

A Study on the English Translation of “Folk Voices” in *Sandalwood Death* from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory -- Taking Howard Goldblatt’s Version as an Example

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Abstract:

In the context of globalization and the strategy of “Chinese culture going global”, the English translation of Chinese literature is of great significance to promote the spread of Chinese culture. Mo Yan’s *Sandalwood Death* shows rich regional culture and a unique flavor with its “folk voices”. Under the guidance of Nida’s functional equivalence theory, this study focuses on three types of “folk voices” in *Sandalwood Death*, including dialect colloquialisms, Xiehouyu (two-part allegorical sayings) and Maoqiang, and systematically evaluates the translation strategies and effects of Howard Goldblatt’s English version at the lexical, syntactic and stylistic levels through text comparison and case analysis. On the whole, the translator achieves functional equivalence at the semantic level through creative translation, feature dilution, semantic supplement and other translation strategies, but has some shortcomings in aesthetic effect. This study not only deepens the understanding of the characteristics of the English translation of *Sandalwood Death*, but also provides useful inspiration on how to reproduce the “folk voice” in the cross-cultural communication of Chinese literature.

Keywords: *Sandalwood Death*, Functional Equivalence Theory, “Folk voices”

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Research

With globalization intensifying and the strategy of

“Chinese culture going global” progressing steadily, Chinese literary works have emerged as a vital medium for presenting the charm of Chinese culture internationally and fostering cross-cultural communication. Particularly, those literary works with distinct

Chinese local cultural features and folk traditions, characterized by unique linguistic expressions and cultural implications, serve as a valuable window for Western readers to understand the diversity of Chinese culture.

Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012 owing to his “hallucinatory realism merging folk tales, history and the contemporary”, further enhancing the international influence of contemporary Chinese literature. Among Mo Yan’s works, *Sandalwood Death* is particularly representative. Against the background of the German construction of the Jiaoji Railway in Shandong Province in the early 20th century and Yuan Shikai’s suppression of the Boxer Rebellion in Shandong Province, the book tells a story of Sun Bing, the head of the troupe, who was sentenced to “sandalwood death” because he resisted the bullying of his family by German soldiers. Through various “folk voices”, the work reproduces the living conditions and emotional world of the people at the bottom of society in China. These voices not only add a unique artistic style to the narrative, but also carry the unique historical memory of China. At the same time, if a work wants to be recognised, the translator plays an irreplaceable role as a medium. As an excellent translator, Howard Goldblatt’s excellent translation plays a crucial role in Mo Yan’s winning the Nobel Prize in Literature and promoting the spread of Chinese literary works in the world. His translation idea is “to use domestication and foreignization flexibly” and “to try his best to express the characteristics of the original text”, combined with his enthusiastic and positive attitude towards the translation of Chinese literary works, both of the two make *Sandalwood Death* spread worldwide and go viral [1,2].

In recent years, scholars have carried out multi-dimensional studies on Howard Goldblatt’s English translation of *Sandalwood Death*, some of which focus on the details of the text and the translation strategies of a certain kind of expression, and some of which interpret the treatment of the translation with the help of theoretical frameworks such as eco-translatology and field theory [3-7]. Although these findings provide researchers with useful enlightenment for understanding the English version of *Sandalwood Death*, there are still some limitations. First, the research objects are limited to individual cases or single-level analysis, lacking holistic investigation. Second, the research emphasizes more on strategic choice and lacks in-depth, systematic evaluation of the delivery of artistic effects of the translation, such as the reception and response of the target readers.

Given these, the study takes “folk voices” as an integrated research object, takes Nida’s functional equivalence theory as the theoretical guidance, and carries out systematic analysis and effect evaluation from three dimensions of

lexical, syntactic and stylistic equivalence, which can fill in the gaps of “fragmentation analysis” and “lack of artistic effect evaluation” in existing research. Meanwhile, it can further enrich the academic understanding of Goldblatt’s translation strategies and cultural transmission effect and provide a reference paradigm for the translation study of similar literary works.

