On Reconstruction of Cultural Images in the Translation of *The Republic of Wine*

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**ABSTRACT**
Nobel laureate Mo Yan’s novel *The Republic of Wine* is notable for its distinctive Chinese rural language. The richness of cultural images renders this novel splendid, but also poses a huge challenge in its translation. From the perspective of the Variation Theory of Comparative Literature, this research analyzes the variation phenomena like transformation, deformation, loss and intentional mis-translations of typical Chinese rural cultural images in Goldblatt’s English version. It aims to describe the deconstruction of meaning and reconstruct Chinese rural cultural images during the cross-cultural journey and therefore aims to provide references and inspiration for Chinese translated literature transmitted abroad.

**KEYWORDS**
The Republic of Wine; cultural images; Chinese rural literature; variation studies

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Due to the fact that Western literature boasts a stronger discourse power, the dialogs between Chinese and Western literature are mostly unequal, which constitutes a barrier for Chinese literature being transmitted abroad. Recently, with the soft power of Chinese culture increasing significantly, many wonderful Chinese literary works have been translated into various languages, some of which even won international literature prizes. It is noteworthy that a large majority of these works attracting worldwide attention are works of absurdist fiction germane to the history and reality in rural China (*Zhou* 88–96). Translation is an integral part in the process of Chinese literature going abroad and presenting the image of rural China. It is, in essence, a cross-cultural and cross-language dialogue in which the mutual understanding of the participants is underpinned by translation as an intermediary. However, the mere conveyance of the message from the source text is insufficient to meet the expectation of the target readers, who not only require the translated texts to be elegant and fluent but also expect the translators to present the cultural images in the source text as faithfully and
accurately as possible (Xie Medio-translatology 135). If, unfortunately, the cultural images from the source text are lost due to distortion, the translated works might be dismissed as defective and potentially misleading. Generally speaking, cultural images are the quintessence of the wisdom and historical culture of all nations, a large proportion of which is closely linked with the tales and early totemism of these nations (140). The Republic of Wine, written by Mo Yan, is undoubtedly a prime example of a work awash with abundant cultural images. These images appear frequently in the form of idioms, proverbs and allusions. The cultural images in The Republic of Wine with rich connotations inevitably become transformed, deformed, lost or mistranslated due to cultural differences in the translated work during cross-cultural dissemination.

1. Variation studies of comparative literature and cultural images

The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature is a new paradigm of cross-civilization studies introduced by Chinese compararists after influence studies and parallel studies, boasting great inclusiveness and universality. On the basis of homogeneity and similarity, variation studies observe and analyze the literary phenomena characterized by heterogeneity and variability. Research on the cross-nation journey of literature from the perspective of Variation Theory has become a cutting-edge issue among compararists. Professor Cao Shunqing put forward the concept of the Variation Theory of Comparative Literature in 2005 on the basis of literary variation in the cross-civilization context. The variation studies redefine the object and scope of influence studies, underpinned by the practice in the mutual interaction among literature of different nations and closely combined with the heterogeneity emphasized by the current cross-civilization studies of Comparative Literature. Due to literariness, heterogeneity and other features, the research scope of variation studies is generalized as four aspects: cross-linguistic variation, cross-national image variation, cross-literary text variation, and cultural variation. Compared with the previous theories of Comparative Literature, the variation studies boast two main advantages. For one thing, the literary variations in the literary exchange are valued, with plausible explanations offered to Medio-translatology, cultural filtering, cultural misreading, Imagology, thematology and other research fields to which empirical methods are inapplicable. For another, the focus on literary and cultural heterogeneity in diverse civilization circles is conducive to eradicating cultural ethnocentrism and establishing diversified cultural eco-systems. Besides, the research objective of “showing the different” instead of “seeking the same” accords better with the postmodern trend of all kinds of disciplines. The studies of Comparative Literature itself center on finding a common rule among different cultures and civilizations in order to deepen and facilitate mutual understanding and literary development. As a branch of Comparative Literature, the variation studies further determine the basic characteristics of the cross-disciplinary research of variation studies and concentrate on the variation phenomena in cultural exchange. It is beneficial to discovering the complementarity of human culture, which even makes it possible to find out multiple ways to achieve cultural understanding.

