



SNAP TO READ

## SEMANTIC AND COMMUNICATIVE TRANSLATION IN CHRONICLE OF A BLOOD MERCHANT

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### **Abstract:**

*Yu Hua is a celebrated avant-garde, post-modernist writer in contemporary China, whose chefs-d'oeuvre are exemplified by To Live, Chronicle of a Blood Merchant and Brothers. The novel Chronicle of a Blood Merchant was composed in 1995 and rendered into English by Andrew F. Jones in 2003. In the English version, two translation approaches can be attested, viz. semantic translation and communicative translation, propounded by Peter Newmark. Similes, metaphors and sayings in Chronicle of a Blood Merchant are saliently translated in a literal and faithful manner, in accordance with semantic translation. Furthermore, the narrative abounds with political allusions that are rendered in line with semantic translation. In terms of communicative translation that tends to be free and idiomatic, it is embodied by linguistic culture, social culture and religious culture in the sense of Nida (1945). Nonetheless, there are instances of under-translation, which encapsulates the weakness of communicative translation.*

**Keywords:** *Yu Hua, Andrew F. Jones, Peter Newmark, Semantic translation, Communicative translation*

## INTRODUCTION

Yu Hua (1960- ), one of the most illustrious avant-garde writers in contemporary China, has attained critical accolades for his post-modernist, post-revolutionary and post-New-Wave fiction since embarking upon his literary career in 1983 (Zhao 1991, Wedell-Wedellsborg 1996, Liu 2002, Xu 2015). Following his debut novella entitled 第一宿舍 *Diyi Sushe* ‘The First Dormitory’ (Yu and Zhang 2007), Yu has composed a bildungsroman 在细雨中呼喊 *Zai Xiyuzhong Huan* ‘Cries in the Drizzle’ (1990) featuring a politically suppressed society during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) period (Li 2011: 2, Xu 2020), 活着 *Huozhe* ‘To Live’ (1992) expatiating a quagmire of vicissitudes and predicaments of a rural family between the Civil War (1945-1949) and the Cultural Revolution (Shi 1999, Jennings 2009, Doll 2014, Shao 2021), as well as the controversial and award-winning epic 兄弟 *Xiongdi* ‘Brothers’ (2005-2006) that paints a vivid portrait of China’s transformation from political turbulence to acquisitiveness and spiritual residue (Finken 2003, Ehrenreich 2009, Lovell 2009, Yang 2009, Shank 2013). Apart from full-length novels, Yu has published short story anthologies since the 1990s, exemplified by 黄昏里的男孩 *Huanghun Lide Nanhai* ‘Boy in the Twilight: Stories of the Hidden China’, the English version of which was released in 2014 (Haggas 2013, Liao 2014).

An exemplary chef-d’oeuvre of Yu is a 1995 novel entitled 许三观卖血记 *Xu Sanguan Maixue Ji* ‘Chronicle of a Blood Merchant’ (Standaert 2003), in which he accords with and refines a national allegory of cannibalism created by an iconic figure of modern Chinese literature, 鲁迅 *Lu Xun* (1881-1936), in his 1918 novella 狂人日记 *Kuangren Riji* ‘A Madman’s Diary’ (Sun 1986, Hsia 1999: 533, Rojas 2011, Ma 2015, Cheng 2014). As illuminated by the narrative’s title, *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* (henceforward *Chronicle*), the impoverished protagonist sells his own blood under various circumstances, so that his family are not devoured by travails and vicissitudes of life, and this habitual, quasi-suicidal conduct spans over three decades of economic insufficiency (King 2004, Tu 2008, Wang 2015).

