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THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN THE NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE:
A CASE STUDY OF HOWARD GOLDBLATT’S TRANSLATIONS OF MO YAN’S WORKS

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THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN THE NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE:
A CASE STUDY OF HOWARD GOLDBLATT’S TRANSLATIONS OF MO
YAN’S WORKS

by
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submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of
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ABSTRACT

The Role of Translation in the Nobel Prize in Literature: A Case Study of Howard Goldblatt’s Translations of Mo Yan’s Works

by

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Master of Philosophy

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the role of the translator and translation in the Nobel Prize in Literature through an illustration of the case of Howard Goldblatt’s translations of Mo Yan’s works.

As the most significant international literary prize, the Nobel Prize in Literature is well discussed in media. However, insufficiently detailed attention has been given to the role of translation in the Prize. In many cases, the works that the Nobel judges evaluate are in fact translations, not the prize winner’s own words. Despite the importance of translation in the selection process, no research has ever examined the role played by translation or the translator in an author’s win of the Nobel Prize. The thesis will trace the history of the Nobel Prize in Literature with regard to translation, showing the growing importance of this linguistic act since the start of the prize.

This thesis aims to show that a good translator was one of the most important factors behind Mo Yan’s win of the Nobel Prize in 2012. Without his excellent translators, including American translator Howard Goldblatt, Mo Yan may never have been able to present his works to the Western world, not to mention win the Nobel Prize and enjoy worldwide appreciation. A thorough analysis of this case will reveal the translator’s influence as well as how translation may affect the decision of who receives the Nobel Prize.

Furthermore, examining the relationship between translation and the Nobel Prize in Literature can shed light on the role of translation in cultural exchange and world literature. With imbalanced cultural exchange between the West and the East, the role of Goldblatt is worth researching, as he successfully introduced Chinese literature to the world and served as a mediator linking up the two cultures.
The research will be conducted using a descriptive approach by information gathering, statistical analysis and text comparison. By comparing the source text and translation of Mo Yan’s works from ideological and literary perspectives, the thesis will explain how Goldblatt’s translations might have affected the Nobel Prize panel’s impression of Mo Yan’s works, based on the criteria for the choice. Paratextual influences will also be analysed, such as the literary reputation of the translator. With the illustration of the case of Mo Yan, this research hopes to open up a new perspective on the studies of the Nobel Prize as well as translation.
DECLARATION

I declare that this is an original work based primarily on my own research, and I warrant that all citations of previous research, published or unpublished, have been duly acknowledged.

(YIM Yau Wun)
Date: 14-4-2016
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

1.1.1 The Role of Goldblatt behind Mo’s Nobel Prize in Literature

Mo Yan’s win of the Nobel Prize in Literature was the biggest event in the Chinese literary world in 2012. Different from the first Chinese laureate, exiled dissident Gao Xingjian, Mo is a pro-establishment Chinese resident and writer whose works have strong local colour of Chinese rural communities. Sparking celebration and bringing pride and joy across mainland China, Mo Yan’s success helped China overcome its “Nobel Complex” (Lovell, 2006), as it has been a long-coveted dream of many mainland Chinese who regard the prize as one of the most globally influential literary prizes that can boost the status of Chinese literature and gain recognition of the PRC’s rising power.

Apart from Mo’s talent, the translator undoubtedly is a key factor for his success. Except for the sinologist Göran Malmqvist, none in the 18-member committee in the Swedish Academy, which decides the laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature, can read Chinese. Other members, thus, could only resort to different translated versions to enjoy Mo Yan’s works. Without his translators’ labour, Mo would not even have a chance of winning.

Being the first Chinese national to win the Nobel literature prize certainly thrust Mo Yan into the limelight, but his translators, meanwhile, have received far less attention despite their almost-equal importance and contribution. Among these back-stage heroes, Anna Gustafsson Chen, Mo Yan’s Swedish translator, did get into the press, but the others received only very little news coverage, including Mo’s

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1 As a Chinese novelist, playwright and critic, Gao Xingjian (1940-) was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature “for an oeuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity” in 2000. Since Gao was an exile writer who was granted French citizenship in 1998, his Nobel Prize was not much celebrated in mainland China.
English translator Howard Goldblatt, whose efforts were emphasized by Chen in an interview.

In fact, Goldblatt’s contribution is by no means less than Chen’s. The Swedish translation, undeniably, gave Mo a push to the Nobel Prize, the laureate of which is chosen by a group of native Swedish speakers. However, as Chen said, “Please note that it was not only the Swedish-language version of the works of a Nobel Literature Prize candidate the panel looked at when making the decision. Other translated versions in German, English and French were also taken into consideration.” The translated versions of Goldblatt, who was the most prolific translator for Mo Yan’s works up to 2012, are referential for the selection to a certain extent.

Understandably, the Prize, to a certain extent, depends on translation. A good translation will do more good while a bad one will do harm. Goldblatt’s translation is believed to be the former. German Sinologist Wolfgang Kubin even said, “Howard Goldblatt knows exactly what the writers' weaknesses are, and manages to translate into a language that is better than the original Chinese” (qtd. in Von Hein, 2012). It might be a bit arbitrary to say Goldblatt’s version is better than Mo Yan’s original work, but it certainly received better reception in the Western literary market than many English translations of Chinese literary works. How could Goldblatt produce those excellent translations? What has he done?

Moreover, Goldblatt is the one who introduced Mo’s works into the English-language book market, which is the largest market in the world. Goldblatt had already discovered Mo’s talents as early as 1986 and started translating Mo’s

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works afterward. *Red Sorghum – A Novel of China*, his first translation of one of Mo Yan’s novels, was published in 1993. Bringing Mo’s works outside China, the English translations did help Mo’s works to get better known internationally. Even Chen was acquainted with Mo’s novel via Goldblatt’s work at first. “I read Ge Howen’s (Howard Goldblatt) English translation in a bookstore. Then, in Sweden it wasn't easy to find Chinese books. I found ["Red Sorghum"] interesting and later bought the Chinese version and tried to translate it”.⁴ As a matter of fact, Mo Yan, who is one of the most translated living Chinese writers,⁵ was already regarded as one of the most popular PRC writers in the West, even before the win of the Nobel Prize. With his significant influence, Goldblatt obviously helped to start Mo on the road toward the Swedish Academy.

### 1.1.2 Translation in the Nobel Prize in Literature

As the world’s prestigious literary prize, the Nobel Prize in Literature enjoys a global repute which overshadows other literary awards. The Prize is regarded as a representation of the pinnacle of general recognition in the field. With a Nobel Prize, not only can the laureate win a considerable amount of money and a gold medal, but also immense prestige and other derived benefits brought by this honour. However, despite its international repute, the Nobel Prize faces criticism and dispute on their laureate selection, which involves many rejections and controversies.

As a world literary prize, the Nobel Prize in Literature has to compare different literary works that are originally written in different languages from different cultures from the whole world, and then decide which is the most outstanding. In the

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⁵ According to Index Translationum, the most translated Chinese living author is Gao Xingjian (88 translations) and Mo Yan comes second (86 translations).

process of the selection, a wide range of aspects like the content, theme, aesthetic values and the quality of writing of each work is considered and compared based on the writers’ original works. However, the literature written in uncommon languages that most judges cannot read can only rely on their translation. Once translation is involved, the game could never be fair because “full equivalence” does not exist in translation as the meaning of a word belongs to its own culture and language. There would always be loss and gain in the translated version, which, instead of the original text, is the actual text that the judges read. A good translation can increase the chance of winning by uplifting the quality of writing and tackling the cultural barrier, but a bad translation degrades originally good works and become a drag. The problem is, to what extent could the deviation affect the selection of the winner of the Nobel Prize? This thesis will try to analyze this problem by studying the case of Mo Yan and Howard Goldblatt.

1.1.3 Translation, World Literature and Cultural Exchange

"What is world literature? World literature is translation," said a former secretary of the Swedish Academy.6

Translation, which bridges the gap between two different cultures, enables both sides to introduce their uniqueness in order to enhance mutual understanding. In translation activities, the translator obviously plays an indispensable role. Yet, not many people know what exactly the role of the translator is.

As a comparison, the translator is like an actor on the stage, playing an assigned role. The role may be different on different stages; the translator’s role changes under different contexts as well. In the past, the translator was regarded as “a slave” to the

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source text (Pasquier 1576:112, Dryden, 1697:175), who is secondary, not creative and required to be absolutely faithful to the original text. Mistranslation was a deadly sin which could never be condoned. Translations of religious doctrines such as the Bible in the West and Buddhist sutras in ancient China are a typical example showing the superior status of the source text because it was believed that translation should be faithful because of its sacredness. Shi Dao’an (315–385), a well-known monk and translator of Buddhist scriptures, adopted a strict literal translation approach. He wrote in the preface of the translation of a Buddhist sutra that the translation should follow the source text closely without missing a word; the translator should not make any change except for the word order (“案本而傳，不令有損言游字；時改倒句，餘盡實錄”) (釋僧祐，1995:382). The role of the translator back then was like a servant who should be as faithful as he could to the source text.

Nowadays, the role of the translator has undergone a significant change. Under a globalized context, the translator has a higher status and a more crucial role because cross-cultural communication is impossible without the translator. Cultural difference is inevitable and the major role of the translator is to break through all cultural barriers, in or outside the text, and serve as a culture disseminator, mediator and facilitator (Bassnett, 2011).

The role of the translator is more complicated nowadays. The translator is more than someone who just buries himself in the source text and simply does the code-switching practice. They need to walk from their room and exert their influence. Take translating bestsellers as an example. There are often conflicts between the publisher of the translated version and the original author. The role of the translator is as a mediator to achieve a compromise between the publisher, who is the patron of the translation activity and mainly concerned with profits and sales, and the author, who cares more about the authenticity of the translation. Therefore, translation is
definitely not a one-man show, but a dynamic process that involves both publisher and author who exert pressure together on the translator. The translator needs to satisfy their requirements, but at the same time, the translator has his own point of view. Therefore, the role of the translator in this kind of conflict is worth examining.

As a mediator in the world of literature, the translator can make a difference on the international circulation of literary works in the world. The world literary market clearly reveals the position of Western and non-Western literature: The number of books translated into Western languages is far smaller than the books translated into non-Western languages. Some post-colonialists like Frantz Fanon (1963) and Edward Said (1978) pointed out that the centre of world literature is occupied by Western literature, while African and Asian literatures are on the periphery. However, there are centre and periphery in Western literature as well, such as Irish literature, which is on the periphery (Tymoczko, 1999). For writers from peripheral literature to gain international fame, they are heavily reliant on creating a masterpiece that will sell in international markets. The assistance of a good translator would be essential in this sense. Howard Goldblatt is one of these good translators who helped to increase Mo Yan’s visibility and build up his reputation in the global literary stage, which eventually led him to the Nobel glory. The case study, thus, will try to look at how the translator can help the peripheral literature more toward the centre.

1.2 Research Questions

“There are many much better writers here in China who aren't so prominent because they've not been translated into English, or rather they don't have the outstanding American translator Howard Goldblatt” (qtd. in Von Hein, 2012).

Sinologist Wolfgang Kubin said the above line in an interview after Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize. What he believed is that there are many good quality writers like Mo
Yan in China, but there is only one Howard Goldblatt. If you want a good reception overseas, the quality of the translator will be extremely crucial. Although Kubin is a classical Chinese literature expert who has continually made harsh comments on contemporary Chinese literature, his point of view is worth discussing. If it is true, the role of the translator would be one of the most determinant factors behind the win of the Nobel Prize.

In order to investigate the role of the translation and translator, we have to know what Goldblatt was doing when he translated Mo Yan’s works first. How translation can affect the choice of the winner? What is Goldblatt’s contribution to Mo Yan’s Prize? What has he done to bring Mo Yan’s works to the Western literary market? What is the limitation? What are the other important factors that contribute to the win of Mo Yan except translation? These are the questions to be answered in this thesis.

This thesis will conduct a tentative study on the role that the translator plays in the Nobel Prize as well as the world literature stage. In this research, “the translator” is a rather vague concept because the translator Howard Goldblatt is actually not the only producer of his translation. In today’s book publishing industry, translation undergoes editing before being published. Therefore, “the translator” hereinafter should refer to all decision makers who participate in producing the translation, which include, of course, the translator himself, Howard Goldblatt, the editors or the publisher, and anyone else who play a role in producing the translation, such as Goldblatt’s wife Sylvia Lin.

The thesis will be descriptive, comparative and target text oriented. Descriptive research will be carried out on the case of Howard Goldblatt and Mo Yan. Para-textual factors, such as patronage and ideology, will be taken into consideration. Text comparison will also be adopted to support the thesis. By comparing the source text and the target text, we can explore the role and strategy of Goldblatt when
translating Mo Yan’s works.

1.3 The Significance of the Study

1.3.1 Limitations in the Existing Research

Despite the influence and repute of the Nobel Prize, there is very limited existing research on the translation aspect of this prestigious prize. As one of the determinant factors in the selection, translation seems to be overlooked in the study of the Nobel Prize in Literature. Some research on the Nobel Prize has mentioned a point or two about translation in the Nobel Prize, but there is almost no detailed and deep research or monograph specializing in this subject currently. With only sketchy and patchy information on this topic available, this research aims to carry out a new model about the Nobel Prize in Literature, as there is no old model or theory to follow as a reference. Other researchers who are interested in this topic may examine other Nobel Prize winners with this new model. In order to see the full picture, many studies need to be done.

Since Mo won the Nobel Prize in 2012, his literary works have become a popular research topic. According to the data from Chinese National Knowledge Resource Integrated Database (CNKI), the number of master’s theses related to Goldblatt’s English translations of Mo Yan’s works rose rapidly from 12 to 53 after Mo won the Nobel Prize. However, the current research on Howard Goldblatt and Mo Yan is mainly limited to text comparison of a single book with a particular theory, such as the following two master’s theses: Chui Ying Mei discussed the English translation of *The Republic of Wine* from the perspective of receptive aesthetics in her thesis (Chui, 2014), and Li Xiayan analyzed *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* from a

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linguistic perspective (Li, 2012). However, based on my own research on different databases, no in-depth research on Howard Goldblatt’s translations of Mo Yan’s works in regard to winning the Nobel Prize has been found. Among the articles about Mo Yan’s Nobel Prize in Literature, most of them only suggested that translation is an important factor behind his Nobel Prize, but detailed explanations and examples are missing. This thesis, therefore, will investigate how translation could affect the decision of the Nobel Committee in terms of the textual and para-textual aspects with sufficient examples to support it. There is a need to have a comprehensive analysis on the role of Howard Goldblatt towards Mo Yan’s success.

Traditionally, translation had been regarded as a linguistic task limited to simple transformation between languages and text comparison. Translation Studies was initially mainly focused on the linguistic aspect. The source text was highly respected and translators only had an invisible status, copying almost all messages from the source text. However, translation is not only code-switching but a complicated process involving different parties. The translator is not the only party in translation activities. Normally, the translator is not allowed to have his/her own way. The author, the reader and the publisher, who are also participants in the activities, should also be taken into account in order to have a whole picture of the translation process which is dynamic rather than static. Studying the role of the translator can give us a clear view on the habitat and the freedom of the translator in translation activities. The interaction between the translator, the publisher and the author, as well as other external parameters such as society and economy should never be ignored as they all exert influence on translation activities and thus, determine the role of the translator. Therefore, a thorough and in-depth analysis of the role of the translator is also needed.

These databases include ProQuest, EBSCOhost, Dissertation Abstracts, JSTOR, CNKI and Duxiu.
1.3.2 Promoting Cultural Diversity in the Global Book Market

This study intends to investigate the role for the translator to introduce peripheral or semi-peripheral literature to the centre of world literature. Not only did Mo Yan’s victory shorten the distance between world literature and Chinese literature, but it also offered a good model for translators to learn from in order to promote non-Western literature abroad. This thesis will examine the strategies and characteristics of Goldblatt’s translation. It is hoped that it can facilitate mutual communication between different cultures and promote cultural diversity.

Globalization has enabled developing countries to have growing influence in the world, mostly in the economic aspect instead of the cultural one. Translation is the only medium for the transnational circulation of books. The data from Index Translationum\(^9\) clearly reveals the core-peripheral structure of the global book market as well as the hegemony of English. Over half of the translated books were originally written in English. On the contrary, Chinese, as an example, only accounted for less than 1% of the global market despite having the largest population in the world. There are many factors behind this phenomenon, like the asymmetrical power relations between the West and the rest of the world. However, this situation did not improve a lot despite the rapid rise of China as a major economic power in recent decades. Are there other factors hindering the dissemination of Chinese literature? Some Chinese scholars, such as Liu Zaifu (Liu, 1999:24), believed that the lack of good translations of Chinese works is another reason. In fact, the relationship between Chinese and Western literature has always been lopsided. Indeed, the Chinese have put effort in exporting contemporary literature, but most of them failed, such as the state-institute manipulated translation project Panda Book Series which

was initiated by the Chinese Literature Press in 1981 (Geng, 2010). However, Howard Goldblatt, a foreign translator, successfully pushed a Chinese writer to the top of the literature world. As Malmqvist said, "Many Chinese poets are qualified enough to be given the Nobel Prize in Literature... but it all depends on the translation."\textsuperscript{10} There might be many factors behind the success but obviously, a good translator does matter.

Therefore, Mo Yan’s case is a good model for peripheral literature entering the Western literary world. The Nobel Prize was seen as a validation of Chinese literature, proving the reception of peripheral literature in the West despite the cultural difference and language barrier. Since Howard Goldblatt is doing a good job at this, his role should be examined to see how the translator facilitates the dissemination of peripheral literature in the global market.

1.4 Methodology

According to my research, nobody has ever conducted any in-depth research\textsuperscript{11} specializing in the role of translation in the Nobel Prize in Literature although the prize is very well-known in the world. Since there is no precedent for reference, I do not have a well-established methodology to follow. For this reason, a new methodology has to be created and hopefully this will be a contribution to the field of translation studies.

This thesis is an explorative and descriptive study of the role of translation and the translator in the Nobel Prize in Literature with a case illustration of Howard Goldblatt’s translation of Mo Yan’s works. Reading, statistical analysis and textual


\textsuperscript{11} In-depth research herein contains monographs, journal articles, PhD or MPhil Dissertations that specialize in the role of translation in the Nobel Prize in Literature.
analysis have been done in order to answer the research questions. These methods will be explained one by one in the following paragraphs.

