Renarrating China

Representations of China and the Chinese through the Selection, Framing and Reviewing of English Translations of Chinese Novels in the UK and US, 1980-2010

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the Faculty of Humanities

2014

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Abstract

Various narratives of China and the Chinese have been elaborated in western literature since as early as the 13th century (for example, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, 1289). Prior to the 18th century, as documented in earlier studies, these narratives largely depicted China from a utopian and positive perspective. From the late 18th century to the early 20th century, China and the Chinese began to be cast in a generally negative light, in both non-translated European – mainly English and French – literature (for example, *Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe) and translations of Chinese novels into European languages (for example, *Hau Kiou Choan*, translated by James Wilkinson). Both of these periods (pre- and post-18th century to early 20th century) are well documented. By contrast, relatively few studies have been undertaken to date to examine how China and the Chinese are narrated in translations of Chinese novels since the 1980s. Most studies undertaken so far are not based on a large body of empirical data and/or are not theoretically informed.

This study set out to examine the role played by translation in negotiating and mediating public narratives of China in the UK and US, with specific reference to the English translations of Chinese novels commissioned and sold in the UK and US literary markets between 1980 and 2010. Drawing on narrative theory, it examines publishers’ choices of source texts for English translation and the marketing strategies they employ in framing and promoting these novels, as well as critical responses to the translations, as articulated in book reviews published in mainstream media outlets in the UK and US during the period under study. The analysis carried out attempted to reveal some of the patterns which the publishing industry and other powerful institutions (such as reviewers, literary prizes, and universities) have given shape to, as these patterns of selective appropriation not only condition the ways in which individual Chinese novels are interpreted and received by English readers, but also evoke and consolidate the broader public narratives of China circulating in the UK and US.

The findings of this research confirm the inextricable relationship between politics and the reception of Chinese novels in the Anglophone world during the period under study. English translations of Chinese novels have played a significant role in elaborating public narratives of China as a political and cultural Other, and in perpetuating these narratives across time and space. Adopting a chronological structure to examine these novels and the reviews they received, a crosscutting pattern of novels on personal trauma emerged from the selections of Chinese novels for English translation during the past 30 years. This pattern, which is prioritised and promoted by both UK and US publishers and reviewers, enjoyed a dominant position in the Chinese literary landscape in the Anglophone world and gained increasing currency through the feature of narrative accrual since the 1980s. Novels on personal trauma mainly centred on two specific historical moments in modern Chinese history: the Cultural Revolution, and the 1989 Tiananmen Square event. Focusing especially on narratives of censorship and dissidence, publishers and reviewers further framed the translations of this type of literature as valuable social documents, rather than creative literary works. This generic change makes it increasingly difficult for Chinese literature to be appreciated for its literary merits, independently from its political significance.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning

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Acknowledgement

I would like to express my wholehearted gratitude to Professor Mona Baker. Her clear guidance, intimate knowledge and continual encouragement have led me through every stage of doctoral research. She not only provided me a rigorous academic training, but also set a high standard of a great teacher I aspire to become. I shall remain grateful to her throughout my academic life. I am also grateful to her for involving me into the TEC project. I am not only financially benefit from this great experience, but also have gained valuable knowledge outside my own research.

I am also indebted to Dr. James St. André and Professor Stephen Milner for their careful reading of each of my chapters and their insightful comments and valuable feedback. Thanks also go to staff in the Library of Congress and the British Library for their patience in answering my questions at the very early stage of my research.

I would like to express thanks to my friends in CTIS, Ting Chih-Chi, Chang Li-wen, Li Dang, Gu Yu, Fan Linjuan, Chen I-Hsin, Kyung Hye Kim and Tania Hernandez in particular, who have helped shape my thoughts in many different ways. Thanks are due to Ph.D. friends outside Translation Studies, particularly Shi Wei, Han Tianzhu, Zhu Yin, Xia Bingqing and Clark Barrett. My gratitude also goes to friends outside the ivory tower, especially Duan Ran and Sang Xiao. Thanks for their understanding and encouragement which helped me go through the most difficult time in my doctoral study.

Finally, I am especially grateful to my parents: my dad Xiao Longfu and my mom Zhang Yanping. Their confidence in me has never ceased to motivate me. They have helped me in more ways than they are aware of during the past four years. Without their support and trust, I would not have completed this study. This thesis is especially dedicated to you.
Chapter 1 Introduction

China has long been a fixture in the Western imagination; it has been described as ‘sleeping giant’, ‘yellow peril’ and ‘red menace’ at various historical stages. Now fast emerging as a global power, China has become an increasingly important market and a key driver of the new economic system that is currently taking shape. Its impressive economic achievements, together with its expanding power around the globe, continue to focus the world’s attention on its history and spark international interest in its cultural products, including its literature. Translation plays a key role in introducing Chinese literature to a wider range of global readers, in part because it involves patterns of selection that determine the landscape of Chinese literature available to world audiences, and in part because it influences the reception of Chinese literary products and the construction of specific narratives of China through patterns of paratextual framing, including critical reviews in the mainstream media. This study explores some of the ways in which translation has been implicated in processes of renarrating China since the 1980s, with particular reference to translated Chinese novels commissioned and published in the UK and US between 1980 and 2010.

In order to contextualise the current study, this chapter begins by tracing some of the most persistent Eurocentric narratives of China and the Chinese since the first Sino-European encounter, drawing on some of the extensive literature on the topic. It then outlines the rationale and objectives of the current study and the research questions it sets out to address (section 1.2), the theoretical framework (section 1.3) and sources of data (section 1.4), and concludes with an overview of the organization of the thesis (section 1.5).

1.1 Background

In his book Scratches on Our Mind, Harold Isaacs suggests two broad images of China that have gradually taken shape since cultural and commercial contacts with the outside world began in the 13th century. One image is benign, the other malignant, and each is available to

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1 I follow Tymoczko in using the term ‘Eurocentric’ to refer to “ideas, perspectives and practices that initially originated in and became dominant in Europe, spreading from there to various other locations in the world, where in some places, such as the United States and the rest of the Americas, they have also become dominant” (Tymoczko 2009: 403).
replace the other as historical circumstances change (Isaacs 1972: 63-64). The Chinese have been narrated as a superior people and an inferior people; devilish heathens and attractive humanists; wise sages and yellow perils; hardworking and honourable people, and devious and sly villains. These and many other narratives of China and the Chinese are often jumbled together, with particular narratives gaining more visibility in different social spaces and at different historical stages. In the following sections, I attempt to trace some of the most persistent Eurocentric narratives of China that have emerged since the 13th century.

1.1.1 Narratives of China in the 13th – 18th Century

The first Eurocentric narrative of China can be traced back to the 13th century, when the Italian explorer Marco Polo recorded his travels through Asia between 1271 and 1295 in The Description of the World, usually known as The Travels of Marco Polo. Concentrating especially on the period from 1275 to 1292, when Polo lived and worked in China as an agent for the Mongol ruler of the Great Khan, the book impressed on European readers’ imagination the material wealth of China and the power of the Grand Khan. Marco Polo gave detailed descriptions of “the great and admirable palace” of the Grand Khan (Polo 1997: 98), including its “handsome and spacious buildings”:

The grand hall is extremely long and wide, and admits of dinners being there served to great multitudes of people. The palace contains a number of separate chambers, all highly beautiful, and so admirably disposed that it seems impossible to suggest any improvement to the system of their arrangement. The exterior of the roof is adorned with a variety of colours, red, green, azure, and violet, and the sort of covering is so strong as to last for many years. The glazing of the windows is so well wrought and so delicate as to have the transparency of crystal. In the rear of the body of the palace there are large buildings containing several apartments, where is deposited the private
property of the monarch, or his treasure in gold and silver bullion, precious stones, and pearls, and also his vessels of gold and silver plate.

(Polo 1997: 99-100)

The Grand Khan’s palace was not only massive in size, but also extravagant in decoration. Polo noted that it was “all painted in gold, with many histories and representations of beasts and birds, of knights and dames, and many marvellous things. It forms a really magnificent spectacle, for over all the walls and all the ceiling you see nothing but paintings in gold” (Polo 1997: 117). There were a large number of well-educated scholars working for the Grand Khan to maintain control over his empire; administrative records of every conceivable kind were held in every corner of this empire and there was a postal service to keep details of the country up-to-date. Polo further recorded comments on trade and commerce in China, describing the country as “a world of highly organised commerce” (Polo 1997: 68).

Compared with the fractious city states and loosely allied countries in Europe, the China depicted in Polo’s travel account was larger, more cohesive and prosperous, a remote Oriental country of “benevolently ruled dictatorship, colossal in scale, decorous in customs, rich in trade, highly urbanized, inventive in commercial dealings, weak in the ways of war” (Spence 1998: 3). However, the Venetian’s narrative of a wealthy China was sidelined by the outbreak of the Black Death in the 1340s and the collapse of the Yuan dynasty, which cut off contacts between Europe and China for about 200 years. It was not until the late 15th century that Polo’s narrative of an exotic East came to be revived and began to attract the interest of many voyagers again, including Christopher Columbus, who hoped to find treasure in the East.

In the early 16th century, the Portuguese adventurers Magellan and Vasco da Gama reached Macau, then a small village at the far corner of the Chinese empire. Their ships’ logs, together with traders’ accounts and the Jesuit missionaries’ reports, constituted the first descriptions of China to circulate in Europe after nearly 200 years of no contact since Polo’s first arrival in China (Reed 2011: 10; Spence 1998: 19-21). Interestingly, some of the early publications about China which gained prominence and reached a wide range of readers in Europe during this period were written by authors who had never been to China themselves,

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4 Some scholars argue that Columbus’ adventure was indirectly inspired by Polo’s travelogue, as he read and annotated his copy of Polo’s work after his own first voyage to America (Larner 2008). Columbus, who was certain that he had reached Asia after his first maritime exploration, used Polo’s account to make sense of his experience.
but based their works largely on second-hand sources, including missionaries’ works and travelogues. These works were extremely complimentary towards China, praising every aspect of its social life. One such account was *Historia de Lascosas Mas Notables, Ritos y Costumbres del Gran Reyno de la China* by the Spanish friar Juan González de Mendoza (translated into English as *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China and the Situation Thereof*, 1585). Mendoza enthusiastically praised China and cited numerous examples of its superiority over Europe. Describing China as “the biggest and most populous country that is mentioned in the world, the great and mighty kingdom”, his book covered various geographic, historical, religious, political and social aspects of China, including “[h]ow that in all this mightie kingdom there is no poore folks walking in the streets nor in the temple a begging, and the order that the King hath given for the meantayning of them that cannot worke” (Mendoza 1854: 66). By 1600 Mendoza’s book was available in seven European languages, and soon became a classic, to be superseded only by the Jesuit missionaries’ works in the 17th and 18th century (Gunn 2003: 95; Reed 2011: 10; Ellis 2006: 470). These early enthusiasts’ accounts⁵, which saw China’s highly organized society and its exemplary princes as models of governance and morality, were not just entertaining, exotic stories about a remote place far out of the reach of Europeans; these accounts also ushered in a tentative beginning of the formation of a whole new range of interests and beliefs regarding the Orient that were subsequently to play a very important role in shaping the imagination of Europeans (Moser 1990: 35; Foss and Lach 1991: 171; Clark 1997: 39). However, they did not permit any real intellectual encounter between Europe and China, and were far less effective and powerful in terms of communicating a sense of China’s intellectual achievements (Porter 2001: 3). It was not until the 17th century that the first detailed studies of Chinese culture, including China’s language, philosophy and records of its tradition, were brought back to Europe by the Jesuit missionaries, whose involvement marked the beginning of systematic, relatively rigorous study of China in Europe (Clark 1997: 42).

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⁵ Other European travellers’ accounts of China written during this period include *Peregrinação* (1614) by the Portuguese explorer Fernão Mendes Pinto (1509-1583), *Il magno Vitei* by Arrivabene and *Algúas cousas sabidas da China* (translated into English as *History of Travale in the West and East Indies* in 1577) by the Portuguese sailor Galeote Pereira. Most travellers’ accounts of China created a powerfully positive image of the country, which was reinforced by the Jesuits writings. For instance, Pinto’s account created a narrative of a wealthy China, peopled by “hospitable, charitable, God-fearing and moral” Chinese (Foss and Lach 1991: 171). The landscape of China in Arrivabene’s book also boasted “marvels, both real and fabulous” (Lach 2010: 222). For more discussions of images of China in early travellers’ accounts, see Maczak and Phillips (1995), Gunn (2003), Betteridge (2007) and Mancall (2007).
The Jesuits, who began their mission in China in the late 1580s, developed a high regard for Chinese civilisation, Confucian philosophy, China’s literature and institutions. They portrayed the Chinese as “a morally and politically sophisticated people, governed by wise and educated rulers who had established basic philosophical principles concerning morality and society on the basis of universal human reason” (Clark 1997: 40). For example, the first Jesuit missionary in China, Matteo Ricci, wrote the following about Confucius:

The most renowned of all Chinese philosophers was named Confucius. […] His self-mastery and abstemious ways of life have led his countrymen to assert that he surpassed in holiness all those who in times past, in the various parts of the world, were considered to have excelled in virtue. Indeed, if we critically examine his actions and sayings as they are recorded in history, we shall be forced to admit that he was the equal of the pagan philosophers and superior to most of them.

(Ricci 1953: 30)

The Jesuits’ accounts contained a large amount of exaggeration in order to serve the purposes of their writers’ missionary agenda. The idealised positive image of China mediated through the Jesuits’ writings was reinforced through their selective translations of Chinese Classics, and was severely attacked by the Protestant missionaries and many European traders who came to China since the late 18th century, a theme that I will return to in the next section. The Jesuits Incorretta, Herdtrich, Rougement and Couplet translated into Latin some of the most renowned Confucian classics, including *The Great Learning*, part of *the Analects*, and *The Doctrine of the Meaning*, and compiled them into *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus (The Meaning of Chinese Wisdom)* (1687). This was the first translation of Chinese classics to appear in a European language (Brockey 2007: 279). Other translated Chinese Classics during this period included *Book of History*, translated by Antoine Gaubil and published in

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6 Motivated by a firm belief in the universal applicability of Christian teaching and by a conviction that “the Christian language had an elasticity that permitted it to conform to the contours of even the most widely disparate cultures” (Brockey 2007: 6), The Society of Jesus started the China mission in the 1580s. From the very beginning, missionaries such as Matteo Ricci realized that the Chinese culture was not a primitive one, but a civilisation as old and sophisticated as Christendom. Therefore, it was pointless to strip away the Confucian beliefs which were at the essence of the Chinese culture and replace them with Christian faith. The Jesuits had their own missionary agenda in China, which was to convert the Chinese to Christianity. But in order to achieve this goal, they recognised the need to understand the world view of the Chinese and to engage in dialogue with them. They were thus the first to transmit Confucian philosophy and China’s world view to Europe. Despite the fact that they eventually failed to convert the Chinese to Christianity, as the Pope ended their mission to China in 1769, the Jesuits were “brilliantly successful in interpreting China to the West” (Mackerras 1989: 30); see also Reed (2011).

The Jesuits also noticed the vast lands and grandeur of Chinese architecture, as earlier missionaries, traders and travelers had done. They commented on Chinese traditions such as tea-drinking, foot-binding, Chinese festivals, porcelain, silk, and fine art. But it was their efforts to introduce Confucian philosophy to the Europeans that sparked various discussions and created a favourable image of China.
Paris in 1770. Some of the poems in *Shi Jing (Book of Poems)* which were rendered by Premare were included in du Halde’s *Description Géographique, Historique, Chronologique, Politique de L’empire de la Chine* (1753), published in Paris. In their translations of Confucian classics, the Jesuits tended to argue that “Confucianism allowed for a concept of divinity” and that the Chinese “possessed genuine knowledge of the true God, and of morality, gleaned from nature but especially tradition” (Fokkema 2011: 146).

The Jesuit missionaries’ writings proved extremely influential as their works on China and their translations were widely read by European intellectuals in the latter part of the 17th century, including Leibniz, Voltaire, Quesnay, Montaigne, Malebranche, Wolff, Montesquieu, Diderot and Turgot, to name just a few (Clark 1997: 40; Mosher 1990: 36). By reading the missionaries’ manuscripts and published works, exchanging letters with the Jesuits in China or meeting returning missionaries, Europe in the early 18th century “knew quite a lot about China” (Mackerras 1989: 37; Mungello 1991:100), and many Enlightenment thinkers held high regard of China and the culture. For example, in the foreword to his *Novissima Sinica* (1697) Leibniz considered the Chinese far more advanced in ethics and politics than the Europeans. He admired in particular the peaceful organisation of social life, the respect for the elderly, filial piety, and in general the loyal obedience to any person in a higher position in the social hierarchy (Hsia 1985). Voltaire, another influential leading figure in the Enlightenment movement, also held China in high regard, saying that it was “particularly superior to all the nations of the universe” (Voltaire 1927: 408). He considered Confucianism as “simple, wise, august, free from all superstition and all barbarity” (Voltaire 1927: 412). The Chinese civil service system also attracted much admiration, because it was considered as a fair system in which officials were selected based on their performance in a series of examinations that were open to all people regardless of their background. This narrative, which circulated in the 18th century, acknowledged China as a great and ancient civilisation whose cultural achievements not only reached back four thousand years, but also continued to rival those of Europe well into the 18th century.

Confucian China, then, was perceived as vastly superior to the European nations which were divided by religious discord and political conflict during the 17th and 18th centuries. It was an alluring utopia which remained very much a product of the imagination because of its geographical inaccessibility. The Enlightenment philosophers used their writings and translations of Chinese literature as a platform for criticising the chaotic Europe. The
strongest such critique could probably be found in Oliver Goldsmith’s *Citizen of the World: or Letters from a Chinese Philosopher Residing in London to His Friend in the East* (1762). Drawing extensively on works written by the Jesuit missionaries, including Le Comte and Du Halde, Goldsmith had Lien Chi Altangi, his Chinese protagonist, satire European morality and ridicule European stereotypes of China and the Chinese. For example, Lien Chi Altangi observed that the English currently pride themselves on holding things Chinese in the highest regard, although they were truly ignorant of even the most elementary information on China. He saw everywhere in London a fad for things imported from China, a mania that he condemned as “vulgar and debasing to the spirit and subtlety of his culture” (Lach and Foss 1990: 27).

Chinese fiction began to appear in European languages during the 18th century. One of the first translations of Chinese poems and a play can be found in *A Description of the Empire of China and Chinese History* (translated into English from French in 1741), compiled by Du Halde. The play included in this book was *Zhaoshi Gu’er* (translated under the title *Orphan of the House of Zhao*), originally written in the Yuan Dynasty and translated into French by the Jesuit missionary Joseph-Henri-Marie de Premare. This play, which foregrounds Chinese respect for virtue and familial loyalty, was later adapted by some European writers, including Voltaire, Mestastasio and Goethe, who argued that the Chinese original needed substantial revision to fit into a European context: the plot was changed and characters were shuffled; little effort was made to re-create a sense of 13th-century China (Lach and Loss 1990: 29).

The first English translation of a Chinese novel, *Hau Kiou Choaan* (translated under the title *The Pleasing History*), was published in London in 1761. Thomas Percy, who edited the translation he found among the papers of an East India Company merchant by the name of James Wilkinson, annotated the translation, drawing heavily on works such as Du Halde’s book for notes about China, from family life to pagodas and Confucianism (Lach and Loss 1990: 29). Hoping that this translated story can be “considered as forming a concise and not altogether defective account of the Chinese” (Percy 1761), Percy’s book moved Confucian wisdom outside the elite circle and made it accessible to the general reading public for the first time (Cheung 2003). This translation of a Chinese novel, which by no means is

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7 Before the 18th century, Europeans knew little about Chinese literature, except for a Spanish translation of *Mingxin Baojian* in 1590 by Juan Cobo, a Dominican priest (Chan 2003: 67). After the appearance of this short story in Spanish, no other literary work from China was made available in any European languages for almost 200 years.
considered a canonical classic in Chinese literary history, also inspired Goethe to make his famous statement that Weltliteratur was at hand (Cheung 2003; Fokkema 2011: 150-151). The German philosopher Wolfgang von Goethe commented on Percy’s translation of *Hau Kiou Choaan* saying that the Chinese “think, act, and feel almost exactly like us, and we soon find that we are perfectly like them, excepting that all they do is more clear, more pure, and more decorous than with us” (Goethe 1998: 173).

At the end of the 18th century the ‘Chinese cult’ began to suffer a significant decline, as the generally positive narratives elaborated by the missionaries and the Enlightenment philosophers gave way to the hostile accounts of traders and diplomats (Mason 1939: 11-12; Dawson 1967: 132; Clark 1997: 52; Zhou 2006; Porter 2001: 7; Zheng 2013: 12). European views of the Chinese became hypercritical and the Chinese taste was characterised as “coarse” and “unnatural” by Johann Herder (Mason 1939: 11-12). Of even greater significance in distancing China from Europe was the fact that many Enlightenment thinkers began to believe that the image of China elaborated and promoted by the missionaries was somewhat inflated. China’s Confucian wisdom, its institutes, its political and economic systems were “somewhat more flattering to China than the realities would warrant” (Mackerras 1989: 41). Negative portrayals of China and the Chinese began to appear and gained currency in many European literary writings. For example, in *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Defoe had his popular adventurer express this view of China:

> I must confess it seemed strange to me when I came home and heard our people say such fine things of the power, riches, glory, magnificence and trade of the Chinese, because I saw and knew that they were a contemptible herd or crowd of ignorant sordid slaves, subjected to a government qualified only to rule such a people.

(Defoe 1719: 163)

As Creel observed, by the end of the 18th century, “disillusionment became complete; the ‘Chinese dream’ was over. Never again in the West, since the end of the 18th century, has interest in China and esteem for that country risen so high” (Isaacs 1972: 95). It was not until the 19th century when the contacts with China were intensified that certain narratives of China that persist to this day began to coalesce and dominate the Western imagination.
1.1.2 Narratives of China in the 19th Century

Europe experienced industrial, social and political revolutions in the late 18th century. These transformations allowed it not only to take a great economic leap forward, but also to reconsider its position in the world and its relations with other cultures. New developments in the social sciences, especially social Darwinism, provided theoretical evidence to “visualize civilization as a scale on which Europe had progressed much farther than other civilisations” (Dawson 1967: 74). By the 19th century, Europe had concluded its industrial revolutions and entered a period of imperial expansion across the globe. As a newly emerging military power, Britain defeated the Qing Empire in the first Opium War (1839-1842), which marked the end of China’s aloofness and isolation from Europe. The war exposed the fact that the Chinese Empire, which boasted of its imposing size, vast population and impressive wealth, was in fact destitute and weak. After the war, the Chinese emperor was forced by the British to sign the Treaty of Nanjing, in which China was required to pay a heavy indemnity, to cede Hong Kong to Britain and to open five ports for commerce. Europeans were no longer restricted to a few coastal cities in China but gained much wider access to China’s inland regions for trade, travel and missionary work. The volume of writing about China soared and the Europeans received an unprecedented number of first-hand accounts of China during the 19th century.

The sudden reversal of power relations between Europe and the Qing Empire led to a complete change in European attitudes towards China: for a newly industrialised and confident Europe, China was no longer considered as sitting at the height of its glory, and the marvels of China described by Marco Polo in the 13th century gave way to images of sin, crime, opium and cruel barbarism. The respectful and admiring attitudes common in earlier centuries were replaced by a condescending one, as captured by Kenneth Latourette:

> from being respected and admired, China’s utter collapse before the British arms and her unwillingness to receive Western ideals led to a feeling of contempt. […]
> Contrasting their old ideas of her greatness with their sudden discovery of her weakness, the impression spread through America and Europe that China was decadent, dying, fallen greatly from her glorious past.

(Latourette 1917: 124-125)

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8 The first Opium War (1840-42) and Treaty of Nanjing (1842) guaranteed the British rights to free trade and free travel in five coastal Chinese cities. However, the Qing court’s inability to defend China under foreign attack in the following years led to more concessions and a huge amount of indemnity. The Treaty of Tianjin (1860), for example, granted unrestricted travel throughout China to passport-holding foreigners. One of the consequences of lifting foreigners’ travel restrictions in China was the emergence of a range of writings detailing travels in China’s interior, which had been closed to foreigners.
Unlike Europe, which had experienced a range of industrial, social and scientific revolutions, China seemed to remain at a standstill, immobile in the eyes of the European travellers and diplomats. Dynasty after dynasty, nothing in China ever changed: China had known no period similar to the Middle Ages in Europe, with its rise of trading cities, universities and parliaments, no Renaissance or Reformation, no Enlightenment, no American or French Revolutions – none of these milestones that marked progress in European and American history can be found in Chinese history. James Wilson, an American engineer who travelled to China in the 1880s, wrote that before the Reformation China was at least as advanced as any other country in the world. But then it seemed to come to a stop: “they have stood absolutely still in knowledge since the middle ages. The discoveries of Galileo, Newton, and Laplace are a sealed book to them” (Wilson 1894: 308). Herder, a German philosopher, described the Chinese empire as “an embalmed mummy, wrapped in silk, and painted with hieroglyphics: its internal circulation is that of a dormouse in its winter sleep” (Herder 1803: 296). Eliza Scidmore, an American diplomat who had made seven journeys to China, expressed a similar idea in *China, The Long-lived Empire*, namely, that the nation had died of old age and senile decay: “its vitality running low, heart-stilling and soul-benumbing, slowly ossifying for this hundred years. During this wonderful century of Western progress it has swung slowly to a standstill, to a state of arrested existence, then retrograded, and the world watches now for the last symptoms and extinctions” (Scidmore 1900: 308).

Many European observers argued that China had not only been stationary for a long time, but was also retrograde and declining from her previous glory. Signs of decay extended to almost every aspect of this vast empire. Many cities which had once been flourishing and alive with commerce had now fallen into decay. The arts had declined. The quality of silk and porcelain failed to match their excellence in previous decades. The inefficiency of the Chinese government and officialdom was one of the elements most severely criticised by European diplomats, merchants and missionaries. The Qing government was inept and weak, but

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9 See also J.F. Davis’ *Sketches of China* (1841), John Barrow’s *Travels in China* (1804) and Lord Macartney’s journal of his experiences in China, which appeared as *An Embassy to China: Lord Macartney’s Journal 1793-1794*, edited by J. L. Cranmer-Byng and published in London in 1963.

strikingly arrogant. John Barrow, a member of Lord Macartney’s mission to China, which aimed to initiate trade relations, described the Qing court as a government full of “tyranny, oppression and injustice” in his *Travels in China* (Barrow 1804: 360). The legal systems were unjust and the law was so cruel as to “exclude and obliterate every notion of the dignity of human nature” (Barrow 1804: 179). Since the time Gaspar da Cruz had praised China’s legal justice in the 15th century, European law had progressed enormously while China’s had worsened. Samuel Williams described the Chinese government as “despotic and defective, and founded on wrong principles” and argued that it failed to make its people “honourable, truthful, or kind” (Williams 1851: 297). John Fryer, a British man who worked as a translator at the Qing court in the 1850s, described the Chinese he had met “as more like children than men in their habit of throwing temper tantrums and their utter lack of intellectual curiosity” (Mosher 1990: 40). Confucian virtues, which used to be highly praised by the Jesuit missionaries and Enlightenment thinkers in the 17th and 18th centuries, were now also blamed for dynastic decline and corruption during this period. This assertion was reflected in the translations of Chinese Classics produced by the Protestant missionaries. For example, James Legge, who translated seven Confucian classics into Latin for the first time and complied them into a book titled *The Chinese Classics*, maintained that Confucius “has all along been trying to carry the nation back. […] the consequence is that China has increased beyond its ancient dimensions, but there has been no corresponding development of thought” (Legge 1861: 108). Other protestant missionaries also asserted that the Chinese lacked intellectual curiosity and were never open to inventions, which directly led to their inability to keep up with Europe (Wang 2008:42).

Chinese ‘moral depravity’ received condemnation especially from Protestant missionaries, who adopted an anthropological approach and presented the Chinese national character as both immutable and negative. This attitude to the Chinese was explicitly articulated in many

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12 The attitude of Protestant missionaries was more complex than that of the merchants and diplomats who disdained the Chinese. The missionaries, who were determined to convey the Christian message to China, believed that all men were equally created in the image of God (Mosher 1990: 41). They were troubled by Chinese traditions such as infanticide of girls, superstitions and ancestral worshiping, etc. However, they still believed that the Chinese, no matter how immoral and corrupt, could be redeemed and saved by God from their dark, miserable society. Samuel Williams argued in *The Middle Kingdom* that the Chinese were not biologically
Protestant missionaries’ writings of Chinese characteristics, such as Samuel Williams’ *The Middle Kingdom* (1848), Arthur Smith’s *Chinese Characteristics* (1894), and Allen Young’s *Woman in All Lands, or, China’s Places among the Nations* (1903). Samuel Williams, an American Protestant missionary, argued in *The Middle Kingdom* that Chinese morality was “devastating”. He found the Chinese “vile and polluted in a shocking degree”. Brothels and their inmates were “everywhere on land and on water” (Williams 1851: 257). The Chinese were ungrateful and deceitful, and “thieving [was] exceedingly common and public and private charity [was] almost extinct” (Williams 1851: 257). In his influential book *Chinese Characteristics* (1894), Arthur Smith gave considerable space to proving his point that the Chinese were cruel and lacking in sympathy. For example, he devoted a chapter titled ‘Absence of Nerves’ to arguing that numbness was one of the distinctive characters of the Chinese. Thus he wrote that “nothing is plainer than that they are nerves of a very different sort from those with which we are familiar. The Chinese can stand in one position all day, sleep anywhere in any posture, need no air. Overcrowding is their normal condition and they do not appear to be inconvenienced by it at all” (Smith 1894: 95). Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to arrive in China in the 1830s, considered the Chinese “selfish, deceitful and inhuman among themselves” (Morrison 1832: 148).

After the mid-19th century, images of Chinese women began to appear in missionaries’ letters, reports and books, which included, but were not limited to, Justus Doolittle’s *Social Life of the Chinese* (1865), Adele Fielde’s *Pagoda Shadows* (1885), Arthur Smith’s *Chinese Characteristics* (1894) and *Village Life in China* (1899). An image of Chinese women as oppressed victims of a patriarchal society began to emerge during this period, and became dominant from the late 19th century onwards (Fang 2009: 328). George Morrison noted the horrible maltreatment of Chinese women, as evident in practices of foot-binding, infanticide,
wife-beating and selling girls as slaves. The birth of a daughter was often met with great disappointment, for a daughter would be married into another family at a very young age and therefore would no longer be helpful to her parental family. Infanticide was common due to “the extreme poverty and hopeless indigence, the frequent experience of direful famines and the scenes of misery and calamity occasioned by them” (Barrow 1804: 170). Gordon Cumming wrote in his *Wandering in China* (1886) that, in some parts in Fujian Province, a third of female babies were drowned or strangled (Cumming 1886: 5). Chinese women were also constructed as the most superstitious and fervent devotees of Buddhism. Protestant missionaries sent out calls for support in their efforts to eradicate superstitions and liberate Chinese women. They argued that “only when China had enlightened, educated women would she shake off the shackles of the past and move forward, and this would require Western intervention” (Lutz 2010: 37).

English translations of Chinese literary works produced by Protestant missionaries contributed to the construction and circulation of the unfavourable images of Chinese women created by other missionary writings. For example, Anna Safford’s translation *Typical Women of China* (1891) projected to American and European readers an image of Chinese mothers, wives and daughters as passive victims (Fang 2009: 332). In the preface to her translation, she assured her readers that her translation is “an honest effort to convey the real meaning of the original” (Safford 1891: vi). This translation, however, was heavily mediated by Safford, as it was based mainly on *Records of Virtuous Women of Ancient and Modern Times* while drawing on information from at least eight other source texts (Fang 2009: 334). By re-organising and deleting paragraphs and stories which projected a positive image of Chinese women, Safford successfully portrayed them as “submissive, ignorant and superstitious” (Fang 2009: 328; 337-344). This translation not only evoked sympathy among millions of Protestant missionaries at home who were concerned about the miserable conditions under which Chinese women lived, but also encouraged church women to join missions to rescue “the soul of their perishing sisters of the Orient” (McNabb 1907: 96). The image of Chinese women as sufferers and victims was crucial to the success of the China mission among Protestant missionaries because “it had great appeal and usefulness to the church women in America who supported that mission so faithfully” (Fang 2009: 346).

European translators often put much emphasis on the social, documentary value of Chinese literature in their prefaces or introductions to their translations. They attempted to direct
readers’ attention to the fact that no one could know the Chinese better than the Chinese themselves, and by reading literature translated directly from the Chinese, rather than reading accounts mediated by European travellers, European readers could develop a better understanding of China. This claim can be found in the introduction to Percy’s translation of *Hau Kiou Choaan, or The Pleasing History* in 1761. Decades later when George Staunton finished his missionary trip to China with Lord Macartney, he translated the Qing legal code into English and published it under the title *Ta Tsing Leu Lee* in 1810. By introducing this penal code to the British public, he hoped that the translation could “afford a more compendious and satisfactory illustration […] of the peculiar system and constitution of the Government, the principles of its internal policy, its connection with the national habits and character […]” (Staunton 1810: 1). Davis, the translator of *Hau Kiou Choaan* (translated as *The Fortunate Union* in 1829), also claimed that “one of the most effectual means of gaining an intimate knowledge of China, is by translations from its popular literature, consisting principally of drama and novels” (Davis 1829: 9)\(^\text{13}\). Whatever the translators’ intentions, European reviewers whose attitudes towards China and the Chinese were largely influenced by the writings of missionaries and travellers continued to draw only negative conclusions from what they read. For example, one reviewer of Staunton’s translation of the Qing penal code “decried the excessive and unprofitable accuracy and minuteness of [Chinese] regulations, including excessive over-regulation of private affairs such as marriage, and declared this over-regulation to be proof that the Chinese are stuck at an early period of civilization” (St André 2006: 201).

The picture of China that emerged from the writings of European travellers, missionaries and diplomats in the 19\(^\text{th}\) century was thus dark, gloomy and cruel, an image that strikingly challenged the favourable narratives elaborated by the Jesuits in previous centuries. George Morrison commented that “we, who live amid the advantages of Western civilization, can hardly realise the severity of particular hardships in China” (Morrison 1895: 13). British

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\(^{13}\) Many scholars have noted that translations of Chinese novels which have appeared in previous decades were retranslated during the 19\(^\text{th}\) century. For example, *Hau Kiou Choaan*, first translated into English in 1761, were retranslated under the title *The Fortunate Union* by John Francis Davis and published in 1829. The title *The Fortunate Union* followed closely to the original Chinese, as opposed to Percy’s *The Pleasing History* which was suggested by the publisher Dodsley to attract a broad readership (Chang 2003: 33). In 1895 Percy’s translation was abridged under the title *A Little History of China and A Chinese Story* by Alexander Brehner and published by a London publisher Fisher and Unwin. This short story, which was not often considered as a masterpiece in Chinese literary history, has been translated into 16 versions during this period and became “a textbook of both modern Chinese everyday life and the current vernacular”, and European students of the language (St André 2003: 66).
explorer and traveller Robert Fortune also acclaimed the superiority of British and Western civilisation. Despite the fact that he claimed in his book to be fair to and “far from having any prejudice against the Chinese people”, he dismissed the idea that the Chinese were equal to “the civilized nations of the West”, because they were far less advanced “in science, in the arts, in government or in laws” (Fortune 1847: 7). The Chinese Repository, a journal which published articles written by missionaries in order to inform Europeans and Americans about China, also adopted a condescending attitude and condemned Chinese culture (Harris 1991: 318). Elijah Bridgman, editor of The Chinese Repository and member of the American Mission Board, wrote in the first issue in 1832 that “we have no very strong expectation of finding much that will rival the arts and sciences, and various institutions of the Western nations” (Bridgman 1832: 3). This attitude of superiority, together with the image of China as decadent, opium-ridden and backward, survived well into the 20th century.

1.1.3 Narratives of China in the first half of the 20th Century

The last decade of the 19th century saw severe drought and economic disruption in China, together with the growing expansion of foreign military powers. The Qing government continued to concede large amounts of land and pay enormous amounts of indemnity to Britain, France and Japan, which directly led to the breakout of the Boxer uprising in Shandong in 1898. With the slogan ‘support the Qing, exterminate the foreigners’, the Boxer uprising aimed to defend China from falling into foreign invaders’ hands by fighting against the foreign army and attacking Christian missionaries in China. The Boxer uprising, however, merely served to confirm the worst suspicions and fears of Westerners. A flood of reports were sent back to Europe and America to describe what had happened in Shandong and later spread to Beijing. The main images of the Chinese that emerged from the literature spawned by the Boxer uprising were those of a cruel, treacherous and xenophobic people, while the Western missionaries were largely portrayed as courageous and righteous in the face of attack by the ragged Chinese Boxer peasants (Isaacs 1972: 67).

The sheer size of China’s territory and population, and the Chinese people’s antagonism to foreigners, evident in the Boxer Rebellion, led Westerners to fear that China might invade the world in the near future and threaten the hegemony of the West. Consequently, the early 20th century witnessed the rise of the notion of the Chinese representing Yellow Peril, which combined “racist terror of alien cultures, sexual anxieties and the belief that the West will be
overpowered and enveloped by the irresistible dark, occult forces of the East” (Marchetti 1993:2). As Western nations began to carve up China into colonies in the early 20th century, their own imperialist expansion was in part rationalized by the notion that a militarily powerful China posed a threat to Christian civilization. Arthur Brown wrote in New Forces in Old China that “the problem of the future is plainly the problem of China with something appalling in the spectacle of a nation numbering one-third of the human race […] majestically rousing itself. No other movement of our age is so colossal; no other is more pregnant with menacing” (Brown 1904: 6). Similarly, Griffith Taylor argued that China represented a menace to world peace in the future. He wrote that “we shall see in the next fifty years a new China in which when we realize that the Chinese have the natural resources at their disposal which are unrivalled (except in North America), it is obvious that only unremitting diligence, thrift and sobriety will enable the white man to resist the yellow peril” (Scott 2007: 17).

Literary images reinforced and reflected this geopolitical unease about China’s potential to challenge Western hegemony. Novels such as Matthew Shiel’s The Yellow Danger (1898) and Jack London’s The Unpatrolled Invasion (1907) all registered in Western readers’ mind an image of the vicious Chinese. No fictional characters personified the Yellow Peril and the prejudices against the Chinese better than Dr. Fu Manchu, a super villain created by Sax Rohmer. First published in serial form in Atlantic Monthly in 1899, Rohmer’s stories introduced to his readers an insidious character, Dr. Fu Manchu, a person who possessed superhuman power, intellect and ambition and was also inhuman in his immobility and ruthlessness:

Imagine a person, tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull and long magnetic eyes of true cat-green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources, if you will, of a wealthy government, which however, has already denied all knowledge of his existence. Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr Fu Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man.

(Rohmer 1912: 35)

Rohmer’s Fu Manchu is a powerful leader of a rebellious yellow mob – the scum of Chinatown’s opium dens, rough waterfronts, secret societies, and heathen religious brotherhoods. In him the qualities of being exotic and evil are bound together, connecting the characteristics of the Chinese with crime, vice and cruelty (Clegg 1994: 4). He also represents the dangers of combining Western science with the ancient traditions of the Chinese, for Dr.
Fu Manchu received his education in the West. However, his villainy is a product of Chinese tradition and so, not bound by the ‘norms’ of the rational civilised West, his behaviour is beyond reason: he belongs to a race of ancestor-worshippers which is capable of anything. In *The Mystery of Dr. Fu Manchu* (1913), Sir Denis Nayland Smith of Scotland Yard, who was in pursuit of the evil doctor, described Fu Manchu as “no ordinary criminal”:

> He is the greatest genius which the powers of evil have put on earth for centuries and his mission is to pave the way! He is the advance agent of a movement so epoch-making that not one British, and not one American in fifty thousand has ever dreamed of.

(Rohmer 1913: 198)

Fu Manchu’s ambition was to take over the Western world and establish a ‘yellow empire’. Sir Denis Smith acts “not in the interests of the British government merely, but in the interests of the entire white race, and I honestly believe – though I pray I may be wrong – that its survival depends largely upon the success of my mission” (Rohmer 1913: 67). Rohmer persuaded his readers that the world is at the mercy of Dr. Fu Manchu’s unfathomable oriental villainy, and wrote that “if the Satanic genius were not destroyed, the peace of the world might be threatened anew at any moment” (Rohmer 1916: 226).

It is interesting to note that stories of Fu Manchu disappeared from the public space during the 1930s and 1940s, an interval which was “the only one in which wholly sympathetic images of the Chinese dominated the entire area of American-Chinese relations” during the 20th century (Isaacs 1972: 87). The Americans showed a general sympathetic attitude to the Chinese who, with great tenacity and strength, launched a persistent and heroic resistance against the better-equipped and better-trained Japanese troops during the Second World War (Isaacs 1972; Hamamoto 1994: 49; Shim 1998: 389.). The gallant defence of their country against all odds earned the Chinese respect from the Americans; as Mosher put it, “after a century of flaccid acquiescence to foreign demands, China was now standing up to an invader, putting up a resistance whose hopelessness only added to its heroism” (Mosher 1990: 46). After the unexpected attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941, America became an ally of China, fighting against Japan in the Far East battlefield. The Office of War Information, which was formed in 1942 by the Roosevelt administration, was intended to promote the American public’s understanding of the war through radio, motion pictures and the press. In an effort to eliminate racist and stereotypical images of the Allies, the Office of War Information urged the film companies to follow its guidelines in the portrayal of minorities in America. “The
agency was particularly concerned with Hollywood’s portrayal of the Chinese and tried (with little success)” to replace the insidious image of Fu Manchu with Charlie Chan, “who had by this time become a folk-hero to millions of Americans and Chinese” (Stromgren 1990: 68).

The American writer Earl Derr Biggers responded to this willingness to tolerate a more sympathetic portrayal of the Chinese and “deliberately designed to refute or at least challenge the Fu Manchu image” (Hawley 1991: 136). First published under the title of The House without a Key in 1919, the serialized novels of the Chinese detective Charlie Chan achieved wide popularity in America in the 1930s after the novel was adapted into a Hollywood movie. In Biggers’ novels, Charlie Chan is portrayed as intelligent, heroic, benevolent and honourable – in contrast with the negative descriptions of evil and the portrayal of the Chinese as cunning in mainstream media in America. Unlike the insidious Fu Manchu, Charlie Chan “is kind, jolly, friendly, neither a threat nor a menace” (Hawley 1991: 136). He possessed “a keen intelligence and the ability to outwit and ridicule dull-minded white policemen” (Yin 2000: 138). The most important quality of Charlie Chan which distinguished him from Fu Manchu was that Chan was not threatening and challenging to the stability of white hegemony; in other words, he was on the side of western reason and law.

The reception of Charlie Chan novels and films in America and Europe was quite controversial. Some reviewers and critics argued that the appearance of Charlie Chan stories marked a shift in the image of the Chinese from negative to positive (Hawley 1991: 145; Leong 2005). The prevailing image of the heathen, evil Chinese began to yield to a new and more favourable image, a portrait of the Chinese which is unthreatening, appealing and intelligent. Michael Brodhead wrote that “Biggers’ sympathetic treatment of the Charlie Chan novels convinces the reader that the author consciously and forthrightly spoke out for the Chinese - a people to be not only accepted but admired. Baggers’ sympathetic treatment of the Chinese reflected and contributed to the greater acceptance of the Chinese in America in the first third of [the twentieth] century” (Brodhead 1934: 87, quoted in Chan 2001: 56.).

However, the portrayal of Charlie Chan still evoked stereotypes associated with the Chinese, and Western readers were constantly reminded of the fact that the detective Charlie Chan was a Chinese from an alien and distant culture. Compared to the toughness, daring and romance that are the mainstays of fictional detectives, the pudgy, seemingly sexless Charlie Chan who spoke heavily accented English and was cloaked in mystery and inscrutability reinforced the racial stereotypes (Yin 2000: 138; Daccache and Valeriano 2012).
The Charlie Chan stories served as a necessary bridge for the American and European acceptance of Pearl Buck’s intensely sympathetic and astonishingly successful novel, *The Good Earth* (1931), winner of the Novel Prize for Literature in 1938. As Hawley pointed out, *The Good Earth*, with its heroes gallantly struggling and ultimately succeeding against overwhelming odds, “might not have been readily accepted by a reading public whose primary image of the Chinese to that time had been the barbarous though fascinating Fu Manchu” (Hawley 1991: 145). In this story, Pearl Buck created a new image of the rural Chinese as “a strong and attractive people of the soil, kind and generous toward the young, respectful toward the elderly, and dignified, even cheerful, in misfortune” (Mosher 1990: 46).

*The Good Earth* attempts to redeem the image of the Chinese by showing them as hardworking, upwardly mobile, striving people, just like Americans. Wang Lung, the peasant and main character, through the urging of his industrious and self-effacing wife O-lan, acquires land and becomes a rich man, eventually moving into the House of Hwang, the dwelling of the former richest family of the village. This upward mobility has something of “a Horatio Alger cast to it, although the cycle of prosperity that has caused the House of Hwang to fall will also cause the downfall of the House of Wang: Wang Lung’s sons will sell the land after his death, thus losing their source of wealth” (Christopher 1995: 133). The “positive” stereotypes put forth in *The Good Earth* are, in the final analysis, not so positive. By portraying the peasants as rooted in their poverty, in their ignorance (the only characters who become educated also become venal), and in their gender stereotypes (which Buck imported from Western culture, in the form of the Madonna/whore dichotomy), she furthered the portrayal of Asians as backward, primitive, inscrutable, and obtuse.

To conclude, the above investigation of some Eurocentric narratives reveals an ambivalent attitude towards China across the centuries. On the one hand, China is a source of inspiration and imagination, fountain of an ancient wisdom, a rich civilisation which is far superior to and can be used to reflect on the inadequacies of European civilization. Voltaire argues that China is the civilisation “to which the West owes everything” (Voltaire 1963: 56, quoted in Reichwein 2013: 90). For Arnold Toynbee, the encounter between China and the West was one of the most significant events in our time. On the other hand, China is an alien culture.

