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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Devour or Nourish? Rethinking Picture Rewriting through Cannibalistic Translation in the Korean Versions of *Red Gourd*

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| ABSTRACT
Drawing on cannibalistic translation theory, this study examines two Korean versions of Cao Wenxuan's *Red Gourd* (红葫芦): the short story collection *Sea Cow* (바다소) and the picture book adaptation *Red Gourd* (빨간 호리병박). It explores how textual reduction and image rewriting function as cross-cultural strategies to reconstruct meaning and mediate cultural values for Korean readers. The short story collection exemplifies a "weak devouring" approach, simplifying poetic expressions while preserving core metaphors. In contrast, the picture book demonstrates "strong devouring" through bold visual transformation, symbolic substitution, and cultural reconfiguration, thereby creating a "third space" for intercultural negotiation. This study argues that picture rewriting in translation not only fulfills a narrative role but also performs cultural work through localized visual language. By extending cannibalistic translation theory to visual narratives, the paper contributes to multimodal translation studies and offers both theoretical and practical insights into cross-cultural adaptation in children's literature.

| KEYWORDS
Red Gourd; Korean translation of Chinese children's literature; picture rewriting; cannibalistic translation theory; visual narrative

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Cao Wenxuan, a celebrated contemporary Chinese children's author, is widely known for his lyrical prose and nuanced depictions of emotional and philosophical themes. *Red Gourd* (红葫芦), one of his seminal works, interweaves motifs of childhood, familial bonds, and resilience within a framework of richly symbolic Chinese cultural imagery. *Red Gourd* has been translated into Korean in two distinct formats: as a short story in the prose collection *Sea Cow* (바다소), and as a standalone picture book under the same title *Red Gourd* (빨간 호리병박). These two versions diverge markedly in terms of narrative structure, translation strategy, and visual adaptation, offering fertile ground for examining how textual and visual modes function in cross-cultural transmission and picture rewriting.

In recent years, the translation of children's literature has garnered growing scholarly attention, especially in light of the increasing interest in multimodal translation studies. Scholars such as Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) have emphasized that images in picturebooks are not mere supplements to verbal text, but integral components of narrative construction. Despite this recognition, much of the current research still centers on verbal language transformation, while the role of images in mediating and reconstructing meaning across cultures remains underexplored—particularly in the context of Korean translations of Chinese picturebooks, where picture rewriting often serves as both a narrative and cultural strategy.

Against this backdrop, cannibalistic translation theory provides a compelling framework for examining the dynamic interplay of culture, language, and image in translation. Originally proposed by Brazilian modernist Oswald de Andrade in his *Cannibalist*

Manifesto (1928) and later adapted into translation studies by scholars such as Bassnett and Trivedi (1999), the theory suggests that target cultures "devour," absorb, and creatively remake foreign elements to produce new cultural expressions. While traditionally applied to postcolonial textual translation, this study contends that the framework is equally relevant to visual narratives in picturebooks, where illustrations serve not only as cultural representations but also as active agents in intercultural negotiation and symbolic transformation.

Accordingly, this paper seeks to answer the following research questions:
(1) How do the two Korean versions of *Red Gourd* differ in terms of textual reduction and visual transformation?
(2) In what ways does picture rewriting substitute for verbal narration to localize core values and facilitate cross-cultural meaning-making?
(3) How are the notions of “devouring” and “re-creation” in cannibalistic translation theory manifested in the visual adaptation of these Korean translations, and what do they reveal about the mechanisms of intercultural communication in children’s literature?

