

**Translation, Symbolic Capital, and Contested Universality:  
Gao Xingjian in Translation**

by

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## Abstract

This dissertation investigates the literary ascendancy in the West of China's first Nobel laureate, Gao Xingjian, through translation. Although Gao's master novel *Lingshan* was significant for his international reputation, the importance of its translations for his literary prestige in the West has not been extensively discussed. With reference to Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory relevant to translation, this project first examines Gao's visibility as a translator of literary modernism during China's reform and opening-up to the world, especially to the West, in the early 1980s. This is followed by an elaborate analysis of the translation of Gao's novel *Lingshan*, first in France as *La Montagne de l'âme* (1995) and then in the Anglophone world as *Soul Mountain* (2000, 2001), mainly in Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Rather than reading *Lingshan* as a "universal" cultural signifier from the West, this project problematizes the nature of this universality by examining the internal logic and mechanism of the canonization of the novel through translation and interpretation (reading) in the social and cultural space of the West. Thus, this dissertation first analyses the agents of translation, such as publishers, cultural markets, and translation regimes, in relation to the target literary requirements, and then explores the *illusio* of *Lingshan*, the essential aesthetic components for validation in the target literary field(s). Through a Bourdieusian sociological investigation supported by textual and paratextual particularities, this study argues that the translation of *Lingshan* and the ascendancy of Gao on the international literary scene are underscored by the fight for symbolic capital, which seeks universal (hegemonic) cultural legitimacy in the international literary field represented by the center(s) of Paris, London, and New York. While examining the competition and fight for dominance as motivations for translation, this study also demonstrates the limits of literary universality in peripheral countries

that are characterized by their own cultural identities and trajectories. This dissertation, therefore, takes a different approach toward universality than that of the West.

This project has significant implications for literature/translation studies. First, it offers a new perspective from which to read Gao's work in relation to translation and from which his visibility and ascendancy can be mapped out and conceptualized. Second, it shows that symbolic capital accumulation and literary dominance are the key motives for translating a literary work, thus unfolding the tensions and dynamics of translation in the social and cultural space(s) at both local and global levels, where the claims and the counterclaims of universal literary capital coexist together. This observation also sheds light on China's current fight for universal symbolic capital on the international scene.

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## Introduction

### 0.1 Research Project and Context

This dissertation investigates the literary ascendancy in the West of China's first Nobel laureate, Gao Xingjian, through translation. It begins with a study of Gao's translation of literary modernism in China in the 1980s, and then focuses on the translation of Gao's novel *Lingshan*, first in France as *La Montagne de l'âme* (1995) and then in the Anglophone world as *Soul Mountain* (2000, 2001), mainly in Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Rather than reading Gao's novel as "universal validity,"<sup>1</sup> this study problematizes the nature of this universality by examining the internal logic and mechanism of the canonization of *Lingshan* through translation and interpretation (reading) in the social and cultural space of the West. In light of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological concepts of symbolic capital and dominance, this study argues that the translation of *Lingshan* and the ascendancy of Gao on the international literary scene are underscored by the fight for symbolic capital, which seeks universal (hegemonic) cultural legitimacy in the international literary field represented by the center(s) of Paris, London, and New York. While examining the competition and fight for dominance as motivations for translation, this project also demonstrates the limits of literary universality in peripheral countries that are characterized by their own cultural identities and trajectories. This study therefore takes a different approach toward universality than that of the West.

This project began shortly after Mo Yan earned the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012, a significant event in China. Upon the announcement of the Swedish Academy's decision, the

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1. "Prize Announcement," NobelPrize.org, October 12, 2000, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2000/prize-announcement/>.



Chinese government euphorically hailed his win as a national event, demonstrating the world's recognition of China's "zonghe shili" (comprehensive strength), including symbolic/cultural power in general and literary power in particular, indications that Chinese influences are being universally recognized and accepted.<sup>2</sup> The win was also taken as a sign that China's long obsession with and quest for world recognition for its culture has been realized after a long time and after much anxiety and frustration, culminating in the attainment of one of the most prestigious emblems of symbolic capital, the Nobel Prize.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Mo Yan has been treated as China's cultural icon in the world literary field. Even as he has been euphorically embraced as China's own, Mo Yan's reputation as a writer of international significance coincides with the Chinese government's campaigns to promote China's "wenhua ruanshili" (cultural soft power) initiated at the beginning of the twenty-first century after China entered the WTO (the World Trade Organization) and subsequently became a major economic power.<sup>4</sup>

In his discussion of the implication of earning such a recognized marker of symbolic capital as the Nobel Prize, Wang Ning argues that as China has become the second greatest economic power in the world, it is imperative for China to use English to translate its literature to the world, so as to redefine the literary order for more "soft power."<sup>5</sup> He emphasizes that more

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2. See the congratulatory message sent by Li Changcun, the top political bureau official of the Chinese Communist Party: <http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/news/2012/2012-10-12/143602.html>, Oct 24, 2012.

3. See Julia Lovell's discussion of China's long quest for the Nobel Prize in *The Politics of Cultural Capital: China's Quest for a Nobel Prize in Literature* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2006).

4. *Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics: China's Campaign for Hearts and Minds*, eds. Ying Zhu et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

5. Wang Ning, "Chinese Literature as World Literature," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 43, no. 3 (2016): 380-392.

efforts should be made to undertake high-quality translation projects, such as those of Howard Goldblatt and Mabel Lee, who respectively helped Mo and Gao to win the Nobel Prize.<sup>6</sup> The rationale behind Wang's argument is that China and Chinese literature had long been translated into Western terms, and later translational efforts have been meant as attempts to reclaim the position China should have occupied. Thus, he claims that in the future China's translation projects should aim at the West in order to occupy more literary space, and that the amount of soft power (symbolic capital) China enjoys should be commensurable with that of its economic power.<sup>7</sup> Wang's argument raises the question of why China seeks more cultural power in face of Western cultural dominance. Setting aside the question, which will be addressed in Chapters 2 and 3, of how influential Goldblatt's and Lee's translations were in Mo's and Gao's respective Nobel Prize achievements, what appears problematic for Wang's argument is that even if China adopts English to promote its position in the world literary field, does this necessarily mean that Chinese literature will be accepted and canonized in the West? Moreover, was the failure of China's pursuit of Western cultural capital prior to these Nobel wins only an economic/linguistic problem? Wang's assertion is largely blind to the essential question regarding the logic and mechanism of literary consecration in the West. If China wants its literature to make an impression in the West, it has to satisfy some essential conditions for its acceptance, such as literary requirements and market demands of the target milieu; otherwise, its cultural products will be subject to blind fate, most often leading to failure and a lack of tangible cultural influences. This has been demonstrated by the various government-sponsored translation projects at the end of the past century, as will be explored further in Chapters 2 and 3. In addition,

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6. Wang, 380-392.

7. Wang, 380-392.

China's economic power does not necessarily guarantee its influences in the cultural sphere, as economic power and cultural power cannot for the most part be treated in the same way, though they are closely connected with each other.<sup>8</sup>

However, Wang's voice is not an isolated one, but reflects China's desire for more symbolic power on the international scene commensurable with its rise as the second-largest economic power, after the United States, in the world. This is illustrated by the various "zou chuqu" (go outside) conferences organized by the government, which address how Chinese culture can be made acceptable to international, especially Western, readers.<sup>9</sup> Mo Yan's winning of the Nobel Prize is an excellent example of how effectively translation can help China win symbolic capital. Such a promotion of China's influences in the world through translation is reflected in academic articles published before and after Mo's win. For example, [www.cnki.net](http://www.cnki.net), China's largest academic databank, lists a significant number of authors whose articles focus on Howard Goldblatt's English translation of Mo Yan's novels. Based on their meticulous analyses of the features of Goldblatt's English translations, some of these articles praise the American translator's rewriting and editing of Mo Yan's Chinese novels as both legitimate and effective.<sup>10</sup> For these translation scholars, Goldblatt's translation was a decisive factor in Mo's Nobel win,

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8. Bourdieu divides capital into three categories: Cultural capital, economic capital, and social capital. Though cultural capital, economic capital, and social capital are relatively autonomous, they indirectly influence each other. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), esp. Chapter 11.

9. McDougall, Bonnie S., "World Literature, Global Culture and Contemporary Chinese Literature in Translation." *International Communication of Chinese Culture* 1, no.1-2 (2014): 47-64.

10. On July 10, 2021, the author of this dissertation did keyword search of "Mo Yan" and "Ge haowen" (Howard Goldblatt) on [www.cnki.net](http://www.cnki.net), more than 800 academic paper titles from 2005 onward appeared, some of which were published in the core translation journal, *Zhongguo fanyi / Chinese Translators Journal*.

which marked the culmination of a process of cultural capital accumulation and consecration, to use Pascale Casanova's terms. Moreover, numerous monographs on translation have been published, reorienting their focus on foreign literatures translated in Chinese, or vice versa, by adopting cultural studies and polysystemic approaches in combination with other approaches, emphasizing the vital roles played by agents of translation such as the publisher, political and cultural institutions, and the market.<sup>11</sup> For instance, Chinese translation scholar Chang Nam Fung dismisses the relevance of Lawrence Venuti's support of source-based translation to China, and instead calls for more target-based translations in order to promote Chinese literature in the West.<sup>12</sup> Such a change is a radical shift from the previous translation norms established by Lin Shu, Yan Fu and Lu Xun. While Lin Shu and Yan Fu promoted a target-based translation, Lu Xu valorized "hard translation," a literal translation that retains as much of the original's foreignness as possible so as to influence and change the target language and culture.<sup>13</sup> Despite such a shift in translation approaches, articles such as these are still largely limited to rudimentary applications of new translation theories. For example, many discussions of Goldblatt's translation of Mo Yan's novels into English neither identify the comprehensive

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11. See Bao Xiaoying, *Mo Yan Xiaoshuo yanjiu* [The Translation and Communication of Mo Yan's Novels] (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 2016); Wang Yougui, *20 shiji xi banyue zhongguo fanyi wenxue shi: 1949–1977* [A History of Foreign Literatures in Chinese Language in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: 1949–1977] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2015); Wei Qingguang, *Gaige kaifang yilai zhongguo fanyi huodong de shehui yunxing yanjiu* [A Study of the Social Operation of China's Translation Activities since 1978] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2014); Li Jianmei, *Wenxue fanyi guifan de xiandai bianqian* [The Modern Transformation of Literary Translation Norms] (Chengdu: Sichuan cishui chubanshe, 2012); Tengmei, *A Study on Translation Policies in China since 1919* (Jinan: Shandong Daxue chubanshe, 2009).

12. Chang Nam Fung, "Wenhua shuchu yu wenhua zi shen" [Cultural Export and Cultural Introspection], *Zhongguo fanyi* [*Chinese Translators Journal*] no. 4 (2015): 88-93.

13. See Lawrence Venuti's discussion of Lu Xun's translation approach in *The Scandals of Translation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 184.

translational features of Goldblatt's English versions nor provide information about feedback from target readers, both of which are essential in making claims about the effectiveness of the English translations for Mo's canonization in the West. Indeed, in an interview, Horace Engdahl, permanent secretary of the Nobel Prize Committee, downplayed the role of rewriting or editing source materials in English translation as a cultural filter in the American literary market.<sup>14</sup>

China's translation model, known as cultural capital accumulation, reflects the desires of a rising power demanding more recognition compatible with its status in the world. This reorientation significantly affects the rules of the game in the Chinese literary world. Such a change can be observed in the case of the first Chinese Nobel Prize winner, Gao Xingjian.

Gao was the first Chinese writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2000, though the announcement led to controversy in mainland China, since he was not regarded as prestigious enough for such an important international award, nor was he considered representative of the highest achievements of modern Chinese literature.<sup>15</sup> Before his Nobel win, Gao was known to mainland Chinese readers only through his experimental plays, such as *Juedui xinhao* (Absolute Signal, 1982), *Che Zhan* (Bus Stop, 1983), and *Ye Ren* (The Wild Man, 1985). After he went into exile in France in 1988, mainland Chinese readers knew very little of his work, except for his play *Tao Wang* (Fleeing), published in 1990. *Tao Wang* presents the dilemma of personal choice for a group of students at Tiananmen Square during the Chinese army's assault on student demonstrators on June 4, 1989. The crackdown is the backdrop for the play, but the play itself is not overtly political. Even so, the depiction of the event infuriated the Chinese government, who

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14. Charles McGrath, "Lost in Translation? A Swede's Snub of US. Lit," *New York Times*, last modified October 5, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/05/weekinreview/05mcgrath.html>.

15. Julia Lovell, *The Politics of Cultural Capital: China's Quest for a Nobel Prize in Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).

openly denounced him and banned all his writings in China.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, shortly after the student protest movement was violently crushed, Gao renounced his Communist Party membership and declared that he would never return to China as long as it remained a totalitarian state. So far, he has kept his promise. Literary critic, Leo Ou-fan Lee, has praised his decision as courageous.<sup>17</sup>

Gao became known to the public in Hong Kong and Taiwan only when he won the Nobel Prize. Though his main Chinese novel *Lingshan* was published by Taiwan's Lianjing (Linking) Publishing House in 1990, it sold poorly,<sup>18</sup> and his other works were equally unfamiliar to Hong Kong and Taiwanese readers. However, when his Nobel win was announced, readers in Hong Kong flocked to libraries to obtain copies of *Lingshan* only to discover that none were available.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to the low critical response of his works in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, continental Europe has embraced Gao with warmth and enthusiasm. His most productive period is in France, with an impressive list of works, including his modernist plays in both Chinese and French, and his major novels *Lingshan* and *Yige ren de shengjing* (One Man's Bible, 1999). The

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16. See Mabel Lee, "The Writer as Translator: On the Creative Aesthetics of Gao Xingjian," in *Culture in Translation: Reception of Chinese Literature in Comparative Perspective*, eds. Kelly Kar-yue Chan and Kwok-kan Tam (Hong Kong: Open U of Hong Kong P, 2012), 3.

17. Leo Ou-fen Lee, *Musings: Reading Hong Kong, China and the World* (Hong Kong: Muse Books/East Slope Publishing, 2011), 100.

18. In his speech "Liuwang shi women huode shenmo?" [What Have We Gotten from Our Exiles?] at the University of London on June 8, 1992, Gao admitted that in the first year of its publication, *Lingshan* sold only 92 copies in Taiwan. See *Meiyou zhuyi* [No-ism] (Hong Kong: Cosmo Books Limited, 2000), 111.

19. "Gonggong tushuiguang buchang lingshan" [No *Lingshan* in Hong Kong's Public Libraries], in *Taiyang Bao* [The Sun Daily], Oct 14, 2000.

Nobel Prize Communiqué in 2000 singled out *Lingshan* as his most important work.<sup>20</sup> His plays, including *Bus Stop* and *Fleeing*, were staged regularly in Europe and sometimes in North America, and his novel *Lingshan* was translated into Swedish and then French. The French version of *Lingshan* was extensively reviewed in France's mainstream newspapers, journals and magazines, and was the version that the Nobel Prize Committee used to evaluate the merits of his writing.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to Europe's recognition of Gao's literary achievements, especially the Nobel Prize, the Chinese government minimized the impact of his work and considered his win politically motivated against the Communist government, because of the controversy surrounding him. In addition, Gao's relative literary obscurity in China was another reason for disagreement with the Nobel Prize Committee's decision, since his work was seen as too ordinary.<sup>22</sup> Regarding the controversies over Gao's win, Jessica Yeung argues that the committee has its selection norms and evaluation criteria for canonizing a literary work. This process is basically independent of influences of the Chinese counterpart. Thus, the controversies about Gao's win only proved that some people or institutions in China cared much about the universal power of a global-scale literary organization.<sup>23</sup>

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20. "Prize Announcement," NobelPrize.org, October 12, 2000, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2000/prize-announcement/>.

21. See Wang Mingxing's interview of *Lingshan*'s translator Noël Dutrait: "Entretien avec Noël Dutrait, traducteur de *La Montagne de l'âme* de Gao Xingjian," *Alternative Francophone* 2, no. 1 (2017): 127-128.

22. *Shouwei nuobeir wenxuejiang dezhu Gao Xingjian pingshuo* [Gao Xingjian: The First Chinese Laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature], ed. Yisha (Hong Kong: Mirrors Books, 2000), 28-29.

23. Jessica Yeung, *Ink Dances in Limbo: Gao Xingjian's Writing as Cultural Translation* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2009), 5-7.

However, in recent years, Gao's reputation in China has drastically changed. More articles and commentaries about him and his works have appeared online, some openly appreciating his works as genuine Nobel-worthy masterpieces, especially his novel *Lingshan*. In addition, although almost no monographs about Gao and his work have been produced in China, many graduate students have written theses on him at both the master's and doctoral levels.<sup>24</sup> Ironically, despite his denunciation by the Chinese government for a span of about thirty years, Gao's name briefly reappeared on the official website of the Chinese Writers' Association in 2012, identifying him as a Chinese Communist Party member and a Nobel Prize laureate.<sup>25</sup> This serves as an example of the cultural capital Gao shares with Mo Yan, both of whom have won the Nobel Prize and have been identified as Party members. The reassessment of Gao demonstrates the shift of China's cultural politics: He had been previously denounced as a political dissident, but is now held up as an example of the universal power of Chinese culture and literature, which will help China gain dominance on the international scenes.

The symbolic capital Gao and Mo share is closely related to translation. This is especially the case for Gao, who started his literary career as a French-language translator in China, before his exile to France in 1988. In addition to translating French modernist works into Chinese, Gao championed modernism in the Chinese literary field when China started to open its doors to the rest of the world, and applied modernist theory to his writings, novels, and plays. In France, Gao finished *Lingshan* in Chinese and cooperated with his French translator(s), Noël Dutrait and his wife Liliane Dutrait, to translate it into French in 1995. The translation established Gao's literary

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24. See "Dissertation and Thesis," [www.cnki.net](http://www.cnki.net).

25. <http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/zxhy/member/8259.shtml>, March 12, 2012. The entry appeared only for a few days on the official website of the China Writers' Association and was deleted shortly thereafter.



reputation in France and subsequently helped him gain recognition in Europe, leading to his Nobel win.

Gao's works in translation in the West provide material for various questions, such as how his translations brought him universal acceptance in the Western literary center(s), and what this acceptance means both for China and for the international literary field. At present, whereas Mo is recognized by the Chinese government as an example of cultural capital, Gao's cultural and literary reputation in China is still limited. This is also evident in academic work: Studies of Mo's works and their symbolic capital throughout the world, particularly the significance of Howard Goldblatt's translation of his works into English, are extensive, but Gao's reception in the world, especially his role as a modernist writer and translator as well as his ascendancy through translation, have not been investigated, leaving some important questions unanswered, though they are significant to both Chinese literature and the international literary field. Thus, this study examines how Gao translates and is translated in the local and international literary contexts.

## 0.2 Literature Review

The Nobel Prizes awarded to Mo Yan and Gao Xingjian appear to confirm Pascale Casanova's notion of translation as capital accumulation and consecration. In *La République mondiale des lettres* and some other writings, Casanova draws on Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory to conceptualize the motivation for translation as cultural capital accumulation and fight for symbolic capital. She argues that the international literary field is autonomous from national literature and other fields, such as law and politics. This field has its own rules and regimes for inclusion and exclusion of certain works and for the formation of a literary hierarchy. Entrance

into a certain literary field means that individual writers join the game to fight for symbolic capital with their existing stake or position in the field. As many subfields exist in the literary field, and these subfields are in constant competition, writers ultimately seek more symbolic capital in order to gain greater influence in the literary hierarchy.<sup>26</sup>

Casanova also defines the hierarchy between different languages and literatures in the world in terms of synchronicity with and distance from the “Greenwich Meridian,” consisting of Paris, London, and New York. Most European countries are synchronous with and closest to France, or other dominant center(s), and thus acquire more cultural capital. Casanova insists that China and Arabic countries have less capital, even though their languages and literatures are considered prestigious, because their language and literature are not synchronous with modern times and are confined only to their national boundaries.<sup>27</sup> Thus, she maintains that, although linguistically speaking, every language is equal, on a sociological scale some languages have more capital than others and are more dominant than others.<sup>28</sup>

Likewise, writers in nations and cultures that are distant from the center and modern times can overcome these limitations by adopting the languages of the center(s) so that their works may become de-national, and thereby international. They may self-translate, as Milan Kundera has done, or they may have their works translated into a dominant language, thus allowing them access to, and potential acceptance by, the center. Thus, translation is a means to

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26. Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris: Seuil, 2008), 27-73.

27. Pascale Casanova, “Consecration and Accumulation of Literary Capital: Translation as Unequal Exchange,” trans. Siobhan Brownlie, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 410.

28. Casanova quotes Pierre Bourdieu’s similar statement to support her argument. See Pascale Casanova, *La Langue mondiale: traduction et domination* (Paris: Seuil, 2015), 10.

accumulate cultural capital by either significantly reducing time gaps between the source and target language milieus and changing the limits of national literature, or submitting the national literature to the norms of the center(s) in order to accumulate more cultural capital.<sup>29</sup>

Casanova divides translation into “intraduction” (inbound) and “extraduction” (outbound). The former refers to the act of translating, or importing in different forms, universal literary texts into those literatures that lack cultural *bourse* (funds), not only bringing these texts into their own literary field but disrupting, and introducing modernity into, their own literary space and unifying that space with the dominant literary center.<sup>30</sup> The latter refers to the act of translating from minor or peripheral languages into central languages, to join the international competition for cultural capital and make the source literature more modern and prestigious.<sup>31</sup> In brief, both acts of translation involve condensing the spatial and temporal gaps between the center and the margin to acquire universal literary capital.

Casanova cites Gao as an example to support her point of view of translation as capital accumulation. Based on essays by Noël Dutrait and Annie Curien, Casanova argues that in his writings, Gao introduced such modern Western literary currents as surrealism, Dadaism, and the *Nouveau roman*, and such writers as Samuel Beckett, Louis Aragon, and Alain Robbe-Grillet, into Chinese literature in the early 1980s, when the Chinese literary field re-established contact with the West for the first time since the Communist takeover in 1949. Gao’s work as a translator helped to modernize the Chinese literary field with Western, especially French, narrative techniques, aesthetics, writing styles, and other innovations. Consequently, the Chinese literary

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29. Casanova, “Consecration and Accumulation of Literary Capital: Translation as Unequal Exchange.”

30. Casanova, *La Langue mondiale: traduction et domination*, 17–19.

31. Casanova, 14–15.

field was encouraged to engage with the modern world, thus redefining its position in the world. It is evident, Casanova points out, that as Chinese national literature is in a state of belatedness (“retard”), translation serves as an instrument to accelerate its development and connect it with the literary center(s) so that it can enter the international literary competition. This act of translation is thus an act of “intraduction.” In addition, Gao also had his plays translated into Swedish, which allowed his works to overcome national boundaries and become internationally recognized.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Gao’s winning of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2000 is a concrete example of the power of translation in the international literary field.

Casanova’s redefinition of world literature in terms of dominance and margins illustrates the logic behind translation as capital accumulation, and also explains the cultural logic of China’s current effort to fight for more cultural capital. However, China’s use of Gao’s Nobel win to demonstrate the universal visibility of Chinese literature and power does not entail an unconditional acceptance of his reputation in the West; rather, it appropriates that reputation in order to achieve its own cultural dominance, in an effort to expand (or destabilize) the literary center(s).

Casanova’s critical approach to modern Chinese literature is problematic, because she lacks not only historical perspectives on modern Chinese literature, but also valid evidence to support her sweeping claims. For instance, she uses Gao’s translation as an example of the logic of capital accumulation in privileging the Western literary center(s). She insists that his translation of modernism into the Chinese literary field is valuable because of the changes he introduced into modern Chinese literature and the reduction of the gap between China and the West. Consequently, these changes enabled China to enter international competitions for more

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32. See note 32 above.

symbolic capital. Casanova's assertion is not valid, and leads to a Eurocentric (or Francocentric) conclusion that Gao intended to introduce Western modern literary techniques through translation in order to make Chinese literature acceptable in the West. However, we can also infer from Casanova's argument that, though translation can reduce the gaps between Chinese and Western literature, the very positioning of Chinese literature in need of being translated or updated upholds the Western-centric view of Chinese literature as belated and as secondary to the Western center(s). Thus, Casanova's problematic critique of Gao's translation seriously undermines his agency as a translator, who negotiated and mediated French modernist literature based on the conditions of the target literary milieu, which is in no way relevant to China's entrance into the game of international literary competition. In contrast to Casanova's reading of his translation work, Gao related his literary intentions to his friend, modernist writer Yang Lian, and discussed his concentration on the advancement of the Chinese literary field in the era of post-Maoist reform.<sup>33</sup>

Jaime Hanneken refutes Casanova's Eurocentric argument with his own case study in Latin America, which forms a counterpart to Gao's early translation work in China. He illustrates the construction of modern literary space in Latin America by showing how the modernist journal *Mundial*, based in Paris, exploited the distance of Paris from Latin America to create the notion of literary modernity. He argues that the marginal literary field does not accumulate capital from the center only. By actively engaging with Paris as the center, the Latin American translators create their own modern space for cosmopolitanism on their own terms,

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33. Gao, "Liuwang si women huodehuo de shenmo?" [What Do We Get from Our Exiles?], in *Meiyou zuyi* [No-ism] (Hong Kong: tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1996), 118.

demonstrating their agency in the construction of their own brand of literary modernism at home.<sup>34</sup>

However, despite Gao's early writings/translations, his literary reputation in France was what primarily ensured his ascendance in the West, which appears to echo Casanova's argument. While he was in exile in France, Gao's situation was different from that of the Latin American modernists Hanneken discusses. After he left China, his writings and translations could not be published in his homeland. As a migrant writer in France, Gao had to create and sell his paintings to earn a living. While mainly writing in Chinese, he also had to translate his works to conform to the requirements and needs of the French literary regime, to make them acceptable to French readers. Otherwise, his works could not be published. Gao had to adapt himself to France's cultural market by either writing in French or translating his Chinese works into French. Thus, Gao's ascendancy in the West was closely related to translation in the target milieu, a situation that fits into Casanova's theorization of translation as capital accumulation.

Gao's works in France need to be distinguished from his projects in his native country. Such a distinction allows us to situate Gao in two different contexts in which his translations can be framed and studied differently. Though Casanova's discussion of literary capital accumulation is not relevant to discussion of Gao's translation in China, it is still relevant to the creation of Gao's image as an international modernist writer through translation, first in French and then in English. Thus, translation provides a site from which to observe and identify how Gao gained cultural capital and canonical status in the international literary center(s).

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34. Jaime Hanneken, "Going Mundial: What It Really Means to Desire Paris," *Modern Language Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2010): 129-152.

Despite the importance of translation in Gao's ascendancy in the West, there have been relatively few studies of how translation functions in Gao's literary pursuits at both the national and the transnational levels, which we will discuss in Chapter 2. Many articles and books that do explore certain features of his work fail to address questions of how his writings, especially *Lingshan*, are and have been translated, or of his identity as a Chinese Francophone writer. For example, Jessica Yeung's *Ink Dances in Limb* deals with Gao in translation from one cultural context to another, but despite its use of French post/modernist concepts to discuss him as a "translated man," it does not identify him as a Chinese Francophone writer and translator. As a result, Yeung frames her discussion of *Lingshan* in (post)modern critical narratives without considering the influence of certain *Nouveau roman* writers on the novel. Cross-references between the Chinese original and the French translation, as well as Mabel Lee's English translation, could have bolstered Yeung's examination of Gao as a translated author by specifically demonstrating how his works have been translated first into the French, then English literary field, an important factor in his international reputation. Yeung does not cite French sources, and such a lack of perspective on Gao's linguistic and cultural identities weakens the validity of her main argument. Similarly, Julia Lovell regards Gao's Nobel Prize win in relation to Chinese politics and China's desire for cultural capital, largely overlooking Gao's Francophone background and the role of French translation in his literary rise, which was a significant factor in his earning the Nobel Prize.

Despite the dearth of interlingual studies of Gao's works, much of the current scholarship does discuss Gao's work in translation in a metaphorical sense, treating his works as troping, figuration, or translingual processing. These critical reviews, which we will discuss shortly, focus on how literary ideas develop and transform in different languages and social contexts by

drawing on Gao's texts as case studies. The theoretical perspectives in these articles allow the authors to frame Gao in current critical themes in cultural studies, literary thinking, and, to certain degrees, literary narratives. As a result, they pay more attention to the translation of literary ideas or models than to more concrete language issues.

For Jessica Yeung, Gao's works show his effort to negotiate the socialist literary discourse in his early writings and as pure self-expression without engagement with his exilic status in France, during which he experiences ambiguity as a Chinese-French writer.<sup>35</sup> For Zhang Yinde and Mabel Lee, Gao's writings in both China and France embody his gradual transcendence from the particular to the universal, thus achieving translatability while minimizing his cultural particularities.<sup>36</sup> However, for Y.H. Zhao and Sy Ren Quah, Gao's translatability is a testament of the success of his universal literature; his linguistic and cultural particularities are not dissolved by an overarching Western other, but used to enrich the other and overcome the latter's limitations. Thus, Gao's translation is neither an approach to the center(s) by sacrificing its identities, nor a resistance of the other, but an interaction between the self and the other, which generates a third space.<sup>37</sup> Zhang Jingyin argues that though Gao's winning the Nobel Prize marks the recognition of Chinese literature in the world, the tension is already there

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35. Jessica Yeung, *Ink Dances in Limbo: Gao Xingjian's Writing as Cultural Translation*.

36. Zhang Yinde, "Gao Xingjian," in *Le Monde romanesque chinois au XXe siècle: modernités et identités* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003), 300-316; Mabel Lee, "The Writer as Translator: On the Creative Aesthetics of Gao Xingjian," in *Culture in Translation: Reception of Chinese Literature in Comparative Perspective*, eds. Kelly Ka-yue Chan and Kwok-kan Tam (Hong Kong: Open UP, 2012), 1-18.

37. Henry Y.H. Zhao, *Towards a Modern Zen Theatre: Gao Xingjian and Chinese Theatre Experimentalism* (London: Cheng & Tsui Co, 2000); Sy Ren Quah, *Gao Xingjian and Transcultural Chinese Theater* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2005).



in a globalized world, and the self can be easily translated into the terms of a powerful other.<sup>38</sup> For Shu-mei Shih, Gao's works defy the definition of Chinese literature in mainland China. Given that his most prolific years are in France, Gao's identity is closer to those who write in Chinese in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and elsewhere, where many people still adopt Chinese as their first language for creative writing and communication.<sup>39</sup>

The aforementioned critical approaches on the metalingual level to Gao's translatability between cultures offer an important avenue to read literature and culture in both local and global contexts. However, the metalinguistic discussions in these articles also invite an essential question: Given that Gao's works are mainly written in Chinese, and that their international literary reception and criticism depend largely on their translations in different target contexts, can interlingual translation be overlooked so easily? The importance of translation must be recognized in literary reception and criticism. First of all, the target reader gets to know a foreign writer from his/her works in translation, an indispensable base from which the influence of the writer and his/her work on the literary world and cultural market can be referenced, measured, and determined. Second, translations furnish literary critics with textual materials which they can compare and contrast to great literary traditions, from which these critics cooperate with cultural institutions to canonize the work. Thus, critical arguments about Gao as a Chinese and transnational (cultural) writer/translator must be substantiated with concrete evidence regarding both translation and its reception in the target milieus. However, the critics discussed above

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38. Zhang Yingjin, "Cultural Translation Between the World and the Chinese: The Problematics in Positioning Nobel Laureate Gao Xingjian," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 31, no. 2 (2005): 127-144.

39. Shu-mei Shih, "Global Literature and Technologies of Recognition," *PMLA* 1, Special Topic: *Literature at Large*, no. 119 (2004): 16-30.

appear to be accounting for the translatability of Gao's identities or cultural spaces by relying on metaconceptual tools without referring to translation in the specific circumstances of the target language milieu. It is difficult, if not impossible, to examine Gao's acceptance in the literary center(s), or his transnational cultural significance, without giving attention to translation.

### 0.3 Research Questions

The main questions and some subsidiary questions that this project asks highlight the significant role of translation in the national and international literary fields, where competition and appropriation of symbolic capital define the logics and rules of publication, reception, and canonization of a foreign literature. Therefore, the arguments of this project are primarily formulated around the two main questions and several subsidiary questions based on representative examples of Gao's own writings and translations, as well as his works in translation. These examples include Gao's translation of Jacques Prévert's poetry and of Eugène Ionesco's *La Cantatrice chauve*, his interpretation of modernism in *Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan* (A Preliminary Examination of Modern Fictional Techniques), and his play *Che Zhan*, an adaptation of Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot*. The French and English translations of *Lingshan* are the focus for Gao's ascendancy in the international literary field, because the novel has been widely regarded as his master novel and the basis for his reputation in the West.

The main questions this study asks are as follows:

1. As an emerging Chinese writer/translator in the post-Mao era, Gao engaged with the dominant Chinese literary current of socialist realism by translating works of modernist French literature and literary discourse. How did his

translational choices reflect his active negotiation with and mediation of source and target literary materials to create a new space in the Chinese literary field?

2. How is Gao's novel *Lingshan* translated into universality (ascendence) in the West in general, and first in France and then in the Anglophone world in particular? How is *Lingshan*'s "universality" defined and contested in the international literary field in relation to the peripheral literary field, such as Taiwan, where it was originally published?

Some subsidiary questions also need to be addressed:

1. As a translator in China, how did Gao's early family background, education, literary tendency (*habitus*) shape his choice of writing and translation in relation to literary field conditions, such as China's literary thaw in the era of opening up to the rest of the world?

2. How is Gao's agency as a translator manifested from his choices of literary genres, texts, and translation strategies to negotiate/subvert socialist realism, a dominant government-sponsored literary trend, for a new productive space in the Chinese literary field?

3. Based on the corpus of Gao's writings/translations in China, how is universal (hegemonic) Western literary modernism translated? What is the nature of Chinese modernism in relation to the literary valorization of China's modernism?

4. If Gao's translation is a formation of Chinese modernist discourse, does it imply that his engagement and negotiation redefine and expand the boundaries of literary modernism in the international literary field, of which China is a part?

5. If Gao's exile in France represents a change in his writing/translation conditions, how does this shift affect writing/translation based on the cultural needs and requirements of the French literary field, publishing market, and readers' tastes? How does *Lingshan*'s translation reflect these conditions and lead to Gao's literary success in France?
6. The French literary field established *Lingshan*'s canonical status and helped Gao gain his international reputation and literary universality. How does the Anglophone world translate such literary universality?
7. If the Anglophone world's translation, publication, and interpretation of *Lingshan* imply their fight for symbolic capital and hence their dominance in the international literary field, what does such a fight for dominance and universality imply for peripheral countries such as Taiwan, where *Lingshan* was originally published and then canonized after Gao's Nobel win?
8. In this investigation of Gao's literary ascendance in China and the West, translation becomes capital accumulation and literary dominance (universalization) in the international literary field. Does such literary dominance or universality signify universal power over other literary fields distant from the center(s)?
9. How does this investigation of Gao's literary ascendance from China to the West contribute to world literature and translation studies?

#### 0.4 Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

The above questions are framed according to the Bourdieusian sociological translation theory. The relevance of Bourdieu's theory to this study's sociological approach to Gao's translation in China and his works in translation in the West can be explained in terms of his role as an active translation agent in Chinese modernist literary discourse and his ascendance through translation in the West. Gao's gradual ascendancy in the West especially demonstrates how literary universality/ dominance is constructed and then accepted according to the logic and mechanism of consecration in the target literary milieus. Translation of dominance in the literary field also reflects the intensive competition for cultural capital, and this aspect also reveals its contradictions and limits. While attempting to create dominance, this universal signifier is contradicted by different claims of universality, leading to the deferral of its hegemonic power, because the translator in the target literary field can redirect/appropriate such universal cultural signifier(s) to projects related to the target literary values and regimes in question. Thus, this theoretical frame fits into the discussion in this project of Bourdieu's sociological theory in relation to translation. Though Bourdieu himself does not apply his sociological approach to translation, some translation studies scholars, such as Daniel Simeoni, Jean-Marc Gouanvic, Pascale Casanova, Michaela Wolf, and others have explored the implications of Bourdieu's sociological theory for translation studies. In particular, Casanova's appropriation of Bourdieu's sociological theory provokes reflections on the relevance of Bourdieu for this study of Gao in the translational cultural space between China and the West.

Though Casanova examines the main function of translation as cultural capital accumulation for dominance in lieu of seeking faithful equivalence or equality, she engages with polysystemic and Bourdieusian theoretical frames by foregrounding the hierarchy and dynamics

of the international literary field.<sup>40</sup> However, Casanova's theoretical approach is problematic. Whereas polysystemic theory describes and conceptualizes the laws of social, cultural, and historical systems in relation to literature, translation is treated as a norm-governed, target-text-based activity within the receiving literary system. In other words, in the polysystemic relationship of language and culture in the world literary system, translation is weighted against its source to conform to the norms of the target literary system in order to be accepted and integrated. Meanwhile, Casanova's application of Bourdieu's sociological theory is equally fraught with tension in that she exploits Bourdieu's theoretical implications for the motivation of translation as cultural capital accumulation and dominance in favor of Western literary center(s), a hierarchical European literary space in which peripheral literatures seek cultural endorsement and validation through translation. Such an appropriation of Bourdieu's sociological theory fails to justify his central concept of habitus, which is designed to accommodate agents and agency that shape translational activities. While translation institutions, publishing houses, and training schools constitute agents of translation, whose rules or regimes dictate or influence translators' choices and professional values for different projects, the agency of the translator him/herself cannot be minimized. His/her agency interacts with conditions/regimes in the literary field, such that the translator is not only constituted by various socializations of translation agents in relation to the regimes of the target literary field, but also constitutes the literary field by modifying its regimes and providing certain re/visions through linguistic choice, interpretation, and sometimes personal interventions, such as personal commentary, criticism, or in some extreme cases,

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40. Pascale Casanova, "Le motif dans le tapis," in *La République mondiale des lettres*, 17-23.

pseudo-translation.<sup>41</sup> Casanova neglects this aspect of translation habitus. As a result, her approach to translational agents in general and translators in particular is not valid. For her, the translator must abide by literary and cultural norms in the Western literary center(s) in order to gain symbolic capital. Consequently, she interprets translation as a meaningful event only so long as the peripheral national literatures, which are far away from the Greenwich Meridian, assimilate themselves to the literary center(s) through translation. Such an understanding of translation minimizes the significance of the dynamics of translation, reducing it simply to *imitatio*.

Moreover, the translator's lack of agency in Casanova's theoretical approach indicates that the translator must also abide by the norms of the target field, leaving no space for him/her to interact with the receiving milieu or even to change the target literary regimes. Casanova compromises Bourdieu's sociological theory in relation to translation studies. According to Bourdieu's sociological theory, the translator's habitus is both "structuring" and "structured" by the field conditions and requirements in the target milieu.<sup>42</sup> The agency of the translator implies that even as he/she brings cultural stakes into the field, he/she also mobilises various strategies to compete with those in the literary hierarchy, or revise the regimes in the target literary field for more capital.<sup>43</sup>

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41. See Denise Merkle, "Translation Constraints and 'Sociological Turn' in Literary Translation Studies," in *Beyond Descriptive Translation Studies: Investigations in Homage to Gideon Toury* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008), 175. Anthony Pym deals with the issue in *Exploring Translation Theories* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 84. Also see Andrew Chesterman, *Reflections on Translation Theory: Selected Papers 1993-2014* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2017), 307-321.

42. Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1993), 73.

The Bourdieusian sociological translation approach defines translation as a dynamic and interactive operation in the social field, and foregrounds the process of linguistic transformation as negotiation and engagement in the literary field by the translating subjects. Thus, seen from this perspective, translation is social, and linguistic structure is never the only determined factor; it is in constant movement to determine its signification and canonization in the literary fields, subject to the processes of the market, institutions, and ideologies. This social aspect of translation differs from polysystemic (or descriptive) and cultural studies approaches. Whereas the former overlooks social and human agency in its theoretical structuration, the latter treats translation as an end production based on cultural hermeneutic reading.<sup>44</sup> However, the basic concepts of both approaches, such as patronage, ideology, norms and power, are still relevant to sociological studies of translation.<sup>45</sup> Despite the shared ground with polysystemic (or descriptive) and cultural studies approaches, the sociological translation approach based on Bourdieu's theory enjoys more advantages than the other approaches in that it allows translation studies to "deal with a broader and more dynamic unit of analysis."<sup>46</sup> Such sociological concepts as habitus, field, *illusio*, and symbolic capital are highly productive in that they expand the studies of a cultural production in a non-linear or non-static fashion by investigating the different layers of

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43. Sameh Hanna, *Bourdieu in Translation Studies: The Socio-cultural Dynamics of Shakespeare Translation in Egypt* (London: Routledge, 2016), esp. Chapter 1.

44. Michaela Wolf, "Introduction," in *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, eds. Michaela Wolf and Alexandra Fukari (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), 6-13.

45. John Milton and Paul Bandia focus on the issues of agents of translation by combining the polysystemic and sociological concepts of patronage, power, habitus, and actor network theory. See *Agents of Translation* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009), 1-18.

46. Sameh Hanna, *Bourdieu in Translation Studies*, 5.



social networking as their multiple causes, which further remind readers that translation is a set of social practices that involve both institutional agents and human agency.

Many translation scholars find the sociological approach useful for translation analysis at a macro level, which is not overtly concerned with linguistic structure.<sup>47</sup> However, Bourdieu's concept of *illusio*, which is related to the signification and values of the linguistic traits in translation, provides a conceptual space to discuss translation at a micro level. Recent translation studies of the Bourdieusian approach do not exclude textual analysis outside its boundary. For example, in her sociological investigation of Arabic drama translation in Egypt, Sameh Hanna discusses the social aspects of translation cemented by her discussion of translation strategy and textual analysis at the paratextual and linguistic levels.<sup>48</sup> The rationale for this analysis is evident. Studying how the agents of translation interact with a literary field requires textual evidence to identify the linguistic role and aesthetic values of translation in the target literary field so as to buttress the claims or counterclaims of why such translational traits are valuable. Consequently, a micro textual analysis is called for in order to highlight *illusio*, the aesthetic features of translation that are significant in the target literary context, so as to rationalize why such a translation is acceptable.

José Lambert's model serves as an indispensable analytical tool to identify the relationship of the agents of translation and field condition (*habitus* and *field*) as well as the aesthetic traits of the textual materials of a literary work.<sup>49</sup> This analytical tool foregrounds the linguistic particularities and their textual context by taking various linguistic and paralinguistic

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47. Hanna, 4.

48. See the final chapters of Sameh Hanna's *Bourdieu in Translation Studies*.

50. Lambert José et al., *Functional Approaches to Culture and Translation Selected Papers by José Lambert* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006), 46-47.

elements into consideration. However, as Theo Herman points out, the model is complicated, and individual researchers are left to apply it according to their circumstances.<sup>50</sup> Despite this, compared to other methodological tools available, such as Gideon Toury's descriptive analysis of translation norms, Lambert's methodology has its advantages because it focuses on the foregrounded textual features from the lexical to textual level, including the most important features such as narrative structure, rhetoric particularities, word choices, sentence structures, textual patterns, and stylistic features, which allow scholars to concentrate on the elements that define the general contour of the *illusio* of a literary work. Second, Lambert's model is a practical tool for examining the paratextual features of a literary work in translation, such as publication data, cultural politics, and literary expectations from the target text. These materials work alongside textual analysis to provide solid evidence for how the essential aesthetic features are constituted and validated in the target social and cultural space as opposed to the original. Such questions as the agents of translation, the agency of the translator, and the significance of the struggle for literary dominance can be identified from textual and paratextual analyses.

Although theoretical and textual (paratextual) analyses are complementary, reception data in the target literary field of a translation are also highly important, because they either confirm the validity of critical analyses, unfold a different scenario that contradicts earlier hypotheses, or something in between. Relevant information about the reception of a literary work and its consecration in the target literary field may be found in book reviews, feature articles, interviews, sales records, academic articles, journals, TV programs, and literary conferences.

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50. See Theo Herman's discussion of José Lambert's functional approach in *Translation in Systems: Descriptive and Systemic Approaches Explained* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1999), 64-71.

## 0.5 Structure

In light of Bourdieu's sociological translation theory, Chapter 1 studies Gao's translation of modernism in the Chinese literary field in the era of China's reform, from which his agency as a translator engages with and subverts the dominant trend of socialist realism. This chapter contextualizes his translation in the history of modernist literary writing and translation in China, and discusses his redefinition of this literary current and the nature of his translation of modernism. It also explores how Gao's concept of modernism is defined by his translation in China's literary and social history and space (*habitus*), and by his negotiation with Chinese socialist literary regimes, as seen in his personal translation projects, such as his translation of French poetry, his critical engagement with the dominant revolutionary literary trend as a metalingual intervention, and his adaptation of Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot* as *Che Zhan*. This analysis of Gao and his *habitus* in relation to the Chinese literary field also examines the *illusio* of his translation in order to determine how he translates the features of modernist literature into Chinese. In short, this chapter problematizes Casanova's claim of the universal validity of the Western literary center(s), from which writers/translators in peripheral countries seek cultural capital and recognition.

Chapter 2 investigates Gao's *Lingshan* in translation in France and its consecration according to the logic and mechanism of the French literary field. This discussion, framed in Bourdieu's concepts of sociological translation, begins with an examination of the *habitus* of translation, such as the publishing market, public cultural policies, and the reception conditions of Chinese literature in the French literary field. This investigation aims to show how *Lingshan* is translated into the reception milieu and becomes a canonical text according to the target cultural logic and consecration mechanisms. The chapter also provides a Lambertian structural analysis

of Gao's novel in Chinese and French, to show how *Lingshan/La Montagne de l'âme* is inscribed in the target field regimes and how the novel is translated in terms of its narrative structure, lexical and sentence features, and stylistic particularities. The investigations of the translation habitus, field conditions/regimes, and aesthetic traits by which *Lingshan* becomes *La Montagne de l'âme* complement one another and show how *Lingshan's* French version is structured not only by the agents of translation in the social networks of the target literary field, but also by *illusio* formulated at the micro levels in response to the literary and canonical requirements of the French literary field. The chapter concludes with an examination of French reviews of *La Montagne de l'âme*, exploring why the reviewers consider it a great work of modern Chinese literature and providing examples of *La Montagne de l'âme's* canonical status and its role in Gao's reception in the West and his earning of the Nobel Prize.

Chapter 3 discusses the competition for literary dominance thematized in *Lingshan's* translation and publication as *Soul Mountain* in the Anglophone world, another important player in the international literary field. The chapter starts with an investigation of Mabel Lee's English translation, produced in Australia, in terms of her translation habitus in relation to the reception conditions of the Australian literary field. This analysis of the field construction of what constitutes a canonical Chinese literary work traces Lee's responses to the literary regimes and their historical contexts at both paratextual and textual levels, and seeks to answer questions about the different logics and mechanisms of literary canonization before and after Gao's winning the Nobel Prize, highlighting the competition of the Australian literary field and cultural market with that of the United States and the United Kingdom, and the resistance of the Australian literary field to being marginalized. The case study of *Soul Mountain's* translation and reception in Australia is followed by an investigation of the publication and reviews of Gao's

novel in terms of the canonical logic and symbolic capital surrounding a novel by a Chinese Nobel winner. *Soul Mountain's* paratextual materials, including promotional information, prefaces, edition set-ups, sale analyses, and reviews, further demonstrate literary and, indirectly, economic, dominance in the international literary field. The chapter ends with a short account of Taiwan's canonization of *Lingshan*, showcasing Taiwan's appropriation of the universalizing power of the literary center(s) as a peripheral literary field.

The conclusion part of this dissertation summarizes the previous chapters, highlights the main contributions of this project to literature and translation studies as a whole, and discusses some limitations of this study as well as future research routes.

## 0.6 Contributions

Framed in the Bourdieusian sociological translation theory and supported by micro-textual and paratextual analyses, this project provides a striking example of how a Chinese novel has been canonized through translation, according to the logic and mechanism of the Western literary center(s), as a work of "universal validity." This literary canonization as universal is not unproblematic, but underscores the fight for dominance in the international field for symbolic capital, which also leads indirectly to the acquisition of economic capital. In addition, this project also demonstrates that such literary universalization is subject to revision and deferral, as different agents of translation have different claims over the significations of universal cultural power by redirecting the master literary signs from the center(s) toward their own trajectories and sociocultural needs. Gao's early translations of Western literary modernism and Taiwan's subversive reading of *Lingshan* are two cases in point. This study of the fight for symbolic capital in the international literary field and the appropriation of symbolic capital also illuminates

the logic of China's current efforts to gain more soft power to enhance its cultural dominance in the world. China not only uses translation to gain cultural capital, but also appropriates the Western literary prestige bestowed upon the Chinese Nobel laureates in order to occupy more cultural spaces.

In short, this examination of Gao's rise to international literary stardom identifies the motivations of translation, the agents of translation, the agency of the translator in relation to the regimes of both the source and target fields, and the logics and mechanisms of canonizing a translated work according to the social and cultural needs of the target milieu and the requirements for cultural dominance on an international scale. The case studies presented here shed light not only on the power struggle in translation in the international literary field, but also the generative power of appropriating a canonical writing in peripheral cultural zones. Thus, this investigation will contribute significantly to literature and translation studies in terms of the diffusion of cultures through translation (interpretation) in the glocal literary context.

## Chapter 1      On the Margins of the Modern Chinese Literary Field: Gao Xingjian, Translator of Modernism in the 1980s

### 1.0 Introduction

It may have been fate that brought together Gao Xingjian, an obscure lover of literature; Xu Chi (1914-1996), a modernist poet, translator, and writer; and François Cheng (Cheng Baoyi in Chinese), a Chinese-French writer, critic, and translator, in the newly-launched journal *Waiguo wenxue yanjiu* (The Journal of Foreign Literature Studies) in 1980. Gao published a critical essay, “Falanxi wenxue de tongku” (The Pains of French Literature), based on his travels in 1978 as a French language translator with a delegation of Chinese writers to Europe, headed by Ba Jin (1904-2005).<sup>51</sup> In the article, Gao provides an in-depth review of modern French literary currents, particularly existentialism, the Theatre of the Absurd, and the *Nouveau roman*, as well as major works of such literary figures as Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, and Eugène Ionesco. Shortly thereafter, Xu Chi, the journal’s general editor, published his first article on modernism and modernization which sparked a heated debate about modernism in China, a taboo at the time.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, the journal published a series of modern(ist) poems translated by François Cheng, including works by Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud. Cheng’s critical introduction of the poets and their works was pertinent, objective, and devoid of political jargon, which was unusual in Chinese literary criticism. Cheng’s translations were well received for their elegant style and their readability;<sup>53</sup>

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51. Gao Xingjian, “Falanxi wenxue de tongku” [The Pains of French Literature], *Waiguo wenxue yanjiu* [The Journal of Foreign Literature Studies], no. 1(1980): 51-57.

52. See Xu Chi’s article “Xiandai hua yu xiandai pai” [On Modernization and Modernism], in *The Journal of Foreign Literature Studies*, no. 1(1982): 117-119.

53. François Cheng’s Chinese articles appeared in the journal from 1980 to 1984.

Xu especially praised Cheng's translation and critical introduction.<sup>54</sup> Subsequently, Xu and Gao promoted modernism in the early 1980s, along with such well-known critics, poets, and novelists as Xu Jingya, Bei Dao, Gu Cheng, and others.<sup>55</sup> In his other essays about his visits in France with some Chinese writers, Gao characterizes China's literary modernism as "cidao" (belated).<sup>56</sup> He notes that Chinese writers associate modernism with Jean Genet, Marguerite Duras, and other French authors, but these authors were not considered avant-garde when they first appeared on the literary scene. During his visit to France, Gao's French literary hosts told him that the works of Genet and Duras had become integral parts of modern French literature. Thus, Gao reminded Chinese writers that they should neither reject French modernism out of hand, nor overpraise it, but draw on it to enrich and develop modern Chinese literature.<sup>57</sup> Contextualizing these observations and comments with the new modernist literature that he promoted in the beginning of the 1980s raises the question of why, since modernism was not new, and its renewal in China was "belated," Gao made these efforts to introduce it to China.

Pascale Casanova answers this question in relation to the competition for symbolic capital, arguing that in the international literary field, different languages and literatures generate

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54. In his introduction of François Cheng, Xu highly values François Cheng's contribution to poetry and translation in France, see the note to Cheng's "Lun bodelaier" [On Baudelaire], *The Journal of Foreign Literature Studies*, no. 1(1980): 58.

55. See "Part Two: Literature Since 1976," in Hong Zhicheng's *A History of Contemporary Chinese History*, trans. Michael M. Day (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009).

56. Gao Xingjian, Lee Oufan Leo, et al., "wenxue: haiwai yu zhongguo" [Literature: Foreign countries and China], in *Wenxue ziyoutan* [Free Review of Literature], no. 6(1986): 25-36 and Gao's "Cidao de xiandai zhuyi yu dangjin zhongguo wenxue" [The Belated Modernism and Contemporary Chinese Literature] in *Wenxue pinglun* [Critical Review of Literature], no.3 (1988): 11-15.

57. Gao Xingjian, Lee Oufan Leo, et al., "wenxue: haiwai yu zhongguo" [Literature: Foreign Countries and China], in *Wenxue ziyoutan* [Free Review of Literature], no.6 (1986): 26-27.



different cultural capital and dominance. As the Chinese language is categorized alongside others such as Arabic, Persian, and Hebrew, Chinese literature is distant from the international literary center(s) dominated by Paris, London, and New York and is not recognized in the international literary field, because it lacks the symbolic capital of these literary centers. Thus, translation is the only way to bring peripheral literatures closer to the centers. Casanova illustrates her observation with Gao's early translation and original writing as examples. She claims that Gao's early effort to translate modernism into the Chinese literary field has brought more modern Western literary techniques and cultural values to the target language and culture and thus narrowed the gap between Chinese and Western literatures.<sup>58</sup> Gao's most important theoretical treatise, *Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan (A Preliminary Examination of Modern Fictional Techniques, 1981)*, functions as a work of translation, because it introduces foreign literary works with "significant aesthetic and temporal transforming of a national literary field. It caused a redistribution of positions that contributed to pushing the Chinese field into the world literary field."<sup>59</sup> Casanova concludes:

The Chinese case illustrates very precisely the measurable consequences of the time gap (it is also a matter of literary time) existing between national literary fields which have entered the international competition at different dates [...]. When the time gap between spaces is significant, translation is the only means of making up literary time. In other words, it is an instrument of "temporal acceleration": translation allows the whole of a national field which is temporally very distant from the literary centers to enter into the world literary competition by revealing the state of (aesthetic) struggles at the literary meridian. Translation is therefore a very efficient weapon in the world competition: it

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58. Pascale Casanova's "Consecration and Accumulation of Literary Capital: Translation as Unequal Exchange," trans. Siobhan Brownlie, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 410.

59. Casanova, 414.

allows an entire literary field to change its position in the international field and to displace the whole of that universe through its autonomous pole.<sup>60</sup>

Elsewhere, she adds that the Swedish versions of his plays helped him win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2000.<sup>61</sup> Does Casanova's assumption apply to Gao's translation at the beginning of China's reform era? Can we characterize Gao's translation and writing as gestures toward modernizing Chinese literature in order to bring it closer to the Western literary center(s) and thus gain more symbolic capital?

Casanova's claim regarding the Swedish Academy's awarding of the Nobel Prize based on the Swedish translation of his plays cannot be substantiated; this will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 2. However, her arguments exemplify the fight for symbolic capital in literary production and the privileging of the West as the source of power that the rest of the world seeks. Moreover, from its position on the periphery, China is seen as lagging behind the literary center(s) and in need of modernization by means of translation. Thus, translation also implies temporal and aesthetic gaps between China and the West, which further suggests a view of the Chinese literary world as belated and trapped in a secondary modernity. Consequently, for China and for other peripheral countries, translation confirms the unilateral direction of signifying power from the Western literary center(s) to the periphery.

Casanova's discussion of cultural capital draws largely from Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical hypothesis that fighting symbolic capital motivates literary production.<sup>62</sup> While significantly

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60. Casanova, 414-15.

61. See Casanova's *La Langue mondiale: traduction et domination* (Paris: Seuil, 2015), 20.

62. Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1993), 73.

developing Bourdieu's theory, Casanova rationalizes literary competition and symbolic capital conferral in favor of the Western literary center(s), and in so doing reinforces the image of the periphery as translator (imitator) of Western literary modernity.

In a certain sense, Casanova appropriates Bourdieu's theoretical frame in relation to translation. In light of Bourdieu's sociological reading of translation, the structures and institutional requirements of a literary field and agents of translation form an interactive relationship. Even as the translator conforms to the objective structures and the institutional regimes in the field of literature (translation) by incorporating them into his/her translation dispositions and tastes (*habitus*), he/she can also counter objective structures and institutional codes by imposing, and even providing a vision for certain revisions and changes. Thus, the translator's *habitus* is both "structured" by and "structuring" the field.<sup>63</sup>

The Bourdieusian vision offers the agents of translation, the translator in particular, a space for interacting with and even modifying the field structure or requirements. Although she sees translation as a unidirectional process of asserting the transcendent source power of the Western literary center(s), Casanova minimizes the agency of the translator, as if the latter's whole enterprise of translation were to imitate the source. Thus, it is imperative to shift the academic focus to the target milieu to investigate how translation functions, as Jean-Marc Gouanvic explains:

Thus, source literary texts are distinguished in the target cultural space for translation due to the interests of the agents of translation (publishers, directors of series, translators) and due to social demand, either from a faithful public or in conjunction with a potential or

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63. Jean-Marc Gouanvic, "A Bourdieusian Theory of Translation, or the Coincidence of Practical Instances," *The Translator* 11, no. 2 (2005): 157.

emerging public in the target social spaces. However, social spaces are not undifferentiated either in the source or target society.<sup>64</sup>

With regard to his translations during China's era of reforms in the 1980s, it is more productive to examine the role of social demands, rather than the desire for cultural capital in the international literary field, in Gao's translation process, because he translated literary modernism within the social spaces of China and for the needs of his target milieu. As this transcends Casanova's discussion of Chinese literature in the international space, a distinction must be made, allowing us to treat translation as a linguistic and sociocultural operation that serves the goals of the target literary field, while still carrying international implications and resonances.

Gao's own words confirm the goals for his writings/translations produced in the Chinese literary field in the 1980s. In an interview with Yang Lian, an exiled Chinese modernist poet in the West, Gao recalled that when he promoted literary modernism in *A Preliminary Examination of Modern Fictional Techniques*, he advocated modern Chinese literature by changing its form, because he thought that it was not a good moment to speak openly about the "truth" of literature and its contents, which might become taboo. In a roundabout way, he framed Chinese literature in post-Mao era from an angle of the evolution of literary form, and in doing so, certain vital issues relating to literary content would be addressed indirectly.<sup>65</sup> In his own treatise, Gao tries to apply modern evolutionary logic to support his argument that the modernist literary form is the logical consequence of development after realism and romanticism. His treatise resonates with the spirit of promoting universal scientific progress, an important part of China's national

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64. Jean-Marc Gouanvic's "The Stakes of Translation in Literary Fields," *Across Languages and Cultures* 3, no.2 (2002): 160.

65. Gao's "Liuwang si women huodehuo de shenmo?" [What do we Get from our Exiles?], in *Meiyou zuyi* [No-ism] (Hong Kong: tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1996), 118.

modernization project at the beginning of the reform era. This was the trump card Gao would play in order to subvert the literary field that was dominated by revolutionary realism. It also implied that his adoption of modernism as a writing mode, through translation, literary criticism, and creative works, aimed to serve different cultural agendas in an era of reform and opening up.

Critic Chen Xiaomei defines “Occidentalism,” the use of Western literature and culture in the Chinese literary field in post-Mao era from the late 1976 to 1989, during which Gao played an important role. Chen points out that the appropriation, through translation and adaptation, of Western modern(ist) literature in various literary forms and genres was meant to formulate a countercultural discourse against mainstream Maoist literature and culture. She argues that, like Orientalism, China’s utilization of Western culture and literature (Occidentalism) in this era was an act of cultural appropriation based on the need to resist the Maoist legacy. Such appropriation of culture was effective for fulfilling the cultural trajectories in the target milieu.<sup>66</sup> The larger part of Chen’s argument draws on instances of mediated modernist literature, including Gao’s plays.

Chen’s discussion raises an important question about the appropriation of Western literary capital in China: Though the utilization of Western literature in post-Mao era may involve arbitrary distortions of the source cultures, their main objectives were to serve internal political and cultural agendas. The use of Western texts in Chinese modernist literature was thus an appropriation rather than a faithful translation, from which a new cultural signified could be

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66. Chen Xiaomei writes: “I here advance my study of a Chinese Occidentalism that focuses on the role of the intellectuals in producing a counter-discourse about an imagined and imaginary West, a discourse, as we shall see, that was directed against the ruling ideology and its self-claimed subaltern interest.” See *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 24.

generated. Thus, translation is not so much a confirmation of the power of Western symbolic capital as a mediation and invention based on the target's cultural history and needs, in which the agency of the translator as a mediator and inventor must be recognized. This resonates with the Bourdieusian emphasis of the translator's agency, though conditioned by the field's requirements.

Despite its irrelevance to Gao's translation in the reform era, Casanova's argument has certain indirect repercussions among some critics. For example, Jessica Yeung's *Ink Dances in Limbo* divides Gao's early writing career into two parts - before and after his trips as a French translator with the Chinese writers' delegations to Europe (roughly between 1978 - 1981). Gao's European trips are deemed to be decisive for his literary production.<sup>67</sup> This division is quite problematic. Though Gao travelled abroad and made first-hand observations of modern French theatre and literature, what propelled him to adopt modernism as a mode to interact with the Chinese literary field was largely based on his experiences as a French language student, translator, and writer both before and after the Maoist era. Without significant investigation into his literary activities in this period, Gao could be seen mainly as a passive receiver and translator of French literature and culture. Gao's formative years of writing/translating were much shaped by his experiences in this time. Furthermore, such a division only reveals a logic similar to that of Casanova: The Chinese writer was lured by Western literary modernity and its symbolic capital, his agency as a translator in negotiating or mediating Western (French) modernism is not significantly relevant to the emergence of the new Chinese modernist literary discourse.

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67. Jessica Yeung, *Ink Dances in Limbo: Gao Xingjian's Writing as Cultural Translation* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2008), 20.

In addition, scholars who have written about Gao as a Nobel Prize winner have mostly focused on his early work as a modernist playwright who adopted the European Theatre of the Absurd into *Che Zhan* (Bus Stop), as well as his other plays while in exile in France. Their scholarly focus is grounded on a similar rationale to that of Casanova: By translating/adapting Western modernism, such as Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot*, into Chinese, as *Che Zhan*, Gao not only brings Chinese and Western literatures closer together, but also makes Chinese drama modern, though serious gaps existed between them.<sup>68</sup> For example, for the French scholar Marie Berne, Gao's "filiation" to Beckett is apparent with the former's adoption of modernist techniques to the plays he wrote while in Paris, which makes his work as a free writer in France more interesting to study than his translation of Theatre of the Absurd in China.<sup>69</sup> Since Gao's *Che Zhan* is widely regarded an adaptation of Beckett's *En attendant Godot*, the questions arise of why he chose Beckett's play and how he translated it. More specifically, if Gao intended to translate Beckett's Theatre of the Absurd, how did he achieve such a translation in his Chinese play? Was it a textually faithful representation of Beckett's absurdity in Chinese society, a reinvention of an absurdity in the target cultural milieu, or a distant echo of European modernism that takes a completely different trajectory interacting with the Chinese literary field on Gao's own terms? These questions are related to various aspects of translation and translator's agency in Gao's work in the Chinese literary field.

Gao started his career as a translator of French modernist poetry and drama, while introducing modernist theory into China with his theoretical treatises, criticisms, and translation

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68. See *Soul of Chaos: Critical Perspectives on Gao Xingjian*, ed. Kwok-kan Tam (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2001).

69. Marie Berne, "Beckett en Chine à Paris: Résonance beckettienne chez Gao Xingjian," in *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* (August 2012): 127-141.

reviews. In 1983, he adapted Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot* to his play, *Che Zhan*. Gao's major works can be discussed within the scope of translation studies as translation.<sup>70</sup> His interlingual translation, theoretical introduction of literary modernism, and adaptation of the absurdist play highlight the different aspects of translation, showing his gradual shift from more linguistically bound translation to adaptation/creation both within and from the modernist idiom. However, whereas many studies of Gao have discussed his translation/interpretation of modernist concepts and theatrical adaptations, his interlingual translations have been largely ignored.<sup>71</sup> Such emphasis at the expense of interlingual translation results in an incomplete picture of his early introduction of Western modernism into the Chinese literary field.

#### 1.1.0 The Bourdieusian Sociological Translation Approach to Gao's Translations/writings

Gao's work of translation significantly defies Casanova's reading of translation, which privileges the Western literary center(s) as the source of power. Therefore, his translation should be examined in the target context, in which he engages and negotiates with the Chinese literary field. Bourdieu's key sociological concepts, habitus, field, symbolic capital and *illusio*, are highly relevant to our investigation of Gao's translations. By adopting such a sociological translation approach, we have more critical edges over other translation approaches to study how Gao translates literary modernism and how it functions in China's literary field. Through our critical analysis, the agency of Gao as a translator will be foregrounded in the formation of

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70. While Gao's translation of French modernist literature can be categorized as "interlingual," his interpretation/introduction of modernist literary theory and his adaptation of Beckett's play, *En attendant Godot*, can be also studied as translation.

71. See Jessica Yeung's *Ink Dances in Limbo* and Todd J. Coulter's *Transcultural Aesthetics in the Plays of Gao Xingjian*.



Chinese modernist discourse, a key issue Casanova and some other translation scholars fail to address. This means neither framing Gao's translation as a norm-governed operation, as elaborated upon in Gideon Toury's concept of descriptive translation studies and Itamar Even-Zohar's Polysystem theory, nor prioritizing the source language and culture as the signifying power exemplified by Lawrence Venuti's valorization of foreignization.<sup>72</sup> The Bourdieusian sociological translation theory overcomes such binarism and sheds much light on this discussion of Gao's translation, both as a path to seeing translation as performance that needs to satisfy particular regimes within the target field and as an influence upon that field via both negotiation and creation. Thus, as an agent of translation, the translator is both constituted by and constituting the regimes of the target field.

Bourdieu's concept, symbolic capital, directs us to see translation as motivated by gaining cultural capital, from which we can observe the participants' fights for social/cultural spaces in the literary field. Gao's translation can be read in this light in that by translating modernism into the Chinese literary discourse in his terms, he opened an alternative avenue that subverted and rivaled the dominant literary mode, socialist realism, henceforth accumulating some cultural capital (also political legitimacy) in the era of China's opening-up. This approach has its advantages over polysystem translation and descriptive translation studies, or cultural translation studies. While polysystem approach and descriptive translation studies fail to account for the "driving forces" behind translation,<sup>73</sup> the culture studies translation approach treats translation as a final product subject to hermeneutic analysis, though it shares with the

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72. See Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).

73. *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, eds. Michaela Wolf and Alexandra Fukari (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 2007), 7.

Bourdieuian translation approach the similar concerns about political/cultural power in translation.<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, Bourdieu's concept, *illusio*, allows us to discuss literature/translation and its significations in the target milieu based on its aesthetic traits. By adopting such an approach, we avoid treating literature merely as social facts. With our analysis of how literary *illusio* is translated from the source and validated in the target milieu, we bring to light the logic of fighting for symbolic capital and political legitimacy. Thus, we study how Gao translates modernist *illusio* and critical concepts, into the Chinese literary discourse and how modernism occupies social/cultural spaces in the Chinese literary field.

In short, the following sections discuss the conditions of the field that structure the habitus of translation, which are both socially and historically constructed, and how the agents of translation, especially the translator, constitutes the field. Specifically, these sections examine the evolution of Chinese modernist discourse and Gao's engagement with it through his translation of works by two French modernist writers: Poet Jacques Prévert and absurdist playwright Eugène Ionesco. We also discuss Gao's critical essays on and reviews of modernist theory, literary works and translations, as well as his best-known play, *Che Zhan*. This investigation situates his translations and creative adaptation in the sociopolitical and literary spaces during post-Mao era and analyses how he engages with the Chinese literary field through translation and interpretation.

### 1.2.0 Writing/Translating Modernism in the Modern Chinese Literary Field

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74. Moira Inghilleri, "The Sociology of Bourdieu and Construction of 'Object' in Translation and Interpreting Studies," in *The Translator* 11, no.2 (2005): 142.

To study Gao's translation as negotiation/engagement with the Chinese literary field, we need to first investigate the conditions of the literary field before we examine how Gao undertook his translation projects. As the Chinese literary field is both socially and historically constructed, a study of the formation and transformation of modernist discourse will inform us the significance of its rupture and continuity, from which we can fruitfully discuss how such conditions limit, or foster a writer/translator's productivity or creativity. Thus, we first review how modernism was translated into the Chinese literary field before and after 1949, and then we discuss Gao's translations as both continuation and invention in relation to the modernist literary discourse before 1949 and in post-Mao era. By analysing modernist *illusio* exhibited in Gao's translations, we demonstrate how translated modernism functioned in the Chinese literary field.

### 1.2.1 Writing/translating Modernism in the Modern Chinese Literary Field before 1949

Gao's writing career was set against the backdrop of China's renewed efforts in 1977 to open itself to the world in general and the West in particular, in its most ambitious modernization and nation-building project since the Communist Party came to power in 1949. The initial efforts were underscored by the "four modernizations:" Industry, agriculture, national defense, and science and technology, echoing the call for science and democracy during the May 4 Movement and the New Cultural Movement in the early twentieth century. However, unlike the previous modernization efforts, democracy was not part of the 1977 campaign. The Communist reformers hoped to build a better nation while still retaining their ideology, which meant not only the advancement of science but also the valorization of revolutionary realism and romanticism in the literary field.

The modernization project bore no relation to Westernization in the fields of the humanities, social sciences, and literature, as these were believed to pose serious threats to the Communist Party's core values. However, Xu Chi, China's leading writer and critic at the time, tried to fill the lacunae of the discourse of modernization in literature by promoting modernism as the most advanced form of literature and as an aid to the advancement of Chinese literature.<sup>75</sup> Xu combined modernization/modernity and modernism into a coherent discourse; however, equating scientific progress with literary modernism intentionally misreads the discourse of universal progress in which literary modernism is an integral part rather than a negation of science. This highlights the radical engagement with and the appropriation of the discourse of modernity on the part of Chinese writers and critics. Such critical investments invite several relevant questions about Gao's literary engagement in the context of the reform movement: How does his translation of modernism accommodate the dominant Chinese discourse of modernization? How does he disrupt the functions of this discourse in pursuit of literary visibility and legitimacy? Answering these questions requires making a fundamental distinction between modernity, modernism, and modernization, as well as an overview of the processes by which modernity and modernism are constructed in relation to Gao's translations. By doing so, Gao's engagement with and contribution to modern Chinese literature can be mapped out.

Leo Ou-fan Lee has pointed out that the concepts of modernity, modernism, and postmodernism in China "have so dominated creative imagination and critical thinking as to become themselves paradigmatic 'tradition.'"<sup>76</sup> Lee explains that, from the late Qing Dynasty

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75. Xu Chi, "Xiandai hua yu xiandai pai" [On Modernization and Modernism], in *The Journal of Foreign Literature Studies*, no.1 (1982): 117-119.

76. Leo Ou-fan Lee, "In Search of Modernity: Some Reflections on New Modes of Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Chinese History and Literature," in *Ideas across Cultures*:

and early Republic era roughly at the end of the nineteenth century to the 1917 New Cultural Revolution and the May Fourth Movement in 1919, major Chinese thinkers and writers all raised the question of how to make China modern. As a literary current, modernism was known in China in the early 1920s with the publication of Li Jinfa's symbolist poetry. Though largely stifled as a literary trend during the Maoist era, modernism re-emerged as a counter discourse against the official domination of realism and romanticism when post-Mao China began a process of modernization in order to catch up to the West.<sup>77</sup> Despite this long history of the formation of discourse on modernity and modernism in China, Lee also asks whether the Chinese understanding of discourses of modernization, modernity, modernism, and postmodernism is similar to, or different from, how these concepts are understood in the West. As postmodernism is not of immediate relevance to our discussion of Gao's translation, we will not deal with it in this chapter.

Many scholars have fiercely debated questions such as those Lee raises.<sup>78</sup> For example, in his discussion of modern Chinese literature, W.J.F. Jenner problematizes modern Chinese literature by asking "Is a Modern Chinese Literature Possible?" His answer is negative, because he regards Chinese writers as lacking a sense of being modern and as trapped in their traditions, and to him, such vital matters as literary originality and individualism are undervalued in Chinese culture. He particularly singles out literary modernism in China in the 1920s and 1930s as an example of the tendency of writers of the time to imitate outdated concepts of Romanticism

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*Essays on Chinese Thought in Honor of Benjamin I. Schwartz*, eds. Benjamin I Schwartz, Paul A Cohen, and Merle Goldman (Cambridge, Mass.: Council On East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1990), 109-135.

77. Lee, 109-135.

78. Lee, 109-135.

in comparison to European modernism. Even one of the most prestigious Chinese modernist poets, Dai Wangshui (1905-1950), is considered less a modernist than a romanticist. In addition, Chinese writers had little, if any, sense of modernity after the Communists took over mainland China due to the imposition of socialist realism as a model for both creative and critical writing. Thus, he concludes that Chinese writers should pursue realism before “the need of modernism,” for which Europe can provide a “guide.”<sup>79</sup>

For Jenner, European discourses of modernity and modernism hold signifying power, which seemingly places China in a state of perpetually lagging behind. However, Leo Ou-Fan Lee points out that both “modernity” and “modernism” are problematic terms because of their implication of European hegemony.<sup>80</sup> The terms “modernity” and “modernism” can not be translated directly into Chinese discourse without mediation. This implies that “modernity” and “modernism” need to be read and introduced according to local exigencies. Thus, these terms may mean different things in China than in the West.

Matei Calinescu defines the notions of “modernity” and “modernism” in the European context. “Modernity” refers to the period of Western history from the Renaissance onward, otherwise known as the modern era, in contrast to antiquity and the medieval era. The Renaissance ushered in the modern era as “the people living in that era wanted to break away from traditions.”<sup>81</sup> Consequently, history was no longer thought of as a “continuum,” but as

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79. W.J.F. Jenner, “Is a Modern Chinese Literature Possible?” in *Essays in Modern Chinese Literature and Literary Criticism: Papers of the Berlin Conference 1978: [a Selection of Papers Which Were Read at the International Conference on Literature, Literary Theory and Literary Criticism in the People’s Republic of China Held at the East Asian Inst. Of the Free Univ. Of Berlin, September 18-24, 1978; in Memoriam Jaroslav Pr Usek, 1906-1980]*, eds. Wolfgang Kubin and Rudolf G. Wagner (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1982): 192-230.

80. Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Zhongguo wenxue yu xiandai xin sijiang* [Ten Lectures on Modernity of Chinese Literature] (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2002), 90–93.

“succession of sharp distinct ages” marked by ruptures.<sup>82</sup> The Renaissance marked a rupture with the Christian tradition in favor of a more secular outlook. From the Renaissance and post-Renaissance eras to the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, the West advanced in science and technology and developed the concept of capitalism. The “bourgeois idea of modernity” is characterized by a belief in universal progress, science and technology, reason, universal humanity, and freedom. The achievements of the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century and the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century led to optimism about the future and a validation of “modern” beliefs as universal. As a result, modernity was seen as a rejection of tradition, a promotion of radical changes, and a valorization of the future.<sup>83</sup>

Modernism refers to the literary trends that began at the end of the nineteenth century, including symbolism, cubism, futurism, imagism, expressionism, and surrealism. It came into being with the nineteenth-century split between modernity as a “process of Western history” and as an “aesthetic conception.”<sup>84</sup> The latter was a reaction against the social and economic changes and the scientific and technological progresses brought and fostered by capitalism. Modernist artists loathed “bourgeois mercantilism and vulgar utilitarianism;” they were anti-rationalistic and anti-historical in that they opposed anything that they considered a “bourgeois idea of modernity.” Instead of relating their works to cruel reality, they attempted to define their artistic realms according to their interiority, in a form of “subjectivism” and “iconoclasm.”<sup>85</sup> In a sense,

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81. Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1988), 20.

82. Calinescu, 21

83. Calinescu, 42.

84. Calinescu, 42.

85. Calinescu, 42.

if the former definition of modernity is a euphorically universal affirmation for what the modern represents scientifically and economically, the latter represents the negative side of the same process.

Modernity and modernism are critical concepts closely related to the Western world's historical experiences. China's responses to modernity vary in different contexts. The May Fourth Movement shared the Western Enlightenment vision of freedom, democracy, equality, science, and technology, but its divergence from its Western counterpart cannot be overlooked. As Leo Ou-fan Lee notes, in the late Qing era, Yan Fu, Liang Qichao, Lu Xun and others translated the modern values of universal freedom, democracy, and the valorization of scientific progress into concrete actions for the collective goal of making China stronger and wealthier. The idea of building a stronger modern nation became the priority of the individuals; thus, the conflicting values between individual freedom and collective goals are not always irreconcilably hostile.<sup>86</sup> In short, Chinese modernity is not a passive absorption of Western material and spiritual cultures, but a process of translation and mediation to meet local conditions and requirements.

Lee further points out that Chinese literary modernism is just as different from that of the West as its philosophical counterpart. The May Fourth Movement was anti-traditionalist and optimistic about a future world based on the Enlightenment, and fostered an optimistic vision of China's future by largely rejecting the traditional values of Confucianism. The writers of the May Fourth generation generally supported the spirit upheld by the movement in science, technology, and universal human progress. As a result, they paid much attention to social reality

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86. Lee, "Modernism in Modern Chinese Literature: A Study (Somewhat Comparative) in Literary History," in *Tamkang Review*, no.4 (Summer 1980): 283.



by following the traditions of European realism and romanticism. Though some attempted to engage with modernism to varying degrees, their “avant-garde” writing mode was deemed a gesture against Chinese tradition and social conditions. Instead of turning into interiority for truth, the “modernist” writers of this generation tried to exteriorize their individuality and impose it on reality. Thus, Chinese modernism in this case largely represented the first phase of European modernism, as seen in Guo Moyo’s poetry anthology *Nu Sheng* (Goddess), written in the spirit of Walter Whitman.<sup>87</sup>

Moreover, as Lee further explains, the desire for national salvation and progress in a semi-colonial society obliged Chinese writers to uphold realism and, to a lesser extent, romanticism, as they did not have the “luxury” to seek truth inside against a “stagnant” and “philistine” society; their artistic scope remained focused on matters of China. In this context, although some writers did try to create modernist poetry, they were confronted with overwhelming hostility and were marginalized for transgressing dominant political and cultural ideologies.<sup>88</sup>

Lee’s observation is valuable for this study. Indeed, when China’s literary scene was dominated by left-wing literature and anti-Japanese literature in the late 1930s due to the Japanese invasion of China in 1937, modernism was marginalized. However, Gregory Lee argues that modernism played a significant role in China, especially during the late 1920s and the

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87. Lee, 283.

88. Leo Ou-fan Lee, “In Search of Modernity: Some Reflections on New Modes of Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Chinese History and Literature,” in *Ideas Across Cultures: Essays on Chinese Thought in Honor of Benjamin I. Schwartz*, eds. Paul A Cohen and Merle Goldman (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990), 124-126.

1930s when symbolism flourished.<sup>89</sup> Gregory Lee's evaluation of the historical role of Chinese modernist literature contradicts Leo Ou-fan Lee's minimization of the importance of modernism in the literary history of modern China. Indeed, the most authoritative literary anthology, *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* (The Comprehensive Compendium of New Chinese Literature), edited and published by Zhao Bijun for Liang You Book Store in 1935 in Shanghai, ranked symbolism as one of the main poetic trends, along with realism and romanticism. Moreover, though highly formalized modernist poetry had no place for the grand narratives of national salvation during China's anti-Japanese War (1937-1945), and after 1949 symbolism and many other forms of modernist literature were banned due to conflict with the literary principles of socialist realism and romanticism promoted by the Chinese Communist Party, modernist literature re-emerged in the 1970s, beginning in Taiwan.<sup>90</sup> At about the same time, in mainland China, "Misty Poetry" writers, such as Bei Dao, were inspired by the Chinese translations of Baudelaire's *Fleur du mal* and other modernist poetry. With more recent study and re-evaluation of literary modernism in China's Republic period (1911-49), modernist poets such as Li Jinfu, Mu Dan, and others, have been enthusiastically embraced by readers and critics.<sup>91</sup>

The role of modernism, especially modernist poetry, in Chinese literary history cannot be underestimated.<sup>92</sup> The translations/writings of such important modernist poets as Li Jinfu, Dai Wangshui, and Mu showcase how modernism functioned in modern Chinese literature.

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89. Gregory Lee, "Modernism," in *Dai Wangshui: The Life and Poetry of a Chinese Modernist* (Hong Kong: The Chinese UP, 1989), 99-120.

90. Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Modernism in Modern Chinese Literature: A Study (Somewhat Comparative) in Literary History," 293-306.

91. Yuping Yang, *Baudelaire et la Révolution culturelle chinoise* (Paris: Presse Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2013) and Ya Wen, *Baudelaire et la nouvelle poésie chinoise* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016).

It is no exaggeration to say that the beginning of China's literary modernism was closely connected to Li Jinfa's symbolist poetry anthology *Weiyu* (Light Rain), published in 1925 while he was studying sculpture in Paris. Li's poetry caused a stir in Chinese literary circles for its fresh imagery and bold thematic subject matter exclusively linked with death, despair, and loneliness, themes that are also associated with Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal*. Li's symbolist poems were particularly shocking to writers of the time because of their extensive use of symbolic correspondences outside Chinese poetic and linguistic norms. In particular, the critics were unfamiliar with Li's use of translationese: Li's poetic imagery, rhetorical expressions, lexical collocations, and sentence structures appeared to have been translated directly from French. However, Li's poetic experiments won high praise from established writers of the time.

The well-known Chinese writer and critic Zhu Ziqing singled out Li Jinfa in his endorsement of modernism. He stated that Li's symbolist poems are "strangely beautiful," "Europeanized," "readable in isolation, not in wholeness," "read like translation."<sup>93</sup> His remarks point to one foregrounded feature in Li's poems: Their translation quality.

However, it is exactly these foreign poetic qualities that expand the Chinese poetic horizon. As Leo Ou-fan Lee explains, the symbolist obsession with imagery led Chinese poetry on a path that was dominated by "a logic of metaphor and form," a poetic world that does not carry a "correspondence of commonplace reality."<sup>94</sup> Li's translation of foreign experiences and

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92. Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Modernism in Modern Chinese Literature: A Study (Somewhat Comparative) in Literary History," 293-306.

94. Zhu Ziqing, *Zhongguo Xin wenxue daxi, shi Ji* [the Compendium of New Chinese Literature, Poetry], vol. 8 (Shanghai: Liangyou Publishing Company, 1935), 7-8.

94. See Leo Ou-fan Lee's "Modernism in Modern Chinese Literature: A Study (Somewhat Comparative) in Literary History," 288.

poetics brought new aspects of imagery and language to vernacular Chinese poetry, which was still inventing and defining itself to serve the agenda of building a strong and modern nation in the context of the New Cultural Movement that began in 1917.<sup>95</sup>

However, this translational quality did not exist in Li's poems alone. Many poets adopted translational language and structures in their works, though some, such as Dai Wangshui, tried to modify these features. Avoiding Li's extensive use of translational language and images of extreme foreignization, Dai Wangshu foregrounded poetic images and sentiments that alluded both to Chinese classical language and French symbolist poetic traces, particularly those of Arthur Rimbaud and Francis Jammes. Dai's poem "Yu Xiang" (Rainy Alley) is a typical combination of both of these influences.<sup>96</sup> While he was in France, Dai's writings and translations were not passive translating/writing of French modernist poetry, because he not only created his own unique symbolist poems in both Chinese and French, but also published his French poems, some of which were translated directly from his Chinese poems, in a well-known journal of modernist poetry in Southern France, *Cahiers du Sud*, in 1935.<sup>97</sup> The published poems demonstrate Dai's passionate participation in both French and Chinese modernism.

While Li Jinfa, Dai Wangshui and other modernist poets wrote and translated (or combined both) by engaging with European modernist literary currents, Mu Dan emerged as an important modernist poet who wrote in both English and Chinese by negotiating

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95. Michelle Yeh, *Modern Chinese Poetry: Theory and Practice since 1917* (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1991).

96. Wang Zuoliang, *Degrees of the Affinity: Studies in Comparative Literature* (Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1985), 60.

97. See "Appendice 3" of Gregory Lee's *Dai Wangshui: The Life and Poetry of a Chinese Modernist* (Hong Kong: The Chinese U of Hong Kong P, 1989), 335-338.

British/American modernist poetics during the Anti-Japanese War and the 1945-49 Civil War, as well as his study in the US in the early 1950s. Mu Dan's modernist poetry can be associated with that of W.H. Auden, who taught at the Southwest Union University in a government-controlled area during World War II. Wang Zuoliang states that "while [Mu Dan] expresses best the tortured and torturing state of mind of young Chinese intellectuals, his best qualities are not Chinese at all."<sup>98</sup> He also adds that Mu's poetry is characterized by his peculiar use of the Chinese language, such as avoiding clichés and intentionally contesting the old classics. In addition to his Western conceits, which can be traced to Maria Rilke, T.S. Eliot, and W.H. Auden, Mu Dan's "diction," "imagery," and "syntax" are all westernized.<sup>99</sup> Wang's comments imply that Mu's poetry amounts to translation: He literally translates English structure, words, and metaphysical conceits into his Chinese poetry.

Why did Mu Dan adopt such a translation style? As Zhao Wenxue points out, in the 1940s, though new Chinese vernacular poetry had experienced only twenty or so years of history, two distinctive trends had developed: One was the romantic trend, which created a world totally detached from harsh reality; and the other was the trend of using literature for war mobilization and political agitation.<sup>100</sup> In his modernist poetry, Mu's writing/translation distanced himself from these dominant literary trends and asserted his own imaginative power. Sun Yushi claims that in doing so, Mu surpassed not only the pioneers of vernacular realist and romantic poetry, but also other modernist writers, by bringing the reader to an intellectual world

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98. Wang Zuoliang's *Degrees of Affinity*, 95.

99. Wang, 95.

100. Zhao Wenshu, "Auden Yu Jiuye Shiren" [Auden and the Nine-Leave Poets], *Waigu Wenxue Pinlun* [The Review of Foreign Literatures], no.2 (1999): 12–19.

with “strange” but “fresh” language.<sup>101</sup> Thus, Mu’s writing as translation assumed the role of a rebel who challenged both tradition and banality in the poetic realm. In this respect, Mu allied himself with his Western modernist counterparts, Auden in particular.

From the initial experience of literary modernity, can we accept Jenner’s or Leo Ou-fan Lee’s comments on the lateness of Chinese modernity and the resulting absence of a true literary modernism in the European sense?

As noted above, Chinese modernity was triggered and generated in a different historical paradigm than its European forebear, and China’s literary modernism placed different emphasis than its European counterpart. If we use European literary modernity as the principal criterion, the answer to the above question is predictable: Not only is China’s modernity belated, but its literary modernism is also inauthentic, because Chinese translation of European modernity is not synchronic with its modern time, and thus largely gave way to China’s own modern conditions and cultural logic.

Such local social and cultural conditions require us to overcome the problematic of whether European modernism and modernity were faithfully translated in China. All three of these major poets/translators translated modernism in different ways. They did so at a time when modern Chinese literature needed new language, form, and perspectives, and they all, in one way or another, opposed the “philistine” world of materiality and technology in order to project their interiority. In this sense, they all acquired a sense of modernity. Contrary to Jenner’s Eurocentric view, Li Jinfa’s poetry was synchronic with the context of high modernism in Europe and was translated successfully into the Chinese literary field, as were the works of Dai Wangshui and

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101. Sun Yushi, *Xinshi sijiang* [Ten Lectures on New Poetry] (Beijing: Zhongxin chubanshe, 2015), 467.

Mu Dan. Moreover, through translating/writing, these poets added more Chinese dimensions and diversities to modernism as a global literary movement. Thus, Chinese modernism was neither belated nor a pale imitation to European modernism.

Be that as it may, literary modernism was a marginal influence in the modern Chinese literary field, especially in the 1940s, when the wind of literature turned to the left. However, it did not disappear. In fact, it was indispensable as a renewing and rejuvenating force in Chinese literature when it was in crisis, because modernist literature provided new forms, languages, and perspectives that modern Chinese literature needed badly. Post-Mao literature appeared to demonstrate this.

### 1.2.2 Translating Modernism in Post-Mao Era

Modernist literature almost disappeared from 1949 to 1977 when socialist realism / romanticism was imposed by the Communist government as the sole writing mode in the Chinese literary field. However, it re-emerged in the era of China's opening-up. Through translation and writing, Chinese modernist writers/ translators negotiated and subverted the dominant revolutionary literary regimes, forcing the Chinese literary field to accept other possibilities. Gao Xingjian contributed significantly to the process of this catalytic development.

In his essay on literary translation in China between 1949 and 1977, Wang Yougui characterizes the development of China's literary translation as the gradual diminishing of the translator's subjectivity.<sup>102</sup> This implies that the translator lost his/her agency to choose and

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102. Wang Yougui, "Ersi shiji zhongguo yisi shi yanjiu: gonghuoguo shou 29 nian de shixue yu fanyi wenxue 1949-1977" [Research on 20th Century Chinese Translation History: Poetics and Translated Literature of the First 29 Years in the People's Republic 1949-1977], in *The Journal Foreign Language and Literature Quarterly*, no. 2 (2012): 104-111.

translate his/her own literary works according to the demands of the readers. Wang points out that the demarcation line was drawn with Mao's "Talks at the Yan An Literary Forum" in 1942.<sup>103</sup> In this speech, Mao claims that no literature is independent of class and politics, and proletarian literature is a part of the revolutionary machine. He then asks writers and artists to go among the masses to create literature that the people can understand and are willing to accept. Though Mao's main ideas were originated from Lenin, they were henceforth regarded as inviolable literary doctrine. From then on, the literature of Mao's era fully reflected the politics of the Party, which negated individual voices and creations.<sup>104</sup>

In the 1950s, socialist realism and romanticism were greatly valued. Andrei Zhdanov, the radical Soviet Communist leader in the 1930s and 1940s, outlined the key functions of the two revolutionary literary modes for writing. He stressed that writers should know to depict life as "reality in its revolutionary development" and their works must be tied up with "the education of the working class in the spirit of socialism."<sup>105</sup> Zhdanov referred to this movement as socialist realism. He also characterized the opposite movement, socialist romanticism, as a means of demonstrating the bright future of socialism to the people. Zhdanov's speech at the 1934 Writer's Association in the Soviet Union was summarized and published in 1935 by the left literary critic Zhou Yang. In the same vein, when he became the chief communist ideologue in

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103. Wang Yougui, "Ersi shiji zhongguo yisi shi yanjiu: gonghuoguo shou 29 nian de shixue yu fanyi wenxue 1949-1977."

104. See note 104 above.

105. Andrei Zhdanov, *On Literature, Music and Philosophy*, trans. and eds. Eleanor Fox, Stella Jackson and Harold C. Feldt (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1950), 15.



the 1950s, Zhou also called for the production of literary works that took a socialist point of view.<sup>106</sup>

In the literary field of the New China, modernism was a counter-discourse that challenged socialist realism. Following the Soviet literary practice, the Minister of Culture of China, Mao Dun, made a statement, denigrating modernism as extremely individualistic in form, pessimistic in tone, and irrational in content. He stressed that since the foundation of modernist literature was based on “subjective idealism” and other Western philosophy, it was largely contradictory to socialist realism, and was therefore not conducive to liberation. He concluded that modernism ultimately served only the bourgeois class.<sup>107</sup> However, Mao Dun also stressed that realism could borrow techniques from modernist literature, such as the works of Soviet poet Mayakovski, to enrich itself in terms of literary expressions.

Except on some rare occasions, modernist literature was not on the government’s cultural list for translation and introduction to readers. However, by the end of the Cultural Revolution, modernist literature was translated for political purposes. For example, when the government denounced certain writers for their political stances, what those writers had actually written was important to know. For political purposes, the government assigned translators to Western literary works that represented what the leaders considered the negative side of the capitalist system. The translations that were produced were referred to as “the Yellow Paper

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106. See Zhou Yang’s summary of Zhdnarov’s report in *Xian dai (Les Contemporains)*, no. 1, 1935.

107. Mao Dun, *Yedui ouji* [Random Thoughts on Literature] (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1958), 65-66.

Publications.”<sup>108</sup> Ironically, thanks to their publication(s), some people managed to read these books privately. Many members of the “Misty Poetry” group and other writers benefited greatly from the translation projects in the 1970s. For instance, in one of his articles about his early writing career, poet Bei Dao describes his experience of reading these restricted materials as a “silent revolution.”<sup>109</sup> Thanks to these works, Bei Dao could reflect on China’s future in a broader horizon and from a different perspective. He particularly cited Chen Yinrong’s Chinese translations of Baudelaire’s poems as inspiration for his own work. Bei Dao was not alone: Other poets of this literary group, such as Gu Cheng, Meng Ke, and Yang Lian, shared similar experiences.<sup>110</sup>

Modernist writing and translation in the Maoist era were stifled, if not totally suppressed, given the irreconcilable differences between modernism and socialist realism. However, when China’s new reforms began in 1977, modernism immediately re-emerged, first from a timid adoption of the stream-of-consciousness technique in Wang Meng’s short story “Ye zhiyan” (The Eyes of the Night) and Ru Zhijuan’s “Jianji cuole de gushi” (The Story of Wrong Clipping) in 1979, even though their works were still stigmatized as socialist realism for portraying the suffering of people during the Cultural Revolution. Meanwhile, as China began to shift away from Mao’s legacy, it needed a correspondent change in cultural scenes. The “Scar Literature” movement, which denounced the trauma produced during Mao’s regime, appeared at a time

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108. Yougui Wang, “20 Shiji zhongguo fanyi yanjiu: teshu shidai de wenhua guitai huangpi shu” [20th Century Chinese Translation Research on “Yellow Page Book” in the Special Period], *The Journal of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies* 21, no. 3 (2010): 43-47.

109. Bei Dao, “La traduction, une révolution silencieuse,” in *Littératures d’Extrême-Orient au XXe siècle: essais*, eds. Chantal Chen-Andro and Annie Curien (Arles: P. Picquier, 1993), 125-131.

110. Bei Dao, “La Traduction, une révolution silencieuse.”

when the reform-minded government sought to justify itself and its broad reforms. Subsequently, “Misty Poetry” voiced protests against the outmoded political and literary regimes. The name “Misty Poetry” referred to the ambiguity of their language and the obscurity of their imagery. These works were mainly published in the underground journal *Jintian (Today)*, edited by Bei Dao and Meng Ke. This journal published poetry that was very different from that of the previous era, and it was consequently branded as modernist and thus as avant-garde.<sup>111</sup>

The new emerging literary trends and their bold exploitation of modernist techniques appeared to renew the movement that had been suppressed since 1949. This would inevitably bring these writers into confrontation with existing literary regimes that valued socialist realist literature, even as China began a new round of modernization. Alongside the “Misty Poetry” movement, Gao Xingjian came into China’s literary scene with a commitment to modernism in his translations, theoretical treatises, plays and short stories.

As Zhang Xuedong points out, China’s reform beginning in 1978 was a turning point toward the resumption of modernity that had ended in 1949, and the reestablishment of China’s links with the West by pursuing modernization in agriculture, national defense, industry, science, and technology, and adopting a more capitalist-oriented market economy. To support the program of modernizing and strengthening their nation, the Chinese reformers also reiterated the slogans of the May Fourth movement: “Catch up with the West,” or “the lagged will be beaten (by the West).”<sup>112</sup> Thus, China continued its unfinished project of modernity, ushering in a “xin

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111. See Yang Yuping’s *Baudelaire et la Révolution culturelle chinoise*, especially the section “Bei Dao,” 211-236.

112. Zhang Xudong, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms: Cultural Fever, Avant-Garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1997), 1-3.

shidai” (new era) and signifying a departure from Mao’s era.<sup>113</sup> These changes would also affect literature.

Post-Mao literature was marked by its initial reliance on established regimes to maintain its active role in the literary field. However, as China began to orient itself toward Western modernity, its literature required new forms and subjects. Translation was essential at a time when writers were exploring other possibilities. In this context, Xu Chi and Gao Xingjian attempted to introduce literary modernism to China. Xu Chi’s literary association with Dai Wangshu as a co-editor of *Xin Shi* (New Poetry) in 1937, and his commitment to modernist poetry, both accounted for his effort in the new era. Gao Xingjian’s university background in French literature and his extensive exposure to modernist literature in both China and Europe partly contributed to his early work as a modernist writer/translator. Their initiatives in launching literary modernism in the early 1980s, and the heated debates, even hostilities, that followed, inevitably raise the question of why modernism was such an important matter. If modernism meant a rivalry between the dominant literary field and an emerging one, what is of interest here is how Gao translated, negotiated, and reinvented a literary modernism in the Chinese context, whose literary field was dominated by the official regimes of the early years of Chinese reform.

### 1.3.0 Translation, Negotiation, Creation, and Literary Capital

Examining how Gao’s translation functioned in the formation of the discourse on modernism requires framing his translational activities in the context of the early era of Chinese reform and opening-up. Doing so provides a cognitive map of how his works are both

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113. Zhang Xudong, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms: Cultural Fever, Avant-Garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema*.