1.2 Significance of the Research

The significance of this study is threefold. At the theoretical level, the application of functional equivalence theory to the interpretation of “folk voices” can examine what kind of translation strategies can reproduce the aesthetic effect of the original text. It also reveals the drawback of the theory—Because historical and cultural differences and the translator’s subjectivity are not fully taken into account, it is difficult for target readers to completely reproduce the reader’s experience of the source language. At the practical level, the translator can refer to three strategies: the first is creative translation, which uses the variant expressions with similar meanings in the target language region to reproduce the language features; the second is feature dilution, which weakens specific markers while retaining key cultural information to enhance readability; the third is semantic supplement, which achieves similar reading effects by replacing synonymous expressions. At the level of cultural communication, the study can help global readers understand Chinese culture, which not only urges academics and translators to attach great importance to the translation value of relevant cultural elements, but also enables Western readers to perceive the charm of Chinese culture, filling the cultural gap and promoting the two-way identity of Chinese and Western cultures.

2. Theoretical Framework

Functional Equivalence Theory is an important translation theory proposed and continuously developed by the American translation theorist Eugene Nida. Its proposal not only opened up a new perspective for translation studies but also became a key theoretical fulcrum for cross-cultural translation research, especially for evaluating specific translators like Howard Goldblatt’s.

In the 1960s, influenced by structural linguistics and communication studies, Nida proposed in *Toward a Science of Translating* that translation should follow the operational process of “analysis—transfer—restructuring”, emphasizing that translation is a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communicative activity—a perspective that provides a theoretical basis for analyzing how Goldblatt balances cultural differences in his translation [8]. In this period, Nida began to focus on the core goal of translation: the trans-

lated text should be naturally understandable to target language readers, rather than merely a word-for-word formal correspondence—this idea guides the evaluation of whether Goldblatt’s version achieves reader-friendly communication. In 1969, Nida and Taber co-authored *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, clearly distinguishing between “dynamic equivalence” and “formal equivalence” for the first time: the former emphasizes achieving equivalence in communicative functions, i.e., “the understanding and response of target readers to the translated text should be as close as possible to that of the original readers”; the latter emphasizes striving for consistency in linguistic form and content [9]. This distinction helps identify whether Goldblatt tends to prioritize function or form in handling “folk voices”. After the 1980s, Nida gradually realized that the term “dynamic” was prone to misunderstanding and thus adjusted it to “functional equivalence”. In *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating*, he proposed that translation should achieve dual equivalence in meaning and style, and distinguished between different levels of equivalence: the lowest level of equivalence is the transmission of basic meaning, while the highest level requires target language readers to obtain an almost identical reading experience and response to that of the original readers—this multi-level standard provides a detailed framework for assessing the equivalence degree of Goldblatt’s translation of “folk voices” [10].

3. Methodologies of the Research

The “folk voice” in *Sandalwood Death* is not only a language form, but also a cultural symbol. “This is a kind of reading by ear, a kind of whole-hearted participation.” Mo Yan wrote in the postscript of *Sandalwood Death*. These “folk voices” incorporate the discourse and collective memory of the people at the bottom of the society into the literary narrative, making the text vivid and impressive. In order to better understand the effect of the translation of “folk voices”, the study employs both textual inquiry and case analysis to systematically explore the translation strategies and the realization of functional equivalence of “folk voices” in Howard Goldblatt’s English version, thus forming a multi-dimensional and progressive research path. Combining the whole text, the study finds that “folk voices” are presented in three forms: dialect colloquialisms, Xiehouyu (two-part allegorical sayings) and Mao-

qiang.

3.1 Dialect colloquialism

In Mo Yan’s works, the dialect of the Shandong area is widely used, which adds a unique local color to the narrative. Dialect implies specific emotional meaning and social identity, which are not only vivid and humorous, but also show the regional identity and class attributes of the characters. From the perspective of functional equivalence theory, translators need to find expressions that can reproduce their communicative effects in the target language while maintaining mood, emotion and social functions.

3.2 Xiehouyu (Two-part Allegorical Saying)

Xiehouyu is another important folk language material in *Sandalwood Death*. It consists of two parts: the first half of the sentence is a description of a certain phenomenon, and the second half of the sentence is the explanation or result of the description, reflecting the folk wisdom and humor. With the help of Xiehouyu, Mo Yan not only enhances the colloquial features of the narrative, but also realizes the allegory of the mentality and social reality. Since the Xiehouyu is highly dependent on the cultural context, it is difficult for translators to make the target readers feel the irony and folk interests only by literal translation. Therefore, how to maintain its rhetorical function and cultural tension in the translation is the key issue that the translator needs to pay attention to.

