

Original Paper

A Study on the Translation Strategies of Imagery and Blank Space in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics: A Case Study of Howard Goldblatt's Translation

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Abstract

*In recent years, China's international status has been steadily rising, along with active efforts to promote the global dissemination of its literary works. However, the translation of culture-loaded terms has emerged as a significant barrier to literary communication. This study focuses on culture-specific terms in the English translation of *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, analyzing them through the strategy of Reception Aesthetics. It explores two primary translation strategies: catering to readers' "horizon of expectations" and expanding it. These findings indicate that these strategies effectively convey traditional Chinese cultural elements while maintaining a reader-centered approach, thereby enhancing China's cultural influence globally. By analyzing Howard Goldblatt's translation of the novel, this paper demonstrates how to balance cultural fidelity with target readers' receptivity, preserving the artistic essence of the original text while considering the cultural context of the target audience. The application of these strategies not only help foreign readers understand Chinese literature but also foster cross-cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Thus, precise translation of culture-loaded terms serves as a crucial step in advancing the internationalization of China's literary masterpieces.*

Keywords

*Reception Aesthetics, *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, image and blank space, translation strategy*

1. Introduction

Since Mo Yan's Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012, his works have earned extensive global attention and

scholarly exploration. *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* (2013), a seminal representative of the “Root-Seeking Literature” movement, stands out among his literary works for its unique blend of magical realism and profound thematic depth. The novel extensively employs the literary device of imagery and blank space, creating rich imaginative possibilities for readers. However, such distinctive stylistic features pose significant challenges in translation. This study selects Howard Goldblatt’s English translation as its focal text to investigate the translation strategies of imagery and blank space through the theoretical aspect of Reception Aesthetics.

Reception Aesthetics emphasizes readers’ active role in the literary reception process, providing a fresh perspective on translation studies. The research aims to explore how translators can preserve the original’s imagery and blank space dynamics while considering the receptive capacity of target-language readers, ensuring both cross-cultural dissemination and faithful artistic reproduction.

2. Reception Aesthetics

2.1 The Origin and Development of Reception Aesthetics

Reception Aesthetics, a literary theory emerging in the late 1960s, was pioneered by scholars from the German Konstanz School, including Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser (1987). This theory subverted the traditional author- and text-centered paradigm of literary studies, positioning readers at the core of literary engagement. Reception Aesthetics posits that the meaning of a literary work is not fixed but dynamically constructed through readers’ interpretative processes during reading (1991). In the process of translation, a new relationship has been formed based on “the original work-the translator-the translated work-the overseas readers”, but this relationship still conforms to the triangle relationship among “the author, the work and the reader” proposed by the receptional aesthetics theory (2004). In this kind of relationship, the reader is neither passive or peripheral. On the contrary, literary works are fundamentally created for readers, who constitute the active agents in literary communication (2000). Factors such as the readers’ horizon of expectations, aesthetic experiences, and cultural background collectively shape their interpretation and reception of the text.

From the perspective of Reception Aesthetics, literary translation transcends mere linguistic transference to become a cross-cultural act of literary reception. Translators, acting as both readers of the source text and creators of the target text, must fully consider the target audience’s horizon of expectations and receptive capacity during the translation process (2003). This theoretical framework redefines literary translation studies by foregrounding the reader’s agency. Reception Aesthetics rejects the notion of passive, unidirectional textual reception. Instead, it conceptualizes reading as a creative aesthetic act (2003), wherein readers actively reconstruct meaning. Such theoretical premises underscore the critical role of readerly factors in translation practice while providing methodological guidance for addressing complex textual features like imagery and blank space dynamics in literary works.

2.2 Imagery and Blank Space Translation under Reception Aesthetics

Imagery and blank space constitutes a distinctive and sophisticated literary technique that holds significant artistic value. It refers to an author's deliberate omission or ambiguous rendering of specific imagery in textual construction, creating semantic voids and indeterminacy through meticulous selection and arrangement of symbols. Far from indicating deficiency, these intentional blanks function as artistic catalysts, inviting readers to actively reconstruct meaning by drawing upon their personal experiences, cultural frameworks, aesthetic sensibilities, and imaginative faculties. This interactive process facilitates co-creation of textual significance between writer and reader.

