

# Translating and Rewriting Chinese Proverbs: A Case Study of Howard Goldblatt's English Translation of Mo Yan's "Shengsi Pilao"

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## Abstract

Howard Goldblatt's translation of Mo Yan's novels remains controversial because he has made various changes in his translation. As a result, a lot of original messages in Mo Yan's novels were not completely conveyed. In this paper, this author compared and analyzed several examples of Chinese proverbs selected from Mo Yan's novel "Shengsi Pilao" and their translation in "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" translated by Howard Goldblatt, in an attempt to investigate how Goldblatt coped with linguistic and cultural challenges in the examples. Findings indicate that based on rewriting, Goldblatt has basically used six translation methods to translate Mo Yan's Chinese proverbs in the novel into English and his transcreation which was previously neglected can be uncovered in his translation of the proverbs. This study can help other translators reflect on how to translate proverbs in other Chinese literary works into English and provide valuable references to researchers who intend to conduct research into this area.

**Keywords:** translation methods, rewriting, Chinese proverbs, transcreation, readers' response

## 1. Introduction

Translation means translating both language and culture. According to House, "Translation is not only a linguistic act; it is also a cultural one, an act of communication across cultures. Translation always involves both language and culture simply because the two cannot really be separated. Language is culturally embedded: it both expresses and shapes cultural reality, and the meaning of linguistic items, be they words or larger segments of text, can only be understood when considered together with the cultural context in which these linguistic items are used" (House, 2009, pp. 11–12).

Obviously, language and culture are inseparable. Thus, translators whose task is to translate both linguistic and cultural elements contained in a source language text into a target language text should convey the linguistic and cultural information contained in the source text to their target readers as completely as possible.

Over the past three decades, Howard Goldblatt (hereinafter HG) has translated 64 Chinese novels into English including about 11 novels written by Mo Yan (hereinafter Mo), the 2012 Nobel Prize Winner. Up to now, HG has translated most of the oeuvre written by Mo into English including "Red Sorghum" (1993), "Big Breasts and Wide Hips" (2004), "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" (2008), "The Garlic Ballads" (2011) and "Frog" (2015), etc. His translation has contributed a lot to Mo's Nobel Prize. All this indicates that HG's translation is considered successful and his translation thus must be faithful to Mo's novels.

However, after carefully comparing Mo's "Shengsi Pilao" and its translation "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out", this researcher found that at least 40 pages of the novel (which contain at least 30,000 Chinese characters) had been omitted. Because the focus of this paper is on HG's translation of Chinese proverbs, it is unnecessary and infeasible to prove page by page which storylines were omitted.

Previous research indicates that some researchers (Zhang, 2005; Shao, 2013; Jiang, 2015; Du & Zhang, 2015) conducted research into HG's translation strategy, namely, "to read in Chinese and write in English" and specific translation methods such as adaptation, addition and omission based on textual analyses of culture-specific items, overstatements, dialectal expressions and etc (see Section 2).

However, neither has much research been conducted into HG's specific translation methods in terms of Mo Yan's Chinese proverbs nor has sufficient attention been paid to clarifying the relationship between HG's rewriting

strategy and his specific translation methods, not to mention any investigation into HG's transcreation.

Thus, this paper aims to (i) clarify the relationship between HG's rewriting strategy and specific translation methods; (ii) investigate what specific translation methods HG employed to cope with those linguistic and cultural challenges from Mo's proverbs in "Shengsi Pilao"; and (iii) tentatively research into Goldblatt's transcreation. Accordingly, this research was conducted based on the examples selected from this novel and their translation from "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out".

To achieve these three aims, the author first reviewed the literature about HG's translation strategy and translation methods in terms of his translation of Mo's culture-specific items, overstatements and dialectal expressions and then reviewed André Lefevere's rewriting theory and Peter Newmark's translation theory.

Based on the findings from the review and the two translation theories, this study clarified the relationship between HG's rewriting strategy and his specific translation methods, analyzed HG's translation methods on translating examples of Chinese proverbs in "Shengsi Pilao" and probed into his transcreation.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Overview of Previous Research on Howard Goldblatt's Translation Methods and Strategy

Mo is renowned for his particular language use in the novels like "Shengsi Pilao" and "Tiantang Suantaizhige". For instance, Mo is good at using culture-specific items, overstatements, proverbs, dialectal expressions and colloquial expressions with Chinese cultural novelty, etc. Such language features pose challenges to translators.

Research indicates that HG employed different translation methods to deal with the language features in Mo's novels.

