatt, p. 201), "Old Master, you shouldn't have died the way you did." (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 503), "You can go too, Master." (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 510). First, "landlord" simply points out Ximen Nao's identity as a landlord, but because he had a good local reputation and never oppressed farmers, expressing regret for his death due to the tide of the times. Secondly, "master" simply points out the relationship between Ximen Nao and Lan Lian as landlord and tenant at that time, on the one hand, indicating Lan Lian's missing for Ximen Nao, and on the other hand, also reflecting Ximen Nao's good treatment of his tenants, further deepening the character images of both parties. However, in Examples 15 and 16, "问问老掌柜的去吧。" (Mo, 2012, p. 522) "老掌柜的，" Uncle Xu said (Mo, 2012, p. 522), the translator translates these two "shopkeepers" as "Go ask the old gentleman." (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 491), "Sir, Master Xu said" (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 491). Here, it is the address of others to Lan Lian, and the story has advanced to the 1990s. The words "old gentleman" and "sir" only indicate respect without any other implications.

Culture-loaded words are a concept in linguistics and translation studies that refers to terms which have rich, special, or unique meanings within a specific culture and context. These words are often difficult to translate directly into other cultural contexts because they carry a wealth of background knowledge, history, beliefs, customs, and values associated with the original culture. Due to its unique regional characteristics and Mo Yan's writing style, the work "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" contains a

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large number of Chinese culture-loaded words. According to Eugene Nida's definition and classification of culture in translation, the culture-loaded words in the novel can be divided into material culture-loaded words, religious culture-loaded words, social culture-loaded words, language culture-loaded words, and ecological culture-loaded words (Nida, p. 91).

From the perspective of polysystems theory, dealing with culture-loaded words in the translation process is a challenge because a simple literal translation hardly conveys the deep meanings of the original text. Translators usually need to find corresponding or similar concepts in the target language culture, or convey the cultural connotations of the original text to readers through annotations and explanations. This approach not only tests the translator's deep understanding of both cultures but also requires the skill to creatively find solutions.

Table 19: 要是我的驴有个三长两短，咱们的事就没完没了。(Mo, 2012, p. 66)

Translation: If anything happens to my donkey because of this, you'll pay, and pay dearly. (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 73)

Polysystem theory posits that translation is not merely a correlation between source and target language texts, but rather an interaction involving multiple subsystems such as culture, history, and society. The Chinese idiom "三长两短" is primarily used to describe unexpected accidents, misfortunes, or life-threatening situations, often serving as an euphemism for death or significant unfortunate events. This idiom originates from ancient funeral customs. In English, there are similar expressions, such as "kick the bucket." The translator did not opt for this translation, demonstrating that the strategy is a specific manifestation of finding the best "secondary pattern" for foreign texts within the target literary system. The translator rendered "三长两短" as "If anything happens to my donkey," which transforms the implicit worry and potential consequences in the original text into a more explicit and clear statement. This phrase is highly understandable in the English context and adopts a structure more in line with English expression habits. By omitting the culturally specific elements of the idiom, the translation focuses on the core meaning, which is the concern for potential unfortunate events that could happen to the donkey. The target readers are expected to understand the basic emotions and intentions of the original text without needing an in-depth understanding of culturally specific idioms. The translation not only conveys the potential threat but also strengthens the tone of the original text by emphasizing the severity of the consequences ("you'll pay, and pay dearly"), making it more persuasive in the target language. Within the framework of polysystem theory, this translation successfully conveys the emotions and tone of the original text and ensures that the audience in the target culture can understand and feel the same message.

Polysystem theory proposes considerations for many factors in the translation process, including the various relationships between source and target texts, as well as the expectations of readers, social and cultural customs, and literary values in the target culture. The translation of the aforementioned terms fully considers the acceptability and readability in the target culture, transforming the cultural characteristics and artistic conception of Chinese into forms that English readers can understand and

accept through appropriate translation strategies. These translations not only achieve conversion at the linguistic level but also, while preserving the emotional hues and cultural features of the original text as much as possible, cater to the expectations of the target cultural environment. Therefore, it can be said that these translations are successful and effective.

2.2 Seeking Common Ground While Resolving Differences: Adaptation and Reconstruction of Linguistic Forms

There is a significant difference in expression between English and Chinese. For instance, Chinese emphasizes parataxis, where clauses are juxtaposed without explicit subordination, while English highlights hypotaxi (Xu, 2014, p. 135), which involves a clear subordination of clauses; Chinese stresses dynamic characteristics, whereas English accentuates rational and static features (Ge & Ma, 2023, p. 57); Chinese often employs short sentences, while English favors long ones. The following analysis of specific examples from the translation of "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" will elucidate the particular translation strategies adopted by Howard Goldblatt under the perspective of polysystems theory.

