



# A Report on the Translation of *Dedicating a Tree to You* (Chapter 1-3)

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## Abstract

Taking the novel *Dedicating a Tree to You* (Chapter 1-3) as an example, this report explores the applicability of Tytler's Three Translation Principles in literary translation. On the basis of applying this principle and combining translation methods such as amplification, literal translation and transformation, so as to provide Chinese to English translation materials for literary translation. Through the translation practice, this report draws the following conclusions: Culturally loaded words and connotative words should be translated accurately to avoid ambiguity caused by mistranslation and omission. In addition, it is important to reproduce the original information and style of the source text, but for the sake of sentence coherence, the sentence structure can be adjusted appropriately without changing the original meaning.

## Subject Areas

Linguistics

## Keywords

Tytler's Three Translation Principles, Literary Translation, Translation Methods, Culturally Loaded Words

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Background

Being one of the ancient civilizations in the world, China has a unique and precious culture. It is not only the mainstream culture in East Asia, but even many Western civilizations are influenced by Chinese culture. As China becoming stronger, it has gradually become the center of the world, and Chinese culture has become well-known to many foreigners. Translating Chinese literary works into a foreign

language is an important way to spread Chinese culture.

China is trying to show the world its excellent and profound culture. It is known to us that novels are the most attractive to foreign readers because they are not as obscure as poetry or as esoteric as scientific and technical texts. Novel translation plays an important role in spreading Chinese culture. Novels are rich in Chinese culture, and novels written in different social contexts reflect the culture of China in different periods. Through this translation, a comprehensive and diverse China would be presented to the target readers.

It must be admitted that there is still room for improvement in novel translation. For example, reproducing the characters, language features and the style of the novel is difficult in translation. To overcome these difficulties, it is necessary to analyze the context of the source text and understand the writing style of the author of the source text. Thus, the translator applies different translation methods and skills to reproduce the style of the novel.

## 1.2. Purpose of Translation Practice

In this translation practice, the author takes the novel *Dedicating a Tree to You* (Chapter 1-3) as the translation text, under the guidance of Tytler's Three Translation Principles, explores the methods and strategies of literary translation [1].

On the one hand, as the carrier of culture, literature not only shows readers the profound and long-standing Chinese culture but also plays a significant role in the communication between China and Western countries. The most important thing is meeting the needs of overseas readers who are interested in Chinese culture. As we all know, with the deepening integration of Chinese and Western cultures, many countries have set off a wave of people learning Chinese. Translating Chinese literary works into other languages can meet the needs of overseas learners to study Chinese and expand the influence of Chinese culture.

On the other hand, exploring the applicability of Tytler's Three Translation Principles in literary translation. In the translation process, the author encountered many difficulties, such as translating connotative words. The first rule of Tytler's three translation principles points out that the translation should reproduce the idea of the source text. In other words, translators are required to translate these words by combining the background and context of the source text. Under the guidance of Tytler's Three Translation Principles, the problems encountered in translation have been solved, which shows that this principle is applicable to literary translation.

Finally, plenty of translation techniques are applied in this translation practice. For instance, transliteration and annotation are combined to translate connotative words. Without profound knowledge of Chinese culture, readers couldn't understand the connotation of a word. Thus, it is necessary to combine transliteration with annotation to translate connotative words.

In view of the above three points, this report could present splendid Chinese cultures to foreigners and have an effect on the communication between China

and Western countries.

### 1.3. Significance of the Translation Practice Report

Firstly, this translation practice introduces the application of Tytler's Three Translation Principles in literary translation. To show the difficulties of culture-loaded words, connotative words, and syntax involved in the source text, the translator consulted a great amount of literature and read relevant parallel texts [2].

Secondly, this novel is adapted from a true story that took place in Yunnan province. It involves the ethnic minority's language and records the local customs of Yunnan. Thus, the translation helps target readers to know the wonderful culture of Yunnan and provides a reference for translation practices related to the social life of Yunnan. Besides, this translation practice provides Chinese to English translation materials for those who are fond of literary translation all over the world.