During the course of history, cultural images constantly occur in languages and in generations of literary works (including the oral works of folk artists and written works of literati). They gradually become a kind of cultural symbol with relatively fixed and distinctive cultural meanings, some of which are even concerned with rich
and far-reaching associations. Therefore, once these images are mentioned, people can easily understand each other without further explanations. The cultural images can take various forms, covering plants, birds, beasts, idioms, proverbs, allusions, the image or vehicle in an adjective, or even a number. The distortions of cultural images are mainly classified into two types: one concerns the distinctions among all ethnic groups on account of different geographical environments, customs and cultural traditions; the other concerns the distinctions of the same image in diverse metaphors from different ethnic cultures. While the translation practice is not simply about code-switching, it is also associated with the conveyance of message in the cross-cultural context. Cultural image translation demands a thorough knowledge of the cultural characteristics of the source language and target language as well as their differences, on the basis of which the original text is reproduced successfully through the interconnection of the cultural connotations of two languages. In other words, the translators should strive to achieve the purposes of providing information intention and communicative intention. For one thing, the intertextuality of the source text should be fully reflected by maintaining the constraints imposed by the source language culture; for another, it is necessary to reconstruct a set of constraint mechanisms in the target language culture to compensate for the cultural loss of communicative intention generated in the translation process so that the acceptability of cultural images of the source language could be improved. Hence the intertextuality of cultural images is critical to the translation of cultural images (Sun 136–139).

2. The transformation of cultural images

When translating The Republic of Wine, Howard Goldblatt didn’t attempt to replace some of the cultural images to cater to the target readers. Since the same image will be associated with different meanings if put into the context of a different culture, the translators will always endeavor to convey the original information in the text so that target readers are able to understand the intention of the author from the perspective of their own culture. To achieve such a purpose, the translators will sometimes select a suitable image from Western culture to perform the exact or nearly exact function of the original one, which reduces the risk of misunderstandings to some extent.

Example 9 ST: 我的眼前摆着一个红烧婴儿, 按他们的说法: 一盘“麒麟送子”。 (酒国 82)

TT: A braised Chad has been placed on the table in front of me, in their words, a platter of Stork Delivering a Son. (Mo, Yan, 2012)

It is evident that the original cultural image 麒麟 (Qilin) in this example is transformed into stock in the translated text. According to the legendary tales in ancient China, Qilin is auspicious and benevolent, believed to be a kind of mascot bringing new babies. However, there is no such equivalent in Western culture. Hence, Goldblatt ingeniously selects the stork, another animal image closely associated with similar meanings in Western culture, to substitute for the original one.

Example 10 ST: 寥若星辰, 风其毛, 麟其角 (酒国 97)
TT: rare as morning stars, as the feathers of a phoenix or the horn of a unicorn (Mo, Yan, 2012)

The writer’s striking use of this metaphor is intended to indicate that the real wine connoisseur is too rare to find. The absence of the image Qilin in the target language impels the translator to find a substitute for it so that readers can fully understand the rarity of wine experts.

Example 11 ST: “太岁头上动土!” 金刚钻大笑着说。(酒国 122)
TT: “How dare they touch a single hair on the head of the mighty Jupiter!” Diamond Jin said with a raucous laugh. (Mo, Yan, 2012)

“太岁头上动土” (Tai sui tou shang dong tu) denotes the offense to someone of higher status. According to related historical materials, people in ancient China believed that 太岁 (tai sui) is a celestial body spinning at the same speed as Jupiter but in the opposite direction. Wherever 太岁 (tai sui) goes, a meat-like object will appear in the place below it consequently. Such an object is claimed to be the incarnation of 太岁 (tai sui), which will be disturbed if touched. Since Jupiter is an ideal image for readers to better understand the cultural connotations of the original text, the translator humorously translated it as “touch a single hair on the head of the mighty Jupiter.”

Example 12 ST: 一个举着寿桃的粉红色裸体男娃咧着小嘴巴哈哈笑, 在墙上, 在年画上, 他的美丽的小鸡儿像一粒粉红的蚕蛹, 蠹蠕欲动, 栩栩如生。(酒国 13)
TT: On the wall hung a laughing, pink-skinned, naked toddler with a longevity peach in his hands – a new year’s scroll – his darling little pecker poking up like a pink, wriggly silkworm chrysalis. (Mo, Yan, 2012)

Chinese people are shy of broaching the subject of sexual issues and they consider it to be inappropriate for discussion. As a consequence, descriptions or expressions in China about sex and sexual organs are rather euphemistic instead of as explicit as that of Westerners. “小鸡儿” (xiaojier) is a euphemism for a male’s sexual organ, which parallels the word “pecker” in English because they both refer to the penis in an implicit way.