From the perspective of reception aesthetics, translating imagery and blank space represents a formidable cross-cultural interpretation task. Effective translation must not only convey surface-level denotations but crucially preserve the original's appeal structure—the textual mechanism that elicits reader engagement. This demands the translator's artistic re-creation of the source text's open-endedness in the target language, ensuring comparable aesthetic experiences for receptor audiences.

Translators must conduct rigorous analysis of the artistic functions and aesthetic values embedded in source-text blanks. These voids may function as narrative ellipsis, emotional implication, or atmospheric elements, collectively shaping the work's interactive structure. The target-language rendering requires judicious equilibrium: excessive explication risks compromising aesthetic potency, while undue obscurity may hinder comprehensibility. Achieving this balance needs profound bilingual competence and literary discernment of the translator.

Howard Goldblatt's English translation of *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* exemplifies masterful approach to translating imagery and blank space. Through strategic adaptation of target-language rhetorical devices, he reconstructs the original's appeal structure not through mechanical transference but via artistic reconfiguration. Goldblatt's methodology demonstrates that successful translation of textual voids enables cross-cultural resonance, allowing target readers to approximate the source readers' aesthetic reception. Subsequent analysis will examine his approaches through three dimensions: characterization, plot development, and thematic articulation.

3. Imagery and Blank Space Dynamics in Howard Goldblatt's Translation

3.1 Imagery and Blank Space in Characterization

Reception Aesthetics underscores the reader's pivotal role in constructing literary meaning, emphasizing textual openness and indeterminacy while positing literary significance as a co-creative result between author and reader. In translation, the transference of imagery and the treatment of textual voids directly shape target readers' perception and interpretation of character portrayals.

In *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, Mo Yan masterfully deploys imagery and blank space dynamics to imbue characters with multidimensional depth and symbolic resonance. Through deliberate omissions in depicting pivotal experiences and psychological states—exemplified by the

protagonist Ximen Nao's cyclical reincarnations—the author constructs narrative gaps that invite readers to actively reconstruct subtextual meanings. Secondary characters like Lan Lian and Yingchun similarly emerge through artful negative spacing, where strategic silences amplify their symbolic weight.

This technique transcends mere narrative economy, transforming character construction into an interactive aesthetic event. The translator's mediation of these voids becomes critical: excessive explication risks diminishing the text's evocative power, while inadequate contextualization may obscure cultural specificity. Goldblatt's approach demonstrates how thoughtful interventions can preserve the original's invitational quality, enabling cross-cultural readers to engage in the co-creation of meaning that defines Mo Yan's literary genius.

Example1

ST: 蓝脸的眼睛里射出疯狂的光芒，那光芒让我感到恐惧。

TT: Lan Lian's eyes shone with a crazy light that filled me with dread.

Analysis: The symbolic construct of “蓝脸 (Blue Face)” in the source text isn't just a facial description, encoding layers of cultural cryptograms concerning identity, temperament, and sociohistorical context. Goldblatt's retention of the transliterated “Lan Lian” without exegetic intervention creates a culturally charged void. Western readers, encountering “Blue Face” devoid of China's specific color symbolism (where blue may signify the extraordinary or mythical), must navigate interpretative dissonance: while blue connotes melancholy or calmness in Euro-American contexts, its juxtaposition with “a crazy light” in the text activates semantic friction. This calculated ambiguity compels readers to excavate subsurface meanings through their own cultural background, transforming the character into a protean signifier shaped by individual hermeneutic frameworks.