In the end, this translation practice is an invaluable experience for the translator. It not only broadens the translator's horizons and improves literacy level but also exercises the ability to collect and sort out materials, which helps improve the translator's translation ability.

## 2. The Analysis of the Source Text

### 2.1. The Introduction of the Source Text

It is selected from the first novel in Da Bing's novel collection—*Child*. This novel is adapted from a real story, which narrates the whole life of protagonist Ping Guan. It takes place in a remote ethnic minority in Yunnan, where people use many languages and customs that are characteristic of ethnic minorities.

The content of these three chapters is mainly about the story of Ping Guan, who was born in a poor family, his family is too poor to afford him and his sister's tuition, Ping Guan had to drop out of school to work with his father in a quarry. He earned money to help his family pay off debts and pay tuition for his sister. At the age when he should have gone to school, he wandered around the construction site and garbage mountain, which showed the extreme poverty of his family. What attracts readers most to this novel is the hard-working, unpretentious, and dedicated spirit of Ping Guan. Although he has suffered great setbacks and hardships, a lot of valuable qualities can be found in him, such as optimism and simplicity.

The author hopes that readers will be inspired by the precious spirits of Ping Guan.

### 2.2. The Analysis of Text Features

The language of the novel is humorous and vivid because it's conventional in our daily lives. A few rhetorical devices are employed in the source text, including metaphor, exaggeration, personification, and so on, all of which make the language vivid and amusing.

At the lexical level, many culturally loaded words and connotative words appear in the article, such as Lahu, which not only arouses the interest of readers to read the novel but also popularizes the unique Chinese culture. When translating these words, we should not only translate the literal meaning, if necessary, we can use dictionaries and other tools to help us [3].

What's more, the author of the source text skillfully combines long and short sentences to give readers a beautiful enjoyment, which also increases the difficulty of translation. By using translation techniques, we can translate these sentences easily, such as Transliteration, Recasting, and so on.

### 3. Literature Review

#### 3.1. The Relevant Studies about Tytler's Translation Principles

In Western countries, the earliest and most popular translation theory is recognized as Tytler's Three Translation Principles. It was put forward by Tytler (1790) in his *Essay on Principles of Translation*. He thought that the translation principles could be concluded as follows: The idea of the translation should be consistent with the source text; The writing style should be of the same character as that of the source text; The language of the translation should be as fluent as the original. Tytler later improved this translation principle, which made it more acceptable. After improvement, Tytler not only made a clear distinction between the purpose and means of translation but also discriminated against the specific translation methods of each principle [4].

In the influence of Tytler's thought, Arnold (1873) pointed out a more useful translation theory based on Tytler's Translation Principles (1790). Arnold (1873) claimed that the translator must retain the characteristics of the source text; The translator must have the insight of the author of the source text, and the translation must have the same appeal as the source text [5].

Leech (2004) supplemented the first principle of Tytler. He proposed seven types of meanings of words: conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, and so on [6]. Therefore, the translator needed to reproduce the meaning of the source text in the translation from these seven aspects or find the most suitable meaning for a word. He added that the translator should also seek translation strategies from the perspective of meaning differences caused by cultural differences between China and the West.

Based on Tytler's Three Translation Principles, Christiane Nord (2005) presented that translation is an activity with a strong sense of purpose. When translating a text, translators should choose principles and strategies according to the purpose or function of the translation forward-looking translation strategies should be chosen by the translator [7]. The first translation principle of Tytler's emphasized that the translation should completely reproduce the thought of the original text, but Nord (2005) thought the information of the source text could be reproduced only after the translation purpose was made out clearly by the translator. This is the major difference between Nord and Tytler's Three Translation Principles.

In *Essay on the Principles of Translation* (2007), Tytler reexamined the advantages and disadvantages of Tytler's Three Translation Principles. Tytler pointed out that the translator cannot copy the writing style of the source text but must make the translation as close to the source text as possible in his own way [8].

Although many scholars have supplemented and improved the translation principles of Tytler, its core idea has not changed. When translating this novel, the translator based on Tytler's translation principles, and combined these valuable suggestions put forward by foreign scholars, so that many problems can be solved easily [9].

