

# Creative Treason in Howard Goldblatt's Translation of *Radish*

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## Abstract

English translators play an important role in promoting contemporary Chinese literature worldwide. Mo Yan's 2012 Nobel Prize for Literature owes, in part, to Howard Goldblatt, his English translator. The "faithfulness vs. rebellion" debate in literary translation has always been ongoing, with the "creative treason" theory providing a solution. Based on the theory of creative treason in comparative literary translation, the article analyzes Howard Goldblatt's translation of Mo Yan's novella *Radish*, to argue that the translator purposefully and creatively develops the expression of the original text. The analysis covers personalized translation, mistranslation, and omission, highlighting how creative treason exists in literary translation. The thesis also explicates Howard Goldblatt's personalized translation style, and provides reference values for literary translation.

## Keywords

Creative Treason, Howard Goldblatt, *Radish*

## 1. Introduction

On 11 October 2012, Mo Yan was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, which not only underlines the importance of Mo Yan in contemporary Chinese literature, but also reflects the international attention and recognition Chinese literature has received, and is of great significance in strengthening the self-confidence of the Chinese nation. It is undeniable that behind this success, translators, such as Howard Goldblatt, have been important in bridging the gap between Chinese and English. With the development of translation theory, the issue of fidelity to the original text has also progressed. In *Literary Sociology*: "translation is a betrayal." (Escarpit, 1987: p. 112), which was later reinterpreted by the Chinese scholar Xie Tianzhen and developed into Medio translatology. Xie Tianzhen has trans-

ferred the “creative treason” from the cultural field to the translation field, opening up the traditional translation community’s discussion of “fidelity and rebellion” in translation.

Howard Goldblatt’s translations have a strong personal style. The strong collision between Chinese and English and the translation that is not exactly the same as the original have also impacted the traditional translation circle. Howard Goldblatt’s own translation style has also been hotly discussed and studied along with the “creative treason”.

Although extensive research has been carried on creative treason in Howard Goldblatt’s translation, no single study exists which analyses in detail Goldblatt’s creative treason in Mo Yan’s work *Radish*. This paper applies “qualitative research” to the analysis and discussion of the topic. Qualitative researchers aim to gather an in-depth understanding of one certain fact and the reasons that govern such fact. The qualitative method investigates why and how decision is made, not just what, where, when. Hence, smaller but focused samples are more often used than large samples (Mu, 2011: pp. 59-60).

This thesis contains five parts. The first part includes research background, research goals, research method and framework of this thesis. The second part is literature review. This thesis first compares the development of creative treason and the specifics of its controversy, and then summarizes Goldblatt’s translation thoughts through the literature. The third part makes a study of theoretical basis of creative treason and particularly analyzes restraining factors of creative treason in literary translation. The fourth part analyzes creative treason *Radish* from the perspective of individualized translation, mistranslation and omission. The fifth part draws conclusions that creative treason is inevitable in literary translation, and this is an important way to give full play to the translator’s initiative and promote cultural exchange.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Creative Treason

#### 2.1.1. Historical Development

Robert Escarpit, a French literary sociologist, first introduced the term “creative treason” in his monograph *Literary Sociology*:

Translation is a betrayal because it places the work in a completely unanticipated system of reference (referring to language); it is creative because it gives the work a new look and enables it to engage in a new literary exchange with a wider audience; and because it not only prolongs the life of the work, but also gives it a second life (Escarpit, 1987: p. 112).

“Creative treason” here, however, does not belong to the realm of translation. The chapter in which the term is used focuses on the two main forms of success of a literary work, the commercial aspect, i.e. the success of circulation, and the literary aspect, i.e. the success of the author’s intention to be interpreted. Thus, the “creative treason” in this context tends to be the succession and change in the

understanding of literary works by different social groups of readers on a social level. This proves that Escarpit's "creative treason", which has been frequently cited by later generations, does not refer to translation, but to the way readers in other linguistic contexts understand a text differently from the author. The simplicity of Escarpit's discussion of "creative treason" has left room for other scholars to interpret it.

The Japanese Otsuka Yukio and the American Weisstein further elaborated on Escarpit's theory. In the Japanese translation, "creative treason" inherits Escarpit's thought that "treason" means "something that the author is not explicitly aware of, or that the author has not even dreamed of, but is understood by the reader", Otsuka Yukio goes on to suggest that "translating a work by a translator is a process of 'creative treason'." (Otsuka, 1985: p. 122) Obviously, Otsuka Yukio affirms the important role of the translator in translation, which is his innovation. Weisstein also explain "creative treason" with the translator as the main subject, "In translation, creative treason is almost inevitable. There is an Italian saying that the translator is a traitor (traduttore as a traditore), and it seems to be true." (Weisstein, 1987: p. 36) Since then, "creative treason" has entered the era of the translator as the subject of translation.