The rendering of “疯狂的光芒” as “a crazy light” preserves the core semantic node of madness while diminishing the original emotion intensity. The Chinese verb “射出(to shoot forth)” viscerally conveys abrupt, dynamic radiance, whereas “shone” reduces this to generic emission. This weakened dynamism necessitates imaginative co-creation: readers must mentally reconstruct the light's violent luminescence based on contextual cues like “dread”. The very indeterminacy of “shone” paradoxically amplifies interpretive agency—some may envision strobe-like flashes, others an ominous glow—each projection revealing as much about the reader's psyche as the character's madness.

Additionally, the phrase “那光芒让我感到恐惧” was translated by Goldblatt as “that filled me with dread”. The translation accurately conveys the core emotion of fear, but it similarly leaves room for readers to ponder the specific feelings of fear and the deeper reasons behind it. The original text does not provide detailed explanations of the fear's specifics, and the translation maintains this ambiguity. Readers can only generally sense the emotion of fear through the word “dread”. Whether this fear arises from the eerie nature of the light itself or from the unknown threat posed by the blue-faced figure, different readers will interpret and imagine it in their own ways, further deepening the richness and mystery of the character's image.

Example2

ST: 迎春的脸上总是带着一种似笑非笑的神情，让人捉摸不透。

TT: Yingchun's face always wore an expression that was neither a smile nor not a smile, making it hard to fathom.

Analysis: In the original text, the phrase “似笑非笑的神情” is translated by Goldblatt as “an expression that was neither a smile nor not a smile”, a literal translation of the description. However, compared to the original, the translation leaves some gaps in the emotional and nuanced portrayal of the expression. The original phrase “似笑非笑” vividly conveys a subtle and hard-to-describe expression, which might reflect a complex inner world, such as resignation, restraint, or a unique perspective on the surrounding circumstances. The translated version, with its more straightforward expression, requires the reader to draw on their own life experience and emotional understanding to fill in the deeper emotions behind this look. Different readers will interpret “似笑非笑” in different ways based on their personal experiences. Some might associate it with the kind of half-smile one wears in awkward situations, leading them to think that Yingchun may be in a similar emotional state. Others might draw on their experiences in interpersonal relationships, recognizing this enigmatic smile as reflecting a deeper, more ambiguous feeling. This provides the possibility for readers to form a more diverse and multi-layered image of Yingchun in their minds, thus fulfilling the goal of broadening the reader's perspective in the translation.

At the same time, the phrase “让人捉摸不透” was translated as “making it hard to fathom”, which accurately conveys the sense of something being difficult to understand in the original text. However, the translation leaves room for contemplation regarding exactly why the expression is so elusive and the underlying personality traits or story clues behind it. Since the original text does not provide a detailed explanation for the expression on Yingchun's face, the translation continues this ambiguity. Readers can only gather that Yingchun's expression is hard to understand from the phrase “hard to fathom”. Whether this is due to Yingchun's introspective, deep-minded character, or because the complexity of her environment has shaped her expression, different readers will interpret and imagine this based on their own reading experience and understanding of human nature. This further enriches and deepens the mysterious and multifaceted image of Yingchun.

Example3

ST: 西门闹的身上散发着一股神秘的气息，仿佛来自另一个世界。

TT: Xi Men Nao exuded a mysterious aura, as if he came from another world.

Analysis: The original phrase “神秘的气息” was translated as “a mysterious aura”, which directly conveys the core meaning of the original. However, compared to the original, the translation leaves some gaps in describing the specific sensations of this aura and the underlying reasons for its mystery. The use of “散发着” in the original text vividly portrays the diffusion of the mysterious aura, suggesting that this mystery naturally emanates from within, potentially hinting at the rich experiences, special identity, or hidden secrets of Ximen Nao. In contrast, the translation adopts “exuded”, which is

relatively neutral. The target readers must rely on their own imagination and emotional experiences to fill in the intensity and unique qualities of this mysterious aura. Due to differences in life experience and cultural background, readers may have vastly different interpretations and imaginations of the “mysterious aura”. Some may associate it with the aura exuded by mystical creatures in ancient legends, while others may draw from mysterious things they’ve encountered in real life to construct the aura around Ximen Nao. This allows readers to build a richer and more diverse image of Ximen Nao in their minds.