2. Theoretical Perspective: Cannibalistic Translation Theory and Picture Rewriting in Children's Literature

Cannibalistic translation theory offers a powerful lens for examining cross-cultural dynamics in translation. Initially articulated by Brazilian modernist Oswald de Andrade in his 1928 *Manifesto Antropófago* (Cannibalist Manifesto), the theory imagines the act of "devouring" foreign cultural materials—absorbing, digesting, and transforming them—to create a new and culturally specific expression. Later, translation scholar Haroldo de Campos developed this concept within the field of translation studies, highlighting translation as a generative and transformative act in which the translator reinvents the source through creative appropriation (Gentzler, 1993; Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999). Central to cannibalistic translation is the notion of re-creation: the translator extracts the “nutrients” of the original text but produces a target version that reflects the aesthetic logic, values, and needs of the receiving culture. While the theory emerged in response to colonial power dynamics, it has since been applied more broadly to describe how dominant cultural symbols can be appropriated and reshaped in translation to enrich and “nourish” the target system (Jeremy, 1999; Wen, 2016). In this sense, the theory resonates strongly with the practice of picture rewriting in children’s literature, where the act of visual transformation becomes a site for cultural negotiation and symbolic reconfiguration.

Scholarship from both Korean and Chinese researchers affirms the importance of picture rewriting as a multimodal narrative strategy. Cui (2020) highlights how visual elements—such as color schemes, compositional structure, and character design—are strategically modified to align with the visual and cognitive preferences of the target audience. Kim (2007) further argues that such modifications lower the barrier to understanding foreign cultural content, especially for young readers, thereby fostering emotional resonance and identification. Likewise, Wang and Ma (2024) suggest that visual re-creation in translated picturebooks performs dual functions: cultural adaptation and semiotic restructuring, enabling a harmonious integration of foreign content into the receiving culture’s aesthetic framework.

Within the Korean translations of *Red Gourd*, the short story collection (*Sea Cow*) and the picture book edition (*Red Gourd*) embody two distinct cannibalistic strategies: "weak devouring" and "strong devouring." The short story version simplifies the lyrical and symbolic dimensions of the original, preserving its core sentiment while adapting its structure to align with Korean narrative conventions that favor conciseness and clarity. By contrast, the picture book translation reimagines the symbolic imagery—especially the red gourd—through bold visual storytelling. This version employs vibrant colors, dynamic layouts, and culturally resonant motifs to reframe the narrative in terms that are more immediately accessible and emotionally compelling to Korean child readers.

3. Analysis of Picture Rewriting in the Korean Translations of *Red Gourd*

3.1 Comparison Between the Chinese Original and the Two Korean Translations

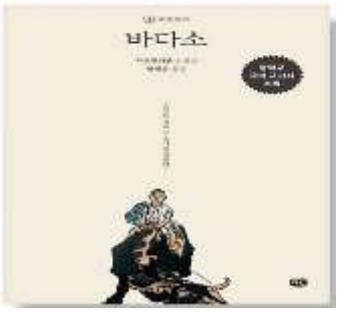

Figure 1 Chinese Original *Red Gourd* *Figure 2 Korean Translation 1 Sea Cow* *Figure 3 Korean Translation 2 Red Gourd*

Red Gourd stands as a quintessential example of lyrical children's literature in China, weaving together seasonal imagery, emotional growth, and cultural symbolism. The narrative delicately interlaces human experience with the rhythms of nature, rendering the red gourd not merely as a plot device, but as a visual-metaphorical emblem of vitality, protection, and transformation. In contrast, the two Korean translations—*Sea Cow* (short story) and *Red Gourd* (picture book)—reconfigure this symbolic ecology through strategies of textual condensation and visual reinvention. While *Sea Cow* reduces narrative density, allowing verbal and visual elements to rebalance the story's emotional weight, the picture book version engages in bold visual rewriting, offering a localized visual discourse that speaks directly to Korean children's aesthetic sensibilities.

3.1.1 Weak Cannibalism: Textual Simplification and Visual Compensation

Case (1):

ST: As soon as Niuniu stepped out of the house, she could always see a boy named Wan swimming in the river, holding a bright red gourd. She would turn her head to one side to look at the cucumber vines climbing up, or turn to the other side to look at the round bird's nest perched on a small tree branch. Or, she would tilt her head back to gaze at the clear blue sky over the river, where pigeons were flying. But in her ears, the noisy sound of water splashing, caused by Wan's feet, could always be heard.

TT: As soon as she stepped out the gate, Niuniu would always see a boy named Wan swimming with a bright red gourd in his arms. (X) However, Niuniu's ears could only listen to the vigorous sound of water splashing made by Wan.