3.3 Maoqiang

As a local opera in the Gaomi area of Shandong Province, Maoqiang’s lyrics are greatly introduced in *Sandalwood Death* and participate in the construction of the structure of the novel. The language of Maoqiang has a strong sense of rhythm, and the language skills of exaggeration, parallelism, repetition and rhyme are abundant. At the same time, the Maoqiang lyrics dominate the atmosphere of the whole book, transforming the traditional narrative into a “performance narrative” with a strong sense of scene. The translator should not only convey the literal meaning, but also take the rhythm, rhyme and deep cultural implications into account.

The evaluation of the translation effect is implemented at the following three levels as Table 1 shows:

Table 1 English Translation Evaluation of “Folk Voices”

Level	Discussion Object	Discussion Content
Lexical Equivalence	Dialect-specific words Dialectal metaphors Xiehouyu	The study focuses on how Goldblatt handles such vocabulary to convey the original meaning and cultural connotations.
Syntactic Equivalence	Subject omission Parallelism	The study focuses on how Goldblatt handles these special syntactic structures and whether he balances the original cultural characteristics and emotional tension while adapting to English syntactic rules and expression habits.
Stylistic Equivalence	Maoqiang	Maoqiang is characterized by repetition, rhyme and other ways to build a sense of rhythm and singing. The study focuses on Goldblatt’s translation strategies to achieve the stylistic equivalence of Maoqiang and the key constraints to achieve the ideal equivalence effect.

4. Goldblatt’s Translation of the “Folk Voice” in Sandalwood Death from Three Dimensions

4.1 Lexical Equivalence

The core challenge at the lexical level lies in the conversion of a large number of culture-loaded words in “folk voices”. Such words are deeply connected to Shandong’s regional culture, Chinese linguistic logic, and the emotional expression of the people at the bottom of the society, and there are significant cognitive differences between them and Western culture. The study focuses on how Howard Goldblatt addresses this challenge from three aspects: dialect-specific words, dialectal metaphors, and xiehouyu.

4.1.1 Dialect-specific words

Dialect-specific words are the most distinctive carriers of regional attributes. The core function of such words is to convey exclusive cultural identities through linguistic expressions, achieving a sense of regional belonging based on psychological and cultural identity. To avoid the dissolution of regional characteristics caused by general expressions and the failure to convey the specific regional temperament and cultural tone, Howard Goldblatt mainly adopts the method of transliteration to retain the regional color to the greatest extent.

Example 1:

Original text: 俺公爹赵甲做梦也想不到再过七天他就要死在俺的手里。

(Mo Yan, 2017: 3)

Goldblatt’ version: My gongdieh, Zhao Jia, could never, even in his wildest dreams, have imagined that in seven days he would die at my hands.

(Goldblatt, 2013: 3)

“Gongdieh”(公爹) is a term used by women in Shandong to refer to their husband’s father, carrying the function of a regional identity symbol. In the Chinese context, “dieh”(爹) contains a distinct sense of intimacy. It does not reflect the dignity implied in the term “father”(父

亲) but conveys a harmonious atmosphere of affectionate interaction within the family through a monosyllable. The term “gongdieh” not only shows the daughter-in-law’s respect for her elder but also does not create an emotional distance due to excessive formality, reflecting the emphasis on family ethical order in Chinese culture. This kind of address bears cultural and emotional functions in Chinese, but there is no similar expression in the Western cultural context. Since the kinship term system in Western culture is relatively simplified, “father-in-law” is a general term for “husband’s father”, which only defines the relationship between the two parties from a legal perspective and cannot reflect the emotional connotation implied in the Chinese term “gongdieh”. In his version, Goldblatt adopts the strategy of direct transliteration into “gongdieh” to enable Western readers to understand the emphasis on family ethical relationships in Chinese culture to the greatest extent. On one hand, the prefix “gong-” clearly distinguishes the kinship relationship from “dieh”, retaining the detailed distinction of kinship in Chinese. On the other hand, the suffix “-dieh” retains the pronunciation characteristics of the local dialect, allowing English readers to perceive that this is a unique kinship term. Compared with the literal translation of “father-in-law”, “gongdieh” in Goldblatt’s version not only avoids the generalized interpretation of kinship but also strengthens the dual identification of regional culture and kinship identity, accurately matching the core function of the original language—“conveying kinship and regional attributes through dialect”.