Enriched by traditional norms and Taoist precepts (Huang 2013, Zhou 2017), this tragicomedy is simultaneously characterised by absurd black humour, fables and parables, as well as oppression of individuals (Theiss 2005, Hong 2010, Pi 2011, Chen 2013, Wang and Li 2014). Chronicle manifests ambivalence towards capitalism and is constructed in a realistic framework enriched by sympathy for humans' agony and reflection on its causes (Knight 2005). By virtue of its artistic value and literary prominence, the novel Chronicle has been adapted into a Korean film (Baek 2015, Liao 2015, Chi 2017) and adulated as one of the 'Ten Most Influential Works in 1990s', along with Yu's another novel *To Live* (Song 2013).

In this research, I scrutinise the English version of Chronicle rendered by Andrew F. Jones in 2003, which is also equipped with the translator's thoughtful introduction to the author's style (Wasserstrom 2015).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Two preponderant concepts, semantic translation and communicative translation, are propounded by Peter Newmark (1916-2011) in *Approaches to Translation*: '[s]emantic translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original' (Newmark 1981: 39), while '[c]ommunicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original' (Newmark 1981: 39). That is to say, semantic translation tends to be literal and faithful, while communicative translation tends to be free and idiomatic (Newmark 1977). To be more specific, semantic translation is conducted within the semantic and syntactic limitations of the target text and only conveys connotations of the original culture when they encapsulate quintessential human messages, so this strategy is disposed to produce more complex, detailed and concentrated target text. Communicative translation, however, is more target-text-oriented and places more emphasis on the effect of the original text, instead of its content, so this approach is expected to be simpler, clearer and smoother

(Hietaranta 1995, Zu and Dong 2015). There is no denying the fact that these two categories entail conspicuous shortcomings: the former is prone to awkward over-translation, while the latter is subject to under-translation (Weller 1989).

## SEMANTIC TRANSLATION

The source text of *Chronicle* abounds with similes and metaphors, the vast majority of which have been rendered in a literal manner, according with the approach of semantic translation. For instance, a cracked skull and brain tissue are compared to a smashed watermelon and stewed tofu respectively in the source text, and the similes are translated faithfully in the target text, as in Example (1). As for Example (2), it contains two insolent metaphors of sexual innuendo, both of which have been rendered directly, complying with the original text and culture.

(1) 他们说：“方铁匠的儿子被丝厂许三观的儿子砸破脑袋了，听说用铁榔头砸的，脑壳上砸出了好几道裂缝，那孩子的脑壳就跟没拿住掉到地上的西瓜一样，到处都裂开了…听说用菜刀砍的，菜刀砍进去有一两寸深，都看得见里面白花花的脑浆，医院里的护士说那脑浆就像煮熟了的豆腐，还呼呼地往外冒着热气…”

People said, “Blacksmith Fang’s son was beaten so badly by Xu Sanguan’s son that he broke his head right open. I heard his skull is cracked open, like a watermelon that’s been dropped on the ground and broken into bits and pieces.” “I heard he used a cleaver, cut almost an inch into the skull, so you could see his brains oozing out. The nurse at the hospital said his brains looked like stewed tofu, and steam was coming out from between the cracks in his head.”

(Chronicle of a Blood Merchant. Chapter 8. Trans. Jones 2003)

(2) “你就不下贱啦？你看看自己的裤裆里有什么？你裤裆里夹着一个百货店，谁都能进。” “我裤裆里夹了个百货店，你裤裆里夹了一个公共厕所…”

“So you’re not a slut? You know what’s inside your pants? A department

store, that's what! Anybody can go inside!" "If I've got a department store in my pants, you have a public toilet!"

(Chronicle of a Blood Merchant. Chapter 13. Trans. Jones 2003)

Chronicle is also replete with idioms and sayings that embody Chinese culture, and a considerable proportion of them are rendered in line with semantic translation. For instance, in Example (3), the idiom 破罐子破摔 *po guanzi po shuai* literally means 'to smash a cracked jar', which indicates an act of abandoning oneself to a mood of despair in the face of mistakes or hinderance (Dong 2005: 277); as for 死猪不怕开水烫 *sizhu bupa kaishui tang* (Lit. 'a dead pig does not fear boiling water'), it implies dauntless deeds and sometimes bears similitude to 'to smash a cracked jar' (Dong 2005: 350). As for 脱裤子放屁 *tuo kuzi fangpi*, it is the Chinese equivalent for 'to gild the lily' or 'to put butter on bacon' (Zeng 2011), and its literal meaning of 'taking off your pants to fart' is presented in Example (4).