#### 2.1.1 Howard Goldblatt's Translation Methods

Shao researched into five examples of culture-specific expressions selected from Mo's "Shengsi Pilao" ("Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out"). For instance, HG translated "天津十八街大麻花" into "fried fritters on Tianjin's Eighteen Street". Shao deemed that this culture-specific item should be rendered into "giant fried dough twist", which is slightly different from HG's "fried fritters" (Shao, 2013, pp. 63–65). Shao claimed that HG's translation did not convey cultural and historical information in the original to target readers, though it seemed easy to read. Shao concluded that HG used two methods to reproduce information contained in the source texts, i.e., cultural modulation (including omission) and pseudo-fidelity (literal translation).

Jiang analyzed ten examples of culture-specific expressions from Mo's "Fengru Feitun" and their translation from "Big Breasts and Wide Hips". For instance, HG translated "茂腔" (mao qiang) into "cat's meow" (Jiang, 2015, pp. 1287–1290). "Mao Qiang" is a kind of local opera played by locals at Gaomi township of Shandong Province, whose tune typically sounds like cat's meow. Jiang found that HG used translation methods such as literal translation, domestication, alteration and omission to make his translation acceptable to target readers. HG believed that translation is betraying and rewriting, but loyalty is always the top priority. Everything HG did is to deliver the original text faithfully to his target readers.

Shao and Jiang's research demonstrates that HG attempted to both faithfully preserve the original information in English and make his translation acceptable to his readers. For the dual purposes, he used different translation methods such as literal translation, modulation, alteration, omission, etc.

#### 2.1.2 Howard Goldblatt's Translation Strategy

Zhang (2005) investigated several examples of dialectal expressions selected from Mo's "Tiantang Suantaizhige" and their translation from "The Garlic Ballads".

Example:

Source Text:

他说：“杏花，你别糟塌了那根蒜薹！一根能值好几分呢。” (Mo, 1993, p. 69)

Translation:

“Careful with that garlic, Xinghua,” he said. “Each stalk is worth several fen” (Goldblatt, 1995, p. 70).

Zhang argued that HG rendered “你别糟塌了那根蒜薹” into “[w]e wouldn't earn enough to get by.” If Mo were able to write in English, he would do the same thing as HG did. HG was not restrained by the literal meanings of these Chinese characters. Instead, he either added or omitted or altered a few words of the original texts to avoid word-for-word equivalent.

Zhang's research shows that HG's translating view, “to read in Chinese and to write in English”, i.e., “rewriting

Chinese source texts in English”, is actually his dominant translating strategy.

To sum up, researchers such as Shao, Jiang and Zhang have investigated into HG’s translation of Mo’s linguistic features like culture-specific items. Their findings show that HG used translation methods such as literal translation, alteration, adaptation, addition and omission, etc. More importantly, “to read in Chinese and write in English” is HG’s dominant translation strategy.

However, these researchers either put stress on HG’s specific translation methods or attach importance to his general translation strategy. None of them has clarified the relationship between HG’s rewriting strategy and his specific translation methods such as literal translation and faithful translation. In the following section, their relationship will be clarified.

It must be noted that HG’s dominant translation strategy is linked with André Lefevere’s rewriting theory, while his translation methods are related to Peter Newmark’s theory. Accordingly, an overview of these two theories will be helpful for clarifying the relationship between HG’s rewriting and specific translation methods.

## 2.2 Overview of Translation Theories of André Lefevere and Peter Newmark

### 2.2.1 Overview of André Lefevere’s Rewriting Theory

Generally, Lefevere’s rewriting theory consists of three aspects: (i) translation is a rewriting of an original text (Lefevere, 1992, p. 1); (ii) the basic process of rewriting involves historiography, anthologization, criticism, and editing (Lefevere, 1992, p. 9); and (iii) translators as rewriters adapt, manipulate the originals they work with to some extent, usually to make them fit in with the dominant, or one of the dominant ideological and poetological currents of their time (Lefevere, 1992, p. 8).

In short, Lefevere puts particular emphasis on the dominant role played by translators who can control translation by rewriting source texts.

As noted earlier, HG’s dominant translation strategy which falls into the scope of Lefevere’s theory is “to read in Chinese and to write in English”. Thus, “rewriting” will be used to analyze HG’s translation of Mo’s proverbs.

### 2.2.2 Overview of Peter Newmark’s Translation Theory

Peter Newmark puts stress on two translation methods: semantic translation and communicative translation. They both comply with the principle of equivalence. As defined by Newmark, “communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original. Semantic translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original” (Newmark, 2001, p. 39).