In *The Outline of Comparative Literature*, Chinese scholars Chen Dun and Liu Xiangyu referred to "creative treason" and added that "it is impossible for a translation to be 100% faithful to the original work," (Chen & Liu, 1988: p. 212) which shared Weisstein's view that for a translator, it is difficult to avoid "treason" against the original work. Xie Tianzhen is one of the more profound scholars on "creative treason" in China. On the basis of affirming Escarpit's view, he proposed in 1992 that "creative treason" should be focused on the field of literary translation: "For comparative literature, the creative treason in literary translation has special research value." (Xie, 1992: p. 30) After that, Xie Tianzhen wrote a special article *Medio-translatology* to discuss this term:

If creativity in literary translation indicates a subjective effort of the translator to approach and reproduce the original work with his own artistic creative talent, then treason in literary translation reflects an objective deviation of the translation from the original work caused by the translator in the translation process in order to achieve a certain subjective desire (Xie, 1999: p. 137).

Thus, the connotation of "creative rebellion" has gained a new interpretation. First of all, "creative treason" has been placed to discuss in the field of literary translation with the translator as the main subject, which is very different from Escarpit's view of the field of cultural understanding with the reader as the main subject. Secondly, he specified the subjective and objective categories of "creation" and "treason". In terms of translation results, "creation" and "treason" belong to "subjective effort" and "objective deviation". The former achieves semantic consistency between the original and the translated text, while the latter makes a "rebellious" deviation from the superficial semantics. In addition, Xie Tianzhen has proposed various ways of "creative treason", including omission and mistranslation.

### 2.1.2. Academic Dispute

After the publication of Xie Tianzhen's *Medio-translatology*, it had a great impact on both the literary and translation communities, and was even more hotly debated in the foreign language translation community. At that time, Chinese translators still regarded Yan Fu's "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance" as the golden rule, and scholars adhered to the logic of translation faithful to the original text, while expressing their dissatisfaction with the newborn "treason" theory. Jiang Feng believes that the view of "creative treason" has contributed to the unfaithfulness of translation and thus led to the decline of translation quality (Jiang, 2009: p. 1566); Xu Jun acknowledged the antagonistic properties of "faithfulness" and "treason", and suggested that the "treason" will be "intellectually difficult for translators to accept" (Xu, 2003: pp. 6-7). At the same time, there are also some scholars who have reservations about Xie Tianzhen's theory. Sun Jianchang affirmed the many forms of "creative treason" proposed by Xie Tianzhen, but questioned the criteria for judging "creative treason", that is, whether the presence of meaning in the case of omission or mistranslation is the key factor for judging whether it is "creative rebellion" (Sun, 2001: pp. 118-119). He thought the scope of "creative treason" should be narrowed. Obviously, satisfying the fidelity of translation and the "creative treason" of translation at the same time will easily put translators in a dilemma. In response to these controversies, Xie Tianzhen published an article saying that "creative treason" can only exist as a descriptive concept and should not be applied to translation practice (Xie, 2012: p. 36). Even though the terminology was clarified, misunderstandings still existed in the translation community, and in the following years, Xie Tianzhen also published articles to explain "creative treason" one after another.

### 2.1.3. Analysis of the Reasons for the Dispute

Wang Xiangyuan analyzed the reasons for the dispute between the "creative treason" and the "faithful" (Wang, 2017: p. 69) He argued that there is a misunderstanding of the original meaning of the term "creative treason" in translation circles, which often only intercepts the phrase "translation is always a 'creative treason'". Wang Xiangyuan took Escarpit's exposition a step further. First, reading through Escarpit's original text, the term "creative treason" appears only once and is not proposed in the context of translation, which shows that the term was only an "incidental phrase" when it was proposed. Second, Wang Xiangyuan argued that the term "创造性叛逆" itself is not entirely accurate and should be replaced by "创造性转换" (Wang, 2017: p. 64). According to Escarpit, "creative treason" arises when a work is placed in another system different from the original language system. Taking traditional Chinese translation theory as a reference, Wang Xiangyuan proposed that "当平行移动、平面传递的‘译’遇到了巨大障碍的时候,就需要‘翻’即‘翻转’" (Wang, 2017: p. 63). And the result of "翻" is to turn back to the original work, which is, "betrayal". Therefore, a more direct way to describe the term would be to replace "叛逆" with "转换". In addition, Wang Xiangyuan argued that the context of the term is the distribution of trans-

lated books, but Escarpit never explains that “creative treason” deals with the act of translation, let alone the role of the translator in the process. In Chinese scholars’ citation of “creative treason”, we directly intercept a sentence from Escarpit’s discussion, resulting in a lack of clarity in the context and the emergence of the role of the translator.