Example 20: 我继续喊叫着，话语重复，一圈圈轮回。阎王与身边的判官低声交谈几句，然后一拍惊堂木，说:"好了西门闹，知道你是冤枉的。世界上许多人该死，但却不死；许多人不该死，偏偏死了。这是本殿也无法改变的现实。现在本殿法外开恩，放你生还。" (Mo, 2012, p. 4)

Translation: So I shouted, repeating myself, the same thing over and over, until one of the judges leaned over and shispered someting in Lord Yama's ear. He banged his gavel to silence the hall. "All right, Ximen Nao, we accept your claim of innocence. Many people in that would who deserve to die somehow live on while those who deserve to live die off. Those are facts about which this throne can do nothing. So I will be merciful and send you back." (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 5)

This translation demonstrates the strategies adopted by the translator in dealing with the cultural and linguistic differences between Chinese and English: First, the translator adapts to the target language's conventions, and in the translation, "一圈圈轮回" is rendered as "the same thing over and over," which aligns with the habitual use of emphasis through repetition in English. This strategy ensures that the original intent is clearly conveyed in the target language while avoiding the confusion that a literal translation might cause. Second, the expression "一拍惊堂木" may be too unfamiliar to English readers who are not acquainted with Chinese culture; the translator transforms it into "He banged his gavel to silence the hall," clarifying that "一拍惊堂木" is used to command attention or announce a verdict. Third, "阎王与身边的判官" becomes "Lord Yama and one of the judges" in the translation. Here, "阎王" is handled as "Lord Yama," preserving a unique entity of Chinese culture while making it more comprehensible to readers from the target culture through the use of "Lord." Meanwhile, "判官" is replaced with "judge," which is in line with Western judicial terminology. Lastly, as there is no equivalent expression to "法外开恩" in English, the translator adds "So I will be merciful and send you back" to elucidate Lord Yama's decision. By including "merciful" and "send you back," the motive and outcome of the decision are made more explicit. The translator adopts adaptive strategies in dealing with the linguistic and cultural differences between Chinese and English in this paragraph, ensuring the fluency

and clarity of the translation in the target language while striving to retain the cultural style and information of the original text. These translation strategies are all based on an understanding of the expected habits and acceptance capabilities of readers in the target culture from the perspective of polysystems theory.

Example 21: 看，看，看……那个拐着一双小脚、提着半筐土、歪着身子、三步一歇、五步一停的女人，就是我西门闹的正妻白氏。(Mo Yan, 2012, p. 31)

Translation: Look, look, look, that women with the bound feet carrying half a basket of dirt but having to stop and rest every four or five steps, that's my formal wife, Ximen Bai. (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 33)

From the perspective of polysystem theory, the translation strategies in the aforementioned examples involve considerations of culture, language habits, acceptability, and many other levels. First, the translator Howard Goldblatt adopts a simplification and omission approach. In the translation, "拐着一双小脚" is simplified to "with the bound feet," without detailed explanation of "小脚" or "缠足," an ancient Chinese cultural custom. The concept of foot-binding may not exist in the target language culture but has some degree of awareness. The translator believes that not providing detailed explanations will not affect the understanding of the overall content, and this translation method can guide readers to delve deeper into this special and era-characteristic image in the source language culture, aiming to achieve the same reading effect as readers in the source language. Secondly, the translator adjusts the sentence structure and word order. The original text uses repetitive "看" and complex modifiers like "拐着一双小脚、提着半筐土、歪着身子、三步一歇、五步一停." In the translation, the translator chooses a more direct and fluent expression, avoiding excessive repetition and awkward syntax, making the translation more in line with English expression habits. Thirdly, the translator concretes "三步一歇、五步一停" into "having to stop and rest every four or five steps," which clarifies the implied imagery of difficulty and effort in the Chinese original text. This specification in English helps convey the degree of difficulty of the situation and the state of the character. Lastly, the translation uses expressions like "formal wife, Ximen Bai" to explain and translate the special culture against the backdrop of the original text's era, as there is no strict distinction between formal and informal wives in English-speaking cultures. Such translation helps readers understand the relationships and social status of the characters. In summary, the translator adopts strategies of simplification, adjustment, specification, and cultural adaptation in dealing with differences between Chinese and English languages, with the main goal of making the translation more fluent and reasonably conveying the content and emotional color of the original text while maintaining sensitivity and adaptability to the target culture. Such handling techniques are based on the understanding of the interaction between different systems and their impact on translation decisions within polysystem theory.

