

Original Paper

Reception of the Goldblatt's Translation of Red Sorghum from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics for Overseas Readers

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Abstract

Literary translation must meet readers' aesthetic needs and acceptance psychology for literary works. At the same time, the quality of translation should not only be judged by the source text, but also by the acceptance of readers. Reception aesthetics is a theoretical system that takes readers as the center to study the effect of text acceptance. This paper selects Red Sorghum translated by Howard Goldblatt as the research object, collects readers' comments on this translation from foreign book review websites (www.goodreads.com), and uses the theory of reception aesthetics to analyze the acceptance of this translation among English readers, aiming to provide more ideas for the translation of Chinese literary works.

Keywords

Reception aesthetics theory, Red Sorghum, Howard Goldblatt's translation, Overseas reception

1. Introduction

The Red Sorghum was written by Mo Yan, a Chinese contemporary writer and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature. Based on the folk life in Northeast Gaomi Township during the Anti-Japanese War, this novel depicts a world of red sorghum on the edge of ethics and morality. It outlines the image of bandit heroes who do bad things but also serve the country. They are deeply attached to each other and fight bravely. Full of both deviant and infinite vitality of the times. "Red Sorghum" reproduces the era of Anti-Japanese War for readers from a folk point of view, showing a spirit of resistance for survival. At the same time, it is also a classic work showing Gaomi people's indomitable vitality and full of courage and national spirit in the Anti-Japanese War.

Since 2008, the Chinese translation field has gradually conducted multidimensional research on Goldblatt's translation of Red Sorghum. The research content ranges from translation studies of culturally loaded words, proverbs and vernacular languages from different theoretical perspectives to

the exploration of the effects of overseas translations, and the academic research has been fruitful. However, most scholars adopt qualitative text analysis methods, and the translation effect research is one-sided, and the research perspective is limited to exploring the relationship between the original text and different translations, analyzing translation strategies and methods, and comparing the translation quality and style of individual cases. In fact, few scholars have conducted a survey on the acceptability of overseas readers. Therefore, this paper tries its best to realize the desire of Chinese culture to “go out” by collecting and analyzing the comments of overseas readers and using the theory of reception aesthetics to explore the reasons for the good or bad reception.

2. Overview of Reception Aesthetics

The theory of Reception Aesthetics was first proposed by Hans Robert Jauss, professor of University of Konstans in Germany in 1960s. The core principle of reception aesthetics is reader-centered theory, and the research focus shifts from works to readers. The innovation of the theory of reception aesthetics lies in that the literary text itself cannot produce independent meaning, and only through the reader can the uncertainty in the work be determined. Secondly, the process of readers' acceptance of text is the process of readers' re-creation of text. Finally, reception aesthetics puts forward the different status of readers and advocates reader-centered way. The horizon of expectation is an important concept in the theory of reception aesthetics. It refers to the different thinking orientation of readers due to their different educational background, culture and literary reading experience. The theory of reception aesthetics puts readers in the first place and greatly improves their status, which is of great significance.

3. Readers' Comments

Comments were collected from readers from August 22, 2007 to December 26, 2021. The website allows readers to rate the work on a scale of 1 to 5 stars, and for the purpose of analysis, the stars are roughly divided into three categories of reader acceptance, with 4 stars and above being highly acceptable, 3 stars being moderately acceptable, and 2 stars and below being less acceptable. 6,384 readers rated the work on this platform, leaving a total of 783 comments, and the work was rated with an average of 3.77 stars. Among them, 64% (4,137) of the readers gave the work 4 stars or more, and the average score given by these 4,137 raters was 4.40 stars, which fully indicates that the translation is more in line with the expected vision of English readers and has a higher acceptance.

4. Red Sorghum Family Translated by Ge from the Perspective of Accepting Aesthetics

4.1 The Pursuit of “Vision Integration”

The process of accepting a literary work is a process of horizon touching and merging. Jauss put forward the concept of horizon fusion to describe the fusion between the reader's vision and the source text's vision. Translators, as readers of the original text, should read the original text thoroughly, and try their best to restore the language characteristics and styles of the original text in the translation by

deeply understanding the stylistic features and language features of literary translation and the writing style of the original author, so as to meet the expectations of readers.

E.g., 他确实是饿极了，顾不上细细品味，吞了狗眼，吸了狗脑，嚼了狗舌，啃了狗腮，把一碗酒喝得罄尽。

It was delicious. And he was ravenously hungry, so he dug in, eating quickly until the head and the wine were gone.

In the West, dogs are one of people's favorite pets and are even considered a member of the family. However, the detailed description of eating dog meat in the original text is too detailed for Western readers to accept the act of eating dog meat. "Swallowing", "sucking", "chewing" and "gnawing" various parts of the dog's body are very bloody. Therefore, considering the acceptability of the target audience, Goldblatt gave full play to the subjectivity of the translator and adopted the provincial translation for this part of the content, so as to meet the expectations of the readers' vision and achieve the effect of cultural transmission.

