



# Annotation Strategies in the English Translation of Contemporary Chinese Literary Works — A Case Study of “Red Sorghum”

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**Abstract:** Mo Yan’s literary works have received wide attention in the world. “Red Sorghum” is his masterpiece. In order to let foreign readers understand the Chinese culture in the works, it is necessary to annotate and explain the corresponding words and sentences. In practical translation, literal translation with notes and free translation with notes can be adopted to help foreign readers better understand our culture. As for the conflicting contents, it is necessary to delete and replace them properly, so as to promote the acceptance of literary works by more readers abroad and promote the development of cultural works in China.

**Keywords:** Chinese contemporary literature, English translation, annotation strategy

## 1. Introduction

Chinese culture can be spread abroad without the efforts of translators. Only by translating Chinese works into English can more foreign friends see Chinese excellent literary works and realize the phenomenon of Chinese culture going out. After Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize for Literature, Howard Goldblatt, the main translator of his novel “Red Sorghum”, has attracted wide attention both at home and abroad. Because some scholars think Goldblatt’s translation belongs to “translation with correction,” which has changed the content of the article beyond recognition. Some scholars also believe that Goldblatt made necessary changes on the basis of the original translation. Why is this happening? Because the translation of literary works does not take the way of direct translation, but the translator carries out the translation according to the overall structure of literary works and their own literary accomplishment. Chinese literary works tend to be written and narrated in Chinese. The language structure of foreign language is inconsistent with that of Chinese, so it is necessary to reconstruct the sentences of Chinese literary works in translation to meet the needs of foreign culture [1].

## 2. An Analysis of Typical Notes in English Versions of “Red Sorghum”

Notes are added by the translator to a sentence when a literal translation would result in the loss of the original meaning. Its main forms are footnotes, endnotes and interlined notes. However, with the development of literary translation, scholars begin to have different views on annotation. Some scholars believe that the above form will narrow the scope of the note. Because in a broad sense, notes include not only footnotes, endnotes, interlines, but also foreword, postscript and appendix. Broad sense broadens the scope of annotation. But take Mo Yan’s books, “Big Breat and Wide Hips” and “Red Sorghum”. The preface, the list of characters, and the introduction to the article in “Big Breat and Wide Hips” are all translated, but there is no preface or vocabulary list in “Red Sorghum”, and neither of the two works has a footnote. Because annotation in translation is a highly recognized thing. One of the most popular methods in translation is direct translation with notes. It does not affect the meaning of the original text, but also retains the sentiment of the original content, which can well spread the excellent cultural works of our country.

The chapter structure of “Red Sorghum” is relatively chaotic. The whole structure is crossed and orderly. The first person “my grandfather” and “my grandmother” are also used in the works. Although behind the confusion is the author’s original expression, but in the actual translation, but need to break this form of expression. The Marxism in Mo Yan’s work is completely different from the American political system. In direct translation, Americans find it difficult to understand this satirical mode of writing. Goldblatt adapts his translation thoughts to the American consciousness. This allows the American reader to understand what is being told in the work and to use other cultures to help him understand it.

Moreover, the religion in the United States is pluralistic and religion has an important influence in the United States. In translation, we should consider the readers’ historical background and preferences, simplify or omit some Christian plots in the works, so as to meet the readers’ needs. For example, the original text: 奶奶在唢呐声中停住哭，像聆听天籁一般，听着这似乎从天国传来的音乐。 Translation: Grandmas stopped crying at the sound of the woodwind, as though command-

ed from on high. In the translation, the words “from heaven” were replaced by “from high above”. Because in the Bible, the music of heaven is soft and sweet. But the original text has taken the irony of the irony of the musicians played music is very bad. In order to avoid unnecessary conflicts and be published smoothly in the United States, it is necessary to delete or rewrite the content that is inconsistent with American values. For example, the original text: 余占鳌对土匪头子花脖子的做派有隐隐的敬佩感，同时又有憎恨感。 Translation: Yu Zhan’ao had grudging respect for the way Spotted Neck carried himself, but not to the exclusion of Loathing. In the translation of Yu Zhan’ao, transliteration is used, but in the translation of Hua Neck, it is expanded to highlight the characteristics of the characters. This will connect the content of the article and make it better understood by American readers.

