Omission and its Impact on Character Reshaping in Literary Translation: A Case Study of Wolf Totem

WANG XIAOLI

Abstract. This article sets out to explore, from a socio-cultural perspective, the heavy use of omission in the English translation of a popular Chinese novel *Wolf Totem* by Jiang Rong and its side effect: the shifts that take place on the characterization of the main character in the translated text. The descriptive perspective on the use of omission, the highly motivated, deliberate operation, shows that this method is well justified when taking into consideration the socio-cultural constraints. Nevertheless, its side effects that come along cannot be overlooked.

Keywords: omission; literary translation; Chinese-English translation; character reshaping; *Wolf Totem*

Introduction

Wolf Totem by Jiang Rong is one of the most popular novels in China. Since its publication in 2004, it has been translated into over 20 languages. When its English version came out in 2008, it soon attracted attention from mainstream media in the West. Distinct from many other Chinese novels, it reaches a far wider readership and is relatively better received. But a comparative analysis of the English version and its Chinese original indicates that instead of being translated faithfully, quite a bit of the original is left untranslated in the English release. Looking from a translation studies perspective, the heavy use of omission triggers questions like: what is the "abandoned" part about and why is it deemed "unnecessary"? How is it related to the translated part and what effects it leaves if deleted? Why is the omission kept silent in the preface? In fact, although the occurrence of omission is quite common in translation, it, as a translation strategy, is rarely mentioned and escapes the attention from translation scholars. Thus, in this paper, I shall try to explore the use of omission in translation based on a case study, where I will find out and categorize the parts dropped and examine one of the consequences that comes along with the use of omission: a shift of characterization in translated text since a large part of the omission is related to the main character's thinking

and discussion, and in the end explain possible reasons that lead to the use of omission.

The Use of Omission in Translation

Omission, as a translation strategy, though occurring often in translation practice, is frequently neglected by translation scholars. Also, there is a lack of particular entry for the term in many modern dictionaries of Translation Studies. But roughly, omission can be referred to, in Dimitriu's opinion, "a strategy by means of which professional translators delete words, phrases, sentences, sometimes even more consistent parts of the source texts in order to adjust – linguistically, pragmatically, culturally, or ideologically – the translated text for their target audiences" (Dimitriu 2004: 165). The possible explanation why omission has been overlooked is that it is easily associated with negative connotations by not telling the whole story of the original text, which breaks the fundamental translation norm of "faithfulness". For example, Jean Delisle *et al.* defines omission as, in *Terminologie de la Traduction*, "a translation error where the translators fail to render a necessary element of information from the source text in the target text" (cited in Dimitriu 2004: 164). Thus, to prescriptivists of translation studies, the use of omission violates their efforts to search for "equivalence". Different from prescriptivists' negative stance on its use, however, scholars of descriptive translation studies approach it in a more proactive way. They not only describe it as a natural phenomenon in translation activities, but also as a strategy which can be adopted if used in a proper way. Chesterman (1997) put omission under the pragmatic strategies and it can be used to present information in a more concise manner. Baker (2000) pointed out that omission is one of the translation strategies that can be adopted to deal with non-equivalence problems at word level and above. Dimitriu (2004) suggested an integrated typology of omissions based on the purpose(s) for which professional translators resort to this strategy. An Du (2015) aims to elaborate the use of omission in translation from the socio-cultural perspective. With regard to the existing studies on the use of omission in translation, most of them focus on the linguistic level. While a few of them attempt to investigate the topic from the socio-cultural perspective, they handle it mostly by listing possible situations where omission may occur in a social-cultural context, lacking more specific examples to show a clearer picture. The present study tries to explore the topic in literary translation through a case study, by examining in detail the heavy use of omission from a socio-cultural perspective, and possible consequences coming along with it, which may help reveal a clearer picture of this translation method.

