



The Art Of Capturing Local Literature And The Craft Of Translating It To Global Literature: A Case Study Of Wu Ming Yi's The Man With The Compound Eyes

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Abstract :

As the demand for English continues to rise, there is an equally pressing need to foster dialogue between English and local languages. This dialogue can be effectively facilitated through translation, which acts as a bridge between cultures. Historically, the standardization of certain languages at the expense of others dates back to colonial times when many nations pursued monolingualism, sidelining regional and native languages. This neglect has had lasting impacts on cultural diversity and identity. However, the 21st century is witnessing a shift. There is a growing recognition of the importance of preserving and revitalizing native languages and cultures alongside English and the modern culture. This paper will explore these significant changes in the realm of translation, highlighting how it can serve as a tool for cultural exchange, empowerment, and the reclamation of linguistic heritage. Through translation, we can celebrate linguistic diversity and foster greater understanding in our interconnected world. The translation of local languages into English in any other nation stands as a significant milestone in the recognition of local literatures on the global stage. It not only elevates the voices of local authors but also challenges the historical marginalization of their narratives within the global literary landscape. This paper aims to delve into the role of translation in promoting global literary landscape serving as a conduit for cultural exchange and understanding, focusing on Wu Ming Yi's internationally acclaimed novel *The Man with the Compound Eyes* which attains global acclaim through its translation by Derry Stark. Moreover, in an increasingly interconnected world, translation serves as a vital mechanism for fostering global literary diversity. Particularly picking up the the work of Wu Ming-Yi, a prominent Taiwanese author whose writings address ecological issues, cultural identity, and the complexities of modern life, it is possible to explore how translation not only makes these works accessible to a global audience but also fosters appreciation for diverse voices and experiences. However, the process of translation is not without its challenges, including the need to maintain the author's voice and the cultural specificity embedded in the text. This paper

discusses the significance of translation as an interpretative act that shapes how literature is perceived across different cultures. Ultimately, through Wu Ming-Yi's works, we illustrate how the craft of translation promotes the art of local native literature enriching literary diversity, global discourse, and multi-cultural understanding.

The primary objective of literary translation is to engage the reader's artistic sensibility, creating an experience that mirrors the original work. This process is highly significant, especially for smaller nations, where translations not only enrich and modernize the local native literature but also preserve cultural heritage and foster global understanding. For prominent Taiwanese writer Wu Ming-yi—who embodies the spirit of a modern Renaissance man by seamlessly integrating his roles as a writer, painter, designer, photographer, literary professor, butterfly scholar, and environmental activist—translation has been pivotal in expanding his global reach. Wu first gained local recognition in Taiwan through his nature writing, such as *The Book of Lost Butterflies* (2000) and *The Way of Butterflies* (2003), both of which explore the intricate connections between humans and nature. These works showcased his literary talents and his deep commitment to environmental issues. His debut novel, *Routes in the Dream* (2007), delves into Taiwan's complex history during the Japanese colonial period and has been celebrated for its exploration of memory and familial relationships. However, it was his eco-fantasy novel *The Man with the Compound Eyes* that brought him international acclaim, particularly after being translated into English by Derryl Sterk and published by a prestigious English language publisher, Pantheon.

In his article 'Landscape in Motion: Wu Ming-Yi's Novels and Translation', Pei-yun Chen begins stating,

"Gary Tan, founder of the Garyhawk Agency and the man who has succeeded in presenting Wu Ming-Yi's Fuyan ren (*The Man with the Compound Eyes*) to an international readership, once proudly claimed, "This is the first time in history that an English prestige publisher purchased the copyright of a Taiwanese novel....The English book market has been the most difficult market for translation all over the globe, and we can hardly believe we made it with only one attempt." Tan insisted on finding someone "local" to translate *The Man with the Compound Eyes* into English, and Darryl Sterk, a Canadian scholar working in Taiwan at the time, appeared to be a perfect choice" (chen,155)

He insisted on Wu's achievement as monumental, as the English-speaking literary market has historically been resistant to translations, especially from smaller nations like Taiwan. Further solidifying his place in global literature, Wu's novel *The Stolen Bicycle* (2017) is also translated by Derryl Sterk and longlisted for the Man Booker International Prize in 2018. The novel blends personal narrative with Taiwan's tumultuous history, once again showcasing Wu's ability to weave together environmental themes, cultural memory, and intricate human relationships. This longlisting highlighted the growing global interest in Taiwanese literature and affirmed Wu's vital role as a dominant literary voice.