The rendering of “仿佛来自另一个世界” as “as if he came from another world” in the translation accurately conveys the original text’s transcendent quality while leaving room for readers’ speculation regarding the nature of this “other world” and its impact on Ximen Nao. The source text deliberately refrains from detailing the specific characteristics of this world, and the translation preserves this ambiguity. Readers can only infer Ximen Nao’s uniqueness through the phrase “another world”, yet interpretations of whether this realm embodies fantasy, peril, or distinct cultural codes will vary significantly. Different readers will construct personalized understandings based on their literary experiences, imaginations of fantastical worlds, and perceptions of human nature, thereby enriching the multidimensionality and mystique of Ximen Nao.

3.2 Imagery and Blank Space in Plot Development

Reception Aesthetics emphasizes the reader’s pivotal role in literary interpretation, advocating for textual openness and indeterminacy, where meaning emerges as a co-creative act between author and reader (1987). In translation, the treatment of imagery and blank space dynamics within plot development profoundly shapes target readers’ engagement with the narrative.

In *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, Mo Yan employs such narrative gaps as suspense mechanisms, propelling the plot through calculated omissions. Ximen Nao’s cyclical reincarnations—particularly his transformation into an ox—epitomize this technique. Critical junctures like soul-body integration and metempsychotic consciousness shifts remain deliberately undescribed. Mo Yan refrains from detailing how the protagonist’s soul merges with the bovine form or articulating the phenomenological rupture of rebirth, instead leaving ontological voids for readers to navigate. Readers must infer possible scenarios solely through the ox’s post-reincarnation behaviors and fragmented memories.

This strategic negative space imbues the rebirth process with mystique, compelling readers to hypothesize, imagine, and yearn to unravel its secrets, thereby propelling the plot forward through readerly co-creation.

Example1

TT: 那一夜，月光如水，村子里突然传来一阵奇怪的声响，随后又恢复了平静。

ST: That night, the moonlight was like water. Suddenly, a strange sound came from the village, and then it returned to calm.

Analysis: The imagery of “月光如水(the moonlight was like water)” in the original text creates a serene and gentle atmosphere, evoking a tranquil moonlit scene. The translation “the moonlight was

like water” retains this simile, succinctly conveying the original’s poetic imagery. However, this concise rendering achieves immediate sensory impact while simultaneously leaving room for imaginative interpretation. For instance, readers may visualize the metaphor differently: some might visualize scenes of moonlight shimmering on water, while others imagine its soft, even diffusion across the landscape. Such personalized reconstructions, rooted in individual sensibilities, enrich readers’ perception of the narrative backdrop.

The phrase “一阵奇怪的声响” is rendered as “a strange sound” in translation, preserving the original’s attribution of peculiarity while maintaining ambiguity regarding its source, nature, and characteristics. This deliberate vagueness invites readers to hypothesize based on personal experiences: the sound could be animal calls, wind-induced rustling, or human-made mystery. Such uncertainty fuels curiosity, prompting active engagement in narrative construction, where divergent interpretations multiply the story’s potential trajectories.

The translation of “随后又恢复了平静” as “and then it returned to calm” mirrors the original’s minimalist depiction of the village’s transition from disturbance to quietude. By withholding explanations—whether the calm conceals hidden truths or merely marks an ephemeral pause—the text compels readers to interrogate the unexplained: Why did the sound emerge and vanish? Is the tranquility genuine or illusory? Some may interpret this as a fleeting anomaly, while others anticipate ominous developments, their imaginative projections deepening the narrative’s enigmatic atmosphere and enriching its unfolding complexities.

Example2

ST: 他走进那片古老的树林，许久都没有出来，树林里隐隐约约传来一些动静。

TT: He walked into that ancient forest and didn’t come out for a long time. There were faint sounds coming from the forest.

