Translating the socialist nation

Exporting Chinese literature under the People’s Republic of China (1949–1966)

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The first seventeen years of the People’s Republic of China (PRC, 1949–1966) was a critical period for the newly established nation to gain international recognition. The period witnessed a unique translation activity, i.e. SL-generated translation of a large number of classical and modern Chinese literature into English and other foreign languages. These state-sponsored translations were mainly undertaken by teams of Chinese and foreign translators in the Foreign Languages Press (FLP) in Beijing. This paper aims to explore how literary translation was used for nation branding and promoting Chinese communism abroad. It reveals the political agenda behind the outward translation activity. It goes on to probe into the patronage of the FLP to disclose the relationship between the translating institution and the political discourse on the nation. Lastly, the study of the English translation of Linhai Xueyuan (林海雪原), i.e. Tracks in the Snowy Forest, a bestseller representative of the ‘revolutionary novel’ of the time, will show that the adaptations aim at recasting revolutionary characters as “perfect” heroes so as to project an ideal image of the modern Chinese nation. The paper concludes with a call to integrate outward translation into TS. Based on Luhmann’s sociology of communication it provides a preliminary observation on the reception of the PRC’s export enterprise, which, more often than not, turned out to be counterproductive.

Les dix-sept premières années ont été décisives pour la nouvelle République populaire de Chine (RPC, 1949–1966) en quête de reconnaissance internationale. La période a connu une activité de traduction exceptionnelle: on a traduit vers l’anglais et d’autres langues étrangères un nombre considérable d’œuvres classiques et modernes de la littérature chinoise. Ces traductions ont été effectuées sous l’égide de l’État par des équipes de traducteurs chinois et étrangers regroupés au sein des Presses en langues étrangères, à Pékin. L’étude vise à montrer comment la traduction littéraire sert à forger une image de la nation et à promouvoir le communisme chinois sur la scène internationale. Elle met en évidence l’agenda politique qui sous-tend ces traductions destinées à
Translating the socialist nation


Keywords: outward translation, nation branding, Foreign Languages Press, Chinese socialist realism, Tracks in the Snowy Forest

Mots-Clés: extraduction, image de marque nationale, presses en langues étrangères, réalisme socialiste chinois, Pistes dans la forêt enneigée

1. Background

“The founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 marked not only the start of a profound transformation of the Chinese state institutions, the society and the economy, but also the beginning of a monumental project to redefine the nature of the Chinese nation-state and its position in the world” (Volland 2007, 51). During its early years, the PRC’s efforts to join the socialist camp manifested themselves through cultural exchanges with other socialist nations such as mutual visits and performances by delegations of writers, orchestras and artists; large-scale international conventions; as well as arts, drama and music students exchanges (Fan 1993). Translation became another striking way for the new China to assert its identity as a socialist nation, also trying to establish its legitimacy as a Communist regime. During its early years, especially the first seventeen years, the young PRC had been translating from other communist countries, the Soviet Union in particular, and from capitalist countries, but on a very limited scale. Foreign translations into Chinese have been relatively well researched (Sun 1996; Zha 2001, 2004). However, translating Chinese literary works by the state itself, which was deemed as a direct means to redefine the Chinese nation, has received little scholarly attention.

The research gap might be due to the development of target-oriented approaches to translation in the 1970s. Literary translation studies mainly dealt with translations initiated by the target society, focusing on target literary “norms” (Toury 1980), or the “manipulation” (Hermans 1985) of foreign texts at the expense of
translations generated by a source-culture. Such is the case of literary translations undertaken by the Chinese Foreign Languages Press (FLP) in the first seventeen years of the PRC. This, however, is a phenomenon worthy of investigation because it sheds light on translations predicated on politics, and perhaps more importantly, on the uses of literary translation for nation branding. Drawing on Lefevere's study of controlling factors in translation, i.e. ideology, poetics and patronage, the paper focuses on the Chinese translation initiative and explores its relevance to the nation-branding project of the time. It first examines the political agenda behind the translation initiative by situating it in its specific cultural and historical milieu, i.e. the Cold War years and the early years of the People's Republic of China. It goes on to probe into the patronage of the FLP to disclose the relationship between the official translating institution and the political discourse on the nation. Lastly, the study of the English translation of Linhai Xueyuan (Tracks in the Snowy Forest), a bestseller representative of the “revolutionary novel” of the time, will show that the adaptations aim at recasting revolutionary characters as “perfect” heroes so as to project an ideal image of the modern Chinese nation. The paper concludes with a call to integrate outward translation into TS. Based on Luhmann's sociology of communication it provides a preliminary observation on the reception of the PRC's export enterprise, which more often than not turned out to be counterproductive.

2. The politics of outward translation

The Cold War has been described as a cultural conflict, a “battle for the minds” (Ninkovich 1981, 135). From the very beginning, the United States and the Soviet Union tried to consolidate and expand their sphere of influence not just via diplomatic means and economic assistance, but also via cultural diplomacy (Volland 2007, 53). Being the second largest communist country, the PRC was inevitably involved in the Cold War. For its first twenty years of existence, the PRC had been unable to gain recognition from most of the Western countries, the United States in particular. In addition, the United States built a network of cultural diplomatic relations and institutions in East Asia, based primarily in Taiwan and in Hong Kong to counter the expanding cultural influence of the Soviet Union as well as the PRC (Zhao 2006; Shan 2009). With regard to translation activities, since 1952 the U.S. government had subsidized an ambitious translation program in the World Today Press based in Hong Kong. It employed top translators and supplied Hong Kong readers with contemporary American fictions. Translating the so-called anti-communist works was also added to the program. One典型 example of activities directed against the PRC was the publication and translation of The Rice-sprout Song and Naked Earth by Eileen Chang, two novels focusing on the abject poverty of
the Chinese rural population after the maoist land reform in the 1950s, the youth struggles during the land reform, Sanfan (三反) and Wufan (五反), namely the mass movements against corruption and degeneration, and the Korean War (Shan 2009). Besides Hong Kong, the US Information Service, an official branch of the US Embassy in Taiwan, also sponsored the English translation of Taiwanese literature in the 1960s in an attempt to show “both the close tie between two governments across the Pacific and the American government’s one China policy, which at that time recognized Taiwan as the only Chinese regime” (Kenneth 2006, 496).