In conclusion, from Escarpit’s proposal of “creative treason” based on *literary sociology*, to Otsuka Yukio’s and Weisstein’s interpretation of translator’s subjectivity, and to the initial discussions by Chinese scholars, it can be found that the term “creative treason” has remained in comparative literature field in the beginning of its dissemination across languages. Xie Tianzhen’s related research has already dedicated the term to the field of translation and reinvented the concept of “creative treason”. Xie Tianzhen believes that creativity and rebellion in translation are of equal importance, and that they are two sides of the same coin, and it is this view that has aroused the debate in the translation field.

## 2.2. Studies on Howard Goldblatt’s English Translation Works

### 2.2.1. Overview of Domestic Research

As a translator of Chinese literary works, Howard Goldblatt has made outstanding contributions to the dissemination of Chinese modern and contemporary literature. He has translated more than fifty Chinese novels in total, with Mo Yan being the most numerous, with eleven English translations. In terms of time, Chinese scholars’ research on Howard Goldblatt’s works in English translation started in 2005, and after Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012, domestic research on Howard Goldblatt’s works in English translation began to increase, reaching its peak in 2015. After 2021, the total amount of research gradually declined, but there is still a certain amount of research output each year.

In terms of the focus of research, domestic scholars usually adopt the way of linking translation works to research, and the research perspectives are mainly the following. First, translation strategy research. Translation strategy mainly studies the methodology used by translators when translating. Most domestic scholars choose to use relevant theories to explain Howard Goldblatt’s English translation strategy. For example, Xing and Chen (2020: pp. 59-67) takes field theory as the theoretical basis to study the specific application of direct translation and attribution in Howard Goldblatt’s translation strategy; Feng and Dang (2019: pp. 84-89) starts from the foregrounded language in the novel and studies Howard Goldblatt’s translation strategy of this language form. The study includes de-foregrounding translation, creative foregrounding translation, and equivocal foregrounding translation. Second, the subjectivity of the translator. Guo and Wang (2019: pp. 89-95) analyze the embodiment of translator’s subjectivity in minority literature by comparing the original text and the English translation with the theory of hermeneutics in terms of pre-translation text selection and translation strategies; Hu and Guo (2017: pp. 52-57) find that Howard Goldblatt has given full play to his subjective initiative based on his own aesthetic tendency and translation charac-

teristics, showing the translator's subjectivity. Third, narratological research. In the field of literary translation, narratology still has research value. In the article, [Shao \(2012: pp. 96-101\)](#) suggests that Howard Goldblatt has successfully catered to the reading preferences of Western target readers by using narrative translation to appropriately deal with the transgression of narrative perspective in the target text.

### **2.2.2. Howard Goldblatt's View of Translation**

As a famous translator of Chinese modern and contemporary literature, Howard Goldblatt's profound understanding of Chinese culture and his unique way of translation constitute his view of translation.

First, his personal experience and insight into Chinese culture play a foundation role. Born in 1939, Howard Goldblatt was admitted to the Naval Officer Candidate School after enlisting in the army and was subsequently sent to Taipei, China. During the course of his study in the language school, Howard Goldblatt became acquainted with Chinese writing and Chinese culture for the first time, and it was his direct immersion in the Chinese language environment that gave him a more direct experience of the historical period in which Chinese modern and contemporary literature is located. He fully affirms the uniqueness of Chinese literature, "Only Chinese people can fully understand Chinese literature-no matter how skillful the translator is, foreigners will still never fully understand Chinese works because they have not experienced the Cultural Revolution, the War of Resistance Against Japan, nor the Opening-up Policy in recent years." ([Goldblatt, 2004: p. 219](#)) Awareness of the events in China's modern contemporary timeline is a prerequisite for Howard Goldblatt's ability to succeed in this field of literary translation.