Example 13 ST: “大人不见小人的怪, 宰相肚里跑轮船” (酒国 178)
TT: A true gentleman forgives the trifles of a petty man, and the broad mind of an able minister can accommodate a ferry boat.” (The Republic of Wine 174)

“大人” (daren) and “小人” (xiaoren) are respectively the appellation for the high-status and the low-status, also referring to the noble and the evil-minded ones. Thus, Howard Goldblatt translates it as “true gentleman” and “petty man,” conforming to the source text. “宰相肚里跑轮船” (zaixiang duli paolunchuan) in the latter half of this sentence is a common Chinese saying used to describe someone remarkably forgiving. “宰相” (zaixiang) is a form of address for the highest-ranking administrative official who assists the Chinese emperor in governing the country, whose equivalent is apparently absent in the English. As a result, “宰相” (zaixiang) is transformed into “an able minister” in the target text.

Example 14 ST: 我与莫言是一丘之貉。(酒国 179)
TT: Because Mo Yan and I are jackals from the same lair. (The Republic of Wine 175)

“一丘之貉” (yi qiu zhihe) means “birds of a feather” in a negative way, for “貉” (he) refers to vile creatures. The scientific name of “貉” (he) is nyctereutes procyonoides. It is a kind of endangered animal unique to East Asia, so westerners might be unfamiliar to them. In the translated text, it is translated in the same way as most wuxia novels, with the cultural image “貉” (he) translated as jackal.
Example 15 ST:......我坚信这样不间断地寄下去, 就能够感动这些居住在琼楼玉阁里, 每日看着嫦娥梳头的上帝们。 (酒国 213)
TT: ...... by continuing to submit my work to them, sooner or later I'll touch the hearts of this pantheon of gods who spend their days in jade palaces gazing up at the sky to watch the Moon Goddess brush her hair. (The Republic of Wine 210)
Example 16 ST:莫言说, “都是广寒宫里人。” (酒国 347)
TT: “They’re like moon goddesses,” he replied. (The Republic of Wine 343)
In his letter to Mo Yan, Li Yidou humorously addresses the editors of Citizens’ Literature as “gods living in jade palaces and gazing up at the sky to watch the Moon Goddess.” The “gods” here should be the ruler of the entire world according to the myths in ancient China. Although the concept of “gods” in China differs from that in the Western Christian religion, there is a considerable overlap between them. “嫦娥” (Chang’e) is a goddess whose legend of flying to the moon is well known to hundreds of millions of Chinese people. However, Western readers unfamiliar with the tales of Chang’e may be puzzled by such a strange name and fail to comprehend the intended purpose of the author.
Example 16 is closely linked to Chang’e as well. “广寒宫” (guanghangong), also known as the moon palace, is the residence of Chang’e. Mo Yan is inferring that the girls of Yichi Tavern are as beautiful as the goddess Chang’e. If translated literally, the cultural image “广寒宫” will be futile to trigger the association of goddesses in the Heaven.
Example 17 ST: 卖驴人叹了一口气, 大声说:“孙秃子呀孙秃子, 下了阴曹地府, 让野驴啃死你个杂种!” (酒国 352)
TT: The other man sighs. “Baldy Sun,” he says loudly, “Baldy Sun, you son of a bitch, you can go straight to Hell, where all the donkeys will chew you up and spit you out!” (The Republic of Wine 346)
The concept of “阴曹地府” (yincaodifu) originates from Taoism. Influenced by Buddhism, it later developed into a system of hell called eighteen layers of hell based on Taoism’s “恶曹地府” (ecao difu). The concept of “地府” (difu) is broader than hell and the concept of the underworld is broader than “地府” (difu). Due to a lack of knowledge about the traditional religious culture in ancient China, Western audiences are quite unfamiliar with the specific details about the afterlife described in Taoism. In order to fill the cultural gap, Goldblatt chose the word “Hell” peculiar to the Western religious culture for the translation.