Against this background of fierce conflicts between two different political and ideological blocs, projecting the self-image of China by various means was included in the cultural-political agenda of the newly founded nation. Translating Chinese literary works amounted to a covert and easily acceptable way to project the perceived self-image of China, hence trying to establish the legitimacy of the newly born nation. This was not only a response to the Cold War. It was also an important means to assert the Chinese national identity.

2.1 Patronage of outward translation

2.1.1 Political function of outward translation

In the first seventeen year period, translation, both from and into Chinese, was assigned important political and cultural functions, which were best expressed by Chen Yi. Addressing students from the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute in 1962, Chen Yi, Vice Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs, illustrated the importance of learning foreign languages:

Don't regard work with foreign languages as a simple and easy task. It is not a technical work. Instead, foreign languages themselves are the tools of political struggle. When foreign languages are mastered, we can introduce the strengths of foreigners in China so that our economy and culture can be improved and developed. We can also introduce our experience of the revolutionary struggle abroad, thereby extending the influence of our revolution and strengthening the struggle against imperialism.

(The Editor, Foreign Language Teaching and Research 1962, 4; my translation)

It is obvious that Chen related “working with foreign languages” mainly to translation. Translating both from and into foreign languages was a means for self-empowerment. In essence, Chen’s view testified to the instrumentality of translation deeply embedded in the logic of rivalry during the Cold War. Translating Chinese literary works was no exception. In July 1959 Chen Yi addressed the editors of Chinese Literature, an English translation journal dedicated to Chinese literature, asserting, “The journal is a literary one. Art is a wise politics and the strongest form
of ideology. The artistry is meant to lure you into our political trap via the creation of appealing artistic images” (Zhou et al. 1999, 160–161; my translation). In other words, outward translation of Chinese literature was subordinate to politics, which in turn exerted a great influence on the politics of the nation.

2.1.2 Producing English translations of Chinese literature in the FLP

With regard to translating Chinese literature, the Beijing Foreign Languages Press (FLP) was the only publishing house appointed by the Chinese government. The state-sponsored institution was modeled after the Foreign Languages Publishing House, which was established in Moscow in 1931, and emulated in other communist countries, notably in Eastern Europe. The FLP was thus closely associated with the state's international propaganda. The establishment of the International Press Bureau (INP), the predecessor of the FLP, coincided with the establishment of the PRC on October 1st, 1949. In the two years following its founding, the INP published a series of documents, policies and writings by the state's leaders in different languages under the name of the FLP. In July 1952, the INP became the FLP, whose mission was to strengthen the state's international propaganda by specializing in editing, translating and publishing foreign-language books and journals for readers abroad. It is reasonable to assume that the FLP was actually born at the same time as the PRC, even if it was formally created three years later. From 1949 to 1966, the FLP published 4108 books in 22 foreign languages (Dai et al. 1999). Apart from publishing books in various foreign languages, the FLP issued several periodicals or magazines, thus forming a powerful network of international propaganda, or of cultural diplomacy through books and periodicals. *Chinese Literature* founded in 1951 was an English-language literary journal of Chinese literature in translation. In 1953, *Chinese Literature* was incorporated into the FLP and started to systematically translate Chinese classical and contemporary literary works, critiques and reports on Chinese literary events. Among these translations, Chinese literary works played a small but significant role in shaping the image of China, thereby helping to represent the newly born nation for the outside world.

Being a state-sponsored publishing house, the FLP reigned over the whole translation process of Chinese literature. This included the selection of materials, editing or censoring the selected texts, translating, revising and proofreading, publishing and distributing, which involved a wide range of agents within different yet overlapping institutional contexts, namely literary agents, publishers, editors, translators and authors. The first stage of the translation assembly line was the selection of what to translate. Chinese editors employed by the FLP made the initial selection of the source texts through reading the official literary journals, like *People's Literature, Literary Gazette (Journal of Literature and Art)*, and dominant review journals and writings on literary historiography written after 1949, such as
Literary Review, Introduction to the History of Modern Chinese Literature by Wang Yao, A Short History of Modern Chinese Literature by Ding Yi, etc. The lists of selected texts were sent to the Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Chinese Writers Association and renowned official writers, etc., who were expected to make the final decision on the works to be translated.

It should also be noted that the FLP was rather meticulous about editing the original works during the selection process. The source texts selected for translation were usually sanitized versions of the originals. Since the founding of the PRC in 1949, the official literary publishers edited and reprinted the classics and May Fourth literary works. The FLP aimed to “reshape the understanding of Chinese traditional culture among the foreign readers” (Dai et al. 1999, 65; my translation), which was tantamount to reinventing or reconstructing the tradition of the newly born nation.

As for modern Chinese literary works, the FLP also selected the latest revised editions, mainly by the original authors, for translation. This was to ensure that the texts to be translated conformed to the dominant ideology, or the state ideology of the time. For example, a revolutionary historical novel titled Qingchun Zhi Ge (青春之歌) was first published in 1958, telling the story of how a woman intellectual became a member of the Chinese Communist Party and later joined the revolution led by the CCP. The book immediately came under harsh criticism from a reader and later from literary critics, who strictly followed Mao’s Talk at Yan’an Forum on Art and Literature, the guiding principles of literary creation and literary criticism at the time. Willingly or unwillingly, the author revised her work accordingly. The revised edition was published in 1960. It was selected for the translation that appeared in 1964.