Example 2:

Original text: 那天夜里，俺心里有事，睡不着，在炕上翻来覆去烙大饼。

(Mo Yan, 2017:4)

Goldblatt’ version: My thoughts kept me awake that night, as I tossed and turned on the brick kang, like flipping fried bread.

(Goldblatt, 2013:4)

In northern China, the “kang”(炕) is a typical piece of

furniture in traditional houses used for heating and resting. Through the flue inside, it uses heat generated by burning fuels such as straw and coal to keep the surface of the kang warm, adapting to the cold and dry climate in northern China. It also has the resting function of a bed and is an important spatial carrier for family daily life. However, there is no such brick-made furniture as “kang” in Western cultural context. If it is literally translated as “brick bed”, readers would misunderstand it as an “ordinary bed made of bricks”, losing the two core attributes of “heating” and “northern China (Shandong)”. To balance these two aspects, Goldblatt adopts a combined method of “free translation + transliteration” and translates it as “brick kang”. Among them, “brick” clarifies the material of the “kang”, solving the problem of Western readers’ cognitive confusion about the physical properties of the furniture. At the same time, “kang” uses the Pinyin of the original language, reflecting that this is a “unique item in northern China” [11]. This approach not only fills the cultural cognitive gap but also does not dissolve the sense of exclusivity of regional culture, achieving a balance between information transmission and cultural preservation.

4.1.2 Dialectal metaphors

The core function of dialectal metaphors is to convey emotions such as teasing, criticism, and praise among people through life-like metaphors. The translation difficulty lies in whether there are metaphors with similar functions in Western culture that can help Western readers understand the humor behind the metaphors. For such metaphors, Howard Goldblatt combines literal translation and free translation to pursue the transmission of the actual semantic effect.

Example 3:

Original text: 白天迷迷糊糊, 夜晚木头疙瘩。

(Mo Yan, 2017:4)

Goldblatt’ version: During the day he walks in a fog, and at night he lies in bed like a gnarled log.

(Goldblatt, 2013:4)

In Shandong dialect, “木头疙瘩” is a commonly used colloquial metaphor. By referring to things that are hard and rigid, like a wooden block, it teases or criticizes a person for being stupid, inflexible, or unadaptable, with a sense of humor. Goldblatt translates it as “gnarled log”, which is a literal translation strategy in form. It retains the image of wood and highlights the rough and uneven characteristics of the wooden block through “gnarled”. This translation strengthens the texture of the “object”, making it easy for Western readers to visualize the image of a knotted wooden block in their minds. However, at the same time, this translation ignores the derogatory function of “木头疙瘩” in Chinese colloquial language. For English readers, “gnarled log” is more of a description

of a natural object and lacks the semantic orientation of describing a person as dull. Although there are similar derogatory terms such as “blockhead” to describe dullness, “gnarled log” still tends to be perceived as a real object rather than referring to a person by target language readers. The effect of this translation in Goldblatt’s version is: it maintains the exotic flavor and the sense of strangeness of the object image in the English text, allowing readers to perceive the colloquial characteristics of “non-standard English”; but from the perspective of reader response, the satirical meaning and interpersonal interaction effect of the original text are not fully conveyed. In other words, “gnarled log” in Goldblatt’s version achieves equivalence at the semantic level but fails to achieve equivalence at the pragmatic level. Goldblatt’s choice in his translation reflects his trade-off in the face of cultural differences. He tends to retain the localized strange image rather than forcibly seeking derogatory alternatives in English, thereby ensuring the exoticism of the text.

Example 4:

Original text: 腔戏是栓老婆的橛子。

(Mo Yan, 2017:9)

Goldblatt’ version: Maoqiang opera was the bait to attract a wife.