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14 Novels which featured hardworking Chinese peasants published in America also include *Daughter of Shanghai* (1938), *King of Chinatown* (1939), *Dragon Seed* (1944) and *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo* (1944), to name just a few.
and an impenetrable mystery which poses potential threat to world stability. It locked itself in its stagnant past until it was awakened brutally by the military invasions of the West in the mid-19th century. C.S. Peirce spoke contemptuously of “the monstrous mysticism of the East” (Peirce 2009: 135) and Arthur Koestler dismissed China’s religions as “a web of solemn absurdities” (Koestler 1960: 29). This condescending attitude is evident in a wide range of images, such as the cunning, sinister and sensual Chinese, and some of these images are so persistent that they have been easily revived and have gained new life in recent years. This has implications for the analysis of data in the current study, as will become clear in chapters 4 and 5.

1.1.4 UK- and US-China Relationships in Post-World War II

The Second World War radically transformed the global political system, with one of its most important outcomes being the emergence of the US as a superpower. US- and UK-relationships with China diverged in some ways and overlapped in others, further complicating the patterns of interaction between China and the English-speaking world. Shortly after the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the UK was among the first to recognize the new regime, perhaps because it saw Mainland China as a potential trade partner who could “contribute to restoring the British economy and Britain’s international Status” in post-war time (Lowe 1997: 87). Unlike the UK, the US was wary of the new Communist-led regime and positioned Mainland China in the Communist camp, alongside the Soviet Union. China’s participation in the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Vietnam War (1954-1975) against the US further strengthened US fears and placed it firmly in the category of ‘vicious’, ‘aggressive’ nations who posed a threat to US security. This positioning underpinned a hostile and cold relationship between the two countries for almost two decades (Neville 2013: 66).

The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed the emergence of rifts between China and the Soviet Union. This was a decisive factor that helped steer the shifting narrative of China elaborated by the US, which now perceived the Chinese as a potential strategic partner that can help contain the Soviet Union (Goldstein and Freeman 1991; Pei 1994; Solnick 1996). This repositioning of China as a potential ally rather than an ideological enemy allowed the two countries to reach agreements on many difficult issues, such as China’s admission to the United Nations in 1971, the Taiwan Strait issue, and the establishment of Sino-US diplomatic
relationships in 1979 (Komine 2008; Kim 2010; Guo and Guo 2010). With much emphasis placed on China’s strategic importance in the fight against the Soviet Union in the early 1980s, both the US and the UK generally cast China in a friendly light, relegating difficult issues such as human rights disputes, arms sales to Taiwan, and China’s commitment to communism in the background.

The 1989 Tiananmen Square incident was decisive in altering the way in which China was framed in the US and the UK, by both politicians and the general public (Lampton 2001: 2). The American Congress, the media, the general public, human rights NGOs and the students who participated in the 1989 events and later fled mainly to the US (Suettinger 2003:2; Sun 2010) all joined in elaborating a narrative of China as a ruthless, totalitarian nation, and exerted tremendous pressure on the White House to take strong action against the Chinese government (Wan 2011: 43-44). Tiananmen also brought the theme of human rights to the centre of the reconfigured narrative of China in the UK and US. America’s new emphasis on human rights conditions in China elaborated a pattern of causal emplotment in which demands for improving China’s human rights record and releasing dissidents held in prison were connected with important economic and political issues such as the imposition of economic sanctions on China in the early 1990s, the debate that surrounded the potential inclusion of China as a member of WTO, and America’s annual review of Most Favoured Nation Status for China in the mid-1990s (Hoogmartens 2004:54). In the UK, the issue of human rights also featured prominently in post-Tiananmen narratives of China, but not as prominently as in the US. In particular, given the UK’s view of China as an economic partner, its criticism was couched in terms that allowed it to continue trading with and benefiting from that country (Berslin 2004: 414). A Foreign Commonwealth Office report in 2000 stated: “we consider that the integration of China into the world community in general, including China’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), is the most powerful external factor likely to strengthen the rule of law and lead to an improvement in the human rights situation in China. Closer integration in commerce is part of this wider picture, and we consider that Government policy in all these areas is complementary” (Cook 2000: 3).

Despite the fact that the Tiananmen Square event raised concerns about the country’s political future, China’s rise to prominence on the economic front and the commercial opportunities that came along with it encouraged the British and American leadership to narrate China as an important driving force in the narrative of globalization. However,
China’s robust economic growth since the 1990s raised more concern in the US than the UK. China’s global expansion in the acquisition of raw materials, economic investment in Africa and the Middle East, and the alliances it gradually built around the world led the US to narrate it as an emerging power that was now reshaping the existing global order and challenging America’s leadership in the world (Zhou 2011: 626). The idea of China as a threat, evoked by the powerful literary figure of Dr. Fu Manchu in the 1930s (see section 1.1.3), continues to be deployed in the US occasionally, as evidenced in a political commercial against ‘government waste’ entitled ‘Chinese Professor’15 aired on CNN in 2012 and discussed in detail in Baker (2014). Produced in Chinese with English subtitles, the commercial is set in the year 2020 in Beijing and features an actor playing a Chinese professor and explaining to his students the reasons behind the fall of the US empire. Looking sinister and ruthless, he tells his students that the US made the same mistake as all empires that fell before it: it indulged in “enormous so-called ‘stimulus’ spending, massive changes to health care, government takeovers of private industries, and crushing debt”, all of which were covered by excessive debts from the Chinese (Baker 2014:171). The commercial closes with the Professor saying “Of course, we owned most of their debt… so now they work for us”, and the students then laughing and revelling in America’s demise.

Apart from the economic challenge it poses, especially to the US, China has also been investing heavily in military modernization in recent years, and this too is seen as posing a threat to America’s political and economic interests in East and Southeast Asia (De Castro 2011: 601). China is occasionally involved in territorial disputes with its neighbouring countries, such as Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines, and takes a firm stance in claiming Taiwan as part of its territory; this too has occasionally led to military confrontations with America in the Asian-Pacific region in the past two decades, most notably during the Taiwan Strait crisis in 1997. In 2006, the US Quadrennial Defence Review Report narrated China as a nation with “the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional U.S. military advantages absent U.S. counter strategies”. This Report also noted that “the pace and scope of China’s military build-up already puts regional military balances at risk” (quoted in Lim 2008: 44).

15 See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTSQozWP-rM [14 October, 2014].
Unlike the US, the UK is not inclined to frame China as a threat to global security and balance (Breslin 2004: 415). As explained above, Britain’s narratives of China are largely shaped by economic considerations and commercial interests, with human rights concerns relegated to the background. In the submission to the Foreign Affairs Committee’s investigation into UK relations with China in 2000, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office stated that the UK’s objectives in dealing with China were to “influence China’s political, economic and social development in a positive way, and to encourage China to play a responsible role both within the region and in the wider international community”. The emphasis on China’s economic importance has continued to inform Britain’s relationship with it. David Cameron’s visit to China with a huge delegation in 2011, followed by Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne’s visit in January 2012, reflected Britain’s emphasis on increasing trade with this growing superpower.

1.2 Rationale, Objectives and Research Questions

The examination of European narratives of China since the 13th century in the previous section reveals that images of China in a wide range of European writings have been well documented. For example, Mackerras’s Western Images of China (1989) was one of the first attempts to summarise western perceptions of China since the first Sino-European encounters. Drawing on Foucault’s theory of knowledge and power, Mackerras locates western knowledge of China in the context of power relationships, and argues that the major determinant of western portrayals of China and the Chinese at any given time is the balance of power between China and western countries, not Chinese reality. He further concludes that “the dominant images of most periods have tended to accord with, rather than oppose, the interests of the main western authorities or governments of the day. There has indeed been a ‘regime of truth’ concerning China, which has affected and raised ‘the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true’ about that country” (Mackerras 1989: 263). Many studies have also investigated narratives of China and the Chinese in the English translations of Chinese literature in the 19th and early 20th century (St. André 2004; He 2009; Song &

An incomplete list of literature pertaining to the study of images of China in the West includes: Zhou Ning’s Tianchao Yaoyuan (2006), James Mann’s The China Fantasy: How Our Leaders Explain Away Chinese Repression (2007); Hayot and Yao’s Sinographies: Wring China (2008); David Martinez-Robles’ The Western Representation of Modern China (2008); David Scott’s China and the International System, 1840-1949 (2008); Adrian Chan’s Orientalism in Sinology (2009); Page and Xie’s Living with the Dragon: How the American Public Views the Rise of China (2010); Colin Sparks’ Coverage of China in the UK National Press (2010); Li Zhang’s The Rise of China: Media Perception and Implication for International Politics’ (2010).
Sun 2008; Fang Lu 2009). For example, Song and Sun (2008) offered detailed analyses of the translations of *Hau Kiou Choaan, or The Pleasing History*, the first Chinese novel to be translated into English, by James Wilkinson (edited by Thomas Percy) in 1761, and demonstrated that there are numerous deletions and instances of rewriting which are mainly focused on (1) a re-organisation of the original chapters; (2) deletions of parts of the original novel, including subtitles, poems and plots which the editor, namely Thomas Percy, seems to have deemed redundant for the readers’ understanding of the novel; and (3) substitution of the original pictures with some irrelevant ones which have nothing to do with the novel. Song and Sun also discussed some potential motivations for these deletions and rewritings: there were no relevant dictionaries available to use at that time; and earlier translators were very limited in their knowledge of China and Chinese culture.

Historical investigation of China’s image in the western imagination, valuable as it is, cannot substitute for an up-to-date, empirical account of contemporary western representations of China. Few studies have been undertaken to date to examine how China and the Chinese are projected through English translations of Chinese novels from the 1980s. What studies there are are not based on a large body of empirical data and/or are not theoretically informed, though some have drawn on particular theories, such as postcolonial theory (Chen 2008; Zhao 2009; Li 2007) and Said’s work on Orientalism (Yu 2006). The issue of how China and the Chinese are represented in a large body of English translations of Chinese novels throughout an extended period of time has therefore hardly been touched upon. Although this study does not undertake textual analysis of specific translations, it offers a detailed account of processes of selection of material to translate and the narratives of China generated through the framing of these translations and the reviews of the translations in the UK and US media.

This study, then, sets out to explore the role played by translation in mediating Western images of China and the Chinese, with specific reference to translations of novels from Chinese into English, commissioned and sold in the UK and US book markets during the period 1980, shortly after the Open Door policy was put in place, to 2010, the year marking the start of the current study. Specifically, the study will examine publishers’ choices of source texts and their marketing strategies, as well as critical responses to contemporary translations, as articulated in book reviews published in mainstream media outlets in the UK and US. The study attempts to reveal some of the patterns which the publishing industry and
other powerful institutions (such as reviewers, literary prizes, and universities) have given shape to, as these patterns of selective appropriation not only condition the ways in which individual Chinese novels are interpreted and received by English readers, but also evoke and consolidate the broader public narratives of China circulating in the UK and US. To realise the above research objectives, the study will address the following broad question:


This question may be broken down into specific questions as follows:

1) How many and what types of Chinese novels are translated into English and published in the UK and US? Can specific patterns of selective appropriation be identified in the choice of authors, genres and themes? Do these patterns differ between the UK and US publishers, and commercial and academic publishers?

2) What marketing strategies do these narrators employ to frame China in the UK and US literary markets? Do UK and US publishers, and commercial and academic publishers, employ different strategies?

3) What recurrent narratives can be identified in reviews of English translations of Chinese novels published in the UK and US? Do these narratives vary between US and UK published reviews?

4) To what extent are the translation and reviewing activities connected with Chinese literature in the UK and US informed and conditioned by evolving relations with China?

Before moving on to a brief discussion of the theoretical framework adopted in this study, there are a couple of issues in relation to the scope of the thesis that deserve further clarification. First, it should be made clear that this thesis will not delve into an analysis of individual translations to examine representations of China and the Chinese at the textual level. Instead, as the research questions suggest, the emphasis is on examining the ways in which the selection of novels for English translation and the ways in which they are framed
and reviewed all participate in the construction and circulation of narratives of China in the UK and US.

Second, in terms of genre, this thesis covers the selection for translation into English of both classical\(^{17}\) and contemporary Chinese novels and accounts for both in the databases constructed specifically for this study. However, it does not delve into detailed analysis of classical novels in chapters 4 and 5. It is fair to say that reading classical Chinese novels can be a daunting task for general British and American readers\(^{18}\), and that their translations are mainly addressed to expert readers in the UK and US, with close knowledge of Chinese culture and traditional society. Their inclusion in the database is informed by their continued relevance today to an influential albeit small sector of the population\(^{19}\), and for the sake of completeness in the overview of novels translated during the period under discussion.

Third, this study focuses on translations published in the UK and US book markets, rather than other English-speaking countries, such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore, among others. As leading powers on the international stage, the UK and US also exert strong cultural influence and their publishing industries dominate the Anglophone world. As statistics published by *the Publishers’ Weekly* in 2013 demonstrate, 10 out of 20 of the largest book companies in the world are based in the UK and US; the rest are spread

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\(^{17}\) In this study, the term ‘classical Chinese novel’ is used to refer to full-length fictional writings in pre-modern China up to the May Fourth Movement of 1919, a literary movement which is traditionally considered as marking the beginning of China’s modern era. Classical novels reached their peak and gained increasing attention in China during the Ming and Qing dynasties (roughly between the 15\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) century). The Four Great Classical Novels, namely *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Journey to the West*, *The Water Margin*, and *Three Kingdoms*, are considered the best of representatives of this genre. For detailed discussion of the scope of classical Chinese novels, see Hegel (1994) and Nienhauser (1986: 34-35).

\(^{18}\) For example *The Story of the Stone* consists of 120 long chapters in its full Chinese original version, which is twice as long as *War and Peace*. There are over 300 characters in the novel. Reading *Chin P’ing Mei* can also be a daunting task not only because the original Chinese version runs into 2,923 pages, but also because the first volume of the English translation alone (the first 20 chapters of the Chinese version) is accompanied by a large number of paratextual elements, including introduction, appendices, lengthy notes and so forth, and extends to more than three hundred pages. David Roy, the translator and a Professor of Chinese literature at the University of Chicago, stresses in the introduction to the translation that he “translated everything” in this allusive novel. The Chinese author of the novel was a scholar of enormous erudition; not only its narrator but most of its characters are forever quoting proverbs, poems and songs (Spence 1994: 24). This means that “even the barest stretch of exposition or the plainest patch of dialogue is likely to be bound up in notes and annotations” (Leithauser 1994: 28). The lengthy and historically-laden translations of traditional Chinese novels could thus be daunting for many English-speaking readers.

\(^{19}\) For example, Paul Mason, the BBC’s Newsnight economic editor, states that his first novel, *Rare Earth*, was inspired by *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, a classical novel written in the Ming dynasty and translated into English in five volumes, with the first one appearing in 1994. The last volume of this translation was eventually published in 2012, and was hailed by many as a great accomplishment (Marche 2013; Schuessler 2013).
across Germany, Spain, Japan, France and Italy\(^{20}\). Publishers in these two countries further export heavily to other English-speaking countries, as well as Europe, which means that translations commissioned in the UK and US can reach (native and non-native) English-speaking readers throughout the world. For these reasons, this study attempts to establish the narratives generated by the selection, framing and reviewing of translated Chinese novels by US and UK publishers insofar as they influence not only readers in the UK and US, but also native and non-native English-speaking readers across the world.

Finally, this study examines novels from mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan as well as novels written in Chinese by Chinese authors living overseas. While acknowledging the fact that writings from these different locales display their own unique patterns of themes informed and shaped by their political and social experiences during the past decades, this thesis includes Taiwanese and overseas literature for a number of reasons. The Taiwanese and mainland Chinese literary markets have been closely connected since the late 1980s\(^{21}\). Well-established Taiwanese writers such as Zhang Dachun, Zhu Tianwen, Zhu Tianxin, Li Ang, Bai Xianyong, Luo Yijun, among many others, are widely read by mainland Chinese readers. In addition, many novels which are censored in mainland China, such as Ma Jian’s _Beijing Coma_, Hong Ying’s _Daughter of the River_, Gao Xingjian’s _Soul Maintain_ and _One Man’s Bible_, and Yang Xianhui’s _Women from Shanghai_, are published in Taiwan first, and are often later selected for translation by UK and US publishers. Many overseas Chinese writers, such as Ma Jian, Hong Ying, and Yan Geling who continued to write in Chinese after moving to the UK or the US, prefer to publish in mainland China, rather than in their host countries, partly because they hope to communicate to mainland readers specific themes, such as the 1989 Tiananmen event, which are suppressed by the Chinese government; and partly because of the enormous and lucrative reading market in mainland China. In addition, as the analysis in chapter 4 and 5 will attempt to demonstrate, dissidence and exile are often flagged as part of the marketing strategies used in promoting translated Chinese novels in the UK and US.


\(^{21}\) When martial law was lifted in Taiwan in 1987, the two countries resumed friendly communication and people were able to travel between the two regions. Taiwan has been trying to maintain its autonomy while establishing a peaceful and mutually beneficial relationship with mainland China. The level of interaction between mainland China and Taiwan has since grown in various areas such as trade, tourism, cultural exchanges and political negotiations. Significant differences notwithstanding, the two countries arguably have much in common and are difficult to separate as two distinctly different regions (Wang and Rojas 2007; Huang 2007).
1.3 Theoretical Framework

In order to examine the role of translation in constructing images of China and the Chinese, narrative theory is adopted as a framework for guiding the analysis undertaken in this study. According to Baker, narrative theory allows us “to see translational choices not merely as local linguistic challenges but as contributing directly to the narratives that shape our world” (Baker 2007: 151). Of particular relevance to this research, which aims to investigate the role played by translation in mediating narratives of China and the Chinese by analysing selections made primarily at the macro level, is the fact that narrative theory offers a framework that allows us to “deal with the individual text and the broader set of narratives in which it is embedded, and encourages us to look beyond the immediate, local narrative as elaborated in a given text or utterance to assess its contribution to elaborating wider narratives in society” (Baker 2006:4). Importantly, narrative theory assumes that ‘reality’ is constantly mediated and reconstructed by a variety of narrators who are embedded in specific narrative environments. This reconstruction, or renarration, may involve selecting and (re)organising pre-existing episodes (or texts) to make sense of the world or part of the world in new ways. Renarration inevitably produces shifts in representation, and gives rise to competing narratives. Translation thus serves as a space of renarration and intervenes in the process of sense-making in significant ways. Drawing on narrative theory, this study attempts to analyse some of the ways in which translation mediates and negotiates narratives of China and the Chinese in the UK and US. A detailed overview of the conceptual tools offered by narrative theory is offered in Chapter 2.

1.4 Data and Methodology

While data on published books in general is available through the Library of Congress and the British Library, there is no systematic collection or statistical analysis of translations published in the UK and US, in any genre. Other than the Index to the English Translations of Chinese Literature compiled by Hu Zhihui (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 1993), which lists titles published before 1992, and a limited number of studies and projects conducted to compile bibliographies of literature in foreign languages in Hong Kong and Taiwan, there is no publicly accessible bibliography or database of translations of Chinese novels in English published between 1980 and 2010. In the absence of reliable and accessible databases, this study aims to address this gap to some extent by compiling two databases: the Chinese
Novels in English (CNE) database and Reviews of Chinese Novels in English (RCNE) database.

The CNE database offers as exhaustive a list as possible of English translations of Chinese novels published in book form between 1980 and 2010. A variety of sources have been consulted, with the primary sources being the British Library, the Library of Congress and Index Translationum, the latter a database maintained by UNESCO, as well as a wide range of secondary sources, including publishers’ websites and scholarly studies of Chinese literature in translation. The RCNE database lists reviews of Chinese literature in English translation published in mainstream outlets in the UK and US between 1980 and 2010. In addition to newspapers, book reviews published in four key magazines are also included in this database: London Review of Books, The Times Literary Supplement, New York Review of Books, and The New Yorker. Details for the selection of publishers and review outlets are discussed in Chapter 3.

1.5 Organization of the Thesis

Following the introductory chapter, Chapter 2 discusses the notion of narrativity as understood in the social sciences, followed by a discussion of narrative typology and some of the core narrative features which will serve as analytical tools with which to examine the renarration of China through translations of Chinese novels since the 1980s. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the data, which is collected from a variety of sources. Two databases, i.e. Chinese Novels in English (CNE) and Reviews of Chinese Novels in English (RCNE), are constructed specifically for this study and details of constructing these two databases are recorded in this Chapter.

Chapter 4 and 5 analyse the data extracted from the two databases. Chapter 4 examines patterns of selection of Chinese novels for English translation resulting from choices made by narrators such as translators, editors and publishers who have been involved in the process of promoting Chinese novels in the UK and US between 1980 and 2010. These narrators tend to work very closely together, at least in the book industry, and to be involved to varying degrees in the process of selecting, framing and publishing Chinese novels in translation. Reviewers and critics, on the other hand, are not directly involved in the process of selecting and publishing translations. Nevertheless, they wield enormous power over the reception of translated Chinese novels, as they do with other translated literature, and guide the way in
which these novels are interpreted by the public. They therefore merit examination separately.
The analysis of the role of reviewers, together with their reviews, in narrating China to US
and UK readers will therefore be addressed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 attempts to summarise some of the main findings of this study and provides
suggestions for future studies.
Chapter 2 Renarrating China: A Theoretical Framework

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework which informs the model of analysis applied in Chapters 4 and 5. It begins with an introduction to narrativity as a theoretical concept, including a discussion of the typology (section 2.2) and the core features of narratives (section 2.3), as elaborated in social and communication studies (Somers and Gibson 1994; Somers 1997), and more recently in translation studies (Baker 2006). The last section (section 2.4) outlines Genette’s theory of paratexts, considered here as a major site of framing that is exploited by a range of narrators – including publishers, translators and reviewers – in renarrating China through English translations of Chinese novels.

2.1 Introducing Narrativity

The interest in narrative originates from Aristotle’s study of plot, which gave rise to the study of narrative as a form of art, or poetics. Narrative has thus traditionally been central to the study of language and literature, but since the 1950s the application of this concept has extended beyond literary studies to a wide range of disciplines, including history, psychology, social science, education, medicine, law and communication studies, as observed by Stanley and Jones:

The category of narrative has been used, among other purposes, to explain human action, to articulate the structure of human consciousness, to depict the identity of agents (whether human or divine), to explain strategies of reading, to justify a view of the importance of “story-telling”, to account for the historical development of tradition (often in religious studies through the language of fables and myths), to provide an alternative to foundationalist and/or other scientific epistemologies, and to develop a means for imposing order on what is otherwise chaos.

(Stanley and Jones 1989: 2)

By the 1990s, narrative analysis had become an established methodology in social science studies (Czarniawska 2004; Elliott 2005), with various overlapping approaches emerging that adopted different definitions of narrative. One approach, adopted in the current study, takes narrative and narrativity “to be [an issue of] social epistemology and social ontology” and emphasizes the role of narrative in constructing the world (Somers 1994: 82). This approach contrasts with other schools of narrative enquiry that treat narrative as a representational form, traditionally common among historians, for instance, and conceives narrative as a meta-mode...
of communication (Somers 1994, 1997; Czarniawska 2004; Baker 2006), or in White’s term, “a meta code”. It allows for the transcultural transmission of “messages about a shared reality” (White 1980: 6). In taking the entire narrative as the unit of analysis, this ontological approach to narrative is based on the assumption that people are essentially storytellers. Instead of assuming that stories directly come to us as an unmediated given (Bruner 2004: 692), this new view of narrative posits that “we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative” (Bruner 1991: 4). Everything we experience is encoded in the form of stories: we come to know, understand and make sense of the social world through stories; we act through stories, tell other people about ourselves through stories, and react to events according to the narratives we are exposed to; narrative thus serves as “the principal and inescapable mode by which we experience the world” (Baker 2005: 5, emphasis in original). It is so pervasive and basic a form of social life that it is “transnational, transhistorical and transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself” (Barthes and Heath 1977: 79).

Scholars advocating this “constructivist” approach to narrative, as Bruner calls it (2004: 691), do not assume that the truth or facts can be discovered and described; facts are seen not as “encountered” but as “constructed and constituted” (Rimmon-Kenan 2006: 15) based on the narrator’s interpretation – with narration understood as a hermeneutic activity both “in its construction and in its comprehension” (Bruner 1991: 8). Even historians who see narrative as one mode of communication, among others, albeit one of the most ubiquitous genres we encounter in everyday life, recognise that narration is never neutral or objective. White argues that this is so because “the world does not come to us already narrativized, already speaking itself” (White 1987:25). A set of events have to be made coherent through narration, because they are not viable until they are categorized and connected in a spatial and temporal sequence. The stories we tell are inevitably selective, with the sequence of presenting events in each story being imposed by storytellers. Based on our experiences and specific narrative location, we single out certain events, impose a certain order on them, prioritize some while effacing others, and combine them into narratives. This means that in order to make sense of happenings around us, events need to be woven into stories through various forms of emplotment that ultimately allow us to construct a coherent and comprehensive narrative with a beginning, middle and an end in a certain temporal and spatial context.
Scholars who approach narrative from this constructive perspective place considerable emphasis on “the plurality of stories” (Rimmon-Kenan 2006: 15); if narrative elements and events are constructed, rather than ‘recovered’, there must be more than one way to arrange these episodes into stories. Different narratives of the same set of events may conflict with, support, or overlap partly or wholly with each other, giving rise to cultural and political conflicts (White 1992: 39). In addition, the elaboration of a narrative is an on-going, open-end process, which is subject to change as narrators are exposed to new events or episodes. It is this dynamic nature of narratives that enables different parties to challenge and contest each others’ versions of events, as Baker argues:

[…] no narrative can represent the ultimate, absolute, uncontestable truth of any event or set of events, [therefore] we have to accept that events do take place in real time and space and hence are verifiable by a range of means that are always extendable and open to refinement and reassessment.

(Baker 2006: 18)

Narrative, then, is a primary tool with which we come to know and approach the world around us. It is through stories that we construct and make sense of happenings. While there is no single, clear definition of narrative in the literature, narrative as understood by social theorists, and in this study, mediates our understanding of the world around us. This study will adopt Baker’s definition of narratives as

public and personal ‘stories’ that we subscribe to and that guide our behaviour. They are the stories we tell ourselves, not just those we explicitly tell other people, about the world(s) in which we live. The term ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ are interchangeable in this context.

(Baker 2006: 19)

The following sections will draw on Baker’s typology and dimensions of narrativity as conceptual tools with which to conduct the analysis of data in chapters four and five.

2.2 Four Types of Narrative

Somers (1994, 1997) and Baker (2006) identify four types of narrative: ontological (or personal), public, conceptual and meta narratives. This typology is particularly relevant for the social sciences, and it accentuates the active role of narrativity in constructing social
identities. Baker (2006) attempts to explain this typology with particular reference to the activities of translators and interpreters.

**Ontological (personal) narratives** are stories about the self. They are “the stories that social actors use to make sense of – indeed, to act in – their lives” (Somers 1997: 84). It is through personal narratives that we construct our identities, tell ourselves and other people who we are and how we relate to the world around us. At the same time, other people also participate in the elaboration of our personal narratives by accepting, rejecting and modifying the stories we tell. The way other people narrate us has an impact on us: it may help us (re)configure our place in the world, or force us to do so; as Baker argues, the stories other people tell about us influence “our own developing narrative of who we are and how we relate to the world around us, … how we ‘narrate’ ourselves” (Baker 2006: 31). Partly because of this interaction between ourselves and others in elaborating our sense of self, personal narratives are never fixed, but adjust continually to new encounters and the stories others tell about us. Social media websites, such as Facebook, Twitter and Goodreads, are good examples of platforms for the elaboration of personal narratives, as they allow people to construct their narrative identities within a public space. While telling stories of their own, users of Facebook and similar platforms can also develop overlapping and group identities, and engage with others.

Although personal narratives focus on stories about the self, they are essentially “interpersonal and social in nature” (Baker 2006: 28). These stories need to be located in larger narratives, such as public and meta narratives: as Ewick and Silbey argue, “even the most personal of narratives rely on and invoke collective narratives – symbols, linguistic formulations, structures and vocabularies of motive – without which the personal would remain unintelligible and uninterpretable” (Ewick and Silbey 1995: 211-212). At the same time, personal narratives can challenge or contest public narratives, simply by individuals refusing to subscribe to them. This interplay between personal and public narratives has implications for translators: it is not always easy to accommodate even the most straightforward personal narratives into new cultural settings without adding, losing or adapting elements of the original narratives.

**Public narratives** are stories “elaborated by and circulating among social and institutional formations larger than the individual” (Baker 2006: 33). These may include the stories
circulating among a family, an institution or a nation. Dolmaya (2010) examines how companies construct public narratives through the images, texts and other elements on their websites and how the image of Canada is projected through a series of such public narratives.

Public narratives circulating within any cultural formation are subject to change over time. Isaacs (1972) offers an example of how Americans’ public narratives of the Chinese altered between 1942 and 1972. In Scratches on Our Minds: American Views of China and India, he provides a number of Gallup trend polls that have been conducted at various intervals in America, and the results of one Gallup poll exemplify Americans’ pendulous attitudes towards China. In this case, Americans were asked “to select adjectives which seemed to them to describe the Chinese” (1972: xviii). The following table shows sets of percentages relating to characteristics of the Chinese as perceived by Americans, taken from samplings made in 1942, 1966 and 1972, respectively.

| Table 1 Characteristics of the Chinese as perceived by the Americans (Isaacs 1972: xviii) |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Hardworking                                                                 | 1942 | 1966 | 1972 |
| Honest                                                                 | 52   | *    | 20   |
| Brave                                                                 | 48   | 7    | 17   |
| Religious                                                                 | 33   | 14   | 18   |
| Intelligent                                                                | 24   | 14   | 32   |
| Practical                                                                 | 23   | 8    | 27   |
| Ignorant                                                                 | 22   | 24   | 10   |
| Artistic                                                                  | 21   | 13   | 26   |
| Progressive                                                               | 14   | 7    | 28   |
| Sly                                                                       | 8    | 20   | 19   |
| Treacherous                                                               | 4    | 19   | 12   |
Isaacs explains that after the Pearl Harbour event in 1942, China became America’s new ally and joined the US military on the battlefield during World War II. Attributes associated with Chinese people were mostly positive during that period; they were perceived as hardworking, honest, brave and intelligent. Isaacs mentions that 123, or 70 percent of the interviewees, expressed positive or admiring views of the Chinese, and they held these views of China as a nation, of Chinese culture as a whole and of Chinese people of all backgrounds and classes in the 1940s. However, changes in the political and cultural situation in the 1960s weakened this positive public narrative of the Chinese. By 1966 China had become “the Communist terror” (Isaacs 1972: 107). As an enemy and potential danger to the US, China was generally narrated as treacherous, warlike and cruel. With US former President Nixon’s trip to China in 1972, we saw another reversal in attitudes towards the country and its people. Once again, a public narrative of the Chinese as hardworking, honest, brave and intelligent began to emerge. From the poll we can see that the mainstream American narrative of China fluctuated widely during the past 30 years, and many of the descriptions and attributes associated with the Chinese are projections of their time and place, and the narrative locations of those who subscribed to the different narratives. It is not the Chinese people who have changed significantly, as Isaacs explains, “but the way they are seen” (Isaacs 1972: 383), i.e. how Americans narrate China and which traits are selected to construct Chinese people as a whole. As Isaacs puts it, it is “a matter of those lights shining at different times from different directions on different facets of what there is to see” (Isaacs 1972: 383).

Personal and public narratives are interrelated in many ways. First, personal narratives, even the most private, have to draw on and connect with a variety of public narratives. Although personal narratives are stories we elaborate about the self, they need to be embedded within shared narratives to become intelligible to others. As Gergen puts it, “narratives of the self are not fundamentally possessions of the individual but possessions of relationships” (Gergen 1994: 186). Second, public narratives also gain currency and acceptance from their synergy with a multitude of personal narratives, because the latter can echo and reinforce or challenge and even subvert public narratives. A recent event can best illustrate this interplay between personal and public narratives. The announcement of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize directed the
world’s attention to China, as the prize was awarded to Liu Xiaobo, an activist persistently calling for human rights and political reform in the country. Liu was a key leader of the Tiananmen Square protest in 1989 and among those who drafted the ’08 Charter, which received considerable attention and support as its circulation grew. Since the release of the Charter, over 10,000 Chinese intellectuals and distinguished people from around the globe have called for real democratic reform in China and have signed the Charter. As Liu became a symbol of the protest movement and his personal narrative was elaborated in his own and others’ writings about him, he gained increasing support and his story developed resonance for others; but it also threatened to undermine domestic public narratives. Consequently, his calls for reform and his writings were banned by the Chinese government, which arrested Liu and condemned him to 11 years in prison for “inciting subversion” (Wee 2011) in 2009. A year later, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded Liu the Nobel Peace Prize for “his long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China”22. Since then, many people have contributed to constructing Liu’s narrative. His personal narrative is no longer his own; it has developed far beyond his control and been imbued with strong political and social resonances. The Chinese government, on its part, has protested the award in the strongest terms. The Spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry narrated Liu as “a criminal who violated Chinese law” and described the Nobel Prize Committee’s decision as “a complete violation of the principles of the Prize and an insult to the peace prize itself”23. Liu is thus officially narrated in China as an outlaw who does not deserve the Nobel Peace Prize. Moreover, few people inside China have even heard his name, as the announcement of the award and other news related to him have been cautiously censored. Given that he has been consistently narrated as a subversive criminal, those who have heard of him tend to think that he is “not an appropriate recipient” of the award (Sautman and Yan 2010). Outside China, on the other hand, a very different version of Liu’s personal story has emerged. He is widely praised in the West for “his belief in a close connection between human rights and peace” (Branigan 2010). Liu is reported to have suffered severe punishment, meted out to him by the Chinese government. Most western media narrate him as “the foremost symbol of [the] wide-ranging struggle for human rights in China” (Cormack 2010), “a worthy winner” (Kerbs 2010) and “a prominent human rights defender”24, rather than a political criminal as the Chinese

government chooses to narrate him. Now that he has received the Nobel Prize, Liu’s books, including his poetry and political essays, have been translated into English by Jeffrey Yang and were published by Harvard University Press in 2012.

Somers and Gibson define conceptual narratives narrowly as “concepts and explanations that we construct as social researchers” (Somers and Gibson 1994: 62; emphasis added), but Baker extends the notion to cover all disciplinary narratives. She defines conceptual narratives as “stories and explanations that scholars in any field elaborate for themselves and others about their object of inquiry” (Baker 2006: 39). Every discipline has its own conceptual narratives, and many of these extend beyond academia to become part of public life. This infusion of academic thinking into public narratives means that conceptual narratives can exercise both intellectual and political influence. For example, scholars of contemporary Chinese literature based in the UK and US universities often assume the responsibility of shaping the public understanding of Chinese literature by publishing articles in the mainstream media outlets or speaking on radio programmes. The views they express are infused with and informed by a range of conceptual narratives that they develop and debate as part of their scholarly work.

Conceptual narratives elaborated by scholars exert considerable influence not only on public perceptions, but also on policy makers and those involved in negotiating various aspects of international relations. For instance, Arthur Henderson Smith, an American missionary scholar, published his seminal book *Chinese Characteristics* in 1890, where he summarized 26 typical Chinese attributes which he thought best described Chinese people. In this book, Smith singled out 26 features of the Chinese, such as “politeness”, “the disregard of time”, “the absence of nerves” and “intellectual turbidity” to comment on and foreground (Smith 1890). This book was so influential that in his day, Smith was known as ‘the American statesman of China’, and the then US President and diplomats around the world turned to his books for information on Chinese affairs (Pappas 1987: 163). After the Boxer Rebellion (1898-1901), Smith also suggested that the then US President Theodore Roosevelt devote the indemnity payments received from China to the education of Chinese students. More than $12 million dollars was spent to help Chinese students receive higher education in the United States (Thompson 2009: 219).
Translations and interpreters can either subvert or accept an established conceptual narrative. For instance, St André (2004) states that in his 1810 English translation of the Qing penal code, Sir George Staunton narrates the Chinese legal system as “comprehensible, reasonable and just”, a depiction which challenges James Barrow’s statements in his *Travels in China* (1806) (St André 2004: 5). Barrow criticizes the Chinese as fundamentally unjust in their everyday lives, including their manner of doing business and selling their children into slavery. His narrative depicts the penal code as responsible for the injustice that pervades Chinese society, because the code “encourages people to indifference and cruelty toward the unfortunate” (St André 2004: 4). George Staunton’s translation of the ‘Great Qing Code’, on the other hand, strives to “persuade his readers that the Chinese had a concept of justice” (St André 2004: 1). He employs paratextual elements, such as the preface and footnotes, to refute Barrow’s claim by arguing that it is foreigners who misunderstand the Chinese and their codes (St André 2004: 6).

**Meta narratives** are “particularly potent public narratives that persist over long periods of time and influence the lives of people across a wide range of settings” (Baker 2010a: 351). They are powerful and pervasive stories that extend across considerable stretches of time and cultural and geographical boundaries. Good examples of meta-narratives include Confucianism, capitalism vs. communism, and the Cold War. The legacy of the Cold War continues to exert an enduring effect on our lives and on international relations even today; it is disseminated through various mass media, especially Hollywood, which has played a major role in ensuring the survival and spread of the Cold War meta-narrative beyond its immediate geographical boundaries (Baker 2006: 45).

One powerful meta-narrative is that of globalization; this has the power and reach to draw every individual and nation under its tremendous clout. China is no exception. As the last remaining socialist country with rapid economic growth, China however presents “a challenge to critical thinking about globalization” (Kang 1998: 188) because globalisation is often considered the result of “the collapse of Soviet-style socialism and the expansion of transnational capitalism” (Kang 1998: 188). Though China is involved in and integrated with the global economic system, it still retains a distinct identity as a developing socialist country. Its rapid economic growth, military modernisation and the growing demand for energy have made many policy makers, strategic thinkers and academics concerned about China’s rise and its impact on the future development of the world. Therefore, narratives about China
generally fall into two sharply contrasting accounts. The first narrates China as a peaceful rising power, and predicts that China will grow into the world’s largest economy by the middle of the twenty-first century without jeopardizing other countries’ national interests and Asian-Pacific security (Zhou 2009: xxi). The second narrates China’s rise as a threat to the West and the global system (Gertz 2002; Broomfield 2003), and predicts that China will one day grow into “a brutal repressive regime whose power … increasingly threatens the stability of the industrial world” (Zhou 2009: xxi). Some observers (Rice 2000; Roy 1996) believe that China’s rise to power may reshape the world order and the rules of the international system to better serve its own interests. For them, China has to be narrated as a significant threat to security and a negative example of globalisation.

Coupled with globalisation, another meta-narrative which is on the surge in various parts of the world is that of nationalism. Since the 1980s, when western political philosophies, values (such as democracy and other liberal values) and pop culture were introduced to China, some intellectuals have constantly reminded Chinese people of the need to keep elaborating distinctive narratives of their own. The late 1990s therefore witnessed a revival of nationalism, which reflected “larger social critiques targeted at globalization, transnational capital, and the economic, cultural, and political imperialism of the West” (Jin 2006: 579). Publications such as China Can Say No (Song Qiang et al. 1996), a book calling “attention to US hegemony in the world and decrying China’s increasing fascination about America” (Jin 2006: 578), and Behind Demonization of China (Li et al. 1996) represent a resurgence of nationalism. The recurrence of this ‘sino-centric’ narrative has become a major concern for both Chinese and western policy-makers and scholars. They find it astonishing and even appalling that Western views of China’s international power clash dramatically with those of the Chinese themselves (Pei 2010). Thus, while western media continuously write stories about China bullying its neighbours in territorial disputes and flooding the world with its goods, and urge China to assume more responsibility in international affairs, the Chinese public subscribe to a very different narrative of their country. They criticise their government for not being assertive and tough enough in preserving the integrity of Chinese territories when disputes arise with Japan or tensions develop in relation to Tibet, Xinjiang or Taiwan. Many Chinese see their leaders as “spineless and western criticisms of Chinese behaviour as unfair and hypocritical” (Pei 2010). Western observers and critics view this radical
nationalism in China as a growing and worrying force, and even as evidence of China’s
growing threat to world security.

Finally, it should be noted that the boundaries between different types of narratives are not
always clear-cut, but often blurred and porous. Conceptual narratives, such as Huntington’s
theory of the clash of civilizations and Said’s elaboration of Orientalism, can grow into
public narratives as an increasing number of people begin to subscribe or contest to their
narratives. Similarly, a meta narrative can be deprived of its inevitability as its currency
decreases and loses credibility to many people to the point when it becomes a public narrative.
In the next section, I will discuss how narratives function and construct the world as we come
to know it.

2.3 Features of Narrativity

According to Somers (1994; 1997), Baker (2006) and Bruner (1991), there are eight core
features of narrativity: temporality, relationality, causal emplotment, selective appropriation,
particularity, genericness, normativeness/breach and narrative accrual.

**Temporality** is a defining feature of narratives (Elliott 2005; Bruner 1991; Baker 2006). Any
event or set of events needs to be emplotted in a spatial and temporal context in order to gain
significance. Even in nonverbal media such as cartoon strips, a sequential convention such as
‘left-to-right’ or ‘top-to-bottom’ implies a temporal and spatial order, and a reverse reading
could give rise to a different narrative of the same set of events. One important implication of
temporality is that every narrative is “history laden” (Somers and Gibson 1994: 44). The
historicity of narrative means that “the narratives of today encode and re-enact those of the
recent as well as distant past” (Baker 2006: 55), that every narrative recalls some aspects of
some narratives that circulated at some point in the past. Every story draws on a specific
historical context to acquire significance and meaning.

Temporality is crucial in translation because a translated text always emerges from a cultural
context at a particular historical moment, which may diverge slightly or significantly from the
historical moment of the source text. Venuti thus argues that “[e]very stage in the production,
circulation and reception of a translation is profoundly marked by its historical moment”
(Venuti 2005: 800). A translation occupies a place in history and enters into a range of
relations to past materials. The temporality of translation suggests that we cannot extract a
translation out of its historical context, where it draws significance, and assume that it will function in the same way at different times and in different locations; the narratives circulating around the translation at any point in time themselves undergo constant change. Changes in language (affecting lexical choices and stylistic preferences, for example) and intensified cultural contact mean that the translations of earlier decades read differently from more recent ones.

Translations can also exploit the feature of temporality to different ends. Fang Lu (2009) discusses how A. C. Safford, the English translator of Gùjīn Lìěnv Zhuan (Typical Women of China), dihistorizes the original work by removing its narrative elements from their original spatial and temporal context in order to weave a different narrative. Fang Lu argues that Safford’s translation is primarily based on Guīfān (translated as Within Baton-Door Standards) written by Lù Kūn in 1590 (Fang 2009: 334), but she also includes other materials written at different time periods. For instance, she drew on Ban Zhāo’s Nǚ Jīe (translated as Commandments for Women), written in the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220BC), in her narration of Chinese women (Fang 2009: 335). Ban Zhāo focused on how Chinese women of her period should ideally behave in social life, but Safford included extracts from this work as one of her source materials and presented them to her readers as ‘real’ records of the behaviour of Chinese women in the late 19th century. Safford’s editorial choices, Fang argues, misrepresent the Chinese originals by “removing them from the Chinese literary traditions which are the sites where they draw their significance”, resulting in a blurring of “the distinction between the portrayal of women as idealized in Confucian ideology and women’s actual position in society in the late 19th century” (Fang 2009: 336). These ‘dehistorized’ narratives ultimately portray Chinese women as compliant and superstitious. Safford’s translation misleads readers into assuming that the book is an important source of ‘authentic’ Chinese women’s lives.

The construction and circulation of narratives also depends on the key feature of relationality, or hermeneutic composability in Bruner’s terms. Relationality means that “it is impossible for the human mind to make sense of isolated events or of a patchwork of events that are not constituted as a narrative” (Baker 2005: 61). Somers argues that narratives are essentially “constellations of relationships (connected parts) embedded in time and space” (Somers 1997: 82, emphasis in original). Every element or event occupies a certain place within a given narrative and enters into various relationships with other elements or events to
construct the overall narrative. In the process of constructing and establishing relationships between different elements in order to elaborate a coherent narrative, narrators imbue individual events and elements with meaning, and that meaning is in large part specific to that narrative. In other words, the viability of a story relies on how the individual elements are made to mesh together. Hence, Somers argues that “to make something understandable in the context of a narrative is to give it historicity and relationality” (Somers 1994: 617).

Although we tend to interpret new narratives by accommodating them within our own, existing narratives, sometimes collisions between parts or parts and whole occur. In other words, if aspects or parts of a new narrative prove difficult to accommodate within a new relational setting, a rupture can occur and this could lead to problems for both narrators and audiences. The early generation of Chinese immigrants to the US often found themselves experiencing such ruptures, as a result of a disconnect between their personal narratives and the mainstream narratives in their new environment. Their struggle to ‘settle down’ in a new environment and develop stories of their own meant finding a place for themselves within and establishing relations with these mainstream narratives, a process which always involves “a confrontation between the past (‘home’ culture) versus the present (host culture)”, as well as negotiation of values, traditions and beliefs, and a search for new identities (Chan 2007a: 398). This type of disconnection, which often resulted in significant trauma for Chinese immigrants, is an often-visited theme in diasporic literature. Stories of “nostalgia, exiles and belongings, cultural differences, assimilations and resistances, the search for identity and reconciliation” (Chan 2007a: 399) that focus on feelings of discomfort and insecurity caused by the disconnect between personal narratives and mainstream narratives are found in the works of Liu Hong (The Magpie Bridge 2003) and Yan Geling (The Lost Daughter of Happiness 2001), among others.