(3) 她是破罐子破摔，我也就死猪不怕开水烫了。

She's like a broken pot that's not afraid of shattering, and I'm a dead pig who no longer minds that the water's coming to a boil.

(Chronicle of a Blood Merchant. Chapter 13. Trans. Jones 2003)

(4) 你这是脱裤子放屁，多此一举。

This makes about as much sense as taking off your pants to fart. It's all completely unnecessary.

(Chronicle of a Blood Merchant. Chapter 19. Trans. Jones 2003)

Similarly, the saying 好钢要用在刀刃上 *haogang yao yongzai daorenshang* 'the best steel is for the blade and not the handle' has been rendered in a faithful fashion in Example (5). As can be seen from Examples (3-5), the translator preserves the exact contextual meaning of all expressions and hence introduces the source culture to target readers.

(5) 好钢要用在刀刃上。

The best steel is for the blade and not the handle.

(Chronicle of a Blood Merchant. Chapter 26. Trans. Jones 2003)

As posited by Newmark, a category of culture is comprised of

organisations, customs and ideas, which are embodied by political, social and legal elements (Newmark 1988: 95, 103). Given the fact the narrative has its setting in Maoist China, the source text of *Chronicle* abounds with political allusions.

Example (6), unravels political purges during the egalitarianism-based Cultural Revolution (Wu 2012: 15, Cai 2013, Strauss 2017, Liu et al 2019, Xie and Zhang 2019). In Example (6), the author alludes to prevalent, institutionalised persecutions, viz. the so-called ‘struggle sessions’ (批斗大会 *pidou dahui*), as well as ‘class enemies’, including 地主 *dizhu* ‘landlord’, 富农 *funong* ‘rich peasant’, 右派 *youpai* ‘rightist’, 反革命 *fangeming* ‘counterrevolutionary’ and 走资本主义道路的当权派 *zou zibenzhuyi daolude dangquanpai* ‘capitalist roader in a position of power’, who were labelled within a hereditary, property-based class framework (Huang 1995, Ji 2004, Mann 2004: 319-320, Su 2011: 97-100). Other political terminologies during the Culture Revolution era, exemplified by 大字报 *dazi bao* ‘big-character poster’, 红袖章 *hong xiuzhang* ‘red armband’ and 阴阳头 *yinyang tou* ‘yin-yang haircut’, are also alluded to in the example. Moreover, Example (6) also involves Mao’s title, i.e. 伟大的领袖伟大的导师伟大的统帅伟大的舵手毛主席万岁万岁万万岁 *weidade lingxiu weidade daoshi weidade tongshuai weidade duoshou Mao Zhuxi wansui wansui wanwansui* ‘the Great Leader Great Teacher Supreme Commander and Helmsman Chairman Mao May He Live Ten Thousand Years’, which encapsulates propaganda highlighting Mao-worship as well as the politico-religious Maoism and Maoist rituals (Young and Ford 1977, Madsen 1984, Shapiro 2001). All political allusions and terminologies in Example (6) have been rendered literally and explicitly, in accordance with semantic translation.