In one early scene, the source text constructs a multisensory panorama: Niuniu sees cucumber vines curling upward, a bird's nest balanced on a branch, and pigeons crossing a blue sky—all while the rhythmic splashing of water persists in her ears. This passage evokes a deep integration of natural imagery and emotion, foregrounding Niuniu's sensitivity and her bond with the environment.

In the *Sea Cow* version, this sensory tapestry is truncated. The natural visuals are omitted, and only the auditory cue—the sound of water splashing—is retained. This "weak devouring" strategy simplifies the linguistic texture but entrusts the visual mode (i.e., illustrations) with increased narrative responsibility.

While the Korean short story format lacks accompanying images in-text, its design allows for symbolic visualization on the cover and in margins. More importantly, this simplification aligns with Korean children's literature norms that emphasize psychological proximity and narrative directness. The implicit trade-off—fewer nature details for clearer interpersonal cues—marks a shift in narrative focus from external landscapes to internal states.

From a theoretical standpoint, this reflects what Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) term **"symbiotic picture-text relationship,"** where the verbal and visual narratives co-construct meaning rather than mirror each other. The Korean version suppresses visual-verbal parallelism in favor of **emotive accessibility**, reorienting readers toward action, sound, and character-driven dynamics.

3.1.2 Strong Cannibalism: Visual Substitution and Cultural Symbol Reframing

Case (2)

ST: On the blue water, the floating red gourd resembled a fresh little sun just rising. The children in this place, when swimming in the river, would always hold a dried gourd. It serves the same purpose as the lifebuoys used by children in the city. The children living on the boat also hang a gourd around their waist, fearing that they might drown in the water.

TT: In their hands, the children here always hold a red-painted gourd, which serves as a lifebuoy.

In this case, the "red gourd" in the source text is not just a tangible object but also carries deep cultural symbolism. In Chinese culture, gourds are often associated with warding off evil, ensuring safety, and other traditional meanings, and even used as charms or medicines. Therefore, the gourd in the original text not only has a physical function but also represents a cultural symbol that carries specific values from the source culture.

In the original Chinese narrative, the red gourd is saturated with cultural symbolism: traditionally associated with warding off evil, ensuring safety, and functioning as a medicinal vessel, the gourd serves not only a narrative role but also acts as a vessel of traditional cosmology and emotional security.

In the Korean picture book adaptation (*Red Gourd* 빨간 호리병박), this object undergoes a marked transformation. While the term *호리병박* (gourd) is retained at the lexical level, the **visual rendering of the gourd is reimagined as a Western-style red lifebuoy**—a familiar safety device in Korean and global children's environments. This substitution exemplifies a "strong cannibalism" strategy: the translator-illustrator team has digested the symbolic function of the object and recreated it in a form that aligns with local cognitive schemas.

This visual replacement constitutes more than a mere pragmatic localization. The lifebuoy retains the protective function of the original symbol while discarding the culturally specific exterior. In visual semiotics terms, it moves from **indexical-naturalist representation** (Chinese gourd) to a **functional-iconic representation** (modern lifebuoy). This translation also shifts from **metaphoric protection** to **literal safety**, reflecting a shift in target culture expectations regarding visual clarity and didacticism in children's literature.

Such reframing also alters the affective dimension of the illustrations. Whereas the gourd's organic shape, color, and texture resonate with natural growth and emotional intimacy in the original, the illustrated lifebuoy conveys urgency, alertness, and assertive intervention. The visual composition—often showing the lifebuoy in stark contrast against the river background—suggests a narrative dynamic based on confrontation with danger rather than harmonious immersion in nature.

Theoretically, this strategy aligns with **substitutive visual translation**, where the source symbol is not preserved but actively replaced with a culturally more legible signifier. It illustrates a process of **semiotic cannibalism**, wherein cultural symbols are devoured and rearticulated in the visual language of the receiving culture, preserving function while altering form.