3. The deformation of the cultural images
The loss or deformation of the cultural images is mostly caused by the translator’s misunderstanding or by the absence of equivalence in the target culture. The neglect of the meanings of cultural images in translation, especially in the literary translation, will affect the presentation of the original work. Worse still, the audience will be hindered from enjoying the beauty of artistic conception and understanding the characters in the work (Xie Medio-translatology 136). The Republic of Wine is sprinkled with allusions, ancient prose and original or adapted poems by Mo Yan, which is undoubtedly a huge challenge for Goldblatt, a non-native speaker. In translation, he tries to deform or twist their original cultural meanings while still maintaining the original images as much as possible. Therefore, the unique characteristics of the original text are maintained to
a larger extent, which enables the target readers to picture those distinctive cultural images in the text according to the context and allows them to better understand the connotations and denotations of specific cultural images.

Example 18 ST: 他看到了永远端坐在神龛里的土地爷爷和两位土地奶奶脸上的冰冷微笑。《酒国》70

TT: He looked inside the temple, where the Earth God himself sat for all time, a spirit-wire seated on either side; all three had icy smiles on their faces. (The Republic of Wine 65)

“土地爷”(tudiye) is the lowest-ranking god governing the land according to ancient Chinese tales, who lives underground and absorbs the energy from offerings, libations and incense. Most of the statues of the Earth God are plainly dressed, kind and amiable old people with gray hair and beards. In the temple of the Earth God, his statue is commonly put alongside his wives, who are addressed respectfully as“土地奶奶”(tudi nainai) and share the incense and offerings with the Earth God.

In the original text of The Republic of Wine, the title of“土地爷爷”and“土地奶奶”come over as three gray-headed old people, but they are simply translated as Earth God and his Spirit-wives, which merely indicates that the worshipping ceremony involves burning spirit money, without apprising the audience of the Earth Gods’ appearance.

Example 19 ST: 大家都说她得了神经病, 我看也是, 她现在天天躲在家里写检举信, 一摞摞地写, 一摞摞地往外寄, 有寄给河南开封府的包黑子包青天的, 您说她不是神经病是什么? 《酒国》113

TT: Everyone says she went crazy, and that’s how I see it. She spends her time these days at home writing letters of accusation, ream upon ream of them, all mailed off, some to the Chairman of the Central Committee, some to the provincial Party Secretary, one even to the legendary magistrate of Kaifeng Prefecture, Magistrate Bao. Now, I ask you, if she’s not crazy, who is? (The Republic of Wine 109)

“包黑子包青天”(baoheizi baoqingtian) is the nickname of the famous minister Bao Zheng in the Northern Song Dynasty. He represents those honest officials who are impartial and strict in law enforcement. However, related information about his identity cannot be acquired from the translated work, which accounts for the failure to inform the readers that the act of mailing off the letters to Bao is literally insane because such a person does not exist in reality.

Example 20 ST: 李一斗说, “这家伙, 是驴阎王” 《酒国》351

TT: “For donkeys, this guy is the butcher from Hell,” Li Yidou comments. (The Republic of Wine 345)

Li Yidou introduces the bald-headed butcher as the King of Hell (阎王) to those donkeys, which reveals that he signifies death for the donkeys. “阎王”(yanwang) is a deity of the underworld in ancient Chinese religious myths. Legend has it that he is the king of ghosts, a half-god and half-ghost entity who is in charge of the life and death of all living beings both in hell and in the human world. Since “阎王”(yanwang) is a common symbol of the religious culture of China, which is quite distinct from Western readers’ conception of the underworld. The transformation from“阎王”to “butcher from Hell” is conducive to the audience’s comprehension of the fact that the bald-headed character is intimidating, dreadful and creepy to those donkeys about to be butchered.
4. The loss of cultural images

Normally, language serves as the carrier of culture, the distinctions among images result from different historical cultures, myths and legends, historical events and literary works. Consequently, during translation, the commonly seen cultural exchange activity, the absence of equivalence in the target language or the readers’ lack of background knowledge about the source culture will inevitably render the images lost in the translated work, which is fully demonstrated in The Republic of Wine.

Example 21 ST:我已将大作寄给《国民文学》编辑部, 那里云集着中国当代最优秀的文学编辑, 如果您是千里马, 相信会有伯乐来发现。 (酒国 28)

TT: But I have mailed it off to the editors at Citizens’ Literature, where the finest contemporary editors have gathered. If you are a true “thousand-li steed,” I am confident there’s a master groom out there somewhere for you. (The Republic of Wine 25)

In the Spring and Autumn Period (circa 770 BC to 476 BC), the man Bo Le known for his expertise in cherry-picking the best horses is here referred to as someone who is capable of discovering, recommending, cultivating and employing talents. The translator intentionally deletes the cultural image about the character Bo Le, only indicating his identity.