(Goldblatt, 2013:10)

In Shandong dialect, “橛子” specifically refers to a wooden stake or short wooden post used to tie livestock. The metaphor “栓老婆的橛子” compares a wife to livestock that can be tied up, reflecting the reality of “women being dependent on men and their range of activities being restricted” in rural Chinese society at that time, with a strong, rough, and teasing tone. In his version, Goldblatt adopts the method of free translation, abandoning the unique expression of “橛子” in rural Chinese society and using the universally understandable metaphor of “bait” in his translation. In the Western context, “bait” in Goldblatt’s version naturally carries the meaning of “temptation” and “trap”; when used to describe a means of marrying a wife, readers can immediately perceive the speaker’s contempt and satire. Although this transformation loses the action of “tying” in the original text and the texture of regional life, and also dissolves the rough imagery of rural society, it to some extent makes up for the understanding barrier in cross-cultural communication. If it is translated literally, although it would be closer to the original image, it would appear rigid and obscure, not only lacking the naturalness of English colloquial language but also possibly leading target readers to misunderstand it as a description of “abusing or imprisoning a wife”, thus causing misinterpretation. Therefore, although Goldblatt’s translation sacrifices the regional cultural characteristics, by introducing the familiar image of “bait” in the target language, he ensures that the translated text can produce a

similar communicative effect among English readers.

4.1.3 Xiehouyu

Xiehouyu is an important form of embodying folk wisdom and humor. The core function of such expressions is to achieve a humorous and satirical effect through “metaphor in the first part + explanation in the second part + homophonic pun”. However, in the Western cultural context, there is often a lack of corresponding cultural background and homophonic associations, making such expressions the most difficult type to translate—this difficulty is fully reflected in Howard Goldblatt’s version.

Example 5:

Original text: 姥姥死了独生子 —— 没有舅 (救) 了。

(Mo Yan, 2017:9)

Goldblatt’s version: No translation.

(Goldblatt, 2013:10)

The first part of this xiehouyu describes a scenario, and the second part describes the result, using the homophonic effect of “舅” (maternal uncle) and “救” (rescue) to express the meaning of “no rescue available”. Goldblatt chooses not to translate it directly, mainly because the humorous effect caused by the homophonic relationship between “舅” and “救” cannot be replicated in English. In English, there are no words with the same pronunciation to express these two different meanings. If it is translated forcibly, it would not only be difficult to maintain the interactive effect between the literal meaning and the homophony but also appear rigid. From the perspective of functional equivalence, this translation choice involves a certain sacrifice: the humorous effect of the original text cannot be reproduced in his translated text, and readers also lose the opportunity to experience the “folk voices”. However, from the perspective of cross-cultural communication, this abandonment in Goldblatt’s translation is a “last resort”, because there are almost no one-to-one corresponding homophonic puns in the target language; forced translation would instead cause misunderstanding or awkwardness, undermining the overall fluency of the text. In other words, Goldblatt chooses to maintain the coherence of the narrative here, avoiding the consequence of “functional dislocation caused by formal equivalence” and giving up the reproduction of local folk interest.

Example 6:

Original text: 你这是睁着眼打呼噜 —— 装鼾 (憨) 呢 □

(Mo Yan, 2017:11)

Goldblatt’s version: Your eyes are open, yet you pretend to be asleep.

(Goldblatt, 2013:13)

This Xiehouyu uses the homophonic effect of “鼾” (snore) and “憨” (dull) to express the meaning of “pretending to be stupid”. In the Chinese context, the original meaning of “憨” refers to a person being simple and honest, and later

extended to the derogatory meaning of “slow-witted” and “stupid”. The homophony of “鼾” and “憨” creates a dual interaction between sound and meaning in the whole sentence, forming a unique humorous effect. However, in English, Goldblatt cannot replicate the homophonic effect of them, also because the words expressing these two meanings have different pronunciations. Nevertheless, this sentence cannot be omitted in the text: it connects Zhu Ba’s question in the previous context, leads to Meiniang revealing Sun Bing’s identity in the following context, and can also reflect Meiniang’s bold and straightforward character. Therefore, Goldblatt adopts the strategy of free translation, directly converting the core meaning into an easy-to-understand expression. Although this translation abandons the humorous effect of the original text, it still retains the function of expressing “pretending to be stupid” through the description of logical contradiction. He does not pursue formal equivalence but maintains the communicative effect through the reconstruction of the semantic level. The translator’s choice ensures the natural fluency of the translated text through the logical reproduction of semantics, while also conveying a satirical effect comparable to that of the original text.

