

The Literature Review of Studies on the English Translation of Yu Hua's Novels

Lan Wang^{1, a}

¹Hangzhou Normal University, Hangzhou 310005, China

^a2161577326@qq.com

Abstract

Yu Hua's novels are an indispensable part of the treasure house of modern Chinese literature and have been translated into English since the 21st century. Domestic scholars began to study the English translation of Yu Hua's novels around 2010. In order to understand the research situation of Yu Hua's novels in China, this paper intends to sort out the domestic literature on the English translation of Yu Hua's novels since the 21st century, make a macro overview of the research status, and make a classified review of the research topics, so as to analyze the existing problems in the research and propose solutions. In order to promote the in-depth development of Yu Hua's novel translation research.

Keywords

Yu Hua; English translation; Literature review.

1. Introduction

Yu Hua, born in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province on April 3, 1960, is one of the writers with the highest reputation in the international literary circle and represents the representative of Chinese avant-garde novels. His works have been translated into more than 20 languages and are popular among readers in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and South Korea. In 2004, Yu Hua was awarded the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres in France.

Yu Hua is the author of five novels; A collection of 6 novellas; 3 essays; 1 collection of essays. Nine of them have been translated into English. This paper first gives a general introduction to the English translation of Yu Hua's works, then attempts to sort out domestic and foreign literature on the English translation of Yu Hua's novels from 2010 to 2023, and gives a macro overview of the research status. Secondly, it makes a micro-classification of the research topics, and on this basis analyzes the existing problems in the research. Some countermeasures are proposed to promote the in-depth development of Yu Hua's English translation research.

2. The English Translation of Yu Hua's Works

The translation and dissemination of Yu Hua's works overseas mainly involve English, French, German, Vietnamese, Japanese, and Korean. Many scholars have made monographs on the overseas translation of Yu Hua's works, and here the focus is only on the English translation overview of his works. The translation of Yu Hua's works in the English-speaking world has been very early, but the translation situation is not very ideal. A total of nine of Yu Hua's works have been published in English in single volumes, including five novels, two collections of novellas and short stories, and one nonfiction work. This is the most important English translation version of Yu Hua's literary works. *To Live* was published in 1992, and its English translation *To Live* was published and released by ANCHOR BOOKS in 2003. The translator is Michael Berry, associate professor of Eastern Asia at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

As soon as the book was published, it caused a heated discussion in the foreign media. Many mainstream media, such as The Washington Post, Time Magazine, and the Seattle Times, have given the work high praise. Us newspaper Star Tribune commented: "You only have to read halfway through Yu Hua's epoch-making family tragedy *To Live* and you're already convinced it's immortal. In other words, *To Live* is a classic. The protagonist Fugui and his family seem to be thousands of miles away from the Western readers as if they are close neighbors, and finally, even become a family." [20] *Xu Sanguan Selling Blood* was published by Jiangsu Literature and Art Publishing House in 1996. The book tells the story of Xu Sanguan who survived every difficulty in his life by selling his blood. But when he became old and knew that his blood was no longer needed, his spirit broke down. It was named one of the ten most influential books of the 1990s. Its English translation, *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant*, was published and released by ANCHOR BOOKS in 2007. His translator, Andrew E. Jones, is a professor of East Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Berkeley, and director of the Center for Chinese Studies. *Cries in the Drizzle* was published by Nanhai Publishing in 1999. The book describes the growth experience and spiritual course of a young man in Jiangnan. *Cries in the Drizzle* was published in an English translation by ANCHOR BOOKS in 2007. It was translated by Pomona College professor Allan H. Barr. *Brothers* (Volume 1 and Volume 2) was published by Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House in 2005 and 2006 respectively. The book tells the story of two brothers, Li Guangtou and Song Gang, from the "Cultural Revolution" to the present. The book was translated into English by Harvard University Professor Eileen Chengyin Chow and Duke University Professor Carlos Rojas and published by Anchor Press in 2009. *The Boy in the Dusk* was published by New World Press in 1999. This collection of 12 works by writer Yu Hua is the closest to the reality of all his novellas and short stories. The English translation of *Boy in the Twilight: Stories of Hidden China* was published by Pantheon in 2014 and translated by Allan H. Barr. *The Past and the Punishment* was translated by Andrew F. Ones and published in 1996 by Ateneo De Manila University Press, It contains eight of Yu Hua's novellas and short stories, including *Doomed*, *Classical Love*, *Nineteen Eighty-six*, *Doomed*, *Things are like Smoke*, *Plum Blossoms of Blood* and *Going on a Journey at the age of Eighteen*. *China in Ten Words* has not been publicly released on the mainland. The book was published by Wheat Field Publishing House in Taiwan in 2011. An English translation by Allan H. Barr was published by Vintage in 2012.