Example 22 ST:他看到子弹射中了墙上一幅玻璃马赛克拼镶成的壁画, 画的内容是哪吒闹大海。 (酒国 24)

TT: He actually saw the bullet shatter a glass mosaic painting on the wall; the theme was Natha Raises Havoc at Sea. (The Republic of Wine 20)

Ne Zha, a classic mythological character depicted as a little boy in China, appears in the original work. “哪吒闹海” (Ne Zha Raises Havoc at Sea) is a myth taken from the 16th-century Ming dynasty novel, also a section of the plot recorded in other ancient literary works such as the roughly contemporaneous Journey to the West. Goldblatt Howard translates the name of Nezha as Natha, which somehow distorts his identity and gives him a name deprived of Chinese characteristics. Since the image that Nezha is a little boy has been deeply rooted in the Chinese readership, the painting, as a kind of satire in the novel, referred to the case investigated by Ding Gou’er. The lack of reconstruction of Na Zha’s image as a naughty and hyper-active little kid somehow lessens the original flavor of the work.

Example 24 ST:“枪打出头鸟!” (酒国24)

TT: ‘The bird that sticks out its head gets shot! (The Republic of Wine 20)

“枪打出头鸟” (qiangda chutouniao) is an idiom in China exhorting that people should be humble and keep a low profile, otherwise they will be in trouble, which is also a metaphor that the one who takes the lead will be most likely to be attacked. Here in the context of The Republic of Wine, the Mine Director and Party Secretary intends to console and flatter Ding Gou’er in a rather humorous way, saving him the embarrassment when his gun goes off. The “bird,” in fact, refers not to a real bird but to the genitalia of the little boy on the wall painting. However, Such a connotation is not reflected in the translated text, with merely the cultural image “bird” remaining rather than its original meaning.

Example 25 ST:俗话说“七十三, 八十四, 阎王不叫自己去”…… (酒国 48)

TT: Deleted. (The Republic of Wine 43)
When one of the officials persuades Ding Gou’er to drink more, he proposes a toast in the name of his old mother so that Ding Gou’er will find it hard to resist due to his filial affection. This saying demonstrates the traditional conception of death and aging in China and the filial duty deeply rooted in Chinese culture. We assume that the omission here could be caused by an absence of the equivalent or closely equivalent “阎王” (King of Hell) and that filial duty has little or even no impact on Western culture.

Example 26 ST: 你既然已经像“王八吃秤砣一样铁了心搞文学,” 我绝对不会敢再劝你浪子回头, 也免得你恨我。 (酒国 62)

TT: Since you say your mind is made up to devote yourself to literature, I’ll never again advise you to play the prodigal son, if for no other reason than to keep you from loathing me. (The Republic of Wine 58)

“王八吃秤砣铁了心” (wangba chichengtuo tielexin) means that one has made up his or her mind and will not change it easily, and the cultural connotation is accurately presented in the translated text. It could be deduced that Goldblatt Howard dismisses the translation of the image “王八” (tortoise) due to the fact that the tortoises for Westerners are not as negative as they are in the Chinese context and that they may never associate the tortoise with someone stubborn and stupid.

Example 27 ST:…… 还有偷鸡摸狗, 打架斗殴, 坑蒙拐骗的流氓无赖。 (酒国 141)

TT: …… and we have no-account hooligans who resort to thievery, mugging, and every imaginable form of trickery to the same end. (The Republic of Wine 138)

The idiom “偷鸡摸狗” (touji mogou) is from the Chinese classic novel Water Margin, referring to thievery or any other forms of misdeeds. The cultural images of “鸡” (chicken) and “狗” (dog) disappear in the target text, with the humor of language lessening in the translation.

Example 28 ST: 我们把前者易名为龙, 把后者易名为凤, 龙与凤是我们中华民族的庄严图腾, 至高至圣至美之象征, 其涵义千千万万可谓罄竹难书。 (酒国 162)

TT: Now we change the former’s name into dragon and the latter into phoenix, for the dragon and the phoenix are solemn totems of the Chinese race, lofty, sacred, and beautiful symbols that signify meanings too numerous to mention. (The Republic of Wine 160)