Second, reader awareness and respect for emotional experience are the most distinctive features. As a translator, Howard Goldblatt carefully selects texts for translation from the perspective of the reader, arguing that "determining the selection criteria (e.g., who to translate? What to translate? when to translate?) is very crucial" ([Goldblatt, 2004: p. 218](#)). Therefore, serving the target audience is one of Goldblatt's principles of translation. "I enjoy translating all kinds of Chinese books (good, bad, average) into readable, accessible, and even best-selling English books." ([Goldblatt, 2002: p. 10](#))

In the interview, he compared listening to an aria to reading a book, saying that it is more important for the reader to have a positive emotional experience than to read the content of the book. He also admits that he does not put fidelity theory first when translating, but rather thinks, "What does this mean to me and how has my background prepared me to accept it?" ([Goldblatt, 2015: p. 9](#)) In terms of translation methods, he first admits that there is a huge gap between Chinese and English, and then proposes that he must make certain "sacrifices" to the original text in order to translate it. "And Chinese rhymes so easily and English so badly or with such difficulty that I knew I had to make some serious sacrifices." ([Goldblatt, 2015: p. 6](#)) In *Howard Goldblatt's Three Treaties or Treatments of Transla-*

tion, the author summarizes three characteristics of Goldblatt's translations: organic unity, imagery and reader-orientation (Deng & Zhang, 2021: p. 726).

In short, Goldblatt believes that translation is a part of cross-cultural communication, and the meaning of translation cannot exist if no Western readers are willing to read the translation. Therefore, the reader-centered view of translation has become a unique feature of Goldblatt that is different from traditional translators.

### 3. Creative Treason in Literary Translation

#### 3.1. About Creative Treason

The phrase “creative treason” first appeared in *Literary Sociology* written by French literary sociologist Robert Escarpit, “Translation is a betrayal” (Escarpit, 1987: p. 112). He affirms that there is no such thing as a translation that is completely faithful to the original, but this does not negate the fact that translations give works a fresh opportunity to communicate with a wider audience and to show their vitality and dissemination.

In the Chinese context, “creative treason” has been introduced from the field of literary sociology into the translation of comparative literature and has become its core concept. As a result, “creative treason” has changed from a metaphorical phrase to a category-oriented academic concept. This transformation highlights that translation is never a neutral act but a strategic “rewriting” influenced by ideological, poetic, and patronage factors in the target culture (Lefevere, 2004). Translators like Howard Goldblatt actively negotiate between source and target cultures, adapting texts to align with the target readers' cognitive frameworks—a process distinct from accidental linguistic errors. Hans Vermeer's Skopos Theory further clarifies this distinction: creative treason is driven by explicit translational purposes (e.g., enhancing readability or cultural accessibility), whereas mistranslation arises from passive linguistic misinterpretation or technical oversight. The former embodies the translator's proactive cultural agency, as seen in intentional strategies to bridge cultural gaps; the latter reflects unintended deviations from the original meaning, unrelated to deliberate communicative goals.

However, there are still similarities between translation studies and literary sociology. According to Xie Tianzhen, translation studies is “to place the object of study (translator, translation product or translation act) in the huge context of two or several different peoples, cultures or societies, and to examine and interpret how these different peoples, cultures and societies communicate.” (Xie, 1999: p. 137) Medio-translatology, like literary sociology, focuses on how works achieve communication across inherent barriers in different cultural contexts and classes. From the perspective of translation, medio-translatology does not focus on the aesthetic judgment of a work, but rather on the dissemination and impact of the work. Therefore, medio-translatology only cover the outer layer of translations, and a comprehensive study of translations needs to include a value judgment of

the translation itself.

### 3.2. Creative Treason in Literary Translation

Literary language is different from ordinary language. In terms of purpose, the direct purpose of literary language is to construct a virtual art world and indirectly act on the reality, while ordinary language directly presents the communication and expression of the reality; in terms of the way of semantic generation, literary semantics is generated in the fictional world created by the author, while ordinary language is generated in the conventional semantic logic. Therefore, literary language is characterized by abstractness and ambiguity.

In literary translation, in order to recreate the artistic world and restore the literary image in the original work, the translator is not only required to accurately grasp the abstract meaning of the original text, but also to correctly convey the emotion and value it contains. It is thus clear that literary translation is not equal to literature itself, but belongs to creative work, and the translator needs to use his or her artistic talent to reproduce the original work. However, when the translator takes the original work into a new language system, the addition, loss and distortion of information are inevitable, which also leads to the creation of “rebellion”. The same literary work may be interpreted differently by different translators. Even if they have the same understanding, they may have different language expressions due to different cultural environments and language experiences. In addition, translators will use different translation strategies flexibly to achieve the purpose of translation. Thus, the existence of these factors in literary translation is absolute, which confirms the rationality of “creative treason” in literary translation.

## 4. “Creative Treason” in Howard Goldblatt’s Translation of *Radish*

According to Medio-translatology, there are four forms of creative treason in literary translation: individualized translation, mistranslation and omission, abridgement and compilation, and transcription and adaptation. The creative treason in Howard Goldblatt’s translation of *Radish* is concentrated in the first and second categories.