Example 22: 我放下粪筐，把他挪动了一下，用手摸摸胸口，还有一丝热气，知道还没死，就脱下棉袍，将他包裹起来。沿着大街，迎着太阳，手托着这冻僵的孩子往家里走。(Mo, 2012, p. 12)

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Translation: I set down my dung baster and nudged the boy, then felt his chest. It was still warm, so I know he was alive. I took off my lined coat and wrapped him in it, then picked him up and carried him home. (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 12)

This translation demonstrates the translator's efforts to adjust sentence structures to accommodate the target language's conventions while striving to preserve the original meaning and the scenes depicted. First, the translator restructures the sentences; the original text uses a series of actions to advance the narrative. The translator breaks these actions into several steps, using punctuation to mimic the sequence of actions, such as combining "把他挪动了一下" and "用手摸摸胸口" into "I set down my dung basket and nudged the boy, then felt his chest." In dealing with the differences in sentence structure between Chinese and English, the translator analyzes and organizes the detailed descriptions in the original text: "我放下粪筐，把他挪动了一下，用手摸摸胸口，还有一丝热气，知道还没死，就脱下棉袍，将他包裹起来。" In the translation, these actions are simplified into more concise key steps: "I took off my lined coat and wrapped him in it." Such simplification strategies help target language readers better grasp the progress of the event and make the sentences more consistent with English expression habits. Secondly, the original text, "用手摸摸胸口，还有一丝热气" might be ambiguous, and the translator clarifies it as "It was still warm, so I knew he was alive." This processing ensures the clear transmission of information, directly stating the purpose and result of the check. English is a hypotaxic language that values logical relationships within sentences. In the English translation, the translator reorganizes the information, such as modifying "沿着大街，迎着太阳，手托着这冻僵的孩子往家里走" to "I picked him up and carried him home," which is more in line with the logic and directness of English expression. In summary, when dealing with the differences in Chinese and English sentence structures, the translator adopts strategies of simplification, clarification of meaning, reorganization of information, and supplementation of details. These translation strategies are designed to make the translated work conform to the target language's expression habits and to make the content clearer and more direct while retaining the emotional and vivid descriptions of the original Chinese text. Within the framework of polysystem theory, translation is a creative transformation process between different cultural and linguistic systems, and the translator balances the need for fidelity to the original text with the adaptation to the target language culture through these strategies.

2.3 Ingenuity in Translation: Poetic Adjustments of Special Structures

"Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" is a chapter-novel divided into four parts based on the reincarnation process of the protagonist, Ximen Nao, comprising fifty-three chapters. Mo Yan deliberately imitates the traditional Chinese chapter-novels from the Ming and Qing dynasties, which feature parallel couplets as titles for each chapter. This writing technique, common in "Water Margin" and "Romance of the Three Kingdoms," summarizes the main content of each chapter and entices readers to continue reading. Additionally, Mo Yan intersperses the book with nursery rhymes, doggerel, and tongue twisters, breaking free from traditional linguistic constraints and enhancing the novel's readability. However, this characteristic of the source text increases the difficulty for translators. Upon careful

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comparison of the translator's handling of these aspects, it is observed that in most cases, Howard Goldblatt has effectively preserved the style of the original text.

Example 23:

单干是座独木桥，走一步来摇三摇，摇到桥下沉没了。

人民公社通天道，社会主义是金桥，拔掉穷根栽富苗。

蓝脸老顽固，单干走绝路。一粒老鼠屎，坏了一杠醋。

金龙宝凤蓝解放，手摸胸口想一想。跟着你爹老顽固，落后保守难进步。

(Mo, 2012, pp. 107-108)

Translation:

Stubborn old Lan Lian is not our firend; independent farming is a true dead end. A single mouse dropping ruins a vat of vinegar. Jinlong, Baodfeng, Lan Jiefang, put your hands over your hearts and think hard. Stay with your dad and you're as good as dead; you will keep falling behind and can't get ahead.