Individual events are embedded within an overall narrative so that each part can draw meaning from its function within the narrative. This applies to both source texts and translations and guides the reception of both. Every (new) narrator is an interpreter, and translators therefore cannot reproduce the ‘same’ narrative in a new relational context because, as Venuti explains,

the translation assumes a place in the different traditions of the receiving language and culture. These traditions not only assign another set of meanings to the translation, but allow it to exert a particular influence on subsequent writing in the receiving situation.
A good example is the translation of a Chinese film, *Summer Palace* (2006), by the Chinese director Lou Ye. The Chinese film features but does not emphasise the Tiananmen Square event; Ye himself explained that the film is meant to be “a love story first and foremost” (Artt, undated). However, the film is interpreted differently in the English-speaking world, where many critics and reviewers narrate it as “a bold assault on that great taboo: the Tiananmen Square Massacre” (Artt, undated). Some reviewers even saw a relational dimension in the title of the film, embedding it more firmly in the Tiananmen Square narrative(s):

the title Yihe Yuan and its translation 'Summer Palace' have an interesting political significance. The Tianamen Square protests are also known as “the political turmoil between spring and summer 1989” which lends a particular significance to the international title of Lou's film. The phrase 'Summer Palace' evokes both the magnificent Imperial Chinese structure that still exists today in Beijing and the idea of a place of freedom and happiness, the cocoon of adolescent idealism before it is tempered by experience.

(Artt, undated)

The elements and events that constitute a narrative are thus located in a spatial and temporal sequence, and acquire significance both from that location and from their relationship to each other within the overall narrative. Ultimately, however, it is causal emplotment that lends significance to this configuration. According to Somers, causal emplotment is “an accounting (however fantastic or implicit) of why a narrative has the story line it does” (Somers 1997: 83). By weaving individual episodes into stories and emplotting them, narrative gives meaning to a series of isolated events. Causal emplotment enables us to “weight and explain” (Baker 2006: 67) why a certain set of events and elements are connected in a particular way, and draw the implications of such connections. According to Baker, “it is … weighting, rather than the details of the event itself, which is often the subject of contestation by individuals and groups” (Baker 2006: 69). Each group involved in a conflict has their own stories, i.e. their own versions of events that provide explanations of why certain things have happened or are happening. A change in the weighting of individual items or events can lead to a whole new narrative, which means that the same set of events can be organized into different plots. As Bruner explains, it is the plot that “determines the power of the narrative” (Bruner 1990: 49) and carries explanatory force, because it allows different parties to construct different stories out of the same set of events.
The year 2001 witnessed a significant conflict between China and the US over the Hainan Island incident. The dispute involved a collision between a US navy plane and a Chinese fighter plane over the South China Sea. Wang Wei, the Chinese pilot, was found dead later in the crash while the damaged American plane was forced to do an emergency landing on a military airfield on Hainan Island. The Chinese government detained the American crew and refused to release them without an apology from Washington. Both sides agreed on the details of the events: two planes crashed above the waters near Hainan Island, resulting in one casualty on China’s side and detention of the American crew. But they disagreed on the causal links between these events and accordingly developed different narratives. China’s story focused on the ‘fact’ that the American aircraft invaded its air space and must therefore have been involved in spying, hence the insistence on an official apology. The American version of the story rejected the suggestion that the American aircraft was on a spying mission and depicted the US fighter plane as flying over international waters. These elements were woven together in such a way as to allow the US to conclude that “if the Chinese jets hadn’t been intercepting the American craft, the accident wouldn’t have happened” (Paglia 2001), and hence to refuse to accept responsibility and apologize for the incident. The two sides therefore weighted the relevant elements differently. This in turn determined their possible reactions. Another interesting point in this case is how the two sides translated the letter from the US Ambassador Joseph Prueher to Beijing after eleven days of negotiations. The letter states:

Both President Bush and Secretary of State Powell have expressed their sincere regret over your missing pilot and aircraft. Please convey to the Chinese people and to the family of Pilot Wang Wei that we are very sorry for their loss…. We are very sorry the entering of China’s airspace and the landing did not have verbal clearance, but very pleased the crew landed safely (emphasis added).

What is interesting here is the translation of the ambiguous expression very sorry by the two sides. In the Chinese translation offered by People’s Daily, very sorry is rendered as ‘shenbiao qianyi’ 深表歉意 (expressing profound apology), which is more apologetic than the original expression (Zhang 2001: 389). In the Chinese version issued by the US Embassy in Beijing, very sorry is rendered as ‘gandao feichang wanxi’ 感到非常惋惜 (feel very regretful). Considering the context of the original letter, very sorry is closer in meaning to

“feel sorrow or grief over; mourn rather than feel apologetic” (Zhang 2001: 389). The word sorry allowed the Chinese government to narrate the response as an apology, and hence provide the Chinese public with a coherent explanation for the release of the American crew. On the US side, the Bush administration insisted that since they did not do anything wrong and did not violate international law and Chinese sovereignty, the document could never be understood as a letter of apology, but “an expression of regret and sorrow” for the loss of life.

As Baker explains, then, the “weighting of events and various elements of a narrative, including characters, can be changed in translation to produce a different pattern of casual emplotment” (Baker 2006: 69). A case in point is discussed in Schaffer and Song (2006), who examined the English translation of A Private Life (1996), which tells the story of Ni Niuniu’s emotional and psychological development, from her adolescence to her early thirties. Parts of the story unfold against the background of the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square events. Although the Chinese version is very indirect in evoking the Tiananmen Square event, it conveys “multiple registers of meaning” and offers Chinese readers “a more radical text both politically and philosophically” (Schaffer and Song 2006: 3). The English translation introduces a number of changes (such as eliminating the rhetorical device of parenthetical breaks in the narrative and cutting or relocating several paragraphs from the Chinese version), thus luring readers to “anticipate a tale of political intrigue that climaxes with the Tiananmen Massacre” (Schaffer and Song 2006: 5). The translator subtly changes the pattern of causal emplotment by accentuating the political elements while downplaying the stylistic and aesthetic ones in Chen’s work. In addition, the publisher’s dust jacket and the translator’s note in the English translation explicitly frame the narrative as a reflection on the political event, thus anticipating the reception and interpretation of the novel by English readers. The translation was very well received, for example by Heinricli, who describes it as offering “a finely-tuned narrative ground in the unmistakable realities of China’s recent economic and political history. The translation is unfailingly accurate and succeeds in conveying the rhythm and tone of the original” (Heinricli 2006).

The fourth core feature of narrative, selective appropriation, concerns selecting and deselecting, stressing and subordinating events in the course of constructing a narrative. Narratives do not and cannot replicate the world around us, and storytelling inevitably

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26 Chen avoids mentioning the Tiananmen Square events directly because of strict political censorship; instead, she refers to what happened on 4 June 1989 as ‘that tragic period in early summer’ and to ‘the square’ as ‘the significant event’ (Schaffer and Song 2006: 6).
“involves selectivity, rearranging of elements, redescriptions and simplifications” (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997: xvi). The process of selective appropriation implies that certain events are more valuable than others by virtue of having more significance. This involves an element of evaluation on the part of any narrator, and Somers and Gibson point to this when they argue that narratives are constructed according to evaluative criteria that enable us “to make qualitative and lexical distinctions among the infinite variety of events, experiences, characters, institutional promises, and social factors that impinge on our lives” (Somers and Gibson 1994: 60). Since the choice of what to include and what to omit is made by individual narrators, a given narrative may be modified if the narrator is exposed to new narratives or if they engage in telling the ‘same’ story to a different audience. The process of selection may also be guided by a specific theme (Baker 2006; Somers 1997; Bruner 1986), which “determines how events are processed and what criteria will be used to prioritize events and render meaning to them” (Somers 1997: 83). Baker argues that the narrator’s positioning within a narrative and their personal values are further important criteria that guide the process of selective appropriation (Baker 2006: 72-76).

Like other narrators, translators employ the feature of selective appropriation in re-presenting a narrative in a new context. Examples of deliberate (de)selection of elements of a source text to elaborate a given narrative of the world abound. An interesting example concerns an international dispute over the selective translation into Chinese of Hillary Clinton’s autobiography *Living History* in 2003. The Chinese translation, published by Yilin Press, was criticised by the English publisher Simon & Schuster because, they claimed, Yilin Press introduced many changes and made many deletions that were not authorized. Many chapters in the translated Chinese version are heavily mediated (Chan 2007b; Wang and Zhu 2009). For example, a large proportion of Hillary Clinton’s negative evaluation of the Communist regime (for example in terms of social control and the violation of human rights) is either shortened, abridged, or deleted. Other stretches about sensitive topics such as the Tiananmen event in 1989 have been removed from the Chinese version by the translators (Chan 2007b: 123). The Yilin Press claims that the translators made these ‘minute’ changes because what matters to the Chinese readers is Hillary Clinton’s first-hand experiences, her narratives of American politics and her private life. Chinese readers should therefore not be exposed to her negative evaluation of Mainland China and its government (Chan 2007b: 125).
The selections made by the translators, and editors in some cases, can sometimes undermine the reception of the translation and in the target culture. Jin Wen (2006) discusses how the deletions and abbreviations made by the English translator and editor of *Fu Sang*, or *The Lost Daughter of Happiness* (2001), alter the construction and the understanding of the female protagonist, namely Fusang. The English translator Cathy Silber and the editor at Hyperion agreed to shorten, delete, or rearrange many passages in the Chinese original in order to make the translation read “more like an English-language novel” (Jin 2006: 572). The deletions, however, “contain descriptions (from the narrator’s or other characters’ perspectives) of Fusang’s unruly sexuality” (Jin 2006: 573). This pattern of selective appropriation has affected the reception of the novel, leading many Anglophone critics, with access to the sanitized, incomplete version, to construe Fusang as the “inscrutable Oriental” who remains “opaque” and “unfathomable” throughout the story (Lovell 2001).

Powerful institutions tend to have more latitude in deciding which source texts to select and translate. Media, publishers and academic institutions are especially powerful organisations which control the traffic of translation. They tend to prioritise “certain domestic values to the exclusion of others and establish a canon of foreign texts that is necessarily partial because it serves certain domestic interests” (Venuti 1998: 71). Therefore, literary works by authors from a dominated culture tend to be selected and translated by a dominant culture when they fit into the target culture’s narratives, especially its narratives of the source culture (Jacquemond 2010). In addition, tastes of a limited group of readers, such as academic specialists (in collaboration with editors and publishers), decide the public’s aesthetics because ordinary readers generally have no direct access to foreign literature. For instance, the translation of modern Japanese novels into English was limited to several writers’ work during the 1950s and 1960s; these writers include Tanizaki Jun’ichiro, Mishima Yukio and Kawabata Yasunari (Venuti 1998: 71). One consequence of this selective translation is that for the western public Japanese literature is represented by several writers and poets, who create an “elusive, misty and inconclusive” image of the Japanese (Venuti 1998: 71). Once the canon is established, narratives of a similar type tend to continue to be selected and hence reinforce the same pattern.

The motivation for selecting specific texts for translation varies. A social or political event in the international arena might promote “a reassessment of foreign literatures which attracts or renews the interest of publishers and translations” (Venuti 2005: 802). For instance, the May
Fourth movement in China stimulated domestic interest in translations of foreign literature, especially English and French novels. Geopolitical rather than domestic events can also result in literature from a certain range of countries being privileged for translation. At the foundation of the PRC, a multitude of Russian literature was translated into Chinese, probably because of the strong political relationship between China and Russia at the time. An important international award can also promote the fame of a specific work or author. Gao Xingjian’s *Soul Mountain* was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001; the plays and novels he wrote in his early career were subsequently translated into many languages.

**Genre**, as defined by Bruner, refers to narratives of “recognizable kinds”, such as farce, comedy, romance, satire and so on (Bruner 1991: 14). Narrative theory, which informs this study, focuses on genre as “a way of comprehending”; in other words, it assumes that genre provides both “writers and readers with commodious and conventional models for limiting the hermeneutic task of making sense of human happenings” (Bruner 1991: 14). Genres can be culture-specific, and translating a genre into another language or culture where it does not exit requires either a fresh invention or an accommodation to conventions of a given genre in the receiving culture (Baker 2006: 96). Huang (2012) discusses a genre that emerged in Chinese literature as a means of contesting the Chinese government’s tight control on cultural products. The new generic invention, namely “doculiterature” as Huang terms it, engages with sensitive topics such as labour camps in Maoist China, and involves meticulous fieldwork to collect first-hand materials from the survivors of the political turmoil. To circumvent censorship, writers of ‘doculiterature’ often incorporate fictional elements into journalistic reports, which allows them to claim their writings as “pure fiction” (Huang 2012). Whereas some American writers consider this genre, which blends fiction with facts, inappropriate, and even unacceptable, Yu Jie, a Beijing-based critic, defends Chinese writers by calling this generic convention “a survival strategy”:

> It’s not that Chinese writers don’t know the difference between fiction and non-fiction writing. The tough political environment in China has presented them with no choice. […] I do believe that, having lived in the West for many years, some writers have forgotten or neglected the reality in China. An urgent task is for writers to protect and defend history and our memories, which are being unscrupulously rewritten and sabotaged by the government.

(Huang 2012)
The English translations of ‘doculiterature’ are usually accommodated into the genre of social science. For example, Liao Yiwu’s *Corpse Walker*, which records the lives of individuals who were either made destitute during the various political purges in Maoist China or left impoverished by the fast economic developments of contemporary China, is categorized under the genre of ‘anthropology’ by its British and American publisher Random House. The addition of the subtitle ‘real life stories: China from the bottom up’ further foregrounds the factual, documentary dimension of the genre. Among the English translations of doculiterature, only one title, namely Yang Xianhui’s *Woman From Shanghai* (2009), is still classified as ‘fiction’ by its publisher; this title will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

All our narratives are necessarily derived from a set of narrative skeletons with recurrent motifs which feature a range of protagonists, settings in space and time, and types of consequences (Baker 2006: 79). The specific realisations of these elements within a given storylines constitute the *particularity* of any given narrative. For example, Bennett and Edelman argue that one of the most popular narrative skeletons in the American mass media revolves around “the deceitfulness of Communists” (Bennett and Edelman 1985: 156). This theme is embedded in a storyline that creates a particular world, with specified heroes and villains and deserving and undeserving people, and can evoke strong emotional reaction among audiences. Different parties in a conflict can resort to the same storylines (such as ‘good’ vs ‘evil’), which may differ in terms of their particularizations and construct different patterns of causal emplotment.

Baker reminds us that storylines with recurrent motifs always “come equipped with character types whose motivation and personality are an integral and often fixed element of the masterplot” (Baker 2006: 81). These character types are not restricted to individual characters; they can “reflect characteristics of an entire group” (Baker 2006: 82). The yellow peril narrative circulating in America in the early 20th century, as discussed in Chapter 1, identified the Chinese as dangerous, vicious and threatening and Americans as righteous, brave and wise. This storyline, which had resonance for American audiences, legitimized the public’s growing hatred for Chinese immigrants in the first half of the 20th century.

Storylines provide readers with interpretative frameworks and allow them to fill in missing particularizations. Likewise, a reference to an element of particularization in a specific storyline can evoke full-fledged narratives in a variety of contexts. The literary creation Dr.
Fu Manchu in Rohmer’s novels is one particularisation of the yellow peril narrative, as discussed above. He is cruel, vicious and scheming, and is able to “mobilize the yellow hordes” (Friedman 2009: 117), a great threat to the world order established by the Americans and Europeans in the early 20th century. Any reference to Fu Manchu immediately evokes the public narrative of the vicious Chinese even today. Mawdsley (2008) demonstrates how some British and American media reports tap into this literary figure Fu Manchu to suggest that just like the fictional construct who has the power to destroy the world, China can change the current world order by exercising its invisible but formidable economic power, as can be seen in its decision to invest heavily in some African countries (Mawdsley 2008).

A storyline can either conform to the canon or depart from it, a phenomenon accounted for by the feature of normativeness/canonicity and breach. Normativeness is preserved when a set of events are organized in a conventional way, whereas a breach is signalled when a narrative deviates from the canon to elaborate happenings from an unconventional perspective. Canonical scripts allow narratives to be “perceived as self-evident, benign, uncontestable and non-controversial” (Baker 2006: 11). At the same time, all narratives are subject to contestation and canonicity is always accompanied by potential breach and the possibility of deviating from the canonical script. An inherent feature of all narratives, breach is what makes a narrative worth telling; a narrative’s “tellability as a form of discourse rests on a breach of conventional expectation” (Bruner 1991: 15). In other words, breach opens up new narrative possibilities. Literary breach is often employed by writers to create new perspectives from which to tell stories. Mo Yan and his *Red Sorghum* is a good case in point. In this ground-breaking novel, Mo Yan employs modern narrative and structural techniques to create both “a naturalistic rural nightmare – the Chinese countryside – and a nostalgic saga of a race of heroes” (Duke 1991: 390). Heavily influenced by many foreign writers, especially William Faulkner, Mo Yan adopted writing techniques that were unheard of in China in the 1980s. Thematically, his story deviates from the conventional way of portraying members of the Communist Party as the heroes who saved China from foreign invasion; instead, he portrays the Communists as rather cowardly and greedy and the Chinese people as the “greatest heroes” (Mo 1993: 1). His bold, unconventional way of renarrating a familiar history of China thus ushered in a new literary scene and quickly gathered a group of followers.
Nevertheless, admitting breach as an indispensable dimension of narrativity does not mean that breaches can be affected unproblematically. Polletta reminds us that breaches of canonical storylines can only be evoked within circumscribed, normative frameworks if they are to be intelligible, an issue that is highly relevant in the context of translation (Polletta 1998). A translator can signal the foreignness of a Chinese novel by exploiting discursive strategies that deviate from the prevailing discourse in the target culture. When reflecting on their translation strategies, many translators argue that it is not always necessary to replace Chinese-specific expressions with English idioms that are more familiar to an English-speaking audience and allow the novel to be read like an original. Howard Goldblatt mentions that he does not often adapt Mo Yan’s idiosyncratic expressions, which could be considered part of his personal writing style. For example, in The Republic of Wine, the expression ‘Changing the sky and replacing the sun’ could be translated as ‘Robbing Peter to pay Paul’ (Goldblatt 2012). Instead of erasing Mo Yan’s idiosyncrasy, Goldblatt opted for retaining the oddness of the expression while ensuring that the translation remains intelligible.

**Narrative accrual** is defined by Bruner as the manner in which we “cobble stories together to make them into a whole of some sort” by means of “the imposition of bogus historical-causal entailment” and “coherence by contemporaneity” (Bruner 1991: 18). Baker broadens this definition and recasts narrative accrual as “the outcome of repeated exposure to a set of related narratives, ultimately leading to the shaping of a culture, tradition, or history” (Baker 2006: 101). Judge (2008) offers an interesting example of this process in her discussion of the role played by the repeated translations of western women biographies in the late 19th century in promoting Chinese women’s status and how these translations accelerated the pace of the women liberation movement in China in the early 20th century.

Once narratives achieve a certain level of currency, narrative accrual begins to have the power of a constraint which confines and guides people’s behaviour and sets limits to the way they interpret and understand the world around them. Narrative accrual can be achieved through a variety of channels. Powerful institutions can force a particular public narrative into the consciousness of the public through repeated exposure, and eventually ensure its legitimacy and popularity. It is the feature of narrative accrual that has enabled the spread and reinforcement of specific narratives of China and the Chinese in the UK and US at different historical moments.
To conclude, narratives are not random sets of events or chronologies. They are stories that are temporally configured, with a beginning, middle and (projected) end. They must have a pattern of casual emplotment that allows us to make moral sense of the events and understand the pattern of relationships among participants and narrators. In addition to studying the way a narrative is put together in terms of the above features, it is also important to examine the way it is packaged and presented to its hearers or readers, especially in the case of translation, through paratextual elements, the subject of the following section.

**2.4 Paratexts: A Site of Framing Narratives**

Translators, together with publishers, editors and other agents may exploit a range of strategies to accentuate, strengthen, change or subvert the narratives elaborated in the source text. Such strategies are discussed in Baker (2006) as instances of framing. Framing allows translators to set up frameworks of anticipation that guide others’ interpretation of events. This means that translators may employ various translation strategies to make certain elements salient in order to influence receivers. Baker (2006) has discussed some of the often used strategies of framing by translators, such as selective appropriation, labelling and repositioning of participants. In this section, I will focus on the use of paratexts in renarrating China through the English translations of Chinese novels.

Paratexts are important sites of framing a translation. A paratext is a marginal zone that mediates between the inside and the outside (Genette 1997: 2). The term paratext was first coined by Genette (1987), who later defined it as “the verbal or other productions” that surround the text and give it an “external presentation” (Genette 1997: 3). In his seminal book *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Genette discusses a range of paratextual elements and their potential effects on readers. He explains that these paratextual components may surround the text or be placed at a certain distance from it. He therefore classifies paratexts into two types, in terms of the spatial distance from the text itself: peritexts—elements which are located “around the text and within the same volume” (Genette 1997: 4), including the book cover, author’s name, titles, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, introductions and glossaries, etc.; and epitexts—elements which are usually located outside a book and circulate in various media, including correspondence, interviews, reviews, advertisements and diaries pertaining to the book. Genette also mentions that epitexts can become parts of
peritexts. For instance, a positive evaluation from a book review published in a distinguished magazine could be quoted in the blurb as evidence of the success of the book.

After careful examination of the structure and evolution of the paratext, Genette investigates its functions and possible effects on readers. For Genette, the primary function of paratexts in all contexts is to attract readers, to draw them toward and into the book. He thus describes the paratext not just as a boundary that separates the world of the readers and the world narrated in the book, but also argues that the paratext offers prospective readers “the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back” (Genette 1997: 2). Genette further presents the secondary function of the paratext as explanation and guidance. Paratextual elements such as prefaces and introductions, where translators may explain their reasons for initiating a translation, the strategies employed in the translation and background information regarding the translation will shape readers’ reception of the book. A good example is Lin Shu’s (1852-1924) prefaces and postscripts to translations of Western novels into classical Chinese. He stated in a number of prefaces to his early translations of western novels that his purported mission to introduce these novels to Chinese readers is to “save the yellow race” (Tsu 2005: 56) and awaken the citizens of China to the fact that the nation is endangered by western military invasion. In his preface to the translation of Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), an anti-slavery story set in America in the 19th century, Lin uses the black slaves’ narrative of oppression to forewarn the yellow race of a similar fate. In another preface to a translation of *Aesop’s Fables*, Lin asserts that the yellow people need to rid themselves of the slave mentality (Tsu 2005: 56) so that the nation can be saved and preserved. Lin’s statements in these prefaces were echoed by many Chinese readers, who continued to argue that the yellow people have to develop a stronger sense of nationhood in order to avoid the fate of the black people, as depicted in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Tsu 2005: 61). These prefaces framed Lin’s translations, individually and collectively, as a warning to the Chinese people against being divided and enslaved.

Genette’s analysis of paratextual elements is not restricted to their possible impact on the reader’s experience of a text. He also pays attention to the author and ‘his allies’, i.e. such figures as the publisher, the editor, and whoever may write the blurbs or the dedication (Carrard 1998). The authors, publishers and editors jointly decide how to package and present the translation to target readers. But in many cases, a paratext may be at odds with the translation it frames. For instance, Fang (2009) explains that in the introduction to the English
translation of *Typical Women of China*, A. C. Safford, the translator, promises her readers that the book depicts “a true picture of the typical women’s life” (Fang 2009: 329) in China and her translation sets out to “convey the real meaning of the original” (Fang 2009: 329). Likewise, in the preface to the second edition, John Fryer, the editor, claims that Safford’s translation is reliable because she has actually stayed in China for more than eight years, therefore, he claims, “no better work could be found … than the ‘Records of Virtuous Women of Ancient and Modern Times’ translated by the talented Miss A. C. Safford, who lived and worked for many years among Chinese women in the city of Soochow” (Fang 2009: 330). Both the translator and the editor thus reassure their readers of the ‘authenticity’ of the translation; nonetheless a close examination of the translation conducted by Fang (2009) reveals that Safford selectively translated and compiled from up to eight Chinese books in order to serve her cultural, religious and political purposes and created a picture of Chinese women as “docile, imprisoned and victimized” (Fang 2009: 343). As China had attracted increasing numbers of missionaries from many countries in the 19th century, knowledge about China and the Chinese was in great demand, and at the same time few resources relating to China and the Chinese were available. The emphasis on ‘authenticity’ is crucial in this context because it disguises a heavily mediated translation that sets out to present a particular narrative of China as reliable, objective fact.

Each paratext therefore addresses a readership at a specific moment in history (Watts 2000: 31). It plays “an active and interventionist role” (Genette 1997: 5) which mediates the world of readers and the world of translators, authors and publishers. A change in the time and cultural context can result in a re-positioning of paratextual elements in a new context and ideology. Pellatt and Liu (2010) discuss the way in which a text is re-packaged by the editors and publishers for target audiences whose cultural and political viewpoints and sources of information may differ from those of the source text readers. They examine the autobiography of Zhao Ziyang’s *Gaige Licheng* (literally ‘The Course of Reform’) and its English translation, which sets out to tell his own story of his experience as Premier of the People’s Republic of China. The book includes Zhao’s narratives about the Tiananmen event in 1989, when he was one of the leaders who sympathized with the students and tried to mediate between other leaders who took a tough stance and the equally determined students who insisted on pursuing domestic reform in China. The book however underwent considerable changes in the English translation and is framed to seek the acceptance of the
West. The title of the book is altered from ‘The Course of Reform’ to *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Premier Zhao Ziyang*. This eye-catching and highly provocative title, together with the subtitle, *The Secret Journal of Premier Zhao Ziyang*, deliberately frames the narrative in such a way as to attract western readers who might not otherwise want to read books about China (Pellatt and Liu 2010: 134). In addition, the preface and introduction featured in the original book are removed and substituted with a preface written by Adi Ignatius, a member of the translation and editing team, and a foreword written by a well-known political scientist, Roderick MacFarquhar. MacFarquhar’s foreword primes the reader with what he selects as relevant historical background and with his own personal account of the events. Pellatt and Liu thus argue that the English translation is re-packaged into a very different book. This radically reframed English translation “sends very different messages to the target audience from those which were sent to the source audience” (Pellatt and Liu 2010: 136).

Paratexts can also serve as a source of information on writing practices, cultural traditions and conventions of the publishing industry. Kalman argues that the presence or absence of certain paratextual elements is “not just a question of practical consideration” (Kalman 2010: 28); in other words, choices are not made on a random basis. Paratexts can reflect attitudes towards translated literary works. Translators’ names, for instance, are not always shown on the cover page but may be included only on the title page in small font. In certain time periods or in some cultural contexts, publishers routinely opt for downplaying the role of the translator. The Panda Books translation series of Chinese literature is a case in point. During the 1960s-70s, when the Cultural Revolution broke out, Panda Books produced many “anonymous translations” (Hegel 1984: 179) that rarely carried any paratexts, such as the translator’s name, prefaces or translator’s notes. The publishers did not wish to accentuate the status of the translation as a mediated text; they opted instead to present the translation as an original piece of writing. It was only at the end of the Cultural Revolution that new translations “reappeared in print and individual translators’ efforts could again be acknowledged” (Hegel 1984: 179).

Paratextual framing, as we have seen, can be crucial in determining the reception and circulation of the text. The study of paratexts of translation is extremely important in the target cultural and historical context, because paratextual features tell us a great deal about the way translated works are presented and received (Shread 2010; Watts 2000, 2005;
Moreover, constellations of paratextual elements may convey “a certain ideology, a conception of authorship, work, life/art relationship, etc.” (Kalman 2010: 28), and cumulatively lead to the framing of national images. In the following section, I will mainly focus on two sites of paratextual framing, namely covers and reviews, and examine their mediating role in framing Chinese translated novels.

2.4.1 Visual Framing: Front and Back Covers

The cover and its appendages, such as the dust jacket, are situated at the outermost boundary of the peritext, and the design of the cover image serves as “an entry point” (Matthews and Moody 2007: xi) to the text. The front cover may advertise the book itself, as when a publisher labels a book as a bestseller or a Pulitzer Prize winner. Readers can also tell from the cover whether the book at hand is a serious academic tome or a paperback to be read on holiday. Back covers may relate the current book to other books in a series, by the same author, or to a film and television version of the same work. In all these ways, covers may generate a wide range of narratives that can envelop the work and frame it in specific ways. Cover images can reinforce these narratives, for example when they depict scenes from a particular film or a television show. The physical appearance of the book thus communicates to readers “many items of information, some of which are authorial and some of which are the publisher’s responsibility” (Genette 1997: 23). Front and back covers can help readers make sense of what kind of book they are about to read, including its genres and the kind of audience it seeks to attract (Matthews and Moody 2007: xi).

The book industry has changed tremendously since the publication of Genette’s comprehensive study of paratext, as the emergence of e-commerce serves as a growing and powerful force that shapes our reading habits alongside traditional bookstores. Buying books online is very different from purchasing books in traditional bookshops. One cannot physically ‘handle’ the book, feel its weight and flick through it freely before buying it. Endorsements that accompany the blurb are replaced on the net with customer reviews. Some customer reviewers are designated as ‘top’ reviewers or spotlight reviewers. Their assessments are relaxed and chatty, use a rating system set by the online bookseller, and each new review adds credibility to this system of evaluating books. The impact of the internet on the book industry has consequently changed the marketing and distribution of books. Some
scholars even argue that “the decline of independent bookshops with their emphasis on personal services has placed more emphasis on book covers” (Mansfield 2003).

Cover images can draw on established stereotypes, especially in the case of translations. Watts (2005) argues that in the Francophone literary world, both original writings and translations were and continue to be framed with specific visual cues—cover illustrations of veiled women or tribal masks, for example—that tend to distinguish them from the literature of other regions (Watts 2005: 3-4). In a similar vein, Morrison, a writer, editor and graphic designer, describes four frequently-included elements in the design of books translated from Chinese or Japanese into English or set in China or Japan (in Wade 2010). These “compulsory” elements include 1) blossoms, often red and pink; 2) fans (preferably held so as to obscure part of the woman’s face; 3) dragon, which is only used on crime novels or other exciting tales; 4) female neck (Wade 2010). Morrison further maintains that “ONLY women are allowed to be on the cover of Chinese and Japanese literature” (Wade 2010, emphasis in the original). The so-called ‘orientalist cliché’ on book covers may include more China-specific elements such as porcelain, chopsticks, traditional clothes, etc. A book design may be colour-coded as well, as Chinese book covers are more likely to be red or gold. Although these paratextual elements succeed in catching readers’ attention, they may also reduce a national or other group into a long-established stereotype which is used by the target culture to define and contain marginalized cultures, with real life consequences.

2.4.2 Epitext: Reviews

Reviews are one of the epitextual elements discussed by Genette and are influential in framing the reception and circulation of books, because reviews often appear at the same time as or prior to the publication of a new book. The content of a review may vary considerably, but most include a summary of the book, accompanied by a critical assessment. Reviewers may comment on the writing styles or other works written by the same author. Reviews can perform three major tasks—describing, interpreting and evaluating the books in question (Rees 1987: 275). Moreover, critics and reviewers may serve as key informants to consumers and their critical comments may affect the sales of a book and influence its success (Clement, Proppe and Rott 2007).

Publishers are inclined to ask someone such as a prominent scientist, economist or other scholars from the same field as the author to review a major work in order to enhance its
credibility. For instance, in the 1980s the reviewers who wrote reviews of Panda Books or literary works translated from China tended to be experts and specialists in modern Chinese history and politics rather than in literature. They published their reviews in UK literary magazines such as the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *London Review of Books* (McDougall 2009: 11). McDougall argues this may be the result of “the review magazine’s editorial conviction that their [the translated books’] chief interest was informational” (McDougall 2009: 11-12). Reviewers and critics are also often viewed as reliable arbiters of taste, especially when they write for notable and influential publications such as the *New York Book Review* and *Publishers Weekly*. As far as reviews of translation are concerned, these arbiters of taste tend to favour invisible translations. Venuti notes that reviews in American media reflect a prevalent attitude towards translation that is usually judged by the criterion of fluency. This benchmark dominates the Anglo-American tradition: “the critical lexicon of literary journalism since World War II is filled with so many terms to indicate the presence or absence of a fluent translation strategy” (Venuti 1998:4). A highly domesticated and fluent translation of foreign literature, then, tends to receive praise in reviews, especially in the Anglo American context.

Reviews serve as a crucial medium for promoting translations of Chinese literary works in the US and UK book markets, and can attract the attention of both lay and academic readers. However, only a limited number of translated Chinese novels have been reviewed by mainstream US and UK media. This reflects a lukewarm reception of translated Chinese literature in these book markets. Hsia comments that classical Chinese literature remains outside the circle of attention of prominent reviewers of international reputation, who have done so much over the decades to promote other foreign literature in the US (Hsia 2004: 11). He points out that many prominent reviewers with a great appetite for world fiction simply disregard Chinese fiction, modern or traditional.

Reviews not only indicate how the book is framed and received, but also reveal certain perceptions of China. St André maintains that in eighteenth-century British critics tended to praise literary works translated from Chinese for their accuracy, but they made disparaging remarks on China and the Chinese in their articles. St André argues that this is because the reviewers generally held a negative attitude towards the Chinese (St André 2006: 201). For instance, in reviewing a translation in the *Edinburgh Monthly Review*, Milne comments that “the book exhibits a very low scale, both of morals and religion” (St André 2006: 201). In
another review of Staunton’s translation of *Ta Tsing Leu Lee or the Great Qing Code*, Jeffrey (1810) criticises the strict control exercised on the Chinese people and cites several examples from the translation of what she thinks of as negative attributes of the Chinese (St André 2006: 201), even though the translator himself notes in the introduction to *the Great Qing Code* that “the severity of the code was not reflected in practice” (St André 2006: 201). Critics who write reviews therefore do not merely introduce and recommend books to their potential readers. Their personal opinions exert further influence on the narration and reception of China and the Chinese people. In other words, these reviews participate in the construction of Chinese cultural identity.

To conclude, this chapter draws primarily on narrative theory and studies of paratexts to investigate the way in which Chinese cultural identity is constructed through the translation of Chinese novels. Narrative in this study is understood as the principal mode of communication by which we experience the world. Moreover, people actively participate in constructing the world through stories, and the narratives we construct constitute the world as we know it. Based on this ‘constructivist’ approach to narrativity, I discussed four types and features of narrative, with particular reference to translation. Of the various framing sites and strategies available to translators, authors and publishers, I focused on paratexts, which play a crucial role in guiding readers’ interpretation of the text. In the next chapter, I will describe the construction of a database of English translations of Chinese novels published in the UK and US from 1980 to the present, which will form the basis for my detailed analysis of selected data in subsequent chapters.
Chapter 3 Data and Methodology

This chapter offers an overview of the data, which is collected from a variety of sources. The current study which covers a period of three decades, from 1980 until 2010, involves compiling the first and most exhaustive database of Chinese novels translated into English and published in the UK and US during the period under investigation, and a database of reviews of these translated novels published in mainstream US and UK media during the same period.

While data on published books in general is available through the Library of Congress and the British Library, there is no systematic collection or statistical analysis of translations published in the UK and US, in any genre. Other than the Index to the English Translations of Chinese Literature compiled by Hu Zhihui (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 1993), which lists titles published before 1992, and a limited number of studies and projects conducted to compile bibliographies of literature in foreign languages in Hong Kong and Taiwan, there is no publicly available bibliography or database of English translations of Chinese novels published during the period 1980 to 2010. In the absence of reliable and accessible databases, this study sets out to compile two databases specifically constructed for this project: Chinese Novels in English (CNE) and Reviews of Chinese Novels in English (RCNE). The sources and structure of the two databases are described in detail later in this chapter. Together, they provide access to the following information:

- Titles and bibliographic information on contemporary and classic Chinese novels which are translated or retranslated into English and published in the UK and US during the period 1980-2010;
- Bibliographic information on the English translations of the titles mentioned above;
- Front covers of the English translations where available;
- Bibliographic information on published reviews of the English translations of Chinese novels included in the CNE database.
3.1 Chinese Novels in English (CNE) Database

The CNE database is designed to offer as exhaustive a list as possible of English translations of contemporary and classic Chinese novels published in book form between 1980 and 2010 in the UK and US. It covers contemporary Chinese novels originally written in Chinese and translated into English during this period as well as contemporary and classic Chinese novels written in earlier periods but translated or retranslated since 1980. Since the study focuses on translations between two specific languages rather than on individual countries, there are no limitations on the writers’ nationalities or place of publication of the originals. Accordingly, the works of Chinese emigrant or foreign-born writers, wherever they might live or write, are included in this database when they can be identified as translations from Chinese originals. Thus, for example, translations of Yan Geling’s and Gao Xingjian’s works are included, even though the former has been living and writing in the US and the latter in France for many years.

The following data falls outside the scope of the current study:

- novels written by Chinese authors in languages other than Chinese and translated into English, such as The Lily Theatre (2001) written by Lulu Wang in Dutch and Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress (2001) and Once on a Moonless Night (2009) written by Dai Sijie in French. Novels written in English by Chinese authors are also excluded – for example, Wild Swan (1991) by Jung Chang and Waiting (2000) by Ha Jin;

- collections of short stories such as Lu Xun’s The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China: The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun (2008), translated into English by Julia Lovell, and anthologies such as The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature, edited by Joseph S.M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt (1995);

- English translations of Chinese novels published outside the UK and US, including translations published in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Canada, among other English-speaking parts of the world;

- Reprints of translations of Chinese novels which were published before 1980, such as Qian Zhongshu’s Fortress Besieged which was originally translated into English by Jonathan Spence in 1979, and reprinted and included into Penguin’s Modern Classics series in 2006.
The database of Chinese novels in English currently contains 150 records. Each record provides publication information relating to a specific book, divided into the following 17 fields:

- Reference number (this is an identifier that facilitates grouping retranslations and different editions of the same book together)
- Title of English Translation;
- Translator(s);
- Year of Publication of the Translation;
- Publisher of the Translation;
- Place of Publication of the Translation;
- Title of the Original Chinese Novel;
- Author;
- Publisher of the Original Novel;
- Place of Publication of the Original Novel27;
- Reprints (e.g. a revised edition)28;
- Series (i.e. whether the title appears part of a series);
- ISBN(s);
- Source (i.e. where information on the title was obtained, e.g. Library of Congress, British Library);
- Notes29;

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27 Some English translations include bibliographic information on their original Chinese novels on the copyright page; where available, this information is recorded in the current database. In some instances, however, it is difficult to identify the original Chinese version/edition on which the English translation is based; in such cases, information on the earliest available edition is recorded.

28 Information on reprints is included where applicable and available, but it is not the aim of the current project to attempt a comprehensive list of reprints.
- Published Reviews (Sources and links);
- Cover(s) (i.e. a digital image of the front cover)\(^{30}\).

The database is currently made available online through the website Zoho Creator\(^{31}\) and is designed for free access to the research community. Chronologically arranged by default\(^{32}\), each entry is assigned a three-digit reference number. However, a couple of points pertaining to the overlap among the data collected from various sources need further elaboration and clarification. First, a novel may be translated and published at the same time in the US and UK, and the relevant information may be listed in both national libraries. In this case, the title is recorded as one entry in this database, indicating ‘published in both UK and US’ in the category of ‘note’. Second, if the different editions are attributed to different publishers or published in different years in the UK and US, which is significant information for the current study and must therefore be recorded separately, each edition is assigned a different record, because Zoho Creator does not allow different editions or retranslations of the same title to appear as sub-fields within the same record. In other words, two different editions of the same title are held as two separate records, sharing the same reference number (see Figure 1 and 2). Finally, if there is a difference in the name of the translator or the title of the translation, the records and the reference numbers are kept separate. This is important because occasionally, a translated novel which is published in the UK and US separately appears with different English titles and is attributed to different translators\(^{33}\). For example, Zhang Jie’s *Chenzhong De Chibang* has been translated twice and published in the UK and US respectively. One translation is attributed to Howard Goldblatt under the title of *Heavy*

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\(^{29}\) Extended notes are included where relevant information is available but does not fit into one of the above fields, for example, information on literary awards, both international and domestic.

\(^{30}\) Most of the digitalised images of front covers are available from the British Library. This information, however, is absent from the Library of Congress. In order to collect images, I searched various websites, including Amazon, Google Books and Worldcat, by the ISBN number of the title. Although the blurbs and back covers are very revealing of the way in which a translated book is promoted in the target book market, digitised images of back covers are very difficult to collect. Therefore, at this stage back covers are temporarily excluded from the current database. I will however refer to individual back covers in the analysis where they are readily available, without attempting to collect them systematically.


\(^{32}\) Zoho Creator allows reordering on any field, including, for instance, author’s or translator’s name (which therefore have to be entered consistently according to the format SURNAME, FIRSTNAME), year of publication, place of publication, source of information, or ISBN number.

\(^{33}\) Kirsten Malmkjær (2003) discussed one such case related to Peter Høeg’s novel *Frøken Smilla’s fornemmelse for sne*, which appeared with the title *Miss Smilla’s Feeling for Snow* in the UK and *Smilla’s Sense of Snow* in the US. The UK version is attributed to F. David and the US version is attributed to Tiina Nunnally. For further discussion, see Malmkjær (2003).
Wings (1989) while another is attributed to Gladys Yang under the title of Leaden Wings (1987). These are treated as two titles/records and allocated different reference numbers, even though the two translations are based on the same original novel.

Figure 1 Entry of Three Sisters (2010) in CNE database (British edition)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference Number</th>
<th>004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of English Translation</td>
<td>Three Sisters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translator(s)</td>
<td>Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of Publication of the Translation</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publisher of the Translation</td>
<td>Telegram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Publication of the Translation</td>
<td>London, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of the Original Chinese Novel</td>
<td>三姐妹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Bi Feiyu 郭飞宇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publisher of the Original Novel</td>
<td>远方文学出版社</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Publication of the Original</td>
<td>重庆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reprints</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Series</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISBN(s)</td>
<td>97818465580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>British Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>The 2010 Man Asian Literary Prize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published Reviews</td>
<td>The Guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cover Image</td>
<td>Bi_Feiyu_Three_sisters_2010_Telegram_97818465580238.jpg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The romanisation of variant Chinese titles and authors’ names poses some difficulties. There are several systems for transcribing Chinese characters into the Roman alphabet, such as the Pinyin system, Tongyong Pinyin (which is widely used in Taiwan), and Wade-Giles system. Many names of authors and titles are spelt based on the pinyin system, but it is not unusual to see spellings of Taiwanese titles and authors’ names based on other systems. What makes this more challenging is that authors from Hong Kong often have their names spelt in Wade-Giles based on the Cantonese pronunciations, and some authors often have their English names printed on their English translations as well. It is possible therefore to encounter different spellings of the name of a single author. For instance, 金庸, an author of martial art novels in Hong Kong, is spelt as Jin Yong in The Book and the Sword (translated by Graham Earnshaw, 2004), whereas in the novel Deer and the Cauldron (translated by John Minford, 1997).
published several years earlier, his name was spelt as Chin Yung (see Figures 3 and 4). Other spellings such as Louis Cha can also be found.

Figure 3 Entry of *The Book and the Sword* (2004) in the Library of Congress

*The book and the sword : a martial arts novel / by Louis Cha ; translated...*

Relevance: ★★★★★
LC control no.: 200401660
LCCN permalink: http://lccn.loc.gov/200401660
Type of material: Book (Print, Microform, Electronic, etc.)
Personal name: Jin Yong, 1924-
Uniform title: Shuan en chiu lu English
Main title: The book and the sword : a martial arts novel / by Louis Cha ; translated by Graham Earnshaw ; edited by Rachel May and John Minford
Description: xiv, 511 p.: 23 cm.
ISBN: 0195907272
Links: Publisher description

Figure 4 Entry of *The Deer and the Cauldron* (2004) in the Library of Congress

*The deer and the cauldron : a martial arts novel / by Louis Cha ;...*

Relevance: ★★★★★
LC control no.: 97036986
LCCN permalink: http://lccn.loc.gov/97036986
Type of material: Book (Print, Microform, Electronic, etc.)
Personal name: Chen Yung, 1924-
Uniform title: Lu ling chi English
Main title: The deer and the cauldron : a martial arts novel / by Louis Cha ; translated and edited by John Minford.
Description: 3 v., 23 cm.
ISBN: 0195903234
Links: Publisher description
Contributor biographical information

This lack of uniformity in transcribing Chinese into English can prove very confusing for readers of translated Chinese literature. To reduce this confusion, the CNE database does not favour any system of romanisation, and the spellings of the Chinese names and titles are recorded as they appear in the English publications. Other variants are also listed where applicable to assist with cross reference(s), as is shown in Figure 5.

In the following section, I offer an overview of the various sources of data used in constructing the CNE database and the methods used in collecting data from these sources. The discussion will also acknowledge the limitations of these sources where applicable.


### 3.1.1 Sources of Data and Search Procedures

This study uses a variety of sources to construct a database of Chinese novels in English Translation published in the US and UK between 1980 and 2010 but is primarily based on the holdings of the British Library and the Library of Congress. The complementary secondary sources, including *Index Translationum*, an international bibliography of translations maintained by UNESCO, and a database maintained by *Three Percent*, a US-based website specialized in introducing and promoting international literature in English translations, are also consulted. In addition, bibliographies, academic papers and articles from newspapers and websites (such as interviews with translators) are also consulted to ensure that the current database contains as many titles as possible.
Main Sources and Search Procedures

The British Library and the Library of Congress hold exhaustive records of all books published in their respective markets. The British Library is the national library of the United Kingdom. As the legal deposit library of the UK and Ireland, it automatically “receives a copy of every publication produced in the UK and Ireland” and maintains records of all publishing activity in the two regions.

The British Library has two major search engines: ‘British National Bibliography (BNB)’ and ‘Explore the British Library’, both of which are available through the British Library website and are free to access worldwide. BNB records books and journal titles published and distributed in the UK since 1950. According to the information provided on the British Library website, BNB is “the single most comprehensive listing of the UK titles” since all publishers in the UK are obliged by law to send a copy of all publications to the legal deposit office in the British Library and these materials are catalogued in the BNB database. Items that are originally published elsewhere but distributed in the UK are also liable for deposit. Therefore, any translations of Chinese novels published and distributed in the UK book markets after the 1980s should be retrievable from the BNB database. But it should also be noted that the coverage of BNB is nevertheless selective, with emphasis on mainstream titles. According to the library’s exclusion policy, the following four types of materials are not included in the BNB database:

- Material without a British or Irish imprint and without a UK distributor;
- Straight reproduction of an earlier edition where the publisher and format is unchanged;
- Second and subsequent issues of serial publications;
- Export editions published in the UK but which are not available for sale in this country.