(6) 毛主席的名字为什么会这么长? 你听着: 伟大的领袖伟大的导师伟大的统帅伟大的舵手毛主席万岁万岁万万岁。一共有三十个字, 这些都要一口气念下来, 中间不能换气。你知道这是为什么? 因为文化大革命来啦...什么叫文化革命? 其实就是一个报私仇的时候, 以前谁要是得罪了你, 你就写一张大字报, 贴到街上去, 说他是漏网

地主也好，说他是反革命也好，怎么说都行…没过两天，一群戴着红袖章的人来到许三观家，把许玉兰带走了。他们要在城里最大的广场上开一个万人批斗大会，他们已经找到了地主，找到了富农，找到了右派，找到了反革命，找到了走资本主义道路的当权派，什么样的人找到了，就是差一个妓女，他们说为了找一个妓女，已经费了三天的时间，现在离批斗大会召开只有半个小时，他们终于找到了，他们说：“许玉兰，快跟着我们走，救急如救火。”许玉兰被他们带走后，到了下午才回来。回来时左边的头发没有了，右边的头发倒是一根没少。他们给她剃了一个阴阳头，从脑袋中间分开来，剃得很整齐，就像收割了一半的稻田。

Do you know how it was that Chairman Mao's name grew so long? Listen to this: He's the Great Leader Great Teacher Supreme Commander and Helmsman Chairman Mao May He Live Ten Thousand Years! That's fifteen words in all, and you have to say it in one breath, without missing a beat. You know why that is? Because the Cultural Revolution has arrived... It's actually just a time for settling old scores. If someone offended you in the past, now's the time to write a big-character poster about him and paste it on a wall on the street. You can accuse him of being an unreconstructed landlord, or a counterrevolutionary, or whatever. You can say whatever you like... Two days later a group of people wearing red armbands came to Xu Sanguan's house and took Xu Yulan away. They were planning to hold a massive struggle session in the town square. They had already found a landlord, dug up a rich peasant, located a rightist, caught a counterrevolutionary, and gotten hold of a capitalist roader in a position of power. They had everyone they needed except a prostitute. They said they had spent three days looking for a prostitute, and since there was only half an hour left until the meeting was to begin, they had finally found one. They said, "Xu Yulan, come with us. We need your help. This is an emergency." She didn't come back until later that afternoon. When she returned, the hair on the left side of her head was all gone, but the hair on the right remained untouched. They had given her a "yin yang" haircut, neatly shaving half of her hair at the part, so that it

looked like a rice paddy midway through the harvest season.

(Chronicle of a Blood Merchant. Chapter 25. Trans. Jones 2003)

Example (7) manifests another paradigm of political allusions in Chronicle, namely, 不拿群众一针一线 *buna qunzhong yizhen yixian* ‘not taking so much as a needle and thread from the masses’. This principle is derived from the Three Main Rules of Discipline and Eight Points for Attention promulgated by Mao in 1947 to prescribe the People’s Liberation Army (Trivière 1975, Kocis 1985). As shown in Example (7), the political expression has been rendered in a straightforward manner, which retains the characteristic Chinese culture during a specific social period.

(7) 等日子好过起来，我还是会不拿群众一针一线的。现在你就别把我当共产党员了，你就把我当一个恩人吧，俗话说滴水之恩，当涌泉相报，我也不要你涌泉相报，你就滴水相报吧，你就把卖了血的钱给我几元，把零头给我，整数你拿走。

When things get a little better, I’ll go back to the old policy of not taking ‘so much as a needle and thread from the masses.’ Just forget that I’m a party member for the time being. Look at me as your benefactor. They say that you should repay a drop of kindness with a flood. But I don’t want a flood. All I want is a drop in return. Why don’t you just give me a few yuan from out of what you make selling blood? You can give me the change and pocket the rest.

(Chronicle of a Blood Merchant. Chapter 20. Trans. Jones 2003)

In addition to a political allusion, Example (7) also contains a saying 滴水之恩，当涌泉相报 *dishui zhien dang yongquan xiangbao* that is extracted from an anthology entitled 增广贤文 *Zengguang Xianwen* compiled collectively and anonymously during the Qing (1644-1912) dynasty. The saying is translated literally into ‘you should repay a drop of kindness with a flood’, in line with the strategy of semantic translation.