Wolf Totem

Wolf Totem is a semi-autobiographical novel based on the author's experience as a young student from Beijing answering Chairman Mao's call, during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), to be sent out of the city to live and work with the nomadic people in Inner Mongolia, the most remote and primitive place in China. It is there the main character, Chen Zhen, became fascinated with the wolf, the totem of the nomadic people, and even came up with the idea of raising a wolf cub himself, and eventually did so, which gave him further insight into the key role of wolf played in the life cycle of the grasslands, which was on the verge of death by encroachment of masses of Han Chinese seeking land and food. The book was written by a former political science professor at a Beijing university, under the pseudonym Jiang Rong, who had the story with him for almost twenty years and spent six years finishing it. Wolf Totem became a bestseller immediately after its release in 2004, selling millions of copies in China. In 2007, *Wolf Totem* won the inaugural Man Asian Literary Prize. One year later, its English version was launched after Penguin Books paid a record US$100,000 and 10 percent royalties for the worldwide English rights and recruited the highly respected Howard Goldblatt as its translator. It received many positive reviews from mainstream media, including *The New York Times, Time*, BBC, etc.

Omission in the English Translation of *Wolf Totem*

In the English version, approximately 90,000 out of 510,000 Chinese characters from the original are left untranslated. Omission is mainly composed of three parts regarding the location in the whole text, namely, 1) quotes at the beginning of each chapter (54% of cases); 2) texts deleted from the body part (40%); 3) dialogues attached at the end of the novel (6%).

In terms of the content, the first part omitted are quotes cited mostly from Eastern and Western works which provide historical insight about wolf and nomadic people; the second part deleted are texts from the body part, including information about Chinese historical figures, Chinese culture specific items and idioms, world history as well as Chinese history, descriptions about the nomadic custom and their daily life; dialogues cut between the two main characters and attached at the end of the novel are independent of the previous texts. They go in depth into issues talked about in the previous texts and involve the discussion of numerous instances of historical evidence.

Omission and Shift of Characterization

While the use of omission is primarily for a better accessibility and acceptability of the translated text in the target culture, it also runs the risk of having some "side effects". In this part, I shall try to look into one of the effects coming from the use of omission: shift of characterization. The analysis focuses on the part of texts left out from the body part as the other two parts deleted are independent of the novel. Among all those cut from the body part, texts regarding the dialogue, thinking, comments, etc. which help shape the characterization are selected and categorized. The following is a rough division, but there are overlaps to some extent:

(1) Chen Zhen's mental process about accepting and appreciating the wolf as the totem of the local Mongolian was partially deleted;
(2) Chen Zhen's association of wolves with important Chinese historical figures, Chinese idioms and Chinese culture was also partially deleted;
(3) Chen Zhen's thinking inspired by the cub he raised were not fully represented in the translated text.

The issues to be addressed here are: what are the omitted parts about; how do they affect the reshaping of characterization of Chen Zhen in the translated text; what the characterization of Chen Zhen is like and how it is different, in a certain way, from that of the original. Examples will be given for better understanding.

Partial Omission of Chen Zhen's Mental Process When Accepting Mongolian Culture

As a Han Chinese, Chen Zhen sticks to the idea that wolves are predators, cunning and ruthless, which are much hated and even loathed in a Chinese social context. People who are so cruel or bearing ill-ambition would be compared to a wolf. But when he comes to the grassland, he is impressed by the local wolf-centric spirituality. The reverence and respect for wolves from the herdsmen amazes him, which makes him doubt whether the ideas Han Chinese have of wolves are justifiable. The learning process is, however, not as smooth as imagined, undergoing many times of doubt and finally comes to an agreement. Interestingly, in the translated text, chunks of words which describe the character's mental activity are left untranslated:

陈阵一边听着他俩小声交谈，一边却在想他自己的心事。
在中国，人们常说的猛兽就是虎豹豺狼，但是虎豹是稀有
动物，不成群，事例少。而狼是普见动物，可成群，故事
多，恶行也多。狼是历史上对人威胁最大、最多、最频繁
的猛兽。到了草原，狼简直就是人马牛羊的最大天敌。但
为什么草原民族还是要把狼作为民族的图腾呢？陈阵又从
刚刚站住的新立场向后退却。(Jiang Rong, 2004: 56)

Literal translation[1]. Chen Zhen was listening to their whispers while drowning in his own thoughts. The savage beasts the Chinese often talk about are tigers, leopards, jackals and wolves, but the former two are rarely to be seen and they don't live in groups. Stories heard about them are scarce. Wolves are relatively more commonly seen and they are gregarious types. Thus, the legends about them and the bad deeds they do far exceed those of other beasts. Also, wolves are the beasts that threaten the humans most, are the greatest and most frequent in history. In grassland, wolves are virtually the greatest enemy of humans and stocks. But why would the herdsmen still regard the wolves as the totem of its people? Chen Zhen started to retreat from his new position he had assumed for a while.