Apart from legal deposits, the British Library also collects and expands its holdings by means of donations, purchasing materials published in countries other than UK. These titles may be

34 See http://www.bl.uk/aboutus/quickinfo/facts/index.html [last accessed 19 September, 2010]
35 See http://bnb.bl.uk/ [last accessed 02 October, 2010]
36 See http://search.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?tab=local_tab&mode=Advanced&scp.scps=scope%3a%20(BLCONTENT)&vid=BLVU1 [last accessed 19 September, 2010]
37 See http://www.bl.uk/bibliographic/natbib.html [last accessed 15 September, 2011]
38 See http://www.bl.uk/bibliographic/exclude.html [last accessed 15 September, 2011]
part of the library holdings but not listed on the BNB database. The search engine ‘Explore the British Library’\(^{39}\) is therefore designed to allow searches to be conducted of the entire range of British Library holdings. It includes, but is not confined to, UK published materials that are contained in the British National Bibliography (BNB). In other words, not everything held by the library is listed in the BNB database; likewise, not everything listed in the BNB database is necessarily held at the British Library; the two catalogues may overlap to some extent, but they also return different results when entering the same key words. Both are essential sources for collecting titles of Chinese novels translated into English, and both catalogues are therefore consulted.

Likewise, the Library of Congress, one of the oldest and largest libraries in the world, receives “two copies of every book, pamphlet, map, print, photograph, and piece of music”\(^{40}\) which are “under copyright protection [and] that have been published or distributed in the United States” within three months of publication as “mandatory deposit”. There is only one search engine provided by the library of Congress – ‘Library of Congress Online Catalogue’\(^{41}\) – which also allows free access by the public worldwide.

Using search engines that allow flexible access to all book records held by the British Library and the Library of Congress respectively, relevant materials are identified by means of specific keywords and phrases. For example, a search on ‘Chinese novel’ in the Library of Congress returns 5072 entries displayed by ‘relevance’. The results cover a wide range of books, such as original Chinese novels, anthologies of Chinese novels written in both English and Chinese (for example, S.M. Lau and Goldblatt 2007; Duke 1991), commentaries and video recordings. Many of these fall outside the scope of the current study. But the results can be narrowed down to 1396 hits by adding the limiting items ‘English’ and ‘Book (Print, Microform, Electronic, etc.)’ through the option of ‘adding limits to search results’. Even then, many entries remain irrelevant to the current study, but there are no further means of excluding irrelevant material automatically. At this stage, I have to examine the 1396 entries manually to identify those specifically indicated as translations from Chinese into English.

\(^{39}\) ‘Explore the British Library’ is available through the following link http://explore.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?vid=BLVU1 [last accessed 22 September 2011]

\(^{40}\) See http://www.loc.gov/loc/legacy/loc.html [last accessed 19 May, 2011]

\(^{41}\) The ‘Library of Congress Online Catalogue’ is available at http://catalog.loc.gov/webvoy.htm [last accessed 19 May, 2011]
and published since 1980. This finally narrowed the result down to 136 translated novels that fall within the scope of the study.

A variety of combinations of key words/phrases other than ‘Chinese novel’ have also been used to extract materials from both libraries. Using advanced search mode available from the navigating bar provided by the Library of Congress, several search criteria can be combined for search. Every search returns irrelevant titles and requires a similar filtering process to that described above to be carried out manually. The list of key words and phrases used and outcomes of the search in each case are shown in Table 2.

The search procedure is lengthy and laborious, and the complexity of the Dewey classification system adopted by both libraries makes for a time-consuming extraction of records. The difficulty comes from having to comb through the diverse sources to locate relevant titles and to identify the bibliographic information of the Chinese original. For instance, some of the English translations of Chinese novels are not always classified under the category of ‘fiction’ or ‘novels’, and they would therefore automatically be filtered out by the search engine. The following example illustrates the point. There is no subject heading available for Jiang Rong’s novel *Wolf Totem* in the Library of Congress (see Figure 6) and the information in the record does not mention that the novel is translated from the Chinese. Consequently, the title cannot be retrieved by searching on any of the key words/phrases listed above. In cases like this, it is necessary to use other types of search items, such as the names of translators, authors, publishers or titles of series. The search results contain many irrelevant titles and those that fall within the scope of the study have to be singled out manually. Search results are shown in Table 3-5.
### Table 2: Search results by key words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key words</th>
<th>British Library</th>
<th>Library of Congress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Translated from the Chinese Fiction</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translated Chinese Fiction</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation China Fiction</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translated Taiwan Fiction</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation China Fiction</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translated from the Chinese (Material type: books)</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation into English Chinese literature</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translated China</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>1526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation into English China</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation into English Chinese</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>692</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6 The record of *Wolf Totem* in the Library of Congress

Table 3 Search results by the names of translators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translators</th>
<th>Library</th>
<th>British Library</th>
<th>Library of Congress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Howard Goldblatt</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva Hung</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Berry</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia Lovell</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Balcom</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mabel Lee</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Minford</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 Search results by series

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York Review Book Classics</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Chinese Literature from Taiwan</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Weatherhead Books on Asia: Fiction</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panda Books</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>387</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renditions</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 Search results by names of authors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Libraries</th>
<th>British Library</th>
<th>Library of Congress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mo Yan</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma Jian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi Feiyu</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gao Xingjian</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mian Mian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Su Tong</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan Lianke</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wei Hui</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinran</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Ying</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data obtained from the British Library and the Library of Congress constitutes the bulk of the database of Chinese Novels in English. Additional titles had to be retrieved from other sources. The final database thus consists of information drawn from these two main sources and combined, complemented and corrected by entries from secondary sources and other bibliographies, academic papers, and reports.

**Secondary Sources**

In addition to the Library of Congress and the British Library, other useful sources for collecting data are the ‘Index Translationum – World Bibliography of Translation’ and databases of literature in English translation maintained by the Three Percent website.

The *Index Translationum*, maintained by UNESCO, is “a list of books translated in the world, i.e. an international bibliography of translations”, currently consisting of more than 2,000,000 entries covering every discipline – including literature, social sciences, art, history and natural sciences. The database contains cumulative bibliographic information on books translated and published in about one hundred UNESCO member states from 1979 to the present. It is intended to be updated every four months.

The *Index Translationum* is a useful source of information on translated materials, but it has a number of limitations. First, it does not contain a comprehensive list of UK and US titles – nor of titles published in other countries. The expansion of the database and the success of updating the *Index Translationum* depend on receiving regular annual reports of publications in each member state (Abramitzky & Sin 2013). As far as the UK is concerned, information from the website’s catalogue ‘Last Update’ reveals that data about UK translation in the years 1990-2000 and the years 2009 and 2010 are currently still being processed by the Index team, and are therefore not available to the public. Likewise, data on US translations are incomplete as the year 2009 and 2010 are missing from the database. The *Index* therefore presents an uneven and incomplete picture of translations into English. In addition, Heilbron (1999/2010)

also notes that the statistics provided by the *Index Translationum* are not reliable as a basis for rigorous comparisons because different countries have different definitions of books; a title listed as a book by one country, for example, may be considered as “grey literature” in another (Heilbron 1999/2010: 308). Despite its shortcomings, the *Index Translationum* is a valuable source of bibliographic information on translated literature, as it is the only source of international data which is readily available to researchers (Heilbron 2010; Abramitzky and Sin 2013). A number of studies, projects and bibliographies are based entirely or partly on data drawn from the *Index*.

Using the bibliographic search facility provided on the website of *Index Translationum*, I entered ‘Chinese’ in the original language option and ‘English’ in the target language option, narrowed the period of search to ‘1980’ to ‘2010’, and finally specified the subject as ‘literature’. This search returned 662 entries, some of which are novels but others are drama, poetry and anthologies. Discarding irrelevant entries left 129 entries from the *Index Translationum* database that fall within the scope of this study.

The *Index Translationum* also provides specific information that can be extracted from the database in terms of author, country, language and publisher. This makes it possible to identify a number of major publishers who are engaged in publishing and promoting translations in the US and UK, whether from Chinese or other languages. According to the statistics provided by *Index Translationum*, the Top 10 publishers of translations in the UK are as shown in Table 6 and 7:

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43 A good example is the study carried out and financed by Next Page Foundation in collaboration with the ‘Translating in the Mediterranean Area’ project run by Transeuropéennes, which examined translations from East European languages into Arabic during 1989-2010 and used the *Index Translationum* as its main source of bibliographic data. Another example is Abramitzky and Sin’s study in 2001 of the flow of book translations between the former Soviet countries and major western European countries, which extracted bibliographic data from the *Index Translationum* over the period 1980-2000. Abramitzky and Sin built a database consisting of approximately 800,000 entries, all drawn from the *Index Translationum*.

44 This is the nearest option provided by the search engine of *Index Translationum* to the keyword ‘novel’ as used in the current study.
Table 6 Top 10 publishers of translations in the UK according to *Index Translationum*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publishers</th>
<th>Number of translations published in the UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Penguin</td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge University Press</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pergamon</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methuen</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hodder and Stoughton</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford University Press</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiley</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macmillan</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methuen Children’s</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 Top 10 publishers of translations in the US according to *Index Translationum*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publishers</th>
<th>Number of translations published in the US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Chicago Press</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barron’s</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princeton University Press</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dover Publications</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of California Press</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrar Straus Giroux</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alered A. Knopf</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springer</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia University Press</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rizzoli</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishers</td>
<td>Number of translated Chinese novels retrieved from the publishers’ websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penguin</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge University Press</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pergamon</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methuen</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hodder and Soughton</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford University Press</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiley</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macmillan</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of California Press</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springer</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia University Press</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dover Publications</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barron’s</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Chicago Press</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rizzoli</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princeton University Press</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrar Straus Giroux</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfred A. Knopf</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to complement the results of searches retrieved from the two library catalogues and the *Index Translationum*, and to ensure that the database being compiled for the current study is as up to date and complete as possible, the websites of 19 out of the 20 publishers listed in Tables 6 and 7 were examined closely to identify any missing titles. The results are shown in Table 8.

**Three Percent** is a US-based website specialized in introducing and promoting international literature in English translation. Its name indicates the percentage of books thought to be translated into English every year in the US. The initiators of the website suspect that the actual figure is lower than three percent, and therefore decided to track the translation titles published and distributed in the US book market since 2008 by consulting as many catalogues as possible and asking the publishers directly for information relating to their translation production. The Three Percent team limits their data collection to translations of fiction and poetry, focusing on new titles that have not appeared in print in the United States before 2008, and excluding retranslations of classics and reprints of previously published titles. Thus the databases maintained by Three Percent provide helpful access to the new titles available in the US every year but cannot be used as source of information on other data that has to be compiled in the current study. The databases compiled by Three Percent are made available in the format of spreadsheets that can be easily accessed and downloaded from the website. There are three spreadsheets available (2008-2010), listing titles of novels and poetry collections translated from other languages into English. 17 titles of novels have been extracted from the three databases.

One consequence of obtaining data by searching by key words from the two national libraries and of consulting databases where an incomplete number of titles is collected is that some titles are included by mistake while others may be excluded. In addition, the bibliographic information obtained from the national libraries and secondary sources is not always reliable. For instance, according to the bibliographic information provided by articles published on *The Guardian* websites, Yan Geling’s novel *The Uninvited* is her first novel written in English, not ‘translated from the Chinese’ as indexed by the British Library. Other than

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45 Methuen Children’s is discarded since children’s novels fall outside the scope of the current study.
47 The article is available at [http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/dec/09/featuresreviews.guardianreview13](http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/dec/09/featuresreviews.guardianreview13) [last accessed on November 05, 2011].
misclassification, a few mistakes such as mismatches between titles and their corresponding cover images have been identified in the bibliographic information extracted from the British Library and the Library of Congress. In order to refine the output of the above searches and to capture any missing titles, the next step is to consult as many other sources relating to Chinese literature in English translation as possible.

**Other Sources**

Complimentary sources that list or discuss English translations of Chinese literature (such as bibliographies, academic papers, newspaper articles, reports, etc) were also consulted to verify and supplement information drawn from the two main sources, the British Library and the Library of Congress, and secondary sources, the *Index Translationum* and *Three Percent*. New titles retrieved from these additional materials were checked against the records maintained by the British Library and the Library of Congress in order to ensure that they are published in the UK and US. Supplementary and complementary materials are cited in Appendix 1.

- **Bibliographic projects/articles**

Translations of Chinese literature into foreign languages have been the focus of several projects organised and carried out by universities from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Among these general references a number of bibliographic projects and articles stand out, which cover English translations of Chinese literature of principal genres such as short stories, drama, poetry and novels published anywhere in the world during a particular time period. For example, Peng Jingxi’s *Index to English Translations of Modern Taiwanese Literature* published in 1997 includes all Taiwanese literature in English translation published anywhere in the world from 1949 to 1997. Titles of Taiwanese novels extracted from this bibliography serve as references to modify, revise and remove bibliographic information recorded from other sources. It should also be noted that each of these bibliographies has its own format for data classification and some bibliographies provide more precise and detailed information than others. For example, Xi Xi’s *Marvels of A Floating City* (translated by Eva Huang, 1997) extracted from *A Bibliography of Hong Kong Literature in Foreign Languages* (compiled by Amanda Hus, 2011) is indexed as ‘fiction’, but marked as ‘short stories’ in *Contemporary World Fiction* compiled by Dali et al (2011).
Based on the record in the latter bibliography, this title, which was initially included in the CNE database, has to be removed.

- **Academic papers/reports/newspaper articles**

Another type of resource consists of academic studies in particular fields such as literary criticism, history and media studies. Geng Qiang’s PhD thesis *Chinese Literature Walking Toward the World Through Literary Translation—A Study of English Translation in ‘Panda Books’* (2010), for instance, explores the distribution and dissemination of Chinese literature in western countries and concentrates on *Panda Books Series* as an example of the Chinese government’s attempt to promote Chinese literature since the 1980s. Of all the 168 titles examined, Geng reveals that only 43 *Panda Book* titles have been available in the UK and US in the past 30 years. As many titles in *Panda Book Series* are collections of short stories, Geng’s list of *Panda Books* in English translation helps to rule them out and also contributes new titles of novels to the current database. In addition to the academic studies, there are abundant articles available online discussing Chinese literature and its reception in the West. For instance, one interview with the distinguished translator Howard Goldblatt (Sparks 2013) is accompanied by a list of his translations before 2005.\(^\text{48}\) Consulting works of history, literary criticism and various kinds of studies makes it possible to locate and track these titles, and then list them together with other translations in the CNE database.

- **Websites and online databases**

Databases such as Worldcat serve as helpful tools to locate bibliographic information of original titles and track reprints. Worldcat, a web-based database, provides searchable information on the holdings of most libraries in the world and all editions of a title, both the original and its translation. In case no accessible information can be obtained from the copyright page of the English translations, the earliest editions of Chinese originals are recorded. This service saves enormous time in locating information on the Chinese originals.

Existing reference tools and databases, such as British Books in Print, Worldcat and OCLC, are helpful to track reprints: many titles published before 1980 and reprinted in the last thirty years are retrieved by library searches. These titles should be removed from the database of CNE as translations before 1980 and their reprints fall outside of the current study. For

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example, *The Golden Lotus* translated by Clement Egerton has been reprinted many times ever since its first publication in 1939. As the search engine in the British Library does not provide any index that can rule out reprints, the 2008 edition of Egerton’s translation can be identified as a reprint of a much earlier publication and hence excluded.

To sum up, though emphasis has been placed on bibliographic information collected from the two national libraries, various sources are indispensable for compiling the CNE database as they help verify bibliographic information on existing titles and complement them with new titles. As a result of consulting various sources, details of each entry are presented as precisely as possible, but for some titles, especially classic Chinese novels written hundreds of years ago, it is not uncommon for certain information such as the name of the publisher to be not available. Indeed, some translators may choose to work from multiple editions, some including manuscript copies, which make collecting bibliographic information on original versions very difficult. In these cases, bibliographic information of the original novels is regretfully left out.

### 3.2 Reviews of Chinese Novels in English (RCNE)

Basic information about book reviews of translations of Chinese novels is listed in the database of Chinese Novels in English. Full details of published book reviews are available as a separate database: Reviews of Chinese Novels in English (RCNE) lists full bibliographic information relevant to each review. The RCNE database focuses on reviews published in seven mainstream media outlets, including 5 newspapers and 2 magazines in the UK and US respectively; outlets such as *London Review of Books*, *New York Review of Books* and *The Guardian* publish high-quality book reviews written by professionals and specialists and are included in the database. Blog reviews and reviews published in scholarly journals such as *Renditions* and *China Quarterly* are not included.

The selection of the UK and US mainstream media outlets from which the reviews are extracted is based on figures of print circulation provided by the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), which is an industry body for media measurement. It offers sales figures of national daily newspapers, among many other media, across the world (see Table 9 and Figures 7-8). Table 9 and figure 7 show sales figures of the most popular newspapers in the UK in 2012.

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49 At the moment, there are no cross-references from the main body of the database of novels; it is, therefore, advisable to consult the database of reviews if further information about reviews is needed.

50 See [http://www.abc.org.uk/About-us/Who-we-are/](http://www.abc.org.uk/About-us/Who-we-are/) [Last accessed 8 November 2012].
with the top six newspapers considered as tabloids. Despite their considerably large
circulation in the UK, tabloid newspapers such as *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* are usually
identified with “a brash style of emotionally charged journalism” (Sterling 2009: 224).

Compared with the tabloids’ particular style of populist journalism, broadsheets are identified
as “more sober” (Sterling 2009: 224) and contain more “demanding content” (Zelizer and
Allan 2010: 13). In addition, most tabloids do not offer book reviews. For these reasons,
tabloid newspapers are excluded as sources from which reviews of translated Chinese novels
are extracted; the five broadsheet newspapers selected include *Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*,
*Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 7 Circulation of British national newspapers, 1988-2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Express</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mirror/Daily Record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Daily Telegraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning Star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail on Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News of the World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Express</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Mirror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Independent on Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sunday Telegraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sunday Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulation.

*Average figures for January–June in each year.
### Table 9 National daily newspapers circulation in the UK, June 2012\(^{51}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>June 2012</th>
<th>June 2011</th>
<th>% Change</th>
<th>May 2012</th>
<th>June 2012</th>
<th>Jan 2012 – June 2012</th>
<th>% change on last year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Sun</td>
<td>2,583,552</td>
<td>2,806,746</td>
<td>-7.95</td>
<td>2,611,838</td>
<td>2,583,552</td>
<td>2,622,123</td>
<td>-7.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mirror</td>
<td>1,081,330</td>
<td>1,170,541</td>
<td>-7.62</td>
<td>1,080,544</td>
<td>1,081,330</td>
<td>1,091,094</td>
<td>-6.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Star</td>
<td>602,296</td>
<td>708,163</td>
<td>-14.95</td>
<td>606,641</td>
<td>602,296</td>
<td>612,568</td>
<td>-13.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mail</td>
<td>1,939,635</td>
<td>2,047,206</td>
<td>-5.25</td>
<td>1,931,135</td>
<td>1,822,652</td>
<td>1,959,014</td>
<td>-5.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Express</td>
<td>602,482</td>
<td>621,871</td>
<td>-3.12</td>
<td>597,885</td>
<td>602,482</td>
<td>581,469</td>
<td>-7.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
<td>573,674</td>
<td>622,719</td>
<td>-7.88</td>
<td>575,132</td>
<td>573,674</td>
<td>578,696</td>
<td>-8.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Times</td>
<td>400,120</td>
<td>440,581</td>
<td>-9.18</td>
<td>395,752</td>
<td>400,120</td>
<td>397,395</td>
<td>-11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Times</td>
<td>297,225</td>
<td>356,194</td>
<td>-16.56</td>
<td>300,584</td>
<td>267,222</td>
<td>309,681</td>
<td>-16.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guardian</td>
<td>211,511</td>
<td>256,283</td>
<td>-17.47</td>
<td>214,703</td>
<td>211,511</td>
<td>216,682</td>
<td>-17.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Independent</td>
<td>90,001</td>
<td>176,681</td>
<td>-49.06</td>
<td>93,983</td>
<td>67,211</td>
<td>100,139</td>
<td>-44.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I 272,597 173,165 57.42 274,539 208,302 267,992 61.83

Figure 7 shows the most widely circulated newspapers in the US. Media outlets such as *Wall Street Journal, New York Daily News, San Jose Mercury News* and *New York Post* publish reviews of China-related books written in English; however, a search for reviews of translated Chinese novels using the search engine provided by these websites returned zero titles. Therefore, despite wide national circulation, newspapers that have not published any reviews of translated Chinese novels during the period under study will be excluded from the database.

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\(^{51}\) See [http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/table/2012/jul/13/abcs-national-newspapers](http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/table/2012/jul/13/abcs-national-newspapers) [Last accessed 8 November 2012].
The major publications from which the book reviews are extracted are listed below:

**UK publications**

- The Daily Telegraph
- The Times
- Financial Times
- The Guardian
- The Independent
- London Review of Books
- The Times Literary Supplement

**US publications**

- USA Today
The database of published reviews is designed to provide as much information as possible about reviews of translated Chinese novels in various broadsheets in the UK and US. Each record contains the following information:

- Title of Translation under Review;
- Title of Original Chinese Novel;
- Author of Chinese Novel under Review;
- Translator;
- Source of Review;
- Title of Review;
- Reviewer;
- Year of publication;
- Link (if applicable).
### 3.2.1 Search Procedures

Most publications under investigation have both print versions and online versions. Both print and online copies of the relevant publications have been consulted. The print versions of *London Review of Books, New York Review of Books* and *The Times Literary Supplement* are accessible at the John Ryland University Library, City Library of Manchester and Hulme Library of Manchester. Together the three libraries hold complete issues of the three publications mentioned above from 1980 to 2010. Therefore it is relatively easy to browse every issue and extract a full list of reviews.

Other book reviews are collected from major online media sites by means of specific keywords. Many of these media sites provide search engines, but they are limited to simple searches which do not allow a combination of key words. Nonetheless, there is no better way to access archives of reviews other than using the search engines provided. For every search, the search item entered is ‘translated from the Chinese’, because the format of a review in most cases features bibliographic information about a translation which includes this phrase – ‘translated from the Chinese’ – where the source text is Chinese. The phrase ‘translated from the Chinese by Howard Goldblatt’, for instance, always appears as part of the basic information provided. Using this key word, a total number of 162 reviews was obtained from the websites of all the sources listed in Table 10.
Table 10 Search results from mainstream media in the UK and US

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Media</th>
<th>Number of translated Chinese novels published</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Daily Telegraph</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Times</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Times</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guardian</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Independent</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Review of Books</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Times Literary Supplement</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco Chronicle</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Post</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Tribune</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Yorker</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Review of Books</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>162</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another effective way of collecting reviews from broadsheets is to search by author or title. Based on titles collected from the database of CNE, a selected number of authors and titles were used as search items to ensure that as many reviews as possible are included in the RCNE database. The relevant titles and authors were selected on the basis of criteria such as numbers of titles translated in the case of authors and awards and numbers of reprints in the case of translations.
Websites and Databases

Searching through the major newspaper websites cannot guarantee full coverage of reviews published after 1980. Online databases facilitate finding book reviews published in broadsheets in the UK and US. There are also plenty of websites devoted to the collection and circulation of book reviews; some publish reviews of their own whereas others collect reviews published in broadsheets and create databases for readers to search so that they form ideas about the book before purchasing. Many databases may have indexes that can be used to locate book reviews for that subject area (such as literature). ProQuest, for example, provides citations to reviews appearing in newspapers, journals and magazines, though many of these journals publish academic reviews, which fall outside the scope of the current study. Therefore, a careful search for reviews published in newspapers and other mainstream publications has to be conducted to single out relevant entries from the enormous amount of hits retrieved. One alternative method to search for reviews from these academic-oriented databases is to search by newspaper title, for instance, *The Independent* in the ProQuest catalogue to find all the reviews published by *The Independent*. Again the search returns a large number of irrelevant entries and the filtering process has to be carried out manually. Other useful databases such as Bowker’s Books in Print, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, etc, offer access to full texts of most of the book reviews or online links to them. Among the many databases I have consulted, the following websites/databases proved particularly helpful.

- **Amazon.com**

Primarily a bookselling site, Amazon sometimes quotes parts of published book reviews in the ‘Editorial review’ section. Their ‘search inside the book’ function allows viewing of selected pages—usually the covers, table of contents, index and an excerpt from the main text—for books published in recent decades. The back cover of a book where quotations from reviews in distinguished media are featured gives a clue of who has reviewed the current book and where to find the full text of the review. Overall, this is a very useful site for obtaining review-related information.

- **Complete Reviews**

This is a website dedicated to collecting published reviews on literary fiction from mainstream media and academic journals published during the period 1999 to 2011 across the
world. Under the category ‘Index of Far East Asia’, there is a list of reviews of Chinese literature in translation arranged by author name. I have collected 14 reviews of 8 titles published in the UK and US from ‘Complete Reviews’.

- ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and The Observer

With limited coverage from 1821-2003, this database provides access to all archives of an important UK newspaper. I used the advanced search engine and entered ‘translated from the Chinese’, narrowed the document type to ‘reviews’ and specified the time period from 1980-2003. This search returned 88 hits. 14 reviews were found to be relevant.

The completeness and accuracy of bibliographic information may vary across sources, and different sources may have their own format of presenting a review. For example, a review obtained from ‘The Complete Reviews’ may be indexed as ‘anonymous’ but the reviewer’s name may be attached to it in the review obtained from ProQuest database. The current RCNE database intends to provide as precise a set of bibliographic information as possible. The bulk of reviews are collected from the major media sites. A total number of 162 reviews have been included in the RCNE database from various sources consulted.

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the sources of data for constructing two databases created specifically for this project and the search procedures and methodology used for collecting and categorizing data. The databases of Chinese Novels in English (CNE) and Reviews of Chinese Novels in English (RCNE) offer access to an extensive list of English translations of Chinese novels in book format and their reviews published between 1980 and 2010. As few bibliographies can lay legitimate claim to completeness, the current database is no exception. In constructing a definitive online bibliography of translated works from the Chinese, my intention was to draw together as comprehensive a list of titles of all the Chinese novels translated into English during the period under study as possible and to map a very substantial body of material which offers insights into Chinese literature in English translation. The database provides practical bibliographic information on translated Chinese novels: for example, whether a particular author or work exists in translation or how many translations of an author’s novels are available in English. Hopefully, this online database can
be expanded continuously in the future as other literary genres will be included and serves as a means of advancing our understanding of the interaction between China and the UK and US.

In the following chapter, I will analyse patterns of choices in translating and publishing Chinese novels into English and the way these translations are framed and promoted in the UK and US literary markets.
Chapter 4 Patterns of Selection and Framing

This chapter examines patterns of selection of Chinese novels for English translation resulting from choices made by various narrators who have been involved in the process of promoting Chinese novels in the UK and US between 1980 and 2010. The chapter starts with a general overview of Chinese novels in English translation published in the UK and US during the period under study, based on data extracted from the CNE (Chinese Novels in English) database. This is followed by a discussion of various patterns of selection at different periods of time and an attempt to explain how the selections contribute to the elaboration and circulation of public narratives of China in the relevant cultural spaces.

4.1 Introduction

Examination of the CNE database reveals that a total of 150 Chinese novels were selected and translated into English and published in the UK and US between 1980 and 2010. Of these, 11 are translations of classical novels and 139 are modern, contemporary novels. Further examination shows that 87 titles have been translated and published since 2000, accounting for more than half of the total number of translations published in the past 3 decades. Figure 10 shows that there is a clear upward trend in terms of the quantity of annual publications between 1980 and 2010, with some fluctuation at different times. This might be explained by the fact that, although the readership base is expanding steadily, the popularity of Chinese literary works tends to peak during periods of intense coverage of China in the news.


Two classical novels, namely Journey to the West and The Dream of Red Mason, were excluded from the database. This is because Journey to the West, which appeared as one volume in Chinese, was translated into four volumes. The first volume appeared in English in 1977, followed by the remaining volumes in 1978, 1980 and 1983 respectively. Despite the fact that the last volume appeared in English in the 1980s, most of the volumes were published and received reviews in mainstream media outlets and scholarly journals in the 1970s. For this reason, Journey to the West is not included in this study. Similarly, The Dream of the Red Chamber was translated by David Hawkes and John Minford into five volumes, published in 1973, 1975, 1977, 1980 and 1983 respectively. It, too, falls outside the scope of the current study.
The landscape of Chinese novels in English translation in the UK and US is one of Mainland, male writers dominating the field at the expense of writers from other regions, including Taiwan, Hong Kong and overseas. As shown in figure 11, 48 out of 79 writers are from Mainland China, 16 writers are from Taiwan, 11 are overseas Chinese writers who live outside China but continue to write in Chinese, and 4 are from Hong Kong. In terms of individual writers, the most translated, such as Mo Yan, Su Tong, Yu Hua and Zhang Xianliang, are also from Mainland China, as shown in figure 12. This imbalanced literary scene which places Mainland writers in a dominant position and accords them the highest level of international exposure reflects the political context in which translations are undertaken: it demonstrates that interest in Mainland China’s politics eclipses literary voices from other regions which deserve a wider international audience. Leung Ping-kwan, a Hong Kong writer, points out that Mainland Chinese literature is an “autonomous, self-sufficient cosmos that no other literature in China can compete against” (Tatlow 2012). Hong Kong novels are a particularly salient example. Known as a global financial centre with a vibrant popular culture, including a world-renowned film industry, Hong Kong boasts many veteran and prolific writers, such as Liu Yichang, Xixi, Wong Bik Wan and Dong Kai Cheung, who have shown considerable vitality in their works. Recent decades have witnessed younger writers breaking new ground; examples include Huang Biyun, Xie Xiaohong and Han Lizhu
(Yeh 2010; France 2000; Louie 2010). Its martial art novels are particularly well-known and have been turned into many internationally appreciated films in the latter half of the twentieth century. But its success in the international cinema field does not bring Hong Kong literature out of obscurity to command the attention of global audiences, nor does it bring equal fame to its translated martial art novels (Goldblatt 2000). So far, only three martial art novels written by two Hong Kong writers, i.e. *The Deer and the Cauldron: A Martial Arts Novel* (1998) and *The Book and the Sword: A Martial Art Novel* (2004) by Jin Yong, and *The Eleventh Son: A Novel of Martial Arts and Tangled Love* (2005) by Gu Long, have appeared in English; both were published by Oxford University Press.

**Figure 11 Regional distribution of Chinese authors translated into English between 1980 and 2010**

To challenge the dominance of Mainland Chinese writers in the Anglophone world, Columbia University Press launched a *Modern Chinese Literature from Taiwan* series in 1998. With the help of Professor Der-wei Wang and financial support from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange, this on-going project aims to bring modern Taiwanese literature out of invisibility in the English-speaking world (Crook 2011). By 2010, 16 full-length Taiwanese novels which deal with various themes had been translated and made available to English readers. For example, themes of war and separation, and Taiwan’s difficult transition from being a [Japanese] colony to a postcolonial society in the late 1940s (Liao 2007: 185; Wu 2013: 212) can be identified in Wu Zhuoliu’s *The Orphan of Asia* (2006). Li Qiao’s *Wintry Night* (2001) deals with the issue of maintaining regional independence and the rising consciousness of native Taiwanese culture; it tells the story of a three-generation family in an isolated interior Taiwanese village (Kinkley 2001: 2011).
(Hualian), a popular destination for American soldiers during the Vietnam war in the late 1960s, Wang Zhenhe explores themes such as “the dislocation of traditional values confronted by the western influence” (Hillenbrand 2007: 162) and Taiwan’s awkward position with regard to America and its strategic planning in Asia during the Cold War (Chen 2009: 105). In her award-winning novel *Notes of a Desolate Man* (1999), Zhu Tianwen deals with the theme of homosexuality and decadence in the city and depicts the world of gay men whose boyfriends died of AIDS in Taiwan in the 1990s (Storm 2003: 183). This series also showcases Taiwan’s science fiction by including Zhang Xiguo’s *The City Trilogy* (2003). Two novels written by immigrant writers are also included, namely Malaysian-Taiwanese writer Zhang Guixing’s novel *My South Seas Sleeping Beauty* (2007), which describes the life of a male protagonist in an exotic and remote village in Malaysia; and Taiwan-based Hong Kong writer Shih Shu-ching’s *City of the Queen* (2005), which explores the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized by telling a story of a young woman’s struggle and her transformation from a prostitute to a wealthy landowner in Hong Kong in the early 20th century.

The influence of this series, however, has been very limited outside academia. So far, only the translation of Zhu Tianwen’s *Notes of a Desolate Man* (1999) has received one review in *The New York Times*; other reviews are mainly published in academic journals and magazines. This near invisibility of Taiwanese novels in English translation among the general public might be explained by at least two factors. First, framed as an academic project and targeting academics, whether faculty or students, as the main audience, the *Modern Chinese Literature from Taiwan* series prioritises literary merit, aesthetic quality and the significance of each work in the context of Taiwanese literary history, rather than marketability and financial considerations (Crook 2011). With limited funding, it produced relatively small print runs of under 1,000 copies, which further restricted its circulation within academia (Crook 2011). Second, Taiwan’s geopolitical position compared to a powerful China that is experiencing an economic renaissance seems to contribute further to limiting the visibility of its literature on the global stage. The narrative of China as an economic power that is playing a major role in reshaping the global system attracts many readers in the UK and US and encourages them to learn about the country and its past through (translated) literary works. Taiwanese writers who have not experienced defining political movements of the scale of the Cultural
Revolution and the Tiananmen Square event, nor other moments of major social transformation that have marked modern Chinese history, cannot provide critical answers to China’s rise to power in their novels, nor address issues specific to the Chinese context, such as the impact of the one child policy on Chinese society. Their novels therefore do not attract the attention of a US/UK readership hungry for information about the rising power of China. Hence, despite the fact that Taiwanese literature constitutes an indispensable part of the conceptual narratives of Chinese literature in the UK and US, it has so far failed to reach beyond academia and attract the attention of general readers in the UK and US.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that in the late 1980s some independent publishers in the UK and the US showed interest in Taiwanese novels which explore homosexual/feminist themes. Three titles were translated into English; Nieh Hualing’s *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China*, which was published by an American feminist press (Women’s Press); Li Ang’s *The Butcher’s Wife* (1986), published by the British independent publisher Peter Owen and the American independent publisher North Point press; and Bai Xianyong’s *Crystal Boys* (1989), published by Gay Sunshine Press, a specialist publisher who promotes gay rights in the US. Still in print today, these Taiwanese novels in English translation, which focus on the oppression and persecution inflicted on women and homosexuals by traditional societies, contributed to the construction of global narratives of the feminist and gay movements in the UK and US in the 1980s (see section 4.2.3 below for further discussion). However, this short lived visibility of Taiwanese novels did not survive the changing political climate in the 1990s. In the following two decades, with the exception of the *Modern Chinese Literature from Taiwan* series, not a single title of Taiwanese literature was translated into English by either commercial or university presses in the UK and US.

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Apart from the imbalance in the regional distribution of Chinese authors, the database also reveals that male Chinese writers who have experienced China’s most dramatic political turmoil during the 1960s and 1970s are prioritised in English translation, compared with young and new voices (see Figure 12). These writers, including Mo Yan, Su Tong, Yu Hua, Zhang Xianliang, Zhang Wei, Gao Xingjian and the exile writer Ma Jian, explore certain themes in their novels, such as political persecution inflicted on the intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution (for instance Zhang Xianliang’s *Half of Man is Woman*, 1986, and Ma Jian’s *The Noodle Maker*, 2004), China’s poverty-stricken rural areas (for instance, Han Shaogong’s *A Dictionary of Maqiao*, 2003), and traumatic memories of the Cultural Revolution (for instance, Yu Hua’s *To Live*, 2001, and Su Tong’s *The Boat to Redemption*, 2010). Despite the fact that many well-established Chinese writers who appeared in English translation drew criticisms for the quality of their literary works, UK and US publishers still preferred their novels to those which explore new themes or are written by new writers.

Among the latter, many Chinese writers contributed during the past 30 years to the vitality and diversity of Chinese literature by responding to the social issues that emerged in post-Mao China. For example, Yan Lianke’s (2009) autobiographical novel *Wo Yu Fubei* (My Father’s Generation and I) deals with the theme of “Chinese family and the fading virtue of filial piety” (Liu 2014); it sold 300,000 copies in China. Zhang Ping’s (1997) *Juze* (Choice), Zhou Meisen’s (1997) *Renjian Zhengdao* (The Proper Way of the World), and Wang Yuewen’s (2005) *Zhaoxi Zhijian* (Between Dawn and Dusk) also examine the declining
traditional values in China during what they regard as a transitional era. Alongside these responses to contemporary issues, there is revived interest in examining Chinese feudal history. Chinese writer Er Yuehe’s historical novel Kangxi Dadi (The Great Emperor Kangxi) (1993) recounts stories of a benevolent ruler in the Qing dynasty (Lee 2005: 199). Yao Xueyin’s (1982) Li Zicheng (Li Zicheng) and Ling Li’s (1983) Shaonian Tianzi (The Young Emperor of the Qing Dynasty), both of which won the Mao Dun literary prize in 1982 and 2006 respectively, are further examples of novels that revisit the history of pre-modern China from a contemporary perspective. In addition, ethnic minority writers have addressed issues such as their sense of cultural identity under the impact of the dominant Han culture by tracing their cultural history to their tribal ancestry. Huo Da’s (1988) Musilin de Zhangli (A Muslim Funeral), Li Zhun’s (1984) Huanghe Xiang Dongliu (Yellow River Flowing to the East), Alai’s (2009) Ge Sa Er Wang (The Song of Gesar), and Zhang Chengzhi’s (1991) Xinling Shi (History of the Soul) are notable examples of novels with ethnic themes (Humes 2007). It is also worth mentioning that science fiction has been experiencing a renaissance in China in the past decade. Han Song is one of the leading writers of Science fiction. His 2066: Xixing Manji (2066: Red Star over America) (2012) tells a story about an affluent China attempting to spread civilization to a decaying America through the ancient board-game Go. None of these titles have been selected for translation into English.

Despite the fact that modern Chinese literature covers many diverse themes, then, UK and US publishers seem to prefer novels written by well-established Chinese writers who have already appeared in English translation and who deal with specific themes, rather than novels written by new writers on a variety of social issues. This can be explained by at least three factors. First, the status occupied by these (male) writers in China serves to contribute to their high visibility in English translation. These male writers are often awarded important literary prizes in China. For example, Bi Feiyu’s Three Sisters won the Luxun Literary Prize in 2004, and Yu Hua won the Prize of Special Contribution to Chinese Literature in 2005. These literary awards constitute one factor that contributes to legitimizing their prominent position in China, and might consequently explain why UK and US publishers and other literary agents find them particularly interesting. In addition, with the exception of Wang Shuo and Ma Jian, these male writers are all members of the Chinese Writers’ Association, a government organization that represents Chinese writers in the international arena; Mo Yan has been its vice-president since 2011. Their membership of this powerful organisation gives
them privileged access to various communicative channels with UK and US publishers. For example, as members of the Chinese Writers’ Association, they are often invited to international book fairs and can capitalise on the opportunities these visits give them to meet publishers and translators and initiate the acquisition of translation rights. Opportunities of this type might be completely unavailable, or at least restricted, as far as dissident writers such as Ma Jian and Liao Yiwu are concerned. Their criticism of the Chinese government leads the authorities to perceive them as illegitimate voices, ill fit to represent China on the international stage, and hence exclude them from participating in book fairs and block their access to foreign publishers and agents. This was evident in the 2012 London International Book Fair which featured China as its guest nation. Most of the authors who attended this Book Fair were members of the Chinese Writers’ Association or ‘politically acceptable’ writers from overseas, whereas dissidents such as Ma Jian and Liao Yiwu, among many others, were denied access to the event. This generated considerable criticism from the British media, who supported the dissidents and advocated freedom of speech, as discussed in detail in sections 4.4 and 5.4.

Second, linguistic difficulty can also hinder the selection of some Chinese writers/novels for English translation. A good example is Jia Pingwa, a well-established Chinese writer. Both themes tackled in Jia’s novels and his innovative use of language contribute to the difficulty of translating him into other languages (Wang 2006: 4). He also draws heavily on “the narrative techniques of traditional Chinese vernacular fiction” (Wang 2006: vii), compared with his counterparts whose novels often draw on popular western literary motifs and movements, such as “surrealism, magic realism, multiple narrators, absurd time shifts and grotesque or scatological descriptions of the crudest human behaviour” (Becker 2012). His themes and writing style, which render his voice unique in Chinese literature, not only led many Chinese literary critics such as Sun Jianxi (2004) and Xu Zidong (2012) to describe his novels as very difficult, but have also resulted in at least one failed attempt to translate his novels into English. Goldblatt attempted to translate Qin Qiang (Qin Opera) at the request of Hawaii University Press, but eventually gave it up because “Jia used a lot of obscure dialect and idioms of Shanxi Province in the book” (King 2010).

Finally, UK and US commercial publishers and editors are generally reluctant to disrupt the homogeneous, established market of Chinese literature and risk introducing new voices from the Chinese-speaking world. This position is largely informed by poor sales figures for
Chinese novels in the UK and US markets. Instead of embracing novels which address new subject matter and are written by young authors who have never been published in English before, publishers generally prefer to stay with well-established Chinese writers whose novels have appeared in English translation and can be counted on to generate a reasonable profit (Lovell 2005; 2006: 36). In addition, their lack of knowledge of the Chinese literary market and the well known language barrier tend to make it difficult for publishers and editors to identify new writers in China (Harman 2008; Abrahamsen 2008).

Moving on to the contribution of different publishers, as reflected in the databases, we can see that UK and US publishers have played a decisive role in selecting and promoting Chinese novels in English translation and mediating the construction of the narrative of China in the Anglophone world during the past 3 decades, though to varying degrees. Figure 13 shows that academic publishers produced a large number of translations: Columbia University Press published 20 titles, University of Hawaii Press 8 titles, and University of Washington Press 6 titles. Moreover, academic publishers have played a major role in introducing some diversity in relation to Chinese literature in the Anglophone world. Apart from the Modern Chinese Literature from Taiwan series launched by Columbia University Press as a major contestant to the dominant position occupied by Mainland Chinese literature, University of Hawaii Press also launched the Fiction from Modern China series between 1994 and 1997, introducing a range of new voices, such as Chen Ren, Liu Suola and Zhang Henshui, who had never appeared in English before. Other academic presses published translations of Chinese classical novels as part of research projects. For example, the

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54 Hale classifies organizations in the publishing industry in America and Britain into two major types: general trade publishers, and cultural and academic publishers (Hale 2009: 217). The publishing industry in Britain, North America, and increasingly in much of Europe, is dominated by a small number of international publishing groups, such as Reed Elsevier, Pearson, Rupert Murdoch’s New International (which owns HarperCollins) and the German media group Bertelsmann (which owns Penguin groups) (Feather 1993). These general trade publishers have a strong presence in both the UK and US and exert considerable influence in purchasing publishing rights and promoting writers and their novels among a broad general readership. However, the distinction between academic and general trade publishers is not clear cut, given that some university presses such as Oxford University Press and Harvard University Press have successfully positioned themselves somewhere between academic and trade publishing. While allowing for this overlap between the two types, it is useful to bear Hale’s classification of publishing organizations in mind in the rest of this thesis in noting what type of authors are selected and stories promoted by different types of publisher and how their selections contribute to the elaboration and circulation of public narratives of China in the UK and US.

55 Between 1998 and 2010, Modern Chinese Literature from Taiwan series published 19 titles, with 4 titles being collections of short stories and poems. They are Cheng Ch’ing-wen’s Three-Leeged Horse (1999), Frontier Taiwan: An Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry (edited by Michelle Yeh and N. Malmqvist 2001), The Last of the Whampoa Breed (edited by Pang-yuan Chi and David Der-wei Wang, 2003), Indigenous Writers of Taiwan: An Anthology of Stories, Essays, and Poems (edited by John Balcom and Ingtsih Balcom, 2005).
University of Michigan published Dong Yue’s *The Tower of Myriad Mirrors* in 2008 as part of the *Michigan Classics in Chinese Studies* series; University of Washington Press published Feng Menglong’s three classical novels in 2000, 2005 and 2009 respectively as part of *A Ming Dynasty Collection* series. These publications again address mostly scholars and students of Chinese literature, and thus have relatively limited influence beyond academic circles.

**Figure 13 Major UK and US publishers**

(with more than one title published each)

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*Figures combine imprints under parent company.*
Some scholars and translators attribute the unpopularity of Chinese literature in the UK and US to the fact that the translations are mostly published by academic presses. They argue that translations “are rarely produced by prestigious commercial publishers [who are] able to afford generous publicity budgets. Translations are more often picked up by academic presses, ensuring that Chinese literature tends to remain in a scholarly ghetto” (Lovell 2006: 30). Contrary to this claim, the data extracted from the current database (see Figure 13) suggests that general trade publishers have always shown interest in producing translations of Chinese novels. Major international general trade publishers, including Penguin, HarperCollins and Random House, have all demonstrated sustained interest in Chinese literature in English translation: Random House has published 17 titles since 1980, Penguin 13 titles since 1983 and HarperCollins 12 titles. In the 2000s, these publishers opened branches in China in order to keep up with the Chinese literary market and identify new titles for English audiences. Apart from these publishing groups, other general trade publishers and independent publishers have also contributed to the promotion of translated Chinese novels in at least two ways. First, the significant rise in the number of translations in the 2000s was largely due to the fact that a growing number of general trade publishers, such as No Exit, Little Brown and Bloomsbury, participated in publishing Chinese novels. Second, unlike international publishers who have far too many renowned writers on their publishing lists and easily overlook Chinese writers, some independent publishers prioritise Chinese writers and their works. For example, Marion Boyars, a UK-based publisher, features Hong Ying as the front list author and devotes large paragraphs to introducing her and her writings on its website57. Methuen, another UK-based publisher, features Mo Yan, especially after he was awarded the 2012 Nobel Prize for Literature. Canongate, an Edinburgh-based publisher, invited Su Tong to join its literary project of rewriting myth from myriad cultures, alongside many important names. However, it should be noted that the consequences of general trade publishers’ activities can be double-edged: these publishers make many Chinese writers more visible on the international literary stage and their stories known to the Anglophone readers; at the same time they also normalise specific patterns of stories through repeated exposure, and consequently set constraints to the selection of titles for translation in the future. These constraints are later imposed on many translators and literary agents in the process of selecting titles and revising translation manuscripts, making it gradually difficult for the

57 See http://www.marionboyars.co.uk/AUTHORS/Hong%20Ying.html [last accessed 14 May 2014].
translators to challenge these patterns. This process will be discussed in the analysis in the following sections.