“structured” by and “structuring” the existing literary field, from which his representation of Chinese literary modernism becomes validated. As a writer/translator, Gao’s family, education, professional training, working environment, and translational choices are essential to define his habitus in relation to the Chinese literary field. The components of his life as a translator are further demonstrated in an analysis of his key works, interlingual translations of Jacques Prévert’s poetry and Ionesco’s *La Cantatrice chauve*, critical treatise and essays, and adaptation of Beckett’s *En attendant Godot*. By such elaboration, we highlight Gao’s agency of translation in the formation of Chinese modernist discourse, a critical inquiry essential to respond to the questions surrounding the nature of his translated modernism.

### 1.3.1 Gao as an Agent of Translation

In an interview, Gao has said that he began to translate after Mao’s death.<sup>114</sup> What particular factors inspired his translational activities? Given his early writings and translations in literary modernism, why was he interested in this movement? We need to investigate Gao’s translation habitus to answer these questions. As explained in the previous “Introduction” chapter, the habitus of a translator includes his/her education, family background, training and other essential elements, which determine his/her choice of a literary work, taste, translation preferences, among other things. Furthermore, our study of Gao’s habitus as an agent of translation aims to show how his habitus was conditioned and structured by the Chinese literary field and how he adopted translation to revise such structuration.

Gao was born into a middle-class family and educated in a former missionary school in

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114. Wang Mingxing, “La Traduction comme création: entretien avec Gao Xingjian,” in *Alternative francophone*, no.1 (2017): 118–20.

Nanjing. His mother, a local opera singer and actress, fostered his love for the arts. In his childhood, he wanted to become an actor like his mother, but he was unable to do so for various reasons. By accident, he read “Dégel,” an essay by Ilia Ehrenburg, a friend of Mayakovski. Ehrenburg’s essay ignited Gao’s love for the French cultural atmosphere that fostered surrealist literature. The free lifestyle and creativity of the French surrealist writers inspired Gao to pursue his university studies at the Beijing Foreign Language Institute, now the Beijing Foreign Studies University, majoring in French Literature. During his four-year studies, he confessed, he did not study the language much, but concentrated more on theatre. In addition, he read extensively, including journals from France; he was especially impressed by Khrushchev’s complete report on Stalin.<sup>115</sup> Despite the political tensions in China, during his university days he enjoyed more freedom than most of the people in China, because he could have free access to the French materials he favored.<sup>116</sup>

In 1962, Gao graduated from university, but like other young students, he was forced by the government to integrate with the peasants in the remote rural region for a number of years as a teacher. He spent several years in the countryside and eventually came back to Beijing to work. Two factors fostered his later translational style and modernist tendency. The first was his employment as a French translator for the Chinese government’s journal of international communication, *La Chine en construction*, in 1972.<sup>117</sup> The second was his exposure to French modernist writings published in France by a French colleague employed by the journal. As the

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115. Annie Curien, “Gao Xingjian: entretien avec Annie Curien,” *La Nouvelle revue française* 556 (2001).

116. Wang Mingxing’s interview, 119.

117. See Weiwei Shen’s *Nanwang beidou: Gao Xingjian* (Taipei: Lishu wenhua shijie youxian gongshi, 2011).

journal aimed to inform French-speaking readers abroad about Communist China's achievements, Gao learned what the government propaganda journal needed him to do. However, while working for the journal, he had access to the most relevant modern literature provided by his French colleague. The authors he read, whose work was largely forbidden in China at the time, included Jacques Prévert, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Eugène Ionesco, Michel Butor, Georges Perec, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Francis Ponge, Henri Michaux, and Marguerite Duras; and one of his particular favorite works was Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot*.<sup>118</sup>

In 1977, Gao began to work as a translator for the Chinese Writers' Association, a government literary organization based in Beijing. This new job provided him with the opportunity to accompany major Chinese writers on visits to Europe. From 1978 onward, he began to write articles on modern and contemporary French literature. He joined the first conference on the Theatre of the Absurd, but refrained from open discussion with the participants, because at the time it was still dangerous to be involved in such literary activity, so he simply listened and said nothing. However, he did translate Ionesco's play *La Cantatrice chauve* into Chinese, which was published by the People's Publishing House five years later. Ionesco's play was produced in the early 1980s by Gao's former French colleague at *La Chine en construction* and his wife.<sup>119</sup>

Gao's early family background, education, and traumatic experiences during the Cultural Revolution, in addition to his later exposure to modernist literature and professional experience as both a translator and a writer, defined not only his choices of modernist literature, but also

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118. See Annie Curien's interview with Gao Xingjian.

119. See Annie Curien's interview.

how he engaged with the dominant Chinese literary currents with his modes of translating/writing. Thus, Gao's literary engagements can serve as vantage points to observe the modern conditions and the development of modernism in post-Mao China, during which Gao, as a translation agent, mediated and negotiated the terms of Chinese literary modernism in the context of global modernism.

Having begun his career as a professional translator, Gao translated Jacques Prévert's poems and Ionesco's *La Cantatrice chauve* as initial engagements with Chinese modernism, which were followed by his critical review of modernist literature and translation during his time working with the Chinese Writers' Association. The culmination of Gao's modernist engagement and invention as a translator/writer came with his play *Che Zhan*. The logical responses and engagements to literary modernism underscore all of Gao's various acts of translation.

### 1.3.2. Translating Jacques Prévert's Poetic *Illusio*

Gao translated Prévert's poetry from his anthology *Paroles* and published several of them three times: First in the second issue of *Shi kan (Poetry Periodical)* in 1980, in the fifth issue of *Hua Cheng (The Flower City)* the same year, and in the second volume of *Waiguo Shi (Foreign Poetry)* in 1984. In the first installment of his translation, he translated two of Prévert's short love poems, accompanied a short introduction; his second installment contains two longer poems from *Paroles* with an extensive introduction and commentary. His third and most significant work appeared in the anthology, which specialized in foreign poetry, with a much shorter introduction. These translations show a gradual progression from Prévert's colloquial love poems to more complicated surrealist poetry.

In his early literary career, Gao committed himself to literary modernism through



translation. His interlingual performance, which includes his choice of literary works and translation strategy, could not be simply taken only as a personal choice, but must be related to such factors as personal history and the conditions of the Chinese literary field. As discussed in “Introduction,” the concept, *illusio*, refers to aesthetic traits and effects exhibited in translations which are significant to the target literary field. This implies that aesthetic traits in translation need to satisfy the requirements and expectations of the target literary field. In the era of China’s reform and opening-up, though socialist realism was the dominant literary regime, there were also different voices against such hegemony. Thus, while translating modernist literature, translators needed to negotiate the seemingly irreconcilable differences between socialist realism and modernism. Gao’s early translation practice is a case in point. By analyzing the foregrounded *illusio* exhibited in Gao’s translations, we will be informed if he represents the full features of modernist poetics. Furthermore, such an approach can help to pinpoint the internal logic of his translation of modernist literature, and thus his role as a translation agent to mediate and negotiate China’s literary modernism.

In a talk at Hong Kong’s Hang Seng Management College, Gao spoke highly of the great translator Lin Shu (1852-1924), who favored a target-based translation strategy by eliminating the source culture’s identity in order to provide a smooth reading. Gao agreed with Lin Shu, claiming that his own works should be translated into different languages with an emphasis on the translator’s creativity in the received language and cultural milieu so that his literary language would come “alive” in different settings. He even argued that translation is not needed if one can master a target language.<sup>120</sup> Gao’s presentation implies that he treats translation as an

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120. Hang Seng University of Hong Kong (formerly Hang Seng Management College), “GaoXingjian jiaoshou dao hang sengguanli xueyuan fenxiang fanyi xinde” [Prof. Gao Xingjian

operation in which the source text is subject to rewriting and free creation. This raises the question of whether Western modernism would become a non-modernist signified in Gao's Chinese translation. It appears that Gao's translation is more complicated than this straight equation, as his translations of Jacques Prévert's poetry demonstrate.

Gao's introduction of Jacques Prévert's poetry to China was an important move in his early work of modernism and translation, because it encompasses his critical view of modernist literature by characterizing the compatibility between modernism and socialist realism. His essay, "Faguo xiandaipai renmin shiren Puliewei'er he ta de Geciji,"<sup>121</sup> is Gao's introduction to his translations of Prévert's poems "Barbara" and "Familiale," which appeared in 1980.<sup>122</sup> Gao points out that, although modernism is a literary trend in the West that separates the arts from ordinary people's lives and poetry from songs, Prévert bridges the gaps between them. *Paroles* thus serves as a solution both for ordinary people and for poetry.

In the beginning of his essay, Gao insists that though Prévert was critical of realism and experimented with modernism by absorbing Picasso's painting style, cinematic techniques, and photography into his poetry, he did not truly belong to the ranks of the modernist poets, because his literary inspiration came from ordinary people in France and his prevailing style is colloquial. Thus, Gao claims that writers who utilize modernist techniques can accomplish what realist and romanticist writers also do for the people.

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Shares his Views about Translation at the Hang Seng Management College], YouTube Video, July 29, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhbBrRav64o>.

121. Gao Xingjian, "Faguo xiandaipai renmin shiren Puliewei'er he ta de Geciji" [The French Modernist Poet Prévert and his *Paroles*], in *Huacheng*, no. 5 (1980): 221–5.

122. Gao Xingjian, "Puleweier shi ershou" [Prévert's Two Poems], in *Shi kan* [Poetry Periodical], no. 2 (1980): 23.

Gao further illustrates his point of view by citing Prévert's *Paroles* as an example. The collection contains ninety-nine poems of various lengths, half of which are satirical portraits of political and religious life in France. For Gao, the satire represents the French materialist spiritual tradition that began with Diderot. Prévert adopts poetic forms to condemn the destructive force and cruelty of war and its effects on life and love, especially the suffering of ordinary people during World War II as depicted in "Barbara." On the surrealist tendency of Prévert's poem "Promenade de Picasso," Gao criticizes the poet's mocking of realism, but defends him by explaining that what Prévert actually opposes is the naturalist tendency of treating artistic creation as copying. Furthermore, Gao stresses that although Prévert's "automatic writing" demonstrates the subconscious association of human mental activities by blending different unrelated elements into a poem, the poet's writing is in fact a conscious choice of poetic details under the guise of randomness. However bizarre his surrealist poems might appear, they constitute Prévert's poetic universe that appears defamiliarized in forms, but effectively responds to modernity. For this, Gao states, Prévert was conscious of the social functions of his poetic works, as he shows his genuine sympathy to suffering people in his work. Gao thus concludes that readers can learn much from Prévert's creative way of writing, and writers can borrow from his technique, as he expresses his artistic vision in a highly dynamic form.

Gao's essay asks what modernism means in China's early reform period. He tries to strike a balance between modernism and the prevailing trend of socialist realism by citing Prévert's poetry as an example, in order to persuade his readers that, as a modernist poet, Prévert shares some fundamental common grounds with realism, in that he adopts the language of ordinary people in their daily lives to foreground various aspects of social life, involving politics,

religion, war, and love. In addition, though he takes up the surrealist mode in his writing, Gao warns that readers should not read his bizarre poetic forms at the surface level. In fact, the very poetic forms Prévert adopted are more effective at expressing his perceptions of the reality of modern life and his vision of the arts. Thus, as a French poet, Prévert is also relevant to China, because Chinese writers can borrow these techniques to enrich Chinese realism.

Gao's defense of Prévert's poetry must be read within the context of China's early opening-up period. As literary modernism is fundamentally different from socialist realism, Gao attempts to reconcile the differences by emphasizing their shared common ground. By doing so, he appears to translate modernism into the terms of the dominant literary field: Modernism as shown in Prévert's poetry is not so different from realism, being only a matter of emphasis, and modernist writers can also make use of non-realist techniques to represent ordinary people's lives. Thus, Prévert's writing technique can be applied to realist writing to enhance its artistic quality.

Though Gao's defense of modernism is camouflaged with realist rhetoric, he hopes that modernism reinvigorate the Chinese literary field by introducing its artistic experiments, such as Prévert's creation of new words and his adoption of cinematic techniques in the writing of poetry. In the same essay, Gao also discusses translation. Though he values Prévert's literary invention, Gao alerts his readers that some of Prévert's poems pose serious problems for translators because there are no ready-made equivalents for his works in Chinese. What one can do is not attempt to translate Prévert's poetry word by word, or sentence by sentence, but render the spirit of the original. However, what appears problematic is that since modernist writings are generally experimental and idiosyncratic, translators cannot afford to eliminate these traits and restructure the original with a familiar text for the sake of keeping its spirit. How can one

translate the spirit of a modernist text without foregrounding its particular traces? If modernist *illusio* is not translated, what do Gao's translations mean to the modern Chinese literary field? Gao's translations address these questions.

Gao's earliest Chinese versions of Jacques Prévert's *Paroles* consist of only two short poems: "Pour toi mon amour" (All for You)<sup>123</sup> and "Le Jardin" (In the Park).<sup>124</sup> At the time,

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123. Jacques Prévert's *Paroles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 43:

Pour toi mon amour

Je suis allé au marché aux oiseaux  
Et j'ai acheté des oiseaux  
Pour toi  
mon amour  
Je suis allé au marché aux fleurs  
Et j'ai acheté des fleurs  
Pour toi  
mon amour  
Je suis allé au marché à la ferraille  
Et j'ai acheté des chaines,  
De lourdes chaines  
Pour toi  
mon amour  
Et puis, je suis allé au marché aux esclaves  
Et je t'ai cherchée  
Mais je ne t'ai pas trouvée  
mon amour

124. Jacques Prévert's *Paroles*, 204:

Le Jardin

Des milliers et des milliers d'années  
Ne sauraient suffire  
Pour dire  
La petite seconde d'éternité  
Où tu m'as embrassé  
Où je t'ai embrassée  
Un matin dans la lumière de l'hiver  
Au parc Montsouris à Paris  
À Paris  
Sur la terre

Prévert and his works were unknown to Chinese readers, and therefore Gao had to introduce them. In his brief introduction, Gao first discusses the poet's participation in, and voluntary departure from, surrealism. However, the focus of his introduction rests on Prévert's role as a poet who pays attention to everyday details of ordinary people and his love for them. Thus, Gao argues that Prévert's poetry is characterized by simple everyday language and musical rhythm with imagery of cinematic montage and painting. In this introduction, Gao does not elaborate on Prévert's signatory surrealist features in his poetry, but emphasizes his poetic upholding of everyday French people's lives.<sup>125</sup>

“Pour toi mon amour” and “Le Jardin” from *Paroles* represent two aspects of love: The former is related to love and liberty, while the latter immortalizes the kissing moment of two lovers in Paris. What foreground these two poems are their descriptions of montages, their poetic rhythm, and their colloquial language style.

In “Pour toi mon amour,” Prévert chooses several montage-like scenes to highlight the relationship between love and liberty, as the narrator progresses from the bird market to flower market, then dramatically to the scrap store and the slave market. At first glance, the scenes do not seem directly related to each other, but in the logic of the cinematic montage, these scenes show the gradual loss of love. First, the buying of birds and flowers in order to please the lover appears as an ironic act that corrupts liberty, with love and beauty represented symbolically as “birds” and “flowers.” Then, love is closely tied to chains and slavery, implying the total loss of love. In terms of sound quality, the first strophe utilizes the anaphora “oiseaux” for rhyming,

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La terre qui est un astre.

125. Gao Xingjian, “Faguo xiandaipai renmin shiren Puliewei'er he ta de Geciji” [The French Modernist Poet Prévert and his *Paroles*], in *Huacheng*, no. 5 (1980): 221–5.

together with “pour toi/mon amour,” which is repeated in each strophe. The second strophe uses “fleurs” as anaphora, while the third and fourth vary in structure and are consistently rhymed with “chaines,” “cherchée,” and “trouvée.” Thus, the repetition of “pour toi/mon amour,” the anaphoric structures, and the phonemes [m], [f], and [s] produce a strong poetic sound quality that mimics the softness of love. In addition, the poetic language consists of simple words with concise syntactic structures. These poetic idiosyncrasies constitute Prévert’s poetic universe of the modern popular ballad.<sup>126</sup>

“Le Jardin” depicts two lovers kissing in a park in Paris as an eternal moment in contrast to the fleeting of thousands of years. As in Prévert’s previous poem, “Le Jardin” first cinematically freezes the seconds of the two lovers as an eternal moment in the park, progressively zooming out from Paris to the earth and then to a star to immortalize the significance of the moment for them. Moreover, the settings of the park, Paris, the Earth, and the star acquire a symbolic dimension through these cinematic montages, presenting the kissing scene as an integral part of universal human experience across time and space. To depict the eternal moment of love, the poet uses alliterations of [m] in the first line, and [s] in the second. The sound produces a soft musical quality with which the poem is endowed. Furthermore, in the poetic lines “Où tu m’as embrassé / Où je t’ai embrassée,” and “Sur la terre / La terre qui est un astre,” “Où” “embrassé(e)” and “la terre” are repeated, creating a strong poetic rhythm and musicality that give the harmonious moment an added emotional intensity. The simple poetic form and linguistic structure combine with these features to produce a poetic style whose lyrical beauty is accessible to all readers.<sup>127</sup>

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126. Jacques Prévert’s *Paroles*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 43.

127. Prévert, 204.

Gao's Chinese translations do not render Prévert's two poems literally, but add his own interpretation and creative liberties. The poetic effects of his translation vary. In the first poem, he reworks the lines "Je suis allé au marché aux oiseaux / Et j'ai acheté des oiseaux / Pour toi / Mon amour" as "I went to the market of birds / For you / My love / I bought birds."<sup>128</sup> Prévert's poetic structure and the rhymes of "oiseaux" and other words are not reproduced.<sup>129</sup> Gao's

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128. Gao's Chinese version in *Shi kan* [Poetry Periodical], 1980 (2), 23:

全都为了你

我曾去鸟市

为了你

亲爱的

买来了鸟儿

我又去花市

为了你

亲爱的

买来了花儿

我还去废品公司

为了你

亲爱的

买了根链条

沉重的镣铐

我再去奴隶市场

找寻你

你竟然无踪无影

亲亲呀亲亲

129. The English version was translated by the author of this dissertation with the consultation of Alastair Campbell's "Poems of Jacques Prévert:" <https://www.otago.ac.nz/deepsouth/vol3no1/campbell.html#garden>, last modified July 18, 2017:

All For You

I went to the market of birds

For you

My love

I bought birds

I went to the market of flowers



version has its own poetic rhythm, which is mainly achieved through the phrase “I went to” in lieu of an anaphoric structure. Instead of accentuating the musicality of the original, Gao cares more about the flow of his Chinese translation: “我曾去鸟市 / 为了你 / 亲爱的 / 买来了鸟儿” (“I went to the market of birds / For you / My love / I bought birds”) reads more fluently than the original order. The same is true of the rest of the Chinese translation. Despite his apparent restructuring, Gao adopts a local expression to render “mon amour” (“my love”) as “亲呀亲亲” (“oh, my babe, my babe”), which is not as harmonious with the ambiance of the lyric poem.<sup>130</sup> It appears that Gao does not distinguish the different registers of the French and Chinese languages. Such familiar expressions commonly occur in operas and folk songs in China, but such use of local language affects the poetic harmony of the Chinese version that Gao tries to achieve. This perhaps has something to do with folk culture’s influence upon his choice of Chinese vocabulary. The two different registers of expressions used together create a problem of stylistic coherence.

In the Chinese translation of Prévert’s second poem, “Le Jardin,” Gao attempts to reproduce the musical quality and rhythm of the original by adopting alliterations.<sup>131</sup> As a result,

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For you  
My love  
I bought flowers  
I went to the scraps company  
For you  
My love  
I bought chains  
Heavy chains  
Then I went to the market of slaves  
looking for you  
You were not there  
My babe my babe

130. See note 130 above.

he renders the lines “Où tu m’as embrassé / Où je t’ai embrassée” into “你吻了我/我吻了你” and “Des milliers et des milliers d’années” as “一千年一万年.” The alliteration of “一” (“yi”) produces a similar sound effect and rhythm. In addition, Gao also repeats [s] phonetic units to reinforce the rhythm of the poem “诉说” (“Su Sho”). However, even as he reproduces the musical quality of the poem, he creates a different poetic rhythm in his Chinese version: “在冬日朦胧的清晨 / 清晨在蒙苏利公园 / 公园在巴黎 / 巴黎是地上一座城 / 地球是天上一颗星” (“In the winter sunlight of one hazy morning / Morning at Montsouris Park / Park in Paris / Paris is a city on the Earth / The Earth is a star in the sky”).<sup>132</sup> Compared to Gao’s Chinese

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131. Gao’s Chinese version in *Shi kan* (Poetry Periodical), 1980 (2), 23:

公园里  
 一千年一万年  
     也难以  
     诉说尽  
 这瞬间的永恒  
     你吻了我  
     我吻了你  
 在冬日朦胧的清晨  
 清晨在蒙苏利公园  
     公园在巴黎  
 巴黎是地上一座城  
 地球是天上一颗星

132. Gao’s Chinese version can be translated with reference to Alastair Campbell’s English version.” <https://www.otago.ac.nz/deepsouth/vol3no1/campbell.html#garden>, last modified July 18, 2017:

In the Park  
 Thousands and thousands of years  
     Would not suffice  
     To speak of  
 The little second of eternity

translation, the French version repeats “A Paris” and “La terre” to emphasize its geographical locations. However, Gao’s is much like a loop poetry rhyme scheme, which is popular in Chinese poetry. In addition, in “清晨在蒙苏利公园,” “morning” replaces “the park” as the subject of the sentence. As a result, the style and meaning are compromised to a degree for the sake of creating a rhyme of loop poetry. Moreover, Gao also adds his personal interpretation of the poem by describing the morning as “hazy” or “foggy” to foreground Prévert’s French version “la lumière de l’hiver.”

The above examples show that in his translations, Gao makes efforts to maintain the language flow and musical quality in his Chinese versions either by adding his own creative touches, or by restructuring the entire text to maximize its poetic effects. Thus, he does not simply treat translation as a literal reproduction of the source, but attempts to transcend this. While trying to be creative, Gao appears to ignore the register of Prévert’s poems: It is between the colloquial and literary registers, but is not slang. In addition, for the sake of rhyme, certain parts of the Chinese versions appear translational. In brief, Gao’s early efforts reflect both his tendency to treat translation as a rewriting/creation and his efforts to introduce French poetry to Chinese folk literature. Though these translations do not necessarily guarantee the ideal quality Gao seeks, they do demonstrate to the Chinese literary field how “modernism” functions in French literature.

After his initial attempts, Gao continued his efforts to translate Prévert’s other works by

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You kissed me  
I kissed you  
In the winter sunlight of one hazy morning  
Morning at Montsouris Park  
Park in Paris  
Paris is a city on earth  
The earth is a star in the constellations

focusing on his other poetic aspects, though he intentionally avoided Prévert's more surrealist experimentation. His next two translations of Prévert's poems, "Barbara" and "Familiale," represent the tragic effects of war on love and family.

Like his previous poems, Prévert's "Barbara" has a ballad quality, with a simple structure and colloquial language.<sup>133</sup> Its rhythm and musical quality are foregrounded by the repetition of

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133. Jacques Prévert's *Paroles*, 208:

Barbara

Rappelle-toi Barbara  
Il pleuvait sans cesse sur Brest ce jour-là  
Et tu marchais souriante  
Épanouie ravie ruisselante  
Sous la pluie  
Rappelle-toi Barbara  
Il pleuvait sans cesse sur Brest  
Et je t'ai croisée rue de Siam  
Tu souriais  
Et moi je souriais de même  
Rappelle-toi Barbara  
Toi que je ne connaissais pas  
Toi qui ne me connaissais pas  
Rappelle-toi  
Rappelle-toi quand même ce jour-là  
N'oublie pas  
Un homme sous un porche s'abritait  
Et il a crié ton nom  
Barbara  
Et tu as couru vers lui sous la pluie  
Ruisselante ravie épanouie  
Et tu t'es jetée dans ses bras  
Rappelle-toi cela Barbara  
Et ne m'en veux pas si je te tutoie  
Je dis tu à tous ceux que j'aime  
Même si je ne les ai vus qu'une seule fois  
Je dis tu à tous ceux qui s'aiment  
Même si je ne les connais pas  
Rappelle-toi Barbara  
N'oublie pas  
Cette pluie sage et heureuse

“rappelle-toi Barbara” (Remember, Barbara) and end rhymes, such as “Barbara / ce jour-la” or “souriante / ruisselante.” In addition, Prévert marks the significant moment with many emotionally charged expressions. In the poem, the narrator meets Barbara for the first time on a rainy day in Brest, a heavily bombarded city by the German during World War II, and he describes the happy moment when he met her as “tu [Barbara] marchais souriante / Épanouie ravi ruisselante.” This phrase is repeated twice, in a different order, to strengthen the impression of the significant moments as though this small moment were framed and frozen as an eternity in his memory. The happy moment in the city is, however, shattered by the war. The happy rain the couple experienced becomes the rain and storm of iron and steel and blood. The city is totally

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Sur ton visage heureux  
Sur cette ville heureuse  
Cette pluie sur la mer  
Sur l’arsenal  
Sur le bateau d’Ouessant  
Oh Barbara  
Qu’es-tu devenue maintenant  
Sous cette pluie de fer  
De feu d’acier de sang  
Et celui qui te serrait dans ses bras  
Amoureusement  
Est-il mort disparu ou bien encore vivant  
Oh Barbara  
Il pleut sans cesse sur Brest  
Comme il pleuvait avant  
Mais ce n’est plus pareil et tout est abimé  
C’est une pluie de deuil terrible et désolée  
Ce n’est même plus l’orage  
De fer d’acier de sang  
Tout simplement des nuages  
Qui crèvent comme des chiens  
Des chiens qui disparaissent  
Au fil de l’eau sur Brest  
Et vont pourrir au loin  
Au loin très loin de Brest  
Dont il ne reste rien.

destroyed and shrouded in a macabre mood. The poem ends by denouncing the war with the surreal metaphor of clouds as dead dogs.

Gao's Chinese version, like his previous translated poems, highlights the rhythmic quality of "Barbara," by rendering "rappelle-toi Barbara" as "你还记得吗，巴尔巴娜?" which is repeated many times to create a poetic rhythm and ambiance that lament what has been lost.<sup>134</sup>

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134. Gao Xingjian's Chinese version in *Hua Cheng*, 1980 (5): 219-220:

巴尔巴娜

你还记得吗，巴尔巴娜？  
那天在布莱斯特雨不停地下，  
你边走边笑，容光焕发，  
可浑身上下湿淋淋地  
在雨下。  
还记得吗，巴尔巴娜？  
在布莱斯特雨不停地下，  
我同你相遇在暹罗街，  
你微笑，  
我也以笑相答。  
还记得吗，巴尔巴娜？  
我本不认识你，  
你也不认识我呀，  
还记不记得啦？  
得记住那一天，  
可别忘啦！  
一个男人在屋檐下躲雨，  
他喊了你的名字—  
巴尔巴娜  
你跑了过去，天还下着雨，  
浑身湿淋淋地可你多欢喜，  
扑进他的怀抱里。  
记住呀记住，巴尔巴娜，  
我亲切地叫你可别生我的气。  
我亲切呼唤我的所爱，  
哪怕只见过一回；  
我亲切称呼相爱的人，

In addition, Gao's version also reproduces in Chinese the music quality of the original poem in such lines as "N'oublie pas / Cette pluie sage et heureuse / Sur ton visage heureux / Sur cette ville / heureuse / Cette pluie sur la mer / Sur l'arsenal / Sur le bateau d'Ouessant" into equally rhythmic Chinese: "可别忘记啦! / 聪明的雨水, 幸福的雨水, / 落在你脸上, / 落在这个城市中有多美。 / 雨水落进海里, / 落到军火库上, / 落在鸟桑岛船只

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即使我对他们并不了解。  
记住啊, 巴尔巴娜,  
可别忘记啦!  
聪明的雨水, 幸福的雨水,  
落在你脸上,  
落在这个城市中有多美。  
雨水落进海里,  
落到军火库上,  
落在鸟桑岛船只上,  
噢, 巴尔巴娜,  
战争可真浑啊!  
巴尔巴娜!  
你如今怎样了了  
这枪林弹雨中,  
这血雨腥风中,  
纵情拥抱你的那人,  
有无音讯?  
是死还是生?  
噢, 巴尔巴娜,  
布莱斯特如今雨还不停地下  
可再也不一样了, 全都给毁啦!  
这吊丧雨讨厌又可怕,  
甚至还不如  
火海, 铁水, 血的风暴,  
无非一堆破云  
像死狗一样烂掉,  
一条条消融  
在布莱斯特上空。  
烂就远处去烂,  
远远离开布莱斯特,  
烂就全烂完!

上。” Gao’s translation is distinct from the original in its addition of punctuation marks. In the original, Prévert allows the reader to follow the poem’s mood through its natural rhythm with emphasis on free association. However, by adding some punctuation marks in his translation, Gao replaces this kind of modernist poetic feature with a conventional poetic form.

Prévert’s poem features an original and experimental use of language. For example, the first time the narrator meets Barbara, Prévert describes her appearance in the rain with the phrase “Épanouie ravie ruisselante,” which Gao conveys in Chinese as “容光焕发， /可浑身上下湿淋淋地” (“appearing radiant, / But soaked wet all over”). Gao’s version does not possess poetic originality. “Ravie” is left untranslated, and “可浑身上下湿淋淋地” (soaked wet) is less concrete and poetic than “ruisselante.” In the middle of the poem, Gao similarly converts Prévert’s poetic language into a more conventional, almost cliché, diction: “Sous cette pluie de fer/De feu d'acier de sang” is rendered into Chinese as a set phrase, “这枪林弹雨， /这血雨腥风中” (Under the rains of bullets and cannons, / In rains of blood and foul wind).<sup>135</sup> As these

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135. The Chinese version was translated into English by the author of this dissertation with the consultation of Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s English version: Jacques Prévert and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *Paroles: Selected Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990), 113-115:

Barbara

Remember, Barbara?  
It rained all day on Brest that day,  
You walked smiling, appearing radiant,  
But soaked wet all over  
In the rain.  
Remember, Barbara?  
It rained all day on Brest that day,  
I ran into you in Siam Street,  
You were smiling,  
I responded by smiling back.  
Remember, Barbara?  
I didn’t know you at all,



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You didn't know me either,  
Remember?  
Remember that day still,  
Don't forget!  
A man was taking cover under a roof,  
He cried your name--  
Barbara!  
You ran to him, it was still raining,  
Soaked wet all over, but how happy you were,  
And you threw yourself in his arms.  
Remember that, Barbara,  
Don't be mad if I speak familiarly,  
I speak familiarly to everyone I love,  
Even if I've seen them only once;  
I speak familiarly to all who are in love,  
Even if I don't know them.  
Remember, Barbara,  
Don't forget!  
That smart rain, happy rain,  
On your face,  
On that town so beautiful.  
Upon the sea,  
Upon the arsenal,  
Upon the Ushant boat,  
Oh, Barbara,  
What stupidity the war!  
Now what's become of you?  
Under the rains of bullets and cannons,  
Rain of blood and slaughter,  
He who held you in his arms passionately,  
Any news about him?  
Is he dead and alive?  
Oh, Barbara,  
It's rained all day on Brest today,  
But it isn't the same anymore, everything is destroyed!  
It's a rain of mourning, annoying and terrible,  
Even not like a storm  
Of iron, steel, and blood,  
But simply layers of bad clouds  
That decay like dead dogs,  
Dissolving one by one,  
Above the sky of Brest.  
And to rot a long way off,  
A long long way from Brest,  
Of which there's nothing left.

passages show, Gao's translation leaves many poetic features of the French poem either untranslated, or insufficiently translated, though he does attempt to reproduce the original's poetic sound quality.

Gao's poems do not foreground the major features of Prévert's surrealist poetry, where his literary reputation lies. However, Gao did finally choose one of Prévert's key surrealist poems, "Promenade de Picasso," for translation when China gradually allowed more freedom in the literary field in the 1980s. In 1984, Gao published another collection of Prévert's poems in a foreign poetry anthology produced by a prestigious literary publishing house, Renmin wenxue chubanshe (The People's Literature Publishing House).<sup>136</sup> The collection included the works of such great poets as Guillaume Apollinaire, Robert Browning, Ezra Pound, and Robert Frost. Gao contributed seven poems to the anthology: "Pour faire le portrait d'un oiseau," "Le Cancre," "La Cène," "Chanson des escargots qui vont à l'enterrement," "Le Grand homme," "Premier jour," and Prévert's major modernist poem, "Promenade de Picasso," which Gao had previously discussed in his essay on Prévert's poetry. In this anthology, he also provides a very short introduction to Prévert, briefly discussing such features as humor and sentimentality in his poetry.<sup>137</sup>

Chosen carefully, the first six poems represent Prévert's favorite poetic subjects, touching upon politics, religion, the arts, and ordinary people's lives. "Promenade de Picasso" appears at the end of this collection. In his earlier discussion of this poem as an embodiment of Prévert's mature surrealist poetry, Gao focuses on Prévert's original poetic style, from which Chinese writers could draw inspiration. But at the time this essay was published, most people in China

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136. Gao Xingjian's "Puleweier shi" in *Waiguo shi*, no. 2 (1984).

137. See note 137 above.

were not familiar with this poem. The translation and publication of “Promenade de Picasso” in 1984 raises questions of how Gao translated surrealist poetic *illusio* into the Chinese literary field.

Compared to his other poems, Prévert’s “Promenade de Picasso” is typical of his surrealist style, in particular his “automatic writing.”<sup>138</sup> This technique establishes free

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138. Jacques Prévert’s *Paroles*, 243-245:

Promenade de Picasso

Sur une assiette bien ronde en porcelaine réelle  
une pomme pose  
face à face avec elle  
un peintre de la réalité  
essaie vainement de peindre  
la pomme telle qu’elle est  
mais  
elle ne se laisse pas faire  
la pomme  
elle a son mot à dire  
et plusieurs tours dans son sac de pomme  
la pomme  
et la voilà qui tourne  
dans une assiette réelle  
sournoisement sur elle-même  
doucement sans bouger  
et comme un duc de Guise qui se déguise en bec de gaz  
parce qu’on veut malgré lui lui tirer le portrait  
la pomme se déguise en beau bruit déguisé  
et c’est alors  
que le peintre de la réalité  
commence à réaliser  
que toutes les apparences de la pomme sont contre lui  
et  
comme le malheureux indigent  
comme le pauvre nécessiteux qui se trouve soudain à la  
    merci de n’importe quelle association bienfaitante  
    et charitable et redoutable de bienfaisance de charité  
    et de redoutabilité  
le malheureux peintre de la réalité  
se trouve soudain alors être la triste proie  
d’une innombrable foule d’associations d’idées  
et la pomme en tournant évoque le pommier

associations between images, words, objects, sounds, and ideas to represent the subconscious of the characters involved. “Promenade de Picasso,” which mocks the realist style of painting, showcases an artist’s humorous attempt to draw an apple on a porcelain plate as what it is, according to the apple in front of him. No matter how he tries, the painter finds himself being resisted by the apple. In frustration, the painter gives up the attempt and falls into reveries, during which various associations of images, word sounds, and texts pop up in his subconscious. Meanwhile, Picasso appears in his dream, eating his apple and breaking his porcelain plate, and the realist artist wakes up from his dream, with his unfinished work, the broken plate, and his

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le Paradis terrestre et Ève et puis Adam  
l’arrosoir l’espalier Parmentier l’escalier  
le Canada les Hespérides la Normandie la Reinette et  
l’Api  
le serpent du Jeu de Paume le serment du Jus de Pomme  
et le péché originel  
et les origines de l’art  
et la Suisse avec Guillaume Tell  
et même Isaac Newton  
plusieurs fois primé à l’Exposition de la Gravitation  
Universelle  
et le peintre étourdi perd de vue son modèle  
et s’endort  
C’est alors que Picasso  
qui passait par là comme il passe partout  
chaque jour comme chez lui  
voit la pomme et l’assiette et le peintre endormi  
Quelle idée de peindre une pomme  
dit Picasso  
et Picasso mange la pomme  
et la pomme lui dit Merci  
et Picasso casse l’assiette  
et s’en va en souriant  
et le peintre arraché à ses songes  
comme une dent  
se retrouve tout seul devant sa toile inachevée  
avec au beau milieu de sa vaisselle brisée  
les terrifiants pépins de la réalité.

fear for the problem of realism. The painter's dreams reflect his subconscious, which once unbound, release myriads of rich imaginary visions of all aspects of the apple. The apple in the painter's dreams has gained more imaginative power than the fixed apple model, invalidating the realist painting as purely a pale copy of the real, which is eventually unable to grasp the essence of painting as an art.

Prévert's poem is characterized by its formal poetic features and vivid presentation of the dream world of associations. This can be identified by the poet's the poetic form, free verse, and creative use and combination of words, and the spontaneous dream sequences of the different and seemingly unrelated images, words, and texts. These associations create multiple layers of cinematic montages with unique perspectives and expressions, as the seemingly chaotic fragments of the painter's free associations follow the internal logic of the poem: The affirmation of free and unrestrained imagination of an artistic work, which is infinitely more valuable than copying.

As in Prévert's other poems discussed in this section, "Promenade de Picasso" has a distinctive musical quality that is achieved via rhyme, parallel structures, and similar sound patterns. For example, the beginning of the poem features an irregular aba end rhyme (réelle/pose/elle) with certain parallel structures such as "comme le malheureux indigent / comme le pauvre nécessiteux," and "et Picasso mange la pomme / et la pomme lui dit Merci / et Picasso casse l'assiette / et s'en va en souriant."<sup>139</sup> In addition, Prévert also exploits the sounds of certain words to create poetic vividness. For example, in "comme un duc de Guise qui se déguise en bec de gaz," and "la pomme se déguise en beau bruit déguisé," the sounds [z], [g], and [d]

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139. Jacques Prévert's *Paroles*, 243-245.

form alliterations. In terms of the sentence structure, Prévert organizes his poem with short poetic lines, punctuated by long sentences, such as “comme le malheureux indigent / comme le pauvre nécessiteux qui se trouve soudain à / la merci de n’importe quelle association bienfaisante et charitable et redoutable de bienfaisance de charité et de redoutabilité.” This long line contrasts with the shorter and more concise lines.<sup>140</sup>

The core of this poem lies in its representation of the character’s subconscious world by linking all the unrelated images and objects together to create a world that promises high artistic productivity. The reader can identify this chain of associations, or automatic writing, in the painter’s dreams, beginning with the apple: “le malheureux peintre de la réalité / se trouve soudain alors être la triste proie / d’une innombrable foule d’associations d’idées / Et la pomme en tournant évoque le pommier / le Paradis terrestre et Ève et puis Adam / l’arrosoir l’espalier Parmentier l’escalier / le Canada les Hespérides la Normandie la Reinette et l’Api.” The images are transformed and linked with each other one by one, from the apple of Adam and Eve, and a watering utensil for a garden, to various apples in the concrete texts of the world; the image of the apple radiates across time and space and establishes a myriad of associations. This world of dreams downplays the practice of the realist painter, which reduces painting to mechanic modeling. What a painter or a poet should do is dissociate him/herself from the real in favor of a more imaginative world of infinite dimensions, which is what Prévert promotes in this poem.

What did the translation of this poem mean to Gao? As seen in his previous articles, though he defends the logic of surrealist writing as a conscious performance against the unconscious, he also argues that copying has more to do with naturalist writing than with realist writing. Thus, it appears that Gao tries to mitigate the conflicting point of realism and

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140. See note 140.

modernism so as not to shock the dominant literary field, which still favored and upheld the principles of realism.

In his Chinese translation, Gao reproduces certain idiosyncratic traits of Prévert's poem, such as his stylistic simplicity and sentence rhythm.<sup>141</sup> Gao's translation does not rely on word-

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141. Gao Xingjian's "Puleweier geciji xuanyi" [Selected Translations of Jacques Prévert's Paroles] in *Waiguo shi*, no. 2 (1984): 49-51:

毕加索的漫步

一只真的圆磁盘里  
放着一只苹果  
一位写实的画家  
徒然去如实描摹  
苹果苹果 不睬他  
自有  
自己一番话  
在真真实实的盘子当中  
纹丝不动  
内里  
自个儿  
闷声不响  
悄悄转圈  
因为有人硬要给苹果画像  
苹果就装成苹果的模样  
于是写实的画家  
顿时领悟到  
苹果的外表  
都在跟他唱反调  
就象个缺吃少穿的穷人  
突然间落到  
某某慈善机关设下的圈套  
大慈大悲得叫人浑身上下  
起鸡皮疙瘩  
这位可怜的写实的画家  
被纷至沓来的联想  
弄得晕头转向  
团团转的苹果使他联想到  
果树、果园和果园里的洒水壶

for-word or sentence-for-sentence equivalency, and thus requires certain changes to the original poetic structures. However, in so doing, he alters the poetic effects of the French original, as his translations of parallel structures illustrate.

In his Chinese translations, Gao represents the basic constituents of Prévert's style. For instance, when translating "Promenade de Picasso," Gao reproduces the structure of the French poem: The main lines are composed of no more than ten words, while others are even shorter,

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地上的天堂、亚当和夏娃  
从农业栽培家又想到了雪茄  
加拿大、加拿里  
还有法兰西的诺曼底  
以及好些苹果的出产地  
创世纪里的罪恶  
和艺术的源起  
瑞士的威廉退尔射苹果的故事  
和牛顿发现的万有引力  
画家望不见他的模特儿  
丧魂落魄  
睡着了  
于是无所不在的毕加索  
走了来  
象在家里一样从容又自在  
看看碟子里的苹果  
和睡着了的画家  
毕加索说  
啊哈，画苹果呢，真不坏  
说完就吃苹果  
苹果谢谢毕加索  
他又砸碎盘子  
微微一笑走了  
从梦中惊醒的画家  
象拔掉的一颗牙  
面前剩下他那张未完的画  
现实的种子落在碎盘子当中  
望着望着没法不害怕



consisting of only two or three words. The words he uses can be found in the language of daily conversation. However, Gao's translation is marked by his condensation of some words and sentences and his conflation of several lines into one either for a smooth flow of the text or for the sake of brevity.

In "Promenade de Picasso," Prévert relies on parallel structure to create poetic rhythm. However, Gao reworks this structure for brevity, as demonstrated in his translation of the passage "comme le malheureux indigent / comme le pauvre nécessiteux qui se trouve soudain à la merci [...]." He condenses "le malheureux indigent" and "le pauvre nécessiteux" into "缺吃少穿的穷人" (hungry and unclothed pauper), so that the corresponding parallel structure is reduced into one. Furthermore, the long sentence is condensed into "某某慈善机关设下的圈套 / 大慈大悲得叫人浑身上下 / 起鸡皮疙瘩" ([the pauper] who finds himself suddenly trapped by / certain association of benevolence charity / great benevolence and charity gives one / goosebumps).<sup>142</sup> As a result, the complicated structure and implied satire in Prévert's original are lost in Gao's version, which only reveals a straightforward criticism of the charity organization. In addition, certain words or expressions that are loaded with cultural specifics are also replaced by brief lexical items. For example, in the lines "comme un duc de Guise qui se déguise en bec de gaz / parce qu'on veut malgré lui tirer le portrait," "un duc de Guise" is simplified into "有人" (someone), which sacrifices the cultural allusions in the original. Gao's translation of the dream sequences similarly omits or adds anything he deems necessary, which is particularly apparent in his Chinese version of the following stanza: "Et la pomme en tournant évoque le pommier / le Paradis terrestre et Ève et puis Adam / l'arrosoir l'espallier Parmentier l'escalier / le Canada les

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142. See note 142.

Hespérides la Normandie la Reinette et l'Api / le serpent du Jeu de Paume le serment du Jus de Pomme / et le péché originel / et les origines de l'art/et la Suisse avec Guillaume Tell / et même Isaac Newton / plusieurs fois primé à l'Exposition de la Gravitation Universelle.” In his Chinese translation, Gao first reorganizes the poetic structure by moving “l'arrosoir l'espalier Parmentier l'escalier” forward in the first line, while simply rendering “l'arrosoir” as “洒水壶” (watering can). He adds more apple-related words to the line, such as “果树” (apple tree) or “果园” (garden), in lieu of the unrelated items in the original: “l'espalier Parmentier” (trellis Parmentier) and “l'escalier” (stairway). Having realized that Prévert’s poem is meant to bring these unrelated items together, Gao invents a poetic line: “从农业栽培家又想到了雪茄” (From agricultural cultivation specialist, [the painter] thinks again of a cigar). He associates the real place Canada with Canina, a place name of his own invention, and selectively mentions one particular apple producer, Normandy, while leaving out others in the summary line “a good number of places for apples.”<sup>143</sup> Consequently, a significant number of cultural allusions are omitted, such as “les

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143. The Chinese version was translated into English by the author of this dissertation with the consultation of Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s English version: Jacques Prévert and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *Paroles: Selected Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990), 141-143:

#### Picasso’s Walk

On a round plate of real porcelain  
 an apple poses  
 a painter of reality  
 tries to paint in vain  
 the apple as it is  
 the apple won't agree  
 it has  
 its words to say  
 On the real plate  
 there is no turning  
 on itself  
 silently

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turning without noise  
because some want to draw its picture against its will  
the apple disguises itself  
and it's then that the painter of reality  
suddenly begins to realize  
that all that appears is against him  
and like a miserable poor  
who finds himself suddenly trapped by  
certain association of benevolence charity  
great benevolence and charity make one  
goosebumps  
the unfortunate painter of reality  
then suddenly finds himself at the mercy  
of so many associations of ideas  
And the apple turning evokes  
the apple tree, garden, watering-can  
The Paradise on Earth and Eve and Adam  
Agricultural cultivation specialist and cigar  
Canadian Canani  
Norman apples, apples of many places  
original sin of the Creation  
and the origins of art  
and Switzerland with William Tell  
and Universal Gravitation of Isaac Newton  
and the painter can't find the model  
disheartened  
and falls asleep  
It's just then that Picasso  
goes by  
as ease as at home  
sees the apple and the plate and the painter fallen asleep  
says Picasso  
What a good idea to paint an apple  
and Picasso eats the apple  
and the apple tells him Thanks  
and Picasso breaks the plate  
and goes off smiling  
and the painter drawn from his dreams  
like a pull-out tooth  
finds himself all alone again before his unfinished painting  
right in the midst of his broken porcelain  
with the terrifying feel of reality.

though these expressions might not be familiar to the Chinese, they inform Prévert's sensibility about the painter's mental activities or association with the world of which he is a part. The direct result of Gao's omission and addition enables the images that are more logically, but not so distantly, related to target readers' imaginations. By doing so, Gao revises the poetics of surrealist poetry to highlight a more logical association between the lines. However, this is reversed by the insertion of his poetic inventions/interventions, which can be considered as his creation or his reaction to the original poem.

As seen in the above discussion about modernist *illusio* in Gao's Chinese version, he rewrites Prévert's poetic world of surrealism in his own terms. Why did he do this? Did his translational act imply his emphasis on the translation of the spirit of Prévert's poem? As revealed in his simplification, abridgement, and addition to Prévert's poem, his translation cannot be taken as a pure linguistic choice, but as a reaction to the dominant literary field. Both Gao's brief introduction to "Promenade de Picasso" and his translation show that he stresses the shared grounds between Prévert and the realist aesthetics that is dominant in Chinese literature, rather than focusing on the conflicts between surrealist poetics and realism: Simple language and realist themes relating to ordinary people's lives. He also argues that Prévert's "automatic writing" does not stress the unconscious of the characters, nor ridicule realism; its true target is naturalism. As a result, Gao does not fully represent the avant-garde features (*illusio*) of "Promenade de Picasso," but translates the poem into the target milieu in a familiar language and style. In particular, the core elements of free association are restructured, bringing the poem somewhat closer to a conscious narrative. By doing this, Gao mitigates the boundary of modernism and realism. It is modernist poetry without its full features; its random associations within its characteristic linguistic traits are minimized and directed to a certain degree of clarity.

At the same time, the poem underscores the general features of people's literature: People's daily language, simple structure, and memorable lines, all of which socialist realism endorses.

### 1.3.3 Translation as an Act of Critical Engagement

Gao translated Prévert's poetry into Chinese literary modernity by mediating the boundaries between modernism (surrealism) and socialist realism. Except interlingual translation, Gao also adopts translation to critically engage with literary modernism; literary criticism can be an interpretation or explication of literary phenomenon or theory, for example. In his seminal work, *The Resistance to Theory*, Paul de Man emphasizes this essential translational feature in literary criticism, which offers more critical space for literary studies.<sup>144</sup> Gao's literary criticism exemplified by his critical essays, monographs, and translation commentaries, demonstrates his engagement with and valorization of modernism in the Chinese literary context.

Shortly after his visits to Europe, particularly France, in 1978 and 1979, Gao wrote several articles in the form of travel notes about France's contemporary literature and the development of small independent theatres.<sup>145</sup> In these essays, Gao critically examines the conditions of the French literary field in relation to Chinese literature, which set the tone for his later key essays and monographs designed to redefine what modern Chinese literature, in particular theatre, should be.

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144. Paul de Man's "Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator,'" in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986), 82-83.

145. Gao's "Falanxi wenxue de tongku" [The Pains of French Literature], *The Journal of Foreign Literature Studies*, no.1(1980): 51-57; "Dangdai faguo xiju de xiwang" [The Hope of Contemporary French Theatre] in *Wen hui*, no. 3 (1981): 48-52; "Faguo guanju shuibi" [Random Notes on French Theatre], *Shiyue*, no. 3 (1979): 257-264.

In “Faguo guanju shuibi” (Random Notes on French Theatre, 1979), Gao critically reviews modern/contemporary French theatre based on his observations during his travels in France in 1979. After watching Jean-Claude Grumberg’s *L’Atelier* performed at the Odéon Theatre, he explores the implication of French realist drama in relation to Chinese theatre. He notes that *L’Atelier*, a realist play about the harsh lives of ordinary French workers after World War II, does not have a story, plot, suspense, or an ending in the conventional sense; instead, it presents several episodes of the characters’ daily lives, much like a theatre journal.<sup>146</sup> However, *L’Atelier* displays two significant dramatic traits. First, the characters in the play, drawn from reality, can remind audiences of their life experiences in the post-war period, prompting a warm reception from French audiences to the actors’ performances. Second, the playwright knew the real lives of the characters and their sufferings in the war and afterward; as a result, the scenes in the plays are so convincing and expressive that they show the power of a realistic drama on the public stage. Gao concludes that, although more traditional realistic plays are still being performed, others like *L’Atelier* that do not have the conventional elements of plays, such as plot, story, or characterization, are more popular in French theatre, demonstrating a change in the connotations of realist drama.<sup>147</sup>

During his visits in France, Gao appeared to be more interested in “xiao juchang” (small theatre), experimental and avant-garde theatre. Based on his observations of the Théâtre du Soleil, one of the well-known small theatres set up in an abandoned artillery warehouse in the suburb of Paris, he visualizes what constitutes modern theatre in China. In the same article, he suggests that small theatre is distinct from traditional theatre for its informal design and

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146. Gao, “Faguo guanju shuibi” [Random Notes on French Theatre], *Shiyue*, no.3 (1979): 257-258.

147. Gao, 258-261.

accessibility. Though the Théâtre du Soleil had poor stage settings, it did produce influential plays such as *1789*, which attracted more than 280,000 spectators. Gao had seen the documentary film about the performance of this play at the French Embassy in Beijing,<sup>148</sup> and thus argues that the poor location and simple stage designs turned out to be blessings for artists and theatregoers alike, because the spectators could sit around an accessible stage and view live performances while interacting with the artists. In addition, various forms of arts were integrated into theatrical performances, such as folklore, dances, marionette shows, and variety shows, among others, thus releasing dramatic art from its traditional forms and greatly enriching its expressivity. Moreover, such performances destabilize the traditional boundary between performers and spectators by inviting the latter to be part of the performance; spectators are not passive viewers, but active participants of performances, either directly or indirectly. Consequently, this type of small theatre has provided a platform for such artistic experimentations based on Antonin Artaud's idea of "wanquan de xiju" (total theatre) by doing away with the written language-centred dramatic tradition and its focus on the analysis of characters' psychology.<sup>149</sup>

In his critical review/interpretation of contemporary French theatre, Gao elaborates on the Theatre of the Absurd, especially the works of such playwrights as Eugène Ionesco and Samuel Beckett. He describes Ionesco's *La Cantatrice chauve* as a typical modernist play, devoid of characterization, plot, and psychological development. The play is about a bourgeois English couple's boring and mundane lives: They speak in the manner of English language drills, with which Ionesco became familiar when he was studying English; they live like machines; their

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148. Gao, 259.

149. Gao, 262-263.

roles never change; and their lives are no different than those of other people in similar urban contexts. The play foregrounds the use of language as a game without clear logic, and features invented words or syllables to create absurd situations. Gao reads Ionesco's work as a criticism of capitalist reality and spiritual poverty by projecting their absurdity. Beckett's *En attendant Godot* shares similar traits with Ionesco's *La Cantatrice chauve*. In Beckett's play, two homeless people do not know each other, but have the same desire or hope to meet Godot, an enigmatic figure. The characters do not have any idea of who Godot is, nor does the play reveal the identity of Godot. Eventually "Godot" is transformed into an abstract idea of "hope" in the play. Gao regards both Beckett's and Ionesco's plays as critical of the capitalist system, because their presentations of the absurdities of human existence are meant to inspire self-consciousness about people's everyday lives and to remind them of their spiritual lives. By providing an extensive introduction to the main features and *raison d'être* of modernist theatre, Gao establishes a model for Chinese writers to follow, because modernist theatre's experimentation with formal expressions is much more meaningful than plays that only bombard the audience with political rhetoric.<sup>150</sup>

Subsequent to his visits in France, Gao published a series of articles, proposing his modernist drama theory to the Chinese literary field. His essay "Yao shenmoyang de xiju" (What Kind of Theatre Do We Need?), an outline of his vision for modern Chinese theatre, presented at a symposium in Paris in 1985 and then published the following year in China, aims to create an alternative modern Chinese theatre.<sup>151</sup> In this essay, through his interpretation of modern

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150. Gao, 263.

151. Gao's essay, "Yao shenmoyang de xiju" [What Kind of Theatre Do We Need?], was translated into French and published as "Ma conception du théâtre" in *Internationale de l'imaginaire*, no.5, 1986: 37-44; the essay was also published in China's *Wenyi yanjiu* [The Journal of Literary Studies], no.4 (1986): 88-91.



Western theatre theories and traditional Chinese theatre practice, Gao advances some significant points about the future direction of a modern Chinese theatre.

Gao opens his discussion of modern Chinese theatre by stating that theatre is different from written literature, though it may become a form of literature; it can be properly called dramatic literature.<sup>152</sup> Such a redefinition is based on the fact that, as distinct from literature for its “juchang xing” (theatricality), theatre is mainly a performing art that spectators can enjoy and engage with in a public space, be it in a fair, a stage in a temple, modern theatre, gym, bar, or an abandoned warehouse. This quality defines the difference between theatre and written literature, though playwrights can write plays for reading as well as for performance. Gao explains that theatre as a performing art is a modern concept as opposed to the theatre practice of some realist dramatists such as Henrik Ibsen, who presented their sociopolitical ideas in theatre and their works by relying on spoken language and realistic mis-en-scenes, a practice adopted in modern China as “Huaju” (spoken drama).<sup>153</sup> Gao stresses that in the contemporary context, Antonin Artaud offered a theoretical foundation for this new approach to modern theatre, as he redefined theatricality as process, which, for Gao, can be further interpreted as change, contrast, discovery, or surprise.<sup>154</sup> Thanks to the pace-setting experimentations of such avant-garde dramatists as Jerzy Grotowski and Tadeusz Kantor, the new principles Artaud proposed in his manifesto “Le

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152. Gao’s essay, “Yao shenmoyang de xiju” [What Kind of Theatre Do We Need?], 88.

153. See “Le théâtre parlé: une occidentalisation particulière,” in Zhang Ning’s *L’Appropriation par la chine du théâtre occidental* (Paris: Harmattan, 1998) and Gao Xingjian, “Les difficultés du théâtre chinois contemporain,” in *Littérature chinoise - le passé et l’écriture contemporaine*, eds. Annie Curien and Jin Siyan, (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme), 29-34.

154. Gao, “Yao shenmoyang de xiju,” 89.

théâtre et la cruauté” were embraced by readers and audiences.<sup>155</sup> Gao further explains that performing art is premised on the idea of “jiadin xing” (suppositionality or fictionality).<sup>156</sup> Theatrical suppositionality does not require actors to show audiences that what they do is real, but use their body language, dancing, singing, and spoken words together with symbols, stage lighting, music, and other means to provoke spectators’ imagination to create a world of fiction together. This suppositionality promises infinite artistic creativity by overcoming temporal and spatial constraints, and by transcending the décor, settings, and props onstage to surpass mere realistic imitations of daily life. Thus, Gao claims that only by returning to the bare stage characterized in the Beijing Opera, or the empty space of the circus, can we gain artistic freedom.<sup>157</sup>

For Gao, an actor should be a story-teller, who can switch to/from different roles: First as an individual, he/she then enters the role of a neutral actor/actress to play different characters, and then returns to him/herself as a story-teller to interact with audiences.<sup>158</sup> Suppositionality is the essence of performance, functioning as a game for adults who are “intellectually mature enough to believe it.”<sup>159</sup> It is also like wearing masks to become someone else, and just as modern theatre uses masks to inspire imagination and creativity. Other artistic and dramatic forms, such as singing, dancing, mime, puppetry, martial arts, and magic become part of the creative process. Consequently, theatre will not be relegated to spoken drama, but emerge as a

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155. Gao, 89.

156. Gao, 89.

157. Gao, 89.

158. Gao, 89.

159. Gao, 89.

free art.<sup>160</sup>

In the redefinition of theatre as a performing art, the director's role must be recognized, as he/she designs the performances of actors and the use and appearance of the stage for a creative artistic production. This emphasis on the director's role requires the playwright to reconcile with the new art direction that cannot be defined by written texts, but by performance, creativity, and interaction. However, Gao still hopes that directors, playwrights, and actors can cooperate to usher in a new era of modern theatre.<sup>161</sup>

Gao further points out that although modern theatre does not need to be dominated by conventional languages, it does need corporal languages, such as that designed by the avant-garde dramatist Grotowski.<sup>162</sup> In addition, other languages, such as surrealist poetic language, monologue, and absurdist playwrights' incoherent and illogical language of the irrational world can all help to enhance theatricality. Moreover, because spoken language can serve as an important medium for communicating and expressing characters' feelings and emotions, spoken conversations between characters and actors, characters and spectators, or actors and spectators can be freely adopted in performances. More importantly, spoken words should be studied like music composition. In theatre, spoken words can be "duosheng bu" (multivocality, or polyphony), harmonic or contrapuntal, or a symphony of spoken words of harmony and counterpoint, and illogical and ungrammatical spoken languages.<sup>163</sup> Gao further claims that for future theatre, "feichenshu xing de yuyan" (non-narrative language) should be favored to

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160. Gao, 89-90.

161. Gao, 90.

162. Gao, 90.

163. Gao, 90.

stimulate spectators' imagination through suggestions, symbols, or fictionalization.<sup>164</sup> This suggests narrating from different points of view: Narrating to “ta” (he) from the point of view of “wo” (I), or narrating to the audience as “ni” (you) about “wo” (I) to achieve a visible immediacy, imaginable reality.<sup>165</sup>

Gao also notes that a rich theatre language has existed in Chinese traditional theatre for centuries: Even without elaborate stage designs, lighting, or music, actors and actresses can perform on a simple stage, overcoming temporal and spatial barriers to depict the past and present, the living and the dead, reality and dreams.<sup>166</sup> However, this does not necessarily mean that actors and writers must be bound by traditional theatrical rules. By drawing on its theatrical suppositionality, modern Chinese theatre can enrich itself and gain much freedom, even to perform characters' subconscious and abstract thinking.<sup>167</sup>

Gao concludes that modern theatre can be as free as other types of literature in producing its fictional worlds: Theatre creates multiple layers of images without temporal and spatial limits by blending dream, imagination, thinking, memory, and reality together.<sup>168</sup> This is strengthened by multiple layers of spoken sounds, or multivocality. As a result, in a theatrical production, it is not so easy to find a unified theme, or plot. Accordingly, we can present different themes in different ways in a drama, without definitive conclusions. For Gao, the flexibility of drama is more suited to modern ideas of thought and perception.<sup>169</sup>

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164. Gao, 90-91.

165. Gao, 90.

166. Gao, 91

167. Gao, 91.

168. Gao, 91.

From his travel notes to his outline, Gao's observations on modern Chinese theatre draw heavily from Western theatre theory and practice as well as from Chinese traditional theatre. His critical interpretation formulates a theoretical discourse on modern Chinese theatre in the new context of China's initiatives for reform and opening. The significance of his observations can be encapsulated in several points, according to the sources from which he draws his inspiration.

First, Gao translates Artaud's concept of modern theatre "théâtre de la cruauté" into the discourse of modern Chinese theatre as "juedui xiju" ("total theatre"). According to Sy Ren Quah, "total theatre" has two meanings for Gao. First, it allows him to creatively take elements from both modern Western theatre and Chinese tradition to develop a new modern theatre. Second, it provides infinite space for performers to imagine and create new fictional worlds.<sup>170</sup> Consequently, Gao destabilizes the dominant model of Chinese theatre as "huaju" (spoken drama), which has prevailed since the early twentieth century. The "huaju" approach is based on the rationale that theatre could be instrumentalized effectively for such projects as cultural revitalization, national salvation, anti-Japanese propaganda before 1949, and ideological indoctrination during Mao's era.<sup>171</sup> The Ibsen-Stanislawski model laid theoretical and directorial foundations for such a realistic approach. The model attempts to create realistic life scenes on stage using settings, lighting, and makeup, which consequently requires actors/actresses to lose themselves in their roles. Moreover, during performances, these actors/actresses debate, articulate political visions, or criticize social issues in spoken language according to the details of

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169. Gao, 91.

170. Sy Ren Quah, *Gao Xingjian and Transcultural Chinese Theater*, 96.

171. Gao Xingjian, "Les difficultés du théâtre chinois contemporain," in *Littérature chinoise - le passé et l'écriture contemporaine*, eds. Annie Curien and Jin Siyan, (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme), 29-34.

the play and the playwright's requirements.<sup>172</sup> By adopting such a "huaju" approach, Chinese theatre became a platform for educating the audience to accept grand narratives, leaving almost no space for artistic creation outside realist literary norms, least of all for spectators' engagement.<sup>173</sup> However, Gao's critical engagement with Artaud's notion of "total theatre" allows him to reimagine modern Chinese theatre as a public platform, not only in dedicated performance spaces but also in bars, warehouses, or gyms, as with small theatres in France. This suggests that modern theatre need not be controlled by government, but should be made accessible to any audience. Such platforms can provide possibilities for infinite creativity and enjoyment (as a game) for both performers and spectators through the interactions between them. Thus, spectators and performers are no longer objects of education, but are free creators of the meanings of dramatic art.

Second, Gao refers to the performance principle as "jiadingxing," a Chinese translation of Vsevolod Meyerhold's notion of "stylization," as opposed to naturalism (realism) in theatre.<sup>174</sup> Gao offers a new perspective on modern Chinese theatre as a free art. He notes that the foundation of theatre does not rely on the overarching criteria of whether what theatre represents is real or not, but on the premise that both performers and spectators recognize that theatre is a place for artistic experience, in which the performers adopt various means, such as corporal language, suggestions, various layers of spoken language, dances, songs, and other techniques to evoke spectators' imagination and allow them to feel the reality of the fictional world as though

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172. Gao Xingjian, "Xiandai xiju shoudan" [The Methods of Modern Theatre], in *Dui yizong xiandai xiju de zhui qiu* [In Search for a Modern Theatre] (Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1988), 4-6.

173. Gao Xingjian, "Les difficultés du théâtre chinois contemporain," 29-34.

174. Sy Ren Quah, *Gao Xingjian and Transcultural Chinese Theater*, 107.

they are part of the game. Thus, striving to be real is no longer an issue. Such theatrical suppositionality gives performers infinite possibility to create, together with spectators. Consequently, the shift of emphasis from the playwrights' authority to actors/actresses' free creation and spectators' participation significantly changes the orientation of modern Chinese theatre.

Third, Gao proposes a tripartite relationship of acting: The self, the neutral actor, and the character. According to his outline, the “zhongxing yanyuan” (the neutral actor) is the key element in acting. Gao appears to draw the concept from Artaud's critical essay, “Le théâtre de la cruauté.” Though Artaud considers the actor as a factor of first importance in theatre, he adopts the terms “passif et neutre” to describe the actor's performance, which mean that “toute initiative personnelle” is denied in his/her acting.<sup>175</sup> Artaud does not elaborate on it. Gao does not discuss the term “zhongxing yanyuan” (the neutral actor) in his outline, but only takes the performance of a story-teller as an example to illustrate what is the best acting. However, he does explain it in “Jinghua yetian” (Night Talks in Beijing) in 1987.<sup>176</sup> While citing some examples from Beijing opera, Gao argues that the actor is first of all a living individual (self), then a “neutral actor” without his special experience and personality, and the character he is playing. During the performance, he, a “neutral actor,” stands out in that before he enters into his role, he has to temporarily extract himself from his everyday life and enters into a kind acting state of neutrality by preparing psychologically for the role he will play. Though his psychological preparation is brief, he can profit the precious moment to think and make some adjustments

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175. Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964), 152.

176. Gao Xingjian, “Jinghua yetian” [Night Talks in Beijing], in *Dui yizong xiandai xijiu de zhui qiu* [In Search for a Modern Theatre], (Zhongguo xijiu chubanshe, 1988), 211-213.

about the role he is about to play while observing the spectators' reactions. Thus, this state of neutrality allows the actor to surpass his own experience and personality and create multiple characters on stage.<sup>177</sup> Indeed, a powerful illustration of the process can be seen in how the well-known male actor Mei Lanfang (1894–1961) prepared to play a female role. Despite the emphasis on the neutral actor, the self, the neutral actor and the character are “mutually constitutive.”<sup>178</sup> Theatre scholar Izabella Labedzka suggests that Gao's tripartite relationship of acting was also inspired by Berthold Brecht's drama theory.<sup>179</sup> Influenced by Beijing opera, Brecht coined the term “*Verfremdungseffekt*” (alienation effect) for the process by which actors can distance themselves from the role(s) they play and critically analyze the characters in order to inspire the spectators to think about their sociohistorical situations. However, whereas Brecht emphasizes the character, Gao does not discuss the character as much as the acting process itself, which he regards as a creative and interactive process whose goal is not didactic. Despite the differences, Gao's concept “the neutral actor,” is a close equivalent to Brecht's idea of the “self-observing actor,” similarly derived from Beijing opera.<sup>180</sup>

Gao's tripartite model of acting allows actors to adopt different pronouns to present multiple points of view: The first personal pronoun “I” can take up the point of view “you,” and in turn, “you” takes up “he/she.” The changes of different personal pronouns allow the actor to take alternative points of view in performance and interpret the same people and events from

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177. Gao, 212.

178. Coulter, Todd J., *Transcultural Aesthetics in the Plays of Gao Xingjian*, 50.

179. Izabella Łabędzka, *Gao Xingjian's Idea of Theatre* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 71.

180. Łabędzka, 73.



different perspectives. Gao also applies the shifting of personal pronouns to his fiction, especially his novel *Lingshan*, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Finally, Gao equally draws from Artaud's treatment of spoken language in theatre as "transcription musicale"<sup>181</sup> and the experimenting of illogical and ungrammatical language, the simultaneous utterance of spoken language in a performance, as practiced by Ionesco and Beckett. Thus, he attempts to transform theatre language into a symphony of voices of different intentions and goals. Sometimes these voices are irrational, valorizing the co-existence of multiple points of view and their uncertainty in face of the modern.

Gao's translation and interpretation of modernist and avant-garde theory into Chinese literary discourse aimed to create an alternative theatre while keeping certain traditional Chinese *xiqu* (opera) elements, particularly those of Beijing opera. However, such translation is also fraught with tension. For example, even as actors' performances in Beijing opera based on suppositionality are presented in theatre, along with avant-garde music, lighting, and other elements of the *mise-en-scene*, the traditional Chinese style is appropriated and dissolved in modernist theatre. Despite this tension, Gao also tried to reconcile realism with modernism by emphasizing that realism should change its form over time. Western theatre can provide modern forms to serve as models for Chinese theatre. However, as his outline of modern Chinese theatre demonstrates, through his translation the very foundation of realist Chinese theatre is destabilized, and the potentials for an alternative modern Chinese theatre are released.

Except critical essays on modern theory of theatre, Gao wrote an important critique on France's contemporary literature "Falanxi wenxue de tongku" (The Pains of French Literature),

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181. Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, 145.

which was based on his observations when he visited France from 1978-1979.<sup>182</sup> In his essay, Gao addresses problems confronting the modern French literary field, with a special focus on such writers as Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, André Malraux, Louis Aragon, and others affiliated with the *Nouveau roman* movement. Gao identifies the key questions to which these French writers tried to respond: “What is literature?” “What is the use of literature?” For him, these questions are more about the process of searching than about finding answers. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre sees literature as a means of fighting against social injustice. In contrast, when surrealist writers cannot find meaning in society, they focus on their own interiority instead. “Automatic writing” allows them to shift from the conscious to record the spontaneous subconscious, especially dreams and associations. Gao states that modernist novelists explore their characters’ subconscious by blending dream and reality together, thus subverting the norms of the temporal and spatial sequences established by realist and romantic novels in the eighteenth century. Like the modernist novel, including the *Nouveau roman*, the Theatre of the Absurd radically departs from traditional literature largely because of its anti-theatre stance, as exemplified in its virtually non-existent plots, minimal characterizations, and lack of references to characters’ backgrounds. Gao concludes that French modernist literature can be characterized by its constant explorations in search of new meaning and form. Though this exploration is a long-term commitment, it is exactly this aspect that accounts for the positive values of French literature.<sup>183</sup>

Gao’s critical investment culminated in the publication of his monograph on modernism,

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182. Gao Xingjian, “Falanxi wenxue de tongku” [The Pains of French Literature], 51-57.

183. Gao, 56-57.

*Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan* (A Preliminary Examination of Modern Fictional Techniques), the first systematic introduction to literary modernism and the techniques of modernist fiction at the time in China. The publication of the treatise aroused heated debate: Conservatives criticized it for promoting decadent literary values, while writers such as Wang Meng and Liu Xinwu defended it.<sup>184</sup> Ye Junjian (1914-99), who had written several influential novels in English while residing in England, wrote a preface to the book, praising Gao for “opening a new window” for China’s literary world, which was crucial for China’s modernization project after having been isolated from the rest of the world for many years.<sup>185</sup>

As its title suggests, *Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan* deals mainly with the techniques of modern/modernist fiction. However, Gao does not restrict himself to this narrow scope. His discussion of the techniques of modernism serves as an entry point to destabilize the established literary regimes.

The book first discusses modern fiction from a technical point of view, and ends with several questions that problematize prevailing literary trends. He cites many examples of “modern techniques and modern schools,” mainly drawing from modern French literature, to resist the politicization of literature in China by demanding a distinction between what a writer writes from an artistic point of view and the simple political labelling of his/her writing. He makes a comparison to reinforce his argument: Disagreeing with another person’s political and philosophical points of view does not entail “destroy[ing]” or negating their specific artistic

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184. Song Jianlin, “Xinshiqi xiandaizhuyi de lunzheng yu fansi” [Debate and Reflection on Modernism in China’s New Era], in *Beijing shehui keyue* [The Journal of Social Sciences, Beijing], no.4 (2001): 71-72.

185. See the “Preface” of Gao’s *Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan* [A Preliminary Examination of Modern Fictional Techniques] (Guangzhou: Hua cheng chubanshe, 1981), 6.

skills, any more than opposing capitalism entails destroying machines too.<sup>186</sup> Thus, he emphasizes that, although certain literary techniques are rooted in certain aesthetic values, once they are utilized extensively they become independent, and can be accepted by people of different political and aesthetic orientations. Some writers may adopt certain techniques while opposing others, but they cannot politically label those they do not like as “reactionary, decadent, [or] corrupted,” and such political labelling is harmful to literature.<sup>187</sup>

In another section of the book, Gao compares the development of modern fiction to that of modern technology. The progress of visual imaging technology, for instance, from photography to silent film to sound film and beyond, indicates the progress of human civilization for all, and socialist China has not rejected these innovations in its own pursuit of modern development. The same logic applies to the exploration of modern narrative languages of fiction, which are not the exclusive property of capitalist countries.<sup>188</sup>

In the chapter “modern techniques and national spirit,” Gao argues that the adoption of modern literary techniques is not contrary to the national spirit and image of China. For example, the “new” novels and short stories produced since the May Fourth Movement benefited greatly from Western novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but are still considered as Chinese. Such elements as the Chinese language and the lives of the Chinese people in these literary works are essential to maintain and validate Chinese identity. Thus, artistic techniques transcend national frontiers and cannot be monopolized by specific nations. The healthy development of literature cannot exclude the adoption and exploration of new skills and

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186. Gao, 106.

187. Gao, 106.

188. Gao, 17-18.

techniques.<sup>189</sup>

Gao's elaboration on modern techniques relates literary modernity to the same logic of scientific modernity. The adoption of modernist literary forms is as significant and imperative as the adoption of new technology and new scientific theory, on which the government has primarily focused. Thus, what Chinese literature needs is to revitalize its forms so as to become modern. By focusing on the technical aspects of literature, Gao avoids a direct opposition to realism, but at the same time aims to subvert the dominant literary guidelines that the Communist Party has imposed on writers to maintain ideological control, because what he attempts to introduce, in fact, is meant to fundamentally change the mode of writing socialist realist literature.

Gao applies the same evolutionary logic to the novel as a genre. First, he questions the tendency to prioritize the content of literary works without taking the appropriate forms for literary representation into serious consideration. Gao argues that merely having a “zhu ti” (topic, or subject) to write about is not good enough; a writer also needs proper literary forms such as characterization, plot, and narrative structure.<sup>190</sup> Moreover, literary forms evolve constantly, as seen in the progression from Chinese classical literature to European realist novels, and the rise and eventual decline in popularity of Balzacian realist literature. Writers need modern narrative forms from which to construct their literary worlds based on their current contexts. Only by making best use of literary forms and languages can writers relate their experiences, sentiments, and perceptions to readers and evoke resonances among them. In doing so, writers are not in a position to educate readers, because writers are not perfect; they must

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189. Gao, 117.

190. Gao, 3.

treat readers as their friends or comrades.<sup>191</sup> Modern fictional narratives also differ significantly from traditional approaches: Modern narration can be constructed in the writer's voice and in the character's interior activities, similar to stream of consciousness. It can be achieved through different perspectives, such as second-person narration, an approach shared by both the French *Nouveau roman* novelist Michel Butor and the Chinese writer Liu Xinwu. Such shift in narrative perspective suggests that modern narrative is not solely dependent on story, nor on plot or characterization. In addition, conventional descriptions of character and physical, natural, or social environments are no longer as important as they were once considered.<sup>192</sup>

Gao emphasizes the formal functions of literature, compares them to the logic of scientific evolution, and then translates that logic to serve his agenda to modernize Chinese literature by updating outdated literary forms and language. For him, literary modernism is an effective means of realizing such transformation. With such radical investments in new languages and structures in fiction, Gao essentially attempts to liberate literature from its role as a subservient tool of the Chinese communist ideology.

Gao's appropriation of the evolutionary logic promoted by Chinese reformers in the post-Mao period is similar to Mathieu Ricci's translation approach. By translating the Christian term "deus" into the Chinese equivalent "sheng" ("god") or "shangdi" ("Lord on high"), which existed in the canonical literary work annotated by Confucius, *Shi Jing* (The Book of Poetry), Ricci attempted to accommodate the dominant Confucian literary class in the Ming Empire (1368-1644) by highlighting their similarities with Confucian officials, at least at the surface level. However, Ricci's translation was not intended to be assimilated by Confucianism, but

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191. Gao, 4.

192. Gao, 6.

rather interpreted the meanings and significances of the Chinese terms in their favor, by showing that the Christian God had existed in ancient times but had been largely forgotten due to wars and Buddhist influences.<sup>193</sup> As a Jesuit priest, Ricci had a mission to restore the people's faith. Similarly, Gao highlights the similarities between modernism and the main trends of Chinese literature, but exploits the implications of that discourse for his goals. This translational act turns out to be both interpretational and subversive.

The remainder of Gao's treatise expounds on literary modernism by drawing on numerous examples from modern French literature, while trying to identify similar instances in Chinese literature. In particular, his literary criticism focuses on such important techniques widely adopted in modernist literature as the alternative use of personal pronouns, especially the second-person pronoun, as well as stream of consciousness and absurdity.

Gao notes that the second-person pronoun has been adopted extensively in modern fiction, because it surpasses the first- and third-person pronouns by creating a direct connection with the audience and more easily bringing readers into the scenes being described or related.<sup>194</sup> It is a new technique in the narrative language of fiction.<sup>195</sup> However, he stresses that although this technique is associated with modernism, the narrative use of the second person is not a foreign invention, and can be found in Chinese literature. For instance, classical novels and popular folk stories sometimes adopt "ni" (you) as a term of address to invite commentary from the readers/audience. In Europe, such application of the second person has been extended to fictional narratives; though the experimental adoption of this point of view is relatively recent, it

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193. See Wang Mingxing's MA thesis, "Power and Translation: The Jesuit Translation of the Christian God into Chinese," Concordia University, Montreal, 2004.

194. Gao's *Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan*, 13.

195. Gao, 14.

has co-existed alongside the first- and third-person perspectives to represent various points of view in a novel. In addition, removing punctuation in conversations also eliminates the narrative boundaries of the characters, effectively representing their psychological movements, a technique that is similar to stream of consciousness.<sup>196</sup>

Gao points out that stream of consciousness is not limited by national boundaries, but is a psychological phenomenon shared by all, which consequently generates a corresponding narrative language that represents the interior truth of the human mind. Because of its universality, any intentional additions of pompous words, abstract comments, or rhetorical devices would harm its effectiveness and its sense of psychological verisimilitude.<sup>197</sup> Wang Meng's use of stream of consciousness in his short stories, for instance, proves that the technique transcends national boundaries, irrespective of language and culture, while working perfectly in the Chinese literary field.

Gao reminds his readers that, as a modernist movement in drama, Theatre of the Absurd is regarded as a reaction to realism, because many readers see realism as a copy of reality. However, he argues that it is false to assume that realism represents reality without exaggeration: Lu Xun's novella "Kuangren riji" (Diary of a Mad Man) is a counterexample. For Gao, absurdity is a technique that exposes unreasonable phenomena by making extreme exaggerations.<sup>198</sup> Although absurdity goes against prevailing logic, it is exactly this illogicality that constitutes the base of the reality. For example, Eugène Ionesco's play *Rhinocéros* exposes the absurdity of the pre-war reality in his homeland of Romania, by creating a bizarre fictional world in which

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196. Gao, 17.

197. Gao, 30.

198. Gao, 35.



human beings are all turned into rhinos that are only capable of shouting, thus using the rhino image to exteriorize disaster and suffering in an abstraction of reality. With this instance in mind, Gao concludes that absurdity represents writers' efforts to seek perfection, and their representations of the illogical suggests an insistence on logic in the actual world.<sup>199</sup> Some techniques associated with the Theatre of the Absurd include making no distinctions of time and space, reversing the order of cause and effect, blurring the boundary between reality and dream, and treating the particular as the general, norms as new discovery, and superstition as epiphany.<sup>200</sup> He adds that these techniques allow for infinite creativity in literature, since an unusual perspective on our society and our own lives that we take for granted implies infinite absurdities.

Gao applies the modernist techniques he discussed in his monograph to his short stories, plays, and translation criticism. Of his short stories published in the early 1980s, "*Gewo laoye maiyu gan*" (Buying the Fish Cane for My Grandpa) is a representative example of stream of consciousness fiction.<sup>201</sup> The narrator of this short story recounts his childhood in his grandfather's home with a loosely structured narrative. Its story is significantly reduced; its plot does not follow a linear time and spatial sequence. Instead, the story is marked by long monologues and free associations unrestrained either by clear logic or by straightforward flows of time or space. By doing so, Gao liberates the protagonist's memories of the past and presents them as if they were happening now, tinged with a sense of nostalgia. In another short story, "*Er shi nian yihou*" (Twenty Years Later), Gao allows his characters to narrate a fictional event

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199. Gao, 39.

200. Gao, 40.

201. Gao's "Gewo laoye maiyu gan" [Buying the Fish Cane for My Grandpa], in *Renmin wenxue* [People's Literature], no.9 (1986): 15-23.

during the Cultural Revolution from the perspectives of several characters with various personal pronouns.<sup>202</sup>

Gao translated literary modernism for his Chinese readers in his critical articles on translation, based on similar theoretical tenets. For instance, in his essay on the translations of two French short stories of the *Nouveau roman* era, Alain Robbe-Grillet's "La plage" and Vercors' "Lazare aux mains vides," Gao reinforces his view of modernism by citing these stories as concrete examples of what constitutes a modernist narrative.<sup>203</sup> While viewing these French short stories as reflections of Western society, he also stresses the positive literary values of these authors' endeavors in seeking new narrative modes. The modes of narration present in "Lazare aux mains vides," whose entire monologue is a narrative in itself, and in "La plage" with its objective description of the beach, can be productively adapted to Chinese literature, despite not being in the realist mode. In particular, the imagery created through these new angles of narration proves to have greater literary power than literature mobilized for ideological indoctrination, which is closely related to the revolutionary literature that was still dominant in the early reform era.<sup>204</sup>

Gao's critical translation/interpretation of modernism in the Chinese context has several implications. First, he argues that modernism is a dynamic form. Though it has its limitations, it critiques the dehumanization and alienation effects of the capitalist system by using disruptive writing techniques, a common ground between modernism and the sort of realism that was

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202. Gao, "Er shi nian yihou" [Twenty Years Later], in *Gei wo laoye mai yugan* [Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather] (Taipei: Unitas Press, 1989).

203. Gao, "Dangdai faguo wenxue de yige zhuti-zhuiqiu - ping liangpian faguo duanpian xiaoshuo" [The Main Theme of Contemporary French Literature - Quest: Review of Two French Short Stories], in *Shiyue*, no. 3 (October 1980): 249-251.

204. Gao, 249-251.

prioritized in Chinese literature. Second, modern writers' explorations of non-realistic forms of expression in poetry, theatre, and novels are praiseworthy because their search for meanings and forms in their respective artistic realms provoke us to think deeply about the limits of artists and about existential meanings in the modern world. Third, Chinese writers can make efforts to modernize Chinese literature by borrowing from modernist writers' experiments, because their literary forms lift literature to a higher level than the mere propaganda that was so prevalent in Chinese literary circles.

Though it is only implied in his literary criticism, Gao makes extensive comparisons and contrasts between modernist literature, French literature in particular, and modern Chinese literature that he saw as anemic. In seeking common grounds with modernist literature, he argues hard about the necessity of adopting modernist forms to correct the grand narratives in the dominant Chinese literary field. By appropriating the logic of modernity for the universal scientific and technological progress that the reformist government of China promoted in the 1980s, he intentionally translates the discourse of Western literary modernism as a technical solution to the stagnation and backwardness he perceives in Chinese literature. In such a translational investment, Gao subsumes socialist realism to the logic of the discourse of universal progress of science and technology in order to liberate modern Chinese literature from political manipulations and abuses. Thus, his critical translation performance constitutes an engagement with discourses on modernism to simultaneously negotiate with and subvert dominant Chinese literary regimes, henceforth opening alternative avenues for modern Chinese literature.

#### 1.3.4 Translation as Adaptation and Creation: Translating Theatrical Absurdity into Chinese

Gao's literary career reached its peak in China during the early 1980s when he wrote and

briefly staged his most successful play, *Che Zhan* (Bus Stop), an adaptation of Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot*. The play was written in the summer of 1981 when Gao became a member of the Chinese Writers' Association. However, it was not performed until 1983 due to fear of controversy, though he had the support of important members of the People's Theatre in Beijing where he worked as a professional playwright and director. In a later article, Gao admits that to avoid controversy over this play, he had to produce a more realistic play, *Juedui xinhao* (Absolute Signal), first.<sup>205</sup>

However, after *Che Zhan* was performed publicly to a limited audience, it was enthusiastically welcomed for its new approach to theatre, its experimental treatment of the stage setting, and its anti-realistic motif. Contrary to Gao's wishes, the play also aroused controversy, and some conservative literary officials even condemned it as a negative influence.<sup>206</sup>

In *Ink Dances in Limbo*, Jessica Yeung states that in many ways, *Che Zhan* is fundamentally different from *En attendant Godot*, especially since the former's ending provides an optimistic note shared by other plays written in the same period.<sup>207</sup> Sy Ren Quah also points out that Gao's play is distinct from Beckett's in their respective approaches to their subject matter: Beckett's play is metaphysical, whereas Gao's is more socially conscious, though they both contain essential features of the Theatre of the Absurd.<sup>208</sup> Xiao Yingying criticizes Gao's play for its lack of modern temporality: Beckett's play denies its characters a past and future and

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205. See Gao's "Geer huanghua" in *Meiyou zhuyi* [No-ism] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian Gongshi, 2000), 158-166.

206. Gao, 158-166.

207. Jessica Yeung's *Ink Dances in Limbo*, 56-62.

208. Sy Ren Quah, *Gao Xingjian and Transcultural Chinese Theater*, 64-69.

places them entirely in the present, whereas Gao's treatment of theatrical time implies a present and a future, both a temporal certainty and a prospect. The very emphasis on the future in *Che Zhan* promises a utopian note that negates the prevailing pessimistic overtones of modernity and modernist literature.<sup>209</sup>

In an interview, Gao compared the similarities and differences between *Che Zhan* and Beckett's:

贝克特认为等待是全人类的悲剧，而我把它作为一个喜剧，而且是抒情喜剧，一个同人们日常生活联系在一起的喜剧。但本质上是个悲剧。这就是我同他相同和不同的地方。<sup>210</sup>

Beckett thinks that waiting is a tragedy for human beings, but I treated it as a comedy, even a lyrical comedy, which is closely linked with people's daily life. In essence, it is a tragedy. These are the similarities and difference between me and him.<sup>211</sup>

In his preface to the Italian version of *Bus Stop*, Gao points out that though he appreciated Beckett's play, he attempts to combine absurdity, reality, sentiment, and comedy within his own play, which is situated in the Chinese context. Gao expresses hope that *Bus Stop* will similarly resonate in Italy.<sup>212</sup>

For some critics, *Che Zhan*'s connection with Beckett's play can be better illustrated by its pessimism and human alienation, key features of the Theatre of Absurd. Sy Ren Quah notes that Gao had to modify the sense of tragedy at the closing of the play to satisfy government

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209. Xiao Yingying, *Une subjectivité fluide* (Paris: Demopolis Editions, 2017), 83-89.

210. Gao Xingjian, *Dui yizhong xiandai xiju de zhui qiu* [In Search for a Modern Theater], 168.

211. My translation.

212. Gao, 127-129.

ensorship requirements. However, Quah stresses that Lin Zhaohua's directorial notes highlight the pessimistic ending of the play, and many viewers might similarly notice its tragic tone.<sup>213</sup>

Regarding the modernist theme of alienation in Gao's play, Izabella Labedzka argues that the simultaneous spoken utterances of the people waiting at the bus stop are not coherent lines of dialogue meant for communication, and that such discourse is characteristic of absurdist plays.<sup>214</sup>

Though critics are aware of differences between Gao's and Beckett's treatments of their modern subjects, they also recognize similarities that establish links between both authors and their works - the contexts and basic theatrical tendencies of Gao's and Beckett's plays differ, but the motifs of waiting and absurdity link them together.

The differences and similarities between Gao's and Beckett's plays provide sites from which to examine how Gao draws his inspiration from a French modernist play and transforms it for the Chinese context, not as an interlingual commitment from the source to the target, but as an interaction with the French theatrical text. Gao's play generates a new text of absurdity that only echoes Beckett's modernist concerns in its own right. Thus, *Che Zhan* is an adaptation, implying that Gao appropriates Beckett's modernist narratives for his own play; the relation between these plays is not that Gao fully translates Beckett's modernist aesthetics into the Chinese literary milieu, but is related to the more productive question of how Gao creates an original play, based on his rewriting (adaptation) of Beckett's *En attendant Godot*, that is more immediately relevant to the concerns and needs of the Chinese literary field.

Before he adapted *En attendant Godot* into *Che Zhan*, Gao produced a translation of Eugène Ionesco's play *La Cantatrice chauve* in 1978. Though *Che Zhan* is more closely

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213. Sy Ren Quah, *Gao Xingjian and Transcultural Chinese Theater*, 87.

214. Izabella Łabędzka, *Gao Xingjian's Idea of Theatre*, 131.

connected to Beckett's absurdist play, it also shares some features with Ionesco's *La Cantatrice chauve*. Comparing both works as an interlingual translation and as a rewriting/re-creation demonstrates how each translates or engages with literary modernism. Gao's translation and writing inform and interact with each other, as seen in his critical justification of his choice of personal pronouns and his subsequent application of such narrative technique in his short stories. However, some immediate questions can also be raised: Why did Gao choose the works of Ionesco and Beckett to translate and adapt? How did he translate modernist *illusio* in these plays?

Gao's choice of *La Cantatrice chauve* was not random. In an interview, he acknowledged being impressed by Ionesco's experimenting with language in the play.<sup>215</sup> This avant-garde play implies both challenges and risks for its translators in China: Challenges, because some words and expressions in Ionesco's play are extremely difficult to render into another language; risks, because the experimentation with theatrical language to represent the characters' subconscious poses a threat to realist literary regimes.

Gao's Chinese translation of *La Cantatrice chauve* was anthologized in *Huangdan xiju ji* (The Selected Plays of the Theatre of the Absurd), which features a brief introduction to the playwright and his major plays, underlining the absurdity of the lifestyle of a bourgeois couple foregrounded by their irrational performance in the bizarre and symbolic stage designs that illustrate the nature of absurdity.<sup>216</sup> The introduction ends with a conclusion that reminds the reader that Ionesco's play is an indirect reflection of the postwar spiritual crisis in the West,

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215. See Annie Curien's interview with Gao Xingjian: "Gao Xingjian: entretien avec Annie Curien." *La Nouvelle revue française* 556, January 2001.

216. See Gao's Chinese translation in *Huangdan xiju xuan* [Selected Plays of the Theatre of the Absurd].

characterized by a sense of hopelessness and despair.

Gao adopted the same practice in his translation of Ionesco's masterpiece as he had used for his modernist poetry translations: Rewriting the foreign text according to the regimes of the target literary field and reproducing the desired effect to ensure a smooth reading, as seen in the following comparison between the French original and the Chinese translation:

M<sup>me</sup> Smith. Le poisson était frais. Je m'en suis léché les babines. J'en ai pris deux fois. Non, trois fois. Ça me fait aller aux cabinets. Toi aussi tu en as pris trois fois. Cependant la troisième fois, tu en as pris moins que les deux premières fois, tandis que moi j'en ai pris beaucoup plus. J'ai mieux mangé que toi, ce soir. Comment ça se fait ? D'habitude, c'est toi qui manges le plus. Ce n'est pas l'appétit qui te mangué.<sup>217</sup>

史密斯夫人：鱼倒是新鲜。我可没馋嘴，就吃了两块，不，三块。吃得我拉肚子你也吃了三块，可你那第三块比头两块小。我可比你吃得得多。今晚你比我吃的少。怎么搞的？往常总是你吃得更多。你可不是个没胃口的人呀。<sup>218</sup>

Referring to his experience in translating *La Cantatrice chauve*, Gao said that because Ionesco had invented a new language, he could not translate his French text word-for-word; otherwise, the result would be a dead translation.<sup>219</sup> Thus, Gao had to recreate something in the target text.

Ionesco's dialogue was inspired by his experience learning English sentence pattern drills. The characters imitate the mechanical way of expressing themselves in their daily lives, but the act of mechanical repetition reveals the lack of meaning in the bourgeois couple's banal

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217. Eugène Ionesco, *La Cantatrice chauve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 24.

218. See Gao's Chinese translation in *Huangdan xiju xuan* [Selected Plays of the Theatre of the Absurd], 182.

219. "Gao Xingjian in HSMC," Heng Seng University of Hong Kong (formerly Hang Seng Management College), February 24, 2012, <https://www.hsu.edu.hk/en/506-20120224/>.



modern life, and presents them as emblematic figures of human alienation. In Gao's Chinese version, we can hardly sense the couple's dialogue as sentence pattern drills, nor do we perceive their verbal behavior as mechanical repetition. Though it is presented in the corresponding colloquial Chinese style, the couple's dialogue loses its original local color in the Chinese version. For example, in the sentence "Je m'en suis léché les babines," the phrase "lécher les babines" is an idiomatic expression, meaning that someone is licking his/her lips like an animal, signaling that his/her appetite has been satisfied after a good meal. Gao's Chinese version is "我可没馋嘴," which can be translated word-for-word as "my mouth is not gluttonous," meaning that Mrs. Smith's mouth is not watering. Gao's translation lacks not only the cultural connotation of the original expression, showing how much the character loves her food, but also the implication that eating reduces Mrs. Smith to a soulless person.

However, Gao's translation does show some degrees of such verbal traces in Mrs. Smith's dialogue. Though the sentence pattern drills are not identifiable in Gao's text, the details exhibited in Mrs. Smith's conversation are still present in the Chinese version, which incoherently foregrounds how many pieces of fish they ate the previous day. Such trivial details further illuminate the banality of the couple's life, and show that although such banality is normal for them, it is exactly this aspect of their life that appears abnormal, constituting the core of the absurd situation that the playwright of the Theatre of the Absurd critiques.

The above examples show that Gao does not follow the original closely; he sometimes even restructures Ionesco's French version at the cost of its vividness and cultural connotations. Thus, his modernist *illusio* is compromised to a certain degree, although the translation is more readable in Chinese as a result. Similar examples of Gao's translational tendency can be identified throughout the play, as seen in the following example:

- M<sup>me</sup> Smith. Oui, mais avec l'argent on peut acheter tout ce qu'on veut.  
有钱能使鬼推磨。
- M. Martin. J'aime mieux tuer un lapin que chanter dans le jardin.  
我宁愿宰个兔子，也不到花园里唱歌。
- M. Smith. Kakatoes, kakatoes, kakatoes, kakatoes, kakatoes, kakatoes,  
kakatoes.  
白鸚鵡，白鸚鵡，白鸚鵡，白鸚鵡，白鸚鵡，白鸚鵡
- M<sup>me</sup> Smith. Quelle cacade, quelle cacade, quelle cacade, quelle cacade, quelle  
cacade, quelle cacade, quelle cacade,  
好一个尿屁屁，好一个尿屁屁，好一个尿屁屁，  
[...]
- M. Martin. Bizarre, beaux-arts, baiser.<sup>220</sup>  
画真美，尽亲嘴，真叫活见鬼。<sup>221</sup>

In the passage quoted above, Gao translates the original French into idiomatic Chinese. The neutral “avec l'argent on peut acheter tout ce qu'on veut” is easily translated into a familiar colloquial expression: “有钱能使鬼推磨;” the corresponding idiomatic English phrase is “money makes the mare go.” In addition, the repetition of “Kakatoes” in the original creates rhythm without clear meaning, in the manner of sentence pattern drills, or nonsense, but the rhythm of the sentence is recreated in the Chinese version by repeating “白鸚鵡” (white parrot), the literal translation of the word “Kakatoes.” The same can be said of the phrases “Quelle cacade” and “Bizarre, beaux-arts, baiser.” The alliterations of the nonsense phrases, “Quelle cacade” and “Bizarre, beaux-arts, baiser,” are transformed into the sentences with end rhymes based on their literal meanings. As Gao acknowledged, it is difficult to reproduce Ionesco's exact language invention; therefore, he reworked/recreated the sentences based on the meaning. Despite some lapses, we can still feel the rhythm within and the mechanical nonsense talk

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220. Eugène Ionesco, *La Cantatrice chauve*, 51-55.

221. Gao's Chinese translation in *Huangdan xiju xuan*, 241-243.

characteristic of absurdity in modern life, which serves as Ionesco's response to modernity.

By adopting idiomatic Chinese expressions and approximating both the nonsense monologues and the dialogue that is largely based on meanings in French, Gao adapts the original for the target reader, with the intent of highlighting some of the idiosyncratic modernist traits of Ionesco's play. As a result, the monotonous and mechanical life of the British couple is represented, but it lacks certain modernist *illusio* appeared in the original, such as the mechanical representation of the sentence-pattern-drill style of Mrs. Smith's conversation. In addition, several cultural and poetic features in the original are significantly reduced in the translation. In short, the modernist *illusio* present in Gao's translation is not a faithful representation of Ionesco's theatrical traits, but a modification of, or an engagement with, the Theatre of the Absurd, from which a different version of Chinese modernism emerges.

Compared to his translation of *La Cantatrice chauve*, Gao's *Che Zhan* is more of an original creation, though its intertextual links with Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot* still mark it as an adaptation. In an interview in France in 2000 shortly after he won the Nobel Prize, Gao recalled the circumstances under which he created one of his most influential plays: It was inspired by a walk on the busy streets of Beijing. Looking around at the people waiting for the bus, he involuntarily compared the scene with Beckett's *En attendant Godot*. Although he acknowledged the similar motif of waiting in both, Gao also reiterated that his play was different from Beckett's in many ways,<sup>222</sup> primarily that *Che Zhan* was more concerned with social reality than the more abstract *En attendant Godot*. Gao's response raises several questions: How and why did Beckett's play relate to Gao's project in the 1980s? How did Gao translate Beckett's modernism into the Chinese context?

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222. See Annie Curien's "Gao Xingjian: entretien avec Annie Curien."