Based on the two methods, Newmark developed a diagram of translation methods as follows:

Table 1. Newmark’s diagram of translation methods

SL (Source Language) emphasis	TL (Target Language) emphasis
Word-for-word translation	Adaptation
Literal translation	Free translation
Faithful translation	Idiomatic translation
Semantic translation	Communicative translation

It must be pointed out that this study only resorted to five of Newmark’s translation methods, i.e., literal translation, adaptation, faithful translation, semantic translation, communicative translation. Their definitions are individually provided in Section 3.

As noted earlier, HG’s dominant translation strategy falls into the scope of Lefevere’s rewriting theory and his translation methods are closely linked with Newmark’s theory. Thus, this researcher combined the findings of HG’s translation strategy and methods with Newmark’s translation methods shown in Table 1 and Lefevere’s rewriting to clarify the relationship between HG’s rewriting and six translation methods. Their relationship is displayed in Table 2 below.

Table 2. The relationship between HG's rewriting strategy and six translation methods

Rewriting	
SL (Source Language) emphasis	TL (Target Language) emphasis
Literal translation	Adaptation
Faithful translation	Omission
Semantic translation	Communicative translation

As indicated in this table, literal translation, faithful translation and semantic translation put stress on source language texts, while adaptation, omission and communicative translation attach importance to target language texts. Rewriting is referred to as HG's dominant translation strategy, while these six translation methods are subordinate to rewriting.

Up to now, this study has clarified the relationship between HG's translation strategy and methods. The case study below was conducted based on this relationship.

### 3. A Case Study of HG's Translation of Mo's Chinese Proverbs

Oxford Dictionary of English defines (3rd ed., 2010, p. 1429) proverb as "a short, well-known pithy saying, stating a general truth or piece of advice."

By this definition, this researcher selected several examples out of 47 Chinese proverbs in "Shengsi Pilao" and their translation in "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out".

Given that all the proverbs and their translation can be easily found in Mo's novel and its translation, it is not necessary to display them in every detail. Thus, this researcher particularly analyzed HG's translation of several examples of Mo's proverbs as below.

#### 3.1 Literal Translation

According to Newmark, literal translation means "The SL grammatical constructions are converted to their nearest TL equivalents but the lexical words are again translated singly" (Newmark, 2001, p. 46).

This research shows that HG literally translated 25 proverbs in the novel into English.

Example:

Source text:

山羊能上树，驴子善攀登。(Mo, 2012, p. 48)

Target text:

A goat can scale a tree, a donkey is a good climber (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 53).

The source text tells that a goat is good at climbing a tree, while a donkey is good at climbing (hills). HG's translation nearly completely preserves both the form and content of the source text and nearly each English word has its equivalent.

It must be noted that in HG's translation the grammatical structure of the source text was strictly retained and the lexical words were also translated literally and individually. This means that Goldblatt's translation in this example stays true to the source text. However, "山羊能上树" could also be translated into "Goats are good at climbing trees" or "Goats can scale trees". Thus, "scale a tree" for "能上树" is just one of many potential renderings for it. "驴子善攀登" could also be rendered into "donkeys are good climbers". By comparison, "a good climber" for "善攀登" is also one of the many possible translations.

This shows that literal translation which is linked with creative rewriting can generate different versions of translations which would be closely equivalent to the source text. HG's translation also indicates that he tried hard to reproduce the linguistic and cultural information contained in Mo's source text.

Example:

Source Text:

肥水不流外人田。(Mo, 2012, p. 13)

Target Text:

Good water must not irrigate other people's fields (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 14).

The source text means that one should not allow his irrigating water with fertilizers to flow into others' fields. In

Chinese, “肥水” is mixture of human and animal waste as well as swill gathered by farmers from local restaurants and is usually put into irrigating water as fertilizers. In English, “fat water” as a word-for-word translation for “肥水”, does not make any sense to English readers—even if it makes sense, it has nothing to do with fertilizers. “Good water” as a literal translation for “肥水”, seems to be reasonable and natural. However, it is still not an accurate equivalent of the source text and only delivers part of the original information into English.

This example shows that as one of possible renderings of the Chinese proverb, “good water” could mislead English readers. It is worth noting that even if “good water” is not an accurate translation for “肥水”, it does reflect HG’s creativity in preserving and rewriting the linguistic and cultural information in the source text.

These two examples demonstrate that HG attempted to fully reproduce the source text message by using literal translation. However, literal translation could result in at least two likelihoods: an accurate rendering and an inaccurate rendering. This indicates that literal translation could generate either faithful or unfaithful translations. It is the translators who control the faithfulness of their translation.

### 3.2 Omission

As noted earlier, omission was used by HG to translate some dialectal expressions.

In terms of his translation of seven proverbs, some Chinese cultural images were omitted.

For analysis, literal meanings of the examples below are provided by this researcher.