**Background reading and research**

Extensive reading was carried out for in-depth analysis in different parts of the thesis. The areas of reading included the studies on the Nobel Prize, translation studies, Mo Yan’s novels, Goldblatt’s translations, the articles written by Mo or Goldblatt as well as the interviews and studies related to them. In the Nobel Prize context, related books, articles and online information have been read for gathering background information about the Prize and its internationalization. Official sources were prioritized, including the official webpages of the Prize and Swedish Academy, and the monographs and articles written by Swedish Academy members. Kjell Espmark’s *The Nobel Prize in Literature: A Study of the Criteria behind the Choices* (1991) gives some inside details, the development of the Prize, the difficulties the Academy met and how they dealt with them. To avoid bias, unofficial sources were also included in reading, like British sinologist Julia Lovell’s *The Politics of Cultural Capital: China's Quest for a Nobel Prize in Literature* (2006), which examines the Nobel quest of China in different periods of time. For translation studies, some contemporary translation concepts were briefly reviewed, including the cultural turn and manipulation school of thoughts. In the case study, Mo Yan’s novels and Goldblatt’s translations were the primary sources for textual comparison. In order to choose suitable books for the comparison, the source texts and the translations have been scanned. Furthermore, for the analysis of the para-textual influences of the translator and translation, materials related to Mo and Goldblatt were widely collected, such as interviews, speeches, reviews and articles from monographs, edited volumes, journals, magazines, newspapers, online resources and so on, either in English or in Chinese. I have also attended several conferences and seminars.
featuring Goldblatt’s translations of Mo Yan works.

Statistical analysis

After reading, analysis was carried out to further examine the role of translation in the Nobel Prize. Statistical analysis has been conducted for the investigation on the importance of translation in the Nobel Prize in Literature. The languages used by laureates were divided into four groups according to the reliance on translation to the Swedish Academy: common European languages, Scandinavian languages, “minority” languages in Europe, and non-European languages (See Table 1). The frequencies of winning of each group over different periods of time were compared in order to conclude the change of the importance of translation to the Prize (See Table 2).

Moreover, the statistics of existing studies of Mo Yan’s novels are also analysed when choosing the novels for textual comparison. By searching databases like the China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database (CNKI), the data of the research circumstance of Mo’s novels can be collected. The statistics can show how much attention each novel got in Chinese academia based on the number of related articles.

Textual analysis and text selection

Textual comparison and analysis were the major part in the case study of Goldblatt and Mo Yan. Comparing the source text and the translation can show the work that Goldblatt has done during translation. Since the existing studies of Goldblatt’s translations of Mo’s works have mainly been confined to a particular novel under a single theory, a comprehensive and organized study would show a large picture of the whole situation and reveal how things changed in the whole period of time. The Nobel Prize is given for an author’s whole body of works and therefore, it does not seem convincing to only use one particular book for reference to illustrate the whole story.
However, attempting an exhaustive analysis covering all of them is not easy—such a task would be more suitable for a PhD dissertation. This thesis, therefore, focuses on a selection of some representative works to support the textual analysis. Out of the seven of Mo Yan’s works that Goldblatt translated, four books are focused on in the textual comparison, namely *Red Sorghum* (1993), *The Garlic Ballads* (1995), *Big Breast Wide Hips* (2004) and *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* (2008). The former two books are the earliest books that Goldblatt translated while the latter two are more recent, so the change of Goldblatt’s translation style can be covered.

These books were selected for their better sales and popularity compared to other books. *Red Sorghum* is the best known of Mo’s novels in the West while *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* won the Newman Prize in 2009. Moreover, the comments of the Nobel Committee on these books were also a consideration. *The Garlic Ballads* was picked by the Nobel permanent secretary Peter Englund as Mo’s gateway book while *Big Breast Wide Hips* was referred to as Mo’s “most remarkable novel” by Chairman of the Nobel Committee Per Wästberg in the 2012 award ceremony speech. Although there are Swedish translations of some of these books, it does not necessarily mean all judges would read the Swedish translations. As Mo’s Swedish translator Anna Chen admitted, the Swedish translation is not the most important since the judges also read other translations.

The textual comparison is carried out from the perspectives of ideology and literary merit, which correspond to the main two criteria of the Nobel Prize—ideal direction and literary excellence. It is hoped that such an analysis will lead to a solid

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and objective discussion on the importance of translation in the Nobel Prize in Literature.

The main body of the research consists of two parts. The first part is an account on the relationship between the Nobel Prize and translation. In Chapter 2, the importance of the translation toward the development of the Prize is analysed in macro and micro aspects. The second part is a case study of the role of translation in Mo Yan’s Nobel Prize. The influence of the English translator Howard Goldblatt will be focused on in Chapter 3, while other factors behind Mo’s Nobel success, mostly related to translation, are examined in Chapter 4. Finally, the conclusion will be drawn in the last chapter. The findings, implications and reflection are summarized while suggested avenues of future research are included in this part.
CHAPTER 2: THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN THE NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE

2.1 Basic Information about the Nobel Prize in Literature

Established because of wishes left in the will of Alfred Nobel, the Nobel Prize in Literature is awarded annually by the Swedish Academy to an author from any country for outstanding contributions in the field of literature, or in Nobel’s words “the person who shall have produced in the field of literature the most outstanding work in an ideal direction.” The emphasis on idealism in Nobel’s will resulted in controversies on the Swedish Academy’s interpretation of the will and their selection of the winner.

It is a common misconception to assume that the Nobel Prize in Literature is only limited to pure artistic literature like poetry, prose and drama. However, philosophical, historical and journalistic writings are also ranked as literature and therefore, the Nobel Prize in Literature includes these types of works. Winston Churchill, who won the prize in 1953, is the most famous laureate of non-artistic literature.

The nomination and selection procedure of literature laureates take a whole year. Four kinds of people are eligible to nominate writers for the prize: (1) members of the Swedish Academy and of other similar academies, institutions and societies; (2) professors of linguistics or literature, (3) previous Nobel laureates in literature, and (4) presidents of those societies of authors that are representative of the literary production in their respective countries. After receiving all proposals, the Nobel Committee for Literature, comprising four to five members, evaluate the nominations and present its recommendations to the 18-member Swedish Academy, which is

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responsible for selecting the year’s laureate. This procedure of nomination and selection can avoid commercial pressure and ensure that the prize winners are chosen by experts.

2.1.1 The Global Status and Controversies of the Nobel Prize in Literature

With its global repute and prestige, the Nobel Prize is the most potent and coveted award of modern time. The authority of the prize comes from its anointed rituals and the lucrative amount of money award. Glorified by the presence of the Swedish king and queen, the Nobel Prize ceremony is a modest and sedate affair, while the banquet is held in the Stockholm city hall and the laureates are well served with venison provided by the king’s own hunter (Feldman 2001: 2). As the richest literary prize in the world, the prize offers 8 million Swedish krona (approximately US$1.1 million) as award money. However, the incomparable honour and lifelong celebrity are certainly worth more than that. The Nobel Prize is regarded as a token of global recognition and therefore, even a whole country, such as China, could be obsessed with this prize. Julia Lovell has made an in-depth analysis on China’s quest for a Nobel Prize in Literature in her book. She suggested the unique position of the Prize as being “the only literary prize of global humanistic scope” (Lovell 2006: 43). Indeed, the Nobel Prize in Literature is the most prominent literary award in the world open to works in any language, any nation, and any genre. Other similar prizes include Neustadt International Prize for Literature (which is referred as “the American Nobel”) and Franz Kafka Prize, but obviously the Nobel Prize is the most celebrated award among them. Therefore, winning a Nobel Prize is by no means an easy job. From 1901 to 2014, among numberless good writers, only 111 awards have been bestowed. The honour and prestige from winning the Nobel Prize are incomparably supreme. The influence and the celebrity brought by the prize are not limited to a single country or language users. Giving the writer a literary prize is the
best way to canonize a piece of literary work and the Nobel Prize is the most prominent one. Apparently, it is hard to find another literary prize which could overshadow the aura of the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Despite its prestige, there are many controversies and criticisms in regard to the selection of the laureates of the Nobel Prize in Literature. The most often criticized point is aesthetic. Many great writers are missing from the list of laureates, while some winners seem to be mediocrities (Engdahl 2013: 317). Leo Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Mark Twain are examples of famous and important literary figures rejected from the prize because the Academy interpreted the will strictly at the early stage. Another realm of controversy is more political. A tendency towards Eurocentrism is revealed from the list of laureates. Undeniably, the majority of the laureates have been Europeans, especially at the early stage. More than 80 out of the 111 laureates are Europeans. In response to these criticisms, the Swedish Academy gradually adjusted its standard on the selection.

2.1.2 Criteria for the Choices

Before investigating how translation affects the selection of laureates, it is essential to understand the criteria for an author to win the prize. However, the criteria for the choices of the laureate are not very clear and have been changing through different periods of time due to repeated revisions of the interpretation of Nobel’s original words “ideal direction”. In this thesis, the criteria are concluded on the basis of the Prize Citation, Press Release and Presentation Speech given by the Academy every year after the announcement of laureates, as well as previous studies on related topics, such as books and journal articles. Among them, some studies are considered to be more official. As ex-Chairman of the Nobel Committee of the Swedish Academy, Kjell Espmark concluded the changing criteria behind the selections of different eras in his book called *The Nobel Prize in Literature: A Study*.
of the Criteria behind the Choices (1991). Sture Allén, the permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy between 1986 and 1999, wrote an article called “Topping Shakespeare? Aspects of the Nobel Prize for Literature” (1997), where he listed five criteria that Nobel provided. Besides these relatively official sources, some research has been done on this topic, such as David Carter’s book, How to Win the Nobel Prize in Literature: A Handbook for the Would-Be Laureate (2012).

It can be concluded from the above sources that there are a couple of factors influencing the choice of winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature: Nobel’s will in 1895, the interpretation of the Swedish Academy, and the influence from criticism as well as the change in society and literature.

Allén suggested that Nobel provided five criteria for the selection in his will (1997). The first three criteria are generally for all the five prizes while the last two are particularly for the prize in literature. First of all, the basic criterion for all five Nobel Prizes is that the recipients “shall have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind” (Nobel 1895). Second, the prize should be awarded for the contribution made "during the preceding year" (ibid.). However, this criterion was later altered. Now, the Academy will look into the whole body of work of the writers, instead of one or two books. Third, "no consideration whatever shall be given to the nationality of the candidates" (ibid.). This criterion uplifted the Nobel Prize to a global level although the Academy has been criticized for being Eurocentric in picking the winners, especially before the 1980s.¹⁵ Fourth, the literature prize should be given to the person who shall have produced “the most outstanding work” (ibid.), which obviously means literary excellence and thus, the selection involves aesthetic evaluation on literary works written in different languages. Last but not least, the

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¹⁵ This will be further discussed in the next section which focuses on the relationship between the Nobel Prize in Literature, translation and world literature.
works shall be written "in an ideal direction" (ibid.). As Allen explained, “In accordance with a philological analysis, including an investigation of an amendment in the handwritten will, this means 'in a direction towards an ideal', where the domain of the ideal is indicated by the first criterion above” (1997). It means that the prize should be given to the writers who have produced literary works that have conferred “the greatest benefits on mankind” (Nobel 1895). However, at the early stage, the definition of “ideal direction” is unclear and therefore, this criterion is vague and caused long-lasting discussion. This is why Espmark concluded that, “Indeed, the history of the literature prize is in some ways a series of attempts to interpret an imprecisely worded will” (1991: 3).

In fact, the Swedish Academy in different eras has interpreted the will in different ways. For instance, from 1901 to 1912, the Academy’s director Carl David af Wirsén defined “ideal” as “a lofty and sound idealism” (qtd. in Espmark 1991: 9). The narrow definition of “an ideal direction” focused on the sacredness of church, family and nation. This conservative idealism resulted in the rejection of famous writers such as Leo Tolstoy, Henrik Ibsen and Emile Zola. Since the 1920s, the Academy adopted a more reasonable definition of those words which were explained as wide-hearted humanity. After the Second World War, the secretary, Anders Österling, reckoned that the prize should be given to the pioneers for their contribution in the development of literature, which was another interpretation of “greatest benefits of mankind”. Since 1978, the Academy started to pay attention to unknown masters that are talented but unnoticed to the world. Starting from the 1980s, the Swedish Academy tried to spread their focus to literature outside Europe and aimed to achieve a global distribution.16

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16 This will be further discussed in the next section about the relationship between translation and the Nobel Prize in Literature.
From the history of the Nobel Prize in Literature, the last two criteria, literary talents and ideal spirit, are the two main aspects for the Academy to consider during the selection. However, these two aspects, inevitably, are limited to individual subjectivity. Similar to other literary prizes, discussing excellence in literature is not easy because literary greatness is hardly definable. Literary prizes are inherently subjective, and the Nobel Prize in Literature suffers even more than other national literary prizes because it involves the comparison of literary works from different cultures in different languages. Worse still, the Nobel Prize in Literature concerns not only literary merits, but also the “ideal direction” of the works. Nevertheless, everybody has different opinions towards the concept of ideal, and one’s judgment largely depends on his or her background, culture and ideology. As we all know, the members of the Academy are all Swedish. How can an institution from a single country determine who the best writer in the world is? It can explain why the prize was criticized for its Eurocentric bias. In the Academy, not every member adopted an open attitude towards literature outside Europe. Artur Lundkvist was an example as he said in his article “Nobelpris at vem?” (“The Nobel Prize to Whom?”) dated on 12 October 1977 in Svenska Dagbladet,

The academy is often reproached for thus neglecting the literature of Asia and Africa and other ‘remote’ parts. But I doubt if there is so far very much to find there. It is a question of literatures (with a certain exception, particularly in the case of Japan) that as far as can be judged have not achieved that level of development (artistic, psychological, linguistic) that can make them truly significant outside their given context (qtd in Espmark 1991: 141).

Even though some of the other members did not agree his point of view, Lundkvist was still an Academy member who could vote in the election of the winner of the Prize. As the present secretary of the Academy Peter Englund admitted, "I think that is a problem. We tend to relate more easily to literature written in
Europe and in the European tradition."\textsuperscript{17} This limitation of the Swedish Academy would easily affect the selection of the winner. It is doubtful whether the Swedish Academy members can fairly judge the literature from different cultural contexts. It seems the literary works of a similar ideology or closer cultural context with the Academy will be easier to find an echo with the judges. This bias, obviously, put most Asian, Middle Eastern and African literatures in disadvantage since their cultures and languages are so different from the Occident and therefore, it comes to the role of the translator.

2.2 The Importance of Translation on the Nobel Prize in Literature

In Nobel’s will, it is stated that “it is my express wish that in awarding the prizes no consideration whatever shall be given to the nationality of the candidates, but that the most worthy shall receive the prize, whether he be a Scandinavian or not” (Nobel, 1895). Without limitation on nationality and written languages, the Nobel Prize in Literature surpasses the bounds of national literature. The selection procedure requires a comparison of literary works written in different languages and therefore, translation plays an important role in the selection. Without translating into Western languages, the judges are unable to understand and evaluate other literatures. Therefore, from the very beginning, translation is the cornerstone of all world literary prizes. World literature would be impossible without translation. By reviewing the history of the Nobel Prize in Literature, we can investigate the role of translation in achieving a wide and global distribution of the prize on a macro scale.

The second point about the role of translation is more worth-researching. To what extent can translation affect the selection of the prize winner? Andre Lefevere

described translation as “a rewriting of an original text” (1992: xi). Different languages reflect different cultures so translators "nearly always contain attempts to naturalize the different culture to make it conform more to what the reader of the translation is used to" (Lefevere, 1999: 237). After the rewriting, how much of the subtlety of the original text would be lost in translation? On the contrary, can translators uplift the quality of writing and have the job done very so well that in the end they win a Nobel Prize for the writer?

After all, the Nobel Prize is a Western institution. How can a local institution perform such an international quest? For distant and marginal literatures, does the Academy prefer the universal literary value or their exoticism?

2.2.1 Change of the Geographic Distribution of the Laureates and the Relationship with Translation

Although the prize aims to celebrate universalism, the nationality of every year’s laureate always draws the public’s attention. Before the 1930s, the prize was dominated by European writers, with the exception of the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore in 1913. Writers from the United States started to enter the list when Sinclair Lewis, Eugene O’Neil and Pearl Buck received the awards in 1930, 1936 and 1938 respectively. After the Second World War, Latin American writers, Asian writers and Australian writers came to the stage of the Nobel Prize with the win of Chilean female poet Gabriela Mistral in 1945, Israeli writer Shmuel Yosef Agnon in 1966, Japanese writer Yasunari Kawabata in 1968 and Australian writer Patrick White in 1973. However, these occasional exceptions are not enough to respond to the criticism of Eurocentrism. It was not until the 1980s that the Swedish Academy finally put their attention on this problem. In 1984, permanent secretary Lars Gyllensten declared that “attention to non-European writers was gradually increasing in the Academy and attempts are being made to ‘achieve a global distribution’” (qtd. 23).
in Espmark, 1991: 132). Indeed, more new faces outside the European-American cultural sphere have emerged since the 1980s when the win of Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka in 1986 and Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz in 1988 marked a change in the history of the prize. Since 1986, the number of non-Anglo-European winners has more than doubled in just over 28 years.\textsuperscript{18} Obviously, the Academy has altered their direction towards the exploration of a more international realm.

The change of geographic distribution of the prize is greatly related to language and translation, which can be seen from an analysis of the list of laureates and the languages they wrote in. The languages can be divided into two main groups according to the level of dependence on translation during the selection: (1) common European languages or Scandinavian languages; (2) “Minority” languages in Europe and other distant languages.

\textbf{Table 1: The classification of the languages the laureates used}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Alienation to Nobel Judges (Is it difficult to translate?)</th>
<th>Reliance on translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>Cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 1a</td>
<td>English, French, German, Swedish and other Nordic languages</td>
<td>All judges can read without translation</td>
<td>Close (Germanic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 1b</td>
<td>Finnish &amp; Spanish &amp; Italian</td>
<td>Some can</td>
<td>Medium (Indo-European)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2a</td>
<td>“Minority” languages in Europe</td>
<td>Most can’t</td>
<td>Medium (Indo-European)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2b</td>
<td>Other distant languages</td>
<td>All/Most can’t</td>
<td>Distant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{18} From the list of Nobel laureates in literature, there were only eight non-Anglo-European winners before 1986. From 1986 to 2014, the number rose to eighteen. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/
In the Group 1a, Swedish is the judges’ mother tongue. Norwegian, Danish and Icelandic are all North Germanic languages, as is Swedish. Scandinavian people are widely expected to understand other spoken Scandinavian languages without interpretation. The small discrepancy between their languages and cultures enables easier translation. For the other three languages, Espmark claimed in his book, “English, German, and French have caused no problems for the judges” (1991: 139). Therefore, the Academy members can read the languages in Group 1a directly without translation.

In Group 1b, Finnish is more difficult for Swedish people but translations between Finnish and Swedish are widely available because cultural interaction has long been developed between these two cultures. For Spanish and Italian, the Academy has made efforts to increase the level of competence throughout the decades by electing more multilingual scholars into the Academy such as Hjalmar Gullberg, Osterling and Knut Ahnlund. Therefore, the languages in this group relies less on translation because either some judges can read the original works directly or the deviation caused by translation is limited.