### 3.2. The Relevant Studies on Literary Translation Applied Tytler's Translation Principles

Many scholars in China would like to apply Tytler's translation principle when they conduct translation practice, and they have gained some valuable experience. For example:

Wang Ding (2018) concluded that Tytler's translation principles can effectively guide prose translation. He applied Tytler's Translation Principles to prose translation, and he proposed that the translation could be closer to the source text by explaining the connotation of culturally loaded words [10].

Ren Yueqiang (2019) clearly pointed out that when culturally loaded words appear in the text, the translator should consult dictionaries or look them up on the Internet to translate these words accurately instead of translating them directly [11]. And if necessary, add notes to explain them. Ren Yueqiang (2019) also added, in literary translation, in addition to conveying the information of the source text, translators should also pay attention to the transformation of the emotion and tone of the source text, so as to reproduce the artistic conception of the source text. Therefore, literary translation should not only emphasize accuracy and fluency but also emphasize translating its artistic conception, esthetic significance and emotional significance.

Tytler's Translation Principles emphasize that the content of translation should be faithful to the source text, but Zhang Ting and Yi Yongzhong (2020) pointed out that the translator can make appropriate additions and subtractions according to the characteristics of the source text [12]. In the comparative study of the English translation of *If I Were King*, they added, the additions should be closely related to the ideas of the source text, and the subtractions should be redundant and unrelated to the ideas of the source text.

Li Dongdong (2020) pointed out that before translating a work, translators need to know the characteristics of literary works and the problems that should be paid attention to when translating such literary works [13]. Translation involves a lot of knowledge related to other fields, such as politics, history, economic and medical science, which requires translators to have a good command of knowledge of various disciplines so that they do a good job in translation. Especially when encountering culturally loaded words and words of minority nationalities, translators

should translate them with the help of dictionaries or other tools.

Pu Siming (2021) translated the *Chengdu Street and Lane Chronicle (excerpt)*. He pointed out that different translation methods should be used for different types of sentences, and one method should not be used for the whole text [14]. He added, there are many methods and skills that should be applied to translation, for example, literal translation, free translation, domesticating translation and so on. From the perspective of how to make the translation smooth, he proposed that translators should pay attention to the analysis of specific translation skills, so that the writing style of the source text can be retained and the translation would leave readers with a feeling of smoothness and coherence.

Liu Baitong (2021) pointed out that translation theory provided a direction for translation practice. Translation theory and methods are important, but in the process of translation practice, translators should not rely too much on them. Translators should combine theory with practice in order to get better translation. She further explained the translation methods of long and difficult sentences in the process of translation practice [15].

It is easy to find examples like this in China because many scholars have chosen Tytler's translation principles to guide their translation practice. According to the literature collected by the author in this translation practice, it is easy to find that Tytler's translation principles are commonly applied in Chinese to English translation, especially in literary translation.

### 3.3. Summary

By searching for many translation materials under the guidance of Tytler's Three Translation Principles, we can see that this translation principle can be widely used in different text types, such as novel, poetry, and scientific texts. Many improvements and suggestions have been made by foreign scholars, which makes these translation principles more complete. When applying Tytler's Three Translation Principles, domestic scholars are accustomed to combining it with other translation techniques and skills to solve the problem that is difficult in translation.

Besides, many problems encountered in the process of the translation practice can be solved by using corresponding translation principles. However, in foreign countries, the research direction of most scholars is the applicability of Tytler's Three Translation Principles. In China, domestic research is not very sufficient in the aspect of novel translation, because the information and literature that can be acquired are very limited. Therefore, further research and expansion are needed in this respect.

In short, Tytler's Three Translation Principles play an important role in the field of translation. It not only has specific translation evaluation criteria but also has important guiding significance for translation practice.

## 4. Case Studies

This chapter is based on Tytler's Three Translation Principles, the translation

analysis of *Dedicating a Tree to You* (Chapter 1-3) is divided into two aspects: lexical level and syntactic level. Apart from Tytler's Three Translation Principles, the author applied a variety of translation skills such as amplification, omission, conversion, and so on.