Following a similar plot to Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot*, Gao's *Che Zhan* depicts a group of people of different backgrounds, all waiting for the bus to go to town. With strong aspirations for a better future and life in town, the passengers wait patiently in the bus station; however, ten years pass before they find out that the bus stop has been abandoned for a long time, and their waiting was all in vain. There is certainly a strong degree of absurdity involved, presented either as exaggeration or as normalized events. *Che Zhan* falls into the former case, a representation of a narrative event with a strong degree of exaggeration. The waiting for ten years is both an exaggeration and an understatement, which produces tragic effects but leads to an optimistic end, a significant difference from both Ionesco and Beckett, even as these plays share similar themes.

*Che Zhan* appropriates Beckett's theme and relates it to China. Both Beckett and Gao show tendencies of minimizing the traditional elements of plot, characterization, and unity of space and time. *En attendant Godot* does not have a plot in a conventional sense. The audience does not know the characters' background, nor do they know what they want, except their common goal: They are waiting for the arrival of an enigmatic figure, Godot. There is also no theatrical conflict, since even though all the characters talk amongst themselves and try to communicate, they do not understand what they are trying to say to each other. In *Che Zhan*, while the characters are labeled categorically simply as the salesman, student, unemployed, and others wait in the bus station, talking to each other and expressing their wishes, frustrations, and desire to go to town, with little or no theatrical conflict present.

Moreover, though both Gao and Beckett focus on the characters' absurd situation of waiting, the tones of their respective plays are somewhat different: Beckett's is more purely tragic, while Gao's strikes a more promising note in the end in his written play as compared to its

performance in theatre. Whereas Beckett's characters, Vladimir and Estragon, are decontextualized and abstract and wait for Godot in vain, Gao's characters, everyday people, are basically active and optimistic. Although various obstacles prevent them from leaving the bus stop, they are still hopeful and determined to pursue their goals by attempting to catch a bus bound for town, which will bring them better lives. The ten-year waiting period could allude to the ten years wasted during China's Cultural Revolution.<sup>223</sup>

The main link between Beckett's and Gao's plays lies in the latter's transfer of the absurdity of waiting from the French source text to the Chinese target text. However, because *Che Zhan* is an adaptation and not merely translation, characters, places, and storylines are transformed significantly and contextualized within the Chinese reality. In this respect, Gao's adaptation is resonant with Lin Shu's free translations of Western literary works, since both involve significant re-creations. Like Lin Shu's classical Chinese translations, which can be read independently without referring to their source texts, Gao's adaptation can be enjoyed on its own merits. Both Lin and Gao re-create their texts from rough ideas, stories, and hints in their Western sources. However, Gao's work was created in a different political and cultural context than Lin's, in which socialist realism still dominated the Chinese literary scene and forced Gao to meet rigid requirements before the play could be published or performed. Gao's play can thus be read in the frame of China's renewed modernization effort: Though people's aspirations for a bright future were wasted, they do not lose hope, but continue to seek their goals. However, such a reading has a serious limitation, because none of the characters' goals are associated with the grand narratives of the government, which promotes collective goals as opposed to the personal ones present in *Che Zhan*.

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223. See Sy Ren Quah's *Gao Xingjian and Transcultural Chinese Theatre*, 64-69.

Gao's play can also be read as a subversion of socialist realism and a satire of communism. *Che Zhan* is in direct conflict with the dominant literary mode and ideology, because it does not have revolutionary heroes as its protagonists, nor does it promise a utopian communist future to its audience. While the characters, several everyday people, try to catch a bus to the utopian land (the world of communism), their efforts are hindered by obstacles, and they are disoriented by the social system. In this sense, Gao's play allegorically subverts the political discourse of the Chinese pursuit of a communist utopia by presenting the futility of these efforts. Some conservative critics have read the potentially subversive meanings of Gao's play by openly denouncing it as a "pernicious" play that is "unharmonized" with realism.<sup>224</sup>

Gao's play adapts narrative techniques from Ionesco's *La Cantatrice chauve* as well as from Beckett's *En attendant Godot*. For example, he chooses the structure of sentence pattern drills to portray a bookish young man who wants to go to town for his college entrance exam, and adopts the multiple dialogue patterns both from the end of Ionesco's play and from Beckett's play to foreground the different banal and confusing visions of the ordinary people waiting for the bus. In so doing, he takes another significant step away from socialist realism.

In short, Gao echoes Lin Shu's way of translating/writing in his adaptation. He draws from the Theatre of the Absurd in general and *En attendant Godot* in particular in order to disrupt the dominant literary discourse in China. Strictly speaking, *Che Zhan* is a literary recreation that interacts with the works of Beckett and Ionesco through its author's engagement with Chinese literary modernity. In the Chinese context, the very act of introducing the modernist narratives of Gao and other writers showed their serious commitment to rescuing Chinese literature from the dominance of socialist realism in order to allow for more creative

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224. Gao, "Geer huanghua," in *Meiyou zhuyi* [No-ism], 158-166.

space in which literary production can flourish. Gao's review of modern Chinese literary history further confirms the goal of his endeavors in the early 1980s:

After 1949, China became a kind of Soviet socialist state, and it was impossible to have complete literary freedom, because Mao Zedong advocated several literary styles. One was revolutionary romanticism and the other was revolutionary realism, and my goal was to overturn this, or turn this on its head, but there was no way to do it directly. So the way I would write was to try to find an indirect way of overturning these styles. I was extremely careful at that time to not cross the line and I kept myself under control. That was how I went around writing at that time. I never imagined that what I wrote would create such problems for me.<sup>225</sup>

#### 1.4.0 Conclusion: Translating, Negotiating, and Creating Chinese Literary Modernism

Framed in Pierre Bourdieu's sociological concepts of habitus, field, *illusio* and symbolic capital, our discussion of Gao's translation agency to interact and negotiate with the regimes of the dominant Chinese literary discourse is significant to understand the nature of China's modernity. While situating Gao's work in China's modern literary history, we have demonstrated that his translations are a significant contribution to the formation of Chinese modernist literary discourse in general and the pluralization of the Chinese literary field in post-Mao era in particular.

During China's May Fourth era, a new vernacular literature emerged, and the development of its distinctive literary poetics depended on the translation and adaptation of foreign forms. In response, Li Jinfa's symbolist poetry introduced a new Western modernist poetics into the Chinese literary field, a radical departure from romantic and realistic writings. Highly original both in literary form and language style, symbolism significantly expanded the dimension of Chinese language and literature, although its translational quality and effects

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225. Derwei David Wang, "A Conversation with Gao Xingjian," Asia Society, last modified February 26, 2001, <https://asiasociety.org/conversation-gao-xingjian>.

conflicted with the doxa of the new literature, which sought popular acceptance.

As exemplified by Dai Wangshui's writings and translations, Chinese modernist poetry in the 1930s attempted to moderate foreignized translations by integrating traditional Chinese elements into modernist poetry. Influenced by Francis Jammes' conversational poetic style, Dai's later work further followed the logic of the literary field, which required both new forms and understandable language to inspire common people during the Anti-Japanese War. In a sense, Dai's modernist writing and translation were mutually dependent on each other. Unlike his predecessor Li Jinfa, Dai tried to negotiate the differences between the source and target languages and cultures to create new poetic imagery and language that were relevant to both the Chinese and the international literary field. His Chinese and French poems, which can be read as both familiar and foreign to their target readers, are mutually translatable, highlighting the intertextual relationship of his works with both Chinese poetics and global modernism, especially French modernism. Thus, Dai's agency as a poet-translator enriched the field of global modernism with his creative engagement.

In contrast, Mu Dan returned to the approach of Li Jinfa, characterized by a sense of "unchineseness" (foreignness). By choosing translation as a writing mode to produce effects of distancing or alienation, Mu Dan attempted to create a poetic language and style unfamiliar to the public, rather than degrading literature to mere propaganda tools for war mobilization. He adopted his more formal and visionary style to oppose the utilitarian encroachment on Chinese literature. However, his writing as translation signified the further marginalization of Chinese modernism, as the influences of the Soviet literary regimes gained momentum in China.

Gao continued literary modernism in post-Mao era. In his treatise on modernist techniques published in 1981, Gao champions modernism as a technique rather than an art, as



technique involves nothing ideological or political. He implicitly grounds his argument on the evolutionary logic that literary forms need constant renewal and renovation, much as science and technology need modernization. This argument draws heavily on the logic developed by the modernization program of the new era, that China needs new science and technology to become stronger. Xu Chi's article develops a similar argument, insisting that much as China needs its four modernizations, Chinese literature also needs to modernize itself by introducing socialist modernism.<sup>226</sup> Xu blends modernism and modernization together in order to legitimize the reintroduction of modernism.

Gao's treatise does not confront socialist realism directly, but translates modernism as discourse that does not necessarily conflict with socialist realism. Modernist techniques, such as those present in the Theatre of the Absurd, can be exploited and utilized to expose the absurdities of the capitalist system, something socialist realism avows. He makes similar arguments in his critical articles on translation. Thus, Gao legitimizes modernism in the Chinese context by sorting out the common traits of both modernism and realism. In his translation of Jacques Prévert's poetry, he highlights the shared features of the two literary currents: Colloquial language and ordinary people's lives. As such, Prévert can be called the "People's poet." In addition, Gao only chooses certain non-controversial poems for translation, which deal with subject matter relating to love, war, and everyday life. Furthermore, he reworks Prévert's poetic style by adding punctuation marks and by condensing and summarizing certain features that were at odds with the dominant literary norms. As exemplified by "Promenade de Picasso," this

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226. For the debate on modernism, see Huang Ping, "Xiandaipai taolun yu xin siqi wenxue de fenhua" [the Debate on "the School of Modernism" and the Division of "the Literature of the New Era"], *Yangtze jiang pinglun* [Yangtze Journal of Literary Criticism] 4 (2016): 41–55.

type of translation (as summary and simplification), further reduces the original poem's surrealist effects. Thus, Gao's translation mitigates the ground of modernism and realism, so that modernism could be less confrontational in the face of mainstream literary regimes.

Gao is not the only one who adopted these strategies to translate modernist literature. In the 1990s, Xia Minghan wrote a review of the Chinese version of William Faulkner's *Sound and Fury*, first published in 1984.<sup>227</sup> Xia criticized Li Wenjun's translation strategy, which made Faulkner's work as plain as an ordinary novel, while eliminating its modernist features: The transition of time and space in the narrative was marked or highlighted, and notes were added to remind the reader of associations and lapses. According to Xia, readers of this translation were likely to lose the pleasure of reading, discovering, and imagining. Another translator of Faulkner's works into Chinese, Tao Jie, responded to Xia's review by pointing out that Li was a conscientious translator with full professional integrity.<sup>228</sup> In fact, Li's translation encouraged readers' appreciation of Faulkner's novel because his works were considered too challenging for Chinese readers due to those readers' lack of familiarity with his modernist narratives or their background and allusions. In this context, Chinese readers certainly required guidance and clues to read such a difficult literary work. Most readers would, therefore, appreciate Li's translation as a serious effort to guide them toward understanding and gradually appreciating modernist literature.<sup>229</sup>

Gao renewed modernist literature in a different context than his predecessors. He

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227. See Xia's criticism, "Wenxue zuoping fanyi de zongsi wenti" [The Question of Faithfulness on Literary Translation], in *Zhongguo fanyi* [China Translators Journal], 1992(3): 38-42.

228. Tao Jie, "Li wenjun shi ge zizuo de laosi ren" [Li Wenjun is a Stubborn and Honest Man] in *Zhongguo fanyi* [The Journal of Translation in China], 1992(5): 28-31.

229. Tao, 28-31.

endeavored to introduce modernism to China through translation, literary criticism, and creative adaptation. Translation allowed him to draw inspiration from modernist writers in order to create his own works; the renewal and invention of modernism challenged socialist realism for more symbolic and cultural power and space, though he mediated and exploited some grey areas between modernism and realism. Furthermore, in the gradual progression from translation to adaptation/creation, from interlingual performance to free adaptation, a new alternative narrative mode was enabled and brought into being, which consequently contributed to the emergence and growth of a new literary field that challenged the dominance of government-sanctioned literature. Thanks to the work of writers and critics such as Gao, the officially dominant literary discourse could not sustain itself, and had to allow certain alternative modes of writing in the Chinese literary field. Gao's translation of modernism through mediation and negotiation further demonstrates Bourdieu's explication of how the agent(s) of translation and the structure of the literary field mutually constitute one another.

As an agent of translation, Gao negotiates the dominant socialist literary regimes by introducing modernist discourse in his translations, critical essays, short stories, and plays, from which his agency to modify the literary field is significant. However, in examining his translation practices, the question arises as to whether the modernism Gao translated and promoted in China is authentic. It should be noted, though, that modernity and modernism are not transcendent signifiers, nor are they master narratives. They are mediated cultural phenomena that must be contextualized both historically and globally. Instead of asking what the innate meaning of modernism in China is, or whether Gao has translated an authentic modernism into the Chinese literary field, it is more productive to examine the role(s) Gao's translation has played in introducing modernism into China, and, as an agent of translation, how he has negotiated and

overcome the overarching literary regimes for a more creative approach to translation: He poses as a (re)creator, rather than as a passive translator. Li Yi notes in her monograph on Chinese modernity that what we need to pay attention to is not whether Western modernity has been introduced in its entirety to China faithfully, but how the Chinese as agents experience, react to, imagine, and recreate it.<sup>230</sup> Gao's translational experience has responded well to what Li Yi discusses in her work.

Gao's translation in the era of China's reform and opening-up also demonstrates that his main agenda was not to introduce literary modernism to the Chinese literary field so that the latter could be synchronized with the West and be placed in a position to win more symbolic capital in the international literary field, or to be brought closer to the literary centers represented by Paris, New York, and London. Gao's role as an active translator and writer indicates that he negotiates the modern Chinese literary field by appropriating modernist poetics to destabilize the dominant discourse of socialist realism and allow for more literary freedom and individual voices in the reform era of China, eventually gaining more symbolic capital and social space in the Chinese literary field. In doing so, his translation performance has both literary and political significance, reflecting his resilience against the marginalization imposed by, and the dominance of, the state apparatus. Thus, Gao's translation is an instance of appropriation of Western literature and culture, "Occidentalism" as Chen Xiaomei states in her monograph. Gao's effort inspired others to push forward in changing the Chinese literary field and making socialist realism one of many options rather than an overarching power.<sup>231</sup>

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230. Li Yi, *Xiandai xing: pipan de pipan* [Modernity: A Critique of Criticism] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2006).

231. China's leading literary journal, *Renmin wenxue* [People's Literature], optimistically predicted in 1987 that Chinese literature would become more and more plural when China deepened its reform and opening to the outside world. See "Geng ziyou di shandong wenxue de

## Chapter 2 *Lingshan (La Montagne de l'âme)* in France

### 2.0 Introduction

During the 1980s, China's literary field was fraught with tension. For the adherents of orthodox socialist realism, fighting for symbolic capital meant the maintenance of its dominance in the social and cultural space during the era of China's reform and opening-up; for more liberal-minded writers, alternative writing modes divergent from socialist realist literature offered them more opportunities to gain symbolic capital and political legitimacy, and many did make significant impacts in the Chinese literary field.<sup>232</sup>

Gao's literary career, for instance, fluctuated with this struggle. His play, *Bus Stop*, was put on the stage for a brief time and was subsequently banned for its modernist theatrical mode and hidden subversive political satire. The same occurred with his other modernist play *Bi An* (The Other Shore, 1986), a highly experimental play that was rehearsed, but was banned before its premiere as the Chinese government tightened control of literature.<sup>233</sup> Gao had no way to continue his literary experimentation in China, and so he went into exile in 1987. His departure from China signaled his determination to cut ties with an oppressive literary environment and embrace an opportunity to create freely. Consequently, Gao's exile ushered in his most productive period.

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chibang" [Spreading the Wings of Literature with Freedom], in *Renmin wenxue* 328-329, no. 1-2 (January 1987): 4-5.

232. Noël Dutrait, "Preface" in Gao Xingjian's *La Montagne de l'âme*, trans. Noël and Liliane Dutrait (L'Édition de L'Aube, 1995), 5-8. Also see Chapter 16 of Hong Zicheng's, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, trans. Michael M. Day (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 257-274.

233. Sy Ren Quah, *Gao Xingjian and Transcultural Chinese Theatre*, 10 -11.

After settling down in France in 1988, Gao created a number of important works in both Chinese and French, among which is his novel *Lingshan*. Conceived in 1982 and completed in 1989, Gao's novel marks his highest literary achievement and has brought him international prestige.

Largely based on his experience as a traveler, Gao's *Lingshan* presents his journeys along the Yangtze River when he was forced into exile during China's Antiburgeois Spiritual Pollution Campaign, which had begun in 1983. During that period, Gao had to escape from possible political prosecution for his controversial play *Che Zhan*. Moreover, his escape was also complicated by an incorrect diagnosis of lung cancer, the same disease that had caused his father's early death.<sup>234</sup> The medical error also forced Gao to rethink the meaning of his life in the space and time of Chinese history. However, in the middle of his trip, he learned that his doctor had made a mistake and he did not have lung cancer after all. Though he was relieved to hear the news, he continued his travels nonetheless.

In all, Gao made three trips in China's South and Southwest along the Yangtze River.<sup>235</sup> During these journeys, he experienced a different China, with marginal yet rich traditional cultures: Taoist rituals, shamanist tradition, and colorful local legends. These trips were taken against a looming political tension beyond these cultural contact zones. On his journeys, Gao attempted to explore the meaning of his existence as a writer who wanted to articulate his weak personal voice in face of mounting political pressures. Thus, his escape into the hinterland of

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234. Gao recalls the incorrect diagnosis of lung cancer in Chapter 12 of *Lingshan*.

235. Gao Xingjian, "Wenxue yu xuanxue guanyu lingshan" (Literature and Metaphysics: Lingshan), in *Meiyou zhuyi* [No-ism], 167-182. Also see Noël Dutrait's "Gao Xingjian: une œuvre riche et foisonnante [bibliographie d'un Nobel]," *Perspectives chinoises* 63, no. 1 (2001): 66-70.

China can be viewed symbolically as his pilgrimage to discover the diverse rich cultural traditions of the country, which have been marginalized and stifled by China's dominant Confucian values and communist ideology, and his attempt to re-evaluate and valorize these marginal cultures.

*Lingshan* was published in Taiwan by the end of 1990. Subsequently, the novel was translated into Swedish, French and English. Gao himself had never imagined that this novel would win him accolades, including the Nobel Prize, at the turn of the twenty-first century.<sup>236</sup> In 2000, the Swedish Academy awarded Gao the Nobel Prize in Literature, making him the first author of Chinese origin to win the award. Gao was chosen as the laureate largely on the basis of *Lingshan*, though his other novel, *Yigeren de shengjing* (One Man's Bible, hereafter referred to as *Yigeren*) is also mentioned in the Nobel Prize Committee's communiqué.

Gao's winning the Nobel Prize attracted the attention of general readers and literary critics alike. Many critics asked the following questions: Was Gao's winning of the Nobel Prize an indication of the universal recognition of Chinese literature? Why did the Nobel Committee give such an honor to Gao, a relatively new writer in China? Was it politically motivated? Given the differences between the Chinese language and culture and those of the West, did the choice indicate that Gao was giving in to Western values?<sup>237</sup>

Though the above questions are crucial to both the general public and literary critics, they also seem to regard Gao's works either as universal signifiers or as binaries. The former reading indicates the possibility of Gao's values acquiring universal ramifications beyond the limits of the local. The latter reading seems to give credence to the view of the official Chinese news

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236. "Gao Xingjian: Facts," NobelPrize.org, last modified October 12, 2000, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2000/gao/facts/>.

237. Julia Lovell, *The Politics of Cultural Capital*, 163-184.

release that the Western acceptance of Chinese literature can be seen as a conspiracy against China, because the West and China are fundamentally different.<sup>238</sup>

These arguments are problematic because they are entrenched in the logic of either the transcendent symbolic capital of the Western literary field, or the essential incommensurability between China and the West. For the purposes of this project, the core of the matter lies in the overall ignorance of translation in the global literary movement and the acquisition of symbolic capital. Thus, instead of asking whether a Chinese writer winning a prestigious award means that universal values are being recognized, more productive and nuanced questions should be asked. Because Gao's works were mainly written in Chinese, how did translation mediate the languages and cultures of the target milieu, transferring the particular to the universal? Specifically, since major European languages such as English, French and others have dominated the international literary field, the reach for international audiences must overcome language barriers. Translation into a dominant language is a prerequisite for a literary work to enter into the field of world literature. Because the canonization of Gao's work is closely related to its translatability, the key question should be refashioned as follows: How did translation contribute to the acceptance of a local novel as a work of international significance? Moreover, a subsidiary question must also be asked: Since many critics consider Gao's masterpiece *Lingshan* a modernist novel, what does modernism mean to the Western literary field(s) through translation?

Since Gao was awarded the Nobel Prize, much scholarly work about him has focused on the translingual aspects of his works. They discuss his works as a transcultural/universal signifier by examining how his narratives travel between languages and cultures and hence gain universal values.<sup>239</sup> However, this exclusive emphasis on Gao's universal literary values appears

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238. Julia Lovell, 163-184.



problematic because his novel was written in Chinese, and its narrative is related to China's reality and Gao's experiences in a specific time and place. This means that Gao's novel is not ahistorical and not unrestrained by its geographical references. Therefore, the question of how Gao's work overcomes deictic indexes to earn universal validity still remains. For this study, to translate this particular narrative into the international/dominant literary field as defined by Pascale Casanova, one must first translate the Chinese text interlingually. Second, interlingual activity does not automatically lead to the canonization of a certain literary work, as such activity is not a unilateral operation, but must fit into the social and cultural spaces of the target milieu, which condition translation regimes, translator's agency, translation strategies, publication policies, cultural politics, and the requirements of the target language(s) and literature(s). These conditions determine the strategies a translator adopts and the role(s) that the translation product can play. However, current research has focused exclusively on the translingual aspects of Gao's work. This means that a comparative study of a text in terms of its metonymic relationship with other foreign texts can validate and determine that text's universal validity. Despite the critical function of the research focus, one cannot dismiss the essential aspect of a literary text in the international literary field: Interlingual translation is fundamental to its openness to and reception

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239. See Henry Y.H. Zhao, *Towards a Modern Zen Theatre: Gao Xingjian and Chinese Theatre Experimentalism*; Zhang Yinde, "Gao Xingjian," in *Le Monde romanesque chinois au XXe siècle: Modernités et identités*, 300–316; Shu-mei Shih, "Global Literature and Technologies of Recognition," *PMLA* 1, no. 119, Special Topic: *Literature at Large* (2004): 16–30; Sy Ren Quah, *Gao Xingjian and Transcultural Chinese Theater*; Mabel Lee, "The Writer as Translator: On the Creative Aesthetics of Gao Xingjian," in *Culture in Translation: Reception of Chinese Literature in Comparative Perspective*, 1–18; Zhang Yingjin, "Cultural Translation Between the World and the Chinese: The Problematics in Positioning Nobel Laureate Gao Xingjian," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 31, no. 2 (2005): 127–144.

in a target milieu. The study of this aspect of translation and its related social and cultural space merits more academic attention.

With all of this in mind, *Lingshan*'s translation and reception must be contextualized with the social and cultural spaces of the target milieu. Since *Lingshan*'s publication in Taiwan and its subsequent translations into Swedish, French, English, other languages, its reception has been noticeably different before and after Gao won the Nobel Prize. Before he was awarded the prize, the French version of his novel was successful, but it was only after he won that the Chinese-speaking communities outside mainland China and the Anglophone world responded favorably to his novel. The questions to be asked are why *Lingshan* was received well in France while it was not widely known in Taiwan, its place of origin, before Gao earned the Nobel Prize, and what roles, if any, the French translation played in its promotion as a work of world literature before and after the award. Gao's earning the Nobel Prize marked an institutional recognition of his achievements as a writer, and by extension, the validation of the translation(s) of *Lingshan*, a matter that transcends the notion of translation as an interlingual phenomenon.

As the Bourdieusian sociological translation approach proposes, the translation of a literary work must first meet homological conditions in the target language and literature. Based on the conditionality of its reception, a source text will receive new life in the target social and cultural space. Therefore, the focus on translation has more to do with the question of how the translator's habitus interacts with the regimes of the target literary field. As explained in the "Introduction" chapter of this dissertation, the translator's habitus mainly includes the agents of translation, such as the translator, translation professional organization, publishing houses, markets, translation regimes, cultural politics, and others. The requirements of the literary field refer to the regimes, or requirements of how symbolic capital is accumulated, sanctioned and

canonized (distributed). The more symbolic capital one has, the more cultural (and economic) power one has in the competitive social and cultural space of the target literary field.<sup>240</sup> From this perspective, the acceptance of Gao's work, via translation, is relevant to the questions of whether the French and English translations of his novel meet the regimes of each respective literary field, or whether Gao, as an agent of translation, has brought something new to these fields.

Consequently, as Gao's *Lingshan* has achieved universal visibility primarily through its French translation, and to a lesser extent its Swedish and English translation, this chapter investigates the logic and mechanism of how the French literary field validated and canonized the translation. It also examines the linguistic characteristics of the translation and the strategies adopted by the translator in relation to the requirements of the French literary community.

The first part of this discussion focuses on the universality of *Lingshan* according to scholars of Chinese studies in Sweden, France, Australia, China, and Taiwan; it then examines the homological conditions of the French literary field into which *Lingshan* was translated and received. This is followed by our analyses of the paratextual and textual details in both the Chinese and French versions of Gao's novel to trace the transformation of the work from the source to the target social and cultural space. The chapter concludes with an examination of French reviews of Gao's novel and its translation, seeking to respond to the question of whether Noël Dutrait's French translation has met the expectations of the target readers. It should be noted, however, that this study is not intended to speculate on the reasons why Gao won the Nobel Prize.

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240. Jean-Marc Gouanvic, "A Bourdieusian Theory of Translation, or the Coincidence of Practical Instances," *The Translator* 11, no. 2 (2005): 147-166.

### 2.1.0 *Lingshan* and World Recognition

On October 12, 2000, the Swedish Academy announced its decision to award the Nobel Prize in Literature to Gao Xingjian. The Academy's communiqué summarized Gao's achievement as "an œuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese novel and drama."<sup>241</sup> As he was the first writer of Chinese origin to win the prize, Gao's accomplishment came as a surprise to many Chinese communities, because the majority of Chinese readers were not familiar with his work, but it was regarded as a marker of world recognition of Chinese literary activity. However, the announcement was not as surprising in France, because since his arrival there Gao had written a number of plays in both Chinese and French, two long novels, and several essay collections. He was made Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 1992 by the French government for his outstanding cultural contribution, especially in contemporary theatre. In addition, his two Chinese novels, *Lingshan* and *Yigeren*, were translated into French in, respectively, 1995 and 1999; the former won the Prix du Nouvel an chinois in 1997. Gao's popularity in Europe was also strongly influenced by his translators, Göran David Malmqvist (1924-2019) and Noël Dutrait.

Before the publication of *Lingshan* by Taiwan's Lianjing Chubanshe (Linking Publishing House) in 1991, Malmqvist, a Chinese studies scholar at the University of Stockholm, suggested revisions to the draft and recommended its publication in Taiwan.<sup>242</sup> Malmqvist, who had studied the ancient language of southwest China, was familiar with the historical background of Gao's short stories and novels. He was the first scholar who translated Gao's short stories and *Lingshan*

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241. "Gao Xingjian: Facts," NobelPrize.org, last modified, October 12, 2000, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2000/gao/facts/>.

242. See Ma Sen, "Preface," in Gao Xingjian's *Lingshan* (Taipei: Lianjing/Linking Publishing House, 1990): 12.

into Swedish. In particular, Malmqvist took a great interest in *Lingshan*, which was loosely inspired by Gao's experience in the same region in which Malmqvist had worked.<sup>243</sup>

Malmqvist was elected to the Swedish Academy in 1985, an organization best known for the selection of the laureates of the Nobel Prize in Literature. Since he was the only Chinese-speaking member of the Academy at the time, Malmqvist had not hesitated to introduce Gao's works to Swedish readers and to the Nobel Prize Committee. He openly claimed that it was his recommendation that earned Gao the Nobel Prize in Literature.<sup>244</sup> In fact, Malmqvist had begun to translate *Lingshan* into Swedish even before it was published in Taiwan; the translation was published in 1992, a little over a year after the Chinese version was published in 1990.

According to Noël Dutrait, the French translator of *Lingshan*, the permanent secretary of the Nobel Prize Committee personally informed him that the Nobel Committee members consulted Gao's *Lingshan* mainly based on his French translation, because they were fluent French speakers.<sup>245</sup> Malmqvist confirmed Dutrait's statement in an interview with Chao Chang-Ching, in which he noted that the committee members had evaluated Dutrait's French translation, but some had also consulted his Swedish translation.<sup>246</sup>

However, while Malmqvist played a significant role in recommending Gao's works to the Nobel Committee, his translation of Gao's most important work did not appear to have been well

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243. Ma, 12.

244. Cao Chang-ching, "Nobel Translator Taken to Task," *The Taipei Times*, last modified February 17, 2001, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2001/02/17/74068>.

245. Wang Mingxing, "Entretien avec Noël Dutrait, traducteur de *La Montagne de l'âme* de Gao Xingjian," *Alternative francophones* 2, no. 1 (2017).

246. Cao, "Nobel Translator Taken to Task."

received in Sweden.<sup>247</sup> In contrast, Dutrait's French version enjoyed a much greater reputation: Before the announcement of the Nobel Prize Committee's decision on October 12, 2000, 6000 copies of the novel had been sold in France,<sup>248</sup> a respectable figure for a French translation of a Chinese novel. In addition, many French literary journals, newspapers, and magazines gave the novel positive reviews, which will be further discussed later in this study. The popularity of the French version was evident from the English version having been accepted and published by HarperCollins Australia just three months before Gao earned the Nobel Prize.<sup>249</sup> Further evidence for the influence of the French translation on its English counterpart can be seen on the back cover for the first Flamingo edition, an imprint of HarperCollins Australia, in 2000, as the French reviews were reprinted at the top of the page.<sup>250</sup> Moreover, according to the sales figures released by Dutrait, by May 2014 over 350,000 copies of the French version of *Lingshan* had been sold,

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247. In his letter dated Dec. 17, 2000 to *The Los Angeles Times*, Malmqvist clarifies the reason he transferred the publishing rights of his Swedish version of *Lingshan* from Forum to another publisher, Atlantis, before the Nobel Prize Committee's decision to choose Gao as the laureate in 2000: "Forum's publication of my translation of 'Soul Mountain,' to my mind the greatest novel of the twentieth century, passed utterly unnoticed. It simply drowned in the flood of popular books of little or no literary value, among them translations of works by Jackie Collins, which in the last decade have been published by Forum." N.G.D. Malmqvist, "Letter from Stockholm," *Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 2000, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2000-dec-17-bk-973-story.html>.

248. Before Gao was awarded the Nobel Prize, the French translation of *Lingshan* sold 6000 copies over five years, according to *Le monde*, November 9, 2000.

249. See Mabel Lee, "The Writer as Translator: On the Creative Aesthetics of Gao Xingjian," in *Culture in Translation: Reception of Chinese Literature in Comparative Perspective*, eds. Kelly Kar-yue Chan and Kwok-kan Tam (Hong Kong: Open University of Hong Kong Press, 2012), 1-18.

250. Gao Xingjian, *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee (Sydney: Flamingo, 2000).

an unprecedented number in the French publishing industry for a translation from Chinese.<sup>251</sup> Gao's winning the Nobel Prize helped to promote its sales as well. More importantly, the quality of the French translation was praised, with some readers claiming that Dutrait's translation was better than Gao's original.<sup>252</sup> For instance, in his comparison between Mabel Lee's English translation and Dutrait's French translation, Leo Ou-fan Lee claims that Lee's rendition is faithful to the original but "wooden," which, along with his citation of the positive comments on the French version, may imply that the French translation was instrumental in the Nobel Committee's decision.<sup>253</sup> The Chinese Swedish literary critic and one of the founders of the well-known underground literary journal in Beijing, *Jintian (Today)*, Chen Maiping, also notes that the French translation of *Lingshan* was one of the factors that contributed to Gao's winning of the Nobel Prize.<sup>254</sup>

Meanwhile, because of the hegemonic symbolic status of English and the publicity from the Nobel win, the sales figures of the English version have exceeded those of the French version, while the Swedish version is not widely known outside its home country.<sup>255</sup> These sales

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251. Wu Yixuan, "yijie de baiduren- aikesimasaidaxue Noël Dutrait jiaoshou xilie jiangzuo" [The Ferryman of the Translation Field-The Serial Talks by Professor of Aix-Marseilles University, Noël Dutrait], *Pariscope* (2014): 23-26.

252. Cao, "Nobel Translator Taken to Task."

253. Leo Lee Ou-fan, "Happy Exiles," in *Musings: Reading Hong Kong, China and the World* (Hong Kong: East Slope Publishing Ltd., 2011), 100-108.

254. Chen Maiping, "Yiyi guanzhi de wenxue zidao" [Overarching Principles of Literature], in Yang Lian's *Xiaoyang ruliao: Gao Xingjian zuoping Yanjiu* [As Free as Birds: Papers on Gao Xingjian's Works] (Taipei: Linking Publishing House, 2012), 38.

255. See Wang Mingxing's "Entretien avec Noel Dutrait, traducteur de *La Montagne de l'âme* de Gao Xingjian" and Lily Liu's "Interview with Mabel Lee," *Translation Review* 62, no. 1 (2001): 7.

figures suggest that the question of Gao's universal reputation is not as related to the original text as it is to the French and English translations. Studying the reception of Gao's work is pertinent to the rendering of his works first in French and then in English.

However, studies of *Lingshan*'s translation have been scarce in contrast to the commentaries on the original Chinese versions of this novel and Gao's other works. Although studies of *Lingshan*'s foreign language versions have been relatively rare, articles have been published in Taiwan on either the French or the Spanish translations of *Lingshan*, emphasizing the problems of translating Chinese culture into European cultural systems.<sup>256</sup> In China, articles and theses on the translation and reception of Gao's works in Europe have appeared only recently.<sup>257</sup> Though these efforts have contributed to the study of Gao's works in translation in their various contexts, a systematic investigation on this topic has yet to be undertaken. The very limited interest in Gao's novels in translation also contrasts with recent efforts among Chinese scholars to categorize the rules of canonization in the international literary field.

Since Mo Yan was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2012, many studies of the role of translation in his earning the award have focused solely on Howard Goldblatt's English versions of his works.<sup>258</sup> However, Goldblatt dismissed this by reiterating that versions in many languages

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256. See Cheng An-chyun's "L'Obstacle culturel dans la traduction franco-chinoise: la case notamment de Gao Xingjian," *Tamkang Studies of Foreign Languages and Literatures*, no. 4 (2006); Ling Chingyu, "Lingshan xibanya wen wenhua luocha yu fanyi jichao" [The Difficulties in Rendering Cultural Particularities in the Spanish version of *Lingshan* and translation skill], *Shijie wenxue* [World Literature], no. 2 (2002).

257. See Huang Yanjie, "Fanyi weimei, chuanglei kailu: guoan yanjiu Gao Xingjian de Luobei er wenxue jiang" [Translation as a Mediation and Power Opens the Road to Ascension: A Case Study of Gao Xingjian's Winning of the Nobel Prize for Literature], *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching Journal*, no. 1, 2011; Shui Yanan, "La Réception de *La Montagne de l'âme* en Europe," MA thesis, The Ocean University of China, 2013.

258. Wang Ning, "Chinese Literature as World Literature," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 45, no. 3 (2016): 380-92.



contributed to Mo Yan's recognition. Indeed, Mo Yan invited seven of his translators to accompany him to the Nobel Prize ceremony in Stockholm as a token of his appreciation of their efforts.<sup>259</sup> Even so, some Chinese scholars have overlooked that Mo Yan's works had been praised even before they had been translated into English. For example, *Jiuguo (Le Pays de l'alcool)* won the Prix Laure Bataillon de la meilleure œuvre de littérature étrangère traduite in France in 2000. This underemphasis can be attributed to Chinese scholars' belief in the hegemony of English and to their desire to avoid the contentious nature of Chinese politics; notably, whereas Gao's work is still banned in China, Mo Yan has been honoured by the Chinese government.

Despite the seeming imbalance in scholarly attention to these two Chinese Nobel laureates, Chinese scholars do seem to exhibit the same concern as to how Chinese translators can choose more effective translation strategies to earn a greater international reputation and thus more symbolic capital. This has largely reflected the Chinese desire for more cultural capital commensurable with the country's rise. In their eyes, Goldblatt's rewriting of Mo Yan's works has helped to promote those works in the West, so his translations are worthy of study in order to gain symbolic capital.<sup>260</sup>

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259. Mo Yan invited seven of his translators to attend the Nobel Prize ceremony: Howard Goldblatt (U.S.), Anna Gustafsson Chen (Swedish), Tomio Yoshida (Japanese), Noël Dutrait (French), Chantal Chen-Andro (French), Brith Sæthre (Norwegian), Patrizia Liberati (Italian). See Howard Goldblatt, "A Mutually Rewarding yet Uneasy and Sometimes Fragile Relationship between Author and Translator," in *Mo Yan in Context*, eds. Angelica Duran and Huang Yuhua (Purdue UPS, 2014), 23-36.

260. Of the academic articles and monographs published in China since Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize in 2012, overwhelming number of academic articles address this translation issue. By simply inputting the key words "Mo Yan" and "translation" in China's largest academic search databank, [www.cnki.net](http://www.cnki.net), more than thousands of articles, thesis and dissertations are to appear, many of which deal with the issues of how Mo Yan's novels were translated successfully in the West, in particular, in English-speaking countries.

By contrast, when Gao won the Nobel Prize, he was regarded as a French citizen, and his works were seen as Orientalist and aiming to please the West.<sup>261</sup> However, this approach still underscores a desire for universal recognition, which raises the question of how a Chinese writer is translated into universality.

### 2.1.1 *Lingshan* and its “Universality”

In the Nobel Prize Committee’s communiqué of 2000, Gao’s *Lingshan* is singled out as “one of those singular literary creations that seem impossible to compare with anything but themselves” that “recalls German Romanticism’s magnificent concept of a universal poetry.”<sup>262</sup> The first impression of this novel is that it is like a travelogue, without the conventional sense of plot and character development. The whole novel appears to be built on the narrator’s impressions during his travels from the upper reaches of the Yangtze River to other parts of Southwestern China, set against an intense political atmosphere. However, there is more to the novel than just Gao’s personal experience. During his search for Lingshan (the Soul Mountain), the protagonist hopes to find an ultimate meaning in life. Gao explores the meaning in marginalized yet thriving native cultures and heritages, represented by ethnic rites, ancient folklore, stories of bandits and ghosts, Taoist traditions and Buddhist rituals. Therefore, Gao’s highly autobiographical novel can be considered a spiritual pilgrimage, during which the narrator mingles his own travel experiences with his spiritual search in the marginalized but lively ethnic minority cultural environment that is different from the mainstream repressive culture. From his journeys, Gao attempts to imagine a spiritual space outside the dominant Chinese culture.

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261. Huang Yanjie, “Fanyi weimei, chuanglei kailu.”

262. “Gao Xingjian: Facts,” NobelPrize.org, last modified October 12, 2000, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2000/gao/facts/>.

Moreover, the novel foregrounds Gao's option of the personal pronouns "I," "you," and "s/he," in the narrative in lieu of proper names. The Nobel Prize Committee considers this choice of pronouns innovative, as demonstrated in its communiqué:

The book is a tapestry of narratives with several protagonists who reflect each other and may represent aspects of one and the same ego. With his unrestrained use of personal pronouns Gao creates lightning shifts of perspective and compels the reader to question all confidences. This approach derives from his dramas, which often require actors to assume a role and at the same time describe it from the outside. I, you, and he/she become the names of fluctuating inner distances.<sup>263</sup>

While considering *Lingshan* the foremost of Gao's works, the Nobel Prize Committee also briefly mentions *Yigeren* and several of his plays. The communiqué identifies *Lingshan* as his masterpiece for its universal poetic value and highly innovative narrative structure. When Gao planned *Lingshan* as early as 1982, he focused mainly on certain limited aspects of Chinese society. In a conference held in Beijing, Gao briefly outlined his plan for the novel to a group of fellow writers:

我这部长篇计划写江南的某个山乡近一个世纪以来人们生活的变迁和几代人的命运。我虽然有过几年山区生活的积累，但用来结构一部长篇仍觉得素材尚不够丰富，因此还准备再跑几个不同的山区，当然都在南方。如今，不少作家都在研究我们这个民族的性格，通常习惯于认为北方人粗犷刚毅，南方人柔弱多情。我则想写一部南方的强者文学，一种非阿Q的性格，我以为这也是饱经苦难而终于崛起于世界东方的我们这个民族的精神。这也许是一些似乎陈旧了的故事，我却想找寻一种现代小说的结构方式和一些能与之相适应的叙述语面。<sup>264</sup>

In this novel, I plan to write about the transformation of the fate and the life of the people in a certain village in Southern China over a century. Though I lived in the mountainous villages in the past, the first-hand materials I have for this project are still not sufficient. So, I've decided to go to several different regions in the south. At present, many writers are studying our national characters and they tend to portray northerners as tough and

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263. See note 263 above.

264. See Gao's speech in *Dang dai* [Contemporary] no. 5 (1983): 251.

southerners as sentimental. However, what I want to write is a kind of literature highlighting the characters of the strong southerners, a non-Ah Q type of character. I think that this is the national spirit of a rising China in the East, which hangs on a great traumatic past. Maybe this novel will be composed of some old-fashioned stories, but I want to look for a new structure and narrative language compatible with what we have called the modern novel.<sup>265</sup>

This passage demonstrates Gao's intention to depict a hidden aspect of the Chinese national character, with northerners seen as pillars of the nation and southerners seen as feminine or weak, as in Lu Xun's episodic novella "The True Story of Ah Q." Through his novel, Gao sought the national spirit in the context of China's switch to modernity in the 1980s, a juncture that marked an identity crisis and a search for what constituted the true national spirit. This trend was later known as "Literature of Seeking Roots." Many well-known writers such as Mo Yan, Han Shaogong, Wang Meng, and others joined the search for China's lost cultural traditions. However, as Gao left China in 1987 for France, his relevance for this literary effort was largely unimportant.

Written in Chinese, *Lingshan* highlights Gao's experiences as an individual searching for Chinese civilizations in order to re-narrativize his own self in the space of modernity. However, as a personal narrative against the dominant master narrative, the novel also poses the problem of how it transcends its locality to reach international audiences. This question is important because it largely determines not only what a Chinese novel narrates, but also how it is relevant to other parts of the world. However, from its publication in Taiwan in 1990 until 2000, only a few academic articles and reviews dealt with Gao's two Chinese novels *Lingshan* and *Yigeren*, most notable among which were Torbjörn Lodén's two articles published in the early 1990s. One of his articles exclusively discusses Gao's *Lingshan* in relation to world literature. Thus, it is

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265. My translation.

imperative to examine what these critics have to say about Gao's works. Moreover, because Gao's novel passed without much notice in Taiwan and China, it is its French and English versions that attracted the attention of readers in the West and paved the way for the novel's canonization as an important work of world literature. Hence, further study of how Gao's Chinese novel overcame its language barriers to gain international recognitions in other languages, particularly Swedish, French and English, is essential. Such an examination begins with the initial responses to *Lingshan* by Chinese and foreign critics and translators, including Taiwanese critic Ma Sen's preface to the novel as well as commentaries by Chinese studies scholars and Gao's translators, from both Chinese and Western perspectives. From their views, we will identify what constitutes *Lingshan*'s "universality."

In the preface of Gao's Chinese version of *Lingshan*, Ma Sen, a Chinese/Francophone modernist playwright in Taiwan, emphasizes Gao's contribution to modern Chinese literature.<sup>266</sup> For Ma, Gao's novel constitutes a turning point for modern Chinese literature for his serious commitment in fiction as an art form. Ma then argues that in modern Chinese literary history, fiction was instrumentalized mainly as a political vehicle, beginning with the China's May Fourth Movement in 1919 and continuing to the end of the Cultural Revolution. When a new generation of Chinese writers began to reorient themselves to the notion of literature as art, Gao responded to this trend with its innovative prose style and its use of the personal pronouns "I," "you" and "s/he" as a unique narrative form in *Lingshan*. These characteristics of Gao's novel have helped to modernize the contemporary Chinese literary field.<sup>267</sup>

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266. See Ma Sen's introduction in *Lingshan* (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe, 1991): 1-12.

267. Ma Sen's "Preface," 11.

Like Ma Sen, Chinese critic Liu Zaifu (who is also Gao's close friend), in his 1998 review of *Lingshan*, praises Gao's innovative use of pronouns. In addition, for Liu, Gao's novel is an analogue of Homer's *Odyssey*, presenting a pilgrimage to (re)visit Chinese cultures that have been marginalized by normative centralized cultural values. Liu insists that Gao's narration from diverse angles contextualizes Chinese ethnic conditions along the Yangtze River with the universal existence of human beings in the modern era, thus transcending national boundaries. Liu also refers to *Yigeren*, maintaining that Gao takes up the pronouns "I" and "you" to highlight his traumatic experience during China's Cultural Revolution, though the novel is not written in a documentary style. Liu insists that, by using the new narrative form, Gao represents a brutal reality, not from a realistic point of view, but as an observer with modern sense and philosophical depth, emphasizing his concern for universal human conditions.<sup>268</sup>

Henry Zhao writes that Gao intentionally avoids the dominant Han and communist cultures and focuses on the minority and peripheral cultures distant from the power centre of Beijing, in order to resist the cultural values that have stifled individual voices and freedoms. Though Gao does not articulate this opposition openly, his gestures of resistance and inventive literary narratives help to transcend national concerns.<sup>269</sup>

In his unpublished monograph on *Lingshan*, Noël Dutrait admits that since its publication in Taiwan in 1990, Gao's novel was known to only relatively few readers,<sup>270</sup> but he alerts us to

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268. See Liu Zaifu, "Gao Xingjian yu lingshan" [Gao Xingjian and His *Lingshan*], *Lianhe wenxue* [Unitas Literature Journal], January 1999. Also see the preface of Gao Xingjian's *Lingshan* (Hong Kong: Cosmos Publishing Company Ltd., 2000), 1-4.

269. Henry Zhao, *Towards a Modern Zen Theatre* (London: London School of Oriental and African studies, 2000), 103-107.

270. Noël Dutrait's unpublished monograph, *La Montagne de l'âme et les conceptions littéraires de Gao Xingjian*, l'Université de Provence, November 1996.

the novel's personal pronouns as an important innovation unparalleled in modern Chinese literature. Meanwhile, Dutrait also identifies the themes in the novel told in the complex psyche of "I," "you" and "s/he:" The search for the spirit through the narrative account of Lingshan (the Soul Mountain), truth, and death; the search for anthropological, mythological and historical traces in the politically uncontaminated regions of China; the search for love as represented by erotic fantasies or imagined or real encounters; the search for nature and "wild man" and the search for his past childhood memories. Dutrait insists that in his personal narrations, Gao truly reflects a real China, just beginning to escape the mires of the Cultural Revolution, through the prism of the inner mind of an individual at the margins of Chinese society. Gao could do so largely because of his deep theoretical reflection on modern fiction as an art, which is evident from his earlier theoretical treatise. Moreover, Dutrait reminds readers that although Gao drafted his novel in China, he finished his novel in France, where he has continued to hone his literary skill as a modern novelist with inspiration from George Perec, Jean Genet, and others, and has thus moved farther away from China. Dutrait also stresses that since its publication in French, *Lingshan*, has been very successful, largely due to the elements he has identified above.<sup>271</sup> In another review, Dutrait touches upon *Yigeren*, insisting that in the global context of human cruelties, the novel represents a small individual voice in a fictional narrative of what has happened in China. However, through his little narrative voice, he connects the history of human cruelty to that of China, in particular the Cultural Revolution as testified from an exiled Chinese writer.<sup>272</sup>

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271. Dutrait, *La Montagne de l'âme et les conceptions littéraires de Gao Xingjian*, 74.

272. See the preface of Gao Xingjian's *Yigeren de shenjing* [One Man's Bible] (Taipei: Linking Publishing House, 1999), 1-4.

In her article on *Lingshan*, Mabel Lee draws a parallel between the paths of the modern Chinese literary movement beginning with Lu Xun and socialist literature.<sup>273</sup> Though they are diverse in many ways, as Lee insists, they share one thing in common: Their use of literature as a vehicle for revolutionary purposes, a grand narrative. However, having been affected by China's devaluing of Confucian literature and other literary forms, Gao followed a different path for his exploration of modern literary fiction as a means of expressing his individual voice, his self. By doing so, Gao has distanced himself from other mainstream writers, but has essentially echoed writers who have abandoned their political engagements for personal expressions. *Lingshan* was written and published according to Western modernist techniques, as identified by Gao, and according to his personal experiences. Lee claims that Gao's use of the stream of consciousness technique and of personal pronouns in lieu of proper names are landmarks in modern Chinese fiction.<sup>274</sup> However, Lee's critique appears to restrict her scope to the Chinese context only.

In another essay focused on *Lingshan*, Lee further explores the self in relation to collectivism in China. She maintains that Gao's novel is "essentially an exploration of the self, of the self in history and specifically the self of Gao Xingjian as a representative of the human species with basic instincts, emotions and the capacity to think and reflect."<sup>275</sup> Lee's commentary highlights the peripheral state of the self in the history of Chinese literature, with an emphasis on Gao's rebellion against collectivism in the name of politics and nationalism.

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273. Mabel Lee, "Gao Xingjian's *Lingshan/Soul Mountain*: Modernism and Chinese Writer," *Heat*, no. 4 (1997): 128-144.

274. See note 274 above.

275. Mabel Lee, "Personal Freedom in Twentieth-Century China: Reclaiming the Self in Yang Lian's *Yi* and Gao Xingjian's *Lingshan*," *History, Literature and Society Essays in Honor of S. N. Mukherjee* (Sydney: Manohar, 1997), 147.



Reviews such as these demonstrate the relevance of Gao's works in both a Chinese and an international context. In particular, Gao's "universality" is perceived to lie in his artistic representation of China's social and cultural conditions within human history. These reviews essentially agree with the Nobel Committee's praise of Gao's "universal validity;" however, such universality also raises the question of how his works, written in Chinese, can be simultaneously nation-bound and universal.

In two of his articles, Torbjörn Lodén accentuates the connection between Chinese and Western literary values in Gao's novel. For Lodén, this connection constitutes the base of "universality." In his discussion of China's experimental literature ("pure literature") in the 1990s, Lodén insists that Gao distinguished himself as a "pure literature" novelist, who experimented "with language and form which illuminates cultural and social realities that we have known before."<sup>276</sup> Lodén argues that Gao's novel has been seen through the historical lens of China's literary field in post-Mao era, in which pure literature attempted innovations in form and style as reactions to the ideologically-charged literature of the time. These writers hoped that such innovations would challenge the tendency of socialist realism that considered literature as a political vehicle. Gao's *Lingshan* was part of this common effort.

In another article, "World Literature with Chinese Characteristics," Lodén further elaborates *Lingshan*'s "universal" significance in the world context. He defines the current trend of world literature with reference to the Chinese context: World literature "integrates elements from different cultures into an organic whole which transcends the total-sum of its constituent

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276. Torbjörn Lodén, "Why Pure Literature?: Random Thoughts on Aestheticism in Contemporary Chinese Literature," in *Insideout: Modernism and Postmodernism in Chinese Literary Culture* (Århus: Aarhus University Press, 1993): 153-161.

parts.”<sup>277</sup> He claims that the writings of V.S. Naipaul, Kenzaburo Oe, Salman Rushdie, and Derek Walcott, among others, exemplify this trend. For Lodén, Gao’s novel is part of world literature as are those of other diaspora writers.

As mentioned earlier, the Nobel Prize Committee describes Gao’s novel *Lingshan* as “one of those singular literary creations that seem impossible to compare with anything but themselves.” In Lodén’s view, the greatness of Gao’s novel is in at least six areas: His creative use of the Chinese language; his sense of alienation; primitivism; anti-Confucianism; skepticism; and his integration of Western myth into that of China. In addition to the six fields Lodén identifies, the greatness of *Lingshan* also comes from its philosophical and cultural dimensions.<sup>278</sup>

Lodén’s critical review of *Lingshan*’s greatness indicates that Gao’s novel possesses the “universal” quality the Western literary world recognizes and valorizes. Thus, this section examines what *Lingshan*’s “universality” means for Lodén and for us. We first address the issues of *Lingshan*’s “universality,” and then briefly discusses Gao’s next novel, *Yigeren*, to see how he continues his narrative experiment by inventing a new method of fictional narration.

To begin with, in order to discuss *Lingshan*’s “universality,” we need to examine Gao’s choice of personal pronouns in this novel. In *Lingshan*, no names are used to identify the main characters, but simply “you,” “I” and “s/he.” At the beginning of the novel, the narrator is referred to as “you” (“tu” or “vous” in French):

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277. Lodén, “World Literature with Chinese Characteristics,” in *The Stockholm Journal of East Asian Studies* 4 (1993): 18.

278. Lodén, “World Literature with Chinese Characteristics.”

你坐的是长途公共汽车，那破旧的车子，城市里淘汰下来的，在保养的极差的山区公路上，路面到处坑坑洼洼，从早起颠簸了十二个小时，来到这座南方山区的小县城。<sup>279</sup>

You take a long distant bus, the sort of old bus no longer used in the city, in the poorly maintained mountainous road, (whose) surface is full of potholes everywhere, bumped for twelve hours from the early morning, and arrive at this small county town in the South.<sup>280</sup>

However, in the second chapter, the focus of the narration changes to “I” (“je” in French):

我是在青藏高原和四川盆地的过渡地带，邛崃山的中段羌族地区，见到了对火的崇拜，人类原始的文明的遗存。无论哪一个民族远古的祖先都崇拜过给他们带来最初文明的火，它是神圣的。<sup>281</sup>

I am at the transition zone between the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and Sichuan Bassin, and the Qiang ethnic minority region in the middle zone of the Qionglai Mountain, seeing the local people’s worship for the fire, the remains of ancient civilizations of human beings. The ancestors of each ethnic group venerated the fire that brought the birth of their civilization. It was godly.<sup>282</sup>

The following chapters shift the narrative pronouns between “you” and “I,” although the subject of these different pronouns is in fact the same character. Meanwhile another personal pronoun appears: “s/he,” who represents the ego of the narrator. The Chinese novelist’s adoption of the narrative pronouns is reminiscent of the novels of Margaret Duras, George Perec, and

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279. Gao, *Lingshan* (Taipei: Lianjing wenxue chubanshe, 1990), 1. Though Gao’s novel was published in traditional Chinese, Gao writes in simplified Chinese. Thus, the quotations of Gao’s works in traditional Chinese are all converted to simplified Chinese in this dissertation.

280. In order to precisely identify the narrative structure and arguments in *Lingshan*, the author of this dissertation translates some parts *Lingshan* into English in consultation with Mable Lee’s English version and Noël Dutrait’s French version.

281. Gao, *Lingshan*, 11.

282. My translation.

Michel Butor, who have been associated with the *Nouveau Roman*, and from whom Gao drew his inspiration. For example, in Duras' *L'Amant*, the focus of narration is "je," but other parts of the novel appear "il/elle" (occasionally "nous") instead. In Butor's *La Modification*, the narrative pronoun "vous" allows the narrator to present his conscious or subconscious while interrogating it by inviting the participation of the reader ("vous") in the fictional narration. The main reason is that "je" is too immediate and "il" too distant; "vous," which can be singular and plural blurs the point of the views between the narrator and the reader.<sup>283</sup> In *Un homme qui dort*, Perec adopts "tu" to portray the narrator's alienation in face of modernity as if the only available means of communication were his solitary monologues. Thus, "tu" provides the reader with an immediate access to such solitary mental activities of the character. For Duras, "je" is always at the centre of the narration, while "elle" is the self of "je" in the past in relation to the male character "il."

However, in *Lingshan*, Gao chooses three personal pronouns, "ni" ("tu"/ "you"), wo ("je"/ "I") and "ta" ("il/elle" and "he/she"), to play different roles as if they were different personas. This technique is similar to "stream of consciousness" or "interior monologue," adopted by such modern writers as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Gao calls this technique "Yuyanliu" (the verbal stream), a long monologue presented as a long dialogue.<sup>284</sup> However, unlike the narrative pattern of psychoanalysis in modernist novels, typically stream of

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283. Lucien Giraud, *La Modification: Michel Butor* (Paris: Edition Nathan, 1992), 20-21. Also see Françoise Van Rossum-Guyon's *Critique du roman: essai sur La Modification de Michel Butor* (Paris: Edition Gallimard, 1970), 100, 120, 163-166, 171.

284. Gao, "Wenxue yu xuanxue guanyu lingshan" [Literature and Metaphysics: Lingshan], in Gao Xingjian's *Meiyou zhuyi* [No-ism] (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books Ltd., 2000), 167-182.

consciousness novels, the narrative of Gao's novel is linear and, in his opinion, fully reflects how one uses the Chinese language, especially daily colloquial speech.<sup>285</sup>

Moreover, Gao's narrative technique is borrowed from certain aspects of traditional Chinese operas and adapted to his novel's structure. Indeed, when a French literary critic asked him about the influence of his theatrical idea on his novels, Gao did admit to such influence.<sup>286</sup> In *Lingshan*, Gao transforms the theatrical narrative structure in some of his French plays to fictional dialogues so as to dismantle the boundary between theatre and fiction. The application of his "tripartite" dramatic theory, for instance, is discernable in the novel. Gao sees the character as playing three roles: The actor as a person, the character, and the critic of the character. Correspondingly, "I" represents the actor himself, "you" represents the character in the play, and "s/he" represents how "I" look at the character in a matter of distance.<sup>287</sup> The flexibility of the Chinese language offers such narrative creation. Even in his early short stories, Gao has already adopted this technique with the restricted point of view of "I" and "you." In *Lingshan* and *Yigeren*, he chooses this tripartite narrative mode, which echoes that of modern novelist Proust and other *Nouveau roman* novelists. In his critique of modernism, Gao draws a parallel between his tripartite dialogue and the dialogue of modern French fiction:

路易·阿拉贡的长篇巨制《共产党人》中，采用过一种非常活泼的叙述语言。阿拉贡在他的叙述语言中十分自觉地把三个人称交替使用，解除了三个人称之间的绝然分野。只要稍许留心观察，就可发现，在人们的日常口语中，三个人称本来就是自然而然地交替使用的。语言是思维的工具和实现。人的思维活动并不死死固守在

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285. Gao, "Wenxue yu xuanxue guanyu lingshan."

286. Gérard Meudal, "La Longue marche du resident Gao," *Libération*, last modified Dec. 21, 1995, [https://www.liberation.fr/livres/1995/12/21/la-longue-marche-du-resident-gao\\_153446/](https://www.liberation.fr/livres/1995/12/21/la-longue-marche-du-resident-gao_153446/).

287. Gao, "Juchang xing" [Theatricality], in *Dui yizhong xiandai xiju de zuixiu* [In Search for a Modern Theatre] (Beijing: Zhingguo shiju chuban she, 1988), 8-14.

一个角度。这不是现代人的新发明，不过是一个早已存在的普遍现象，如今被用语言进行艺术创作的人开始意识罢了。当我谈及阿拉贡的时候，对我所说的对象，用的是第三人称。当我要把我的看法告诉本文的读者的时候，我便自然而然地转向你，用第二人称“你”同你谈他——那位阿拉贡。而你未必赞同我的意见。比方说，你认为我的话失之武断。这时候，我在行文中又不知不觉站到你作为一个读者的立场上，设想你可能对我有什么批评。现在，请你再回头看一看这段文字，你便发现，即使在这种讲道理的文章中，三个人称“我”“你”“他”竟然在不知不觉中相互转化。这难道不是一种颇为活泼的语言吗？<sup>288</sup>

In Louis Aragon's master novel, *Les communistes*, he consciously uses a very lively narrative language by alternating between three personal pronouns. In doing so, he dismantles their definitive boundaries. If taking a look at how it is used, one will find that during our daily conversation, three personal pronouns are alternated naturally. Language is the tool of thought and its realization, and people don't think in a fixed perspective. Using it in the modern context is not a human invention; in fact, it was extensively adopted in the past, but only now those who use languages as a means of literary creation have begun to explore its potential. When I talk about Aragon, I use the third-person pronoun to refer to what I talk about. When I communicate with my readers about what I have written, I turn naturally to you, by using the second-person pronoun "you" to talk about Aragon. Maybe you don't agree with me. For example, you may say that my opinion is too reckless. At this point of time, my writing turns to you as a reader, imagining what you will level against me. Now please turn back and take a look at this paragraph; you will not help noticing that in this expository article, the three personal pronouns "I" "you" and "he" are used alternatively, even if you don't realize it. Is it a lively language?<sup>289</sup>

For Gao, Aragon's adoption of pronouns is not limited to French literature, but has a resonance in Chinese literature. He notes that even such writers as Liu Xinwu and Wang Meng began to exploit the second-person pronoun "you" as an alternative narrative form in their novels or short stories, even though they might not have read Michel Butor's *La Modification* (the Chinese version was not available in the early 1980s).<sup>290</sup> Gao points out that Western and

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288. Gao Xingjian, *Xiandai xiaoshuo chutan* [A Preliminary Examination of Modern Fictional Techniques] (Guangzhou: Hua cheng chu ban she, 1981), 15-16.

289. My translation.

290. Gao, *Xiandai xiaoshuo chutan*, 13-14.

Chinese authors show similar tendencies in their writings, because common narrative traits of human communication exist in both everyday life and in fiction. Thus, it is not surprising that both Chinese operas and Western fiction share the same narrative mode, as this narrative mode or language aims to achieve flexibility and expressivity of perspectives.<sup>291</sup>

However, there are some subtle differences between Gao's novels and French *Nouveau roman*. In the *Nouveau roman* novels, the second-person pronoun usually reflects the narrator's interiority. Gao's *Lingshan* and *Yigeren* are constructed based on a different rationale. He explains in Chapter 52 of *Lingshan*, he explains:

你知道我不过在自言自语，以缓解我的寂寞。你知道我这种寂寞无可救药，没有人能把我拯救，我只能诉诸自己作为谈话的对手。  
这漫长的独白中，你是我讲述的对象，一个倾听我的我自己，你不过是我的影子。当我倾听我自己你的时候，我让你造出个她，因为你同我一样，也忍受不了寂寞，也要找寻个谈话的对手。  
你于是诉诸她，恰如我之诉诸你。  
她派生于你，又反过来确认我自己。  
我的谈话的对手你将我的经验与想象转化为你和她的关系，而想象与经验又无法清。连我尚且分不清记忆与印象中有多少是亲身的经历，有多少是梦呓，你何能把我的经验与想象加以区分？这种区分又难道必要？再说也没有任何实际的意义。  
那经验与想象的造物她变幻成各种幻象，招摇引诱你，只因为你这个造物想诱她，都不甘于自身的孤寂。<sup>292</sup>

You know that I only talk to myself so as to alleviate my loneliness. You know that there is no remedy for my loneliness, nor can anyone save me. I have no recourse but to take myself as the partner of conversation.

In this long monologue, you are the object of my dialogue. It is I who listens to myself; you are only my shadow.

When I listen to my "you," I let "you" create "she," because just like me, you can't stand your loneliness and have to find someone to talk with.

So you take recourse to "she," much like I take recourse to "you." "She" derives from "you" and in return confirms "I."

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291. Gao, 13-14.

292. Gao, *Lingshan*, 340-341.

“You,” the partner of my dialogues, has converted my experience and imagination in relation to “You” and “she.” But imagination and experience can’t be distinguished from each other. Even I myself can’t distinguish the part of the living experience from my memory, impression, and dream; you can’t do it either. Is it necessary? Moreover, is there any real meaning for doing this?

“She,” created by your own experience and imagination, uses various forms of fantasies to seduce “you,” only because “you” also want to seduce her and don’t want to resign yourself to loneliness.<sup>293</sup>

In this passage, “I” represents the author himself, while “you” is the invention of the subject, a shadow of “I,” to relieve the author from his loneliness and solitude by engaging them in dialogues and inventing stories. “S/he” are the pronoun narrators, the objects of “I” and “you,” to confirm or convey their experience or imagination in relation to “you.” From Gao’s perspective, distinguishing them is not necessary, because they are all fictional.

Mabel Lee regards the creation of these pronoun narrators as a means of “dissect[ing] the author’s self, subjecting its various facets to the scrutiny of the author and the reader.”<sup>294</sup> Gao does not choose the technique for its own sake, but to show the spectrum of the narrator’s mental activities, including his memories, imagination, fantasies, and alienation during his journey towards Lingshan - the mountain, an unknown destination he tries to reach. This narrative technique is considered an invention, “unparalleled in literary history” (as the Nobel Committee comments), because it enables the reader to see the inner life of the narrator from different perspectives, obtain impressions of the narrators incurred from different directions, and strengthen their perception.

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293. My translation.

294. Mabel Lee, “Pronouns as Protagonists: Gao Xingjian’s *Lingshan* as Autobiography,” in *China Studies*, no. 5 (1999): 174.



Lodén also agrees with this view, but he further explores the significance of such narrative pronouns by adding that Gao chooses the technique to express his understanding of human existence: The world is the projection of the ego, and there is no way to escape from its limitations and reach the *Ding an sich*.<sup>295</sup> In *Lingshan*, Gao implies this response in his reflection on his tireless search:

还哪里去找寻那座灵山？有的只是山里女人求子的一块顽石。她是个朱花婆？还是夜间甘心被男孩子引诱去游泳的那个少女？总之她也不是少女，你更不是少男，你只追忆同她的关系，顿时竟发觉你根本说不清她的面貌，也分辨不清她的声音，似乎是你曾经有过的经验，又似乎更多是妄想，而记忆与妄想的界限究竟在哪里？怎样才能加以划断？何者更为真切，又如何能够判定？<sup>296</sup>

And where can I find Lingshan at the moment? There is only a hard rock, from which women look for a blessing to have a baby. Was it the legendary Zhuhuapo (Dark Pink Flower Lady)? Or, was it the young girl who let herself be seduced by a boy to swim at night? Anyhow, she was not a young girl, but you are not a young boy. You only remember the relationship that you had with her, and at present you find you can't describe her face, nor can you recognize her voice, as if it were an experience already lived, or simply an illusion. Moreover, where does the boundary lie between memory and illusion? How can you determine the boundary? Which one is truer? How can you judge it?<sup>297</sup>

In the narrator's mind, gaining the ultimate meaning of life is perhaps an illusion, much as Lingshan is likely out of the narrator's reach. However, while trying to escape from his alienated society and urban life, he still lingers on his hope to find something that can transcend himself (if not in the religious sense), even though he himself is uncertain of exactly what it is.

Lodén only validates certain aspects of Gao's universality: "it is the writer's perspective and his method, and not so much the theme, that are part of a modern world culture transcending

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295. Lodén, "World Literature with Chinese Characteristics," 30.

296. Gao, *Lingshan*, 334.

297. My translation.

the boundaries of traditional national cultures.”<sup>298</sup> In a presentation to students at the University of Hong Kong, Chinese literary critic Liu Zaifu did not agree with this view. Opposing Lodén’s statement, Liu appeared to place more emphasis on the theme that Gao developed. Liu argued that in *Lingshan*, Gao presents his effort to unravel the secrets of life and death about the human beings. It is in this sense that Western readers understand and appreciate the novel, because what they face is the same dilemma of materialism, and they also hope to transcend themselves.<sup>299</sup> From Liu’s statement, one may say that attributing the acceptance of *Lingshan* in the West only to Gao’s narrative techniques greatly reduces the richness of this work, leading to the conclusion that writing is only a process of technical invention that has nothing to do with the themes that the author presents.

In his essay “World Literature with Chinese Characteristics,” Lodén identifies the most important theme, the sense of alienation that compels the writer to wander around for *Lingshan*, as found in Chapter 2:

[...] 我早该离开那个被污染了的环境，回到自然中来，找寻这种实实在在的生活。在我那个环境里，人总教导我生活是文学的源泉，文学又必须忠于生活，忠于生活的实。而我的错误恰恰在于我脱离了生活，因而便违背了生活的真实，而生活的真实则等于生活的表象，这生活的真实或者说生活的本质本应该是这样而非那样。而我所以违背了生活的真实就因为我只罗列了生活中一系列的现象，当然不可能正确反映生活，结果只能走上歪曲现实的歧途。<sup>300</sup>

[...] I should have left the contaminated surroundings and returned to nature for real life. In my literary circle, they always tell me that the life is the source of literature and literature must be faithful to the truth. My fault is that I have distanced myself from life. This is the opposite side of the truth. The truth of life is not the representation of life. The

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298. Lodén, “World Literature with Chinese Characteristics,” 36

299. Liu Zaifu, *Lun Gao Xingjian zhaungtai* [On Gao Xingjian’s Literary Creation] (Hong Kong: Mingbo Publishing Company, 2000), 11.

300. Gao, *Lingshan*, 13.

truth of life, or the substance of life should be such, not otherwise. If I violate the truth of life, it is because I show a series of the phenomena of life that of course can't reflect life correctly. As a result, I only misrepresent the reality.<sup>301</sup>

This sense of alienation was rooted in Gao's awareness of the sterile intellectual life in urban Beijing in the 1980s. Overwhelmed by this keen sense of alienation, he embarked on a spiritual journey, searching for Lingshan in hope of finding a sense of unity and true life. As seen in the novel, when the narrator returns to nature, he sees and experiences a kind of life, which is more productive than what he had in urban Beijing. In the remote areas away from the urban centre, he can still see the rich heritage of minority traditions, ethnic lifestyles, and unique cultural expressions that have not yet been corrupted by the official ideology. Despite, or perhaps because of, its distance from the country's power centre, the people still keep their ethnic cultural traditions. The narrator is inspired by the vitality of the lives of the marginalized ethnic groups he visits; however, he also realizes that the dominant Han culture (comprising 95% of the total Chinese population), Confucianism, and communist ideologies have pushed these rich cultures onto the periphery. Even so, these cultures are part of China's history and civilization, and Gao condemns the coercive power of the dominant civilization:

这是没被文人糟蹋过的民歌！发自灵魂的歌！你明白吗？你拯救了一种文化！不光是少数民族，汉民族也还有一种不受儒家伦理教化污染的真正的民间化！<sup>302</sup>

Those are the genuine folk songs unspoiled by the (Confucian) literati. They are from the depth of the people's souls. Do you understand this? You have saved a culture, not only an ethnic minority culture, but also the Han culture itself. They both possess the same true folk culture uncontaminated by Confucian moral values!<sup>303</sup>

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301. My Translation.

302. Gao, *Lingshan*, 390.

303. My translation.

As his quest continues, Gao finds himself far from finding the truth of life, and develops a strong sense of skepticism, even questioning the legitimacy of history: If the nation's culture is built on the doctrine of rigid Confucianism, then the civilization that means so much to the people and to the state apparatus seems to be a history of oppression, hegemony, lies and chaos:

历史是谜语

也可以读作：历史是谎言

又可以读作：历史是废话

还可以读作：历史是预言

再可以读作：历史是酸果也还可以读作：历史铮铮如铁又能读作：

历史是面团再还能读作：历史是裹尸布进而又还能读作[...]<sup>304</sup>

History is an enigma

Or again: history is only lies

Or again: history is only gossip

Or again: history is prophecy

Or again: history is an acid fruit

One can again read it as: history is like steel; again it can be read:

History is dough, and again can be read as: history is a piece of shroud and can be again read as [...]<sup>305</sup>

In reality, Gao/the narrator could not identify the true Chinese culture, either its composition or its authenticity, leading him to the conclusion that Chinese history has been manipulated by ideology, politics, and dominant social hierarchies. Even so, this still raises an important question: If his search has led him nowhere, does his journey have a positive meaning? If he does not want to wander aimlessly, he can still find something positive. As the novel closes, the narrator does not seem to have found the destination he has done his utmost to achieve. However, even though his journey ends near the East Coast of China, the possibility of his taking

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304. Gao, *Lingshan*, 500.

305. My translation.

another journey exists. Perhaps this is where the value of his travel lies: The process of the quest for truth and meaning itself is a value, which symbolizes human efforts to reach beyond themselves.

Furthermore, in his essay, Lodén also discusses two other characteristics of Gao's work: His "recreation of literary language" and his integration of both Chinese and Western myths into his novel. For the former, Lodén refers to Gao's critical attitude against the Chinese language being made serviceable to political ideology and his desire to create a modern literature with a new Asian spirit. The new language Gao imagines would defer the influences of European syntax and grammar and return to traditional classical language. Though Lodén considers Gao's approach problematic, he claims that Gao can identify archaic language features and valorize them in the modern era. Indeed, some archaisms are present in *Lingshan*. Moreover, many more examples of linguistic hybridity also exist. Thus, if Gao's option of personal pronouns is a narrative innovation, his fictional style can similarly be regarded as original. Meanwhile, despite the fact that Chinese cultural traditions echo Western influences in *Lingshan*, Gao's blending of Chinese and Western myths in his novel is not so much conspicuous and extensive.

In short, Lodén discusses Gao's narrative innovation, his articulation of alienation from and in human life, modern values of skepticism, quest for meaning in life, and valorization of minority cultures as the universal values on display in *Lingshan*. At the same time, Lodén stresses that Gao has created a new language style but does not specify what that style is. His critique also emphasizes the untranslatability of the geographic conditions and human habitat that characterize China as background to *Lingshan*. For Lodén, Gao's descriptions of modern human life and the quest for its meaning transcend the novel's national characterization, allowing it to be integrated into "the total sum" of world literature.

In his second novel, *Yigeren* (One Man's Bible), Gao continues to adopt the personal pronouns "I" and "you" for an account of his traumatic experience during the Cultural Revolution and its effects on his life as a participant, a victim, and a writer. Unlike *Lingshan*, *Yigeren* does not seek a universal meaning of life, but instead focuses on the effects of an age of terror on one individual.

As a "companion novel" to *Lingshan*, *Yigeren* is another example of Gao's exploration into more effective modes of artistic expression. As in *Lingshan*, the protagonist of *Yigeren* has no name but is identified by the pronouns "you" and "him," alternating in each chapter. "You" represents the writer in exile, who lives in the present, while "he" represents the narrator (Gao) during the Cultural Revolution. In contrast to *Lingshan*, "I" plays no part in this novel, "he" is a silent doer and "you" is an observer.

*Yigeren* has a different focus than its predecessor: *Lingshan* pays more attention to its protagonists' psychological reactions to the world around him, while *Yigeren* focuses on objective descriptions of past events, supplemented by the narrator's reflections in the present. The pronoun "you" in the novel is to ensure that "he" narrates matter-of-factly what happened during the traumatic era. However, it appears that "you" and "he" constitute two alienated worlds, divided, yet greatly connected: "he" lives in the past while "you" lives now in exile, although both of them are linked with what "he" has gone through.

The novel begins with the protagonist's love affair with his Jewish girlfriend in Hong Kong on the eve of China's takeover of the colony, where he participates in a conference. The protagonist and his girlfriend, Margaret, are similar in many ways, but their lives are so divided: The protagonist tries to do everything to cast off the shadows of the past and does not want to

live in their collective memory, while Margaret cannot withdraw from her collective memory as part of the Jewish people.

The narrator has good reasons to forget his nightmarish experiences during the Cultural Revolution. His traumatic experience is particularly connected to a woman called Qian, who married him after he had written several letters in which he promised to give her a peaceful life. However, their marriage ended tragically when Qian learned that he had joined the faction of a Revolutionary Red Guard that ruined her family. In revenge, Qian threatens to hand over what he wrote to the government, and in a fit of rage, she attempts to murder him. Living in fear and terror, “he” has no other choice but to divorce her.

The novel’s narration often appears impartial, as though for a historical text, but the narrator’s individual memory constructs a history of his particular trauma. For him, love does not bring happiness, but hatred, cruelty, violence, and betrayal.

The protagonist of *Lingshan* seeks spiritual peace; although he does not find it, he does retain an undying hope. By contrast, the protagonist of *Yigeren* wishes to forget the history and nightmares of the past that continue to haunt him. He is thus in the same position as modern humanity, refusing to valorize beliefs, ideals, or history that will result in a recurrence of unpleasant memories. At the same time, however, this attitude drives him toward nihilism: He has no memory, country, affiliation, or religion; his desire to forget and believe in nothing positive in life has deprived him of any substance and made him into what T.S. Eliot called “the hollow man.” Where *Lingshan* still holds some trace of optimism, *Yigeren* is marked by an overwhelming sense of futility. Is it thus possible that in search of the ultimate truth, the author/narrator ends up in despair and nihilism? In this manner, *Yigeren* echoes similar themes in modern novels such as Camus’ *L’étranger* and Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*, all of which are

concerned with the lives of modern men, albeit in different contexts, suggesting that despite linguistic, aesthetic, and cultural differences, Chinese literature can and does express themes common to other literatures and cultures. In his preface to the Chinese version of *Yigeren*, Dutrait draws a similar conclusion.

In brief, as Lodén and other critics argue, although Gao's novels present linguistically and culturally different worlds, and experiences in different contexts, his original use of narrative pronouns, his sensitivity to human destinies in the modern era, and his perception of reality and human pursuit of the spiritual sphere, as demonstrated in *Lingshan* and *Yigeren*, share the similar literary values and themes the Western literary field valorizes, thus indicating that Gao's works, in particular *Lingshan*, have achieved "universal validity." This implies that on the one hand, Gao's "universality" lies in his singularity (particularity) in the Chinese context, as shown by Ma Sen and Mabel Lee, Henry Zhao, Liu Zaifu, Torbjörn Lodén, and Noël Dutrait. On the other hand, this very singularity in the modern Chinese literary field conforms to or renews Western modern literary conventions, therefore constituting Gao's "universality" notably recognized by the Nobel Prize Committee. Though Gao's "universality" implies Goethe's vision on literature's transcendence of language and culture for a universal humanity (*Weltliteratur*), we should not fail to ask the key question: "who defines this universality?" Certainly, regarding Gao's literary ascendancy, the Western literary field defines what constitute literature's universality.

Pascale Casanova well illustrates the logic and mechanism of acquiring such "universal" symbolic capital. According to Casanova's views, the dominant literary centre(s) dictates and defines literary regimes. Her presentation offers us an insight on the logic of a literary work's universality: A literary work's universality is sanctioned and valorized by a literary centre—the Western literary field (particular) gains the dominance and henceforth becomes universal. Thus,



Gao's universality lies in the Western literary centre's recognition of his work, which they define and valorize.

In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize, Gao expresses his universalist vision without referring to the literary centre:

文学作品之超越国界，通过翻译又超越语种，进而越过地域和历史形成的某些特定的社会习俗和人际关系，深深透出的人性乃是人类普遍相通的。<sup>306</sup>

Literature transcends national boundaries — through translations it transcends languages and then specific social customs and inter-human relationships created by geographical location and history — to make profound revelations about the universality of human nature.<sup>307</sup>

Gao's commentary acknowledges that although linguistic and cultural differences do exist, they are not necessarily barriers to knowledge. Through translation, people of different nationalities learn about others, and learn more about themselves as well. However, his prophetic vision must be buttressed by translation practice and reality. While the Chinese version of Gao's novel was not well appreciated in the Chinese-speaking world, the French translation became very popular in France and beyond. This does, however, serve as a reminder that, since Gao's novels and plays were created within specific cultural and social contexts, they did not automatically gain the universal symbolical capital, but must be translated into the dominant Western languages and cultural fields in order to achieve such a literary status.

### 2.1.2 Utopian and Bourdieusian Visions of Translation

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306. Gao Xingjian, "The Case for Literature," NobelPrize.org, last modified Dec 10, 2000, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2000/gao/25532-gao-xingjian-nobel-lecture-2000-2/>.

307. See note 307 above.

As noted above, Gao's vision of literature is utopian. For him, literature by nature can surpass language barriers and overcome social and cultural obstacles to reach the international community. Translation helps to eliminate linguistic and cultural barriers and make literature accessible to all people regardless of language or culture. However, Gao's messianic vision of universal translatability must be problematized. His utopian view of translation can be discussed with reference to that of Walter Benjamin. The latter argues that since people are divided by languages and cultures, translation renders only a piece of language into a fragmented vase of "pure language," and never represents the totality of language. Translation is an act of exile into a foreign land for survival and a new life. For Benjamin, any attempt to reach linguistic (translational) universality is in vain, much like the building of the Tower of Babel.<sup>308</sup>

Though Benjamin's metaphysical underpinnings imply the impossibility of full translatability, some still desire for a universal audience. For Gao, some sacrifices must be made in order to achieve universality, such as rewriting. As discussed in Chapter 1, Gao cherishes the idea that writings need translation, but not in a word-for-word sense, which is a dead end leading to the incomprehension of a translated version. The only way for a translation to reach its target audience efficiently is to liberate the source text from its linguistic prison house and let the translator rewrite it according to the norms of its receiving milieu or treat it as a re-creation, as Lin Shui's translation demonstrates (to a certain extent, likening translation to *les belles infidèles*, that is, a free adaptation of the source text into the target language by embellishing, grafting, and using other rewriting methods), because the differences between Chinese and Western languages are too great. To reach his target audience, Gao even asked his Italian, Greek

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308. Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 15-25.

and Spanish translators to translate his works from the closest French versions, not from the original Chinese, because the French versions are closer to the European translators' cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, he asked his Hong Kong and Korean translators to translate his works directly from Chinese, which is closer to their cultural contexts.<sup>309</sup>

Gao's translation methods are problematic. In an interview, a student of translation studies asked Gao whether his approach to translation would result in linguistic and cultural particularities being filtered or weakened. He did not answer the question directly, but did note that the best way to overcome language barriers is to be able to read and write directly in another language,<sup>310</sup> because translation is not an ideal way to break down those barriers. However, as the world is divided according to languages and cultures, translation is still valuable. Moreover, is it possible to avoid the problem of translatability even by being able to read and write in a second language?

Though Gao's view on translation's universality appears utopian, his point at least converges subtly with the Bourdieusian sociological approach to translation. Rather than focusing only on the power of his original works, he chooses to let the translator find effective means of creating a work that is acceptable in the target language and culture. In the Bourdieusian sociological approach, faithful translation is not an issue; what is more important is how translation is negotiated and fit into a target social and cultural space; in other words, how a translation is accepted in a translated field through the institution, market, and agency of a translator in response to the requirements of the target literary field. Such an approach does not

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309. "Gao Xingjian in HSMC," February 24, 2012, <https://www.hsu.edu.hk/en/506-20120224/>.

310. See note 310 above.

promise a vision of literary universality, but highlights the priority of the target over the source, contrary to Gao's vision of the transcendent function of translation. This can be understood as the social and cultural acceptance of a translation in the target milieu. In order to understand how Gao overcame linguistic and cultural barriers, we need to examine his translational practice as the materialization of his vision. Since Gao himself has been involved in his own translational projects, his and his translators' interpretations of his works, primarily *Lingshan*, in French and English are especially important in this context.

Bourdieu's model regards translation from the perspective of habitus, field, symbolic capital and *illusio* in order to determine how a translation is processed in the target cultural milieu. Translation agents such as markets, publishing houses, translation conventions and the translator's agency are factors in the choice of translation strategies in response to the requirements of the specific literary field.<sup>311</sup> Bourdieu's model provides a valid theoretic frame to study *Lingshan*'s translation and its canonization in France.

As discussed above, the "universality" of *Lingshan* lies in its inventive use of narrative pronouns, its valorization of marginal civilizations in the face of the encroachment of dominant central powers, its profound themes in relation to modernist concerns about the alienation of the individual in modern society, and its exploration of the human quest for spiritual freedom and transcendence. However, the "universality" of *Lingshan* is based not so much on its original Chinese text as on its translations, particularly its French translation. In other words, the French version of *Lingshan* has to fit into the cultural and social space of the target milieu for achieving its literary recognition. Thus, the following sections investigate such issues as the homological

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311. Jean-Marc Gouanvic, "A Bourdieusian Theory of Translation, or the Coincidence of Practical Instances," *The Translator* 11, no. 2 (2005): 147-166.

conditionality of the target literary field, the market, the politics of publishing, translation regimes, and the *illusio* of the source in the target field.

### 2.2.0 *Lingshan* and Modern French Literature

Like his plays, Gao's novel *Lingshan* was strongly influenced by modern/contemporary French literature, particularly the *Nouveau roman*. Although many critics in both Taiwan and Europe have discussed Gao's relevance to their own cultural contexts in terms of its universality, they have ignored the fact that Gao's main inspiration as a writer has come from French literature, such as the Theatre of the Absurd in *Che Zhan*. However, Gao himself seems to have attempted to minimize the significance of modern French literature to this play.<sup>312</sup>

In the case of *Lingshan*, Gao and his critics, particularly in the Anglophone world, have seldom discussed his debt to French literature, and this reluctance has negatively affected many critical responses to the novel. For example, in her discussion of Gao's fiction, Jessica Yeung notes that *Lingshan*'s "introduction" of (post)modernism is not complete, as the novel does not fully incorporate narrative spatiotemporal sequences like those of James Joyce, nor do Gao's works in general appear postmodernist, like Robbe-Grillet's "depiction of an unlocatable reality."<sup>313</sup> *Lingshan* does not truly introduce Western (post)modernist literary discourse into the Chinese literary field, but rather adapts it. However, Yeung's view of (post)modernist literature

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312. See Ma Shoupeng's interviews with Gao on his plays, in *Dui yizhong xiandai xiju de zuixiu* [In Search of a Modern Theatre] (Beijing: zhongguo xiju chubaishe, 1988), 167-169.

313. Jessica Yeung, *Ink Dances in Limbo: Gao Xingjian's Writing as Cultural Translation*, 98.

is restricted to the scope of the Anglophone literary world and only certain aspects of the modern French novel.

Modern French fiction began with Marcel Proust, followed by various currents including surrealism, existentialism, and the *Nouveau roman*. Even within the *Nouveau roman* movement, writers are only loosely bound by certain stylistic tendencies. For instance, Alain Robbe-Grillet's approach is different from that of Michel Butor. The former is closer to Yeung's characterization of (post)modernist literature, while Michel Butor's novel *La Modification*, for example, follows a linear time sequence even as his psychological depictions of alienated characters and of the protagonist's physical world follow the paradigm of the *Nouveau roman*.<sup>314</sup> Thus, Yeung's conclusion appears to be partial and limited to her relatively narrow scope of modernisms.

Malmqvist admits to a lack of familiarity with modernist literature, but does acknowledge that *Lingshan* is a unique novel incomparable to anything in modern Chinese literature.<sup>315</sup> Therefore, a study of the sources of Gao's novel can help us understand not only how Gao reworks those sources to foster his own imagination, but also how his novel and its reception define modernism.

Gao's indebtedness to French literature is seen in his treatise on modernism, in which his examples are largely drawn from French modernist writers such as Marcel Proust, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Samuel Becket, Eugène Ionesco, and Alain Robbe-Grillet. A French influence is also present in his short-story collection *Youshuang geer jiao hongchuner* (Such a

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314. Bernard Lalande, *La Modification Butor: Analyse Critique* (Paris: Hatier, 1972), 24-31. Also see "The Nouveau roman," in *A New History of French Literature*, eds. Denis Hollier et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 988-993.

315. Cao, "Nobel Translator Taken to Task."

Pigeon Called Red Lips, 1984). In the afterword to this collection, Gao advances his theory on novel writing: A novel does not have to tell a story nor have a coherent plot or characterizations, but is more about the art of language than about copying reality. To this end, instead of presenting characters in a story, the writer must opt personal pronouns to reflect different perspectives in the narrative, and show the inner world of the character with detailed descriptions.<sup>316</sup> Gao's new approach is reminiscent of the innovations that *Nouveau roman* authors such as Robbe-Grillet, George Perec, and Michel Butor brought to the writing of fiction. For Robbe-Grillet, story (l'intrigue) is less important to the novel than the character's memory, which also drives the narrative chronology; characters need to be impersonal and anonymous, rather than being identified by proper names; scenes and settings can be ambiguous; and a modern sense of alienation is an integral part of the work (petit recit).<sup>317</sup>

The *Nouveau roman* developed against the background of Sartre's stance favoring "la littérature engagée" that emulated Soviet-style socialist realism.<sup>318</sup> Gao's interests in the *Nouveau roman* lie in his resistance against the tendency to make literature into a vehicle of collective voices for political action, such as China's revolutionary or socialist realism. As his Nobel Prize speech demonstrates, Gao seeks to downplay the political instrumentation of literature and valorize the individual voice.

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316. Gao, "Afterword" in *Youshuang geer jiao hongchuner* [Such a Pigeon called Red Lips] (Beijing: Shiyue wenyi chuban she, 1984), 334-338.

317. Bernard Lalande, *La Modification Butor: Analyse Critique* (Paris: Hatier, 1972), 24-31.

317. Bernard Lalande, 26-27.

Although Gao himself does not deal directly with the influence of the *Nouveau roman* on his writing, his French translator, Noël Dutrait, reveals that during their collaborative work on *Lingshan* in 1992, Gao asked him to refer to George Perec's *Un homme qui dort*, Michel Butor's *La Modification*, and Marguerite Duras' *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, suggesting that Dutrait consult parts of the novels that corresponded with *Lingshan* in order to translate the latter work, as he drew inspiration from them.<sup>319</sup> *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* was published in 1991, a year after *Lingshan*, but Gao wished to model his French version of *Lingshan* on Duras' both novels.

In an essay on his translation of *Lingshan*, Dutrait points out that the personal pronouns, theme and writing style of the aforementioned French novels were significant influences on Gao's novel. For example, "vous," "tu," "je" and "il/elle" in these French novels as the nameless narrators (or narrative voices) can be identified in the dialogues or interior monologues of Gao's novel. In addition, the terse conversational style of Duras' novel is also comparable to that of Gao's.<sup>320</sup> Dutrait's essay demonstrates the influences of Perec, Duras, and Butor on Gao, but does not refer to Alain Robbe-Grillet. However, Gao's theoretical treatise does echo Robbe-Grillet's theory of fiction.<sup>321</sup>

If Gao drew his inspiration from the novels by Butor, Perec and Duras, does Dutrait's French version reflect these influences? Do these French novelists' influences account for Gao's

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319. Noël Dutrait, "Traduire Gao Xingjian: le traducteur comme interface de l'interface," in *Le Choix de la Chine d'aujourd'hui: entre la tradition et l'Occident*, ed. Frederic Wang (Paris: Les Indes savants, 2009), 160-161. Also see Wang Mingxing, "Entretien avec Noel Dutrait, traducteur de *La Montagne de l'âme* de Gao Xingjian," *Alternative francophones* 2, no. 1, 2017.

320. Noël Dutrait, "Traduire Gao Xingjian: le traducteur comme interface de l'interface," 160-161.

321. Gao, *Xiandai xiaoshuo chutan* [A Preliminary Examination of Modern Fictional Techniques].



popularity in the French literary field, or even for his universality? What does *Lingshan's* universality mean to French readers, and what does *Lingshan's* Chineseness mean in the French literary field? These questions are of vital importance to understand Gao's ascendancy in France and his universality in the West. In order to answer these questions, we need to first investigate the field conditions that receive Chinese literature.

### 2.2.1 Chinese Literature in the French Literary Field

In his monographs on the French translation and reception of modern American literature, Jean-Marc Gouanvic offers a Bourdieusian sociological perspective in translation theory, which is also useful in our discussion of French translation of Chinese literature. In this Bourdieusian-inspired sociological approach to translation, "habitus" is the key term, relating to the social and cultural conditions of how a translation is produced. At the beginning of a translation project, the key issue is how one chooses an original version, an act that is relevant to the economical, social and cultural aspects of the target milieu. The work should be as homologous to the existing genre as possible, which Pierre Bourdieu terms "ressemblance dans la différence."<sup>322</sup> Such homology involves the symbolic capital or reputation of the source text previously established, and socially and culturally embedded, in the target field over a period of time. In addition, the choice of a source text must also meet market demand and publishing politics. Although the translator is selected by the publishing institution and is expected to work according to established regimes, the translator does have a certain power to determine the practical and/or creative strategies he/she will adopt to create the translation. Under certain

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322. Jean-Marc Gouanvic, *Hard-boiled fiction et serie noire* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018), 46.

circumstances, the translator is essentially equal to the writer, as demonstrated in Gao's granting authority of rewriting his works to his translators as long as their translations are acceptable for the target reader. The literary field determines certain standards or requirements for the possible acceptance of a literary work, thus, newcomers must face competition for cultural capital.

Normally, new authors and new works must contribute more to the field so that it can renew itself and thus maintain its vitality, and so that those authors and works can gain prestige and power. *Illusio*, or "signifiante," denotes the aesthetic effects of a translation on the operation of linguistic transfers in the target milieu. All of these factors affect how features of a source text, especially its aesthetic traits, are judged meaningful and then selected for the target audience.<sup>323</sup>

Gouanvic's theoretical approach is important to this discussion of the French translation of Gao's *Lingshan* because it leads us into the process of *Lingshan*'s translation, integration, reception and canonization in the social and cultural space of the French literary field. This approach treats translation not only as an interlingual performance, but also as a socially governed operation shaped and generated by multiple factors. Moreover, as many translation scholars have followed the Bourdeusian model with various sociological emphases on translation, Gouanvic excels at bringing Bourdieu's concept of *illusio* into his sociological analysis of translation practice.<sup>324</sup>

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323. Gouanvic, *Hard-boiled fiction et serie noire*. Also see Yu-Ling Chung, *Translation and Fantasy Literature in Taiwan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 15-41.

324. In the key monograph concerning sociological aspects of translation, *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, eds. Michaela Wolf and Alexandra Fukari, the translation issue of *illusio* is largely ignored. However, recently some translation scholars have begun to discuss this aspect. See Sameh Hanna, *Bourdieu in Translation Studies: The Socio-Cultural Dynamics of Shakespeare Translation in Egypt* and Jean-Marc Gouanvic, *Hard-boiled fiction et serie noire*.

With Gouanvic's Bourdieusian approach in mind, the following sections investigate the conditionality of the French literary habitus and field regimes, such as the market for foreign, especially Chinese literature in France and the publishing politics of foreign literatures in translation. This study will shed light on the production of the French translation of *Lingshan* from its start to its integration into the French literary field.

In a radio talk on *La Montagne de l'âme* (Lingshan), Julia Kristeva spoke favourably of the novel's evocative power in its enigmatic and intimate depictions of ancient China. She confessed that she could not judge Gao's Chinese style, but she was impressed by the French translation.<sup>325</sup> Although Kristeva had studied Chinese language and literature as an undergraduate student in Paris in the 1960s, her passion for China is more related to a narrative construct based on French translations from the eighteenth century onward.

In an interview with the Chinese scholar Qian Linsen, Francois Cheng pointed out that most major French writers and thinkers including Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Philippe Sollers, Tzvetan Todorov, Jacques Lacan, and Jean-Luc Godard, engaged with Chinese classics, poetry, novels, and films; Michel Foucault was a notable exception from this list.<sup>326</sup> Indeed, many thinkers, writers, and missionaries throughout French history engaged in various ways with Chinese culture, in particular Chinese classical poetry; some of these include Paul Rimbaud, Jules Verne, Paul Claudel, Pierre Loti, Victor Segalen, Georges André Malraux, Romain Rolland, and Paul Valéry. These and other French authors drew their inspiration from French

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325. Julia Kristeva, "Julia Kristeva sur France culture de L'universalité de Gao Xingjian," accessed June 27, 2017, [http://www.psychanalyse-in-situ.fr/livres/L\\_nobel.html](http://www.psychanalyse-in-situ.fr/livres/L_nobel.html).

326. Qian Linsen, *Huo er butong/Concliant mais non conformiste* (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chuban she, 2009), 12.

translations of Chinese classical literature, or cooperated with Chinese literary figures in France to translate or adapt Chinese classical poetry into various French literary genres, all of which exhibit a fascination with ancient China.<sup>327</sup>

As Muriel Détrie notes, after the appearance of the first Chinese poetry anthology by the Marquis d'Hervey-Saint-Denys (1822-1892), *Poésies de l'époque des T'ang* (1862), the translation of Chinese poetry was first undertaken by sinologists and later adapted by French poets and writers as a mode of literary invention and engagement.<sup>328</sup> Inspired by classical Chinese poetry, Judith Gauthier (1845-1917) translated and rewrote some Chinese poems and published *Le Livre de jade* (1872). This poetry anthology attracted the interests of several prominent French poets and novelists, such as Victor Hugo, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud. From Gauthier's poetry anthology, Verlaine identified the basic traits of Chinese poetry as brevity, conciseness, and simplicity. Rimbaud further recognized other traits, such as allusiveness and symbolic values, which could be found not only in Chinese poetry but also in images on Chinese porcelain vases, which depicted only half of a whole scene while leaving the rest to the imagination.<sup>329</sup> Détrie points out that, as presented in some French anthologies, Chinese poetic stanzas are relatively short with a relatively simple syntactic structure, the proposition of which is often independent, almost without coordination and subordination. Each verse line corresponds with a unit of sense; the logic and chronological order of one verse with

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327. See Yvan Daniel's *Littérature française et culture chinoise 1846-2005* (Paris: Indes savantes, 2010).

328. Muriel Detrie, "Les effets de la traduction sur le langage littéraire: le cas de la poésie en France au XXe Siècle," in *Littérature chinoise: le passé et l'écriture contemporaine: regards croisés d'écrivains et sinologues* (Paris: L'Édition de La Maison des sciences de L'homme, 2001), 101-107.