3.1.3 Hybrid Cannibalism: Cultural Retention and Functional Substitution in Visual Discourse

Case (3) :

ST: One afternoon, while Niuniu was happily swimming in the shallow waters, Wan, who had been sitting still, suddenly said to Niuniu: "Hold the red gourd and swim to the other side."
"I'm scared."
"I'll protect you."
"Then I'm still scared."
"I'll stay close to you. Isn't that okay?"
"Well, alright, but don't leave me."
Wan nodded.
When Niuniu swam to the middle of the river, she looked at the faraway banks on both sides and suddenly felt a bit afraid.

TT1: One afternoon, when Niuniu was splashing around in the shallow waters, Wan, who had been sitting still, suggested, "Let's swim across the river. You just have to hold the gourd."
"I'm scared."
"I'm here."
"I'm still scared."

"I'll hold you tight. Still no?"
"Then okay, but don't ever let go!"
Wan nodded.
When they reached the middle of the river, Niuniu suddenly felt a bit afraid, thinking about how far she was from both banks.

TT2:

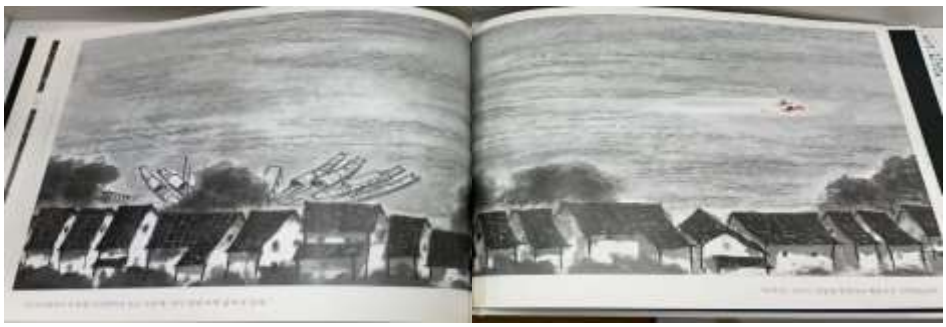

Figure 4 **Figure 5**

Figure 4: "Do you want to try going across the river? You can just hold the gourd, and I'll stay right beside you."

Figure 5: "I'm scared." Niuniu hesitated for a while before starting to swim.

A pivotal moment in *Red Gourd* occurs when Niuniu, hesitant yet trusting, is urged by Wan to cross the river with the red gourd. In the original Chinese text, this moment unfolds with a careful layering of emotional reassurance ("I'll protect you"), spatial imagery (the distant riverbanks), and the red gourd as a symbolic mediator between fear and courage. The gourd here is not only an object of flotation but a vessel of emotional support, deeply embedded in the relational tension of the scene.

In the Korean picture book, this emotional architecture is visually reconstructed rather than verbally explained. The red gourd appears in the illustrations, but its design is notably stylized: it resembles a lifebuoy in shape and coloring, yet retains the gourd's name (*호리병박*). This dual strategy blends cultural retention (terminology and symbolic resonance) with functional substitution (form and visual logic), exemplifying what this paper calls hybrid cannibalism.

The illustrations convey much of the emotional progression: Niuniu's hesitation, Wan's ambiguous smile, and the symbolic distance of the river are all depicted through facial expressions, body orientation, and compositional framing. In this way, the pictures assume the narrative and psychological functions of the omitted inner monologue and environmental description. This aligns with enhancement-type picture-text relationships (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006), where the image deepens and emotionalizes what the condensed text implies.

More critically, this strategy reflects a visual intercultural negotiation. By retaining the linguistic trace of the "gourd" while substituting its visual morphology with a modern analog, the translation creates a liminal space where source and target cultural codes coexist. For the Korean child reader, the lifebuoy's safety connotation is intuitive, while the term "gourd" offers a faint echo of exoticism—an entry point into the foreignness of the original narrative.

Such hybridization also mirrors broader patterns in transnational picturebook translation, where translators and illustrators act not as passive conveyors but as visual cultural mediators, curating what is domesticated and what remains visibly foreign. This highlights cannibalistic translation as a spectrum, rather than a binary, in which textual and visual strategies fluctuate between digestion, adaptation, and preservation.