### 4.1. Creative Treason in Individualized Translation

Xie (1992: pp. 30-37) says “Translators, especially good translators, have their own translation principles they believe in when engaging in literary translation, and also have their own unique pursuit goals.” Howard Goldblatt, also articulated his principles in literary translation: Does the author use certain specific techniques to achieve a specific purpose, or does his native language norms make it so? If the latter is the case, I will follow the English style of translation. If the writing style is “special”, and if I feel that the author wrote this to make the text seem “strange” or to slow down the reader, then I try to capture that effect (Lin, 2019: p. 6). What

Goldblatt says “translation according to the conventions of the English text” implies domestication, while “capturing this effect” implies foreignization.

Domesticated translation means translating according to the linguistic habits of the target language and erasing the cultural differences embedded between languages. Foreignized translation means allowing the readers of the target language to enter the context of the source language, accepting the foreign culture and showing the cultural differences. In *Radish*, two methods are used for several times.

#### 4.1.1. Creative Treason in Domesticated Translation

In *Radish*, domesticated translation is mostly reflected in the translation of cultural-loaded words, and the translator adopt corresponding translation strategies in order to cater to the readers of the target language.

- 1) “回家跟你后娘要件褂子穿着，嘻，你这个小可怜虫儿。” (Mo, 2020: p. 5)  
 “Tell your stepmother to give you a shirt, you poor little beggar!” (Goldblatt, 2015: p. 9)
- “小石匠，又是你这个滑头小子！” (Mo, 2020: p. 6)  
 “You again, you slippery devil.” (Goldblatt, 2015: p. 12)

The terms “小可怜虫儿” and “滑头小子” are often used as a folk term of address by elders to their juniors. The former shows the elder’s care and tenderness for the junior, while the latter implies reproach and dislike. In English, there is no such term as “可怜虫”, so the translator translates “小可怜虫” as “poor little beggar”, “beggar” means a person who lives by asking people for money or food, which has the same living condition as “小可怜虫”. The translator translates “滑头小子” as “slippery devil”. The word “devil” does not have the same meaning as “boy”, but together with the modifier “slippery”, it works to reinforce the reader’s perception of the young stonemason’s active and mischievous character.

- 2) “我寻思着你该去见阎王了。打摆子好了吗？” (Mo, 2020: p. 4)  
 “I thought you’d gone down to meet the King of Hell. Are you over the shakes?” (Goldblatt, 2015: p. 8)

“阎王” is the god of the underworld in ancient Chinese religious mythology and is widely known among the people. When used in folk language, it usually indicates death. The translator translates “阎王” as “the King of Hell”, and chooses to use the word “hell”, which is a common symbol of death both in Chinese and English religious culture, so that English readers can more personally feel the bad physical condition and the sense of dying of the characters in this sentence.

- 3) “烧什么你？小杂种、”小铁匠说、“别回家、我收你当个干儿吧、又是干儿又是徒弟、跟着我闯荡江湖、保你吃香的喝辣的。” (Mo, 2020: p. 29)  
 “What was that for, you little bastard?” the young blacksmith said. “Why bother going home? I’ll adopt you as son and apprentice. We’ll roam the world together. I guarantee you’ll eat good food and drink strong liquor.” (Goldblatt, 2015: p. 66)

In Chinese, “吃香的喝辣的” not only means that people have a guarantee of food, but also have a corresponding improvement in the quality of life. The translator’s translation of “香” as “good” and “辣” as “strong” is very different in terms of word meaning. However, in the English context, “strong liquor” refers to a wine with a high alcohol content, which has the same meaning as “喝辣的”, and both have an allusion to a better life. Therefore, by making minor adjustments to the words, the translator has catered to the linguistic logic of the English reader and brought about a more comfortable reading experience.

#### 4.1.2. Creative Treason in Domesticated Translation

4) 黑孩用跑的姿势走到小石匠跟前。(Mo, 2020: 5)

Hei-hai, still appearing to be running, made his way over to the mason. (Goldblatt, 2015: p. 11)

“菊子，想认个干儿吗？”一个脸盘肥大的女人冲着姑娘喊。(Mo, 2020: p. 10)

“Looking to adopt, Juzi?” a large, round-faced woman shouted. (Goldblatt, 2015: p. 25)

In these two examples, the translator takes a direct translation and keeps its original pinyin name, which emphasizes the importance of these two characters in the text. As the protagonist of *Radish*, Hei-hai has an unfortunate childhood, with no parental care and a difficult life, while Juzi is like a guiding light for Hei-hai, giving him spiritual support and love.