The passage above in the Chinese version follows a bone-chilling description of how a wolf pack traps and devours a herd of warhorses and leaves behind a terrifying sight with carcasses lying all over the frozen lake. It describes what Chen Zhen is thinking when he sees the sight. When gazing at the sight, he starts to retreat from his new position he has assumed for a short time that the grasslanders' wolf totem deserves to be revered. The sight reminds him of what Han Chinese say about wolves, cruel, threatening creatures, which makes him doubt why the nomads would still put the wolf in such an unshakeable place in their soul even though it is virtually the greatest enemy of livestock in grassland. It even triggers his association of wolves in the passage that follows with fascism and Japanese soldiers in the Nanjing Massacre, which is also deleted:

陈阵眼前突然出现了南京大屠杀的血腥场面。他在狼性中
看到了法西斯、看到了日本鬼子。陈阵体内涌出强烈的生
理反应：恶心、愤怒，想吐、想骂、想杀狼。他又一次当
着毕力格老人的面脱口而出：这群马死得真是太惨了，狼
太可恶可恨了！比法西斯，比日本鬼子还可恶可恨。真该
千刀万剐！(Jiang Rong 2004: 56)

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[1]   Translation from Chinese here and henceforth by the author of this paper.

> **Literal translation.** What suddenly popped into his mind was the bloody sight of the Nanjing massacre. What he saw in wolf spirit is fascism, Japanese aggressors. Chen Zhen's physiological reaction was fierce. He felt sick, angry, and wanted to vomit, to curse and to kill wolves. He once again blurted out into the face of Bilgee, "what a tragic death the horses suffer. How cruel and abominable wolves are! More hateful than fascism and Japanese aggressors. They deserve to be killed for sure!"

The character's reaction to what he sees is violent. His hatred for wolves arises again which makes him sick and he wants to kill wolves himself. Even worse, he even blurts out to his highly-respected herdsman Bilgee that wolves need to be killed for their cruelty, which is to the great disappointment of the wise old man who helps him learn the virtues of wolves. In the translated text, however, those passages are completely omitted. What is presented to the readers is only a thinly characterized Han Chinese who is shocked to see the sight but calms down later only because of Bilgee's obvious displeasure at his reaction. The emotional turmoil Chen suffers in the original version is totally wiped out. His highly doubtful attitude towards the wolf totem is thus toned down, which is not in tune with what Chen is supposed to be, a critical and curious young intellectual.

To illustrate with another example. As is evident in the translated text, much of Chen's critical thinking revealing his effort to explore the myth lying behind the wolf totem is deleted, making his learning process a smooth one:

> 而且，成吉思汗及其子孙的军事成就和奇迹，不是以多胜少，以力取胜，而恰恰是以少胜多，以智取胜。难道他们靠的是狼的智慧和马的素质？狼的素质和性格？以及由狼图腾所滋养和激发出来的强悍民族精神？(Jiang Rong 2004: 62)

> **Literal translation.** the military achievement and wonder Genghis Khan and his descendants generated was not because of their numerical superiority and powerful forces but actually because of numerical inferiority and wisdom. Did they manage to do it with the wisdom of wolves and the qualities of horses? Or with wolves' qualities and character? Or with strong national spirit nurtured and inspired by the wolf totem?

Here, Chen attempts to connect the military miracles performed by Genghis Khan, the greatest Mongolian conqueror in history, and his descendants with the wolf spirit and wolf intelligence they possessed but he is not sure. Three questions here indicate his uncertainty. Without them, which is the case in the

translated text, Chen's psychological complexity cannot be fully elucidated, thus failing to picture a more "real" personage.

To conclude, by consistently leaving out a part of the text in the original, the characterization of Chen tends to be flat. By excluding certain descriptions about his experiences accepting a different culture as a Han Chinese, the main character in the English version is more inclined to identify with wolf culture and Mongolian spirit, or precisely, more readily assimilated by an alien culture. Thus, the character's complexity is greatly diminished.