In terms of Example (8), it contains a terminology 牛棚 *niupeng* that was coined during the Cultural Revolution to denote flimsy, dank camps where victims of the Red Guards were imprisoned (Perlez 2016,



Zha 2016). Although the literal translation of ‘cow shed’ in Example (8) is well-established and appears in academic and memoir works such as 牛棚杂忆 Niupeng Zayi ‘The Cowshed: Memories of the Chinese Cultural Revolution’ by 季羨林 Ji Xianlin (Anna 2016, Zhang 2016, Wu 2019), the direct translation of ‘cow shed’ might impede readers’ comprehension if they are void of profound understanding of the Cultural Revolution. It is worth mentioning that Example (8) contains a translation error: 活活打死 huohuo dasi means ‘to be beaten to death’, rather than ‘(to be) beaten half to death’.

(8) 为什么有人被吊在了树上、有人被关进了牛棚、有人被活活打死?

Why some people have hung themselves from trees, and some people are locked up in ‘cow sheds’ and beaten half to death?

(Chronicle of a Blood Merchant. Chapter 25. Trans. Jones 2003)

### COMMUNICATIVE TRANSLATION

It is notable that Example (6) contains a saying that does not fall under the category of semantic translation, viz. 救急如救火 jiu ji ru jiu huo or 救病如救火 jiu bing ru jiu huo (Lit. ‘to resolve emergencies/cure diseases is like to extinguish fires’) that describes urgency (Dong 2005: 168). As can be seen from the target text, the saying is simply rendered into ‘this is an emergency’ (Example (6), which complies with communicative translation.

Another saying under the category of communicative translation is 君子一言，驷马难追 junzi yiyán sima nanzhui, indicating that an undertaking cannot be retracted (Dong 2005: 173). The saying literally means ‘even four horses cannot chase a gentleman’s word’ (Trans. Mine), yet in Example (9) it is paraphrased into ‘when you promise something, you have to follow through’. The free translation in Example (9) is simple and smooth, without delivering the word-for-word information, so it should be regarded as an instance of communicative translation. It is noteworthy that in the source text, the character is referred to as 那个王八蛋何小勇 nage wangbadan He Xiaoyong that literally means ‘that bastard He Xiaoyong’ (Trans. Mine), whereas in the target text it is simply ‘He Xiaoyong’, without

the offensive word. I postulate that such an adaptation reflects the weakness of communicative translation, i.e. the contingency of under-translation, and the target text fails to convey the disdain and loathing explicitly expressed in the source text.

(9) 这是我答应人家的事，我答应人家了，就要做到。君子一言，驷马难追。再说那个王八蛋何小勇也真是你的亲爹…

I've already given my word that I'd help out, and when you promise something, you have to follow through. You have to keep your word. And after all, He Xiaoyong really is your dad.

(Chronicle of a Blood Merchant. Chapter 24. Trans. Jones 2003)

As for the saying 人是铁，饭是钢 *ren shi tie fan shi gang* that literally means 'humans are iron; food is steel' (Trans. Mine), it is omitted from the target text (Example (10)). The saying is to highlight the indispensability of food to human beings (Dong 2005: 308), yet its implication is not closely correlated with that in the posterior context. Therefore, even if the saying is absent from the target text, the intended effect is not adulterated. Additionally, the protagonist's nickname during the period of Backyard Steel Furnaces, 许炼钢 *Xu Liangang* (Lit. 'Steel-Melting Xu'. Trans. Mine), is omitted from Example (10), in that his new work commitment in 1958 is expounded in the previous context, so the deletion of such an expression renders the target text more concise.