This brief overview of the engagement of US and UK publishing houses with China during the period under study is meant to provide a backdrop for more detailed analyses of period-specific patterns in the rest of this chapter. Adopting a chronological structure, the following section will discuss how narratives of China woven by UK and US publishers, editors and translators through translating Chinese novels rely heavily on the feature of selective appropriation.

4.2 The 1980s

The 1980s saw the beginning of a rapprochement between China and the West. As China moved away from the radical Cultural Revolution (1967-1977) decade to a much more open era, the new leadership abandoned and replaced the great majority of party policies (Mackerras 1989: 209; Goodsman 1990: 2). A series of political and economic policies adopted in the late 1970s and early 1980s not only resulted in impressive economic achievements, but also helped to promote a positive narrative of China and the Chinese leadership, especially Deng Xiaoping, in the West. In the early 1980s, China appeared to be moving away from its totalitarian and authoritarian past and towards freedom and democracy (Mackerras 1989: 226-227).

This changing narrative of China in the UK and US paved the way for closer contact between Chinese writers and scholars of Chinese literature in the UK and US since the late 1970s (McDougall 2003:1), with implications for the selection of titles for translation. Looking beyond the literary texts that were selected and approved by the Chinese government,

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58 For Example, *Time* magazine selected Deng as ‘Man of the Year’ in 1985. The American magazine *Success!* selected him as the ‘success story of the year’ for 1985 and Harrison Salisbury, who wrote a feature report on Deng, claimed that he had “put China on a new and successful fast track” (Salisbury 1984). Salisbury further argued that Deng Xiaoping introduced free enterprise, entrepreneurship, price competition, stock offerings and even toyed with the idea of reopening the Shanghai Stock Exchange, in other words, he behaved like a capitalist. This is a dominant narrative of China in North America and Europe in the 1980s. Many believed that China was going to be more like ‘the West’ politically and economically, and that moving closer to Western models meant moving in the right direction (Mackerras 1989: 256).

59 Translated literary texts used for teaching Chinese were selected and published by the Chinese government: these translations were accepted in UK universities “without much criticism or scrutiny” before the 1980s (McDougall 2003: 24). Similarly, the ‘Panda Book’ series, launched in 1980, was government sponsored and aimed to (re)construct the image of China in the world by selectively translating the ‘best’ Chinese literature for foreign audiences (Lee 1985: 561). By 2009, the ‘Panda Book’ series had published 149 Chinese novels in English translation (including reprints) (Geng 2010). The series is often criticized for selecting “politically
publishers and translators began to discover new source texts for English translation independently of government mediation (McDougall 2003: 33-35). UK and US publishers now seemed to ‘disfavour’ Chinese writers who were favoured by the Chinese government or who promote Communism and Maoism in their novels, and to appear to be ‘deselecting’ them despite their promotion by government organizations such as Panda Books. One example is Zhang Chengzhi, an ethnic writer who was sent to Inner Mongolia as a young intellectual during the Cultural Revolution. In some of his novels and short stories, he defends the Cultural Revolution and narrates the ten-year political turmoil as “a bittersweet and perhaps even necessary ordeal that converted the Red Guards from the elitist to personally privileged vanguards of Chairman Mao” (Huang 2007: 110). This theme is evident in his early writings, such as Xiezai Xinshang de Mingzi (The Name Inscribed on the Heart) (1979). In addition, as an ethnic minority writer he focuses on the relationship between the Han Chinese and the ethnic groups in Inner Mongolia, a theme dealt with in novels such as Jinse Caoyuan (The Golden Grassland) (1988). Despite the potential attraction of his ethnic identity and his treatment of ethnic minority issues, his defence of the Cultural Revolution seems to have made him unpopular with UK and US publishers, who tended to prioritise titles which elaborate robust critiques of aspects of social and political life in contemporary China. Zhang’s politics appealed to the editors of Panda Books in Beijing, however, whose mission included promoting the image of China in the UK and US. Zhang’s The Black Steed, one of his most important works, was included in Panda Books in 1990. Another example is Sun Li. A prolific writer, three of his novels were translated and included in Panda Books. Novels such as The Blacksmith and the Carpenter (1982) and Stormy Years (1982) revolve around rural reform and the life of peasants, and were incorporated into the state’s socialist projects (Chan 2003: 159). But he was not selected for translation by US and UK publishers.

In terms of the distribution of translated output among publishers, 16 translated Chinese novels were (co-)published by 23 UK and US publishers during this decade. Only 5 of these novels were published by general trade publishers: Shen Fu’s Six Chapters of a Floating Life (published by Penguin, 1983); Cao Xueqin’s The Story of the Stone (Penguin, 1986); Stones of the Wall (co-published by St. Martin, an imprint of Macmillan, and Michael Joseph, an imprint of Penguin, 1986), Half of Man is Woman (published by Viking, an imprint of Penguin, 1988) and Baotown (published by Viking Penguin, 1989). This was an encouraging
development in terms of the reception of contemporary Chinese literature abroad, as commercial publishers which had not included Chinese literature in translation on their publishing lists before began to show some interest in the 1980s. Consequently, some Chinese writers began to attract international attention as their works were promoted by large, mainstream American and British publishers (Kinkley 2000: 247). Nevertheless, most of the novels\textsuperscript{60} were published by small, specialist publishers or university presses, such as W. Dolby, Westview Press, Peter Owen Press, North Point Press, Readers International Press, University of Washington Press, and Northeastern University Press. Of these, China Books & Periodicals Press, a small, independent publisher founded in 1960 by Henry Halsey Noyes and specialized in importing publications on China, played an important role in the elaboration of narratives of China at the beginning of the 1980s.

China Books & Periodicals elaborated a public narrative of itself as “the oldest and largest publisher, importer and distributor of books from and about China to North America since the 1960s”\textsuperscript{61}. In the 1960s and the 1970s, as the only American distributor of books, magazines and newspapers imported directly from Mainland China during the Cold War, the Press acquired a licence from the American government to import and sell materials from Mainland China, despite the fact that the antagonism between the two countries made it difficult to obtain permission from the American government to receive shipments from the People’s Republic of China at the time. In 1967, it imported and distributed Quotations from Chinaman Mao (widely known as The Little Red Book in the Anglophone world), which sold over 250,000 copies by the end of 1968; in the following fifteen years, it sold more than one million copies in America alone (Noyes 1989: 82). Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, due to the increasing interest in China, China Books & Periodicals “found it profitable to handle not only the Quotations but books on history, art and literature from China” (Noyes 1989: 91). Moreover, the press reached a growing and increasingly diverse audience comprised of scholars, students, travellers and other individuals interested in China and Chinese culture.

\textsuperscript{60} Three out of 16 translated Chinese novels are classical Chinese, namely The Story of Hua Guan Suo (1989), A Dream of Red Masons (1986) and Six Chapters of a Floating Life (1983).

\textsuperscript{61} See http://www.chinabooks.com/pages.php?pageid=1 [last accessed 15 July 2012]. China Books & Periodicals was later sold to the Chinese International Publishing Group in the late 1990s. However, the nature of its public narrative as an importer and publisher of materials from China remains unchanged after the merger. According to Vice President of Marketing Chellis Ying, almost all the staff speaks Mandarin, and the house still aims to bring Chinese books that other publishers ignore to America: “We have made it our goal to bring in contemporary material that North Americans may never have heard of” (unauthored 2007: 36-37). According to Ying, the company distributes significantly more than it publishes, and translations from the Chinese only constitute a margin of the whole publications.
Gradually, the reputation of China Books & Periodicals as distributor of the *Little Red Book* gave way to a more ambitious programme, and it became known as a resource centre for anyone interested in the Chinese language, Chinese art, literature, travel, medicine – acupuncture in particular – as well as the politics and economics of the People’s Republic of China (Noyes 1989: 89).

China Books & Periodicals Press thus positioned itself as a bridge between China and the US and attempted to elaborate an alternative narrative to that of China as an ideological Other even before the reestablishment of Sino-American diplomatic relations in the late 1970s, a period during which the American public was openly hostile to China (Noyes 1989: 77). In 1982, the Press was invited as a guest publisher to the Chinese Export Commodities Fair, where Chinese book publishers were eager to export books to America and European countries. Later, in his memoir *China Born: Memoirs of a Westerner* (1989), Noyes recorded his trip to major Chinese cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Suzhou and Guangdong, and described the changing Chinese urban landscape in his book, compared with half a century ago when he lived there as a child. His description challenges the dominant narrative of China as a sinister, backward and monolithic country, as elaborated in most western travelogues and journalistic writings. In general, his memoir attempted to convey a positive message to the American public, namely, that the Chinese government was willing to re-enter the global system as a friendly, peaceful country.

Translations of Chinese novels published by China Books & Periodicals also constructed an alternative narrative of China and the Chinese. Lao She’s *Ma and Son: A Novel* is a case in point. Lao She (1899-1966), a Chinese playwright and novelist, is perhaps best known in the

62 Before and since the rapprochement between China and America in the late 1970s, many American journalistic accounts have repeatedly elaborated narratives about China’s lack of personal freedom and the difficult lives of the Chinese in the post-Maoist era. These journalistic writings include *China Alive in the Bitter Sea* (Butterfield 1983), *Behind the Forbidden Door: Travels in Unknown China* (Terzani 1985), and *Discos and Democracy: China in the Throes of Reform* (Schell 1988), to name just a few. Apart from travelogues and journalistic writings, stories of heroic Americans fighting against the evil Communist Chinese proliferated in American movies. From *Peking Express* (1951), to the thriller *Hell and High Water* (1954) and TV series *Soldier of Fortune* (1955), to the melodrama *Love is a Many Splendid Thing* (1955), *The Seventh Sin* (1957) and *Five Gates to Hell* (1959), communists from China appeared as demonic conspirators (Whitfield 1991; Barson 2001). For example, in *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and *Satan Never Sleeps* (1962), the Chinese regime was depicted as exploitative of its own people, and as posing a threat to America. The stereotyped Chinese villain prevailing in the 1930s – Fu Manchu and his vicious daughter – came back to the screens in the 1960s, complete with an evil plan to conquer the world, as in Rohmer’s novel *The Blood of Fu Manchu* (Rohmer 1968).

63 Translations of Chinese novels, however, constituted only a sideline of China Books & Periodicals publishing activities; the translations included Lao She’s *Ma and Son: A Novel* (1980), Zhang Jie’s *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* (1986) and Zheng Yi’s *Old Well* (1989).
US for his translated novel *Rickshaw Boy* (1936), which became a US bestseller in the 1940s. *Ma and Son* is a story about the life of two Chinese in London in the 1920s. Originally published in 1929 in China, Lao She attempted to establish “his nationalist credentials” in this novel in a harsh indictment of British racism through two Chinese experiences in London (Louie 2000: 1063). In the early decades of the 20th century, when Lao She’s novel was first published, overseas Chinese in Britain acquired a “sinister repute” for opium smoking and gambling (Kiernan 1986: 164). Moreover, Fu Manchu, a literary character who incarnates the ‘yellow peril’ narrative dominant in the US and many other European countries, had become an omnipresent icon of the inscrutable and sinister Chinaman since it was created by Sax Rohmer, as discussed in Chapter 1 (Louie 2000: 1063). Such narratives constrained the expectations and reactions of British and American readers in their encounters with the Chinese. In this respect, the public narratives of the Chinese in the early 1920s bear some resemblance to those circulating in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, when China was narrated as an evil Communist country. Written in a politically and racially charged atmosphere, Lao She’s *Ma and Son* provides an interesting inventory of perceived injustices suffered by the Chinese during the 1920s and how the male protagonists made an effort to challenge the prejudices against them. The English translation, published about fifty years later by China Books & Periodicals, offered an opportunity for contesting the dominant narrative of the sinister Chinese that circulated in the US.

Two patterns of selection emerged during this period: translations of Chinese novels were selected as valuable sources of information which shed light on the Cultural Revolution and contemporary Chinese society whenever other sources of information on China were in short supply; and women writers were more likely to be selected for translation, perhaps as a response to the growing influence of the feminist movement and women’s liberation movement in the UK and US. These two patterns will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

### 4.2.1 Translations as Social Documents

Driven by the shifting narrative of China as a potential strategic ally elaborated by the UK and US leadership since the early 1970s, the demand for Chinese publications extended beyond the academic sphere to the general public in the 1980s in the UK and US (Noyes 1989: 91). However, there was a scarcity of materials in the UK and US pertaining to
communist China since its foundation in 1949 (Link 2000: 5). Translations of Chinese novels were selected to fill this gap and framed by publishers and translators as ‘valuable documents’ for understanding social change in China through various paratextual elements, and presented as “reflect[ing] certain aspects of Chinese society that translators believed should be brought to the attention of the reading public in the UK and US” (Duke 1990: 213). One example is Zhang Jie’s *Leaden Wings* (1987), which tells the story of the modernization programme of the Ministry of Heavy Industry in the early 1980s. This novel reveals the factional struggle between the reformists and the conservatives. The former advocated “less political interference in economic matters, less rigid centralized control of and greater autonomy for enterprises, [and] a fairer system of personnel recruitment” in order to achieve modernization (Chan 1989: 202). Their reform proposals were opposed by the conservatives, who wanted to preserve the current system in order to protect their interests (Chan 1989: 202). These two conflicting narratives with regard to modernization and economic reforms were “typical enough of the Chinese situation” and were “hotly debated everywhere in China” (Chan 1989: 202). This novel is relevant for UK and US readers in that it helps them understand some of the urgent social and political issues that emerged in China shortly after the Cultural Revolution. In addition, other issues raised by Zhang Jie in this novel, such as the idea that economic construction since 1949 was a total disaster, her resentment of the political control exercised on intellectuals and her defence of divorce (Chan 1989: 203; Wood 1988: 137) could also help UK and US readers identify some of the most hotly-debated topics in China in the early 1980s. It appears, however, that “many long passages of speech [between the protagonists] and interior monologue” were abridged or deleted (Chan 1989: 204), possibly to make the translation more readable to a wider public. Chan argues that these changes significantly undermined the literary quality of the novel by reducing its “emotional intensity” (Chan 1989: 204), which further suggests that the documentary value of the novel was prioritised at the expense of literary quality.

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64 In addition to book-length novels selected for English translation, anthologies were compiled and published with the aim of providing insight into contemporary Chinese society. Examples include two titles issued by Indiana University Press in its Chinese Literature in Translation series: *Stubborn Weeds* (1983, edited by Perry Link) focuses on controversial writings published in 1980-1981; *People or Monsters?* is a volume of stories and reportage by a Chinese writer Liu Bingyan. Other presses published similar collections, such as *Mao’s Harvest: Voices from China’s New Generation* (Oxford University Press, 1983), *The New Realism: Writings from China after the Cultural Revolution* (Hippocrene Books, 1983), *Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Conscience* (Hill & Wang Publishing, 1986), to name just a few. Anthologists in the 1980s thus showed more interest in “realist works which are believed to be a window on Chinese life and culture, politics and history” (Chan 2003: 50).
Some of these novels, which were very well received in China, were translated and participated in the construction of conceptual narratives of China in specific areas. Most studies of Chinese women since the foundation of the People’s Republic of China were “produced by anthropologists, sociologists, and scholars of contemporary literature” (Hershatter 2004: 992; emphasis added), who assumed that Chinese literature “would throw light on policy … [and] provide a key to the politics of the literary bureaucracy or even the public and private consciousness of individual authors or collective readers” (McDougal 2000: 24). Socialist and feminist scholars who examine the emancipation of Chinese women within a socialist framework turned to Zhang Jie’s literary texts for answers. Prazniak discussed the relation between women’s social problems and socialism in China based on translations of Zhang Jie’s novels, for instance, Love Must Not Be Forgotten (1986) and Heavy Wings (1987), and her other translated literary writings included in anthologies, because Zhang “expresses a critical but optimistic view of prospects for both women and socialism in China” (Prazniak 1989: 269). Prazniak argues that Zhang’s literary works shed light on Chinese women’s condition within a socialist framework and should be included as a valuable supplement to Euro-American feminist experiences (Prazniak 1989: 269-270). Kam Louie (1985) similarly examined marriage in the post-Mao period and the meaning of love in Chinese marriage based on Zhang Jie’s novels. This again demonstrates that the interaction between public and conceptual narratives, if we accept that literature is part of the public domain, has been central to the negotiation of China’s image in the West.

Most of these translated novels are supplemented with various paratextual elements that function as important sites of framing the literary work for readers – often reinforcing its value as a social document. These elements, including translators’ notes, introductions, prefaces and afterword, maps, glossaries as well as introductions written by a scholar of Chinese studies such as Jonathan Spence, a famous American historian specialising in Chinese history, offer background information about the Cultural Revolution and post-Mao Chinese society which help readers to contextualize the translated texts. For example, in all three versions of Yang Jiang’s Ganxiao Liuji, which tells of the daily life of Chinese intellectuals in a cadre school during the Cultural Revolution, a Translator’s Note informs readers of the cultural and historical background against which the book was written and the events leading up to the Cultural Revolution. Martha Avery, the translator of Zhang Xianliang’s Half of Man is Woman (1988), also offers information about labour camps during
the Cultural Revolution in her *Translator’s Introduction*. This approach of framing a translation with paratextual elements which offer cultural and historical background information seems to suggest that Chinese novels were largely translated to inform and educate general readers in the UK and US, rather than to be enjoyed and appreciated for their literary merit. In the following two decades, this type of framing was largely abandoned, perhaps because narratives of the Cultural Revolution had been circulated by then through other channels, such as newspapers, movies, drama and academic studies, all of which provided adequate background for UK and US readers.

Translators can also intervene through paratexual elements to guide the way in which American and British readers position themselves in relation to protagonists and the events being narrated. The three translations of Yang Jiang’s *Ganxiao Liuji* are cases in point. Rather than foregrounding major instances or aspects of suffering, Yang’s story records ‘mundane’ aspects of daily life, such as digging a well, getting treatment for minor ailments, the puppy she adopted, etc. All three translators explain to readers at some point in their introductions that in order to understand the import of these minor happenings they must read between the lines: what is left unsaid speaks louder than what is said. And they offer them a particular interpretation to adopt, as in Djang Chu’s introduction to his translation, titled *Six Chapters of Life in a Cadre School* (1986):

*Six Chapters of Life in a Cadre School* […] describes seemingly irrelevant and minute events, thus allowing readers to figure out the hidden meaning the author has tried to convey. There is no criticism of the social system per se; occasionally there are romantic and positive clichés about the monolithic Communist regime. The author does not challenge Mao’s verdict concerning the intellectuals who were indeed alienated from the mass, but she doubts whether the peasant masses could teach them anything at all. One wonders if the original Maoist vision was really an unmitigated disaster…In the final analysis, it is the gap separating the officially proclaimed morality and the venal reality of the situation that creates the subdued cynicism…The book, in the main, can be read as a footnote to the sorry history of the now thoroughly discredited Cultural Revolution.

(Chu, introduction, in Yang 1986: xii-xiii)

Howard Goldblatt, the translator of the 1984 version, titled *Six Chapters From My Life ’Downunder’*, similarly notes in the *Translator’s Afterword* that “several themes emerge from her [Yang’s] quiet, matter-of-fact narrative” (Goldblatt 1984: 100), one being “the mutual distrust and general incompatibility between China’s urban intellectuals and the peasants who were their ‘masters’” (Goldblatt 1984: 100). Other themes explored in the book, Goldblatt
tells his readers, include “the backwardness of the Chinese countryside and the demeanour of
the people involved in them” (Goldblatt 1984: 101). Similarly, Martha Avery, the translator
of Wang Anyi’s *Baotown* (1989), asks the reader to look beyond the surface of the literary
work for connections between China’s past and present. *Baotown*, she argues, should be read
as “a kind of parable, a folktale that has been pared down through the ages to the bare
essentials” (Avery 1989: v). It offers readers a chance to “listen to the deeper pulse in
Chinese life” – that is, its traditions, its past and its history, which give rise to today’s China:
“one can see how the skin of Communist China is folded into the deep ongoing current of
tradition” (Avery 1989: v).

The generic shift involved in framing translated Chinese novels as social documents guides
the reader’s interpretation and expectations in particular ways. The reader is encouraged to
look for facts about Chinese society in a literary text that would normally be approached as
fictional in nature. A novel that is not rich in historical and social detail might then be
experienced as deficient in some way, which might explain a comment by Jones in his review
of Dai Houying’s *Stones of the Wall* in the *London Review of Books*: “we might complain that
Dai Houying has not given us enough description – and this is a pity, for she is very good at it.
We would like to know more about what the characters look like, how they moved, their
homes and their landscapes” (Jones 1986: 26).

### 4.2.2 Visibility of Chinese Women Writing and Writings about Chinese
Women

The 1980s saw the publication of a number of novels written by Chinese women writers.
These seem to have been prioritised for translation into English, with the number of
translations of novels by women writers rising to account for more than half of those by male
writers – 8 out of 15 contemporary Chinese writers translated during this period are women:
Can Xue (*Dialogues in Paradise*), Dai Houying (*Stones of the Wall*), Li Ang (*The Butcher’s
Wife*), Nieh Hualing (*Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China*), Wang Anyi (*Baotown*),
Xiao Hong (*Market Street*), Yang Jiang (*Six Chapters in A Cadre’s School*), and Zhang Jie
(*Heavy Wings and Love Must Not Be Forgotten*). In addition to Chinese women writers who

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65 Short stories and/or excerpts of Chinese women’s novels also appeared in several anthologies in the 1980s, such as *Born of the Same Roots: Stories of Modern Chinese Women* (1981); *Seven Contemporary Chinese Women Writers* (1982) *Bamboo Shoots After the Rain: Contemporary Stories by Women Writers of Taiwan* (1990), to name just a few.
attracted international attention, some Chinese male writers also explored feminist themes in their novels, such as Zhang Xianliang’s *Half of Man is Woman* (1989).

The sudden visibility of Chinese women writers in English translation a decade or more after they had already made their mark in China is related to several factors that include but are not limited to the following: the growing interest in ‘third world literature’ in general in Anglophone countries during that period, especially literature written by women; recognition among feminist activists of the bond between writing and women’s consciousness; and the expansion of social science studies on modern China which began to include Chinese women as a subject of enquiry. The following section examines some of the narratives of Chinese women that emerge in translations of novels by female Chinese writers.

### 4.2.2.1 The Feminist Movement and Chinese Women Writers

The second wave of the women’s movement emerged in the US and Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. One of the consequences of this movement was the establishment of a number of feminist publishers dedicated to promoting writings by women (Young 1995: 26; Schackel 2003). Von Flotow underscores the role of publishing houses in elaborating and promoting public narratives of feminism and the translation of women’s literature:

> Feminist initiatives of the 1970s triggered enormous interest in texts by women writers from other cultures. This led to the realization that much writing by women has never been translated at all, and to the suspicion that what has been translated has been misrepresented in ‘patriarchal translation’. Thus extensive translation and re-translation activity was set off, for which willing publishers were found […] The context created by the women’s movement encouraged the development of women’s publishing houses (The Women’s Press in London, Editions des femmes in Paris, Frauenoffensive in Munich, Les Editions du remuemenage in Montreal) […]

(Flotow 1997: 49)

Beginning in the early 1970s, there was a surge of feminist writings on the condition of third world women which formed part of the larger narrative elaborated by American and British feminists at the time. These feminists constructed a global narrative of women as oppressed by patriarchal society and their relevant traditions (Rosenlee 2007: 1-2). Stories by and about third-world women who suffer from oppression of various kinds in their society serve to validate and reinforce the overall feminist narrative of gender-based oppression. These women are narrated in such stories as “sexually constrained…ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family oriented, victimized, etc.” (Mohanty 1991: 56). However,
women from the third world in the conceptual narratives elaborated by American and British feminist scholars are confined in time and space, divorced from the complex set of relationships that constitute their everyday life in their own country. As Rey Chow observes, women in non-western societies are often portrayed as “identical and interchangeable”, and more “exploited” than women in their dominant capitalist societies (Chow 1991: 93).

Chinese women are often narrated as the oppressed party in Chinese society. Throughout history, they were silenced by a highly patriarchal society. Their voices only “emerged from the surface of history” during the course of numerous revolutions in the twentieth century (Lu 1993: 1-2). Their personal stories are essential in legitimising the narrative of the third world as backward and oppressive. Ong thus concludes that

…studies on women in post-1949 China inevitably discuss how they [the Chinese women] are doubly exploited by the peasant family and by socialist patriarchy, reflecting the more immediate concerns of American socialist feminists than perhaps of Chinese women themselves. By using China as a “case study” of the socialist experiment with women’s liberation, these works are part of a whole network of Western academic and policy-making discourses on the backwardness of the non-Western, non-modern world.

(Ong 1988: 85)

A western feminist narrative of constructing a global sisterhood across cultural, geographical, religious, and ethnic boundaries thus informed some of the selections of source texts written by third-world women writers during this period. Each personal story about the oppression of a third world woman is part of a process of narrative accrual that is crucial for the elaboration and maintenance of the larger feminist narrative. The recurrent storyline in which third world women feature as oppressed protagonists and third world men as patriarchal oppressors has special resonance for western readers, and supported a pattern of selection that favours literary works which echo this storyline in the Anglophone market. Two Chinese novels selected for translation into English during the 1980s evoke this particular storyline: Li Ang’s *The Butcher’s Wife* (1989) and Nieh Hualing’s *Mulberry and Peach: Two Chinese Women* (1986). *The Butcher’s Wife* will serve as a good example of how translations from Chinese foregrounded the theme of gender oppression during the 1980s.

*The Butcher’s Wife*, originally published in Taiwan in 1983, tells a story about a Chinese woman, Lin Shi, whose husband, a local pig butcher, sexually abused her. He treated her brutally, refused to feed her, and punished her if she begged for food or work in the
neighbourhood. Lin finally kills her husband to end her suffering. This novel was based on a true story whose events unfolded in 1977 in Shanghai and appeared in a local newspaper. The news featured a woman who killed her abusive husband for revenge, although the police suspected that she must have had a lover – a familiar storyline in traditional Chinese literary texts. In traditional Chinese society, “any woman who kills her husband is presumed to have done so because of an extramarital affair; there could be no reason for committing the heinous crime of killing her own husband other than the desire to be with her lover” (Li, 1986 Author’s Preface). A woman guilty of killing her husband is narrated as promiscuous: no other pattern of causal emplotment is possible within this narrative environment. This narrative tradition, which imposes a specific view of women’s moral character, was passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years in traditional Chinese society.

Relocating the events which took place in Shanghai to Lu Gang, a Taiwanese fishing port and the author’s hometown, Li Ang intended to examine and challenge “women’s role and status in a traditional society” (Li 1983: viii-ix). The Butcher’s Wife weaves a pattern of causal emplotment that explains women’s victimisation as the outcome of their social-economic dependence on men and their low status in Chinese society. It is precisely for this reason that The Butcher’s Wife was widely read as a feminist novel. In her preface to the English translation, Li Ang makes it clear that she intended to write a feminist novel:

I cannot deny that I approached the writing of The Butcher’s Wife with a number of feminist ideas, wanting to show the tragic fate that awaited the economically dependent Taiwanese women living under the rule of traditional Chinese society.

(Li Ang 1986: Author’s Preface)

The English translation, which appeared three years after the original, highlighted the feminist theme of the novel and its contestation of traditional, patriarchal Chinese society. The book cover, for instance, features the following quotation from a review published in Los Angeles Times: “The Butcher’s Wife may be the most frightening book ever written about

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66 In the Author’s Preface, Li Ang explains that she “knew nothing about Shanghai”, and hence “decided to move the setting of the story to [her] hometown”, a small coastal city in Taiwan where “the flavour of old Taiwan” was retained (Li 1986).

67 This theme is elaborated in detail in the novel. For example, the husband has complete economic control over his wife, who has no other choice but to exchange sex for food. Lin’s mother dies as a result of selling her body to a soldier for two rice balls.

68 When The Butcher’s Wife was first published in Taiwan, the novel’s boldness in depicting sex evoked considerable controversy, especially when it won first prize in the annual fiction contest sponsored by United Daily News. The heated debate revolved around the sexual scenes, with one critic even claiming that “the novella’s sexual brutality might traumatize young girls” (Ng 1993: 266).
women oppressed by men”. Other quotes from book reviews published in mainstream outlets also appear on the back cover and direct readers’ attention to the motif of oppression:

‘Brutally realistic and ground-breaking…This compelling portrait of a world where poverty erodes all but the most primeval instincts transcends feminism to become a great human tragedy. Unforgettable and highly recommended.’ – Library Journal

‘Li Ang’s novel may start in a feminist rage against male oppression, but it goes much further than that.’ – Times Literary Supplement

The Butcher’s Wife featured as one of the top ten bestsellers in print written by women writers and published by Peter Owen Press. Li Ang was the only Chinese woman writer who made it on the list. Positioned next to European and American writers, her presence made clear that the narratives of western women and Chinese women were markedly different. Western female protagonists challenge their environments and grow into independent, strong individuals with admirable moral character. In contrast, Chinese female protagonists are docile and tend to endure suffering and accept it as their fate. When they do fight back, the result is usually tragic. The Chinese woman has to commit a crime to end her suffering and is then shunned by her society. Ignorant and illiterate, Chinese female protagonists do not know how to challenge the injustice inflicted on them by patriarchal society.

To conclude, scholars of Chinese studies in the UK and the US during the 1980s relied on translations of Chinese novels to teach their subject, and these translations therefore formed part of a conceptual narrative of China elaborated and disseminated through the academy. Most Chinese novels were treated as sources of information about mainland China rather than as literary works in Anglophone world. Meanwhile, translations written by women writers were privileged. This was largely influenced by the feminist movement in the UK and US. Two feminist novels, namely Li Ang’s The Butcher’s Wife and Nieh Hualing’s Mulberry and Peach, were selected for English translation, as they fit into the pattern of oppressed third-world women elaborated by American and British feminist scholars.

4.3 The 1990s

The 1990s saw a revival in the US of narratives of China as an evil and aggressive regime, evoked by the Tiananmen Square event in 1989, which was transmitted live to audiences.

69 See [http://peterowen.blogspot.co.uk/2007/03/international-womans-day.html](http://peterowen.blogspot.co.uk/2007/03/international-womans-day.html) [last accessed on 28 September 2012].
around the world. This political movement was generally perceived by Western media as a turning point in China’s political life: the figure of the lone protestor facing the tanks, flashed onto television screens on a global scale, became a powerful world-wide symbol of Chinese government oppression. Scenes of Chinese students erecting their own Statue of Liberty and quoting Abraham Lincoln on Tiananmen Square—the political heart of China—suggested to the media and to international television spectators that “they were witnessing a primal, ideological confrontation between pro-democratic students and an unyielding communist government” (Perlmutter 1998: 61). The images of the students’ hunger strike, the reports on the Tiananmen massacre and the subsequent mass purge, replayed on TV screens, convinced international publics that the Communist Party forcefully rejected the American model of progress and brought back the old narrative of Communist China as a brutal government which was set against progress and democracy as embraced and promoted by the West. Tiananmen once again placed the issue of individual freedom and human rights in China in central position and became the most visible in a long line of reminders of Communist China’s otherness (Goodman 2004; Fewsmith 2001). In the meantime, the 1990s also witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the East European Communist regimes and of the Soviet Union, which marked the end of the Cold War. These events gradually undermined the potency of the narrative of Communism across the world.

Consequently, China’s rather isolated position as one of the few remaining Communist countries in the world reinforced its construction as an ideological other, especially after the Tiananmen Square event in 1989.

This reconfigured narrative of China had implications for the selection of Chinese novels for English translation and the ways in which Chinese writers and their novels were framed in the UK and US. A growing number of novels on personal trauma were selected for English translation, partly perhaps because of the commercial success of memoirs written by Chinese immigrant writers in the UK and US (section 4.3.1). The emphasis on novels which tell stories about traumatic experience in Maoist China in general (such as Hong Ying’s *Daughter of the River*) or persecution in labour camps during the Cultural Revolution in particular (such as Zhang Xianliang’s *Grass Soup*) activate and reinforced the narrative of

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China as oppressor and human rights violator, and drew attention to dissident writers in exile and dissenting voices in China. Novels favoured by the Chinese government for their political content were less likely to be selected for English translation. One example is Chen Zhongshi’s (1993) *Bailu Yuan* (White Deer Plain). This national epic, which quickly became a bestseller and sold more than 2 million copies (Song 2013: 47), chronicles modern Chinese history during the past 50 years by telling stories of rivalries between two Confucian families in the central Shaanxi province. The novel perceives Confucianism as “a positive intellectual and social force that organizes a changing Chinese society”, and as “the cultural soul that maintains the Confucian social order and nationalist sentiments” (Gao 2013: 8). In the post-Tiananmen era, when the Communist Party resorted to reviving the narrative of Confucianism to support its status and consolidate its power base (Gao 2013:12; Wang 2006: 19), *Bailu Yuan* lent the central government legitimacy by constructing a narrative which foregrounds the central position of Confucianism in the formation of Chinese history (Wang 2006: 19). The book was not selected for translation into English.


The following sections examine these two narrative patterns that emerge from the examination of translated Chinese novels during this period.

### 4.3.1 Novels on Personal Trauma: Foregrounding China’s Suppressive Nature

During the 1990s, stories of personal trauma during the Cultural Revolution resonated with a huge and growing audience who became hooked on stories set within these ‘ten years of madness’ in Maoist China (Lovell 2011). Chinese novels such as Bei Dao’s *Waves: Stories* (1990), Ba Jin’s *Ward Four* (1999), Dai Houying’s *The Everlasting Rock* (1998), Hong Ying’s *Summer of Betrayal* (1997) and *Daughter of the River* (1998), Ma Bo’s *Blood Red Sunset* (1995), Su Tong’s *Rice* (1995), Yan Geling’s *White Snake and Other Stories* (1999),
Yu Hua’s *The Past and The Punishment* (1996), Wang Ruowang’s *Hunger Trilogy* (1991), Zhang Xianliang’s *Getting Used to Dying* (1991), *Grass Soup* (1995) and *My Buddha Tree* (1996), which follow this narrative pattern in recounting China’s recent history, were selected for English translation. These stories do not only touch on Chinese history since 1949, such as Anti-Rightist campaign and the Cultural Revolution, which were previously dealt with by scar literature and introspective fiction, but also draw in Chinese history of the entire 20th century. The focus of these stories shifted from describing major historical incidents to weaving stories of individuals or families against the backdrop of history. History is frequently handled as a series of violent incidents, and individuals always have difficulty mastering their own fates and become victims of the violence of history (Hong 2007: 445).

The prioritizing of novels on personal trauma in English translation could partly be attributed to the commercial success and considerable popularity of memoirs written by Chinese immigrant writers since the late 1980s; these include Nie Cheng’s *Life and Death in Shanghai* (1987)71, and Jung Chang’s *Wild Swan: Three Daughters of China* (1991)72. The phenomenal sales figures for such memoirs encouraged many authors to follow suit. Toby Eady Associates, the London-based literary agency originally responsible for promoting *Wild Swan*, continued to receive proposals for memoirs with a storyline of traumatic family suffering in Communist China even in the late 1990s (Lovell 2006: 198). By providing a unique narrative perspective on a country which had not only undergone radical political

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71 Nie Cheng’s narrative of suffering in China fed a sense of superiority in American audiences, who could celebrate their own good luck to reside in a free world. Since its publication, *Life and Death in Shanghai* received critical acclaim throughout the US and UK. It stayed on *The New York Times* bestseller’s list for 13 weeks and was selected by many newspapers all over the United States as one of the best books for 1987. The popularity of Cheng’s autobiography encouraged many Chinese intellectuals who had immigrated to the UK and US to document the tragic dies of their families under Mao’s regime (Grice 2002: 56).

72 Among all the memoirs, Jung Chang’s *Wild Swans* (1991) is perhaps the best-known title. It sold 13 million copies in 36 languages worldwide. Stephen Thompson describes it as “a very important book both for Chinese history and for oral history”, as it “bridges the huge cultural divide between Chinese and Western culture in a way that few books have done” (Thompson 2007:1). Following Jung Chang’s success, a set of related stories with recurrent motifs of trauma and oppression in Communist China became available in the UK and US markets, for example, Anchee Min’s *Red Azalea* (1993), Anhua Gao’s *To the Edge of the Sky* (2000), Aiping Mu’s *Vermilion Gate* (2000) and Ting-xing Ye’s *A Leaf in the Bitter Wind* (2000), among others. These Chinese writers’ first-hand experiences of suffering in Maoist China and regeneration in America and Britain provided the Anglophone public with ‘authentic’ insider personal narratives and were thus promoted as ‘real-life’ sagas of Chinese families. Despite differences in protagonists and settings, these autobiographical accounts adopt a similar “tragedy-triumph-freedom” storyline (Zarrow 1999: 168): moving from recounting the violence and suffering inflicted on the narrators when they lived in China, to describing their escape from China and persecution, and then settling happily in the West, in particular the US and Britain. Given these memoirs’ foregrounding of the narrators’ suffering under Oriental despotism, they were bound to find resonance among American and British readers, especially after the 1989 Tiananmen Square events (Zarrow 1999: 186).
changes throughout the 20th century, but which had also largely been closed to the West (Grice 2002: 104), these memoirs set a narrative pattern which has been variably referred to as “the Wildswanisation of literary works” (Shih 2004: 21), “the literature of the wounded” (Mirsy 1992: 8), and “memoirs of victimhood” (Chen 2008), among other designations. Through a process of narrative accrual, then, underpinned by significant commercial success of a few early titles, these memoirs shaped the expectations of readers of Chinese literature in the Anglophone world. In addition, they also prepared markets in the UK and US for the consumption of similar stories, whether translated or otherwise, about the country’s painful past, and ushered in a renewed literary interest in Communist China (Shih 2004: 21; Grice 2002: 103). Publishers’ selections of Chinese novels for translation thus responded to and contributed to strengthening these expectations (Kinkley 2000: 255). As Evens observed,

[i]n recent years, the reading public has clearly developed a taste for accounts of suffering and hardship under Communist rule in China. Publishers have responded eagerly with memoirs chronicling family misfortune, emotional and cultural deprivation, and political victimization by a totalitarian regime. Though these accounts vary, they often reproduce a view of China’s history which reinforces stereotypes and assumes ignorance on the part of their readers.

(Evens 1997)

Driven by the lucrative market of literature centred on China’s painful past in the UK and US, many publishers came to invest in novels on personal trauma translated from Chinese. This pattern was largely promoted by general trade publishers, such as Penguin, Random House and Macmillan: Zhang Xianliang’s Getting Used to Dying (1991) was published by Flamingo, an imprint of HarperCollins in the UK and the US; Ma Bo’s Blood Red Sunset (1995) was published by Viking, an imprint of Penguin in the UK and US; Hong Ying’s Summer of Betrayal (1997) was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, an imprint of Macmillan in the US and by Bloomsbury in the UK; Hong Ying’s Daughter of the River (1998) was published by Grove House in the US and by Bloomsbury in the UK; Bei Dao’s Waves: Stories (1990) was published by New Directions in the US. That the general trade publishers’ choices of titles for translations were largely influenced by economic factors suggests that they tend to be conservative and refrain from breaking new ground and discovering new writers. As Lovell explains, general trade publishers need to “look for commercial themes”, or books that seem to recapitulate storylines that have worked in the past (Lovell 2012). Most books have to make a profit for publishers and this can make editors and their boards quite conservative.
about their choices. Therefore, “anything new or very literary will, of course, seem a risk” (Lovell 2012).

In promoting and framing the translation of novels on personal trauma, some publishers selectively accentuated particular aspects such as the brutality of the Cultural Revolution, the political controversy the novel triggered in China, and the writers’ dissident identity, as is evident in the following extracts from back cover blurbs:

“In Waves, the poet Bei Dao turns to fiction, recording the painful years of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath.” (Bei Dao’s Waves: Stories, 1990)

“In Kyna Rubin’s flowing translation, this remarkably dispassionate work by one of the Chinese Communists’ most persistent critics builds through painful details to a devastating conclusion that exposes the cannibalistic waste of people, talent and truth that has characterized modern China.” (Wang Ruowang’s Hunger Trilogy, 1991)

“Charged with passion, never doctrinaire, Blood Red Sunset is a startlingly vivid and personal narrative that opens a window on the psyche of totalitarian excess that no other work of history can provide. This is a tale of ideology and disillusionment, a powerful work of political and literary importance”. (Ma Bo’s Blood Red Sunset, 1995)

“A haunting prison diary that depicts the epic sorrow and unmitigated human suffering that took place in the “re-education” camps of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.” (Zhang Xianliang’s Grass Soup, 1995)

“To travel through these stories is to cross a landscape of stunning beauty and terrific cruelty, where expectations are subverted, where moral certainties are shattered, where gorgeously wrought surfaces beguile at the same time that acts of incredible brutality horrify.” (Yu Hua’s The Past and The Punishment, 1996)

Moreover, the dissident identity of the Chinese authors is usually exploited and foregrounded on the covers. For example, on the back cover of Waves: Stories, the author is framed as a dissident writer who is censored in China and now living in exile: “Bei Dao himself has been a victim of the censors. […] The author now lives in exile” (Bei Dao Waves: Stories). Similarly, the back cover of Ma Bo’s Blood Red Sunset (1995) tells the reader that the book was “banned in its native land”, as shown in Figure 14. Thus, much of the reader’s attention is directed towards the political persecution of Chinese authors and their dissident identity. This framing strategy led many scholars to conclude that “the best marketing strategy for Chinese literature is to emblazon ‘banned in China’ on the cover” (Lovell 2006: 34).

Another form that this selective appropriation of political significance as the focal point in translated Chinese literature takes concerns the choice of writers and reviewers whose comments and endorsements appear on the covers of translated novels as a way of promoting
them. Some publishers tend to find Chinese novels such as Yan Geling’s *White Snake and Other Stories* (1999), Hong Ying’s *Daughter of the River* (1999) and *Summer of Betrayal* (1997), which echo the narrative storylines of memoirs written by immigrant women writers, credible and marketable. The dust jackets of many translated novels similar to *Wild Swans* bear endorsements or quotations from reviews by well-known Asian American authors, such as Amy Tan, to reinforce this narrative pattern. Not only is Tan an important Asian American writer, one who was repeatedly invited to review books that follow this pattern during the 1990s, but quoting her allows publishers to connect the translated texts about Communist China with the commercially successful themes of ‘authentic’ Chinese experience and the memories of Chinese American mothers and daughters that are prominent in her own writings (Grice 2002: 108). This can be seen from the back cover of Hong Ying’s autobiographical fiction *Daughter of the River* (1997), where the publisher, Bloomsbury, attempts to establish a connection with both *Wild Swans* and Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*: “Dealing as it does with the nightmare of Mao’s China, comparisons with Jung Chang’s *Wild Swans* will be inevitable, but Ying’s book more closely resembles Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*” (Hong Ying 1997).
Some publishers also attempt to establish a connection between Chinese writers and Chinese dissidents living abroad and consider this an effective strategy for promoting translated Chinese novels. For example, a famous Chinese human rights dissident, Liu Binyan, was often invited to comment on or review translated Chinese novels during the 1990s:

No other writer has fought as long and as bravely as Wang Ruowang for the human rights of the Chinese people, and no other writer has paid such a heavy price for doing so. This is a record of hunger written by the writer most qualified to address this theme. (Liu Bingyan, on the back cover of Wang Ruowang’s Hunger Trilogy, 1991)

A genuine, no-holds-barred, unadorned piece of writing…echoing the realities of contemporary China. (Liu Binyan, on the back cover of Ma Bo’s Blood Red Sunset, 1995)

Equating Chinese authors such as Zhang Xianliang, Wang Ruowang, Bei Dao and Ma Bo with human rights dissidents such as Liu Binyan has the effect of projecting them as fellow dissidents: it might indirectly (mis)guide readers to expect a story of dissidence and political
repression. And yet, *Hunger Trilogy*, for example, arguably does not quite fit this pattern. Written by Wang Ruowang in 1980 (translated in 1991) and based on his experience of being imprisoned by the Nationalist Party in the 1930s and 1940s, and the Communist Party in the 1960s, *Hunger Trilogy* is not a straightforward indictment of the Chinese government; instead, Wang expresses his hope for a New China at the very beginning of his novel: “And now I want to describe to you the three times I experienced this sort of hunger. I’m not telling you this to strengthen any sort of proletarian consciousness, but to express a hope” (Wang 1990: 3).

Such changes in weighting narrative elements led to the elaboration of a different pattern of causal emplotment in the Anglophone world. Paratextual framing which foregrounds political elements does not encourage Anglophone readers who are not already familiar with Chinese literature to appreciate translated Chinese novels as literary works; it thus makes it increasingly difficult for Chinese literature to be read for its artistic value, independently of its political significance. As Dian Li explains, for instance, despite attempts by the exiled poet and novelist Bei Dao to seek “forms of distance” from his political persona, and despite the increasingly inward turn of his poetry by the mid-1990s, he is now often read as a poet/novelist in exile, and the reading of his literary works is largely restricted by his political history (Li 1996: 369-384). Lovell similarly observes that

> [s]ince 1989 the rising public profile of a new Chinese dissidence has pressed Chinese writing published in the West still further into a corner occupied chiefly by memoirs of political persecution in Communist China. The slur of ‘ideology’ is erased by politics progressive enough to be congenial to Western audiences.

