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## Studies on the Translation of Personal Names in *Red Sorghum*

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**Abstract:** Personal name is one of the methods to build images of diversified characters in literary works. In Chinese culture, personal names carry abundant cultural information, so it is extremely difficult for translators to translate the personal names. This essay makes an exhaustive research of the translation of personal names in *Red Sorghum* and analyzes the translation effects. Howard Goldblatt employs three methods to translate personal names: transliteration, free translation and rewriting. Personal names are not just social symbols. Their translation does not equal to the transfer of linguistic codes. In some cases, Goldblatt cherishes the important role code users play in the communication, so he attempts to transmit the user-oriented cultural information represented by personal names in the source text. Goldblatt does not always transliterate into English the Chinese personal names with the Chinese phonetic alphabet. When situation permits, he free translates or even rewrites the personal names in order to transmit the pragmatic and cultural meanings, which demonstrates his magnificent creativity and initiative.

**Keywords:** *Red Sorghum*; Translation; Personal names; Howard Goldblatt.

### 1. Introduction

One of the main functions of literary works is to build images of diversified characters, which are described and represented in various methods, personal names among one of them. In some cases, names of the characters can reflect their physical, moral and behavioral features. Furthermore, authors of literary works usually deliberate repeatedly the naming of characters, express their own attitudes, comments and preference to certain characters, or imply the characters' experience, destiny, merits, weaknesses, etc. Thus it is naturally perceived that personal names in literary works can be regarded as linguistic expressions of particular meanings, rather than a pile of pure symbols. Personal names, to some degree, are essential keys to comprehend and appreciate the characters.

On October 11, 2012, Mo Yan, the author of *Red Sorghum*, won the Nobel Prize in literature, which stirs up the interest of translation circle. The English version of this novel is translated by American sinologist Howard Goldblatt. Judging from the relationship between personal names and images of the characters, it can be inferred that Mo Yan imply certain cultural meanings through personal names of the characters.

Chinese language is ideographic, each Chinese character expressing meanings rather than the sound, whereas English language is phonographic, each English letter representing the sound rather than the meaning. Besides, Chinese culture attaches great importance to the given name of a person rather than the family name, while western culture pays less attention to the given name. Due to the sharp linguistic and cultural differences between the Chinese-speaking community and the English-speaking community, it is extremely difficult for translators to translate the personal names.

Mo Yan implies much information through personal names of the characters, for instance, destiny, physical features, personalities, merits, etc. Chinese readers can appreciate the implied meaning without striking a blow. If the translator only transliterates the phonetic sound of the personal names and ignores the implied meaning, western readers may lose the opportunities to appreciate the images of the characters through their personal names. With the aim to reach the inter-textual coherence between the source text and the target text, Goldblatt comprehensively take many elements into account and flexibly select the appropriate translation methods. His translation of personal names in *Red Sorghum* exhibits his extraordinary creativity and initiative. Accordingly, the detailed analysis of his translation of personal names can provide plentiful experience for introducing Chinese literature into the western world.

Personal names carry abundant cultural information. The translation of culture-loaded words has been the focus of research. When analyzing the translation of culture-loaded words, scholars sometimes mention a few examples of the translation of personal names. However, few exhaustive researches have been done on the translation of personal names in *Red Sorghum*.

Among the data available only one essay (Chen and Jin, 2016) has been found that makes an exhaustive investigation of the translation methods of personal names in *Red Sorghum*. It divides the corresponding translations

into three types and analyzes the different translation methods of each type, regardless of the implied messages hidden behind the Chinese names. Other researches focusing on the translation of culture-loaded words mention several examples of the translation of personal names, but not in an exhaustive way.

## 2. Material and Method

The current research attempts to make an exhaustive comparison and contrast between the Chinese personal names and their counterparts in English. First, this essay listed all the translations of the personal names and arranged them alphabetically. Then, the names were classified according to their motivations. Finally, this essay analyzed how Goldblatt translates each type of the personal names and evaluated the translation effects, especially the effects of the translation of cultural meanings.