The selection process entailed the canonization of Chinese literature by reinforcing the official ideology and poetics. One can assume that translating officially sanctioned literary works contributed to the construction of a more or less homogeneous image of Chinese literature and thereby of a unified nation.

The selected texts were edited by the FLP Chinese editors, highly knowledgeable in Chinese language and literature as former graduates of famous universities such as Sun Yat-Sen University and Peking University, but with little knowledge of foreign languages and cultures. The Chinese editors, acting as gatekeepers, would expurgate those elements that might tarnish the positive image of China. This can be construed as an act of self-filtering, peculiar to the translation being initiated.

1. Chinese literary works created during “May Fourth Movement” or “new culture” movement, which began in China around 1916, following the failure of the 1911 Revolution to establish a republican government, and continued through the 1920s.
by the SL society. The deletions roughly fell into two categories. One was any “licentious and ghastly” content to be found especially in the classics of Chinese literature. An example of this was a story titled “The Man with the Curly Beard” collected in *The Dragon King’s Daughter: Ten Tang Dynasty Stories* published by the FLP in 1954. The editor abridged the plot about feeding on human heart and liver, an act of barbarism. This might have been dictated by the desire to protect China’s image as a civilized nation (Lau 1995, 226). The other category was contents that “distorted the images of revolutionary heroes and the laboring people”, which was to be found mainly in the contemporary works published since 1942. For example, the English version of *Xiaochen Chunqiu* (小城春秋), i.e. *Annals of a Provincial Town* (1959), a revolutionary historical novel based on a Party-organized prison raid in 1930, where the intricate triangular episode of two communist revolutionaries falling in love with the same girl, while one of them had a wife, also a Communist, was eliminated.

The selected and sanitized originals were forwarded to the different translation sections. With the development of the FLP, and especially the shift of focus of China’s foreign policy from “leaning to one side (i.e. the Soviet side) towards the third world”, which had been agreed upon in the mid-1950s, the number of foreign languages had increased dramatically. By the end of 1958, the FLP had thirteen translation sections, namely Russian, English, French, German, Spanish, Japanese, Indonesian, Hindi, Vietnamese, Burmese, Thai, Urdu, and Arabic. Despite the variety of foreign languages English was still the most translated language, especially in the field of literature. The reasons for this are as follows: First of all, there had been bidirectional translational activity between various communist countries in order to foster a sense of international socialist identity. The FLP did not need to translate many literary works into the languages of these countries. Hence, the limited FLP translations into “minority languages” played a supplementary role in providing more access to Chinese literature for their readers. Secondly, due to the conflicting ideologies between China and the Western world, there had been few cultural exchanges, including translations. Therefore, translations from Chinese into English initiated by China itself were a must, or to use the official words, “a vital piece of propaganda targeting the capitalist world” (Fang 1957, 19; my translation). Lastly, translating Chinese literature into English, which frequently works as a vehicular language (Glissant 1997), could inevitably help to extend the influence of Chinese literature as well as the communist China it represented, since a translation

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2. The principle of these two types of deletions established for the Chinese editors is found in the FLP unpublished document titled “Introduction to *The Series of Classical Chinese Literature*”.

into English often leads to translation into yet other languages that are themselves peripheral (Heilbron 1999, 435). In fact, many English translations published by the FLP were regarded as official translations, and later became the source texts from which some countries, especially those with minor languages, translate into their own languages. A typical example is the English translation of Mao Zedong's poems, on which most of the translation works published in Paraguay and Greece were based.

Being the commissioner, the FLP also set some guiding translation principles for in-house translators, i.e. 'faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance' put forward by Yan Fu, a great Chinese scholar and translator in Late Qing Dynasty, which later became the general standard for translation. Among those three principles, faithfulness to the original was of overriding importance. But as we have seen, the original was not simply the original. Instead, it was a state-manipulated version. The fidelity principle actually turned out to be faithfulness to the official ideology.

Given the official background of the FLP, who to translate was another crucial matter. Two groups of translators would be working for the FLP. The first group was made of in-house native Chinese translators. Most of them were foreign language graduates and usually expected to translate contemporary Chinese short stories. One exception was a renowned translator, Yang Xianyi, who translated almost all the classics with the help of his British wife, Gladys Yang. The second group comprised native speakers of the target languages, including the 'foreign experts' hired by the FLP as well as the 'Peace Champions' invited by the FLP to participate in the translation activity, either polishing the translation drafts by the Chinese translators or translating. 'Foreign experts' and 'Peace Champions' were people sympathetic to the Chinese revolution. Some of them later became Chinese citizens, notably Sydney Shapiro, who translated most of the revolutionary fictions in this period. One typical example of 'Peace Champions' was Rewi Alley, a writer and social worker from New Zealand, who first came to China in 1927 and later engaged in various activities supporting the CCP and China, such as setting up the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives and schools. After the creation of the PRC, Alley remained in China and wrote many works praising the Party and the PRC government. He also translated Chinese literary works, mostly classical Chinese poetry (Alley 2003), including *Peace through the Ages, Translations from the Poets of China* (1954), *The People Speak Out: Translations of Poems and Songs of the People of China* (1954), *The People Sing* (1958), *Poems of Revolt* (1962), *Tu Fu, Selected Poems* (1962), etc. One recurrent theme of these translated poems was the Chinese people's love of, and struggle for freedom and peace, which instantiated Alley's role as 'Peace Champion' in China.