Group 2a includes “minority” languages in Europe. By “minority”, it is not really talking about the number of speakers. It is unreasonable to classify Russian or Portuguese as small languages given the large amount of speakers of these languages in the world, especially when compared to Scandinavian languages. However, these languages and the cultures they represent may seem comparatively distant to the Swedish and the Nobel institution. Most judges would need to resort to translation to understand and evaluate the works in these languages.

For other distant languages in Group 2b, the reliance on translation is the heaviest.
Table 2: Language of Works of the 111 Nobel Laureates in Literature (1901 to 2014):\textsuperscript{19}

**Group 1a: English, French, German, Swedish and other Nordic languages (Table 2a)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1903, 1920, 1928</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1917, 1917, 1944</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>68</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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**Group 1b: Finnish & Spanish & Italian (Table 2b)**

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
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**Group 2a: “Minority” languages in Europe (Table 2c)**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1905, 1924</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1963, 1979</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungarian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occitan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{19} According to the website, “Rabindranath Tagore (Nobel Prize in Literature 1913) wrote in Bengali and English, Samuel Beckett (Nobel Prize in Literature 1969) wrote in French and English and Joseph Brodsky (Nobel Prize in Literature 1987) wrote poetry in Russian and prose in English. These three Nobel Laureates have been sorted under Bengali, French and Russian, respectively.” Moreover, the prizes in 1904, 1917, 1966 and 1974 are shared by two writers so these years are counted twice.
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbo-Croatian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiddish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Group 2b: Other distant languages (Table 2d)

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<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2000, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total of Group 1 and Group 2 (Table 2e)

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1 Total</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Data Source: The Nobel Prize Official Website)

Figure 1: The proportion of languages groups in different periods

![1901-1944](image1a)

![1945-1980](image1b)
The above tables and figures show an obvious fact that writers using common European languages or Scandinavian languages clearly have a better chance of winning compared to the Asian and “minority” languages in Europe. Out of the 111 laureates, only less than one fourth of them come from Group 2.

However, the proportion of Group 1 is shrinking while Group 2 is expanding when talking about the trend of the performance of each group which varied in different periods of time. Before 1944, only 5 out of 39 winners wrote in Asian languages and “minority” European languages. It doubled to 10 out of 38 winners from 1945 to 1980 and 10 out of 34 winners from 1981 to now. The number of winners from Group 1 keeps dropping while those from Group 2 tend to rise.
throughout the decades. When it comes to distant languages, reliance on translation is unavoidable. Over the years, “the significance of translation has been a recurring theme in the reports” (Espmark 1991: 140). These figures bring out the fact that the reliance on translation is getting higher in the selection of the Nobel laureates in recent decades.

Among the winners from Group 2, Tagore was the only and the first non-Anglo-European winner before the Second World War because he translated his own poems from Bengali to English, so the judges were able to read them. It is clear that the final decision of the Academy “was based on Tagore's English version of Gitanjali, without the aid of Oriental experts to access the rest of his production” (Espmark 1991: 136). Obviously, Tagore’s self-translation played an indispensable role in his prize. While Greek poet Kostis Palamas was not as lucky as Tagore, he was nominated 14 times in the 1920s and 1930s but never received the prize due to “the difficulty of judging the diction of the original while relying for general impressions on translation” (Espmark 1991: 54). Back in those days, literary translation was not yet as well-developed as in the modern world probably due to ineffective cross-cultural communication and poor information technology. The number and quality of available translations were limited for the judges to read. Nowadays, they can read various translated versions in different languages to assess the original works. The development of translation facilitated the global distribution of the Nobel Prize in Literature to a large extent.

Furthermore, several Academy members have also mentioned that translation is a key point in the selection of a Nobel winner. A Chinese author, Tsu-Yu Hwang (黃祖瑜), had raised a question in Swedish newspaper Gotegorgs-Posten to Gyllensten, the permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy at that time, about “whether an author writing in an ‘uncommon’ language has the same chance of a Nobel Prize as a
Western author” (qtd. in Espmark 1991: 132). Gyllensten explained “that the problem lay in the language barrier” (Liu 2004: 42) and admitted “that accessing the literary works concerned had entirely depended on translation” (ibid.) when it came to non-European languages and minority languages in Europe. He believed the best way of breaking down linguistic and cultural barriers was to “promote the translation and publication of the literature one feels enthusiastic about” (Espmark 1991: 133).

This story also revealed that the relationship between translation and the Nobel Prize in Literature is not simply one-way. Not only does translation facilitate the international quest of the Nobel Prize, but the prize might have also motivated the development of translation. Since this prestigious prize widely attracts international attention, it carries huge significance for some countries which are eager for world recognition. Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz, the laureate in 1988, once said in an interview in 2006, “One effect that the Nobel Prize seems to have had is that more Arabic literary works have been translated into other languages.”

In fact, China could be cited as the most typical example in the study of the Nobel Prize. Chinese is one of the latest languages to win the prize. No Chinese writer had ever received this honour until Gao Xingjian won in 2000. In China, dozens of articles were written on this topic in newspapers, academic journals and on the Internet. Since the 1980s, many Chinese journalists and scholars have raised the question why no Chinese writer had ever won the Nobel Prize in Literature. They had also discussed the problem of translation. Wang Ning mentioned the role of the translator in his article: “The translators in our country (including myself) should bear a certain responsibility

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21 Examples include “A century of Nobel Prize for Literature and the absence of Chinese writers” (百年諾貝爾文學獎和中國作家的缺席) by Liu Zaifu (劉再復), “The Nobel Prize in Literature and China: questioning and reflection” (諾貝爾文學獎與中國: 質疑與反思) by Wang Ning (王寧) and “Why the Nobel Prize for Literature missed Chinese writers?” (諾貝爾文學獎為何與中國作家無緣) by Cui Yinhe (崔銀河).
because we spent a lot of efforts in translating foreign literature into China while
neglecting another more important job – introducing Chinese literature to the rest of
the world” (Wang 1997: 9). After Mo Yan won the prize, many conferences and
seminars were held in China to discuss the inspiration and implication of the prize.
Translation became one of the main focuses in discussion. Obviously, the
importance and honour of the Nobel Prize raised the attention to translation as well
as the status of the translator.

In this era of globalization, translation and cross-cultural communication is
becoming easier with the advanced technology. The role of translation is becoming
more critical than ever in all disciplines, including the international literary prizes
like the Nobel Prize. The mutual relationship between translation and the Nobel Prize
in Literature is becoming closer and closer. The case of the Nobel Prize showed that
translation is the decisive factor in the reception of “other” literature in the West.

2.2.2 The Judges as the Translator

As the judges of the Nobel Prize, the Swedish Academy members have to master
different languages. Their language competence enables them to translate foreign
literature into Swedish. Interestingly, some of their translations later won the Nobel
Prize for the writers. In the history of the Nobel Prize in Literature, these cases are
not exceptional. Hjalmar Gullberg, a member of the Swedish Academy from 1940 to
1961, translated Chilean Gabriela Mistral’s poems into Swedish and one year later
the latter won the Nobel Prize. Another Swedish Academy member, Anders Österling,
did translation for Italian poets Quasimodo (winner in 1959) and Eugenio Montale

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22 I attended a couple of these conferences: “Chinese Comparative Literature and Translation Studies Forum 2013” (held in Tsinghua University on 15 Oct, 2013) and “Author and Translator: A Mutually Rewarding yet Uneasy and Sometimes Fragile Relationship (held in The Chinese University of Hong Kong on 2 Nov, 2013). Howard Goldblatt was invited to these conferences to share his experience of translating Mo Yan’s novels.
(winner in 1975).

In fact, China’s success in the Nobel Prize in Literature seemed to be closely related to Swedish Academy member and sinologist Göran Malmqvist. He is the Swedish translator of the first possible Chinese winner Shen Congwen\textsuperscript{23} and the first actual Chinese winner Gao Xingjian. Translation scholar Liu Ching-chih recounted his encounter with Swedish Academy member Göran Malmqvist in a seminar in 1991. Liu asked the sinologist about the absence of Chinese writers in the Nobel Prize and Malmqvist ascribed it to “lacking good translations” (qtd. in Liu 2004: 40). Liu joked, “Then the Nobel Prize in Literature should be changed to the Nobel Prize in Literary Translation” (2004: 40) He further explained, “On reflection, it is rather ironical: Gao Xingjian won the Nobel Prize in Literature and Göran Malmqvist was the translator of Gao’s works – does that mean the latter’s translation was the decisive factor for the former to become a winner of this Prize? It must be. This example has further proved that the Prize should be renamed as the ‘Nobel Prize in Literary Translation’ and I think Göran Malmqvist should share the Prize with Gao. And then, it will be even more embarrassing,\textsuperscript{24} since Göran Malmqvist was one of the Selection Committee members for the Prize” (Liu 2004:40).

Indeed, the popularity of Gao’s writing among the general reading public, no matter in China or the West, was very limited before he received the prize. He was better known as a playwright or a scholar, rather than a novelist, before he won the Nobel Prize. However, Malmqvist appreciated his novel, *Soul Mountain* (*靈山*), and translated his manuscript into Swedish in 1992. Although the Nobel Prize is given for the whole body of works of the laureates, the Academy laid much emphasis on *Soul
\textsuperscript{23} Malmqvist revealed that Shen Congwen was “in line to win the 1988 Nobel Prize in Literature, if he had not suddenly passed away that year”(Kinkley 2004: xiv).
\textsuperscript{24} One thing Liu may not know is that the Swedish Academy did give the Prize to their members several times (Verner von Heidenstam in 1916, Erik Axel Karlfeldt in 1931, Pär Lagerkvist in 1951, Eyvind Johnson and Harry Martinson in 1974).
Mountain in the press release and other statements. “Indeed, in the Swedish Academy’s statement justifying their award to Gao, Soul Mountain is given a prominent place. One can reasonably assume that it was on the strength of this novel that the author was awarded the prize. This has put the novel in the spot-light and made it Gao’s best known work” (Yeung 2008: 79). Gao Xingjian is the first Chinese to get the prize, but why would he be the first among all Chinese writers? It is hard to deny that the recommendation of his Swedish translator Göran Malmqvist is the key factor for his success, since Malmqvist’s translation of Soul Mountain was easily and well received by his colleagues. It is not easy to tell or judge whether it involved any conflict of interest, but obviously this case revealed that the role of the translator could be much more influential than what people assume.

Göran Malmqvist also translated some novellas for the second Chinese laureate, Mo Yan, but he published them after Mo Yan won the prize to avoid any speculation of the Prize winner. Mo Yan’s primary Swedish translator, Anna Gustafsson Chen, is a student of Malmqvist. Since Anna Chen translated Mo Yan novels into the mother tongue of the judges, it may seem that she made the greatest contribution towards Mo Yan’s Nobel Prize. However, this statement would be unfair to Mo’s other translators, such as Howard Goldblatt, as Chen clarified that the Nobel judges would read different translated versions such as the German, English and French translations during the selection of the winner. However, the Swedish Academy would not reveal to the public which translations they have read during the selection, and there is even a rule to keep all information about the nomination and selection secret for 50 years. Therefore, it is by no means easy to analyse the

25 Mo Yan, Den genomskinliga rättikan, trans. Göran Malmqvist (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Tranan, 2014)
importance and contribution of a particular translation or translator.

2.2.3 The Importance of an English Translation and the Reliability of Translation

This part aims to discuss how translation exerts an influence on the Nobel Prize at a micro level. To what extent can translation affect the decision of the winner of the Nobel Prize? In fact, as stated above, analysing the influence of translation is not an easy job. Because of the strict secrecy, the nominations and other information in the past 50 years cannot be revealed. No one knows exactly who lost in which year, nor can one really ascribe the loss to poor translation. Even for the published statements and reports of the early prizes, they are only available, unfortunately, in Swedish. Moreover, as mentioned in the last section, the Academy will not reveal exactly which translations they have read. The above factors, indeed, are a barrier to the investigation of the role of translation on recent prizes, including Mo Yan’s prize.

However, we can make logical speculations and assumptions based on the available information. If we look into the bio-bibliography of Mo Yan on the Nobel Prize Official Website, a list of Mo’s works are cited. In addition to a selection of 17 of his major works in Chinese, the list also includes a selection of Mo’s translated works in five languages: 11 works in English (10 of which are translated by Goldblatt), 18 in French (by 6 different translators), 3 in Swedish (all by Anna Chen), 7 in Spanish (by 4 different translators), and 6 in German (by 5 different translators). Among all, Howard Goldblatt translated the largest number of Mo’s works (10 books). French translator Chantal Chen-Andro, and Noël and Liliane Dutrait come

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second (7 books) and third (4 books), respectively. It is reasonable to assume that the judges might have read some of these translations for reference. Although there is no way to measure the influence of each translation and each translator, Goldblatt must play a role, presumably an important role, on the judges’ evaluation of Mo Yan’s works, given that he translated the most.

Even if the judges, by little chance, did not read any of Goldblatt’s translations, the present examination is still useful. After all, the greatest significance of Goldblatt’s translation is the good reception of Mo Yan’s works in the West. Without Goldblatt, Mo Yan might not have had such a good reception in the Western world, which could be seen as a prerequisite to the Nobel Prize.

Good translation can help to build up an author’s name in the target literary world, and a good English translation is even more fundamental at this point. First, a good English translation raises the circulation of a book to a new level. Anna Chen’s husband Chen Maiping, a Chinese exiled writer living in Sweden, described the publishing of Chinese literature in Sweden in an interview. Swedish publishers have little interest in publishing Chinese literature and do not know much about it. No editor in publishing houses knows Chinese so they cannot read the original works. Therefore, they usually follow the American and European publishers. Instead of their own literary taste, they select Chinese literature to publish based on what have been translated in the US and Europe book markets, such as *Shanghai Babies*, *Wolf Totem* and other commercial fictions. Of course, the American and European now published better books like those by Mo Yan, Yu Wa and Yan Lianke, and the Swedish publishers did the same (Zhang 2015: 57). This tells us an interesting fact that the level of circulation of a book in the world seems to be largely determined by the European and American publishers. Obviously, if you want a book or an author to be famous worldwide, the first step to take the American or European market. To
succeed in these markets, an English translation that can get a good reception is indispensable.

Second, English is always used as an intermediate language in indirect (relay) translation. In fact, it is not an uncommon practice in the world that translators in other languages actually translate a book from the English translation, instead of directly from the original source language. The Turkish translation of *Yinggelishi* (格力士) a Chinese novel by Wang Gang, is actually translated from the English translation. The works of Japanese writer Haruki Murakami are translated from the English translations into German as well. As for Mo Yan, his works were translated into more than twenty languages, but up to 2012 actually quite a number of them are translated from Goldblatt’s rendition, including six of seven Spanish translations (Marín-Lacarta 2012: 1), Dutch translations, Portuguese translations and many uncounted hidden indirect translations. In the above cases of indirect translations, Goldblatt’s translations have, in fact, replaced the source text. The reason for indirect translation may seem explicit: a lack of translators. However, the underlying reason is rather commercial: faster, easier and lower risk. The English translation has already solved the cultural distance problem and proved to be well received in English language book market. Why bother doing it all again? The English hegemony certainly confirms the importance of an English translation. Howard Goldblatt, who is the only English translator of Mo Yan’s novels, undoubtedly plays a very vital role towards Mo Yan’s international success.

Going back to the Nobel Prize, how do the judges deal with the works written in

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30 All Dutch versions were translated from English until Mo won the prize in 2012 (a total of five books: *Red Sorghum, The Garlic Ballads, The Republic of Wine, Shifu, You’ll do Everything for a Laugh and Big Breasts and Wide Hips*). Since 2012, De Geus, a large publishing house in the Netherlands specializing in foreign literature, started to publish direct translations from Chinese.
a language that the majority of the Academy members cannot read? They consult oath-sworn experts for opinion, and read the translation of the original works.31 But according to Espmark, “the academy members could not delegate their task to experts but ‘must in the end make up their minds independently’; thus, when it came to non-European languages – and also to ‘minority’ languages in Europe – they had to rely on translations” (1991: 133). It is implied that the reading of translation is more important than the expert advice since the use of experts involves difficulties of “discriminating among the specialist” on “the reliability, impartiality and so on of their reports” (ibid.). Interestingly, they did not challenge the reliability of translation, which sometimes can be even more unreliable than an expert’s words. A piece of work can be rewritten into a totally different story for certain purposes in its translation. The manipulation in translation is always underestimated.

Of course, the judges have certainly felt doubts when reading translation. This is the core issue of translation in the Nobel Prize: How can the judges assess the works under the veil of translation?

Translation was mentioned several times in the published statements of the Prize. Despite being nominated nineteen times in total by nine different parties from 1926 to 1940, Greek poet Kostis Palamas never got a prize partly because of “the difficulty of assessing the language of the original works” (Espmark 1991:140).

Stefan Żeromski’s case was discussed in Alan Asaid’s article on how translation affected the decision of the Nobel Prize in Literature.32 In the statements of 1922,

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31 There are two types of translation the judges may read: available translations in the book market, or commissioned translations. “Where translations into English, French, German or the Scandinavian languages are missing, special translations can also be procured. In several cases such exclusive versions - with no more than eighteen readers - have played an important role in the recent work of the Academy.” Kjell Espmark, “The Nobel Prize in Literature,” Nobelpize.org, accessed 24 Feb 2015, http://www.nobelpize.org/nobel_prizes/themes/literature/espmark/

Nobel Committee chairman Per Hallström mentioned in the report that the works of Żeromski, who was nominated for the second time, “in translation he seems unbalanced, overstrung, lacks means and ends, confusing and weary” (my translation). Without reading the text directly, is it really fair to give such harsh comments on the stylistic qualities of a writer? Although Hallström pointed out that perhaps the translation gave such an impression, no evidence has shown that the judges can effectively and fairly differentiate the writing of the author from the translator. The report in 1924 described that regarding Stefan Żeromski, there is an “unfortunate mismatch between the foreign reader's review of his literary rank and his enthusiastic countrymen's admiration for him” (my translation). The award of 1924 finally went to another Polish writer Władysław Reymont. How did the Academy compare the writing of these two Polish writers when all they could read were translations?

The cases of Kostis Palamas and Stefan Żeromski are just the tip of the iceberg. No one knows exactly how many writers in the Nobel history might have been knocked out because of translation. These authors are admired in their own culture and literary world but fail to impress Western readers and judges. Such a discrepancy in reception is very normal, not only in the history of the Nobel Prize, but also in all different kinds of cross-cultural communication. The reasons behind it are worth discussing. Normally, it would be ascribed to cultural difference (which results in the untranslatability of the work), or the (Euro-) centrism of the Swedish Academy.