### 2.1. Personal Names List

**Table-1.** Instances of the Translation of Personal Names

Source Text	Target Text
Dai Fenglian	Dai Fenglian
Douguan	Douguan
Fang Liu	Fang Six
Fang Qi	Fang Seven
Huabozi	Spotted Neck
Laolao Si	Consumptive Four
Lianr	Passion
Leng Mazi	Pocky Leng
Lingzi	Lingzi
Liu Dahao	Bugler Liu
Liu Luohan	Arhat Liu
Qianr	Beauty
Shan Bianlang	Shan Bianlang
Shan Tingxiu	Shan Tingxiu
Sun Wu	Sun Five
Wang Daya	Big Claw Wang
Wang Wenyi	Wang Wenyi
Yaba	Mute
Yu Daya	Big Tooth Yu
Yu Zhan'ao	Yu Zhan'ao

### 2.2. Classification of the Personal Names

On the basis of the motivation, the personal names in Red Sorghum can be classified into five types: 1) formal names, such as Dai Fenglian, 2) informal childhood names, for example, Douguan and Lingzi, 3) names including seniority among brothers and sisters, for instance, Sun Wu (Wu in Chinese means five.), 4) nicknames: Qianr, 5) monickers: Yu Daya (Daya in Chinese means big tooth.). It is likely that there are overlaps among the five types, for example, Consumptive Four, which consists of both the seniority and the monicker.

### 2.3. Theoretical Bases

Personal names are social symbols. Accordingly, the translation of personal names involves semiotic theories. And the translator is expected to follow the operating principles of symbols. On the one hand, as a symbol, the meanings of personal names include three parts: denotative meaning, linguistic meaning and pragmatic meaning. On the other hand, the translation process is anything but a simple process of transferring linguistic codes. It engages in the transfer of cultural information. All in all, the translation of personal names involves the transfer of denotative meaning, linguistic meaning and pragmatic meaning, each of which can not be parted from the consideration of cultural elements.

Denotative meaning is more or less like the meanings listed in the dictionary. On the aspect of denotative meaning, there are four types of relations between the source text and the target text: 1) complete correspondence, 2) partial correspondence, 3) incomplete correspondence, 4) no correspondence.

Linguistic meaning emphasizes the relations between different linguistic units and discourses, which can be illustrated with reference to three pairs of relations: the relations among words, the relations among sentences, and the relations among discourses. The relations among words include repetition, reduplication, etc. The relations among sentences consist of antithesis, inversion, parallelism, length, etc. The relations among discourses are mainly reflected on the logical reasoning.

Pragmatic meaning arises from the users of a linguistic unit, including both the producer and the receiver. This type of meaning can be divided into two major types: common pragmatic meanings and special pragmatic meanings.

The former produces universal pragmatic meanings to almost all the users, whereas the latter produces special pragmatic meanings in a specific context.

### 3. Results

In view of the complexity of the translation of personal names, Goldblatt employs different translation methods to translate the personal names of the same type.

#### 3.1. Transliteration

Goldblatt transliterates some formal names and childhood names, such as: Dai Fenglian, Shan Bianlang, Shan Tingxiu, Wang Wenyi, Yu Zhan'ao, Lingzi, Douguan.

The above translations demonstrate that Chinese phonetic alphabet has been employed to translate the personal names with the aim to ensure the inter-textual coherence between the source text and the target text. In Chinese culture, family name precedes given name, whereas in western culture, given name comes the first. The translator does not change the order of family name and given name, complying with the habits of the Chinese culture.

#### 3.2. Free Translation

In *Dictionary of Translation Studies*, free translation is defined as a type of translation in which more attention is paid to producing a natural target language than to preserving the source language wording intact. It is a translation method aiming to achieve semantic, pragmatic and functional equivalence in the target text.

The free translated personal names are mainly divided into four types: 1) feature + family name: Bugler Liu, Big Claw Wang, Pocky Leng, Big Tooth Yu; 2) translating the meaning of the nickname: Mute, Spotted Neck, Consumptive Four; 3) family name + seniority: Fang Seven, Fang Six, Sun Five; 4) corresponding counterpart in the target text + family name: Arhat Liu.

Except for the second type, the rest three types include family name. Among the three, two types: feature + family name and corresponding counterpart in the target text + family name, are translated by complying with western habits—given name preceding family name. One type: family name + seniority, is translated by following the habit of Chinese culture—putting family name first. When it comes to the family name + seniority type, the translator reserves the habit of Chinese culture in the target language, for this type of names involves only the denotative meaning. The linguistic meaning and pragmatic meaning are not as important as the denotative meaning. Accordingly, seniority is translated into the corresponding number in the English language.

Considering the two types: the feature + family and corresponding counterpart in the target text + family name, in order to facilitate target readers' comprehension of the personalities of the characters in the novel, Goldblatt takes two measures: 1) complying with the western habit by putting family name behind the given name, 2) representing the pragmatic meaning of the source text in the target text. In doing so, he not only establishes a relationship between the codes and the persons they refer to, but also takes into account the users of the codes.