(10) 今年是一九五八年，人民公社，大跃进，大炼钢，还有什么?...我们丝厂也炼上钢铁了，厂里砌出了八个小高炉，我和四个人管一个高炉，我现在不是丝厂的送茧工许三观，我现在是丝厂的炼钢工许三观，他们都叫我许炼钢。你知道为什么要炼那么多钢铁出来？人是铁，饭是钢，这钢铁就是国家的粮食，就是国家的稻子、小麦，就是国家的鱼和肉。所以炼钢铁就是在田地里种稻子…

This year is 1958. We've had People's Communes, the Great Leap Forward, Backyard Steel Furnaces, and what else?...And our silk factory's started to smelt steel too. We made eight little furnaces. Me and four other people are responsible for looking after one of them. So now I'm not the

man who distributes the silkworm cocoons anymore. I'm a steel smelter now. You know why we have to smelt so much steel? Because steel is like grain, grain for the state. It's like rice, wheat, meat, and fish for the state. That's why smelting steel is just like planting rice in the paddies.

(Chronicle of a Blood Merchant. Chapter 18. Trans. Jones 2003)

As mentioned previously, allusions in the source text are translated in a literal manner; alternatively, they are translated into more idiomatic English, parallel to communicative translation. For instance, the pretty heroine who fries dough is nicknamed 油条西施 Youtiao Xi Shi in the narrative, in which 西施 Xi Shi is a historical personage renowned as one of the Four Beauties of Ancient China. In Example (11), instead of rendering the nickname literally into 'Fried Dough Xi Shi', the translator adapts it into a more idiomatic English expression, 'Fried Dough Queen', thereby delivering the same connotation of attractiveness and facilitating readers' comprehension. Analogously, Xi Shi is mentioned again in Example (12), and it is translated flexibly into 'a beauty', in line with communicative translation.

(11) 她在大街上的行走，使她的漂亮像穿过这座城镇的河流一样被人们所熟悉，在这里人们都叫她油条西施...

Her strolls through the streets made everyone feel as if her pretty face were as familiar as the stream that flowed across town. And almost everyone in town knew her as the Fried Dough Queen.

(Chronicle of a Blood Merchant. Chapter 3. Trans. Jones 2003)

(12) 男人靠不住，家里有个西施一样漂亮的女人，他还要到外面去风流。

You just can't trust men. Even if they have a beauty at home, they still think they can play around with other women.

(Chronicle of a Blood Merchant. Chapter 17. Trans. Jones 2003)

Furthermore, communicative translation in Chronicle can be illustrated by linguistic culture, social culture and religious culture, all of which are subcategories of culture under Nida's equivalence framework—according to Nida's classification, culture can be divided into ecological culture, material

culture, social culture, religious culture and linguistic culture (Nida 1945: 196).

First, linguistic culture of communicative translation can be embodied by naming conventions in *Chronicle*. In Chinese naming conventions, numbers can be embedded in given names to illuminate people's sequences in nuclear or extended families (Blum 1997, Chen 2013). In the source text of *Chronicle*, the protagonist explains that his name 许三观 Xu Sanguan, in which 三 san 'three' is embedded, is to reflect that his uncles have two sons older than him, so he is the 'third' man among his generation in the extended family (Example (13)). Nonetheless, owing to the lack of English equivalent, the translator has to omit such a cultural implication and transliterate the name, as in Example (13). Analogously, the protagonist's three sons are called 一乐 Yile, 二乐 Erle and 三乐 Sanle, which literally mean 'First Happiness', 'Second Happiness' and 'Third Happiness' (Trans. Mine) respectively. In the target text, however, the three names are simply transliterated, without demonstrating the sequence among siblings.

(13) 我叫许三观，我两个伯伯的儿子比我大，我在许家排行老三，所以我叫许三观。

I'm called Xu Sanguan. My uncles' two sons are older than me, so I rank third in the Xu family.