Analysis: The imagery of “那片古老的树林(that ancient forest)” in the original text evokes a mysterious and profound atmosphere. The term “古老(ancient)” implies the forest’s long history and potential hidden secrets. While the translation retains the descriptor “ancient”, it refrains from elaborating on the forest’s interior details or concealed narratives, leaving ample imaginative space for readers. Depending on their cultural backgrounds and reading experiences, readers might envision the forest as a realm of mythical creatures or a perilous, silent wilderness—such individualized interpretations enrich the narrative’s contextual layers.

The phrase “许久都没有出来” is rendered as “didn’t come out for a long time”, faithfully conveying the factual duration without addressing the underlying cause. This narrative gap prompts readers to hypothesize: Was the character lost, endangered, or captivated by something within the forest? Such speculative engagement generates multiple plot possibilities, inviting readers to co-construct the storyline.

Besides, “树林里隐隐约约传来一些动静” is translated as “There were faint sounds coming from the forest”, accurately preserving the ambiguity of the origin and nature of the sounds. Readers may

interpret these noises as wildlife activity, rustling leaves, or even supernatural signals. This deliberate uncertainty heightens suspense, encouraging readers to imaginatively extrapolate subsequent events, thereby deepening the story's enigmatic undertones and narrative complexity.

Example3

ST:暴雨如注的夜晚，那座废弃的房子里突然亮起了一盏灯，一闪一闪的。

TT: On a night of torrential rain, a lamp suddenly lit up in that abandoned house, flickering on and off.

Analysis: The imagery of “暴雨如注的夜晚 (On a night of torrential rain)” in the original text establishes an oppressive, tense, and enigmatic atmosphere. Torrential rain often symbolizes chaos, unease, and primal natural forces. While the translation accurately conveys the scenario, it omits sensory details such as the howling wind or the splashing patterns of raindrops, inviting readers to visualize the storm through personal experiences. Some may recall their own harrowing encounters with storms, infusing the scene with visceral tension, while others might draw on cinematic or literary storm tropes to amplify its mystique.

And the phrase “那座废弃的房子 (that abandoned house)” similarly evokes mystery. The descriptor “废弃 (abandoned)” implies prolonged desertion and concealed histories. The translation retains this attribute but avoids detailing the house's decay, past purposes, or residual traces. Readers naturally speculate: Why was it abandoned? What events transpired there? Such questions prompt culturally and imaginatively diverse backstories, enriching the narrative's latent plotlines.

Lastly, “突然亮起了一盏灯，一闪一闪的” is rendered as “a lamp suddenly lit up in that abandoned house, flickering on and off”, faithfully capturing the abrupt illumination and unstable state. Neither the original nor the translation explains the light's cause—whether triggered by an intruder seeking shelter or supernatural forces. This deliberate ambiguity compels readers to hypothesize, transforming them into active co-creators of the plot. Divergent interpretations of the flickering light's significance multiply narrative possibilities, intensifying the story's mysterious allure and thematic complexity.

3.3 Imagery and Blank Space in Thematic Articulation

Reception Aesthetics prioritizes the reader's significant role in constructing literary meaning, emphasizing textual openness and indeterminacy, and upholding the principle that a work's significance arises from collaborative construction between author and reader. In literary translation, the conveyance of imagery and treatment of negative space critically shape target readers' comprehension of thematic depth. In *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, the strategic use of imagery-blank space dynamics in thematic expression functions as intellectual wellsprings, offering readers expansive contemplative spaces to derive unique insights, thereby amplifying the work's philosophical resonance. The novel's multifaceted portrayal of human nature reveals humanity's complex manifestations through historical upheavals and social realities.

In articulating the theme of fate, negative space proves equally vital. Characters, swept helplessly by historical currents, embody existential unpredictability and resignation. Ximen Nao's injustice and cyclical reincarnations, Lan Lian's solitude and perseverance, Lan Jiefang's fraught love and

struggle—all traverse ambiguous destinies. Through strategic omissions, Mo Yan refrains from didactic explanations or moral judgments, entrusting readers to intuit and interpret these trajectories independently. The unspoken voids around their fates—whether shaped by societal forces, personal choices, or cosmic irony—invite readers to confront the ineffable complexities of human existence.