Example:

Source Text:

常言道：螃蟹过河随大溜，识时务者为俊杰。(Mo, 2012, p. 23)

Meaning:

As a saying goes, “Crabs crossing the river should follow suit, those who follow the tide will be true heroes.”

The source text is typically used by someone who persuades others to do something as s/he wished. However, the cultural images, “螃蟹过河” (which literally means “crabs crossing the river”) and “俊杰” (which literally means “true heroes”), were both omitted in HG’s translation. Such an omission could make his translation concise, succinct and thus easier to read. However, it denied English readers an opportunity to access the cultural content of this Chinese proverb.

Example:

Source text:

日月如梭，光阴似箭。(Mo, 2012, p. 346)

Target Text:

Time flies (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 344).

The source text includes two similes, “日月如梭” and “光阴似箭”. The first means, “days and months fly like a shuttle”; The second means, “time flies as quickly as an arrow”. Both “shuttle” and “arrow” are used in Chinese to describe the rapid flow of time. Clearly, “Time flies” is a replacement of the original Chinese source text, but not an exact translation of it because the two cultural images have been omitted. It is true that HG’s omission can make the storylines in English more succinct and readable to English readers. However, his readers cannot access the cultural images in the source text.

As mentioned earlier, over 40 pages of Mo’s “Shengsi Pilao” were omitted (further research needs to be conducted into possible reasons behind such a huge amount of omission, which is beyond the scope of this research). Certainly, it is not strange that Mo’s proverbs or part of his proverbs was omitted. Then, will native English readers accept such omission? Discussion about this will be provided in Section 5.

### 3.3 Adaptation

According to Newmark, adaptation is the freest form of translation. By adaptation, “the SL culture converted to the TL culture and the text rewritten” (Newmark, 2001, p. 46).

As noted earlier, HG used adaptation as a method to translate culture-specific items. Here is another example. He translated “三弦”, a kind of Chinese three-stringed folk musical instrument, into “the two-stringed erhu”, another kind of Chinese musical instrument (Du & Zhang, 2015, p. 6). “The two-stringed erhu” may sound more pleasant or familiar to English readers than “Chinese three-stringed musical instrument, san xian”. However, it

does not stay true to its source text.

HG adapted six proverbs in “Shengsi Pilao” into English.

Example:

Source Text:

他借坡下驴地说, “……你们俩可以破罐子破摔, 但你们的孩子, ……。” (Mo, 2012, p. 24)

Target text:

Like a man climbing off his donkey to walk downhill, using her arrivals as a way forward, he said: “... you two can act recklessly if you think your own situation is hopeless, but you have to think about your children, whose lives are ahead of them” (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 26).

Firstly, “借坡下驴” literally means, “someone who is driving a donkey downhill should take the advantage of the slope in order to move downward safely without taking much effort”. Its hidden meaning is that one should seize an opportunity to do something or solve a problem to avoid accidents or losses. HG adapted this proverb into “climbing off his donkey to walk downhill”, which seems to be functionally equivalent to the source text. That is, this rendering may also indicate that someone should take an opportunity to do something. However, the Chinese cultural novelty in the proverb was lost. In addition, although the cultural image “下驴” in the source text was partly reproduced, its original meaning has been completely distorted.

Secondly, “破罐子破摔” literally means, “someone did not choose to repair a pot with cracks but smashed it into pieces.” It indicates that when in trouble, someone does not try to find a way out of the trouble, but choose to do something to worsen the situation. Seemingly, in English, the proverb “throw the handle after the blade” could be the equivalent of “破罐子破摔”. However, HG did not use this existing English proverb. Instead, he adapted it into “act recklessly”. This adaptation may sound natural and idiomatic to English readers. However, the cultural image in the source text, “a pot with cracks”, was totally removed. As a result, the rendering, “act recklessly”, can only deliver part of the original meaning to English readers. Then, will native English readers accept such adapted translations? Clearly, more research needs to be done about this question.

In short, HG’s adaptation could generate translations functionally equivalent to their source texts. However, his adaptation could also remove the cultural messages contained in the original texts.

Also, it must be noted that HG has made full use of his creativity to adapt the source texts into natural and idiomatic English texts.

### 3.4 Faithful Translation

“A faithful translation attempts to reproduce the precise contextual meaning of the original within the constraints of the TL grammatical structures. It ‘transfers’ cultural words and preserves the degree of grammatical and lexical ‘abnormality’ in the translation” (Newmark, 2001, p. 46).

HG rendered three Mo’s proverbs by using this method.