(*Chronicle of a Blood Merchant*. Chapter 3. Trans. Jones 2003)

Second, social culture correlated with communicative translation is manifested by Example (14) capturing son preference as a longstanding manifestation of patriarchy, as well as Example (15) concerning traditional Chinese opera. In Example (14), 香火 xianghuo 'incense' acts as a metaphor denoting offspring, so it is translated into 'have descendants', accompanied by the translator's annotation 'to burn incense for you at the family shrine', which successfully preserves the original culture and simultaneously enables smoothness. As for 倒插门的女婿 dao chamende nüxu (Example (14)), 上门女婿 shangmen nüxu or 赘婿 zhuixu 'live-in son-in-law; in-marrying son-in-law', it refers to a man who joins his wife's natal family and has their

offspring adopt her surname via uxorial marriage (Fei 1947/2007: 497-477). The earliest extant record of this matrimonial institution can be attested from 史记 *Shi Ji* 'Records of the Grand Historian' composed by 司马迁 *Sima Qian* (circa 145-90 BC) (Li 2003), and this marriage custom illuminates an immemorial yearning for male offspring to preserve households' surnames (Lu and Li 2008). Notwithstanding the inferior status of live-in sons-in-law in their wives' natal families, such a social credo is the incarnation of a patriarchal structure and male dominance (Xing 2013, Ma 2016). Given the fact the implied social culture might hinder readers' understanding, the expression is paraphrased into 'I agreed to take on your family name instead of making Xu Yulan take mine' in the target text.

(14) 你只有许玉兰一个女儿，许玉兰要是嫁给了何小勇，你家就断后了，生出来的孩子不管是男是女，都得姓何。要是嫁给了我，我本来就姓许，生下来的孩子也不管是男是女，都姓许，你们许家后面的香火也就接上了，说起来我娶了许玉兰，其实我就和倒插门的女婿一样。

Xu Yulan is your only child. If she were to marry He Xiaoyong, your family line would be broken for good, because no matter whether the kids were boys or girls, their last name would still have to be He. And if she married me? My last name is the same as yours, Xu, so no matter if we had boys or girls, they would all be named Xu. Your family line will remain intact, and you'll always have descendants to burn incense for you at the family shrine. Look at it this way—if I marry Xu Yulan, it would be just the same as if I agreed to take on your family name instead of making Xu Yulan take mine.

(Chronicle of a Blood Merchant. Chapter 3. Trans. Jones 2003)

Apart from patriarchal norms, the social culture in Chronicle is illustrated by traditional Chinese opera, exemplified by terminologies appertaining to the Yue Opera (越剧 *yue ju*) in Example (15). 小旦 *xiaodan*, 小生 *xiaosheng*, 老生 *laosheng* and 丑角 *choujue* refer to discrepant roles of distinct genders, ages and characteristics (Tian 2000, Thorpe 2005, Mackerras 2016), yet they have been translated into idiomatic English expressions

‘singing clowns’, ‘the leading man’ and ‘the guy who always played the villains’, so as not to impede readers’ comprehension.

(15) 还有我们家前面的戏院，戏院也变成了食堂，你知道戏院食堂的厨房在哪里吗？就在戏台上，唱越剧的小旦、小生一大群都在戏台上洗菜淘米，听说那个唱老生的是司务长，那个丑角是副司务长...

And then there’s the theater around the block. That’s a canteen now too. You know where the kitchen is? Right on the stage. All the singing clowns from the Yue Opera Company are up onstage rinsing vegetables. I hear the leading man’s the deputy of the canteen, and the guy who always played the villains is the vice deputy.

(Chronicle of a Blood Merchant. Chapter 18. Trans. Jones 2003)

Third, religious culture is embodied in Chronicle and it is rendered parallel to communicative translation. In Example (16), the expression 阎王爷 *yanwangye* ‘Yama’ pertains to folk religion, aka popular religion (民间宗教 *minjian zongjiao*), and it is translated into ‘King of Hell’ that is more familiar to target readers.

(16) 我的命好，他们都说许三观是长寿的相，说许三观天庭饱满，我家许三观手掌上的那条生命线又长又粗，就是活到八九十岁，阎王爷想叫他去，还叫不动呢。我的命也长，不过再长也没有许三观长，我是怎么都会死在他前面的，他给我送终。

My fate is sweet. Everyone says Xu Sanguan will live for a very long time. They say you can see from his face that he’ll be blessed with longevity. If you look at his hands, you’ll see that my Xu Sanguan’s life line runs long and deep. What does that mean? It means that even when he’s over eighty, the King of Hell won’t be able to pull him down to the netherworld, no matter how hard he tries. I’m going to live to a ripe old age as well, but I won’t live as long as Xu Sanguan. He’ll be around to see me off to the netherworld.