Example1

ST: 那片金黄的麦浪，在风中翻滚，仿佛诉说着土地的故事。

TT: That golden wheat field, rolling in the wind, seemed to be telling the story of the land.

Analysis: First, the imagery of “那片金黄的麦浪” conveys a sense of the golden color of ripe wheat, symbolizing harvest and hope, while the term “麦浪” gives the image a dynamic quality, showcasing the vitality and energy of nature. The translation, “That golden wheat field”, accurately conveys the main elements but lacks the metaphorical richness provided by the word “浪”, which would have detailed the undulating motion of the wheat in the wind, like waves. This leaves space for readers to imagine the scene in their own way. Readers from different cultural backgrounds may envision different interpretations of the image of “the golden wheat field rolling in the wind”. Western readers might associate it with the pastoral landscapes or rural life scenes they are familiar with, picturing a broad, serene harvest scene. In contrast, Eastern readers might recall images of rural life or the depictions of wheat waves in ancient poetry, infusing the imagery with more emotional and cultural significance. This kind of individual interpretation, based on readers’ differences, enriches the work’s themes of nature and life, offering a more diverse expression.

Secondly, the dynamic description of “在风中翻滚” is translated as “rolling in the wind”, which accurately conveys the action. However, the original text not only illustrates the movement of the wheat but also hints at the power of the wind and the continuous cycle of nature. The translation does not further elaborate on the interaction between the wind and the wheat, nor does it explore the deeper meanings behind this interaction, such as the workings of natural laws or the resilience of life. When reading the translation, readers must rely on their own life experiences and understanding of nature to fill in the gaps left by this ambiguity in the imagery. Some readers may associate the wind’s influence on the wheat with the hardships and challenges of life, thus connecting the theme to life philosophy. Others may focus more on the harmony and beauty of nature, finding in this image the charm and bounty of the natural world. These different interpretations help readers understand the themes of the work from multiple perspectives.

Finally, the phrase “仿佛诉说着土地的故事” was translated as “seemed to be telling the story of the land”, which conveys the general meaning of the original. However, what exactly the “story of the land” is remains unspecified in both the original and the translation. This ambiguity sparks the reader’s curiosity, prompting them to think about the hidden history, culture, and relationship between the land and humanity. Readers will make guesses and imagine the story of the land based on their own knowledge and emotional experiences. It could be the story of the hard work of farmers, the land’s wear and tear over time, or the deep connection between the land and the propagation of life. This

uncertainty encourages readers to actively engage in constructing the themes of the work, and the diverse interpretations and imaginations allow the themes to take on various forms in the readers' minds. This, in turn, deepens the expression of the work's themes about the land, life, and the relationship between humans and nature.

Example2

ST: 那条蜿蜒的河流，流淌着岁月的痕迹，也流淌着无尽的沧桑。

TT: That winding river, flowing with the marks of time and also with endless vicissitudes.

Analysis: The imagery of “那条蜿蜒的河流” in the original text uses “蜿蜒” to evoke the river's sinuous form, suggesting both its geological persistence and symbolic resonance with life's meandering paths. The translation “that winding river” retains this core attribute but omits contextual details—how it twists through mountains or flows past villages—leaving readers to visualize its course. Western readers might envision grand rivers like the Mississippi traversing plains, while Eastern readers may recall intimate hometown streams winding through fields, layering the imagery with personal nostalgia. Such culturally mediated interpretations diversify the theme's exploration of nature and human existence.

Second, the phrase “流淌着岁月的痕迹” is translated as “flowing with the marks of time”, preserving the original's metaphorical essence while maintaining ambiguity about what these “marks” entail. Readers might project eroded riverbanks as historical imprints or childhood memories along its shores, bridging the gap between collective history and individual experience.