#### 3.3. Rewriting

Traditional translation methods hold that the source text is the absolute standard, which controls powerfully the entire process of translation. On the contrary, rewriting means that the translator has the power to process and adjust his comprehension of the source text and can represent the processed and adjusted information in the target text. This type of translation method, which is employed to translate the following two names: Lianr (Passion) and Qianr (Beauty), endows translator with the greater power of creativity and initiative. As to rewriting, the relationship between the codes and their users outweighs the relationship between the codes and the characters they refer to.

### 4. Discussion

In some cases, Goldblatt cherishes the important role code users play in the communication, so he attempts to transmit the user-oriented cultural information represented by personal names in the source text.

Take the translation of Liu Luohan as an example. It is free translated into Arhat Liu, which is an example of feature + family name type. Arhat is defined as "one who is worthy", a "perfected person" having attained nirvana, or people far advanced along the path of Enlightenment, but who may not have reached full Buddhahood. The Buddhist meaning of Arhat plays a critical role in portraying the character. Arhat Liu and the Arhat in Buddhism share some similarities. It is through tough Buddhist practice that a common person can have the opportunity to become an Arhat. The character Arhat Liu has experienced a series of tough struggles and developed into a true and respected man. Originally, he is just a common farmer, serving his host diligently and conscientiously, whose insight is not different from an ordinary servant. He is humble, focusing on himself and his work only. When he has been arrested and forced to work for Japanese soldiers, he feels fearful and swallows insult and humiliation silently, which are the natural reflections of common people. However, as the story develops, his fear dies down gradually. Under the encouragement of other people, he firmly makes up his mind to escape.

Unfortunately, the situation does not develop according to his ideals. The blood on his face covers his original appearance. When he attempts to take away the host's mule, the stupid animal fails to recognize him and starts to bray, wakening the Japanese guards. He is enraged and shovels the mule's leg, cursing the mule for its betrayal of its host. On the surface, he appears to curse the mule. However, actually he curses the Puppet troops, who betray their

mother land. He takes death calmly. When he is stripped of his skin alive, he demonstrates an awe-inspiring righteousness, making a sharp contrast with Sun Five's cowardice and lack of integrity.

Arhat Liu has experienced tough Buddhist-like practice and then formed the unswerving personality, which is similar to the implied meaning of the word Arhat in Buddhism. The translator does not transliterate the name with Chinese phonetic alphabet but find out the corresponding word in the English language to translate the cultural meaning rather than the pronunciation of "Luohan". In doing so, both the denotative meaning and the pragmatic meaning have been transmitted into the target language, facilitating target readers' comprehension of the personality of Arhat Liu.

The translations of Lianr (Passion) and Qianr (Beauty) are also cultural-information-oriented. Passion is my grandmother's servant girl, gentle, sweet-tempered and infatuated with Yu Zhan'ao. She even discards her sister's feeling, for the sake of her love for Yu Zhan'ao. It can be said that she is a courageous girl daring to love and hate with great passion. Goldblatt does not transliterate the name of Lianr with the Chinese phonetic alphabet, but rewrite it into Passion.

She loves Yu Zhan'ao and would like to become his concubine without any consideration of her sister's feelings. She hates the Japanese soldiers, who have raped her. The result is that she cannot remain pure and live to old age in conjugal bliss with her love. She feels angry, watching helplessly the Japanese soldier killing her innocent daughter. At the same time, she feels that the foetus struggles in her womb, but she is incapable to resist the raping Japanese soldier. What she can do is to yell vehemently—her heart is dead.

Lianr is rewritten into Passion, whose meaning conforms to her character traits. Therefore, western readers can gain some information about her experience and personalities suggested by her English name.

"Beauty" can be defined as one who is beautiful, especially a beautiful woman. Because Mo Yan does not describe her appearance directly, readers have little knowledge of it. However, beauty can not only be embodied in one's appearance, but also in one's personalities. If one faces danger fearlessly, and makes calm and quick-witted responses, he is considered to be beautiful, too.

Goldblatt rewrites Qianr into Beauty, which not only conforms to the meaning suggested by the Chinese character Qian, but also transmits the original author's commendatory comment on this figure.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, with the continuous development of internet and transportation, communication among countries increases sharply, making almost all countries get involved in the globalization. In this process, besides economic, diplomatic and transportation communications, cultural exchange has become more and more important. People have greater interest to get acquaintance with the foreign culture. Accordingly, translators are expected to fulfil the expectations of readers and facilitate the cultural communication. Personal names, especially personal names in Chinese culture, not only play the function of referring to the corresponding characters, they also carry abundant cultural information. Besides transliteration, in certain cases, translators can free translate or even rewrite the personal names in order to transmit the pragmatic and cultural meanings. In this case, the source text may no longer control the entire translation process. Translator can demonstrate his initiative to the full. Goldblatt's translation method of personal names is worth learning by other translators.

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