Some scholars, especially nationalists, tend to hold the view that it is not fair to adapt their national literature to the literary taste of the Nobel judges. They criticize the limitation of the Swedish Academy and the power relations between the West and

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33 The original words are “I översättning verkar han obalanserad, överspänd, oklar om mål och medel, ja virrig och tröttande.”
34 Quoted in Asaid’s article.
the East from a post-colonialist perspective. For example, Cai Yi stated:

The Nobel Prize in Literature, which should be set up for literature for all human beings in the world, actually was nothing more than a machine controlled by the West, a creation under Western ideologies...From the Prize history, we can see the hidden standpoint of the West, the projection of the power relation, the distance between the centre and the periphery, and the domination of the Western hegemony, utterance and narration. (My translation) (Cai Yi 2003: 175)

People like Cai believe that it is the Academy’s responsibility to avoid expressing their Eurocentrism in the selection of an international prize, and evaluate the literary works from different cultures objectively (Cai Yi 2003: 167).

However, the dilemma of the Swedish Academy is understandable. After all, the Nobel Prize is a Western institution with its own limitations. Certainly there is much room for improvement, but it would be idealistic to expect that anyone on earth can fairly evaluate the literature from every culture. Of course, you can criticize or even boycott the Prize, but if you want to get a Prize and enjoy the Nobel prestige, you have to accept the reality and observe their rules.

Considering this whole picture, the role of a translator might be more important than we imagined. International literary prizes are a cross-cultural communication activity that cannot work without the participation of translation. Repeatedly emphasizing the importance of translation, Espmark stated that the support of expertise “cannot, of course, replace the personal study upon which the members of the committee and the academy must base their final decisions; for such study, when it comes to the more ‘remote’ languages, reliance on translation is unavoidable” (1991: 140).
CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDY: ANALYSIS OF HOWARD GOLDBLATT’S TRANSLATION OF MO YAN’S WORKS

3.1 A Brief Introduction to Mo Yan and Howard Goldblatt

In 1955, Mo Yan was born into a poor rural family in Gaomi County, Shandong Province. Dropping out of school during the Cultural Revolution, he worked in a factory and later joined the People’s Liberation Army in 1976. Starting his writing career in the 1980s after the Chinese economic reform, this prolific writer has produced more than 12 novels, including *Honggaoliang Jiazu* in 1986, which was later made into film by Zhang Yimou and soon gained a national-wide reputation as the winner of the Silver Bear at the 1988 Berlin Film Festival. This was the first appearance of Mo Yan on the international literary stage, and Howard Goldblatt later translated this piece of work into English in 1993 (*Red Sorghum*). He obtained a Master's degree in Literature from Beijing Normal University in 1991.

Mo Yan’s writing is influenced by authors from around the world, including Chinese classical novels like *Water Margin*, the social realism of Lun Xun, as well as the magical realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and other foreign writers such as William Faulkner. Reading foreign literary works in Chinese translation, Mo upholds the idea of world literature and noted at the 2009 Frankfurt Book Fair that "literature can overcome the barriers that separate countries and nations" (Mo, 2010: 23).

Mo has received many national and international literary awards, including the Japanese Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize XVII in 2006, the American Newman Prize for Chinese Literature in 2009 and the Chinese Mao Dun Literature Prize in 2011. In 2012, the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to Mo Yan “who with hallucinatory realism merges folk tales, history and the contemporary.”

Different from the first Chinese laureate Gao Xingjian, Mo is embraced by the Chinese mainland

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government and state media because he is inside the system as the vice-chairman of the government-linked China Writers’ Association. Despite his official position in the communist government, his works are not without social and political criticism and his books got banned several times.

Mo Yan’s English translator Howard Goldblatt is seen as one of the most prominent translators of contemporary Chinese literature in the West. Born in southwestern California in 1939, Howard Goldblatt joined the Navy at the beginning of the 1960s and worked as a communication officer in Taiwan, where he had plenty of time to study Chinese language and culture. He continued his studies on Chinese and Chinese literature in San Francisco State University and Indiana University, where he received his doctoral degree in Chinese literature. While doing his dissertation, he did research on Xiao Hong (蕭紅), a female Chinese writer in the 1930s, and translated her two novels. Noticing his talents in translation, he began translating more contemporary Chinese literature and became more famous.

Writer John Updike once described the translation of contemporary Chinese novel in America as Howard Goldblatt’s “lonely province” (Updike, 2005). As an award-winning, celebrated translator, Goldblatt has devoted himself to the research and translation work of Chinese literature and the introduction of contemporary Chinese literature into the English-speaking world.

Howard Goldblatt is not only a translator, but also a founding editor of the academic journal Modern Chinese Literature, the author or the editor of a number of books on contemporary Chinese literature, and a researcher who has written many academic papers on the subject. Along with Goldblatt’s excellent command of

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36 In 1999, Goldblatt won the National Translation Award from the American Literary Translators Association for his translation with Sylvia Lin of Notes of a Desolate Man by Taiwanese novelist Chu Tien-wen. This annual prize is given to the best translation into English from any language in the world. Other awards his translations won include the 1989 Pegasus Prize for Literature, the 2009 Newman Prize, as well as the 2008, 2010 and 2011 Man Asia Prize.
Chinese language, his thorough understanding of contemporary Chinese literature and culture are the cornerstone for his success.

### 3.2 An Introduction to Mo’s Works and the English Translations


**Table 3: The Published Titles of the English Translations of Mo Yan’s literary works**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title in Chinese and Pinyin</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Year Published</th>
<th>Title of the Translations</th>
<th>Translator</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Year Published</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>爆炸 (Baozha)</td>
<td>崑崙出版社</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Explosions and Other Stories</td>
<td>Janice Wickeri and Duncan Hewitt</td>
<td>Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>豐乳肥臀^38</td>
<td>作家出版</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Big Breasts and Wide Hips</td>
<td>Howard Goldblatt</td>
<td>New York:</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^38\) Goldblatt wrote in the Introduction of Big Breasts and Wide Hips, “Big Breasts and Wide Hips was first published in book form by Writers Publishing House (1996); a Taiwan edition (Hong-fan) appeared later the same year. A shortened edition was then published by China Workers Publishing
The above books are novels except Shifu, You’ll do anything for a Laugh (2002) and Change (2010).39 All of them are included in the present research area while the text comparison part will focus on Red Sorghum, The Garlic Ballads, Big Breast and Wide Hips and Life and Death are Wearing Me Out. The reasons for choosing these four books have been explained in Section 1.4 (See P.14).

Red Sorghum is Mo Yan’s best known work in China and in the West, thanks to Zhang Yimou’s successful movie adaptation of the first two chapters. The novel tells a story of the three generations of a family in rural China during the Anti-Japanese War. With various graphic scenes, from banditry, kidnapping to seduction, the story is told in flashbacks by the grandson of the hero and heroine who fight the Japanese in a quite different way from the earlier communist socialist novels in the 1960s and 1970s. Instead of a righteous communist fighter, the protagonist in this novel was a bandit leader who had taken over a bride and killed her husband. His fearless and boisterousness were celebrated as he fought for his land and survival.

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*The Garlic Ballads* was Mo Yan’s most overtly political novel. Depicting bureaucracy and brutality in Communist Party policy, this book was banned briefly in mainland China in 1989 after the Tiananmen Square Protest for its anti-government sentiments. Set in the 1980s, this realist novel tells a story about a group of deprived peasants fighting the corrupted government. The peasants were ordered by the government to plant only garlic, only to be told that the government would stop buying their garlic because of a surplus. The helpless peasants angrily rioted against the county government and ended up in jail. This story is based on a real incident in a county in Shandong Province in the summer of 1987. As Mo Yan wrote, “This incident enraged me. I may look like a writer, but deep down I'm still a peasant. So I sat down and wrote the novel; it took me a month” (2000: 476).

Spanning almost the entire 20th century, *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* is a massive narrative about an ill-fated mother enduring all sufferings and tortures in bringing up her eight daughters and one son. As her children grew up, they lived their legendary lives and ended up in totally different fates. This novel contains certain feminist elements as the women were strong and terrific while most male characters were evil, weak or dependent. Mo once said, "If you like, you can skip my other novels, but you must read *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*. In it I wrote about history, war, politics, hunger, religion, love, and sex" (ibid). The novel stirred up controversy “for its eroticism and, in the eyes of some, inaccurate portrayal of modern China’s political landscape” (Mo 2004: ix) and ended up being banned for eight years.

*Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* is the latest novel in the four books that will be discussed in the text comparison. Set in the latter half of the 20th century in rural China, this historical novel tells a story of a kind but unfortunate landlord who was killed after Mao’s Land Reform Movement and reincarnated as various animals (donkey, ox, pig, dog and monkey). The English translation won the inaugural

Among these four selected books, the most focus is on *The Garlic Ballads* in the text comparison in this thesis because it best shows the difference in reception of Mo Yan’s novels in China and the West. Based on my research, this book did not seem to get much attention in Chinese press, but it seems quite appreciated in the Western world.

The following examples show *The Garlic Ballads* won critical acclaim from foreign readers. First of all, Howard Goldblatt revealed in an interview with Stephen Sparks that he discovered Mo Yan by this novel. A friend sent him a copy of what would become in English *The Garlic Ballads*, and he was hooked.\(^{40}\) "It was new, powerful, stylistically innovative," Goldblatt remembers. "I'd never read anything like this from China."\(^{41}\) "I wrote to Mo Yan, care of the now-notorious Writers Association, asking for permission to translate and locate a publisher. He had no idea who I was, but was happy to find a broader readership for his work."\(^{42}\) Without this book, Goldblatt might have missed Mo Yan. Obviously, Goldblatt chose this book not only because he liked this book, but also because he found the book marketable enough to attract foreign readers.

*The Garlic Ballads* was highly praised by Michael Duke in his article where he described the book as "a mature work of art that is stylistically impressive, emotionally powerful, and intellectually engaging” and "one of the most imaginatively conceived and artistically accomplished narrative evocations of the complexity of peasant life ever written in twentieth-century Chinese fiction" (1993: 40).


\(^{42}\) Quoted in Stephen Sparks, 2013.
The Nobel Committee also showed their preference for *The Garlic Ballads*. This novel was recommended by the Nobel Committee’s permanent secretary, Peter Englund, as a "gateway book" for the rest of Mo's work. Following the announcement of the Nobel Prize winner, Peter Englund was interviewed by freelance journalist Sven Hugo Persson about Mo Yan. When Persson asked which book people should start with if they want to get to know Mo’s work, Englund answered, “Why not *The Garlic Ballads*?” Furthermore, every year the Nobel Committee chooses a book excerpt from the works of the laureate to be read by the laureate in Stockholm. For Mo Yan, they selected chapter 16 of *The Garlic Ballads* instead of any other of Mo’s novels. The excerpt, together with the video of Mo Yan reading it, can be found in the Nobel Prize Official Website. Clearly, *The Garlic Ballads* won the Nobel Committee’s high appreciation although it is under-researched and less famous than Mo’s other novels, such as *Red Sorghum* and *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*.

Although this book is Mo Yan’s second major novel, it did not get as much attention as Mo’s other translated novels in China. According to the data on the China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database (CNKI), from 1994 to November 2014, the number of articles about *The Garlic Ballads* is far smaller than Mo’s other translated novels. The search result is shown below:

**Table 4: the numbers of articles in China related to Mo Yan’s works**

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44 Ibid.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Novels</th>
<th>No. of Related Academic Journal Articles</th>
<th>No. of Related Master Theses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

(Data Source: China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database website)

The above table shows that *The Garlic Ballads* is the least discussed and studied novel among all five of Mo Yan’s translated novels. Since this book is political and has been banned for five years, the attention that this book got in China is far less than other Mo Yan’s translated major novels. This little-noted book in China, however, caught Howard Goldblatt’s attention and earned recognition from the Nobel Committee. Undoubtedly, as the most known books by Mo Yan, *Red Sorghum* and *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, enjoy high reputation both in China and overseas (especially *Red Sorghum* which was made into a film and won the Golden Bear award at the Berlin Film Festival in 1988). Compared to these two books, *The Garlic Ballads* seems to have better reception in the West (and in the eyes of the Nobel Committee) than in China.

The reason for this discrepancy is worth researching. It seems translation plays an important role in this case. It should not be neglected that *Tiantang suantai zhi ge* that the Chinese readers read is Mo Yan’s original work while *The Garlic Ballads* that the foreigners read is Goldblatt’s translation. The difference in the reception of this book makes it valuable to investigate. Therefore, together with the other three
novels, this book will be studied in the following text comparison section where the discrepancies between the source text and the translation will be analysed.

3.3 The Translation View and Style of Howard Goldblatt

Although Howard Goldblatt has not written any essays on his translation strategies and theories, his view and style can be generally concluded from his interviews, his own articles and translation works. First of all, he believes that rewriting is unavoidable to retain the spirit of the original works. The true task and challenge for the translator should be “capturing the tone, the cadences, the imagery of an original text” (Goldblatt 1999: 42) instead of literally translating the words. Therefore, rewriting is “surely the nature of translation” (Goldblatt 2002: BW10). Re-creation is inevitably involved in translation because “a literal translation would be gobbledygook, meaningless” for languages “as disparate as Chinese and English”. Therefore, he has to “internalize a sentence and then recreate it in English” although the translation is “going to be quite different than the original, perhaps”. He hopes that “it winds up being essentially the same in terms of its impact” (ibid).

Second, the reception of the target reader is the main concern. Marketability is a big concern to Goldblatt, or at least to his publisher. He puts the focus on the readability, fluency and the literary qualities in his translation since natural language seems to be more appealing to general readers who read for entertainment. A reviewer of Goldblatt’s translation of Gu Hua’s novel Virgin Widows said, “Goldblatt's English translation is so very fluent that the story reads like a popular novel in English, though this readability is sometimes at the expense of the historical and cultural references of the original” (Zhang 1997: 178). Goldblatt said he always

asked himself a question during translation: “Have I given my reader the opportunity to enjoy the work in much the same way as a reader of the original could enjoy it? That, in case you’re paying attention, is my goal” (2011: 100).

Third, Goldblatt aims to introduce Chinese culture to the Western reader through translation, which he regards as a cross-cultural activity. In his article “Why do I Hate Arthur Waley? Translating Chinese in a Post-Victorian Era”, although he admitted Waley’s translation could reach out more easily to the target reader, he commented that Waley’s severe abridgement translation of Journey to the West (西遊記) would “deprive readers of English of some of the Chinese readers’ favourite episodes and verse” (Goldblatt 1999: 37). In a recent interview, he said that his wife, Sylvia Lin, tends to make the translation less exotic. A foreign translator like him, however, could not do the same thing because he would be accused of being a colonialist if he did so (李文靜 2012: 58). It seems that Goldblatt has increasingly foreignized his translations compared to the past. In recent translations, he retains relatively more cultural elements in his translation than before. In his rendition of Mo Yan’s novel Sandalwood Death (檀香刑) (2012), he first transliterated “爹” and “娘” as “Dieh” and “Niang” respectively in the whole novel, rather than translating them as “Mother” and “Father”, which is quite an unordinary practice in Chinese to English translation.

Fourth, Goldblatt repeatedly mentioned on different occasions that the translator deserves more freedom. Goldblatt shared a “spat” with the author on translating Wolf Totem (狼圖騰) in his self-interview. He concluded that, “If nothing else, a translator enjoys the freedom of interpretation and need not share an author’s preference in how to carry across a meaning or image” (Goldblatt 2011:103). Therefore, Mo Yan is one of Goldblatt’s favourite writers to work with because Mo gave much freedom to his translator. Mo once replied to Goldblatt, “Do what you want. I can’t read what
you’ve written. It's your book.” (Goldblatt 2013: 9). Goldblatt said that he really appreciates Mo’s attitude about relinquishing control over the translation (ibid.).

3.4 Textual Comparison: The Influence of Howard Goldblatt

This section presents a detailed study on the text comparison of a selection of Mo Yan’s works and Goldblatt’s translations. The comparison can clearly show the difference between the source text and the translation, which will shed light on how the evaluation of the Nobel judges and other readers on Mo Yan as well as the reception of Mo Yan in the English world may be influenced by Howard Goldblatt’s translation. The investigation will be carried out from two perspectives: ideological content and the literary quality.

3.4.1 Ideological Content

Regarding the mainstream ideology and political environment, discrepancies obviously exist between mainland China and the Western world. Under the rules of the Communist Party of China (CPC), socialism and collectivism are prevalent in China, especially in the Mao era. Even after the Chinese economic reform in 1978, the Party still holds ultimate authority and power over China. The freedom of speech and publication are restricted under the rule of the Communist Party, which is manifested in (self-)censorship.48

However, capitalism and individualism are essential elements of the Western ideology. They advocate the ideal of free markets and emphasize the importance of the individual over the interest of a collective society on the grounds of reason and personal autonomy. As a result, democracy and human rights, which emerge out of the Western tradition of liberal political thought, are the cornerstones of Western core values for the equal protection of freedom and personal rights.

48 The word “(Self-)censorship” was used in an article by Tan Zaixi to represent “censorship and/or self-censorship” (Tan, 2014).
Among all Western countries, Sweden is known as a typical Nordic welfare state. Combining a free market economy with welfare policies, the Nordic model, or Nordic Capitalism, is applied in this country based on its traditional advocacy of humanitarianism, which is derived from the principle of individualism, as the significance of every human being is considered equal in a moral sense. Under these values, the Nobel Prize, as a Swedish and Western institution, is strongly related to Western traditional humanism and humanitarianism, with its stated mission to honour those who have conferred the “greatest benefit on mankind”. Therefore, the “ideal tendency”, suggested by Alfred Nobel as the main criterion of the Prize in Literature, is interpreted in such a way. The words related to “human”, “humanity” or “humanitarianism” appeared in the prize citations of 23 laureates, which briefly justify their awards.49

As a native Chinese citizen who grew up in the Mao era, Mo Yan is “inside the system” of an authoritarian government that maintains rule through censorship. In regard to book censorship, all Chinese literature is screened by the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) before being published. As Chinese writer Ma Jian revealed, "Mainland writers can only express themselves within confines set by the state. They must avoid taboo topics...... and must above all never question the legitimacy of the Communist party."50 In order to get their works published in China, writers “inside the system” like Mo Yan could do nothing but make certain accommodation with Chinese official guidelines, and follow the orders given by the Chinese authorities in public. At the opening ceremonies of the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2009, Mo joined the official delegation’s boycott of the

session when Chinese dissident writers appeared, although he later explained that he had no choice. At a press conference in Stockholm, he even defended state censorship, which he claimed to be as necessary as airport security checks.

However, Mo Yan has a different attitude in his literary world. In his novels, not only does he uncover the dark side and unfairness in society, but he also criticizes government policies. Of course, he does it in a rather implicit way so that he will not get into trouble. Since literature faces comparatively less strict censorship than newspapers and the internet, Mo has been walking “a fine line between writing social criticism and angering communist censors” (Knight 2014: 95). Despite the fact that Mo Yan had been warned several times and a number of his novels, including *The Garlic Ballads* and *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, were banned for a short time in China, he managed to work his way up to being the vice-president of the state-run Chinese Writers Association (CWA) and even winning the state-sponsored Mao Dun Literary Prize in 2011.