4. "Cannibalism" and "Re-creation" in the Context of Cannibalism Translation Theory

Within the framework of Cannibalism Translation Theory, "cannibalism" refers to the process by which the target culture absorbs, digests, and reconstructs the symbols and elements of the source culture, making them conform to the aesthetic and narrative habits of the target culture. In the two Korean translations of *The Red Gourd*, this "cannibalism" strategy is fully realized in the rewriting of the text and illustrations, particularly in the treatment of natural scenes. Below is a detailed analysis of this aspect:

4.1 Cannibalism through Textual Simplification and Visual Redistribution

The original *The Red Gourd* creates a vibrant and poetic natural world through delicate descriptions of nature. These descriptions, featuring images of cucumber vines, bird nests, and pigeons flying across the blue sky, showcase Niuniu's love for nature and her keen observation of life. These natural scenes not only enhance the visual imagery of the story but also convey Niuniu's emotional state through symbolism.

ST: Reeds grew out of the water, and a few fluffy little ducklings appeared. They swam lightly across the water. They would occasionally dip their flat beaks into the water, or splash water onto their necks. The sparkling droplets of water rolled vividly on their soft down feathers. A green frog, startled by the wind, jumped from a lotus leaf into the water. With a splash, droplets of water rolled down the lotus leaf, making a gentle sound. The big river exuded a coolness. The river deeply tempted Niuniu.

TT1: At that moment, fluffy little ducklings emerged from the reed bed. They leapt lightly into the water and swam gracefully. Their small beaks pecked at the water, occasionally splashing droplets over their soft feathers, which glistened like beads of dew. A green frog sat on a lotus leaf when a breeze blew by. Startled, the frog leapt into the water, and the droplets on the lotus leaf rolled down with a soft sound. The coolness of the river spread across the air. Niuniu could not resist the allure of the river.

TT2:

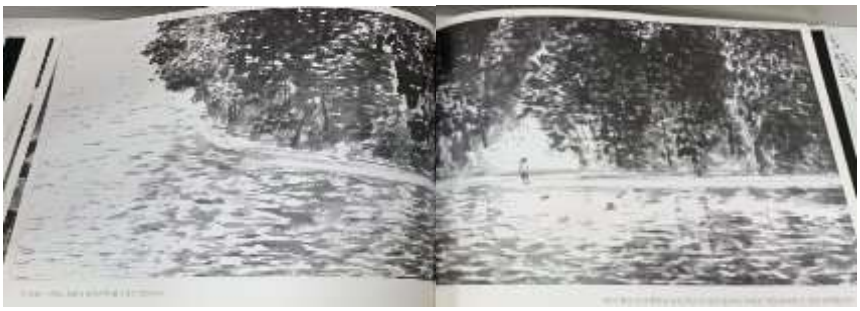

Figure 6 **Figure 7**

Figure 9: The great river flowed with cool water in winding curves.
Figure 10: Wan pushed the red gourd towards Niuniu. Niuniu hesitated as she gazed at the vast river.

While the Chinese text often relies on interior monologue and psychological narration to express Niuniu's hesitation, fear, and longing for protection, the Korean picture book conveys these emotional states primarily through images. In key scenes, Niuniu's fear is externalized through body posture, facial expression, and the use of empty space around her in the illustrations, creating an emotional ambience that complements—and in some cases, **replaces**—the verbal description.

This transformation is best described as **intersemiotic translation**: emotional subtext is not lost but converted into a different semiotic code. The picturebook medium enables this process by allowing visual language to take over from verbal interiority. The gourd, for example, is no longer described in poetic terms as "a rising sun on the water" but is instead illustrated in glowing red against the cool tones of the river—a symbolic contrast that **visualizes Niuniu's vulnerability and Wan's power**.

Here, re-creation is not only narrative but affective. By shifting from verbal to visual affective cues, the translation renders emotional states more immediate and more accessible for young Korean readers. This aligns with what Oittinen (2000) calls the **"embodied accessibility"** of picturebooks, wherein children engage with meaning through both textual content and visual resonance.