One of the keys to this success was Tan's insistence on finding a translator who was familiar with Taiwan's culture. Derryl Sterk, a Canadian scholar living and working in Taiwan at the time, was chosen as the ideal translator. Sterk's deep understanding of Taiwanese culture, paired with his linguistic expertise, enabled him to preserve the novel's rich ecological and cultural themes, thus making it accessible and resonant for an international audience. In an interview discussing the intricacies of translating Wu Ming-Yi's works, Darryl Sterk demonstrates his expertise as a translator through his thoughtful insights saying,

"foreignization is about bringing the reader closer to the original and it is integral in drawing a connection between reader and author....."Okay I can make so much money in a week, wow this is a pretty good job," but if that is your attitude you will not do a good job. It is extremely time-consuming, with many revisions—so you must forget about the time and income. You focus on making it as good as you can, making it perfect." (sterk)

It is clearly visible translation played as one of the significant role in Wu's global recognition in spite of his skilful strategic writing about which Shiuuhuah Serena chou rightly puts in his article,

"In Wu's *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, we find the impulse of a non-Western writer to adopt Western environmental vocabulary as a way of modernizing and aligning the local with the global. The globalized local or localized global in Wu's novel reveals a cosmopolitan sense of the world and the readership of *The Man with the Compound Eyes* reveals the worlding of ecocriticism as a process of cultural adaptation and translation" (Chou 8).

Through Sterk's best ever translation, Wu's vision surpassed linguistic barriers, reaching readers across the world and allowing them to engage with Taiwan's environmental and cultural landscapes. In this way, literary translation not only expanded his global audience but also contributed to global ecocriticism by providing a unique Taiwanese perspective on nature, humanity, and the consequences of environmental destruction.

The success of *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, an eco-novel concerning threatening environmental issues, demonstrated the potential for exporting Taiwanese literary works, which had long been marginalized in the world literature scene. Moreover, Wu's novel offered a glimpse into what Taiwan could contribute to global literary conversations as it is so much appeal as complex narratives that blend myth, environmental consciousness, and a deep engagement with modern crises.

Furthermore Ursula K. Le Guin, a prominent American writer, praised the novel for offering "a new way of telling our new reality," calling it "beautiful, entertaining, frightening, preposterous, and true." Her statement highlights one of the key reasons the novel appeals to an international audience. Wu's depiction of environmental degradation resonates deeply in an era where climate change is a shared global reality, and his storytelling transcends national boundaries.

In *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, Wu argues that the environmental crisis is a global phenomenon, one that cannot be confined by national borders. Citizenship and language barriers must be suspended, as the environmental damage is a collective responsibility, and its consequences affect everyone, regardless of location. This universal theme of ecological interconnectedness is what makes the novel so compelling on the world stage and it speaks to the shared fate of humanity in the face of environmental destruction, offering a literary voice that bridges the local and the global.

The following quotes from the novel underscores this universal theme,

"In all honesty, I don't envy you the possession of this power over memory, nor do I admire you. Because humans are usually completely unconcerned with the memories of other creatures. Human existence involves the willful destruction of the existential memories of other creatures and of your own memories as well. No life can survive without other lives, with the ecological memories of other living creatures have, memories of the environments in which the live. People don't realize they need to rely on the memories of other organisms to survive. You think that flowers bloom in colorful profusion just to please your eyes. That a wild boar exists just to provide meat for your table. That a fish takes the bait just for you sake. That only you can mourn. That a stone falling into a gorge is of no significance. That a sambar deer, its head bent low to sip at a creek is not a revelation . . . When in fact the finest movement of any organism represents a change in an ecosystem." The man with the compound eyes takes a deep sign and says: "But if you were any different you wouldn't be human." (Wu,328)

By breaking through the barriers of language and nationality, Wu Ming-yi's work has challenged the notion that Taiwanese literature belongs on the periphery of world literature with the aid of his translator Derryl Stark. His success demonstrates how a strong, localized voice can contribute to and enrich global dialogues on pressing issues such as environmental degradation and cultural identity, making his work not just a Taiwanese triumph, but a significant contribution to world literature as a whole.

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