## 4.1. Lexical Level

### 4.1.1. Connotative Words

#### Example 1:

Source Text (ST): 瓶罐说，苦聪和卡佯一样，都是直接从刀耕火种的原始社会进入的现代文明，因此，早些年苦聪被蔑称为老黑。

Target Text (TT): Ping Guan said that Kucong and Kawa were both modern civilizations that entered directly from the primitive society of slash and burn cultivation. Therefore, Kucong was despised as Lao Hei (the nickname of Kucong and Kawa) in earlier years.

Analysis: In this sentence, “老黑” is the nickname of Kucong, the connotation of “老黑” is that this is a barbarous nation without modern civilization. If it is only translated by the literary translation, it will be translated as “Old Black”, which will mislead readers. The author translated it as “Lao Hei (the nickname of Kucong and Kawa)”, and also added a note for it. In this way, not only did the author explain the word clearly, but also helped the reader understand the connotative meaning of the word.

#### Example 2:

ST: 瓶罐家境虽也不好，母亲却从未要求他们分担过任何家务，她只叮嘱要好好上学，这样将来才能有个好出路。

TT: Although Ping Guan's family is not well off, his mother never asked them to do any housework. She only told them to study hard so that they can have a good way out in the future.

Analysis: In this sentence, the connotation of “好出路” is “a bright future”. In English, it is very difficult to tell “好出路” is a verb or noun, so if translator don't care about its connotative meaning, it will be translated as “a good way”. The author translated it as “a bright future”.

#### Example 3:

ST: 她说：“家里出了点事情，爸爸欠了七八万的外债，咱们家可能以后十年也翻不了身了……”。

TT: She said: “something happened at home. Dad run into a debt, over 70000 yuan. Our family will never prosper in the next ten years...”

Analysis: In this sentence, “翻身” is not difficult for us to find its corresponding word in English, which can be translated as “turning over”. However, in fact, “翻身” is a connotative word, which means Ping Guan's family will be in a very poor and embarrassing situation for a long time. Therefore, it was translated as “our family will never prosper in the next ten years”.

From these examples, the author didn't translate them according to their literary meaning in order to express the connotation of the words but translated them

in combination with the first rule of Tytler's three translation principles—the idea of the translation should be consistent with the source text. When translating example 1, transliteration was applied, “老黑” was translated as “Lao Hei” with notes. In example 2 and example 3, explanation was used to translate connotative words—“好出路” and “翻身”. It is difficult to find that their corresponding translations in English, and the transliteration was not accurate enough to translate their connotative meaning, so explanation was applied to translate the meaning that did not exist in the target language. Therefore, when selecting translation skills, transliteration and explanation are better than literal translation and added notes if necessary.

#### 4.1.2. Culturally Loaded Words

Nida (1993) divided culturally-loaded words into five types in *Language, Culture and Translating*: linguistic culturally-loaded words, material culturally-loaded word, religious culturally-loaded words, material culturally-loaded words, and ecological culturally-loaded words. Such words not only carry rich cultural connotations but also are often difficult to translate.

##### Example 4:

ST: 蝇头小利的生意往往最耗人。

TT: Businesses with small profits are the most exhausting.

Analysis: “蝇头小利” is a linguistic culturally-loaded word, which is called idiom in Chinese. It is a unique cultural phenomenon in China. However, it cannot be translated by transliteration, therefore, on the premise of keeping its connotation unchanged, explanation was applied. As we all know, the head of a fly is very small, and the income as much as the head of a fly is small too. Therefore, “蝇头小利” should be translated into “...with small profits”.

##### Example 5:

ST: 扁担悠悠，两头筐里都是饭菜。

TT: The shoulder pole is long, and there are meals in the baskets at both ends.

Analysis: “扁担” is a material culturally-loaded word. It is unique to Chinese culture and does not exist in English, we call this phenomenon as Semantic Zero. Generally, the commonly used translation methods are literal translation or transliteration with notes. Therefore, it can be translated into “the shoulder pole” or “Bian Dan (a tool made of wood to pick things)”. In *The Chinese-English Dictionary* (2010), the translation of it is “the shoulder pole”, so it is reasonable to translate it as “the shoulder pole”.