The FLP hired or invited native speakers of target languages for two main purposes. The first one was to make the translation as natural and idiomatic as possible.
The second and more important was their symbolic role, which was to show that the Chinese revolution led by the CCP enjoyed international support, that the New China was not isolated, or as Mao put it, China had “friends all over the world”.\textsuperscript{4} The name of the foreign translators on the cover of translated works could function as an important tool in the service of political and cultural diplomacy. Rewi Alley also served as “de facto ambassador” for the regime, regularly hosting groups of foreign visitors, mostly from the West. He thus played a small but significant part in “China’s people’s diplomacy”, which aimed at fostering people-to-people links between China and other countries in the days when China was politically isolated (Brady 2003, 77–78).

Polishing and proofreading followed. Translations by Chinese translators, except a high-profile translator like Yang Xianyi, would be polished by foreign experts, and later proofread by experienced Chinese translators to ensure that there was no incongruity between the original and the translation.

The last stage was publishing and distribution. The translated texts would be printed in the Printing House attached to the FLP and then transferred to the China International Publishing Group (CIPG) for distribution. There were two main channels to disseminate the translated works. One was selling through the CIPG networks. These agencies or distributors were mostly the bookstores set up by the Communist Party and leftist groups in Asian, African, Latin American, as well as Western countries. The other way was by sending them as gifts, in an attempt to widen the potential readership.

To promote the translated works, other measures were taken by the FLP. Questionnaires were sent with the translated works to get readers’ feedback and to identify their reading interests. While the FLP was intent on promoting the translated works the world over, the distribution of Chinese literature was thwarted by complex and volatile international relations especially in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. The translated works produced by the FLP mostly reached India and other Asian, African and Latin American countries. The translation activity itself, from the initial stage to the final one, was entangled in the changing relations between China and the rest of the world during the Cold War.

2.1.3 \textit{FLP translators}

Being employed in the FLP, translators were subordinate to the publishing house, and ultimately subject to what was felt to be the needs of the nation. Along the

\textsuperscript{4} This observation is inspired by Herbert Passin’s work titled \textit{China’s Cultural Diplomacy}. According to Passin, every foreign visitor in the 1950s and 1960s “is another feather in her cap, a mark of recognition, another milestone on the road to acceptance and respectability, another blow to the American policy of non-recognition” (Passin 1963, 8).
management line, translators were instructed by editors, who in turn were following instructions from high up, thus deprived of much of the right to choose what to translate. From the translation experience of Yang Xianyi and his wife Gladys Yang, the doyen of translators into English at that time, we clearly see a lack of autonomy. Owing to his profound knowledge of Chinese classics, Yang Xianyi was not only employed as a translator. He was one of the FLP experts responsible for selecting classical literary works to be translated. Speaking about his translation work for the FLP at the beginning of the 1950s, Yang said he was “satisfied” (Yang 2002, 187). However, with the recurrent political movements in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, translation freedom was not guaranteed. Although Yang was not labeled a “rightist” in the anti-Rightist Movement of 1957, he later became a “rightist who had escaped the net” (Lei 2007, 199; my translation), which greatly influenced his translation activity. In his autobiography, Yang Xianyi mentioned the restrictions he and his British wife Gladys met when selecting translation materials:

Unfortunately, since we were in essence employed merely as hired hands and since the selections were made by young Chinese editors whose knowledge of Chinese literature was rather limited or because the selections had to suit the political taste of the period, many such translations done by us were not worth the time spent on them. I only chose classical Chinese literature, so I was often lucky with my choices. However sometimes even classical poems were chosen for their “ideological” or “political” content, and we often argued with the editors about their choices, reaching compromise only after lengthy discussion. (Yang 2002, 202–203)

Even when Yang and his wife translated works they liked and appreciated, if those works ran counter to the political ideology, their translation would be censored or left unpublished:

When I was translating Song Ming stories, because the popular Chinese editions were expurgated, we had to go to Beijing Library to make copies from an early Ming edition. There was a very nice story called “The Pearl Vest”. The original edition contained some exquisitely written erotic passages. Though we were using the original unexpurgated edition, our English edition was censored and these passages were deleted. Another story from the same collection mentioned Japanese pirates during the Ming Dynasty. We had to cut that reference because our editors were afraid to annoy Japanese friends. Another story was a good Song dynasty called “Ghosts of the Western Hills”. The story was nicely written, full of humor, and translated well by Gladys, but because Chairman Mao had just made his famous dictum, ‘We should not be afraid of ghosts’ (meaning foreign imperialists). This ghost story was purged from the collection. These are only a few examples of the trouble we encountered during our translation work those days. (Yang 2002, 203)
The above citation underscores the political constraints imposed on translators. W.J.F. Jenner, a former foreign expert working for the FLP, once asserted that the editors “have absolutely no control over the selected texts for translation or the final form of the published translation. These decisions […] are made by political authorities […]” (Lau 1995, 226). Absolute as it might be, this observation reveals the subordinate status of FLP translators.

A translator’s preface or postscript attached to the translated text indicates the degree of freedom the translator enjoys. Significantly, none of the translations published by the FLP contains a translator’s preface or postscript. Instead, one typically finds “The Publisher’s Note (Words)” and/or “Preface” written by the original author or “official” literary experts. The role of these “paratexts” (Genette 1997) is to orient the interpretation of the original according to China’s dominant ideology and poetics. Hence, the FLP translator was made invisible to the greatest extent. He or she was just a link in the chain of agents intervening in the production of translations for foreign consumption. All the factors mentioned above, such as the political and cultural function assigned to translation, its institutionalization and mode of production led to the subordinate status of the translators.