In light of the history of the Nobel Prize in Literature, the controversy of Mo’s prize is understandable. Charles Laughlin pointed out that the Prize is usually given to “writers who forcefully oppose political repression”. Even laureates from developed countries are sometimes honoured as much “for representing a new, repressed, or marginalized voice as for their literary achievements”. This tradition leads some observers to conclude that the Prize is “political”. It is very rare for the prize to be given to a writer who is that close to an authoritarian regime. Laughlin

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54 Ibid.
believed that Mo Yan is only the second, after Soviet writer Mikhail Sholokhov in 1965.

How can Mo Yan be well received in both the East and the West in spite of the obvious distinction between their ideologies and political environments? Does translation have anything to do with it? We should not neglect the fact that most Western readers, including the Nobel judges, can only read translations, which are free from the (self-)censorship and ideological control of the Chinese authorities.

Example 1:

ST: 「一個政黨，一個政府，如果不為人民群眾謀利益，人民就有權推翻他；…我自認為並沒有違反四項基本原則，我只是說：如果是那樣。事實上，黨是全心全意為人民的。經過整黨，黨風正在好轉。天堂縣的大多數黨員幹部也是好的。」(莫言 1989: 359)

TT: “The people have the right to overthrow any party or government that disregards their well-being. … In my view this conforms in all respects to the Four Cardinal Principles of Socialism. Of course, I'm talking about possibilities—if that were the case. In point of fact, things have improved in the wake of the party rectification, and most of Paradise County's responsible party members are doing a fine job.” (Mo 1995: 270)

Chapter 19, The Garlic Ballads

In this example, which appears near the end of novel The Garlic Ballads, the writer spoke for all farmers in blunt terms through the defense of a young officer whose father rebelled against the local government. He made the point that the Communist government should be overthrown if they neglected people’s well-being. This statement is rather blatant because the Communist Party of China enjoys the highest status in China. Since the process of (self-)censorship forces Chinese writers to agree with the regime, and work within the confines of the officially acceptable discourse, writers who are inside the system try to avoid trouble by, for example,
making their criticism more implicit and showing their respect to the party. In the above case, Mo added that in fact “the Communist Party served the people whole-heartedly” ("黨是全心全意為人民的") (shaded) though he was criticizing the corruption of the party officials.

These words, however, were omitted in the translation of the bold line. Contrary to the Chinese book market, the freedom of publishing is protected in the Western world, where this kind of political censorship is not present (especially in the American book market where Howard Goldblatt’s translations of Mo Yan’s works were published). In the USA, writers can freely criticize their government without worrying any censorship. Goldblatt apparently decided that these words are unnecessary, if not unwanted, in the English translation.

Moreover, these words seem out of place in the whole book. The book reveals serious corruption among party officials, who had done nothing but oppress people. The reader can hardly find a good party official in the whole story. At the end, the bad officials did not even receive much punishment. The two statements, “the Communist Party served the people whole-heartedly” and “most of Paradise County's responsible party members are doing a fine job”, are hardly convincing in this sense because the Party officials were evil and corrupted in the whole book. These two statements are so ridiculous in the context that no one would agree. Therefore, the coherence of the book seems to be enhanced after omission of one of them.

Considering the ideological difference between the target reader and the source text reader, Goldblatt had a reason to cut these words. Growing up under capitalism, Western readers mostly have a different, if not negative, point of view of the Communist Party of China. It is highly questionable for them whether the Communist Party did whole-heartedly serve people. As an American who has
experienced the Cold War, Goldblatt himself might personally not agree with these words as well. On top of that, media and literature in Communist China were regarded as a tool of propaganda. Books that praised the Communist government are easily found in the PRC, while American readers are particularly interested in the literature that criticized the government (羅嶼 2008: 121). Having a book banned in China can always boost the sales of an author abroad. In fact, the publisher of The Garlic Ballads, Viking Penguin, did try to promote the book as a subversive voice in China. It is stated on the front flap of the dust jacket of the English version of The Garlic Ballads (1995) that the novel was “so inflammatory that it was banned in his homeland” although the book had already been unbanned in China two years before the English version published. Naturally, if Goldblatt and the publisher wanted better sales, they would try to sharpen Mo’s criticism in his novels so that they could stand out and attract Western readers.

The following two examples show the translator’s selection of the source text:

Example 2:


ST2: 父親對我說過，任副官是難找的純種好漢，只可惜英雄命短…… (莫言 1988: 75)

TT: Father told me that **Adjutant Ren was a rarity, a true hero**: unfortunately, heroes are fated to die young. (Mo 1993: 59)


Example 3:

ST1: 江隊長被爺爺罵得狼狽不堪，但他還是振振有詞地說：「余司令，你不要幸負我黨對你的殷切期望，也不要瞧不起八路軍的力量。濱海區
一直是國民黨的統治區，我黨剛剛開闢工作，人民群眾對我軍還認識不清，但這種局面是不會太久的，我們的領袖毛澤東早就為我們指明了方向。余司令，我做為朋友勸你一言，中國的未來是共產黨的。我們八路軍最講義氣，決不會坑人。您的部隊與冷支隊打伏擊的事，我黨全部瞭解。我們認為冷支隊是不道德的，戰利品的分配是不公道的。我們八路軍從來不幹坑害朋友的事情。當然，目前我們的裝備不行，但我們的力量一定會在鬥爭中壯大起來的。我們是真心實意為人民大眾幹事情的，是真打鬼子的。余司令，你也看到了，我們昨天，靠著這幾支破槍，在青紗帳裡，與敵人周旋了一天，我們犧牲了六名同志。而那些在墨水河戰鬥中得到大批槍支彈藥的人，卻在一邊坐山觀虎鬥，對於數百鄉親的慘遭屠殺，他們是有大罪的。兩相對照，余司令，您還不明白嗎？

爺爺說：「你打開天窗說亮話，要我幹什麼？」
江隊長說：「我們希望余司令加入八路軍，在共產黨的領導下，英勇抗戰。」
爺爺冷笑一聲，說：「讓我受你們領導？」
江隊長說：「您可以參加我們膠高大隊的領導工作。」
「讓我當什麼官？」
「副大隊長！」
「我受你的領導？」
「我們都受共產黨濱海特委的領導，都受毛澤東同志的領導。」
「毛澤東？老子不認識他！老子誰的領導也不受！」
「余司令，江湖上說，『識時務者為俊傑』，『良禽擇木而棲，英雄擇主而從』，『毛澤東是當今的蓋世英雄，你不要錯過機會啊！』」(莫言 1986: 93)

ST2: 江隊長被爺爺罵得狼狽不堪，但他還是振振有詞地說：「余司令，你不要幸負我們對你的殷切期望，也不要瞧不起我們的力量。」
爺爺說：「你打開天窗說亮話，要我幹什麼？」
江隊長說：「我們希望余司令加入膠東大隊。」
爺爺冷笑一聲，說：「讓我受你們領導？」
江隊長說：「您可以參加我們膠高大隊的領導工作。」
「讓我當什麼官？」
「副大隊長！」
「我受你的領導？」
「我們都受濱海特委的領導。」
「老子誰的領導也不受！」
「余司令，江湖上說，『識時務者為俊傑』，『良禽擇木而棲，英雄擇主而從』，你不要錯過機會啊！」(莫言 1988: 255-256)
TT: Jiang would not be put off, no matter how awkward Granddad’s harangue made him feel. “Commander Yu, please don’t disappoint us. And don’t underestimate our strength.”

“Let’s open the skylight and let the sun shine in,” Granddad said. “Just what do you have in mind?”

“We want you to join the Jiao-Gao regiment.”

“In other words, take orders from you,” Granddad sneered.

“You, sir, can be part of the regimental leadership.”

“My title?”

“Deputy regiment commander!”

“Taking orders from you?”

“We all take orders from the Binhai-area special committee.”

“I don't take orders from anybody!”

“Commander Yu, as the saying goes, ‘A great man understands the times, a smart bird chooses the tree where it roosts, and a clever man chooses the leader he’ll follow.’ Don’t pass up this chance!” (Mo 1993: 198)

The above two examples are cited from Red Sorghum: A Novel of China, which is the first published translation of Mo’s works in English. The first source text (ST1) of both examples is from all different mainland China editions while the second source text (ST2) is from the Taiwan edition (1988). Goldblatt’s English version (1993) chose the Taiwanese edition as the source text, instead of the mainland ones. He explained in the Translator Notes that the choice was made “at the request of the author” because the Taiwan edition “restores many cuts made in the mainland Chinese edition” (Mo 1993: Copyright page). From the above examples, instead of restoring cuts, we can see that the Taiwan edition actually cut quite a large amount of words (the shaded) related to the Communist Party.

In example 2, the bold line in ST1 means it was hard to find a true hero like

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Adjutant Ren except in the Communist Party. This blatantly positive comment to the Communist Party, however, has been removed in ST2, as well as in Goldblatt’s translation, where Adjutant Ren was just described as a rare true hero.

In example 3, ST1 includes a whole paragraph (the shaded one) about a Communist Party member, Jiang, who is speaking for his Party and blaming the army of the Chinese Nationalist Party (or National Army 國軍). This has all been omitted in ST2 and in the TT. Moreover, the bold words like “我黨” (our party) and “八路軍的” (Eighth Route Army’s) are just translated as “us” and “our” respectively. The communist elements like “共產黨” and “毛澤東同志” (Communist Party and Comrade Mao Zedong) are removed, let alone the words that praise Mao and the Communist Party like “毛澤東是當今的蓋世英雄” (Mao Zedong is the most prominent hero these days).

Obviously, the rewriting of ST2 is out of political consideration, as the promotion of Communism was prohibited by law in Taiwan before 2000. The positive comments on the Communist Party and the negative comments on the National Party (the then governing party of Taiwan) are either omitted or rewritten. Censorship in Taiwan plays an important role here.

In fact, of the ten books by Mo Yan that Goldblatt translated, only the first three books, namely Red Sorghum, The Garlic Ballads and The Republic of Wine are translated from the Taiwan editions. For The Republic of Wine, the choice is justifiable since the Taiwan edition (1992) came out earlier than the mainland edition (1993). But for the other two books, it may be assumed that the choice of the source text is more related to the ideological difference between mainland China and the United States. In regard to the tension against communism still lingered in the early
1990s (especially after the Tiananmen Incident), American audience did not see mainland China, which is ruled by Chinese Communist Party, favorably in those days. The ideology of the Taiwan edition would be easier for the American audience to accept.

It should be noted that the claim that the choice of the Taiwan edition as the source text was “requested by the author” might not be completely true. Goldblatt and the American publisher, Viking Penguin, seem to have both played roles in making the decision. Viking is the first publisher of Goldblatt’s translation of Mo’s novels. Both of Mo’s novels it published, Red Sorghum and The Garlic Ballads, are translated from the Taiwan editions even though the mainland editions were published earlier. The other of Mo’s novels that were published in other houses like Arcade Publishing and Seagull Books were all translated from the original mainland editions (except The Republic of Wine for the reason mentioned above). Here we can see the influence of the patronage, in this case the commercial publisher Viking Penguin, on translation activities.

No matter who made the decision, the rewriting and the choice of the source text certainly affect how Western readers, including the Nobel Judges, judge Mo Yan and the values of his works. Is he a conscious writer or just a propaganda tool controlled by the Communist Party? The overwhelming political controversies after Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize mainly put the focus on his political attitude. It is generally believed that the Nobel Prize in Literature should be given to writers who produce great literature. However, can great literature with an ideal direction come from a place with limited freedom of expression? The Nobel Committee thinks it can. Their

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57 After the Tiananmen Incident, the US Congress and media widely criticized the CCP’s military action against the students and civilians. Military sales to China were suspended. Large scale protests against the Chinese government took place around the country. Robert d. Mcfadden, “The West Condemns the Crackdown,” The New York Times, June 5, 1989, http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/05/world/the-west-condemns-the-crackdown.html
secretary Peter Englund said, “You can open almost any one of his [Mo Yan’s] books and see it’s very critical about many things to do with Chinese history and also contemporary China. But he’s not a political dissident. I would say he is more a critic of the system, sitting within the system.” It is worth noting that the Nobel judges, except Göran Malmqvist, can only read translations, so the Mo Yan in their eyes is based on translations, which are manipulated by ideology and patronage (the publisher in this case).

American sinologist Perry Link pointed out that the social criticisms by Mo Yan and other inside-the-system writers are only limited to local bullies but “leave the top out of the picture” (2012: 22), which is different from dissident writers like Liu Xiaobo (劉曉波) and Zheng Yi (鄭義) who “denounce the entire authoritarian system, including the people at the highest levels” (ibid.). According to the examples discussed in this section, Link’s argument is quite accurate because Mo Yan is very careful in order to avoid trouble when he makes criticism about society.

Undeniably, Mo Yan is a writer with a social conscience, even though he is not a dissident writer, but he has to comply with certain hidden rules when publishing in mainland China. Of course, translation cannot transform an authoritarian puppet into a subversive dissident writer, but it might help to restore the voice of a suppressed writer. Moreover, it is hard to deny that the English translation of Mo Yan’s novels play a role in building up his subversive image in the Western world at the very beginning and thus, reducing his “red background”. After all, packaging is essential in modern society. Ironically, the original voice of the author is sometimes difficult to detect with all the different kinds of (self-)censorship that took place, both in mainland China and Taiwan, as well as the rewriting that occurred as part of Goldblatt’s translation.
3.4.2 Literary Quality

Many Mo Yan supporters argued that people put too much attention on politics. They agree with what Mo Yan said in his Nobel lecture and on many other occasions that literature should transcend politics. Indeed, the aesthetic value of a piece of literary work is a very important factor for a literary prize like the Nobel Prize in Literature. Mastery of language and writing skills has to be shown in order to win the prize. Paradoxically, the judges are unable to read the original works on many occasions but rely on translation to relish the artistic style of the author and evaluate the literary works because of the language barrier.

It generates a number of questions: how much of the original style can be restored after translation? How can one’s masterly use of a language be conveyed into another language? How can the judges differentiate and evaluate the style of the writer from that of the translator? Are these even possible? Howard Goldblatt once described his experience as a judge for an international literary prize in an interview, writing:

…the other prizes are given for the book, not the translation, since the judges cannot know if in fact the translators have done their job well; I served as a judge for one of the PEN contests, in which a great many languages were included, while we judges were competent in three or four. I loved the book we chose, but to this day can state only that the translation read well.

The Nobel judges pretty much feel the same way as Goldblatt. Those who cannot read the source text can only evaluate the quality of writing of the translation of which the words are the translator’s, but not the author’s. As Howard Goldblatt said,

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“Anyone who reads Mo Yan in English is reading Goldblatt.”\(^{60}\) The role of translation in this perspective might be even more crucial than ideology.

**Stylistic Elements**

Mo Yan seems to be a lucky one since his English translator Howard Goldblatt not only did a good job in restoring his style, but also produced well-received translations. It can be seen from German sinologist Kubin’s positive comments on Howard Goldblatt’s translation,

There are many much better writers here in China who aren't so prominent because they've not been translated into English, or rather they don't have the outstanding American translator Howard Goldblatt. He has a very sophisticated way of translating into English, not translating word for word, sentence for sentence or paragraph for paragraph. He translates the whole, as has been common in Europe since the 18th century. Howard Goldblatt knows exactly what the writers' weaknesses are, and manages to translate into a language that is better than the original Chinese. That's why Chinese works are often translated from English into German.\(^{61}\)

Although Kubin has made harsh comments on contemporary Chinese literature a couple of times, his comment is worth discussing. How might Goldblatt have translated into a language that is “better than the original Chinese”? The following examples show the translation approach of Goldblatt.

**Example 4:**

**ST:** 有一個青面獠牙的光屁股頑童抓起一團牛糞打過來，不知他是想打犯人呢還是想打警察呢還是既想打犯人又想打警察抑或是既不想打犯人又不想打警察他只是想扔牛糞玩耍。（莫言 1989: 345）

**TT:** …including one hideous-looking, bare-assed juvenile who flung a cow chip at them, although it was impossible to tell if he was trying to hit a


prisoner, or a policeman, or both, or was just moved to throw something. (Mo 1995: 261)

The above example shows the difference of language style between the translator and the author. The language in the source text is very clumsy and repetitive. It is uncommon in a Chinese novel to have a 52-word-long sentence without any punctuation at all. On top of that, the words “想打” was repeated six times in this single sentence, while the words “犯人” and “警察” were repeated three times each. Mo Yan might have done it deliberately because it might look unnatural and clumsy even in the eyes of some source text readers, but it would look even more unnatural, if not poorly-written, in English if Goldblatt translated it literally, as in: ‘it was impossible to tell if he was trying to hit a prisoner or a policeman or hit a prisoner and a policeman or not trying to hit a prisoner or a policeman but just moved to throw something for fun’. The current translation not only delivers the meaning of the sentence but also make it more concise and more appropriate to the literary standard in the target language.

Example 5:
ST: 「謝謝審判長的提醒，我馬上進入實質性辯護。近年來，農民的負擔越來越重。我父親所在村莊，種一畝蒜薹，要交納農業稅九元八角。要向鄉政府交納提留稅二十元，要向村管會交納提留三十元。要交納縣城建設稅五元（按人頭計算），賣蒜薹時，還要交納市場管理稅、計量器檢查稅、交通管理稅、環境保護稅，還有種種名目的罰款！所以有的農民說「雁過拔毛」。再加上近年來化肥、農藥等農業生產所需物資大幅度漲價或變相漲價，農民得到的利益已經很少。今年以來，這種種違背國家政策的現象到了令人無法容忍的地步，所以，我認為，『天堂蒜薹案件』的發生不是偶然的。」(莫言 1989: 356)
TT: “Thank you for reminding me, Your Honor. I'll get right to the point. In recent years the peasants have been called upon to shoulder ever heavier burdens: fees, taxes, fines, and inflated prices for just about everything they need. No wonder you hear them talk about plucking the wild goose's tail
feathers as it flies by. Over the past couple of years these trends have gotten out of control, which is why, I believe, the Paradise County garlic incident should have come as no surprise.” (Mo 1995: 268)

The source text in example 5 shows that Mo Yan paid a lot of attention to details when he described the increasingly heavier burden of farmers. Eight types of taxes or fees are listed in the text, such as agricultural tax (農業稅), construction tax (建設稅), market management tax (市場管理稅) and so on. The amounts of some taxes are even stated very accurately (九元八角, or 9 dollars and 80 cents RMB). However, does it really matter if the reader does not know all these kinds of taxes and fees? Would the understanding of the story be hindered? At least, this is by no means important information for an ordinary Western reader, who probably has no idea how much 9 dollars and 80 cents RMB meant to a Chinese farmer in the 1980s. If all the names and amounts of taxes were translated, the flow of reading would be disturbed. Therefore, Goldblatt used only four noun phrases (fees, taxes, fines, and inflated prices) to conclude more than 150 Chinese characters of all these complicated taxes and fees. The English translation is more concise and focused, and the reader would not be distracted to digest those proper names and numbers.

Furthermore, the diction in Goldblatt’s translation shows a difference from Mo Yan’s source text.