##### Example 6:

ST: 皇天不负翻垃圾的人，一天黄昏，他终于又翻出四盘磁带。

TT: God helps those who collect the garbage. One evening, he finally turned out four more tapes.

Analysis: In this sentence, “皇天” is not only a religious culturally-loaded word but also a Chinese traditional vocabulary. Besides, “皇天不负翻垃圾的人” is adapted from a famous Chinese proverb “皇天不负有心人”. In English, the corresponding translation of this proverb is “God helps those who help themselves”.

If there is a corresponding translation in the target language, we directly adapt the corresponding translation. Thus, “皇天不负翻垃圾的人” was translated as “God helps those who collect the garbage”, loan translation was applied here.

Carrying the specific culture of a nation or country, culturally loaded words bring many difficulties to translation. In the process of translating these words, cultural factors are taken into account, so it is difficult to achieve complete equivalence in the translation. Under the guidance of Tytler’s Tree Translation Principles, various translation skills are applied, such as explanation and transliteration, especially loan translation, which is often used in culturally loaded words. Combined with these translation skills, the translation can be more accepted by readers.

## 4.2. Syntactic Level

### 4.2.1. Translation of Passive Voice

#### Example 7:

ST: 姐姐渐渐长大，换瓶罐坐进扁担筐里。

TT: The sister grew up gradually, so Ping Guan was put into the basket of shoulder pole.

Analysis: If this sentence is not translated into a passive voice, it should be “put Ping Guan put into the basket of shoulder pole”. Then the question is, who put him into the basket? Sister or mother? It is ambiguous because the subject is not clear. Therefore, the best choice is to translate this sentence into passive voice as “Ping Guan was put into basket”.

#### Example 8:

ST: 小铁锤震手大铁锤震胳膊。

TT: Hands were shocked by small hammer and arms were shocked by big hammer.

Analysis: This sentence is an active sentence, but the hammer is a thing, it is not a person, who cannot send out the action. Therefore, when translating it into English, we should turn it into a passive sentence.

#### Example 9:

ST: 磁条被扯出来纠缠成一团，歌曲目录被指甲抠得干干净净。

TT: The magnetic strip was pulled out and tangled, and the catalogue was cleaned by fingernails.

Analysis: There are two types of passive sentences, one is the sentence with “被” and the other is the sentence without “被”. Identifying passive sentences is a difficult point in translation. The former is easy to recognize and translate, the first one is easy to recognize and translate, for example, in example 9, it is hard to find the subject and object of the sentence, so this sentence could not be translated directly. Therefore, more attention was paid to the analysis of the second type of sentence. Passive voice is usually used in such situations as not knowing who the actor is, emphasizing the actor of the action, and so on. In example 7, it is hard for readers to tell who the actor is. It may be Ping Guan’s sister or Ping Guan’s mother. And S (8), the subject of it is hammer, but hammer is obviously a receiver rather than an actor. Thus, example 8 emphasizes the subject of the sentence, that

is to say, it emphasizes the state of the hand and arm after a day's work. To achieve the goal of being semantically and structurally correct, it had better translate these two sentences into passive voice.

When translating passive sentences, the translator uses the first and second rules of Tytler's three translation principles so that reproduce the original ideas and writing styles.

#### 4.2.2. Translation of Long and Complex Sentences

##### Example 10:

ST: 当然不嫌弃这个贫寒的家，可生在这样的家里，一个女孩子如果不上学，她就只能回家种地、去工厂当女工，或者去饭店当服务员，然后嫁给一个厨师或是工友，生一堆孩子，一辈子就那么过去了。

TT: He loved his poor family. But if a girl born in such a home doesn't go to school, she can only stay at home, work as a female worker in a factory, or work as a waiter in a restaurant. Then she would marry a cook or workmate, and give birth to a bunch of children, and finally, her lifetime has just passed by.