Partial Omission of Cultural "Bumps"

The second part deleted from the original is about Chen Zhen's association of wolves with important Chinese historical figures, Chinese idioms and Chinese culture which are alien to the target text readers. In the original text, Chen is depicted as a young intellectual who is so obsessed with wolves that he wants to do research into every piece of historical evidence he can think of that is related to wolves. The omission of those parts greatly flattens the characterization of Chen.

For instance, a three-page-long description has been deleted from Chapter 21 of the Chinese version which describes how Chen tries to figure out whether the "warning wolf smoke" in the old Chinese idiom "the warning wolf smoke signals the approach of enemy forces from all sides" (狼烟四起) has something to do with wolves. It depicts in detail how he learns that the warning smoke is actually made from burning wolf droppings by referring to an authoritative dictionary and how he collects wolf droppings and does an experiment in order to testify whether it makes sense. The result, however, fails him. Instead of producing thick and dense smoke, burning wolf droppings release thin and pale smoke to his great surprise. It motivates him to ponder on why the smoke signal from the beacon towers is called "wolf smoke", a thought which takes him far into the comparison of national characters and the possible reasons for it.

Or, as is evidenced by another example, there is a paragraph cut from Chapter 28 of the original describing Chen's effort to interpret why the bold and uninhibited character of the famous Chinese poet, Li bai (701–762 A.D.), together with his distinctively vigorous and flowing style of his poems, can never be emulated by his peers. In the end, he finds out that the combination of wolf spirit and the essence of Han Chinese culture in Li bai is the answer.

While the omission of cultural "bumps" is likely to narrow the knowledge gap or save the trouble of lengthening the text, it leads to a shift in the remodeling of characterization in the translated text and turns the main character into a person who is less knowledgeable and has a less experimental

spirit, which does not quite comply with how Chen is characterized in other parts of the novel as an intellectual, a thinker, a book lover and one who loves searching for answers to his questions. Also, the fascination wolves and the wolf totem hold for Chen is considerably lessened along with the partial deletion of the main character's quest for historical evidence for the justification of the wolf totem.

Partial Omission of Thinking when Observing the Wolf Cub Being Raised

The third part omitted from the original text is about Chen's thinking inspired by the cub he raised. Owing to his mythical fascination with and great respect for wolves, Chen decides to capture a cub and raise it so as to learn more about the nature of the wolf, which he calls a science experiment. It provides him with a great opportunity to have a close observation of the much-revered animal in the grassland. Every small change happening to the little wolf provides him with insight into the myth of wolf spirituality. In the translated text, however, lots of descriptions of Chen's thoughts which have little to do with the development of the plot are left untranslated:

> 这确实要比狗，甚至比人还聪明。狼的先天遗传居然强大到这般地步？陈阵从自己的观察做出判断：遗传只是基础，而小狼的智商更强大。他这个有知识的大活人，在毒日下转悠了大半天，就是没有想到就地给小狼挖一个斜斜的遮阳防身洞。一个现代智人，竟眼睁睁傻乎乎地让一条小狼给他上了一堂高难度的生存能力课。
> [...]
> 他相信小狼会教给他更多的东西：勇敢、智慧、顽强、忍耐、热爱生活、热爱生命、永不满足、永不屈服，并藐视严酷恶劣的环境，建立起强大的自我。他暗暗想，华夏民族除了龙图腾外，要是还有个狼图腾就好了。
> [...]
> (Jiang Rong 2004: 220)

Literal translation. It is surely wiser than dogs or even humans. How can the inherited intelligence be so powerful? Judging from his own observation, he found out that while inheritance serves as a basis, the wolf cub's intelligence is superior. He, as a living human with knowledge, wandered about in the heat but cannot think of the idea of digging a slanted hole for the cub. A modern

> man, helpless and idealess, was given a challenging lesson by a wolf cub on how to survive.
> [...]
> He believed the cub would teach him more: brevity, wisdom, determination, tolerance, love of life, never getting satisfied, never giving in, withstanding harsh environments and building a strong self. He thought if only there were a wolf totem besides the dragon totem for the Chinese nation.
> [...]