5) “小石匠，又是你这个滑头小子！你们村真他妈的会找人，派你这个**箊箊**捞不住的滑蛋来，够我淘的啦。”(Mo, 2020: p. 6)

“You again, you slippery devil. That damned village of yours sure knows how to meet quotas. They’ve sent me a man who could slip through the holes of any strainer. Just my luck.” (Goldblatt, 2015: p. 13)

“箊箊” is a traditional cooking utensil that originated in China and is used to fish out food so that the food being fished is separated from the soup and oil. This separated substance is a useless residue, which in the context means to deny and question the ability of the little stonemason himself to do things. In terms of “箊箊捞不住的滑蛋”, the translator adopts foreignization by translating it as “a man who could slip through the holes of any strainer”. The translator has retained the unique role of the apparatus, allowing the English reader to imagine the specific form of the apparatus through the linguistic descriptions, and then to associate it with the implied emotions.

#### 4.2. Creative Treason in Mistranslation and Omitted Translation

In the perspective of creative treason, both mistranslations and omissions are seen as manifestations of the translator’s exercise of subjective initiative. According to Xie Tianzhen, mistranslation can be divided into two types: conscious and unconscious. The translator, in order to meet the reader’s cultural attitude and habit of acceptance in his or her nation, intentionally uses incorrect means to translate

which causes an intentional mistranslation. Or the translator aims to introduce a foreign culture or language form. In terms of cultural exchange, mistranslation is of great value (Xie, 2014: pp. 91-92).

#### 4.2.1. Basis for Assuming Deliberate Mistranslations

The basis for assuming that certain mistranslations in this paper are deliberate rather than due to linguistic misunderstanding or oversight lies in three key aspects. First, it is supported by the theoretical framework of translator subjectivity. As Xie Tianzhen's *Medio-translatology* posits, "creative treason" represents a translator's strategic choice to proactively reconcile cultural differences, marked by purposefulness and systematicity (Xie, 1999: p. 137). Deliberate mistranslations serve specific goals such as cultural filtering, enhancing readability, and catering to market demands, distinguishing them from accidental linguistic errors. For example, Goldblatt's emphasis on making translations "readable and marketable" (Goldblatt, 2002: p. 10) reflects this intentionality.

Second, intratextual evidence reveals the regularity and strategic consistency of such mistranslations. In *Radish*, Goldblatt's treatment of Gaomi dialects and cultural images demonstrates systematic patterns. Translating "打摆子" (malaria) as "the shakes" (Goldblatt, 2015: p. 9) or "熊样子" (clumsy demeanor) as "pitiful little thing" (Goldblatt, 2015: p. 9) is not arbitrary but a deliberate effort to bridge cultural gaps and ensure target readers' comprehension. Similarly, converting "箬篙" (bamboo strainer) to "strainer" (Goldblatt, 2015: p. 13) preserves the metaphorical meaning through functional analogy, showcasing strategic consistency rather than linguistic oversight.

Third, external confirmation from the translator's statements and academic research reinforces this argument. Goldblatt explicitly acknowledges the need to make "sacrifices" to the original text for cross-cultural communication (Stalling, 2014: p. 6), and his practice aligns with this philosophy—such as translating "吃香的喝辣的" as "eat good food and drink strong liquor" to prioritize reader experience over literal fidelity (Goldblatt, 2015: p. 66). Academic studies further highlight his "reader-centered" strategy, emphasizing that these mistranslations are proactive cultural adaptations rather than errors (Deng & Zhang, 2021: p. 726). Collectively, these factors confirm that Goldblatt's mistranslations are intentional acts of creative treason driven by cultural strategy and translator agency, not linguistic misjudgments.

#### 4.2.2. Creative Treason in Mistranslation

6) "我寻思着你该去见阎王了。打摆子好了吗?" (Mo, 2020: p. 4)

"I thought you'd gone down to meet the King of Hell. Are you over the shakes?" (Goldblatt, 2015: p. 9)

"打摆子" is a dialect of Gaomi, Mo Yan's hometown, and means suffering from malaria. Malaria is a parasitic disease spread by mosquito bites, with symptoms such as recurrent chills. The chills are characterized by small, constant shaking of the body, which is why the disease is called "打摆子". The translator used the

phrase “打摆子好了吗？” as “Are you over the shakes?”. Some Western readers may not have a concept of such expression of malaria, so translating it into specific disease symptoms will allow Western readers to understand the disease itself.