Example 6:

ST: 在院子裡走著，灼熱的土地烙著腳，熱氣上沖，他感到雙眼正在分泌眼眵。(莫言 1989: 2)
TT: Baked earth burned the soles of his feet; the intense heat made his eyes water. (Mo 1995: 1-2)

Goldblatt used the word “water” to interpret the condition of “分泌眼眵” in the source text. “眼眵” means eye discharge. Since the character Gao Yang here was an
uneducated peasant, the words that appeared in his thought could be unpolished. However, this image might be too gross for the Western reader, who usually refers to it as “sleep in the eyes”, a more euphemistic term for eye discharge. In this case, translating it as “his eyes water” could be a good way to rewrite the source text with a view to avoiding the unpleasantness of the target reader.

Example 7:
ST: 這時，司馬亭的喊叫聲又一次湧進廂房，父子二人的身體都不安地絞動起來，仿佛屎逼，好像尿急。(莫言 2003: 9)
TT: The silence in the barn was broken once again by the shouts of Sima Ting, setting father and son squirming, as if their bowels or bladders were about to betray them. (Mo 2004: 10)

Similar to example 6, euphemisms once again replaced the original expressions. In this example, Shangguan Shouxi and his father Shangguan Fulu panicked when they heard the shouts of Sima Ting. Mo Yan used “屎逼” and “尿急”, which means urge to poop and pee, to describe their movement in order to show their anxiety. In the English translation, not only did Goldblatt euphemize the two vulgar images with neutral words——human organs “bowels” and “bladders” —— he even attributed human qualities to these two organs by saying “as if their bowels or bladders were about to betray them”. This vivid image certainly created an additional humorous effect in the translation.

Besides the use of language, one of the most important stylistic features in Mo’s novels is the rhythmic beauty. In the view of the difference in tone and pronunciation between two languages, rhymes could be a difficult task for the translator. How can Howard Goldblatt reproduce the sound in the English? The following example is a jingling rhyme in Mo’s novels.
**Example 8:**

**ST:** 引人注目，聞人圍攏，很快形成一個場子，打牛胯骨的叫化子洪泰嶽頓喉高唱，雖是公鴨嗓，但抑揚頓挫，有板有眼，韻味十足：
太陽一出照西牆，東牆西邊有陰涼。
鍋灶裡燒火炕頭上熱，仰著睡覺燙脊樑。
稀粥燙嘴吹吹喝，行善總比為惡強。
俺說這話您若不信，回家去問你的娘…… (莫言 2006: 19)

**TT:** You drew crowds, quickly transforming the square into an entertainment center: the beggar Hong Taiyue banging on his ox bone and singing. It may have been more like the squawks of chickens and ducks, but the cadence had a recognizable rhythm, and it was not without a bit of charm:

The sun emerges and lights up the western wall,
The western edge of the eastern wall is chilly as fall.
Flames from the oven heat the bed and the hall,
Sleeping on the back keeps the spine in its thrall.
Blowing on hot porridge reduces the pall,
Shunning evil and doing good makes a man stand tall.
If what I am saying you heed not at all,
Go ask your mother who will respond to my call (Mo 2008: 23)

Chapter 8, Life and Death are Wearing me out

Example 8 is a jingle sung by a character named Hong Taiyue, a beggar who went around singing and doing tricks. In the source text, the writer emphasized that his singing is “抑揚頓挫，有板有眼，韻味十足” (cadenced and charming). Therefore, attention should be put on the sound and rhythm of this song. In the source text, there are five lines in rhyme of [iang]: 壻(qiang), 涼(liang), 樑(liang), 強(qiang) and 娘(niang). Not only did Goldblatt reproduce the rhyme in those five lines, but he actually made all lines in the same rhyme of [-all] in the translation. Instead of literally translating the exact meaning, he tried to rhyme every line while keeping the meaning at the same time, or made slight alternation only when he could not find any
Goldblatt once revealed in an interview that he reckoned it is much more difficult to rhyme in English than Mandarin.

And what’s important here is the sound of the words, without music. Chinese opera rhymes almost every line, and Chinese rhymes much more easily than English. One way to go about it was not to worry about the rhymes and just translate the meaning. But that didn’t work. I exhausted my storehouse of rhymes. Sometimes there were ten or fifteen rhymes in a paragraph. And I had to rhyme while keeping the meaning, or changing it slightly if I could not find a word that rhymed with that exact meaning. So it was untranslatable in a way, but something could be done. However, he managed to rhyme more lines in his translation than the lines in the source text in the above example. It showed his great efforts on the recreation of rhymes and thus, enhancing the rhythmic beauty of Mo’s works.

Anna Sun (孫笑冬) wrote an article titled “The Diseased Language of Mo Yan” in *Kenyon Review* criticizing Mo Yan’s language. In her article, she tried to explain that Mo Yan’s language is "diseased" because of the damage to the Chinese language caused by the revolutionary discourse and being cut off from the grand Chinese literary tradition. She stated that Mo Yan’s work is not illumination, but “disorientation and frustration due to his lack of coherent aesthetic consideration.”

These are manifested in Mo Yan’s language and the mixture of disparate language...
registers:

Open any page, and one is treated to a jumble of words that juxtaposes rural vernacular, clichéd socialist rhetoric, and literary affectation. It is broken, profane, appalling, and artificial; it is shockingly banal. The language of Mo Yan is repetitive, predictable, coarse, and mostly devoid of aesthetic value.66

Along with these negative comments, Sun even compared Mo with Goldblatt in terms of literary merit and pointed out that the translation is aesthetically better than the source text.

The English translations of Mo Yan’s novels, especially by the excellent Howard Goldblatt, are in fact superior to the original in their aesthetic unity and sureness. The blurb for The Republic of Wine from Washington Post says: ‘Goldblatt’s translation renders Mo Yan’s shimmering poetry and brutal realism as work akin to that of Gorky and Solzhenitsyn.’ But in fact, only the ‘brutal realism’ is Mo Yan’s; the ‘shimmering poetry’ comes from a brilliant translator’s work.67

Sun’s comments on Mo Yan are quite harsh, subjective and potentially controversial. In fact, she did not provide any substantial evidence to support her criticism of Mo Yan. However, her observation about the discrepancies between the language of an author and a translator is worth noting. Her conclusion on the superiority of Goldblatt over Mo seems very arbitrary, in view of the fact that the Chinese author and the American translator write in two completely different languages which are subject to different norms and literary standard. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Goldblatt’s translations are considered to have high literary merit and are well-received in the target culture. The target reader and almost all Nobel judges, who cannot read Chinese, can never know whether Mo Yan’s language is “repetitive, predictable, coarse and mostly devoid of aesthetic value”. The Mo Yan in their eyes is always a writer with shimmering poetry who deserves a Nobel Prize. However, not everyone notices that this grand impression is actually blended with the shadow of

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
Mo Yan is a prolific writer who can write a novel very fast. Regarding Mo’s rapid writing speed, Kubin questioned the quality of writing. Mo Yan claimed that it only took him 43 days to write Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out, and 83 days for Big Breasts and Wide Hips, a book which contains more than 500,000 Chinese characters. According to Kubin, a German author usually only writes 100 pages a year, but Mo can write 800 pages in three months. Therefore, Kubin brought out a speculation that Mo might not have time to revise or refine his works. Chen Sihe 陳思和 also agreed with Kubin’s argument and made a remark that writing too fast could be rough (“寫得太快難免粗疏”) (qtd in 蔣泥 2012: 28). Indeed, the quality of writing can be enhanced with revising and editing, which is actually the job of an editor. However, editors in China do not work the same way as editors at US publishers. Mo Yan told Goldblatt that he handed one of his novels, which was as thick as a brick, to his editor at a publishing house in China and requested him not to change any word (“一個字不改！”) (Goldblatt 2004: 26). With the low status of editors in China, the editing work is only limited to proofreading, fixing typos or other minor errors. They might need to ensure the book would not be involved in any trouble once published (i.e. self-censorship). When the book is going to be published in the West, the translator takes up part of the duty of editing since editors at commercial publishers do not know Chinese.

Goldblatt admitted that editing is very important during his translation of Chinese novels (Goldblatt 2004: 22). What he said somehow proved Kubin’s speculation. He

quoted a term ("retro-editing") used by William Hutchins, one of Egyptian Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz’s translators, to describe the “effort to bring the work more in line with an admittedly arbitrary literary standard set by a translator and the editor of the translated text” (ibid). Goldblatt gave three reasons for the need of “retro-editing” in producing translations of contemporary Chinese novels, including the quality of writing, the role and status of Chinese editors and publishing economics. Retro-editing can be quite easily found in Goldblatt’s translation of Mo Yan’s works. According to Goldblatt, Mo Yan’s novels sometimes “lose their shape” either because he “has lost interest in the current novel as the idea for the next one forms in his head, or he lards his work with irrelevant and obtrusive asides that spring to mind” (Goldblatt 2004: 25). If Goldblatt wants to produce a good work that appeals to his reader, he can do nothing but take on the role of an editor. The editing in the last chapter of The Garlic Ballads is a typical example. Goldblatt and the editor at Viking found that the original ending of this book was too weak and that it was “leaving all his carefully drawn characters in limbo” (ibid). Goldblatt suggested a new last chapter with some ideas and Mo complied immediately. Mo Yan also liked the new chapter and even replaced the old one with it in subsequent Chinese editions. This is hardly a common case in literary translation because writers tend to be very protective towards their own works. Normally they only accept editing in translation for better reception in the target culture. It is beyond imagination that the translator actually exerts influence on the author’s original writing in the source language and culture.

The edit actually improved the organization of the story and the literary quality of the book. The old ending can hardly be considered a complete ending. The story stops abruptly at Chapter 19 after the presiding judge of the case of Garlic Incident said the verdict would be announced in 30 minutes. However, the story does not
continue in Chapter 20. Instead, there are just news and editorials from an official newspaper reporting the Garlic Incident. The endings of the main characters like Fourth Aunt and Gao Ma are absent. In contrast, the new ending gives a clearer account of the fates of the characters. To a large extent, the change in ending is not made because of the difference between the literary standard in China and the West, but because the new ending is really better than the old one in both literatures. Otherwise, Mo Yan would not have replaced the Chinese version with the new ending.

From this example, we can see that Goldblatt is not only a translator of Mo Yan, but perhaps could even be called an editor, if not “a collaborator”, who exerts influence on Mo Yan’s works. In an encyclopedia about modern East Asian literature, it is also stated that “many of his [Mo Yan’s] works have been masterfully translated into English by Howard Goldblatt, in a close collaboration that has at times influenced Mo Yan’s writing” (Braester 2003: 541).

As one of the most important techniques in Goldblatt’s retro-editing, omission is not only limited to the lexical or syntactic level, but extends to the whole page. *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* can be cited as a good example. With reorganization of the chapters and omission, the translation is far shorter than the source text. Goldblatt stated in the introduction part of the book that the cut was made by the author: “The current translation was undertaken from a further shortened, computer-generated manuscript supplied by the author” (Mo 2004: xii). However, he came clean later in his article “Blue Pencil Translating: Translation as Editor” that it was actually him who decided to reduce the length of this novel with the author’s permission: “Not only is the novel [*Big Breasts and Wide Hips*] extremely long, it includes protracted portions of material that beg understanding in an otherwise realistic novel… With Mo Yan’s permission, I removed those items and others, trimming the 800 pages
down to something over 500 and sent it off to the publisher” (Goldblatt 2004: 26).

A lot of Chinese critics or writers, who are very protective towards Chinese literature, always blame translators for over-editing or making heavy cuts when translating Chinese novels. They criticize foreign translators for imposing their own literary standards on works that they translate with their arrogant colonial mentality. However, cutting the length actually greatly helps with the reception of Mo Yan’s novels in the West. Martina Hasse, one of the German translators of Mo Yan’s works, revealed in an interview that she was rejected many times for the great length when she sought publication for her translation of Mo’s *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* because the publishers thought the book was so long that no one would read it. Indeed, a long and obscure book is hard to arouse the interest of usual Western readers who just want to read for fun or at most catch a glimpse about China. That is not something that a commercial publisher would like to see. To get good sales in Western countries, it is almost essential to make quite a lot of edits. After all, translation activities, as Lefevere suggested, are manipulated by patronage, which is the commercial publisher in Mo Yan and Goldblatt’s case. Ironically, Mo’s Nobel success, to a certain extent, is credited to international recognition, which is based on the commercial success in the English book market.

Some critics might hold the belief that the heavy cut is only catering to commercial purposes which would diminish the quality of writing, if not vulgarize the original novel. However, not only the commercial publishers, but literary experts in the West also notice the verbosity in Mo’s novels. Göran Malmqvist, the only Nobel judges who can read Chinese, admitted that one of Mo Yan’s weaknesses is

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the length of his works. His view can probably show some hints on how Nobel judges see Mo Yan. Long before Mo won the Prize, Malmqvist told Mo Yan in a chat, “I think your novels are too long and you are writing too much.”

Goldblatt’s bold cuts and editing actually are good practices to tailor Mo’s novels to the Western literary standard, if not uplifting the quality of writing of his works.

A brief conclusion can be drawn based on the above comparison of the literary quality of the source text and the translation. In translating Mo’s novels, Goldblatt took quite a great deal of liberty in his renditions. He managed to restore a large part of the original style but also gave up certain surface structure to suit his target reader in the West. Moreover, there are instances of improvement on the original such as more concise language and better organization of chapters. With Goldblatt’s well-received translation, Mo Yan’s works earned favourable comments in the West. Undeniably, it is impossible to differentiate the style of the writer from that of the translator if the reader does not know the source language. For the Nobel judges who do not know the source language, the best way to find out the writer’s original style is by reading translations in as many different languages as possible but of course, time is a big concern, so the judges must rely on the most widely-read languages like English.

3.5 Paratextual and Extratextual Influence

Nowadays, many literary translators no longer hide in their own houses burying themselves in translating texts. They might actively participate in different academic events, act as a mediator or even promote their translations. This section will list the paratextual and extratextual influence of Goldblatt on the building of Mo Yan’s

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70 This is quoted from an interview in *Southern Weekend* dated on 20 Oct, 2005 and I translated it from Chinese to English. The original words are “我說莫言你的小說太長了，你寫得太多了”.
international fame and literary capital which paved the way to his Nobel Prize.\footnote{Coined by the French literary theorist Gérard Genette, the term ‘paratext’ indicates the reference texts surrounding the main text, including not only prefaces, introductions or illustrations (peritexts) but also reviews, criticisms or interviews with the author (epitexts) (Gil-Bardají et al. 2012: 7). The paratextual influence of Goldblatt in this section focuses on Goldblatt’s own published articles, book reviews and interviews.}

### 3.5.1 The Reputation of the Translator

As the most famous translator of Chinese contemporary novels in America, Howard Goldblatt produces numerous excellent translations. John Updike described American translation of contemporary Chinese fiction as “the lonely province”\footnote{John Updike, “Bitter Bamboo: Two Novels from China,” \textit{The New Yorker}, May 9, 2005, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/05/09/bitter-bamboo} of Goldblatt. As the recipient of two translation fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts in the US\footnote{The Translation Fellowships in are offered to literary translators for translation projects from other languages into English. The first fellowship Goldblatt received is for translating Mo Yan’s \textit{Red Sorghum} in 1992 and the second one is for \textit{My Life as Emperor} by Su Tong in 2004. “Online Grant Search”, \textit{National Endowment for the Arts}, accessed June 25, 2015, https://apps.nea.gov/grantsearch/} and a Guggenheim Fellowship,\footnote{Guggenheim Fellowship is offered to men or women “who have already demonstrated exceptional capacity for productive scholarship or exceptional creative ability in the arts”. Goldblatt received the fellowship for translating \textit{Sandalwood Death}, which is also written by Mo Yan. “About the Fellowship,” \textit{John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation}, accessed June 25, 2015, http://www.gf.org/about/fellowship/} Goldblatt has rendered more than fifty titles from Taiwan or mainland China into English. His translations have won several important translation prizes, such as the Translation of the Year Prize from the American Literary Translators Association in 2000 for translating Chu Tien-wen’s \textit{Notes of a Desolate Man}, and the inaugural Man Asian Literary Prize (2007) for \textit{Wolf Totem} by Jiang Rong. These awards have set the seal on his distinguished translator career. The good sales of these prize-winning translations might also benefit Goldblatt’s other translations.\footnote{Wolf Totem is a bestseller in China which won many domestic and abroad literary awards.}

On one hand, the reputation of Howard Goldblatt is surely an attraction to his faithful readers, who might read all of the books he translated. On the other hand, it is easier for a renowned translator to get his translation published in a well-known
publishing company. Mo Yan’s first American publisher, Viking Penguin, is a good example of well-known publishing company which enjoys worldwide fame. Its parent company, the Penguin Group, is one of the leading trade book publishers in the world. Before Mo Yan, five authors from Viking Penguin have been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature: John Steinbeck (1962), Saul Bellow (1976), Patrick White (1973), Nadine Gordimer (1991) and J. M. Coetzee (2003). Not only can its reputation draw a large amount of readers, but a large, famous and experienced publishing company also manages to carry out better promotion with appropriate and effective sales tactics. This can be manifested in the design of the book cover, the price and the accessibility of the books. The other two publishers of Mo Yan’s books (Arcade Publishing and Seagull Books) are also famous publishing companies though they might not be as famous as Viking.

Without an intimate knowledge of Chinese literature, most editors in foreign publishing houses rely on the choice of reputable translators. Goldblatt translated many Chinese contemporary authors, including Su Tong (蘇童), Wang Shuo (王朔), Bi Feiyu (畢飛宇), Jia Pingwa (賈平凹). However, among all Chinese authors, he has translated more of Mo Yan’s works than any other single author. When Goldblatt first wrote to Mo Yan to ask for his permission to translate *The Garlic Ballads* in 1987, Mo Yan was just “a bit of a nobody” (Goldblatt 2012: 5) but Goldblatt was already a scholar with a good reputation in China studies. In these twenty-five years, Goldblatt had translated five of Mo’s long novels, a collection of short stories and many other novellas. Mo Yan was plucked from obscurity and turned into a prestigious laureate of the splendid Nobel Prize. It seems Goldblatt’s fame could be an easy short cut for Mo Yan to gain influence and literary reputation in the international book market as well as the stage of world literature.

### 3.5.2 Promotion in Publications
Besides translations, the Nobel judges also read literary reviews and consult experts when evaluating an author. In this regard, Goldblatt’s other role, a literary critic, comes in very handy. Apart from being a translator, Howard Goldblatt is also a researcher who started his career by doing research on mainland Chinese female writer Xiao Hong (蕭紅). He received his PhD from Indiana University in 1974 and served as a research professor of Chinese at the University of Notre Dame from 2002 to 2011.