Analysis There are two techniques used in translating this sentence. One is Cutting, and the other is Recasting. We all know that Chinese always uses long sentences, while English uses short sentences. Therefore, we should simplify long sentences according to their meaning and logic. For example, in example 10, this long sentence consists of three parts, the first part is “当然不嫌弃这个贫寒的家”, the second part is: “可生在这样的家里，一个女孩子如果不上学，她就只能回家种地、去工厂当女工，或者去饭店当服务员”, and the third part is “然后嫁给一个厨师或是工友，生一堆孩子，一辈子就那么过去了”. After cutting this long sentence into three parts and then translates then in turn. The reason why the translator chooses Cutting is that there are many parallel elements in this long sentence, and the two parts are relatively independent, which can reduce the difficulty to translate it. When translating the second part, based on retaining the information of the source text, the translator breaks the structure and adjusts the order of this sentence and expresses the information in her own words.

##### Example 11:

ST: 20 岁的年纪，全部的世界不过是这个家和这块地，有孩子的陪伴，她不觉累，田间地头有泥巴，有鱼，那是瓶罐和姐姐所有的玩具。

TT: At the age of 20 s, her whole world is just home and land. With the company of children, she doesn't feel tired. There are mud and fish in the field, which are all the toys of Ping Guan and his sister.

Analysis: It is well known that Chinese is a parataxis language with a loose sentence structure that relies on word order and internal logic to convey meaning. English, on the other hand, is a hypotaxis language with clearer word boundaries and an emphasis on structural integrity. In most cases, the comma in Chinese is to be replaced by a conjunction in English. S (11) is divided into three short English sentences, and adds some conjunctions such as “which” to make the sentence clear in structure. Besides, English as a hypotaxis language often uses pronouns, while Chinese often omits pronouns because it is a parataxis language. In S (11), there

are no extra pronouns except for the subject “她”, but in T (11), many pronouns are added to make the sentences clear and avoid ambiguity, such as “his” and “her”.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. Major Findings

Firstly, Tytler’s Three Principles emphasize that the translation should reproduce the information of the source text comprehensively, which points out the significance of understanding the source text. It is important to have a good command of both source language and target language because only by defining the source text can one understand the author’s intention in writing and the central idea of the text.

Sometimes, a variety of translation methods will be used to make the translation in accordance with the target language. Thus, according to the different content, various translation methods should be combined and applied flexibly by the translator. For example, transliteration, annotation, and loan translation are used to translate culturally loaded words.

Thirdly, translation is not a simple word-to-word transformation. Apart from the meaning, original thought of the source text that the author wants to express through his works should be translated accurately to strike a chord with target readers [16]. When there are culturally loaded words and connotative words in the source text, translators should look them up on the Internet or related books to find out the denotative or connotative meaning of them, rather than transliterate them directly, otherwise it will mislead the target readers.

### 5.2. Limitations

Although the translator looked up a lot of parallel texts and made some modifications to the translation, there are still some limitations. To begin with, since only three chapters were selected, the samples available are very limited and cannot show the whole picture of the novel translation. What’s more, many complex sentences are included in the source text, which leads to the incomprehensive analysis of discourse and sentence structure. Finally, there are relatively few case studies for this translation practice report. The translator has only analyzed typical cases, but they are also very representative. In future studies, more examples will be explored.

Although there are many shortcomings and limitations in this translation practice report, it has provided the translator with valuable experience for future translation tasks. Besides, learning is a long-term process, more attention will be paid to overcoming these shortcomings in later studies.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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## Appendix 1. Abstract and Keywords in Chinese

### 《送你一棵树》(第 1~3 章)翻译实践报告

**摘要:** 本文以小说《送你一棵树》(第 1~3 章)为例, 在运用泰特勒三原则的基础上, 结合增译、直译、转化等翻译方法, 探究泰特勒三原则在文学翻译中的适用性, 为文学翻译提供汉译英翻译材料。在翻译文化负载词和内涵词时, 选用的方法有音译、加注、解释等; 在翻译被动语态和长难句时, 选用的方法有语态转换、形合、仿译等。通过原文本的翻译实践, 本文得到以下结论: 在翻译文学作品时, 须准确翻译出文化负载词和内涵词, 避免错译、漏译造成歧义; 此外, 再现原语信息固然重要, 但是为了句意连贯, 在不改变原文意思的基础上, 可以适当的对句子结构进行调整。

**关键词:** 泰特勒三原则, 文学翻译, 翻译方法, 文化负载词