7) “你是不是要干点活儿挣几个工分？你这个熊样子能干什么？放个屁都怕把你震倒。” (Mo, 2020: p. 4)

“Feel like earning a few work points? Though I don’t know what a pitiful little thing like you could possibly do. A fart would knock you off your feet.” (Goldblatt, 2015: p. 9)

In Chinese, “熊样子” is used to describe people as stupid and the image of a bear is one of sluggishness, slowness and, in most cases, a negative connotation. While in English, when referring to a person, a bear is a person with a violent and reckless temper. It can be seen that in order to make foreign readers not misunderstand the expression in the original text, the translator consciously translates “熊样子” to “a pitiful little thing”.

8) 闸下水槽里的水增了两拃，水面蓝汪汪地映出天上残余的乌云。(Mo, 2020: p. 23)

Water in the trough was twice as high as the day before; the few remaining clouds were reflected in the brilliant blue water. (Goldblatt, 2015: p. 49)

“拃” is a word of measure in the Gaomi dialect, referring to the distance between the ends of the open thumb and middle finger. The translator translates “增了两拃” as “twice as high as the day before”, which will make reader have better understand the depth. A direct translation of the word measure would make it difficult for foreign readers to understand exactly how deep the water has risen, so the translator uses a general concept to express it.

#### 4.2.3. Creative Treason in Omitted Translation

9) “小铁匠，你淬得什么鸟火？不是崩头就是弯尖，这是剥石头，不是打豆腐。没有弯弯肚子，别吞镰头刀子。等你师傅回来吧，别拿着我们的钢钻练功夫。” (Mo, 2020: p. 20)

“What kind of shitty work are you giving us, black-smith? The tips either break off or bend. We’re working with stone out there, not bean curd. Wait till your master returns, and don’t use our chisels for practice.” (Goldblatt, 2015: p. 46)

“没有弯弯肚子，别吞镰头刀子” is an allegorical saying in Gaomi dialect, which means that people should make sure whether they are capable of completing things before they do things, and do not overstep their efforts, which strengthens the speaker’s taunting tone. Even if translated, the translation does not have the same vivid and meaningful impact as they do in a Chinese context. Therefore, Goldblatt omits it, considering target reader’s accessibility.

#### 4.3. Howard Goldblatt’s Translation Thoughts

Howard Goldblatt’s translation style can be summarized as follows: make the

translation readable and marketable on the basic premise of being faithful to the original.

When it comes to translation, Howard Goldblatt does not just stop at the surface of the language, but digs deeper into the original text and thus chooses a suitable translation strategy. Literary translation is a form of intercultural communication. The translator has to consciously preserve cultural phenomena in the source language beyond the basic elements such as the direction of the story, which is of great significance in an era of Western cultural hegemony. In *Radish*, the treatment of the protagonist's name and the appropriate strategy of foreignization reflect the respect and transmission of Chinese culture.

Goldblatt chooses to emphasize the subjectivity of the translator in the treatment of culturally loaded words, etc. that are specific to China. He pays attention to the linguistic needs of his own readers by personalizing the translation and creatively treasoning against the source language, thus reducing the gap between Eastern and Western culture, and enhancing the effectiveness of English transmission. In *Radish*, the large number of mistranslations reflects the translator's concern to increase readability.

At the same time, Howard Goldblatt, as a translator, maintains the market demand for his translations, in addition to thinking about the translation itself. In one interview, Goldblatt refers to his own thinking on the commercial side: "A commercial publisher will never slowly sell a work that sells very little, and if it doesn't sell well after two weeks in a bookshop, they take it back and destroy it." (Ji, 2009:51) In a modern society, payment and social impact are among the indicators of the quality of a work. In *Radish*, the use of domestication to cater for English readers and the mistranslation of dialects with regional limitations are examples of Goldblatt's efforts to meet market demand.

#### 4.4. Reader Reception and Cultural Dissemination

Goldblatt's creative treason in *Radish* demonstrates its effectiveness through its dual impact on reader reception and cross-cultural dissemination. His translation strategies deliberately align with English readers' cognitive frameworks, supported by market performance and academic evaluation.

Goldblatt's translations of Mo Yan's works have gained significant traction in English-speaking markets, reflecting their accessibility and appeal. For example, Goldblatt's translation of *Red Sorghum* appeared on the *New York Times* Best Seller List, and multiple titles are included in Chinese literature curricula at institutions such as Harvard and Columbia University. This dual recognition by general readers and academic institutions shows that Goldblatt's adaptations balance literary merit with readability. *Radish*'s inclusion in Penguin Books' "Modern Classics" series attests to the publisher's confidence in the translation's enduring value and broad appeal. Such market validation indirectly confirms that his creative treason, such as contextualizing dialects or adapting cultural images, resonates with target audiences. Meanwhile, his strategic choices (e.g., prioritizing

emotional impact over literalism) proactively facilitate cultural dissemination by making Chinese rural narratives relatable to Western readers.