Finally, the phrase “也流淌着无尽的沧桑” was translated as “and also with endless vicissitudes”, which conveys the general meaning. However, the specific connotations of “vicissitudes”, such as the changes in dynasties, wars, disasters, or the joys and sorrows of people living by the river, are not clearly explained. Readers will use their own knowledge and emotional experiences to imagine and interpret the meaning of “vicissitudes”. It could be the mysterious stories of rivers in ancient legends or the historical changes of the region. These different interpretations encourage readers to actively participate in constructing the themes of the work, further deepening its expression of the themes of time, history, and the vicissitudes of life.

Example3

ST: 她站在山顶，俯瞰整个城市，仿佛在思考人类的命运与未来。

TT: She stood at the top of the mountain, overlooking the entire city as if contemplating humanity's fate and future.

Analysis: The imagery of “她站在山顶” in the original text positions “山顶” as a symbolic spatial locus, representing elevation and transcendence. The act of standing atop the mountain suggests expansive vision and potential spiritual ascendance. While the translation accurately conveys the spatial fact, it omits descriptive details of the summit's environment—whether shrouded in mist or offering panoramic views, its flora or geological features. This strategic omission invites culturally mediated interpretations: Western readers might visualize the snow-capped majesty of the Alps, infusing the

scene with sublimity, while Eastern readers may recall Mount Tai's cultural resonance, evoking classical ideals of "surveying all below(一览众山小)" and philosophizing about life's pinnacles. Such interpretative pluralism enriches the thematic exploration of individual-world relations.

The phrase "俯瞰整个城市" is translated as "overlooking the entire city", precisely replicating the physical act while leaving the city's appearance and the emotional tone of this vantage point undefined. Readers may project bustling metropolises—symbols of modern chaos—or intimate hometown steeped in personal nostalgia, grounding the theme in subjective lived experiences.

Finally, the phrase "仿佛在思考人类的命运与未来" was translated as "as if contemplating humanity's fate and future", which conveys the general meaning. However, the specific content of her contemplation, the reasons behind it, and the attitude reflected in her thoughts toward humanity's fate and future are not clearly elaborated. Readers will use their own knowledge and understanding of the world to imagine and interpret this contemplation. It could be about the impact of technological development on humanity's destiny, or concerns about the direction of humanity's future amid social change. These different imaginations and interpretations encourage readers to actively engage in constructing the themes of the work, further deepening its expression of themes related to humanity's fate, future thinking, and the exploration of the individual's spiritual world.

4. Conclusion

As a gem of contemporary Chinese literature, *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* stands as an indispensable monument in Mo Yan's literary works, distinguished by its magical realist narrative style and profound thematic resonance. The novel not only chronicles half a century of rural transformation in China through Ximen Nao's six reincarnations but also constructs a rich "call structure" through its unique technique of imagistic blankness, inviting readers to co-create meaning through imagination and reflection. However, the international dissemination of literary works perpetually faces dual challenges of cultural divergence and linguistic transposition, with the translation of imagistic blankness posing particularly intricate difficulties. Framed by Reception Aesthetics theory and centered on Howard Goldblatt's English translation, this study delves into the strategies and effects of translating culturally loaded terms and imagistic blankness across cultural boundaries. Through theoretical analysis and case studies of translated excerpts, the paper illuminates the translator's ingenuity in balancing the artistic essence of the source text with the receptive capacity of target-language readers, offering practical insights for the global promotion of Chinese literature.

First, Reception Aesthetics theory provides a robust theoretical foundation for this research. By placing readers at the core of literary activity, this theory emphasizes the dynamic generation of textual meaning, asserting that readers' horizons of expectation, aesthetic experiences, and cultural backgrounds directly shape their interpretation and reception. In translation, the translator assumes a dual role as both interpreter of the original text and creator of the translated work. This duality necessitates fidelity to the source text's artistic features while accommodating the cognitive limitations

of target-language readers. Goldblatt's translation practice reveals his adept handling of imagistic blankness: he avoids over-interpretation while reconstructing the call structure in the target language through strategic linguistic choices. For instance, in translating character imagery such as "Lan Lian" (Blue Face) and "Yingchun", Goldblatt preserves the ambiguity of the original, employing direct or simplified translations that convey the characters' distinctiveness while leaving room for English readers' imaginative engagement. This approach respects the literariness of the original text and activates the aesthetic participation of target readers, achieving the dual objectives of "cultural fidelity" and "reader-friendliness" in cross-cultural communication.