Example:

Source text:

乐极生悲, 物极必反。(Mo, 2012, p. 87)

Target text:

Extreme joy begets sorrow; when things reach their extreme, they turn and head in the opposite direction. (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 97)

The source text basically means “sorrow could arise from extreme happiness and if things go too far towards one direction, they may finally turn into its opposite direction”.

Overall, HG’s translation preserves the exact meaning of the original proverb.

For instance, “Extreme joy begets sorrow” is completely true to “乐极生悲” both in form and content.

However, in terms of “物极必反”, it has been expanded in form for retaining the meaning of the source text. That is to say, its meaning in English is faithful, while its form is not. This indicates that when using the method of faithful translation to translate such a proverb containing rich Chinese cultural information, HG had to rewrite it in order to break off the linguistic and cultural shackles of the Chinese proverb and further carry over its meaning to English readers. “He analyzes its components, builds in proper redundancy by making explicit what is implicit in the original, and then produces something the readers in the receptor language will be able to

understand” (Nida & Taber, 2004, p. 165).

Obviously, the original meaning of “物极必反” was precisely translated into English. However, its lexical “abnormality” in Chinese was removed in HG’s translation. This means that HG’s faithful translation is also inseparable from rewriting.

### 3.5 Semantic Translation

According to Newmark, “semantic translation differs from ‘faithful translation’ on in as far as it must take more account of the aesthetic value (that is, the beautiful and natural sound) of the SL text, compromising on ‘meaning’ where appropriate so that no assonance, word-play or repetition jars in the finished version” (Newmark, 2001, p. 46).

HG translated three Mo’s proverbs by using this method.

Example:

Source Text:

今天是恶心对恶心，下流对下流。(Mo, 2012, p. 239)

Target text:

It was just one louse pitted against another, pig against pig (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 247).

The source text literally means, “Today, the disgusting goes against the disgusting and the nasty goes against the nasty”. However, such a word-for-word explanation may not make any sense in English. Basically, its hidden meaning is “tit-for-tat”.

It must be noted that there are alliterations and assonances in the source text such as “恶心对恶心” (exin dui exin) and “下流对下流” (xialiu dui xialiu). These alliterations and assonances in Chinese contribute to the sound effects of the proverb and are impressive to Chinese readers.

By comparison, HG rendered “恶心对恶心” into “louse pitted against another” and “下流对下流” into “pig against pig”. The former partly preserves the meaning of the source text, i.e. “pitted against another”. However, one new cultural image, “louse”, that does not exist in the original text, was added in English. Similarly, the latter, “pig against pig”, basically mirrors the alliterations and assonances of its source text. However, another new cultural image, “pig”, was also added.

Obviously, HG took more account of aesthetic values of the source text than the original meaning. Accordingly, he creatively rewrote the source text in order to reproduce in English the sound effects of the alliterations and assonances in the source text. HG didn’t preserve the cultural images in the source text but added new ones into his translation. As a result, his translation is functionally equivalent to the source text and reflects his creativity in coping with the linguistic and cultural challenges in the source text.

### 3.6 Communicative Translation

According to Newmark, “communicative translation attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership” (Newmark, 2001, p. 47).

HG translated three proverbs by adopting this method.

Example:

Source text:

你是煮熟的螃蟹难横行了，你是瓮中之鳖难逃脱了。(Mo, 2012, p. 21)

Target text:

...you’re a cooked crab that can no longer sidle your way around, a turtle in a jar with no way out (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 19).

Firstly, “你是煮熟的螃蟹难横行了” literally means, “You are a cooked crab! It is hard for you run amuck”. It indicates that someone either cannot exploit others any more or cannot act like tyrant as usual. HG’s rendering, “you’re a cooked crab that can no longer sidle your way around”, is easily acceptable and idiomatic in English. More importantly, it retains the exact contextual meaning of the source text.

Secondly, “你是瓮中之鳖难逃脱了”, literally means, “You are a turtle trapped in an urn! It is hard for you to escape from it.” HG’s translation, “a turtle in a jar with no way out”, is succinct and provides a picture to English readers, which is as vivid as the original text does to Chinese readers.

Thirdly, the off-rhymes “了” (le) at the end of “横行了” (heng xing le) and “逃脱了” (tao tuo le) make the entire proverb sound rhythmical. By comparison, HG’s translation, “a cooked crab that can no longer sidle your way around, a turtle in a jar with no way out”, contains a few internal rhymes such as “cooked”, “around”, “sidle” and “turtle”, which can basically mirror the sound effects of the source language message like “了”(le).

Fourthly, there is an analogy between “煮熟的螃蟹” (a cooked crab) and “瓮中之鳖” (a turtle in a jar), which was also fully reproduced in HG’s translation.