329. Muriel Détrie, 101-107.

another is embedded without clear markers, but can be perceived by imagination. Thanks to translations, Chinese poetry provided much inspiration for modern French poetry, which was eager to invent a modern form. In particular, French symbolism and Parnassian poetry absorbed these poetic elements and further developed their own poetic styles, with emphasis on simplicity, concision, indirectness and allusiveness.<sup>330</sup>

The Chinese poetry anthologies that Détrie discusses were translated only in response to the needs of modern French poetry. For instance, Marquis d'Hervey-Saint-Denys' translations were mostly of Tang poems with simple structure and easy rhyme schemes rather than longer and more complicated ones. In addition, his translations are often incomplete in relation to the originals, despite his annotations to explain their cultural contexts; complicated structures or difficult verse lines are often omitted in favor of simpler elements. The resulting translation is an example of a sinologist translator's relative mastering of ancient Chinese poetry, but can be regarded as only a partial translation.<sup>331</sup> Judith Gauthier on the other hand, cooperated with the Chinese scholar Tin Tung-ling (1831-1886) himself a Chinese scholar and poet, to translate classical Chinese literature from the ancient past to her own time according to themes such as love, autumn, palace, war, and others. She followed the French tradition of *les belles infidèles*, which treats translation as free creation and embellishment. For example, she would sometimes combine two short poems into a longer one, or only partially translate others. Moreover, she appropriated certain ideographic aspects of Chinese poems to create fresh and imaginative poetic imagery, similarly to Ezra Pound's translation and adaptation of ancient Chinese poetry in his

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330. See note 330 above.

331. Wang Yu, *La Réception des anthologies de la poésie chinoise classique par les poètes français (1735-2008)* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2016), 136-139.

anthology *Cathay*.<sup>332</sup> Gauthier also adopted the “petit poème en prose” to express themes of love, loss, beauty, and sentimentality, which aligned her with other innovative French authors: Two years before Gauthier’s translation anthology, Charles Baudelaire had published his “petit poème en prose” collection, *Le Spleen de Paris*.<sup>333</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century, French writers such as Jules Verne and Pierre Loti attempted to depict China in a more realistic manner, based either on missionaries’ accounts and historical documents or on personal experience,<sup>334</sup> while others, such as Paul Claudel and Victor Segalen, experimented with “high modern French poetry” in China in order to construct an alternative imaginary space in French literature.<sup>335</sup>

Claudel’s *Connaissance de l’est* accentuates his loss, agony, and crisis of belief; unlike in Europe, where he experienced ephemerality and a sense of futility, Claudel regarded China as the opposite of Europe, which he expressed in poetic form. Chinese poetry offers Claudel a better form to narrate himself as a modern subject in French literature. His translation does not seek word-for-word correspondence between the two languages, but chooses Chinese poetry as an inspiration to create more substantial French modern poetry. *Cent phrases pour éventail* rewrites Chinese poetry in the form of Japanese Haiku, which was heavily influenced by Chinese poetry, in such a manner that he simply reduces poetic lines to a minimum. By exploiting the emptiness

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332. Wang, 157-199.

333. Wang, 171-189.

334. See Jules Verne’s *Les tribulations d’un chinois en Chine* (1879) and Pierre Loti’s *Les derniers jours de Pékin* (1900).

335. Yvonne Y. Hsieh, *From Occupation to Revolution: China through the Eyes of Loti, Claudel, Sagalen, and Malraux (1895-1993)* (Birmingham, Alabama: Summa Publications Inc., 1996), 1.

or blankness of poetic space, Claudel in fact valorizes its poetic suggestion, which has more evocative power. One can observe the same modernist trend in the works of Ezra Pound, who appropriated the foreign literary sources to invent a unique poetic form.

Between 1937 and 1946, Claudel adapted and composed Chinese classical poetry for an anthology, *Autres poèmes d'après le chinois*, published by Gallimard under the prestigious imprint La Pléiade. Seventeen of the poems appearing in the collection were selected from *Le Livre de jade*. Claudel's anthology was an important work in the French appreciation of Chinese poetry, and he later collaborated with Tsen Tsonming (Zeng Zhongming) to adapt twenty-two poems from the latter's *Rêve d'une nuit d'hiver: cent quatrains des Thang*. This translation was integrated into the earlier version of his Chinese poetry.<sup>336</sup> Claudel's adaptation was a rewriting based on his own interests and doxa, "the cosmic harmony under Catholicism," as demonstrates in his rendering of Tsen's third poem in the anthology about the human experience of looking at the moon as a process of seeking for love from above (God).<sup>337</sup> As Yvonne Y. Hsieh points out, Claudel shares the modernist sentiment of "loathing of the philistine bourgeois who dominated French society."<sup>338</sup> In addition, as a Catholic, Claudel also shows his discontent with the "progressive laicization of France."<sup>339</sup> Thus, Claudel's translation and writing have more to do with his response to modern conditions of French society than China.

Victor Segalen was an admirer of Claudel, but did not want to live in Claudel's shadow. In his poetry anthology, *Stèles* (1912), Segalen presents another aspect of French literature

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336. Wang Yu, *La Réception des anthologies de la poésie chinoise classique par les poètes français (1735-2008)*, 213-282.

337. Wang Yu, 328-329.

338. Yvonne Y. Hsieh, *From Occupation to Revolution*, 47.

339. Yvonne Y. Hsieh, 47.

according to his interpretation and adaptation of classical Chinese poetry, in particular from French missionary translator Séraphin Couvreur's (1835–1919) Chinese-Latin-French edition of *Cheu King* (The Book of Poetry), the ancient Chinese poetry collection annotated by Confucius. Segalen did not want his poetry to be immediately relatable to reality, but hoped that ancient Chinese literature and culture would allow him to observe the modern conditions of the world from an “authentic” Chinese perspective and thereby narrativize his interiority: Self, individuality, alienation, agony and futility. Thus, the original Chinese texts co-exist in parallel with his French poetry, enabling both Chinese and French readers to see their own cultures from different perspectives.<sup>340</sup> Segalen's poetry is neither Chinoiserie nor a pure Claudian appropriation of Chinese ancient poetry; his investment in the ancient Chinese literary canon transcends exoticism. For instance, in his sonnet *Les Mauvais artisans*, he combines the Chinese canonical epithet with French verse lines, highlighting the views of both Western individualism and Taoism on the usefulness and un-usefulness of practicing beauty.<sup>341</sup> It is not a syncretism but an engagement through which his poetry appears very original. Indeed, Segalen's poetry shows that his vision has expanded beyond the limits of China and the West with its fresh language style and living images. However, Segalen's interests in the Chinese classical literary canon and archaeology also indicate his desire to use ancient China as an alternative space from which to engage French modernity and modern French literature as a whole.

Meanwhile translation of Chinese poetry was no longer dominated by French writers; many Chinese writers were producing more exact and diverse translations of these works. This

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340. Haun Saussy, “Foreword,” in *Stèles*, trans. Timothy Billings and Christopher Bush (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), xi-xxxiv. Also see “Introduction,” 1-45.

341. Wang Yu, *La Réception des anthologies de la poésie chinoise classique par les poètes français (1735-2008)*, 398-399.



Chinese translation movement was heralded by Tcheng Ki-tong (Chen Jitong, 1851-1907) and was followed by many other Chinese students and writers in France, including Li Jinfa, Dai Wangshu, Liang zongdai, Lo Ta-Kang (Luo Dagang), and others. They not only translated Chinese poetry into French, but also wrote French poetry of their own. As bilingual poets and translators, they were part of both the French and Chinese literary fields in the modern era. Their contributions were essential in the deepening of exchanges between China and France, particularly their efforts to open a space in which later translators and writers could interact at linguistic and cultural boundaries. The efforts of these French writers and later Chinese literary figures led to the publication of the first complete anthology of Chinese classical poetry, *Anthologie de la poésie chinoise classique*, edited by the French sinologist Paul Demiéville, in 1962, one hundred years after the Marquis d'Hervey-Saint-Denys's first anthology of Chinese classical poetry.

This discussion of Chinese literature and its resonances in the French literary field, whether through translation, adaptation, or creative writing, identifies a fictionalized, or sometimes even fossilized image of China within French literature, which has been developed since the eighteenth century. Such discussion helps us to situate the translation of Gao's master novel, *Lingshan*, in the history of French literary modernity in order to uncover the logic of its canonization. Indeed, the French translation of Chinese classical poetry world and their quest for the self against the mounting alienation of the modern world resonates with the Chinese/French writers' and translators' searches for the self in the face of uncertainties, crises, political persecution, and alienation. This resonance is present in Gao's *Lingshan*. Like Claudel and Segalen, Gao attempts to search for his self and individuality by exiling himself to the remote regions relatively beyond the centralized control of the communist government. In his novel, he

envisions an alternative space in the marginalized ethnic cultures, Taoist and Buddhist tradition, and others as a strategy against alienation, solitude, meaninglessness, loss and futility. However, the novel ends with bewilderment rather than enlightenment in the narrator's spiritual quest, a characteristic that has marked it, like many of Gao's other works, as a modern novel. In short, the quest for the self in a world of alienation through exile brings Gao together with modern French writers. In addition, their investment in a classical Chinese world also signals their desires to imagine a space in order to resist the erosion of modernity, and for Gao political repression as well. Therefore, Gao is relevant to the concerns of modern French literature as much as Claudel and Segalen are to modern Chinese literature.

The translation and publication of Gao's *Lingshan* also need to be connected with cultural politics and literary publication market in the French literary field, which are essential to a Chinese novel's integration into the target literary space.

Despite the French fascination with an eternal ancient China, especially its poetic world, French translators did not pay much attention to other literary genres, such as novels. As Gao Fang illustrates, with the exception of classical stories of secondary importance, the major classical novels were only translated in the 1970s with the help of the French comparatist René Etiemble, as a United Nations' UNESCO sponsored program. Translations of such classical novels as *Hongloumeng* (The Dream of the Red Mansion) by the Chinese professor Li Tchehoua (Li Zhihua) and his French wife Jacqueline Alézaïs as *Le Rêve dans le pavillon rouge* were published in the La Pléiade collection by Gallimard. Other translations produced between the 1970s and 1990s include *Shui hu zhuan* (*Au Bord de l'eau*, 1978), *Le Jin ping mei* (*Fleur en fiole*

*d'or*, 1985), *Xiyouji (La Pérégrination vers l'ouest, 1991)*, and *Jingu qiguan (Spectacles curieux d'aujourd'hui et d'autrefois, 1996)*.<sup>342</sup>

French translations of modern Chinese literature, on the other hand, are few and far between, except for works by well-known authors such as Lu Xun, Ba Jin, or Mao Dun. Lu Xun was most translated in France. According to Gao Fang, Lu Xun's works comprise 39 of the approximately 146 Chinese literary works of the modern era (1917-1949) published in France before 2010.<sup>343</sup> Translations of his works have also appeared in such well-known journals as *Europe* and *Tel Quel*. As Gao points out, the translation of Lu Xun's works from the 1970s was related to China's Cultural Revolution and the Maoists in France. Because he is regarded as the father of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun's role in modern Chinese history is uncontested, which has been subjected to various appropriations. Even Mao himself promoted and consecrated Lu Xun's image as a communist-affiliated writer who contributed to the establishment of the New China. In the 1970s, French intellectuals believed that understanding Lu Xun was the key to understanding China's revolution, his role as a revolutionary writer, the political situation in the 1970s, and the changes China experienced. When French leftist intellectuals saw China's Cultural Revolution as a cornerstone for greater human emancipation, equality and freedom, the translation of Lu Xun was imperative. For instance, Maoist scholar Michelle Loi actively engaged in supporting the Maoist China with her husband Louis Althusser.

For Michelle Loi, understanding Lu Xun and the revolutionary cause of literature is highly relevant to French interests, especially for French leftist intellectuals whose goals were

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342. Gao Fang, *Traduction et réception de la littérature chinoise moderne en France* (Paris: Classiques Garniers, 2016), 161-227.

343. Gao, 161-227.

similar to those of China.<sup>344</sup> The leftist reading of Lu Xun's works as purely instrumental had serious consequences for the reception of Chinese literature in the contemporary French context. However, on travelling to China, some *Tel Quel* authors experienced a different reality from their imaginary vision of China nourished by classical literature and cultural texts. They found a country thrown into chaos, and a mass movement that sought to eradicate the ancient traditions that Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva and others treasured very much. The reality of the time challenged their view of the Cultural Revolution as an outgrowth of traditional Chinese literary culture.<sup>345</sup>

The French reception of modern and contemporary Chinese literature was a major part of the literary discourse outlined above. Reviewing literary translation in France in the 1980s and early 1990s, Noël Dutrait notes that translating and anthologizing Chinese literature in the post-Mao period was unanimously treated as a political allegory of a China that was essentially devoid of literary values, a reading that largely resulted from reading radical literature as political discourse.<sup>346</sup> For some publishers, the French translation of contemporary Chinese literature was only meant to liberate Chinese writers from the yoke of communist ideology.

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344. In Michelle Loi's article written at the request of *Tel Quel*, she rationalizes the importance of the translation of Lu Xun in relation to France: "si l'œuvre de Lu Xun est de première importance pour les Chinois, quoi qu'ils n'aient plus sur le dos leurs « trois montagnes » d'oppression, elle l'est à nous, je pense, beaucoup plus encore, parce que la société dans laquelle nous vivons présente beaucoup plus d'analogies avec la sienne (dirons-nous qu'elle est pré-révolutionnaire ?) Ses analyses du combat de classe et des différentes catégories d'ennemis ne nous sont pas étrangères." See Michelle Loi, "Lire Luxun," *Tel Quel* 53 (1973): 49-61.

345. Gao Fang, *Traduction et réception de la littérature chinoise moderne en France*, 199-204. Also see Eric Hayot, "Tel Quel," in *Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht, Tel Quel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 103-175.

346. Noël Dutrait, "Traduire la littérature chinoise contemporaine au début du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, une question de choix," in *La Traduction entre orient et occident, modalités, difficultés et enjeux*, ed. Paul Servais (Paris: Harmattan, 2011), 77-90.

Dutrait points out that even though older and younger Chinese writers in this period were at their most experimental and productive period since the founding of the new China, the French translations failed to present the aesthetic quality of their works. Many short story anthologies and their introductions produced at the time reveal a combination of arrogance, condescension, and ignorance on the part of the publishers.<sup>347</sup>

In an interview on the publication and translation of modern Chinese literature, the Chinese Nobel laureate Mo Yan drew a similar conclusion to Dutrait's on the dearth of attention to modern Chinese literature in French translation. However, he also used himself as an example of post-1980s Chinese writers who were not as guided by proletarian class ideology as the previous generation of Chinese writers had been. Critics of his generation, therefore, began to read the works of contemporary writers not as political materials, or as illustrations of the social politics of present-day China, but as examples of literary quality.<sup>348</sup>

Mo Yan demonstrated the shift of Western literary circles from treating Chinese literature as raw materials of politics and sociology to focusing on fictional narratives, with his works marking the beginning of this change. His novel *Red Sorghum* (1986) was made into a film that won the Golden Bear Prize at the Berlin International Film Festival in 1988, an unprecedented recognition for Chinese film and fiction since the founding of the New China. In France, the Chinese-language film *Bawang bieji* (*Adieu ma concubine*), adapted from Liliane Lee (Li Bihua)'s novella of the same name, won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes International Film

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347. See note 347 above.

348. Mo Yan, *Mo yan duihua xinlu* [New Dialogues with Mo Yan] (Beijing: Wenhua yixu chubanshe, 2012), 132-133.

Festival in 1993. In 1997, Jia Pingao's novel *Feidu (La Capitale déchue)*, which was translated by Genevieve Imbot-Bichet, won the Prix Femina étranger.

Such shift also brought about the change of translating Chinese literature as a business. From the start of the 1980s to the first half of the 1990s, the copyrights to translations of Chinese texts were transferred without contracts in France. However, since the middle of the 1990s, the translation of Chinese contemporary literary works has become commercialized, which is subject to the law of the market.<sup>349</sup> Though the market demand for Chinese literature is still relatively small, much effort has been made to promote the works of contemporary writers, such as Le Salon de livre international, held in Paris in 2004 and featuring Chinese literature. In addition, some key publishing houses such as Le Seuil and Gallimard have published contemporary Chinese literature in different genres, but mainly novels and short stories. While larger publishers that have led literary trends and enjoyed large sales volumes, mainly publish well-established writers and canonized works such as Cao Xueqin's *Hong lu meng (Le Rêve dans le pavillon rouge)*, lesser-known publishers such as Acte Sud, L'Aube, Philippe Picquier, and Bleu de Chine, which have limited business scope and sales and sometimes receive state financial subsidies, have translated works by emerging writers. For example, L'Aube published Gao's *Lingshan* in 1995, when he was not widely known. You-Feng Publishing Company is the only company which is solely devoted to the publication of books relating to China, including Chinese literature, culture and language education in both French and Chinese.

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349. Mo, 132-133.

In many of these French publishing houses, they have specialists of Chinese studies as advisors or editors, who recommend or translate works of Chinese literature.<sup>350</sup> Thanks to their efforts, the French market for Chinese literature, particularly contemporary novels, has responded favourably. Once a new novel appears in China, these publishing houses obtain relevant information about its publication and reception in the Chinese market before commencing translation, publication, and marketing. For example, the revised edition of Mo Yan's *Fengru Feitun* (*Beaux seins, belles fesses*, 2004) was published in France before its release in China.<sup>351</sup>

It is worth noting that the translation and publication of Chinese literature, and literature in other languages in general, has followed a different path in France than in the United States. As Gisèle Sapiro points out, the interest in translation in France showcases the politics of cultural diversity adopted and practised by the European Union, whereas in the United States, translation is relatively marginal, as American readers tend to read more works written in English than translations, in part due to a belief in the superiority of their own language and culture.<sup>352</sup> This invites another question: Aside from its tradition of classical Chinese poetry translation, why does France show such an interest in contemporary Chinese literature? Because China is one of

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350. Annie Curien, "Connaissance et reconnaissance de la littérature chinoise contemporaine en France," in *France-Asia: un siècle d'échanges littéraires*, ed. Muriel Détrie (Paris: Éditions You-Feng, 2001), 56-68.

351. Elodie Karaki and Chloé Carbuccia, "Entretien avec Noël Dutrait, un traducteur 'principalement fidèle,'" *Les chantiers de la création*, no.6 (November 12, 2013), accessed July 20, 2018, <http://journals.openedition.org/lcc/758>.

352. Gisèle Sapiro, "Mondialisation et diversité culturelle: les enjeux de la circulation transnationale des livres," in *Les contradictions de la globalisation éditoriale* (Paris: Nouveau monde Éditions, 2009), 275-301. Also see her "Les raisons de traduire," in *Traduire la littérature et les sciences humaines: conditions et obstacles* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2012), 15-19.

the most powerful countries in the world, reading Chinese literature provides access to current Chinese culture and its values, as well as a counterbalance to America's monolingual hegemony.<sup>353</sup> Moreover, the influential works of the Chinese immigrant writers, such as Gao Xingjian, Dai Sijie, Ya Ding, Shan Sa, and others, in the French literary field have also fostered French readers' love for Chinese literature and culture.<sup>354</sup>

Such cultural and economic context has conditioned *Lingshan's* translation, publication, and canonization, which we will analyze in details in the following sections in conjunction with other related key issues, such as translation regimes, translation agents, *illusio* and others. We first discuss the translation regimes in relation to the requirements of the French literary field, from which we identify the logic and mechanism of how a literary work is selected, translated, published, and canonized in the target milieu.

## 2.2.2 The Translational Approaches to Contemporary Chinese Literature

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353. Pascale Gimeno, "Étude sur une oeuvre chinoise: *La Montagne de l'âme* de Gao Xingjian," MA thesis, Université de Provence, 1997, 71-73. Also see Zhang Yinde's introduction to *Littérature chinoise et globalisation*, eds. Nicoletta Pesaro and Zhang Yinde (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2017), 11-14.

354. François Cheng's novel *Le Dit Tianyi* was awarded the Prix Femina in 1998 and he was elected to the Académie française in 2002. Dai Sijie's first novel, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, was published in 2000 and made into a film in 2002. His novel *Le Complexe de Di* won the Prix Femina in 2003. Gao Xingjian won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000. Shan Sa's *Porte de la paix céleste* won the Prix Goncourt du Premier Roman in 1998, and *La Joueuse de Go* was awarded the Prix Goncourt des Lycéens in 2001. Ya Ding's novels also won various distinctions in France. Ying Chen's novel *L'ingratitude* was nominated for Le Prix Femina (1995) and won the Prix Québec-Paris (1996). Though Ying Chen lives in Canada, her works have been published by some major publishing companies, such as Seuil. See Ileana Daniela Chirila's "La Littérature transculturelle franco-chinoise ou comment réinventer la République des lettres," in *Traits chinois / lignes francophones: écritures, images, cultures*, eds. Rosalind Silvester and Guillaume Thouroude (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2012), 67-83.



French translations of Chinese and other literatures have taken a variety of approaches throughout history, including adaptation, rewriting, and dialoguing. These trends reflect the development of the French literary field. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, translation was related to the act of free writing, which echoed the notion of *les belles infidels*. Such practice dominated literary/translation discourse until the 1960s when the structuralists promoted the binary choice of translating “signifier” or “signified.” This shift opened more possibilities for translation, as seen, for instance, in Georges Mounin’s linguistic approach to translation compared to Roland Barthes’ more dynamic conceptual frame that regards *l’écriture* (including translation) as readerly, writerly,<sup>355</sup> and unsettling signified (untranslatable).<sup>356</sup> In the 1980s, Henri Meschonnic and Antoine Berman valorized the fidelity to source text and culture in translation as an ethnographic decision, which propelled the paradigm change of “the Cultural Turn” in translation studies.

The early trend of French translation as a free writing can be seen in the works of such writers as Judith Gautier and Paul Claudel, whose translations were closely related to the spirit of *les belles infidèles*. In the contemporary context, Francois Cheng’s renditions of Chinese poetry mark the shift from a more self-centred translation to an open one by offering more options than merely adaptation or rewriting: In his poetry translation, Cheng leaves some

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355. Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 4-5.

356. In his essay “The Third Meaning,” Roland Barthes discusses the three meanings of the experience of viewing moving images. While at the information and symbolic levels, these images generate definitive meanings, the third meaning refers to signs for which the yielding of a definitive signified is indeterminable. Thus, the meaning of the image(s) is differing and unsettling, and these blanks and gaps must be filled in by the imagination. Although Barthes deals with moving images and stills, the concept can be effectively applied to the translation process, in which the definitive meaning of a certain language must be created and recreated. See Also see Roland Barthes, “The Third Meaning,” in *Image, Music and Text*, trans. and ed. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 52-68.

culturally loaded poetic allusions untranslated, inviting French readers to participate in translation process by creating their own expressions. He also includes Chinese brushworks or paintings as a semiotic means in his poetry translations to stimulate readers' imagination about the beauty and force of Chinese poetry beyond linguistic signs.<sup>357</sup>

In response to the recent translation approaches discussed above, Dutrait stresses that showing respect to the source text by sticking to its language is an ethic in the profession of translation, and rewriting is not an option for a translator.<sup>358</sup> However, the actual practice of translation demonstrates a rather different reality and raises more nuanced questions: What does "respect" mean for a translator? Does it mean respect to the original text, to the writer, or to the reader? Which of these, if any, is most important? In a later interview, Dutrait revised his previous statement and explained that his approach to translation stresses fidelity to the author, then the reader, and finally the text.<sup>359</sup> His statement complicates the translational binary division

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357. While rendering of Chinese poetry into French, Cheng sometimes leaves certain words or expressions untranslated, as the ancient Chinese poets used language that was either intentionally ambiguous or poetically untranslatable. He leaves the readers to fill in any blanks with their own imagination and creativity. This is a subtle response to Roland Barthes' definition of the meaning of the unsettling signified, which is termed "the third meaning." The unsettled signified needs readers to actively participate in filling in gaps and re-creating the work in the translation. Cheng also attempts to add a semiotic dimension to his Chinese poetry translation in French. In some of his later anthologies, he emphasizes the semiotic beauty of Chinese poetry by combining poetry with calligraphy, an unprecedented effort to present Chinese classical poetry visually. See Paula Varsano, "Emptiness-as-Ambiguity: Francois Cheng's Hybrid Poetics and his Translation of Tang Poetry into French," in *One into Many: Translation and Dissemination of Classical Chinese Literature*, ed. Leo Tak-hung Chan (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003), 115-147.

358. Noël Dutrait, "La traduction de la poésie de Gao Xingjian en français," in *Littérature chinoise et globalisation*, eds. Nicoletta Pesaro and Zhang Yinde (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2017), 91-98.

359. Liu Yunhong and Noël Dutrait, "guanyu zhongguo wenxue duiwai yijie de dui hua" [Dialogue on Chinese Literature Translation], *Xiaoshuo pinglun* [Fiction Criticism] no. 5 (2016): 37-43.

between loyalty to the source or the target, and raises questions of a more sociological nature: Is respect for the source text equal to respect for the author? If the author and the text can be regarded as the source, do they necessarily mean the same source of the original authority? More specifically, if the author wants to gain more cultural capital by revising his/her own text in order to conform to target norms, to which source should the translator be loyal? For Dutrait, the author has priority, with the reader coming second, and the text at the bottom. What does this hierarchy imply?

Dutrait's priority to the author shifts the object of the translator's fidelity from the source to the client; in other words, the translator's job is to fulfill what the author expects to achieve. This means that the translation can be oriented toward the source milieu, or the target milieu, or even both. The second implication of Dutrait's statement is the acknowledgement that translation is a market-oriented activity that seeks to meet the expectations of the target readers.

Accordingly, the translator may choose to adjust his/her strategies to favour the readers. These implications basically agree, but may also experience division. For example, while trying to express him/herself in his/her work, a writer may choose to emphasize this goal, with the expectations of the readers of secondary importance. The third implication is that, as the source text is the least important of the three elements in the translation process, fidelity or not to the source is secondary. Serving the will of the author and the desires of the market are the priorities of translation.

In connection with Dutrait's statement on translation, the emphasis in modern translation theory on the importance of the source text and culture constitutes a discursive vision that serves as a guide for an action plan for translation practice. However, what lies at the core of translation practice is the author's expectations and the market acceptability of his/her works. By relating

Dutrait's statement on translation with his French version of *Lingshan*, we need to consider how Dutrait's discourse on translation reflects the reality of his work.

### 2.3.0. *Lingshan* in Translation

The translation of *Lingshan* is of special significance in discussions of the reception of Chinese literature in the French literary field. In this section, we investigate the conditions of the milieu of the translation's target language. We need to address some of the essential factors that influenced *Lingshan*'s translation and reception in France, including the agency of the translator(s); the agents of translation, as seen in an analysis of the novel's paratextual features; a textual analysis of foregrounding features in the translation, and reviews of *Lingshan* in France. Examining all these factors will help to provide answers to the main question asked in the previous section, of the role of translation in the international canonization of a Chinese novel. This discussion also addresses a subsidiary question: If *Lingshan* is a modernist novel in Chinese, what does its translation mean for the target literary fields?

#### 2.3.1 The Agency of the Translator: Translating *Lingshan* in France

In the Bourdieusian sociological approach to translation, the agency of the translator is dialectically positioned in the translation process. The translator is not totally submissive to translation conventions, nor can he/she reject them, as he/she both structures and is structured by such conventions. As the translations of Lu Xun in France demonstrate, the translator has agency to choose texts and translation strategies; however, the translator is still constrained by the regimes of the literary translation field, publication policy, market, and client-translator's

cooperation. The relationship of “structuring” and “structured” is exemplified in Dutrait’s translation of Gao’s *Lingshan*.

Many translators in France, particularly translators of Chinese literature, are not necessarily professional translators. Some, such as Noël Dutrait, Annie Curien, Chantal Chen-Andro and Isabelle Rabut, are specialists in the language they translate and teach in universities. Other professional writers or poets sometimes turn to translation to create something new from an original text that they regard as a valuable source of inspiration. As they are mainly part-time professional translators, they are more likely to follow their creative urge to translate or use the translation as a springboard for their own creation or invention, as many of the translations of classical Chinese poetry discussed above demonstrate. However, seemingly free translations invite the question of whether such translations are constrained by the demands of the market, publishers, or institutions, and if so, how. The experience of Gao’s French translator Noël Dutrait can provide answers to this question.

Dutrait is an example of the Chinese-studies scholars who have taken the lead to promote Chinese literature in the French literary field through translation, with his efforts rooted in his conviction of the literary and aesthetic value of modern Chinese literature. He began his work as a translator in the 1970s, focusing on “littérature de reportage.” The rationale for this work was to demonstrate how Chinese literature, especially documentary literature, described and reflected the reality and history of China from the 1920s to the present day. It was also a gesture against the blind fervour of Maoist supporters for China’s Cultural Revolution by unfolding China’s historical path through “reportage literature.”<sup>360</sup>

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360. Noël Dutrait, “Traduire la littérature chinoise contemporaine au début du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, une question de choix,” in *La Traduction entre orient et occident, modalités, difficultés et enjeux*, ed. Paul Servais (Paris: Harmattan, 2011), 77-90. Also see Elodie Karaki and Chloé

Dutrait continued his translation work even after the decline of Maoist sympathies in France, but its influence on the reception of contemporary Chinese literature in the French literary field was still dominated by more general political readings. His translations of works by Wang Meng, A Cheng, Su Tong, Mo Yan, and other such writers were meant to challenge this political tendency in the reading of Chinese literature in translation by treating those works both as literary art and as social documents. These French translations exemplify Chinese writers' use of fiction as an art form to present their observations and imagination of contemporary China.<sup>361</sup>

Dutrait's cooperation with Gao began in the early 1990s. Gao had known Dutrait since the former served as a translator for Ba Jin's visit to France in 1979. In the early 1990s, after his former translator passed away, Gao asked Dutrait to be his translator. In 1992, shortly after *Lingshan* was published in Taiwan, Dutrait and his wife, Liliane Dutrait, began working on their French translation on gaining the initial impression that Gao's work was "si frais" and different from other modern Chinese novels.<sup>362</sup>

In an extended interview for *Livres* in January 2001, Noël and Liliane Dutrait discuss their cooperation with Gao and the publishing house L'Aube.<sup>363</sup> Noël Dutrait's friendship with Gao began in 1978 when Gao was the translator for the first official delegation of the Chinese Writers' Association. As a teacher of Chinese language and literature in Lyon, Dutrait had much to share with Gao, as he was part of the debate in China on modernism. Dutrait was interested in

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Carbuccia, "Entretien avec Noël Dutrait, un traducteur 'principalement fidèle,'" *Les chantiers de la création*, no.6 (November 12), 2013, <http://journals.openedition.org/lcc/758>.

361. Noël Dutrait, "Traduire la littérature chinoise contemporaine au début du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, une question de choix," 77-90.

362. Wang Mingxing, "Entretien avec Noël Dutrait, traducteur de *La Montagne de l'âme* de Gao Xingjian," in *Alternative francophones* 2, no. 1 (2017).

363. "Entretiens avec Noël and Liliane Dutrait," in *Livres*, no.36 (January 2001): 39-41.

the developments in Chinese literature at the time, and he decided to translate these works to French readers. He translated works by writers such as A Cheng, Han Shaogong, Wang Meng, Mo Yan and others, sharing this task with his wife. Noël Dutrait translated these texts into French as faithfully as possible to the originals, and Liliane Dutrait helped revise the texts, given her experience as a proof-reader and editor, to minimize “translationese” traces. They paid much attention to the musicality of the language, sometimes reading the French texts together several times until they were pleasing to them. The best compliment the Dutraits received for their work was “on n’a pas l’impression de lire une traduction” (we don’t have the impression that we are reading a translation). It is important to note that because translation was not their main job, they were not pressured by their publishers and could work according to their own rhythm, thus ensuring the quality of their translation.

According to Liliane Dutrait, it was easy for her and Dutrait to communicate with Les Éditions de l’Aube, because she had occasionally been a reviewer for them. If there was a problem, the Dutraits could deal with the publisher directly. In addition, the publishing house was not far away from the place where they lived. Despite these advantages, Noël Dutrait adds that L’Aube took a risk in publishing Gao’s *La Montagne de l’âme*. The success of the novel in France was also due largely to the effective promotional work undertaken by the publisher’s founder, Marion Hennebert, described in the article as “l’éditeur du Nobel.”<sup>364</sup>

In the introduction section to the review in *Livres*, Hennebert regards the process of publishing Gao’s novel as a real risk, but their vision on the literary quality, their political stand of supporting the minority’s writers and their interests in other cultures were the fundamental

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364. See note 363 above.

reasons for launching quite a number of book projects, notably works by Vaclav Havel, N'guyen Huy Tiep, and Abed Charef.<sup>365</sup>

Several points should be noted about the collaboration of Gao with the Dutraits in the translation of *Lingshan* into French. At the beginning of the translation project, Noël Dutrait was a professor of Chinese language and literature at the Université de Provence, and Liliane Dutrait, who had obtained an MA in Chinese Archaeology, was an editor for an arts journal based in Southern France. Their investments in translation were therefore temporary, and did not need to abide by institutional norms or authorial requirements, as they were not professional translators for a publishing company and were not bound by contracts. Noël Dutrait's interest in translating Chinese literature came from his opposition to the French Maoists and his love of modern literature. Gao even gave the Dutraits freedom to rewrite his novel in French, providing them with the conditions that allowed them to translate his work from a scholar's point of view stressing fidelity to the source. However, this aspect of translation ethics provoked an uneasy relationship between the Dutraits and Gao.

As a bilingual writer, Gao sought to provide French readers with an acceptable French version that was transparent and readable. As scholars, the Dutraits were bound by the principles and norms of their academic training. Because they were Gao's translators and friends, the Dutraits had to take his expectations into consideration. Noël Dutrait considered his role as a translator as a matter of professional ethics and standards of service.<sup>366</sup> Thus, Dutrait and Gao

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365. "Entretiens avec Noël and Liliane Dutrait," 39-41.

366. Noël Dutrait, "Traduire la littérature chinoise contemporaine au début du XXIe siècle, une question de choix," 77-90.



entered a translator-client relationship, during which they cooperated to ensure a translation on which all of them could agree.

It took the Dutraits over three years to translate *Lingshan*. During this period, Noël Dutrait would create a draft that Liliane Dutrait would then edit. When problems arose, they would ask Gao for clarification or explanation, either by sending him the finished portions of the translation for re-reading and feedback, or by having face-to-face discussions.<sup>367</sup> The close collaboration of author and translators ensured a timely completion of the translation, but Gao and the Dutraits had difficulty finding a publisher.

The major publishing companies in Paris, including Gallimard and Seuil, refused the Dutraits' translation of Gao's novel for several reasons. The main reason was its length: It was over six hundred pages, where French publishers prefer manuscripts of four hundred pages or fewer. In addition, Gao was not well known in France, as none of his novel(s) had been published in France at the time. Gao and the Dutraits finally found a lesser-known publisher, Les Éditions de l'Aube, who agreed to publish the novel.<sup>368</sup> Les Éditions de l'Aube specialises in foreign literatures, especially works by underrepresented writers from Communist countries.<sup>369</sup>

Noël and Liliane Dutrait's efforts to translate Gao's novel were based on their professional expertise in both Chinese and French. They sought to create a fluent French translation, which would match Gao's expectations for his novel. The translators successfully completed their work thanks to their close collaboration with Gao, and its publication was also due to Liliane Dutrait's networking with the publisher.

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367. See Wang Mingxing's "Entretien avec Noel Dutrait, traducteur de *La Montagne de l'âme* de Gao Xingjian."

368. See "Entretiens avec Noël and Liliane Dutrait."

369. See its website: [www.editiondelaube.fr](http://www.editiondelaube.fr).

The translation and publication of *Lingshan* are examples of translation as a social practice. The translators were not free to do what they wanted to, as, because of Noël Dutrait's professional ethics, the author and translator had to find common ground. The Dutraits' translation was also affected by publishing norms, as they could not find a prestigious company to publish Gao's novel for their specific market requirements. However, several French publishing companies have received government subsidies to encourage cultural diversity. Gao's novel, therefore, matched L'Aube's political and literary criteria. Noël Dutrait managed to reach a compromise with the publishers by valorizing the artistic aspects of Chinese literature over its capacity to be read as political allegory. It is worth mentioning that the 2012 Seuil editions of Gao's *Lingshan* and his other major works show a change in focus, emphasizing the universal values of his novels.

*Lingshan*'s translation was constrained by Gao's desire to make his novel "acceptable" for the target context, meeting the publisher's vision, market demands, and the government's funding policy for minority cultures. The translator(s) had to negotiate the terms of translation in order to create a successful project. Despite these constraints, Dutrait did enjoy a certain degree of agency as a translator, such as his will to promote contemporary Chinese literature and his choice to provide creative options for translation.

### 3.3.2 The Agents of Translation: *Lingshan* in the Social Space of France and Taiwan

Though secondary sources such as interviews and critical articles provide much information about the translator's habitus, more insights can be found in *Lingshan* itself. To be specific, the paratextual materials of a book provide vantage points from which to observe such issues as publication conditions, market strategies, readership, the targeted role of the publication

in the literary field, and translation conventions and strategies. These materials include cover pages, title pages, introduction, notes and annotations, and cover designs. According to José Lambert's methodology for the study of translation, paratextual data such as titles, title pages, footnotes, and other metatext, as well as the general strategy of the target text in relation to the source, serve as entry points for further analysis of textual materials at different levels. These paratextual elements constitute "macro-level structural features," and through this kind of the preliminary survey as initial investigation, questions regarding "the overall translation strategy and main priorities in it" can be answered in relation to the source text.<sup>370</sup>

For Lambert, the analysis of a translation begins with the cover page, introduction, and translation notes, which are all parts of the text body of a translation. Lambert's method focuses on identifying translation strategies and developing hypotheses that will lead to further analysis of the translated text itself. However, the analysis of these paratextual materials is informed not only by translation strategies but also by other macro-level features such as editorial policies, publishing politics, and the aesthetic traits of cover designs. Furthermore, different production policies and strategies are present in the source and the target text, highlighting the similarities and differences between the source and home environments (*habitus*) of a literary work. Paratext is part of the translation *habitus*, which demonstrates the translation of roles between the source and target cultural and social spaces. The strength of Lambert's analytic tool lies in its inclusion of the crucial paratextual information that is related not only to translation strategies, but also their "socio-cultural features."<sup>371</sup> The Bourdieusian translation approach shares some common

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370. José Lambert, "On Describing Translations," *Functional Approaches to Culture and Translation: Selected Paper by Jose Lambert*, eds. José Lambert et al. (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006), 46.

371. Lambert, 43.

grounds with Lambert's paradigm and the latter's methodology can be used to investigate the translation habitus. Lambert's analytical method appears more adequate if we can compare it with other approaches, for instance, Antoine Berman's hermeneutical analysis. While Lambert's translation analysis is not intended to judge the quality of a version, but provides the information necessary to show the role and functions of a version in a literary field in relation to other literary fields, Berman's hermeneutical translation analysis examines a translation and its transformation from both synchronical and diachronical points of view. Berman's method is basically prescriptive, with the aim of highlighting differences between certain versions of a literary work and possible solutions and suggestions for future retranslations. Though the two approaches overlap in their certain scopes, such as the study of the translator and the translation environment, they have completely different goals.<sup>372</sup>

Following the same method as Lambert's, our investigation of the paratextual features in both the original Chinese and the French translation of *Lingshan* will present not only how the writer is positioned in a literary field, but also how the editors and translators reinforce or weaken this positioning with publication details such as cover page designs, publication promotions, introductions, and translator's notes and annotations. The following section compares the paratexts of Gao's *Lingshan*, originally published in Taiwan amidst changes in cultural policy following the repeal of martial law against Communist China in 1988, and the Dutraits' translation *La Montagne d'ame* in France.

Gao was among the first contemporary mainland Chinese writers to be introduced in Taiwan after its martial law against the mainland had been lifted, leading to an encouragement of

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372. Antoine Berman, *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne* (Paris: Galimard, 1995).

liberalization and democracy. Lianjing (Linking) Publishing House/Company, a specialized literary publishing house set up in 1974 in Taipei, took the initiative to introduce works of major mainland authors, which had previously been banned, to Taiwan. Gao's short story collection was published first in 1989, though at the time he was known more for his plays. This initiative was followed by *Lingshan*'s publication in 1990, which can be regarded as a continuation of the effort to provide mainland Chinese literature, especially contemporary literature, to the Taiwan market.

Gao's works were published in Taiwan thanks to the recommendations of Ma Sen and Malmqvist. The latter had discovered Gao's short stories in Chinese literary journals and translated them in close cooperation with him.<sup>373</sup> Consequently, Gao was chosen as one of the mainland authors whose works would be published in Taiwan; others included Wang Meng and Yang Lian. Although Gao's plays were well known at the time in mainland China, his fiction was basically unknown, which justified his inclusion in this publication project.

Information about a writer's inclusion in a literary series can be found in the novel's introduction, as well as in the promotional material on its front and back covers. These paratextual data can help the reader determine the reason for Gao's novels, rather than his other genres such as drama or short stories, being included in this publication series, and, more importantly, its relevance to Taiwan's literary field. The translation conditions (*habitus*) of his novel can be further determined by examining the paratextual features of its French translation(s) in comparison with those of the Chinese text published in Taiwan.

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373. See Ma Sen, "Preface," in Gao Xingjian's *Lingshan* (Taipei: Lianjing Publishing House, 1990), 11-12.

The front and back covers of a novel usually provide summaries of the novel's key elements and artistic themes. The cover page of *Lingshan* of this Taiwan edition features abstract patterns, such as triangles, lines, and dots in various shapes, suggesting the roads, mountains, and rivers the protagonist observes on his journey.<sup>374</sup> The red background further strengthens the sense of the location, with the colour red referring to mainland China and the contrasting shades of blue indicating borders with other regions. The footprints-like dots on the red portion of the land are visible, seemingly indicating the places to which the narrator has travelled. On the left flipside, a black square is printed with the Chinese words "Lingshan" in white, surrounded by pink and yellow arrows, which could represent the movement of inner thought from the surface to the deep layer of the narrator's conscience. The cover design accentuates the narrator's trips as an inner journey while traversing certain regions of the Communist China overwhelmed by the colour red. The black pattern and the ideographic forms of the Chinese words "靈山" ("灵山" in simplified Chinese) suggest death, underworld, spirit, and the inner life. In brief, the front cover defines the nature of the novel as a modern narrative, integrating a person's journey in the land of tension in contrast with the living ethnic cultures (as the colour blue suggests).

While the front cover gives the reader an impression about Gao's novel, the back cover further emphasizes the spirituality in the journey in its summary: "I" and "you" roam all over the country, exploring the "Lingshan" (the Soul or Spiritual Mountain), so as to find the "Taohua yuan," a Chinese synonym for Shangri-La. The summary also describes the novel as a mental pilgrimage to the Soul Mountain that unveils the ethnic mysteries of the border region of Southwestern China. The cover designs thus present the novel as a modern, spiritual, ethnic, and exotic travelogue.

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374. See the cover page of Gao's *Lingshan*.

Gao's novel is prefaced by Ma Sen's introduction, "Yishu de tuiwei yi fuwei-shu Gao Xingjian *Lingshan*" (Negation and (Re)valorization of Novelistic Arts: The Preface to Gao Xingjian's *Lingshan*).<sup>375</sup> Ma Sen's preface was not accidental, as he and Gao have had similar experiences. Ma did extensive graduate study in France and was an early promoter of modernist Chinese drama in Taiwan. Ma's background both as a modernist and Francophone provides commonality between him and Gao Xingjian.

In his preface, Ma highlights the features of Gao's novel in relation to the history of Chinese modern literature, making a case for its relevance in China as well as in Taiwan. While characterizing the historical development of literature as instruments for national salvation, Ma points out the underemphasis on treating the novel as an art form, especially during the period following the Chinese Communist takeover in 1949, which degraded literature as a tool for service to the Party's cause. Ma notes that with the death of Mao in 1976, many Chinese writers abandoned this practice and began to take a different road, leading to a revival and new development of Chinese literature. It was in this context that a group of Chinese writers, among whom was Gao, distinguished themselves. For Ma Sen, Gao's literary theory and his exploration of new writing, including his total rejection of socialist realist components such as engagement with reality, story, and characterization, marked an attempt to promote the novel as a work of art rather than as a political vehicle. Ma argues that by focusing on the creation of literary art, Gao has revalorized fiction as an art form and resisted the totalization of literature for political purposes.

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375. Ma Sen, "Preface," in Gao Xingjian's *Lingshan* (Taipei: Lianjing Publishing Company, 1990), 1-12.

Furthermore, Ma showcases Gao's essay style in his short stories and in *Lingshan*. He argues that Gao's new writing mode can be considered a dismantling of the boundaries between *sanwen* ("essay") and *xiaoshuo* ("fiction"): Where fiction uses story and character development, essay projects random thoughts, feelings and imagination. Gao extensively adopts this essay style to reduce such fictional elements as characterization and plot development in his work. By applying the personal pronouns "you" and "I" to his fictional narratives, Gao largely avoids telling a story in his novel, choosing instead to focus more on the two aspects of the traveler's psychological experiences in quest of the spiritual: "I" represents the analytical side of the narrative, whereas "you" is synthetic. The ultimate goal of the narratives is to illuminate the inner experiences of the narrator and present those experiences to the readers. Ma concludes that Gao's mixture of prose and novelistic techniques is a significantly new experiment that attracts both resistance and appreciation on the part of readers and critics. At the end of his essay, Ma stresses that Gao's novel was sent to Malmqvist for translation before its publication in Taiwan, suggesting a recognition of the novel within the mainstream Western literary circle.

According to Ma's preface, the significance of Gao's novel lies in his rejection of the communist instrumentation of literature for political purposes by his exploration of new forms to narrate personal experiences. Second, Gao's option of essay style in his fiction, particularly his minimization of characterization, story, and plot development for a more dynamic narrative of "I" and "you," marks a radical direction in the psychological unfolding of the various aspects of a character's mental process.

Ma's preface points out that Gao's exploration of new art forms in his novel is validated from a historical perspective in the Chinese context, and for Chinese literature as a whole, keeping in mind that Ma is a "nationalist" writer, who considers Taiwan part of China. Gao's



legitimization of the artistic value of novels is designed to evoke a response in the reader, a goal that is relevant to Taiwanese literature as well. Ma's preface appears to choose Gao's case to promote the serious treatment of the novel as a work of art rather than as a political instrument, as had been the case not only in mainland China after 1949 but also in Taiwan during the period of martial law between 1949 and 1987.<sup>376</sup> In addition, Ma also avoids the categorical term "modernism" to describe Gao's writings, and instead tries to link Gao's works with the Chinese literary context and its history.

If Lianjing's publication of Gao's works is relevant to Taiwan's cultural politics, *Lingshan*'s experience in France is an example of a different aspect of social context in the receiving cultural milieu. As noted above, *Lingshan* was translated and published by Les Editions de L'Aube in Southern France based on the 1990 Lianjing edition. Thus, comparing the Chinese and French versions of the text will demonstrate the transformation of *Lingshan* for the target French milieu at the paratextual level, focusing on the publishing house, editorial policy, translation strategy and other elements to the French literary field.

The front cover of the French translation published in 1995 depicts an ink painting by Gao himself which was collected by Morat-Instituts für Kunst.<sup>377</sup> The painting, in "encre de Chine" (Indian ink) style, shows a landscape with a river at the bottom and a dark mountain dominating the centre, with its upper part exposed to strong sunlight. Though the original painting was adopted as the front page of the novel, its dark-ink color was modified by the addition of blue to the base, emphasizing the beauty and the poetic quality of the landscape. In

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376. Ma Sen, *Ma sen wenlun* [Ma Sen's Selected Essays on Literature] (Taipei: lianjing chuban she, 1986).

377. See the front cover of Gao's *La Montagne de l'âme*, trans. Noël and Liliane Dutrait (La Tour d'Aigues: L'Édition de L'Aube, 1995).

addition, the sunlight becomes a mixture of yellow and dark blue, bringing forth its strong radiance, over top of which appear the title *La Montagne de l'âme* and Gao's Chinese seal. The design suggests that the novel is about a Chinese author's narrative of a spiritual quest. While the colors of the mountain and flowing river give an impression of the Chinese landscape's dimensions, movement, force, and mystery, the light coming from above appears to indicate the transcendental nature of the spiritual quest involved.

The back cover presents a synopsis of the novel.<sup>378</sup> The introduction emphasizes the “par hasard” of the unnamed character “je” who takes a long trip to escape the stresses of his life in Beijing in the 1980s. Two teacups bumping into each other on a train inspire his search for a non-existent *Lingshan*. From there, Gao gradually introduces unknown parts of China and its infinitely rich history to the reader. In its narration of the journey, the novel unfolds a multidimensional search for Chinese civilization, the origin of men, love, and spirit, among other things. The editor also comments that Gao's choice of different personal nouns in an alternative narrative style helps to depict various aspects of the psychological reactions and developments along the protagonist's journey. The cover blurb concludes that the novel's varying narrative styles help to make it a classic of late-twentieth-century Asian literature.

A short supplementary biography appears at the bottom of the page, describing Gao as a modernist writer who joined the debate on realism and modernism while he was in China. It also acknowledges his status as a political refugee since 1988, even as his plays and paintings were praised throughout the world. The back cover, in total, provides several justifications for the publication of the novel: Its artistic exploration, particularly its signature of narrative pronouns; Gao's relevance to Western literary modernism; and his status as a political refugee. His

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378. See the back cover of Gao's *La Montagne de l'âme*.

positioning as an important Asian literary figure provides a further reason for this edition of the novel, though at that point, Gao was mainly known in France.

The title pages and introduction of the French translation of *Lingshan* include more information about Gao's work in the French socio-literary context, to situate the funding of the translation by the "Centre national du livre" (CNL), formerly "Le Centre national des lettres," a cultural organization of the French government's Ministry of Culture and Communication. Its mission is to promote the publication and dissemination of challenging literary works. The works are examined by experts to determine their suitability for the program, and those that are chosen receive funding to aid publication, translation, and dissemination.<sup>379</sup> Thus, various players in the publication process are supported, including writers, translators, publishers, editors, and others, who are chosen from numerous entries in the annual competition. The French translation of *Lingshan*, as indicated on its title page, was recommended as an important project for publication and was considered artistically significant, and subsequently its publisher received aid from the government.

The publication of Gao's novel was compatible with L'Aube's policy of promoting literature from authoritarian countries, and its publication with the assistance of French cultural organizations was largely undertaken due to its value as the work of a writer in exile from a communist country. In addition, its title pages indicate that the novel was also funded by the "Conseil régional Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur," a financial aid project for promoting French translation of literary works.<sup>380</sup>

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379. See CNL's website: [https://www.centrenationaldulivre.fr/en/aides\\_aux\\_auteurs/](https://www.centrenationaldulivre.fr/en/aides_aux_auteurs/).

380. See the regional organization's website: <https://www.maregionsud.fr/la-region-en-action/institution/le-conseil-regional>.

The covers and title page do not indicate whether the novel is connected to China's political reality. However, the biographical information on the back cover, identifying Gao as a political refugee, and the acknowledgements on the title page of its funding sources, inform readers that Gao's novel does have relevance to Chinese politics, especially since Gao was exiled from China for rebelling against socialist realist literature and favouring French modernism. Dutrait's "preface" further strengthens this aspect of Gao's life and writing in China and France.

If Ma's introduction focuses on the aesthetic evolution of Chinese literature, Dutrait's introduction appears to approach Gao's writing and style from a different angle.<sup>381</sup> Dutrait's preface offers three visions on Gao's novel. He first defines Gao's leading role in contemporary Chinese literature after China was opened to the outside world. He states that Gao introduced modernist literary discourses to the Chinese literary field with his experiential short stories, plays, and translations of the works of such French modernist writers as Ionesco, Beckett, and Prévert. Moreover, the publication of Gao's first treatise on modernism in fiction was more significant. Second, Dutrait contextualizes Gao's life and writing in China's political environment that had forced him to relocate, first to the south and southwest of China, and then to France. Even so, both countries have furnished Gao with inspiration, fostering the creation not only of *Lingshan* but also many plays and paintings. Meanwhile, Dutrait also stresses that, although Gao wrote *Lingshan* when he was still in China, he completed it amidst the influence of French literary currents. Following the "Tiananmen Incident" (as called by the Chinese government) in 1989, Gao broke off firmly from the Communist Party, "settling his account with his home country" in his novel. Dutrait maintains that in this regard, Gao's exile was not a

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381. Noël Dutrait, "Préface" in Gao's *La Montagne de l'âme*, trans. Noël and Liliane Dutrait (La Tour d'Aigues: L'Édition de L'Aube, 1995), 5-8.

source of suffering, but a blessing that allowed him direct contact with the Western literary world. Third, while characterizing Gao's novel in terms of the quest for the origins of Chinese civilization, ethnic identity, love, fantasy, and spirituality in contrast to the bleak picture of an absurd reality, Dutrait underlines Gao's creative dimension in his novelistic art through his fictional pronouns "je" "tu", and "il/elle" to relate the narrator to the reader, so as to present different aspects of human psychological activities and perspectives. Dutrait concludes that Gao's writing transcends norms of both Chinese and Western literatures and invites many questions, including whether or not what he wrote can be considered a novel, due to its many artistic experiments that overcome the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, between essay and novel. Finally, in the postscript to his preface, Dutrait stresses that his translation is the result of a fruitful cooperation between himself and Gao. He also adds that Gao's novel has been translated into Swedish, and the English and German versions were in progress.

The paratextual features of the Chinese and French editions of *Lingshan* both demonstrate the various strategies the publishers of each respective version adopted to promote Gao's novel. The Chinese text presents the novel in the literary contexts of both Taiwan and mainland China. The publisher characterizes the novel as travel literature with a spiritual dimension, whereas Ma sees that it further valorizes its literary values and its relevance to Taiwan. In addition, somehow, Ma cites Malmqvist as an authority on Gao's novel.

The L'Aube edition focuses on the Chinese background of the story, buttressed by Gao's painting that depicts the poetic beauty and spiritual quest in China. By contrast, the Taiwan edition chooses abstract modernist designs on its cover. In addition, the emphasis on the haphazardness of the narrator's journey to Lingshan is aimed at a French readership. The paratext's description of Gao as a political refugee and the acknowledgement of government

sponsorship for the translation project further draws attention to the appreciation of his novel in French. More specifically, Dutrait's account of Gao's creative writing in China and France shows that Gao's writing, literary criticism and translation were irrevocably connected with modernist currents and writing in France. This is especially the case as Gao's novel was finished following his rejection of the Chinese Communist Party's influence on literature, and benefitted from his exile, which allowed him to write freely.

The various editions of *Lingshan* demonstrate the transformation of Gao's novel from the Chinese/Taiwanese context to the French literary field, conditioned by publishing policies, literary conventions, and cultural politics. The paratextual features of later versions indicate a shift in emphasis as the novel enters a different model of adaptation and interpretation. Different versions in various contexts and time frames provide more information about and insights on the reception of Gao's novel both in Taiwan and France. Thus, comparing the later editions of the paratextual features of *Lingshan* in Chinese and French is important to determine the different literary field conditions and requirements in relation to its translation.

The 2000 edition of *Lingshan* by Lianjing Publishing Company replaces the original cover page with Gao's own ink painting, with a Chinese caption at the top of the page indicating that the novel was written by the 2000 Nobel Laureate.<sup>382</sup> The back cover includes the Nobel Committee's statement on Gao's novels *Lingshan* and *Yigeren*. In addition, Ma's preface is retained, as in the first edition, but Gao's acceptance speech at the Nobel Prize ceremony and his biographical information are added as supplementary materials. All of this paratext indicates the Chineseness of Gao's Nobel Prize work in the international literary field.

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382. Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan* (Taipei: Lianjing Publishing House/Company, 2000).

The 2000 L'Aube edition keeps the original front cover design, but Gao's Chinese seal on the page does not appear, while the back cover quotes from reviews of *La Montagne de l'âme*, published in French journals such as *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*, before Gao won the Nobel Prize.<sup>383</sup> These reviews characterize Gao's work as an Asian novel with a "modernist" form, a musical quality, and living language, which also displays the legacy of the Chinese fictional tradition, as seen in its various story forms from Chinese literary history. One review remarks that Gao's novel depicts both "la Chine éternelle" and "la Chine cruelle," while another reviewer calls it "un guide du routard céleste." This edition does not include information about the sponsor of the translation, but its editorial note does agree with its predecessors that Gao is both a political refugee and a great writer.

While L'Aube continued to publish other editions of *La Montagne de l'âme* after Gao won the Nobel Prize, these editions continued to link Gao with politics and literature, and draw attention to his achievement in France. It was not until Gao left L'Aube in 2004 and published his works with Le Seuil that the paratextual material included with his novels changed significantly. As one of the most prestigious publishing houses in France, Le Seuil sought to canonize Gao's work in France and in the rest of the world, as demonstrated by the publication of Gao's major works of fiction in 2012 as the part of the Nobel Prize Writers series.<sup>384</sup> This edition marked a shift toward presenting Gao's novel as a work of world literature, as the cover

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383. Gao Xingjian, *La Montagne de l'âme*, trans. Noël and Liliane Dutrait (La Tour d'Aigues: L'Éditions de L'Aube, 2000).

384. Gao Xingjian, *La Montagne de l'âme, Une canne à pêche pour mon grand-père, Le Livre d'un homme seul, L'Ami, Vingt-cinq ans après: romans et nouvelles*, trans. Noël et Liliane Dutrait (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2012).

design and the preface both illustrate. On the title page, Gao's name is prominently printed out and followed by the descriptor "prix Nobel de littérature."

In his new preface to the Le Seuil edition, Dutrait stresses the importance of Gao's novel *La Montagne de l'âme* in France in contrast to the low reception of *Lingshan* in Taiwan: After its publication in French, French readers enthusiastically embraced the novel, whereas in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, the novel became popular only after he had been awarded the Nobel Prize. In addition, Dutrait's preface does not mention Gao's political status as a refugee and focuses more on his "universality," as the interior experience of his protagonist would also be relevant to American or Australian readers, for instance. Readers in all these cultures would share the quest for beauty, spirituality, love, and friendship, and disillusionment in the context of modernity. Moreover, the popularity of Gao's novel(s) is inextricably linked with the efforts of its translators. At the end of the preface, Dutrait points out that he and his wife Liliane (who died in 2010) collaborated with Gao, in order to translate his works in such a manner that Gao always encouraged them to keep away from the original and "recreate" it in their own manner.<sup>385</sup>

Examining *Lingshan*'s translation and publication habitus in Taiwan and France reveals a shift from local literary significance to the French literary context, as well as Gao's gradual ascendancy from a political dissident writer to a canonical writer of "universal" relevance. Agents of translation, publishing companies, cultural offices, and grant agencies all played significant roles in this process of canonization. By contrast, the paratext of the Taiwan edition demonstrates the opening up of Taiwan to mainland literature, which allowed both Taiwanese and mainland readers and writers to draw inspiration from each other in renewing and innovating literature as an art form independent of political manipulation and instrumentalization. The

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385. See the "Préface" of the new Seuil edition of Gao's works in 2012.



French translation of Gao's text does not follow this logic, showing interest instead in Gao's political status and free creation. As a result, although the French version of *Lingshan* is based on the 1990 Taiwan edition, the paratextual modifications demonstrate that the overall literary tone has been changed according to the social and cultural needs of the target milieu.

As identified, the agents of translation were significant for the initial translation process of *Lingshan* at the macro level. However, we also need to examine how cultural policies and politics influence translation strategies at the micro-level. Dutrait indicated that Gao encouraged him to recreate his work in French; however, does this mean that the translator and/or writer have the freedom to do so? What is the ultimate aim of this kind of re-creation for the French version? The following section offers a micro-analysis of how translation creates its own dynamic in the target milieu; in other words, how Gao's novel fits into the sociocultural space of the French target milieu.

### 2.3.3 Translating *Lingshan* into the French Literary Field

According to his preface to *Lingshan*, Dutrait attributes the successful reception of its French version to his collaboration with Gao. This version proved more popular than Gao's Chinese original, which was largely overlooked, as well as Malmqvist's Swedish version.<sup>386</sup> On many occasions, Dutrait points out that he is a translator, not a rewriter; he remained loyal to the original, and he did not produce a re-creation. But he respected Gao's intentions: "don't hesitate to rewrite. You may distance from the source language. If there is a sentence you need to change completely, change it." Consequently, Dutrait admits that "As I didn't write a novel myself, what

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386. See note 381 above.

I could do is to write better to achieve the best result in my capacity.”<sup>387</sup> For Gao, the ultimate goal of the translation is to eliminate obstacles to the target audience’s appreciation of his work. However, such questions as how the novel should be translated and which strategies were necessary are fundamental to understanding the success of the translation. Whether the French version is faithful or not to the original does not appear important in this context. It appears that Gao and Dutrait did not share the same ideas on translation; however, since Dutrait places loyalty to the translator as his priority, he was obliged to provide the solutions to “recreate” Gao’s novel according to French literary regimes, as Gao requested. Thus, the questions of what has been changed and how such transformations reflect the conditions of the French literary field are important in our discussion of the reception of *La Montagne de l’âme* in France.

As the above discussion of *Lingshan*’s paratext illustrates, the implied translation strategy of “co-creation” for the French version can be understood as the re-creation of a French text that would meet readers’ expectations. Although such a translation might not be faithful to the original, it was faithful to the writer, whose expectations of creating an “acceptable” novel by re-creating it for the French literary field were clearly prioritized to the translator.

The process of “re-creation” aimed to bring Gao’s novel closer to French readers; in other words, the French version had to meet the expectations of these readers and the literary regimes under which they operate. For example, Gao himself did not want to follow other translators’ examples and fill his work with copious French annotations about Chinese language and culture. He wanted to conform to French literary conventions that favoured minimal use of annotations, so that readers’ attention from the novel would not be diverted; if they found anything in the

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387. Wang Mingxing, “Translation, Rewriting and Creation: Interview of Professor Noël Dutrait, Translator of Gao Xingjian’s *Lingshan* (*La Montagne de l’âme*),” in *Transcultural: A Journal of Translation and Cultural Study* 12, no. 2 (2020): 41.

novel especially interesting, they could look it up later.<sup>388</sup> It is true that the French version contains only a very few annotations in the main body of the text. However, omitting annotations could risk obscuring the connotations in the original Chinese text.

The apparent linguistic choices in Dutrait's translation are meant to create an *illusio*, a set of assumed aesthetic features that will allow the target audience to identify the text's significance in their literary field. José Lambert qualifies these features as the dominant characteristics in a literary work, though some deviations from the foregrounded features might also exist. For Lambert, analysis of these dominant characteristics requires operations on various levels, such as word choices, sentences, paragraphs, and textual and narrative modes. Based on the data collected, external theoretical and practical patterns must be established so as to determine the translated text's functions and theoretical models.<sup>389</sup> As Lambert indicates, it is impossible to study every possible aspect of a certain text, but its main features must be sorted out to address broader issues. Thus, Gao's reception in the French literary field can be charted by examining the most important features in both the Chinese and French texts of his novel.

*Lingshan*'s hybrid intertexts constitute one of foregrounded features. As Leo Ou-fan Lee points out, the Chinese version of *Lingshan* is composed of hybrid text sources, such as the texts of the ancient steles, various ancient stories, Buddhist canons, Taoist scriptures, elements of folklore, and songs. These texts constitute what may be described as postmodern pastiches or simulacra. However, Lee also stresses that Gao's novel shares most characteristics of modernist fiction, with its emphasis on "artistic originality" and "the author's creative ego" that is "often in

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388. Wang Mingxing, 39-49.

389. José Lambert, "On Describing Translations," 37-46.

defiance of the philistine bourgeoisie society.”<sup>390</sup> We also need to add that Gao’s artistic endeavours are identifiable in his ruthless experimentation with language and style.

For the purposes of this study, Gao’s adoption of hybrid texts is meant to bring the “original” cultural atmosphere to the reader by mimicking the auras of various historical texts. It is more related to literary intertexts than to the metatextual functions of postmodern depthlessness and commercial values. His reworkings of these texts do lead to some degree of stylistic inconsistency. However, since the spiritual quest is the dominant theme of the novel, Gao’s narrative monologue or imagined dialogue, in addition to the descriptions of the journey, are in the foreground.

Moreover, as mentioned previously, Dutrait identifies three sources from which Gao has drawn his inspiration. Gao had wanted his novel to be translated according to George Perec’s style, in particular modelling on his “tu” as the narrator in the novel in addition to Duras’ “je dis” “il/elle dit” and Michel Butor’s “vous.” Gao’s fictional personal pronouns as a creative device signal the various focuses on the character’s memory, reflection, mental impressions, fantasy and imagination. Thus, his narrative style can be characterized as inward-looking, introspective, and poetic, as the length of the sentences and the rhythms and sounds of the words demonstrate. Therefore, the primary analysis of the French translation of *Lingshan* should focus on how these pronouns are used

### 2.3.3.1 Translating the Chinese Pronouns “wo,” “ni,” and “ta” into French “je,” “tu,” and “il/elle”

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390. Leo Lee Ou-fan, “Happy Exiles,” in *Musings: Reading Hong Kong, China and the World* (Hong Kong: East Slope Publishing, 2011), 100-109.

In an interview on the influence of foreign literatures on his novels, Mo Yan points out that when he wrote his novels in the 1980s, his literary style was shaped by García Márquez's novels, particularly the use of local languages. However, he adds that nobody noticed this influence, especially when his works were translated into another language, even if some people could find it, the traces of these influences were barely visible. Mo Yan contends that translating the works of a writer, who has been subject to foreign literary influences will be decided by whether or not the translator recognizes those influences and translates them accordingly, or normalizes those foreign traces.<sup>391</sup> Mo Yan's observation is relevant to the discussion of certain aspects of Dutrait's French translation, especially his translation of Gao's *Lingshan*.

On many occasions, Gao categorically dismissed the idea of adopting a foreign style, or foreign words and expressions, in his works. He defended his distinctive approach to his writing in reaction to the post-Mao period's dominant ideology of socialist realism. Thus, he promoted a kind of literature of what he called "no-ism," which sought to reduce the impact of mainstream literature of collective political commitment, and thus allow writers more individual voices and freer expression. Consequently, in his writings, Gao not only avoids any words or expressions with overt political connotations, but also restricts his use of set phrases in the Chinese language. Moreover, he also avoids the foreignized structures in his writings, believing that Europeanized Chinese grammatical structures following the May 4 Movement have degraded the Chinese language's purity. Thus, he maintains that, by appealing to classical vernacular language and expressions, he can resist prevalent literary norms and revitalize the Chinese literary language,<sup>392</sup>

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391. Mo Yan, "Yuwai yingxiang" [Foreign Influences], in *Mo yan duihua xinlu* [The New Dialogues with Mo Yan] (Beijing: Wenhua yixu chuban she, 2012), 133-159.

392. Gao, *Meiyou zhuyi* [No-isms] (Hong Kong: Cosmo Publishing Company, 2000).

a different approach than those of writers such as Li Jinfa, Dai Wangshui, and Mu Dan, as discussed earlier in this study.

However, as Dutrait has pointed out, Gao drew his inspirations from modern French literature, particularly the *Nouveau roman*. Neither Chinese critics nor Chinese readers have said much about this influence, perhaps because they have not overtly noticed it. This in turn may be due to their being unaware of Gao's inspiration in French literature, or to Gao's subtle translations from his French sources. If the influence of French literature on Gao is important, we need to investigate those traces and their functions in his work. Such questions should be asked: Do these French traces coexist harmoniously with his traditional vernacular language and form? Or, if his Chinese text is a hybrid, does such hybridity reject the French traces in his text? If his use of traditional vernacular language is part of his style, how is this older form of language translated into French? If the foreign influences on his novel do not depend on loanwords or expressions, where does this foreignness come from and how is it translated into the target language? Does it have the same "foreignness"? If not, what does this translation look like for a French reader? To answer these questions, we first examine the translation of the pronouns in Gao's French version in order to identify this foreignness and the significance of its translation into another language.

As he states in his essay on points of view in Louis Aragon's and Michel Butor's novels, Gao emphasizes the shared affinity between French novels and Chinese opera in terms of the use of narrative pronouns, that is, the affinity between the theatrical tripartite relationship and the French narratives. However, this does not necessarily mean that the translation provides ready-made equivalents between these two languages.

The use of pronouns in place of proper names in contemporary Chinese literature of the 1970s was scarce, with Wang Meng's adoption of "you" in an early story being a notable exception.<sup>393</sup> Gao theorized the functions of pronouns in the Chinese context and promoted the creative use of these narrative pronouns as a modern literary discourse.

Jessica Yeung is not impressed by Gao's early experimentations. She points out that Gao's early short stories and plays are negotiations between modernism and socialist realism, thus revealing the limitations of his early artistic endeavours.<sup>394</sup> However, Yeung's assessment is partial, which especially does not apply to *Lingshan*. Gao's master novel was written and eventually finished in France, and his continuous essays in modernism surpassed his previous efforts. Despite Ma Sen's opinion that Gao has renewed Chinese literature as an art form that already existed in modern Chinese literary history, we should not limit our investigation of Gao writing to the modern Chinese literary field only. Various aspects of *Lingshan's* *illusio* are pertinent to Gao's choice of personal pronouns, which is more extensive than in his short stories. His work shows a continuity and development connected to his years of exile in France.

Gao's inspiration from French literature suggests that translation into French would be smooth; however, the differences between Chinese and French preclude the possibility of a direct translation. Nonetheless, Dutrait notes that Gao's novel provides an "interface" for both Chinese and French cultures as a site of border crossing,<sup>395</sup> as any translation must negotiate the linguistic

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393. Gao, *Xiandai xiaoshuo chutan* [A Preliminary Examination of Modern Fictional Techniques] (Guangzhou: Hua cheng chu ban she, 1981), 13-16.

394. See Chapter 3 of Jessica Yeung's *Ink Dances in Limbo: Gao Xingjian's Writing as Cultural Translation* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2009).

395. Noël Dutrait, "Traduire Gao Xingjian: le traducteur comme interface de l'interface," in *Le Choix de la Chine d'aujourd'hui: entre la tradition et l'Occident*, ed. Frederic Wang (Paris: Les Indes savants, 2009), 160-161.

and cultural differences. This is demonstrated in *Lingshan*'s themes of spiritual journeys and marginalized Chinese cultures and its narrative style inspired by those of various French novelists. This indicates that a study of *Lingshan* and of its translation should consider both the text itself and its intertexts.

In *Lingshan*, Gao chooses three pronouns to characterize the narrator's spiritual journey to Lingshan (the Soul Mountain). The predominant narrative pronoun is "ni" ("tu/vous" or "you"), though the subject is "wo" ("je" or "I"). "Tu/vous" is the invention of the subject, the author, with which to share dialogues in order to minimize loneliness along the journey. The third-person narrative pronoun, "ta" ("il/elle" or "s/he"), serves as the objects of "je" and "tu/vous," relating the main narrators' ("je" and "tu") living experiences and fantasies. In the story, "ni" takes up a dominant role, visualizing the narrator's spiritual quest as though the writer is expressing his emotions and relating his experiences to the reader in an unmediated manner. However, translating these words into the corresponding French is not a one-to-one process, because the translation of personal pronouns is subject to other elements such as mood, tense, or prosaic rhythm. Dutrait's translation of Gao's novel in the fashion of the *Nouveau roman*, particularly his use of narrative pronouns with references to authors of such novels, helps to illustrate these differences.

In Gao's Chinese novel, the second-person pronoun "ni" denotes singularity and suggests familiarity/intimacy, which can be translated as "tu" or "you," but some nuances remain. Where "ni" is a singular second-person pronoun, the choice of "tu" indicates familiarity/intimacy/equality in French and covers nicely the meanings of the main implications of "ni." However, comparing with "tu" and "vous" indicates either singularity or plurality, connoting the distance and respect between interlocutors. As Gao indicated, "ni" can also refer to readers in general, who might



contradict the main narrator's point of views. Thus, "ni" can be also translated as "vous," as Butor does in *La Modification*.

As discussed in the previous section, Gao invents "ni" to talk with himself. Sometimes "ni" appears as a female partner(s) to talk with the protagonist, so as to expel his loneliness and satisfy his sexual fantasies. Thus, Gao's "ni" appears to exteriorize his ego (as Id, to use the Freudian term). Seen from this perspective, Gao does not need to invite readers "ni" as "vous" to moralise him, because he also chooses "ta" ("he/she," or "il/elle") to function as the narrator's super ego. Thus, relating to "tu," "vous" is not a suitable pronoun to translate "ni." Furthermore, "you" either indicates singularity, or plurality, but it can also function the same as "ni" "tu" and "vous" do, depending on its textual context.

In Chinese, the pronoun in a sentence can be ignored if the context is clear. Moreover, the tense of a sentence is not indicated by action verbs unless a word or phrase is specifically chosen to do so. Because Chinese is a non-inflectional language, a translation must be made according to the context provided so as to determine the time frame and the degrees of familiarity, which further affect the mood and flow of a sentence. However, this also allows for more space for interpretation and creation.

As noted, Perec, Butor and Duras influenced Gao's writing of his master novel: Perec chooses "tu" to present internal monologues mainly in the present tense. Michel Butor ambiguously uses "vous:" He mainly depicts the main character's stream of consciousness on the train either through memory, reflection, or imagining, in a linear timeframe with different tenses in different contexts. In addition, Butor invites the reader, "vous," into the same fictional narrative to question or interrogate the narrator "vous." Thus, "vous" is utilized both as singular and plural. Duras, meanwhile, opts for "je" and "il/elle" to reflect or anticipate an event, though

the focus is always “je,” and “elle” is the reflection of “je.” The passages discussed below show the similarities between Gao’s style in *Lingshan* and those of the three aforementioned French writers. Dutrait praises such a harmonious and inventive creation of the three personal perspectives in his master novel.<sup>396</sup> We start our analysis from the extracts of some key sections related to the uses of the personal pronouns as narrative devices:

你坐的是长途公共汽车，那破旧的车子，城市里淘汰下来的在保养的极差的山区公路上，路面到处坑坑洼洼，从早起颠簸了十二个小时，来到这座南方山区的小县城。

你背着旅行袋，手里拎个挎包，站在满是冰棍纸和甘蔗屑子的停车场上环顾。

从车上下来的，或是从停车场走过来的人，男的是打着大包小包，女的抱着孩子。<sup>397</sup>

You take a long distant bus, the sort of the old bus, no longer used in the city, in the poorly maintained mountainous road, (whose) surface is full of potholes everywhere, bumped for twelve hours from the early morning and arrive at this small county town in the South.

You carry a travel bag in the back, with a satchel in hand, standing and looking around at the parking lot littered with ice lolly wrappers and sugarcane residues.

(Among those who) get off from the bus, or come over from the parking lot, the men carry various big or small bags, the women carry their babies.<sup>398</sup>

In this passage, the Chinese pronoun “ni” appears to indicate singularity and familiarity, as the French terms “tu” does. Furthermore, as the sentence does not have any tense markers, except for the vague “morning,” leaving the decision of which tenses to use to the translator.

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396. Wang Mingxing, “Translation, Rewriting and Creation: Interview of Professor Noël Dutrait, Translator of Gao Xingjian’s *Lingshan* (*La Montagne de l’âme*),” 39-49.

397. Gao, *Lingshan* (Taipei: Lianjing (Linking) chuban she, 1990), 1.

398. The literal translation is mine.

In Gao's original, what is singular is the object in the first sentence, and the action is seemingly delayed until the end of the paragraph. With the comma and the suspended sentence structure, a thought stream that flows slowly to the end of the sentence creates a narrative rhythm and mood of inwardness and meditation, as the second-person pronoun "ni" indicates.

Dutrait's version retains the French *Nouveau roman* style in the original:

Tu es monté dans un autobus long-courrier. Et, depuis le matin, le vieux bus réformé pour la ville a cahoté douze heures d'affilée sur les routes de montagne, mal entretenues, pleines de bosses et de trous, avant d'arriver dans ce petit bourg du Sud.

Sac sur le dos, une sacoche à la main, tu balaies du regard le parking jonché de papiers de bâtonnets glacés et de déchets de canne à sucre.

Des hommes chargés de sacs de toutes tailles, des femmes, bébé dans les bras, descendent du bus ou traversent le parking tandis qu'une bande de jeunes, sans sacs ni paniers [...]<sup>399</sup>

In the French translation, Dutrait chooses the singular form of the second-person pronoun "tu" instead of the singular/plural, and/or more respectful, "vous." His choice of "tu" indicates that "tu" is addressing the author himself ("je"), which would call for the more personal rather than the more formal/distant "vous." In addition, the first sentence is in the past tense, indicating that the narrator is describing/recalling an event in the past. However, in the second sentence and in the main body of the French version, the present tense is adopted throughout, producing a seeming conflict between the past and the present.

In *Un homme qui dort*, George Perec's "tu" presents the narrator's inner thoughts through a series of monologues. According to Dutrait, Gao had suggested modelling his translation on this style,<sup>400</sup> a sample of which can be seen in the following passage:

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399. Gao, *La Montagne de l'âme*, trans. Noël and Liliane Dutrait (La Tour d'Aigues: L'Édition de L'Aube, 1995), 9.

Dès que tu fermes les yeux, l'aventure du sommeil commence. A la pénombre connue de la chambre, volume obscur coupé par des détails, ou ta mémoire identifie sans peine de chemins que tu as mille fois parcourus, les retraçant à partir du carré opaque de la fenêtre, ressuscitant le lavabo à partir d'un reflet, l'étagère à partir de l'ombre un peu plus claire d'un livre [...]<sup>401</sup>

Perec opens his novel with two short sentences in the present tense, which are followed by another long sentence, punctuated by commas, to accentuate the narrator's mind rambling from one thread to another. But what distinguishes his style from that of Gao's is that, although Perec chooses long sentences, the components of the paragraph are connected by short sentences separated from each other by commas. By applying this structure throughout his novel, Perec centers his monologues on the character's self and feelings in exclusion of the outside world, so that his novel appears to be dominated by the character's linear thought streams. Gao's novel has a similar lengthening pace and rhythm that presents a pensive narration about the outside world and the narrator himself.

Dutrait interprets *Lingshan* as a narration of a past journey. His adoption of the past tense in the beginning provides a reminder to the reader that the story happened in the past. With this background, the story continues, but is presented as if it is happening now. This mode of translation does not conform to Perec's style, but to Butor's and Duras', especially in *L'Amant*:

Un jour, j'étais âgée déjà, dans le hall d'un lieu public, un homme est venu vers moi. Il s'est fait connaître et il m'a dit: "je vous connais depuis toujours. Tout le monde dit que vous étiez belle lorsque vous étiez jeune, je suis venu pour vous dire que pour moi je vous trouve plus belle maintenant que lorsque vous étiez jeune, j'aimais moins votre visage de jeune femme que celui que vous avez maintenant, dévasté.

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400. Noël Dutrait, "Traduire Gao Xingjian: le traducteur comme interface de l'interface," 160-161.

401. George Perec, *Un homme qui dort* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1967), 13.

Je pense souvent à cette image que je suis seule à voir encore et dont je n'ai jamais parlé. Elle est toujours là dans le même silence, émerveillant. C'est entre toutes celle qui me plaît de moi-même, celle où je me reconnais, où je m'enchante.<sup>402</sup>

At the beginning of her novel, Duras describes the imagined scene of her lover's call to her with the imperfect tense and past tense, followed by her present situation told in the present tense, and then a continued use of the present tense to narrate the events of her youth in Indochina. The function of the present tense is the same in Dutrait's translation: To foreground the past with the sense of the immediate presence, as though the narrator is reliving the past now. The similar approach is also adopted by Butor in his novel, *La Modification*, especially its beginning as cited below:

Vous avez mis le pied gauche sur la rainure de cuivre, et de votre épaule droite vous essayez en vain de pousser un peu plus le panneau coulissant.

Vous vous introduisez par l'étroite ouverture en vous frottant contre ses bords, puis, votre valise couverte de granuleux cuir sombre couleur d'épaisse bouteille, votre valise assez petite d'homme habitué aux longs voyages, vous l'arrachez par sa poignée collante, avec vos doigts qui se sont échauffés, si peu lourde qu'elle soit, de l'avoir portée jusqu'ici, vous la soulevez et vous sentez vos muscles et vos tendons se dessiner non seulement dans vos phalanges, dans votre paume, votre poignet et votre bras, mais dans votre épaule aussi, dans toute la moitié du dos et dans vos vertèbres depuis votre cou jusqu'aux reins.<sup>403</sup>

In Butor's text, he first introduces his protagonist with the past tense (le passé composé) to identify him in the precise moment in the past as an introduction. The next paragraph is switched to the present tense, describing his action as if it were happening now. Gao's novel resonates with Duras and Butor's similar approach. Moreover, *Lingshan*'s rhythm follows the

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402. Marguerite Duras, *L'Amant* (Paris: Les Éditions de minuit, 1984), 9.

403. Michel Butor, *La Modification* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1957), 9.

similar pattern in *La Modification*. The sentence structure in its beginning chapter is punctuated by pauses, leaving the main action until the end of the sentence. This is not a usual Chinese structure, and it has been regarded as Gao's experimentation with the flexibility and potential of Chinese narrative. However, it does appear to respond to Michel Butor's similar structures in *La Modification*.

As shown, the opening Chinese passages of Gao's *Lingshan* begins with a long sentence that describes the bus and road conditions, containing the pronoun "ni" ("tu" or "you"), continuing with several action verbs, and ending with a period. However, this sentence could reasonably be broken down into several shorter sentences. Though it does not exhibit a usual Chinese sentence structure, the sentence has its own rhythm, with the repetition of the word "bus:" "You get on a long-distance bus, the shabby and old bus." The French version of Michel Butor's text has a similar structure: "Vous vous introduisez par l'étroite ouverture en vous frottant contre ses bords, puis, votre valise couverte de granuleux cuir sombre couleur d'épaisse bouteille, votre valise assez petite d'homme habitué aux longs voyages, vous l'arrachez [...]." The repetition of the words "votre valise" creates a rhythm that imitates the movement of the mind, fixing on the same objects and then slowly moving on. This sentence is also foregrounded for its length with only the full stop at the end.

Dutrait is aware of the rhythm of the long sentence, but his translation changes the structure slightly by cutting it into two smaller ones: "Tu es monté dans un autobus long-courrier. Et, depuis le matin, le vieux bus réformé pour la ville a cahoté douze heures d'affilée sur les routes de montagne [...]." Such a reformulation does appear to match the typical French sentence structure in general, and Perec's in particular: "Dès que tu fermes les yeux, l'aventure du sommeil commence." However, by adding "et" and "depuis le matin," Dutrait links the two

parts as a whole, even though dividing the sentence into two does disrupt the rhythm present in the original. The rest of the sentence nonetheless follows the same rhythm, as seen in the length of the sentences, the pauses, and the continuous flow of the narrator's stream of thought. In brief, whereas Gao's original is influenced by Butor in terms of mood, pace and rhythm, Dutrait restructures it according to Duras/Perec's style, making the sentence more readable in French even though its rhythm is slightly affected.

Dutrait's translation similarly reflects Perec's narration by "tu" in the following passage from *Un homme qui dort*:

Tu te promènes encore parfois. Tu refais les mêmes chemins. Tu traverses des champs labourés qui laissent à tes chaussures montantes d'épaisses semelles de glaise. Tu t'embourbes dans les fondrières des sentiers. Le ciel est gris. Des nappes de brume masquent les paysages. De la fumée monte de quelques cheminées. Tu as froid malgré ta vareuse double. Tes chaussures, tes gants. Tu essayes maladroitement d'allumer une cigarette.<sup>404</sup>

In Chapter 68 of *Lingshan*, Gao narrates a mountain-climbing experience in a very similar style and theme to the passage from Perec quoted above:

你却还在爬山, 将近到山顶筋疲力尽的时候, 总想这是最后一次。等你登到山顶片刻的兴奋平息之后, 竟又感到还未满足。<sup>405</sup>

Toi, tu continues à gravir les montagnes. Et chaque fois que tu t'approches du sommet, exténué, tu penses que c'est la dernière fois. Arrivé au but, quand ton excitation s'est un peu calmée, tu restes insatisfait.<sup>406</sup>

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404. George Perec, *Un homme qui dort*, 52.

405. *Lingshan*, 485.

406. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 577.

As seen above, Dutrait's translation of the Chinese version follows a similar style: The use of "tu," short sentence structure, and rhythm. Gao's Chinese text begins with the second-person pronoun "你" ("tu," or "you"), which indicates an emphasis on personal narrative. The narrative paragraph is composed of short sentences, showing that the character is talking to a person in his presence. However, the person the narrator is actually talking to is "tu," the projection of "je." Gao's style is virtually identical with that of Perec's, as Dutrait's French translation demonstrates in its choice of "tu" and its short and rhythmic sentences.

Similar correspondences between Gao's and Perec's styles can be identified throughout Gao's novel. In particular, Perec's style represents the inner movement of the character's mind with short sentences for a conversational rhythm. Moreover, Gao's conversations between "tu" and "elle" further parallel Duras' more concise poetic style, in which "je" is always at the centre of the narration, while "elle" represents Duras' youth, whose images and experiences can be examined and reflected on with a strong feeling of nostalgia. By contrast, in *Lingshan*, three personal pronouns play different roles as though they were different personas. Hong Kong critic Lingdun Wei, for instance, describes this narrative technique as "triple-voiced narration," or "multiple-voiced narration."<sup>407</sup> "I" represents the person "je" or "tu," the ego of the narrator, while "elle" represents the women that "je" imagines. As Gao indicates, it is not necessary to distinguish them, because all the narrators are essentially the same person, and the only difference is the focus of the narration. However, the styles that constitute their narration are different. When Gao accentuates the narrator's mental activities, he offers more descriptive details about "je" and his journey, and the sentences tend to be long, sometimes even wordy,

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407. Wei Lingdun, *Yisen er, er sen san: Gao Xingjian xiaoshuo yanjiu* (Hong Kong: Tiandi toudui gongshi / Cosmos Book Company), 2013), 166.



creating the rhythm of a long inward monologue. To achieve this inwardness, Gao appears to model his narrative structure on those of Butor and Perec, while Duras influences his narrations with “je” and “elle.”

In Chapter 21, Gao creates a dialogue between the narrator himself and the imagined female character to expel his loneliness with “tu” and “elle:”

她说她害怕老鼠，老鼠从楼板上跑过去的声音都让她害怕。她还怕蛇。这山里到处有蛇，她害怕花蛇从梁柱上吊下来，钻进她被子里，她要你紧紧抱住她，她说她害怕孤独。<sup>408</sup>

She says she is afraid of rats, even the noise of the rats that are running on the floor. She is also afraid of snakes. There are lots of them on the mountains. She is afraid of the colored snakes falling down from the beam above and sneaking into her bed. She wants you to hold her tightly. She says she is afraid of loneliness.<sup>409</sup>

The English translation of the above paragraph, the first paragraph of Chapter 21, is a literal translation, for comparison purposes, to show how Gao adopts “she says” to introduce “you” and respond to what this imagined woman says:

你让她说下去。  
她说她不知道怎样像开了话匣子一样，说个没完。  
你说她说得很好。  
她说她真想总也长不大，可又想长大[...] <sup>410</sup>

You let her continue to speak.  
She says she can't help talking without stopping, like a talking box.  
You say she talks very well.  
She says she truly wants to always remain little, but also wants to grow up [...] <sup>411</sup>

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408. *Lingshan*, 36.

409. Translation is mine.

410. *Lingshan*, 139.

411. Translation is mine.

These paragraphs demonstrate the influence of Duras' *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine*

*du Nord*:

Elle lui dit: je préférerais que vous ne m'aimiez pas. Même si vous m'aimez je voudrais que vous fassiez comme d'habitude avec les femmes. Il la regarde comme épouvanté, il demande: c'est ce que vous voulez ? Elle dit que oui. Il a commencé à souffrir là, dans la chambre, pour la première fois, il ne ment plus sur ce point. Il lui dit que déjà il sait qu'elle ne l'aimera jamais. Elle le laisse dire. D'abord elle dit qu'elle ne sait pas. Puis elle le laisse dire.<sup>412</sup>

Une porte.

Il ouvre cette porte.

C'est obscur.

C'est inattendu, c'est modeste. Banal. C'est rien.

Il parle. Il dit :

-Je n'ai pas choisi les meubles...Regarde...

Elle rit. Elle dit :

-Il n'y a pas de meubles ... regarde ...

Il regarde et il dit tout bas que c'est pourtant vrai, qu'il n'y a que le lit, le fauteuil et la table.

Il s'assied dans le fauteuil, lui. Elle, elle reste debout.

Elle le regarde encore. Elle sourit. Elle dit :

-Ça me plaît la maison comme ça [...] <sup>413</sup>

The above paragraphs from *L'Amant* and its sequel show both the similarities and the differences between Gao and Duras. Both choose "il/elle" ("s/he says"), but Duras' language is terse and poetic, where Gao follows a smooth conversational style, internal and pensive, as though the narrator is speaking to inner beings.

In his translation of Gao, Dutrait adopts a similar style to that of Duras:

Elle dit qu'elle a peur des souris, du bruit des souris qui courent sur le plancher. Elle a peur des serpents aussi. Il y en a partout dans ces montagnes, elle a peur des serpents

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412. *L'Amant*, 48.

413. *L'Amant de la chine du nord*, 69.

colorés qui tombent des poutres et se glissent entre les couvertures. Elle veut que tu la tiennes étroitement serrée dans tes bras, elle dit qu'elle a peur de la solitude.<sup>414</sup>

Tu lui dis de continuer.

Elle dit qu'elle a l'impression d'avoir ouvert une boîte à parole, elle parle, parle sans fin.

Tu dis qu'elle parle très bien.

Elle dit qu'elle avait à la fois envie de rester petite et de grandir.<sup>415</sup>

The sentences in Gao's original text are similar in length to Duras', suggesting that Gao is loosely following her style, with "tu lui dis de continuer" very much like the passage from Duras quoted above.

The second chapter of *Lingshan* depicts the narrator's journey towards the mountain with the first-person pronoun "wo" ("I" or "je"). Where the "tu" narratives focus on internal dialogues, "je" pays more attention to his reflections in flashback about his experiences in Beijing and other areas, as well as his actual experiences on the road. The fictional narratives are organized according to the three pronouns "je" "tu" and "elle." and "il" is also added in Chapter 31, providing a new narrative perspective. This mode of narration continues until Chapter 81.

As Gao drew his inspiration from the *Nouveau roman*, traces of such influences are abundant in *Lingshan* when comparing it to the French texts Gao read. An important question to ask when identifying these influences is whether, if Gao's novel is a hybrid of various literary allusions and styles, these elements can be integrated as an organic whole with the style of the *Nouveau roman*.

As the above discussion of translated pronouns demonstrates, Dutrait has not followed one style only, but adopts the style that is most suitable to translate certain parts of Gao's

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414. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 179.

415. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 181.

Chinese text. The strategy of Dutrait's translation indicates that, in translating the main narrative mode into a familiar French context, he has chosen to integrate Gao's text into French narrative modes as naturally as possible. This choice is not a one-to-one correspondence, but a selective process to bring new life to a literary text, seeking to achieve a similar result to the original by increasing the readability of the translation.

Dutrait's choices of translated pronouns work well for Gao's Chinese text, because they are based on the common feature between Perec, Butor, and Duras: All three adopt personal pronouns, respectively "je," "vous/tu," and "il/elle," for their narrators in lieu of proper names. Despite this similarity, each text shows a different narrative emphasis and rhythm. Butor's is more meditative and descriptive; Perec's is more internal, reflective and dialogistic; and Duras' is more nostalgic because of the narrator's memory and imaginary conversations, which tend to be poetically terse and rhythmic. Though their styles are distinctive, their stylistic registers are not overtly different from one another, and the style Dutrait chooses for his translation of *Lingshan* is very much a counterpart of all of these.

#### 2.3.3.2. Translating *Lingshan* in the Form of French Narrativity

Though Gao drew his inspirations from the the novels of Butor, Perec and Duras and adopted similar stylistic features marked primarily by the narrative personal pronouns, his novel is also characterized by its experimental use of hybrid sources in order to bring the reader into closer contact with history, folklore, philosophical reflections and literary debates. While the Chinese sources of Gao's literary experiments are bound by their temporality and spatiality, they sometimes resist translational efforts, as the French edition's dominant mode of narrative structure dictates that any major deviations can inadvertently affect its narrative coherence. How

the French translator(s) achieves the desired level of coherence must be investigated at the micro-level, from the level of word choices to the more foregrounded features, such as syntactic structure, literary style, and others.

José Lambert's analytic scheme indicates that the aim of the analysis of translation is to identify the confrontation between the macro and the micro levels of texts.<sup>416</sup> However, as there are many ways to conduct an analysis, only the foregrounded elements can account for the constituent part of the textual integrity. Word selection, literary rhythm and stylistic features are significant factors in comparing *Lingshan* to its French translation, as the following sections demonstrate.

#### 2.3.3.3 The Selection of Words

Although Gao's style and choice of narrative pronouns fit well with the French narrative mode, his novel is a Chinese work, associated with the Chinese context synchronically and diachronically, despite the substantial influence of modern French literature. The initial starting point for studying translation of these elements can reasonably begin at the word level, because at this level one can identify the historical, cultural, literary, and stylistic details of the original novel and their conversion to another narrative mode. Consequently, analysis of the translated text reveals both translation strategies and textual functions, thereby illuminating the role of the translation in the interface of Chinese and French language and culture, and allowing us to determine whether the translation is an immersion in or a negotiation of the source and the target.

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416. José Lambert, "On Describing Translations," in *Functional Approaches to Culture and Translation: Selected Papers by José Lambert*, 46.

In *Lingshan*, Gao cites both ancient and modern Chinese cultural materials to highlight the cultural significance of his journey. Most frequently, he refers to ancient texts, including poetic couplets, stele inscriptions, Buddhist sutras, and Taoist texts. He also uses more current sources, such as the word-for-word copy of an unauthorized advertising leaflet that appears in Chapter 1 of *Lingshan*, for comic effect.<sup>417</sup> However, Gao's citation of ancient texts in his narration is problematic, because while these texts aim to evoke the aura of ancient culture in the current context, their mixtures with more recent texts create incoherence with the target textual environment, especially with the overall narrative. Because words cannot function outside of their textual environments, they must be discussed within context, as the following examples of how words affect literary narratives demonstrate:

你不是到那种地方去凑那分热闹，在人看人、人挨着人、人挤人的山阳道上，再抛些瓜果皮、汽水瓶子、罐头盒子、面包纸和香烟屁股。这里想必早晚也逃不脱这种盛况。你总算乘那些鲜艳夺目的亭台楼阁尚未修建，赶在记者的照和名人题字之前，你不免暗自庆幸，同时，又有些疑惑。<sup>418</sup>

Tu n'es pas venu dans ce genre d'endroit pour te distraire en groupe sur le sentier d'une colline où les gens s'observent, se bousculent, se pressent et jettent par terre peaux de pastèques, bouteilles d'eau gazeuse, boîtes de conserve, papiers sales et mégots. Ici aussi, un jour ou l'autre, il en sera de même. Tu croyais venir avant que de charmants pavillons, kiosques, terrasses ou tourelles ne soient construits, te presser devant l'épigraphe d'un homme célèbre ou l'appareil photo d'un journaliste. En toi-même, tu te réjouis tout en nourrissant certains doutes.<sup>419</sup>

In this short paragraph, what foregrounds the text is Gao's adoption of classical vernacular language to construct a sentence structure. Such words as “山阳道上” (on the “yang”

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417. *Lingshan*, 7-8.

418. *Lingshan*, 8.

419. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 14.

/southern side of the mountain road) or “想必” (most probably) belong to the vernacular language register, which can be traced in works of classical fiction such as *Xiyouji* (*The Journey to the West*, published in 1592). These classical words placed within a more everyday text make Gao’s style appear elegant and allusive, but a more implicit reason for such a word choice relates to his experiences travelling in a remote mountainous region, evoking a sense of the ancient world as described in classical Chinese novels. This subtle use of the language is metonymic, serving as a free association of the narrator. Modernist fiction adopts this technique extensively. However, in the French translation, the classical literary style of the words “山阳道上” is rendered, with a modern connotation, as “sur le sentier d’une colline.” In addition, “想必” is lost in the translation, “Ici aussi, un jour ou l’autre, il en sera de même.” Gao’s style is transformed to a modern language registry by harmonizing the elements of the hybrid source of the Chinese language with a normalized one that is more suitable to the modern French literary style.

While embedding many vernacular literary elements into his novel, Gao creates his own niche modernist style with particular expressions that can be challenging to translate. Chinese translations of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* have experienced similar challenges, as some translators add notes to help readers better appreciate the long monologues in those novels whereas others have left them unannotated. One example of Gao’s distinctive literary feature is his use of the lengthy modifier, composed of several short sentences, describing a bean curd he longs to eat: “你在左边吃一碗豆腐脑，那种细嫩可口作料齐全走街串巷到处叫卖一度绝迹如今又父业子传的豆腐脑[...],”<sup>420</sup> which is translated into French as “[...] tu manges un bol de fromage de soja en gelée, ce genre de fromage de soja

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420. *Lingshan*, 9.

tendre et délicieux, bien assaisonné, que l'on vendait à travers rues et venelles et qui, pendant un temps avait disparu, mais qui est aujourd'hui de nouveau fabriqué grâce à une recette transmise de père en fils."<sup>421</sup>

Gao expresses his appreciation of the bean curd for its long tradition and delicious taste, as well as his eagerness to eat it. “那种细嫩可口作料齐全走街串巷到处叫卖一度绝迹如今又父业子传的” can be translated as an adjectival phrase modifying the bean curd: “the kind of tender-delicious and well-seasoned-sold in the street and deep alleys-disappeared before but has passed down from father to son.” The length of the modifying phrase and its lack of punctuation accentuate the narrator's love for his favourite food, which reminds him of his homeland. Gao chooses this slightly unconventional narrative style to present intense emotions; however, the translator does not appear to sanction such creativity, and the modifier is rearranged and punctuated as a paragraph in the French translation. As a result, the passage does not adequately capture the narrator's excitement. Dutrait may have made this choice because an exact translation would affect the flow and readability of the sentence for French readers.