(Lovell 2006: 34)

The selective appropriation of novels on personal trauma persisted into the 1990s and gained currency and legitimacy in narrating China and the Chinese. The recurrent motif of trauma exposed “the West’s perennial fascination of the Orient by offering an unbalanced and uncritical examination of the authors’ personal and their nation’s traumatic past” (Chen 2008: 15). While the Chinese literary market began to show diversity and vigour in the 1990s, the selection of titles for English translation gradually narrowed the Chinese literary scene down to the theme of trauma about China’s political past.
4.3.2 Box-office Success: Exotic stories of China

Another important development that brought attention to Chinese novels is the success of Chinese cinema on the global stage in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Since the late 1980s the so-called ‘Fifth Generation’ filmmakers (for example, Zhang Yimo and Chen Kaige) have been making a major impact on the international stage by producing films about China’s recent history, culture and collective identity. These include Zhang Yimou’s Red Sorghum (1987), Ju Dou (1990), Raise the Red Lantern (1991), and The Story of Qiu Ju (1992), Chen Kaige’s Farewell My Concubine (1993), and Tian Zhuangzhuang’s The Blue Kite (1993), to name just a few. Many of these films and their directors won prestigious awards abroad and gained international financial backing. For example, Red Sorghum won the Golden Bear Award in the 38th Berlin International Film Festival in 1988. Raise the Red Lantern was nominated for the Academy Awards for the Best Foreign Language Film in 1991, and won the British Academy Film Awards for Best Film Not in the English Language in 1993. Its director, Zhang Yimou, won the Silver Lion Award in the Venice Film Festival in 1991. Farewell My Concubine was nominated for the Academy Awards for the Best Foreign Language Film in 1994; Chen Kaige won the Palme d’Or in the Cannes Film Festival in 1993.

With unprecedented vigour and impact in Chinese and world cinema, these films brought intriguing images of China to international audiences, partly because they are regarded as “authentically national, Chinese and Oriental” (Lu 1997: 105). These films brought international fame not only to fifth generation Chinese directors such as Zhang Yimou, but

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73 The term ‘Fifth Generation’ directors refers to the first group of students who graduated from the Beijing Film Academy in 1982, after the Academy’s reopening at the end of the Cultural Revolution. They are practically the first group to work after the death of Chairman Mao, and their innovations include “the switch out of Maoist socialist realism, the attempt to enter the international film market, and a general and severe questioning of Chinese film-making techniques, contents, aesthetics, and institutional structures” (Larson 1999: 196). Their personal experiences during the Cultural Revolution manifest themselves in their films and in their attempt to re-tell stories about modern Chinese history (Larson 1999: 196; Lin 2007: 151). The subject matter explored in their films not only reflects their attempt to comprehend and reproduce their wasted youth during the Cultural Revolution on the screen, but also serves to separate the fifth generation from the fourth generation (those who graduated from the Academy between the 1950s and the late 1970s) and the sixth generation (the younger filmmakers active in the 1990s and early 2000s). The best known fifth generation directors include Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige and Tian Zhuangzhuang.

74 Films such as Red Sorghum and Farewell My Concubine did not escape criticism. On the contrary, they were severely criticised for their cinematic representation of China “for the gaze of the West” (Lu 1997: 126), and their pandering to “the exoticism and eroticism that the capitalist West would like to assign to a commodified East” (Larson 1999: 184). By showing the ugly, dark, backward side of China’s past on screen, these Chinese directors, it has been argued, reinforced the static images and stereotypes of Orientalism rather than deconstructing them (Wang 1994). They ultimately proved to be “a cultural sell out” (Lu 1997: 105) on the international stage, or a form of “cultural exhibitionism” (Chow 1995: 166), designed to cater for “international fantasy” (Yau 1993: 95).
also to actors and actresses, most notably Gong Li – indeed, many foreign film enthusiasts consider these two names, i.e. Zhang Yimou and Gong Li, as key representatives of Chinese cinema (Lin 2007: 144-145).

Box-office successes in the global markets inspired interest in Chinese novels, especially those adapted for films, partly because some Anglophone critics and general readers were curious to establish whether the original novels were better than the movies (Kinkley 2000: 255). In the early 1990s, these novels were finally made available in English translation, and published and promoted by international, commercial publishers; they include Li Bihua’s *The Last Princess of Manchuria* (1992, published by HarperCollins in the US), Mo Yan’s *Red Sorghum* (1993, published by Penguin in the US and UK), Su Tong’s *Raise the Red Lantern* (1993, published by Simon & Schuster in the UK and US), and Li Bihua’s *Farewell My Concubine* (1993, published by HarperCollins in the US).

The promotion and packaging of these translated Chinese novels capitalised on the narrative currency of the award-winning Chinese films. Cinematic awards are often mentioned at some point in the introductory paragraphs on the back covers. Images of the leading actress Gong Li in scenes from the relevant films, for example, appear on the front covers of the novels, as shown in figures 15-18. As Reynaud argues, “what is remarkable about Gong is not so much her poise or versatility, but her ability to signify Chineseness, femininity and mystery outside her own culture” (Reynaud 1993: 15). Indeed, her fame, popularity and her established narrative role as an icon of ‘Chineseness’ meant that her image could be effectively exploited even on the covers of translated Chinese novels whose related films she played no leading role in. For example, *Farewell My Concubine* tells the story of two Chinese actors, Duan Xiaolou and Cheng Dieyi, who had been together since they started studying Beijing Opera as young boys. Xiaolou becomes a *sheng*, playing generals and other male leads, while Dieyi becomes a *dan*, playing his consort, concubine and other female leads in all-male Peking Operas. Dieyi becomes so immersed in his role that he falls in love with his ‘general’, the role played by Xiaolou. Instead of featuring the male actors who are relatively lesser known than Gong Li, it is Gong Li’s image that appears on the cover of the novel. Gong Li therefore came to function as an independent element in the public narrative of ‘Chineseness’ in circulation at the time, demonstrating one way in which relationality operates as a dimension of narrativity. In this case, a protagonist comes to acquire a specific value that is a function of
the configuration of the entire narrative under construction rather than a reflection of any inherent quality of the character.

Gong Li enjoyed international popularity among western audiences, and her appearance on the back cover of a translated novel will therefore have special resonance for them. In addition, she is considered to possess ‘Oriental’ qualities of Chineseness. It is interesting to note that new cover images of reprints of these novels in 2003 and 2004 replace the image of Gong Li with other visual elements (Figures 19 and 20). The new images rely on more universal symbolic icons of China, such as the red lantern, suggesting that these now occupy the same relational position in the narrative of ‘Chineseness’ that Gong Li occupied in the 1990s.

One of the consequences of the impact of box-office success on the selection and framing of Chinese novels for translation into English was to bring recognition to Mo Yan, Su Tong and Yu Hua on the stage of world literature. Mo Yan shot to fame when his novel *Red Sorghum* was adapted into the internationally acclaimed film bearing the same title. With a growing number of works subsequently translated into English, Mo Yan is frequently praised by international critics as the writer of his generation who is most likely to reach the first rank as “a truly great writer” (Inge 2000: 501). To date, this novel is still considered as Mo Yan’s best work and the best known work for English readers. It is no exaggeration to suggest that filmic success attracted sustained interest on the part of the publishers and readers.
Figure 15 Cover image of Su Tong’s *Raise the Red Lantern* (1993), published by Touchstone, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, in the UK and US

Figure 16 Cover image of Su Tong’s *Raise the Red Lantern* (1996), published by Penguin in the UK and US

Figure 17 Cover image of Mo Yan’s *Red Sorghum* (1994), published by Viking, an imprint of Penguin in the UK and US

Figure 18 Cover image of Li Bihua’s *Farewell My Concubine* (1994), published by Harper Perennial, an imprint of HarperCollins in the US
Wang Shuo’s *Playing for Thrills*, originally published in 1988, was also made available in English translation by No Exit Press in the UK and Penguin in the US in 1997. Depicted as the pioneer of the genre of ‘hooligan literature’ which emerged in the late 1980s, Wang Shuo generally abstains from engaging with dominant themes such as Maoist China in general and the Cultural Revolution in particular (Huang 2007: 64). Instead, he attempts to subvert mainstream values and traditions by focusing on marginalized youths living in urban China during the post-Mao era. His *Playing of Thrills* features as protagonists four young guys, who are addicted to alcohol, having sex and speaking to each other like characters in a gangster movie. Living dangerously in the Beijing urban underground in the late 1980s, these young people had lost their youth to the Cultural Revolution and now find themselves lacking the education or skills required in the new era of economic reform. Unlike most novels translated from Chinese, *Playing for Thrills* tells a brisk, sarcastic story which openly mocks the government and the political system, and may be responsible for the fact that Wang Shuo is perceived by many critics in and outside China as “a cultural, if not political, dissident” (Booker 2008: 746). Its UK and US publishers emphasise its unique style on the book cover: “this frightening, sometimes hilarious, always astonishing novel […] is totally unlike anything ever published from China before” (Wang 1997). They also align Wang Shuo with important writers of the Lost Generation in the US, such as Jack Kerouac, Joseph Heller and
Kurt Vonnegut, and foreground this on the back cover: “Wang Shuo has become one of the most provocative, influential, enchanting – and widely read – writers in China. He romanticizes young alienated rebels in much the same way that Jack Kerouac did. He explores the paradoxes and absurdities of society, as Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut do” (Wang 1997). This framing helps to position Wang Shuo within a narrative framework that is familiar to UK and US readers. The second translation of a work by Wang Shuo, Please Don’t Call Me Human (2000), appeared soon after in the UK and US, and had a considerable impact on English-speaking readers (Chan 2003: 166).

4.4 The 2000s

The first decade of the new millennium witnessed the elaboration of a narrative of China which highlights the country’s economic boom and its role in revitalizing global economy. Driven by economic considerations, the UK and US leaderships re-cast China in the role of a potential strategic partner. At the same time, however, this narrative is undercut in the US by a recognition, perhaps even fear, of the challenge China now poses to America’s dominant position in the world. Driven by this shifting narrative, the 2000s witnessed a heightening interest in Chinese novels. Many UK and US publishers and translators have commented on the increasing demand for Chinese books in their markets. Jo Lusby, manager of Penguin China, explains that “it used to be assumed that [Western readers] were interested in books about China, but not necessarily from China. Now that’s changing” (Larson 2012). The overall book market for Chinese books has expanded in the UK and US: “seven or eight years ago, there wouldn’t have been the market to sustain what we’re doing. Today it’s challenging business, but it’s commercially as well as literarily worthwhile for us” (Larson 2012). Jane Friedman, President and CEO of HarperCollins Publishers Worldwide, also confirms that introducing Chinese literature to a wider audience has become a worthwhile undertaking for commercial publishers: “we see English translation of Chinese literary works as an underserved category and therefore an opportunity” (Miller 2006).

Against this background, 87 titles were translated and published in the UK and the US during the 2000s, accounting for more than half of the total number of translations published in the past 3 decades. Many of the translated Chinese novels were published and promoted by international publishers; some Chinese writers, such as Mo Yan, Su Tong and Yu Hua, rose to prominence and won recognition on the global stage. In 2000, Gao Xingjian, a Chinese-
born novelist and playwright living in France, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. According to the Nobel Prize Committee’s Press Release, Gao Xingjian was awarded the prize “for an oeuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese novel and drama”\textsuperscript{75}.

Towards the end of the 2000s, there emerged a growing emphasis on new voices and new themes to be translated into English on the part of UK and US publishers (Abrahamsen 2012), as some publishers began to realise that Chinese novels available in English “aren’t representative of the diversity of Chinese writing today” (Leese 2013). Eric Abrahamsen, an American translator based in Beijing, points out that although “translators remain at the mercy of publishing whims, fads and general confusion”, they are still very “interested in providing a broad picture [of Chinese literature], rather than just picking a few people and making them our project” (Cornell 2012). Driven by market needs, major international publishers such as Penguin, HarperCollins and Macmillan began to set up branches in China to enable them to compete in identifying promising novels and new novelists. Penguin, the first international publisher to set up an office in China in 2005, has been at the forefront of this move to find new Chinese writers whose works might resonate outside China, as well as within China. It released the English translation of Jiang Rong’s \textit{Wolf Totem} in 2008, a bestselling Chinese novel about a Beijing intellectual’s travels to the grasslands of Inner Mongolia to live among the nomadic Mongols – a brave and ancient people who coexist in perfect harmony with the grassland. Following in Penguin’s footsteps, HarperCollins established a partnership with the People’s Literature Publishing House in 2006, with the aim of translating and publishing classic Chinese literary works in English-speaking markets (Miler 2006). Macmillan, meanwhile, also started a new publishing division, Picador Asia, based in Hong Kong in 2007.

In addition to the efforts made by publishers in identifying new writers in China, an increasing number of communicative channels between the UK and US publishers and Chinese writers have been established in recent years. First, literary agents were established to represent Chinese writers who are lesser known in the UK and US. Founded in 2006, Peony Literary Agency, based in Hong Kong and Beijing, represents Han Han, a young writer of the post-80s generation, and other well-established writers such as Su Tong. It

\textsuperscript{75} See \url{http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2000/press.html} [Last accessed 20 November 2012].
successfully sold the copyright of the English translation of Han Han’s novel *1988: I Want to Talk with the World* (2011) and his collections of essays *This Generation* (2012) to Simon & Shuster. Second, some websites, blogs and literary magazines were set up by translators towards the end of the 2000s to create spaces where new talented Chinese writers are translated and introduced to UK and US publishers. For example, magazines such as *Pathlight, Chutzpah* and *Asymptote* and websites such as Paper Republic have been established to introduce works published by young Chinese authors and to help them find English publishers and reach a wider readership.

The following sections attempt to trace some of the recurrent themes and storylines that characterise the narratives selected for translation during this period.

### 4.4.1 Novels on Personal Trauma: Foregrounding China’s Repressive Character

Novels on personal trauma continued to capture the imagination of Anglophone readers during the 2000s. A number of Chinese novels drawing on the theme of Maoist China and Tiananmen Square event were selected for translation in the UK and US during this period; these include Lin Zhe’s *Old Town* (2010), Su Tong’s *The Boat to Redemption* (2010), Bi Feiyu’s *Three Sisters* (2010), Ah Cheng’s *The King of Trees* (2010), Yu Hua’s *Brothers* (2009), Han Dong’s *Banished!* (2009), Wang Gang’s *English: A Novel* (2009), Yang Xianhui’s *Women from Shanghai: Tales of Survival from a Chinese Labour Camp* (2009), Xu Xiaobin’s *Feathered Serpent* (2009), Zhang Wei’s *Seven Kinds of Mushrooms: A Novel of the Cultural Revolution* (2009), Zhang Wei’s *The Ancient Ship* (2008), Mo Yan’s *Life and Death are Wearing me Out* (2008), Ma Jian’s *Beijing Coma* (2008), Yan Lianke’s *Serve the People!* (2007), Bi Feiyu’s *The Moon Opera* (2007), Zhang Wei’s *September’s Fable: A Novel* (2007), Yu Hua’s *Cries in the Drizzle: A Novel* (2007), Mo Yan’s *Big Breast and Wide Hips* (2004), Ma Jian’s *The Noodle Maker* (2004), Ma Jian’s *Sticking out of Your Tongue* (2003), Yu Hua’s *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* (2003) and *To Live* (2003), Gao Xingjian’s *One Man’s Bible* (2002), Liu Heng’s *Green River Daydreams: A Novel* (2001), Ma Jian’s

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76 Founded by Eric Abrahamsen, Cindy Carter and Brendan O’Kane, Paper Republic is a website dedicated to contemporary Chinese literature in English translation. It serves as a source of information about Chinese literature for interested readers; it also provides a platform for publishers to select translators. Paper Republic have made considerable effort to promote Chinese literature to UK and US publishers since its foundation in 2007. For example, since 2008, Abrahamsen and his team of more than a dozen translators have submitted a total of 15 proposed titles to publishers, though only four have been received and published in the UK and US (Shu 2012).
These translated novels, which reveal a deep preoccupation with cultural and political turbulence in Maoist China and post-Tiananmen China and engage in the artistic exploration of historical experience as trauma, construct a space where modern Chinese history is mediated and the tension between remembering and forgetting is negotiated. Given the fact that certain historical episodes such as the Tiananmen Square event are suppressed or even completely omitted from official histories, popular culture and the collective unconscious in China, many Chinese writers of novels on personal trauma, such as Ma Jian, Yan Lianke, Yang Xianhui and Yu Hua, tend to construct a narrative of modern Chinese history which foregrounds these suppressed episodes, and which serves to preserve the past from being assimilated, misrepresented or even repressed by the government. As the dissident writer Ma Jian states, “this whole period in Chinese history has been completely erased. […] I wanted to chronicle these events [in *Beijing Coma*], to hammer them down like nails in a piece of wood, so no one would be able to forget” (Interview, *The Independent*, 2008). Based on this narrative position of preserving modern Chinese history from being misrepresented by the Chinese government, Ma Jian draws on the theme of Tiananmen to elaborate in *Beijing Coma* a powerful epic story of a student, Dai Wei, who was shot in the head while participating in the Tiananmen Square protest. Dai Wei then fell into a coma but somehow his mind remained active. His memories of the past, from the Maoist China to post-Tiananmen era, were retained. When he woke up from his decade-long coma in the 2000s, Dai Wei found that China had changed beyond recognition as a result of economic reforms, and that the Chinese seemed content with their new found material comfort but indifferent to the history which is re-written by the government. This story concludes with Dai Wei’s warning of the danger of forgetting Tiananmen:

> We’re the ‘Tiananmen Generation’, but no one dares call us that. […] It’s taboo. We’ve been crushed and silenced. If we don’t take a stand now, we will be erased from the history books. The economy is developing at a frantic pace. In a few more years the country will be so strong, the government will have nothing to fear, and no need or desire to listen to us. So if we want to change our lives, we must take action now.

(Ma 2008)

*Beijing Coma* offers the fullest account yet of the Tiananmen event in fiction (Kong 2012: 184) and is often perceived as a masterpiece of Tiananmen literature. Released by Random House in the UK and US shortly before the 2008 Beijing Games, at a point when China was
attempting to elaborate a narrative of cultural harmony and economic power, *Beijing Coma* constructed a contesting narrative which exposed this harmony as, at least, partly a delusion. As Whittaker, a commentator writing for the *New Internationalist Magazine* which focuses on issues of global justice, stated, “given this summer’s Olympics and the international focus on the occupation of Tibet and the Chinese government’s appalling human rights record, *Beijing Coma* could hardly be more timely or relevant” (Whittaker 2008). Appropriated in this temporal configuration, *Beijing Coma*, together with other stories of personal trauma written by Ma Jian, served to construct a competing narrative which undermined the potency of China’s own account of itself as a harmonious, rising economic power fit and able to reshape the world.

It is this narrative which foregrounds themes suppressed by Beijing and causally emplots the Chinese government as oppressor and human rights violator that allows publishers and many literary critics to frame Ma Jian as a ‘bold’, ‘authentic’ voice from China who deserves ‘our’ support and respect (Abell 2008). As Thien states, “great literature [such as *Beijing Coma*] doesn’t exist for the privileged, the narcissistic or the powerful, as so much contemporary North American literature seems unthinkingly to do” (Thien 2014). Indeed, when dissident writers are silenced by the Chinese government on the international stage and UK and US governments fail to defend to them in their attempt to appease the new, growing economic power, UK and US media often voice their support for them. The 2012 London International Book Fair is a good example. The book fair, which was perceived by the British government as an event to “deepen understanding and strengthen cultural and business links between the UK and China”, invited over 180 Chinese publishers and featured 21 writers from Beijing, but excluded dissident writers living abroad, such as Ma Jian and Liao Yiwu. The British Council’s “collaboration with China” received severe criticism from British media. The narrative elaborated by the British media drew on themes of censorship and freedom of speech, and exerted great influence on the British Council, which was eventually forced to invite Ma Jian to the Fair. In a joint open letter clarifying their position in relation to censorship and collaboration with China and published in *The Guardian*, Allistair Burtenshaw, Director of the London Book Fair, and Susie Nicklin, Director of Literature at the British Council, assured readers that “censorship and human rights are expected to feature prominently in all the discussions and debates” because these are “the key issues for UK
audiences” and “the debate that is arising around these issues is welcome” (Burtenshaw and Nicklin 2012).

Narratives that foreground China’s oppressive policies and its cruel past could sometimes still be published in China, and continued to be popular in the US and UK. Yang Xianhui’s Woman from Shanghai (2009), an interview-based story, recounts the horrors of prison and labour camp life during the 1960s and 1970s. As a “sent-down youth” in Gansu province between 1965 and 1981, Yang vaguely heard from some ex-inmate workers about the previous existence of a certain Jiabiangou Farm (a labour-remoulding camp) in a barren region in Gansu province as well as the tragic and appalling fate of its numerous inmates in 1959-1960 (Yang 2002: 335). Yang then travelled to Gansu province and interviewed survivors of the camp. In order to avoid censorship by the Chinese government, which “has engaged in a systematic cover-up involving the sabotage and elimination of many historical materials over the past decades”, Yang had to incorporate “some fictional elements […] in an effort to carry out […] the mission of defending and protecting memories” (Huang 2009: xii-xiii). In order to ensure that the novel would be published in China, Yang’s Chinese editor and publishers had to publish the book “under the category of fiction, even though they were well aware of the journalistic nature of Yang’s works. They knew that the stories were closely based on true events and taken from the author’s interviews with survivors” (Huang 2009: xiii). Despite the fact that this title reiterates and reinforces the same narrative of labour camps during the Cultural Revolution, a narrative which first began to attract western interest in the late 1980s and could still find an audience in the 2000s, it quickly sold out after the first print run was well received in the US. Halzack, a reviewer for The Washington Post, confirms this even as he recommends the book to readers:

Readers of Mr. Yang’s book should not be put off by the frequent recurrence of common elements in these stories: the exposure to bitter cold; hunger so intense as to cause inmates to eat human flesh; the familiar sequence of symptoms, beginning with edema, that lead down the path to death; the toolbox of common survivor techniques, from toadyism to betrayal, from stealthy theft to making use of the vestiges of privilege, which survived even incarceration in this era of radical egalitarianism. It is through the accumulation and indeed repetition of such things that this utterly convincing portrait of a society driven far off the rails is drawn.

(Halzack 2009)

Xu Xiaobin’s Feathered Serpent (2009) is framed in the same way. The following introductory paragraph appears on the back cover of the English translation:
To avoid and survive the fierce government censorship that governs all publications in the People's Republic of China, Xu Xiaobin masterfully created an atmosphere where the distinction between past and present is blurred; memories of previous and present lives are intertwined; and realities and illusions are fused.

(Xu 2009)

The potency of this narrative, which plots the Chinese government as human rights violator, encourages many UK and US institutes, media and universities to create a public space for the dissident writers to circulate and promote their personal narratives on modern Chinese history as well as their narratives on censorship and human rights in China. For example, English Pen, an institute which advocates freedom of writing and reading, organised a public talk entitled ‘Ma Jian’s public talks: Ma Jian and Isabel Hilton in conversation: China’s literary dissidents and F: Hu Feng’s Prison Years’ in 2013. The University of Oxford China Centre also invited Ma Jian to give a public talk about “the way in which contemporary Chinese youth did not seem to value political involvement the way his generation had; the different relationship that politics had towards literature in China and the West and the difficulties of being in exile”.

Many mainstream newspapers such as The Independent and The Guardian have also interviewed Ma Jian (Merritt 2004; unauthored 2008). It is through these various channels of communication, together with the promotion work undertaken by their publishers, that narratives of modern Chinese history and human rights elaborated about and by dissidents gain wider circulation in the UK and US.

With repeated translation of novels on personal trauma, this pattern has been normalised through translation and other non-fictional literature to such an extent that it might discourage UK and US editors from publishing Chinese authors who write novels that do not feature characters who have suffered physical as well as mental hardship during the Cultural Revolution; or intellectuals as well as educated youths who were uplifted from their urban homes and exiled to China’s rural areas. P.P. Wong, a British-born Chinese novelist living in America, recently alluded to this by telling the story of her friend’s book proposal, “a contemporary comedy on growing up as an Asian-American” (Wong 2014), which was rejected by many American publishers. Many of the comments that Wong’s writer friend received from the editors emphasise the fact that his identity as American Chinese does not sit comfortably with the usual subject matter explored in Asian literature:

The novel was a fascinating take on Asian American culture. We were very impressed by his poignant and humorous story. However, we are currently publishing the books of a ‘Famous Asian’ writer so we believe there may be some overlap if we take this book on. We wish ‘Asian Friend’ all the very best in his writing endeavours.

(Wong 2014)

According to Wong, the story told by this ‘Famous Asian’ writer foregrounds traumatic experiences in Maoist China whereas her friend’s novel tells stories about growing up in America as Asian Chinese. Another editor’s points responded to the proposal thus: “As much as I loved the writing, due to the subject matter, I’m not sure whether it will be something that can sell in our economic climate. The novel does not seem to fit into the genre of our current Asian authors and we do not know how to place it in the market” (Wong 2014). Wong’s account suggests that the pattern of personal trauma is so formalised in relation to China in the US and UK that it leaves little room for novels that explore other themes. Prioritising one pattern of recounting modern Chinese history not only runs the risk of essentialising this period of history, but may also exclude or marginalise multiple voices and perspectives from participating in the construction of narratives of modern China. For example, Lin Bai’s Zhi 1975 (To 1975) and Manyou Geming Shidai (Wandering around in Revolutionary Years) significantly downplay issues of trauma and persecution, but foreground revolutionary idealism during the Cultural Revolution. These novels reflect young people’s idealistic narratives of Communism and their genuine yearning for social change in China during the 1970s. Ning Ken’s Chenmo Zhimen (The Gate of Silence) and Du Min’s Xuese Langman (The Scarlet Romance) depict stories of happy childhood in Maoist China, emphasise elements such as friendship, and explore how their revolutionary zeal subsided and was replaced by dreams of going to university once the Cultural Revolution came to an end. Another American Chinese writer, Yan Geling, also engages with the theme of the Cultural Revolution from a different perspective. Her early short stories, originally written in the 1980s and 1990s, include White Snakes and Celestial Bath, both of which expose the cruelty of the Cultural Revolution and highlight traumatic experiences in Maoist China from a feminist perspective. These were compiled and published in English under the title White Snakes and Other Stories in 1999. However, her recent full-length novels, such as Dijiuge Guafu (The Ninth Widow, 2006) and Xiaoyi Duohe (Aunt Duohe, 2008), downplay descriptions of trauma and suffering relating to the Cultural Revolution and stress the link between the ten-year political turmoil and Chinese culture, rather than the Communist Party (Chen 2009; Zhang 2010). While they were hailed by Chinese literary critics (Chen 2008),
the novels have not been selected for translation into English to date.

4.4.2 Romanticising China and Consuming Orientalism

During the 2000s, a number of Chinese novels that engage with love relationships and romance were selected for translation into English. Unlike novels which focus on personal trauma and historical experience, some of the novels examined here draw on orientalist tropes and create a highly romanticised and gendered narrative of China. Hong Ying’s The Concubine of Shanghai (2008), Su Tong’s Binu and the Great Wall of China (2007), Su Tong’s My Life as Emperor (2005), Shih Shu-ching’s City of the Queen: A Novel of Colonial Hong Kong (2005), Hong Ying’s Peacock Cries: At the Three Gorges (2004), Hong Ying’s K: The Art of Love (2002), Ye Zhaoyan’s Nanjing 1937: A Love Story (2002), and Yan Geling’s The Lost Daughter of Happiness (2001), Wei Hui’s Marrying Buddha (2005), Chun Shu’s Beijing Doll (2004), Guo Xiaolu’s Village of Stone (2004), Mian Mian’s Candy (2003), Alai’s Red Poppies (2001) and Wei Hui’s Shanghai Baby (2001). The promotion of these novels relies heavily on female images featured on book covers in order to appeal to domestic readers.

In this romanticised narrative of China, Chinese women, who are often identified as the main characters in the translated romance, are constructed as mysterious, erotic and seductive. The protagonist appears to be a nostalgic relic of an indeterminate, oriental past: she is beautiful, oppressed and brutalised by a patriarchal society; she appears as a mystery, outside the reach of modernity. For example, Yan Geling’s The Lost Daughter of Happiness (2001) tells a story of a Chinese prostitute, Fusang, in 19th-century Chinatown in San Francisco and her intriguing love relations with two men. Fusang is constructed as a mysterious and inscrutable woman in the eyes of Chris, her American lover. Chris’s obsession with Fusang is partly fed by his racial and sexual fantasies of the Orient. When Chris first visits Fusang in her brothel in Chinatown, he “carries with him all the fairy tales and adventure stories he has consumed and the assumption that the Orient is a realm of fascinating mysteries” (Jin 2006: 581). The plot suggests that Chris approached Fusang with a set of Orientalist fantasies that increased his love for her. In Chris’s imagination, Fusang is cast as “an infant or an innocent savage, untouched by civilization”: her bounded feet looked like “fishtails” that “signify both stunted evolution and cruel mutilation”; her strongly accented English “predate[s] human language” (Jin 2006: 581). His perception of Fusang is thus heavily shaped by a range of Orientalist
discourses and images circulating in 19th-century America, and contributes to his idea of rescuing Fusang, as evident in the narrator’s voice in the novel: “his infatuation with you [Fusang] has left him time for nothing else. In his dreams, he is much taller, brandishing a long sword. A knight of courage and passion. An Oriental princess imprisoned in a dark cell waits for him to rescue her” (Yan 2001: 19).

Apart from the construct of Chinese women as mysterious, other attributes of Chinese women drawn from the narrative of orientalism, such as femininity and hypersexuality, are also foregrounded. The romances feature prostitutes, concubines, and impoverished girls who exploit sex to achieve material success. This narrative of Chinese women resonates with the ‘China doll’ motif, a portrayal that “often associates Asian women with Western fantasies of available hyper-sexuality and youthful, graceful, compliant femininity and idealised womanhood” (Lyne 2002). Fetishised as a super-feminised exotic object, the Chinese doll creates Chinese women as “inscrutable, petite, […], subservient, […], quiet, docile, overly feminine women whose main role is to please and serve men” (Leo 2009: 22).

Interestingly, images of Chinese women as exotic and seductive are closely associated with the imaginary construction of colonial Chinese cities such as Shanghai, Nanking (Nanjing) and Hong Kong in the early 20th century, well before the Communist Party’s takeover of China: women are essential elements in the imagination of the colonial cities and the cities provide a discursive construct with which to capture woman. Take the city of Shanghai as an example. As one of the most tenacious themes that have a hold on the western imagination, the Shanghai that emerged from literary imagination is a mix of colonialism, cosmopolitism and modernity, social climbing and sexuality, the search for a modern Chinese identity and the formation of patriotic feelings78. Known as ‘Paris of the Orient’ or ‘the whore of the East’ (Nosirrah and Grace 2010: 198), Shanghai in the first half of the 20th century, especially during the 1920s and 1930s, became an international legend and a world of splendid modernity, which set it apart from most parts of China that were still tradition-bound and poverty-driven. Hundreds of female entertainers, including singing girls, dancers, cabaret artists and prostitutes, sprouted up in brothels, opera houses and opium dens to cater to night time dreams and fantasies cherished by people from around the world. These Chinese women

78 Zhang points out that Shanghai invites various imaginations in literature and cinema in both China and the West: it is a city of “higher education and western enlightenment”, “career opportunities and financial speculations”, “romantic fulfilment and sexual adventure” and “revolutionary activity and national salvation” (Zhang 1996: 189).
thus formed an essential particularization in the storyline of the Shanghai adventure in western literature. As Sergeant observes, Shanghai at its golden age can find no parallel in the imagination of western readers:

In the twenties and thirties Shanghai became a legend. No world cruise was complete without a stop in the city. Its name evoked mystery, adventure and licence of every form. In ships sailing to the Far East, residents enthralled passengers with stories of the ‘Whore of the Orient’. They described Chinese gangsters, nightclubs that never closed and hotels which supplied heroin on room service. They talked familiarly of warlords, spy rings, international arms dealers and the peculiar delights on offer in Shanghai’s brothels. Long before landing, wives dreamed of the fabulous shops; husbands of half an hour in the exquisite grip of a Eurasian girl.

(Sergeant 1991: 3)

This particular temporal and spatial configuration becomes the setting where the tragic stories of impoverished Chinese female protagonists unfold; they include Hong Ying’s *The Concubine of Shanghai* (2008), Wang Anyi’s *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow: A Novel of Shanghai* (2008), Zhang Ailing’s *Lust, Caution* (2007) and *Love in a Fallen City* (2007), Shih Shu-ching’s *City of the Queen: A Novel of Colonial Hong Kong* (2005), Hong Ying’s *K: The Art of Love* (2002) and Ye Zhaoyan’s *Nanjing 1937: A Love Story* (2002). These stories follow a similar storyline: a fragile beauty is destined to end up in colonized cities such as Shanghai, Hong Kong and Nanking, where she leads a difficult life; she manipulates powerful men by means of sex; and she finally finds herself ruined by this cosmopolitan city (Juzefovic 2011: 78). Some UK and US readers find this setting in Shanghai interesting and intriguing, as Meghan suggests in relation to *The Concubine of Shanghai*: “the early 20th century Chinese setting was very interesting […], particularly with the mafia-like “brotherhoods” and the difference between the country and the city. These are things I rarely come across in fiction” (Meghan 2009).

This feature of relationality between colonial cities and the image of decadent Chinese women is often exploited by the publishers who attempt to set up an interpretative framework and encourage readers to anticipate the stories in a particular way. The translation of Wang Anyi’s *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (2008) is a case in point. As one of Wang Anyi’s best works, *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* tells a story of a girl’s life, spanning forty years in Shanghai. Michael Berry, one of the translators, stated in an interview that initially they attempted to have the translation published by a commercial publishing house. Although many publishers showed interest, they all required considerable changes to be made to the
translation, including a change of title. One of the publishers suggested *Miss Shanghai* as an alternative title, rather than *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* which is a direct translation of the original Chinese (Berry 2008). The publisher argued that using *Miss Shanghai* as a title would hold more appeal for potential readers. The author, however, firmly refused to go along with this suggestion and the publication of the translation was significantly delayed as a result. It eventually had to come out with a university publisher, namely Columbia University Press, who promised to keep the translation as close to the original as possible.

Publishers exploit this narrative of Shanghai to promote translations to readers, as evident in the change of title in the case of Hong Ying’s *The Concubine of Shanghai* (2008). The novel tells a story of an impoverished Chinese girl, Cassia, who was sold by her uncle to a brothel in Shanghai to work as a prostitute. She later meets Chang, the boss of the fearsome Shanghai Triad, and quickly becomes his favourite mistress and enjoys a luxurious life. After the violent death of Chang, Cassia rises to a prominent position in the triad and becomes the godmother of Shanghai. The central theme of the novel is Cassia’s struggle to survive and her ability to become the most powerful woman in the 1930s and 1940s Shanghai. The original title of the Chinese version, literally translated as ‘The Lord of Shanghai’, was changed into *The Concubine of Shanghai* for the English version, leading to a new configuration by highlighting the protagonist’s sexuality and downplaying her rise to power. The English title not only erases the feminist meaning signalled by the author, but also evokes in readers’ imagination oriental elements such as the arranged marriage, the concubine system, and even sexual abuse suffered by women in a primitive and oppressive non-Western culture. In this sense, the new title evokes a colonial narrative and triggers sympathy for a poor Oriental woman in need. This new narrative paradigm suppresses the author’s attempt to creating an image of a strong, courageous Chinese woman as a challenge to the China doll construct.

The emphasis on sexuality and attempt to frame Chinese women as seductive are central to a number of other Chinese stories, which devote long passages to detailed descriptions of sexual encounters. The theme of oriental sex is considered by many publishers as a “money-spinning ingredient” which many western readers, particularly male readers, are “especially eager for” (Mirsky 2002: 32). For example, Hong Ying’s stories are uncompromising portrayals of prostitutes and concubines who seduce and control even the most powerful men with their sexual wiles. Her novel *K: The Art of Love*, which tells a story of the Bloomsbury poet Julian Bell and his illicit love affair with a Chinese writer known as Lin during the
1930s, focuses on adultery and offers detailed descriptions of the Daoist-inspired lovemaking of the two young writers. The heroine is “a furnace in bed, fuelled by her devotion to an ancient Daoist sex manual, namely The Art of Love” (Tew 2009). She overpowers Julian with unforgettable sex, described in the detailed terms which authors and publishers see as a gold mine. Lin taught the young Bell in The Art of Love sexual skills and self-cultivation from a Daoist text, which was secretly passed on from Lin’s mother to her. Long descriptions of Lin and Bell’s sexual encounters – with “bodes bathed in sweat, glued together” – are replete throughout the novel. Sex and love are salient topics in Hong Ying’s other novels (Tew 2009). Contrary to the publisher’s expectations, however, many readers find the excessive and detailed descriptions of sex distasteful, going as far as describing the novel as “soft porn” (Wilberg 2009). One reader complains that apart from the awkward prose and the translation, the detailed sexual scenes make the novel vulgar: “worse, it was far more erotic than I’d bargained for and I’m sure some of the scenes should be up there as the worst written sex in fiction. I think the novel would have been far, far better off with just suggestion rather than going into the details” (Meghan 2009).

An important breach is signalled in the portrayal of female characters and their positions in Chinese novels which feature inter-racial relationships. Conventionally this storyline follows a pattern of dominance and submission in which “race and gender difference mark the boundaries of the orientalised other” in a manner that allows erasure and suppression of the threatening Chinese image (Yamamoto 1999: 22). Desirable, gendered Chinese qualities identify the Chinese woman as sympathetic, and even pathetic because her obedience does not allow her to fight back the injustice she suffers. Her subordinate status in her own society justifies the rescuing role assigned to the western white man. This configuration of Chinese women as mysterious, sexually available and hungering for contact with the West is evident in many canonical works, including Giacomo Puccini’s Madame Butterfly, and Schönberg and Boublil’s Miss Saigon79.

Recent translated novels which feature interracial relations deviate from the conventional storyline by reversing the role of Chinese women and white male protagonists and

79 Madame Butterfly is an opera written by Giacomo Puccini in the 1890s. It tells a love story between an American lieutenant and Japanese Geisha girl. Later, the opera was adapted into film, musical and ballet. Miss Saigon is a musical written by Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil. It is based on Giacomo Puccini’s opera Madame Butterfly, and similarly tells the tragic tale of a doomed romance involving a Vietnamese woman abandoned by her American lover, set in the 1970s Saigon during the Vietnam War.
positioning the former in the dominant place in this relation. A powerful set of images of Chinese women’s empowerment and western males’ attempts to maintain order and dominance in these cross-cultural sexual relations are recurring motifs. This shifting narrative pattern can be read as a challenge to the western imaginary of China. For example, in Hong Ying’s *K: The Art of Love* (2002), mentioned above, the female protagonist Lin emotionally and physically controls Julian Bell and has the upper hand in the relationship. Her dominance also challenges Bell’s understanding of the Chinese woman as a docile China doll, as Tew points out: “[Lin] appears to challenge Julian’s downfall: he believed that all the Oriental women are docile sweetness” (Tew 2009: 405). Eventually, Bell has to admit that he was another Westerner in China, “attracted to the ‘exotic’ but contemptuous of Chinese people and their culture” (Jennings 2003). Similarly, Yan Geling in *The Lost Daughter of Happiness*, a triangle love story between a Chinese prostitute, Fusang, and her American lover Chris and Chinese lover Dayong, reverses the role of the dominated Chinese woman and the dominant white male in the conventional storyline. UK and US critics consider the character of Fusang, though opaque and inscrutable, as an implicit challenge to the Orientalist narrative in which the West dominates the Orient and has the ability to know, understand and analyse it; as reviewer Julia Lovell writes, the novel “subverts the basic tenet of Orientalism – that the Orient can be read” (Lovell 2001: 20). Jeffrey Kinkley similarly comments that the character of Fusang enables the plot to break out of the predictable storyline of “white men saving yellow women from yellow men” (Kinkley 2002: 136).

The image of China that emerges from this pattern of translated romance is not only one that is highly gendered and exoticized, but also in a sense depoliticized. By depicting the daily lives and trivial experience of ordinary people, these romances attempt to explore the unofficial stories, intimate life-worlds and memories usually hidden by the exploration of grand themes such as history, war and nationalism. *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, for example, as Choy points out, elaborates “a social history of everyday life [in Shanghai] that is created against the grain of the grand narrative of political history” (Choy 2008). The author, Wang Anyi, “avoids major historical events as if civil war, famine and Cultural Revolution have never occurred” by focusing on the basic everyday aspects of Shanghai and the life of an ordinary girl (Hockx 2008). History, as such, remains in the background. Similarly, *K: The Art of Love* does not devote long paragraphs to recounting the historical and political contexts of the warfare that tore apart communities in the 1930s, including civil war between Chinese
Communists and the Guomindang, Fascist Japan’s invasion of China, and General Franco’s coup against the Republican Government in the Spanish Civil War. In other books, too, Hong Ying used dramatic and violent moments in Chinese history as backdrops for her fiction. But her focus has tended to be on individual emotion and the torments of love, as in the case of the doomed affair of Lin and Bell in K: The Art of Love. Another Chinese author, Su Tong, in created in My Life as an Emperor an imaginary empire tied to no particular time and history. Unlike authors who dig into archives and documents for facts and historical details to create a semblance of history in fiction, Su Tong cautions his readers against treating this novel as historical fiction by pointing out that “identifying allusions and determining the accuracy of events places too great a burden” on reader and author (Su 2005: 6).

The framing and promotion of translated Chinese romance novels during this period rely heavily on employing images of young, porcelain doll-like Chinese women whose femininity and seductiveness are emphasized in order to appeal to an implied Western audience: the women usually have long dark hair, delicately-constructed bodies and porcelain-like skin; they may look down or sideways, giving a suggestive smile or gaze which signifies either Oriental myth or erotic desire (Figures 21-24). Some book covers also frame Chinese women in ways that foreground their ethnic otherness: the figure on the cover typically wears traditional Chinese dress or costumes of Beijing opera and heavy makeup, and is surrounded by a number of Chinese objects such as fans, blossoms, chopsticks and even some random Chinese characters that make no particular sense. These seductive spectacles direct audiences’ attention to voyeuristic pleasure. While these sexual and erotic exhibitions present Chinese women for the viewing modes of fantasy and possession, what makes this framing more problematic is its double otherness, constructed not only by gender, but also by national and racial difference. The socially violated yet visually eroticized image thus offers the audience a taste of cultural otherness and sexual satisfaction.

In addition, this portrayal rarely makes any distinctions between women from Japan, China and South East Asia (Lyne 2002; Kim and Chung 2005): the woman on the covers appears as a Madam Butterfly, a courtesan, a geisha and a Lotus Blossom Baby, an image that historically narrates Chinese or East Asian women as exotic, enticing, subservient, pampered, self-sacrificing, self-effacing and sensual. As Renee Tajina points out, “Asian women […] are interchangeable in appearance and name, and are joined together by the common language of non-language” (Tajina 1989: 309).
In contrast to the female images discussed above, the construct of Chinese males is less appealing. They are either marginal or unattractive in appearance; on most book covers it is Chinese boys rather men that are featured. During the 2000s, only 3 titles featured young Chinese males on their covers (figures 25-27). Thus, the profoundly gendered narrative of China that emerges from translated book covers during this period is further reinforced and legitimised by the absence of Chinese males, who enjoy less visibility compared to their female counterparts.

Featuring Chinese women on book covers also has implications for another feature of narrativity, namely, genericness. This type of image on a cover is associated with the genre of romance or chick literature, but some UK and US publishers disregard generic connotations in their choice of cover images. A case in point is Yang Xianhui’s *Women from Shanghai: Tales of Survival from a Chinese Labour Camp* (2009). As a story which recounts the horrors of prison and labour camp life during the 1960s and 1970s, this novel is widely praised by many critics and reviewers as “China's *Gulag Archipelago*” (Martinsen 2009; Yu 2009). However, the publisher, Pantheon – an imprint of Random House, associates this highly political novel with Asian chick literature by featuring an image of a sensuous looking Chinese woman on the front cover of the 2009 hardcover edition (Figure 28). The woman is featured in traditional Chinese clothes, *qipao*. The upper half of her face is cropped, and her lips are bright red and slightly open. This choice of image misrepresents the content of the
Figure 21 Front cover of Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby* (2001), published by Robinson in the UK

![Shanghai Baby](image1.jpg)

Figure 22 Front cover of *The Lost Daughter of Happiness* (2001), published by Faber in the UK

![Lost Daughter of Happiness](image2.jpg)

Figure 23 Front cover of Hong Ying’s *K: The Art of Love* (2002), published by Marion Boyars in the UK

![K: The Art of Love](image3.jpg)

Figure 24 Front cover of *The Concubine of Shanghai* (2008), published by Marion Boyars in the UK

![The Concubine of Shanghai](image4.jpg)
book, and the new configuration in which Yang’s story is embedded encourages readers to anticipate a story of a sensuous oriental girl. The theme of the novel is thus changed through the visual messages on the book cover. Dissatisfaction with the use of this image led to its replacement in cover of the second edition, and to the addition of the subtitle *Tales of a Survival from a Chinese Labour Camp* (figure 29). In addition to Yang’s novel, the framing of other Chinese novels which explore political themes, such as Mo Yan’s *The Garlic Ballads* and *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, also draws on the theme of oriental femininity (figures 30 and 31). This promotional strategy draws on the time-old theme of Oriental feminine exoticism which forms an essential part element in the narrative of Orientalism. As noted by Edward Said, the Orient was produced “discursively and epistemologically as a feminized location, impenetrable by the West” (Chang 2004: 239). This feminisation of the Orient results in the hyperfeminisation and sexualisation of ‘oriental women’ as part of a narrative perpetuated and disseminated by Hollywood films, western literature and other cultural products. Prasso thus argues that

Many [westerners] attribute their interest in the region to their interest, first of all, in Asian women and the lure of the exotic. Their very literal passion contributes to identifying Asian with ‘the feminine’, and assigning the region and its people attributes that typically are associated with femininity in the West. Casting Asia as ‘feminine’ causes the romanticizing of it and […] contributes to its ineffability.

(Prasso 2006:1)
Figure 25 Front cover of Yu Hua’s *Brothers* (2008), published by Random House in the UK and US.