Goldblatt has contributed essays and articles to a lot of different media, from widely circulated newspapers to academic journals. His articles and reviews have been published in The Washington Post, TIME Magazine, and World Literature Today, as well as other scholarly books and journals. Mo Yan and his novels are always mentioned in Goldblatt’s articles, as a way to promote them. For book reviews, “The ‘Saturnicon’ Forbidden Food of Mo Yan” (2000), posted on World Literature Today, is a review of his own translation of Mo Yan’s The Republic of Wine, and so was “Speaking Out” (1995b) which introduces Mo’s The Garlic Ballads. In fact, Goldblatt has inserted positive comments on Mo Yan and his works during the discussion on the themes of the novels in these reviews:

The Shandong novelist Mo Yan is not only the most imaginative writer to deal with the issue of cannibalism, but is also the novelist who most frequently returns to it” (2000: 480, underline added)

“…in his long novel Jiuguo (Eng. The Republic of Wine), Mo Yan has constructed one of the most complex and narratologically sophisticated novels dealing with contemporary Chinese society…” (2000: 481, underline added)

Similarity with a legend also helps to raise the rank of a new author. Comparing Mo to legendary Chinese literary figure Lun Xun, Goldblatt stated that The Republic of Wine can be read in part as “a parody of Lu Xun’s earlier works” (ibid). This might appeal to readers who are interested in Lu Xun. Even though these reviews might not
be influential enough to largely boost the sales of Mo’s books, Goldblatt took the first step to talk about these novels in international journals. After all, any noise is better than complete silence. In Goldblatt’s other academic articles and his interviews, the name of Mo Yan is frequently mentioned with acclamation. These articles and reviews are good ways to introduce Mo Yan to Western readers and build up Mo’s international fame, no matter whether Goldblatt’ promotion is intentional or not.

Moreover, Goldblatt has served on the editorial and advisory boards of a number of scholarly and literary magazines. Nowadays, publishing an article is not easy for a fresh scholar even in small journals, let alone promoting their own works in the article. As an editor or an advisor, Goldblatt might relatively easily get his articles published and enjoy relatively more freedom when choosing the topics of his content. He is an editor-at-large of the journal *Chinese Literature Today*, to which he contributes content on a semi-regular base, and is even a founding editor of the scholarly journal *Modern Chinese Literature* (now *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*). He can grasp every chance to promote his translation if he wants. His positions and reputation enable him to get his articles published. With an influential Western translator like Goldblatt, it is much easier for Mo Yan to walk onto the world literature stage.

### 3.5.3 Award Nominator

As a reputable translator and a scholar, Howard Goldblatt was invited to nominate candidates and even serve as a juror for several international literary awards. He was a judge in PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grants, the Neustadt International Prize for Literature and the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature and others. The latter two prizes are organized by the University of Oklahoma which is home to journal *World Literature Today* (WLT) and *Chinese Literature Today*.

The Neustadt International Prize for Literature is often referred as the “American
Nobel”. Like the Nobel Prize in Literature, it is one of few international prizes for which poets, novelists and playwrights alike are all equally eligible. Each juror can nominate one author for the prize. Invited to be one of the jurors, Howard Goldblatt proposed Mo Yan as a candidate for the Neustadt Prize in 1998. Although Mo did not win the award, this is actually the first international prize for which he was nominated. With Goldblatt’s help, the name of Mo Yan first appeared in the world of Western literary awards. Not only did Mo Yan attract more global attention, but he also rose to a new level and started his journey of competing for international literary awards.

Similar to the Neustadt Prize, the Newman Prize is also sponsored by the University of Oklahoma. However, this Prize is only given to Chinese literature. As one of the jurors in 2009, Howard Goldblatt nominated Mo Yan’s novel *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out*. Besides introducing and promoting a selection of eight of Mo Yan’s novels, Goldblatt heavily praised Mo Yan’s talents in the nominating statement for “Mo Yan’s Novels Are Wearing Me Out”:

> Most good novelists have difficulty maintaining a consistently high standard in their writing, but not Mo Yan. Each of his novels has been universally praised, and each demonstrates the depth and breadth of his exceptional talent. He is a master of diverse styles and forms... His imagery is striking, his tales often bewitching, and his characters richly appealing. He is, quite simply, one of a kind. (Goldblatt 2009: 29)

This statement was published in *World Literature Today* and eventually, Mo Yan won this Prize. Although Mo Yan is a talented writer, Goldblatt’s efforts on translation, nomination and promotion should also be credited. Literary awards are one of the most effective ways to accumulate a writer’s literary capital, which is fundamental to the competition in the Nobel Prize in Literature.

From Chapter 3, we can see how Howard Goldblatt’s translation and paratextual
influence might have accidentally affected, if not helped Mo Yan to reach the Nobel Prize. For the textual comparison, Howard Goldblatt’s rewriting and editing produce an English version that is easier to be received by the target audience. On top of that, Goldblatt’s reputation and promotion have taken part in turning Mo Yan from a little-known writer into a winner of international literary prizes.

Of course, the contribution of Goldblatt is not the only factor facilitating Mo Yan’s Nobel Prize. There are also limitations to his role, which will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4: OTHER FACTORS FOR MO’S SUCCESS

Chapter 3 provides some clues on how Howard Goldblatt’s translation and his reputation might have affected the choice of the winner, or even helped Mo Yan to get the Nobel Prize. However, Goldblatt is not omnipotent despite his crucial role in Mo’s Prize. There are also limitations to his role. In this chapter, other factors that contributed to Mo Yan’s prize will be discussed. Some of these factors are relevant to translation and therefore, the role of translation in Mo Yan’s Nobel Prize will continue to be discussed in this chapter.

4.1 The Influence of Movie Adaptation

Movie adaptation can also be seen as a form of translation. In an essay entitled “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation” written by Russian linguist Roman Jakobson in 1959, three ways of interpreting a verbal sign are distinguished: intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translations. As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, Howard Goldblatt’s translation of Mo Yan’s works is an example of interlingual translation, the research of which is dominating the field of translation studies. Movie adaptation may be regarded as a kind of intersemiotic translation — “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” (2012: 127). During movie adaptation, the textual description in a literary work will be transmuted into scenes, actions, expressions and tones of actors in movies, which are no longer on the verbal level. In fact, intralingual and interlingual translations are also involved. The adaptation of dialogues in a written work into movie script is actually intralingually translating written language into spoken language. In the modern film industry, a movie usually aims at the global market so interlingual

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76 According to Jokobson, intralingual translation or rewording is “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language”. Interlingual translation or translation proper is “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language”. Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” (2012: 127).
translation of movie subtitles into foreign languages is inevitable. Thus, movie adaptation is inextricably linked with translation.

No one can deny that the accessibility and influence of movies on the general population is much higher and greater than books, since movies can reach a much wider audience. In many cases, a book could never get to be so famous without the help of the promotion of a good movie. In fact, Mo Yan is a typical example of this, since the success of movie adaptation is the cornerstone of his popularity. To a large extent, his early fame, no matter in China or in the West, was built up by good reception of the movies based on his novels. Up to 2012, four of Mo Yan’s novels were adapted into films as shown in Table 5:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Movie Title</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Original Work(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>红高粱 (Red Sorghum)</td>
<td>Zhang Yimou</td>
<td>红高粱、高粱酒 (1986) (Red Sorghum and Sorghum Wine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>白棉 (Cotton Fleece)</td>
<td>Li Youqiao</td>
<td>白棉花 (1991) (Cotton Fleece)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>暖 (Nuan)</td>
<td>Huo Jianqi</td>
<td>白狗鞭敲架 (1985) (White Dog Swing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among these four movies, the most influential one was Red Sorghum in 1987. Mo Yan’s early national and international fame was gained most notably for the film script of Red Sorghum. This film won the Golden Bear Award in the 38th Berlin International Film Festival in 1988, which was the first major international movie award a Chinese movie received in the post-Mao era. The news about the movie was all over different media at that time, including a whole page article devoted to the award in the official newspaper People’s Daily. As Mo Yan revealed, “The novel became famous because of the movie. In China, when my name is mentioned, people
say, “Oh, Red Sorghum!”” (Mo and Lin 2000: 473). Bringing the “fifth-generation” Chinese cinema to the world, the film has boosted the popularity of director Zhang Yimou, leading actress Gong Li, as well as Mo Yan, the author of the original novel.

Even Howard Goldblatt’s translation relied on the reputation of the movie. In fact, this award became a great capital for the English translation, which “became publishable only after the commercial success of its film adaptation” (Chan 2003: 162). It is an indisputable fact that the market of translated books of foreign literature is very small in the United States. Only about 3% of all books published in the States are works in translation. Obviously, it is a big challenge for foreign authors to get published, let alone to make good sales. Worse still, literary translations are even more difficult to sell as they account for only about 0.7% in the American book market. As Goldblatt described, “with the exception of Nobel Prize winners and a couple of Japanese authors (Murakami Haruki and Banana Yoshimoto), for Asian writers, it borders on the impossible” (2004: 26).

Considering the economic calculation of publishing a book, publishers would hardly take a risk to publish a translation which no one has ever heard of. Undoubtedly, the publication of Goldblatt’s translation of Red Sorghum benefited from the award-winning movie. There is little difficulty in understanding why the published title of the English translation is Red Sorghum: A Novel of China, instead of “Red Sorghum Clan”, a literal translation of the original Chinese novel title “紅高粱家族”. With the same title as that of the movie, it can attract the audience who have watched or heard of the film so they can relate the book to the famous movie easily. Moreover, the promotion of the English translation “inevitably takes advantage of the movie’s success” (Chan 2003: 162). The book’s front cover carries film stills of leading actress Gong Li on the paperbacks and leading actor Jiang Wen

77 “紅高粱” means red sorghum in Chinese while “家族” means family or clan.
on the hardcovers. On the back cover of the paperbacks (and the dust jacket of the hardcovers), there is a line that reads “a legend in China, where it won major literary awards and inspired an Oscar-nominated film” in the description of the book (ibid). Undoubtedly, Viking Penguin has made good use of the capital from the success of the movie to sell copies.

The other three movies based on Mo’s novels are less popular than Red Sorghum, but some of them have also won movie awards. Nuan, directed by Huo Jianqi, has won a number of awards in China including the Golden Rooster best screenplay award, as well as the Tokyo Grand Prix at the 16th Tokyo International Film Festival in 2003. Happy Times was listed in the selection of the Berlin International Film Festival in 2002.

The success of the movie adaptations was an initial and important step for Mo Yan to gain his national and international fame, which has built a good foundation for Goldblatt’s English translations to be published. However, the Nobel Prize in Literature is not the Oscars; the decision of the Nobel Prize is based on reading, not movie watching. Literary translation undoubtedly plays a more crucial part in the Prize for its direct influence.

4.2 Translators and Translations in Other Languages

Apart from Goldblatt’s English translation, Mo Yan’s works have been translated into more than twenty languages. With the mastery of English, French, German and Swedish, the Nobel judges revealed that they read more than one translation in the above languages. Moreover, like the English translations, these translations help spread the literary reputation of Mo Yan, earning international literary awards and accumulating literary capital for Mo.

One of Mo Yan’s French translators, Noël Dutrait, is a renowned translator of
contemporary Chinese literature. This award-winning translator has translated many Chinese literary works into French with his wife Liliane Dutrait, such as novels by Su Tong, Zhong Acheng and Han Shaogong. The point most worth noting, however, is the fact that they also translate for the first Chinese-born Nobel literary laureate Gao Xingjian. In fact, Gao is the author whose works they translated the most among all Chinese writers. Their translations include *Lingshan* (Soul Mountain) in 1995, *Yi ge ren de shengjing* (One Man’s Bible) in 2000 and many other literary works. With their excellent translations, Gao enjoys a good literary reputation in France. Furthermore, Noël and Liliane Dutrait have won Mo Yan the Lauren Bataillon Prize in 2000 for translating *Jiuguo* (English: the Republic of Wine). In 2004, Mo Yan received a Knight Medal of the French Order of Arts and Letters, which proves that Mo’s works is well-received in France. Undeniably, the Dutraits should be credited for giving impetus to the Nobel Prizes of the two Chinese Nobel laureates. As one of the languages the Nobel judges can read directly, French language is of special importance and status in the European literary tradition, including in Sweden. Sweden has long been influenced by French culture and literature. Set up in 1786, the Swedish Academy was modelled on the French equivalent establishment. Obviously, the French translations carry certain weight in the selection. Moreover, a total of fifteen titles of Mo’s works are translated into French, which is more than any of the other languages, so some books are only available in French. Naturally, the French translations played a crucial role in Mo’s success.

As Swedish is the mother language of the Nobel judges, the contribution of the

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78 The Lauren Bataillon Prize (Prix Laure-Bataillon) is a literary prize established in 1986 to reward the best work of fiction translated into French in the past year. It is awarded jointly to the foreign writer and his French language translator.

79 The Order of Arts and Letters (Ordre des Arts et des Lettres) is a French honorary award established by the Minister of Culture in 1957. The medals are given to people who have significant contributions to the arts, literature, or the propagation of these fields.
Swedish translations was widely covered in Chinese media when Mo Yan won the prize, from news reports on CCTV⁸⁰ to local newspapers. The Swedish translator, Anna Gustafsson Chen, was a student of Swedish Academy member Göran Malmqvist and his wife Chen Ningzu.⁸¹ Before Mo Yan won the prize, his works did not sell well in Sweden as the market of Chinese literature was very small. After publishing the first two translations of Mo’s novels, the publisher, sinologist Lennart Lundberg, was deeply in debt so he could do nothing but sell his business and work as a translator for the European Union to pay his debts. The new owner refused to publish the third translation of Mo’s novel, until Chen agreed to charge no translation fee. Obviously, the great persistence and passion of the translator enabled the dissemination of Mo Yan’s novel in a harsh publishing environment. Besides Anna Chen, Malmqvist also translated a couple of short stories by Mo Yan into Swedish for the evaluation process. As one of the judges, Malmqvist’s translations might carry special weight in the discussion of the Academy members. Still, there were only three long novels translated into Swedish (Red Sorghum, The Garlic Ballads and Life and Death are Wearing me out) so the judges could only rely on translations in other languages to comprehensively evaluate the oeuvre of Mo Yan.

The Japanese translations also had great importance on Mo Yan’s prize. Similar to the English and French translations, the Japanese translations won Mo Yan major international prizes, such as the Grand Prize of the 17th Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize in 2006.⁸² Undeniably the Nobel judges cannot read Japanese, but the 1995 Japanese

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⁸¹ However, Chen revealed in an interview that Malmqvist has just taught her a couple of lessons about Zuo Zhuan (左傳) in Stockholm University which she ‘did not understand at all’. In fact, the one who taught her Chinese is the first wife of Malmqvist, Chen Ningzu (陳寧祖). He Chunwa, “Anna Chen who introduced Mo’s Works into Sweden,” (把莫言带到瑞典的陳安娜), Dalian Daily 大連日報, December 13, 2012, A18, http://szb.dlxww.com/dlrb/html/2012-12/13/content_768191.htm?div=3
⁸² The Fukuoka Prize (福岡アジア文化賞) is an award created by Japanese city Fukuoka and the
Nobel laureate Kenzaburo Oe (大江健三郎) can. Oe already mentioned Mo Yan’s name in his Nobel Lecture in front of all Nobel judges as early as 1995:

   By sharing old, familiar yet living metaphors I align myself with writers like Kim Ji-ha (Kim Chi-ha) of Korea and Chon I (Zheng Yi) and Mu Jen (Mo Yan), both of China. For me the brotherhood of world literature consists in such relationships in concrete terms.\(^8\)

Oe’s appreciation and friendship with Mo Yan became an important literary capital for Mo’s prize. On the back cover of the English translation of a collection of Mo Yan’s short stories *Shifu, You'll Do Anything for a Laugh*, is Oe’s comment, “If I were to choose a Nobel laureate, it would be Mo Yan.” Moreover, as a previous Nobel laureate in Literature, Oe is entitled to nominate a Nobel candidate to the Academy every year. Being nominated is the only way to join the competition of the Nobel Prize. The Japanese translations play an important role in expanding Mo Yan’s literary influence and link up Mo Yan with Oe, an important literary figure inside the establishment of the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Besides Howard Goldblatt’s English translations, the contribution of Mo’s other literary translators should never be neglected. Due to the time and length limit, it is impossible to cover an in-depth discussion or analysis on translations in every single language in this research. In view of the world status of English, only the English translation is focused in this research while others could only be briefly explained above. It is hoped that thorough studies on the role of other language translations will be further established in the future.

4.3 The Role of the Author

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Yokatopia Foundation to honor the outstanding individuals or groups/organizations in preserving or creating the unique and diverse Asian cultures. There are three categories of prizes: Grand Prize, Academic Prize, and Arts and Culture Prize.

Undeniably, Mo Yan is a talented writer. It would not be fair to overestimate the role of translators while neglecting the talents of the author. As a famous author in China, he has won a number of domestic literary prizes. Recent major awards include the Chinese Literature Media Award in 2005, Dream of the Red Chamber Award in 2008 and Mao Dun Literature Prize in 2011. His reputation in the Chinese literary world, to certain extent, was reinforced by the good global reception of his works because more attention was attracted to this international prize-winning author who won the appreciation of foreign critics.

Mo Yan’s books contain elements that can attract both local and foreign readers. His vivid imagination, storytelling talents and writing technique are often praised. Burying social criticism under ridicule and sarcasm, Mo’s works are not limited to local Chinese literature but “soars across the entire human existence” according to the Swedish Academy. His works are rich in literary values in terms of the writing skills, choice of topics, characterization, and narrative perspective. Most impressively, he tried to raise social criticism and challenge authority under the ruling of the Chinese Communist government, which appeals to the audience who are interested in questioning those in power, since Western readers have responded a lot to this kind of Chinese novels.

In fact, translation plays a very important role in Mo’s writing. He revealed that he was greatly influenced by famous foreign writers when he read the Chinese translations of foreign literature, since he cannot read any foreign language. In his speech at Peking University in 2001, he emphasized the merits of translators:

Starting my writing career in the 1980s, I deeply understood the importance of learning from foreign literature. Without the great efforts of our excellent translators and translations, writers like me, who do not know any foreign

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language, would never see the brilliant achievement made by the foreign literature. (My translation) (莫言 2010: 7)

During the Cultural Revolution, the publication and translation of most foreign literature were banned. Even books and periodicals of foreign literature in public libraries were locked away from borrowers. After the Cultural Revolution ended, Western literature became available again. Along with the Open Door Policy, new publishers were established and many books were translated into China in the 1980s. Founded in 1978, Shanghai Translation Publishing House started to publish the Chinese translations of a number of series of famous foreign literature, including the most representative Twentieth Century Foreign Literature Series (二十世紀外國文學叢書). This collection features influential foreign literary works, mostly novels, in the twentieth century, including Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* and Yasunari Kawabata’s *Snow Country*.