The above example is not an isolated one, as Gao's particular way of creating literary devices and expressions can be seen throughout the novel. For example, in Chapter 54, Gao adopts a similar language structure to represent the protagonist's experience roaming in his native land:

你就这样茫然漫游，从一个市城到一个城市，从县城到地区首府再到省城，再从另一个省城到另一个地区首府再到一个又一个县城，之后也还再经过某个地区首府又再回到某一个省城。有时，无端的，你突然在一个被城市规划漏划了的或还顾不上规划的或者压根就没打算规划的乃至于纳也纳不进规划的一条小巷子里，见到一

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421. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 18.



幢敞开门的老房子，在门口站住，止不住望着架了竹篙晒着衣裳的天井，似乎只要一一走进去，就会回到你那童年，那些暗淡的记忆就都会复活。<sup>422</sup>

You aimlessly roamed from one city to another, from county towns to prefecture cities and provincial capitals, and then from the provincial cities to prefecture centres and county towns. A little later you still have to go back to a provincial city through a certain prefecture centre. Sometimes, by hazard, you suddenly entered a little lane, which had been omitted from the urban plan, or had not had any chance to be put into a government plan, or had not had any intention to do so in the slightest so that it had not been put into any city blueprint, (you) saw an old open-doored house, and (then) stood at the door and could not help watching the patio that was filled with bamboo clothes hangers, (and) it seemed that one you went inside, you would go back to your childhood days, and the somber memories of it will be revived.<sup>423</sup>

In the Chinese text, Gao chooses a long modifier to describe the little lane that evokes memories of his childhood: “你突然在一个被城市规划漏划了的或还顾不上规划的或者压根就没打算规划的乃至于纳也纳不进规划的一条小巷子里，” which can be roughly translated as “you suddenly entered (one) had-been-omitted-by-the-urban-plan-or- had -not- had- any-chance-to-put-into-a-government-plan-or-had- not-had-any-intention- to- do- so -in- the-slightest- so- that- it -had -not -been-put-into-any- city- blueprint” lane. This long adjectival phrase highlights the protagonist’s despair and frustration over the modernization and progress of urban development that squeeze out his personal space of memories and nostalgia. It also indicates his exasperation over the state-sponsored collective marginalizing process against the personal. The long modifier expresses this sentiment, mimicking the out-of-breath delivery of his accusation. This language style, which appears bulky and slightly wordy, deviates from Chinese language norms by increasing the length of the sentence. Despite its unusual structural length, it

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422. *Lingshan*, 355-356.

423. My translation.

effectively conveys the protagonist's mood and sentiment, which deepens the novel's theme of the quest of modern identity amidst China's experiences of modernity and political oppression.

Dutrait's French translation appears to reduce the defamiliarizing effect of Gao's narrative experiment:

Et tu as erré ainsi, d'une ville à l'autre, d'un chef-lieu de district à un chef-lieu de canton, d'une capitale provinciale à une autre, d'un autre chef-lieu de canton à un autre chef-lieu de district, ainsi de suite, sans fin. Un jour, par hasard, tu as soudain découvert une vieille maison à la porte grande ouverte, dans une petite rue carrément oubliée par la planification urbaine ou que la planification urbaine n'a pas prise en compte ou encore que le plan n'a pas l'intention de prendre en compte ou même qu'il est impossible d'inclure dans le plan. Tu t'es arrêté sur le seuil et tu as contemplé la cour intérieure où séchait le linge sur des tiges de bambou. Tu avais l'impression qu'il te suffirait d'entrer pour retourner dans ton enfance et redonner vie à tes souvenirs flous.<sup>424</sup>

Dutrait's French version is different from the Chinese original in terms of language structure and style: The adjectival phrase Gao uses to describe the little lane in the Chinese text becomes several post-modifier clauses in the translation. In addition, the French clauses do not appear bulky or wordy, but demonstrate a similar structure and style to those of Butor's *La Modification*, which foregrounds long post-modifier clauses frequently, particularly in its first chapters.

Where Gao mainly creates long modifiers for evocative and stylistic purposes, Dutrait's post-modifier clauses are designed largely to conform to established French norms, such as Butor's fictional style. This raises the questions of whether Gao's style is translational and whether Dutrait has restored it to French norms. There is a noticeable difference between Gao's adoption of French translation style and Dutrait's restorative translation: Gao intended to create evocative intensity and defamiliarity through his experimental translational style, while Dutrait's

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424. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 440.

translation is not intended to produce a similar effect in the French version, which lacks the stylistic edge of the Chinese original. Where Gao's translational style aims to create novel images and linguistic style in his Chinese text, Dutrait's seeks to restore Gao's influence to its French original, with the latter becoming a linguistic normalization.

Dutrait's normalization of Gao's Chinese text results not only from using the *Nouveau roman* style but also from making this foreign text familiar to the target reader. The passage quoted below demonstrates again how Dutrait normalizes Gao's text by transforming cultural objects into something more familiar to French readers:

之后，你到了一座石桥上，没有狐臭。清风徐来，凉爽而适意，石桥架在宽阔的河面上，桥上虽然是柏油路面，两边斑驳的石柱子上刻的猴子还依稀可辨，肯定很有一番年代了。<sup>425</sup>

Puis tu arrives à un pont de pierre. Aucune mauvaise odeur. Un vent frais souffle doucement, rafraîchissant et plaisant. Le pont de pierre enjambe une large rivière. Bien que la rue soit asphaltée, on distingue encore vaguement des lions sculptés sur les colonnes rainurées. Il doit sûrement être très ancien.<sup>426</sup>

In this paragraph, Gao describes his experience as a traveler in a small Chinese town in the South. The sculpture on the stone column of the ancient bridge is described as a monkey in the original Chinese text, but as a lion in Dutrait's French translation. Sculptures of lions and monkeys are both common in China, but the French translation refers to a lion because lions are more familiar and have favourable historical and cultural connotations to French readers. Dutrait's translation appears to treat translation as ornamentation in order to impress the readers

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425. *Lingshan*, 8.

426. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 18.

and help them better appreciate the text. He himself acknowledged the similar beautification strategy.<sup>427</sup>

In Chapter 13, the narrator tells a story about a young woman called “朱花婆,” whose name is associated with a flower or plant called *Dracaena angustifolia* in Latin or *Zhuhua* (Dark Red Flower) in Chinese. In the French version, the Chinese “朱花婆,” is translated as “femme au camélia,”<sup>428</sup> which could be easily related to the French novelist Alexandre Dumas fils’ *La Dame aux Camélias*. The French novel was translated into classical Chinese by Lin Shu as *巴黎茶花女遺事* (Past Stories of the Camelia-woman of Paris) in 1899 and became very successful. Though these two stories are not relevant to each other, they share a certain degree of similarity: Both women are beautiful, but experience ill-fated love affairs with men. Dutrait’s translation of Gao’s novel follows this and other examples of the influence of the French literary imagination on translations of Chinese texts. These examples demonstrate the basic approach of the translator in changing words in order to suit the target reader. However, such a strategy is problematic in that it minimizes the peculiarities of the original text and converts a foreign narrative into a transparent domestic text.

Despite the obvious domesticating strategies in his translation, Dutrait does not exclude other strategies, some of which can be considered source-text-based. These strategies are effective because the translator intends to let the reader know the deep layers of culturally, ethnically, and/or linguistically loaded words:

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427. Pascale Gimeno, “Étude sur une œuvre chinoise: *La Montagne de l’âme* de Gao Xingjian,” MA thesis (U of Provence, 1997), 77.

428. *La Montagne de l’âme*, 111-117.

无处可以问讯，你只好仰头去数售票窗口上方一行行的站名：张村、沙铺、水泥厂、老窑、金马、大年、涨水、龙湾、桃花坞……越来越加美好，可都不是你要找的地方。<sup>429</sup>

Tu frappes, sans obtenir le moindre résultat. Il ne te reste qu'à lever la tête pour compter les noms des gares, plus jolis les uns que les autres, alignés au-dessus du guichet : le Village des Zhang, la Boutique de Sable, l'Usine de Ciment, le Vieux Four, Cheval d'Or, Bonne Année, Inondation, la Baie du Dragon, le Bassin des Fleurs de Pêcher... mais aucun ne correspond à l'endroit que tu cherches.<sup>430</sup>

Generally, proper names are translated phonetically. However, the Chinese language is not alphabetic, and thus meaning cannot be determined from the sound representation of Chinese words only. Translating these terms literally from Chinese into French provides insight into the words' connotative meanings. Thus, “张村” becomes “Village des Zhang,” and “桃花坞” “le Bassin des Fleurs de Pêcher.” Though the phonetic forms of the Chinese proper names are opted out, the French translations of the proper names are appropriate because the target reader is shown why these place names are so significant in the original text.

This translation strategy can be taken to its extreme with the practice of calquing, or word-for-word translation of certain sentences or phrases in order to retain the original cultural identity. For example, as noted in the previous section, “你让她说下去。她说她不知道怎么样像开了话匣子一样，说个没完” is translated as “Elle dit qu'elle a l'impression d'avoir ouvert une boîte à parole, elle parle, parle sans fin.” Dutrait does not change the metaphor “开了话匣子” (open a chatterbox). He renders it almost word-for-word from the Chinese version as “boîte à parole.” There is no exact French equivalent for “话匣子;” the closest would be “moulin à paroles.” However, in his attempt to convey the exact meaning, Dutrait adopts the phrase “la

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429. *Lingshan*, 6.

430. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 15.

boite à parole” which is quite analogous to “la boîte à chansons,” so that his readers will recognize both the strangeness and freshness of the expression. By doing so, the translator keeps the Chinese cultural particularity of the original, though its total French textual environment is the Durasian style.

A pure phonetic translation of a proper noun without any explanation also faces the risk of effacing the original cultural or individual creative particularities attached to the text. For Dutrait, both form and meaning should be translated in order for the target reader to fully understand the original message, as the following passage shows:

“能不能找到一位懂得这种邪术的老猎人，跟他一起去打猎？”我又问。  
“那石老爷最有本事了，”他想了想，说。  
“能找到地吗？”我立刻问。  
“他在石老爷屋。”  
“这石老爷屋在哪里？”<sup>431</sup>

- Pourrait-on trouver un vieux chasseur connaissant la sorcellerie, avec qui je pourrais aller chasser?
- C'est le vieux père Shi qui a le plus de talent, répond-il après un temps de réflexion.
- On peut le trouver?
- Il est dans la maison de pierre du père Shi'.
- Et où se trouve-t-elle?<sup>432</sup>

In the Chinese text, the old hunter's name is “石” (Shi), which means “stone.” It is important to render his name as Shi, because it is also associated with his isolated home, built in stone. The stone house personifies Mr. Shi (stone) himself and the myth surrounding it. Thus, to help the target reader understand the full implications, Dutrait inserts a footnote: “En chinois, le

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431. *Lingshan*, 15.

432. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 27-28.

nom Shi signifie la pierre.”<sup>433</sup> Through the annotation, Dutrait acknowledges the two meanings of “Shi.” For Dutrait, clarifying the meanings of a text could be a better solution, either using a brief explanation within the context, or summarizing the meaning of the word. By doing so, a target text also eliminates the cultural particularities involved, as seen in the following example:

做了老婆的女人又把丈夫叫做老公，你的老公，我老公，这里人有这里人的语调，虽然都是炎黄子孙，同文同种。<sup>434</sup>

Une fois mariée, la jeune femme appelle l'époux « le vieux », aussi bien pour dire « mon mari » ou « ton mari ». Ici, les gens ont leur propre vocabulaire, bien qu'ils soient tous Chinois descendant des empereurs fondateurs, appartenant à la même ethnie et possédant la même culture.<sup>435</sup>

In the paragraphs quoted above, Gao describes the particular daily life of the women in a town in Southern China. He uses the set phrase “炎黄子孙，” which refers to the Chinese people as the sons and daughters of the Emperor Yan and Emperor Huang. If this is translated as “the descendants of Emperor Yan and Emperor Huang,” a note must also be added to explain who Emperor Yan and Emperor Huang are. To avoid the bulky body of a novel and the distraction of too many annotations, Dutrait instead translates the general meaning of the sentence: “tous Chinois descendant des empereurs fondateurs.” However, although the meaning of the sentence is clear, the cultural nuances of the words may be lost.

In all, in translating the Chinese text, Dutrait adopts various strategies in order to bring the Chinese text closer to French cultural and fictional narrative modes, such as rendering its intertextual content as a synchronic text and replacing exotic or strange references with more

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433. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 27

434. *Lingshan*, 2.

435. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 11.

familiar ones. In the process, Dutrait reestablishes Gao's textual and intertextual links with modern French fiction to some extent, while maintaining certain degrees of Chinese identity through strategies such as annotation and calquing.

#### 2.3.3.4 Translating Poetic Rhythms

The narrator of Gao's novel relates his experiences with underrepresented minority ethnic groups in remote regions of China, using ballads and songs to demonstrate the vivacity of these cultures. Those songs and ballads vary in form and content, but all of them display a similar, singable rhythm that, nonetheless, poses a challenge for translation due to the differences between Chinese and French rhyme schemes and patterns.

*Lingshan* describes Gao's journey to local areas in China's hinterland, and his attempts to adopt many popular folk songs, traditional tales and ballads as inspirational sources for his spiritual journey. These ballads are important Chinese cultural texts that contain densely loaded local cultural signifiers that may resist translation. Therefore, translating these poetic forms requires creative methods of sticking to "local colour" and cultural connotations, as the following example demonstrates:

月亮汤汤，骑马烧香，烧死罗大姐，气死豆三娘，三娘摘豆，豆角空，嫁济公，济公矮，嫁螃蟹，螃蟹过沟，踩着泥鳅，泥鳅告状，告着和尚，和尚念经，念着观音，观音撒尿，撒着小鬼，把得肚子疼，请个财神来跳神，跳神跳不成，白费我二百文。<sup>436</sup>

The above passage is a humorous children's ballad that can be easily sung or read aloud.

Dutrait's translation shows how this feature can be foregrounded even in another language:

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436. *Lingshan*, 20.



Par la pleine lune, à cheval l'encens je brûle, Grande-Soeur Luo j'ai tué, demoiselle petit pois j'ai énervé, les petits pois elle a cueilli, mais la cosse était vide, avec le père Ji elle s'est mariée, le père Ji est trop petit, avec le crabe elle s'est mariée, le crabe a traversé le fossé, la limace a piétiné, la limace l'a dénoncé, près du moine plainte a porté, les soutras a récité, la Guanyin il a prié, la Guanyin elle a pissé, un petit diable elle a pissé, ça lui a fait mal à la panse, le saint de la Richesse j'ai appelé, en transe il est entré, c'est raté, deux cents pièces j'ai gaspillé.<sup>437</sup>

Dutrait's French translation of this popular ballad is marked by its poetic creativity and respect for the folk culture that produced the source text. He treats the ballad as a rhymed poem, but does not follow the exact rhyme scheme of the original. For instance, the first line of the Chinese ballad “月亮汤汤，骑马烧香，” “月亮汤汤” features the rhymed lines /yue/liang/tang/tang/. In addition, as the Chinese text does not provide any contextual references, Dutrait must add more words in order to construct a French poetic diction for the translation. Thus, “月亮汤汤” is translated as “Par la pleine lune” which retains the rhyme and prosody of the original, with “pleine” accurately conveying the meaning of “汤汤.” This line is followed by “骑马烧香，” translated as “à cheval l'encens je brûle.” Though not rhymed, the Chinese original has its poetic rhythm. The French version does not follow its regular word order, but reverses the word order to create a poetic rhythm equivalent to that of the ballad. The rest of the translation of the ballad, however, follows the original to create a continuous rhyme scheme throughout the poem.

Dutrait creates a rhyming effect that corresponds to that of the original, but does not strictly follow the original's word order. He also creates a rhyme scheme by repeating certain words and phrases such as “j'ai,” “avec,” “mariée,” “le pere,” and “la Guanyin.” Such repetition produces an echo effect, as though many people are joining in on a game purely for the fun of the

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437. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 34.

words, which is the nature of the original poem. Dutrait carefully chooses words and phrases to convey the exact meanings of certain culturally-specific expressions; for instance, “罗大姐” is translated as “Grande-Sœur Luo” which is more expressive than the simple transliteration as “Luo Dajian.” Similarly, the translation of “豆三娘” as “demoiselle petit pois” reproduces the humorous connotation and poetic ambiance of the original words, making them more acceptable to the French reader than a simple phonetic translation as “Dou Sanliang” would. Mabel Lee’s English version, by contrast, simply renders these expressions as “Luo Dajie” and “Dou Sanliang” based on their phonetic forms.<sup>438</sup>

Despite the humorous effect and poetic rhythm of Dutrait’s translation of the ballad, certain key words are ambiguously translated. For example, “济公” is a fictional Chan Buddhist monk known for his humorous, but upright character. The French equivalent, “le père Ji,” could be a mismatch to this Chinese monk. The word “père” is an honorific addressing a catholic priest, the male parent of a family, or an elderly man in a familiar and respectable way. As with the case of Dutrait’s translation, if he addresses “济公” as a priest, “le père Ji” is not an appropriate equivalent, because such translation will evoke its catholic connotation. If Dutrait addresses him as an elderly man, it is acceptable, but the Chinese monk’s identity is lost. In addition, the name of the Buddhist goddess (Buddhist bodhisattva) “观音” is translated phonetically as “La Guanyin,” which would require annotation for a typical French reader. This is an example of how the absence of references to cultural particularities in the translation would weaken the humorous effect of the poem’s making fun of Buddhist figures. Dutrait’s attention to

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438. Gao, *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2000), 18.

the brevity and humour of the ballad comes at the expense of annotation or other means of explanation that would make the ballad too bulky for French readers.

Dutrait's French version translates the Chinese folk ballad form and language into French with much creativity. The ballad retains the humour and rhythm of the Chinese original, even though it does not translate the original word-for-word. As a result, his version reproduces not only the poetic form of the original, but also the folk culture attached to it to certain degrees.

In addition to popular ballads, many chapters of *Lingshan* are also devoted to ethnic folklore and rituals of the folk religions of the places to which the novel's narrator travels. Translating the cultural ambience of the religion alongside the stylistic features of the Chinese text is essential, as demonstrated in the following example:

[...]他右手拿神刀，左手持龙角，越说越快，像用嘴皮子吐出一串滚珠：  
“三下灵牌打打打三道催兵符尽收庐山茅山龙虎山三山神兵神将顷刻间哦呀呀啊哈  
哈达古隆冬仓嗯呀——呀——呀——呜呼，天皇皇地皇皇吾乃真君大帝敕赐弟子轨  
邪除妖手持通灵宝剑脚踏风火轮左旋右转——  
她转身站起，你跟着也迈过人腿，人们都转而对你们怒目而视。<sup>439</sup>

[...] De la main droite, il se saisit du couteau sacré et, de la main gauche, de la corne de dragon. Il parle de plus en plus vite, comme s'il crachait de ses lèvres un chapelet de perles: “Par trois fois, pan, pan, pan, il envoie trois ordres de marche pour rassembler les soldats et généraux divins des monts Lushan, Maoshan et Longhushan, oye-yo, haha ta, kulong tongtchiang, enya ... ya ... ya ... wuhu ... Seigneur céleste, Impératrice terrestre, je suis le disciple de Zhenjun qui m'envoie tuer les démons. L'épée à la main, je vole partout de mes roues de feu et de vent ... ”

Elle se tourne et se lève. Tu la suis en enjambant les pieds des spectateurs qui vous jettent des regards furieux.<sup>440</sup>

The passage quoted above is an extract from a local story related to Taoist deities, describing a ritual evoking divine power and intervention with the human world. The narration

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439. *Lingshan*, 36.

440. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 53.

of the chapter begins with “tu,” who accompanies “elle” to the site in a small town where the story is told. Gao describes the ceremony as a theatrical performance, marked by some onomatopoeic words such as “打打打” (da da da) to express readiness for the battle, and “哦呀呀啊哈哈达古隆冬仓嗯呀——呀——呀——呜呼” (wo ya ya ahaha dagulongtongchang, ya...ya...wuhu) to evoke the divine power itself. “打打打” (da da da) means “fight,” while other such words serve to intensify the theatricality reminiscent of local operas.

Dutrait recreates the rhythm by generating a series of French onomatopoeic words. He does not simply imitate the sound of the Chinese language, but converts the Chinese words “da, da, da” into its French equivalent, “pan, pan, pan,” which mimics the sound of the explosion of a bomb or bullet. Such a word choice creates the intensity of a pre-battle atmosphere, as does the following string of words designed to achieve similar results. However, the Chinese text does not separate the onomatopoeic words with punctuation, in order to strengthen the immediate urgency and intensity of the battle scene, as shown in the performers’ uninterrupted delivery of theatrical expressions. Conversely, the French text separates these words with commas, which weakens the intensity of the scene but does emphasize the rhythmic flow of the words.

Except for the translation of onomatopoeic words, the last sentence is rewritten from classical style to more everyday speech. Taoist allusions such as “Zhenjun” and “L’épée à la main, je vole partout de mes roues de feu et de vent,” referring either to the essential Taoist deity or to phenomena associated with the religion are not further explained in annotations, so that the connotations of the text cannot be explicitly identified.

As in the previous example, Dutrait makes efforts to present the sound and rhythm of the theatrical moment of the folk stories, either by choosing equivalent onomatopoeic words or by accentuating the atmosphere and rhythm in which the story is presented. However, more

attention is paid to the intensity of the atmosphere in Gao's original. In the same manner as the previous segments, Dutrait leaves many passages without annotations, blurring the cultural elements in the source text.

In *Lingshan*, one of the key folk song collections that Gao discovers in the minority area along the Yangtze River is *Heian Juan* (The Chronicle of Darkness). This collection has existed for centuries, but had long been forbidden from publication; the songs cover such topics as love, death, philosophies of life, and other local rituals. For Gao, the significance of these marginal songs lies in their unique cultural values, in contrast to Confucianism and to modern Chinese culture. Gao quotes several important parts of the folk songs in his novel in order to express his opposition to Confucianism as China's mainstream ideology, and his valorization of the minority cultural values passed down among ordinary people over the centuries.

These songs have a simple rhythm and a simple vocabulary, and are easy to sing, as are typical of folk songs from Southern China. The challenge in translating the songs is much the same as that of the folk song cited above – how to rewrite them in readable French while maintaining their distinct stylistic and cultural features, as seen in the following example:

伏羲来制琴，  
女娲来做笙，  
有阴才能言，  
有阳才有声。  
阴阳相配才有人，  
有人才能有声音，  
有了声音才有歌，  
歌多才能出歌本。  
当年孔子删下的书，  
丢在荒郊野外处，  
一本吹到天空中，  
才有牛郎织女情，  
二本吹到海里去，  
渔翁捡到唱怨魂。

三本吹到庙堂里，  
和尚道士唱圣经。  
四本落到村巷里，  
女子唱的是思情。  
五本落到水田中，  
农夫当作山歌唱。  
六本就是这《黑暗传》，  
歌师捡来唱亡灵。<sup>441</sup>

Nügua, l'orgue à bouche a inventé.  
Grâce au yin le langage est né  
Grâce au yang le son est né.  
La fusion du yin et du yang l'homme a engendré,  
Quand l'homme est né, la voix est apparue,  
Quand la voix est née, les chants sont apparus,  
Quand ils ont été nombreux, des recueils on rassembla.  
A l'époque, les livres expurgés par Confucius,  
Dans un désert ont été perdus,  
Le premier volume par le vent jusqu'au ciel a été soufflé,  
Et c'est alors qu'est né l'amour entre le Bouvier et la Tisserande.  
Par le vent, le deuxième volume dans la mer fut poussé,  
Pour épancher son âme, et vieux pêcheur l'a récupéré et l'a chanté  
Le troisième volume dans les temples par le vent fut poussé,  
Les bonzes bouddhistes et les moines taoïstes, les soutras ont chanté.  
Le quatrième volume dans les rues du village est tombé,  
Filles et garçons leur amour ont chanté.  
Le cinquième volume dans les rizières est tombé,  
Les chants des montagnes, les paysans ont entonné.  
Le sixième volume, c'est cette "Chronique des ténèbres,"  
Pour chanter l'âme des défunts, le maître de chant l'a récupéré.<sup>442</sup>

The Chinese version of the folk song is composed of several stanzas that follow a regular rhymed pattern, which is different from the strict classical poetic forms sanctioned and valorized by the dominant social hierarchies and institutions, especially in the Tang or Song dynasties and

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441. *Lingshan*, 393-394.

442. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 481.

in later generations.<sup>443</sup> This folk song features beginning and ending rhymes, such as “伏” (fu)/“女” (nu), and “琴” (qin)/“笙” (zen) in the first stanza, and repetition of the ending words of the previous stanza at the beginning of the second stanza, as with the repetition of “有人” at the end of the fifth stanza and the beginning of the sixth. In addition, most lines feature regular numbers of words, although exceptions do exist. For example, in the first four lines, each line is composed of five words, while the remainder of the lines, except for the second-last, contain seven words. Though this word count appears irregular, it has a certain degree of flexibility. In short, this genre of folk songs is marked by their simplicity, frankness and concise rhyme.

Dutrait’s French rendition is characterized by its commitment to the musical quality of the original by reproducing the head rhyme and end rhyme, as well as other rhyme patterns, such as “fu”/ “nu” or “fabriqué”/ “inventé;” and repetitions of words such as “Grâce” and “né.” This correspondence of rhyme patterns is not purely imitational, but creative, in that the emphasis is shifted from the musical instruments in the original (“le luth” and “l’Orgue”) to the action verbs, in order to retain the original text’s musicality.

Dutrait also often adjusts the order of the poetic lines in order to preserve the rhythm of the original. For example, in the Chinese line “一本吹到天空中/才有牛郎织女情” which can be rendered literally as “the first volume is blown to the sky, / so is born the love between Niulang (the Herder) and Zhinu (the Weaver),” the first verb follows the subject, and the second is inverted. In the French version, “Le premier volume par le vent jusqu’au ciel a été soufflé, / Et c’est alors qu’est né l’amour entre le Bouvier et la Tisserande,” the first verse line similarly inverts word order, with the verb “été soufflé” at the end. In the second verse line, the vowel “é”

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443. Hu Shi, *Baihua wenxue shi* [A History of Vernacular Literature] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999).

echoes the first line, forming a rhyme. Thus, despite the modifications to the translation to fit French poetic licenses, the meaning, rhyme, and rhythm of the originals are largely retained.

In changing the Chinese folk chant to a French poem, Dutrait translates certain Chinese names phonetically rather than culturally. For example, “伏羲” (Fuxi) and “女娲” (Nügua) are only transliterations of the names of the Chinese mythical figures connected to the origin of humanity. Dutrait does not annotate their names, however, the two gods have already been mentioned in the discussion of Chinese mythology in Chapter 51 in *Lingshan*. “牛郎” and “织女” are respectively translated as “le Bouvier” and “la Tisserande,” since the legend of the Herder and the Weaver is well known, having first been translated into French in Paul Demiéville’s *Anthologie de la poésie chinoise classique* in 1962, and later retranslated or summarized by such scholars as Jean Levi and Jacques Pimpaneau.<sup>444</sup>

Dutrait’s translations share common ground with previous French versions of Chinese songs and legends: The translator pays attention to the poetic quality of these songs and attempts to capture the mood behind the rhymes. In doing so, Dutrait reorganizes the structure of the verse lines to achieve maximum poetic effect in the target language. In addition, the choices of French onomatopoeic words are not always a matter of a simple phonetic rendering, but a more complicated process in which the translator makes efforts to create a similar effect in the target French text, as his change from “da da da” to “pan, pan, pan” demonstrates. Despite these shared features, however, a common problem also exists in these renditions: A lack of sufficient references to or annotations about Chinese history and culture, which would easily lead to confusion or misunderstanding. However, the examples cited above do not seem to exhibit this

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444. Paul Demiéville, *Anthologie de la poésie chinoise classique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 62.



weakness, as the references have either been elaborated on by the original author or made familiar to the target readers by earlier translators.

### 2.3.3.5 Translating Literary Style

As discussed earlier, the influence of French literature on Gao is evident in his option of “je,” “tu,” and “il/elle” as narrators in lieu of specific names of characters. However, translating these pronouns into French does not necessarily mean a restoration of French influences, and indeed, sometimes *Lingshan* appears to resist such modifications, because of its hybridity and intertextuality for creating a network of cross-references. Even so, the major parts of this novel, especially relating to monologues, memories, fantasies, dreams and descriptions of nature, scenes, and events, have a consistent style, as all of these are viewed by the narrator from different perspectives. The language style in much of the novel tends to be inward, meditative and introspective, with similar registers, words, sentence structures and lengths, textual rhythm and mood. The translation of the pronouns is, therefore, closely related to these stylistic and narrative patterns.

Since Gao’s novel was influenced by the French *Nouveau roman*, some parts of it do not pose serious challenges to translators. However, these parts appear foreign to Chinese readers, even like a translation from French. Some Chinese critics regard this as a poor usage of Chinese, even speculating that Gao has poorly mastered the language.<sup>445</sup>

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445. Cao Chang-ching, “Gao Xingjian de culie yuyan” [Gao Xingjian’s Bad Language Style], last modified July 27, 2015, <http://www.tangben.com/USpolitical/aboutgao5.htm>.

To understand such seeming discrepancies, a discussion of the following passage is useful to contrast Gao's particular style and translation issues that are present in Dutrait's French version:

她说他还对她说他爱她，她说，假的！他说他真想过她，她说已经晚了。他问为什么？她说这还用问！他问为什么连吻她一下也不行？<sup>446</sup>

Elle dit que lui aussi avait déclaré qu'il l'aimait, mais elle avait dit: "C'est faux !" Il prétendait avoir vraiment pensé à elle, mais c'était trop tard. Il avait demandé pourquoi. Quelle question! Pourquoi il ne pourrait même pas l'embrasser une fois.<sup>447</sup>

In the Chinese version, “她说他还对她说他爱她，她说，假的！” can be rendered literally as “she says that he also said to her that he loved her, she said, it was a lie.” What poses a problem is Gao's repetition of the pronouns in Chinese, which appears wordy, or translational, because the pronoun “he” in “he loved her” is redundant in Chinese. However, in French, the pronoun “il” in “il l'aimait” must be included; otherwise, the sentence would be ungrammatical. The overuse of the pronoun is not isolated in Gao's novel, as it appears in some other instances:

他问我有没有收到他寄给我的他的稿子，说是看到我这几年发表的一些作品，想必是我，才把稿子寄到一家发表我文章的刊物编辑部，请他们转给我，还真联系上了。<sup>448</sup>

Il me demande si j'ai reçu le manuscrit qu'il m'a envoyé et m'explique qu'il a lu les œuvres que j'ai publiées ces dernières années. Pensant qu'il devait bien s'agir de moi, il avait adressé son manuscrit à la rédaction d'une revue qui avait publié l'un de mes articles, en demandant qu'on me le transmette.<sup>449</sup>

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446. *Lingshan*, 209.

447. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 272.

448. *Lingshan*, 422.

449. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 511.

The same problem lies in his overuse of the Chinese possessive pronoun “ta de” (his), which would be considered grammatically incorrect. “His manuscript” is translated in French as “le manuscript qu’il m’a envoyé.” Though “le” is placed before “manuscript,” the sentence makes it clear that the manuscript is his. Thus, Gao’s Chinese text can be smoothly translated into French without a problem, but his Chinese is “translationese,” following French lexical syntactical structures to express his Chinese ideas, and thus sounding foreign, sometimes ungrammatical, to Chinese readers.

The translationese style can be found throughout *Lingshan*, and serves to foreground Gao’s Chinese literary style, as the use of conjunctions in the following passage demonstrates: “我尽管疲劳不堪，无法入睡。过不多久，床下的一只公鸡开始啼鸣，老头却打着震天响的呼噜”<sup>450</sup> (J’ai beau être épuisé, je ne parviens pas à dormir. Peu de temps après, un coq sous le lit entonne ses cocoricos, mais le vieillard continue à ronfler).<sup>451</sup> The conjunction in this sentence is another example of Gao’s translational style. As he chooses “尽管” (though), he does not apply the indispensable part of the collocation “但是” (but or yet) in the next part of the sentence. In English and French, “though” and “bien que” serve the same function, but neither needs “but” or “mais” to collocate the rest of the sentence. In Chinese “但是” is compulsory. Thus, Gao fails to meet the Chinese grammatical requirement for collocation and omits an indispensable component of the language structure, so that the sentence is ungrammatical in Chinese but would make sense in English or French. However, Dutrait avoids this construction altogether and translates the passage according to the speech mood, by connecting two short

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450. *Lingshan*, 328.

451. *La Montagne de l’âme*, 405.

sentences without any conjunctions, only adding “avoir beau” in the first part. The advantage of this structure is that it is more colloquial and terser.

As these examples show, the translational traits have become Gao’s patent stylistic features, even though he has openly dismissed any overt foreign linguistic influences in a Chinese literary work. The main reasons for such translational features are his internalization and subconscious choice of the structure of French when writing in Chinese. The most conspicuous traces of French influence can be identified in his syntactical and textual structures, such as his adoption of Chinese pronouns in a narrative style modelled on the *Nouveau roman*.

Three different French novels have served as models for Gao’s text and for Dutrait’s translation. However, Gao does not write passively according to these models; his choices of hybrid texts prove that these French influences are only partial, coexisting with vernacular Chinese narratives including folklore and stories. The relation between Chinese and French is not always harmonious, and is sometimes tense, as seen on both the word and textual levels.

In contrast to French elements in Gao’s Chinese novel, other stylistic features sound natural to Chinese readers but do not conform to French literary norms. Thus, Gao’s Chinese text cannot be translated into French without a certain degree of modification. The following passage demonstrates this tension between the original Chinese and the French translation:

他不说话了，低头走在前面。我于是又上了路，这就是我的胜利，我只能对我自己出脚力钱的向导毫无必要施行我的意志。我无非要证明我有自己的意志，这也就是我来到这鬼都不肯来的地方的意义。<sup>452</sup>

Il se tait et marche devant, tête baissée. Je me remets en route. Voilà ma victoire: faire exécuter ma volonté par un guide que j’ai payé. Je veux prouver que j’ai ma volonté, c’est le sens de ma venue dans ce lieu où les diables eux-mêmes n’osent pénétrer.<sup>453</sup>

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452. *Lingshan*, 216.

453. *La Montagne de l’âme*, 281.

This paragraph appears in Chapter 35, in which “je” explores a mystical lake on a foggy day. When the narrator and his guide go further into the heart of the lake area, the guide refuses to move for the fear of approaching the ghostly lake. This passage, which presents the narrator’s inner thoughts about the meaning of his trip, can be translated literally into English as follows:

He doesn’t speak, and walks with bowed head ahead of me. I am again on my way; this is my victory, I could only exercise, without absolute necessity, my will on my guide (for whom) I myself paid for his legwork and labor. All I want to do is only to show that I have my will; this is the whole meaning of my coming to this place, where even ghosts refuse to come.<sup>454</sup>

The first three sentences are shorter than the rest of the paragraph, producing a quick rhythm; however, beginning with “this is my victory,” the sentences become longer and the rhythm is intentionally slower, as though to express the narrator’s frustration with the guide about the trip. However, what foregrounds this paragraph is the repetition of the pronoun “wo” (“I”) and its possessive form “wo de” (my). The pronouns “I” and “my” are repeated many times, making the latter part of the paragraph wordy and ungrammatical, but also translationese. For example, “我自己” (I myself) is redundant in Chinese. However, in Dutrait’s version, “这就是我的胜利” becomes “Voilà ma victoire,” with the comma in the original becoming a colon in the translation. In addition, Dutrait apparently shortens the following sentence by cutting “毫无必要” (without absolute necessity). Meanwhile “我自己出脚力钱的向导” (the guide [for whom] I myself paid for his legwork and labor) is simplified as “un guide que j’ai payé.” These transformations of sentence structure produce a simpler, more concise style that sounds more

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454. My translation.

natural in French, but it does minimize the effect of the original sentence in expressing the narrator's frustration and alters the rhythm and flow of the narrator's thoughts.

Dutrait's linguistic and rhetoric transformation of Gao's narrative language indicates that while restructuring the latter's work, the translator changes its original style and function in order to make it conform to the regimes of the French literary field. However, if this rewriting alters an entire text, it would seriously affect the reader's perception of the source text's style and function in French:

还有什么可说的没有？

你说这一片长满茅草的废墟只山风凌厉，断残的石条上趴满苦药和地衣，一只壁虎从半截石板上爬过。

说当年晨钟暮鼓香烟缭绕，一千间僧房九白九十九个挂单的和尚，寺庙的住持是一位高僧，圆寂的那天举行了盛大的法会。

说寺庙里无以计数的香炉全都插上了点燃的信香，数百里方圆香客们闻风而来争相目睹老和尚坐化升天，通往这佛地丛林的大小山道上挤满了赶来朝拜的善男信女。

说寺庙里唱经声浑然一片，直飘到山门之外，大小殿堂里没有一个空的蒲团，后来的便就地跪拜，再晚来的则待在殿堂之外，进不来佛门的人群背后还源源不绝，那真是一次空前的盛会。<sup>455</sup>

As-tu autre chose à dire ?

Tu lui parles de ces ruines envahies de roseaux et battues par les vents violents des sommets, des pierres brisées, couvertes de mousses et de lichens, du gecko qui rampe sur une dalle fendue.

Tu lui dis comment, autrefois, résonnaient ici la cloche du matin et le tambour du soir, comment la fumée de l'encens tourbillonnait, comment neuf cent quatre-vingt-dix-neuf bonzes habitaient les mille chambres que possédait le temple, comment, les jours de nirvana, se tenaient de somptueuses assemblées religieuses.

Tu dis que lorsque les fumées de l'encens s'échappaient des innombrables brûle-parfums, les fidèles accouraient de cent lis à la ronde pour voir de leurs propres yeux le vieux moine entrer en béatitude. Les pèlerins se pressaient sur les chemins à travers la forêt.

Tu dis que les psalmodies des soutras résonnaient au-delà de la grande porte de la pagode. Il ne restait plus la moindre natte disponible dans le temple.

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455. *Lingshan*, 198.

Les derniers arrivés s'agenouillaient à même le sol et ceux qui arrivaient encore plus tard devaient attendre dehors. Et derrière la masse des fidèles qui ne parvenaient pas à entrer se pressait encore une foule immense. C'était un rassemblement exceptionnel.<sup>456</sup>

The female narrator “elle” begins the chapter by asking the second-person narrator “tu” to tell her about the temple and the pilgrimage to visit the grand Buddhist monk. “Tu” responds to “elle” with a description of the holy Buddhist site. The foregrounded feature of this paragraph “shuo” (say, said) at the beginning of each sentence indicates the source of the description. The structure does not necessarily identify the agent of the utterance. A reader would naturally link the agent with “tu,” because “elle” has asked “tu” to do so; but only the second paragraph chooses “tu” to identify the speaker.

The sentences beginning with “shuo” appear to be a direct citation of a legend, or a Buddhist sutra, recounting the history of the Buddhist temple. By imitating such a narrative mode beginning with the phrase “hua shuo” or “shuo” (it is said; it goes), Gao retells the history of the temple as though it existed in the people’s collective memory or narrative accounts, giving it the characteristic structure of folklore, or sacred text.

In Dutrait’s translation, “tu” is always the doer, as phrases such as “tu dis” and “tu lui dis” indicates. The chapter thus becomes a personal narrative that imagines the past in vivid detail, mingled with awe and veneration of the Grand Monk in the temple. This narration deviates from the folkloric mode that is passed from one generation to the next, but achieves a narrative consistency with the remainder of the novel’s *Nouveau roman*-influenced style. Gao adopts the folkloric mode to produce a sense of historical authenticity and its effects on the lives of the people, whereas Dutrait’s French version pays more attention to the fictional mode of the

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456. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 285-286.

story with the narrative pronoun “tu” while retaining the style of the rest of the novel. Dutrait picks up the thread left in Chapter 36, interspersed by the first-person “je” narration in Chapter 37, beginning with “dire, dire que” to recover the buried history, shifting from the old temple to more recent legends, and continuing with the narration of “tu” and “elle.”

In brief, Gao’s narrative is not necessarily an organic whole, but features different sources, elements, and styles. Translating this narrative raises the question of whether corresponding changes are necessary. With Gao’s approval, Dutrait made these changes to bridge the gaps between Chinese and French, while keeping in mind the consistency of style and readability, with an eye toward the French literary field.

However, Gao is immersed in modern literary currents, and what distinguishes him from other writers are his unique narrative style and perception of the world. Whether his work can be properly translated into a French narrative, or even if his style is translatable at all, is the primary challenge for a translator such as Dutrait. Chapter 72, the main body of which presents an argument over literary questions in China, with authorial comments interspersed throughout, is a case in point:

他倒有些茫然，不明白这所谓小说重要的是在于讲故事呢？还是在于讲述的方式？还是不在于讲述的方式而在于叙述时的态度？还是不在于态度而在于对态度的确定？[...] 而他又无非迷醉于用语言来讲述这女人与男人与爱情与情爱与性与生命与死亡与灵魂与肉体之躯之快感与疼痛与人与政治对人之关切与人对政治之躲避与躲不开现实与非现实之想象与何者更为真实与功利之目的之否定之否定不等于肯定与逻辑之非逻辑与理性之思辨之远离科学超过内容与形式之争与有意义的形式与无意义的内容与何为意义与对意义之规定与上帝是谁都要当上帝与无神论的偶像之崇拜与崇尚自我封为哲人与自恋与性冷淡而发狂到走火入魔与特异功能与[...]<sup>457</sup>

Il reste perplexe, il ne comprend pas si dans un roman, le plus important, c’est de raconter une histoire. Ou si c’est la manière de la raconter ? Ou sinon, si c’est l’attitude de l’auteur envers la narration ? Ou bien, si ce n’est pas l’attitude, si c’est la détermination

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457. *Lingshan*, 435.



de l'attitude? Ou bien, si ce n'est pas la détermination de l'attitude, si c'est le point de départ de la détermination de l'attitude?[...] Et pourtant, il n'a fait que s'enivrer dans l'utilisation du langage pour raconter la femme et l'homme, l'amour, la passion et le sexe, la vie et la mort, l'âme et la joie et la souffrance du corps humain dans sa chair, et l'homme dans les relations politiques et la fuite de l'homme devant la politique et la réalité que l'on ne peut fuir et l'imagination hors du réel et laquelle des deux est la plus vraie et la négation de la négation du but utile qui n'est pas équivalence à la nécessité et l'illogisme de la logique et la prise de distance par rapport à la réflexion rationnelle dépassant le débat sur le contenu et la forme et la forme qui a un sens et le contenu qui n'a pas de sens et qu'est-ce que le sens et la définition du sens et Dieu que tout le monde voudrait être et l'adoration d'idoles athées et l'envie d'être considéré comme un philosophe et l'amour de soi et la frigidité et la folie qui conduit à la paranoïa et les capacités supranormales[...]<sup>458</sup>

This passage is a counterargument delivered breathlessly by the narrator near the end of the novel. It is formulated without any punctuation marks, and the links between the sentences largely rely on the conjunction “与” (“and” or “et” in French). This argumentative style extends for several pages, bringing to mind such English writers as James Joyce and William Faulkner, who similarly write long sentences without punctuation in order to present the uninterrupted flow of their characters' subconscious activities in the form of monologues, fantasies, or dreams. For instance, the last chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses* describes Molly's thoughts for about forty pages without punctuation. The links and relations between the sentences are constructed according to the logic of the mind, not normal grammatical rules, a distinctive feature of Joyce's writing style.

In Chapter 72 of *Lingshan*, Gao adopts a similar style to introduce a debate over China's literary development in the early 1980s. His approach is also original in that the uninterrupted argument symbolizes the narrator's obsession and struggle with the questions that he wants to debate openly, but has to keep to himself in a monologue that is so intense that he seems to forget the existence of the invisible literary critics or ideologues who posed these questions. The

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458. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 602-603.

style of this chapter represents Gao's inner mind and the force of his delivery. However, the audible personal discourse is ironically presented as a voiceless suppressed monologue.

Despite its convergence with those of other modernist novelists, Gao's monologue differs from their approaches. Where Joyce's stream of consciousness relates to the narrator's life experiences, including suppressed personal memories and desires, in fragmented associations, Gao's monologue presents the narrator's internal mind and his continuous grappling with several thorny issues, which are delivered primarily in a linear form and clear logic.

The *Nouveau roman* does not extensively use unpunctuated sentences as the English modernist novel does; however, both Butor and Perec do link shorter sentences to form longer ones with "et." Despite this, both French authors have their own distinct linguistic styles. Especially in *La Modification*, Butor chooses long sentences separated by commas rather than by periods, sometimes linked by multiple layers of various types of clauses, often with "et." As a result, the sentence structures of his novel may give the reader the impression of the jumbled mental processes of a narrator who is troubled by his life in Rome and Paris. Perec's sentences in *Un homme qui dort*, on the other hand, are joined by different clauses, short but rhythmic, internal but expressive. Like Butor, he sometimes describes his characters' inner thoughts with "et" and past participles alongside long sentences.

Gao's singular modernist style in his novel is another example of his hybridizing of textual sources to create an original mode of expression that deviates from his French sources. Butor was influenced by both Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner,<sup>459</sup> but Gao's presentation of the inner world of his characters is different from theirs. All of this raises yet more questions for

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459. Bernard Lalande, *La Modification Butor: Analyse Critique* (Paris: Hatier), 1972, 24-31.

translators who seek to reproduce the novel's fragmented thought stream: Whether the Chinese text should be translated into French with traces of the English modernist style, or according to the regimes of the French literary field. The former was influenced by Auguste Morel's 1929 translation of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, aided by Stuart Gilbert, Valery Larbaud, and Joyce himself. Morel's translation, which helped Joyce's novel attain canonical status in the French-speaking world, respected Joyce's experimental ventures, especially in the last chapter, as Molly's forty-page monologue keeps Joyce's signature style by refraining from using punctuation until the final sentence. The translation also retains the informal conversational style of the original by linking sentences with "et" as Joyce linked them with "and." Dutrait seems to have chosen the latter approach: Translating the long paragraph according to the stylistic model of the *Nouveau roman*.

Dutrait adds punctuation marks to several long sentences in the beginning of Gao's monologue, according to his reading of the text: "而他又无非迷醉于用语言来讲述这女人与男人与爱情与情爱与性与生命与死亡与灵魂与肉体之躯之快感与疼痛与" is translated into "Et pourtant, il n'a fait que s'enivrer dans l'utilisation du langage pour raconter la femme et l'homme, l'amour, la passion et le sexe, la vie et la mort, l'âme et la joie et la souffrance du corps humain dans sa chair, et[...]." However, in the main body of the monologue, Dutrait chooses the conjunction "et" to give the impression of breathlessness. As a result, the French version shows both Dutrait's interpretation of Gao's text and his conform to French literary norms of translation, echoing the linear delivery of the narrator's inner thoughts in the *Nouveau roman* and the French translation style of Joyce's unpunctuated presentation of thought streams.

In sum, although Gao's style is influenced by French literary sensibilities, his Chinese text has its own distinctive features, which may sometimes deviate from and other times

converge with the French literary environment and style. Dutrait's translation normalizes Gao's translationese and his narrative experiments for the sake of consistency with the *Nouveau roman* style and other French literary norms.

#### 2.4.0 The Reception of *La Montagne de l'âme* in France

The previous sections discussed the publication and translation of *Lingshan* in Taiwan and France according to Lambert's methodology, on the paratextual, narrative, and linguistic levels. The paratextual level accounts for the reception contexts of *Lingshan* in Taiwan and France, while the linguistic level focuses on the validation of the translation *illusio* of the source text in the target text. This exploration of different aspects of Gao's *Lingshan*, both original and translation, in light of a sociological approach, in combination with detailed paratextual and textual analyses, aims to uncover the logic and mechanism that lead to the canonization of *La Montagne de l'âme* in France.

First, comparing the paratextual features of both languages allows us to trace the radical transformation of one textual narrative into a very different one. Gao's Chinese publisher in Taiwan considers *Lingshan* in continuity with modern Chinese literature, whereas his French publisher codifies him as a Chinese writer in exile longing for freedom and an individual voice in France, where he had developed a distinct artistic vision and style, comparable to Samuel Beckett or Milan Kundera. In addition, a linguistic analysis of *Lingshan* and *La Montagne de l'âme* reveals the shift of the *illusio* of the source text to the target text in the process of translation, or "co-creation." The joint efforts of Gao and Dutrait have given *Lingshan* a new life as *La Montagne de l'âme*, and greater recognition than the original Chinese text had received when it was published in Taiwan but remained largely unknown to Chinese readers. It is not,

therefore, the original text that established Gao's reputation, but the French translation, which helped him become accepted first by French readers and then internationally.

Second, at the macro level according to José Lambert's framework, the main narrative mode of Gao's novel shows inspiration from modern French novelists such as Butor, Perec, and Duras. Specifically, Gao draws from Butor's descriptions of physical environments and internal mental movement, Perec's internal meditation, and Duras' depictions of memory and dialogue. At the micro level, various linguistic and stylistic particularities allow us to answer the question of how these micro-textual features, such as words, rhyme and stylistic elements, establish the novel's narrative mode.

Third, although Gao's Chinese original and Dutrait's French translation do converge in many places, there are still overwhelming differences between them. Dutrait resolves the tension between these texts by normalizing features of the original based on his target readers' perceptions: Distancing Gao's Chinese text and creating reference points familiar to French linguistic and cultural particularities; foregrounding the *Nouveau roman* style, and rewriting certain parts of Gao's novel to make them more readable in French. Although these translational traits bring Gao's novel closer to the French literary context and environment, they do not imply that the translation does not leave room for French readers to perceive the Chinese otherness within the French text. On the contrary, Dutrait does heighten the Chinese presence in his translation by rendering some expressions word for word, or creating French rhymes according to Chinese poetic licenses, or even creating a shared space between Chinese and French by combining Chinese phonetic forms with French renderings.

In all, what do these translation strategies suggest? A detailed examination of the dominant features of *Lingshan* in translation shows that Dutrait seeks to create an "acceptable"

French textual style in the target culture, a process that means extensively rewriting the source text, which also reflects Gao's goal of transcending the limitations of the "source language." However, Dutrait's target-oriented translational approach is seriously challenged by the strong influence of French literature on Gao's writing, implying that Dutrait's translation from the Chinese original also roughly restores Gao's Chinese text to its French sources. This constitutes a complicated process of multiple translation, sometimes blurring the identity boundary between the source and target texts. This mutually narrated text, in addition to other Chinese sources, makes it difficult to determine whether, in Gideon Toury's terms, the translation can be considered "acceptable" or "adequate."<sup>460</sup> Asking such a binary question is not as productive as examining how target readers respond to this novel and how it functions in their literary field.

As noted earlier, mainly some Francophone read *Lingshan* (*La Montagne de l'âme*) before Gao's Nobel Prize; therefore, the reception of the novel by these readers is essential for this study. Pascale Gimeno's MA thesis, "Étude sur une œuvre chinoise: *La Montagne de l'âme* de Gao Xingjian" (1997), for instance, compares the reception of Gao's novel in France and Sweden, including reader expectations, reception conditions, and comparative perspectives of journalists and critics, assisted by surveys asking readers why they were interested in the novel. In many ways, Gimeno's pioneering study helps us understand how and why *Lingshan* became popular in France and contributed to Gao earning international prestige. For example, by characterizing the novel as a "special literary work," Gimeno focuses on critical essays that

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460. Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 1995), 7.

provide guidance and feedback. She also investigates the French literary market, including book promotion and media coverage.<sup>461</sup>

Although Gimeno's study has shed much light on Gao's reception in France, her perspective is limited, because, even as she discusses Dutrait's translation strategies, she does not provide any comparisons with the original, nor does she mention any dominant literary traits in *Lingshan*. As a result, her analysis is impoverished, because she relies only on external factors to evaluate Gao's novel. For example, she discusses the conditions under which Chinese literature is received in France only in terms of popular desires to know more about China in the context of its opening up to the outside world. As a result, this portion of her examination is too partial to account for certain critics' interest in China's past and their extension of this interest into the literary context.

Despite the lapses in Gimeno's approach, her focus on media responses to Gao's canonization in the French literary field is worthy of special attention. As she points out, in France, Spain, and Italy literary criticism consists both of academic and popular essays, in contrast to the English-speaking world and Germany, which consider literary criticism and literary journalism two separate disciplines.<sup>462</sup> Gimeno points out that critics are meant to narrow the gaps between the expectations of the source and target readerships, and guide readers toward appreciating the work in its concrete social, political, and economic contexts.<sup>463</sup> Thus, critics

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461. Pascale Gimeno, "*Étude sur une œuvre chinoise: La Montagne de l'âme de Gao Xingjian*," MA thesis, U of Provence, 1997, 80.

462. Pascale Gimeno's assumption is partial. In the English-Speaking countries, literary criticism can be found in both popular and academic journals. We will deal with this issue in Chapter 3.

463. Before the publication of the French translation, L'Aube Editions launched various advertising campaigns, such as radio talks with the author, book signings, media interviews, and

play an essential role in creating a favorable reception of literature. Gimeno further notes that ordinary French readers are largely accustomed to realist fiction as established in the nineteenth century, and the distinctive narrative structure and modes of Gao's *La Montagne de l'âme* mean that it is not a conventional novel by this standard. Thus, only 6000 copies were sold over three years since its publication by the end of 1995 (compared to 300,000 copies sold by 2004 following the Nobel honour).<sup>464</sup> Literary journals, newspapers, radio and TV programs, and conferences all provide data on the novel's reception by literary professionals within the French context, and reflect the values of the French literary field. Examining these critiques allows us to answer essential questions about Gao's works in general and *Lingshan* in particular, which in turn may either problematize or support the findings of this study.

The previous sections have dealt extensively with the questions that also focus on French critical responses to the novel. This study is particularly interested in how French readers responded to Dutrait's French translation of *Lingshan* in relation to the field of French literature, and how Gao's work matches reader expectations of a literary masterpiece. The opinions of French readers and critics on the quality of the translation, the roles of the publisher and the market, and the sales figures of the novel are also important factors in this discussion.

Thus, it is necessary for this study to establish criteria, such as media profiles, genres, timespans, and relevance, by which we can select relevant reviews from the vast body of articles on the reception of China and its literature in France. Such criteria are important in ensuring the availability of data that represent general trends in the reception of Gao's work.

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conferences on Chinese literature, which were mainly held at Aix-Provence Université. In addition, because the novel was released before Christmas, the publisher also promoted it in a gift package for holiday reading. See Pascale Gimeno's thesis, 74-75

464. The sales of *Lingshan* in France are discussed below.



As noted earlier, the publication of *Lingshan* was praised by major French journals such as *Le Figaro* and *Libération*. Articles appearing in these publications are especially relevant to this project because of their importance in the France. Also, because Gao's novel was published in 1995 and won the Nobel Prize in 2000, the reviews discussed in this study are roughly limited to this timeframe, during which Gao's literary ascendancy in France and internationally can be traced and identified. Reviews of and responses to *Lingshan* appeared in various media, including newspapers, journals, magazines, radio interviews, TV programs, academic conferences, and sales notes. Our discussion of these reviews is organized according to the following categories: *Lingshan* in the context of Chinese literature; *La Montagne de l'âme* and its relevance to the French literary field; and translation, publication, and sales of *La Montagne de l'âme*.

French critical views of *Lingshan* in the context of modern Chinese literature are important in examining the novel's place in the Chinese literary field with reference to world literature, especially that of France. These critical views provide information not only about the Chinese literary imagination, but also Gao's position in that literary imagination that paved the way for his positive reception in France and elsewhere. We begin with an interview with Gao by France Infos dated on November 12, 1995.

Interviewed by Philippe Vallée, host of France Infos, about his novel, *Lingshan*, Gao drew a thematic parallel between his writing of *Lingshan* in China and France by emphasizing that the character's search for another culture is both a spiritual escape and a reflection of himself

in his real life. He also pointed out that his novel was meant to settle account for his nostalgia for his home country.<sup>465</sup>

This interview was followed by André Clavel's article "Lisez Gao Xingjian," published in *L'Express* on November 23, 1995, which discusses Gao's experiences in China that inspired the novel.<sup>466</sup> Clavel praises Gao's novel as it "culmine très haut dans le ciel des lettres chinoises," a guide to the celestial road that highlights lesser-known aspects of Chinese ethnic cultures and myths. For Clavel, Gao does not reach the summit of the inaccessible *Lingshan*, but he succeeds in finding the celestial road in the Oriental fantasy, which is internal and spiritual. He adds that this novel might remind readers of classical Chinese novels such as *The Journey to the West* and *Water Margin*, two Chinese classics written in vernacular, since Gao's novel has the same freshness, ease and grace. Clavel concludes that Gao is the "nouveau timonier" of Chinese literature.<sup>467</sup> Clavel's descriptions of Gao's protagonist's journey as "celestial road," "Oriental fantasy," and "spiritual" reveal his critical stance on Chinese classical literature in general and Gao's novel as a whole: He sees Gao as continuing the classical Chinese literary tradition and emerging as a new master in modern Chinese literature.

While Clavel's critique appears to easily confirm Gao's literary status, Alain Peyraube's December 16, 1995 article in *Le Monde*, "Voyage au bout de la Chine," strengthens links

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465. Philippe Vallée, "Gao Xingjian, *La Montagne de l'âme*," Infos France, November 12, 1995. The transcript of Philippe Vallée's interview is available at L'Espace de recherche Gao Xingjian, Aix-Marseille Université, <https://bu.univ-amu.fr/espace-recherche-gao-xingjian>.

466. André Clavel, "Lisez Gao Xingjian," *L'Express* (November 23, 1995).

467. Clavel, "Lisez Gao Xingjian."

between *Lingshan* and China's classical literary tradition.<sup>468</sup> For Peyraube, Gao's novel follows the same tradition as the "youji" (travel notes) originating in the Song Dynasty. However, he also sees Gao as a radical modernist and promoter of the Chinese Theatre of the Absurd. Peyraube comments on Gao's adoption of personal pronouns to represent different points of view, and his intentional merging of *sanwan* (essay) with fiction through his historical references and long reflections. However, the novel still has its own unique fictional narrative based on Gao's creative use of language. In addition, Peyraube values the musical quality of the novel's words and rhymes and its semantic symmetry, which are present in the French translation as well.<sup>469</sup> Peyraube's critical reviews of Gao's novel draw upon his work as a scholar of Chinese studies in France. Though *Lingshan* is closely related to Chinese classical novels, Gao's contribution to modern Chinese literature does not lie in this linkage, but in his merger of the classical literary genre with modern fiction and with his inventive choice of personal pronouns.

The most important article following the publication of *Lingshan* appeared in the left-wing newspaper *Libération*, Gérard Meudal's "La Longue marche du résident Gao."<sup>470</sup> While examining Gao's literary career in China and *Lingshan*'s place in modern Chinese literature, Meudal provides a comprehensive picture of Gao's background as a dissident and writer who has been in exile in Paris since the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989, where he has continued his literary creation as a poet, novelist, dramatist, and theatre director. Meudal notes that although

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468. Alain Peyraube, "Voyage au bout de la Chine," *Le Monde*, last modified December 16, 1995, [https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1995/12/16/voyage-au-bout-de-la-chine\\_3888924\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1995/12/16/voyage-au-bout-de-la-chine_3888924_1819218.html).

469. See note 470 above.

470. Gérard Meudal, "La Longue marche du résident Gao," *Libération*, last modified December 21, 1995, [https://www.liberation.fr/livres/1995/12/21/la-longue-marche-du-resident-gao\\_153446/](https://www.liberation.fr/livres/1995/12/21/la-longue-marche-du-resident-gao_153446/).

*Lingshan* combines elements of picaresque, dream vision, and lyric poetry, Gao still refers to it as an “oriental novel,” containing familiar elements of Chinese literature, such as fables, travel notes, and fantasy stories, narrated not by specific persons with specific names, but by “je” “tu” and “il” according to the different layers of conscience. In this manner, Gao is similar to the French essayist Michel de Montaigne, in that both include themselves in their writings. For Meudal, Gao pays so much attention to Chinese ethnic minority customs, histories, and folklore in order to demonstrate his belief in the power of these marginalized cultures in the face of oppression. He associates Gao’s choice of personal pronouns with Diderot’s essay “Le Paradoxe sur le comédien” and traces the evolution of this feature from Diderot to Brecht, maintaining that this trace of theory can also find expressions in Peking Opera and Japanese No and Kabuki. In the article, Gao adds that he has attempted in all of his writings to extend such theatricality to other arenas, which forms a *mise en abîme* or *jeu dans le jeu*, suggesting that the actor can step out of the role he plays and solve the problem of the game. In brief, Meudal projects Gao as a political dissident and artist at the same time, and *Lingshan* as both a highly original novel and a narrative against oppression, which can easily be associated with French theatrical traditions.<sup>471</sup>

Shortly after the release of Gérard Meudal’s article, *La Marseillaise*, a major regional daily based in Marseilles, published Josefa Martinez’s review “Voyage dans la Chine profonde,” featuring a photo of Gao with his translator Noël Dutrait, on November 26, 1995.<sup>472</sup> Martinez characterizes *Lingshan* as “une redécouverte des civilisations ancestrales chinoises.” The voyage depicted in the novel can be regarded as Gao’s quest for the roots of the Chinese civilizations in

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471. See note 467 above.

472. Josefa Martinez, “Voyage dans la Chine profonde,” *La Marseillaise*, November 26, 1995.

plural forms, some of which the Cultural Revolution attempted to eradicate. The significance of *Lingshan* lies in Gao's effort to reconstruct a Chinese culture composed of different sources and traits. It is also a quest of the self and the other through the narrative form of the personal pronouns, "je" "tu" and "il." As a result, his writing is absolutely modernist, marked by alternating monologues and dialogues, and well-crafted descriptions. For Martinez, Gao's quest for the soul of Chinese culture and tradition also resonates with the French readers' similar desires.<sup>473</sup> Thus, *Lingshan*'s modernist narrative reinvents Chinese ancient civilizations and forms an alternative modern Chinese identity, which arouses French readers' empathy.

Jean Contrucci's review "Le Robinson du fleuve Jaune," published by the regional newspaper *Le Provençal* on December 24, 1995, portrays Gao as an intellectual dissident who rebels against Chinese government's propaganda, collectivism, and political surveillance, and is able to write freely in France.<sup>474</sup> Contrucci also argues that *Lingshan* is a spiritual quest for the meaning of life and a renewal of lost cultures and traditions, and reaching the summit of Lingshan (the Soul Mountain) is not as important as the journey as a whole. As the title of Contrucci's article suggests, Gao gives French readers a lesson of wisdom from a foreign land. Contrucci also praises the courage of Le Éditions de L'Aube for taking risks in its publication of Dutrait's French translation.<sup>475</sup> Contrucci agrees with Meudal that Gao is both a Chinese dissident and creative writer, whose explorations of the meanings of tradition, culture and human life in a Cartesian way are highly laudable.

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473. See note 474.

474. Jean Contrucci, "Le Robinson du fleuve Jaune," *Le Provençal*, December 24, 1995.

475. Jean Contrucci, "Le Robinson du fleuve Jaune."

These reviews all attribute the importance of *Lingshan* to its connections to Chinese classical literature, its modern and modernist narration of Chinese culture and tradition, its innovative use of theatricality and personal pronouns, and its depiction of the universal spiritual quest. Other reviews, which are discussed below, highlight the relevance of Gao and his novel to the French literary field. These articles explore the appeal of *Lingshan* to French readers, and its perception as a universal work.

Jacques Decornoy's article, "Sous la neige de la mémoire," which appeared in *Le Monde diplomatique* on November 30, 1995, explores the similarities between Gao's *Lingshan* and Butor's *La Modification*, particularly their opening paragraphs.<sup>476</sup> He notes that Gao's character "tu" is not on the Paris-Rome express train, but on a bus to the South of China, where "je" and "tu" begin their quest for pre-Confucian China, "la Chine de toujours et de nulle part." He focuses on Gao's connection with French literature by singling out his first treatise on literary modernism, his knowledge of Western literature, and his efforts to translate French modern authors into Chinese. Because of his long commitment to literature, Decornoy points out, Gao could finally finish *Lingshan* in Paris in 1989 after he settled down in France. In his introduction to the background of Gao's writing process, Decornoy unfolds different aspects of the novel, covering its quest for the civilization, history, tradition and cultures of a lesser-known part of China, especially the arts of fiction, language and writing. He claims that *Lingshan* is a work of art rather than of nostalgia, and, like Contrucci, believes that reaching the mountain is not as important as continuing to search for it.<sup>477</sup> In particular, Decornoy discusses Gao's relevance to

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476. Jacques Decornoy, "Sous la neige de la mémoire," *Le Monde diplomatique* November 30, 1995.

477. Jacques Decornoy, "Sous la neige de la mémoire."

modern French literature, particularly the *Nouveau roman*, and acknowledges *Lingshan*'s resonance with the French Jesuit imagination of pre-Confucian China.

Diane de Margerie's "Fragments d'une Chine dévastée" appeared in the center/right-wing newspaper *Le Figaro* on January 11, 1996.<sup>478</sup> Her review calls *Lingshan* a kaleidoscope that unfolds "une Chine éternelle, une Chine cruelle" marked by destruction and restoration. The scenes of sexual violence, the pursuit of love, nostalgia for home, traumatic memories of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-45 and of re-education camps, and the survival of minority cultures in the face of oppression all constitute the road to the Soul Mountain. Gao's creative uses of fictional pronouns show his efforts to represent the complex facets of the hero: Sometimes as a man, another time as a woman; as a spectator, as a traveller, as a human being in all his/her facets. In addition, De Margerie also praises Noël and Liliane Dutrait's superior French translation quality of Gao's master novel.<sup>479</sup>

Jean-Luc Douin's review "Le Grand bond en arrière," published in *Télérama* on January 17, 1996, provides French readers with biographical information on Gao, particularly referring to him as a political refugee in France after the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989. Douin associates Gao's experiences with his exile, from childhood to his departure from China in 1989, to his attempts in *Lingshan* to trace the cultural sources of the remote regions of China. Gao's journey represents his interior quest for a China seemingly synchronic with the Confucian era. Ironically, Gao's search for the Soul Mountain ends with "I know nothing, strictly speaking nothing." Douin speaks positively of Gao's modernist use of language and defiance of rigid literary rules,

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478. Diane De Margerie, "Fragments d'une Chine dévastée," *Le Figaro*, January 11, 1996.

479. Diane De Margerie, "Fragments d'une Chine dévastée."

concluding that *Lingshan* combines every genre of classic Chinese literature and represents various human experiences including life, death, suffering, happiness, love, sex, and war. As a playwright and novelist, Gao's literary connections to France and French modernist literature are also evident. In particular, Gao's fictional personal pronouns are especially effective in representing daily life, interior monologues, and philosophical meditations. Douin also characterizes the French version of *Lingshan* as "joliment traduit."<sup>480</sup> Douin's review addresses two key aspects of Gao's novel: Its interior quest for China's past, and its modernist traits. Douin aligns Gao's interior narrative of China with the Confucian world that French literature has praised; he also associates Gao's use of modernist techniques in his novel with those of Jean-Luc Godard.

André Clavel published his second review of Gao's *Lingshan* in *Journal de Genève et Gazette de Lausanne* on February 3-4, 1996.<sup>481</sup> He regards *Lingshan* as a renewal with the old Chinese tradition, in contrast to his modernist plays staged in Paris. With his inventive use of pronouns, Gao presents a loner's journey through the virgin forest, villages, Taoist and Buddhist temples, during which stories are told from different perspectives (with different pronouns) in collection with the local history, legends, and myths. Clavel argues that while depicting the journey of finding the paradisiacal Soul Mountain, Gao assumes a role similar to Blaise Pascal or Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Little Prince*. Thus, Gao is a defender of Chinese traditional culture and an opponent of the exclusion of the individualism in a collective society. In this sense, Gao's

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480. Jean-Luc Douin, "Le Grand bond en arrière," *Télérama* (January 17, 1996).

481. André Clavel, "Sur les cimes de l'âme," *Journal de Genève et Gazette de Lausanne* (February 3, 1996).



novel is not just a story that reveals China to the West, but is also an adventure that valorizes Chinese traditional culture and personal freedom.<sup>482</sup>

In his interview with Gao, “La voix puissante d’un écrivain en exil,” published in *Perspectives Chinoises* in 1998, Noël Dutrait addresses the relevance of Gao’s *Lingshan* and its success in France, which he attributes to Gao’s application of the theory he advanced in his treatise on modern fiction when he was still in China.<sup>483</sup> In the interview, Gao maintains that although his novel presents a different world than that with which French readers are familiar, it transcends its concrete environment and reaches out to French readers, because the problems it addresses, and the hopes that individuals cherish, are common to both French and Chinese readers. The positive response of French readers to his novel is not necessarily only due to a love of Chinese culture.<sup>484</sup>

In summary, the above reviews cite several reasons for the success of Gao’s novel in France: *Lingshan*’s pertinence to French perceptions of ancient Chinese civilization, its use of pronouns as narrative voices, its modernist traits, its quest for spiritual transcendence, its valorization for cultural diversities, and its portrayal of universal human existential concerns. These articles are by no means exhaustive: Among many articles discussing *Lingshan* and *Yigeren*, particularly after Gao won the Nobel Prize, are Jean-Luc Douin’s “Gao Xingjian à l’encre de Chine ” in *Le Monde* on March 20, 2000, André Clavel’s “Gao Xingjian, retour sur les années d’ombre” in *Le Temps* on April 1, 2000, Rose Sean James’ “Gao Xingjian, nobel français

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482. Clavel, “Sur les cimes de l’âme.”

483. Noël Dutrait, “La Voix puissante d’un écrivain en exil,” *Perspectives chinoises* (1998): 60-63.

484. Dutrait, “La Voix puissante d’un écrivain en exil.”

en chinois” in *Libération* on Oct 13, 2000, and Alain Peyraube’s “Gao Xingjian, écrivain français de langue chinoise” in *Le Monde* on October 20, 2000. These articles are not discussed in detail in this study because they are not immediately relevant to its scope. However, they do demonstrate the prevalence of critical articles on Gao in general and *Lingshan* in particular following his Nobel win in 2000. Many of these articles placed emphasis on the values present in the novel, according to its discursive relevance established in France on China and on Chinese culture and literature. However, with the exception of the reviews in *La Marseillaise* and *Le Provençal*, these articles seldom acknowledged the role of the translator and publisher in the reception of Gao’s novel. Translators and publishers are necessary for foreign literature to reach new audiences, and sometimes a publisher’s ideology can determine the acceptance and publication of a specific work. Only after the Nobel win did a small number of journals address these issues.

These articles are important in determining how Gao became accepted in the field of French literature and beyond, as are examinations of how *Lingshan* came to be translated and published, and how its sales figures changed following the Nobel Prize. This information helps to determine the roles of the agents of translation in the dissemination of the novel.

After the announcement that Gao had won the Nobel Prize, *AFP* (Agence France-Presse) published an article on October 13, 2000, “Le Nobel de littérature récompense aussi un traducteur et un petit éditeur,” featuring Noël Dutrait and L’Édition de L’Aube. Though *Lingshan* had been rejected by larger publishers in France, for Jean Viard, co-founder of L’Aube, Gao’s honour was also a reward for his company’s three years of hard work to defend the rights and freedoms of dissident authors such as the Czech writer Vaclav Havel and the Iranian writer Ali Erfan. While some publishers had dismissed *Lingshan* as unpublishable and too great a

financial risk for its long length, Viard made his decision to publish it for Gao's adoption of European narrative structures to present Chinese culture and civilization. At the time of the interview, more than 17,000 copies had been sold; Viard hoped that the Nobel win would help to sell another 10,000 copies.<sup>485</sup>

Another article published in *Le Monde* on October 14, 2000, "La Récompense d'un petit éditeur," featured an interview with Marion Hennebert, the other co-founder of L'Aube. She stated that when she made the decision about accepting a long book by an unknown author, she had chosen to read it first. Three days later, L'Aube agreed to publish the novel, at a translation fee of 100,000 francs and a printing fee of 100,000 francs. This was a gamble for a small publisher with only seven workers and an annual output of 70 books. However, L'Aube had a similar experience with the publication of the works of Vaclav Havel, who went on to be elected three times as Czech President, and they were proud of their role as a cultural broker or "passeur" (ferryman).<sup>486</sup>

Jean Viard remarked in an interview with journalist Aubry Chantal that Gao's Nobel honour also placed L'Aube in the spotlight in France and the rest of the world.<sup>487</sup> At the time of the interview, L'Aube was producing a pocket edition of *La Montagne de l'âme* and also reprinting Gao's other works of fiction and criticism, at a total investment of 400,000 francs.<sup>488</sup> For Viard, Gao symbolizes the spirit of liberty that L'Aube upholds. He also explained the

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485. AFP (Agence France-Presse), "Le Nobel de littérature récompense aussi un traducteur et un petit éditeur," October 13, 2000.

486. "Le Récompense d'un petit éditeur," *Le Monde*, October 14, 2000.

487. Aubry Chantal, "La vie comme elle va," *La Croix*, October 18, 2000.

488. See note 489.

company's operation: As a professor of sociology at the University of Provence, Viard had connections to scholars and professors who could publish their works with him.

In "Un Nobel inespéré pour les Editions de L'Aube" published by *La Tribune* on June 28, 2001, Viard revealed that he had mortgaged his house in order to publish Gao's novel. The sales of the novel following Gao's Nobel win increased from 100,000 to 300,000 copies, with sales volumes jumping from 5 million francs to 12 million francs, making L'Aube the most successful publisher in the Vaucluse region. Hennebert also stated that the publishing house was in debt in the beginning, but thanks to the subventions support of the CNL (Centre National des Lettres) and la région Paca, a local government's cultural program in Southern France, her company reached a profit of 1 million francs in 2000.<sup>489</sup>

"Des éditeurs se livrent en Pays bigouden," published by *Le Télégramme* in Bretagne on August 21, 2001, accentuates the contribution of L'Aube to French culture by publishing not only sociological and political essays, but also other subjects. The book projects of which Viard and Hennebert are most proud are their publications of Vaclav Havel's works and their publication of Gao's *Lingshan*.<sup>490</sup>

The interviews cited above all note that the successful publication of *Lingshan* was both conditioned and facilitated by the French government's funding of cultural projects including their translation and publication, the publishing company's ideology of supporting the writers oppressed by communist regimes, and the publishing company's networking in the community

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489. "Un Nobel inespéré pour les Éditions de L'Aube," *La Tribune*, June 28, 2001.

490 "Des éditeurs se livrent en Pays bigouden," *Le Télégramme* (August 21, 2001).

of the University of Provence. Thanks to these favorable conditions, Gao's novel was published and received excellent critical reviews, unprecedented sales, and prestigious literary awards.

Other articles, especially those appearing in newspapers published in the French translator Dutrait's home city of Aix, also examined his role in the promotion of Gao's work in France. *La Provence* gave Dutrait a prominent place in Gao's ascendance to the international literary centre. For instance, the January 15, 2001 article "Rencontre ce soir avec les traducteurs du prix Nobel" claimed that Noël and Liliane Dutrait's translation of *Lingshan* facilitated Gao's Nobel ascendancy, and helped the Western world better understand Chinese literature. A January 27, 2001 article, "Littérateur: L'étrange Nobel de Monsieur Dutrait," associates Gao's Nobel Prize with Dutrait, whose translation helped to "refine" the original, thanks to the Dutraits' direct contact with Gao. Both of these articles focus on the inseparable relationship between Gao and his translator and emphasize that Dutrait's work is an original one deserving of the Nobel.<sup>491</sup>

Before 2000, there was not much information available about *Lingshan*'s sales from various journals and newspapers. However, October 12, 2000 marked a dividing line for Gao's reputation and sales of his work, especially *La Montagne de l'âme*, because the Nobel Prize Committee announced Gao as the laureate on that day. The section "L'Édition Française" in *Le Monde* on November 10, 2000 stated that 4000 copies of Gao's works had been sold daily since October 12, 2000. In total, 65,000 copies of *La Montagne de l'âme* were sold, compared to 6000 copies in all between its publication in 1995 and Gao's Nobel win on October 12, 2000. More new prints were expected to come out. The article "Harry Potter jette un sort sur les ventes," in the "Le monde des livres" section of *Le Monde* on January 2, 2001, discussed the most popular

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491. "Rencontre ce soir avec les traducteurs du prix Nobel," *La Provence*, January 15, 2001 and "Littérature: L'étrange Nobel de Monsieur Dutrait," *La Provence*, Jan. 27, 2001.

novels in France, noting that sales of *Le Montagne de l'âme* to that date had reached 160,000 copies for the pocket edition and about 34,000 copies for the large format edition. The sales for his other novel, *Le Livre d'un homme seul*, reached only 27,200 copies. In the same journal, the March 1, 2002 article "Des chiffres plein les poches" showed that the pocket edition of *Le Montagne de l'âme* had sold 12,900 copies, which allowed L'Aube to be ranked among larger publishers, which was rare. In the column "Les Livres Stars" of the *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Gao's *La Montagne de l'âme* was ranked seventeenth among the best-selling novels in France.<sup>492</sup>

In addition to the sales volumes of Gao's book, these articles also discuss his relationship with his publishers. Gao's cooperation with L'Aube ended in 2004, as noted in "Gao Xingjian quitte Les Éditions de L'Aube pour Le Seuil" of *Les échos* on March 18, 2004 and other articles by *Le Nouvel observateur* and Agence france-presse. However, Gao did not reveal his reasons for switching to Le Seuil, saying only that it was personal.<sup>493</sup>

All of these reviews, and the paratexts of the French editions of *Lingshan*, present Gao as a political dissident, or a dissident intellectual: A writer persecuted in China for his promotion of

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492. For the sales of *La Montagne de l'âme*, see "L'Édition Française," *Le Monde*, (November 10, 2000); "Chiffres de plein les poches," *Le Monde*, last modified March 1, 2002, [https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2002/03/01/des-chiffres-plein-les-poches\\_4210074\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2002/03/01/des-chiffres-plein-les-poches_4210074_1819218.html); "Harry Potter jette un sort sur les ventes," *Le Monde*, last modified February 8, 2001, [https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2001/02/08/harry-potter-jette-un-sort-sur-les-ventes\\_146087\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2001/02/08/harry-potter-jette-un-sort-sur-les-ventes_146087_1819218.html) and "Les Livres Stars," [www.alapage.com](http://www.alapage.com) and "Ventes en hausse au 21e Salon du livre," *Le Monde*, last modified March 26, 2004.

493. "Gao quitte L'Aube pour Le Seuil, éditeur de nombreux Nobel," Agence france-presse, last modified March 24, 2004, <http://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx>; "Gao Xingjian quitte Les éditions de L'Aube pour le Seuil," *Les échos*, March 18, 2004 and "Gao passe L'Aube pour le Seuil," *Le Nouvel observateur*, last modified March 22, 2004, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/culture/20040316.OBS5988/gao-xingjian-passe-de-l-aube-au-seuil.html>.

modernism and individualism against the overarching communist ideological apparatus. His status as a political refugee in France is especially highlighted, so is with his courageous effort to cut his ties with the Chinese government after the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989, even though he had claimed political refugee status when he was in Germany in 1987 and settled down in France in 1988. Consequently, *Lingshan* has been read as an expression of his political rebellion against Chinese government-sponsored literary trends, at least partially, as Gérard Meudal, Jean Construcci, Jean-Luc Douin, Josefa Martinez, and Noël Dutrait have all acknowledged. Given that Gao has sought to express his personal voice without political commitment, which he called “no-ism,” the choice of French reviewers to accentuate his political status is puzzling. Pascale Gimeno explains that in France, the critics’ inclination to read Gao as an “auteur-martyre” to the French is largely because the image of a dissident functions better than his technical innovation in a country that is concerned with human rights.<sup>494</sup>

The reviews also point out Gao’s association with France first as a translator of Ionesco, Beckett, and Prévert, and second as a free author in exile. Furthermore, they characterize Gao’s work as modernist based on his creative use of personal pronouns, monologues, poetic language, and various literary sources. In particular, his choice of the narrative pronouns “je” “tu” and “il/elle” is similar to that of Michel Butor’s *La Modification*; the theatricality exhibited in the novel is comparable to that of Diderot, his novel’s spiritual quest is analogical to the works of Pascal and Descartes, his allusions to and citations of different sources are reminiscent of Jean-Luc Godard, and his childhood memoirs are reminiscent of Saint-Exupéry’s *Le Petit prince*.

The third conclusion we can draw from the reviews is that Gao’s novel is considered a renewal of China’s tradition, an “oriental fantasy,” which calls back to classical Chinese works

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494. See Pascale Gimeno’s M.A. thesis, 87.

such as *The Journey to the West* and *Water Margin*. *Lingshan* depicts both “la Chine éternelle, la Chine cruelle” and “La Chine toujours et nulle part,” which are concerned with the pre-Confucian world, Taoist wisdom, Buddhist rituals, bandits, fantasies, folk songs, and poetry. In short, *Le Montagne de l’âme* presents a world that feels both familiar and mysterious, both shocking and attractive, to French readers, who, like Gao’s narrator, empathize with a world they seek but cannot identify, for which they must never stop searching.

#### 2.5.0 Conclusion: Translation, Literary Reception, Institutionalization and “Universal” Values

The publication of *Lingshan* in Taiwan and France demonstrates how different literary fields respond to a literary work. These production and reception processes are conditioned by such factors as translation habitus, literary field requirements, and translator’s contributions, which consequently determine the symbolic capital a writer enjoys. In this respect, the publication of *Lingshan* in Taiwan indicates that as a literary novice, Gao did not have enough capital to influence the literary field, despite excellent references by such well-known writers as Ma Sen and Göran Malmqvist. His novel was categorized as a fresh attempt by a mainland Chinese writer to create a literary work as art rather than as an instrument for propaganda. It was viewed as both a continuation and a further exploration of the art of Chinese fiction writing. Consequently, Gao’s novel was branded as an attempt to search for an idealized space for the people, similarly to the works of the Taoist-inclined poet Tao Yuanming (365-427AD). As a result, Gao’s exploration in modern fiction writing was largely ignored, because Taiwan’s literary field had other priorities than Gao’s. Many critics were unfamiliar with the modernist traits of Gao’s work, shaped by the French *Nouveau roman*, and with modernist fiction as a whole.



In the French context, Gao's novel was greeted positively because he satisfied its homological conditions: His image as a dissident writer much like Milan Kundera or Václav Havel, his literary themes of the quest for interior spirituality, alienation from the urban centre of power, valorization of the vibrant minority cultures, and nostalgic portrayals of a mysterious China with Taoist traditions, Buddhist rituals, shaman mysteries, bandits, fantasies, folklore, and songs. These themes, both familiar and fresh, reciprocated with modern French readers' interest in a poetic China codified by the writers' engagements with Chinese classics and reality. French critics and writers, including Julia Kristeva, respond to Gao's work in terms of their imagination and fantasies about "La Chine éternelle, La Chine cruelle" or "La Chine toujours, et nulle part." More importantly, through translation, an *illusio* of the text has been translated into the French literary field, resembling the styles of Michel Butor, Georges Perec, and Marguerite Duras. Though some critics still consider Gao's work a Chinese novel, many draw analogous links with French literary and cultural history in narrating fictional events, including Diderot, Pascale, Saint-Exupéry, Descartes, Jean-Luc Godard, and other modernists.

The positive reception of Gao's work is largely attributed to the joint efforts between the translator(s) and the author. The translation strategies are based on the idea of fidelity first to the author, then the reader, and then the text, and Dutrait rewrote the original text of Gao's novel with the latter's full encouragement and confidence. In translating *Lingshan*, Dutrait rewrote it according to the regimes of the French literary field in order to reduce reading difficulty in the target milieu as much as possible through the rendering of words, sentence, and text as concisely as possible, and the conversion of the original text's musicality and rhythm into a French equivalent. In addition, new prefaces and other paratextual materials have helped bring *La Montagne d'âme* more in line with French literary norms than its original, with the major

obstacles to its reception removed or minimized, though additions, word-for-word translations, and creative translations are all present in various places.

Gao's novel is a new French creation that conforms to the requirements of the French literary field, generating a homological effect for the original Chinese work's reception. However, even as readers value Gao's original writing and Dutrait's re-creative efforts, the role of the publisher and its promotional activities should not be minimized. Publishing Gao's literary work as a means of helping the voiceless to gain voices, L'Aube recreated Gao's images as both a political dissident and a writer, a process that was also supported by the national and regional grants for promoting cultural diversity and literary invention.

In brief, through the cooperative translation and publisher's investments, both political and literary, the critical responses of the literary work, Gao's novel has been transplanted from the Chinese literary field and enjoys a new and different life whose meanings are further redefined according to the terms of the reception of the target readers and the logic of the literary field. In the whole process of canonization, the author, the translator, the publisher, the literary organizations, and the media have jointly institutionalized Gao's literary works and reputation. Inevitably, such a translation of the target-oriented text also means redefining the boundary between the source and the target text and culture, thereby determining the relevance of the literary text to the French literary field.

As discussed in the previous section, Gao's novel has evolved from a simple motive to rewrite a grand narrative of history to a full account of a personal spiritual journey. Gao did not finish the novel until he settled down permanently in Paris in 1988. From the time when he conceived this novel until 1990, he constantly rewrote and reworked it according to different influences. *Lingshan* is a work of hybrid sources and multiple voices, in which modernism is a

prominent feature, but not necessarily in terms of Western modernism in general. In his speech given at the University of Stockholm, Gao pointed out what he wanted to do in this novel: Modern experiments in language and narrative mode exemplified in his personal pronouns for the points of view in his novel. His fictional narrative creates an affinity between Chinese opera and modern Western theatre, showing that he seeks to harmoniously negotiate between these literary fields.<sup>495</sup>

For the French translation of *Lingshan*, Gao advised Dutrait to follow the models of Michel Butor, Georges Perec and Marguerite Duras, thus reducing a hybrid textual space to a space of modern French fictional narration. Although the French narrative space is foregrounded, other voices are essentially minimized. The obvious example is the rejection of the co-existence of different modernist styles, such as text without punctuation, experimentation with language use, and intertextual allusions. As a result, modernism in Gao's original writing has undergone a redefinition according to the terms of French literary modernism, from which readers experience the echo of the modern French writers who influenced the novel. With the boundary redrawn, Gao's novel also reciprocates with modern French literary works with significant Chinese content, from Paul Claudel, Victor Segalen, and André Malraux. Those modern writers, whose sense of modernity was endowed with increasing anxiety, alienation, and longing for spiritual transcendence, coincide with Gao's concerns and quest.

In a sense, the translation of the modernist space for Gao means a significant withdrawal from the complicated web of modernisms into the kingdom of signs restituted according to the *illusio* of the French literary field. The logic of the game and the lure of the symbolic capital that

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495. Gao Xingjian, "Wenxue yu xuanxue guanyu lingshan" [Literature and Metaphysics: Lingshan], in *Meiyou zhuyi* [No-ism] (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 2000), 90.

marks Gao's recognition as a French/Francophone author writing in Chinese, are constantly present.<sup>496</sup> The late President Jacques Chirac elegantly expressed Gao's relevance to French readers: "De même je voudrais rendre hommage au nouveau prix Nobel de littérature, M. Gao Xingjian, qui a su allier toutes les finesses de la civilisation chinoise aux plus contemporaines de la culture européenne."<sup>497</sup> For Chirac, the importance of Gao's work lies in his fine Chinese literary sensibility and in his adoption of contemporary forms of European culture. We may further infer from Chirac's remark that the "universality" of Gao's works is a recognition of Gao's relevance to Chinese civilization in European forms and values.

Lydia Liu well illustrates the logic in Chirac's message on the relationship between universalism and difference: "Universalism thrives on difference. It does not reject difference but translates and absorbs it into its own orbit of antithesis and dialectic."<sup>498</sup> Gao's universality is achieved through French translational mediation of his works, in particular *Lingshan*. As shown in this chapter, the translation of his novel is not so much relevant to the Chinese literary field as to the dominant French literary field, which imagines, defines, and valorizes a literary work as universal according to its own needs and regimes.

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496. Gao Xingjian, "L'esprit de liberté, ma France," *Le Monde*, August 20, 1998.

497. See Jacques Chirac's message in Liu Xinwu's *Liaojie Gao Xingjian* [To Know More about Gao Xingjian] (Hong Kong: Quaille Publishing, 2001), 180.

498. Lydia Liu, "Introduction," *Tokens of Exchanges: The Problem of Translation in the Global Circulation*, ed. Lydia Liu (Durham, NC: Duke UPS, 1999), 1.

### Chapter 3 Translation, Othering, and Contested Universality: *Lingshan* in the Anglophone World and Beyond

#### 3.0 Introduction

The reception of Gao's *Lingshan* in the French literary field had a significant effect on its international reputation. Following its positive response in France, Mabel Lee's English version was published in July 2000 by HarperCollins Australia, about three months before Gao was awarded the Nobel Prize. For this English printing, the Australian publisher used French literary reviews of Gao's novel as symbolic capital to attract English readers.<sup>499</sup>

As noted earlier, Gao's winning of the Nobel Prize further promoted the sales of the French, English and Chinese versions of his novel in Europe, North America and Asia respectively, acquiring more cultural and economic capital for him. However, Mabel Lee's English translation of *Lingshan* has exceeded its French counterpart in sales volumes on a global scale. The unprecedented exposures of Gao as a Nobel laureate in the international literary field and in the book market have helped his work earn greater symbolic capital than other modern Chinese writers except Mo Yan.<sup>500</sup>

Though Gao's transnational reputation is connected with the publication of the translation of *Lingshan* in the English-speaking world, current studies of his work have focused exclusively on how Gao's original novel has transcended its national boundaries to become transnational literature. No significant attention has been paid to the role of interlingual translation in the

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499. See the back cover of Gao's *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee (Sydney: Flamingo, 2000).

500. Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012.

development of Gao's literary reputation in the West.<sup>501</sup> As was briefly discussed in Chapter 2, this lack of interest in translation has seriously affected the target reception of Gao's works as though they transcended linguistic and cultural boundaries. In particular, the "universality" of Gao's work is attested by the Nobel Prize communiqué for literature in 2000. It is exactly this aspect that we find problematic, and which should be studied in order to show how the translations of Gao's novel *Lingshan*, and especially Lee's English translation, were meant to move beyond its particularity and provide it with a "universal" significance in various contexts of the global literary field.

The contexts of literary reception in the Anglophone world are different from that of France. Each player in the international literary field follows different logics and mechanisms for conferring and consecrating a literary canon, as these literary zones attempt to compete to gain more cultural capital for literary dominance.<sup>502</sup> Bourdieu explains the nature of this competition as follows:

The structure of the field is a state of the power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in the struggle, or, to put it another way, a state of the distribution of the specific capital which has been accumulated in the course of the previous struggles and which orients subsequent strategies. This structure, which governs the strategies aimed at transforming it, is itself always at stake. The struggles, which take place within the field, are about the monopoly of the legitimate violence (specific authority), which is characteristic of the field in question, which means, ultimately, the conservation or subversion of the structure of the distribution of the specific capital.<sup>503</sup>

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501. See "Introduction" of this dissertation.

502. Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

503. Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1993), 73.

Translation scholars have explained translation practice and history with Bourdieu's concept of "field." They maintain that the literary field is a force field for competing symbolic capital; the more cultural capital an agent or institution gains in a fight, the more dominance it will have in the field. Consequently, the more prestige, in terms of awards and other forms of recognition, one book has gained from well-known specialized institutions, such as reputed literary prizes or critical reviews by prestigious journals and media, the more cultural capital, and indirectly, more economic capital, its author will gain in the literary field.<sup>504</sup>

Some translation scholars further apply Bourdieu's sociological theory to translation studies by showcasing the struggles for symbolic capital in the international field. Jean-Marc Gouanvic, for instance, sees translation as "globally inscribed in the framework of national hegemonies," and points out that "the ultimate power of literary translation is to globalise the literary *illusio* in the form that it takes in the Western world."<sup>505</sup> He warns that as global cultural production is a "stake of power" and translation is an indispensable player of exercising this power for literary dominance, it likely maintains "the strongest in their position of strength and of weakening those who cannot position themselves as cultural industries on a world scale."<sup>506</sup>

Bourdieu's approach is relevant to this discussion of symbolic capital competition and conferral with regard to *Lingshan's* translations in France and the English-speaking world, because we need to address questions of how two competing literary centers fight for cultural dominance through translation. Specifically, if the French literary field recognizes Gao as a

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504. Jean-Marc Gouanvic, "A Bourdieusian Theory of Translation, or the Coincidence of Practical Instances," *The Translator* 11, no. 2 (2005): 147-166.

505. Jean-Marc Gouanvic, "The Stakes of Translation in Literary Fields," *Across Languages and Cultures* 3, no. 2 (2002): 166.

506. Gouanvic, "The Stakes of Translation in Literary Fields," 167.

modernist writer who shares French literary values, does the Anglophone world mind the French canonization of Gao? If not, on what ground does the Anglophone world accept Gao's status as a major author, particularly in light of his Nobel Prize? Moreover, as these literary centres compete for dominance, a study of the effect of canonization on a peripheral literary field is imperative, based on the rationale that not only can we identify the extent of the dominance of a literary centre, but we can also demonstrate its limits and, in doing so, the nature of universal values. Thus, the response of Taiwan, in which *Lingshan* was first published, to Western reception of the novel is of particular interest here. As *Lingshan* did not attract much attention in Taiwan until Gao won the Nobel Prize, the canonization of this novel in translation in the West offers us a vantage point to scrutinize how the Taiwanese (Sinophone) literary field has responded to Gao's rise in the West. How does the Chinese literary field in general, and that of Taiwan in particular, reply to the mediation, redefinition, and valorization of Gao and his work by the Western literary centre(s)? Though the question is supplementary to the focus of this study, it is not necessarily moot.

Chapter 3 examines the conditions of the target literatures and their fields on the reception of Gao's novel in translation, that is, in the English-speaking world with reference to those of France and Taiwan. The chapter compares various aspects of translation habitus- translator, publisher, government cultural politics, and book market-in relation to the regimes of these literary fields to explore the logics and mechanisms of the competition of symbolic capital in the international literary field. It specifically investigates how the Anglophone world - mainly Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom - constructs a different *Lingshan* as *Soul Mountain* through translation, publishing, and critical reviews. This investigation demonstrates



how *Lingshan* was translated, adapted, and re-created in the world context, in which competition, dominance, and appropriation are underscored for symbolic and economic power.

### 3.1.0 *Soul Mountain* in the Anglophone World

Mabel Lee's English version of Gao's Xingjian's *Lingshan* was published following positive reviews in France of Dutrait's translation. In an interview, she dismissed claims that Gao's Nobel Prize win was the result of Malmqvist's influence on the Swedish Academy:

All of Gao's major writings (including his second novel *One Man's Bible*) were available in French prior to the Nobel Prize announcement. I expect all of the Nobel Prize Committee would have read Gao's writings in French; most Scandinavians read French and English as well as Swedish. In France, as early as 1992, Gao received the award of Chevalier for his contributions to literature. His plays have been performed internationally since he relocated to Paris in 1987. His two novels were selling well in France before the Nobel Prize announcement.<sup>507</sup>

It was in such a context of favourable receptions that the English version of *Lingshan* was published in Australia in July 2000. However, Lee's English version became instantly popular in the Anglophone world once Gao won the Nobel Prize in Literature that October. While many critics and journalists published extensive reviews of his plays and novels, these reviews of the English translation *Soul Mountain* investigated Gao's "universal" literary values and his greatness from their own perspectives, interpreting, assessing, and appropriating *Soul Mountain* by contextualizing the novel within the target field's literary history and regimes. The reception of Gao's novel in the English literary field and book market raises the question of how his "universality" is translated into the Anglophone literary field; specifically, how it has been

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507. Liu, Lily. "Interview with Mabel Lee: Translating Nobel Prize Winner Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain*." *Translation Review* 62, no. 1 (2001): 7.

translated and canonized in the English literary field as opposed to the French conferral of symbolic capital. This process of translation as canonization is related to Lee's translation of *Lingshan's* modernist features that were in turn based on the French *Nouveau roman*.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Gao has been regarded in France as a modernist writer with reference to the *Nouveau roman*. However, though the Anglophone world and France share certain aspects of modernism, they also differ on what is meant by modernism. Kimberly Healey explains that twentieth-century studies of modernism as an international movement has been "primarily Anglocentric," with only a limited number of French writers included in these discussions, such as Proust and some symbolist poets.<sup>508</sup> The particular characteristics of French modernism have not been studied in detail until relatively recently. Healey further points out that French modernism can be classified under the general term "modernism," because it shares some key modernist features identified by Richard Sheppard: "uncompromising intellectuality," "nihilism," "formalism" (valuing avant-garde literary forms), "attitude of detachment," "emphasis on subjectivity," and "feeling of alienation and loneliness," among others.<sup>509</sup> However, the particularities of French modernist literature resist such a general definition. Healey explains that first of all, French modernism resists the periodization of modernism between 1890 and 1930 defined by such scholars as Bradbury and McFarlane,<sup>510</sup> because such a periodization excludes many important writers and dates in French modern literature that are

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508. Kimberly Healey, "French Literary Modernism," in *Modernism*, eds. Astradur Ey-Steinsson and Vivian Liska (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), 801.

509. Richard Sheppard, "The Problematics of European Modernism," in *Theorizing Modernism*, ed. Steve Giles (London: Routledge, 1993), 2. and Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane's *Modernism 1890-1930* (London: Penguin Books, 1976).

510. Healey, "French Literary Modernism," 802.

relevant to modernism. In addition, just as French literary studies focus on particular schools or groups in their social and biographical contexts, the French literary field tends to place writers into categories, including exiled writers or travel writers. Modernism is outside such literary categorization. Moreover, Healey insists that though French modern literature has been shaped by modernism, it does not represent the modern world as “new, progressive, or revolutionary,” which is the case in British or American literature; French modernist literature pays much attention to the past as well. By writing about the present “tempered” by the past (“a mythic or literary past”), the French modernist canons reveal their distinctive approaches to modernity.<sup>511</sup> Thus, French literature does not strictly fit into the definition of modernist literature favoured in the British/American literary world.