Therefore, it is fair to say that HG’s translation of this proverb is functionally equivalent to the source text. More importantly, it could be easily accepted and understood by native English readers. This rendering also reflects HG’s creativity in dealing with the linguistic and cultural features in the proverb.

#### 4. Proportion of HG’s Translation of Proverbs and Translation Methods

Overall, HG adopted six translation methods, i.e., literal translation, adaptation, omission, faithful translation, semantic translation and communicative translation to translate the relevant Chinese proverbs. As noted earlier, there are a total of 47 Chinese proverbs in “Shengsi Pilao”. It is worthwhile to provide an overall picture of HG’s translation methods on dealing with the Chinese proverbs.

The author categorized the Chinese proverbs in “Shengsi Pilao” and displayed the six translation methods, number of the Chinese proverbs corresponding to each translation method and proportion of each translation method in the table below.

Table 3. Proportion of six translation methods

Translation methods	Number of Chinese proverbs	Proportion of translation methods
Literal translation	25	53.20%
Omission	7	14.89%
Adaptation	6	12.77%
Faithful translation	3	6.40%
Semantic translation	3	6.40%
Communicative translation	3	6.40%

This table indicates that literal translation is HG’s most frequently-used translations strategy. Second to it is omission. Adaptation ranks the third. Faithful translation, semantic translation and communicative translation rank the fourth.

As shown in the examples, HG’s literal translations could be either accurate or inaccurate; omissions could make the original cultural images inaccessible to English readers; adaptations could only deliver part of the original meanings to English readers; faithful translations can carry the full meaning of the source text but hard to precisely preserve the original form and content completely; both semantic and communicative translations can be functionally equivalent to their source texts and easier to read. To a greater or lesser extent, all such translations are connected with rewriting.

It can be seen that HG attempted to strike a balance between preserving the meanings and cultural images in the Chinese proverbs and ensuring readability of his translation in English-speaking context. As Schleiermacher’s argument that “[e]ither the translator leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him” (Schleiermacher, 1813/1992, pp. 41–42).

Overall, in order to make his translation of Mo’s proverbs easily acceptable and readable in English, HG tried to rewrite the linguistic features and cultural images in them.

#### 5. Discussion

Both the findings in the literature review and the analysis of the above examples demonstrate that HG used rewriting as the dominant strategy to deal with Mo’s language features such as culture-specific items, overstatements and dialectal expressions and proverbs, etc. Under this general principle, HG resorted to the six specific translation methods in an attempt to create a kind of in-between translation which could preserve the linguistic and cultural messages of the Chinese proverbs and be easily understood by English readers. As a result, Goldblatt’s translation of the Chinese proverbs is natural and idiomatic in English.



### 5.1 Rewriting Mo's Proverbs for Preserving Cultural Images of Mo's Proverbs

HG considered literal translation as his top priority and thus preferred to use literal translation as an effective method to translate 25 Chinese proverbs in Mo's "Shengsi Pilao", just as Newmark commented, "Literal translation is the first step in translation, and a good translator abandons a literal version only when it is plainly inexact or, in the case of a vocative or informative text, badly written" (Newmark, 2001, p. 76).

Basically, HG's literal translation does not only reproduce the original meaning and cultural images but also sounds more natural and idiomatic than the word-for-word rendering. His literal translation is inseparable from creative rewriting. This has been analyzed in the examples of Section 3.1 and indicated in Table 3. It can also be seen in the following example:

Source text:

“猫改不了捕鼠，狗改不了吃屎”。(Mo, 2012, p. 395)

Target text:

“You can't keep a cat from chasing mice or a dog from eating shit” (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 384).

The source text literally means “A cat can never change its nature of chasing mice, while a dog can never change its nature of eating shit.”

Clearly, HG creatively rewrote the source text by adding “you” into his translation in order to make it sound natural to English readers. Furthermore, the source text puts stress on the two cultural images, i.e., “猫” (cat) and “狗” (dog), while HG's translation places emphasis on “you”. However, such a minor change does not affect the original cultural images and may not mislead English readers in that it basically reproduces the original linguistic and cultural messages and is functionally equivalent to its source text.

### 5.2 Rewriting Mo's Proverbs for Acceptability

Due to the linguistic and cultural gap between Chinese and English, HG also resorted to other translation methods like omission in attempt to transform Chinese proverbs into natural and idiomatic English. This method can enhance acceptability of his translation.

Example:

Source text:

“你可真是石头子腌咸菜，油盐不进啊” (Mo, 2012, p. 24)

Target text:

“You really are stubborn” (Goldblatt, 2012, p. 27).