Yu Hua's English translation work into the English-speaking world was done by American scholars of Chinese literature and Chinese culture, such as Michael Berry, Andrew E. Jones and Allan H. Barr, and Luo Peng and Zhou Chengyin. Professor Allan H. Barr, who translated five of Yu Hua's works alone, has made a great contribution. Since the 1990s, Yu Hua's works have been accepted by the English-speaking world, which continues to this day and reaches a climax in the 21st century, reflecting the large number and variety of translations, the diversification of translation approaches, the authoritativeness of one verse carrier, and the long dissemination time of his works. The translation interval is short and so on [19].

3. Literature Review of The English Translation of Yu Hua's Work

The author combined the words "Yu Hua", "English translation", "translation", "translation" and "translation" as search terms respectively to search the literature on Yu Hua's novel translation from English to English through CNKI, Wanfang database, and Taiwan academic literature data. By reading the literature title, abstract, or catalog, the author manually screened the literature on Yu Hua's English translation. The literature that is only partially involved in the study of the English translation of Yu Hua's novels but is not the special research object and the literature that has nothing to do with the study of the English translation of Yu Hua's novels are eliminated

and the data are finally retrieved by reviewing the literature. After sorting it out, the author collected 53 academic papers and 56 journal papers.

This part intends to systematically review Chinese scholars' research on the English translation of Yu Hua's novels since the 21st century. Firstly, it summarizes the current study situation from the macro level and then summarizes the studies from the micro level, namely translation strategy studies, translator studies, cultural studies, and translation studies. On this basis, the next section analyzes the existing problems in the research to promote the in-depth development of the research on the English translation of Yu Hua's novels.

English translation studies of Yu Hua's works can be roughly divided into two categories: in-text and out-of-text studies. In-text studies focus on the study of the source text and the target text itself, and its content involves translation strategy studies, translator studies, cultural studies, and out-of-text research, which mainly refers to the English translation of Yu Hua's novels.

Firstly, in terms of translation strategies, researchers mainly study how translators use different translation strategies to maximize the reproduction of the source text's style. Liu [1] found in the English translation of *Xu Sanguan's Blood-Selling Book* that the translator Andrew Jones adopted flexible and diverse translation methods, such as literal translation, free translation, addition translation, substitution, omission, and transliteration, which adapted to the pragmatic habits of target language readers and met their reading expectations in terms of ensuring the readability of the translation. Many scholars take the English translation of *To Live* by Michael Berry as the research object and investigate the translation strategies used by the translator to reproduce the style and language characteristics of the source text. Wang and Xia [2], from the perspective of translation ethics, found that in the process of translation, Michael Berry made good use of simile rhetoric and colloquial expression, added footnotes to literal translation, and reproduced the style of the original text in an appropriate foreignizing way, thus achieving a better balance between the fluency of the translated text and the "exotic flavor". Dong [3], from the perspective of adaptation theory, found that to maintain the narrative style of the original text and better convey the cultural information in the source text, Michael Berry mainly adopted the translation method of literal translation and annotation. When the content of the source text is within the scope of readers' understanding, the literal translation is adopted. However, in the translation of culture-loaded words, the translator adds additional explanatory content, which ultimately translates better accepted by readers. Wen [4] explored the phenomenon of heterozygosity in English translation from the perspective of hybridity theory and the aspects of language and culture. It is found that Michael Berry mainly used foreignization (transliteration, transliteration annotation, literal translation, and literal translation annotation) to reproduce the expression and culture of the source text. At the same time, the translator also appropriately adopted the translation strategy of domestication (free translation, substitution, omission) to ensure the acceptability of the translation. Based on the ecological translation theory, Han [5] discussed the core role of Michael Berry as the translation subject with the method of translators' centralism. By transliterating simple words and sentences in Yu Hua's works, abandoning the tense changes in English, and following the parataxis principle in Chinese, he tried to preserve the original style of the novel as much as possible. However, these studies are mostly limited to the evaluation of the reproduction effect and the analysis of the stylistic features of the translated text. For the follow-up studies, such as the insufficient analysis of the reasons for the stylistic differences between different translations, and the failure to raise the desirable stylistic reproduction strategies as the guiding principles for the stylistic reproduction of Yu Hua's novels in English translation, the stylistic studies need to be deepened.