Healey’s observation is valid. While some French writers’ works can be defined by modernism, certain key features of the French modernist canons can not be subsumed by the broad categorization of the term “modernism” as used in the Anglophone world. For example, the *Nouveau roman* exhibits some of the general features of modernist literature: The focus on characters’ inner worlds by extensively adopting monologues, the constant shifting of points of view, the tendency toward “nihilism,” and the narrators’ world characterized by loneliness and alienation. However, the *Nouveau roman* is significantly different from Anglophone modernist works in that, where the former presents the characters’ minds in a linear sequence, stream of consciousness novels by authors such as Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner extensively choose non-linear free association and interior monologues to represent characters’ visceral sensations and inner reactions to the outside world. Moreover, whereas the *Nouveau roman* experiments with

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511. Healey, “French Literary Modernism,” 803.

the narrative pronouns “tu” / “vous,” “je,” and “il”/ “elle” to present different aspects of the narrator’s inner world, Anglophone modernist novels do not experiment with narrative pronouns.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Jessica Yeung uses the Anglophone definition of modernism to critique Gao’s *Lingshan* as a compromised modernist novel for its linear temporality and spatiality in its fictional narratives. However, she actually attempts to subsume Gao’s novel under the broad category of modernism as it is understood in the Anglophone world.

Relating to Lee’s translation of Gao’s novel, the relevant question to our study of *Soul Mountain* in the Anglophone world is closely related with such key questions: Given that Gao’s novel is inspired by the *Nouveau roman*, particularly the use of personal pronouns as narratives, how is Gao’s modernism translated into the target literary milieu? Does Lee’s English version imply that the modernist features of Gao’s novel have to be transformed according to the modernist category defined by the target field’s norms and conditions? If so, the canonization of Gao’s novel in English is a strong indication of the affirmation of the Anglophone world’s literary values. Thus, these questions directly lead into a discussion of how these literary fields compete for symbolic capital.

The following sections discuss Lee’s translation of *Lingshan* with the same theoretical framework as applied in the previous chapter: The Bourdieusian approach with the Lambertian analytical tool. This section first studies the agent of translation; that is, Lee’s translation environment of *Lingshan* in relation to the writer, publisher, and cultural market in the target milieu, and then explores what constitutes the homological (reception) conditions of the English literary field in Australia, the US, and the UK for imagining and receiving the Chinese other, including various aspects of translational habitus and the regimes of the literary field of English-speaking countries from a comparative/contrastive perspective. This investigation chooses a

Lambertian macro/micro textual analysis of Lee's *Soul Mountain* to demonstrate how the *illusio* of the source is constructed for and conformed to the English literary field, especially regarding the ethnicity and poeticality of the Chinese other in the British/American literary imagination. The key features of the English text in relation to the Chinese version are first analyzed on both macro and micro levels, followed by a discussion of Lee's translation, particularly the narrative pronouns, in order to identify the significant aesthetic traits of *Soul Mountain*. Such an examination of the the *illusio* of Lee's English text will shed much light on the vital issue of whether *Soul Mountain* fits into the target field requirements for conferring symbolic capital. This discussion will be supplemented by critical reviews, from key journals and TV programs, which address the "universal" values of Gao's novel in the Anglophone literary field, including its translation, publication, and sales. It is followed by a comparison and contrast of Gao's reception in the Anglophone world, in France, and in the Sinophone world (especially Taiwan) in order to highlight the use, appropriation, and competition of symbolic capital in the international literary field.

This exploration of *Lingshan*'s translation, publication and reception in the Anglophone world begins in Australia, then the United States and the United Kingdom. Australia was the first Anglophone country to produce a translation of *Soul Mountain*; Lee's translation was published in the United States after Gao won the Nobel and received an unprecedented number of sales records and in-depth critical reviews. The novel also had a significant reception in the United Kingdom. However, it should be noted that although *Soul Mountain* was also published in other English-speaking countries, such as New Zealand and Canada, their reception of Gao's work was limited in terms of market scale and critical scale. This study focuses on Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom because of their notable responses to *Soul Mountain*; however,

the general term “the Anglophone world” is meant to emphasize their common language. At the same time, each country has a distinct literary tradition and owns different markets and symbolic capital. For example, London and New York are generally referred to as competing centres to Paris, while Australia is often considered an outpost of Britain. However, despite the hierarchy of their literary fields, these three countries share common historical and cultural features.

### 3.1.1 Translating and Publishing *Soul Mountain* in Australia

Shortly after Gao won the Nobel Prize in 2000, his English translator Mabel Lee won the first translation award set up by the New South Wales government in Australia in 2001. In the Bulletin of the 2001 NSW Premier’s Translation Prize and Pen Medallion, the judge made the following comments on *Soul Mountain*:

She [Mabel Lee] gives the impression of having the target readers firmly in mind, and the result is a fascinating exploration of another world for English language readers [...] Mabel Lee’s translation gives the impression of complete naturalness and ease, and despite the continual changes of register involved in the moving mix of genres and storylines. She manages to convey a wholly convincing and consistent narrative voice. This is modern Chinese writing with all its cultural differences offered to the English-speaking world.<sup>512</sup>

The bulletin comments that Mabel Lee’s English version of Gao’s novel provides an excellent rendition for target readers with “all cultural differences” intact while at the same time having “the target readers firmly in her mind.” Yet the statement seems self-defeating: How can Mabel Lee be both faithful to the source text and oriented toward the target text?

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512. “the Bulletin of the 2001 NSW Premier’s Translation Prize and Pen Medallion,” February 21, 2001, accessed July 20, 2008, [www.arts.nsw.gov.au/awards/translation\\_prize](http://www.arts.nsw.gov.au/awards/translation_prize).

However, some critical voices have opposed the Australian government's positive opinion. For instance, "Shanghai Vixen," a regular reviewer of Chinese books, calls Lee's translation "a significant work but a tedious read. Many unusually literary devices work very cleverly in the original Chinese, but are awkward in the translation."<sup>513</sup> Another reviewer repeats the same charges against the translation: "This new translation of his [Gao's] book is marred by flaws and inconsistency. Not only is some of the original, graceful flow of the prose lost in the English translation, but just unfortunately, the translation itself is riddled with written mistakes. The language often reads awkwardly."<sup>514</sup>

The reviews cited above are two examples of many similar critical articles, which will be discussed later in this chapter. However, they do raise the following questions: If Mabel Lee's rendering of Chinese is as awkward and faulty as these reviewers have claimed, how could she effectively transpose the "foreignness" of Chinese culture to the English readers? How does Lee's *illusio* in translation respond to the needs of the target literary field? These questions point to the key issue regarding the reception of a literary work in a foreign culture, whose relevance and creative imagination must be measured in terms of fidelity. Can translation really be judged by its fidelity to the source text? If not, how can we evaluate and then valorize or dismiss a literary translation? As the responses to Dutrait's translation in the French literary field demonstrate, the issue of translation fidelity is highly subjective term and is constructed by social and cultural practices and discursive regimes – what are considered foreign and different in the source text and culture do not automatically produce the equivalent effects in the target milieu. Moreover, what is considered "foreign" in a target literary field must be connected with the

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513. [www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/cm](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/cm), accessed July 11, 2002.

514. [www.bookmagazine.com/issue15/fan](http://www.bookmagazine.com/issue15/fan), accessed July 11, 2002.

internal aesthetic regimes of literary works established over a long period via imagination and creativity. This assumption matches with Bourdieu's notion of translation vision, maintaining that the *illusio* of a translation must be validated and valued according to the aesthetic norms of the target field. Following this line of thought, more productive questions should be fashioned as follows: What are the valued aesthetic traits of Mabel Lee's English version of *Soul Mountain* in the target literary field? Why are these traits of *illusio* important to the target language and culture?

In order to identify Lee's translational traits of Gao's *Lingshan*, this study follows the Bourdieusian translation approach to investigate how the translator's habitus shapes her translation strategies in response to the requirements of the target literary field. Such an approach largely avoids focusing on the issue of whether a text is oriented toward its source. Rather, we deal with the question of why a translator adopts certain translation strategies in order to make his/her version acceptable (homological) in the target culture. In the same vein, as with the case of Lee's translation of Gao's novel, we will shift our focus to her choice of certain translation strategies in response to her translation environment and the target literary regimes. Moreover, the reception of readers in other English-speaking countries to Mabel Lee's translation differs significantly, showing the variety of responses within the target literary field to the "universal" literary and cultural values embodied in Gao's novel and canonized by its reception in France and his earning of the Nobel Prize.

This discussion begins with an examination of Lee's translation habitus, followed by an exploration of the reception conditions of the target literary field for Chinese literature with an emphasis on the logic and mechanism for conferring symbolic (indirectly economic) capital to literary works about China in both translation and writing, which are interrelated with each other.



### 3.1.2 Mabel Lee, the Agent of the Translation of *Lingshan*

In the Bourdieusian translation approach, the translator's role as an agent is emphasized as an active participant in the translation activity while following certain translation regimes in relation to a target literary field. The Bourdieusian vision highlights both aspects of translation practice: A translator is both an agent and a defender of regimes, explicitly and implicitly. Thus, studying *Soul Mountain* first involves studying Mabel Lee as both an agent and a participant of the governing regimes in translation practice. This inquiry not only allows us to see how Lee engages with a Chinese novel, but also how she interacts with regimes of translation, publishers' goals, the trends of the cultural market, and the government's cultural policy. Examining this translation habitus reveals the logic and dynamics of Lee's translation practice in the social and cultural spaces of English-speaking countries such as Australia, the US, and the UK.

The following section examines Mabel Lee as an agent of translation and discusses the agency of translation itself. It is necessary to put Lee's translation habitus into perspective in relation to Dutrait's in order to compare and contrast the production and reception of their translations in their respective literary fields.

In many ways, Mabel Lee and Noël Dutrait share similar backgrounds as Chinese studies scholars and as translators. Mabel Lee was trained in Sinology and obtained a PhD at the University of Sydney in 1966, with a dissertation on the economy of China's last imperial Qing Dynasty. Among other modern literary figures and thinkers, she was interested in the works of Zhang Taiyan (1869-1936) and Lu Xun. Later, as a full-time professor of Chinese Studies in the same university, she mainly taught courses in Chinese language and culture, supervised graduate students, and was on the editorial boards of several academic journals. She only began to translate when she was asked by her poet friend, Yang Lian, an exiled Chinese modernist poet

who was then living in Australia and New Zealand. In 1990, she translated and published two anthologies of Yang Lian's poetry: *Dead in Exile: A Collection of Poems*, published by Tiananmen Edition; and *Masks & Crocodile: A Collection of Poems*, published by Wild Peony Ltd.<sup>515</sup>

Despite her shared background with Dutrait, Lee differs from the latter in several significant ways. First, Lee was exposed to ancient Chinese classics in English translation and read Chinese literature for academic purposes. She has said that her reading list in Sinology consisted of Chinese classics covering philosophy, religion, history, and some literature; she only paid attention to the aesthetic values of modern Chinese literature until she began to teach the relevant language courses in the 1970s.<sup>516</sup> In addition, she first began to translate some of Lu Xun's works as references while writing her academic papers. By contrast, Dutrait is an enthusiastic promoter of modern Chinese literature in translation, whereas Lee is a scholar in the field of Sinology whose interests only partially concern literature. Moreover, Lee's literary focus was restricted to Chinese literature before the May 4 Movement and her investment in translation was not as extensive as Dutrait's. Her work in translation was mainly for research purposes or personal interest; however, the latter point is a similarity she shares with Dutrait with regard to *Lingshan*.

In a November 2000 interview, Lee mentioned that Yang Lian introduced her to Gao Xingjian in Paris in 1991; Yang and Gao were good friends. In Paris, Gao, Yang and Lee

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515. See Lily Liu, "Interview with Mabel Lee: Translating Nobel Prize Winner Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain*," *Translation Review* 62, no. 1 (2001): 3.

516. Ouyang Yu, "Mabel Lee (Chen Shunyan) fangtan lu" [Interview with Mabel Lee (Chen Shunyan)], *Huawen wenxue* [Literature in Chinese], no. 1 (2014): 65-67.

discussed various issues of modern Chinese literature. At the time, *Lingshan* had just been published by Taiwan's Lianjing Publishing House. Gao told her some of the stories in the book, and Lee became interested in the stories and decided to translate the novel: "I like the sort of the things that he [Gao] was trying to explore in the novel and when I scanned some pages, I was captivated by the language: It was sparse and minimalist. It was a prose."<sup>517</sup> She began to translate it in 1993, and *Soul Mountain* was released just a few months before Gao was awarded the Nobel Prize. Lee admits that she tended to be a "fussy" translator and always tried to work as closely as possible to the original text: "In the process, I found myself drawn to his thinking about the place of the individual in society. My upbringing and my life generally had made me intensely aware of the importance of personal autonomy."<sup>518</sup> As with Dutrait's French translation, Gao gave Lee total freedom to translate *Lingshan* into English.

The interview reveals that Lee translated Gao's novel according to her personal interests; she likes Gao's poetic language (auditory and visual) and literary narratives, and shares an affinity with Gao's concerns about the individuals in a collective cultural setting. On the latter point, she notes that when she read Gao's theoretical treatises on literature, she felt that she had a "great responsibility [...] to the translation of *Soul Mountain*," because she could immediately see the literary values of *Lingshan* and Gao's place in Chinese literary history.<sup>519</sup> Given that she was born into a Chinese family in Australia, whose father and mother had strong connections in mainland China, Lee would resonate with what Gao narrates in his novel. In addition, as a

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517. Liu, "Interview with Mabel Lee," 10.

518. Liu, "Interview with Mabel Lee," 11.

519. Liu, "Interview with Mabel Lee," 5.

scholar, she shares and admires the views Gao puts forth in his treatise on modernist fiction techniques.

As for the translational approach adopted in *Soul Mountain*, Lee considers her training as a scholar helpful in sticking to Gao's original language and format, without adding many footnotes or endnotes. She claims that although translation means "rewriting" in another language, she has always tried to find equivalents in the target language and follow the Chinese text closely, with no re-creation permitted. For Lee, if re-creation means anything at all, it relates to the idea that in order to make the original text "easily digestible," some changes are needed.<sup>520</sup> In addition, because of her teaching work, she did not have to be a professional translator and translated only works that she personally liked, such as *Lingshan*.

Lee considers her role that of an academic, or scholar, whose agency does not lie in her ability to rewrite or re-create the original, but who follows the original text as closely as possible and "rewrites" it in the target language, adopting a different language to express exactly the same idea. In addition, Lee characterizes her translation as self-indulgent, in that she translates as long as she finds enjoyment without thinking about whether she needs to cater to the reader or the market. Lee states that in Australia, translation is generally conducted according to publishers' commissions. However, she did not follow these norms; instead, she translated Gao's works as her personal project, similarly to her translation of Yang Lian's poetry. She had to find a publisher to publish her translation, but the risk was worth taking, because in lieu of receiving translation fees, Lee would share 40% of the total royalties with Gao for her translation of *Lingshan*.<sup>521</sup>

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520. Liu, "Interview with Mabel Lee," 6.

521. Jane Sullivan, "An Accent on Accuracy," *The age*, last modified February 12, 2005, <https://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/an-accent-onaccuracy-20050212-gdzjle.htm>.

Lee's translation approach is relatively atypical, highlighting the translator's role as an agent. On this point, she shares some similarities with Dutrait, who translated Gao's work as a personal project deriving from his friendship with the author and his love of modern Chinese literature. Lee's translation environment is also similar to that of Dutrait. Because translation is not considered a research achievement in Australia, the translation of *Lingshan* did not help Lee's professional career; she translated the novel because she shared Gao's literary vision, poetic sensibility, and valorization of the role of the individual in Chinese society. That said, receiving 40% of the royalties was also an important factor in her decision to undertake the project.

However, there are some significant differences between Dutrait and Lee. Most importantly, as a translator, Dutrait worked with Gao himself; Gao helped Dutrait understand the context of his novel and the meanings of certain linguistic and cultural peculiarities. Lee did not have such a privilege; she openly states that she finished her translation almost on her own, mainly consulting dictionaries, but occasionally seeking help from colleagues and friends.<sup>522</sup> As the following sections demonstrate, the lack of collaboration with Gao could be a disadvantage for Lee. Gao did not speak English and thus could not offer Lee his suggestions about her English translation, while she could not discuss the linguistic or cultural challenges she faced with him. Thus, in terms of translation practice, Lee's work was an independent personal fulfillment.

Moreover, whereas Dutrait was supported by government funding and translation fees from the publisher, Lee did not have enough institutional support for her project, or a strong

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522. Liu, "Interview with Mabel Lee," 7.

publication network; her work was closely related to the Australian government's cultural policy and publication market for literary translation.

As indicated above, the Australian government's cultural policy and the Australian publication market are not very favourable to literary translations. Jane Sullivan's article "An Accent on Accuracy" states that literary translation in Australia is often considered an "underrated profession," with "derisory rates of pay," and "next to nothing in the academic pecking order."<sup>523</sup> The critics and translators Sullivan consulted for her article further stress that the translator is invisible for his/her role for introducing a foreign literature: Their names do not often appear on the book cover, or may not even be mentioned at all. This is because translation of foreign literature into English in Australia is not regarded as an important matter. Broadly speaking, of all the published titles in English-speaking world, only 3-5 percent are translated from other languages. Australia is not an exception. Australian editors and publishers attribute this to the global effect of "Anglophone triumphalism;" that is, "all the cultures in the world to be delivered to our doorstep [are] already gift-wrapped in an English text."<sup>524</sup> Some critics have further pointed out that the Australian market for translation is so small that publishers normally do not commission translation. In addition, institutional support for translation favours translation from English into other languages rather than the other way around. For example, the Australia Council primarily supports the translation of Australian writers' works into foreign languages; rarely do they support the translation of foreign literary works into English. As a result, in the Australian translation market, a publisher will offer a translator the opportunity to translate a work, the translator chooses a work to translate, and then the translator must promote the work

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523. Sullivan, "An Accent on Accuracy," *The age*, February 12, 2005.

524. Sullivan, "An Accent on Accuracy."

him/herself. Unfortunately, this process of translation and marketing purely depends on “blind luck.”<sup>525</sup>

In this harsh market environment, Mabel Lee began to translate Gao’s *Lingshan* into English; it took her seven years to translate and two years to get it published. Upon finishing the translation of *Lingshan* in 1998, she found an agent to publish the novel in America, but no publishers would be willing to publish it. Lee recalled in an interview that in 1998 she contacted the literary agent Lyn Tranter and had her manuscript sent to American publishers, but it was rejected because too many similar Chinese works were being published.<sup>526</sup> Finally Lee sent her translation to Rod Morrison, an editor at HarperCollins Australia, who told her that he had never heard of Gao, even though English translations of his plays had been published and performed in Australia. Nevertheless, Morrison recommended Lee’s English version for publication.<sup>527</sup> Despite Rod’s favorable evaluation of her translation, it took Lee six months to sign a contract with the publishing company. Initially the Flamingo only printed 4000-5000 copies of *Soul Mountain*,<sup>528</sup> for the fear that it would not sell well in Australia’s book market. However, shortly after its publication in Australia and New Zealand, Gao won the Nobel Prize.

The Nobel Prize effect changed everything. First, when the news was announced to the world, English readers outside Australia and New Zealand could not find English editions of the novel, and on October 19, 2000, HarperCollins America immediately signed a contract with

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525. Sullivan, “An Accent on Accuracy.”

526. Catherine Keenan, “Glebe Connection: The Nobel Climb of a Literary Mountain,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 14, 2000.

527. Keenan, “Glebe Connection: The Nobel Climb of a Literary Mountain.”

528. See note 529.

HarperCollins Australia for the North American copyright of *Soul Mountain* and Gao's second novel, *One Man's Bible*, whose translation was not yet complete.<sup>529</sup> Although the Australian edition was available in Britain, the United States and Canada received a differently edited and packaged version. The initial sales of Gao's novel in the English-speaking world were unprecedented: For the first three months after its release in the United States by the end of 2000, more than 85,000 copies were sold.<sup>530</sup> After its release, *Soul Mountain* was on the top of the bestseller list in English-speaking countries for a short time. In Australia, from January to June 2001, Gao's novel ranked on the top of the sales list, with a total of 35,000 copies sold, a record for a novel translated from Chinese. The success of Lee's translation was matched only by Patricia Clancy's translation of Simon Ley's *The Death of Napoleon* in 1992, an international best seller.<sup>531</sup> In Britain, the novel was listed as the one of the top sellers in the category of translated fiction for 2001, with over 20,000 copies sold.<sup>532</sup>

Despite its unprecedented sales record, the Anglophone world's reception of *Soul Mountain* varied. Gao's novel was promoted as a masterpiece of the first Nobel Prize winner of Chinese origin. However, as the last section of this chapter will demonstrate, the Anglophone world's responses to the Nobel Prize are not a given. For example, the American literary reviews focus on the significance of Gao's international literary reputation in relation with modern American authors, mainly David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and American/Chinese novelist Pearl

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529. See "HarperCollins Publishers Acquires North-American Rights to Novel by Gao Xingjian, Winner of the 2000 Nobel Prize for Literature," *Business Wire* (October 19, 2000): 25–27

530. Jane Sullivan, "An Accent on Accuracy," *The Age*, last modified February 12, 2002, <https://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/an-accent-onaccuracy-20050212-gdzjle.htm>.

531. Sullivan, "An Accent on Accuracy."

532. Sullivan, "An Accent on Accuracy."



Buck who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1932. In Australia, *Soul Mountain* was seen as a testimony of the power of translation to influence the world in terms of literature and culture: Australia was no longer regarded as an outpost of Great Britain, but was recognized for its own contribution in bringing Gao to world recognition in English. British literary critics minimized the significance of Gao's literary works and emphasized their flaws in such issues as misogyny or the erotic portrayal of women as objects of the male protagonist's gaze. These critics also claimed that Britain had more original authors than Gao.

Though the reception of Gao's novel was mixed, there is little doubt that the Nobel Prize helped its world recognition and unprecedented sales. However, Gao's literary values exemplified in *Lingshan* are mediated mainly through Lee's English translation in the Anglophone world, which raises questions as how Gao's novel in English is relevant to the target literary field? How does *Soul Mountain* qualify as a "universal" literary masterpiece as defined by the Nobel Prize Committee? How does Lee's translation meet the requirements of the target literary field, and what elements disrupt or contribute to that literary field?

In order to discuss the above issues, we first explore how China has been translated and written as a cultural other in the English literary field, so that we can identify how these translation/writing practices have shaped the perceptions of the target readers about China. The reception conditions of Chinese literature in the Anglophone literary field can be traced to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century British construction of "Chineseness" in writing and translation, the later construction of China as the other in literary and historical continuity, and the rupture in English literary discourse. Moreover, the inclusion of creative writing in this investigation of translation history *per se* is based on the rationale that literary writing on a foreign other could not be separated from translation; the former draws on translation as its source of inspiration to imagine

and construct what are considered foreign identities with regard to a particular culture, which is also a form of an engagement with the self. In English literary (translation) history, figurations of the Chinese other prevail in writing, translation, and a mixture of both forms known as trans/writing. Through various acts of trans/writing, English literary/translational regimes on a foreign other, the Chinese other in particular, are formed, shaped, and strengthened.

With *Soul Mountain* in mind, how the English literary regime was established, redefined, and consequently affects the present reception and conferral of symbolic capital for a translated work is important to this discussion. The major issue surrounding the reception of *Soul Mountain* centers on the legitimacy of foreign literary images and values that satisfy the homological conditions of the target literary field, thus promoting its canonicity and popularity. The following section elaborates on this historical process and its relevance to this study's particular inquiry about translation.

### 3.1.3 Trans/writing "Chineseness" in the British/American Literary Field

According to James St. André's historicization of English translation of Chinese materials, there is "almost no translation from Chinese into English in the eighteenth century"<sup>533</sup> and serious attempts were first made in the early nineteenth century. However, Lu Mingjun argues that the construction of "Chineseness" in English literature and the notion of China as oriental other can be identified in various seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works such as John Donne's poems "unfil'd Pistolets" (1593) and "Hymne to God" (1594), "Essayes in Divinity" (1614), and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. These works reveal their authors' desires to

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533. James St. André, "The Development of British Sinology and Changes in Translation Practice," *Translation and Interpretation Studies* 2, no. 2 (2007): 5.

reach a world beyond their own based on the materials brought to England. These materials, including translations, travel notes, and exotic products, force writers and readers to think about early global modernity beyond Britain.<sup>534</sup>

The mid-eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century witnessed gradual British dominance in trade with Asia, particularly China. Britain's trade with China and its close relation with the rest of Europe, especially France, played a significant part in furthering its imagining of China, reciprocating with the similar European fascination. The British construction of "Chineseness" can be observed in the translations and writings of such literary figures as Thomas Percy, Oliver Goldsmith, William Johns, and others, as the first generation of writers/translators, whose works significantly affected later generations of people who engaged with China.<sup>535</sup>

Thomas Percy (1729-1811) translated/rewrote the Chinese novel, *The Haoqiu Zhuan*, which had been published in China in the mid-seventeenth century. Percy did not know Chinese, but he managed to translate a manuscript which had been brought back by James Wilkinson who had worked in the East India Company.<sup>536</sup> It has been considered the first Chinese novel translated into English. Published in 1761 as *Hao Kiou Choaan (Haoqiu Zhuan) or The Pleasing History*, it became a success in Britain and was subsequently translated into French, German and Dutch. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe read the German translation and regarded it as

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534. Lu Mingjun, *China's Impact upon English Renaissance Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

535. James St. André, "The Development of British Sinology and Changes in Translation Practice," *Translation and Interpretation Studies* 2, no. 2 (2007): 5-42. Also see James St. André, *Translating China as Cross-identity Performance* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2018).

536. Peter J. Kitson, *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange, 1760-1840* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 33.

“Weltliteratur,” because he saw that the Chinese way of life described in the novel was comparable to that of the Europeans.<sup>537</sup>

Peter J. Kitson points out that the choice of the novel was part of the general environment that fostered British interest in Chinese culture and literature. At the time of its publication, such works as Arthur Murphy’s *Orphan of China* (1759) and Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Citizen of the World* (1762) were being produced, attracting wide attention to Chinese culture in British society.<sup>538</sup> Percy wanted to use the novel to provide his British readers with an idea of “a faithful picture of Chinese manners, wherein the domestic and politic oeconomy of that vast people is displayed.”<sup>539</sup> He also claimed that his interests had nothing to do with the beauty of the literature, but that his approach was equivalent to a sociological reading in order to shed light on the Chinese way of life. He sought to redress what he considered imprecise scholarship on, and misinformation about, China perpetuated by Jesuit missionaries. This reflected a common desire in Britain to forge its national identity in the face of a foreign cultural influence. Percy’s choice of the novel also reveals his affinity with the target literary genre: The Chinese novel, an example of the “scholar-beauty” genre, has much in common with British novels, typically Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, whose female protagonists Percy regarded as a “perfect example of all virtues.”<sup>540</sup>

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537. Kai-chong Cheung, “The Haoqiu Zhuan, the First Chinese Novel Translated in Europe: With Special Reference to Percy’s and Davis’s Renditions,” in Leo Tak-hung Chan’s *One into Many: Translation and Dissemination of Classical Chinese Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 31.

538. Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 32-33.

539. Thomas Percy, *Hao Kiou Chooan* [Haoqiu zhuan] or *The Pleasing History* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1761), 1: xiv-xv.

540. James Watt, “Thomas Percy, China and the Gothic,” *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 48, no. 2 (2007): 97.

Percy's translation is a naturalized English version based on his understanding of Chinese language and culture, subject to the norms and field requirements of the literature of the time. Kittson points out Percy's need for and indebtedness to Chinese culture and how, while "repudiating a non-English source," such indebtedness leads to "an instrumental amnesia" with respect to China's role in the production of eighteenth-century British aesthetic culture.<sup>541</sup>

Meanwhile Oliver Goldsmith's epistolary novel *The Citizen of the World*, relates the experience of a Chinese Confucian scholar, Lien Chi Altangi, who has come to England under the invitation of his English friend, who stayed in Canton for business when the former worked there as an imperial official. Through the eyes of a Chinese scholar and philosopher, Goldsmith criticizes various aspects of social and cultural life in England, such as political in-fighting, moral decay, corruption, and religious problems.

Why does Goldsmith give a Chinese character such a sweeping moral authority to air his critical views on British society? St. André notes that Goldsmith's epistolary novel was shaped by the French narrative structure of the Oriental and China.<sup>542</sup> His narrative focus on a Chinese scholar shows his willingness to appropriate and reinforce the discourse on the Oriental and China for his home agenda: "the British discourse on China is not interested in China as it really is (if it ever was), but rather in how the British perceive it."<sup>543</sup> That is, Chineseness in Britain was more about the projection of their self than the cultural other.

Goldsmith adapts the ethnic traits of his Chinese characters from popular narratives such as the *Arabian Nights*, which figure the Chinese as indistinguishable from Turks, Persians, or

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541. Kittson, 31.

542. James St. André, *Translating China as Cross-Identity Performance*, 49.

543. St. André, 50.

Georgians.<sup>544</sup> In fact, Lien Chi's friend in his home country is named Fum Hoam, the hero of the Chinese stories in *Arabian Nights*. In the preface of the novel, Lien Chi's English friend's language is distinctively simple, business-like English, which starkly contrasts to Lien Chi's English, which is "florid," "emotive" and "biblical."<sup>545</sup> In terms of the narrative style, the translation style of *Arabian Nights* is comparable to the King James Bible, which is also a translation from Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek. Thus, the Biblical language in Lien Chi's letters shows its innate Oriental style, which is also identified as Chinese. The biblical quality in these letters echoes the Jesuit construction of China as the place where Noah's Ark landed. In addition, the overwhelming adoption of emotive and florid language indicates Goldsmith's construction of his Chinese characters based on Western perceptions of the Chinese as very similar to, if not the same as, Middle Eastern people. Moreover, to reinforce the Chineseness of his characters, Goldsmith cites many Confucian sayings, maxims, and proverbs (translated from Latin into English) in Lien's letters and daily speech, in addition to some unique Chinese cultural terms, such as the *kobi* desert (Gobi desert), *Fo* (Buddha), or *Tian* (heaven).<sup>546</sup> To increase the credibility of his materials, he retells Chinese stories that were popular in French translations of Chinese literature, such as the stories of Zhuang Zi, a disciple of Lao Tzu.<sup>547</sup>

In all, Goldsmith's construction of Chineseness for his English audience is shaped by many interrelated discourses. Goldsmith incorporates source material in French and Latin into a relatively harmonious literary narrative, serving his purpose of projecting the translational image

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544. St. André, 56.

545. St. André, 56.

546. St. André, 53.

547. St. André, 56.

to engage with English social reality. This process of translation also demonstrates a certain degree of appreciation for, and appropriation of, the French constructed image of Confucius. Goldsmith's adoption of biblical language and florid style to construct an Oriental other as Chineseness is significant, as St. André claims that "it is still possible for someone to speak in an elevated tone in oriental tales to be taken seriously."<sup>548</sup>

In a similar context, the translation of Chinese plays was limited; Arthur Murphy's *Orphan of China* (1759), an adaptation of Voltaire's French version, was an exception. However, Murphy did not faithfully translate Voltaire's French version of the Chinese play, but tried everything possible to improve it. The major change appears in the final act of the play: In Voltaire's version, Genghis Khan's love for a Chinese woman leads him to abandon his barbarism for a new life of peace, while in Murphy's English adaptation, he defeats the Tartar invaders led by a Chinese man who experienced reversals of fortune as an orphan and a member of the Chinese court. With this change from the more feminine ending of the French translation to the more masculine action present in the English version, the Voltairean theme of the Chinese play is significantly altered. Murphy's play was successful in England, but its popularity was also largely due to his extensive adoption of the motifs of Chinese artefacts, which were greatly appreciated in the eighteenth-century context of *chinoiserie*.<sup>549</sup>

Compared with novels and drama, English translations of Chinese poetry were rare, though Sir William Jones' occasional rendering of classical Chinese poems is worth mentioning.

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548. St. André, 56.

549. St. André, 66-67.

Jones' interest in Chinese poetry largely originated from his career as an Orientalist, who wanted to identify social and cultural facts from oriental poetry.

During his tenure as the chairman of the Society of Asiatic Association from 1784 to 1794, Jones made several speeches, one of which deals with Chinese poetry translation. This particular speech features three translated poems: First the original Chinese, then literal translations, with even the number of words in each poem marked for reference, and then English lyric versions. Jones found it impossible to retain the same features as the original, and thus created a rhymed translation, which was not so much a translation as an imitation based on the poetic diction and rhyme scheme of existing British poetry. For example, his English version of “桃夭” (“Peach Blossom”) was grafted to the English literary context with a virtuous couple enjoying their married life under the divine sky in the green country, though the poem has completely different cultural and linguistic connotations.<sup>550</sup> Jones' translation echoed Percy's treatment of the Chinese novel: Both translators were motivated by the need for a distinction of a cultural other in the British literary field. Jones' translational efforts were inspirations for later British sinologists translating Chinese classical poetry, such as James Legge (1815-1897).

Early translations of Chinese literature such as those by Percy, Goldsmith, Murphy, and Jones, demonstrate the initial formation of discourse on Chineseness in the British literary field. These translators tapped various sources to figure Chineseness in trans/writing according to their imagination and social and political agendas. Chineseness, mediated and endowed with symbolic capital in Europe and especially in France, was therefore appropriated to satisfy the needs of British sociopolitical contexts. Their figurations met the expectations of the target literary field

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550. T.C. Fan, “Sir William Jones's Chinese Studies,” *The Review of English Studies* 88, no. 22 (1946): 304-314.



not only of what a Chinese literary work should be, but also of what it could do according to the cultural logic for literary canonization. The literary regime established in the eighteenth century has maintained its influence over the next two hundred years and can be observed in the works of translators and authors such as James Legge, Ezra Pound, and Pearl Buck. Serious attempts to write and translate Chineseness began in the early nineteenth century, with English travel writings and sinological translations of Chinese classics further strengthening the previously established norms of treating the Chinese other as an authentic identity in the English imagination.

James St. André observes that in the 1830s, literal rendering in translation gave way to domestication, in which English translations of Chinese texts were adapted to English norms of readability with such practices as omission, rewriting, and extensive editing.<sup>551</sup> However, this shift does not mean that literal translation was completely excluded from translation practice. St André stresses that, as English professional associations of Asian studies multiplied, literal translation in conjunction with footnotes supplying abundant information about the subjects under discussion was preferred for learned journals, reflecting the spirit of positivism in British academic studies. However, the literal translation of the original materials in these learned journals emphasized the foreignness of the texts by adopting transliterations of Chinese terms, with connotations of barbarity, gibberish, extreme strangeness, excessive politeness, and clichés. St André further points out that such an approach to translation also indicated a change of

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551. St. André, "Travelling toward True Translation: The First Generation of Sino-English Translators," *The Translator* 12, no. 2 (2006): 25.

attitude towards China, a logical consequence of trade conflicts such as the banning of the British opium trade in China's coastal regions.<sup>552</sup>

English translation of Chinese materials increased, particularly after the Opium War between Britain and China (1839-1842), which greatly facilitated Britain's presence in Chinese society. In this context, the increase in translation activities could not be regarded as a coincidence, but as a correlation to the British Empire's expansion in the Far East for its economic interests, colonial conquests, diplomacy, and Christian evangelization. These translations helped the British communicate more effectively with the Qing government (1644-1912), and also provided their home readers with more cultural materials needed in English. James Legge stood out in this period.

As a missionary/translator, James Legge, translated the most important works in the Confucian canon, *Four Books* and *Five Classics*, resonated with both Percy's and Jones's approaches. As a missionary/translator, he translated the earliest anthology of ancient Chinese odes, *Shijing* (The Book of Poetry) three times as *The She King*, in 1871, when he was a missionary in China; in 1876, as a sinologist in Oxford; and in 1879, when he slightly modified his first version for Max Müller's religious projects.<sup>553</sup>

Like Percy and Jones, Legge translated ancient Chinese poetry into prose in the first version, creating a strict literal translation that was complemented by an extensive "prolegomenon" covering about two hundred pages in a total of over four hundred pages. He also

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552. St. André, "Travelling toward True Translation: The First Generation of Sino-English Translators," 31-32.

553. Wu Guangjun and Liu Tingting, "The Transformation of the Translatorial Identity and the Shift of Translation Style," *Perspectives in Translatology* 24, no. 1 (2016): 131-132.

added extensive footnotes, exceeding the total pages of translation text proper. Legge's translation practice suggests that he treated Chinese poetry more as social documents than as aesthetic works. His translation also served as a guide so that "our missionary labours among the people should be conducted with sufficient intelligence and so as to secure permanent results."<sup>554</sup> Furthermore, Legge's was a serious scholarly work, with extensive exegetic annotations and indexes jointly conducted with the Chinese scholar and writer Wang Tao (1828-1897), echoing the approach of Thomas Percy. The difference between Legge's and Percy's translations, however, is that Legge's annotations and analyses are supported by both Chinese sources and translation references produced by Jesuit writers. Thus, his translation reflects the positivist viewpoint of translation as not only a linguistic task but as a scientific effort grounded in historical documents and hermeneutic tradition.

Legge began work on the second version, *Shijing*, when he was in Oxford. Because he was a scholar of Chinese, he was primarily concerned with the aesthetic quality of Chinese poetry. He adapted the poems into English metrical forms, including the *aabbccaa* rhyme scheme that was popular in Victorian poetry. The "prolegomena" in the first version was significantly abridged in the second edition, while the annotations were omitted, a practice that similarly resonated with Jones' approach. The third version of Legge's translation was similar to the first version. As it was included in Max Müller's religious series, it provided relevant information about ancient Chinese religious rituals, while omitting non-religious material. The oldest odes in

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554. Wu and Liu, "The Transformation of the Translatorial Identity and the Shift of Translation Style," 131-140.

the anthology were moved to the first part rather than being placed in the later chapter, in order to highlight the nature of ancient Chinese belief.<sup>555</sup>

In the twentieth century, translators such as Arthur Waley and Ezra Pound brought Chinese poetry to the English literary field as a response to modernity. In *Cathay* (1915), Pound prioritizes “original writing” and subjects his translation of ancient Chinese poetry to the rules of creation of original works.<sup>556</sup> Though *Cathay* was based on the notes of the American Orientalist Ernest Fenollosa, Pound departs significantly from Fenollosa’s analytical writing on some of the poems in the collection. He combines several poems into one, and fully exploits the ideographic symbolism of Chinese words for their poetic quality. In addition, Pound adopts *verse libre* for his translations, which differs significantly Victorian rhyme schemes. Despite his creative translation, Pound occasionally translates some expressions literally to achieve certain poetic effect. For example, in his famous poem “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter,” he conveys a female voice: “At fourteen, I married My Lord you,”<sup>557</sup> which sounds odd in English but connotes the image of a timid and obedient Chinese woman. In this fashion, Pound’s literary translation also falls into the stereotypical image constructed through literal translation, a practice that some of his Victorian predecessors had also adopted. George Steiner observes that Pound’s *Cathay* is something that “we have come fully to expect and believe,” because “it matches, it conforms powerful pictorial and tonal expectation” which are based on the “cumulative

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555. See note 556.

556. Lawrence Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 72.

557. Ezra Pound, *Translations* (New York: New Directions, 1962), 33.

impressions” of China in European arts, material cultures, and humanities. Thus, each of Pound’s translations “appears to corroborate what is a Western ‘invention of China.’”<sup>558</sup>

Pearl Buck’s valorization of literal translation is another important case in point. Buck’s monumental novel *The Good Earth*, published in 1932, displays translation traits in its account of the life of a Chinese farmer, Wang Lung, and his wife, O-lan, in a remote village of China’s Zhenjiang, Anwei (Anhui) province. Her novel can be easily associated with Goldsmith’s epistolary novel and with earlier sinological translations. Buck’s novel is known for its foregrounded translatedness in the narrative. She does not adopt Pidgin English for conversations, nor transliterations for unique Chinese cultural objects or phenomena. She noted that when writing her novel, she first made mental notes, then “reproduce[d] in English altogether the different cadence of Chinese speech.”<sup>559</sup> First, in order to treat her characters in a noble but foreign way, Buck describes the famers’ lives and conversations with a biblical language structure. What foregrounds the novel is her extensive use of “and” as in the King James Bible, and expressions such as “it come to pass,” or “so,” “let it be bought,”<sup>560</sup> “Then it all came to pass as Wang Lung had foreseen,”<sup>561</sup> or “Come, woman, we will go south.”<sup>562</sup>

Buck’s novel is also characterized by the literal translation of certain Chinese words or phrases. For example, the Chinese “huo che” is translated as “fire wagon” instead of “train;”<sup>563</sup>

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558. George Steiner, *After Babel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 377.

559. Pearl S. Buck, *The Good Earth* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1931), 53.

560. Pearl S. Buck, *The Good Earth*, 266.

561. Buck, 272.

562. Buck, 79.

563. Buck, 91.

“huo qi” as “firestick” (“gun” or “rifle”),<sup>564</sup> “lao tou” as “old head” (“old man”).<sup>565</sup> Though she does not normally transliterate Chinese nouns, she often attaches explanations to transliterations when they do appear: “it was far away, more than a *li* which is a third of a mile.”<sup>566</sup> In addition, Buck also opts for the ideographic meaning of Chinese words to emphasize the poetic quality of the Chinese language. For example, “月” (“Yue”) refers to the moon, as its lexical form indicates, but it also refers to the calendrical month. Buck intentionally chooses the first usage to underscore the poetic vividness of Chinese: “and a moon of days had passed and the thing was not yet complete.”<sup>567</sup> Buck’s emphasis on ideograms echoes the sinologist approach to translation, which can also be observed in Mabel Lee’s English translation of *Lingshan*.

Buck also translates some culturally loaded sentences literally. For example, “Well, and my uncle and have you eaten?”<sup>568</sup> uses the phrase “have you eaten?,” the Chinese equivalent of the English greeting “How are you?” upon meeting an acquaintance. Similarly, in the sentence “Now Wang Lung is seeking to pluck a flower somewhere,”<sup>569</sup> “pluck a flower” is a Chinese idiom referring to a man looking for a woman. Another piece of dialogue, “Bring the first child to me to see,” also preserves Chinese phraseology.<sup>570</sup>

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564. Buck, 297.

565. Buck, 6.

566. Buck, 54.

567. Buck, 194.

568. Buck, 187.

569. Buck, 190.

570. Buck, 19.

In short, Buck's use of biblical language in her narrative does not appear to constitute a problem for her literal translation of Chinese linguistic and cultural expressions, because the biblical phraseology itself derives from a translation. By combining Chinese expressions with biblical language, Buck foregrounds the Chinese identity through translation and ennobles her Chinese characters, who might otherwise have been stereotyped and racialized within the English literary field.<sup>571</sup>

From early British trans/writing Chineseness to Pearl Buck's adoption of translation, the figuration of the Chinese other varied in response to the needs of the target literary field based on the literary regimes. Thus, translated Chineseness is not so much the real source as an expression of the expectations and interests exhibited in the target literary field. In the contemporary context, trans/writing has shown certain degrees of rupture while the established literary norms persist. In particular, the American literary field valorizes translatedness as literary variants as distinctions of ethnic identity and literary need.

In the modern/contemporary context, although the British and American book markets lack interest in translation in general, this does not necessarily mean that the English literary field excludes translation. On the contrary, the English literary field privileges translation in a different way. Translation is treated as inseparable from literary narrative; translational verbal traits are highlighted as a figuration of an ethnic/cultural other, a trace that was also present in the works of Goldsmith and missionary/sinologists. Wang Guanlin observes that Chinese American writers,

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571. Such racialized stereotyping can be found in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe, the Farther Adventure of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), Jack London's "The Unparalleled Invasion" (1910), Sax Rohmer's *The Mystery of Dr. Fu-Manchu* (1912), Somerset Maugham's *On a Chinese Screen* (1922) and *Painted Veils* (1925), and others.

such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, and Ha Jin adopt translational language in their works in order to preserve their identities as Asian Americans, connected closely to their “ancestral homes” in China, so those identities will not be lost in a white-dominated society.<sup>572</sup> For Wang, the translatedness of Kingston’s work “gives the narrator an afterlife, a way to strive for recognition instead of being anonymous, and this recognition becomes a reality as represented in the articulation on the part of a marginal and therefor avoids being forever silenced.”<sup>573</sup> In order to have a voice, these writers appropriate linguistic norms relating to a translated “Chineseness,” as found in the early missionary translations of Chinese expressions as idiosyncratic ethnic traits to represent Chinese peculiarities to English readers in familiar language that also carries implications of its deconstruction or subversion.<sup>574</sup>

Having examined briefly the discourse of translation in the history of the British/American literary field, we can identify the logics and mechanisms of trans/writing the Chinese other as appeared in novels, poetry anthologies, dramas and scholarly writings. However, we also need to discuss how Chinese literature has been published, read and canonized in the modern/contemporary context, which constitutes an essential component of the translation habitus for the translation and reception of Gao’s novel in the Anglophone world.

Though Chinese literature has been translated and rewritten, the market for it is small, due to the preferences of selection and translation regimes. Especially in the modern era, translating modern Chinese literature became stagnated, because the popular acceptance of the

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572. Wang Guanlin, *Translation in Diaspora Literatures* (New York: Palgrave Pivot, 2019), 7.

573. See note 574 above.

574. See Wang Guanlin’s discussion of Maxine Hong Kingston’s subversive translation of the racist term “Chinamen” in America as “China Men” in *Translation in Diaspora Literatures*, 16.



modern Chinese vernacular began only after the May Fourth Movement in 1919. When the Chinese Communist Party gained control of China in 1949, translations of Chinese literature into English were further limited. While the West in general and America in particular lamented the loss of China and its literature, the latter encouraged Chinese studies in its universities and research programs from the 1950s, which were compatible with its foreign policies and political goals to contain the New Red China.<sup>575</sup> As a result, the study of Chinese literature was marginalized in America's institutions of higher learning and ghettoized into the category of Area Studies. American scholars usually read modern Chinese literature as "a window on the Chinese revolution."<sup>576</sup> Britain shared with the United States about Chinese literature research. Zhang Hong writes that literary studies in Britain prior to the 1980s treated modern Chinese literature as ideological facts, as critics and scholars developed a sophisticated method to read modern Chinese literary works by identifying their internal contradictions, gaps, and silences to demonstrate the fundamental problems confronting the Chinese communist government.<sup>577</sup> Julia Lovell further observes that the ideological/political reading of Chinese literature was dominant between the Cold War era and the 1990s, even though China began to open its doors to the West in the 1970s and its literature was increasingly depoliticized. Even in the twenty-first century,

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575. In the context of the Cold War, such programs as language training, foreign policy studies, and history were prioritized to serve immediate goals to combat communism. See He Yin and Xu Guanghua, *Guowai Hanxue* [Chinese Studies in the Foreign Countries] (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Education Press, 2000), 245-250.

576. See *Chinese Literature in the Second Half of a Modern Century: A Critical Survey*, eds. Pang-yuan Chi and David Der-Wei Wang (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 242.

577. Zhang Hong, *Zhongguo wenxue zaiyingguo* [Chinese Literature in Britain] (Guangzhou: Huacheng chuban she, 1991), 318.

this trend of reading has continued to affect the reception and review of modern Chinese literature in the English-speaking world.<sup>578</sup>

The Chinese communist government's policy of treating literature as a tool to serve its political goals has strengthened the Western perception of modern/contemporary Chinese literature as political discourse, and translation is no exception. The well-known Australian scholar and translator Bonnie S. McDougall has noted that in order to publicize its achievements to promote a positive image of a triumphant socialist system in the West, China established foreign-oriented cultural organizations that regularly publish journals, newspapers, and books in different languages. The publishing house for which McDougall worked, the Foreign Language Press (FLP), was one such unit. The works chosen to be translated were decided by the relevant officials according to Party guidelines to fully present China's achievements and political visions. Any works against these guidelines, even if indirectly, would be subject to strict censorship. Such highly ideologically charged translation projects forced translators to overlook literary quality, and they were unable to develop an effective translation strategy for the English-speaking world.<sup>579</sup> McDougall stresses that though these works were published with significant investments, the Anglophone market did not circulate them commercially, but instead made them available only to bookstores that sympathized with Chinese revolutionary causes or to left-wing organizations.<sup>580</sup> However, FLP also organized well-known foreign language experts to translate a number of classical Chinese literary works and modern classics into English. Though these

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578. Julia Lovell, *The Politics of Cultural Capital: China's Quest for a Nobel Prize in Literature* (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 33.

579. Bonnie S. McDougall, *Translation Zones in Modern China* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2011).

580. Bonnie S. McDougall, 25-83.

works were written either in the distant past, or in the Republic era, they were translated as part of the government's effort to promote Chinese culture in the West. These translations were mainly collected by some universities and institutions of the Anglophone world as materials for teaching and studying Chinese language and literature.<sup>581</sup> In all, of 181 book-length English translations published between 1976 and 2002, the Chinese official press took up 69 contemporary works of fiction.<sup>582</sup> Most of these works did not have any impact in English-speaking countries, as they were selected for political criteria rather than “the creative diversity of the contemporary literary scene,” and were often translated by non-native speakers before being edited by native speakers.<sup>583</sup>

However, from the 1990s onward, the translation and publication of Chinese literature in the Anglophone world underwent some improvement. As noted in the previous chapter, more modern/ contemporary Chinese literary works were translated and sold in bookstores or purchased by public libraries in the West. One significant example is Howard Goldblatt's English version of Mo Yan's *Hong gaoliang (Red Sorghum)*, which sold over 20,000 copies in the US in ten years, after the popular reception of Zhang Yimou's film adopted from Mo's novel in 1987.<sup>584</sup>

Despite the positive trend of the sales of Chinese literature in translation, the reception of Chinese modern/contemporary literature has still been limited in the English-speaking countries. Novelist John Updike characterized the translation of Chinese literature in the US as “the lonely

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581. See note 582 above.

582. Lovell, *The Politics of Cultural Capital*, 29.

583. Lovell, 29.

584. Howard Goldblatt, *Ge haowen shuibi* (Beijing: Xiandai chubanshe, 2014), 213.

business” of the sole American translator, Howard Goldblatt.<sup>585</sup> Updike’s statement is not an exaggeration, because Howard Goldblatt is the only person in the Anglophone world to translate many modern/contemporary Chinese literary works. However, lack of interest in translation is a general phenomenon in the Anglophone world, which confirms Lawrence Venuti’s assertion about the disregard for translation of foreign literature in British/American culture.<sup>586</sup>

Howard Goldblatt has said of his experience translating the works of Mo Yan and other Chinese authors into English that in the US book market for foreign literature, translations generally do not sell well, but works by Nobel Prize winners are exceptions. For example, García Márquez’s novels have sold extremely well. However, this is not absolute, as some Nobel winners’ works have not sold as well as others.<sup>587</sup> As for Chinese literature, American readers favor books dealing with sex and politics, as well as detective stories.<sup>588</sup> Goldblatt confesses that when translating works of modern/contemporary Chinese literature, he has been commissioned either by the publishers or the authors themselves. He sometimes produced translations for his own interest. As many publishers do not have any editors who know Chinese, they normally require the translator to comply with the norms of American fiction. Consequently, he has been asked to significantly cut, abridge, condense, or rewrite certain parts of the novels he translated.<sup>589</sup> Moreover, Goldblatt claims that some authors gave him permission to rewrite their

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585. John Updike, “Bitter Bamboo,” *The New Yorker*, last modified May 2, 2005, <https://newyorker.com/magazine/2005/05/09/bitter-bamboo>.

586. Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995), 11-12.

587. Howard Goldblatt, *Ge haowen shuibi*, 215.

588. Goldblatt, 215.

589. Goldblatt, 215.

works in order to suit the publication and market requirements in the US. For example, Mo Yan once told him that since he could not read foreign languages, he would entrust Goldblatt to do any revisions deemed suitable for the target market. Goldblatt has also sometimes taken initiatives to cut or rewrite certain parts of the novels he translates, because he found some of those works wordy and clumsy by the standards of English readers. This has been the case with many contemporary Chinese writers.<sup>590</sup>

McDougall's and Goldblatt's experiences of translating Chinese literature inside and outside of China, especially with regard to the conditions and operational norms of translating in the English-speaking world, are largely corroborated by a 2015 study of the Booker Prize, one of the world's most prestigious literary awards. According to the study, Chinese author Wei Hui's novel *Shanghai Baobei* (Shanghai Babe) ranked first on the bestselling list for the fiction category and Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain* ranked ninth in 2001.<sup>591</sup> Wei Hui's novel is sexually explicit and was banned by the Chinese government, while Gao's has been regarded as a novel of political significance. The popularity of both novels in English translation appears to confirm Goldblatt's observations about English readers' preferences for translations.

While China makes efforts to introduce its modern/contemporary authors to the West, in particular to the Anglophone world, these officially commissioned translations have not made a significant impact among readers. According to the Penguin Classics list of Chinese literary works, more than 160 works have been translated, with a significant number of these taken from

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590. Goldblatt, 221.

591. Marko, "First Research on the Sales of Translated Fiction in the UK Shows Growth and Comparative Strength of International Fiction," November 1, 2019, <https://thebookerprizes.com/international/news/first-research-sales-translated-fiction-uk-shows-growth-and-comparative-strength>.

the Chinese classical canon, and modern/contemporary literature forming only a small number of the total. In addition, these canonical works have mostly been translated by British or American translators, a further indication of the lack of popularity of government-sanctioned translation projects.<sup>592</sup> In addition, some English versions of Chinese classics are merely abridgements, such as Arthur Waley's *Monkey*, whereas the full English translation of *Xi youji* (*The Journey to the West*) prepared by Chinese translators has been largely unnoticed.<sup>593</sup> This indicates that translations of Chinese literature by British or American translators are more likely to be canonized, as they more closely meet the expectation of the target literary field.

Meanwhile, in the 1990s, a group of newly arrived Chinese migrant writers came to the fore by adopting English as their second language to renarrativize the history of the Chinese revolution and of modern China. Such writers as Jung Chang, Nien Cheng, Da Chen, and Anchee Min dismantle the grand narrative of the Chinese communist revolution by retelling their personal experiences and family sagas to provide counter-discourses to modern Chinese history. Many of these authors' novels have become bestsellers in the West.<sup>594</sup> The popularity of the so-called "misery" narratives is largely due to their personal accounts of suffering during the Chinese Cultural Revolution and after, and Eva Kneissl considers translations part of this "misery" novel genre. Chinese French novelists such as Dai Sijie and Gao Xingjian are also included in this category thanks to the English translations of their works.<sup>595</sup>

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592. Qian Menghan, "Penguin Classics and the Canonization of Chinese Literature in English Translation," *Translation and Literature* 26, no. 3 (November 2017): 295–316.

593. Qian Menghan, 295–316.

594. Eva Kneissl, "Chinese Fiction in English Translation: The Challenges of Reaching Larger Western Audiences," *Logos* 18, no. 4 (2007): 205.

595. Eva Kneissl, "Chinese Fiction in English Translation: The Challenges of Reaching Larger Western Audiences," 205-206.

Despite the attention paid in the English literary world to personal accounts and alternative histories of modern China, English publishers are generally interested in other subjects. Since China's further opening to the outside world including its entry into the WTO in 2001, Chinese literature in English translation has received more attention in commercial channels. For example, though it was banned in China, Wei Hui's controversial *Shanghai Babe* became very popular in the West, and Eva Kneissl argues that this popularity was directly due to its banning in China.<sup>596</sup> Indeed, its publisher promoted it specifically as a work banned on political grounds.

Many Chinese authors find their works entering the commercial circuit after they win important international awards. For example, after Jiang Rong's novel *Lang Tuteng (Wolf Totem)* was successfully received in China in 2004, Penguin bought the exclusive rights for its translation and publication at a staggering figure of 100,000 Pounds for its treatment of the environment and marginal cultures.<sup>597</sup> This novel won the first Man Asian Literary Prize in 2007.

In contrast to the American market's preference for original English works, Britain's book market appears more receptive toward translations of Chinese literature. According to a Booker Awards report, between 2001 and 2015 Chinese was the most translated language in Britain, next to French, for which the British book market has always shown special interest due to its symbolic capital. This situation also happens in other European countries.<sup>598</sup> China's rise as the world's second greatest economic power, after the United States, contributes much to this

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596. Kneissl, 205-206.

597. Karen Ma, "Slowly, Chinese Authors Entice the West-Culture-International Herald Tribune," *The New York Times*, last modified November 17, 2006: <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/17/arts/17iht-IDSIDE18.3577921.html>.

598. Marko, "First Research on the Sales of Translated Fiction in the UK Shows Growth and Comparative Strength of International Fiction: The Booker Prizes."

interest. Although many critics have expressed optimism about the increasing popularity of Chinese literature in translation, some also warn that such interest should not be solely for economic reasons.<sup>599</sup>

Meanwhile, in China, after Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012, various seminars and conferences have addressed translation as a means of gaining cultural capital in the West, so that readers outside of China can recognize its role as a dominant cultural and economic power.<sup>600</sup> For Chinese scholar Wang Ning, such interest also means the relocation of cultures; in other words, shifting the centre of culture to peripheral countries, particularly China.<sup>601</sup>

The English construction of the Chinese other through trans/writing highlights the projection of the target culture's interests, such as dominance, demonization, poetic invention, and political and commercial incentives. Such historical transformation further underscores the regimes of the literary field in which China is othered: From the early trans/writing of authors such as Goldsmith to the modern creation of the translational *Cathay* as a poetic realm, the use of translation by sinologists and English writers has significantly shaped regimes in the English literary field. These English literary regimes are formed from the initial choice of translation as cultural comparison, references, and a utopian desire for a more defining translation practice, such as the radical translation of Chinese as barbarians through literal translation and creolizing.

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599. "In Conversation with Dr. Mabel Lee, Founder of Wild Peony Book Publishers and Translator of Nobel Prize-winning Novel *Soul Mountain*," June 18, 2018, [www.acya.org.au/2015/06/conversation-dr-mabel-lee-wild-peony-book-publishers2/](http://www.acya.org.au/2015/06/conversation-dr-mabel-lee-wild-peony-book-publishers2/), accessed July 20, 2018.

600. Bonnie S. McDougall, "World Literature, Global Culture and Contemporary Chinese Literature in Translation," *International Communication of Chinese Culture* 1, no. 1–2, (2014): 49.

601. Wang Ning, "Translation and the Relocation of Cultures" (a talk at the Confucius Institute of the University of Michigan), June 3, 2013, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=wf9DMYzfkGc&feature=share>.



These translational practices have significantly affected writing about Chineseness, as seen in works by Pearl Buck, Maxine Hong Kingston, Ha Jin, and other authors. Trans/writing in English has not only constructed and codified various aspects of Chineseness, but has also shaped the literary perception and reception of China as an authentic cultural other.

### 3.2.0 Translating *Lingshan* into the English Literary Field

As a professor of Chinese studies and a translator, Mabel Lee undertakes her translation work within the frame of the English literary field; her linguistic choices and paratextual materials must meet the requirements of the target literary field to create the significant *illusio* desired by the target readers. In light of this observation, this section frames Lee's translation in the regimes of English translation of Chinese literature and examines how her translation is structured by these regimes. This invites a key question about *Soul Mountain*'s translation and reception in the Anglophone world: How does Mabel Lee translate Gao's *Lingshan*'s *illusio* to meet her readers' expectations of being "Chinese" and to make a case for its canonization in the English literary field? To answer the question, this section discusses how *Soul Mountain* is translated and read in the English literary field at the macro- and micro-levels, both paratextual and textual, with supplementary material from reviews, feature articles, interviews, and sales records from Australia, the US, and the UK. More specifically, this study examines not only how Lee translates Gao's novel within the frame of the English literary field, but also whether her translation successfully creates a fictional narrative that conforms to the literary field's requirements for a great work of literature. It demonstrates how a literary work is translated into the literary field from which *Soul Mountain*'s reputation as a universal work of literature is confirmed, modified, or redefined by reactions from the field and the reading public. The English *illusio* in *Soul Mountain* is also discussed in relation to Dutrait's French version in order to map

out the distinctive paths for a work's reception and canonization and show what "universality" means for the respective literary field. Finally, this section looks at the Taiwanese appropriation of Gao's "universal" reputation in order to problematize the limitations of the novel's universality in the West.

In addition, following the same Lambertian analytical model as in Chapter 2, this section explores how Gao's *Lingshan* is translated into the English literary field at both the macro and micro levels. The former includes the paratextual and textual features of Mabel Lee's English versions in relation to Gao's Chinese original. The questions we seek to answer are how paratextual materials, including covers, promos, titles pages, preface, and appendices, reflect the publication policy, market orientation, translation strategy and other relevant information of the English literary field. The latter examines the aesthetic details of the English version in order to ascertain whether, and if so, how the target literary field affects, regulates, and/or determines the textual details of the translation. This section also further investigates the different versions of *Soul Mountain* in Australia and the United States before and after Gao's winning of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2000, in order to identify the features of the various receptions of *Soul Mountain* in the English-speaking world, and to examine whether, and if so, how, the English translation of Gao's novel responds to and meets the needs of English literary regimes.

### 3.2.1 The Paratextual World of *Soul Mountain*

As discussed above, the trans/writing of the Chinese other has been conditioned by the regimes of the target literary field. Though ruptures occur in the literary field, the effects of literary regimes are constantly present and serve as boundaries of that field. Thus, a preliminary examination of the paratextual materials of *Soul Mountain* highlights how the literary boundary

is framed and maintained at the macro level. This examination looks at how a work of foreign literature is chosen for translation, why this particular novel, how it meets the publishers' visions and market prospects, and how the translator responds to these requirements. It begins with a discussion of the cover design of the Flamingo Edition of *Soul Mountain*, published by HarperCollins Australia in 2000.

The front cover of *Soul Mountain* is a reworking of Gao's painting "Recueillement" ("Meditation"), completed in 1997. A facsimile of the original ink color painting is also included between the title pages of the book.<sup>602</sup> In the original painting, a lonely vertical line appears to mimic the shape of a human figure standing in the grasses of a mountain slope. The human figure faces an empty space, in contrast to the mountain and a long, rough, faded black line of clouds above. Caught between the mountain and clouds, the human figure in solitude in the empty space bends his head, mediating. The painting of a man meditating in nature expresses the main mood and theme of the novel, which follows its protagonist's lonely travels in search of meaning in life.

The cover of the Flamingo Edition of Gao's novel is a reworking of Gao's painting: The brownish red color is unevenly spread, making the previous motif of solitude more like a memory scene, with small dots of white clouds added on the surface. A thick wall at the bottom of the painting serves as a foreground, beyond which is a mountain, where the human figure stands in meditation. On the top right corner, the Chinese title of Gao's novel appears, and the English title *Soul Mountain* occupies a large space in the middle of the cover, followed by Gao's name and, in small print, "Translated from Chinese by Mabel Lee." At the bottom is a

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602. See the front cover of Gao's *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee (Sydney: Flamingo, 2000).

commentary on the novel by Australian writer and scholar Nicholas Jose, who describes it as “an odyssey like no other, a magnificent monster of a book that takes us deep into China’s unruly heart as no other work of contemporary literature.”<sup>603</sup>

The front cover image modifies the original painting so that the original theme of a human being meditating in the space of the earth and sky gives way to an emphasis on dream memories and meditation on the meaning of life, with the thick wall in the background seeming to indicate that the quest for meaning depends on overcoming this barrier, which cannot block the man’s exploration of the meaning of life. Moreover, the cover page emphasizes the author’s work by presenting his name in large type, whereas the translator’s name is significantly reduced and almost invisible. Nicolas Jose’s comment serves as an authority to inform Australian readers that Gao’s novel is a unique contemporary creative work that portrays China from a different perspective, with “China’s unruly heart” signifying the unexplored part of China associated with adventure, romance, or fantasy.

On the back cover, the editor further demonstrates the merits of Gao’s novel in a brief introduction supplemented by quotations.<sup>604</sup> In this short paragraph, the editor summarizes the novel as a “picaresque journey” containing various elements such as philosophical musings, adventure stories, and exotic locations. Though some might seldom have heard of humans’ “triumph” and “foibles” unfold throughout the novel, some of the novel’s more exotic or outlandish elements, such as the Wild man, Qichuan Snake, farting buses are mentioned selectively for the purpose of emphasis.

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603. See note 604 above.

604. See the back cover of Gao’s *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee (Sydney: Flamingo, 2000).

The back cover also reprints several important critical comments on *Soul Mountain*, notably the French reviews from *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*, which hail Gao's novel as a monumental work of Chinese literature in the 1990s and a "kaleidoscope of the cruel China." Two Australian reviews describe Gao's work as a blending of Chinese and European sensibilities and praise Gao's valorization of an individual's voice in a society that values collectivism by experimenting with narrative voices.

At the bottom of the back cover, a short paragraph discusses the context in which *Lingshan* was written, including Gao's incorrect diagnosis of lung cancer and the oppressive political environment of Beijing in the early 1980s. The latter was particularly influential, because it disrupted Gao's literary experimentation and forced him into an internal journey that resulted in his "epic novel."

The cover reminds readers that Gao's novel presents a different China to what readers know, in which various aspects of this ancient culture are revealed, including both its cruel history and its fantastic stories. *Lingshan*'s literary value is highlighted for its fusion of Chinese and European cultures and its positive reception by reviewers in major French journals. Gao is also praised as a courageous writer who has overcome personal and political obstacles to produce a masterpiece of contemporary Chinese literature.

Mabel Lee's dual role as translator and scholar is on display in the introduction to *Soul Mountain*, which focuses on Gao's writing background in relation to China's modern and contemporary literary field, his achievements in France, his universal appeal, and his novel's emphasis on the conflict between individual voices and oppressive collectivism.<sup>605</sup> The introduction provides more detail as to what, how, and why the cover matter and editorial

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605. Mabel Lee, "Introduction," in *Soul Mountain* (Sydney: Flamingo, 2000): v-x.

promotions present the novel as an important symbolic work relevant to the Australian cultural market. In her essay, Lee connects Gao's writing to China's long oppressive history of the self in favor of the interests of others, from Confucian culture to Chinese communist revolutionary literature as pure political indoctrination. Confucianism had a profound impact on people's lives through its rigid doctrines and institutions, in which individuals were relegated to different social classes and norms. Either by escaping to Taoist and Buddhist sites, or by committing oneself to creating literature, could some people gain limited freedom. In the modern and contemporary contexts, Communist revolutionary literature deprives writers of their freedom to create by forcing them to accept the Party's official political directives in the name of the public interest. Literature during China's Cultural Revolution is an example of this extreme development, in which any writers who wanted to create for self-expression were subject to severe physical and psychological tortures. Lee notes in her introduction that Gao wrote in this social, political, and cultural environment. During the Cultural Revolution, he struggled to write, but was forced to burn his drafts for fear of his own works being utilized against him. It was only in the 1980s that he could publish some of his short stories and plays. During this period, though he could travel to France and Italy for a while for his free literary pursuits, he still had to be careful. Indeed, when the government launched campaigns against Western influence, his works were subject to severe criticism and banned.

Lee further points out that only in France could Gao finish his plays and major novels. Though *Lingshan* is partly autobiographical, it foregrounds a universal human phenomenon: When people seek freedom, they face loneliness in the process. This problem can be resolved by establishing connections with other people, but this may in turn create anxiety on the part of the individual who fears losing his/her freedom. The implied struggle between the self and the other

is clearly identified and connected within human history, in which the individual's self could be dissolved and completely lost for the interests of the collective.

As in her previous essays we discussed in Chapter 2, Lee reiterates the significance of Gao's personal vision of the human struggle between the self and the other. She notes that while traveling to the remote regions of China, Gao meditates on Chinese cultures and nature in relation to his self; he, as the narrator of *Lingshan*, is drawn to social life, despite his anxieties. This tension between self and other is illustrated by Gao's adopting of personal pronouns. Though these pronouns change constantly, they are "composite" parts of the protagonist, who creates different others as partners for conversation, daydreaming, and meditating.<sup>606</sup> This analysis of different layers of the protagonist's psyches has its edges "dissecting the authorial self into the singular pronouns."<sup>607</sup>

The final part of Lee's essay deals with Gao's artistic achievements in France. She specifically mentions Gao's play *Taowang* (Fleeing), which depicts Chinese students escaping from the Tiananmen Square crackdown in June 1989. Lee claims that Gao defends his portrayal of the student demonstrators as non-heroic in order to maintain his creative freedom. The essay ends with a list of his representative works published, or soon to be published, in French and English, and the honours he has received from French and Belgian cultural organizations. Lee further notes that her titles for her English translations of *Lingshan* and *Yi geren* as, respectively, *Soul Mountain* and *One Man's Bible*, were based on Dutrait's French versions.<sup>608</sup>

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606. Lee, "Introduction," ix.

607. Lee, ix.

608. Lee, x.

Lee's essay is both an introduction to and a critique of Gao's literary background in general and *Lingshan* in particular. It is further supplemented by an appendix that includes bibliographies of Gao's works in Chinese and English and of English reviews of his works.<sup>609</sup> The appendix provides readers with a guide to additional material for further study, which indicates that Gao and his work are not immediately familiar to the Anglophone world. Thus, the appendix gives readers a greater picture of Gao's work and its critical reception. The supplementary material at the end of Lee's translation also suggests her treatment of *Soul Mountain* as a scholarly work, indicating that her translation habitus, especially her training as a scholar, may have played a part in her approach to translating the novel.

Lee's translation project can be situated in the context of the Anglophone literary field's taste for personal accounts of modern Chinese history, a counter-discourse against the "official" accounts of China's Communist Revolution, which Jung Chang and other Chinese diaspora writers are trying to articulate. Similarly, to Gao, these writers narrate how the self of the individual is largely denied in the name of the collective good for the sake of progress, so that the revolution is seen as a tragedy for both the individual and the nation. Gao's literary work and personal narratives serve as a rebellion against the grand narrative of the Communist revolution, and his *Soul Mountain* echoes this English construction of the Chinese other.<sup>610</sup> In addition, as Howard Globatt has noted about Chinese literature in the US, the English translation of the Chinese other also involves treating it as an exotic being.<sup>611</sup> Many elements of *Soul Mountain* furnish the target English reader with imagery of Chinese cultures, Taoist and Buddhist stories,

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609. Mabel Lee, "Appendix," *Soul Mountain*, 507-510.

610. Kneissl, 205-206.

611. Goldblatt, *Ge haowen shuib*, 221.



and erotic fantasies, as the novel's front cover and promotional materials demonstrate. Moreover, the positive reception of Gao's novel in France, a result of Gao's immersion in modern French literature and experience as an exile seeking artistic freedom, provides the (Australian) English field with a justification for the translation and publication of *Soul Mountain*. The quotations from reviews of *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* reprinted on the back cover of *Soul Mountain* help to persuade English readers of the novel's greatness.

While the front cover page highlights Gao's novel as a mediation of a personal journey against a background of nature and the peripheral boundary, the wall appears to indicate that inner freedom is possible only outside the dominant cultural terrain. This cover image is supplemented by Lee's essay, which presents her perspectives on Chinese culture and modern literature. More importantly, Gao's narrative attempts to project his personal voice and vision, a symbolic gesture against the Chinese Communist narratives that valorize the collective literary impulse as the dominant expression, notably in the genres of socialist realism or socialist romanticism. The back-cover information and Lee's introduction form an integrated whole that place Gao's novel in context for the English literary field.

Though *Soul Mountain* had limited success in Australia in 2000, Gao's subsequent winning of the Nobel Prize in Literature kindled interest in his work, especially *Soul Mountain*, which has gained popularity in the Anglophone world and especially in the United States. How has the Nobel Prize influenced *Soul Mountain*'s reception and canonization in the Anglophone world, compared to its receptions in Taiwan and France? A comparison of the paratextual materials of each version can provide insights about the homological conditions of *Soul Mountain* following Gao's Nobel win. While there are some significant differences between the pre- and post-Nobel paratexts of Lee's *Soul Mountain* as published in Australia, HarperCollins

America published its own version with different paratext. Britain did not buy the copyright for *Soul Mountain*, but imported the Australian and American versions shortly after Gao's win.

In the new edition of *Soul Mountain* published after Gao's winning of the Nobel Prize, the cover pages of the previous Flamingo Edition were updated to include his Nobel win and to hail *Soul Mountain* as his masterpiece. This indicates that Gao's novel has reached international prominence, and that he has established his reputation as a major writer who has transcended national boundaries.

The second Flamingo Edition of *Soul Mountain* bears the eye-catching slogan "Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature."<sup>612</sup> While the cover design and some information about Gao and his novel remain the same, the back cover differs significantly from the previous edition in several ways. For instance, the Nobel Prize Committee's communiqué is quoted at the top: "*Soul Mountain* is one of those singular literary creations that seem impossible to compare with anything but themselves...in the writing of Gao Xingjian literature is born anew from the struggle of individual to the survival of the masses."<sup>613</sup> The quotation from the Nobel communiqué appears to agree with Mabel Lee's assessment of Gao's depiction of the position of the self and the individual in a collective culture. However, the quotation is actually an abridgement of the full communiqué: "In the writing of Gao Xingjian literature is born anew from the struggle of individual to the survival of the masses [...] his great novel *Soul Mountain* is one of those singular literary creations that seem impossible to compare with anything but

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612. Gao, *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Sydney: Flamingo, December, 2000).

613. See the back cover of the second Flamingo edition of *Soul Mountain*.

themselves.”<sup>614</sup> In this Nobel Prize communiqué, Gao’s artistic contributions, as shown in his *Lingshan*, are highlighted, whereas the quotation provides the impression that Gao’s *Lingshan* was awarded the prize because of his rebellion against the Chinese grand narrative. Thus, the quotation does not appear to reflect the main spirit of the Nobel Prize communiqué, but is a rewriting in support of the translator’s or publisher’s opinions about Gao’s literary value in translation.

The review from *Le Figaro* is omitted from the second edition, and *Le Monde*’s review is also modified: “Chinese literature of the nineties will have to be content with the creative energy and the daring of Gao Xingjian” is modified as “Chinese literature [of the future] will have to be content with the creative energy and the daring of Gao Xingjian.” This rephrasing implies that the future of Chinese literature rests on Gao’s novel, a significant move forward from the past to the future, largely due to the canonization that comes with winning a Nobel Prize.

Except for the above changes, Jose’s comments, along with reviews from other Australian journals, are retained. In addition, the short original introduction, which discusses the background and contexts of *Soul Mountain*, and the editor’s promotional material from the first edition have all been removed in favour of giving prominence to the Nobel Prize committee’s communiqué.

By referring to Gao’s Nobel Prize on the front cover and reprinting part of the Nobel committee’s communiqué on the back, the publisher intends to show the enormous cultural capital Gao’s novel has had and that the Australian translator and publisher have shaped, or at least shared, the Nobel Prize’s vision of universality as highlighted in Mabel Lee’s introduction,

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614. “The Nobel Prize for Literature 2000,” NobelPrize.org, October 12 2000, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2000/press-release>.

which discusses Gao's life and writing even before he won the prize. The Australian publisher uses the novel to appropriate the world's most prestigious literary award. The Nobel Prize communiqué highlights Gao's literary merits as a narrative inventor in relation to Chinese history and culture as well as to the world, such as the German *Bildungsroman*, and lauds his work for its universal appeal; the Australian edition treats the Nobel Prize communiqué as evidence to project its own vision on Gao's novel, which is relevant to the Anglophone world's, and specifically Australia's, reading and reception of the Chinese novel.

The American versions of Gao's novel also see significant changes. After Gao won the Nobel Prize, HarperCollins America bought the copyright to *Soul Mountain* from HarperCollins Australia. HarperCollins America published Mabel Lee's English version by the end of 2000. Repackaged anew as the Harper Perennial Edition, the North American edition differs in many ways from the Australian edition, especially in the cover design, title page, promotional materials, and critical reviews.

Gao's name appears prominently at the top of the American front cover, followed by the official gold seal and the words "Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature."<sup>615</sup> The white brush-styled title "*Soul Mountain*" is printed emphatically in the middle of the page, against a background gradation from brownish red to darker red. At the bottom of the page is a quotation from *The New York Times Book Review* praising the novel "Engaging and Elegant...His finest work," followed by "National Bestseller." The placement of Gao's name and the addition of the Nobel Prize logo are the most obvious differences from the Australian edition. The background colours, moving from a moody brownish red to a somewhat depressing dark red, appear to indicate that the novel's personal travelogue and mediation are more depressing than a mere

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615. Gao, *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee (New York: HarperPerennial, 2001).

picaresque journey. In addition, although Gao's name is highlighted, the translator's name is nowhere to be found on the front cover.

On the top of the back cover appears an excerpt from *The Los Angeles Times Book Review*, calling the novel "A True Work of Great Literature."<sup>616</sup> This high assessment is followed by introductory paragraphs which were partly used in the first edition. The first paragraph from the first Australian edition is retained, which informs the reader about *Soul Mountain's* background: Gao's mistaken diagnosis of lung cancer and his experiences with the repressive political environment of Beijing. The second paragraph praises Gao's exploration of the spiritual world of human beings and the imagination that expands and enriches the "the notion of the individual self." The description of the exotic and unexplored world that is Gao's China is not available in the American edition, though it was in the Australian edition. This brief introduction is followed by two reviews from *The Washington Post Book World* and *The New York Times*. The former praises Gao's novel for successfully "transporting" a new dimension of the human spirit to English readers, while the latter is a general remark focused more on the various narrative styles, including poems, monologues, ballads, and others, which the reviewers praise as "Lyrical." The reviewer is equally impressed by the remarkable magical and erotic stories and folktales present in the novel.

There are also differences between the Australian and American versions of the novel's title page. On the top of the first page of the title pages, a short biography of the author appears under Gao's portrait. The biography notes that he is the first Chinese laureate of the Nobel Prize, whose education, exile, and literary life are connected to France, where he completed his masterpiece *Soul Mountain* and has gained recognition for his literary achievements. At the

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616. See the back cover of the 2001 HarperPerennial edition of *Soul Mountain*.

bottom of the page, Mabel Lee is also briefly mentioned as “one of Australia’s leading authorities on Chinese cultural affairs.” The biographical information is followed by a facsimile of Gao’s original painting “Recueillement,” which was previously printed in the first Australian edition. The rest of the title pages are similar to those of the Australian edition of *Soul Mountain*, as is Mabel Lee’s essay on Gao’s literary career in China and France and the literary significance of his major novel. In both editions, the introduction is followed by a short paragraph about Lee’s academic work, but not mentioning her work in translation. The paragraph is meant to provide information about Lee’s study of world literature at the University of Sydney, a perspective that illuminates her discussion of Gao’s works in her essay. Her research style is also demonstrated at the end of her translation, where an appendix is attached, as in the Flamingo Edition.

The Harper Perennial Edition of *Soul Mountain* shows that the publisher’s interests can be identified from the cover and title pages. On the cover pages, Gao, a Nobel Prize recipient, is given a prominent place, followed by an acknowledgement of *Soul Mountain* as a best seller in the United States. The book cover aims to provide the audience with information about the symbolic capital Gao has earned. In addition, the cover design in dark red also tells the reader about the repressive cultural environment that underlines and overwhelms the protagonist’s spiritual journey. Meanwhile, although Gao’s name is given a prominent position, the translator’s name is only mentioned later in the title page. The book title and the publication information seem to indicate that it is an English novel, with only Gao Xingjian’s name possibly suggesting otherwise. The back cover provides background information about the creative context of Gao’s novel, supplemented by the editor’s general comments that *Soul Mountain* is a “lyrical” novel exploring the human spirit with imagination and freedom. These comments highlight the main values in Gao’s novel in terms of his unprecedented literary portrayal of the human spiritual

world. This assessment is further cemented by reviews from some of the most prestigious American book review journals and newspapers, *The Washington Post Book World* and *The New York Times*, which focus either on the novel's universal spiritual journey or its impressive literary styles and stories.

The cover materials are supplemented by Gao's biography as an exiled Chinese writer who has won the first Nobel Prize. Whereas the cover material establishes Gao as a Nobel Prize author whose novel unfolds a new perspective of the human soul in universally appreciated narrative styles, Lee's introduction in the book portrays him as a rebel against China's grand narratives in literature, largely inspired by Western literature in general and French literature in particular. Lee deals with Gao's novel from a cultural point of view rather than in terms of his innovative narrative styles. Though there are certain differences, these critical perspectives can be integrated into an overall portrait of Gao's relevance to Anglophone readers.

The similarities and differences between the Flamingo Editions and the Harper Perennial edition are evident. Both editions share Mabel Lee's summary of Gao's literary career, which include Gao's experiences as an exile in France as well as her characteristic way of reading his novel. Although Lee's English text is largely unchanged between the Australian and American editions, the paratext does show differences. The Australian editions establish Gao first as a rebel writer in contemporary Chinese literary history and then as a Nobel Prize winner based on the reading of *Soul Mountain* as a personal account against a repressive culture that denies and represses the self. This inevitably brings Gao's novel closer to the "misery novel," a common genre among several prominent Chinese diaspora writers. However, the Harper Perennial Edition of *Soul Mountain* reads Gao's novel from a literary point of view by emphasizing its transcendent literary values and spiritual explorations that other cultures may share. This

emphasis on Gao's "universality" reflects the publisher's position of the novel as a work of world literature that can overcome national and cultural boundaries to reach readers throughout the world. In addition, all the reviews are carefully selected from prestigious American newspapers and literary journals, to support the acknowledgement and appreciation in North America of Gao's vision and merit. In addition, where the Flamingo editions print Mabel Lee's name on the cover page as a translator, the Harper Perennial edition appears to minimize *Soul Mountain* as a translation.

In short, these similarities and differences between the Australian and American paratexts demonstrate shifts of the cultural politics of publication and marketability. Each edition is characterized by different emphases on the quality of cultural products and in marketing, though the main body of the translation is the same. The first Flamingo edition attempts to relate Gao's novel to English novels by other diaspora Chinese writers, who are popular in the Anglophone world, and appropriate the symbolic capital of the French literary field. The second Flamingo edition attempts to profit from the Nobel Prize effect of Gao's novel for its own purposes. The first American edition minimizes the previous reading in the Flamingo editions to reassert Gao's "universal" literary value, promoting the novel for the booming American market for Nobel Prize-winning works and providing unobstructed access to important works. Thus, the translator is not considered as important as the author. Moreover, it is also worth mentioning that in all the English editions, *Soul Mountain* more or less follows the format of scholarly writing, notably the bibliography as an appendix that can be easily linked with the format of academic publication rather than as an indispensable part of the modern novel form. This format was typically adopted by sinologist translators such as James Legge in his first version of *The She King (The Book of Poetry)*.



Compared to the Chinese and French versions, the English versions appear significantly different. Taiwan first accepted Gao's work with great reluctance, and then appropriated his Nobel Prize win as a confirmation and consecration of the greatness of Chinese literature. The French versions project an image of Gao as a modernist writer who is indebted to French literature, as shown in his inventive use of narrative pronouns. In addition, he is also promoted as a cultural and political dissident comparable to Milan Kundera. However, the English editions assert Gao's status as a literary rebel but largely minimize his prevailing modernist literary traits, giving way to the homological regimes of the English literary field as a personal counterdiscourse against Chinese communist literature, and/or as a universal literature as conferred by the Nobel Prize Committee.

### 3.2.2 Translating *Lingshan* into English *Illusio*

The paratextual materials' framing of Gao's novel in the homological English cultural and linguistic environments raises the question of whether the Nobel Prize effect, as the Australian and American editions demonstrated, can truly override the English literary field's conditions for reaching the status of "universal validity" of Gao's literary works, in particular *Lingshan*.<sup>617</sup> Putting Gao's masterpiece in French in perspective, the "universal" values of Gao's novel lie in its relevance to the canonization regimes in the French literary field. In the English literary field, the Australian editions appear to suggest that the Nobel Prize's vision of Gao's novel was shaped and defined by the Australian English translation. Thus, the canonization of Gao's novel turns out to be a validation of Australia's visionary investment in his work. This struggle for cultural capital

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617. "The Nobel Prize for Literature 2000," NobelPrize.org, October 12, 2000, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2000/press-release>.

problematizes how the English literary field translates this kind of literary universality with the case of *Soul Mountain*.

As with the French editions, microtextual layers of translation create conditions conducive to the regimes of the English literary field. However, since Gao draws his inspiration from French modernist literature and Chinese vernacular literature, how is his text translated according to the regimes of the English literary field, or in other words, the English literary *illusio*?

The following section examines the aesthetic traits of Lee's English version of Gao's novel based on the Lambertian textual analytical procedures applied above in the study of Dutrait's translation: Narrative pronouns, the selection of certain key lexical items, poetic rhythms, and novelistic style. An analysis of these features in *Soul Mountain* in relation to the paratext can help to reveal the significance of Gao's text in the English literary field, either confirming or confronting claims of "universality." The different reception conditions of both the French and English literary fields also help to determine what "universality" means in each field.

### 3.2.2.1 Translating Fictional Narrative Pronouns in *Soul Mountain*

As pointed out in the previous chapter, Gao acknowledges his indebtedness to the *Nouveau roman* in his critical essays, as does Dutrait in his articles and interviews. During the translation process in the early 1990s, Gao even asked his translator(s) to imitate/restore the literary styles of such figures of the *Nouveau roman* as Butor, Perec and Duras, mainly their use of the pronouns "tu," "je," and "il/elle" in the narrative in lieu of proper nouns. Dutrait's extensive adoption of the specific French literary style for his translation foregrounds Gao's novel as an innovative modernist literature recognized by the French literary field. In fact, the French literary circle has chosen two novels by Butor and Perec among the 100 most influential modern novels in the

world.<sup>618</sup> Despite this, Gao's original novel possesses many traits beyond the *Nouveau roman* style. His novel is a fictional construction based on hybrid sources including ballads, folk stories, legends, public notices, advertisements, and others. In the French version, Dutrait makes significant changes at different textual layers to highlight the aesthetic traits the targeted French novelists valued, which sometimes entail sacrificing the Chinese textual identities. Gao apparently encouraged the translator to rewrite his work as a free creation in order to gain access to the literary field for recognition and symbolic capital. Gao conveyed the same message to Mabel Lee in the 1990s when she accepted the responsibility of translating his manuscript. However, what Lee would translate was different from the regimes of the French literary field. This raises some questions: Did Lee maintain the French narrative style as exhibited in Gao's Chinese texts? If Lee's approach diverges from that of Dutrait, what characterizes her translational traits of the English text? How does her translational *illusio* validate the regimes of the English literary field and its "universality"? We analyse some key examples of Lee's translation to identify *Soul Mountain's illusio* and significance to the English literary field.

As identified in Chapter 2, the beginning of the French translation is important, because it sets the general tone for its narration. The first three paragraphs are analogous to that of Butor's *La Modification*, which presents the interior movement of the narrator's mind about the past—internal, meditative, and reflective. The narrative pronoun "tu" invites readers into the protagonist's own world as if he speaks to himself alone about his past journey in a meditative mood, marked by the long sentence. The narration then shifts from the past tense to the present tense to indicate that the past journey is being narrated as though it is happening now. When "tu"

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618. "Les 100 livres du vingtième siècle d'après *Le Monde*," accessed July 2, 2018, [https://www.wenscritique.com/liste/les\\_cent\\_livres\\_du\\_siecle/178124](https://www.wenscritique.com/liste/les_cent_livres_du_siecle/178124).

narrates his journey, the narrative voice becomes moody and introspective, with the narrator's verbal delivery generally lacking a focus on the place, time, and purpose, but giving vivid details about the bus, road, and mood in a contemplative manner. This narrative style is similar to the beginning of Butor's novel, which begins with a narration of the character's train trip from Paris to Rome with an interior voice "vous."

The narrative pattern in Dutrait's translation also provides Gao's novel with an affinity to Butor's (Perec's) *illusio*, with which French critics can easily identify. This narrative familiarity, albeit slightly modified in the translation, helps to remind French readers of Gao's connection to their narrative tradition and to allow them to recognize what Bourdieu calls "resemblance dans la différence."<sup>619</sup> Though Dutrait's choices of when to use "tu" or "vous" are similar to Perec's and Butor's choices of pronouns, the differences are evident between them in their contexts and characters.

In her English version, Lee chooses to present the *illusio* of Gao's novel differently from Dutrait's French version. A passage in the original Chinese is quoted below, followed by examples in three languages to demonstrate each one's respective *illusio*, especially the translations of the Chinese *ni* into the French "tu/vous" and the English "you" as distinctive narrative voices in each respective literary field:

你坐的是长途公共汽车，那破旧的车子，城市里淘汰下来的在保养的极差的山区公路上，路面到处坑坑洼洼，从早起颠簸了十二个小时，来到这座南方山区的小县城。

你背着旅行袋，手里拎个挎包，站在满是冰棍纸和甘蔗屑子的停车场上环顾。

从车上下来的，或是从停车场走过来的人，男的是打着大包小包，女的抱着孩子。<sup>620</sup>

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619. Pierre Bourdieu, *Choses dites* (Paris: Édition de Minuit, 1987), 167.

620. Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan* (Taipei: Lianjing (Linking) chuban she, 1990), 1.

The following passage is a literal English translation based on the above quotation:

You take a long distant bus, the sort of old bus, no longer used in the city, on the poorly maintained mountainous road, (whose) surface is full of potholes everywhere, bumped for twelve hours from the early morning and arrive at this small county town in the South.

You carry a travel bag in the back, with a satchel in hand, standing and looking around at the parking lot littered with ice lolly wrappers and sugarcane residue.

(Among those who) get off the bus, or come over from the parking lot, the men carry various big or small bags, the women carry their babies.<sup>621</sup>

Dutrait's French translation is as follows:

Tu es monté dans un autobus long-courrier. Et, depuis le matin, le vieux bus réformé pour la ville a cahoté douze heures d'affilée sur les routes de montagne, mal entretenues, pleines de bosses et de trous, avant d'arriver dans ce petit bourg du Sud.

Sac sur le dos, une sacoche à la main, tu balaies du regard le parking jonché de papiers de bâtonnets glacés et de déchets de canne à sucre.

Des hommes chargés de sacs de toutes tailles, des femmes, bébé dans les bras, descendent du bus ou traversent le parking tandis qu'une bande de jeunes, sans sacs ni paniers [...]<sup>622</sup>

Mabel Lee's English version is quoted below:

The old bus is a city reject. After shaking in it for twelve hours on the potholed highway since early morning, you arrive in this mountain county town in the South.

In the bus station, which is littered with ice-block wrappers and sugar cane scraps, you stand with your backpack and a bag and look around for a while. People are getting off the bus or walking past, men humping sacks and women carrying babies.<sup>623</sup>

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621. Translation is mine.

622. Gao, *La Montagne de l'âme*, trans. Noël and Liliane Dutrait (La Tour d'Aigues: L'Édition de L'Aube, 1995), 9.

623. Gao, *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee (Sydney: Flamingo, 2000), 1.

These passages demonstrate some significant differences between the French version and the English version in relation to Gao's original. First, the opening paragraphs in Mabel Lee's English translation of *Lingshan* are marked by narration in the present tense, with the singular pronoun "you." Lee chooses to present the English version as though the story were happening now, giving the reader a sense of immediacy. However, her narrative pronoun "you" near the end of the last sentence in the first paragraph is problematic, because she appears to be ignoring the meditative nature of the narrative. With the pronoun placed amongst descriptive details of the narrator's background, the English version does not focus on "you" as the narrator, making the whole opening paragraph a descriptive narration rather than a reflection or an internal monologue. Furthermore, by condensing the second and third paragraphs into one and by using regular short sentences, the English translation largely reduces the rhythm of slow and contemplative mood that exists in the original and in Dutrait's version. In Gao's original, what is singular is that the action is delayed until the end of the paragraph: With the comma and the suspended sentence structure, a thought stream that flows slowly to the end of the sentence creates a narrative rhythm and mood of inwardness and meditation, which is led by the second-person pronoun "ni" ("you").

Lee's translation and interpretation are in stark contrast to Dutrait's retention of the French narrative style in the original. Where Dutrait's French translation evokes an association between Gao's novel and *Nouveau roman* narratives identified by their adoption of "tu/vous" and the long sentence structure, Lee's translation cuts off this association by extensively minimizing the French influences and establishing a new narrative mode for English readers. Thus, the foregrounded French narrative features are largely eliminated. First, the focus of the paragraph is no longer "you," as the first sentence "The old bus is a city reject" serves as an introduction of

the background, which is followed by the description of the road conditions. The narrative “you” as the subject who traces his own past in his monologue à la Butor/Perec is replaced with descriptive details of the physical world in the novel. The narrator “you” only appears at the end of the paragraph. In these examples, it is difficult, if not impossible, to establish an association between Gao’s original novel or Dutrait’s French version and Lee’s English translation. Lee’s focus on the descriptive details of the outside world of the protagonist instead of the interiority of his mind echoes the traditional storytelling mode, whether realist or romanticist narrative. This kind of narrative exploits descriptive details of the outside world to show a character’s social environment, or as the psychological projection of the character in the story. For Gao’s novel and the *Nouveau roman*, the narrative perspective is of primary importance, and the physical world is often filtered through the character’s interior experiences, such as monologues, imagination, and fantasy.

Lee’s translation disregards Gao’s novelistic traits in *Lingshan*, and her approach to the source text’s literary features constitutes a rewriting. Venuti points out that translating a particular source text into a transparent English at the cost of source textual particularities has become a dominant trend among translations for English readers.<sup>624</sup> In rewriting Gao’s source text for her English reading public, Lee generally overlooks the influences of Michel Butor and George Perec, for instance.

Aside from Butor, Gao also draws inspiration to formulate his fictional narrative in *Lingshan* from George Perec’s personal narrative. Though Perec’s pronoun “tu” shares the meditative stylistic features of Butor’s novel, his literary style stands out among other French

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624. Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995), 11-12.

writers as that of a distinguished experimenter who adopts “tu” as a device to foreground his characters’ monologues in defiance of solitude, anxieties, and despair. Such use of the personal voice to heighten the sense of a frail voice in modern society resembles to Gao’s narrative approach for his quest for meanings, as even his protagonist is denied the means to utter his voice and only seeks comfort by inventing stories, narratives, and fantasies, or by commenting on historical events to himself. This narration is reduced to, in essence, a monologue, with which he can react against depression, anxiety, and solitude in a society characterized by political tension and modern alienation. This loss of meaning in modern life is an important theme in both Pécerc’s and Gao’s writings, as seen in the examples given below:

你却还在爬山，将近到山顶精疲力竭的时候，总想这是最后一次。等你登到山顶片刻的兴奋平息之后，竟又感到还未满足。这种不满足随着疲劳的消失增长，你遥望远处隐约起伏的山峰，重新生出登山的欲望。可是凡你爬过了的山，你一概失去兴趣，总以为那山后之山该会有你未曾见过的新奇，等你终于已登上那峰顶，并没有你所期待的神异，一样又只有寂寞的山风。久而久之，你竟然适应了这种寂寞，登山成了你一种痼疾，明知什么也找不到，无非被这盲目的念头驱使，总不断去爬。这过程之中，你当然需要得到安慰，便生出许多幻想，为自己编造出一些神话。<sup>625</sup>

You still climb the mountains, (and) feel extremely exhausted when you are about to reach the summit, (and) always thinking this is the last time. (However,) the moment when you reach the summit and your excitement calms down, you still feel unsatisfied. The dissatisfaction grows more after your exhaustion disappears, you look at the undulating mountains in the distance, your desire to climb another mountain is renewing. But you have absolutely lost interest in the mountains you have climbed, and always thinking that behind the mountains, you will see new views you have never seen, and (when) you finally reach the top of the mountain, there is nothing spectacular, (but) the same solitary mountain wind. As days go by, you get used to this kind of loneliness, (and) climbing mountains becomes a chronic disease, knowing that nothing new will be found, short of being driving by a blind idea, always trying to climb. During this process, you certainly need comfort, (thereby) generating many fantasies, creating some fairy tales for yourself.<sup>626</sup>

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625. Gao, *Lingshan*, 454.

626. Translation is mine.



The above paragraph is taken from Chapter 68 of *Lingshan*. The mountain motif in this passage has some resonance with Albert Camus' obsession with existential problems in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942). For Gao, endless mountain climbing in hope of finding something meaningful ends in a Sisyphean meaningless effort marked by sheer loneliness, which can only be eased by daydreaming and seeking to do the same again. This modern sense of futility and alienation can equally be identified in Perec's novel *Un homme qui dort*:

Tu te promènes encore parfois. Tu refais les mêmes chemins. Tu traverses des champs labourés qui laissent à tes chaussures montantes d'épaisses semelles de glaise. Tu t'embourbes dans les fondrières des sentiers. Le ciel est gris. Des nappes de brume masquent les paysages. De la fumée monte de quelques cheminées. Tu as froid malgré ta vareuse double. Tes chaussures, tes gants. Tu essayes maladroitement d'allumer une cigarette.

Tu fais des promenades plus lointaines qui te mènent vers d'autres villages, à travers les champs et les bois. Tu t'assieds à la longue table de bois d'une épicerie-buvette dont tu es le seul client. On te sert un viandox ou un café sans goût. Des dizaines de mouches sont agglutinées sur le papier collant qui tombe encore en spirale de l'abat-jour de métal émaillé.<sup>627</sup>

Comparing the mountain climbing in *Lingshan* with Perec's walking, we note that Gao's narrator always tries to climb one mountain after another in hope to find something new, but by doing so, he finds himself being purely driven by a "blind desire" and is sure that "nothing new will be found." Perec's narrator walks from one place after another in loneliness, speaking only to himself: The people he encounters, the places he walks through, the actions he performs appear trivial and inconsequential, illustrating the lack of meaning in his life. Like Gao's narrator's act of climbing, Perec's narrator's walking leads to a loss of sense in his life and a growing feeling of alienation against the modern world.