### **3. English Translation of China Literary Works**

Traditional China translation studies usually focus on the translation of the original text at the linguistic level, with emphasis on the translation of the original text and cutting out the text contrast in the process of translation. This ignores the cultural differences between China and other countries and the role of translators themselves. At present, there are three kinds of literary translation activities in China. One is China native translation, in which the translation personnel and the translation content are all native culture. The second type is those who have studied or worked in foreign countries and have a certain degree of understanding of foreign customs and customs, and can translate works into works that meet the needs of local culture in combination with foreign culture. The third is the joint efforts of national translators and publishing houses to complete the translation work. The second scenario resonates better with expatriates. In this case, the translation is carried out in the language conforming to the local culture, the sentences that are not suitable for other cultures in the article are replaced or expanded, and the phenomena unfamiliar to readers in other countries in the article are explained in the notes. This can help foreign readers to better understand China culture. My friends, my friends, my friends. This kind of translation is to express the local culture with more complicated meaning in simple English words, so as to reduce the reading difficulty of foreign readers. This information does not require comments. Because even if this kind of information is annotated, it is still difficult for foreign readers to understand our culture. Moreover, it will also lead foreign readers to interpret our culture too bloated under the annotation, which is not conducive to the development of our literary works.

## **4. Annotation Strategies in the English Translation of Contemporary China Literary Works**

### **4.1 Transliteration with notes**

There are many cultural differences between China and other countries. Many Chinese words have no corresponding words in English. In this case, it is necessary to take the way of literal translation and annotation to make up for the vacancy. annotated may be background, word origins, etc. Only in this way can it be beneficial to the understanding of foreign readers. For example, the original text: 三星正响,黎明前的黑暗降临。 Translation: The three stars-Rigel, Betelgeuse and Bella-trix hung directly overhead. A heavy pre-dawn darkness had fallen around him. If you translate “三星” directly into “the three stars,” foreign readers will not know what it means. However, it can help foreign readers to understand correctly by substituting Rigel, Betelgeuse and Bellatrix of Orion in foreign cultures. Then put a footnote next to “Three Stars” and explain it as follows:”Every year at 7:00 pm in the twelfth lunar month, three stars rise from the east, called Sanxing. It was midnight when they appeared in the middle of the sky.” In the notes will explain the China culture, promote the development of Chinese culture [2].

### **4.2 Free translation**

Free translation is a rough translation according to the original meaning. On the premise of great differences in Chinese culture, the native culture is translated into other national cultures. Original text: 无恩不结夫妻,无仇不结夫妻。嫁鸡随鸡,嫁狗随狗。 Translation: Man and wife, for better or for worse. Marry a chicken and share the coop, marry a dog and share the kennel. Use “Man and wife, for better or for worse” to accurately express the meaning of “无恩不结夫妻,无仇不结夫妻” . You can set a comment next to “嫁鸡随鸡,嫁狗随狗” . In ancient China, a married woman had to obey her husband regardless of his moral character. so that foreign reader can have a better understand of China culture.

### **4.3 Substitution**

In literary works, the words and phrases of cultural conflict need to be replaced. This will make it easier for the reader to understand. Replace the original words and sentences in the article to achieve the effect of “changing the word, the whole sentence is brilliant.” Original text: 你没送给他点见面礼? Translation: You didn’t give him anything to grease the skids?

In this sentence, “送他点见面礼” is replaced by “to grease the skids” in English. Explain in the note: it means to lubricate the brakes to prepare for the smooth running of things. Use words that are more in line with English habits to replace words with Chinese cultural characteristics, making the content of the article more vivid [3].

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, when translating China literary works, it is necessary to translate according to the living habits of the target group and the needs of the works. The translation method should be flexibly selected, and the appropriate words should be annotated and parsed. However, we should also put an end to the wrong idea that translation must be annotated. In the translation, the phenomenon of adding endnotes to the text is also reduced as far as possible. We should learn how Goldblatt makes comments invisible, increases the readability of literature itself, and promotes the smooth dissemination of China literary works abroad [4].

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