Literally, “石头子腌咸菜油盐不进” means “The stone in the vegetables-pickling vat can never be permeated by oil and salt around it” and the entire sentence means “You are really as stubborn as the stone in the vegetables-pickling vat that can never be permeated by oil and salt around it.”

Clearly, this creative translation carries over the original meaning “stubborn” to his English readers. However, the cultural images, i.e., “stone”, “vegetables”, “oil and salt” in the source text, were totally lost. This translation indicates that Goldblatt's tried to simplify some Chinese proverbs by omitting the cultural images in order to enhance acceptability of his translation among English readers.

### 5.3 Dilemma Between Preserving Cultural Images of Mo's Proverbs and Enhancing Acceptability

HG creatively rewrote Mo's proverbs into natural and idiomatic English for his readers. He first viewed himself as a reader. As reader, he interpreted what he was reading. As a translator, he translated a work to let the author to speak to his audience in ways that are not only accessible, but a commensurate degree of pleasure, or awe or outrage, etc (Goldblatt, 2011, p. 100).

This indicates that on one hand, he must speak in English what Mo has said in his Chinese proverbs; on the other hand, he must make his translation accessible to English readers who can enjoy the same degree of pleasure or awe or outrage as Chinese readers. In other words, Goldblatt attempted to provide his English readers with a translated text that could have effects upon his readers to the extent that the source text could have upon the source text readers.

However, HG also claimed that readership took priority over the writer. He stated in an interview that “like an editor, the translator's primary obligation is to the reader, not the writer. Translators need to produce something that can be readily accepted by an American readership” (Lingenfelter, 2007, p. 46).

This statement illustrates why HG employed both literal translation and omission more frequently than other translation methods.

According to Rainer Schulte, “translators have to undergo a transformation and not take their own ways of thinking and understanding for granted if they want to find entrance into a new culture and a new mode of interpreting the world. In that sense, we can say that translation is neither the original language nor the receptor language. Translation is that which happens in the crossing of the bridge, that which is transformed in the act of crossing” (Schulte, 2012, p. 2).

This statement precisely depicts HG’s translation. HG was always in a dilemma where he tried every means possible in translation to cater to English readers and the author, Mo Yan. By using literal translation, he preserved the cultural images in the relevant examples; by using omission, he attempted to make his translation easier to comprehend. In other words, in order to bridge the gap between the source texts and his translated texts and enhance acceptability of his translation, HG has made full use of his translation methods and creativity.

#### *5.4 HG’s Transcreation*

Transcreation as a long-established term (Ricardo Gessner, 2016; Leticia Vitra & João Queiroz, 2018) is based on theories of Haroldo de Campos and is widely used in discussions about translation theory and practice. It consists of translation and creation and is associated with rewriting. It is usually conducted in a specific cultural context and for particular readers.

HG’s creativity can be found in his translation of culture-specific items, overstatement, proverbs and others. However, it has been neglected by researchers who usually paid close attention to HG’s translation methods only. The analysis of all the above examples shows that whatever translation methods HG employed, he gave a new life to Mo’s proverbs by either slightly or significantly changing the linguistic and cultural information in them.

Obviously, HG’s creative rewriting which always involves both translation and creation can be viewed as a kind of transcreation. By transcreation, HG minimized the losses of the linguistic and cultural information in Mo’s proverbs and maximized their acceptability.

HG’s transcreation can be uncovered in at least four aspects:

Firstly, HG translated and created the linguistic and cultural images of the source texts as completely as possible. This can be proved by the examples like “good water” (see Section 3.1).

Secondly, HG reproduced the linguistic and cultural information of the source texts by recreating the “closest natural equivalents” (Nida, 2004, p. 12) in English. This can be found in the examples like “Extreme joy begets sorrow” (see Section 3.4).

Thirdly, HG reproduced both the meaning and sound effects of the source texts by recreating rhyming words in English, which are functionally equivalent to their counterparts in Chinese. This can be proved by the examples like “pig against pig” (see Section 3.5).

Fourthly, by rewriting Mo’s source texts, HG recreated and delivered succinct linguistic information to his readers. This can be found in the examples like “act recklessly” (see Section 3.3).

In a word, it is HG’s transcreation that generated the natural and idiomatic English texts as above. Given the fact that HG’s transcreation is inseparable from his creativity reflected in his translation and usage of translation methods, further research about it needs to be done.

#### *5.5 Four Issues About HG’s Translation Methods*

In terms of HG’s translation methods, at least four issues need to be taken into account:

Firstly, regarding literal translation and faithful translation, from the perspective of the translators, HG worked hard to reproduce the original linguistic messages and cultural images of the proverbs and make his translation sound natural to English readers. Then, to what extent HG’s translation could be really accepted by English readers? If readers-response data about HG’s translation could be collected and analysed, then acceptability of HG’s translation among English readers could be assessed. It is believed that such research based on empirical surveys can provide valuable reference to translators in the area of literary translation.