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627. George Perec, *Un homme qui dort* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1967), 52.

Gao's style in the passage quoted above is analogous to Perec's in terms of sentential length and structure. The formal narrative structures mimic the monologue of a person who is ghettoized and suppressed by the modern way of life - talking to himself is the only way for him to assert his existence, or even his sole meaning. Dutrait translates Gao's text in a corresponding style, an interior narrative addressed to himself combined with conversational mode of second-person pronouns. Gao's and Perec's themes of modern alienation, fictional pronoun "tu," and narrative rhythm marked by short sentences, bring the former closer to the French reader, though contextual differences exist:

Toi, tu continues à gravir les montagnes. Et chaque fois que tu t'approches du sommet, exténué, tu penses que c'est la dernière fois. Arrivé au but, quand ton excitation s'est un peu calmée, tu restes insatisfait. Plus ta fatigue s'efface, plus ton insatisfaction grandit, tu contemples la chaîne de montagnes qui ondule à perte de vue et le désir d'escalader te reprend. Celles que tu as déjà gravies ne présentent plus aucun intérêt, mais tu restes persuadé que derrière elles se cachent d'autres curiosités dont tu ignores encore l'existence. Mais quand tu parviens au sommet, tu ne découvres aucune de ces merveilles, tu ne rencontres que le vent solitaire.

Au fil des jours, tu t'adaptes à ta solitude, gravir les montagnes est devenu une sorte de maladie chronique. Tu sais parfaitement que tu ne trouveras rien, tu n'es poussé que par ton aveuglement et tu ne cesses de grimper. Dans ce processus, bien sûr, tu as besoin de quelques consolations et tu te berces de tes chimères, tu te crées tes propres légendes.<sup>628</sup>

In a critical review about his cooperation with Gao to translate the above part of *Lingshan*, Dutrait confirms Perec's influence on Gao's modernist vision and writing style.<sup>629</sup>

This raises the question of whether, in her English translation, Lee notices these correspondences

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628. Gao, *La Montagne de l'âme*, trans. Noël and Liliane Dutrait, 577.

629. Noël Dutrait, "Traduire Gao Xingjian: le traducteur comme interface de l'interface," in *Le Choix de la Chine d'aujourd'hui: entre la tradition et l'Occident*, ed. Frederic Wang (Paris: Les Indes savants, 2009), 160-161.

and translates them accordingly so as to associate English readers with Gao's French intertextual features. The following passage foregrounds what is conspicuous in her version:

You go on climbing mountains. As you near the peak and are feeling exhausted you always think it is the last time but when the exhilaration of reaching the peak subsides you feel the urge again. This feeling grows as your weariness vanishes and looking at the rising and falling lines of the peaks in the hazy distance your desire to climb mountains resurges. But once you climb a mountain you lose interest in it and invariably think the mountain beyond will have things you haven't encountered. When you eventually get to that peak the wonders you hoped for aren't there, and once again there is just the lonely mountain wind.

After some time, you get used to this loneliness and climbing peaks becomes an obsession. You know you will find nothing but are driven by this blind thought and keep on climbing. However, while doing this you need to have some distraction and as you fabricate stories for yourself, images are born.<sup>630</sup>

Lee chooses long sentences to present the inner thoughts of the protagonist. For example, in the first paragraph, the second sentence is composed of several independent or subordinate clauses somewhat awkwardly put together. By comparison, the original “你却还在爬山，将近到山顶精疲力竭的时候，总想这是最后一次。等你登到山顶片刻的兴奋平息之后，竟又感到还未满足” can be translated as “(you) feel extremely exhausted when you are about to reach the summit, (and) always thinking this is the last time. (However,) the moment when you reach the summit and your excitement calms down, you still feel unsatisfied.”

The original sentences are of more even length with a clear logical relation, indicating their connections to their independent sense groups. However, in Lee's version, these sentences are rearranged together as a different sense group: “as you near the peak and are feeling exhausted you always think it is the last time but when the exhilaration of reaching the peak subsides you feel the urge again.” In this passage, Lee puts a group of independent sentences

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630. Gao, *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee, 435.

together to reflect the state of the character's mind. This kind of narrative structure is similar to stream of consciousness, which prevails in numerous English modernist novels, such as James Joyce's *Ulysses*.<sup>631</sup> It is extensively used by Joyce and other writers to imitate/present the mental state of characters, giving the reader an unmediated access to the human mind, sometimes in a jumbled state and sometimes in sobriety. However, such a structure does not exist in the *Nouveau roman*, except for occasional long sentences. Thus, Lee translates Gao's narrative in terms of the conventions of English modernist novels, typically combining different sentences together without punctuation to present the inner workings of a character's mind. However, by doing this, she deviates from both Gao's original and Dutrait's French translation.

In addition to its extensive use of long sentences as a stream of consciousness style, Lee's translation also differs from Dutrait's in other ways. Dutrait translates Gao's work in the style of the French authors, retaining the traces of Gao's internal meditative monologues based on that of Proust's; Mabel Lee focuses on uncovering the character's mind and its uninterrupted flows in his subconscious. Dutrait's style is rhythmic, conversational, and concise, where Lee's minimizes the conversational language structure and mimics the jumbled state of the character's mind with long sentences.

These differences are characteristic of the translators' approaches to the original, as well as the conditions of their respective literary fields. Where Dutrait mainly sticks to Gao's original

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631. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin Books, 2000.) The novel abounds with such structure mimicking the immediate and continuous flows of the characters' subconscious minds. For example, at the end of Joyce's novel, Molly's subconscious monologue takes up 40 pages without punctuation marks: "Yes because he never did a thing like that before as ask to get his breakfast in bed with with a couple of eggs since the City Arms hotel when he used to be pretending to be laid up with a sick voice doing his highness to make himself interesting to that old faggot Mrs Riordan that [...]," 871.

and renders it according to the *illusio* of the *Nouveau roman* with some modifications to strengthen the effect, Lee rewrites several paragraphs freely. For the former, Dutrait adds “toi” in the beginning, and opts for “et” to link the relevant parts of the sentences to maintain a smooth flow. Lee does not hesitate to omit some parts and add others to create brevity. For example, Lee translates the sentence “这过程之中，你当然需要得到安慰，便生出许多幻想，为自己编造出一些神话” (“During this process, you certainly need comfort, [thereby] generating many fantasies, creating some fairy tales for yourself”) as “However, while doing this you need to have some distraction and as you fabricate stories for yourself, images are born.” She replaces the original word “安慰”(psychological comfort or consolation) with “distraction,” which does not fully represent the narrator’s need while he is in a state of loneliness. The word “distraction” only means that when the narrator suffers from stress, he needs to relax by diverting his attention to something interesting. Thus, this word does not accurately encompass the circumstances in which the narrator goes through. The last part is rewritten, with the phrase “images are born” added. In addition, “generating many fantasies, creating some fairy tales for yourself” is simplified into “you fabricate stories for yourself.” Under such linguistic operation, Gao’s sentence is reduced to a summary. In the French version, the last paragraph is translated as “Dans ce processus, bien sûr, tu as besoin de quelques consolations et tu te berces de tes chimères, tu te crées tes propres légendes.” Dutrait translates the sentence based on Gao’s linguistic particularities, such as choosing “bien sûr” to foreground Gao’s conversational style in the monologue. Thus, Dutrait’s version exhibits a coherent treatment of Perec’s style: The narrative pronoun “tu” and the casual conversational style are integral parts of Perec’s novelistic universe, projecting the characters’ solitude in the face of alienation. Examples such as these show the differences between Lee’s and Dutrait’s treatments of Gao’s text and between their translation

strategies. Their choices are not random, but reflect their efforts, whether consciously or not, to render the Chinese texts according to the literary mode of the target context which they take part.

We can identify this in relation to Duras's novels.

As discussed in Chapter 2, *Lingshan* abounds with examples of Duras's stylistic features, such as internal dialogues between the protagonist and the partner characters he imagines. For instance, Duras often exploits the third-person pronoun "elle/il" as her narrative voice. In Chapter 21 of *Lingshan*, Gao constructs a fictional dialogue between the character himself and the female character he imagined with "you" and "she" to drive away his loneliness:

她说她害怕老鼠，老鼠从楼板上跑过去的声音都让她害怕。她还怕蛇。这山里到处有蛇，她害怕花蛇从梁柱上吊下来，钻进她被子里，她要你紧紧抱住她，她说她害怕孤独。<sup>632</sup>

She says she is afraid of rats, even the noise of the rats that are running on the floor. She is also afraid of snakes. There are lots of them on the mountains. She is afraid of the colored snakes falling down from the beam above and sneaking into her bed. She wants you to hold her tightly. She says she is afraid of loneliness.<sup>633</sup>

In the following sentences, the author's "you" introduces "she says" to respond to the imaginary woman:

你让她说下去。  
她说她不知道怎么像开了话匣子一样，说个没完。  
你说她说得很好。  
她说她真想总也长不大，她说她真想总也长不大，可又想长大，她希望被人爱，希望人都看着她，可又畏惧男人的那种眼光。她觉得男人的眼都挺肮脏，他们看人的时候并不是看人的美貌，看的是别的什么东西。  
你说你也是男人。<sup>634</sup>

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632. Gao, *Lingshan*, 130-131.

633. Translation is mine.

634. Gao, *Lingshan*, 130-131.

You let her continue to speak.

She says she can't help talking without stopping, like a talking box.

You say she talks very well.

She says she truly wants to always remain little, but also wants to grow up, she wants to be loved, (and) hopes people look at her, but (is) afraid of men's eyes. She feels men's eyes are dirty, (when) they look at people not for their beauty, but for other things.

You say you are a man too.<sup>635</sup>

The above passages reveal influence from Marguerite Duras' *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, though there are also notable differences. Both writers opt for the phrases "she says" and "he says," but Duras's language is terse and poetic, whereas Gao follows a smooth conversational style, expressing an internal and pensive mood as if the protagonist were speaking to his inner beings.

Mabel Lee's translation of this passage is as follows:

She says she's afraid of rats, even hearing them running on the floorboards terrifies her. And she is afraid of snakes. There are snakes everywhere on this mountain, she's afraid of spotted snakes slithering down from the rafters and getting into the bed, she wants you to hold her tight, she says she is afraid of the loneliness.<sup>636</sup>

You ask her to go on talking.

She says she can't understand why, it's as if flood gates have opened and she can't stop talking.

You say she is doing very well.

She says she never wants to grow up and yet she also wants to grow up. She wants to be loved, wants everyone to look at her, but she's afraid of men's looks. She thinks men's looks are always salacious. When they look at someone they aren't looking at the person's beauty, they are looking at something else.

You say you're a man.<sup>637</sup>

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635. Translation is mine.

636. Gao, *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee, 126.

637. Gao, *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee, 128.

As noted in Chapter 2, Dutrait's French text has a similar style to that of Duras. However, Mabel Lee translates Gao's conversation into a casual dialogue as though it were happening in everyday life. For example, the contracted form "she's" turns Gao's language register in *Lingshan* into an informal and casual style, even though the language in the original Chinese text is conversational but not informal, echoing Duras' terse and poetic language to a certain degree. Dutrait's French version corresponds to Duras' poetic language, whereas Lee's is more casual. In addition, though Lee's narrative pronoun "she" provides a rhythm to her sentence structure, she also uses the pronoun more than a poetic text would seem to call for, thus making her translation sound somewhat wordy or redundant. Moreover, Lee organises sentences of irregular lengths, a departure from Gao's regular language pattern and more musical rhythm, which changes the poetic features of these sentences and thus defers the influences of Duras' presentations of thoughts and dialogue on Gao's. As in the example, discussed above, of Perec's influence on Gao, Lee transforms Gao's rhythmic sentences into one long stream-of-consciousness sentence, further demonstrating both the traces of English modernist novels on her translation and her departure from Gao's original style.

Lee also changes the word "chatterbox" in Gao's original to another metaphor, "the floodgate." Though both terms refer to the same verbal event, they are inscribed in different language registers. "The floodgate" is hyperbolic than Gao's metaphorical "chatterbox," indicating that Lee does not notice how the nuanced use of language affects its corresponding poetic image. Where "floodgate" evokes an image of an excessive verbal act, "chatterbox" rests on the level of the private verbal act, which in Gao's text is both ethnically embedded and stylistically harmonious.



The above examples show how Lee's English version distances itself from the French stylistic and textual influences present in Gao's novel in terms of word choice, poetic diction, rhythm and purposeful additions. Dutrait's French translation reveals the narrative traits of the *Nouveau roman* writers, even if those traits are not overtly present in the Chinese original. However, Dutrait's translation style does not suit the effects Lee seeks for. The following example shows how Lee and Dutrait treat Gao's Chinese text differently:

还有什么可说的没有？  
你说这一片长满茅草的废墟只山风凌厉，断残的石条上趴满苦药和地衣，一只壁虎从半截石板上爬过。  
说当年晨钟暮鼓香烟缭绕，一千间僧房九白九十九个挂单的和尚，寺庙的住持是一位高僧，圆寂的那天举行了盛大的法会。  
说寺庙里无以计数的香炉全都插上了点燃的信香，数百里方圆香客们闻风而来争相目睹老和尚坐化升天，通往这佛地丛林的大小山道上挤满了赶来朝拜的善男信女。<sup>638</sup>

This excerpt from Chapter 36 is a narration by the character "you" in the style of a story about the past glory of a Buddhist temple and the legend of its master, indicated by its introductory marker "it is said." Dutrait chooses "tu dis" ("you say") throughout the chapter. Though the phrase "tu dis" disrupts the old style of Chinese storytelling, Dutrait's expression heightens the textual association of Gao's novel with the *Nouveau roman*. In contrast, Lee takes a different approach to restore the style of Chinese storytelling, further evidence of her distinctive translational approach:

Can't you talk about anything else?  
You say these ruins overgrown with weeds are assailed by mountain winds moss and lichen cover broken slabs of rock and there's a gecko running on one of them.

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638. Gao, *Lingshan*, 207.

It is said that in those times, the sound of bells at dawn, the boom of drums at dusk and the smoke of incense filled the air and there were a thousand monk dormitories and nine hundred and ninety-nine monks sworn to solitary existence. The monastery was ruled by a venerable monk and on the day he died there was a grand Buddhist gathering.

It is said that incense burned in each of the censers of the monastery, filling a circumference of several hundred *li* with its aroma, so that devotees smelling it in the wind fought to witness the old monk transform as he sat there and rose to heaven. The tracks and paths through this wooded Buddhist territory were crammed with devout men and women hastening to worship.<sup>639</sup>

The passage begins with the narrative pronoun “you,” and the protagonist narrates his stories in a style that imitates the ancient storytelling tradition of Buddhist texts or legends with each paragraph beginning with “shuo” (“It is said”). As each line begins with “shuo,” the solemn Buddhist ritual is presented to the reader as though it were real. Lee’s translation follows a similar style: Introduced by “you,” the story progresses with “It is said” as though the narrator “you” is reliving the past event. This translational strategy indicates, first, that Lee’s approach differs significantly from her French counterpart, with her own distinctive means and style of making the text more suitable to her target audience. The English storytelling style does not need to emphasize the role of the narrator by repeating the reminder “you say.” The most appropriate way for her to present this narrative style is to foreground the phrase “It is said,” and let the reader see that it is “you” retelling the past story for making the present ridiculous, a feature often exploited in modernist fiction.<sup>640</sup> Gao’s adoption of an ancient story and a traditional style of story-telling aims to satirize what appears inauthentic in present historical sites: Only the

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639. Gao, *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee, 205.

640. In “Ithaca” of *Ulysses*, Joyce uses questions and answers to parody the catechisms used in Irish schools for satirical and “distancing” effects. As the title of the chapter suggests, the chapter has the same “Homeric parallels.” See *Ulysses*, 1167.

traditional mode of narration of the ancient Buddhist world through personal narrative can arouse the sense of the old ritual and the old legends in Chinese life.

Given that Lee's translation helps foreground Gao's modernist features, her further effort in this direction is also evident in her version of the unpunctuated long paragraph in Chapter 72, to which Dutrait's translation added some punctuation marks. The long unpunctuated paragraph, an important feature of Gao's experiment in modernist narrative, helps to capture the narrator's breathless internal struggle against the literary trends of contemporary China. Dutrait appears to mitigate this narrative style so as to serve his target readers and the norms of the French literary field. However, Lee translates this paragraph to underscore Gao's modernist features, largely borrowed from his predecessors' stream-of-consciousness novels:

还是不在于语言而在于语言之有无趣味？而他又无非迷醉于用语言来讲述这女人与男人与爱情与情爱与性与生命与死亡与灵魂与肉体之躯之快感与疼痛与人与政治对人之关切与人对政治之躲避与躲不开现实与非现实之想象。<sup>641</sup>

Ou bien, si ce n'est pas dans le langage lui-même, est-ce dans la saveur du langage ? Et pourtant, il n'a fait que s'enivrer dans l'utilisation du langage pour raconter la femme et l'homme, l'amour, la passion et le sexe, la vie et la mort, l'âme et la joie et la souffrance du corps humain dans sa chair, et l'homme dans les relations politiques et la fuite de l'homme devant la politique et la réalité que l'on ne peut fuir et l'imagination hors du réel et laquelle des deux est la plus vraie [...] <sup>642</sup>

Where Dutrait adds punctuation marks before properly introducing Gao's long monologue, Lee appears more straightforward in clothing Gao's text with modernist style than Dutrait, leaving the passage largely unpunctuated:

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641. Gao, *Lingshan*, 472.

642. Gao, *La Montagne de l'âme*, trans. Noël and Liliane Dutrait, 602.

Or is it not in the language but whether the language is interesting? Nevertheless he is intrigued with using language to talk about women about men about love about sex about life about death about the ecstasy and agony of the soul and flesh about people's solicitousness for people and politics about people evading politics about the inability to evade reality about unreal imagination about what is more real [...] <sup>643</sup>

In short, Lee is more interested in bringing Gao's text into an English literary environment than in retaining the intertextual influence of the *Nouveau roman* on that text. By transforming Gao's *Nouveau roman* narrative for the English literary field, Lee relates his fictional narrative to the regimes of the English modern novel, notably stream-of-consciousness fiction, by foregrounding the distinctive features of this literary genre. Lee's translational efforts against the grain of French literary conventions indicate that her English version is designed for a different circle of readers with different literary tastes and a different publication market. This general translational direction enables Lee's English version to fulfill the expectations of the target English literary field.

#### 3.2.2.2. Translating Foreignness through Lexical Choices

According to Lambert's analytic scheme, the choice of lexical items is a basis that constructs larger linguistic units, constituting the "preliminary fact" that foregrounds a literary text's aesthetic contour. Dutrait's French translation of Gao's novel reflects his aesthetic tendency at the lexical level, which is appropriate for his target field's literary norms. Some notable examples are his normalization of Gao's experimenting with adverbial modifiers, and his literal translation of some key culturally-loaded Chinese words when addressing the identity of Chinese ethnic groups. As a result, Dutrait's French version responds well to the Bourdieusian

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643. Gao, *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee, 454.

principle of “resemblance dans la différence;”<sup>644</sup> the lexical items in the French version correspond to the literary requirements established in the target literary field, even though these lexical expressions come from a foreign culture.

Compared to Dutrait’s translation, Lee’s is aimed at the Anglophone market and literary field. Therefore, her approach restructures Gao’s text according to the homological conditions of the target language and cultural milieu. Some key features of Gao’s novel must be adjusted according to the requirements for a Chinese literary work in the Anglophone world, and the lexical items that Lee foregrounds establish an association in the English literary regime with Chineseness. Lee’s text is underscored by her extensive use of transliteration, her effort to translate the ideographic forms of Chinese words, and her normalization of Gao’s experimenting of Chinese adjectival modifiers.

Comparing to Lee’s approach, Dutrait adopts transliteration sparingly, as it often creates foreignness and obscurity, requiring either notes or contextualization of meaning. In general, transliteration is practiced to represent an ethnic cultural identity; inappropriate use of it makes the text ambiguous, mysterious, or exotic. Many British missionaries, sinologists, and writers, such as Oliver Goldsmith and James Legge, adopted transliteration in their works, in order to heighten the sense of China’s foreignness, uniqueness, exoticism, and untranslatedness or untranslatability. Furthermore, transliteration comes close to literal translation, the latter of which Lee often adopts in her work for similar effects. Such extensive use of transliteration and literal translation constitute a legitimate practice that creates Chinese ethnicity and identities in the works of diaspora Chinese writers and, for instance, Chinese American writers. This translated identity has shaped the perception of Chineseness in the literary imagination of the Anglophone

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644. Pierre Bourdieu, *Choses dites* (Paris: Édition de Minuit, 1987), 167.

world, which Wang Guanlin discusses in his study of the hybrid construction of Chinese images in the English literary world.<sup>645</sup> As a sinologist and translator, Lee was trained and immersed in this translational practice, and her translation can be seen as part of this discourse, as shown in the following example:

她们该是走亲友或回娘家的新鲜媳妇，可这里人媳妇专指的是儿子的老婆，要照北方老那样通称已婚的年轻妇女，立刻会招来一顿臭骂。做了老婆的女人又把丈夫叫做老公，你的老公，我老公，这里人有这里人的语调，虽然都是炎黄子孙同文同种。<sup>646</sup>

Both are probably recent brides back seeing relatives and friends, or visiting parents. Here, the word *xifu* means one's own daughter-in-law and using it like rustic Northerners to refer to any young married woman will immediately incur angry abuse. On the other hand, a married woman calls her own husband *laogong*, yet your *laogong* and my *laogong* are both used. People here speak with a unique intonation even though they are descendants of the same legendary emperor and are of the same culture and race.<sup>647</sup>

In Gao's version, the Chinese word “媳妇” (*xifu*) refers to the wife of a son in a family, or young women in general, in Northern China. Lee retains the phonetic form of the word “*xifu*” with the author's explanation in the text: “one's own daughter-in-law,” or “married young woman.” Lee's transliterating of the term appears to suggest its local colour. In addition, in the same paragraph of Lee's English version, “老公” (“*laogong*”), a familiar term of address for someone's husband is rendered in its phonetic form, which could be translated into English as “my old guy” or “my old man.” Although the local Chinese expressions could be translated directly into English, Lee chooses to transliterate them in order to project the uniqueness of the ethnic culture.

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645. Wang Guanlin, *Translation in Diaspora Literatures*, 1-20.

646. Gao, *Lingshan*, 2.

647. Gao, *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee, 2.

Though transliteration may often cause some problem of understanding on part of readers, the above phonetic representations of the familiar terms are reasonably clear in meaning. However, Lee's transliterations are sporadic, and may look either unfamiliar or mysterious to the English reader, as seen in the following three examples:

“可以坐车先到乌伊那个小镇，再沿尤水坐小船逆水而上。”  
“那里有什么？看山水？有寺庙？还是有什么古迹？”你问得似乎漫不经心。  
“那里一切都是原生态的。”  
“有原始森林？”  
“当然，不只是原始森林。”  
“还有野人？”你调笑道。  
他笑了，并不带揶揄，也不像自嘲，倒更刺激了你、你必须弄明白你对面的这位朋友是哪路人物。<sup>648</sup>

“Take the train to Wuyizhen, then go upstream by boat on the You River.”  
“What's there? Scenery? Temples? Historic sites?” you asked, trying to be casual.  
“It's all virgin wilderness.”  
“Ancient forests?”  
“Of course, but not just ancient forests.”  
“What about Wild Men?” you said, joking.  
He laughed without any sarcasm, and didn't seem to be making fun of himself which intrigued you even more. You had to find out more about him.<sup>649</sup>

In her English version, Lee reproduces some words both phonetically and semantically. For example, “尤水” is translated as “You River.” “You” is the phonetic representation of the Chinese word “尤” and “River” is the English equivalent of the Chinese word “水.” This approach is similar to Dutrait's, but Lee also adopts phonetic representation alone in other cases; for instance, “乌伊那个小镇” is rendered as “Wuyizhen,” which, strictly speaking, should be

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648. Gao, *Lingshan*, 3-4.

649. Gao, *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee, 3.

translated as “a small town in Wuyi,” or simply as “Wuyi Town.” However, Lee’s phonetic rendition of the term “Wuyizhen” does not provide the reader with exact information about what “Wuyizhen” is, but the context does indicate that it is a place name. This lack of clarity poses a problem when phonetic representations of words do not have any explanations, notes, or context, and are left as subject to reader guesses, occasionally blurring the cultural implications of certain verbal expressions. For example, Dutrait translates “朱花婆” (“Zhuhuapo”) into French as “femmes au camélia,” an expression known in both China and France, to establish an association between the Chinese and French literary imaginations.<sup>650</sup> By contrast, Lee simply translates it as “Zhuhuapo,” explaining neither what “Zhuhua” is nor why it is used for all the beautiful young women. Her transliteration of the word has no poetic association with a flower’s name nor allusion to Alexandre Dumas fils’ novel *La Dame aux Camélias*, but is adopted only as a common name, which sounds mysterious and unique for the target reader.<sup>651</sup>

Lee’s English version abounds with similar phonetic representations of proper nouns, which blur the denotative and connotative meanings of certain subtle expressions found in Gao’s novel. Such an extreme transliteration can occasionally lead to difficulty comprehending the text. For example, the sentence “在海拔两千五百公尺观察大熊猫的营地，到处在滴水，被褥都是潮湿的”<sup>652</sup> can be rendered literally as “At the Observation Camp of Giant Pandas situated 2500 meters above the sea level, water is dripping everywhere, the bedding is all wet.” Lee’s English version renders this sentence as “In the 2500-metre giant panda observation compound at

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650. Gao, *La Montagne d’ame*, trans. Noël and Liliane Dutrait, 113.

651. See *Lingshan*, 75 and *Soul Mountain*, 76.

652. *Lingshan*, 36.



Haiba, water drips everywhere and my bedding is damp.”<sup>653</sup> 海拔 (the sea level) is phonetically reproduced as a proper noun, “Haiba,” a mistake that may impede the target reader’s comprehension of the complex literary style and layered meanings of the original text.

Lee’s translational approach is also characterized by literal translation, which may be related to the earlier missionary/sinologist/literary strategies discussed above. Her approach has many implications for her work, among which are the established regimes of English translation and of the English literary imagination. Some salient examples are discussed below, to show how these literal translations may work in the English literary environment:

你立刻有了兴致。渡船大概是过来了，歇凉的纷纷挑起担子，只有一位老人还坐在凉亭里。

“老人家，请问这对子——”

“你是问这楹联？”老者纠正道。

“是，老先生，请问这楹联是哪位的手笔？”你问得更加恭敬。<sup>654</sup>

You’re intrigued. The boat is probably about to arrive as the people resting and cooling off have got up and are rushing to shoulder their carrying poles. Only an old man is left sitting in the pavilion.

“Venerable elder, may I ask if these couplets . . .”

“Are you asking about the couplets on the principal columns?” the old man corrects me.

“Yes, venerable master, might I ask who wrote the couplets on the principal columns?” you say with added reverence.<sup>655</sup>

Lee’s translation of Chinese terms of address is rather particular and is reminiscent of Oliver Goldsmith’s translational style: When Lien addresses his English friends, he uses figurative language to express his excessive politeness. This translational style also appears in

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653. *Soul Mountain*, 36.

654. *Lingshan*, 22-23.

655. *Soul Mountain*, 21.

Pearl Buck's works. The Chinese polite address “老人家” has no exact English equivalent, but can be roughly translated as “sir” to show respect. With her rendering of “老人家” as “venerable elder” or “venerable master,” Lee's English has a translational resonance evoking the English popular image of the Chinese as excessively polite and respectful to older people. Lee retains this style throughout her translation; for example, in Chapter 47, the narrator addresses an elderly Taoist monk as “the Venerable Master,” and in Chapter 49, he addresses an elderly folk Taoist as “Venerable elder.”<sup>656</sup> Because the novel is set in contemporary China, such a literal translation appears anachronistic; however, it does reflect Lee's familiarity with English constructions of Chineseness in the popular imagination.

Lee's approach to translation confirms such literal translation as a means of constructing Chineseness for English readers. Even though the language, and characters, may thus seem absurd, ridiculous, exotic, or even barbaric, her lexical choices are convenient ways of demonstrating the characteristics of a foreign other according to established practice, as the following examples show:

众人都纷纷起哄，小街上已经堵满了人，过不去的自行车直掀车铃。  
“可是你们叫唱的哟！”老头儿受了鼓舞，真站起来了。  
“唱一个戴瓜皮帽儿的马猴钻绣房！”<sup>657</sup>

“It's all right, old man, come on, sing us one.” The crowd clamours and the little street becomes jammed with people and bicycles can't get through and are ringing their bells.

“But it's you who have put me up to it!” Egged on by the crowd the old man stands up.

“Sing ‘Horse-Monkey Wearing a Skullcap Steals into the Maiden's Bedroom!’” Someone has picked a title.

The crowd yells bravo and starts clapping.<sup>658</sup>

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656. *Soul Mountain*, 277.

657. *Soul Mountain*, 288.

In the above scene, the narrator sees some people gather around in a small town during a folk Taoist's singing performance. These country folks ask an elderly Taoist to sing a song called “戴瓜皮帽儿的马猴钻绣房,” which Lee translates as “Horse-Monkey Wearing a Skullcap Steals into the Maiden's Bedroom.” What appears problematic is that “马猴” is a Chinese slang phrase for “monkey.” The literal translation of this expression as “horse-monkey” leaves the reader with few ideas as to what kind of creature this is: Is it a giant monkey, or a horselike monkey? Consequently, the very literal translation of the term is subject to the interpretation or imagination of the target reader. The English translation thus attracts the reader's attention by presenting an exotic cultural expression. As such choices recur throughout Lee's work, they can be interpreted as a general feature of her translational style.

While adopting transliteration and literal translation, Lee also attempts to translate the ideographic representations of Chinese expressions, sometimes with modifications. This implies that sticking to the ideographic formation of the words means that the deeper layers of these expressions could not be effectively identified and subsequently fully translated. For example, “月亮汤汤，骑马烧香”<sup>659</sup> is translated as “In moonlight thick as soup / I ride out to burn incense.”<sup>660</sup> In Chinese, “汤” means “soup,” but if used as “汤汤” to describe the moonlight, it means “luminous.” It appears that Lee adopts the ideographic formation of the word and does not count “汤汤” as an expression that combines its poetic quality, “luminous,” and its rhythmic

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658. *Lingshan*, 19.

659. *Lingshan*, 19.

660. *Soul Mountain*, 18.

form, “tang/tang.” By opting for the ideographic form of “汤” (“soup”), Lee weakens the poetic image and rhythm of the folk song, reducing it to a sheer joke, a humorous effect. Lee’s adopting of the ideographic sign in this manner appears similar to Pearl Buck’s use of the Chinese word “月” (“moon”) to indicate a calendar month, which we have discussed in Chapter 2: “three moons” refers to “three months,” but Buck’s word choice is more poetic and more characteristic of ancient Chinese culture.

If Lee’s translation from Chinese to English is relevant to her training and translational aptitude immersed in the regimes of the target language, her translation of certain words or expressions demonstrates her efforts to reconstitute Gao’s style into the homological environment of the target text. This is especially evident when she translates his experimental language as a modernist writer, such as his use of classical vernacular language as an intertext, or his experimenting of adjectival modifiers as long sentences to achieve effects.

Gao often adopts classical vernacular literary language in his novel to narrate his experiences. Though the language style appears outdated, it is evocative of the poetic world of premodern Chinese literature, a world that has nothing to do with the impurity of the modern Chinese language, which he regards as having been polluted both by the Western linguistic analytical system and by Chinese political jargon, especially the tendency of the latter to reduce the language to a propaganda tool. Gao’s linguistic style is also nostalgic and multilayered; in particular, in Chapter 1 of *Lingshn*, his classical vernacular language is reminiscent of such novels as *Xi Youji (The Journey to the West)*, which can arouse the reader’s sense of history when the narrator travels to a town in China’s South. These intertextual clues of language remind readers of similar situations in the classical world and invite them to imagine the writer’s current situation and mood.

In his French version, Dutrait normalizes this deliberately archaic narrative style as a depiction of the travel route and scenes the narrator encounters; nothing is associated with the past, and no intertextual language markers are added to reinforce the sense of historical ambiance in the region or its fictional relevance to the classical fictional world. In her English version, Lee does not highlight the intertextual markers of Gao's narratives, but normalizes the hints of intertextual details, such as conjunctions, nouns, and syntactic structures, by synchronizing them as a linear narrative. The examples already cited in Chapter 2 of Dutrait's translation of these foregrounded features are also of interest here, as they are important part of Gao's modernist narrative in *Lingshan*:

你不是到那种地方去凑那分热闹，在人看人、人挨着人、人挤人的山阳道上，再抛些瓜果皮、汽水瓶子、罐头盒子、面包纸和香烟屁股。这里想必早晚也逃不脱这种盛况。你总算乘那些鲜艳夺目的亭台楼阁尚未修建，赶在记者的照和名人题字之前，你不免暗自庆幸，同时，又有些疑惑。<sup>661</sup>

You haven't come to enjoy yourself in one of those places on the sunny side of a mountain where people congregate just to look at and jostle one another and to add to the litter of melon rind, fruit peel, soft drink bottles, cans, cartons, sandwich wrappings and cigarette butts. Sooner or later this place will also boom but you're here before they put up the gaudy pavilions and terraces, before the reporters come with their cameras and before the celebrities come to put up plaques with their calligraphy. You can't help feeling rather pleased with yourself, and yet you're anxious.<sup>662</sup>

In the English version, “山阳道上” (literally “on the path of the yang[Southern] side of the mountain) is simplified as “the sunny side of a mountain,” “山” is literally rendered as “mountain,” “阳” as “sunny,” which actually means “the yang (Southern) side” in opposition to the “yin” side. The original Chinese noun phrase “道上” (on the road) does not have any

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661. *Lingshan*, 6.

662. *Soul Mountain*, 4-5.

equivalent, but generally is referred to as “one of those places.” In addition, the conjunctions indicating the Chinese classical narrative mode “想必” (most probably) are omitted, and the sentence starts with “Sooner or later this place will also boom.” Dutrait’s French version does not show any feature of Gao’s hybrid text and its function in a modern fictional narrative; nor does Lee’s English version. However, Lee’s is less precise than Dutrait’s, as not only is the important classical language marker “山阳道上” abbreviated along with other places as “in one of those places on the sunny side of a mountain,” but “想必” (most probably) is similarly dismissed as unnecessary. As a result, Lee’s translation eliminates the traces of modernist features in Gao’s language games. It may be useful to note that if the translator could point out Gao’s hybrid language to the reader with a footnote so as to provide a hint about the language games he is playing, the reader would have appreciated the richness of Gao’s text more than simply as a linear narrative.

Gao also experiments with long adjectival modifiers to describe the narrator’s mood and mental reactions to the outside world. Dutrait erases Gao’s experimental traits of the text for a smooth flow, similar to that of the *Nouveau roman*, as does Lee, as seen in the following examples:

你在左边吃一碗豆腐脑，那种细嫩可口作料齐全走街串巷到处叫卖一度绝迹如今又父业子传的豆腐脑[...]<sup>663</sup>

Two food stalls stand at the end of the bridge. In the one on the left you eat a bowl of bean curd, the smooth and tasty kind with all the right ingredients. Hawkers used to sell it in the streets and lanes but it completely disappeared for quite some years and has recently been revived as family enterprises.<sup>664</sup>

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663. *Lingshan*, 8.

664. *Soul Mountain*, 7.

In the Chinese text, Gao's long adjectival phrase modifies the delicious bean curd: “那种细嫩可口作料齐全走街串巷到处叫卖一度绝迹如今又父业子传的豆腐脑” (the kind of tender-delicious and well-seasoned - sold in the street and deep alleys - disappeared before but has passed down from father to son). Lee breaks this passage down into several sentences: “In the one on the left you eat a bowl of bean curd, the smooth and tasty kind with all the right ingredients. Hawkers used to sell it in the streets and lanes but it completely disappeared for quite some years and has recently been revived as family enterprises.” Lee adopts a simple language structure to reconstitute Gao's long sentences according to their sense group, and these sentences thus lack the stylistic force of Gao's eagerness and happiness, his breathless descriptions, when he has the chance to eat his favourite familiar foods. Though the English text is neatly constructed and balanced, Lee transforms this passage into a simple statement of fact with no emotion involved. This structural reorganization does not feature Gao's experimentation with the Chinese language in expressing his nostalgia for home.

The following example similarly demonstrates how Lee, like Dutrait before her, weakens the expressive power of Gao's long adjectival modifiers, reducing his linguistic experimentation to narrative banality:

你就这样茫然漫游，从一个市城到一个城市，从县城到地区首府再到省城，再从另一个省城到另一个地区首府再到一个又一个县城，之后也还再经过某个地区首府又再回到某一个省城。有时，无端的，你突然在一个被城市规划漏划了的或还顾不上规划的或者压根就没打算规划的乃至于纳也纳不进规划的一条小巷子里，见到一幢敞开门的老房子，在门口站住，止不住望着架了竹篙晒着衣裳的天井，似乎只要一一走进去，就会回到你那童年，那些暗淡的记忆就都会复活。<sup>665</sup>

You wander in a daze like this from city to city, county town to district capital then to provincial capital, then from another provincial capital to another district capital, then one county town after another. Afterwards you pass through a certain district capital then

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665. *Lingshan*, 333.

return to a particular provincial capital. Sometimes, in some small lane which city planners had missed, or couldn't be bothered with, or had no intention of doing anything about, or which they couldn't do anything about even if they wanted to, you suddenly see an old house with the door open, and you stop there and to look into the courtyard where clothes are drying on bamboo poles. It is as if you have only to enter and you will return to your childhood and those dim memories will be resurrected.<sup>666</sup>

The Chinese sentence “你突然在一个被城市规划漏划了的或还顾不上规划的或者压根就没打算规划的乃至于纳也纳不进规划的一条小巷子里” may be roughly translated as “you suddenly entered (one) had-been-omitted-by-the-urban-plan-or- had -not- had- any-chance-to-put-into-a-government-plan-or-had- not-had-any-intention- to- do- so -in- the- slightest- so- that- it -had -not -been-put-into-any- city- blueprint lane.” Lee breaks this sentence into several small parts according to their sense groups in order to modify the words the “small lane,” translating it as “in some small lane which city planners had missed, or couldn't be bothered with, or had no intention of doing anything about, or which they couldn't do anything about even if they wanted to.”

As noted in Chapter 2, Gao experiments with language to express his frustration and disappointment over the modernization process that pits urban development against personal space and memory, doing so by imitating an out-of-breath delivery of his frustration in order to reinforce this sentiment. His style appears wordy and bulky, but it is exactly this unusual style that foregrounds his narrative, a feature that distinguishes his work from those of other Chinese writers. Lee imitates Gao's style in her translation by modifying the word “small lane” with several sentences separated by commas. This structure equally looks wordy and bulky, but neither has the de-familiarizing effect of the Chinese text nor accurately reproduces the out-of-breath delivery of the narrator's frustration. The commas between the sentences in the English

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666. *Soul Mountain*, 327.



text weaken, rather than strengthen, the flow of the delivery, making it more like a supposition that highlights the situation of the small lane than a protest. Lee basically fails to grasp the form and function of Gao's language experiments and reduces his efforts to common literary expressions. She minimizes the stylistic significance of the adjectival phrases, and extracts meanings from his rich linguistic expressions.

To summarize, Lee foregrounds her English texts by extensively adopting transliteration, literal translation, and ideographic representations of some Chinese expressions, and also normalizes Gao's layered experiments with language. Her lexical choices are related to her background as a trained sinologist, aiming to represent China's foreignness and unmediated ethnicity, which sometimes appear bizarre and mysterious. Though this approach does transfer certain features of Gao's text to the English reader, some deeper layers of the Chinese language are not fully unpacked and conveyed accordingly. Moreover, while minimizing his experimental (modernist) traits such as long adjectival phrases and textual hybridity, Lee translates Gao's text into a normal English style, integrating it into the regimes of the target language and culture. These two seemingly conflicting aspects of Lee's translation, textual foreignness and normality, constitute the key features of her work, which are typical of English literary translation practices: Both the foreign and familiar embrace differentiation and normalization in the English literary field.

### 3.2.2.3 Culture, Politics, and Stylistic Referentiality

As discussed in Chapter 2, Dutrait occasionally adds or omits certain words either to beautify cultural objects (such as turning a monkey into a lion), modifies sentence structures to suit the narrative function of the French target literary field, and changes some of Gao's

experimental language to serve the same purpose. These changes helped him to integrate Gao's text into the target literary field and satisfy French readers' expectations. Lee takes a different approach from Dutrait, combining transliteration, literal translation, and rewriting in order to foreground certain aspects of Chineseness and literary modernism in Gao's text. This section continues to examine Lee's translational approach at the sentence level, which is mainly related to her additions, omissions, or mistranslations of some key sentences, and the *illusio* from which the translator's tendency toward cultural or political valorization originates.

Gao treats his novel as a personal narrative, as opposed to the grand narrative prevalent in contemporary Chinese literature. Lee's reading, as shown in the preface of her English version of *Lingshan*, is inevitably in collision with Gao's literary values, because she sees in his text the literary figuration of the individual against the overwhelming web of corrosive collectivism. Be that as it may, Gao's writing is overall an aesthetic work: His literary text is both a linguistic art form and a narrative innovation, and his work should be read as such. Lee's reading appears to emphasize *Lingshan's* social and political messages over its literary quality and innovative artistic form. Consequently, the importance of allusive language style and narrative forms in Gao's novel is diluted, ceding to social or political reading of a literary text—through addition, or omission of certain parts of literary texts, the desired reading is achieved. We can identify several key excerpts invested with such a reading in Lee's English version.

In Chapter 4 of the English version of *Lingshan*, Lee translates/rewrites a paragraph about “she,” the female partner “you” imagines and fantasizes during the protagonist's travel to a small town in the South. “She,” the young woman tells the protagonist about her traumatic experience during China's Cultural Revolution, which involves her father and other relatives as follows:

外婆死了，她就再也不扎辫子了，把头发剪了，故意剪得短短的，连红卫兵当时时兴的两把小刷子都扎不起来，为的是抗议。她父亲当时被隔离审查，关在他工作的机关大院里，不让回家。<sup>667</sup>

After her grandmother died, she didn't wear her hair in plaits anymore but in protest cut it short so that it couldn't even put into two bunches which was the style of the Red Guard period. At the time, a neighbor had reported her father and he was locked up in the building where he worked and not allowed to go home.<sup>668</sup>

The underscored words were added by Lee. For comparison, the Chinese version could be translated literally into English as follows:

After her grandmother's death, she didn't have her hair plaited anymore. In protest she intentionally cut her hair so short that she even could not make her hair plaited like small "bunches," which was popular among the Red Guards. At the time, her father, who was separated from her for investigation, was detained in a building he worked in and was not allowed to go home.<sup>669</sup>

During the Cultural Revolution in China, it was common to be subjected to investigation, and to report others who were suspected of "counter-revolutionary" activities. However, the sentence "at the time, a neighbor had reported her father" does not appear in Gao's original text, and the narrative does not provide any hint it should be there. Lee added the sentence on her own, although it does reflect a common occurrence in China at the time the story takes place. It is likely that she made this addition so that English readers would more clearly understand the girl's family situation.

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667. *Lingshan*, 162.

668. *Soul Mountain*, 153.

669. Translation is mine.

Other such interpolations appear throughout Lee's translation, giving the impression that she plays the role not only of translator, but also of interpreter, rewriter, or creator. In many of these cases, she tends to add something more significant in her English version.

In Chapter 28, when the protagonist takes a bus to a village with some farmers, road inspectors with red armbands, from the Highway Management Department, stop the bus for fines because of its suspicious violation of traffic regulations. This incident ignites a conflict between the passengers and the inspectors, because the driver does not want to pay the fines and the officers refuse to let him go. The narrator observes the scene with a degree of detachment:

众人对司机的反感又愈益变成对红袖章的憎恨，全都敲窗子叫喊抗议，戴红袖章的女人才明白她已成为众矢之的，赶紧扯下罚款单，朝司机手里一塞。另一位扬了一下手中的一面小旗，检查车开了过来，他们这才上车，一阵灰尘，扬长而去。<sup>670</sup>

The dislikes for the driver gradually change into hatred of the red armbands, by knocking the windows as protest. Only then does the woman officer with the red band understand she is the target of the protests. She tears off the ticket and quickly thrusts it into the driver's hand. When another man waves his small flag, the van drives over and the inspectors get on it, going away with dust blowing in the air.<sup>671</sup>

Lee's version creates an impressive image of power:

The hostility towards the driver gradually transforms into a hatred for the red armbands. It is only when everyone starts knocking on the windows and shouting their protests that the woman realizes they are targeting her. She quickly tears off the ticket and thrusts into the driver's hand and signs the man with the little flag for inspection van to drive over. Finally, they get in and depart, leaving behind a trail of dust in a show of might.<sup>672</sup>

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670. *Lingshan*, 167.

671. Translation is mine.

672. *Soul Mountain*, 157.

In addition to her inaccurate translations of “dislike” as “hostility,” and “dust in the air” as “a trail of dust,” Lee adds “in a show of might” to her English version, based on her interpretation of the text. This addition illustrates her stance against the power image represented by the government law enforcement officials, an image that for Lee may represent the power structure in China as a whole. Gao does not have anything to say about this, but Lee expresses it clearly in her additional description and its emotional intensity. Moreover, in this sentence, where Gao’s text keeps a degree of detachment by providing a factual description of the scene without resorting to personal emotions, Lee’s text explicitly condemns the traffic officers for abusing their power; their image, by extension, can be associated with the Chinese communist regime in general. Dutrait, in contrast, retains the detachment present in Gao’s account of the event: “L’autre inspecteur agite un petit drapeau. Leur voiture arrive aussitôt, ils montent dedans et disparaissent au loin.”<sup>673</sup> Compared to Lee’s English version, Dutrait’s French version is more like an objective description of the incident as it happens.

The discordance in Lee’s translation is related less to translation choices than to her position, although this is contrary to what she outlines as the principle of her translational choices for her English version of *Lingshan*.<sup>674</sup> She suggests that she takes no position in relation to the book, but translates the messages faithfully. However, what she adds in the version, interpretive or otherwise, reveals her position. In addition to the bus incident discussed above, her translation of Gao’s account of China’s largest hydro project, the Three Gorges Dam, provides another

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673. *La Montagne de l’âme*, 222.

674. Lily Liu, “Interview with Mabel Lee: Translating Nobel Prize Winner Gao Xingjian’s *Soul Mountain*,” *Translation Review* 62, no. 1 (2001).

example of her transformation of Gao's implied criticism in the original into an overt condemnation.

In Chapter 51, the protagonist goes to the Three Gorges Dam, site of one of the largest hydroelectric power projects in the world. Having visited the construction site and its adjacent areas, in which many historical and cultural monuments will be submerged by water once the project is completed, Gao comments on its consequences for Chinese culture and history:

泥沙沉积，河床年复一年越益增高，人还要在三峡出口筑坝。那虚枉的大坝建立起来，连这汉代的古城垣也将没入水底，那么这采集人类远古的记忆又还有什么意？<sup>675</sup>

(As) mud and sand accumulate, the riverbed becomes higher and higher year after year, (but) people still want to build a dam at the outlet of the Three Gorges. When this huge vain dam is completed, even the ancient castle wall of the Han Dynasty will be submerged, so what does it mean to collect the memories of people of the remote past?<sup>676</sup>

In this paragraph, Gao criticizes the tremendous negative impact of China's hydropower project, the Three Gorges Dam, on human culture and ancient civilization. In doing so, he even questions the meaning of his travel as a quest for human spirit, which is on the verge of being lost in the process of modernization and political repression. This narrative style indicates that his comments are made from a personal point of view by drawing a contrast between modernity and the human memories represented by the ancient historical site. He considers the hydropower project “虚枉” (vain/vanity) because it will destroy human history and culture. Gao's Chinese text follows a pace of prosaic rhythm marked by phrases such as “年复一年” (year after year) and “越益增高” (will become higher and higher). This rhythm is created alongside the use of

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675. *Lingshan*, 316.

676. Translation is mine.

classical vocabulary, such as “越益” (more and more), “也将” (will also), “古城垣” (ancient castle wall), and “虚枉” (vain/vanity). Lee does not take this important aspect into consideration and minimizes the musicality of the sentence structure in favour of its surface layer. She also, again, makes a statement with her translation by adding particular words, such as translating “虚枉” (vain/vanity) as “ridiculous:”

The silt accumulates and the riverbed gets higher each year and this is why they want to build a dam at the end of the Three Gorges. When this ridiculous dam is built, even this ancient Han Dynasty wall will be submerged. So what meaning would there be in collecting the memories of people of remote antiquity?<sup>677</sup>

Lee’s English version does not fully present prosaic rhythm between the sentences, as Gao’s text does. Instead, her translation is characterized by her forcibly putting sentences together based on their sense groups rather than a regular syntactic structure, as seen in the first three sentences of the above passages. She breaks down the last three sentences according to regular English structure rules, but once again ignores the rhythm of the Chinese prose. Thus, where Gao’s text is marked by its poetic presentation of ideas with foregrounded classical language features, Lee’s sentence structures lack Gao’s classical allusions and musical rhythm, and instead become an incoherent assembly of the literal translation (as in the first paragraph) and free translation (in the rest). In addition, Lee’s translation of some key words is problematic in another way: Gao adopts the word “虚枉” (vanity/vain) to describe China’s biggest hydropower project at the cost of human history, indicating that building a large dam to challenge nature is an example of human vanity that would eventually destroy the very culture and history it is meant to uphold. Lee substitutes “ridiculous” for “vain,” referencing her own

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677. *Soul Mountain*, 308.

attitude about this colossal hydroelectric project. In doing so, she attempts to make the text conform to her opinion and the target reader's perceived ideas about the project, which has solicited wide criticism for the environmental damage it has caused. Here once again, Lee takes on the role of critic over translator, providing a loud and clear message where Gao's criticism is more or less implicit and is concerned more with the fate of China's cultural heritage in the face of a modern hydroelectric project. Dutrait's version, in contrast to Lee's, retains more of the flavor of the original text:

La vase s'accumule et le lit du fleuve s'élève d'année en année. De plus, on projette de construire un barrage à la sortie des gorges. Quand cette grande digue vaniteuse sera édifiée, la muraille de l'ancienne ville des Han sera submergée par les eaux. Quel sens aura alors la collecte des reliques du passé ?<sup>678</sup>

Dutrait's French version is rhythmic and marked by such set phrases as "d'année en année," though his allusion to the features of classic vernacular Chinese is not identifiable. In addition, he translates "虚枉" (vain) as "cette grande digue vaniteuse," which conveys what is implied in Gao's text.

Moreover, Lee's role as a rewriter can be further identified in her translation of passages with specific historical connections. In Chapter 32, for instance, the female character "she," relates her experience to "you" when she was eight years old in her home city during the era of the Cultural Revolution:

她说她妈妈也死了，病死在“五七”干校里，她去农村的时候就带着病。那时候，整个城市都战备疏散，说是苏联毛子要打来了。奥，她说，她也逃过难，火车站月台上布满广岗哨，不光带红领章的军人，还有同样穿军装戴着红袖标的民兵。站台上押过一队唱歌的劳改犯，破衣烂社，象一群乞丐，有老头儿也有老太太，每人背一

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678. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 417.



个铺盖卷，手里拿着瓷缸子和饭碗，一律大声高唱：“老老实实，低头认罪，抗拒改造，死路一条。”<sup>679</sup>

She says her mom is dead, died in the May 7th Cadre School, (and) she had been ill when she went to the countryside. At the time, the whole city was mobilized for war, ready to evacuate, (and) it said that the Soviet bandits were coming to attack. Oh, she says, she also escaped, (and) the station platform was full of sentries, not only the soldiers with red badges on their collars, but also militiamen in the same uniforms with red armbands. A team of singing detainees of labour camps passed under the escort to the platform, (who) were dressed in rags and tatters, all like beggars (;), there were old men and also old women, each carrying a bed roll in their back and an enamel mug and a rice bowl in their hands, all singing: “Be honest, confess your crimes, refuse to be reformed, it is an impasse (or dead end).”<sup>680</sup>

The last sentence of Gao’s Chinese passage includes a long description of a group of detainees in labour camps and of their miserable lives on a railway station platform, also providing a detailed historical context of the later period of the Cultural Revolution. What foregrounds this paragraph is its long length and its conversational style, characterized by the uninterrupted delivery of verbal utterances. As the long sentence features small parts of dangling sentences, only loosely connected by syntactic logic, the main subjects shift from detainees to old men and old women, and the verbs also shift from one action to another without connection markers. Gao seems to be attempting to imitate the narrator’s (“she”) way of presenting the past as if it were a present event.

Lee’s translation, quoted below, takes a different approach:

She says her mother is dead too, that she died from illness in the May Seventh Cadre School, when she went to the countryside, she was already ill. At the time the whole city had been deployed for war, they said the hairy Russians were about to attack. Yes, she says, she too has been a refugee. The platform at the station was lined with sentries, not just military men with red badges on their collars but also civilian militias dressed in the same army uniforms with red armbands. A group of criminals to be reformed through

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679. *Lingshan*, 183.

680. Translation is mine.

labour were marched under escort onto the platform. They were wearing tattered clothing and looked like a band of beggars. Old men and old women, each with a bed roll on their back and an enamel mug and a rice bowl in their hands, were singing together loudly, “Sincerely, with heads bowed, we acknowledge our crimes. To resist reform can only bring death.”<sup>681</sup>

In the first paragraph, Lee translates the three short Chinese sentences into one English sentence: “She says her mother is dead too, that she died from illness in the May Seventh Cadre School, when she went to the countryside, she was already ill.” Here, Lee follows the Chinese language structure of Gao’s text so much that it sounds awkward in English, as the original Chinese is translated according to sense groups rather than the logical relationship of the sentence structures. In Chinese, Gao’s sentence structure is plausible. However, if it is translated into English without any changes, the structure will become clumsy. It could be translated as “she says her mother is dead too, that she died from illness in the May Seventh Cadre School. When she went to the countryside, she was already ill.” In the second paragraph starting with “at the time,” she translates “整个城市都战备疏散，说是苏联毛子要打来了” as “the whole city had been deployed for war, they said the hairy Russians were about to attack.” The English version simplifies “战备疏散” (prepared for war, ready to evacuate) into “deployed for war,” indicating that “ready to evacuate” is untranslated or omitted. In addition, “苏联毛子” rendered as “the hairy Russian” is not precise because “苏联” refers to the Soviet Union, not Russia, and the slang expression “毛子” is a derogatory term for the Russians, or brutes; the two-word phrase cannot be separated, though the single word “毛” (wool, thread, hair) does partially encompass the meaning “hairy.” Lee’s English version is a literal translation, though it could be translated more exactly as “the Soviet brutes” or simply “the Soviets.” Dutrait renders it as “les

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681. *Soul Mountain*, 182-183.

Soviétiques.”<sup>682</sup> Though he does not express the pejorative connotation of “毛子,” his rendition is closer to Gao’s Chinese phrase.

The most problematic elements of this passage appear in the final part of Lee’s text. First, “劳改犯” is translated as “criminals to be reformed,” which is not accurate, because during the Cultural Revolution, “劳改犯” referred to those who committed minor criminal offenses.

Normally they were sent to a labour camp for a shorter period, a maximum of two years, to be reformed through labour. Dutrait translates the phrase into French as “un groupe de détenus des camps de travail” (“a group of detainees of the labor camps”), which more closely reflects the political context of China.<sup>683</sup> In addition, the song those detainees sing is problematically translated, since the song is a slogan adopted by the law department of the Chinese government to intimidate those who are considered criminals or suspects to comply or cooperate with the court or a prison facility. In Lee’s English version, the intended addressees are the “criminals,” and the government law enforcer is the “addresser.” “抗拒改造，死路一条” (“Resist reform, it is only a dead road [end]”) is translated as “To resist reform can only bring death,” an imprecise and overly literal translation that does not convey the deeper layer of the meaning “死路一条.” In Dutrait’s French version, it is rendered as “C’est l’impasse,”<sup>684</sup> which is more accurate. Lee’s translation depends on an incorrect understanding of the language and an inaccurate perception of the political context, so that she exaggerates the degree of political intimidation that is present in the Chinese source text. Furthermore, in the last part of the text, Lee does not stick to Gao’s

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682. *La Montagne de l’âme*, 256.

683. *La Montagne de l’âme*, 256.

684. See note 679.

original sentence structures of the conversational style, but instead restructures it according to the smooth flow of the English sentences by breaking down longer sentences into shorter ones. This change brings Gao closer to the English reader than her first paragraph cited above. However, it also subtly alters Gao's literary style characterized by the rhythm and tempo of its delivery.

Where Gao's Chinese text is an uninterrupted flow of an informal conversation style with little attention paid to the logic relation between the sentences, Lee's is a more formal description of an event, revealing no trace of the narrator's immediate presence.

The above examples demonstrate how Lee attempts to achieve her desired effects rather than that of Gao's. For instance, in the first paragraph, Lee attempts to present Gao's language style by copying his Chinese sentence structure into English, but the results are often awkward. In the last paragraph, her English version naturalizes Gao's style into English norms; smooth as it is, it does not foreground the feature of Gao's style. Moreover, in the English version, Lee simplifies Gao's text by cutting some key expressions or structures. There are some instances of inaccurate rendering of specific terms or expressions, such as translating "Soviets" as "Russians," "minor offenders" as "criminals to be reformed," and "it is a dead end" as "bring you death." In these examples, Lee either translates the surface meanings of the original Chinese or exaggerates the cruelty of government law enforcement, or even both.

Moreover, Lee's additions to and omissions from the original reflect cultural and political interpretations or engagement of the translator, changes that affect the perception of Gao's work. The above examples illustrate some general features of Lee's English translation, though these examples are certainly not exhaustive. These features, more significantly, raise the questions of whether Lee's translation has certain pattern(s), or whether she is responding to the regimes of the target literary field, or if she creates her own translational style. At least at the sentence level,

Lee's translation shows her efforts to preserve Gao's style while also expressing concern for the reading habits of her target audience. The following example illustrates how she reduces the friction between English and Chinese:

比较显眼的再就是照相馆了，挂满了搔首弄姿或戏装打扮的姑娘，都是当地有名有姓的美女，不像电影招贴画上的那些明星远在天边。这地方还真出美人，一个个如花似玉，托着香腮，做着眉眼，都经过摄影师精心摆布，只是着的颜色红的过红，绿的太绿。<sup>685</sup>

The photographer's shop is eye-catching: photos of women in coquettish poses and wearing awful dresses are on display. They are all local beauties and not movie poster film stars from some place at the other end of the earth. This place really produces good looking women, every one of them is stunning. They have their beautiful cheeks cupped in their hands and their eyes have alluring looks. They've been carefully coached by the photographer but they are garishly dressed.<sup>686</sup>

The above is an extract from Chapter 3, in which the narrator describes Wuyi Town on his way to search for Lingshan. In this passage, Gao adopts classical vernacular language to describe the beautiful women in the old town, such as “搔首弄姿” (making “coquettish poses”), “戏装打扮” (dress up in costumes), “做着眉眼” (painted alluring eyebrows), or “如花似玉” (as beautiful as flower and jade). Lee translates the first sentence, “挂满了搔首弄姿或戏装打扮的姑娘” (the photo shop is full of photos of young women, who make coquettish poses and dress up in costumes), as “photos of women in coquettish poses and wearing awful dresses.” The latter phrase is a more negative comment about the women's style of dress than is present in the original, since Gao does not say this openly although he may be hinting at it. In contrast, Dutrait's French version is closer to Gao's original text, though he does make some slight

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685. *Lingshan*, 18.

686. *Soul Mountain*, 17.

modifications: “Les devantures des photographes sont aussi très voyantes. Elles sont pleines de photos de jeunes filles qui font les coquettes ou qui sont costumées et fardées.”<sup>687</sup> Dutrait’s French version is more accurate than Lee’s summary comment “wearing awful dresses.”

In the next few sentences, Lee simplifies some descriptive expressions while reproducing others in full; for example, “这地方还真出美人，一个个如花似玉，托着香腮，做着眉眼” (this place certainly produces beautiful women, who are like flowers or jade, and who have their beautiful cheeks cupped in their hands and have painted their eyebrows alluringly) is translated as “This place really produces good looking women, every one of them is stunning. They have their beautiful cheeks cupped in their hands and their eyes have alluring looks.” The phrase “一个个如花似玉” (as beautiful as flowers and jade) is simplified into “every one of them is stunning,” which reduces the literary quality of Gao’s original into a mere exclamation. This is tantamount to what Antoine Berman calls “qualitative impoverishment,”<sup>688</sup> in which the key literary features of the source text are altered, and consequently lost, in the target text. Lee’s translation approach thus extracts meaning from the living language, and weakens the basic functions of literature for other purposes. Dutrait translates this sentence as “Et ce lieu a vraiment vu naître des beautés plus belles que le jade.”<sup>689</sup> Though he does not translate the full sentence, perhaps because the comparison of women to flowers would be considered banal by French readers, he does render the original image of the beautiful women as “more beautiful than jade,” which retains part of Gao’s original metaphor and preserves the literary quality of the sentence.

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687. *La Montagne de l’âme*, 32.

688. Antoine Berman, “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign,” in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 288.

689. *La Montagne de l’âme*, 32.

A more serious problem occurs at the end of the paragraph cited above, as “都经过摄影师精心摆布，只是着的颜色红的过红，绿的太绿” (they are arranged by the photographer, (but) only the colors [of the painted eyebrows]—reds are too red, greens are too green) implies that the girls are not presentable because of the colours of their eyebrows. Lee simplifies this sentence into “They’ve been carefully coached by the photographer but they are garishly dressed.” As in the example cited earlier, Lee reduces the allusive quality of Gao’s classical poetic language to a subjective comment. Dutrait translates this sentence into French as “beautés plus belles que le jade, les joues parfumées, les sourcils peints selon l’arrangement minutieux du photographe, avec des rouges trop rouges et des verts trop verts.”<sup>690</sup>

The above example demonstrates Lee’s tendency to minimize the literary quality of Gao’s original text and to regard its rich literary allusions as unnecessary burdens that block the flow of the English version. Her overlooking of the nuances in the original reduce the novel to a popular easy read or to a source of information from a foreign text.

To summarize, in *Soul Mountain*, Lee adds and/or omits important sentences or expressions, leaving them either untranslated or substantially summarized (impoverished), even more so by adding details that are not present in the original. As a result, in her English version, Lee sometimes acts as a commentator, who radically turns the nuanced implicit descriptions into open criticism or even condemnation. This is relevant to Lee’s stance on or preconception of various political or historical events in China, which sometimes overrides the desire for reproducing Gao’s textual messages. Her translational intrusion also leads her to simplify more complex and nuanced sentences by neglecting their literary qualities for the sake of the flow of her text, reducing that text to an easy English version. Some of her translation choices suggest a

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690. *La Montagne de l’âme*, 32.

failure to grasp certain key features of the Chinese language, particularly when translating Chinese expressions, allusions, or poetic sentences. In attempting to maintain particular sentence structures based on their meanings in the Chinese text, she often translates those sentences according to their sense groups, rather than their deep structure, so that the living language of the original becomes merely a dead copy in the target language. In a word, Lee appears to struggle between presenting Gao's text according to its own style and restructuring and thus impoverishing it according to the needs of the target reading environment. This dilemma persists at other levels throughout Lee's translation project.

#### 3.2.2.4. Poetic Form, Rhythm, and Musicality

As discussed in Chapter 2, Dutrait's French translation retains much of Gao's musical language and poetic imagery with considerable creativity and linguistic and cultural accuracy. The importance of these rhythmic features lies in Gao's efforts to present an underrepresented world of minority cultures in contemporary China, as local ballads, folklore, and legends contain essential elements inseparable from those cultures. Dutrait's French version allows his readers to comprehend and appreciate the aesthetic quality and cultural meanings of the texts in Gao's novel.

How does Lee convey those ethnic poetic qualities and local images found in the popular forms of literature in the minority districts? Has she successfully translated the main aesthetic features of the local literature while sticking to the translation regimes of the English literary field? This section discusses the aesthetic features of Lee's English translation and how these translated traits construct the ethnicities of the Chinese minority communities present in



*Lingshan*. This part specifically studies how Lee translates the poetic features of the local ballads, such as their rhythm and popular language usages.

In *Lingshan*, the ballad constitutes one of the most important sources of Chinese culture. Translating ballads into a foreign language is a challenge, as these poems contain densely loaded local cultural signifiers that resist translation. Creative methods are necessary to maintain the “local color” and cultural connotations. For instance, many fictional narratives emerge in Chapter 3 of *Lingshan*, serving as bridges linking the narrator’s spiritual exploration to the other parts of his life history. Gao quotes a folk ballad to show the differences between that culture and mainstream cultures such as Confucianism or Communism, and to valorize the subaltern culture in modern China, as the following examples illustrate:

月亮汤汤，骑马烧香，烧死罗大姐，气死豆三娘，三娘摘豆，豆角空，嫁济公，济公矮，嫁螃蟹，螃蟹过沟，踩着泥鳅，泥鳅告状，告着和尚，和尚念经，念着观音，观音撒尿，撒着小鬼，把得肚子疼，请个财神来跳神，跳神跳不成，白费我二百文。<sup>691</sup>

Mabel Lee’s English version radically changes the popular ballad into a poetic form more familiar to her readers:

In moonlight thick as soup  
I ride out to burn incense  
For Luo Dajie who burnt to death  
For Dou Sanniang who died in a rage  
Sanniang picked beans  
But the pods were empty  
She married Master Ji  
But Master Ji was short  
So she married a crab  
The crab crossed a ditch

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691. *Lingshan*, 20.

Trod on an eel  
The eel complained  
It complained to a monk  
The monk said a prayer  
A prayer to Ganyin  
So Ganyin pissed  
The piss hit my son  
His belly hurt  
So I got an exorcist to dance  
The dance didn't work  
But still cost heaps of money.<sup>692</sup>

The original Chinese version is a popular ballad in rural China characterized by its humorous rhymes and local imagery. Dutrait's French translation creatively reproduces these local particularities, while Lee's English version features systematic linguistic and prosodic changes. These modifications reformulate the original ballad form and rhyme scheme so radically that Lee's version becomes a "re-creation" in a new poetic license. If Dutrait's version bears some resonance with Gao's Chinese text, Lee's English version deviates radically from that of Gao's, which is marked first by its shift from a popular ballad form, a relatively old form of singable poetry, to a modern form of poetry. It is also characterized by its overwhelming use of transliteration, resulting in the loss of some key cultural connotations.

In Gao's novel, the ballads are a popular humorous poetic form that can be easily sung or read aloud. Lee minimizes the genre register and turns the ballads into modern free verse, which features unrhymed stanzas and little, if any, punctuation. The incompatibility of the two forms is evident because the popular ballad is a traditional oral poetic form passed down from generation to generation, generally about historical figures and legends, while modern free verse attempts to break from traditional poetic license and experiment with novel expressions. By adopting the free

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692. *Soul Mountain*, 18-19.

verse form, Lee's translation shifts the literary genre from popular culture to a more formal modern poetic register, thus dismantling the expected correspondence between the source and target texts, updating and changing an age-old cultural form to an experimental and avant-garde literary style.<sup>693</sup>

Lee's genre shift is related to her earlier translation of Yang Lian's modernist poetry anthologies in the early 1990s, some portions of which exploit China's ancient cultural allusions and refashion them in a newer poetic form. Although Lee adopts a similar strategy in her translation of Gao's ballads, there is a fundamental difference between Gao's and Yang's poetic forms. Yang appropriates ethnic Chinese cultural allusions to create a modern text in order to resist the prevailing modernity of contemporary China.<sup>694</sup> In *Lingshan*, Gao cites the ballad as a living example of the vivacity of the cultures he discusses, in order to identify and valorize these cultures and their poetry. By forcibly updating Gao's ballad into a modern form, Lee turns the ethnic ballads into the realm of modernist poetics, rather than evidence against the corrosive effects of cultural dominance in contemporary China.

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693. The experimental use of punctuation marks or the lack thereof is a constituent part of literary modernism. Some notable examples appear in both fiction and poetry. In James Joyce's *Ulysses*, for instance, Molly's monologue takes up 40 pages with only one full stop at the end of the last chapter. Many of the poems appearing in Guillaume Apollinaire's anthology *Alcools* do not have punctuation marks, including his most famous poem, "Le Pont Mirabeau." Other French modernist poets, including Pierre Reverdy, Tristan Tzara, André Breton, and Louis Aragon invent new modernist poetic languages by experimenting with not using punctuation marks in some of their poems. See "L'éclatement modern," *Anthologie de la Poesie francaise*, ed. Jean Orizet (Paris: Larousse, 2010), 431-560. Many modern/contemporary American poems have used this technique as well, such as E.E. Cummings' "Me Up At Does" and others; William Carlos Williams' "This Is Just to Say;" Donald Hall's "Without;" and Lawrence Ferlinghetti's "Two Scavengers in a Truck, Two Beautiful People in a Mercedes," and others.

694. Mabel Lee's translation of Yang Lian's poetry anthologies, *Masks & Crocodile: A Contemporary Chinese Poet and His Poetry* (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1990); *Dead in Exile: A Collection of Poems and Masks & Crocodile: A Collection of Poems* (Kingston ACT: Tiananmen Publications, 1990).

In addition to shifting genre from a popular folk song to modern poetic form, Lee continues to adopt transliteration strategies and phonetic representations that overwhelm the culturally coded messages and rhythms of the original. This approach, if adopted without proper textual and linguistic annotations, can blur readings of a literary work and the layered meanings present in that work.

As noted earlier, Lee opts for translating the ideographic forms of some Chinese words or expressions in lieu of their deeper meanings or connotations. For instance, her translation of the combined words “汤汤” could be regarded as a mistranslation in relation to this ballad’s textual context, because “汤汤” in the ballad describes the smooth flow of the river water under the bright moonlight, but Lee renders it as “soup” according its ideographic form. However, this inappropriate translation does appear to create, if coincidentally, a humorous effect that the ballad embodies. The next few stanzas contain many phonetic representations of some proper nouns without any footnotes. For example, the legendary figures “罗大姐” and “豆三娘” are rendered simply according to their Chinese pronunciations as “Luo Dajie” and “Dou Sanliang,” as the translator transcribes the corresponding sounds into English without paying any attention to their local connotations. “大姐” (Elder sister) refers to any (un)married woman who is older than a young man, but is also a term of respect addressing to a woman who is older (sometimes younger) than a man. In addition, Lee’s translation of “豆三娘” (“Lady Small Bean”) as “Dou Sanliang,” a phonetic representation, does not convey the humorous use of the name in the local culture. In contrast, Dutrait’s French translation as “Grand- soeur Luo” and “demoiselle petit pois”<sup>695</sup> are more expressive and humorous. By simply rendering the words as “Luo Dajie,” or

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695. *La Montagne de l’âme*, 32.

“Dou Sanliang,” Lee does not fully translate the connotations of folk culture in rural China. In addition, the Chan Buddhist monk Ji Gong and the Buddhist goddess Guanyin are translated fully or partially as, respectively, “Master Ji” and “Guanyin.” If readers are not familiar with Chinese Buddhist culture, they may not understand these references without footnotes.

Although she focuses heavily on the phonetic or ideographic forms of the words, Lee does pay attention to the Chinese form of palindrome by repeating the last word of a previous ballad line, creating a poetic form that shows one echoing the other in the ballad chant: “She married Master Ji / But Master Ji was short / So she married a crab / The crab crossed a ditch.”

In brief, Lee attempts to translate the ballad as a free verse poem without punctuation markers, and in doing so transgresses the original ballad genre, making the latter into a modern representation of the popular culture in the receiving language. In addition, Lee’s excessive use of phonetic representation when translating culturally loaded words or phrases shows how her particular choices dominate her translational performance, impeding to some extent the readers’ understanding or appreciation of the deeper layers of linguistic and cultural meanings in Chinese ethnic cultures, which can only articulate themselves in their own terms. Furthermore, her mistranslation of the phrase “月亮汤汤” as “In moonlight thick as soup” helps to ironically build a humorous ambiance in its own right. Generally, although the ballad is humorous and its Buddhist icons and folk customs retain traces of the local culture and its ethnicities in Lee’s translation, some vital folk cultural particulars, as well as much of the humorous poetic cadence and rhythm, are still lacking. This is largely due to the difficulties of maintaining linguistic and cultural clarity and proper poetic form in the translation of an ethnic cultural identity that is meaningful in the context of modern/contemporary China.

The above is a key example of how a foreign text constructs ethnic Chinese cultural images in terms of linguistic particulars, poetic forms, and cultural connotations in a popular ballad in a meaningful context for a fictional narrative. This narrative construction heavily relies on the choice of words, sentence structure, poetic forms, and rhythms, through which ethnic cultural identities can be formulated and strengthened.

Many chapters of *Lingshan* deal with ethnic stories and songs, as the narrator focuses on these details in his search for the meanings of life during his extended journey. Some of these narrative forms, such as mythology, adventures, and romances, are extensively promoted in the remote regions of China's Southwest, serving as prisms through which Gao visualizes what lies ahead of his quest for meaningful exploration and overcoming his existential impasse. Thus, translating these narrative details from one culture to another helps the target reader understand why these ethnic narrations are important to the local culture, and their ramifications for other cultures.

In *Lingshan*, Gao contrasts the vivid cultures his narrator encounters on his spiritual quest to the repressive mainstream culture with poems and folk songs. An important concern in the translation of the novel is how the translator transfers these unique poetic features, coded with ethnic identity, into other languages and cultures. We examine this issue in our example below:

牛啊牛啊，	Ox oh ox,
你生在水，	Born in still waters,
长在沙滩，	Growing up on sandy banks,
跟妈涉水，	You cross rivers with your mother,
随爸爬山，	You climb mountains with your father,
同蚂作争祭鼓，	Fight the locusts for the sacrificial drum,
同螳螂抢祭筒，	Fight the praying mantis for the sacrificial pipes,

去三坡打仗，	Go to battle at Three Slopes,
冲杀七冲湾，	Charge to attack at Seven Flats Bay,
你打胜蚂炸，	Defeat the locusts,
杀死螳螂，	Slay the praying mantis,
抢得长筒，	Snatch the long pipe,
夺得大鼓，	Steal the big drum,
拿长筒祭妈，	The long pipe is a sacrifice to your mother,
拿大鼓祭爸。	The big drum is a sacrifice to your father,
牛呀牛呀，	Ox oh ox,
你背四旋银，	Bearing on your back four platters of silver,
你驮四旋金，	Bearing on your back four platters of gold,
你跟妈去，	You follow your mother,
你随爸行，	You follow your father,
进到黑洞，	To enter the black cave,
去踩鼓门，	To tread the drum door,
你跟妈守山拗，	You guard mountain passes with your mother,
你跟爸看门问，	You guard village gates with your father,
不让恶鬼把人害，	To stop fierce demons harming people,
不许邪魔进宗房，	To stop evil spirits entering ancestral tombs,
让妈千年安静，	So your mother will have peace for a thousand years,
让爸百辈温暖。 <sup>696</sup>	So your father will have warmth for a hundred generations. <sup>697</sup>

The passage quoted above is a folk song from a Miao Village, where a minority Miao ethnic population lives in China's remote regions. The song shares certain poetic features with other examples of ethnic folk songs, such as a singable rhythm, a simple language structure, and rich details of its creators' ethnicity and faith in this world and beyond. The song is sung before a

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696. *Lingshan*, 238-239.

697. *Soul Mountain*, 237-238.

water buffalo is slaughtered for a sacrificial ceremony. This “牛” (water buffalo), an indispensable animal for the local villagers for plowing rice fields, is considered as a member of the family. Through the story, the local people’s faith and moral values are represented in music and poetry.

The narrative describes the life, labour, and adventures of a water buffalo with gravitas, humour, and emotion. The poetic features in this song also treat the animal as though it were human, mirroring the people’s emotional world as the sacrifice approaches. Thus, the simple rhyme scheme and poetic stanzas are designed to represent the simplicity of life, family loyalty, and everlasting love in this world and beyond. Though there is no regular rhyme pattern in the song, its musicality is achieved through its head rhymes and end rhyme, either with repetition of certain nouns or verbs in the beginning, or at the end of the verse lines.

The folk song is divided roughly into two sections separated by “牛呀牛呀” (Buffalo, Buffalo). The first stanza adopts end rhymes in the second verse line and the fourth with “水” (“shui”), the third line matches the fifth line with “滩” (“tan”) “山” (“shan”). The verse lines also contain rhyming words; for example, “生在” (“sheng zai”) in the second line and “长在” (“zhang zai”) in the third line echo each other, both in sound and in meaning (“born” and “grow up,” respectively). An example of head rhymes and repetition can be identified in the sixth and seventh lines, in which “同” (“tong”) appears at the beginning of the respective verse line matched by the regular number of words, including nouns and verbs. In the second stanza, the repetition of “你” (“ni/you”) creates an effect of musical harmony, projecting the peace of mind of the buffalo (human) and showing its family loyalty and love for their dead mother and father after the sacrifice is done. In brief, this song’s key poetic features are achieved mainly through the elaborate arrangements of different rhymes, matched by the repetition of verbs and nouns.



These poetic devices help to create effects of humour, harmony, and peace, realized as a natural course and rhythmic flow honouring the death of the animal and the lasting faith of the people as its death evokes family love and ancestral traditions.

In her English translation, Lee preserves the musicality of the Chinese source passage with rhymes. At the beginning of the first stanza, she translates the Chinese exclamatory verse line “牛啊牛啊” (“buffalo oh buffalo”) as “Ox oh ox,” which closely follows the rime and word order of the original text. However, a water buffalo as a domesticated animal evokes a highly favourable image in Chinese cultures because of its hard work, and even sacrifice, for humans. Lee translates “water buffalo” as “ox,” which has different connotative meanings in English, associated with stubbornness or strength. Thus, Lee’s English equivalent is not as culturally relevant for the ethnic communities Gao describes, such as the Miao minority.

In the first stanza, Lee relies heavily on head rhymes and end rhymes to foreground the poem’s smooth and singable quality, matched with her regular patterns of verbs and nouns in some verse lines to create a poetic rhythm. In the second and third verse lines, “waters” and “banks” followed by “You cross rivers with your mother / You climb mountains with your father” flows rhythmically. However, in the Chinese verse lines, “妈” (“mom”) and “爸” (“dad”) are informal and conversational, whereas Lee’s words are not. For the sake of rhyme, Lee opts for less conversational words; in the sixth and seventh lines, she chooses head rhyme words that resonate with the previous rhythmic lines. In the next lines, she adopts present-tense verbs (with the implied pronoun “you”) to create a rhythm: “go,” “charge,” “defeat,” “slay,” “snatch,” and “steal.” Though these words themselves do not have the same poetic values as rhymes, they do produce rhythm by describing the buffalo’s series of actions against the fierce insects, building up tension for the battle while also evoking familiar humour.

The second stanza chooses a similar structure to accentuate its musicality: “bearing,” “you,” “to,” and “so” alternate in the song lines to form the rhyme pattern bbccddeeff. Although such a rhyme scheme does not match any standard English poetic schemes, it is meant to give the text a musical quality. However, the irregular rhyme scheme is not as harmoniously matched with the previous stanza, which has more rhythmic diversity than the second one.

Lee’s translation gives this folk song a different rhythm and musical feel than its Chinese original. The Chinese version features irregular head rhymes and end rhymes, strengthened by the regular use of similar words at the beginning of a verse line. These features generate rhythm and harmony by repeating the pronoun “ni” (“you”) to emphasize the buffalo’s role in the narrator’s mind or memory, figured as the people in the community. Lee’s English version does not follow the original song’s rhymes, but creates a different kind of rhythm by taking up either end rhymes or head rhymes supplemented by some dynamic action verbs. In the second stanza, Lee differs significantly from Gao in several ways, most notably by highlighting the regular poetic pattern bbccddeeff to create the musical effect of the song. Though this restitution has its own values, it weakens the emotional emphasis on “ni” (“you”) in the chant to give prominence to some concrete actions.

Lee’s mistranslation of the “牛” (“water buffalo”) as “ox” displays an insensitivity to the cultural connotations of water buffalo to the people and thus fails to capture their emotional investment. As a result, the cultural signifier becomes something unrelated to the local imagination, which represents the buffalo as one of their own by giving it human qualities and faith and making it a reflection of the human world.

A comparison of Lee’s English translation to Dutrait’s French version can help to underscore the idiosyncrasies of her interpretation. Dutrait’s translation displays several

significant features that Lee's English version does not convey, especially because he correctly translates the Chinese “牛” and creates a more distinct poetic structure and rhythm, making the Miao ethnic song both a piece of poetry and an example of popular music:

Buffle, buffle,  
dans l'eau calme, tu es né  
sur la grève, tu as grandi  
dans les eaux, ta mère tu as suivie  
sur les monts, ton père tu as suivi  
le tambour de sacrifice à la sauterelle tu as disputé,  
le bambou de sacrifice à la mante religieuse tu as disputé,  
sur trois pentes tu t'es battu,  
dans sept anses tu as combattu  
la sauterelle tu as vaincue,  
la mante religieuse tu as tuée,  
le bambou tu as coupé,  
le gros tambour tu as saisi,  
avec le bambou, à ta mère tu as sacrifié,  
avec le tambour, à ton père tu as sacrifié.  
Buffle, buffle,  
tu portes quatre paniers d'argent  
et quatre d'or en même temps,  
avec ta mère, tu vas  
avec ton père, tu vas  
dans la grotte, tu entres  
la porte du tambour, tu vas fouler,  
avec ta mère, les vallées tu surveilles  
avec ton père, la porte du hameau tu veilles  
pour empêcher de nuire les mauvais esprits,  
pour interdire aux démons d'entrer dans la maison des ancêtres,  
pour que mille ans ta mère soit tranquille,  
pour que cent générations ton père soit serein.<sup>698</sup>

Dutrait translates Chinese water buffalo “牛” as “buffle,” short for “buffle d'eau.” In addition, he restructures the Chinese song according to a poetic rhythm by inverting the original structure to create an intensive musical quality inherent to poetry. The first two lines of Dutrait's

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698. *La Montagne de l'âme*, 327-328.

version, “dans l’eau calme, tu es né / sur la grève, tu as grandi,” thus have a more discernable rhythm than those in Lee’s version, “Born in still waters / Growing up on sandy banks.” Lee’s English text appears too flat to reflect the folk song’s rhythm and poetic structure, whereas Dutrait’s re-creates the Chinese text with various poetic devices to achieve both musicality and poetic elegance.

In summary, the examples above demonstrate Lee’s approach to representing or creating a rhythmic flow in her English translation. In her English version of the ballad, she adopts many Chinese expressions phonetically without footnotes, creating degrees of confusion. She further translates the forms of certain words without addressing the deeper layers of meaning. Moreover, her restitution of the folk ballad into a modernist/avant-garde form misrepresents the song as it appears in Gao’s text as a modern literary invention rather than a traditional ballad. She thus represents Chinese ethnic culture and literature in a form that echoes existing approaches in the field of Chinese Studies and in English literary writing to constructing Chineseness with transliteration and ideographic forms. Consequently, Gao’s Chinese text is represented as a modern poetic creation, subjecting its Chineseness to various other interpretations rather than as an ethnically embedded folk culture. In the final example discussed above, Lee does not distinguish the cultural significance of the water buffalo by translating it as an ox, an image that is alien to the local ethnic culture, though her English translation does have its own distinctive rhythm and flow.

Lee’s interlingual practice suggests that her approach to Gao’s original Chinese text is strongly shaped by her professional training and experience. However, she does still make creative and effective choices in her translation that help to bring the text closer to English

readers. For example, Lee's recreation of the English rhythm and use of onomatopoeic words in rendering Gao's literary text heighten the literary expressivity and musicality of *Soul Mountain*.

### 3.2.2.5 Foreignness and Familiarity: Poetics and Politics

What does *Lingshan*'s translation in the target literary field suggest? As shown from the previous sections, though Lee's translation entails tension, compromise, creation, and mistranslation, the translation and publication of *Lingshan* (*Soul Mountain*) have satisfied the homological conditions of the British/American literary field, constituting "ressemblance dans la difference." We can observe these homological conditions from aesthetic and political point of views.

The *illusio* of *Soul Mountain* defines Gao's novel in the target literary field. In Lee's English translation, the overwhelming transliteration, literal translation, and ideographic representation of Chinese words indicate that the translator attempts to create the Chinese other according to the popular imagination established over time. In particular, the aesthetic traits of nineteenth-century literary translations, pseudotranslations, or sinologist translation were consolidated to respond to regimes for constructing Chineseness in the English (mainly British/American) literary field. These translational traits are gradually coded as authentic and timeless. In a certain sense, such *illusio* ("foreignness") has been filtered into the target reader's consciousness so much that it has become familiar.

*Soul Mountain*'s aesthetic traits also imply that Lee attempts to translate *Lingshan* into a concrete narrative of modernist fiction. To achieve this goal, Lee conducts many translational operations, including changing the ballad form from traditional to modern, or reconstructing sentences to delineate the character's mental movement. However, while Lee's translation does

highlight *Lingshan*'s modernist traits, she weakens, or misrepresents other stylistic or cultural allusions, thus lessening the effect of the original text's foreignness or heightening its exoticism in the target language and culture.

The translational *illusio* of *Soul Mountain* also creates strong political resonances. By adopting addition, omission, or simplification in her translation, Lee either makes her own political statements, or facilitates the narrative flow in English in *Soul Mountain*. In both such cases, Gao's stylistic features and layered subtexts are denied or dismissed in favor of establishing a familiar narrative in the English literary field. Thus, Lee's political statements through aesthetic choices respond to relevant dominant literary and sociopolitical discourses of the target milieu.

As identified in *Soul Mountain*, Lee's construction of translated Chineseness draws on existing discourses within the British/American literary field to figure a cultural other. This figuration has various ramifications, the most important of which is Gao's popular image as a dissident modernist writer. This designation relegates him to the genre of "misery" fiction about the traumatic experiences of some Chinese during the Cultural Revolution, directing his personal narrative against the mainstream Chinese Communist literary narrative. Thus, as the critic Eva Kneissl points out, Gao's winning of the Nobel Prize is associated with the international popularity of other writers in this genre, such as Jung Chang, Anchee Min, and Ha Jin.<sup>699</sup> Kneissl does seem to overstate the totalizing political terms of Gao's novel, especially when comparing the English translation with the French responses to *Lingshan* before the Nobel win; French reviews of the novel generally do not read it exclusively as a work of political fiction. However,

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699. Eva Kneissl, "Chinese Fiction in English Translation," *Logos* 4, no. 18 (2007): 204-205.

Kneissl's critical statement is partly grounded in the reception of Gao's novel in the Anglophone world, and some key features of Lee's English translation/interpretation also justify this categorization.

The textual and paratextual features of the first Australian English version of Gao's *Lingshan* indicate that Lee reads it in her "introduction" as a work that valorizes individualism against collectivism, against which his aesthetic exploration is placed as secondary, if not irrelevant. The pre-Nobel Prize conditions of the translation and publication of Gao's work mirrored the cultural politics and market for an English translation of a Chinese language literary work in Australia. Like Britain and America, Australia also treated Chinese literature as social and political documents. Furthermore, some Chinese literary works were subject to exoticization in the target reading environment, as the paratextual promotional materials in the first impression of *Soul Mountain* show. Lee's English version provides text materials for these aspects of the novel's reception, though her insistence on Gao's modernist exploration is also present. However, Gao's Nobel win adds another reading aspect to Gao's novel/Lee's translation in the Anglophone world, treating *Soul Mountain* as world literature with significant symbolic capital.

Lee's English version was produced in a different literary and translational environment than Dutrait's French version. Dutrait produced his translation in collaboration with Gao, in order to fulfill the expectations of the French literary regime for Chinese literature, including the essential components of *Lingshan*: Gao's experimenting with fictional narrative pronouns analogous to the *Nouveau roman*, his quest for selfhood in the face of modern alienation and political repression, and his valorization of underrepresented minority Chinese cultures against the dominant mainstream Confucian/Communist culture. These themes and traits are translated in French in such a manner that Gao's modernist novelistic style is foregrounded in line with

those of Butor, Perec, and Duras. Thus, reference points are established to accommodate the French reader linguistically and culturally, though Dutrait also creates space for the target reader to read the otherness in Gao's novel, such as his word-for-word translations of certain Chinese expressions.

Dutrait's French translation of Gao's work is in contrast with Lee's first English version of *Soul Mountain* published in Australia. Though both Dutrait and Lee adopt similar translational strategies, such as literal translation and restitution of certain lexical or syntactic structures to maintain the flow of the text, Lee overwhelms the target readers with her excessive transliteration, literal translation, and rewriting with the aim of constructing an otherness commensurable with the English literary field, emphasizing Gao's political voice and inventing, projecting, or emphasizing parts of his modernist style.

Compared to the Australian edition, the American edition of *Lingshan* published after Gao won the Nobel Prize emphasizes *Soul Mountain*'s universal appeal in the international literary field. Meanwhile, the second edition of *Soul Mountain* in Australia shifts its focus from the political and exotic aspects of Gao's work to Australia's contribution to the international canonization of this novel, though the main body of the English text does not change.

In short, Mabel Lee's translation of *Soul Mountain* demonstrates how *Lingshan* has undergone a different translation and reading appropriately commensurable to its target cultural market and policy. Though the first edition of *Soul Mountain* attempts to appropriate the positive French reviews to impress the target reader for its symbolic value, *Soul Mountain* did not become popular in the English cultural market until Gao was awarded the Nobel Prize, an indicator of



universally-accepted cultural capital.<sup>700</sup> The Australian and American editions of the novel all show that such literary capital is accepted not without contestation, given how different the reviews from each country are. Each English-speaking country tries to exploit *Soul Mountain*'s symbolic capital. However, the question remains: What does their literary appropriation aim at?

The following section discusses the reception of Gao's novel in the English-speaking world in order to determine whether their assessments confirm, supplement, or contradict our analysis of Lee's English translation from the perspectives of translation habitus, literary field regimes, symbolic capital, and *illusio*. This study further identifies the process of how Gao's work is received, canonized, or problematized in the English literary field, which offers the vista of social and cultural spaces in the target culture for an English translation of a Chinese Nobel-winning writer's work. It is compared to Gao's reception in France in order to shed light on the different logic of cultural capital accumulation through translation and their competition in the international literary field for more dominance in terms of symbolic and, to some extent, economic capital.

### 3.3.0 The Reviews of *Soul Mountain* in the Anglophone World

*Soul Mountain*'s publication in Australia complicated the reception of Gao's novel in the target English literary field. In some Australian critics' eyes, Mabel Lee's English version of *Lingshan* has brought Gao into the limelight of the international literary field, and has also brought attention to Australia's contributions to the literary world by translating a Chinese work for international readers. Meanwhile, the international symbolic capital—mainly the Nobel Prize—

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700. See Chapter 2 of Julia Lovell's *The Politics of Cultural Capital: China's Quest for a Nobel Prize in Literature*.

given to Gao's work is exploited by the US and Britain, which are considered the major competing literary centers with France. These English-speaking countries' contribution to Gao's international reputation is also crucial. Thus, this section examines the reception of Gao's *Soul Mountain* in these countries as reflected in major newspapers, professional journals, literary reviews, TV interviews and other critical reports and commentaries. The purpose of this discussion is not mainly to determine which English-speaking country plays a bigger role in further promoting Gao's literary reputation and canonization, but to identify the logic and mechanism of how each country has received and responded to the novel so as to redefine the effect and significance of symbolic power according to their own agendas.

There is no unified acceptance of Gao's universal appeal in the English literary field; English-speaking countries try to seek evidence of this appeal by appropriating Gao's symbolic capital to either prove the universal value of their national literature (as in Australia), to show that its literary field promotes the same universal literary values as the Nobel Prize (as in the US), or contest the validity of Gao's works as the Nobel oeuvre (as in the UK). This inevitably provokes the following questions: How was Gao's novel received in the Australian literary field before it won the Nobel Prize, and how does this reception contrast to that which followed the award? Why does the Australian literary field promote Gao's international literary reputation? How do the responses of the American and British literary fields differ from that of Australia, and what do these differences imply? Thus, a differentiated analysis of the major literary reviews and journals in these countries can provide information about Gao's novel in translation and its reception, which can demonstrate the novel's significance in the English-speaking world.

Furthermore, this discussion focuses on English readers' responses to Gao's novel in English translation and the novel's pertinence to the English literary field, particularly how Gao's

novel meets the expectations of the target readers as a masterpiece of international importance in relation to Chinese literature. These responses can be identified in readers' and critics' reviews of *Soul Mountain* with reference to Chinese literature and English literature. Such key reception issues as the features of Lee's English translation, the roles of the publishers, and sales trends are also significant to this discussion.

As Gimeno has suggested in her thesis, the French and Spanish literary fields are distinct from their Anglophone and German counterparts in terms of reviewing and canonizing literary work. Whereas the former use journals, newspapers, and radio talks to review literary works, guide readers, and promote reception, the Anglophone countries tend to restrict literary criticism to specialized literary journals.<sup>701</sup> However, Gimeno's observation is partial, because the Anglophone literary field also promotes literary works in both popular journals and specialized academic publications. Both mainstream journals and academic publications can be utilized to observe the reception trends, and valorization, of literary works in the English literary and cultural systems, and data from these journals, conferences, radio talks, TV interviews and academic publications can either support, supplement, or problematize our discussion of Gao's writing in general and *Lingshan* in particular.

For the purposes of this study, the timeframe of publications on Chinese literature and its reception is restricted to the general period between 2000, when *Soul Mountain* was published in English translation and when Gao won the Nobel Prize three months later, and 2002. However, certain key critical articles that were published later are also included. The period of 2000-02 is reasonable because during this time, Gao and his work were receiving significant critical and

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701. Pascale Gimeno, "Étude sur une oeuvre chinoise: *La Montagne de l'âme* de Gao Xingjian," MA thesis, U of Provence, 1997, 80.

popular attention. Thus, from this timeframe, we can observe the reception conditions of Gao's work in various media categorized according to their importance in the reception of *Lingshan*, Chinese literature and the Nobel Prize for Literature as well as the relevance of *Soul Mountain* to the English literary field, covering such matters as translation, publication, and sales figures in English-speaking countries. Australia was the first country to publish *Soul Mountain* in English before Gao's winning of the Nobel Prize, while the US and UK each produced many editions and reviews of the novel.

### 3.3.1 Translating and Canonizing *Soul Mountain* in Australia

Gao's image as a modernist writer underwent a significant change after he won the Nobel Prize, as the pre-Nobel reception of Gao's *Soul Mountain* in Australia demonstrates. Gao's work must be situated in the context of not only modern/contemporary Chinese literature, but also global literature in general and the Australian literary field in particular. Before he received the Nobel Prize, a limited number of literary reviews of *Soul Mountain* were published in Australia's major journals, such as *The Courier Mail* and *The Age*; two of the most important of these reviews were those of Simon Patton and Linda Jaivin. Where Patton positions *Lingshan* in the context of contemporary Chinese literature and its global significance, Linda Jaivin reads the novel negatively from the angles of orientalism and feminism. These and other critical articles reflect the early reception of Gao's novel, and contemporary Chinese literature as a whole, in the Australian literary field.

In "From China with Gusto," published by *The Courier Mail* on August 12, 2000,<sup>702</sup> Simon Patton, a specialist in Chinese Studies, discusses Gao's novel within the context of

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702. Simon Patton, "From China with Gusto," *The Courier Mail*, August 12, 2000.

Chinese diaspora writers in English-speaking countries, such as Jung Chang, Hong Ying, Lulu Wang, and Ha Jin. For Patton, these Chinese diaspora writers created a new literary genre by drawing on their personal experiences as inspiration for their accounts of the Cultural Revolution and its traumatic effects. Their novels were welcomed by English readers. However, Patton also wonders if the popularity of these authors, especially Jung Chang, have caused other contemporary Chinese writers and their works to be overlooked in Australia. Those diaspora Chinese writers who wrote in English often lack the sophistication of using English as a mother tongue, and their works appeared “predictably conventional.” Ha Jin’s award-winning novel *Waiting* is a case in point. Though the novel won the US National Book Award for Fiction in 1999, it was chosen not only for its literary merits, but also for, in Patton’s opinion, “the way they reinforce a politically desirable image of China.”<sup>703</sup> A significant number of works by Chinese authors, written in or translated into English, were selected and published for their “‘dissident’ value.”

However, Gao’s *Soul Mountain*, Patton notes, is “a welcome respite from the life-story regime,” because Gao loves French literature and writes literature for his own pleasure.<sup>704</sup> His novel draws from his own life, sexual fantasies, and soliloquies on the meanings of life. Despite its apparent looseness in narrative and structure, the novel appears coherent by its “linguistic energy and exuberant story-telling.”<sup>705</sup> Meanwhile, Patton also points out some flaws in the narrative: Generally speaking, *Soul Mountain* reads beautifully, but in some places it “wobbles.”

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703. Patton, “From China with Gusto.”

704. See note 704.

705. Patton, “From China with Gusto.”

He also briefly mentions Mabel Lee's contribution to the narrative style and use of language in the English translation.<sup>706</sup>

Linda Jaivin's "Chinese Water Torture," published on *The Age's* website, refutes Patton by problematizing Gao's representation of women and Chinese ethnic cultures in his novel.<sup>707</sup> Jaivin argues that Gao depicts women as objects of desire, sometimes with disdain, contempt, and even hatred. She contextualizes China from a feminist perspective with her extensive reading of Chinese literature in the 1980s, and dismisses such representations as "derriere-guard," like "Chinese water torture."<sup>708</sup> Moreover, Jaivin regards Gao's depiction of Chinese ethnic culture as a kind of "deja-vu" in the Western construction of Chineseness, and ultimately does not recommend *Soul Mountain* to her Australian readers.