Starting his writing career in the 80s, Mo Yan read so many Chinese translations of Western Literature that his writing style might inevitably be influenced by them. As a faithful reader of this series, he mentioned the influence of the above books on his writing many time in his speeches and articles. In his speech titled “How are you, Uncle Faulkner?” (福克納大叔，你好嗎？) at the University of California Berkeley in March 2000, he explained how he was inspired by Faulkner’s apocryphal county, Yoknapatawpha County, to create his own “Northeast Gaomi Township” where he set almost all of his novels (莫言 2010: 119). From Faulkner’s novels, he

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85 Mo Yan revealed in a speech in the East Asian Literature Conference in South Korea in 2005, “In the early 1980s, I got into contact with Western literature. After reading Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* and Yasunari Kawabata’s *Snow Country* and many other works, I felt as if I had awakened from a dream and suddenly realized I could have written novels like these” (莫言 2010: 31) (my translation)

86 Different from Yoknapatawpha County, Gaomi County is actually Mo Yan’s hometown in Shandong Province which exists in China. However, the Gaomi County in Mo’s novel is a fictional place which is different from the one in real life. Mo Yan pointed out that this county in his novels is a concept in literature rather than in geography.
found that a writer could even make up a geographical locale besides fabricating stories and characters. Similar to Faulkner, Gabriel García Márquez’s Macondo Town in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was also a source of inspiration for Mo Yan, who explored and elevated his Gaomi Township to a literary kingdom that combined his vast imagination and creativity with local legendary folktales and history. Mo Yan admitted that his success and recognition in China are based on his own creation of “a republic in literature” — “Gaomi County” which was inspired by the foreign writers and his own hometown (莫言 2010: 31). Before that, he always suffered from running out of ideas and stories to write. Ever since he discovered this new way to write, he gained a sudden enlightenment under which endless inspirations and topics, from hometown folktales, family stories to his own country life, ran into his mind (莫言 2010: 32). Apparently, Chinese translations of foreign literature opened a new door for Mo Yan’s writing experience, which uplifted his novels to a whole new level.

On top of that, since Mo Yan has read a large number of translations, the language of Chinese translators exerted certain influence on his writing language, as he admitted in a speech titled “The Boundless Beneficence of Translators” (翻譯家功德無量):

The language of writers like us, who do not know foreign languages, underwent changes after reading the Latin American literature translated by Zhao Deming, Zhao Zhengjiang, Lin Yian and other translators. Was our language influenced by Latin American literature or these translators? I can answer unhesitatingly that my language was influenced by the Chinese translators like Zhao, instead of those Latin American writers. Then whose language was influenced by those Latin American writers? The translators’. (My translation) (莫言 2010: 8)

Foreign literature translation can enrich the target language with new linguistic features, from vocabulary and sentence structure to writing skills. Although Mo
Yan’s works contain local Chinese elements, foreignness can also be found in his works from his extensive reading of foreign literature. A foreignized text usually yields to translation and is easier for the foreign reader to understand, so the translatability of Mo Yan’s works is higher than some Chinese writers like Jia Pingwa (賈平凹), whose works are known to be loaded with obscure Xi’an dialect or Shaanxi regional mountain dialect writing, a unique literary form and untranslatable deep meaning.87

Furthermore, the attitude of the author seems to be even more crucial than the translatability of his works. The character of Mo Yan is actually a key point leading to his success. Goldblatt has praised Mo’s humbleness and open-mindedness on a number of occasions. Admiring his translators, Mo Yan has praised their efforts many times in interviews and speeches. In a talk in Colorado in 2000, he gave Goldblatt much credit for his efforts in translating Mo’s novels into English:

Before I start, I should mention my American translator, Howard Goldblatt. My novels could have been translated by someone else and published in the United States, but the English versions would never have been so beautifully translated, if not for him…… you can see that he is not only a talented translator, but a serious and conscientious one. It's my good fortune to be able to work with someone like him (Mo and Lin 2000: 473).

Mo Yan also gives his translators much freedom to translate.88 When Goldblatt asked him questions in regard to one of his translations, he always simply replied, “Do what you want. I can’t read what you’ve written. It’s your book” (Goldblatt 2013: 8). Many other Chinese writers are not as easygoing as Mo Yan. Goldblatt revealed that an author once required him not to change any word in the English

87 King tried to explain the literary issue that makes Jia Pingwa difficult to translate in his article. In fact, only one of Jia’s novels, Turbulence (浮躁), was translated into English and it was by Howard Goldblatt. Dylan Levi King, “Jia Pingwa and dick jokes,” Paper Republic Chinese Literature in Translation, February 19, 2010, http://paper-republic.org/dylanking/dick-jokes/

88 Besides the translators, Mo Yan also gives freedom to the movie directors who adapted his works. He told Zhang Yimou he can do anything in adapting his Red Sorghum (莫言 2010: 342).
translation. When Goldblatt translate Jia’s *Turbulence*, he did not understand some Xi’an dialect in the novel so he wrote down every word to consult the author. In the end, it was said the author therefore came up with the conclusion that Howard Goldblatt does not know Chinese and only Chinese people can translate Chinese literature.89

With Mo’s complete trust and support, his translators can fully demonstrate their talents and put the focus on the reception of the target reader. Goldblatt revealed that he enjoys working with Mo Yan the most. It could explain why Mo Yan is the most translated Chinese contemporary writer. He even offered his translators a free trip to Sweden when he invited them to participate in the Nobel ceremony with him. A talented and humble writer surely wins the heart of his translators.

4.4 Globalization, Modernization and Politics

From a macro perspective, globalization is a crucial factor for the internationalization of the Nobel Prize. With increasingly advanced technology of communication and transportation, people in every corner of the world are getting more exposed to other cultures. The Nobel institution, therefore, received many criticisms for its Euro-centrism. Although the prize aims for the whole world, at the beginning the Academy mainly focused on European literature. In a letter in 1904, the diplomat Carl Bildt, a member of the Swedish Academy, expressed the wish that “to begin with we work round Europe” (qtd in Espmark 1991: 131). Before the 1980s, there were only occasional excursions outside European-American literature, which hardly settle the claim for a more reasonable geographic distribution (1991: 132). To a certain extent the Eurocentric criticism created pressure on the Academy and led to

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89 Fu Ge and Zhang Ying, “Howard Goldblatt on Chinese Literature (葛浩文談中國文學),” Southern Weekend, March 27, 2008, http://www.infzm.com/content/6903
a new objective and some new measures within the Academy. Lars Gyllensten, the permanent secretary of the Academy in 1984, declared that attention to literature outside Europe was gradually increasing in the Academy and attempts were being made “to achieve a global distribution” (ibid). The Academy has made efforts to carry out different measures to achieve this aim. A better scout system to non-European literature has been established. For the language barrier, the Academy has sought help from language experts, like Alfred Jensen, Anton Karlgren, orientalist Esaias Tegner, Jr., H.S. Nyberg and Bernhard Karlgren. Meanwhile within the Academy, efforts have been made to ensure a significant level of linguistic and literary competence. More multilingual academics have been elected into the Academy, including Spanish literature expert Knut Ahnlund in 1984 and sinologist Göran Malmqvist in 1985 (Espmark 1991: 139-140). Under these changes, the Academy has become more competent for this global task and therefore, more Prizes have been given to non-European writers since the 1980s.

In addition to the change within the Nobel institution, the influence of globalization facilitated modernization and cultural activities in many developing countries. In China, cross-cultural exchange with the West boosted the development of literature. Led by returned students like Hu Shih and Chen Duxiu, who introduced Western thoughts to China, the New Cultural Movement starting from 1917 was the beginning of the development of modern Chinese literature. This period nurtured many famous modern writers and translators who broke through feudal thoughts and uplifted literature to a new level. Among these writers, Hu Shih90 and Lin Yutang91

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90 As a leader of the New Cultural Movement, Hu Shih was nominated at least two times for the Prize, one by Swedish Academy member Sven Hedin in 1939 and one by the PEN in 1957.
91 Lin Yutang was nominated at least three times by Nobel laureate Pearl Buck in 1940 and 1950 and by Sven Hedin in 1940.
were the first group of Chinese writers to get nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

During the Mao era, the exchange with Western culture was cut off by the communist party’s stringent control of thought. In the Cultural Revolution, a great many literary works were banned and stigmatized as bourgeois literature, and numberless intellectuals were sent to labour camps. Revolutionary literature was the only style allowed in this period. The strict censorship and restraint in publishing created an unfavorable environment for the production of literature. The development of translation was also suppressed in this period. Evidently, national isolation only led to economic and cultural impoverishment in China, not to mention the Nobel Prize.

After the reform in the 1980s, China opened up to the world again. The control over publishing became more lenient. Writers and translators picked up their pen again. Chinese translators and foreign sinologists continued translating Chinese literature into foreign languages. For example, Gladys Yang translated Shen Congwen’s *The Border Town* into English in 1981. Göran Malmqvist translated the same book into Swedish in 1987. Shen was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1987 and 1988. Malmqvist revealed that Shen was very close to the Nobel Prize. He would have been the first Chinese to won the Prize if he had not died a couple of months before the announcement of the Prize winner in 1988. Shen’s case clearly shows the importance of translation on the Nobel Prize. In fact, Shen’s entire literature-writing career had already ended before 1949, but his novels had to wait until the 1980s to be translated. If the translation of his works came out earlier, he would probably have got the Prize before he passed away. Cultural activities, which include translation, are always affected by the political and
Meanwhile, a new generation of writers was up and coming in the literary world. Gao Xingjian and Mo Yan both started their writing career in the 1980s, when writers enjoyed relatively more freedom to try new writing styles and touch sensitive subject matter. Translated and published by foreign publishing companies, their novels occupied a place in the international literary world, and eventually caught the attention of the Nobel Committee.

After Mo Yan won the prize, political speculation was all over the media. Considering the fact that Mo was the first politically tolerable Nobel laureate for the Chinese government, some critics believed that Mo Yan won the prize for certain political reasons. In the light of the rising power of the PRC, diplomatic or economic pressure from China might have played a role in the decision of the prize winner. However, these are just media speculations without evidence. Even if they wanted to give the PRC a Nobel Prize, it still could not explain why the Academy picked Mo Yan out of hundreds of Chinese writers. Obviously, the reason is related to the literary talent, good translations, international reputation and cultural capital of Mo Yan.

From this chapter, we can further see the role of translation in Mo Yan’s Nobel success apart from Goldblatt’s English translations. Movie adaptation, other language translations of Mo Yan’s works, Mo’s literary talents and the sociopolitical environment are all influential factors which contributed to Mo’s Nobel Prize in Literature.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Translation plays an indispensable role in the Nobel Prize in Literature, no matter to the selection procedure, to the development of the Prize or to the authors who would like to get this Prize. This prestigious global event would be impossible without translation, which is the only way to break through the language barrier. At the same time, translation can actually exert impact on nomination and the evaluation of the nominees. Mo Yan would not have been able to obtain the Nobel Prize without the assistance of translation, especially by his talented and well-known English translator Howard Goldblatt.

5.1 Reflection on the Role of Translation in the Prize

From the research on the Nobel Prize in Chapter 2, we can see this prestigious Prize is hardly a fair game due to its limitation, bias and subjectivity. In fact, this globally-known prize just represents the literary interest of a group of men of letters from Sweden. Besides the absence of many great writers on the list of laureates, their ability to appreciate literature from different cultures is questioned as well. On top of that, this thesis exposed an unnoticed but fatal weakness of the Nobel Prize in Literature — the heavy reliance on translation.

How can translation affect the choice of the winner? This is a difficult question to answer because the sources of related information are very limited. The strict secrecy of the Nobel Institution keeps the nominations and other information in the past 50 years in the dark. Even the published statements and reports of the early prizes are only available in Swedish, which is an unfamiliar language for me. Still, in those statements and reports the Academy did not reveal exactly which translations they have read. These factors, indeed, are an obstacle to the analysis of the role of
translation, especially in recent prizes. Although I cannot read Swedish, I managed to understand some important published statements of the early prizes with the help from some Swedish speakers. Fortunately, some statements can also be found quoted and translated in various books and articles, which are very helpful to the research.

The role of translation is manifest in the development of the Prize and the selection of winner. In the selecting procedure of the Prize, a good translation might actually be even more important than the source text to a certain extent. Although experts are sometimes consulted, the judges have to do their own reading to make the decision to maintain the independence of their choice. Since they rely on the translation to evaluate a piece of work, it considerably determines their impression of a writer. However, translation is a process of rewriting which involves manipulation. The text analysis in Chapter 3 shows how rewriting in Goldblatt’s translation might have affected the evaluation of Mo Yan’s works from ideological and stylistic perspectives. His well-received translations also built up good international reputation and accumulated literary capital for Mo Yan, which are both fundamental for a writer to get the Nobel Prize in Literature. In Chapter 4, the role of translation on Mo’s Nobel Prize is further explained in different perspectives. Ironically, translators receive pathetically little credit for their work in the Nobel Prize despite their important contribution. The spotlight of the media is always concentrated on the author, while little attention is put on the importance of the translator. The award money of eight million Swedish kronor will all go into the author’s pocket. Worst still, some laureates, like Isaac Singer, even spent much of his writing career complaining about his translators.

But an unfair game like the Nobel Prize actually receives a lot of media attention and even reaches the level of national obsession such as China’s so-called “Nobel complex”. Giving an author a Nobel Prize does not only boost the book sales, but
also is a good way to canonize an author. Mo Yan’s novel, A Transparent Radish, was added to the high school syllabus in China right after he won the Prize. Every student in the future has to read and analyze Mo Yan’s works. The laureates have formed a kind of canon which carries weight in world literature.

5.2 The Implications of Mo Yan’s Case towards Translation

What is the influence of the translator and translation on Mo Yan’s Prize? To answer this question, textual comparison was carried out in this research. At first, the comparison was aimed to be in-depth and concentrated so only one book (The Garlic Ballads) was planned to be used in the comparison part. However, it was found that the argument would be very unconvincing because the Nobel Prize rewards the whole body of writing, instead of a single title. Unfortunately, it was by no means an easy task to analyze Mo Yan’s whole huge oeuvre within this short period of time. Therefore, four representative books were chosen out of the seven titles translated by Goldblatt in an attempt to be comprehensive and conclusive. Moreover, related information was collected from different sources to analyze the importance of translator and translation. Indeed, it is very hard to contact Mo Yan or Goldblatt because they became famous and busy so I attended several conferences and seminars in which Goldblatt was invited and tried to ask him questions.

Based on the case study of Mo’s Nobel Prize, the contribution of translation toward Mo Yan’s Nobel Prize should by no means be neglected. From Mo’s case, the success in reception of Goldblatt’s translations is a good role model for translators and writers that want to achieve success in the Western literary world. As translated foreign literature is not popular in the English commercial book market, the reception is one of the most important factors in the translation process. Instead of literal faithfulness, literary translation should convey the artistic quality and stylistic
features into the target text. Rewriting is necessary in order to meet the Western literary standard as well as settle the conflicts from ideological and cultural difference if good reception is desired. From this we can see the participation of foreign translators, whose first language is the target language, is very crucial when doing Chinese to English translation since they are more familiar with the target culture, language and literary standard.

The relationship of the author and the translator is another topic worth discussing. According to Goldblatt, he translated so many of Mo’s works not because Mo’s writing is the best, but because Mo gave him the most freedom to translate. Despite his acclamations on Mo’s imagination and creativity, Mo is still ‘rough around the edge’ in his opinion (SCMP 1999). He revealed in an interview that the cooperation with Mo Yan is the most pleasant because they do not cooperate. Mo Yan trusts him completely so Goldblatt and the American editor can boldly tailor his novels for the sake of the target reader. On top of that, Mo Yan offers Goldblatt sufficient support during the translation process. “We’ve exchanged more than a hundred letters and spoken innumerable times over the telephone. The sole purpose of such frequent contact is to perfect the English translations” (Mo and Lin 2000: 473). However, many Chinese authors are too concerned about being misrepresented or mistranslated, so actually neglected the consideration of reception. Mo Yan’s success actually tells us that writers should give more confidence to their translator, instead of closely watching them to catch their small mistakes. An appreciative and positive attitude is needed for encouraging the translation of Chinese literature.

5.3 Limitations and Suggested Avenues of Future Research

Inevitably, this thesis has some shortcomings. First, the oeuvre is too large to be analyzed thoroughly and deeply within the text limit of an MPhil thesis and therefore, this thesis cannot cover every single book. Second, my linguistic competence is limited so only the English translation is focused on in this research. If the Swedish, French and German translations were also included in the text comparison, the research would be much more solid and convincing.

Undeniably, one single case is not enough to prove the importance of the role of translation in the Nobel Prize in Literature. More case studies on other prizes are strongly needed to show the whole picture. Future research should be conducted to investigate the role of translation in the cases of other Nobel winners or writers who nearly got the Prize.

As an example, another Chinese laureate, Gao Xingjian, is a case worth researching. Gao experienced a Nobel path that is different from Mo Yan although both of them benefited a lot from their translators. His works were translated into English, French, Swedish and other languages. Compared with Mo Yan’s books, the reception of the English translation of Gao’s notable novel _Soul Mountain_ was poor. It was translated by Mabel Lee (陳順妍) and published in July 2000. Paul Gray’s review in _TIME_ magazine made harsh comments on Lee’s translation:

Unfortunately, while Mabel Lee… may have captured the literal essence of "Soul Mountain" in the original, she presents it in a strange and often irksome form of English… Reading "Soul Mountain" in this version is a frustrating experience, chiefly because of the sense that there must be more to it than this. Surely the Nobel Prize cannot have been decided principally on the basis of what appears here. Gao… is regarded as a master of the Chinese language. Perhaps that skill cannot be completely conveyed in a translation, but a better use of English might have helped.\(^\text{93}\)

In fact, there is a strong possibility that the Nobel judges had not read much of the

English translation during the selection procedure since the English translation was just published three months before the Prize was announced, when the preliminary and final candidates had already been chosen. In a matter of fact, the Swedish translation by Göran Malmqvist and French translation by Noel Dutrait were more decisive in Gao’s Prize. Both of them are famous sinologists in their countries. As a Swedish Academy member, Malmqvist has important influence in the decision of the Nobel winner (See 2.2.2: The Judges as the Translator). Malmqvist was accused of conflict of interest after he steered his translations of Gao’s novels to his friend’s publishing house ten days before the announcement of the prize winner.\(^\text{94}\)

As a highly westernized writer, Gao relied less on translators than Mo Yan because he is more familiar with Western culture, literature and language. He even wrote dramas in French, such as *Au bord de la vie* (Between Life and Death/生死界) (1993) and *Le Somnambule* (Nocturnal Wanderer/夜游神) (1995). At the same time, Gao is a translator who self-translated his French dramas into Chinese. Analyzing the Swedish or French translation of Gao’s works could show the role of translation. In the light of the difference between Gao and Mo, it would be a good research topic to compare the role of translation in their Nobel success. Of course, the research area should not be limited to Chinese Nobel laureates. The situation in other languages or other international literary prizes could also be explored.

In a word, there is a long way to go before the exact role of translation in the Nobel Prize in Literature can be determined. This thesis is just an initial and fundamental step in the studies of translation and international literary prizes. The author hopes that more research will be done in this field so that we can see a clearer picture.

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