Secondly, would native English readers accept the fact that HG has omitted and/or adapted several Chinese proverbs? Clearly, his omission and adaptation indicate that some linguistic and cultural messages in some Chinese proverbs have been changed. This issue was noted by Ping Du and Lili Zhang who pointed out that HG employed rewriting and adopted conversion, omission, and mistranslation to degrees to assist English-language readers to appreciate contemporary Chinese literature and culture (Du & Zhang, 2015, pp. 6–7). This issue was

also mentioned by Jiang who claimed that “If the translator alters or modifies the original text and culture without restraint and only caters to target language readers and critics, merely to secure business success, he then betrays the original work and at the same time deceives the reader. Therefore, this translation couldn’t be regarded as good translation” (Jiang, 2015, p. 1290). Further to this issue, would HG’s omission and adaptation be really acceptable to English readers? This is an important question that needs to be answered.

Thirdly, HG also resorted to semantic translation and communicative translation to enhance acceptability of his translation and to bring the pleasure or awe felt by Chinese readers to English readers. Then, would English readers’ responses to HG’s translation of Mo’s proverbs be different or equivalent to Chinese readers’ responses to the proverbs? It is believed that assessment of the difference or equivalence between English readers’ responses and Chinese readers’ responses could illustrate the degree of equivalence of HG’s translation from the perspective of readers’ response. Thus, it is worth researching into HG’s translation of Mo’s proverbs based on empirical surveys.

Last but not the least, it is also worth investigating into the factors that could exert influences upon HG’s translation. According to Lefevere, professionals like editors, poetics and ideologies could be three dominant factors that influence translators’ translation (Lefevere, 1992, pp. 11–73). Thus, it is reasonable to presume that HG’s translation has been influenced by factors like editors and/or poetics as well as ideologies. Such factors may have resulted in the large amount of omission as mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Thus, issues about to what extent and in what aspects such factors have influenced Goldblatt’s translation are also worth researching into.

## 6. Overview of Findings

Findings in the literature review show that previous research failed to clarify the relationship between HG’s rewriting and the specific translation methods and shed light on his transcreation.

Overall, this research demonstrates that (i) HG has basically used six specific translation methods to translate Mo’s proverbs in “Shengsi Pilao”; (ii) HG’s six translation methods are subordinate to rewriting; and (iii) It is necessary to do more research into HG’s transcreation.

## 7. Conclusion

This study shows that HG’s employed six translation methods to cope with the linguistic and cultural challenges from Mo’s proverbs. Among them, literal translation and omission are his most frequently-used translation methods. Given the fact that previous research neglected HG’s creativity in coping with the linguistic and cultural challenges from Mo’s proverbs, there is a need to conduct further research into Goldblatt’s transcreation.

Moreover, to what extent HG’s translation of Mo’s proverbs would be accepted by native English readers is an issue that needs to be answered. Further to this issue, would English readers agree over HG’s omission and adaptation? Would English readers’ responses to his translation be different or equivalent to Chinese readers’ response, if there is any, to what extent and in what aspects? It is believed that such issues could be solved based on empirical surveys.

In addition, it must be noted that this research has its own limitations.

Firstly, limited by space, this researcher is unable to display all the Chinese proverbs and their English translation by HG. Thus, other researchers need to find them out by themselves for a full picture of Mo’s proverbs and their translation.

Secondly, limited by the focus of this case study, this researcher is unable to conduct empirical surveys at this stage. However, such kind of surveys could be done later by this researcher or others who are interested in the area of literary translation studies. There are also a number of Chinese proverbs in Mo’s novels such as “Hongaoliang” (“Red Sorghum”) and “Fengru Feitun” (“Big Breasts and Wide Hips”) and etc. This paper could only serve as a modest spur to induce more valuable studies and expect other researchers to conduct more investigations into this topic.

Thirdly, the relationship between HG’s rewriting and six translation methods was clarified based on only 47 Mo’s proverbs from Mo’s “Shengsi Pilao” and their counterparts in English. This means that such a relationship may not apply to investigations into English translation of language features in other Chinese literary works.

In a word, this study is a preliminary analysis of HG’s translation of Mo’s Chinese proverbs in “Shengsi Pilao” as a case study. It could provide valuable reference to other translators who are interested in translating Chinese proverbs in Mo’s other works and/or works written by other Chinese writers into English. It could also provide

valuable reference to other researchers who intend to investigate into HG's translation of Mo's rhetoric devices like proverbs in his other works.

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