The above reviews of *Soul Mountain* are examples of the limited, and polarizing, reception of the novel prior to the Nobel Prize announcement. After Gao won the Nobel Prize, more in-depth literary reviews and commentaries were published, focusing on Gao's literary significance in relation to Chinese literature, Australian literature, and the importance of translation. These reviews praise Lee's translation for promoting Australia's national cultural power in the international literary field. The reviews, which include reports, feature articles, interviews in important literary journals, newspapers, and websites, demonstrate how Gao's *Soul Mountain* was read and canonized in Australia. Jaivin's negative review did not seem to affect the positive reviews of his works in general or *Soul Mountain* in particular. Why is Gao's *Lingshan* so important to Australia? How does Mabel Lee's translation meet the logic and

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706. Patton, "From China with Gusto."

707. Linda Jaivin, "Chinese Water Torture," *The Age*, last modified August 14, 2000, <http://www.theage.com.au/books/20000814/A3040-2000Aug14.htm>.

708. Linda Jaivin, "Chinese Water Torture."

mechanism of canonizing a Chinese work in the Australian literary field? What does Gao's role as a modernist writer mean to the Australian literary field? These questions are relevant to our study of how *Lingshan* is translated, read, and appropriated in the English literary field.

In "A Long and Winding Road," a book review that appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on October 28, 2000,<sup>709</sup> Peter Pierce briefly reviews the background of Gao's writing of *Soul Mountain* and its general storyline. He calls attention to the Australian contribution to Gao's Nobel Prize win by citing Mabel Lee's translation, which took thirteen years to complete and is the only English version available in the world. Pierce intentionally links Lee's translation with Gao's Nobel Prize: "this month, not long after its English publication (only in Australia), Gao won the Nobel Prize for Literature."<sup>710</sup> He points out that though Gao's novel is a fictional narrative of his spiritual journey in China's remote regions, his novel also depicts the violent, cruel, and barren realities of post-Cultural Revolution China. Pierce claims that Gao's *Soul Mountain* is a conventional novel, combining "a picaresque series of adventures on the road" with the portrayal of the character's interior world.<sup>711</sup>

Nicholas Jose's comprehensive article on Chinese literature in translation in the West situates Gao's works in the history of Chinese literature, Australia's translation culture in the global literary competition. His review is a testimony to Gao's importance to China and Australia. The article, "At Play with Words," appeared in the journal *The Australian* on December 13, 2001, shortly after Gao won the Nobel Prize.<sup>712</sup> Though it is a general review of

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709. Peter Pierce, "A Long and Winding Road," *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 28, 2000.

710. Pierce, "A Long and Winding Road."

711. Pierce, "A Long and Winding Road."

712. Nicolas Jose, "At Play with Words," *The Australian*, December 13, 2000.

Gao's works, some parts of it related to Gao's role in the field of contemporary Chinese literature in the West, and Australia's contribution to the reception of Chinese literature deserve a special mention.

A well-known writer and scholar of Chinese Studies in Australia, Jose is well positioned to address writing and translation, among other issues in Chinese literature. The first question he asks is whether China and Chinese literature have been accurately translated in the West. For Jose, although Chinese literature has been translated into English for centuries, Chinese literature is still largely "inaccessible"<sup>713</sup> and China's real voice has not been heard. This is particularly true with regard to Chinese diaspora writing in English, starting from Nien Cheng and culminating with Jung Cheng's *Wild Swans*. Their accounts of China's traumatic history have been regarded as a "goldmine" for Western publishers;<sup>714</sup> however, Jose argues that these writings are not from China, and that mainland Chinese writers' works have not received the reputation in the West that they deserve. He also notes that English translations of Chinese literature have been poorly received, because of such factors as translation costs, the denials of promotional and cultural events and readers' "distrust" for translation. Jose stresses that even though translation is subtly affected by the cultural politics of America, Australia, and other English-speaking countries, Chinese literary works need to be properly translated.

According to Jose's historical overview of translating China in the West, the Chinese language is set apart as the other of Western languages, and in the modern context, this otherness denies Chinese intertextual connection with the network of the West. Jose insists that an Australian approach to the emphasis on "Alter/Asians" as joining and breaking presupposes the

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713. Jose, "At Play with Words."

714. Jose, "At Play with Words."



complex relation of translation in Australia that dismantles the conceptual category of “us” and “them.”<sup>715</sup> This Australian cultural orientation has shaped translation practices for Chinese literature. For example, the Chinese writers Bei Dao and Gao Xingjian are internationally recognized thanks to such Australian translators as Bonnie S. McDougall, Geremie Barme and Mabel Lee. Jose claims that without Mabel Lee’s efforts to translate his novel into English, Gao could not have achieved “universalism.”<sup>716</sup>

Jose praises Lee’s English translation for its treatment of Gao’s “unorthodox, many-voiced imagination,” and notes that her efforts to translate and publish it in eight years have shown the typical Australian approach that resists the influences of New York and London in favor of an engagement between China and Australia as “margin speaks to margin.”<sup>717</sup> He considers both China and Australia as allies on the margins against the hegemonic British/American literary center. The Nobel Prize thus valorizes not only Gao as an author and as a representative of Chinese literature, but the Australian approach to translation as an activity of integrity, independence, and free expression. Thus, Jose concludes that unlike America, which “demonizes” China, Australia keeps its independence for “full translation” and “the best protocol in our intercommunal relations.”<sup>718</sup>

Although his review discusses the position of Chinese literature, as exemplified by Gao, on the global literary stage, Jose focuses on Australia’s active promotion of Chinese literature

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715. Jose, “At Play with Words.”

716. Jose, “At Play with Words.”

717. Jose, “At Play with Words.”

718. Jose, “At Play with Words.”

through translation, a strenuous effort against British/American dominance in the world literary scene. It is in this respect that Gao's novel is relevant to Australia and the world.

Jose's review provides an example of the Australian literary field's responses in relation to contemporary Chinese literature in the global context. As a focus of the study, Gao's novel also demonstrates the reception of conditions and translation politics in the target milieu. After the initial responses to Gao's winning of the Nobel Prize, Australian media, literary reviews, and translation associations began to pay greater attention to the role of Australia in Gao's achievements, as seen in critical reviews published in major journals, newspapers, and websites. These reviews not only reflect the appropriation of Gao's reputation as a Nobel laureate to promote Australia's own political and cultural agendas, but also how his symbolical capital is transformed into economic capital in terms of the market value and sales volumes of *Soul Mountain* in Australia and the world. For these reviewers, Australia's canonization of Gao's work and its concomitant appropriation of the resulting cultural capital are closely related to the Australian translator's effort.

In his feature article "Voices out of the Void," published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on April 21, 2001,<sup>719</sup> Simon Patton discusses contemporary Chinese literature in the context of China's opening to the outside world by introducing two contemporary Chinese writers, Yu Jian and Mo Yan, who attended the Sydney Writers' Festival. Patton cites Yu Jian and Mo Yan as examples of the new vitality and literary significance of contemporary Chinese literature. He insists that as Australians are "devouring" Jung Chang's *Wild Swan* and other similar semi/autobiographical novels about the trauma of the Cultural Revolution (which he does dismiss as "often written by mediocre writers"), they have virtually neglected the achievements of post-

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719. Simon Patton, "Voices out of the Void," *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 21, 2001.

Mao China since the 1980s, during which the Nobel laureate Gao Xingjian emerged.<sup>720</sup> These works can serve as instances of the renaissance of Chinese literature, which has undergone a radical change since Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping initiated reforms, allowing writers to search for new methods to express themselves without significant political commitment, as sometimes even highly experimental modes of artistic expressions are tolerated. In this context, Yu Jian and Mo Yan have come to distinguish themselves in China's literary landscape. In the conclusion, Patton does not fail to mention the essential role Australian translators played in bringing new Chinese literature to the world. Like Jose, Patton lauds the achievements of such writers as Mo Yan and Gao Xingjian while downplaying English works by Chinese diaspora writers because of their limited ability to write in English. Gao's achievement is presented in contrast to the diaspora writers largely due to the Australian translator's efforts, underscoring the relevance of Australia to Gao's recognition as a contemporary Chinese writer.

For Patton, Jose and other Australian trans/writers, they are proud that Australian translators bring Chinese contemporary literature into visibility in the international literary field and market. Bei Dao and Gao Xingjian are the two great examples, which outshine those Chinese diaspora writers, who write in English about their traumatic experiences in China. However, their claims are also pretentious in that in the English-speaking world, including Australia, those diaspora writers have received excellent reception, even Patton admits that Gao's *Soul Mountain* was published in the time when Australian readers were "devouring" the works by those Chinese diaspora writers. This implies that the positive Australian reception of their works actually would promote *Soul Mountain*'s publication and reception in Australia.

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720. Patton, "Voices out of the Void."

In “Just Between You and He,” published in *The Australian* on November 23, 2002,<sup>721</sup> Sally Blakeney emphasizes the political significance of Gao’s writing by stating that though labeled as “China’s Solzhenitsyn,” he stands out among other Chinese writers for his refusal to be an instrument for the people or for political causes, and for his valorization of writing as a mode for individual existence. It is through arts and French culture that Gao, along with Beckett and Ionesco, has his own individual voice, in a society in which “ideology silences.”<sup>722</sup> Blakeney also adds that Mabel Lee’s English translation has contributed significantly to making the novel accessible to English readers.

In addition to reviews of Gao’s *Soul Mountain* in relation to contemporary Chinese literature in the world context and especially in Australia, Australian journals and newspapers have given extensive coverage to Mabel Lee’s role as a translator in bringing Gao’s *Lingshan* to the English world, who further inspires other Australian translators to let the world hear Australia’s voice.

In “Glebe Connection: The Nobel Climb of a Literary Mountain,” published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on October 14, 2000,<sup>723</sup> Catherine Keenan gives a brief account of Lee’s translation in relation to the publishing market in Australia. In the article, Lee reveals that her translation of Gao’s novel was “a labor of love.”<sup>724</sup> The successful publication of the novel in Australia was attributed to the recommendation of Rod Morrison, an editor at HarperCollins,

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721. Sally Blakeney, “Just between You and He,” *The Australian*, November 23, 2002.

722. Blakeney, “Just between You and He.”

723. Catherine Keenan, “Glebe Connection: The Nobel Climb of a Literary Mountain,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 14, 2000.

724. Keenan, “Glebe Connection: The Nobel Climb of a Literary Mountain.”

though Morrison also admitted that there was a certain worry about the novel's "size and "relative obscurity."<sup>725</sup> At the end of her article, Keenan mentions that Gao's novel was a "best-seller in France" and most of the 4000-5000 copies of the first edition in Australia were sold before the Nobel announcement.<sup>726</sup> The British and American copyrights to the novel were expected to sell for a good price at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October 2000.

In "The Third Degree," published in *The Australian* on November 8, 2000,<sup>727</sup> James Jeffrey interviewed Mabel Lee about her friendship with Gao, her translation process, and the impact of the Nobel Prize on her as a translator. Lee stated that she was attracted to *Lingshan* because of the beauty of Gao's literary language and her agreement with many of Gao's philosophical views of human life and the world. She admitted that the most difficult part of the translation process was to render the same style of Gao's novel into English, and she needed many dictionaries to do so. The Nobel Prize changed her life as much as it did Gao's, even though her translation was completed well before he won the award.

Sharon Verghis' feature article "A Boundary Writer Climbs the Mountain," published on May 15, 2001, in the *Sydney Morning Herald*,<sup>728</sup> speaks highly of Lee's successful translation and publication of *Soul Mountain* and reminds that literary translation is still undervalued in Australia. She stresses that Lee's translation is significant in terms of its market value, its promotion of Australian culture in the world, and its role in raising national awareness of the importance of translation. The success of Lee's translation is evident in its achievement in

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725. Keenan, "Glebe Connection: The Nobel Climb of a Literary Mountain."

726. Keenan, "Glebe Connection: The Nobel Climb of a Literary Mountain."

727. James Jeffrey, "The Third Degree," *The Australian*, November 8, 2000.

728. Sharon Verghis, "A Boundary Writer Climbs the Mountain," *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 15, 2001.

bringing Gao's work to international attention. In addition, since Gao's Nobel win, for only three months more than 85,000 copies were sold in the US and 35,000 copies in Australia, in contrast to 300 copies of the original Chinese version sold in Australia and New Zealand in October 2000. In addition, Lee's 40%-60% deal with Gao has provided her with greater financial benefit than any other Australian translator. More significantly, Lee's translation also promotes the productive work of Australian translators, and Australian culture in general. However, in the same article, Mabel Lee comments that Australia has failed to tap its multicultural resources to encourage different voices in the Asia-Pacific region, largely due to "an Anglocentric bias in local publishing."<sup>729</sup>

When Lee's success sparked a debate on the importance of translators' work in Australia, Deborah Hope published a lengthy article, featuring the debate, in *The Australian* on January 13, 2001.<sup>730</sup> Hope insists that Australia has a serious problem with missing the opportunity to "act as a literary trading post for the region," as literary translation is undervalued in universities, discouraged by publishers, and receives little financial support. The heart of the debate is "whether literary translations can be regarded as new works."<sup>731</sup> For this issue, the Australia Council cut its funding program for translators in 2000 and rejected translations as new works. The Society of Authors has used Lee as a case against the Australia Council's cut to the translation program, believing that "we can translate the world" and "in the future we will be able to translate the region to the world."<sup>732</sup>

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729. Verghis, "A Boundary Writer Climbs the Mountain."

730. Deborah Hope, "In Other Words," *The Australian*, January 13, 2001.

731. Hope, "In Other Words."

732. Hope, "In Other Words."

Thanks to her successful translation of *Lingshan*, Lee received the NSW Premier's Prize for Translation and Pen Medalling in 2001. She was the first translator to win the award, which was the first award for translators since it was added to the original program in 2001. The awarding communiqué commends Lee's excellent translation.<sup>733</sup>

Lee's English translation of *Lingshan* has proven successful in terms of its sales. From January to June 2001, *Soul Mountain* was among the top 10 on the bestseller lists of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian*.<sup>734</sup> In addition, Sarah Bryden-Brown reported in *The Australian* on February 22, 2001 that HarperCollins would publish 15 kinds of ebooks by the end of March 2001 for its first global publication started in February, one of the first of which was Gao's *Soul Mountain*. The project manager announced that the books were carefully selected for their superior quality.<sup>735</sup>

These and other reviews show the significant cultural and political influence of Lee's translation project on the Australian literary world. In addition, Lee's translation is regarded as an ideal model that has earned both cultural and economic capital, as seen in the sales figures for Gao's novel. The sales figures also demonstrate how a prestigious literary award can result in profit.

To summarize, Lee's English translation *Soul Mountain* generally meets the expectations of the Australian literary field: It is a work of political significance promoting individual values in an oppressive collective society. It is also a work of artistic originality (drawing from French

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733. See the bulletin at: [www.arts.nsw.gov.au/awards/translation\\_prize](http://www.arts.nsw.gov.au/awards/translation_prize), accessed July 12, 2013.

734. See the details in *Sydney Morning Herald*'s column "Bestseller" and *The Australian*'s feature section "Bookshop" from January to June, 2001.

735. Sarah Bryden-Brown, "E-books Threaten to Leave Paperbacks on the Shelf," *The Australian*, February 22, 2001.

modernism), and high symbolic and literary value (a Nobel winner). For the Australian literary field, Lee's translation not only valorizes the marginal as opposed to British/American cultural bias, but also serves as an Australian literary mediator that brings Chinese literature to universal attention and greater symbolic value. However, the Australian critical reviews of Gao's novel are largely based on the general assumption that Mabel Lee's English version is responsible for Gao's international reputation. This assumption is primarily founded on Australia's cultural and, indirectly, market needs for its visibility in the world literary scene. Lee's translation of Gao's Nobel-winning novel provides Australia with a chance to assert the important role of its language and culture in the international literary field, even though these opinions can be only partly substantiated. Two facts stand out: Lee's English translation did not play a significant role in Gao's Nobel win, having been published in Australia only three months prior to the announcement, and the critical reviews of Lee's English version in the US and Britain were overwhelmingly negative. The Australian reviewers have thus appropriated Gao's novel as a symbolic source of capital for Australia's cultural and economic agendas. As a modernist writer, Gao is generally associated by Australian reviewers with French modernist playwrights such as Ionesco and Beckett. However, these reviews say little about how French literary modernism inspired Gao's novel and how Lee translated the modernist *illusio*. The discussion of such matters is not of immediate interest to them; what is central in these reviews is Australia's contribution to Gao's rise in the international literary scene.

### 3.3.2 Dissident Voice, Literary Universality, and Canonization: *Soul Mountain* in the US

Compared with the Australian reception of Gao's *Soul Mountain*, American responses to Gao's novel and his winning of the Nobel Prize are more extensive and in-depth, encompassing



literary reviews, TV interviews, literary journal articles, and other forms of media features. Among these media or specialist journals, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Books of The Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Times*, *Publishers Weekly*, PBS, and Asia Society offer different perspectives on Chinese literature in relation to the American literary reception of Gao's works in general and *Soul Mountain* in particular. Why are American critics interested in Gao and *Soul Mountain*? If Gao's novel is a Chinese modernist novel, what does this mean for the American literary field? These questions are essential to define how the works of a Chinese Nobel laureate are received, canonized, and appropriated by the target American literary field. Responses to these questions can be found both in mainstream media channels and in specialist journals or interviews.

Why are American readers interested in *Soul Mountain*? *The New York Times*, and especially its supplement *The New York Times Book Review*, have published many articles on Gao, *Lingshan*, and the Nobel Prize, while other perspectives on Gao and his novel have appeared in other major journals, newspapers, and TV features.

The first article about Gao's winning of the Nobel Prize on October 12, 2000, *The New York Times*' "Gao Xingjian Wins the Nobel Prize for Literature,"<sup>736</sup> informs readers about Gao's literary achievements and his status as an exiled Chinese writer in Paris. The article singles out Gao's modernist plays and his masterpiece *Soul Mountain*, describing the former as modernist works with traditional elements and the latter as a product of Gao's travels in China due to government harassments, which develops a unique style by combining different literary genres

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736. "Gao Xingjina Wins Nobel Prize for Literature," *The New York Times*, October 12, 2000, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/12/arts/gao-xingjian-wins-the-nobel-prize-for-literature.html?searchResultPosition=2>.

and techniques. The article draws the reader's attention to Gao's political refugee status and his renunciation of his Communist Party membership in 1989, which led to his denunciation by the Chinese government and the subsequent banning of his works.

Alan Riding's long feature article published on November 21, 2000, "Sudden Fame on a Quest for Freedom,"<sup>737</sup> is a lengthy account of Gao's life as a writer who suffered from the Communist government's cultural policies and sought freedom in the West, not as a political activist but as a writer who could devote himself to literature only. For Riding, Gao's novel is outstanding for both its stories and its styles, the latter of which, in Gao's words, are a "research of styles," but his language is the greater concern in his novel.

*Books of The Times* published Richard Eder's review of Gao's *Soul Mountain*, "A Dreamlike Chinese Journey Haunted by Past and Present,"<sup>738</sup> on December 18, 2000. Eder describes Mabel Lee's English translation as "stiffish," but "accurate," and characterizes Gao's style both as "reveal[ing] and veil[ing]" and as "assert[ing] and distract[ing]." He finds Gao's styles and forms in his novel often "bewildering and considerably uneven." Despite this, Eder associates the novel's tone with the Chinese government's political pressure against Gao's experiment and describes his mixture of writing styles as his "war" with "modern China." Moreover, Gao's fictional "pronouns" is similar to that of Werner Herzog's film protagonist Kasper Hauser, whose narrative is nothing but about "myself." The article also points out some

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737. Alan Riding, "Sudden Fame on a Quest for Freedom," *The New York Times*, November 21, 2000.

738. Richard Eder, "A Dreamlike Chinese Journey Haunted by Past and Present," *Books of The Times*, December 18, 2000.

of the novel's defects, such as its "lofty woolliness," which appears to refer to Gao's abstract meditation or philosophizing.<sup>739</sup>

In "The Backwater Journey," which appeared in *The New York Times* on December 24, 2000,<sup>740</sup> Nicholas D. Kristof links Gao's novel with his *Bus Stop*, with the impression that Gao's playful account is much like Beckett or Ionesco's travelling in China. Having examined parts of the novel that describe romantic love affairs, local legends, myths, and other things, Kristof asks what *Soul Mountain* is trying to relate. In his view, this novel is more of a personal monologue, exclusive to the narrator himself, who is caught between the oppression of the collective and the fear of the loneliness. In this respect, Gao's novel echoes those of many other Chinese intellectuals, and one may find in the novel some inkling of Tao's hermitage as a desired form for Gao's character. Kristof values neither this part of Gao's novel nor his experimental style, as they do not make this book a "page turner," though he does like Gao's parodying.

The article "Exiled Chinese Authors Names Literature's Foes,"<sup>741</sup> a review of Gao's Nobel Prize acceptance speech, reaffirms his position as a writer dedicated to literature, who regards both politics and commercialism as the "enemies of literature." *The New York Times* also published an interview with Gao, "Found in Translation," on December 10, 2000,<sup>742</sup> shortly after the Nobel Prize award ceremony. In this interview, Paisley Rekdal asks Gao a wide range of questions about his writing career in China and the West, his exile, and his attitude about his

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739. Eder, "A Dreamlike Chinese Journey Haunted by Past and Present."

740. Nicholas D. Kristof, "Backwater Journey," *The New York Times*, last modified, December 24, 2000, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/12/24/books/backwater-journey.html>.

741. "Exiled Chinese Authors Names Literature's Foes," *The New York Times*, December 8, 2000.

742. Paisley Rekdal, "Found in Translation," *The New York Times Magazine* (December 10, 2000): 51.

homeland. What appears significant in this interview is its title, which suggests Gao's transformation (translation) from a writer suffering from China's systematic political repression to a free writer in France, where he can devote his life to his work.

*The New York Times* articles generally present Gao's novel as an artistic expression rooted in his rebellion against both communist repression and Chinese literary tradition, drawing from modernism in the West and experimenting with techniques, such as the creative use of pronouns. The reviewers tend to focus more on the political significance of his work than on its artistic exploration. The interviews and feature articles further confirm this prevailing reading in the West as well as the vision of Gao as a Nobel laureate who disregards politics and commercial interests. However, such a reading is also problematic, at least in part due to the contradictory assessment of Mabel Lee's English version as both "stiffish" but "accurate," capturing Gao's style that both "reveals and veils" and "asserts and distracts." The reviews do not make it clear if this is a problem with Lee's translation, or Gao's original text, or even both.

*The Los Angeles Times'* articles on Gao agree in many respects with those of *the New York Times*, while also showing substantial differences. Its reviews emphasize Gao's universal literary values with reference to world literature, especially American literature, though they do mention his political background in passing.

In "Chinese Exile Gao Xingjian of France Gets Nobel Literature Prize,"<sup>743</sup> John Thor Dahlburg describes Gao's writing as a blend of Chinese subjects with Western narrative techniques; he also characterizes them as rebellious in the Chinese context of political repression, and Gao as a dissident writer exiled in France. Citing the comments of members of the Nobel

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743. John Thor Dahlburg, "Chinese Exile Gao Xingjian of France Gets Nobel Literature Prize," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 2000.

Prize Committee, the article hails Gao's *Soul Mountain* as a masterpiece and Gao's win as for "literature" rather than for political reasons of any sort.

Jonathan Levi's review of Gao's *Soul Mountain*, published on December 17, 2000, praises the novel as a great literary work comparable to many Western examples.<sup>744</sup> Levi admires both Gao's original style and Lee's effort to translate the novel into English. He states that Gao's mixture of different literary genres seems to outshine Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, though both novels feature similar themes. In *Soul Mountain*, Gao chooses his fictional personal pronouns to narrate historical events, personal memories, and romantic encounters; he departs significantly from Thomas Mann's narrative structure and joins writers such as Eduardo Galeano and Julio Cortazar in his description of ethnic cultures and history, and Herman Melville due to the similarity of the ballad chapter to the catalogue of proverbs in *Moby Dick*. In addition, the narrator's travel through the Tibetan plateau for fear of death resonates with the music score of Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Gao's philosophical messages are also reminiscent in places of M. Scott Peck, rather than Thomas Mann. Overall, Levi credits Gao's creative use of language for his winning the Nobel Prize.

Susan Salter Reynolds' feature article "The World According to Gao" is a summary of Gao's book tour with Mabel Lee in February 2001.<sup>745</sup> In this article, Reynolds describes Gao's *Soul Mountain* as "a beautiful, confusing, thought-demanding book full of questions and no answers." She notes that Gao's *Soul Mountain* received mixed reviews in the United States, with some critics comparing it to the works of Thomas Mann, Herman Melville, and David Thoreau,

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744. Jonathan Levi, "Internal Mountain," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 2000.

745. Susan Salter Reynolds, "The World According to Gao," *The Los Angeles Times*, last modified December 17, 2000, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-feb-27-cl-30610-story.html>.

and others dismissing his use of pronouns as “confusing” and Lee’s English version as “wooden.”<sup>746</sup>

Other reviewers have similarly evaluated Gao’s works in comparison to books and authors of the American literary tradition. The praise of Gao’s novel indicates a recognition of the similarity between Chinese and American canonical works, and, indirectly, an assertion of the greatness of the target literature. For example, in the *Post Gazette* article “A Chinese Traveler Seeks Meaning of Life,” published on February 25, 2005,<sup>747</sup> John Freeman compares Gao’s novel to Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*, since both works are related to the spiritual quest, and both authors are environmentalists who believe in “civil disobedience.” In this sense, Gao’s novel can be considered a reflection of an “oppressive government” that denies personal freedom and rights. However, Freeman also points out the defects of this novel in Lee’s English translation, which he calls an “inconsistency.”<sup>748</sup>

Marie Arana speaks highly of Gao’s narrative pronouns and characterizes his work as Scheherazadean, alluding to the narrator of *One Thousand and One Nights*. In “Guided by Voices,” published on January 28, 2001 in *The Washington Post*,<sup>749</sup> she argues that although Gao’s novel takes up multiple voices, the narrator is a lonely person, whose solitude is “endemic” in Communist China, where the only possible form of free speech is interior

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746. Reynolds, “The World According to Gao.”

747. John Freeman, “A Chinese Traveler Seeks Meaning of Life,” *Post Gazette*, last modified February 25, 2005, <http://old.post-gazette.com/books/reviews/20010225review705.asp>.

748. Freeman, “A Chinese Traveler Seeks Meaning of Life.”

749. Marie Arana, “Guided by Voices,” *The Washington Post*, last modified January 28, 2001, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/entertainment/books/2001/01/28/guided-by-voices/cea5bf82-3a9a-4679-b8f4-f22860cac178/>.

monologue.<sup>750</sup> This aspect of the character's life shows the vital role of literature in keeping the writer conscious of his state. She describes Gao's journey in China's remote regions in search of the meaning of life as a "picaresque" narrative mixed with a series of stories, invented or real, to ease his loneliness in a Scheherazadean narrative style, interchanging the narrative focus between "I," "you," "he," and "she." The "carnival of voices" essentially mirror the deep layers of the narrator's subconscious.<sup>751</sup> However, Arana criticizes the lack of plot development and the excessive "meandering" in the novel, and dismisses Mabel Lee's translation as "largely bloodless."<sup>752</sup> Despite the apparent lapses, for Arana, the success of Gao's novel lies in lifting readers to a new level of the human search for spiritual meaning in life and delivering them to a "new world, similar to what Jose Saramago and Naguib Mahfouz offer to us."<sup>753</sup>

Linton Weeks' review, "Freedom's Peak,"<sup>754</sup> in *The Washington Post* avoids an exclusively political reading of Gao's novel by emphasizing its great philosophical depth and artistic originality; such an emphasis fundamentally defines *Soul Mountain* as a masterpiece of world literature. Weeks contrasts Gao's traumatic experiences in China to the freedom he enjoys in France and the West in general. However, he agrees with the well-known scholar in Chinese Studies, Charles Laughlin's comment that Gao is not a dissident writer, since he does not abuse his freedom for political purposes. Weeks examines both positive and negative reviews of Gao

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750. Arana, "Guided by Voices."

751. Arana, "Guided by Voices."

752. Arana, "Guided by Voices."

753. Arana, "Guided by Voices."

754. Linton Weeks, "Freedom's Peak," *The Washington Post*, last modified February 22, 2001, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2001/02/22/on-freedoms-peak/5bfb85a8-8012-4024-97e2-bfd49de21e41/>.

and his novel to demonstrate that his reputation among American literary circles is not universally endorsed. For instance, he singles out the well-known Chinese-American writer Ha Jin's negative comments on Gao's traditional storytelling, which claim that the *Nouveau roman* narrative mode is an outdated literary device.<sup>755</sup> Despite the apparent critical differences, Weeks maintains that Gao is immersed in a global tradition of both traditional Chinese literature and French existentialist currents, and his literary greatness comes from his extraordinary experiences in China. *Lingshan* endeavours to portray the "tiny people," in keeping with his intent for the freedom to do ordinary things.<sup>756</sup> Thus, Gao's fictional narratives resonate strongly with the works of Dante, Faulkner, and Kerouac. Moreover, even if he writes about China's Cultural Revolution, Gao does not do so for political reasons, but goes deeper to uncover the traumatic impact of the repressive collective culture on the individual's life. It is this aspect of free creative effort for ordinary people's lives that has won Gao wide recognition in the West, in contrast to China's denunciation of him; Gao is therefore not truly a "dissident writer."<sup>757</sup>

Other academic journals, both in print and online, have attempted to frame Gao's novel within China's classical culture, especially Taoist tradition. "A Daoist Pilgrimage," published in *The Yale Review of Books*, regards the novel as a great appropriation of the Taoist wisdom of truth by exploring its various paradoxical aspects.<sup>758</sup> Gao adopts multiple narrative pronouns as a character to ask the reader to examine the different layers of his/her self. However, Gao's

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755. Weeks, "Freedom's Peak."

756. Weeks, "Freedom's Peak."

757. Weeks, "Freedom's Peak."

758. Aaron Modiano, "A Daoist Pilgrimage," *The Yale Review of Books* 4, no. 2 (2001), <https://web.archive.org/web/20090522110523/http://www.yale.edu/yrb/summer01/review12.htm>.



narrative is also problematic because of the misogynist undertones of his female characters, who are generally subjected to the male narrator's gaze.

Andrea Kempf's "After Buck: Modern Chinese Fiction," published in *Library Journal*, ranks Gao at the top of the list of modern Chinese canonical authors, after Pearl Buck.<sup>759</sup> In Kempf's view, Buck depicts ordinary Chinese people's experiences of love and hopes for a better future, presenting them in a positive light in opposition to the negative stereotypes of the Chinese that appear in works such as Sax Rohmer's *Dr. Fu Manchu*. Gao Xingjian, Qiu Xiaolong, Dai Sijie, Mo Yan and others represent more diverse examples of modern Chinese literature. Kempf claims that Gao's experimenting with narratives and keen portrayals of minority life related to Taoism and Buddhism in *Soul Mountain* provide vivid details of Chinese ethnic cultures without Confucian influences. Kempf's review and recommendation of Gao's novel is a gesture to recognize and canonize it as a great contribution to modern Chinese literature in America's cultural spaces such as public libraries.

American literary critics are also interested in applying contemporary cultural theories, especially postcolonial and feminist theories, to examine *Soul Mountain*'s relevance and validity to America's cultural politics and academic discourse. Kam Louie's and Sylvia Li-Chun Lin's debate over Gao's novel is an example of the applicability of these theories both to the novel itself and to American literary criticism.

Kam Louie's "In Search of the Chinese Soul in the Mountains of the South," published in *The China Journal* in 2001,<sup>760</sup> gives Gao's novel a negative review. She argues that *Soul*

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759. Andrea Kempf, "After Buck: Modern Chinese Fiction," *Library Journal* 127, no.2 (February 1, 2002): 164.

760. Kam Louie, "In Search of the Chinese Soul in the Mountains of the South," *The China Journal*, no. 45(January 2001): 145-149.

*Mountain*'s ethnic cultural details relating to sex and violence only satisfy the desires of Western and Chinese readers for "oriental exotica and schizophrenia."<sup>761</sup> In addition, Gao's appropriation of the female voice, which is identified as "you," the object of "I"'s fantasy and desire, is inherently "misogynist" and "androcentric." She adds that the appeal of Gao's novel to the Swedish Academy is manifold, but is largely based on Western visions of a repressive China and of journeys in the border zone of minority cultures in search of spiritual discovery in the face of modernity. Gao's writing style, largely influenced by French literature, enables Western readers to readily accept it.

Sylvia Li-Chun Lin's "Between the Individual and the Collective: Gao Xingjian's Fiction," published in *World Literature Today* in 2001,<sup>762</sup> responds to Louie's charges against Gao's novel. Lin argues that what lies in Gao's universality as a Nobel laureate is both his Chineseness and transnational features. She clarifies that one can see Gao's strong concerns about Chineseness from the relationship between the collective and the individual, represented by the narrative pronouns "I," "you," and "s/he" instead of "we," a valorization of the individual's role in the face of the dominant Confucian and Communist culture. This narrative further upholds minority cultures for the roles they have played in Chinese civilization. In essence, Lin concludes that Gao's depiction of this relationship through his experimental personal narratives implies an indirect criticism of Communist totalitarian rule over the individual. Moreover, Gao's reflection on the self and the other resonates strongly with the questions Jean Paul Sartre poses about human existential problems, so that the novel becomes both Chinese and transnational. Lin

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761. Louie, 146.

762. Sylvia Li-Chun Lin, "Between the Individual and the Collective: Gao Xingjian's Fiction," *World Literature Today* 75, no. 1 (2001): 12-18.

categorically rejects the relevance of postcolonial and feminist readings of *Soul Mountain* as chauvinistic and imperialistic in that the other, whether in terms of gender or ethnicity, is the target of the spiritual quest by a Chinese of the dominant Han culture. Gao's depictions of minority cultures in lieu of the dominant Confucian/ Communist cultures therefore shows his genuine opposition to a Han-centered cultural and ideological dominance.

David Der-Wei Wang's interview with Gao during Asia Society's welcoming ceremony for the new Nobel laureate has a different focus from those of Louie and Lin.<sup>763</sup> During the interview, Gao answered many questions about his experience in China, his ideas about writing, and how his trips in Southwest China changed his life and work, of which a brief summary of the questions about *Lingshan* and his experimentation with the Chinese language are relevant to this discussion. Regarding the question of how his novel achieved an "encyclopaedic vision" of Chinese culture and literature, Gao recalled that in the early 1980s, he was interested in the role of power in Chinese history and culture, and he decided to investigate and identify its origins. During the process, though he found this social phenomenon characteristic of Chinese society, the hidden problems are general. Thus, by examining one's consciousness by means of self-doubt, one could trace his/her development and growth, which was equally related to the question of how much one could articulate one's self in language. In short, his novel was more about the changes one underwent during this quest for meaning. He stated frankly that writing *Lingshan* was very difficult, and confessed that his Chinese had not reached the level of linguistic creativity that he expected, because even though he had attempted to avoid certain language norms or clichés in his works, creating something new was a dominant issue.

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763. David Der-Wei Wang, "A Conversation with Gao Xingjian," last modified February 26, 2001, <https://asiasociety.org/conversation-gao-xingjian>.

Wang's interview with Gao contradicts some American critical reviews of his novel, especially those that read it mainly from a political angle. However, though these critical comments did not need to accommodate Gao's views, they revealed why the target literary field was interested in Gao's novel: They integrated Gao's novel into their discourse about what a Chinese/French Nobel Prize writer should be.

Gao's life and work, and Lee's English translation, have also been promoted to the wider public in TV programs and interviews. During his visit to the US, Gao participated in a PBS interview about his winning of the Nobel Prize, the writing process of his novel, and Lee's English translation.<sup>764</sup> He admitted that most of his readers were initially French and Swedish, but after he won the award, he gained a larger audience and his book became a bestseller in the US. When asked if his winning of the Prize showed the West's acceptance of Chinese literature, Gao did not answer the question directly, but stated that he did not personally regard himself as a representative of Chinese literature even if an overwhelming number of Chinese people throughout the world did. In that same interview, Mabel Lee similarly answered questions about her translation of Gao's challenging work. She dismissed the idea of her English version as a compromise or negotiation, claiming that Gao's work was "like poetry," and his writing "sparse, very minimalist."<sup>765</sup> In addition, Lee stressed that Gao's point of view was not focused on a specific culture, but on general human conditions. She shared Gao's vision and did not find it difficult to translate that vision.

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764. "Ray Suarez talks with Chinese-born author Gao Xingjian, winner of the 2000 Nobel Prize for Literature," PBS online, <https://pbs.org/newshour/show/nobel-prize-winner-gao-xingjian>, accessed July 12, 2018.

765. See note 760.

These reviews and interviews help to construct Gao's image as a Nobel laureate. The PBS interview revealed the transformative power of his Nobel win as symbolic capital that expedited his global acceptance. In her statements about her translation of *Lingshan*, Lee appeared to repeat her previous assertion that she had translated *Lingshan* out of love for Gao's minimalist and poetic style and their shared values. However, her statement appears contradictory to the American reviewers' assessment of her English version.

Many of the American reviews of Lee's translation of *Lingshan* into English are generally negative, as noted above, though they also recognize the literary quality of portions of her translation. These remarks are based largely on the critics' impressions, but do provide some information for references. The most important review specifically of Lee's translation appeared in *Time Magazine's* "Book Review," a regular column that reviews the most popular books published in the United States. Paul Gray's review "Lost in the Translation"<sup>766</sup> points out that, since Chinese literature is not well recognized in the West, the translation of this literature must bear "heavy burdens."<sup>767</sup> He claims that although in her translation Lee may have grasped "the literal essence" of the original text, her reworking of Gao's novel in English appears "strange" and "irksome," marked by "run-on" sentences, "redundancies," obscurities, and other inappropriate uses of language.<sup>768</sup> The stories and narrative pronouns are also often obscure, as exemplified by "you" as a pronoun in the sentence "the source of the You River," or "she" to refer not to one specific woman but to many different women.<sup>769</sup> Gray further states that there are many aspects of Gao's

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766. Paul Gray, "Lost in the Translation," *Time*, last modified December 1, 2000, <https://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,90313,00.htm>.

767. Gray, "Lost in the Translation."

768. Gray, "Lost in the Translation."

769. Gray, "Lost in the Translation."

novel that Lee has not translated thoroughly, and that the Nobel Committee could not have based their decision on Lee's translation because Gao is a "master" of the Chinese language and Lee does not adequately translate his style. He characterizes his experience reading *Soul Mountain* as "frustrating" and notes that "a better use of English might have helped."<sup>770</sup> Lee's translation defies Gray's understanding and appreciation of the normal English; however, his negative review of Lee's translation reveals his lack of reading experience in both Chinese literature and modern French literature. For instance, he does not recognize that the name "You River" has nothing to do with the pronoun "you" and is actually a phonetic representation of the Chinese proper noun. He also fails to recognize that Gao's pronoun "she" to refer to multiple women is a technique derived from modernist French literature.

*Soul Mountain*'s popular reception in the United States cannot be measured without referring to its sales, especially the bestseller lists produced by *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times*. The book review section of *The Los Angeles Times* indicated on December 1, 2000 that *Soul Mountain* ranked sixth in the category of fiction.<sup>771</sup> However, its top ranking lasted only several weeks. On February 4, 2001, Gao's novel fell out of the top ten list, ranking 12 in the category of fiction.<sup>772</sup> In comparison, *Soul Mountain*'s popularity in Australia on the top-ten list lasted until July 2001.

The American reception of Gao and *Soul Mountain* has generally been positive, framing Gao's transnational literary reputation in both Chinese tradition and global literary currents of which American literature is part. These include Gao's literary pursuits against political

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770. Gray, "Lost in the Translation."

771. *The Los Angeles Times*, "Book Review," December 1, 2000.

772. *The Los Angeles Times*, "Bestsellers," February 4, 2001.

repression and in favor of free spiritual quest and literary expression, which match Chinese traditional literary values such as Taoism and with the West's recognition of such pursuits. Gao's reception among American readers also upholds the literary values of American writers such as Thoreau, Melville, Faulkner, and Kerouac, to all of whom he has been compared. Despite the confirmation of his greatness, American critics claim that their appreciation of Gao's novel is marred by its inventive narrative pronouns, its rambling stylistic traits, and its excessive meandering. Such responses indicate that Gao's essential literary invention in line with the *Nouveau roman* is not as appreciated in the American literary field as it is in the French literary field. Gao's literary space as a modernist is reduced to a more familiar literary current related to Ionesco, Beckett, and to a lesser degree Sartre, suggesting a hybrid space between Chinese traditional narrative and Western modern narrative, characterized by positive portrayals of traditional Chinese ways of life and the influences of French existentialism, such as Saul Bellow's novels. However, there is a limit to the American reviewers' canonization of Gao's original writing. Though *Soul Mountain* was ranked as a bestseller in the United States for a period of time, it has not been included in HarperCollins' classic collection as have works such as García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. This is in sharp contrast to the French canonization of Gao's novels in the Opus series produced by the prestigious Seuil Publishing House. The reception of Gao's Nobel work in the United States shows that the American literary field is not favorable to his literary invention, especially his experimental narrative pronouns inspired by the *Nouveau roman*. The reception of his novel has also been complicated by accusations of misogyny and by the perceived uneven quality of Lee's translations. Nonetheless, the high sales records of *Soul Mountain* in the US show that the symbolic capital bestowed by the Nobel Prize Committee on *Lingshan* has also generated economic capital. The sales volumes

in the US market reveal that though symbolic capital conferrals follow different logic and mechanism than those of economic capital, both are related to each other, as *Soul Mountain*'s canonization in the US illustrates.

### 3.3.3 Contested Claims: *Soul Mountain* in Britain

Compared with its Australian and American receptions, the British critical responses to Gao as a Nobel winner and to *Soul Mountain* are measured, if not dismissive, even though *Soul Mountain* was on the bestseller list in the country's leading publishing ranking in 2001.<sup>773</sup> The British appraisal of its translation quality has especially been overwhelmingly negative.

Some of the British reviews focus on Gao's worthiness as a Nobel writer. For instance, in the article "Nobel Award Amazes Chinese Writer and Literary World," published on October 13, 2000 in *The Guardian*,<sup>774</sup> John Ezard and Danny Gittings use *Soul Mountain* as an entry point of discussion of the controversy over Gao's winning the prize. Referring to feminist critics' dismissal of the novel's misogyny, Ezard and Gittings suggest that the British press reinforced the argument by citing the Australian critic Linda Jaivin's August 14, 2000 review of *Soul Mountain*, discussed earlier in this chapter. However, the review also quotes Horace Engdahl, the permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy, to affirm the quality of the novel, as well as other contrasting critical views. For Michael Hockx, a well-known specialist in Chinese literature at the London School of Oriental and African Studies, Gao's plays have revolutionized Chinese

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773. Marko, "First Research on the Sales of Translated Fiction in the UK Shows Growth and Comparative Strength of International Fiction."

774. John Ezard and Danny Gittings, "Nobel Award Amazes Chinese Writer and Literary World," *The Guardian*, last modified October 13, 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/oct/13/books.nobelprize>.



drama with his creative blending of elements of the Theatre of the Absurd with Chinese dramatic practices, while Bill Jenner, the head of Chinese Studies at Leeds University, regards Gao's inspiration from modern Western theatre as "copying." The review does not draw any conclusions, but highlights Gao's most important works, including *Soul Mountain* and *One Man's Bible*. In short, the article concludes that Gao is a controversial winner, particularly because of the problematic representation of women in *Lingshan*.

For the reviewer of "Soul Man; Chinese Fiction; A Chinese Laureate's Novel," published in *The Economist* on December 9, 2000,<sup>775</sup> *Soul Mountain* is "[...] strongly political" in that Gao took his journey as an attempt to escape from persecution and from collectivism. Since the novel had only just recently been published in the US and Britain at the time this article appeared, the reviewer leaves the readers to draw their own conclusions.

In "Exiled Dissident Whose Works Are Banned in China Wins Nobel Prize," published in *The Independent* on Oct 13, 2000,<sup>776</sup> Jojo Moyes does not hesitate to adopt the term "dissident Chinese writer" to identify Gao, and *Soul Mountain* is given a special introduction. In Moyes' view, Gao's novel is "a search for roots, inner peace and liberty in time and space."<sup>777</sup> By quoting the Swedish Academy's praise for this novel, she supports the claim that Gao's novel is a "universally" significant modern work.

In "The Nobel Mystery Man and His Deep Daoist Novel," published by *The Observer* on December 18, 2000,<sup>778</sup> Roger Gathman focuses on the traditional values of classical Chinese

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775. See *The Economist's* review, "Soul Man; Chinese Fiction; A Chinese Laureate's Novel," December 9, 2000.

776. Jojo Moyes, "Exiled Dissident Whose Works are Banned in China Wins Nobel Prize," *The Independent*, October 13, 2000.

777. Moyes, "Exiled Dissident Whose Works are Banned in China Wins Nobel Prize."

culture, Taoism in particular. He observes that since Gao is the first Chinese Nobel laureate, his name is not well known in the West and there is no clear Western reference for his popular appeal. In China, he is known for his play *Bus Stop*, which is clearly influenced by Beckett. Gathman stresses that though Gao has made serious commitments about literature, his play “reads more like juvenilia;”<sup>779</sup> his *Soul Mountain*, much like the late seventeenth-century British “antiquarians,” seeks for “something merrie olde Cathay” and “portents” denied by the Communist establishment. The novel is narrated by “I” talking to himself, like “ego to alter ego,” kept in a secret journal entry about his travels, during which a series of adventures, events, old Chinese customs, Taoist rituals and other things are all depicted. In particular, the sections narrated with the personal pronoun “you” are more romantic than the rest of the novel. For Gathman, these fictional narratives reflect Gao’s belief in Taoist principles of “the dissolution of duality in an ultimate unity.”<sup>780</sup> He concludes that Gao’s greatest talents lie in his pictorial delineations of mood and atmosphere, as he does in his painting.

Whereas the critics cited above view Gao’s work in terms of politics and Chinese culture, some British reviewers see *Soul Mountain* in relation to British literary tradition. The author of “A Year Spent Ducking Death,” published on March 10, 2001 in *The Telegraph*,<sup>781</sup> regards Gao’s novel as a “rattle bag of narrative,” in which philosophy, legend, folklore, discourse on

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778. Roger Gathman, “The Nobel Mystery Man and his Deep Daoist Novel,” *The Observer*, last modified December 18, 2000, <https://observer.com/2000/12/the-nobel-mystery-man-and-his-deep-daoist-novel/>.

779. Gathman, “The Nobel Mystery Man and his Deep Daoist Novel.”

780. Gathman, “The Nobel Mystery Man and his Deep Daoist Novel.”

781. “A Year Spent Ducking Death,” March 10, 2001, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4722128/A-year-spent-ducking-death.html>.

arts and literature, and other elements are all integrated. Of these, Gao's narrative account of the protagonist's sexual life can be easily associated with "Victorian erotica." His description of the events of the Cultural Revolution is shocking, particularly the destruction of China's environment is in contrast to its natural beauty and ancient culture. The reviewer declares that though Gao writes well, he does not merit the Nobel Prize in that he only wrote two novels and some plays, and *Soul Mountain* had only recently been made available to readers in the English-speaking world.

Henry Zhao's essay goes against the general reaction in Britain about Gao's qualification as a Nobel laureate.<sup>782</sup> He argues that Gao's plays were put on stage in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and continental Europe, and his novels have been translated into major European languages. However, the English-speaking world has not paid much attention to him, due to the "ignorance" perpetuated by the Chinese government and by Chinese literary commentators in the United States and Britain.<sup>783</sup> He hopes that with the publication of *Soul Mountain*, a real discussion of Gao's excellence be launched in earnest. Moreover, Zhao insists that in the Chinese literary field, *Lingshan*'s uniqueness is self-evident, because it is a new literary genre that mixes different narrative voices in its remarkable vernacular Chinese style to give voices to unvoiced marginal ethnic groups in the face of mainstream Han Chinese culture. Gao's novel is particularly relevant to the vernacular classical Chinese novel *Lao can youji* (The Travel of Lao Can). During his travels, Gao experienced an "epiphany" from "a frog's eyes." For Zhao, this is a "revelation in trivia," a typical Chan Buddhist allusion; the same can be identified in Gao's use of "eighty-one

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782. Henry Zhao, "Books: Zen Visions through a Frog's Eyes," *The Independent*, March 10, 2001.

783. Zhao, "Books: Zen Visions through a Frog's Eyes."

chapters” to organize the novel with “Buddhist allusions.”<sup>784</sup> In addition, Gao’s positive depictions of Taoist, Buddhist, and other ethnic cultures highlight the close link between these cultures and the writer for the long-cherished tradition of escaping political persecution, as these cultures resist corruption under the Chinese communist modernization programs. In short, the narratives of *Lingshan* interact with the tradition of Chinese fiction as “small talk,” gossip, ghost story, fables, and other vernacular literary genres. Thus, for Zhao, Gao’s novel can be exclusively categorized in terms of Chinese literary tradition.

*The China Quarterly* published an article featuring two interviews conducted in 1990 by Gregory Lee and in 1998 and Noël Dutrait.<sup>785</sup> Lee’s interview directly deals with such topics as Gao’s exile in France, self-censorship in China and France, and his transnational identity as a writer in exile. Dutrait’s interview partly covers Gao’s creation of *Lingshan* and its significance. During the interviews, Gao insisted that *Lingshan* was a result of his long sojourn in France, where he wanted to create a new condition and escape his past. In his other novel, *Yi geren*, Gao wanted to adopt his own personal stories as testimony of how China’s Cultural Revolution reduced the individual’s life to slavery, and how an individual’s journey was affected by traumatic events beyond his control and by his changing psychological world. Both novels were written under the principle of “no-ism,” which means that Gao did not follow any ideological guidelines, or doctrines, but “I display, but do not draw conclusion.”<sup>786</sup>

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784. Zhao, “Books: Zen Visions through a Frog’s Eyes.”

785. Gregory Lee and Noël Dutrait, “Conversations with Gao Xingjian: The First ‘Chinese’ Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature,” *The China Quarterly* 167 (September 2001): 738-748.

786. See note 781.

The above reviews and interviews highlight what Gao's *Soul Mountain* means for Britain from political and cultural perspectives. Some other reviews discuss translation issues surrounding *Soul Mountain*. Bradley Winterton specifically deals with Mabel Lee's English translation in "Souls Lose Way in Foggy Translation," published on December 9, 2000 in the Hong Kong-based English-language newspaper *The South China Morning Post*,<sup>787</sup> which was also available in Britain. Winterton criticizes Lee's translation for its lack of "fluidity or relaxed naturalness," and claims that her "foggy translation" prevents readers from experiencing the real qualities of Gao's book.<sup>788</sup> Consequently, he refuses to recommend this book to readers.

While reviewing Gao's *One Man's Bible*, W.J.F. Jenner also discusses *Soul Mountain* in passing in "Prize Woes," published in *The Guardian*.<sup>789</sup> He characterizes Lee's English version as "wooden," but also claims that *Soul Mountain* "has enough exotic color to survive its translation."<sup>790</sup> Though it is brief, Jenner's experience as a professional Chinese-English translator and specialist in Chinese literature lends credence to his review and generally supports the assessments of some of the American critics discussed earlier in this chapter.

Winterton and Jenner do not provide any evidence for their negative responses to Lee's translation. A comprehensive review of Lee's translation of Gao's novels first appeared in 2003 in *Translation and Literature*. In "Reviewed Work(s): *Soul Mountain* by Gao Xingjian and

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787. Bradley Winterton, "Souls Lose Way in Foggy Translation," *The South China Morning Post*, December 9, 2000.

788. Winterton, "Souls Lose Way in Foggy Translation."

789. W.J.F. Jenner, "Prize Woes," *The Guardian*, last modified November 30, 2002, <https://www.ourdailyread.com, 2002/11>.

790. See note 785.

Mabel Lee; *One Man's Bible* by Gao Xingjian and Mabel Lee,"<sup>791</sup> Weili Fan maintains that Lee's *Soul Mountain* abounds with so many errors that an English reader would have difficulty understanding the novel. Lee's mistakes, according to Fan, are due to her "negligence," "ignorance," and "lack of [...] contextual understanding."<sup>792</sup> Such mistakes are present not only in *Soul Mountain* but also *One Man's Bible*. At the stylistic level, Gao pays much attention to the musicality of language in the form of rhythm and cadence. However, this linguistic style is lost in Lee's English version, in part because of her literal translation from a Chinese syntactic structure to that of English, resulting in "run-on" sentences, "redundancies," and other problems. Fan attributes these mistakes to Lee's speedy translation due to market demands from the English-speaking world as Gao gained literary prominence. However, Fan's conclusion is not overtly convincing, because the length of time Lee took to translate *Soul Mountain* suggests that she was not pressured by the market; Fan's charges apply only to Lee's translation of *One Man's Bible*, which came shortly after Gao's win.

Despite the lack of critical enthusiasm for his works in Britain, Gao's winning of the Nobel Prize promoted the sale of his books. The British journal *The Independent's* "Books: Cover Stories" on October 21, 2000 discusses the Frankfurt International Book Fair, which the new Nobel Laureate Gao Xingjian visited and "created a stir."<sup>793</sup> Gao's visit also helped HarperCollins US to buy the copyright of his two novels, *Soul Mountain* and *One Man's Bible* (still in translation at the point of time), though the UK had yet to make a decision. In addition,

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791. Weili Fan, "Reviewed Work(s): *Soul Mountain* by Gao Xingjian and Mabel Lee; *One Man's Bible* by Gao Xingjian and Mabel Lee," *Translation and Literature* 12, no.2 (2003): 307-312.

792. Fan, 308-309.

793. "Books: Cover Stories," *The Independent*, October 21, 2000

*Soul Mountain* was ranked in Britain as No. 8 on the bestseller list for translated fiction in 2001, selling 20,282 copies.<sup>794</sup> Furthermore, in the 2001 selection of the Books of the Year, British novelist Rose Tremain chose *Soul Mountain* as one of her favourite books in that year.<sup>795</sup>

The British responses to *Soul Mountain* were greatly influenced by the literary regimes, which favor a political reading of Gao's novel, while its oriental mysteries, cruelties, and exotica can be equally identified, critiqued, and consumed. British critics either dismiss the modernist aspects of *Soul Mountain* as secondary in general, or ignore them entirely. The reading of Gao's novel is further complicated by Lee's somewhat dubious English translation.

From the above reviews, interviews and reports in the three English-speaking countries, we see that the responses to Gao's novel in these countries are not unanimous, even the shared features of these responses reflect their investments in their own cultural and literary agendas, which highlight the tensions in the literary field for dominance and economic interests. Thus, the "universality" of a literary work honoured by the Swedish Academy is not a given; its "universal" value as symbolic power is constantly under negotiation, appropriation and redefinition. As with the cases of *Soul Mountain*'s reception, Gao's literary reputation is exploited and integrated into the target literary habitus, where the fight for symbolic capital on the terms of that field defines the nature of its reception. What is at stake are the regimes in the target literary field that dictate the direction of the reception and canonization of a literary work in translation. *Soul Mountain* is an excellent case in point.

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794. Marko, "First Research on the Sales of Translated Fiction in the UK Shows Growth and Comparative Strength of International Fiction."

795. Allison Pearson, "Books of the Year," *The Telegraph*, November 17, 2001, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4726609/Books-of-the-year.html>.

The reception of *Soul Mountain* in the Anglophone world fits well with the findings of this study. The assessment of Lee's translation as "stiffish" and "foggy" largely derives from her systematic use of transliteration, which fails to convey the allusive language style in the original, including its intertextual layers, poetic quality, and cadences. Moreover, by adding items to or omitting items from her translation, Lee either impoverishes Gao's literary language, or highlights/manipulates the social or political intensity of certain parts of his text. Consequently, Lee's translational approach constructs a particular image of Chineseness that distantly echoes the similar approaches of early British sinologists and writers. In addition, Lee's translation strengthens the target readers' perceptions of the political significance and ethnic particularities of Gao's novel. Furthermore, by neglecting the allusive language quality and intertextual layers of the texts, Lee normalizes Gao's very creative narrative pronouns in *Lingshan* as a commonplace narrative mode. Hence, Gao's literary invention as a modernist writer is compromised by critics who interpret his novel in light of political and existentialist senses. Despite the problematic nature of much of her translation, Lee does still translate some of the novel effectively, as the existence of positive responses to her English version demonstrates.

Though Lee's translation plays a significant role in Gao's reception in the English literary world, critics can read Gao's novel and interpret it according to the literary regimes and perceptions of the Chinese other. These views, as noted above, may be randomly articulated without much textual evidence.

#### 3.3.4 The Appropriation and Use of Literary Capital in Taiwan

Examining various aspects of *Lingshan*'s translation and reception in light of the Bourdieusian sociological approach in the Anglophone world reveals the logics and mechanisms



of *Soul Mountain*'s reception and canonization as a universal work of literature in the English literary field. However, even in light of the competition and dominance in the literary field, the reception and canonization of a foreign literary masterpiece as "universal" problematizes its limits. The Taiwanese reception of *Lingshan*, for example, defies the translated power of "universalizing" a Chinese literary work from the Western literary centres.

*Lingshan* was published in Taiwan and was canonized as an important Chinese literary work after Gao won the Nobel Prize. The opposing reception collapses the logic elaborated by Casanova, which designates marginal countries as subsidiary places under the signifying power of the universal (dominant) literary centres. The Taiwanese reception of *Lingshan* demonstrates that the marginal are not docile receivers of a totalizing signifier (or designation), but turn the powerful translated signifier into the signified for their own advantages through various acts of interpretation.

*Lingshan*'s reception in Taiwan is an important case illustrating the effects or limits of the consecration of major symbolic capital in the international literary field. Examining this case reveals how Gao's literary canonization through translation in the West affects Taiwan's recognition and how this reception reflects Taiwan's cultural politics and literary valorization. Thus, this comparative/contrastive investigation shows not only how a Chinese literary work translated in the dominant Western languages and then canonized by the Nobel Prize committee achieves universal validity in both the Anglophone world and Taiwan, but also how symbolic capital is appropriated to contest that very universality for different goals. This further exemplifies the fight for literary dominance, or the resistance to being universalized by different literary fields, where translation plays an indispensable role.

After he was awarded the Nobel, Gao instantly became one of the most popular literary figures both in and outside of China. Although China's reception to the announcement was hostile,<sup>796</sup> Hong Kong and Taiwan embraced Gao as a prominent literary figure who had earned the most prestigious award in the West. Shortly after the Nobel Prize award ceremony, Gao was invited to visit Hong Kong and Taiwan in January and February 2001. However, since Hong Kong had only recently been returned to China, it did not officially welcome Gao, but did allow him to give a talk at the University of Hong Kong, under the condition that he did not discuss politics. After his three-day visit ended, Gao expressed his displeasure over the limited freedom he had in the former British colony.<sup>797</sup> In contrast to Hong Kong's cold reception, Taiwan extended a hearty welcome, and his visit lasted for two weeks.

During his visit, not only was Gao received by then-president Chen Shui-bian and the mayor of Taipei City, Ma Ying-jeou, who became president in 2008, but he also participated in various literary forums, TV talks with prominent figures, and the International Book Fair in Taiwan. Sometimes Gao's translators Goran Malmqvist, Noël Dutrait, and Mabel Lee would join him; Malmqvist and Dutrait were equally highly regarded.

Taiwan's enthusiasm for Gao's visit was seen as a gesture that recognized Gao's great achievements in literature, whose significance transcended national boundaries and gained a universal symbolic value. Gao's popularity was demonstrated by the extensive coverage of his life in China, his exile in France and his journey toward ascendancy in the international literary

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796. Christopher Boden, "China's Reaction to Nobel Shows Literature Still a Dicey Business," *Taiwan News*, October 14, 2000.

797. Mark Landler, "Exiled Writer Finds Politics Hard to Avoid in China Visit," *The New York Times*, January 31, 2000. Also see *Taiwan News*, "Gao Says He Feels Lack of Freedom in Hong Kong," February 1, 2001.

field. Both of his novels, *Lingshan* and *Yi gerren*, became bestsellers, with the former breaking the sales record in the island state, selling 100,000 copies for a short period of time.<sup>798</sup> Taiwan's warm reception for Gao was in sharp contrast to its less fervent response to *Lingshan* ten years earlier. This contrast demonstrates the overwhelming power of the symbolic capital bestowed by the West, which not only turned a once-anonymous author into a literary master, but also more seriously problematized the limits of the Chinese literary field. Even as Taiwan hailed Gao's literary success in the West, it also tried to associate Gao's honour with its role in fostering his growth by initially publishing his works. Chen Chao-ju, a writer for the English newspaper *The Taipei Times*, however, questions the same phenomenon as experienced by Ang Lee's film *Crouching Tiger and Hidden Dragon*. Lee's film had been dismissed in Taiwan as a "lousy film" until it received an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, whereupon Taiwan gave him a warm welcome.<sup>799</sup> Chen argues that both Gao and Lee were not recognized in Taiwan until they earned international awards, which made many people feel that they were actually "in the Third World" and were being made aware of their own "insignificance."<sup>800</sup> Despite the various international awards and the recognition of Gao's and Lee's works, Chen maintains that critics should have their own perspectives unbound by those of the West and should not be misled by the commercial success of certain works. In an interview with Malmqvist, Cao Chang-Ching expressed a similar opinion to Chen, questioning whether Gao's works represented the pinnacle

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798. See the report of *Lianhe Bao (UDN News)*, February 7, 2001.

799. Chen Chao-Ju, "Stunned into Silence by Foreign Recognition," *The Taipei Times* February 21, 2001.

800. Chen, "Stunned into Silence by Foreign Recognition."

of contemporary Chinese literature, while Malmqvist defended the Nobel Prize Committee's decision to award the prize to Gao.<sup>801</sup>

Taiwan's joyful welcome of Gao, however, raises the question of whether this recognition entails an acceptance of its perceived inferiority. Answers to this question are far from easy and general, as major media coverage of Gao's win demonstrates.

After Gao became the first Chinese winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, the major Taiwanese newspapers devoted their front pages to cover this unprecedented event and its significance to the Chinese-speaking world. However, Taiwanese newspapers and journals treated this news from utterly different perspectives, both acknowledging the importance of the symbolic capital and relating Gao's win to their own trajectories. What do Gao and his works mean to Taiwan? How does Taiwan's literary circle read, and re-read, *Lingshan*? What does translation mean for Gao's winning of the prize in reference to his Chinese original?

On October 13, 2000, one day after the news of Gao's win was announced, *Zhongyang ribao* (*CN Times*), a major Nationalist Party newspaper, published an article titled "huaren yiyiwengxue shijimo wentan zhanguangmang" (Chinese Dissident Literature Shines in the Literary Field at the Fin de Siècle). The subtitles of the article highlight Gao's stance against the June 4 Massacre in Beijing in 1989, his renunciation of membership in the Communist Party, and his decision to never return to mainland China.<sup>802</sup> Another feature article on the same page describes Gao's works as anti-totalitarian. The main feature article in the pro-independence

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801. Cao Chang-Ching, "Nobel Translator Taken to Task," *The Taipei Times*, February 17, 2001.

802. "Huaren yiyiwengxue shijimo wentan zhanguangmang" [Chinese Dissident Literature Shines in the Literary Field at the Fin de Siècle], *Zhongyang ribao*, (*China Times*), October 13, 2000.

newspaper, *Ziyou shibao* (*The Liberty Times*), considers *Yi geren* (*One Man's Bible*) Gao's most important novel about the suffering of the Cultural Revolution, and *Lingshan* as an account of the road to freedom. Another feature article in the same newspaper uses the title "Likai liufang fanguang" (Leave, Exile, Shine) to describe Gao's literary life,<sup>803</sup> indicating that pro-independence reviewers identify with Gao's narrative treatment of his trauma and his desire for freedom. The front-page article of *Lianhe Bao* (*UDN News*) refers to Gao as the first Chinese to win the Nobel Prize, after he left China and went into exile in France.<sup>804</sup> The main article on the front page of *Minsheng Bao* (*Min Sheng Daily*) similarly calls him the first Chinese Nobel winner in literature, whose literary life is closely associated with Taiwan. On the sixth page, a feature article reviews Gao's literary creation and the reception of his literary works in Taiwan.<sup>805</sup> Gao's experimental plays and novel *Lingshan* are singled out as both modernist and Chan Buddhist. In *Taiwan ribao* (*Taiwan Daily*), a headline announces Gao's Nobel win by citing several key words of the Swedish Academy's Communiqué, and the article also singles out *Lingshan* as a work that seeks roots, peace of mind, and freedom.<sup>806</sup>

The first wave of Taiwanese media coverage began to feature Gao and his major works shortly after his win, praising him for his great contributions to Chinese literature and his earning such a prestigious award, which made him the pride of all the Chinese people in the world. *Lingshan* was frequently cited as Gao's most important work. In the *Liberty Times*' feature articles, *Lingshan* is upheld as an expression of Chinese culture, typically Taoism, with the style

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803. See these articles: *Ziyou shibao* (*The Liberty Times*), October 13, 2000.

804. *Lianhe Bao* (*UDN News*), October 13, 2000.

805. *Minsheng Bao* (*Min Sheng Daily*), October 13, 2000.

806. *Taiwan ribao* (*Taiwan Daily*), October 13, 2000.

of Chinese prose.<sup>807</sup> An interview with Gao characterizes his work as basically Chinese with a Western style.<sup>808</sup> However, the front pages of Taiwan's English newspapers, *The China Post* and *Taiwan News*, labelled him as "the Chinese Dissident Gao" and "Dissident Gao."<sup>809</sup>

During Gao's visit in February, Taiwanese media reported his activities from various angles, showing divergent interests and readings of his Nobel Prize win and of his works. When Gao arrived in Taiwan, he was greeted in the newspapers as though it were his second home, a sharp contrast to mainland China's negative reaction.<sup>810</sup> In addition, the newspapers also quoted Gao's words to convey his appreciation of Taiwan's freedom. Gao's visit included top government officials' receptions and face-to-face talks with well-known figures of Taiwan's literature, culture, and politics. Then-President Chen Shui-bian spoke highly of Gao's great literary achievements, praising him as the pride of all the Chinese in the world. During the meeting, Chen quoted Gao's literary motto of "no-ism" to appeal to mainland China not to play politics in handling cross-straits relations.<sup>811</sup> Moreover, Chen invited Gao to direct his own play *Ba yuexue* (Snow in August) in Taiwan, which would be funded by the Council of Cultural Development and Planning of Taiwan, with the participation of the Taipei Peking Opera School.

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807. *Ziyou shibao* (*The Liberty Times*), October 14, 2000.

808. *Zhongguo shibao* (*China Times*), February 7, 2001.

809. See *China Post*'s "Nobel Laureate Praises Taiwan's Freedom," February 2, 2001; *Taipei Times*' "Gao Xingjian Gets Warm Taipei Welcome," February 2, 2001.

810. See the article featuring the TV interview between Gao and the Cultural Bureau, Director Lung Ying-tai, of Taipei City, *Zhongguo shibao*, February 12, 2001. Also See Chen Wen-fang's report "Gao Xingjian: Taiwan youru guxiang" [Gao Xingjian: Taiwan is like My Hometown], *Zhongguo shibao*, February 2, 2001.

811. Zhang Huijun, "Gao Xingjian: meiyou zhuyi Shui-bian: fengwei liangan zhuyi" [Gao Xingjian: No-ism Chen Shu-bian: No-ism for the Cross-straits Relation], *Minsheng ribao*, February 7, 2001.

Gao accepted the president's invitation and promised to come back to direct the play in October.<sup>812</sup> Meanwhile, *Lingshan* was adapted as a radio play by the Broadcasting Corporation of China to be aired on February 6, 2000, a gesture to welcome him and a recognition of the greatness of his novel.<sup>813</sup>

*Lingshan* was chosen as a Nobel masterpiece for its superior literary quality, and its success in the international literary field could not be achieved with translation. In Taiwan, Gao's translators, Malmqvist, Dutrait, and Lee were in the limelight, but only Malmqvist and Dutrait were regarded as the "tuishou" (key players) in Gao's win.

*UDN News* articles glowingly acknowledges Dutrait's contribution to Gao's success: "after the French version of *Lingshan* was published, it was greatly received and praised by the French, hence pushing Gao to the limelight of the international literary circle."<sup>814</sup> In addition, Malmqvist's role as the only Chinese-speaking member of the Swedish Academy was recognized, especially his passion for translating Chinese literature, Gao's *Lingshan* in particular.<sup>815</sup>

Malmqvist's roles as a member of the Swedish Academy and a translator were particularly interesting to Taiwanese readers and critics. On various occasions, he answered questions about the importance of Gao's work and the secret to his winning the Nobel. In an

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812. Hei Zhongliang, "zongtong shangxue Gao Xingjian zhaodao wutai" [The President Appreciates *The Snow in August*, and Gao has Found his Stage], *Minsheng ribao*, February 7, 2001.

813. Liu Yinchuan, "Zhongguang pan ling shang" [The Broadcasting Corporation of China is Climbing *Lingshan*], *Minsheng ribao*, January 31, 2001.

814. Lai Suling, "Tan lingshan fanyi bao mixin" [The Talk on the Translation of *Lingshan* Reveals Secrets], *Lianhe bao*, January 31, 2001.

815. Zeng Huiyan, "Lingshan ruidian yizhe mayueran gong bukemo" [The Swedish Translator of *Lingshan*, Malmqvist, Will Not Be Forgotten], *Lianhe bao*, October 13, 2000.

interview published in *CN Times*,<sup>816</sup> Malmqvist maintained that Gao's win did not mean that he is the best writer in the world, because the Nobel Prize is not a literary competition to choose a champion. Following its initial cold reception in Taiwan, *Lingshan* now became popular there. Outside Taiwan, the novel enjoyed a great reputation in other countries, opening a path for Chinese literature in the rest of the world. In another interview, Malmqvist pointed out that during the evaluation meeting for the Nobel Prize, some members were not willing to vote for Gao, but after he made a speech, the members changed their minds. He stressed that for a Chinese writer, translation is very important because very few readers outside the Chinese-speaking community understand Chinese. Thus, no matter how well a writer writes, he/she will not be known in the greater world without translation.<sup>817</sup>

In addition to the above interviews, Malmqvist also joined Gao for a talk and answered some questions about his personal relationship with the latter as a translator, which dated back to the 1980s. In that time, Malmqvist was very interested in Gao's short stories and novellas, and began to translate his masterpiece even before its publication in Taiwan.<sup>818</sup> In a separate interview, Ma Sen, who wrote the preface for *Lingshan*, recalled that it was at Malmqvist's request that he recommended Gao to Lianjing (Linking) Publishing House. He added that he did not know whether the company "bought his face" (granted his favour), and *Lingshan* could be published, because at that time Gao was still anonymous in Taiwan.<sup>819</sup> In response to

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816. Chen Wen-fen, "Mayueran ditai, xitan gaoxing jian" [Malmqvist Arrives in Taiwan, Talking about Gao Xingjian with Pleasure], *Zhongguo shiba*, January 31, 2001.

817. Wang Lanfen, "Mayueran, zhi wu buyan yanwubujin" [Malmqvist, Say All You Know and Say it without Reserve], *Minsheng bao*, January 31, 2001.

818. Ding Wenling, "Gao xingjian duitan mayueran" [Face to Face: Gao Xingjian and Malmqvist], *Zhongguo shibao*, February 11, 2001.

819. See the interview in *Zhongyang ribao (CN Times)*, October 13, 2000.



Malmqvist's talk on the importance of translation, Taiwan's literary and translation organizations held an academic conference to discuss how Taiwanese literature can earn international recognition.<sup>820</sup>

Taiwan's reception of Gao as a Nobel winner is not a passive one. The early reactions to Gao's win show that Taiwan saw the decision as a political gesture from the West that affirmed him as a political dissident writer, a status that originated from his early creative activities in mainland China and then his resistance to Communist tyranny. His *Yi geren* was especially singled out as his major statement against the Chinese Communist regime and the Cultural Revolution. In Taiwan's literary field, Gao's win was further seen as an affirmation of Chinese literature and culture in the West. *Lingshan* was widely lauded for its poetic beauty and philosophical depth, associated with Taoism and Chan Buddhism and Chinese prose. Moreover, Gao's relationship with Taiwan demonstrated how Taiwan fostered Gao's creative ingenuity as a writer in residence in the 1990s, which then helped him publish his plays, short stories, and novels. Taiwan also drew from the translation of *Lingshan* and initiated its own project for translating Taiwanese literature to the world. Gao's symbolic capital as a Nobel laureate was further appropriated as he was invited by Taiwan's president to direct his play, a gesture to promote Taiwan's visibility to the world.

Taiwan's acceptance of Gao's literary works is closely associated with its political and cultural desire for recognition, though this utilization of Gao's fame is predicated on its acceptance of the symbolic power of international literary awards, by extension implying the superiority of the West. However, this gesture of acceptance has its own preconditions that serve

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820. See the report "wenzue de chuanguozuo yu fanyi" [Literary Creation and Translation], "Fukan"[the supplementary] of *Ziyou shi bao*, February 7, 2001.

Taiwan's own political and cultural agendas, whether the ideological war against Communist China, or the desire for Taiwan to be known to the world and to assert its own identity as a sovereign nation-state.

Taiwan's appropriation of Gao's symbolic capital continued after Gao's visit in early 2001. Ten years after Gao won the Nobel Prize, the Lianjing Publishing House issued a tenth-anniversary edition of *Lingshan*.<sup>821</sup> By leaving the front cover blank and adding photos taken during the author's journeys in the 1980s in the remote ethnic regions of China, the new edition of *Lingshan* reminds readers of similar Chinese classical novels, such as *The Travels of Lao Can* by Liu E (1857-1909). This edition shows that, despite the modernist traits of Gao's novel, its cover design and the photos of the places Gao visited all suggest that it is part of the classical Chinese literary genre, and is related more to Gao's authentic visits to China's history and culture than anything else. In this fashion, the new edition of *Lingshan* further confirms Gao's identity as a Chinese author. By extension, Gao's literary status as a Nobel winner is also an affirmation of the universal recognition of the greatness of Chinese literature.

It is also worth mentioning that *Bayuexue* (*The Snow in August*) directed by Gao himself, was launched and presented in both Taipei and Marseilles in 2004. It was greatly received in both metropolitan cities, and the modern form of opera based on Gao's theatrical experimentation met Western expectations as a work of avant-garde Chinese theatre established by Gao's previous plays in France.<sup>822</sup> However, the play failed to promote Taiwan's image as a nation to the world,

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821. Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition. (Taipei: lianjing chuban she, 2010).

822. Noël Dutrait, "The Birth of a Chinese Language Opera," *Chinese Perspectives*, no. 46 (March-April, 2003): 69-71.

which was an important part of President Chen Shui-bian's political agenda.<sup>823</sup> This demonstrates the limits to the appropriation of Gao's symbolic capital on the international scene.

#### 3.4.0 Conclusion: Translation, Literary Competition, and Appropriation of Symbolic Capital

The publication and reception of Gao's *Lingshan* (*Soul Mountain*) in the Anglophone world (and then in Taiwan) shows how a literary work's universal canonization is read, recognized, and appropriated in various literary worlds. *Lingshan*'s reception in the Anglophone world and Taiwan following its acceptance in France and its Nobel Prize win is not necessarily a simple acceptance of literary canonizations as such, as readers respond to the novel according to the regimes of their respective literary fields. Thus, their reception of Gao's novel is not a given, but is entwined in the complicated webs of the target literary fields. Lee's English version of *Lingshan* is submitted to the process of reading and appropriating to the terms of the literary, social, and cultural conditions of the target milieu. This investigation of Gao's reception in various countries provides examples of the different translation habitus and field conditions whose logic and mechanism determine the reception of Gao's Nobel-winning novel.

Firstly, an observation of the English editions of *Soul Mountain* in Australia shows that the publisher informs the target English reader with significant emphasis on Gao as a dissident writer with modernist tendencies. This is buttressed by Mabel Lee's elaborate contextual messages in her preface to *Soul Mountain* and the redesigned painting of Gao's on the front page. Meanwhile, to promote the visibility and sale of Gao's novel in an English-speaking country, critical comments from major French journals about *Lingshan* are cited as important assessments of its literary quality. The emphasis on Gao's status as a writer and political refugee in Paris

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823. Zhan Minxui, "Rentong yu chiru" [Identity and Effects of Shame], MA thesis, National Cheng Kung University, 2013: 76-97.

coincides with the already existed literary genre of “misery” novels by a group of diaspora Chinese who write in English about their experiences during the Cultural Revolution, or counter-historical novels about modern China in the Anglophone world.<sup>824</sup> The publication of Gao’s novel implies Australia’s engagement with this literary narrative, though some critics reject such works written in English as banal, or simply dismiss their association with Gao’s novel in English translation. However, the post-Nobel reception of Gao’s novel reveals radically different aspects in its shifting to Australia’s contribution to a universally recognized literary work. Australia sees itself as a great promoter of a minor literature, regarding Mabel Lee’s English translation as the means by which a Chinese literary work gained worldwide recognition. Such well-known Australian translators as Bonnie S. McDougall, Geremie Barme, and others have also made significant contribution to this effort. Thus, the Nobel Prize is the recognition of Australia’s effort to translate the marginal to gain universal symbolic capital, which can also effectively resist the dominance of the hegemonic British/American literary centres.

The similar evidence can also be found in the American version of *Soul Mountain*. The overwhelming responses of the American literary field to the first Chinese writer to win the Nobel Prize are marked by dominant voices underscoring different aspects of the reception according to its own literary regimes. On the front cover of the American edition published at the end of 2000, the Nobel Prize was the selling point for Gao’s novel in English. More American reviews and editorial materials are added to strengthen the critical impressions of *Soul Mountain*’s political tendency and great literary value. Although many critics considered Lee’s English version murky, faulty, and unclear, they also read Gao’s novel in line with their

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824. See Eva Kneissl, “Chinese Fiction in English Translation,” *Logos* 18, no. 4 (2007): 205-206. Wang Guanlin, *Translation in Diaspora Literatures*, 1-20.

perceptions of the political aspects of Chinese reality, traditional Chinese culture, and its universal symbolic values. Of these voices, the views of Gao as a dissident writer are more dominantly articulated, demonstrating the perception of modern Chinese literary works as social documents in the target literary field. Moreover, while submitting Gao's novel to different American readings, many critics and reviewers mainly associate Gao's novel with the American formation of the literary representation of self and other; in other words, they read others as mirrors of themselves. Such a reading would codify Gao's novel in the American imagination of its Chinese other, thus diluting or overlooking other important literary elements, such as Gao's modernist narrative both as self-exploitation and as a spiritual quest. Consequently, as readings of *Soul Mountain* prioritize its political significance, its artistic richness and invention are significantly minimized.

Compared with the American responses, Britain's receptions of Gao as a Nobel laureate and his *Soul Mountain* are not as in-depth or as interactive, in general. On the one hand, they argue, the British authors are far more worthy of being considered than an anonymous Chinese novelist and dramatist; even Gao's inspiration from the French Theatre of the Absurd is downgraded as a secondary copying. On the other hand, some critics attempt to review *Soul Mountain* according to the regimes of the English literary field as both a political and a traditional Chinese novel.

The respective responses of the Anglophone world demonstrate that their acceptance of a literary work is predicated on their literary requirements for a foreign work, especially one endowed with great symbolic capital. Their integration of Gao's works into their literary logic and canonization mechanism indicates that their homological conditions create a literary environment to receive Gao's novel, especially after his Nobel win. These homological

conditions must meet the target literary field requirements coded in social and cultural logic in the span of time and place.

Trained as a sinologist, Mabel Lee studied and worked in a translation habitus established by British missionaries, diplomats, and sinologists. In *Soul Mountain*, she adopts excessively literal translations and transliterations to convey the essential features of Chineseness to the English world. Lee's excessive adoption of literal translation and transliteration projects China as a foreign, mysterious, inscrutable, exotic, and incomprehensible, other. Although she treats the Chinese other as incomprehensible and shrouded in religious mystery and peculiar exotic ethnic traits, Lee also rewrites certain parts of Gao's novel with her substantial additions or omissions, especially regarding political content such as the traumatic experiences of China's Cultural Revolution. She even intervenes in the novel by adding her own statements as if they were the words of the narrator. Consequently, the political tendencies in the novel become more explicit. This type of translation establishes references for the target audiences to read Gao's novel politically. Although such a reading can be partially justified, it does minimize, if not ignoring, certain important aspects of Gao's text.

The *illusio* of *Soul Mountain* indicates the consistent presence of translational traits as othering in the literary/translational imagination of English literature. These traits constitute the homological conditions under which Gao's novel is integrated into the target literary field that indexes China as the other. These othering traces help to foreground some significant aspects of Gao's novel, such as the political messages of the protagonist's journey and the representation of marginal cultures, including Taoism, which are upheld and amplified. Consequently, affected by such a translational style, the traces of French literary influences, the most important features of Gao's novel, as well as some key intertextual materials associated with China's traditional

linguistic and cultural allusions, are sacrificed in favour of a more immediate relevance to the reading and appropriation prevalent in the Anglophone literary world for its translation as othering.

Compared with the French literary field, the Anglophone world has more divergent voices. Though it partly shares the French vision that treats Gao as a political dissident and a writer, the Anglophone world differs significantly from the French literary field. As France values Gao's literary invention (typically the creative use of narrative pronouns) and spiritual quest for transcendence, the Anglophone world tends more to associate him with existentialist pursuits and with Taoism, while greater efforts are made to read his texts as social documents. These focuses show the respective field regimes at work. Moreover, whereas Dutrait translated the *illusio* of Gao's novel in line with French modernism, Lee's English version tends to foreground his modernism in terms of the British/American stream-of-consciousness style. In addition, Lee's English version further strengthens the image of China as an other in the English literary imagination, mainly through literal translation, phonetic representation of Chinese linguistic signs, and projecting political aspects of the narrative, so that *Soul Mountain* is tainted with the traces of the "misery" novel, whose literary features are significantly relevant.

As identified in our discussion of several versions of *Soul Mountain*, the fight and use of the symbolic capital bestowed to Gao's novel are highly evident. We note that though France initially helped Gao's ascendancy in the French literary field, the Nobel Prize for Literature has further promoted him in the international literary fields, and France's subtle influences as a dominant European centre are still identifiable. Compared to that of France, the Anglophone world's reception to Gao's works was significantly delayed. Even though *Soul Mountain* was published in Australia in 2000, its popularity in other English-speaking countries was achieved

only after Gao's Nobel win in October 2000. The Anglophone reception was largely based on Gao as a Nobel Prize winner and *Lingshan* as his greatest work. Thus, the Nobel Prize constitutes a precondition of universal symbolic cultural capital for Gao's reception in the world, especially Australia, the United States, the UK, and elsewhere.

Despite the Nobel Prize communiqué's praise of Gao's works as "an œuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity," and his *Lingshan* as a work that "recalls German Romanticism's magnificent concept of a universal poetry,"<sup>825</sup> Gao's "universal validity" appears as a flying signifier, which is subject to a deferring reading according to the target literary logic for appropriating cultural and economic capital. Except for Taiwan's praise of France's contribution to Gao's international prestige and the citation of the French critical reviews in Australia's first edition of *Soul Mountain* as a recognition of the French symbolic capital as universal, the US does not mention the French version of Gao's *Lingshan* at all, least of all with regard to his inspiration from French modernist writers within the *Nouveau roman*. Rather, they read Gao's novel according to the regimes of their own literary discourses and cultural logic. Their reading is not entirely based on Lee's translation, as some scholars and critics have severely criticized Lee's translation, mainly for its lacking of clarity and fluency. However, Lee's English version does help the target reader see certain aspects of Gao's novel that the English literary field has normalized and valorized.

The reception of Gao's award-winning novel in the Anglophone world and Taiwan has also demonstrated the limits of "universality" of Western literary canonization; the utopian universal validation and valorization of a literary work highlights more of its conceptual tension

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825. "Gao Xingjian: Facts," NobelPrize.org, October 12, 2000, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2000/gao/facts/>.



and contradiction than its reality. The search for universality means the fight for, or resistance to, dominance among the participating players in the game on the international scene. Taiwan's reception of Gao's novel radically shows the limit of the signifying power about what constitutes a great universal work of literature.

From our investigation, we can draw several conclusions. First, *Lingshan* is not automatically accepted as a Nobel-winning novel of universal symbolic capital as such, but is translated, utilized, and appropriated according to the regimes of the target literary field. Second, such differing readings and appropriations aim to compete for more cultural and economic capital in terms of social/cultural space and the book market economy. Thus, as much as they recognize the legitimacy of the Nobel Prize for conferring prestige to Gao's works, they follow their own cultural logic and mechanism to accumulate symbolic and economic capital. This process is designed to establish its own cultural legitimacy by expanding its own literary and cultural space, though there is always tension and competition in this process of capital acquisition.

Viewed from a Bourdieusian angle as cited at the beginning of this chapter, the reception of Gao's *Soul Mountain* demonstrates that literary universality reveals much more about its limitations and constraints than its overarching power as a master signifier. In essence, universality is not self-evident, but constantly subject to negotiation and appropriation for its definition and redefinition, in which the fight for symbolic (and economic) capital persists through the act of trans/writing in the literary field.

## Conclusion

Rather than attributing Gao Xingjian's popularity in the West to translation as pure linguistic performance, this project takes a new approach to his ascendancy in the Chinese and international literary fields by adopting the Bourdieusian sociological translation theory to investigate the context, rationale, and nature of Gao's translation of modernism in the era of China's opening to the rest of the world, and then his achievement of international literary prestige while in exile in France. Applying the concepts of habitus, field, *illusio*, and symbolic capital to this project, we trace the contour of Gao's translation of modernist literature and theories in the Chinese literary field, highlight the agency of the translator to engage with and revise the dominant literary structure, through his interlingual translation of French surrealist poetry and absurdist plays, his engagement with modernist theory, and his adaptation of Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot*. This study argues against Pascale Casanova's sweeping claim that writers/translators from peripheral countries in general, and Gao in particular, are mere imitators of the writers and literatures of the Western literary center(s). A critical analysis of Gao's habitus as exhibited in his translations in terms of translation (interpretation)/adaptation strategies reveals him as a translator of modernist literature who subverted the dominant genre of revolutionary realism/romanticism in order to open new literary spaces in the Chinese literary field. Gao's literary visibility does not lie in his faithful representation of Western modernism, but in his efforts to appropriate the latter's universal (dominant) significations through translation as negotiation, mediation, and recreation. As a result, his translation responds to Western literary modernism by adapting it to the field conditions and needs of modern Chinese literature. The new space thus created by Gao and other Chinese writers/translators accommodates the social and cultural needs of the target milieu, so that the modern Chinese literary field becomes

pluralized and socialist realism/romanticism has to co-exist with many other literary currents, including modernism. Gao's translation trajectories thus serve as a refutation of Casanova's view of translation as capital accumulation in favour of the Western literary center(s).

While Gao's translation of modernism in the post-Maoist period signifies his effort to fight for symbolic capital/political legitimacy vis à vis government-approved literature, his exile in France marked a new phase in his literary career, as he moved from a peripheral country to a power center of the international literary field, where he had to translate himself into visibility according to the logic and mechanism of the French literary field. The literary conditions he now faced, such as the reception and construction of Chineseness in French literature, political investments in new literary trends and writers, and agents of translation, including publication regimes, cultural markets, and literary tastes, were important factors in his ascendancy in the West, and thanks to his cooperation with his French translators, *La Montagne de l'âme* satisfied the regimes and expectations of a great work of literature in the French literary field. The positive reception of *La Montagne de l'âme* was based on a similar model to the French promotion of Milan Kundera, whose works were also seen as instances of the political significance of creative freedom and modernist literary experimentation; in Gao's case, other Chinese elements that were esteemed in the receiving milieu were further factors in his success in France. In addition, Dutrait's translation also re-created the *illusio* of the *Nouveau roman* genre, thus relating Gao's novel to French values and producing what Bourdieu describes as "ressemblance dans la différence." Consequently, with the support of France's cultural institutions, excellent press reviews, and relatively high sales volumes, *La Montagne de l'âme* became a canonical literary work and accumulated significant cultural capital. As the French literary field is one of the centers of the international literary field, its consecration of a foreign work also promotes that

work's "universal" validity. Thus, the translation of *Lingshan* in France demonstrates how *La Montagne de l'âme* has overcome the particular and moved into the space of universality. It is exactly this aspect that problematizes the nature of universality: *Lingshan*'s translation, reception, and consecration shows how literary valorization of an author's œuvre as universal, in fact, confirms the dominance of a Western literary centre in the international literary field.

The translation, reception, and cultural appropriation of *Lingshan / Soul Mountain*, both before and after Gao's Nobel win, are essential components of Gao's ascendancy in the international literary center represented by London and New York. Comparing and contrasting the English and French literary fields highlights different logics and mechanisms of the accumulation of symbolic capital in the Anglophone and French literary fields. Mabel Lee's translation responds first to the regimes of the British/American literary field, including Australia, and that literary field's definition of a great work of literature, such as the portrayal of Chinese society in *Soul Mountain* as an immutable Taoist/Confucian world, exotic and mysterious, and populated by other living ethnicities and cultures. In addition, Lee's translation and paratextual materials interpret Gao's innovative use of narrative pronouns as soliloquies of socialist loneliness, thus projecting and foregrounding his status as a political dissident. Meanwhile, in the Anglophone world, Gao's literary capital is transformed into economic capital, as each country draws on his literary prestige to promote the sales of *Soul Mountain*, to gain more profit and cultural market dominance. Thus, *Lingshan*'s publication in English not only implies the cultural dominance of the literary center by Britain/America, but also indicates the efforts of the center to transform such high symbolic capital into economic capital.

Moreover, in contrast to France's canonization of Gao's novel according to its own literary regimes and expectations, Mabel Lee's English translation demonstrates a different set of

values, shaped by the literary field of Britain/America. Lee's translation reworks the *Nouveau roman* style of the original into stream of consciousness and minimizes *Soul Mountain's* links with France, leaving a text that only confirms the universality of the British/American literary center. However, such universality is contested first by Australia within the Anglophone world, where *Lingshan* was originally translated and published, then by Taiwan, where the Chinese version was originally published. Both Australia and Taiwan use Gao's Nobel-winning novel to promote their literary fields and resist their marginal status: In Australia, Mabel Lee's English translation is seen as the direct cause of Gao's Nobel win and the source of his cultural universality, and as an opposition to the dominance of Britain/America in the literary world. Taiwan appropriates Gao's Nobel prestige to show the universality of Chinese literature vis-à-vis mainland Chinese Communist literature, thus asserting Taiwan's political and cultural legitimacy to the world and projecting its visibility as an independent island nation.

In short, *Lingshan's* translation and publication in the Anglophone world manifests itself as cultural assertion based on the regimes of the target literary field for its universal power of cultural validity. However, such claims of literary (economic) capital are not absolute. The aforementioned examples of the appropriation of dominant literary capital from a literary center show that a counter-claim for universality against hegemony underlines the international literary field. This implies that the fight for symbolic capital is thematized in translation and literary publication with its specific logic and development mechanism, where the law of the jungle does not necessarily apply all the time.

This investigation of Gao's translation and ascendancy through translation has significant implications for literature and translation studies. First, this project contributes significantly to the current, and relatively small, field of Gao Xingjian studies in terms of translation. This

study's critical perspectives based on the Bourdieusian sociological translation theory open a new avenue from which to read Gao's work in relation to interlingual performance, translation habitus and literary regimes, an essential process in his acquisition of visibility in the global literary field. Such issues as the nature of Chinese modernism, Chinese literature in a global context, intercultural space(s), and Chinese literature as world literature can be explicated from this new angle, supplementing or revising existing assumptions about Chinese literature in relation to the international literary field. Second, this investigation provides a greater understanding of how a foreign literary work from a peripheral country was accepted and canonized according to the logic of literary canonicity and capitalization in the target literary field. The logic and mechanism of literary consecration particularly showcase the internal motivation of translating a literary work as capital accumulation in pursuit of dominance. Although the literary center(s) consider *Lingshan* a universal work, this very consecration as universal is also contested by another claim of universality, as shown by Taiwan's appropriation of dominant literary signification from the West for its own political and cultural purposes. In brief, this investigation of Gao's translation and *Lingshan*'s translation in various stages of his literary pursuits presents the two contrasting power relations underlined in the literary fields, governed by their respective regimes and conditions, where accumulation of symbolic capital and the contest for universalizing literary dominance generate the dynamics of translation in social and cultural spaces at both local and global levels.

In addition, the application of Bourdieu's translation theory to Gao's work and reputation also provides compelling evidence that Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, symbolic capital, and *illusio* are highly productive to translation studies, allowing us to effectively see how the agents of translation negotiate the target literary regimes to gain symbolic capital with serious

investment in *illusio*. In particular, the *illusio* foregrounded in a Lambertian microanalysis remedies the lack of interest in defining a literary work by its proper aesthetic traits in sociological translation studies. Doing so demonstrates that the Bourdieusian sociological approach to translation is significant not only to uncover the motivation of translation as cultural capital accumulation, but also the relevance of logic and mechanism of literary consecration to the aesthetic traits of a literary field per se. *Lingshan*'s translation is a compelling example in this respect.

This study of Gao's literary ascendancy also sheds light on China's current fight for symbolic capital ("soft power") through translation. However, though China's desire for more cultural power resides in its rising strength in the world, what is important to remember is that, without properly understanding the logic and mechanism of literary consecration and granting of symbolic power in the West, any attempts to translate Chinese literature into universal dominance will not yield tangible results in the West, where the competition and fight for literary dominance are thematized and the target literary conditions and regimes have defining roles to play. Thus, more constructive engagements must be undertaken on China's part in order to achieve the cultural recognition it desires and deserves in the future.

Though this project is significant to literature and translation studies, its sociological investigation of Gao's translation in relation to *Lingshan*'s translation, publication, and reception in the West shows restraints and limitations, mainly in the application of Bourdieu's theory. This application of Bourdieu's sociological theory in relation to translation does not exclusively discuss politics in translation, especially in Chapter 1, which deals with Gao's translation of literary modernism. In examination of modern Chinese literary translation, political functions of literature are overarching. For Bourdieu, the literary field is independent and autonomous, a

conceptualization that is, perhaps, based on the conditions of the modern/contemporary French literary field. However, in countries and historical eras such as Soviet Russia and Maoist China, politics dominated literature to such an extent that the latter became an expression of the former. Soviet literature and Maoist revolutionary literature can be best described as the politics of the Communist Party, as the logic of competition for symbolic capital gave way to violent political indoctrination and domination. Under such circumstances, the investigation of the literary field must be conducted under different parameters, supplementing/overriding cultural consideration.

Drawing on Bourdieu's sociological discussion on writers' habitus and their positions occupied in the social space of a specific field, Gisèle Sapiro further explores the relationship between politics and literature in *Les écrivains et la politique en France*, which addresses the relationship between French writers' political engagement and its theorization and writing practice.<sup>826</sup> Sapiro's approach provokes further reflection on the dominant role of politics in the manipulation or maintenance of the Chinese literary field in the Maoist era and beyond: In modern Chinese literature, political consideration can, and frequently does, override literary and cultural values, a context significantly different from that of France.

Though this exploration of Gao's translation demonstrates the importance of political legitimacy in the Chinese literary field, further studies need to be undertaken to address such issues as political patronage, hierarchization, and canonization in relation to literary translation, valorization, and im/possible resistance, because these issues will help us understand how politics and political/cultural institutions function in defining political/literary values and gaining political/literary dominance.

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826. Gisèle Sapiro, *Les écrivains et la politique en France: de l'Affaire Dreyfus à la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Seuil, 2018), 29.



This investigation of Gao's early translation does not go into detail about the significant role of politics in his early career as a professional translator in the government-sponsored cultural journal *La Chine en construction* in the 1970s, when politics overwhelmed translation oriented to the West. However, Gao himself refrained from talking about it,<sup>827</sup> and it is difficult to determine which translator produced which feature, article, or report, because the translations that appeared in the journal mostly bore the collective label of its editorial office. Identifying Gao's translation and tracing his shift towards literary modernism from the period of the Cultural Revolution to China's opening-up would have been more productive; however, the textual and paratextual evidence exhibited in this discussion of his translation and motivation can sufficiently support its argument.

In addition, the corpus of this study of Gao's translation in China and *Lingshan's* translation in the West represents only small portions of his writings/translations. His most productive years in France included a considerable number of writings, translations, and bilingual plays, and more recently Gao has moved forward to intermedia/multimedia creations, combining visual arts with poetry, painting, or contemporary dance. These aspects of Gao's works as translation can be studied productively. For space reasons, it is impossible to examine all of Gao's original works and translations under the same theoretical frame. Despite this, we can still draw on Bourdieu's sociological theory to discuss Gao's reception through translation in different countries, regions, or language communities. Nuanced comparative and contrastive

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827. During an interview with Wang Mingxing in Paris in September 2015, Gao was reluctant to talk in detail about his translation in the journal. See Wang Mingxing, "Translation as Creation: Interview with Gao Xingjian." *Transcultural: A Journal of Translation and Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (November 18, 2020): 50–52.

studies can help identify and theorize different claims, constructions, and recognition of the respective cultural power of these communities, especially with respect to the literary center(s).

A comparison of the two Chinese Nobel-winning authors, Gao Xingjian and Mo Yan, particularly in terms of translation and literary ascendance, would also be fertile ground for future work. As they were awarded the prize in different contexts, comparison of their translation into universal recognition in the international literary field can help determine the role of cultural politics in their achievement of literary honours. In addition, an examination of Gao's works in bilingual editions may inspire a study of the cohabitational relationship between Chinese and French, in comparison to Victor Segalen's *Stèles*.

The above are only a few suggestions for further research on Gao's writings/translations in the transnational context. Many different approaches can be taken to address different problematics vital to literature, translation, or critical theory, which are subject to different academic interests and focuses.

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