3. Recasting hero images into official models: Tracks in the Snowy Forest

According to available statistics, the FLP published 171 translations of literary works during the seventeen years of the PRC, including 134 contemporary works. In this corpus, I have selected a representative text for closer examination, i.e. the translation of Linhai Xueyuan (林海雪原), which belongs to the ‘revolutionary popular novels’ whose main protagonists are portrayed as heroes.

Linhai Xueyuan depicts the anti-Kuomintang guerrilla warfare during the Civil War in China in the second half of the 1950s, when a small detachment of thirty-six men was dispatched to search for and destroy the scattered armed gangs loosely known as the Kuomintang Central Vanguard Assault Army. Thanks to the Chinese cultural tradition implicitly reflected in the contemporary theme of revolutionary struggle, the work won its name as a “legendary tale of revolutionary heroes” (Wang 1958, 56) and became enormously popular among all classes of the Chinese people. Within less than two years from its initial publication in 1957, the novel had sold nearly two million copies and became the most popular novel of the time. In contradiction with its enthusiastic reception by the general public, the reaction of the literary establishment was mixed. On the one hand, most critics praise the novel for its readability and revolutionary theme reflecting the communist indomitable and all – conquering military struggle. On the other hand, following the dominant political ideology and the prevailing standard of “heroes in the new time” of
socialist realism, critics never fail to draw attention to its “weak points”. One of the most severe charges is the characterization of revolutionary heroes indebted to the traditions of Chinese classical works. As Lefevere has observed (1999), ideology and poetics are the two main control factors conditioning all forms of rewritings, including translation. The critics’ complex reactions towards Linhai Xueyuan, which was subject to the prevailing ideology, allowed the novel to be translated, but in its adapted form. The reshaped image of revolutionary heroes in the English version of Tracks in the Snowy Forest (1962) is evidenced by comparing the original, the critical reviews and the English version.

In the original novel Shao Chien-po, the young leader of the detachment group, is not only handsome but also sentimental. Brought up by his sister, Shao Chien-po has deep affection for her. When he learns of the possible death of his sister, who is the county head in Pin Tree Station raided by the bandits, Shao naturally exhibits his feeling: such as in the description, “嗓音因急躁而有些颤抖” (Shao’s voice trembled with a bit of impatience) (Qu 1958 4). When receiving the order from the upper commander: “虽然努力镇静，但总显露有点担心和不安” (he composed himself with an effort, although he naturally displayed some worry and uneasiness) (Qu 1958 4). In the English version, Shao never exhibits his feelings of “impatience”, “worry and uneasiness”. He rather displays strong-mindedness and loyalty to the revolutionary cause. Similar deletion of Chien-po’s deep yearning for his late sister re-enforces his image of a strong-willed revolutionary. These deletions are closely related to the critical comments on Chien-po from the literary establishment. A critic complains about Chien-po’s display of sadness when informed of his sister’s death, arguing that this might give the impression that Chien-po’s affection for his sister is deeper than for the masses, a comment leading to the denigration of his mindset. In the eyes of the critic, “personal sentiment should give way to revolutionary emotion” (He 1958, 43–44). As the leader of the detachment group, Shao Chien-po figures conspicuously in the story, in violation of the prevailing ideology of “collectivism”. In other words, a communist should not proclaim his personal heroism, according to the dominant poetics of socialist realism, a literary doctrine imported from the Soviet Union in the 1930s, which became “the highest principle” for literary writing and criticism in China from 1953 onwards. The hero image embodies the ideology of socialism and communism, namely “the mentality of collectivism and high level of discipline” (Zhou 1958). Therefore, a salient individuality is perceived as an obstacle to establishing socialism.

Against this background the individual heroism of Shao Chien-po attracts severe charges from various critics of the time. Most of these criticisms follow the same logic: Shao Chien-po is dangerously individualistic. Displaying Shao’s personal brilliance is tantamount to neglecting the leadership of the Party and the wisdom of the masses. In line with these criticisms, the English edition tones
down or even erases the self-perceived elements of individualism. One of the most salient examples is in Chapter 8. The detachment succeeds in taking the Breast Mountain where the Kuomintang guerrillas live, helped by an old villager called Mushroom Picker. At the end of the chapter, Shao Chien-po expresses his gratitude to Mushroom Picker in front of the detachment group. The medical orderly Bai Ru reads out the poem about the battle written by Shao Chien-po to the soldiers. Facing their brilliant leader, the soldiers are filled with admiration and regard Shao as their idol: “our leader is well versed in both fine letters and martial arts!” Obviously, Shao reminds us of Zhou Yu, a skilled war commander well versed in music and poems in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. However, as a hero in the new China, Shao should remain modest and loyal to the people. The critic He Qifan sees the depiction “rather dated” and lashes out at “Shao’s individual heroism” (He 1958, 27–29). The whole page is consequently reduced to the following sentences: “‘Let’s give thanks to the Old Mushroom Picker for his help,’ Chien-po called to the fighters, ‘and wish him a long, long life. With shouts of approval, they all surrounded the smiling old man” (Shapiro 1962, 119). The translation omits the poem written by Shao and the soldiers’ admiration for Shao, hence watering down elements demonstrating Shao’s individual talents, or what is felt to be a personality cult on the part of the soldiers; instead, it emphasizes Shao’s understanding of Mushroom Picker’s importance, a typical representative of the masses.

The amendment of Shao Chien-po’s individualism in the translation can be further and best exemplified by the adaptation in Chapter 25. The residents in Chiapi Valley are worried that the detachment might not be able to capture the bandit nicknamed the Eagle; they begin to express their fear and disappointment. Hearing the gloomy talk, some of the younger militiamen try to reassure the local residents, saying “剑波同志神人一般, 保险活捉座山雕” (Chien-po isn’t an ordinary man. He’ll capture that old eagle for sure) (Qu 1958, 337). In the English version, the man saving the residents from the grip of the old eagle becomes “our PLA fighters” (Qu 1962, 329). Shao’s individual heroism disappears.