4.2 Syntactic Equivalence

At the syntactic level, *Sandalwood Death* creates an artistic characteristic of speaking and singing. This characteristic has obvious performative features, which connect the readers’ senses and make them feel as if they are in the scene. The following analysis focuses on how Howard Goldblatt handles these syntactic features to achieve functional equivalence.

4.2.1 Subject supplementation

Example 7:

Original text: 我的妻啊，怎承想雹碎了春红，更那堪风刀霜剑。

(Mo Yan, 2017:164)

Goldblatt’s version: My wife, how do I accept that the blush of spring has been shattered by a hailstone chime, and worse, how do I endure the blade of wind and sword of rime.

(Goldblatt, 2013:209)

In the original text, the sentence structure is very compact, and emotional expression mainly relies on the listing of images. This kind of expression in Chinese is due to its strong context dependence. When the scene and context are clear, the sentence does not need to emphasize the subject, and omission can even create a lyrical atmosphere with intense emotional fluctuations, such as urgency and sorrow, making the sentence present a characteristic of half-chanting and half-singing, which is closer to the performance tradition of folk art. However, Goldblatt supple-

ments the subject “I”, considering that English syntactic habits require a clear subject. Otherwise, the sentence will appear fragmented or even ungrammatical. By adding the subject “I”, he not only ensures the completeness of the sentence but also enables Western readers to more directly perceive Sun Bing’s inner pain. Nevertheless, this supplementation in Goldblatt’s translation dissolves the emotional tension of the original text to a certain extent. Although the “I accept” and “I endure” clearly identify the speaker, they also make the sentence more rational and logical, losing the effect of the original text in which images directly advance and make readers “hear the cry”. Therefore, although Goldblatt’s translation is successful in information transmission, it is weakened in terms of emotional atmosphere and narrative expressiveness, making it difficult to fully convey the “folk voice” characteristics of the original text. In other words, Goldblatt here pursues smooth readability of the language to a greater extent, but at the cost of sacrificing the colloquialism and performativity of the original text.

4.2.2 Parallelism

Example 8:

Original text: 他藏愚守拙，他欲擒故纵，他避实就虚，他假装糊涂。

(Mo Yan, 2017:86)

Goldblatt’ version: He succeeds in things by keeping his inadequacies hidden, seizing his prey by feigning to let go, and pretending to be dull-witted.

(Goldblatt, 2013:107)

This series of descriptions forms an intensive rhythm through parallel structure, which not only vividly shows Zhao Jia’s cleverness, wisdom, and cunning but also reflects the rhythmic characteristics of folk storytelling and opera lyrics, as if Qian Ding has transformed into a character in the opera and is talking to the audience. However, Goldblatt’s translation is more simplified in the overall structure, condensing four separate sentences into one sentence. This choice is restricted by the English language system. Since English readers are accustomed to coherent linear narration, too many separate sentences will make the text cumbersome. Therefore, the translator combines the four sentences into one to maintain the natural expression of English. From the perspective of functional equivalence, this handling in Goldblatt’s translation is both reasonable and defective. The reasonable aspect is that the translated text still retains the character traits of “forbearance, calculation, and pretending to be stupid”, and the literal meaning is basically conveyed. The defect is that the parallelism in the original text is not only for semantic transmission but also for the construction of tone and atmosphere—this function is not fully realized in Goldblatt’s version. The sense of rhythm and performativ-

ity inherent in Chinese parallel sentences is weakened into logical statements in English, resulting in the loss of part of the colloquial charm of “folk storytelling and singing”. In other words, while achieving “semantic equivalence”, Goldblatt fails to fully retain “rhetorical functional equivalence”.

4.3 Stylistic Equivalence

At the stylistic level, the “folk voices” are mainly reflected in Maoqiang, a local opera genre with Shandong characteristics. Maoqiang extensively uses techniques such as repetition, rhyme, and modal particles, endowing the language with a strong sense of rhythm and performativity, and creating a unique reading experience that can be both “read” and “sing”. The following analysis focuses on how Howard Goldblatt reproduces these stylistic features.