English-speaking scholars often frame Goldblatt as a “cultural mediator” whose translations facilitate cross-cultural understanding. Scholar [Stalling \(2014: p. 9\)](#) notes in an interview that Goldblatt’s work allows Western readers to “feel the emotional impact of Chinese literature” rather than focus solely on linguistic accuracy, affirming the effectiveness of his reader-centered approach. This emphasis on affective resonance not only enhances individual comprehension but also positions Chinese rural narratives within a universal literary framework, laying groundwork for their broader cultural integration.

Goldblatt’s translations quietly reshape Western literary perceptions of Chinese narratives by dismantling the dichotomy between “exotic” and “universal.” His approach in *Radish*, which is rooted in translator subjectivity and reader-centered strategies, challenges the historic marginalization of Chinese literature in English-speaking circles. By prioritizing emotional resonance over linguistic literalism, he introduces Western readers to the psychological depth of Chinese rural characters, reframing their stories as relatable human experiences rather than anthropological curiosities. This shift is evidenced by the integration of Mo Yan’s works into Western literary canons: titles like *Red Sorghum* are no longer confined to “ethnic literature” shelves but are discussed alongside global modernist masterpieces in academic settings.

Culturally, his translations act as non-discursive ambassadors, fostering cross-cultural engagement by highlighting shared literary themes—such as power dynamics, generational conflict, and the tension between tradition and modernity. The intentional retention of ambiguous emotional tones in *Radish* allows Western readers to engage with Chinese social realities through a literary lens, rather than through the filter of political stereotypes. This aligns with Xie Tianzhen’s mediotranslatology, which defines translation as a “cultural negotiation” that transcends mere language transfer ([Xie, 1999: p. 137](#)).

In the broader literary system, Goldblatt’s work challenges the historical dominance of English as the default language of global literature. By proving that Chinese narratives can achieve commercial and critical success in translation without sacrificing their aesthetic integrity, he opens space for non-Western literatures to assert their voices in a pluricentric literary world. This has implications for comparative literature studies, urging scholars to develop more inclusive theoretical frameworks that account for the creative transformations inherent in cross-linguistic exchange. Ultimately, his translations suggest that “creative treason” is not a betrayal but a vital mechanism for enriching global literary discourse, enabling Chinese literature to contribute to and redefine its terms.

In essence, Goldblatt’s creative treason in *Radish* embodies a form of cultural mediation that transcends linguistic boundaries. The translation’s commercial viability, academic endorsement, and theoretical consistency collectively validate that his strategies enhance reader accessibility and serve as a strategic tool for cul-

tural diplomacy. By balancing reader engagement with cultural authenticity, his translations enable Chinese literature to transcend linguistic barriers, participate in global literary discourse, and disseminate China's complex social realities, thus enriching cross-cultural understanding and affirming creative treason as a vital mechanism for intercultural dialogue.

## 5. Conclusion

In the field of literary translation, there has been a long-standing debate about fidelity and treason. Creative treason is a translation issue, but also a cultural one. Using Howard Goldblatt's translation as an example, this thesis elaborates how the translator manages to retain the writer's style while catering to the thinking habits and linguistic logic of English readers in a context of great cultural differences. Taken together, these results suggest that in the process of translating contemporary Chinese literature, creative treason is not the translator's betrayal, but an integral part of the translation process. With creative treason, the translator's initiative can be fully used, and cross-cultural social concepts and linguistic values can be more widely disseminated, exchanged and integrated.

The above description and probing are done with the hope to achieve some findings here. However, there are still limitations. Firstly, due to the limited access to foreign literature, the research on creative treason and Howard Goldblatt in this paper focuses more on the current state of research in China, and not comprehensive enough for relevant studies abroad. Secondly, the analysis of the translations in this paper is based on the word and sentence level, and lacks the use of a macro perspective to interpret the context.

Howard Goldblatt has devoted more than thirty years to the dissemination of modern and contemporary Chinese literature to the West, yet there is still much room for research on the translation of his works. From the perspective of "creative treason", the author of this thesis figures out that the combined application of foreignization and domestication is an efficient translation strategy, providing a new direction for the foreign translation of Chinese literary works and promoting the exchange between Chinese and Western cultures.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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