The illustrations also offer **visual foreshadowing**: Wan's ambiguous smile and distant gaze are depicted before his betrayal, prompting child readers to infer tension even without explicit narration. This enhances narrative depth while maintaining a simplified textual surface—a hallmark of **visual cannibalism** that swallows narrative complexity into pictorial form.

4.2 Re-creation through Intersemiotic Translation and Emotional Visualization

In the original text, emotions (such as Niuniu's fear and Wan's comfort) are often expressed through delicate descriptions in words. In the Korean translations, however, these emotions are visually conveyed through the expressions and actions of the characters in the illustrations.

ST: One afternoon, Niuniu was happily playing in the shallow water when Wan, who had been sitting still, suddenly said, "Hold the red gourd and swim to the other side."
"I'm scared."
"I'll protect you."
"But I'm still scared."
"I'll stay close to you. Is that okay?"
"Well, alright. But don't leave me."
Wan nodded.
When Niuniu swam to the middle of the river holding the gourd, she looked at the distant shores on both sides, suddenly feeling afraid. She then saw Wan smile. His smile was strange, as though it contained a secret. To Niuniu, there was nothing but a vast expanse of water. It was the first time she realized how big the river truly was. Apart from the red gourd, there was only emptiness. Niuniu turned and looked at Wan, but his face was expressionless as he stared at the far shore.
"Let's go back."
"It's just as far to go forward as it is to go back."
"I'm scared."
Wan kept staring ahead, as if making some decision in his mind.
"I'm scared..."
"What's there to be afraid of?"
Suddenly, Wan pulled Niuniu close and snatched the red gourd from her hand. Niuniu screamed and began sinking into the water. Her hands desperately grasped at the water's surface, and she cried out loudly to Wan, "The red gourd! The red gourd!"
But Wan just smiled and swam away. Niuniu continued sinking.

TT1: One afternoon, Niuniu was splashing in the shallow water when Wan, who had been sitting still, suddenly proposed, "Let's swim across the river. You just need to hold the gourd."
"I'm scared."
"I'm here."
"But I'm still scared."
"I'll hold you tightly. Is that okay?"
"Alright. But you must never let go of me!"
Wan nodded.
When they reached the middle of the river, Niuniu suddenly realized how far she was from the shores. She started to feel afraid. Then, Wan smiled at her. His smile seemed to carry some kind of meaning, as though there was a hidden scheme.
Surrounded only by water, Niuniu finally understood just how vast the river was. She looked back at Wan, but he was staring ahead with an emotionless face.
"Let's go back."
"Going forward or going back, it's just as far."
"I'm scared."
Wan continued looking ahead, as though making some decision in his mind.
"I'm scared..."
"What's there to be scared of?"
Suddenly, Wan pulled Niuniu close and snatched the red gourd from her hand. Niuniu screamed and sank into the water. She desperately reached out, grabbing at the water, and shouted to Wan, "The red gourd! The red gourd!"
But Wan just smiled and swam away. Niuniu sank deeper into the water.

TT2:

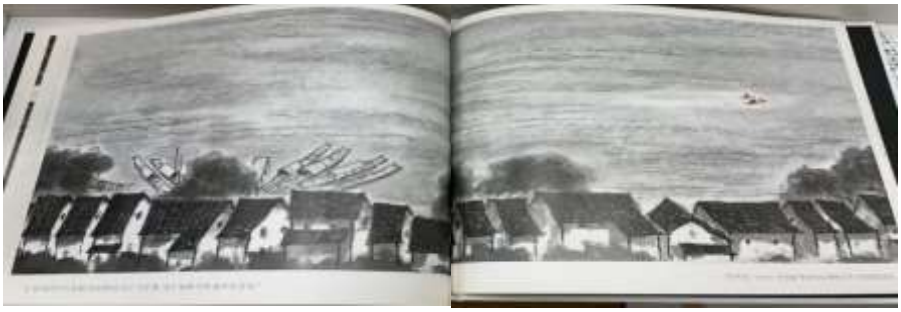

Figure 8 **Figure 9**

Figure 8: "Would you like to try swimming to the other side? Just hold the gourd. I'll stay right next to you."
Figure 9: "I'm scared." Niuniu hesitated for a moment before starting to swim.