(Goldblatt, 2012, p. 119)

Polysystem theory posits that for texts closely related to culture and ideology, translators must weigh how to convey the cultural characteristics and contextual adaptability of the original text to the target readers. This doggerel reflects the political propaganda and socio-cultural phenomena of a specific historical period. Firstly, in terms of language style and rhythm, doggerel in Chinese usually has a clear rhythm and a distinct beat. The translator attempts to present this rhythm and beat through rhyming translation, such as "Stay with your dad and you' re as good as dead; you will keep falling behind and can't get ahead." This phrasing maintains a certain rhythm and fluency, allowing English readers to experience the characteristics of doggerel. Secondly, in terms of cultural transmission, the translation must not only convey the literal meaning of the original text but also the cultural and political significance it carries. Expressions like "Stubborn old Lan Lian" and "independent farming is a true dead end" convey the ideological orientation and historical context of the original poem. Thirdly, in terms of the handling of imagery and metaphors, for example, "一粒老鼠屎，坏了一杠醋" is translated as "A single mouse dropping ruins a vat of vinegar," preserving the metaphorical meaning of the original text while also expressing a similar idea with an idiom in the target language. Lastly, the translation needs to consider the political atmosphere and acceptability in the target language culture. The translator omitted the second line of the original text, avoiding the strong era characteristics of the original, although Western readers are likely not to have experienced the era mentioned in the text, the translation tries to convey the urgency and critical nature of the original meaning.

Overall, the translation of this doggerel is relatively successful. The translator, through the adaptation of rhythm and beat, effectively recreates the style of the original text in the target culture. At the same time, the translator maintains the intention to be faithful to the original text when dealing with specific cultural imagery and metaphors, making it understandable to the target readers. Although the target readers may be completely unfamiliar with the historical background and contextual context of the original poem, the translator's work allows them to perceive the ideological background of this poem. Therefore, from the

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perspective of polysystem theory, this is a successful case of reconstructing the cultural characteristics of the source language within the target language system.

Example 24:

老顽固，小顽固，组成一个单干户。

牵着一头蚂蚱牛，推着一辆木轱辘。

最终还要来入社，晚入不如趁早入……

(Mo, 2012, p. 114)

Translation:

A headstrong man, a headstrong boy, choosing to farm apart.

Pulling an ox the size of an insect, pushing a wood-wheeled cart.

Sooner or later you'll have to join, and sooner is better than later to start...(Goldblatt, 2012, p. 125)

The translation of this nursery rhyme requires consideration of the original text's cultural, social, and historical context, as well as how these elements are conveyed into the target language's cultural environment. Firstly, translating nursery rhymes particularly needs to take into account rhythm and rhyme, as these elements are its distinct artistic features. The translation maintains the original's rhythmic structure, imitating the rhythm of the original poem through corresponding rhymes, such as "apart" and "cart," "join" and "start," making it smooth and natural in English. Secondly, the translation effectively conveys the original meaning, communicating a negative evaluation of the old and young stubbornly insisting on independent farming and urging the joining of cooperatives. "Pulling an ox the size of an insect, pushing a wood-wheeled cart" vividly describes the harsh conditions of farming, in line with the original's artistic conception. Thirdly, the depictions, metaphors, and symbols in the translation are acceptable to target language readers while also perceiving the critical and satirical intent expressed in the original text. Direct expressions like "A headstrong man, a headstrong boy" may be more explicit than the original, but in English, they clearly convey the negative implications of stubbornness. Lastly, this poem reflects the social and economic policies and ideological orientation of a certain historical period, and the handling of this orientation in the translation is very subtle, reflecting the original's historical context while gaining new interpretations and understandings in the new cultural context. In summary, from the perspective of polysystem theory, the translation of this doggerel is successful. The translation is not only faithful to the original's imagery and tone but also adapts to specific expressions in the target cultural context, allowing the poem to maintain its vitality in the new cultural environment.

Example 25：锣鼓喧天群众入社 四蹄踏雪毛驴挂掌 (Mo, 2012: catalogue)

Translation: Gongs and Drums Pound the Heavens as the Masses Join the Co-op

Four Hooves Plod through the Snow as the Donkey Is Shod (Goldblatt, 2012: 31)

In the original text, Mo Yan not only adopts the traditional Chinese chapter-novel structure with paired titles for each chapter but also imitates the writing style of couplets, a unique form in Chinese literature that requires the upper and lower parts to correspond in meaning, sound, and structure. These titles are rich in traditional Chinese cultural colors, and their charm lies in the specific cultural background and