Shao Chien-po is young, handsome and brilliant; he easily wins the unreserved admiration and love of Bai Ru, the medical orderly. Their love story forms one of the main threads of the plot. However, the love plot had been the subject of severe criticism ever since the novel was published. The critic Hou Jinjing, for example, regards the exquisite depiction of Bai Ru’s love for Shao Chien-po as a “structural wart”; he argues that their love tarnishes Shao’s heroic image of “bravery and resoluteness” (Hou 1958, 20–21). Obviously, Hou sees the love depiction from its political efficacy; in other words, if love between men and women cannot complement the political nobility of the protagonist, it is useless and even harmful. Another critic, He Qifan, regards Bai Ru as a character who plays up the individualism of Shao Chien-po (He 1958, 27–29). Accordingly, the translated version undergoes
many deletions and adaptations of the love between Bai Ru and Shao Chien-po. Take Chapter 9 for example: after the battle of Breast Mountain, Bai Ru cannot help day-dreaming about her beloved young leader: “在她看来剑波好像晴朗的天空中一轮皎洁的明月，他是那样的明媚可爱，但又是那样的无私公正” (In her eyes Chien-po is like a bright moon in the sky. He is so shining and loveable, and he is so unselfish and impartial) (Qu 1958 114). “她爱剑波那对明亮的眼睛，不单单是美丽：而且里面蕴藏着无限的智慧和永远放不尽的光芒。他那青春丰满的脸腮上挂着的天真热情的微笑，特别令人感到亲切、温暖。她甚至愿听剑波那俏爽健壮的脚步声，她觉得这脚步声是踏着一支豪爽的青年英雄进行曲” (She is always bathed in the fantasy of happy and sweet love. She loves Chien-po’s shining eyes not only because of their beauty, but also the glamour of infinite wisdom and endless radiance from them. The ingenuous and passionate smile on his young and strong face always makes one feel affable and warm. She likes to listen to the sound of his brisk step. She feels that sound is like the march of heroes (Qu 1958 115). All these exquisite depictions of Bai Ru’s love for Chien-po vanish from the English version. Equally noteworthy is the addition and adaption of Bai Ru’s love in the English version. On the same page of the original Bai Ru marvels at Shao Chien-po’s intelligence and handsomeness, quoting Chien-po’s words to demonstrate his modesty: “一切归功于党，一切归功于群众。’他又是这样谦虚。我若有这样一个亲哥哥的话，我这个当小妹妹的该是多么幸福骄傲呀！” (“ ‘We owe everything to the Party and the masses’ he always says. He is so modest. If I have such a lover, I will be so happy and proud”) (Qu 1958 115). In the eyes of He Qifang, the word “modest” is ideologically problematic. Moreover, via Bai Ru’s comment, the author actually attributes the victory to Chien-po, thereby stressing Chien-po’s individual role (He 1958). Not surprisingly, Bai’s narration “he is so modest” is abridged in the English version, and the above quotation changes to “We owe everything to the Party, and the masses. If it weren’t for the Party and the people, my sister and I wouldn’t be alive today,” he always says… Yes, he’s right, I feel just the same” (Qu 1962, 121–122; italics mine). The italicized addition of his personal example highlights Chien-po’s understanding of the importance of the Party and the people. Besides, Bai Ru’s bold confession of her love for Shao is changed into that of her loyalty to the Party and the people. The nature of their love is also changed accordingly. In the original Bai Ru’s love and admiration for Shao is due to Shao’s personal glamour, which the translation turns into love based on the common revolutionary cause. Bai Ru’s transformation does not stop there. On the same page of the original, Bai Ru is bothered by Chien-po’s vague attitude towards her love; she cannot help asking in her sleep: “他怎么对我这样腼腆呢？他怎么老对我…” (Why is he so shy with me? Why does he always …) (Qu 1958 310). In the English version Bai Ru’s natural display of love becomes worrying about the frostbite of her comrade: “Longlegs Ta-the is suffering from a bad case of frostbite,
a bad case of frostbite…” (Qu 1962, 308). The English Bai Ru therefore acquires the quality of conscientiousness with her revolutionary job.

Besides Shao Chien-po and Bai Ru, the novel vividly portrays various characters of the detachment, like Luan Chao-chia, Liu Hsun-tsang, Yang Zirong, etc. A typical veteran soldier, an experienced mountain climber, and a carefree fun-loving man, Luan Chao-chia never misses an opportunity to crack jokes, often at himself, and, occasionally to the embarrassment of others. Once, he describes how he tailed a woman suspect for several days. At a railway station people smile at him, even the women and girls. He thinks to himself, “为啥都上了我的眼? 我这个模样也不怎样啊?” (Why do they all have an interest in me? I’m not that good looking!) (Qu 1958 326). Walking into the stationmaster’s room, he comes face to face with a weird-looking fellow. The man’s face is black with dust, only his eyeballs and teeth showing white; his padded army coat is inside out. Chao-chia cannot help laughing at the sloppy-looking soldier, and then realizes it is his own reflection in a mirror. In the English version Luan’s humorous joke at himself turns into a pale narration: “what’s so funny about me? I wondered” (Qu 1962, 318).