Second, through analysis of specific translated examples, this study identifies two core strategies for translating imagistic blankness: catering to readers' horizons of expectation and expanding readers' horizons of expectation. The former emphasizes using expressions and cultural symbols familiar to target readers to lower comprehension barriers, while the latter encourages retaining cultural heterogeneity to stimulate readers' curiosity and foster active engagement with foreign cultures. For example, in translating natural imagery like "moonlight like water" and "torrential rain", Goldblatt adopts direct translation, employing common English metaphors (e.g., moonlight was like water) to convey the original artistic conception, while omitting certain descriptive details. This allows readers to fill the blanks based on their own experiences, aligning with Western readers' aesthetic habits while preserving the poetic openness of the source text. Conversely, when translating culturally dense imagery such as "轮回转世 (reincarnation)" and "土地的故事 (the story of the land)", Goldblatt retains cultural specificity (e.g., reincarnation), guiding readers to bridge cultural divides and gradually grasp traditional Chinese perspectives on life, death, and rural nostalgia. This "strategic retreat" avoids cultural erosion while cultivating cross-cultural empathy through the text's call structure.

Furthermore, this study reveals that translating imagistic blankness transcends linguistic conversion, embodying a process of cultural negotiation and artistic re-creation. The success of Goldblatt's translation lies in his precise grasp of Reception Aesthetics' core principle: centering the reader without subordinating the text to readerly demands. For instance, in translating "Ximen Nao's mysterious aura", the phrase "mysterious aura" conveys the character's surreal essence without explicating the roots of this mystery. Such blankness allows Western readers to project their understanding of mysticism (e.g., spectral imagery in Gothic literature) onto the text, enabling multidimensional interpretations of the character. This strategy preserves the literary depth of the original while endowing the translation with vitality in a foreign cultural context.

From a broader perspective, this study's conclusions hold significant implications for the internationalization of Chinese literature. In a globalized era, translating Chinese literature requires cultural dialogue beyond linguistic conversion. Translators must strike a balance between "cultural confidence" and "reader awareness": they must uphold the uniqueness of local culture, avoiding oversimplification or distortion to cater to foreign aesthetics, while skillfully leveraging the expressive strengths of the target language to mitigate cultural discount. For example, when translating Taoist or

folk-religious imagery in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, translators might employ contextual explanations or strategic amplifications to clarify cultural backgrounds, rather than resorting to deletion or substitution. Collaboration between publishers and academia is equally crucial; supplementary materials such as prefaces or cultural guides can equip target readers with contextual knowledge, enhancing their preparedness and overall reception of the translated work.

Finally, this study's significance extends beyond offering fresh perspectives on *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*'s translation, injecting new reflections into the theory and practice of Chinese literary translation. The application of Reception Aesthetics demonstrates that the success of literary translation hinges not merely on textual accuracy but on its capacity to evoke aesthetic resonance in the target culture. Future research could expand to analyses of other Mo Yan works or translations of contemporary Chinese authors, exploring optimal strategies for diverse genres and culturally loaded terms. Interdisciplinary approaches—such as reader-response surveys or corpus analysis—could also objectively assess translation reception, providing empirical support for translation practices.

In summary, the translation of imagistic blankness is an artistic odyssey across languages and cultures, demanding a translator's scholarly rigor and artistic sensitivity. Goldblatt's translation of *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* exemplifies how respect for the original's literariness and activation of readers' creativity enable Chinese literature to radiate unique brilliance within world literature. This process will continue to foster profound dialogue between Chinese and Western cultures, contributing literary power to the construction of a shared human destiny.

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