Secondly, in terms of translator research, most researchers study the subjectivity of translators and their views on translation. Wang and Cui [6] reveal Michael Berry's view of translation as

an academic translator by analyzing Michael Berry's social track, educational background, material selection habits, and translation strategies. The translation should be loyal to the content and ideas of the original text, and try to reproduce the feelings brought by the original text to its readers, but should not be too rigid in the form and structure of the original text, and strive to pursue the readability and acceptability of the translation. Feng [7] and Zhao [8] studied the embodiment of a translator's subjectivity in the translation process, respectively, from the perspective of hermeneutics and adaptation theory. Feng [7] took the English translation of *To Live* as an example and revealed the close connection between the translator's subjectivity, hermeneutics, and literary translation with the help of detailed examples. Zhao [8] analyzed the English translation of *To Live* by Michael Berry and finds that the subjectivity of the translator, Michael Berry, is mainly influenced by translation purpose, ideology, translation view, and personal knowledge interest. By analyzing Michael Berry's English translation of *The Seventh Day*, Zhang [9] found that under the influence of Chesterman's five translation ethics, the translator Michael Berry translated as close to ethical requirements and standards as possible by exerting individual subjective initiative and creativity. However, most of the above studies focus on the subjectivity of translators, and the translation ethics, translator identity, translator's professional habits, translator's ideology, translation behavior, and other aspects have not received sufficient attention.

Thirdly, in terms of cultural studies, researchers generally agree that the translation of cultural elements should follow the general principle of taking into account the adequacy of the cultural information transmission of the original text and the acceptability of the target text. By analyzing the English version of *Brothers*, Wang, and Quan [10] found that when dealing with the Chinese culture-specific words in *Brothers*, the translator used the strategies of cultural preservation and cultural substitution, and generally tended to preserve the characteristics and connotations of Chinese culture. Li and Wang [11] found that translators not only built the context within the text to achieve the basic restoration of cultural information but also made full use of footnotes, preambles, and other cultural information to explain in more detail. Based on the Chesterman translation ethics, Zhang and Zhang [12] studied the presence of culture-loaded words in the English translation of *To Live* by James Burrito. They found that in the process of translating culture-loaded words, the translator took representation ethics as a guide, respected the heterogeneity of the original text and Chinese culture, and adopted literal translation to reproduce Chinese culture. Under the guidance of service ethics, he constructed the context outside the text, adds footnotes, and used the "cross-translation" method to translate culture-loaded words. Under the guidance of communicative ethics, appropriate additions or deletions were made to achieve cross-cultural communication. Liang [13] analyzed the English version of *To Live* and found that translators used cultural preservation strategies more than cultural substitution strategies when translating culture-specific items in *To Live*, among which absolute globalization is the main translation strategy used by translators to replace items specific to the original culture. The culture-specific items in the translation achieve cultural function equivalence with the original text to a large extent. However, most of the above studies select several limited cultural elements from one of Yu Hua's novels summarize translators' choice tendency towards the translation strategies of these cultural elements, and reveal the factors that affect the selection of translation strategies. The study vision is limited to a single article and fails to comprehensively summarize and conclude the differences in translation strategies of various characteristic cultural elements in Yu Hua's novels from a macro perspective.

Fourthly, in terms of translation research, Yu Hua's novel English translation research mainly involves the stage characteristics of novel translation, social and historical background, translator group composition, overseas acceptance, and so on. Shi and Zhao [14] found that the great success of Yu Hua's masterpiece *To live* in the English translation in the English-speaking

world was largely due to the translator's choice of appropriate translation strategies. The translator restored the original content through efforts to reproduce the contextual meaning of words, adjust the text structure, and so on, to help better spread Chinese literature in the world. Liu [15] traced the three stages of Yu Hua's translation and publication in the US, namely prologue, expansion, and peak, summarized the characteristics of each stage, explored the reasons for the translation and publication of Yu Hua's works in the US, and provided references for the external translation of Chinese literature. Zeng [16] proposed that the communication mode of Yu Hua's English translation can be constructed from four aspects: text selection, text translation, editing and publishing, and communication and acceptance. In addition, Zeng [17], through the study of the English translation of Yu Hua's works (original and secondary texts), found that there were mainly three types of editing behaviors in the English translation of Yu Hua's works: poetics normative editing behaviors, background knowledge editing behaviors and personal preferences editing behaviors. Fu and Wu [18] discussed the translation effect of Yu Hua's novels in the United States with the assistance of corpora and found that the translation effect of Yu Hua's novels in the United States has the characteristics of contradictory unity and multidimensional differentiation. Generally speaking, the English translation research of Yu Hua's novels is still weak in terms of overseas transmission channels and reception effects.