(Chronicle of a Blood Merchant. Chapter 23. Trans. Jones 2003)

Another instance of religious culture in Example (16) is 天庭饱满 *tianting baoman* ‘the forehead is broad’ (Trans. Mine) that is a preponderant enigmatic physiognomic construct prevailing in Chinese culture. According to

traditional Chinese physiognomy, facial and physical manifestations portend fate (Kohn 1986, Shi and Wu 2016), as illuminated by divination treatises during the Song (960-1279) dynasty, such as 麻衣相法 *Mayi Xiangfa* ‘*Mayi Physiognomy; Physiognomy of Plain Clothes*’ and 神相全编 *Shenxiang Quanbian* ‘*The Compendium of Divine Physiognomy*’ (Wu 2009: 183, Ling 2015, Wang 2020: 15). In particular, a broad forehead and a round chin are surmised to prefigure affluence and sufficient offspring, as indicated by *Mayi Physiognomy* (Example (17)). This axiom occurs frequently in literary works, exemplified by a 1956 play 茶馆 *Chaguan* ‘*Teahouse*’ that is a chef-d’oeuvre of an illustrious dramatist and novelist 老舍 *Lao She* (aka 舒庆春 *Shu Qingchun*, 1899-1966) and a monumental masterpiece in Chinese literature (Ho 1996, Tan 2014, Wang and Ma 2020: 1). In Example (18) extracted from *Teahouse*, the expression ‘a full forehead and a strong jaw’ is presented to faithfully reflect the original culture. Nevertheless, in Example (16), this fortune-telling concept has been omitted, which I posit is under-translation.

(17) 地阁满来田地盛，天庭平阔子孙昌。

A round chin augurs possession of extensive land; a broad forehead bodes legions of offspring.

(*Mayi Physiognomy*. Vol. 1. Trans. Mine)

(18) 这位爷好相貌，真是天庭饱满，地阁方圆，虽无宰相之权，而有陶朱之富！

This gentleman has an auspicious face. Truly a full forehead and a strong jaw. I don’t see the lineaments of a prime minister, but there’s a wealthy merchant there.

(*Teahouse*. Act One. Trans. Howard-Gibbon 2001: 32)

In terms of the construal 生命线 *shengming xian* ‘*life line*’ in Example (16), it pertains to palmistry (手相 *shouxiang*) expounded in a treatise on divination, viz. 滴天髓 *Di Tian Sui* ‘*The Leaking Essence of Heaven*’ that illustrates birth horoscope theorisation via 阴阳 *Yinyang* ‘*Yin Yang*’, 八字 *Bazi* ‘*Eight Characters*’ and 五行 *Wuxing* ‘*Five Elements*’, 干支 *gan zhi* ‘*Sexagenary Cycle*’, etc (Li 2010, Kubny 2011). Although the expression

'life line' is translated literally, it conveys the intended effect, so the rendering is consistent with communicative translation.

## CONCLUSION

The source text of Chronicle is replete with similes, metaphors and sayings, the vast majority of which have been rendered faithfully and literally, consistent with semantic translation. There are, however, instances that are translated in a more idiomatic fashion or omitted from the target text, so as to circumvent potential comprehension barriers. By virtue of the narrative's setting, political allusions and terminologies pertaining to the Maoist era play a preponderant role in the source text, and they are predominantly rendered in line with semantic translation. In terms of linguistic culture, social culture and religious culture that are inextricably intertwined with immemorial credos and precepts, they are frequently paraphrased or omitted, so as not to impede target readers' comprehension. Nonetheless, such techniques can be regarded as under-translation, which is a conspicuous shortcoming of communicative translation.



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