4.2 Take Care of Readers' "Horizon of Expectation"

The horizon of expectation refers to the requirements and level of appreciation of literary works formed by readers' various life experiences, personal tastes, educational attainment and ideals. In the concrete reading, it is manifested as a potential aesthetic expectation. Due to the differences in experience and educational background, the "horizon of expectation" of each person will be different, and the horizon of expectation will also change with the continuous expansion of the experience and knowledge of the readers. This requires the translator to fully consider the intended audience's knowledge background and acceptance when translating. Translators need to take the readers' expectations into consideration when translating, which is helpful for translators to translate more readable and acceptable works.

E.g., 高粱地里悠长的哭声里，夹杂着疙疙瘩瘩的字眼：青天哟—蓝天哟—花花绿绿的天哟—棒槌哟亲哥哟你死了—可就塌了妹妹的天哟—我不得不告诉您，我们高密东北乡女人哭丧跟唱歌一样优美。

The disconsolate weeping in the sorghum field was dotted with words, like knots in a piece of wood: A blue sky yo—a sapphire sky yo—a painted sky yo—a mighty cudgel yo—dear elder brother yo—death has claimed you—you have brought down little sisters sky yo—I must tell you that the weeping of women from Northeast Gaomi Township makes beautiful music.

The woman was heartbroken when her husband died. And women cry like singing, great sorrow is accompanied by a beautiful song. On Grandma's wedding day, she met a woman crying for her dead husband, suggesting that the marriage was not peaceful, and the beautiful song seemed to show that the death of her husband was not a loss of hope for the woman. The reader may wonder why singing is combined with mourning, but the answer may come when the reader reads on and sees how her grandmother felt free and happy after the death of her husband who suffered from leprosy. By writing this way, the author intentionally invites the reader to participate in the article and expand the association. The original text has several colloquial "yo", which reflects the musicality and rhythmic

beauty. The translation directly transliterates and uses several “Yo”, which retains the same linguistic characteristics. In the original text, “花花绿绿的天哟” 和 “棒槌哟亲哥哟你死了” are longer than “青天哟—蓝天哟”. In order to maintain the rhythm and better let the translated readers feel that this paragraph is as beautiful as singing, the translator divides it into short sentences of similar length. Translated as “a painted sky yo -- a mighty cudgel yo -- dear elder brother yo -- death has claimed you”. Because “you” and “yo” sound similar, the translator did not add “yo” after “you”. Readers of the target text can feel the musicality of the original text, think about the meaning of the combination of singing and mourning, and develop rich associations based on the background of the original text. After reading the text, readers can make the uncertain meaning concrete, enrich their reading experience, and realize the integration of the vision of expectation and the translation.

4.3 Filling the “Spots of Indeterminacy and Blanks” of the Original Work

In the process of translation, different translators adopt different methods to deal with the blank spots in the original text. The purpose is to make the target text accepted by the readers in the target language culture and feel the spirit of the original text and the subtlety in the text. For Iser, “spots of indeterminacy and blanks” in a text is “an unspoken invitation to seek a loss of connection”, and it refers to parts of the text that were not actually written or not explicitly written, but the parts of the text that were actually written provide an important hint. The existence of this blank phenomenon is not void, but has a certain function. It is called “calling structure” by Iser, and it is evocative.

E.g. 罗汉，你们家那个老长工 他和你奶奶不大清白咧，人家都这么说 呵呀呀，你奶奶年轻时花花事儿多着咧

Arhat, your family's foreman something fishy between him and your grandma, so everyone said...

Aiyaya, when your grandma was young she sowed plenty of wild oats.

“花花事儿” will remind the reader of a playboy who is fond of eating, drinking and playing, and it's full of derogatory meaning. Considering the previous sentence, many people said that Liu Luohan, a long-time worker in grandma's family, might have had an affair with grandma, it can be inferred that “花花事儿” refers to grandma's private life, which is not very good by the standards of the time. It is an implicit expression. “Sow plenty of wild oats” means to be unrestrained, especially when it comes to sex. Goldblatt did not retain the semantic blank brought by the implication in the original text, but translated it into flower things. Instead, he adopted the method of free translation to find similar expressions in English, so that readers could better understand the translation. This expression accords with readers' reading habits to a large extent, and is conducive to the integration of the readers' expectation horizon and the translation, so as to better understand the image of grandma.

5. Conclusion

This paper collects readers' comments from foreign book review websites and explores the acceptability of Goldblatt's translation of Red Sorghum to English readers from the perspective of reception aesthetics. The author finds that the translator's objective and subjective conditions may lead

to differences in the filling of “blank spots” in the original work, which can make the translated text diversified and provide readers with more reading choices. In addition, acceptance aesthetics emphasizes that readers enter the text with a specific “vision of expectation”, which requires translators to fully consider the cultural and cognitive differences of readers, so that the readers’ vision of expectation and readers can be perfectly matched to realize the aesthetic value of the translated text.

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