Finally, from the perspective of research articles, Yu Hua's English translation studies involve a total of 9 novels, while the domestic research and analysis of Yu Hua's English translation articles are mostly limited to *To Live*, *Xu Sanguan Selling Blood*, *Brothers*, *The Seventh Day* and *Shouting in the Drizzle*, which is several well-known works. It can be seen that the research text is single and the convergence of research translation is prominent.

In general, under the background of "going out" of Chinese literature, on the one hand, Yu Hua's novels as a successful case of "going out", strengthening the translation of his works can provide a reference for Chinese contemporary literature "going out"; On the other hand, as a writer whose works are still being translated, strengthening the systematic study of his existing English translations will certainly provide strategic guidance for the subsequent English translations of his works. To deepen the study of Yu Hua's novels in English translation and open up new research directions depends on the long-term efforts of scholars at home and abroad.

4. Existing Problems and Suggestions

First of all, existing research on Yu Hua's English translation account for a large proportion of microscopic translation techniques, while there are few researches on descriptive translation. In terms of promoting the translation and dissemination of literary works, some scholars believe that "excellent Chinese literary works translated into beautiful and authentic English is the only way to marginalize Chinese literature" [22], and such remarks are no longer the focus of discussion. Examples such as "Chinese Literature" and "Panda Series" have been enough to illustrate the limitations of normative translation studies aimed at "faithfulness" on translation dissemination [21]. It is more suitable and enlightening to understand the internationally popular reading habits, acceptance mode, and aesthetic taste, explore the current translation norms in the West, and find effective promotion channels and marketing means for the "going out of the text" of the current stage. Therefore, the lack of descriptive research will undoubtedly hinder the further development of Yu Hua's overseas translation.

Secondly, for the study of Yu Hua's works, the articles are single and the research scale is small. Establishing the overall view of the study of the English translation of Yu Hua's novels seems to be a desirable idea to break through the barriers of articles and articles and break through the existing research scale. For example, the study of the English translation of Yu Hua's novels, no

matter from what perspective, should be based on the investigation of the original and the language of the translation. Therefore, it is possible to conduct a comprehensive analysis and conclusion on the linguistic features of Yu Hua's novels, establish the comprehensive research parameters of the English translation of the linguistic features of Yu Hua's novels, investigate how different translations deal with various linguistic features, and summarize the overall selection tendency of different translators for the translation strategies of various linguistic features. Or explore the differences in style and narrative mode brought by translation conversion. The regularity of any kind of language feature translation strategies can play an overall promoting role in the study of the English translation of Yu Hua's novels.

Finally, the research topic imbalance, each topic lack of systematic research. Among all the subjects, the language and review studies are the weakest. Translation studies are the new trend in Yu Hua's novel translation studies in recent years. The translator, culture, and style studies run through all the research stages. The problems of style research are mainly reflected in the unreasonable selection of research parameters, the formulation of evaluation criteria of style reproduction effect, and the insufficient follow-up research of style investigation. By comprehensively examining and summarizing the linguistic features of Yu Hua's novels and constructing the research parameters of language features in English translation, it is bound to provide a basis for the establishment of the research parameters of style translation. The evaluation criteria of the style reproduction effect should be determined by considering the "fidelity", the "sufficiency" of the original text, and the "textuality" of the translated text. Under possible conditions, it is necessary to involve professional English readers as one of the evaluation subjects in the translation quality evaluation system. The study of style should not only focus on the evaluation of the effect of style reproduction but also summarize the desirable strategies of style reproduction and explore the reasons for the differences in style reproduction strategies among translators. The study of translators needs to break through the restriction of a single title, investigate the translator group as a whole, find out the translator group with strong comparability, and systematically investigate the translation strategy selection tendency and differences of various translators.

5. Conclusion

Chinese translation studies of Yu Hua's works have undergone a transition from a single prescriptive study to a coexistence of prescriptive and descriptive studies. This trend is consistent with the overall trend of translation studies after the "cultural shift"[23]. At present, the English translation research of Yu Hua's works is insufficient, and the quantity and quality of the research results are weak, which is difficult to provide reference think tank support for Yu Hua's overseas promotion. The existing research shows the lack of influence and landmark research results. The scarcity of Yu Hua's translation research papers in important domestic journals, the low attention paid to dissertation research, and the low frequency of articles cited all reflect the realistic problems of the hindered development of Yu Hua's translation research. The loss of contact with important international media and the neglect of the role of foreign sinology is also the restricting factors of its development stagnation. Of course, English translation communication is a complex activity, and analyzing the current situation of English translation research is only one dimension to explore the problem. Combing the existing literature, analyzing the current situation, and reflecting on the problem is the starting point of the next research topic[24]. Under the background of Chinese literature "going out", on the one hand, as a successful case of "going out", strengthening the translation of his works can provide a reference for Chinese contemporary literature "going out"; On the other hand, as a writer who is still being translated, strengthening the systematic study of his existing English translation is bound to provide strategic guidance for the subsequent English translation of his works. To

deepen the study of Yu Hua 's novel translation into English and open up new research directions depends on the long-term efforts of researchers at home and abroad.