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imagery. When translating, it is necessary to convey the corresponding cultural atmosphere and traditional implications. Here, "锣鼓喧天群众入社" conveys a festive and lively scene, and although the English translation does not directly reflect the rhythm and antithesis of traditional Chinese couplets, it retains the main imagery of the original text. However, the translation of "Four Hooves Treading on Snow, Donkey with Shoes" is somewhat biased. According to the original text, "Four Hooves Treading on Snow" is a description of the donkey's characteristics, which is also an external manifestation of the Chinese farmers' perception of the donkey as Hard work, good characteristics of human nature. The translator has processed this noun as a depiction of the donkey struggling through the snow, possibly to avoid the cultural conflict that would arise from explaining this minor detail in the translation, which could affect the fluency and integrity of the title translation and the reader's experience. "Donkey with Shoes" indicates the actual situation in rural northern China, where "shoes" usually refer to special hoof protectors for donkeys. The English "the Donkey Is Shod" effectively expresses this action. Considering the beauty and rhythm of the couplet, the translator also needs to reflect these characteristics well. Although it is difficult for the English translation to completely replicate the antithetical rules of Chinese couplets, the parallel structure "as the Masses Join the Co-op" and "as the Donkey Is Shod" in the translation to some extent reproduces the style of the corresponding upper and lower parts in Chinese. In summary, from the perspective of polysystem theory, the translation of this couplet is successful in conveying the main imagery, maintaining cultural colors, social background, and basic functions. However, due to the differences in language structure and cultural background, it is challenging to fully reproduce the beauty and rhythm of the original text. Therefore, although the translation effect is not perfect, it can be considered acceptable and has well maintained the overall meaning and emotional color of the original text.

3. From the Perspective of Polysystem Theory, the Successful Factors of the English Translation Strategy of "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out"

"At the Fifth Plenary Session of the 15th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China held in October 2000, the 'going global' strategy was explicitly proposed for the first time." (Yang, 2014, p. 186) As a vehicle of culture, the translation of literary works is one of the important means of spreading Chinese culture. However, the situation of the international dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature is not optimistic. "Chinese writers have to look up to Western literature, and in the end, they have to be recognized by the 'West' to enter the ranks of 'universality'" (Wang, 2012, p. 166), "Chinese literary works are considered 'successful' if they sell two to three thousand copies in Europe and America," "Nobel Prize in Literature judge Ma Yueran once said: 'Chinese literature should have gone global a long time ago, but there are too few works translated into foreign languages.'" (Zhu, 2015, p. 131)

In 2012, Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize in Literature, and Howard Goldblatt's translation work was widely recognized. Mo Yan also publicly expressed his appreciation for Goldblatt's translation contributions, pointing out that Goldblatt's translations played a key role in his winning the Nobel Prize in Literature.

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Through Goldblatt's translations, several of Mo Yan's works have been able to cross linguistic and cultural barriers and reach a broader global readership. It can be seen that translation is a cross-cultural communication behavior. By using polysystem theory, we can focus on studying and interpreting translation practices, revealing the role of political and cultural factors behind them, expanding new fields for translation studies, and providing reference significance for the introduction of Chinese literature.

According to polysystem theory, the subject of translation, the translator, in the translation process, Howard Goldblatt believes that he has well handled how to cater to the aesthetic interests of English readers. British sinologist Gerhard also said that translation is best done into one's mother tongue because readers have a higher level of trust in translators with the same cultural background. "And Howard Goldblatt's translations are carried out in collaboration with his wife, Lin Lijun" (Wang H. & Wang Y., 2023, p. 35). In addition to providing translations, the translator also acts as a cultural exchange intermediary among the original author, editors, sponsors, etc., and uses their influence to expand the influence of the translation in the target country. After completing the translation, Goldblatt uses his influence to find more authoritative publishers. In summary, the translator can not only determine the quality of the translation but also has a significant impact on the distribution, dissemination, and translation effect. From Goldblatt's translation approach, it is clear that an excellent translation subject can not only make appropriate bilingual conversions during the translation process but also increase the acceptability of the translation. Therefore, a good translation subject should be a collaboration between local translators and foreign sinologists, so that Chinese literary works can not only be "translated out" but also truly "go out" with Chinese culture.