Chao-chia curses freely and never censors his language. When the detachment commander jokingly criticizes him for taking chances in barging into Tiger Mountain, he says that his sixth sense tells him that the detachment has already taken the mountain and a merry party is going on. Then somebody asks him if his sixth sense can tell the fate of the Eagle. Chao-chia’s answer is that the Eagle cannot be dead but will not live. He even uses coarse language such as “百鸡宴上拿座山雕哇，就好比裤筒里抓…” (capturing the Eagle at the Hundred Chickens Feasts is just like...ing in one's underwear) (Qu 1958 454). His face reddens when he sees White Dove in the Crowd. When pressed by the other to be explicit, he gives White Dove a glance and says, “说句文明的吧! 裤筒里抓那玩意，是手拿把卡” (Let’s use a civilized expression; catching that thing…) (Qu 1958 324). More than a page of the narrative is removed in the English translation. When he reports his struggle experience to Shao Chien-po, a series of curse words, like “妈的”, “他妈的” (roughly translatable in a range from “damn” to “fuck”) always come out of his mouth; these vulgar terms never appear in the translation. In order to catch up with the enemies in time, Chao-chia takes a landlords’ horse without permission. This part is also wiped out in the translation, thus concealing the negative image of Chao-chia as a revolutionary soldier.

Liu Hsun-tsang is another character portrayed with vigor and force. A strong, husky fellow, Liu moves around like a tank and is called Tank by other detachment members. He is brave in fighting, but reckless and quick-tempered in dealing with other people. When Tiger Mountain is taken in a surprise attack, the soldiers suffer frostbite after covering three hundred li on skis day and night. As White Dove is instructing everyone to massage their legs with snow, Tank Liu grumbles:
“小白鸽！你这是哪一国的大夫？这样调理人！越冻越加雪？天下哪有这样治病的？这简直是越渴越吃盐，越热越包棉。你不是来‘上庙’，你是成心来糟蹋‘老道’哇！” (What kind of charlatan are you? What sort of treatment is this! Apply snow to frozen feet? Never heard of this sort of cure! It's like eating salt when you're thirsty or wrapping up with cotton padding when you’re warm. You're not making a sacrifice in the temple but abusing the monk!) (Qu 1958 294). Incited by Liu’s sarcastic words, other soldiers reluctantly follow Bai Ru’s instruction. Chien-po quickly explains to them the reason for Bai Ru’s suggestion. These three pages are entirely censored out of the English version. As a result, Liu no longer projects the negative image of someone lacking scientific knowledge; ignorance no longer bothers him or the other soldiers.

Liu also loves fun. As the detachment is recuperating on Tiger Mountain, a sentry spots two suspects and reports to the commander. Tank Liu is ordered to take five men to get the suspects alive. Moments later, a small, thin man is taken in blindfold in bandit fashion along with another untied man. Leading his captive to the center of the hall, Tank Liu, imitating a Tientsin magician, prattles: “蒙上盖上，变得快当，铜锣一响，变出个猴王!” (Cover up, quick, with the sound of a brass gong, change into a monkey king!) (Qu 1958 321). He whips off the blindfold; it is Luan Chao-chia. This paragraph is omitted in the English version, and Liu’s humor is lost.

It is natural for soldiers to get angry when they risk their lives only to be given the cold shoulder. At Suifen Plain the Communist soldiers find the local people simply refusing to talk to them. Only a few elderly women venture out of their courtyard with basins to fetch snow. They melt snow for drinking but will not go farther to the well for water. The soldiers are irritated and mock the villagers for their stupidity and backwardness. Tank Liu calls the village “全中国第一号的落后区” (China’s number one backward area), and “一定是土匪窝，奶奶！查出来都枪毙” (It must be a bandit lair. Damn it! They should all be shot once we get the evidence) (Qu 1958 388). This description of Tank Liu’s rudeness and quick-temper is also censored out of the translated text.

The deletion of the abovementioned vivid descriptions deprives the soldiers’ characters of much of their personality, recasting the revolutionary heroes into ideal models reflecting the perfect self-image of China. It is not difficult to see that the deliberate abridgements and adaptations are predicated upon the dominant ideology and the prevailing esthetics of socialist realism. The problem of how a man should talk and act never exists in a guerrilla war situation. But once the hero is to be presented as a hero image and a national incarnation to the outside world, the way he talks and acts suddenly acquires enormous importance. In an endeavor to make perfect everything associated with the hero character, the ideology-oriented editor treats sentimentality, individualism, dirty language and uncivilized deeds as
elements susceptible to tarnish the representation of the hero as well as the nation he stands for.

4. A counterproductive translation project?

4.1 Outward translation as a fact of source society

Reacting against prescriptive and judgmental approaches to translation criticism, descriptive translation studies (DTS) attracted attention to the constraints exerted on translators by the target (literary) system. For Gideon Toury (1980, 28), the proponent of this paradigm shift, translation as a social behaviour is “the fact of target culture […] translators operate first and foremost in the interest of the culture into which they translate, and not in the interest of the source text, let alone the source culture”. Translations, Toury observed, have hardly any significance in the source culture (Hermans 1985, 16–14). While such definition of translation “opened the way of cultural self-definition within the field of translation studies” (Tymoczko 2005, 1086), it seems to turn a blind eye to outward translations, a typical example being what Dollerup refers to as “imposition” translations driven by the source culture, often with little regard for the receptor culture (Dollerup 1997). If the objective of TS is “to describe the phenomena of translating and translation(s) as they manifest themselves in the world of our experience” (Holmes 2000, 176), the target-oriented approach to translation based on Toury’s definition needs to be enlarged.