The passages describe Chen's amazement at the cub's intelligence when digging a hole as a shelter from the heat in the sand, where it is chained on an extremely hot summer day, which is in stark contrast with his inability to think of a solution to the problem. A modern intellectual, as he calls himself, is defeated by a wolf, which makes Chen feel ashamed of himself and at the same time look at wolves with awe. Actually, the descriptions here indicate a step closer towards Chen's understanding of the virtues of wolves. In the translated text, however, the mental activities give way to the plot. How the cub digs its hole is given great importance, leaving the description of the characterization of Chen secondary to that. In fact, examples like this are not few. Though they are merely depictions of Chen's thinking on trivial incidents involving the wolf, they surely help shape a character who can be identified and got emotionally involved with by readers. Without them, the character tends to be thinly described.

In addition to the omission of thoughts which contribute little to the plot, many arguments which reveal the main character's thought process on national character are also partially deleted:

> 小狼的耳朵使陈阵发现耳朵与身份地位关系密切。比如, 强悍民族总喜欢去拧非强悍民族的耳朵, 而不太强悍的民族又会去拧弱小民族的耳朵。
> [...]
> 后来, 强悍的游牧民族又把此成功经验用于其他部族和民族, 去拧被征服地的民族的耳朵, 占据统治地位的集团去拧被统治民族的耳朵。于是人类社会就出现了 "牧羊者" 和 "羊群" 的关系。刘备是 "徐州牧", 而百姓则是 "徐州羊"。世界上最早被统治集团拧软耳朵的人群就是农耕民族。
> [...]
> (Jiang Rong 2004: 296)

Literal translation. It occurred to Chen Zhen from observing the ears of the cub that ears are greatly related to the social status. For example, people of a strong nation always like to pinch ears of the one not so strong. Likewise, people of a less strong nation like to pinch the ears of the weak.
[...]
Later on, the tough nomads applied the theory to rule other tribes and nations, to pinch the ears of those conquered or the ruling class pinched the ears of those being ruled. As a result, the relation between "shepherd" and "sheep" formed. For instance, Liu Bei (A.D. 161–223) was "the governor of Xuzhou city" while the civilians were "sheep of Xuzhou city". The people whose ears were pinched by rulers in the earliest history of the world were an agrarian race.
[...]

The comparison of the national character of the Han Chinese and the nomadic people is frequently discussed in this novel. The passage above is one example, in which the subject is brought up again when Chen finds out that there is a close relationship between social status and ears, for he notices that a wolf's ears would always stand straight up while those of dogs and other domesticated animals drooped. He then relates the inferiority of the agrarian race to their domesticated status and the superiority of the nomadic race to their wolf-like characteristics.

To leave out information in the original that seems repetitive about the same topic, the translator helps create a character who is likely to be neutered. This is because the translated text is closer to the nature of an adventure story. Chen, in the translated text, is thus remolded as a character who sounds less didactic in his arguments.

What is also left out from the original text are ideas which are extreme or which sound illogical to the foreign readers. Such information includes Chen's attempt to attribute wolf-spirit to the origin of the human race, Western mythology, etc.

那些拒绝直立，终因跑不过虎豹狮狼而被淘汰。陈阵多年来的
观察思索与直觉都告诉他自己：猿猴是在草原上直立起来的。
而草原狼是逼迫猿猴直立起来的重大因素之一。
（Jiang Rong 2004: 296）

Literal translation. Those that refused to stand erect were eventually eliminated for the reason that they were outpaced by tigers, leopards, lions and wolves. Years' observation, thinking and intuition told him that it was in the grassland that the anthropoid ape stood erect and grassland wolves were one of the vital factors that led to it.

The above thinking is part of the text deleted concerning the main character's assumption of the place as well as the reason why the anthropoid ape started to walk on its feet instead of crawling. He later confirms his idea by his observation and intuition that it is the wolves in the grassland that may account for the human ancestors' evolution. The translator chooses to cut this part probably because of the disputability of what seems like "biological determinism" in Chen's attempt to explain everything with wolves or wolf spirit. By doing so, the translator remolds a character who tends to be less radical or subjective in his way of thinking. His obsession with the wolf spirituality becomes more rational. But at the same time, the character seems to lose some of his personality and complexity.