This example is an excerpt from the letter written by the drunken Li Yiduo to Mo Yan, in which there is an obvious error in his writing – he misuses the Chinese idiom “罄竹难书” (qingzhu nanshu). This idiom is used as a metaphor for describing that one commits too many crimes to be recorded (ancient people in China wrote on wooden slips made of bamboo). Therefore, it is most commonly used as a negative word, not suitable for describing things that are glorious and wonderful, which means that it is definitely improper to be used in this letter to show that the meanings of the dragon and the phoenix are associated with infinity. However, if the characterization of Li Yiduo is taken into account in the interpretation of such a minor mistake, it will seem perfectly plausible. There are mainly two possible explanations for such a seemingly elementary blunder on that account. First, Li Yiduo is presumably too drunk to stay sober when writing this letter, in which he keeps bragging about himself and his novel. Alcohol probably impairs his judgment and renders him unable to ponder over his words. Second, Doctor Li is crazy about literature and excessively confident about himself, even dismissing any criticism or
advice about his works. It can be inferred that he is such an arrogant and self-contented person that he enjoys showing off in front of the real expert, but in reality he is ignorant of the usage of this idiom.

Nevertheless, this intriguing mistake is erased from the translated text. Goldblatt renders it in a quite logical and sensible way to fit in with the context. On the one hand, Mo’s outstanding writing techniques are not shown in the translation, but on the other hand, the chance of misunderstanding is reduced and readers therefore will be less likely to have trouble with their interpretations.

Example 29 ST: 他们口味高贵，喜新厌旧，朝秦暮楚，让他们吃得满意并不容易。

(T酒国 223)

TT: Diners have expensive tastes, they like new things and despise old stuff, wanting one thing in the morning and changing their minds in the evening. (The Republic of Wine 220)

“朝秦暮楚”(zhaoqin muchu) is used as a metaphor for describing someone inconsistent and unpredictable. Given the fact that the literary allusion about Qin and Chu is foreign to Western readers, the cultural images in this idiom are concealed and reproduced in the form of their connotations.

Example 30 ST: 杨贵妃是咱酒国嫁出的女儿，每次温泉水滑洗凝脂时都要在池子里倒上一桶咱酒国酿造的高粱酒，要不她的皮肤哪里会那么光滑，她的神态哪里会像一枝海棠春带雨？汉高祖是咱酒国人的儿子，刚出生时他娘没奶，他爹就往他的嘴里灌烧酒，喝烈酒长大的孩子与吃母乳长大的孩子如何能够相比？(酒国 319)

TT: Or, the consort Yang Guifei left Liquorland to get married, and Han Wudi is a son of Liquorland. (The Republic of Wine 318)

Comparing to the original text, a relatively large proportion of the information is omitted from the translation, which can be interpreted from two aspects. One is that there might be obstacles in the translating process since the statements in the source text are unarguably fallacies, such as bathing in wine will make one’s skin clear and smooth or feeding the babies with wine will make them extremely strong. These are definitely wild exaggerations of the merits of wine. Besides, the images in “一枝海棠春带雨”(yizhi haitai chundaiyu) will hardly be associated for the Western readership with a woman of great beauty. The other is that the description in the source text does not conform to the historical facts, so those unacquainted with Chinese history may take the misinformation as reality. Besides, the deletion here may have little impact on the overall organization of the plot. Nevertheless, it fails to indicate that Li Yidou hyperbolizes and twists the facts to publicize the wine culture and his hometown.

Example 31 ST: “行喽，” 余一尺说, “别卖你的狗皮膏药了。” (酒国342)

TT: “Enough already,” Yu Yichi cut in. “You and your quack sales methods.” (The Republic of Wine 339)

“狗皮膏药”(goupi gaoyao) is used as a metaphor for fake products in Chinese culture. The literal sense of this idiom is dog skin and plaster, but the cultural images are lost in the translated work, substituted with “quack.” The word “quack” contains two meanings – someone dishonestly claiming to have medical knowledge or skills; or the sound that a duck makes. Generally speaking, Goldblatt’s translation only accords with the original text in terms of meaning.
5. The mistranslation of cultural images

Translation study conducted from the perspective of Comparative Literature is in essence a literary and cultural study. It is no longer constrained by the understanding and description of certain linguistic phenomena or the evaluation of the translated text. Instead, it takes the linguistic phenomena of translation as a literary phenomenon. Compararists normally treat the translation in a more open-minded and unbiased way. We consider the mistranslation to be uniquely valuable except those careless ones. Professor Xie Tianzhen classified the mistranslations into two types, the unintentional and intentional. He believes that mistranslations in rendering, especially the intentional ones, represent the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the original work in another kind of language and culture. Such mistranslations also fully reflect the distortion and deformation induced by cultural communication and collision of different cultures. Therefore, they are not merely considered linguistic phenomena, but complex cultural phenomena.