4.3.1 Repetition

Example 9:

Original text: 好好好，乡亲们莫烦恼～恼恼恼，奸贼们仔细着～看看看，众子弟揭竿起～去去去，去扒那火车道～死死死，死得好～火火火，烧起来了～了了了，还没了～要要要，要公道～

(Mo Yan, 2017:351)

Goldblatt’ version: Good, wonderful, bravo, fellow townsmen do not fret—fret fret fret, all you traitors, be on your guard—watch watch watch, our people rise in rebellion—go go go, go tear up those tracks—die die die, die a good death—fire fire fire, flames reach into the sky—finish finish finish, finished not yet—demand demand demand, a cry for justice be met—

(Goldblatt, 2013:445)

Expressions such as “好好好” and “恼恼恼” form a rhythm of “three beats and one exclamation” with three repeated syllables in a group. Through the progressive rhythm, they intensify the emotions and visualize the people’s anger. At the same time, they endow the text with stage-like performativity, making readers feel as if they are in the scene of a mass resistance movement, and endowing the words with a strong sound effect and appeal. Goldblatt adopts a literal translation strategy, fully retaining the “three-beat-one-exclamation” rhythmic structure of the original text. This approach is highly faithful at the formal level, enabling English readers to intuitively perceive the rhythmic sense of a chant, thereby achieving partial functional equivalence. At the same time, Goldblatt supplements the rhyme at the end of the sentences, such as “yet” and “met”, to make up for the lack of reduplicated tones in English. This supplementation in Goldblatt’s translation strengthens the inspiring nature of the translated text, making it closer to the chanting atmosphere of the original text.

4.3.2 Rhyme

Example 10:

Original text: 夜里做了一个梦，梦到了白虎到俺家。白虎身穿小红袄，腓上翘着一根大尾巴。白虎与俺对面坐，张嘴龇出大白牙。

(Mo Yan, 2017:58)

Goldblatt's version: In my dream last night, I saw a white tiger at our house. Wearing a red jacket, tail standing up in the air. White Tiger sat across from me, mouth open, white fangs, a great big maw.

(Goldblatt, 2013:72)

In the original text, the three sentences end with the rhyme /a/ in Chinese, forming an end rhyme. Rhyme enhances the sense of rhythm in reading, endowing the text with musicality and performativity beyond the narrative, allowing readers to experience a lingering effect similar to opera during reading. However, Goldblatt only transcribes it in prose-style short sentences, abandoning the reproduction of end rhymes. Although this handling in Goldblatt's translation ensures the clarity of the semantics, it loses the musicality and performativity of the original text at the formal level. According to the requirements of functional equivalence theory, the translated text should be as close as possible to the original text in terms of stylistic effects, and rhyme is an important element among them. If rhyme is completely abandoned in his translation, target language readers will find it difficult to obtain an auditory experience similar to that of the original readers. Therefore, when dealing with similar texts, translators can try to simulate the rhythmic sense of the original text in English by repeating word-end sounds, using alliteration, or forming short sentences with internal rhythm in their versions, thereby reproducing the rhythmic effect of the original text at the functional level—an improvement direction that can be drawn from Goldblatt's handling of rhyme.

5. Conclusion

Based on Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory, this study takes Howard Goldblatt's version of *Sandalwood Death* as the case and systematically analyzes the English translation practice of "folk voices" in his version. The research results show that Goldblatt generally adopts a combination of transliteration, literal translation, and free translation, and achieves good equivalence at the semantic level. However, restricted by language and cultural differences, some pragmatic functions and stylistic features fail to be fully reproduced. For example, the homophony of Xiehouyu, parallelism, and the rhyme of Maoqiang are all weakened in his translated text. This indicates that Functional Equivalence Theory has certain guiding value in analyzing Goldblatt's handling of culture-loaded linguistic materials, but also has limitations in applicability. Future research can further combine the reception and

response of target language readers to supplement the empirical investigation of translation effects. At the same time, researchers can introduce perspectives such as sociolinguistics and cultural translation studies to explore more flexible strategies to make up for the deficiencies in pragmatic and stylistic reproduction. In addition, it can compare Goldblatt's version with other translators' versions or analyze Goldblatt's handling methods in different contextual parts of his version, thereby establishing a more universal translation paradigm and providing richer theoretical support and practical experience for the overseas dissemination of contemporary Chinese literature based on excellent translators' versions like Goldblatt's.

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