Reasons for the Use of Omissions

Identifying the differences between the translated text and the original is, however, not an end in itself, but it is worthwhile if it can be shown why certain parts of the original text are dropped, abandoned or deemed unnecessary. Whatever is attributable to the omission, at any rate, needs to be placed into the context of how the novel is finally shaped as a product and what is known about the translator in question. Therefore, in what follows, I shall try to interpret the reasons for using omission from the perspectives of editorial intervention and the translation principles of the translator.

Literary translation is not merely a textual and creative process, it is also an economic activity. Howard Goldblatt assumes that "publishing economics" may be one of the most important factors which results in the "retro-editing" of Chinese literature. As a key agent of the publishing industry, editors significantly influence the translation strategies adopted and the final product shaped through heavy intervention. Howard Goldblatt, on so many occasions, defends himself by stressing the pivotal role played by Western editors when confronted with the criticism of rewriting or producing a "doctored" text. He believes that, differently from Chinese editors who normally do not fulfill their responsibilities, Western editors would be fully committed to their role. It is even so when it comes to Chinese literature. In an article he wrote for *Translation Review*, he expressed his amazement at what editors do to the source text of Chinese literature, what he calls an "eye-opener", that is, "editors stand ready to change Chinese novels in ways that my anecdotal research shows that few other literatures have to contend with. It drives me a little crazy, even when I agree that the changes tend to improve the work (I'm not talking about paragraphing or punctuation – things Chinese writers view with less than rapt

concern – but significant changes in narrative structure, substantial cuts, and rewrites)" (Goldblatt 2000: 25).

Wolf Totem is no exception. After Howard Goldblatt submitted the manuscript of the novel of more than a half million Chinese characters, he received a letter from the Penguin editor, which reads "I am blown away by what you have achieved with this translation and especially so when I consider the enormity of the task. What remains now is to make it more accessible to Western readers, which I think will be principally achieved by making some (many) strategic cuts. […] Just to give you a sense of the extent, my initial thinking is that the book could be cut by roughly one third or so [...] It is clear that there are many repetitive phrases, passages, even concepts that could be skimmed away quite easily" (Ge 2011: 102). Obviously, the top concern of the editor is readership. Actually, *Wolf Totem* was chosen to be translated into an English version mainly because of its fascinating description of the exotic Mongolian culture and life, the universal concern of human and animals, nature and culture, and its vivid depiction of all those elements intertwining with the fierce but mysterious and spiritual wolves. Just as what Jo Lusby, Managing Director of Penguin China, said on the novel's English release ceremony in the Palace Museum, "topics like environmental issues, nationalities in this novel are universal, which will surely interest Western readers." (Lusby 2008) While *Wolf Totem* is welcome for its richness of material and universal topics, it is filled with the author's pondering over the myth of the wolf totem and the comments on two different national characters, which the editor believes are too repetitive and didactic for the target text readers. Thus, cutting off the information which the editor believes does not conform to the expectation of the Western readers and keeping the rest which may appeal to them is one way of producing a readable and marketable novel.

Whereas editorial intervention works as an external factor shaping the translated text as a final product, the translation principle of a translator working as an internal factor influences considerably the specific translation strategies adopted in the whole translation process. For Howard Goldblatt, while trying to please both of his two masters, the author and the target readers, he would, eventually, choose to be on the side of his readers if he is left with no choice. In the self-interview mentioned before, he talked about his translation goal by asking questions like "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? Have I let the author speak to his new audience in ways that are not only accessible, but with a commensurate degree of pleasure or awe or outrage, or whatever?" (Ge 2011: 100) What he suggested in the two questions he asked of himself

was, in a sense, an "equivalent effect" he wanted to create through translation. Concerning the differences between cultures, poetics, readers' expectation and other factors, whether it can be achieved is still a question. As a result, if compromise is a must, "accessibility" is, at least, something that needs to be realized, which well justifies the translator's tilting towards the target text readers instead of the author.