Polysystem theory holds that most of the time, translated literature will be on the periphery of the target language's literary system. Therefore, blindly exporting literary works oriented by one's own culture without considering the social conditions, cultural needs, and acceptance of the target country will definitely not be satisfactory. When selecting content for translation, it must conform to the poetic attitudes and market demands of the target country, arousing the target language readers' interest in the source language culture. After the translated literature gradually enters the center of the target language's literary system, more content containing more source language culture can be translated. "In Mo Yan's works, there are two conflicting local forces, one is nostalgia for local legends, and the other is ruthless exposure of reality" (Xiong, 2014, p. 78). At the same time, in "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out," the shadows of Marquez and Faulkner often appear, so this work also has a strong magical realist style. Therefore, this work has both the heterogeneity of Chinese literature and the universality of world literature, conforming to the poetic preferences of mainstream Western literature. In summary, when selecting content for translation, it is necessary to choose excellent and valuable works with a long-term development perspective to achieve better translation effects.

Compared with the dominant Western culture, Chinese literature is on the periphery of the world literary system, and the translation of Chinese literature in the Western literary system is even more so. From the perspective of polysystem theory, there is a "time lag" and a "language difference" behind the translation

of Chinese literature "going global" (Xie, 2014, p. 8). The acceptance of one nation's culture by another nation is a long process of evolution and development. Goldblatt's translation of Mo Yan's works can be divided into three periods: from 1993 to 2000, Goldblatt used domestication translation methods in the translation of "Red Sorghum Clan" and "The Republic of Wine," deleting most of the vocabulary with special historical background in the original text, and using the established literary models of his own country to avoid reading obstacles caused by the lack of cultural background. Starting from 2008, when translating "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" and "Frog," Goldblatt used a combination of domestication and foreignization translation methods. On the one hand, he considered that readers have a certain understanding of Chinese culture, and on the other hand, he stimulated readers' interest in actively learning Chinese culture. Later, when translating "Frog," Goldblatt even stated that the translation of the work was "unchanged." In summary, when dealing with the translation of Chinese culture, it is necessary to consider the status of translated literature in the target language's literary system at different times, so as to retain the Chinese elements in the original work and meet the expectations of foreign readers.

In the polysystem, the factor of "patron" plays a significant role in the translation process. "Patron" can to some extent restrict the position of translated literature in the target language's literature. In the process of translating "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out," Goldblatt also used his influence to cooperate with the overseas authoritative publishing institution Arcade Publishing, using its professional opinions to cater to the needs of overseas readers, allowing this work to enter a broader international market and meet English-speaking readers.

4. Conclusion

This article takes Howard Goldblatt's English translation of "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" as an example, and from the perspective of polysystem theory, discusses its English translation strategies. Through comparative text analysis, the author believes that Goldblatt has effectively overcome the barriers between the two languages and cultures, making the aesthetic value and artistic image of the translation almost identical to the original. Goldblatt has done his best to build a cultural bridge, connecting the author Mo Yan with readers from foreign countries across the ocean, conveying Chinese cultural elements to them well, while also considering the readers' reading interests and cultural backgrounds. He skillfully combines domestication and foreignization translation methods, making the English translation of "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" a well-loved translation by readers.

Great classic literary works often possess extraordinary universal value, capable of resonating deeply with readers and motivating them to actively explore the profound meanings of the works. These literary masterpieces not only showcase the common emotions and thoughts of humanity but also provide a clear mirror in which readers can discover their reflections and spiritual counterparts. In this vibrant literary ecosystem, translated literature plays a crucial role. It serves not only as a bridge for cultural exchange between different cultures but also provides a stage for readers from different linguistic backgrounds,

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allowing them to interpret and appreciate these classics from their unique perspectives and understandings. Through translation, literature transcends the boundaries of language and geography, spreading more widely and allowing more readers to access and experience these great works. Therefore, translated literature is not only an important medium for cultural dissemination but also a vital tool for inspiring readers' creative interpretations. It enables the wisdom and beauty of classic literature to cross time and space, continuously inspiring and enlightening generations of readers, enriching their spiritual lives and cultural identity. The importance of translation work lies not only in converting words from one language to another but also in giving these words new life, allowing them to shine uniquely in different cultural contexts.

Goldblatt's successful translation of Mo Yan's novels into the Western literary world has not only paved the way for the international dissemination of Chinese literature but also provided a replicable example. We should understand the mechanisms of the relevant systems according to the dynamic relationship between the "center" and "periphery" within the literary polysystem and grasp the timing of translation and optimize translation strategies based on this. With a flexible attitude towards the translation of literary works, this can pave the way for Chinese literature to move from a relatively marginalized state to the central position in the international literary system and find the most suitable translation model for the overseas promotion of Chinese literary works. As China's national strength grows increasingly strong, the Chinese literary polysystem will also increasingly move towards the center of the global polysystem.

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