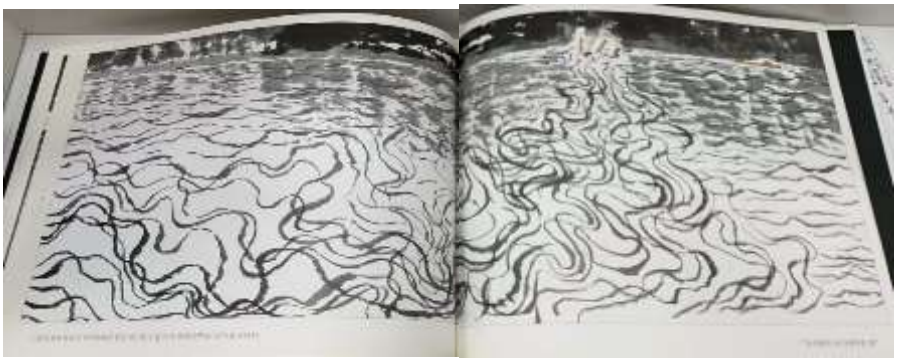

Figure 10 **Figure 11**

Figure 10: While swimming near the middle of the river, Wan suddenly grabbed the gourd away from Niuniu.
Figure 11: "The red gourd! Give me the red gourd!"

In the original Chinese version of *Red Gourd*, Niuniu's emotional arc is rendered through delicate inner monologue and detailed narrative description: her hesitation, fear, desire for reassurance, and eventual panic are all woven into the text. Wan's ambiguous smile, the description of distance from the riverbanks, and the surreal sense of isolation ("only water and the red gourd remain") work together to build psychological tension. These effects are achieved through verbal nuance and gradual narrative buildup.

In contrast, the Korean picture book *Red Gourd* does not rely heavily on text to convey this emotional depth. Instead, the illustrations shoulder this burden—visually encoding emotional transformation through subtle compositional shifts. In early panels, Niuniu is visually small, centered in a wide, horizontally stretched river; she is drawn with sloping shoulders, downcast eyes, and surrounded by empty space. These visual elements signify vulnerability, uncertainty, and fear—what Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) call "demotional distancing" through spatial framing.

As the narrative progresses, the illustrations shift: close-up perspectives are used on Niuniu's facial expressions, especially her widened eyes and hesitant steps. The moment Wan smiles "strangely" is rendered through a visually ambiguous smirk, drawn slightly asymmetrically, which introduces cognitive dissonance. This reflects the illustrator's visual re-creation of subtle betrayal, a theme too complex to be directly verbalized in simplified children's text.

Most crucially, the iconic scene in which Wan suddenly snatches the gourd is transformed into a two-panel emotional climax. The first panel uses diagonal framing to show Wan's movement—a sudden, angular gesture that cuts across the calm water. The second panel isolates Niuniu mid-scream, arms raised, mouth open, with the gourd receding into the background. Here, the emotional rupture is not told but shown—through posture, proportion, and negative space. This marks a clear instance of what

Nodelman (1988) calls "visual narrative punctuation", where a major shift in plot is communicated entirely through layout and pacing.

These artistic choices constitute a deliberate act of visual re-creation, not merely translating emotion but reinterpreting how emotion is experienced and understood within Korean visual culture. The simplification of verbal narrative is not a loss but a mode shift—one that privileges immediacy and visual legibility over internal verbal reflection, in keeping with Korean picturebook traditions that emphasize emotional clarity and reader empathy.

Ultimately, this section of the translation enacts intersemiotic cannibalism: the source culture's narrative style is digested and re-emitted through visual cues adapted to the cognitive and affective expectations of the target audience. Emotional resonance is preserved—but refracted—through a different semiotic prism.

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ORCID iD (if any): 0009-0006-0878-8148

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