Observing his principle of "translating for the target text readers", Howard Goldblatt, at the request of the Penguin editor to do some strategic cuts, tends to remove information in the original by taking into consideration various factors. Among them is the literary convention in the target language culture. Due to the differences between literary conventions, it is very likely that the target text would undergo adjustments to conform to the literary convention in the target language culture in order to reach a wider readership, which is especially so when considering the secondary position the translated Chinese literature holds in the West. This is illustrated by an interview Howard Goldblatt gave to *The Bund*, a Chinese magazine, in which Goldblatt was asked about the omission of a considerable proportion of discussions and comments from the original, to which he offered briefly his answers, "the omission was done at the requirement of the English editor. One part of the omission is the quotes appearing at the beginning of each chapter, which are deleted primarily for the concern that Western readers love reading stories with clear and coherent plot and hate something that is pedantic. This also applies to the dialogues attached to the end of the novel, which is left out as it is difficult for the American readers to continue reading an almost 200-page comment after they have covered a roughly 500- or 600-page novel. The rest that are deleted are scattered throughout the chapters. The Japanese version made no cuts but it consists of two volumes. If that is the case with the English one, it won't have any readers in the US" (Gu 2008). From his answer, we can see that while it is a common practice for a Chinese novel to be filled with discussions and comments, for the purpose of increasing the awareness of its readers on certain issues, it does not quite comply with what a novel should be like in the US. Thus, the translated text tends to remove part of the discussions and comments which are unnecessary for the development of the plot, adjusting it to the convention of an English novel.

Apart from taking into account the literary convention, the translator also bears in mind the cultural background knowledge of the source text and target text receivers. This in part explains why cultural "bumps" relating to Chinese history, idioms and figures were partially omitted. For example, there is an approximately 450-word dialogue completely cut from Chapter Two of

the original, a dialogue held between Chen Zhen and the old herdsman Bilgee discussing a short story of how the wolf spirit is well exemplified in the youngest son of Genghis Khan in a battle to defeat his enemy. But what are incorporated in the story are various cultural elements like great Liao dynasty, early Song dynasty, emperor of great Jin, tartars, shaman, etc. Each of them entails many footnotes when translating into English for readers who are lacking in background knowledge of Chinese history, which would greatly impair a good reading experience. After all, the novel is targeted at the general Western reader, not the professionals. In addition, in terms of the function of this part in the original text, it serves as one additional example of what has been agreed about wolves' huge impact on the military strategies used by Mongols, which is possibly the reason why it is assumed to be repetitive. As a result, consistent parts of the source text like this are deleted. Besides excising content which are seemingly repetitive or only of local interest but are alien to Western readers, the translator tends to omit some information which is likely to contradict common beliefs among target text readers. In fact, Howard Goldblatt has done much preliminary work by watching movies themed on wolves, reading books about Inner Mongolia before translating *Wolf Totem.* The knowledge he has of the source language culture, together with his understanding of the target language culture, contributes to his decision-making about which part of the original is to be preserved or cut.

Conclusion

This study, through a case study of comparing the English translation of *Wolf Totem* to its Chinese original, investigated the use of omission and its impact on the shift that occur in terms of characterization of the hero, Chen Zhen, in the target text. A close examination shows that among others, there is a heavy omission of information from the original relating to the character's thinking and discussion. The analysis of the omitted content tells us that the shift does occur regarding the characterization of Chen Zhen, which as presented in the translated text, tends to be thinly described, flat and rationalized, with less complexity, being of secondary importance when compared to the wolves and the plot. Put in a larger social-cultural context, the underlying reason for omission is attributable to the editorial intervention and translator's translation principle. While the editor bears in mind the marketability by requiring some cuts to make the target text more accessible to the Western readers, the translator, sticking to the principle of "translating for the target text readers", omits information which may potentially harm the readability and acceptability

of the target text. Thus, the use of omission is justifiable when taking into consideration the social-cultural constraints. While the use of this can promote accessibility and acceptability in the target culture, it runs the risk of having "side effects", just like what we have here, the shift in characterization. I hope that the case study would provide some insight into the nature of omission as a translation method in literary translation.

Wang Xiaoli
freja123@163.com
Shanghai Jiao Tong University
800 Dongchuan Road
Minhang District
Shanghai 200240
P. R. CHINA

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