Example 32 ST:我不是虚伪的谦谦君子, 我知道并且敢于公开宣称我的才华横溢, 但一直藏在深闺无人识像杨玉环一样, 一直委屈在村里拉车像千里马一样, 现在, 终于, 李隆基和伯乐手拉手出现了! (酒国 159)

TT: I am not a hypocritically modest gentleman; I know and dare to announce publicly that I am bursting with talent that has been hidden away like the Imperial Concubine of the Tang, like a steed that has been forced to pull carts in a village. Now, at last, Li Shimin, the Tang Emperor, and Bole, the true horse breeder, have shown up hand in hand! (The Republic of Wine 156)

By discussing about Yang Yuhuan and Li Longji as well as the allusion to the thousand-li steed and Bo Le, Li Yidou intends to express his deep resentment when he is unappreciated and undervalued. In the translation, the name Yang Yuhuan is turned into a brief introduction of her identity – the Imperial Concubine of the Tang, from which one could neither learn about the historical facts that Yang is one of the four greatest beauties in ancient China nor that her beauty happens to be a cause of the downfall of monarchs and nations. Moreover, the translator’s lack of knowledge about Chinese history may cause mistranslation. Li Longji, supposed to be the original name of the Emperor Xuanzong, is translated incorrectly as Lishimin (the Emperor Taizong).

Example 33 ST:我是“不到黄河心不死,” “不到长城非好汉,” 决心百折不挠地写下去。 (酒国 255)

TT: Being one of those who will “Never give up till he sees the Yellow River,” and “Never calls himself a man till he reaches the Yangtze.” I’m determined to keep writing, undaunted by setbacks. (The Republic of Wine 253)

Some famous places of interest are mentioned here, such as the Yellow River and the Great Wall. We surmise that Goldblatt rewrites and modifies the cultural images intentionally to achieve the effect of parallelism, changing the original image from the Great Wall to Yangtze.

6. Conclusion

The unique cultural characteristics of rural China and magical realism are interwoven in The Republic of Wine, which puts the translator in a dilemma during the cross-cultural journey. Judging from the readers’ requirements, the translator is not only supposed to be
faithful to the original text, but also supposed to take the expectation and reception of the Western readers into account. Besides, the production of the high-quality translation demands a good understanding of different cultures, a good command of both the source language and target language and a good ability to merge the intertextuality of the source cultural images with the target culture.

The translation pertaining to cultural image symbols is not simply restricted by language itself but associated with cultural connotations and the expectation of the target readers closely. Cultural images are not isolated; they correlate and interact with many other aspects, with a feature of intertextuality. Consequently, when deciding on which translation strategy to use, a translator normally prioritizes the intertextuality between the two languages, which is concerned with the target readers’ reception about the source culture. If the target readers can easily understand and absorb the source culture, the intertextuality of the source language could interact with the target language. Otherwise, the intertextuality of the source language will be hindered from merging with the target language. In most cases, the translators tend to use foreignization in the former situation and domestication in the latter one. In sum, the translators should select an appropriate translation strategy and make adjustments according to the context.

In the translation of *The Republic of Wine*, Goldblatt mainly adopts foreignization to deal with ambiguous and distinctive cultural images and leave them untouched during the translation. Nonetheless, a large quantity of cultural images suffers from loss or displacement to a varying extent due to the careful considerations of the readership’s needs and tastes. Therefore, a relatively ideal way to avoid such phenomena is to select an equivalent or semi-equivalent one from the target language that is familiar to Westerners, which will assist the readers in making effective association effortlessly.

Goldblatt Howard deals with the translation of cultural images with a combined method of literal translation and transliteration. Despite the minor errors and the inevitable loss of some images, the English version of *The Republic of Wine* by Goldblatt boasts considerable merits, which shows his indelible contribution in the process of bringing the work of Mo Yan to the West.

The analysis of the translation reveals that translators should constantly rethink and study the target culture so as to reduce errors when translating. These are effective ways to enable foreign readers to accurately grasp the cultural connotations of Chinese literary works and to eradicate prejudices and bias from Chinese culture. Additionally, this paper inspires us to realize the profoundness of Chinese culture and the necessity of cultural exchange, integration and cross-cultural dialogue between China and the West.

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