For the past two decades, translation studies seem to have undergone a “reflexive turn”. The limits of target-oriented DTS have been increasingly felt. New approaches, especially those under the umbrella notion of a “sociology of translation” have developed, exemplified by a growing number of studies drawing from various sociologists such as Bourdieu, Latour, and Luhmann (Brisset 1996; Simeoni 1998; Inghilleri 2005; Wolf and Alexandra 2007; Buzelin 2005; Tyulenev 2010, 2012). Drawing on German sociologist Niklas Luhmann’s social systems theory, Sergey Tyulenev (2010) explores the role of translation in the intersystemic communication of eighteenth-century Russia. He describes how Russia’s export of translations participated in the Russian system’s informing its environment, i.e. Western Europe, about itself, while also being part of the Russian system’s reaction to unfavorable opinions, thus “a constructive act for Russia’s positive image in its environment” (Tyulenev 2010, 185). More examples of outward translations can be found in Tymoczko (1999) on the role of English translations of early Irish literature as a way of achieving decolonization and serving nationalist purposes in the postcolonial context.
In the context of the Cold War, outward translations acquired a strong ideological impetus. When a new communist system or communist state was created, there was perhaps no greater urge to “self translate” than the established capitalist systems. The translation initiative of the PRC in its formative years is a case in point. In the Cold War environment, the newborn PRC was intent on translating Chinese writings, especially literary works, to project a favorable image of itself to the rest of the world.

4.2 Agency in outward translation

The type of outward translation under discussion sheds light on a too often-neglected facet of translation, i.e. team work or collaborative translation. This is not new in the history of translation practices. It is also quite common in contemporary societies. However, agency in translation has only recently become a focus of attention in the field of translation studies (Simeoni 1998; Inghilleri 2003; Buzelin 2006; Milton & Bandia 2009). Based on Latour’s ethnographic methodology, Hélène Buzelin (2006) has pioneered investigations into the multiplicity of agents intervening in the decision-making process leading to the production of a translated literary work.

The above examination of the translation process initiated by the Chinese state and supervised by the FLP has similarly shown the sequence of decisions ranging from selecting authors and works, editing and reprinting originals, translating, revising, printing and circulating the translated works. The sequence of decisions involved multiple agents, including Chinese editors and translators, foreign experts without mentioning literary critics who triggered modifications in the target texts. The Yang couple’s experience is indicative of how little or no control translators can have on the final text.

An important agent identified by this research and which, to my knowledge, has received little consideration is the editor of the original Chinese literary work. The task, admittedly, seems specific to certain cases of “translation as imposition” such as the Chinese outward translation initiative. As opposed to translators, who bear the most responsibility for the translation, editors of the originals enjoy very little visibility. Yet, as shown above, the anonymous editors had a central role in the end product. It is worth noting that the FLP outward translation initiative was sponsored by the state, thus highly institutionalized. The different agents intervening in the production of the translated texts were more or less invisible, entirely subordinated to the political and ideological function assigned to these outward translations.
4.3 Reception

According to reported discussions at the FLP in 1962, the main target audience of China’s outward translations was located in three so-called “in-between regions”: the socialist countries, the “developing countries that are fighting for independence”, and “the capitalist countries.” (Zhou et al. 1999, 238–239) Such a global target makes it difficult to assess the effect and result of the FLP’s proactive enterprise. Here is a preliminary assessment of the reception and efficacy of the PRC’s outward translations based on Luhmann’s social systems theory, which is a powerful analytical tool to describe intended or unintended consequences of translation activity within a society (Tyulenev 2012, 7–8).

Luhmann describes social systems as being “autopoïetic”, i.e. operationally closed, and yet open to their observable environment from which they draw what they deem necessary to survive and regenerate. In its formative years, the PRC tried to “irritate” or attract the attention of the outside world by promoting China, including its literature via exported translations. Reactions to such “irritation” varied according to each social system. Being autonomous, a social system responds to the influx of information according to its own needs and agendas (Tyulenev 2012).

Within the socialist bloc, since “nothing like this kind of organized literary outreach was carried out by the noncommunist bloc during the Cold War”, the availability of both contemporary and classical writings from China and the Soviet Union in well-distributed, state-sponsored translations into English and other languages greatly facilitated the development of socialist internationalism (Day 2010, 153). In this sense, China’s exported translations have been relatively successful. Some of the PRC’s neighboring countries, especially in Southeast Asia, took direct or indirect inspiration from the Chinese revolution, notably from its literary works. They adapted the Chinese political thought to their local contexts. The English journal Chinese Literature published under the auspices of the FLP was an important platform for Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Indonesia’s most prominent author at home and abroad, to get access to the literary doctrine of socialist realism and to be connected with the leftist “internationals” of world literature during the Cold War (Liu 1996; Day 2010).

We cannot easily claim that Pramoedya’s case is a measure of the overall success of the PRC’s export enterprise. In terms of Luhmann’s theory of social systems, outward translations can be viewed as communication events – a synthesis of “selection of information”, “utterance” and “understanding”. While the FLP selects and disseminates data through translations, a targeted society can choose to ignore or process these translations according to its internal logic. Therefore, it comes as no surprise to see that the PRC’s persistent efforts to project its self-perceived and positive image via outward translations were thwarted by the volatile international
relations during the Cold War. In the late 1950s and 1960s, the governments of Israel, Lebanon, Indonesia, France and India imposed restrictions, and even a ban on the PRC’s exported works including translations (Dai et al. 1999, 203). Thus, China’s outward translations created new fault lines in the Cold War years as much as it built bridges.

Such dividing force is even more blatant if we examine the reception by the Western English-speaking world, another important target readership at the time. Due to conflicting ideologies, the FLP’s translations of Chinese literary works hardly produced the desired effect: they instead did the opposite. Remember the “manipulation” of revolutionary heroes in Tracks in the Snowy Forests. The reshaping of soldiers’ characters with distinct personalities in the original into one-dimensional models embodying China’s official ideology and poetics in the translation is a typical example of China’s naïve and transparent propaganda. This only reinforces the stereotypical image of “China” as a totalitarian regime, especially “Communist China” in the Western world. In this regard, the PRC’s English translations of Chinese literary works were no more than a self-aggrandizing enterprise, which turned out to be counterproductive.

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