Figure 26 Front cover of Wang Gang’s *English* (2008), published by Penguin in the US.

Figure 27 Front cover of Yu Hua’s *Cries in the Drizzle* (2003), published by Random House in the US.

Figure 28 Front cover of Yang Xianhui’s *Woman from Shanghai* (2008), published by Pantheon in the US.
Figure 29 Front cover of Yang Xianhui’s *Woman from Shanghai* (2009), published by Pantheon in the US

Figure 30 Front cover of Mo Yan’s *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* (2005), published by Methuen Publishing Ltd in the UK

Figure 31 Front cover of Mo Yan’s *The Garlic Ballads* (2006), published by Methuen Publishing in the UK
4.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined patterns of selection of translated Chinese novels resulting from choices made by various narrators who have been involved in the process of publishing and promoting Chinese novels in the UK and US between 1980 and 2010. Across all the novels translated into English, two major patterns emerged during the past three decades. The first involves a prioritising of novels on personal trauma, including stories of Maoist China in general and the Cultural Revolution in particular. This theme received sustained interest from UK and US publishers since the 1980s. The stories in question emphasise pain, brutality, violence, the ugliness of a totalitarian regime and repression, and establish a narrative paradigm of interpreting and understanding modern China from this perspective. The second pattern involves a feminisation of China and focuses on romance, sexual exoticism, and femininity. Narratives of China emerging from the two patterns are different but complementary: novels on personal trauma create a highly politicised account of China, one that is oppressive, dark and decadent; the focus on romance by contrast constructs a highly romanticised, exoticised and feminised narrative of modern China.
Chapter 5 Reviews

This chapter examines the role played by reviewers in the reception of English translations of Chinese novels in mainstream UK and US media outlets and the power they wielded in shaping the reception of Chinese novels in the English-speaking world between 1980 and 2010.

5.1 Introduction

As explained in Chapter 4, 150 Chinese novels were translated into English and published in the UK and US between 1980 and 2010. Of these, 51 titles (34%) received one or more reviews published in the UK and US mainstream media outlets during the period under discussion. According to the RCNE (Reviews of Chinese Novels in English) database, a total of 162 reviews of translated Chinese novels were published in mainstream publications in the UK and US between 1980 and 2010. Of these, 94 reviews were published in the UK while 68 were published in the US. As shown in Table 11, The Times Literary Supplement (29 reviews) and The New York Times (32 reviews) published the largest number of reviews of the translated Chinese novels in question in the UK and US respectively.

In terms of subject matter, novels on personal trauma, which tell stories about China’s past and political movements, received more attention from reviewers in the UK and US mainstream media outlets. Since the 1990s, there has been a renewed literary interest in stories about the lives of ordinary Chinese living at the bottom rung of society during the political turmoil that characterised 20th century Communist China, especially the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square event; this interest is reflected in the large number of reviews of books featuring these events in the UK and US. As Table 12 shows, Beijing Coma, Red Dust, The Noodle Maker and Brothers, which recount heart-breaking stories about the lives of ordinary Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution or those involved in the Tiananmen Square event, received extensive book reviews. Ma Jian’s Beijing Coma (2008), a fictional account of a Chinese student’s experience during the 1989 Tiananmen Square event and his life in a coma after he was hit by a soldier’s bullet while participating in this protest, attracted 16 reviews: among these, The Guardian, The Times, The New York Times and Financial Times published 2 reviews each. This is the most extensively reviewed translated Chinese novel published in the UK and US during the past three decades.
Surprisingly, Gao Xingjian’s Nobel Prize winner, Soul Mountain (2000), and his subsequent novel One Man’s Bible (2002) received only 6 reviews each in the UK and US. His third translated novel, Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandfather (2004), received only 2 reviews – in The Times Literary Supplement (Carlyle 2004) and The Guardian (Lovell 2004). Despite the fact that Gao’s novels engage with the theme of the Cultural Revolution and reflect on its
effect on Chinese intellectuals, they did not receive many favourable reviews in the mainstream media in the UK and US. Although the Nobel Prize committee describes *Soul Mountain* as a “great novel, […] one of those singular literary creations that seem impossible to compare with anything but themselves” (Swedish Academy 2000), most reviewers could not extract a comprehensible story from *Soul Mountain*’s loose structure and bewildering plot, which is complicated by various religious and philosophical strands of thought (Kristof 2000; Gee 2001; Eder 2000). Reynolds writes in *The Los Angeles Times* that she found the novel “confusing” and “thought demanding” and “full of questions and no answers” (Reynolds 2001). Other reviewers expressed similar views: Gray from the *Times* magazine states that “reading *Soul Mountain* in this version [the English version] is a frustrating experience, chiefly because of the sense that there must be something more to it than this” (Gray 2000); Kristof comments in *The New York Times* that “[i]t is not easy to say what the novel is about – and it is lacking in plot, descriptions and character development” (Kristof 2000). Apart from one favourable review in *The Independent* written by Henry Zhao, who is a leading Anglophone critic and academic of Gao’s literary works (Lovell 2010: 206), the remaining five reviews of *Soul Mountain* question the author’s eligibility as a Nobel Prize winner. Gao Xingjian’s translator, Mable Lee, also receives her fair share of reviewers’ criticism. W.J. F. Jenner, reviewer of *The Times Literary Supplement*, even complains: “your Swedish translator must have done a good job on your book to persuade his fellow members of the Nobel Academy to give you the big prize. […] The clumsiness of expression [in English translation] [is evident] in virtually every paragraph” (Jenner 2001). Gao’s subsequent novels, *One Man’s Bible* (2001) and *Buying A Fishing Rod for My Grandfather* (2004), received even worse reviews. In her review entitled ‘Prize Woes’, Jenner, who writes for *The Guardian*, expresses disappointment in the quality of Gao’s second novel *One Man's Bible*: “The ideas in *One Man's Bible* are commonplace, its characters are ciphers, and it is not redeemed by wit, grace or self-mockery. Its solipsism is banal. I hope we will not have to endure a third novel in this series on the splendidours and miseries of being a Nobel prize-winner” (Jenner 2002).

The literary innovation and special writing technique of *Soul Mountain* may explain the paucity of book reviews. Using devices and themes characteristic of his play writing, *Soul Mountain* is Gao’s “experiment in narrative” (Lovell 2006: 167), and is organised on the principle of a dual structure: a spiritual journey alongside a physical one. In his physical
journey, the protagonist visits many different places in the hope of finding ‘Soul Mountain’, which symbolises a spiritual site. His journey, in other words, is one of seeking the meaning of life and of understanding the true self. The novel is plotted within a number of stories, predominantly set in China:

Historically, it ranges from contemporary China to ancient times, from the Cultural Revolution to China’s earliest emperors. Geographically, it covers the protagonist’s travels from the metropolitan capital to the remote regions of south-western China. Culturally, it fuses East and West, from Taoism to Existentialism.

(Fan 2003: 307)

The dual-structure of the novel creates obstacles to readers, as for many readers Soul Mountain seems to be a “formless” story: “parts are profound or poetic; parts seem like unfinished sketches or notes jotted to oneself. There is no progression, except perhaps an inward progression toward understanding” (Nagle 2002). Nicholas Kristof80 of The New York Times considers Soul Mountain as “a quirky, playful monster of a book, [and] it is not easy to say what the novel is about – and it is lacking in plot, descriptions and character development” (Kristof 2000). Another (unnamed) critic on Amazon was so frustrated by the aimlessness of the book that he went directly to the final chapter and started reading backwards.

In addition to its literary innovation, the theme of Soul Mountain is not considered by many UK and US reviewers as ‘typical’ of a Chinese novel, which seems to mean that it is not a trauma or political novel that depicts tragic stories during the Cultural Revolution, for instance. Some scholars of Chinese literature may argue that Soul Mountain is “a strongly political novel, as Gao meditates on his escape from politically and environmentally contaminated Beijing” (Lovell 2006: 169). However, the political implications are buried under the seemingly random jottings and the mix of Chinese myth and philosophical thinking (i.e. Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism). Nagle therefore concludes that

It is not a typical Asian novel. What is it? […] Gao makes no attempt to organize the anecdotes, the observations and encounters that populate the book, giving the whole enterprise the aimlessness of a travelogue. Gao is dealing with vague allegory (I am thinking of J. M. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians or maybe Kadare). But although

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Gao’s protagonist is obsessed with describing legends and examining their significance, in fact the novel dwells on the mundane.

(Nagle 2002, emphasis added)

So far only 4 out of 14 publications, i.e. The Times, The New York Times, The Independent, and The Times Literary Supplement, have reviewed Soul Mountain, a novel which may “fit a European literary prize committee’s perceptions of a contemporary work of art with Chinese characteristics” (Louie 2001: 149), but does not seem to generate equal enthusiasm among reviewers and general readers in the UK and US.

As discussed in Chapter 4, conceptual narratives of China circulating in the US and British academy during the past three decades played an important role in constructing public narratives of China during the period under examination, which may have informed processes of selection and deselection of novels to be translated. Another way in which the influence of conceptual narratives may have been exercised is through reviews of translated Chinese novels. Many reviewers frequently invited to review translated Chinese novels are scholars specialising in Chinese history or area studies (Table 3): Julia Lovell, a British scholar and translator, specialises in Chinese literature and modern Chinese history; Frances Wood, a British historian, is known for her writings on Marco Polo and life in the Chinese treaty ports; Harriet Evans is a professor of Chinese Cultural Studies at the University of Westminster and her research interests include gender and sexuality in China, as well as urban China and Chinese modernity; Jonathan Spence, an American historian and specialist in Ming and Qing history, reviewed 4 Chinese novels; Jonathan Mirsky taught Chinese history and comparative literature at Cambridge University, the University of Pennsylvania and Dartmouth College before moving to Hong Kong to work as the East Asia editor of The Times in 1993. It is reasonable to assume that the conceptual narratives in which these reviewers are/were embedded might have exercised some influence on their selections of authors/titles for review. For example, Harriet Evans, a specialist in gender studies, has reviewed 4 novels, including works of 2 women writers, namely Can Xue’s Old Floating Cloud (1991) and Hong Ying’s Daughter of the River (1999), and she takes a feminist perspective when reviewing Zhang Xianliang’s Getting Used to Dying (1991) in The Times Literary Supplement. As the analysis presented in the following sections will argue, most reviewers in the 1980s and 1990s draw on Zhang Xianliang’s labour camp novels to (re-)construct a narrative of the Cultural Revolution which accentuates themes such as political persecution, hunger/food, and the
government’s attempt to control intellectuals. Harriet Evans’ review of *Getting Used to Dying*, on the other hand, highlights the theme of “sexuality and love with reminiscences about the brutality of the long, bitter years [Zhang] spent in China’s labour reform camps” (Evans 1991: 18). She argues that by foregrounding depictions of “fantasies about love-making [which] appear on nearly every page”, the novel reads as “little more than a celebration of his [the author’s] own (particularly sexual) identity” (Evans 1991: 18). The “self-congratulatory tone” throughout the novel, as evident in references to his charm as a lover and “his popularity as a writer (comparisons are made to Faulkner and Joyce)”, leads Evans to frame the book primarily as a celebration of the author’s sexuality and writing (Evans 1991: 18).

Journalists form another category of reviewers who are often invited to review translated Chinese novels. Richard Bernstein, an American journalist and author, used to work as a book critic at *The New York Times* and a foreign correspondent for both *Time* magazine and *The New York Times* in Europe and Asia. Books that established his reputation as a China expert include *From the Centre of the Earth: The Search for the Truth about China* (1982) and *The Coming Conflict with China* (1997). Other journalists, such as Barbara Crossette and Isabel Hilton, tend to review certain types of novels: Isabel Hilton is the author of the widely acclaimed *The Search for the Panchen Lama*, which traces the history of the Panchen Lama, the second most important spiritual leader in Tibet; this might explain why she is regularly invited to review novels that have a Tibetan theme, such as Ma Jian’s *Stick out of Your Tongue* (2006) and Alai’s *Red Poppies* (2001). Barbara Crossette, an American journalist and author of *So Close to Heaven: The Vanishing Buddhist Kingdoms of the Himalayas* (1995), writes extensively on India and Buddhism in Asia, and has reviewed Ma Jian’s *Red Dust* (2001) and Alai’s *Red Poppies* (2001). These reviewers tend to provide an extensive amount of background information about their area of specialism before they start to comment on the novels under review.

Interestingly, it is very rare to see specialists in Chinese literature (as opposed to history, politics, gender studies, etc.) review Chinese novels in English translation; so far, only Perry Link (1 review), Henry Zhao (1 review), and WJF Jenner (2 reviews) have reviewed contemporary Chinese novels in the mainstream media in the UK and US. This phenomenon supports the suggestion that translated Chinese novels have been treated primarily as social-
political documents, and at best only secondarily as having aesthetic value or literary merit, during the past three decades.

Table 13 Reviewers between 1980 and 2010 (with more than one published review)

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<th>Reviewer</th>
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In terms of genre, translated Chinese classical novels do not seem to attract much attention from reviewers of mainstream media outlets. Of a total of 13 classical Chinese novels translated into English between 1980 and 2010, only 2 were reviewed in UK and US media.

The Story of the Stone, translated by David Hawkes and John Minford, is known as one of the ‘four classic Chinese novels’ and received two reviews after the appearance of the first volume in 1972 in the UK and US: one in The New York Review of Books, reviewed by Frederic Wakeman Jr. in 1972; and one in The Times Literary Supplement in 1974. In 2012, John Minford, one of the translators of The Story of the Stone, reviewed the novel again in The Telegraph, calling general UK and US readers’ attention to “China’s greatest work of literature” which “is still virtually unknown in the English-speaking world” (Minford 2012). However, these three reviews were published outside the period examined in the current study, and are therefore not included in
outlets during the period under study: *The Journey to the West* (volume 1) received one review in *The New York Times* in 1983, and *The Plum in the Golden Vase or Chin P’ing Mei* received two reviews in 1994: one in *The London Review of Books* and one in *The New York Review of Books*. These three reviews are different from other reviews of modern Chinese novels in that they are exceptionally long and resemble academic articles in terms of using specialist terminologies and cross-referencing other academic studies. The six-page review of *Chin P’ing Mei* in *The New York Review of Books* by Jonathan Spence, an outstanding scholar of Chinese history at Yale University, features seven footnotes that offer full bibliographic details of academic sources, suggesting that the target readers are envisaged to be academics. It is also worth noting that no reviews of translated Chinese classical novels were published during the first decade of the 2000s.

In terms of *individual outlets*, *London Review of Books* (LRB) stands out as a unique venue for reviewing translated Chinese novels. For one thing, it does not review titles such as *Beijing Coma* (2008), *Soul Mountain* (2000) and *Wolf Totem* (2008), which are either reviewed extensively by other UK and US publications or have won prestigious awards such as the Nobel Prize for Literature and The Man Booker Prize. LRB narrates itself as a site for “the literary and intellectual essay in English” written by “academics, writers and journalists” who combine “topicality with depth and scholarship with good writing”, and states that it “isn’t afraid to challenge received ideas” 82. In the 1980s, at a time when other publications were extensively reviewing Zhang Xianliang’s political novels, such as *Half of Man is Woman*, LRB published reviews of Dai Houying’s *Stones of the Wall* (1986) and Wang Anyi’s *Baotown* (1989). It also published a review of *The Plum in the Golden Vase or Chin P’ing Mei*, the only Classic Chinese novel to receive a review in the UK and US during the past three decades. Secondly, unlike other UK and US publications which review an increasing number of translated Chinese novels as a growing number of Chinese writers rise to global recognition, the *London Review of Books* seems to have gradually lost interest in reviewing Chinese novels in English translation as they became more fashionable. This downward trend in interest constitutes a clear pattern: LRB published 3 reviews of translated

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82 See [http://www.lrb.co.uk/about](http://www.lrb.co.uk/about) [last accessed 30 Jan 2012].
Chinese novels in the 1980s, 2 in the 1990s and 1 in the 2000s. It has not reviewed any translated Chinese novels between 2004 and 2010.

In terms of translators, 23 out of the 51 (or 45%) translated Chinese novels that received reviews during this period are translated by Howard Goldblatt, who is also the most prolific translator of Chinese novels in the English-speaking world. Through sheer quantity and quality of work, Goldblatt has undoubtedly played a key role in introducing contemporary Chinese literature to Anglophone readers. As Michael Berry, an American scholar of Chinese literature, puts it, “if you have read a Chinese novel published anytime in the last twenty years, chances are it was translated by Howard Goldblatt” (Berry 2002: 18). Numerous other UK and US reviewers have also given credit to Goldblatt and acknowledged his efforts in introducing global audiences to the universe of modern Chinese literature. For example, Richard Bernstein called him “the most admired American translator of contemporary Chinese fiction” (Bernstein 1995); and John Updike argued that the translation of modern, contemporary Chinese literature has become “the lonely province of one man” (Updike 2005).

Having offered an overview of the main trends and patterns related to reviewing translated Chinese literature, in the following sections I will adopt a chronological structure to examine how narratives of China are woven by UK and US reviewers through the selection and manner of reviewing translated Chinese novels between 1980 and 2010.

**5.2 The 1980s**

Seven out of 23 (or 30%) translated Chinese novels that appeared in print during the 1980s received a total of 13 reviews in 6 UK and US publications. Three of these 7 novels were published by general trade publishers: *Stones of the Wall* (co-published by St. Martin, an imprint of Macmillan, and Michael Joseph, an imprint of Penguin, 1986), *Half of Man is Woman* (published by Viking, an imprint of Penguin, 1988) and *Baotown* (published by Viking Penguin, 1989). Two titles were published by university presses: Wu Cheng’en’s *The
Journey to the West (published by University of Chicago Press) and Yang Jiang’s Six Chapters from My Life ‘Downunder’ (published by University of Washington Press, 1984). The remaining two were published by specialist publishers: Leaden Wings (published by Virago, 1989) and The Butcher’s Wife (published by Peter Owen, 1989). Of the 14 UK and US mainstream media outlets examined in this study, only 6 published reviews of translated Chinese novels: New York Review of Books (3 reviews), The New York Times (1 review), The Washington Post (1 review), London Review of Books (2 reviews), The Times (1 review) and The Times Literary Supplement (4 reviews).

Translated Chinese novels were framed by reviewers during this period mainly as a source of information on China, especially the Cultural Revolution and its impact on Chinese society. Many reviewers have first-hand experiences in China, a rather rare phenomenon during the 1980s as foreigners’ access to China was strictly limited even after China had announced its open-door policy in 1978. Judith Shapiro, for example, was employed by the Foreign Language Press in Beijing as a translator of Chinese literature on the Panda Book Project and D. J. Enright visited China in 1984 as a delegation member of the American government and participated in a conference hosted by China’s Writers Association, where he had a chance to meet a number of Chinese writers. These reviewers incorporate their personal encounters with Chinese writers into their reviews of translated Chinese novels as evidence of the novel’s authenticity. In the following section, I will examine how translated Chinese novels are framed as a valuable source of information on China.

5.2.1 Chinese Novels as Social Documents

Apart from one review of a classic Chinese novel, The Journey to the West, published in The New York Times in 1983, the remaining 12 reviews are of contemporary Chinese novels. Reviewers in UK and US media outlets tended to select for review titles that feature the Cultural Revolution and/or post-Mao China. Stories derived from the motif of the Cultural Revolution and its impact on contemporary Chinese society, for example Dai Houying’s Stones of the Wall, Zhang Xianliang’s Half of Man is Woman and Zhang Jie’s Heavy Wings or Leaden Wings, seemed to capture the imagination of many scholars, reviewers and readers alike in the UK and US, partly because these novels could be used as alternative sources of information for those who did not have access to first-hand materials on this complex epoch.
of Chinese history, allowing them to make sense of and elaborate a coherent narrative of the Cultural Revolution.

This approach to translated Chinese literature, which prioritises works of/about the Cultural Revolution and addresses a political need to understand China’s psyche in the post-Mao period, suggests that Chinese novels translated into English in the 1980s were treated as valuable ‘social documents’ that cast light on the Cultural Revolution, especially its impact on contemporary Chinese society. This seems to be an important selection criterion during the 1980s, and titles that do not evoke the storyline of the Cultural Revolution did not receive any reviews. For example, Nie Hualing’s *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China* (1988) recounts a Chinese woman’s life experiences during the war, before the Communist Party took over, and her middle-age life in America. Widely considered as a great feminist novel, *Mulberry and Peach* is textually and thematically rich, exploring multiple topics such as violent encounters between a traditional society and modern colonizing powers, catastrophic political upheaval, physical and cultural displacement, border-crossing and identity transformation, state control (whether feudal, totalitarian, or capitalist) of the individual, inscription of the female body with the ideologies of patriarchy and nation, madness as a form of spiritual transcendence in a world gone mad, to name but a few.

(Wong 1998: 209)

The book has received extensive scholarly attention and was reprinted by three feminist presses since its first appearance in the English-speaking world: first published by the Women’s Press in the UK in 1986, it was reprinted by Beacon Press in the US in 1988 and The Feminist Press in the US in 1998. Nonetheless, *Mulberry and Peach* has never caught the attention of the mainstream media in the UK and US and was not reviewed in mainstream outlets. Other important Chinese novels translated into English in the 1980s were similarly accorded no attention by reviewers; these include Lao She’s *Ma and Son: A Novel*, which tells the story of two Chinese men living in London in the 1920s, Bai Xianyong’s *Crystal Boys*, which features Taiwanese gay men as protagonists, and Xiao Hong’s *Market Street: A Chinese Woman in Harbin*, which tells the story of a Chinese writer’s life in the 1930s, among others.

Reviewers’ preoccupation with the documentary value of translated Chinese novels during this period is reflected in a number of different ways. First, most reviewers chose to give their reviews titles that foreground the social and documentary value of the translated novels, thus
framing the translations as ethnographic material which can shed light on Chinese society and its psyche. The following examples of titles of reviews published during this period illustrate the point:

- ‘Bamboo Realism’, a review of *Half of Man is Woman*, published in *The Times* (Sinclair 1988);
- ‘Roots of Revolution’, a review of *Half of Man is Woman*, published in *The New York Review of Books* (Fairbank 1988);
- ‘Brutal Reality’, a review of *Butcher’s Wife*, published in *The Times Literary Supplement* (Banerjee 1989);

These titles provide interpretive frames which guide readers’ expectations as they approach the translated novels under review and encourage them to establish links between these translated stories and China’s social and political reality, and to look to these novels as a source of ‘facts’ rather than as an enjoyable or enriching literary experience, for instance.

Apart from suggestive titles, another way of framing translated Chinese novels as valuable social documents in the English-speaking world during the 1980s involved reviewing them alongside other non-fictional books on China. John Fairbank, reviewer in the *New York Review of Books* and a scholar of Chinese history, reviewed Zhang Xianliang’s novel *Half of Man is Woman* alongside Frank Ching’s memoir *Ancestors: 900 Years in the Life of a Chinese Family*, because, he explains, these two “vastly different” books “each casts light on the Cultural Revolution” (Fairbank 1988). He stresses that considered together, these two books may even begin to explain the roots of the Cultural Revolution (Fairbank 1988: 31).

Fairbank explains that Ching’s *Ancestors* traces his ancestry back to the 11th century Song dynasty and ends with the story of his father who was a successful lawyer as well as a victim of the Cultural Revolution. This memoir has a strong documentary basis as Ching extracts evidence from family documents, essays, the artefacts of tombs and literature, and other sources that are hard to come by (Fairbank 1988: 31). *Ancestors* reflects on the intricacies of

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84 John King Fairbank (1907-2991), an influential scholar of Chinese, exercised considerable influence on American policy towards China and on the development of scholarship on China in the US. He wrote and edited more than two dozen books, including *The United States and China* (1948), which was published by Harvard University Press and was once considered the “best short introduction to Chinese history, culture and civilization” (Gonzalez 1991). His later publications, such as *China: A New History* (1992) also exerted considerable influence on American thinking about China.
traditional Chinese scholarship and its essential role in the formation of ancient Chinese society, a tradition which is carried over into modern Chinese society. Fairbank argues that the Cultural Revolution is a political movement that fought against the elites at the beginning and continued to struggle against “the landlord-scholar-official ruling class of old China” (Fairbank 1988: 31). For him the remarkable value of Ancestors lies in the fact that it shows us “what Mao was fighting against, […]; it even suggests why he lost it” (Fairbank 1988: 31). Zhang’s novel, which is set in a labour camp during the Cultural Revolution, also reveals the link between the scholarly tradition and modern Chinese society:

[…] he [the protagonist] had inherited the sense of superior status and responsibility described in Ancestors. As we learned so soon after the death of Chairman Mao in 1976, the Cultural Revolution’s crusade of class struggle and egalitarianism to tear down China’s elitist social structure was a failure. Mao found that “proletarian intellectuals” could not be raised up overnight and “peasant scientists” could not modernize the country.

(Fairbank 1988: 31)

Fairbank thus concludes his review with the comment that “both books, for all their differences, suggest the strength of the scholar-official translation” which has carried over into the new era after the Cultural Revolution came to an end (Fairbank 1988: 33). In today’s China, family loyalties, scholarship, and the examination system discussed in Frank Ching’s Ancestors and reflected in Zhang’s Half of Man is Woman “are back in vogue, contributing their strengths and weakness” to a new period of reconstruction (Fairbank 1988: 33).

Another example of a translated novel reviewed alongside a non-fictional publication is Zhang Jie’s novel Heavy Wings, reviewed for The New York Times by Herbert Mitgang, an author and journalist, alongside Liu Binyan’s reportage What Happened in China and Why. In reviewing together two books which belong to different genres, Mitgang hopes to find the “most intimate ideas and dreams about China today and tomorrow” from the two recently translated books and allow western readers to find “the first truths about freedom or the lack of it in China because these signs usually appear in novels, plays and reports from the underground” (Mitgang 1990). Reviewing Zhang Jie’s novel alongside Liu’s reportage signals a generic change, which encourages readers to look for ‘facts’ of Chinese society from the novel, as Mitgang argues that characters in Heavy Wings are not simply fictional literary creations, but “vividly realistic women and men whose family goals and working problems appear universal” (Mitgang 1990). In addition, aligning Zhang Jie with Liu Binyan,
a well-known outspoken critic of the Chinese government who moved to the US after the Tiananmen Square event, frames Zhang Jie as a dissident writer. Mitgang argues that Zhang’s novel, which was originally published in China in 1981, “foreshadows the frustrations that erupted in student demonstrations last year and led to the democracy movement” (Mitgang 1990). As a novelist of knowledge and courage, Zhang features in her novel a group of 30 people who struggle to “break out of a rigid social and economic structure and seek the right to express themselves as individuals” (Mitgang 1990).

Third, in terms of content, some reviewers select specific elements from the translations to recreate a picture of the life of Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution for UK and US readers. Episodes of the Cultural Revolution, such as specific examples of excessive cruelty, the distrust of intellectuals by the local farming community, and the deep sense of loss and feeling of waste of talents suffered by intellectuals are carefully teased out by reviewers from the translated stories and elaborated into a powerful public narrative of the Cultural Revolution. For example, writing in *The Times Literary Supplement*, D. J. Enright considered Zhang Xianliang’s novel *Half of Man is Woman* as “an exemplary work” of the Cultural Revolution, because this novel is “an enactment of the Cultural Revolution” rather than a reflection on it after the ten-year turmoil finally came to a conclusion (Enright 1988: 101). Briefly summarized, he tells his readers that the novel is “a story of life in the Chinese Gulag between 1966 and 1976”. Enright then selects a number of motifs and episodes from the storyline of the Cultural Revolution in the novel, such as self-analyses, the weekly thought-reports, the criticism of others, the large number of ever-changing slogans such as ‘Right-leaning opportunism’, ‘hired-hand mentality’ and ‘landlord element’, etc. to frame the novel – and Chinese society – for his reader. Using detailed descriptions of a variety of slogans and labels mentioned in the novel, Enright comments thus on their devastating effects on people’s relationships:

> These words do hurt, through the sticks and stones they incite to, spreading fear and suspicion, turning ordinary dislikes and petty envies into political virtues and social duties, and thus perverting the foundations of human relationship both casual and intimate.

(Enright 1988: 101)

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85 D.J. Enright is a poet, novelist, critic and essayist based in the UK.
He also pays attention to another aspect of the Cultural Revolution in the novel: the Cultural Revolution turned China into an irrational country. He quotes the protagonist in the novel claiming that “the labour camp is the more rational place” because in the camp prisoners are employed based on their personal skills – a doctor can treat the sick – but outside the prison chances are that he would be cleaning toilets (Enright 1988:101). It is in this sense that Enright finds Zhang’s novel “exemplary” and claims that even “the hazards and insufficiencies of translation cannot affect that” (Enright 1988: 101).

Some reviewers use Chinese writers’ personal stories to elaborate a narrative of adversarial relationships between the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese writers in their reviews. These reviewers tend to devote less attention to the translations themselves. For example, Jonathan Mirsky, a scholar on Chinese history, devotes long paragraphs in his review, entitled ‘Stories from the Ice Age’ and published in The New York Review of Books in 1989, to the adversarial relationship between Chinese writers and the Communist Party since the 1920s, using Chinese novelist Ding Ling’s personal story as an entrée to investigate the Communist Party’s tight control over Chinese intellectuals since the May Fourth Movement in the early 20th century. Mirsky argues that for western readers who are interested in China, understanding this relationship is essential to understanding modern Chinese literature. He claims that “what had happened to the Ding Ling who had written about Miss Sophia is what happened to most Chinese writers working under party control after 1942; they no longer wrote for their readers” (Mirsky 1989: 28; emphasis in original). Chinese writers had to write for the Party, Minsky continues, as evidenced in the ‘wounded’ literature that emerged shortly after the Cultural Revolution, which confined itself to the horrors of that period, carefully placing the blame on members of the Gang of Four, as if they had nothing to do with Mao or the Party - “Such treatment reminds every writer that things could suddenly become much worse” (Mirsky 1989: 28).

D. J. Enright opens his review of Dai Houying’s novel Stones of the Wall, entitled ‘Winter not too far behind’, in The Times Literary Supplement with a description of his first trip with a group of British writers to China in 1984 at the invitation of the Chinese Writers’ Association: during a meeting, Enright asked a Chinese writer how he dealt with people who had persecuted him during the Cultural Revolution. Instead of providing a direct answer, the Chinese writer quoted from Shelly’s poem “If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?” (Enright 1985: 923). The implied meaning was that the end of the Cultural Revolution has
ushered in a more peaceful era in China. Enright, however, is unconvinced: he believes that in China “freedom of expression is a political invitation” which can be taken back at any time (Enright 1985: 923). Moreover, China has witnessed the rise and fall of many political movements since 1949, on both the left and right of the political spectrum, and new movements might yet come to dominate, with unpredictable impact on Chinese writers. Dai Houying’s novel, *Stones of the Wall*, provides evidence to this argument: “Some [protagonists in *Stones of the Wall*] were denounced or otherwise victimized by others among their colleagues, but all have suffered in some way. And suffering doesn’t inevitably refine, for a past victim can himself become a victimizer in the present” (Enright 1985: 923).

But does the above mean that reviewers failed to acknowledge the literary merit of Chinese novels? Although some reviewers did treat Chinese novels as artistic production and approached them from a literary perspective, by and large the answer to this question is yes.

At the beginning of the 1970s, modern and contemporary Chinese literature began to attract increasing scholarly attention as a subject of enquiry in the UK and US; it was later moved from area studies to East Asian literature departments (Link 2000: 11). Many scholars in western universities called for an investigation of Chinese literature as art, not as social science documentation. Reviewers writing in the 1980s, however, adopted a very mixed attitude towards translated Chinese novels in terms of their literary and aesthetic value. Of the 12 reviews of contemporary Chinese novels published during the 1980s, only 2 reviewers acknowledged the literary worth of translated Chinese novels and reviewed them as literary works. Law-Yone Wendy, reviewer in *The Washington Post*, praised Zhang’s *Half of Man is Woman* as “a beautifully autobiographical novel” (Law-Yone 1988), where readers can find “small delights and sudden reprieves – so small and sudden as almost to be missed” (Law-Yone 1988). For example:

>a rubber band, dropped on the road, that excites the imagination because it has served as a bracelet for a female prisoner; a vase of plastic flowers that decorates the bare shed the newlyweds live in; a sprinkling of scallions sautéd in the meagre ration of oil that Huang has sacrificed for her husband; Zhang’s pride upon hearing that his poems have been turned into wall posters, even though the intent of the posters was to hold his poems up for public criticism; and finally the trancelike relief of hard labour itself.

(Law-Yone 1988)

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Law-Yone also notes that there are plenty of descriptions in Zhang’s novel of the minute details of ordinary everyday life, including sounds of everyday existence, and that the Chinese who suffer terror, deceit, humiliation, heartbreak and despair can survive desperation through the eloquence of hope (Law-Yone 1988). It is in this respect that the novel achieves literary success. Despite his general tendency to treat Chinese novels as social documents as discussed above, John Fairbank of *The New York Review of Books* occasionally also acknowledges the literary merit of Chinese novels. He states, for example, that the remarkable quality of Zhang’s work “lies in its blending of narrative and poetic fantasy, its lightness of touch”, therefore, Zhang Xianliang “will surely be read around the world” (Fairbank 1988: 32).

In contrast, 4 reviewers explicitly dismiss the literary value of translated Chinese novels while confirming their documentary value. For example, in his review of Dai Houying’s *Stones of the Wall* D. J. Enright remarks that it “cannot be said to be a ‘good read’; it is of *no aesthetic interest whatsoever*”; “it raises our hackles, if it doesn’t send us to sleep” (Enright 1985: 923; emphasis added). However, this novel is still worth reading, he tells his readers, because “aside from inducing further apprehension in those who are nervous of political ideologies, it has very *considerable documentary value* for anyone interested in China” (Enright 1985: 923; emphasis added). Similarly, Terrill, a reviewer for *The Washington Post*, thinks that Zhang Jie’s *Heavy Wings* “does not live vividly as fiction”, because “the plot is so weak and fragmented that it is not worth describing” (Terrill 1990). He further states that it simply “jump[s] from one character to another, and a third, all in a page or two” (Terrill 1990). The sparse descriptions of characters and lack of psychological insights into their personalities in Zhang’s novel leave no deep impression on American readers, according to Terrill: the characters are not only very difficult to distinguish, and serve as “mere messengers of Zhang Jie’s comments on cultural and political ways” (Terrill 1990).

Nevertheless, as a scholar in Chinese politics at Harvard University, Terrill stresses that *Heavy Wings* catches a moment of transition in China “from a tame populace to a sceptical populace”; therefore, as a documentary of Chinese private lives, the novel is “worthwhile” and still deserves readers’ attention (Terrill 1990). Some reviewers even take a step further by arguing that the whole worth of a translated Chinese novel lies in its documentary value. Judith Shapiro writes in *The New York Times* that despite the fact that Yang Jiang’s *Six Chapters from My Life ‘Downunder’*, which is one of a few books that appeared in the 1980s
to recount stories set during the Cultural Revolution, focuses on mundane activities of
everyday life rather than tackling sensitive political issues during the Cultural Revolution;
nevertheless, this book still deserves reading because it can be read “as a commentary on the
Cultural Revolution” as “many of her [Yang Jiang’s] gently stated ironies are powerful
indictments of Cultural Revolution politics” (Shapiro 1984).

Another area of weakness identified by reviewers as far as literary merit is concerned is the
didactic language of translated Chinese novels\(^7\). Enright argues that reading Dai’s *Stones of
the Wall*, which is “overloaded” with slogans and testimonies, is like reading “the
proceedings of some earnest and over-large conference”:

Remote from the stereotype of the inscrutable Oriental, her people agonize at length
and *converse in set speeches*. Even in their occasional moods of light-heartedness they
come out with things like “Take Mencius’ ideas on age…” and “That’s very
dialectical”. Another offensive stereotyping comes to mind: where there is one Chinese,
he smokes opium; where there are two, they gamble; where there are three, they form a
political party.

(Enright 1985: 923, emphasis added)

Despite the call for aesthetic appreciation of Chinese literature from western scholars in the
1970s, then, reviewers writing in the 1980s generally did not view Chinese novels as
possessing any literary merit. In his review of Wang Anyi’s *Baotown*, Mirsky rejects the
opinion of Leo Lee Oufan, a distinguished scholar of Chinese literature, who argues that the
stories in a collection of Chinese short stories entitled *Spring Bamboo* deserve strong praise.
In sharp contrast, Mirsky finds no enjoyment in any of these short stories as he finds them
“imitative, derivative, or boring”; “they are didactic-sounding or flat” (Mirsky 1989: 28).
Chinese writers and their novels are more likely to be praised for their political bravery and
courage. In another review in the *London Review of Books*, D.A.N. Jones reviews Dai
Houying’s *Stones of the Wall* alongside French novelist Marguerite Duras’ *The Lover*, and
finds more merit in *Stones of the Wall* because it enunciates political opinions:

There is no politics in it [*The Lover*], no general statements, no abstract ideas, no
arguments – only little cries for help. It is all description, evocation of memoires
leading to no conclusion, a very passive book. *Stone of the Wall*, in contrast, is
hyperactive. It is all argument: abstract ideas, in conflict with love and man’s ‘animal
nature’, are a driving force in the characters’ lives. We might complain that Dai
Houying has not given us enough description – and this is a pity, for she is very good at

\(^7\) It is interesting to note that none of the reviewers blame the translators for this defect of the translated novels.
it. We would like to know more about what the characters looked like, how they moved their homes and their landscape. We certainly know what each of them is ‘driving at’, and we may fairly guess what Dai Houying is driving at, too. \textit{Stones of the Wall} is a political novel.

\begin{quote}
(\textcite{Jones1986:26})
\end{quote}

Jones states that \textit{Stones of the Wall} is worth reading because “the author […] is a critic of […] Chinese Marxist tendencies”, therefore Jones trusts her judgment as well as admires her work (\textcite{Jones1986:26}). Another reviewer of \textit{Stones of the Wall}, D. J. Enright, who thinks the novel has no literary value, likewise still concludes that it is “a brave book” (\textcite{Enright1985:923}). Zhang Xianliang’s \textit{Half of Man is Woman} (1988) is considered by many reviewers as an excellent depiction of the Cultural Revolution. Reviewing it for \textit{The Times}, Andrew Sinclair described it as a “strange mixture of labour camp reportage, surrealism, and politics”, and argued that it can provide answers to “the upheaval of the Chinese Revolution as \textit{What Is To Be Done?} did for the first Russian one” (\textcite{Sinclair1988}). John Fairbank, reviewer in \textit{The New York Review of Books}, is also convinced that Zhang’s novel can “explain the Cultural Revolution” (\textcite{Fairbank1988}).

With the Tiananmen Square event hitting the headlines in 1989 and proving to be a turning point in the narration of China and Chinese cultural production, including novels, the brief engagement with the literary merits of Chinese novels in the UK and US media outlets in the 1980s seemed to come to a halt. Political relevance continued to outweigh aesthetic value in narratives of Chinese novels elaborated by the reviewers, as we will see in the next section.

\subsection*{5.3 The 1990s}

13 out of 38 (34\%) translated Chinese novels published during the 1990s received a total of 33 reviews in the UK and US mainstream media outlets. Despite the relatively steady growth in the number of translations during this decade, Chinese novels remained largely unpopular with reviewers in the UK and US. Media outlets such as \textit{The New Yorker} and \textit{Chicago Tribune} did not publish any reviews of translated Chinese novels during this period; among those who published reviews, \textit{The Financial Times} and \textit{The New York Review of Books} only published one review each.

As discussed in section 5.2, novels on personal trauma enjoyed high visibility and were prioritised in the selection of Chinese novels for review in the 1980s. This pattern continued to be favoured by reviewers during the 1990s. Novels on personal trauma selected for review
include Zhang Xianliang’s labour camp novel Getting Used to Dying (1991), which received two reviews; his subsequent novel Grass Soup (1994), which also draws on the theme of labour camps in the 1970s and received five reviews, despite the fact that it was published by relatively small publishers: David R. Godine in the US and Secker & Warburg in the UK; Mo Yan’s The Garlic Ballads (1995), which depicts the peasants’ riot against the local government at the end of the 1980s and received five reviews; Ma Bo’s Blood Red Sunset (1995), which received two reviews; Hong Ying’s Summer of Betrayal (1997), which received 3 reviews; and her subsequent autobiographical novel Daughter of the River (1999), a fictional recount of Hong Ying’s experience of growing up in 1970s and 1980s China, which received three reviews. These stories, all set in prison, became a powerful tool for reviewers in their critique of the Chinese government and allowed the ‘West’ to claim the moral ground in the debate over closed, communist societies vs. democratic, free market societies.

The box-office success of several Chinese movies may have made Chinese novels more visible on the market, but it does not seem to have generated many book reviews. Apart from Mo Yan’s Red Sorghum (1993), other novels adapted into films – such as Li Bihua’s The Last Princess of Manchuria (1992), Su Tong’s Raise the Red Lantern (1993), and Li Bihua’s Farewell My Concubine (1993) – did not receive any reviews, despite the fact that the translations were published and promoted by commercial publishers in the UK and US, including Penguin and Random House. Nevertheless, reviewers of Red Sorghum did tend to mention, at some point in their reviews, that the novel served as a basis for the Oscar-nominated movie directed by Zhang Yimou in 1989: “two of the stories – ‘Red Sorghum’ and ‘Sorghum Wine’ – formed the basis of Zhang Yimou’s acclaimed first film” (Hampton 1993); “Zhang Yimou made his Oscar-nominated film from the first two chapters [of Red Sorghum] alone” (Walter 1993). This suggests that the success of the film played some role in the selection of the translated novel for review. Beyond these broad patterns and cutting across them, there are at least two sub-patterns that deserve further discussion.

5.3.1 A narrative of China as backward and uncivilised

The 1989 Tiananmen event was decisive in altering the ways in which China was narrated in the UK and US during the 1990s. Many reviewers began to focus on certain episodes from the novels under review to construct a narrative of China that featured two main protagonists:
the Chinese people as victims living in a bleak and unhappy nation, under extremely poor living conditions, and the Chinese government as the oppressor confining them to this fate. Harriet Evans, reviewer of Hong Ying’s *Daughter of the River* in *The Times Literary Supplement*, tells her readers that this autobiographical novel paints “a bleak and aggressive world” (Evans 1999: 30). She describes the location where the protagonists lead a life of suffering and hardship as “poor, cramped and squalid riverside slums of Chongqing” (Evans 1999: 30). Richard Bernstein, reviewer of *Daughter of the River* in *The New York Times*, provides readers with more detailed descriptions of the shocking living conditions in Chongqing, the city in which the story begins:

She [the protagonist] grew up in its South Bank district, a place of dark, misshapen, courtyardsoff twisting little lanes where there are hardly any sewers or garbage-collecting facilities, so the accumulated filth spills out into roadside ditches and runs down the hills, producing an astonishing mixture of strange odors. This is a district where the river labourers live, including Ms. Hong’s unforgettably surly mother, a woman dried out by hardship and hard labour.

Her book […] reminds us that poverty is not only a lack of certain things but an overabundance of them as well: of rats, smells, disease, of a perpetual insecurity that gives a poisonous edge to human relations. […]

(Bernstein 1999)

Similarly, Paradise County, a fictional town in Mo Yan’s *The Garlic Ballads*, is a “rude and unforgiving place”, according to Richard Bernstein, the same reviewer, writing again for *The New York Times* (Bernstein 1995). Writing in *The Times Literary Supplement*, Delia Davin, another reviewer of *The Garlic Ballads*, also notes that the society portrayed in the novel is “neither heroic nor bucolic, but harsh, violent and haunting” (Davin 1995). Bernstein sums up the horrors of that place as follows:

Paradise, in short, is a world in which love and prosperity fall victim to calculation and corruption. The characters brawl; they bleed; they grovel. They live in a world of stink and putrefaction, of rats, lice and maggots, of blood, urine and the pervasive sour smell of the garlic, which hangs in the air and in the breath of the farmers. It seeps out of the spilled blood of the dead and, in Mr. Mo’s uncelestal carnal vision, even clings to the skin of lovers: “A surge of hot air floated up from her stomach, bestowing on Gao Ma the taste of garlic and fresh grass.”

(Bernstein 1995)

For reviewers of Mo Yan’s *Red Sorghum*, Gaomi – the town where the story takes place – is a community steeped in brutality and anarchy: “with no central government, every village has
been left to fend for itself’. Highwaymen and bandits “lurk by every road and in the sorghum fields”; “numerous local militias have sprung up, each contending with the others for dominance while at the same time trying to fight off the Japanese invaders” (Hampton 1993); “brutality, military and uncivil, is rife. […] There are no visionaries or poets or students in evidence, and no reference to anything more intellectual than Outlaws of the Marshes” (Enright 1993: 22). In other words, the town depicted in Red Sorghum lies outside the bounds of civilised society as ‘we’ know it.

Violence and gory descriptions in the novels selected for review are elements that attract much attention from the reviewers. Michael Glover, reviewer of Mo Yan’s Red Sorghum in the Financial Times, finds that every page in the novel is “taken up with the dirty, messy business of death, death-dealing and dying” (Glover 1993). Overwhelmed by detailed depictions of brutality, Glover concludes that the characteristics that “shock, disgust and exhilarate in almost equal measure” in Red Sorghum are two-fold: “its headlong, almost unmitigated cruelty; and the breath-taking speed with which barbaric incident is piled upon barbaric incident” (Glover 1993). This observation is confirmed by Wilborn Hampton, who reviewed the same novel in The New York Times. He writes that “on almost every page, the horror and humor of brutal and barbarous time are brought to life in graphic detail” (Hampton 1993). D. J. Enright, reviewer for the London Review of Books, also comments on the extensive descriptions of violence in Red Sorghum and devotes much space in his review to recounting some of them: “no gory detail is spared. Heads explode or fly off, as do other limbs, men are split down the middle, innards tumble out (‘Father found it hard to believe that a man’s belly could hold such a pile of intestines’), genitals are sliced off […] dogs eat human corpses, humans eat the dogs” (Enright 1993: 22). Natasha Walter, reviewer for The Independent, tells us that the Gaomi township is “founded on banditry and murder”; stories of love and family intrigue are “threaded between the endless violence” – some of it inflicted by the Japanese and some by the Chinese themselves on each other, but both ultimately leading to “a culture forced to take war into its own heart, to reshape itself in the image of death” (Walter 1993). A particular scene in Red Sorghum of a villager slowly skinned alive is quoted by all reviewers: “the worst single atrocity, minutely related, must be the slow skinning alive of Uncle Arhat by the village butcher on the orders of a Japanese officer” (Enright 1993: 22); “one scene, in which the Japanese order the local butcher to skin a villager alive, with the
whole town as witnesses, is as horrifyingly real as any documented war atrocity” (Hampton 1993).