References

- [1] Z.H. Liu: A Study on the English Translation of Xu Sanguan's Blood Sale from the Perspective of Adaptation Theory (MS., Lanzhou Jiaotong University, China 2020).
- [2] W.Q. Wang, J. Xia: On the English Translation of To Live from the Perspective of Translation Ethics. Journal of Mudanjiang University, Vol. 23 (2014) No.8, p.134–136.
- [3] Q. Dong: A Study on the English Translation of Ruiwen's To Live from the Perspective of Adaption Theory (MS., Zhengzhou University, China 2015).
- [4] P.P. Wen: A Study on the English Translation of To Live from the Perspective of Hybridity Theory (MS., Henan Normal University, China 2015).
- [5] S.Y. Han: A Comparative Study of the English Translations of To Live from the Perspective of Translators' Centralism. Journal of Shanxi Agricultural University, Vol.13 (2014) No.12, p.1270–1274.
- [6] B.R. Wang, J. Cui: An Analysis of Translator's Habitus by British Sinologist Alian H·Barr—Centered on the English Translation of Yu Hua's Novel The Seventh Day, 5(2019) No.4, p.47–56.
- [7] H.Z. Feng: The Embodiment of Translator's Subjectivity from the Perspective of Hermeneutics (MS., Jilin University, China 2016).
- [8] F.Y. Zhao: A Study of Translator Subjectivity in the English Version of to Live from the Perspective of Adaptation Theory (MS., Southeast University, China 2020).
- [9] O.D. Zhang: A Study of the Translator's Subjectivity from the Perspective of Chesterman's Translation Ethics (MS., Xi'an International Studies University, China 2020).
- [10] B.H. Wang, Y.B. Quan: The Translation Strategies of Cultural Specific Words in Yu Hua's Novel Brothers—An Investigation Based on Data Statistics and Case Analysis, Vol.38 (2017) No.2, p.90–97.
- [11] Z.J. Li, W.T. Wang: The "Deep" Restoration of the Heterogeneous Culture in the English Translation of To Live, Vol.22 (2021) No.2, p.105–112.
- [12] B.H. Zhang, J.L. Zhang: A Study on the Translation Ethics of Culture-Loaded Words in the English Version of To Live, Vol.44 (2022) No.1, p.80–84.
- [13] L. Liang: A Study on the Translation of Culture-Specific Items in the English Version of To Live (MS., Lanzhou Jiaotong University, China 2022).
- [14] C.R. Shi, H.F. Zhao: A Study on the Relationship Between English Translation Strategies and Translation Effects of To Live, Vol.8 (2020) No.4, p.63–67.
- [15] Y. Liu: Translation and Reconstruction: The Translation and Publication of Yu Hua's Works in America, Vol.11 (2019) No2, p.91–93.
- [16] L.L. Zeng: A Study on the English Translation and Dissemination of Yu Hua's Works, (2015) No.4, p.60-64+106.
- [17] L.L. Zeng: A Study on Editing Behavior in English Translation of Yu Hua's Works, Vol.25 (2017) No.5, p.32–36.
- [18] Y. Fu, Y. W: A Study on the Translation Effect of Yu Hua's Novels in the United States with the Aid of Corpus, Vol.45 (2021) No.2, p.34–45.

- [19] H.J. Li: The translation and dissemination of Yu Hua's works in English-speaking countries, Vol.16 (2014) No.5, p. 61-63.
- [20] H. Yu: To live (Nanhai Publishing Company, China, 2003)
- [21] G.S. Liang: "Faithfulness" and "Creation" in Literary Translation, (2009) No.3, P.80-84.
- [22] Y.M. Liu, C.S. Zhu: International Translation and Criticism and the "Active Existence" of Chinese Literature Outside China, Vol.26 (2015) No.1, p.5-12+126
- [23] W.G. Pan: Language and translation studies under Great Change, (2016) No.1, p.6-11.
- [24] H.J. Li: On the Translation of Chinese Contemporary Literature, (2013) No.13, p.121.