This portrayal of Maoist China allows some reviewers to establish a causal link between the poor living conditions of the Chinese and persecution by the Chinese government. For example, Harriet Evans argues that Hong Ying’s personal story of growing up in a cruel society represents “the life of the ordinary members of “the masses” in whose name the revolution was staged” (Evans 1999:30). The novel’s depictions of misery and violence expose the fact the Communist Party’s revolutions did not turn the Chinese people into ‘masters’ of a new China but locked them into a life of poverty and misery (Evans 1990: 30). This narrative construct of a dark, brutal and brutalised China which had “largely been concealed by the Chinese government propaganda and western ignorance” (Bernstein 1999) is promoted by many reviewers, who consider the stories of horror and violence depicted in the various novels they select for review as confessional, honest and frank. Bernstein regards Hong Ying’s Daughter of the River as “more private and less overly political and more confessional than other accounts from China”; the novel is “rigorously honest, sometimes [offering] cruelly frank portrayal of a young woman’s mind and body subjected to a poor and to a loveless world” (Bernstein 1999). These translated stories provide the material that allows reviewers to elaborate a public narrative of China to which most foreign readers had hitherto had no access, not even those who had actually travelled to China. For example, Richard Lourie stresses that The Garlic Ballads “slips the reader in a corner of China where no tourists would go. It shows us the new China from the bottom up instead of from the top down, a view that history and journalism inevitably take” (Lourie 1995). Chongqing, the city where Hong Ying’s story is set, is a picturesque Sichuan location overlooking the confluence of the Jialing and Yangtze rivers, a famous tourist attraction known by many foreign travellers as “an exotic startling point for the riverboats that take passengers through the famous Three Gorges” (Bernstein 1999). The dark and bleak city depicted in Hong Ying’s novel is “not the city that the foreigners see” (Bernstein 1999). For Caroline Moorehead, the novel Summer of Betrayal depicts a very different China, one that is “dimly visible from the West” (Moorehead 1997). Thus, these translated stories, according to reviewers, offer UK

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and US readers insight into “the deepest truths of a tormented psyche, and into the truths as well of a bruised generation otherwise almost impossible for us to know” (Bernstein 1999).

Reading these reviews, one cannot help but wonder why the reviewers focus so much on the depictions of violence and brutality in these translated Chinese novels, to the exclusion of other elements, such as love stories, which form an important part of the novels but seldom receive any attention or comments in the reviews. Fascinated by Chinese writers’ bold depiction of cruelty and suffering, I would argue, the reviewers fail to interpret the broader meanings of the Chinese novels. In the following part, I will focus on Mo Yan’s *Red Sorghum* and its four reviews to explain how the reviewers’ over-emphasis on the scenes of violence and chaos overshadows other important aspects of this novel and undermines readers’ ability to form a richer, more diverse narrative of China.

Published originally in China in 1986, *Red Sorghum* tells a story of three generations of a Chinese family, starting from an autumn day in 1939 as the narrator’s grandfather, Yu Zhan’ao, prepares to lead an ambush against the Japanese army near Gaomi town. The narrator’s non-linear style of storytelling moves back and forth through the sorghum fields of Gaomi, from when his grandmother and grandfather first meet before the war, to his father’s life and struggle as a 15-year-old boy, involved in skirmishes with the Japanese. The first two parts of the novel, namely ‘Red Sorghum’ and ‘Sorghum Wine’, provide the basis for Zhang Yimou’s acclaimed film *Red Sorghum*, which gained this Chinese director international prominence for the first time. Greatly influenced by the well-received film, the novel was translated into English and published by Penguin in 1993, seven years after the appearance of the Chinese original. Since its publication in the Anglophone world, *Red Sorghum* has been widely praised in the scholarly literature as “one of the best modern Chinese novels available today in English”, largely because of its “beautiful symbolism, bold invention, skilful modernist interweaving of subplots, and moments of magical realism and surrealism” (Kinkley 2000: 254). This startling and powerful story which challenges many UK and US readers’ expectations of what a great Chinese novel might look like differs greatly from socialist-realist novels translated from the Chinese into English in the 1980s.

The setting of the novel, i.e. the anti-Japanese war and the war between the Communist Party and the Nationalist Party, provides the backdrop for the violence depicted throughout. Some reviewers categorise *Red Sorghum* as a war novel set in pre-Communist China: “presented as
the history of the narrator’s own family from the 1920s to the 1970s, it concentrates on the brutal wars the Chinese fought in the Thirties, both with the Japanese and with each other” (Walter 1993). Michael Glover, another reviewer, also points out to his readers that there are two types of wars in the novel: one is “among the native Chinese themselves who, in the 1920s, seemed to be part brigands and part freedom fighters” and another is “between the Chinese and the Japanese in an on-going war of resistance that reaches a climax of bloodletting in 1939” (Glover 1993). But \textit{Red Sorghum} is more than just a narrative of Sino-Japanese war or the fighting between Chinese political groups. As the author himself put it,

\begin{quote}
  on the surface, \textit{Red Sorghum} seems to be about the war against Japan. But in reality, it’s about the folklore and legends told by my kin. Of course, it’s also about my longing for the contentment of love and a life of freedom. The only history type in my head is legendary type. […] Their [i.e. the novel’s protagonists] heroic accomplishments were nothing but the results of embellishment over a long period of oral transmission.
\end{quote}

(Mo 2010: 226)

The Japanese invasion, then, is intended to serve merely as background to the main events of the story. The Communist Party and their various programmes and propaganda are mostly a source of ridicule, meant to “elicit laughter” (Updike 2005). Contrary to most revolutionary fiction, Mao and his Communist Party battle the enemy, inspiring ordinary citizens to rescue China from enemies, foreign and domestic. Traitors and cowards are invariably punished, and the force of justice, the Communist party, is always victorious (Duke 1993: 48). Mo Yan’s focus on Chinese peasants and outlaws who live on the verge of Chinese society and his depiction of them as anti-Japanese heroes challenges the Communist Party’s self-portrayal as the national hero in the Sino-Japanese war (Lu 1997: 52).

Mo Yan employs much symbolism in \textit{Red Sorghum}. Used as the title of the story, red sorghum (field), which serves as battlefield, lovebed, deathbed, and burial ground in the story, is considered by many literary critics to be the most compelling element, one that takes on strong narrative meanings that allow various interpretations. For example, one possible interpretation is that sorghum represents the human body, which endures violence and oppression inflicted on village people during war. Mo Yan shows in \textit{Red Sorghum} how war in the late 1930s destroyed civil life and community in China and how communities and vulnerable people could not be protected from barbarism and war’s devastation. In \textit{Red Sorghum}, cultural and social institutions do not provide protection and nurture, and “in the aftermath of such failure the human body itself becomes the target to be burned, trampled,
penetrated, flayed, and dismembered” (Davis-Undiano 2012). These acts are repeated so often in the novel that we eventually come to see them as ways of searching the limits of what the body can endure in a kind of epistemological horror show. However, reviewers fail to engage with this broader symbolism and simply associate the image of red sorghum with barbarity and violence in war. Michael Glover states that the image of red sorghum only represents barbarity and violence: “the barbarity of Red Sorghum […] is underpinned symbolically by the abiding presence of red sorghum in the fields, a crop that grows tall and dense and, in the autumn, “shimmers like a sea of blood”” (Glober 1993).

Excessive emphasis on the violent scenes in the novel obscures the moral of the story and compromises the appreciation of its aesthetic elements. The moral of the story, which is communicated to readers at the beginning and the end of the novel, fails to be interpreted by the reviewers. At the very beginning of Red Sorghum, Mo Yan makes it clear that his intention is to pay tribute to and express reverence for his forebears who lived in Gaomi town and defended their hometown against the Japanese invaders:

> Over decades that seem but a moment in time, lives of scarlet figures shuttled among the sorghum stalks to weave a vast human tapestry. They killed, they looted, and they defended their country in a valiant, stirring ballet that makes us unfilial descendants who now occupy the land pale by comparison. Surrounded by progress, I feel a nagging sense of our species regression.

(Mo Yan 1993: 4)

However, reviewers do not see the narrator’s grandparents’ stories in Gaomi town as heroic. Hampton uses this same quotation as an example to justify his claim that Gaomi town, which is “brilliantly and fondly re-created with visceral writing” by Mo Yan, “reeks of gunpowder, blood and death” (Hampton 1993)90.

In the concluding part, the narrator goes back to his ancestral home in Gaomi to search for his roots. He unearths the heroic stories of the generation of his grandparents who defended their land relentlessly and passionately. Having learned his family history, he feels ashamed not to be able to carry on the tradition for which his grandparents sacrificed their lives. The confession made by the narrator, however, leaves the reviewers puzzled. D. J. Enright only had a vague feeling that there seems to be more than the words suggest and found the ending of the novel confusing:

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90 Wilborn Hampton is a former journalist with United Press International and The New York Times.
But the closing pages are difficult to interpret. After ten years’ absence from his village, the narrator returns, professedly degraded by his exposure to ‘high society’ (where, one wonders) and immersion in ‘the filth of urban life’, his body ‘covered with the seals of approval of famous people. And the sorghum around him now is an imported hybrid variety, grey-green instead of red, high-yield but lacking soul and with a bitter, astringent taste; moreover, it causes rampant constipation. ‘How I loathe hybrid sorghum.’ The passage seems to be saying something in code, not easily deciphered.

(Enright 1993: 22 emphasis added)

Another reviewer, Natasha Walter, who writes for The Independent, only tells her readers that the ending is full of “vivid descriptions”: “at the end, Yan is prepared to stake his book on the beauty of colour; vividness is all: ‘I think of surpassingly beautiful scenes that will never again appear… the red tips of sorghum rising above the muddly yellow water, appealing stubbornly to the blue sky above […] That is the epitome of mankind and the beauty for which I yearn” (Walter 1993).

To conclude, the four reviews of Red Sorghum serve only as an example of how reviewers’ over-emphasis on the violence and other bleak elements in translated Chinese novels limited the scope of interpretation of Chinese literature in the English-speaking world. The image of China that emerges from these reviews published in the 1990s is of a bleak and uncivilised country whose people suffer from oppression. There is little for reviewers to engage with in this vast and important country. Reviewers seldom mention the historical and social contexts in which the novels are embedded. Nor do they engage much with the Chinese literary tradition. This is not a trivial detail, because lacking specialised knowledge of Chinese literature, the reviewers are likely to impose domestic values on evaluating the translated novels.

5.3.2 A Narrative of Chinese Authors as Oppressed and Dissenting

During the 1990s, another type of public narrative elaborated by reviewers of translated Chinese novels revolved around the Chinese authors themselves. Reviewers tended to weave a pattern of causal emplotment that cast the authors of the novels they were reviewing in two different but related roles: either as victims who were persecuted by the Chinese government and incarcerated in prisons/labour camps during the Cultural Revolution, or as dissenting
intellectuals who expose the dark side of Chinese society in their novels and are currently\(^91\) banned or are under investigation by the regime.

The first role into which Chinese authors are cast by reviewers projects them as victims who were deprived of the fundamental human right of independent thinking. Many reviewers consider these authors as representatives of millions of Chinese intellectuals who suffered various forms of physical torture such as hunger, imposed self-criticism and overwork in prisons, and who are closely censored by the government. The purpose of inflicting physical torture such as hunger “is to reform the population [and] to make them submit”, as Isabel Hilton explains in her review of Zhang Xianliang’s *Grass Soup* in *The Independent* (Hilton 1994). She quotes a prisoner in Zhang’s *Grass Soup* explaining that the whole of China suffers from starvation because “only by making the people endure hunger can you make them submit to you, worship you. So you see, don’t let Chinese people have full stomachs – keep them hungry and in a few years not just people, even dogs, will be reformed” (Hilton 1994). Another reviewer of *Grass Soup*, Judith Shapiro\(^92\), points out that one of the consequences of starvation is that millions of Chinese intellectuals wasted their talent searching for food:

> China's engineers, agronomists, accountants, professors, also graduates of universities abroad with masters degrees and PhDs apply their intellect to how to eat toad without ingesting poison and how to construct scales to weigh rations so that no one gets a single blade of grass more than another; a gentle primary school teacher is found dead in a corn field, his belly exploded from eating raw corn; Zhang awakens next to the corpse of a fellow convict, possibly an astronomer, from whose face long hairs have inexplicably sprouted; a prisoner sheds tears of disappointment, rather than of fear or humiliation, when he's caught preparing to boil a rat.

(Shapiro 1995)

These ravages of hunger create an unforgettable impression on Judith Shapiro, as she writes that after reading Zhang’s novel, no readers will “approach a plate of food in quite the same way again” (Shapiro 1995).

Against this background, reviewers show strong sympathy and support for the Chinese authors whose books they are reviewing. These authors, like other intellectuals, suffered the persecution of a ruthless government. For example, Jonathan Spence states that Zhang

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\(^91\) Currently, meaning in the 1990s, not at the time of writing this thesis.

\(^92\) Judith Shapiro is scholar at American University. Her research focuses on global environmental politics, the environmental politics of Asia and Chinese politics under Mao.
Xianliang and Bei Dao’s suffering in labour camps “demands our respect” (Spence 1995:15). Another reviewer, Ian Burma, states that “it [Grass Soup] is a glorious story, for Zhang has shown us that the human spirit can prevail, even in hell” (Buruma 1994). Jonathan Mirsky, reviewer of Getting Used to Dying in The New York Times, similarly expresses his support for the author: “Zhang Xianliang, one of China’s best-selling writers, has had plenty to be afraid of [from the Chinese government]. […] After the events of Tiananmen Square in June 1989, ‘Getting Used to Dying’ (1989) went on the index and […] its author is again under investigation. Mr. Zhang therefore deserves our support and sympathy” (Mirsky 1991). Some reviewers are also impressed by these Chinese authors’ courage in writing about their suffering at the risk of being denounced by the Chinese government. Judith Shapiro expresses her gratitude to Zhang Xianliang for his wit, courage and outstanding linguistic ability: “[…] the extraordinary fact that the original diary survived would mean little without the author’s gift for language, memory for detail and search for meaning; Zhang’s compassion for his fellow convicts, his sharp sense of humor and irony, and his gratitude in the most adverse circumstances all seem to have contributed to his ability to survive” (Shapiro 1995). Shapiro goes on to tell us that “Zhang bears the scars of tyranny and hunger to this day: “The minute I begin to think seriously about something”, he writes, “my heart starts to pound”. That he overcame such fears to write about his haunting experiences in these pages inspires the deepest respect and gratitude” (Shapiro 1995).

Projecting Chinese authors as victims allows reviewers to elaborate a public narrative of the Chinese government as a ruthless and merciless regime that oppresses its own people. This public narrative saw a revival after the 1989 Tiananmen Square event, partly because this historical event led to a period of diplomatic tension between China and western countries, during which most UK and US media placed far more emphasis on China’s shortcomings, and the issue of human rights in particular (Mackerras 2000: xxv). Some reviewers tap into this public narrative, which projects the Chinese government as a human rights violator. For example, Jonathan Spence claims that the four translations under review constitute an indictment of “the current regime in China [which] still, despite its vague murmurs of cooperation, shows no signs of opening to inspection from the United Nations or the Red Cross, let alone the various international organizations committed to monitoring human rights

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abuses” (Spence 1995: 15). With deep sympathy for the sufferings of the Chinese authors and great respect for their courage in recording their past experiences which still haunt them, he reminds western readers that these Chinese authors need ‘our’ help and are worthy of ‘our’ assistance. Spence thus warns those who buy prison-made goods that they are “boosting China’s economy while ignoring the agonies of people who are often imprisoned without trial and for no proven offense” (Spence 1995: 18).

Some reviewers take the past prison experience of Chinese authors as a starting point to criticise current Chinese leaders who would rather not mention the political excesses of China’s recent history, including the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution and the 1989 Tiananmen Square event. Harriet Evans, reviewer of Zhang Xianliang’s Grass Soup, comments that Zhang Xianliang’s prison years serves as a potent reminder of bitter political movements in recent Chinese history, a period of time that many Chinese leaders would prefer to forget or leave undiscussed: “a policy of official silence about the Great Leap Forward reigned. Even now, official texts about the period gloss over the evidence of Mao’s brutality with only vague references to “man-made disasters”” (Evans 1994: 22). While the Chinese government does not allow open discussion or public investigation of any political movements, Zhang Xianliang published his novel Grass Soup more than three decades after he was imprisoned, “when memories of June 1989 have faded, to remind young people in China of the brutalizing effects of submission to an authoritarian system” (Evans 1994: 22).

In elaborating this public narrative of the Chinese government as a totalitarian regime, reviewers selectively neglect engaging with some reflective episodes in the novels under review or ignore the authors’ loyalty to the government, which is explicitly expressed in the novels. Zhang Xianliang, for example, never makes a clear break with the Chinese government; on the contrary, he openly praised Deng Xiaoping and party policies after he was released from prison in the early 1980s and served in various government posts. In addition, Zhang Xianliang certainly reflects in his three translated novels on the reasons why things went wrong in China during the Mao era (Wu 2006: 28). In the concluding part of Grass Soup, he explores the roots of the Cultural Revolution, and emphasises the need to take into account the less visible, more remote origins of the disaster in China’s labour camps (Muhlhahn 2004: 131). He writes in Grass Soup:

A close examination will show that China’s labor camps possessed peculiarities that are a characteristic of the Chinese in general. For instance, in the course of my twenty-two-
year career in the camps, I rarely encountered convicts who did not cooperate with the system and with prison authorities from the start. [...] As for the majority of intellectual convicts, they carried a sense of guilt for the original crime that they may or may not have committed as well as guilt for newly discovered crimes for which they were now painstakingly reforming themselves. This great majority, I must say, include me. You will find no precedent in any history book of prison authorities and prisoners having such an intimate symbiosis.

(Zhang 1994: 81-82)

Zhang Xianliang thus places part of the responsibility for the evils of the Cultural Revolution on the shoulders of Chinese intellectuals, who blindly followed the government’s policies and Mao’s instructions94 (Wu 2011: 71; Wu 2006: 34-35). They appear feckless, easily intimidated and subjugated. Rather than refusing to follow instructions like other prisoners, the intellectual prisoners always cooperated with the camp authorities. However, Jonathan Spence, reviewer of Grass Soup, writes in The New York Review that this cooperation of the Chinese intellectuals under the pressure of the prison authority only gives Zhang’s novel “a bitter tone”, as they cannot even keep their integrity as the poor peasants or criminals who were imprisoned in the same camp for various reasons (Spence 1995: 17).

The victim trope reflects one dimension of the way Chinese authors are narrated by reviewers during the period under study. Another dimension concerns the issue of censorship and freedom of speech in contemporary China. Censorship is an important element in the narrative of Chinese writers as dissenting voices. As these writers’ literary explorations are considered as crossing the boundary of what can be tolerated, many of these novels were banned in China shortly after their publication. Many reviewers refer repeatedly to the fact that the novel under review or the Chinese author is censored by the Chinese government. For example, Delia Davin, reviewer of The Times Literary Supplement, writes that “although published in Beijing in 1988, The Garlic Ballads is now banned in China. Howard Goldblatt’s readable translation makes it accessible to Western readers, but it is a real loss to

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94 Mulhlhahn argues that Chinese prisoners, who had undeservedly suffered the worst maltreatment in prisons/labour camps, often express guilt for their small mistakes but make no direct comment on or even critique the government in their novels and memoirs, as opposed to the survivors from labour camps in the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe, who do critique their governments in their memoirs and other literary works (Mulhlhahn 2004: 134). He explains that one plausible reason is that in China “the party still controls literary life in the PRC and certainly prefers not to hear sharp, concrete accusations” (Mulhlhahn 2004: 134). Perry Link offers two reasons for the Chinese intellectuals’ close relationships with the Chinese government, even after they were maltreated in camps/prisons. First, Link argues that these Chinese writers are unwilling to admit that their lives were wasted in prisons; second, they may have ambitions to serve in government office (Link 2000: 32-33). For more discussions, see Goldman, Cheek and Hamrin (1987); Andreas (2002).
China that it cannot for the moment at least be read there” (Davin 1995). Jonathan Mirsky states that many of Zhang Xianliang’s books – all with labour camp themes – “have encountered difficulties with the censor before or after publication” (Mirsky 1991). He also quotes Martha Avery, Zhang’s translator, saying that after the Tiananmen Square event, “Getting Used to Dying went on the index [of censorship] and […] its author is again under investigation” (Mirsky 1991). Another reviewer of Hong Ying’s Summer of Betrayal, Caroline Moorehead writes in The Independent that

> The novel has not been published in China, where Hong Ying’s work is banned as too erotic and too political. She lives in London. Her earlier futuristic trilogy, Far Goes the Girl - a fantasy woven around the theme of minorities, both sexual and cultural - did appear in China some years ago, but only heavily censored. For writers and dissidents, China has not moved far since the crackdown in Tiananmen Square.

(Moorehead 1997)

Some reviewers attempt to explore why the translated Chinese novels under review were banned in China. The pattern of causal emplotment they elaborate configures censorship as a response to the transgressive political content of the novels. Richard Bernstein, reviewer of The Garlic Ballads in The New York Times, claims that given that the novel portrays a fictional Chinese town which “is full of lazy and overbearing tyrants, of truculent, superstitious peasants, of daily violence, of grime and of hard, earthbound lives”, it is “no wonder that The Garlic Ballads was banned in China” (Bernstein 1995). Another reviewer of The Garlic Ballads, Margot Norman, who writes for The Times, comments that “the Chinese authorities duly banned the book” (Norman 1995, emphasis added). Some novels manage to be published in the mainland but with some deletions and changes. D. J. Enright, writing for the London Review of Books, observes that the translation of Red Sorghum is based on the Taiwanese version: “in its original language Red Sorghum was published by the Liberation Army Publishing House in Beijing in 1987, apparently with a number of cuts since the present translation is based on a Taipei edition of 1988 in which deleted material was restored” (Enright 1995: 23).

To conclude, the 1990s witnessed a rise in interest in Chinese literature among UK and US reviewers. This provided an opportunity to challenge the persistent stereotype of Chinese literature as a dull, propagandistic source of social information on China in the 1980s, and to garner broader attention for Chinese literary works. Unfortunately, all too often the breadth and depth of literary contributions by Chinese authors are overshadowed in reviews which
are restricted to a narrow selection of genres and themes considered to have wide market appeal.

5.4 The 2000s

30 out of 87 (34%) Chinese novels in English translation received a total of 114 reviews during the 2000s in the UK and US mainstream media outlets. As China’s economic presence became more visible and the demand for Chinese novels was exponentially increasing in English-speaking countries during this decade, reviews of Chinese novels were featured in many mainstream media outlets. For example, the May 4, 2008 edition of The New York Times featured reviews of four translations of Chinese novels: Mo Yan’s Life and Death are Wearing Me Out, Jiang Rong’s Wolf Totem, Wang Anyi’s The Song of Everlasting Sorrow, and Yan Lianke’s Serve the People!.

Translations of novels focusing on personal trauma continued to be favoured by reviewers in the UK and US; this pattern, which was already identified in the 1980s and 1990s, persisted well into the 2000s. Novels that feature political movements, such as the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen, were selected for review and attracted much media attention. For example, among many others, Yu Hua’s Brothers (2009) received six reviews; Yang Xianhui’s Woman from Shanghai (2009) received two reviews; Yan Lianke’s Serve the People! (2007) received one review; Su Tong’s The Boat to Redemption (2010) received three reviews; Mo Yan’s Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out (2008) received two reviews; Mo Yan’s Big Breasts and Wide Hips (2005) received four reviews; Gao Xingjian’s One Man’s Bible (2002) received six reviews; and Bi Feiyu’s Three Sisters (2010) received four reviews.

Novels that deal with the themes of Tiananmen and China in the post-Tiananmen era also attracted considerable media attention: Ma Jian’s Beijing Coma (2008) received 16 reviews and The Noodle Maker (2004) received 5 reviews. For a long time after 1989, Chinese writers both at home and abroad remained silent about the Tiananmen Square event (Kong 2012). When they began to feature it in their literary works, they tended to push it into the background, into the margins, or refer to it in metaphorical terms, or, if they did address it directly, for the most part they treated it only in superficial terms (Kong 2012). Hong Ying’s Summer of Betrayal (1997) is a case in point. As one of the first Chinese writers to explore the Tiananmen event, Hong Ying’s debut novel Summer of Betrayal, which first appeared in English in 1997, tells of a young woman emotional struggling through the summer of 1989 in
Beijing, betrayed by her government and her lover. However, the novel’s focus is on the lovers, the underground poetry group the protagonists belong to, and sex, and in the end “sex overwhelms all else” (Tew 2009: 389). When it was translated into English in 1997, Summer of Betrayal received only three reviews, published in the same year. Jean McNeil writes in The Times Literary Supplement that “the book’s message is feminist [and] Tiananmen Square is simply a backdrop” (McNeil 1997). She further argues that this novel “sheds little or no light on the political events surrounding the actual uprising; and Lin Ying’s [the protagonist] personal values matter more than her political ones” (McNeil 1997).

By contrast, during the 2000s, Chinese writers began to engage with the Tiananmen Square event in their literary works more directly. These recently published works, the vast majority of which are originally written in English, elaborate an alternative narrative of Tiananmen event. They include Liu Hong’s Startling Moon (2001), Terrence Cheng’s Sons of Heaven (2002), Ha Jin’s The Crazed (2002), Annie Wang’s Lili (2001) and The People’s Republic of Desire (2006), to name just a few. Among these Tiananmen novels is Ma Jian’s novel Beijing Coma, which was translated into English in 2008. It received an unprecedented number of reviews in the UK and US media outlets: 16 reviews, making it the most reviewed Chinese novel in English translation so far. Literary critics and reviewers claim that this is the work that stays closest to this historical moment and provides readers with the most detailed descriptions, minutely tracking the rise and fall of the student pro-democracy movement. Meanwhile, this novel also explores Tiananmen’s political impact on contemporary Chinese society and the Chinese national psyche (Kong 2012).

Reviewers’ interest in novels that feature personal trauma generally exceeded their interest in novels written by new writers who explore new themes. One example that demonstrates reviewers’ relative lack of interest in new themes involves a Chinese writer, Guo Xiaolu, promoted by Random House, a major publisher. Guo’s Village of Stone (2004) only received two reviews: one in The Times Literary Supplement (Su 2004) and one in The Independent (Hussein 2004). According to one reviewer, the novel does not once mention “the Cultural Revolution, Chairman Mao, or the Communist Party. Nor has the author taken the rebellious route of some Beat-inspired young Chinese writers in exploring themes of sex, drugs and the invasion of American pop culture” (Su 2004). Aamer Hussein, who writes for The Independent, finds that Village of Stones does not possess “the grim realities of earlier Chinese fiction [that] left readers with the grit of tragedy between their teeth; Guo, however,
is concerned with reconciliation, redemption and rebirth, Coral’s trip to the places of her past signals release, telling her that the present has only just begun” (Hussein 2004).

It is also interesting to note that publishers’ financial investment in English translations of Chinese novels which deviate from the dominant storyline of the Cultural Revolution and/or Tiananmen, and their heavy promotion of some translated novels, do not always generate favourable reviews or enhance the visibility of Chinese novels and writers. In 2008, for example, Penguin paid £55,000 for the English copyright to Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem*, a novel that deviates from dominant themes describing the ravages of the era of former supreme leader and the political movements in recent Chinese history. This gesture suggests an emerging awareness of China’s literary heritage, a great cultural offering to the world that should not be overshadowed by China’s growing economic importance (Wasserstrom 2009). Jo Lusby, representative of Penguin’s office in China, also confirms that Penguin intended to publish titles which are popular in China and this is also one of their intentions in establishing a branch in China (Coonan 2008). Therefore, Penguin was confident that *Wolf Totem* would raise the profile and popularity of Chinese fiction in Britain and reach a general readership in the UK (Coonan 2008). In sharp contrast to the publishers’ good intentions, reviewers’ reactions were quite disappointing. Some found this novel “relentlessly gloomy and ponderously didactic” (Mishra 2008) and “preachy” (Standaert 2008; French 2008). Michael Standaert, reviewer of Jiang Rong’s *Wolf Totem* in *Los Angeles Times*, even found the novel’s in-depth exploration of Chinese national character disappointing:

> What a rich stew of themes to work with: revolution; ecological destruction; man versus nature; the clash of cultures, traditions and lifestyles. Unfortunately, the author deviates from the vivid material that is in front of him and wanders into the realm of didactic philosophizing. Had Jiang avoided his philosophical musings and *ramblings about “the Chinese soul”* and concentrated more on the soul of his story, it could have been a spectacular novel. Instead it fails to rise above ordinary and at times ventures into the realm of batty.

(Standaert 2008, emphasis added)

This generally negative reception of *Wolf Totem* suggests that it is still difficult to break the established patterns of interpreting Chinese novels and introduce new Chinese novels with new themes to English readers. Even when the commission of the novel is initiated by a powerful commercial publisher such as Penguin, the resistance from reviewers still poses a significant obstacle.
Nevertheless, general trade publishers played an important role in attracting media attention during the 2000s. The early 2000s saw an increasing investment in translated Chinese novels from the general trade publishers who have a strong presence in the UK and US and exert considerable influence in terms of purchasing copyright and promoting Chinese writers. Chinese novels which generate most reviews are more likely to have been published by general trade publishers: for example, *Soul Mountain* (2000) published by Flamingo, an imprint of HarperCollins, received 5 reviews; *Red Dust: A Path through China* (2001), published by Random House, received 7 reviews; *Beijing Coma* (2008), published by Random House in the UK and Macmillan in the US, received 16 reviews; *Wolf Totem* (2008), published by Penguin, received 10 reviews. With their enormous distribution and financial power, these general trade publishers are able to garner media attention and establish international prominence for some Chinese writers, such as Ma Jian, Jiang Rong and Mo Yan. In contrast, only 3 out of 27 titles published by university presses received a total of 4 reviews, and all 3 titles were published by Columbia University Press: *A Dictionary of Maqiao* (2003) received two reviews in *The New York Times* (Wolff 2003) and *The Times Literary Supplement* (Wood 2003a); *Retribution* (2003) received one review in *The Times Literary Supplement* (Wood 2003b); *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow: A Novel of Shanghai* (2008) received one review in *The New York Times* (Prose 2008a). Considering that university presses published a good number of novels during this decade, and that in 1998 Columbia University Press launched a literary series entitled ‘Modern Chinese literature from Taiwan’, the fact that only 10% of the novels published by university presses received reviews is striking. It highlights the fact that it is the general trade publishers who play a key role in promoting Chinese writers in the Anglophone world.

Beyond these broad patterns, there are at least three sub-patterns that deserve further discussion.

### 5.4.1 A Narrative of Dissident Authors in the Post-Tiananmen Era: Competing for Legitimacy in Narrating China

During the 2000s, many reviewers tended to prioritise works by dissidents or dissenting writers living in China. This is evident first in the number of reviews dissidents and dissenting writers received during this decade. Dissident writer Ma Jian published 4 titles in English translation during this decade; these received 34 reviews altogether, accounting for
more than a quarter of the total number (114 reviews) published during the 2000s: *Red Dust* (2001) received 7 reviews, *The Noodle Maker* (2004) received 5 reviews, *Stick out of your Tongue* (2006) received 6 reviews, and *Beijing Coma* (2008) received 16 reviews that featured in 11 out of the 14 mainstream media outlets under study. Among the reviews received by *Beijing Coma*, *The Guardian* published 2 reviews by Choudhury (2008) and Lasdun (2008) and *The New York Times* published 3 reviews by Fishman (2008), Row (2008) and Kakutani (2008). Nobel Laureate Gao Xingjian, a dissident writer living in France, also received considerable media attention; *Soul Mountain* (2000) received 8 reviews and *One Man’s Bible* (2002) received 6 reviews. Although media attention in the case of Gao Xingjian may be largely explained by the award of the Nobel Prize, it is interesting to note that his identity as dissident is foregrounded in most reviews. By comparison, one of the most critically acclaimed Mainland writers, Mo Yan, also has 4 titles published during this decade, which received only 14 reviews; another writer, Su Tong, published 3 titles in English that received 10 reviews. Other Mainland writers received even less media attention.

In addition to being selected for review, an author’s identity as dissident is often accentuated in reviews. Reviewers of Ma Jian’s novels, such as Prose (2008), Smallwood (2008), Dirda (2006), Leith (2006), Pugh-Thomas (2006), Cheuse (2006), Sun (2004) and Evans (2004), among many others, recount his personal story of being persecuted by the Chinese government. For example, in Christina Smallwood’s review of *Beijing Coma* in the *Los Angeles Times*, she draws on Ma Jian’s personal background to construct a narrative that projects the author as an innocent victim whose works are being sanctioned by the Chinese government and who is constantly harassed by the regime:

Ma is free to travel in China, but he can’t publish or make public statements. He lives in a double isolation: As a foreigner in the West, he speaks no English, writes in Chinese and is read only in translation. Versions of “The Noodle Maker” and “Red Dust” have been published in China under pseudonyms but so heavily censored as to be what Drew calls “unreadable”. Yet when he goes home, he is rarely alone. On his last trip back, he visited, for the first time, his grandfather’s village. (Since his grandfather had been a landowner whose crop was tea, he was killed during the Cultural Revolution by being deprived of liquids.) The town was eight hours from Ma’s family home in Qingdao. Even before he returned, they had already been visited by police who wanted to know what he was doing.

(Smallwood 2008)

By giving voice to writers suppressed by the Chinese government, reviewers not only empower these authors, but also establish a channel to communicate a specific narrative of
China to their audiences in the UK and US. As Pankaj Mishra writes in *The New Yorker*, “China – garishly capitalist but still officially Communist – seems to impose its own peculiar ordeal on writers; they risk the state’s malevolence without exercising any great moral or political influence in their easily distracted society. “Beijing Coma” is unlikely to be published on the Chinese mainland (though editions printed in Hong Kong and Taiwan will probably be pirated there), and will be read mostly by readers outside China” (Mishra 2008).

The prioritising of dissident writers by reviewers could also be attributed to the theme(s) they deal with in their novels. As discussed in section 4.4.1., dissident writers often draw on certain historical episodes which are suppressed by the Chinese government to elaborate a competing narrative of China. For example, *Beijing Coma* elaborates a narrative of Tiananmen that is at odds with the official Chinese account; *Stick out of your Tongue* weaves a story of Tibet as a culture suppressed by the Chinese government; *Women from Shanghai* tells a story which uncovers the brutality of the Jiabiangou labour camp in the 1960s and 1970s, an episode which is prohibited from public examination by the government. In reviewing these translated novels, reviewers are able to construct a narrative of resistance to the Chinese government’s repression of certain historical episodes in order to legitimise their rule. For example, Ma Jian’s *Beijing Coma* chronicles Chinese history from the 1960s to the economic reform era in the late 1990s by telling a story of Dai Wei, the protagonist, who grew up during the bleak era of the Cultural Revolution, participated in the Tiananmen protest and fell into a coma after the event. It constructs an analogy between Dai Wei’s comatose mind, which holds on to the memory of Tiananmen, and a Chinese society that is distracted by economic development and willing to leave historical tragedy behind. Tash Aw\(^\text{95}\), reviewer in *The Telegraph*, explains this analogy to readers as follows: “Dai Wei’s body represents not just Tiananmen Square but China itself, a place where “millions of tiny cells could gather and forget themselves and, more importantly, forget the thick, oppressive walls that enclosed them”. But in his stubborn refusal to surrender to death, Dai Wei also signals a change in a country more self-destructive and tragic than any other” (Aw 2008).

The same analogy is picked up by other reviewers, such as Choudhury (2008), Lasdun (2008), Kynge (2008), Mirsky (2008), Mishra (2008), Yang (2008), among others, who accentuate the chilling effect of suppressing the narrative of Tiananmen on the national psyche and on contemporary Chinese people, especially the younger generation growing up after Tiananmen.

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\(^{95}\) Tash Aw, a Malaysian writer living in London.
Belle Yang writes in *The Washington Post* that “Dai Wei may be stuck in his iron bed, haunted by the tragedy of 1989, but this novel is thoroughly awake to the evils of the new China. During the 10 years he has been in what he calls ‘hibernation’, China’s citizens have become preoccupied with getting rich, a development that dismay him” (Yang 2008). She further argues that “Ma Jian […] offers the Chinese people an avenue through which to retrieve their souls and emerge from their collective coma. He gives us two choices: remain society’s slaves or lose everything and find freedom” (Yang 2008). Writing in *The Guardian*, James Lasdun states that “mention of the troops’ massacre of unarmed civilians remains forbidden, as does all reporting that differs in any way from the official version. Many young people in China know nothing about events at all (the iconic “tankman” images drew a blank recently among Beijing University students), and with their new prosperity, perhaps few care” (Lasdun 2008). Drawing on the story of a young clerk in a Beijing newspaper who inadvertently allowed the following words appeared on the newspaper: “Respects to the mothers of 4 June”, Boyd Tonkin, reviewer in *The Independent*, argues that the tragedy of this story is that “this girl didn’t even know the importance of the date” and that Tiananmen might run the risk of being erased from the public memory by the Chinese government (Tonkin 2008).

Released before the Tiananmen anniversary and the 2008 Beijing Games, this temporal configuration of *Beijing Coma*, together with the considerable media attention the translation received, effectively contest the official narrative of China as a peaceful, harmonious country, as elaborated by the Chinese government. Boyd Tonkin points out that “its *Beijing Coma* appearance, just as the giant propaganda juggernaut built in preparation for the Olympic Games looks liable to topple over in the face of global anger over Beijing’s record of repression, is an event that should, and will, resonate around the world” (Tonkin 2008). Jess Ross describes it as “an extraordinarily effective novel” and argues in *The New York Times* that the temporal configuration in which the novel is embedded signals “an important political statement” (Row 2008). It is interesting to note that this temporal emplotment of *Beijing Coma* within a specific set of (then current) events also leads some reviewers to project the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as complicit in allowing Beijing to host the Olympics despite the country’s appalling human rights record and its silencing of dissident voices. James Lasdun, reviewer in *The Guardian*, presents IOC as one of “the encroaching forces of silence” (Lasdun 2008). Lasdun seems to suggest that IOC, together
with Google – which “agreed to censor all information about the Tiananmen massacre from its China website” (Lasdun 2008) – has succumbed to the Chinese government’s power and is contributing to the suppression of the ‘real’ narrative of Tiananmen. In this narrative context, where powerful international organisations are projected as yielding to China’s power, Ma Jian’s resistance constitutes “a mighty gesture of remembrance” (Lasdun 2008).

Another, related and overlapping pattern evident during this decade is that novels about Tibet also attracted considerable media attention: Ma Jian’s *Stick out of your Tongue* (2006), which tells the story of the writer’s journey in Tibet in the 1980s, received 6 reviews, and Alai’s *Red Poppies* (2002), which revolves around a wealthy Tibetan chieftain clan and his dramatic rivalry with the other three chieftains in Republican China from the perspective of his youngest son (believed to be retarded), received 4 reviews. Despite the fact that the two stories are quite different, many reviewers drew attention to the authors’ identity – Alai as a Tibetan writer publishing in Chinese and Ma Jian as a dissident writer – to argue for or against the ‘authenticity’ of their stories and the eligibility of the authors as narrators of Tibet. For some reviewers of *Red Poppies*, Alai’s identity as a Tibetan writing and publishing in Chinese is a reminder of China’s invasion of Tibet and its status as ‘coloniser’. The takeover of Tibet in the 1950s led to a transformation of its identity, partly as a result of the Chinese government’s policy of suppressing Tibetan language and promoting the Han Chinese by force (Lovell 2002; Hilton 2002; Crossette 2002). Chinese thus became a privileged language and Tibetans are less able to express themselves using their own language, as has happened in other colonial settings such as North Africa. The Tibetan literary scene is largely dominated by Chinese-language writing. The relationship between China and Tibet thus sets up a framework in which Alai and his novel are evaluated. In her review in *The Times Literary Supplement*, Julia Lovell argues that *Red Poppies* exposes “the tensions arising from the colonial legacy within contemporary Tibetan literature”:

[There are] two broad choices faced by writers who have grown up with the legacy of colonialism: either to reject the language of the colonizer, or to use it for their own purposes. The benefits and drawbacks of both options are clear. Although those writing in Tibetan may seem the more “authentic” representatives of their culture, they are addressing a restricted audience, since the urban Chinese readership exceeds the Tibetan. Meanwhile, in order to gain access to a wider [Chinese] audience for their own accounts of Tibet, those writing in Chinese (*including Alai*) must abandon the sense of cultural identity that comes with use of the Tibetan language and, to some degree, align themselves with the colonial culture.
Lovell thus implies that Alai, a Tibetan dissident writing in the language of the ‘coloniser’, is a less ‘authentic’ voice of Tibet. In addition, she argues, Alai’s narration of pre-Communist Tibet as a problematic place that the Communist government rescued from chaos “falls into line with the colonial power’s version of history” (Lovell 2002), and undermines the ‘authenticity’ of his voice. Nevertheless, Lovell acknowledges that Alai tells an interesting story from “a new and thought-provoking perspective on Tibetan history” and his decision to write in Chinese is understandable given the need to reach a wider Chinese audience, which also “benefits readers in the West, since translation opportunities for books written in Tibetan are scarcer even then those for Chinese literature” (Lovell 2002).

The other two reviewers of Red Poppies, Barbara Crossette (The New York Times) and Isabel Hilton (The Los Angeles Times), also imply that Alai’s voice is not to be considered ‘representative’ of Tibet. In her long review, Hilton offers even more historical information about Tibet to support her argument that “Alai himself might be considered Tibetan, but his novel is not. Such novels read strangely to Tibetans, as though they were written for outsiders” (Hilton 2002). It is worth noting that in her review of Ma Jian’s Stick out of your Tongue, Isabel Hilton casts Ma Jian, a dissident Chinese who does not speak nor write in Tibetan, in a different light. She contextualises Ma Jian’s novel within a narrative that highlights the tension between the Chinese and the Tibetans:

Relations between Han Chinese and Tibetans are not generally warm. For Tibetans, Han Chinese are the occupiers of their land and destroyers of their culture. For most Han Chinese, Tibetans are the dirty, backward and ignorant people of Beijing's propaganda, lucky to be “liberated” by the Red Army from their feudal serfdom. For those Han Chinese who find Beijing’s propaganda less appealing, Tibet can seem like the romantic locus of a profound spirituality and a place of exhilarating, if dangerous, beauty.

(Hilton 2006)

Hilton claims this configuration is important for understanding Ma Jian, because without the Tibetan context, “the stories can seem stark, even brutal” (Hilton 2006). Unlike his contemporary Chinese writers in the 1980s and 1990s who portrayed exotic Tibetans with “faces illuminated by celestial light”, Ma Jian avoided “the trap” and constructed in this novel a narrative of Tibet which features “poverty and degradation of a spiritual tradition all
but destroyed by political persecution” and exposed the destruction of Tibetan culture as a result of the cultural invasion of the Han Chinese:

The Tibetan city of Lhasa has largely been destroyed and prostitution flourishes amid the Chinese-imposed concrete blocks and karaoke kitsch. Today Han Chinese visit Tibet as tourists, buying up Buddhist images that they hope will help them in their businesses; for them Tibet has been tamed as a spiritual Disneyland, not unlike the Tibet of many western imaginations.

(Hilton 2006)

This framing of Ma Jian as a writer sensitive to the suffering of Tibetans under the Communist Party positions him on the side of Tibetans, and projects him as an author who writes “of Tibet as he had experienced it, both as a reality and a state of mind” (Hilton 2006). In addition, Ma Jian’s personal story of being denounced by the Chinese government in the 1980s, an incident which forced him to undertake the journey to Tibet, is also incorporated in the review. This portrayal projects Ma Jian himself as a victim of the Chinese government. Ma Jian’s stories of Tibet are not only considered ‘authentic representations’ of Tibet but we are also told that they reveal (his) “humanity”: “at the heart of Ma Jian’s stories, there is both humanity and a piercing, if painful, literary truth” (Hilton 2006). Hilton’s narrative of Ma Jian and/or his novel is confirmed by other reviewers. For example, Guy Mannes-Abbott, reviewer in The Independent, accentuates Ma Jian’s self-portrayal as an outsider to Tibet who, as Han Chinese, should not be in Tibet: “in an afterword, Ma describes the Tibetan people as “outsiders in their own home”, adding that being Han Chinese, he had “no right” to be there. However, Ma was already a beatnik fugitive in his own land” (Mannes-Abbott 2006).

To conclude, this section has argued that in many cases, Chinese novels/authors are often appropriated within a narrative framework that emphasises the political significance of their works and their narrative position in relation to the Chinese government. By foregrounding dissident and dissenting authors and projecting them as legitimate voices that can be trusted to tell us the ‘true’ story of China, including Tibet, many reviewers succeed not only in promoting particular novels and the personal stories of their authors, but also in giving currency to the narrative of past and current Chinese governments as evil and ruthless.
5.4.2 The Cultural Revolution: The Same but New

For UK and US reviewers in the 2000s, the Cultural Revolution – in which one of the world’s oldest, most elaborate cultures began destroying itself, in which a successful, disciplined political organisation tore its own heart out, and in which colleagues and classmates turned murderously against each other – continues to be regarded as one of the monumental events in recent Chinese history (Lovell 2013). The theme of the Cultural Revolution, which is prioritised by UK and US publishers as seen in section 4.4.1, also draws the attention of reviewers and general audiences in large numbers to continue to read stories that depict that period of Chinese history. A number of Cultural Revolution novels were reviewed during the 2000s; these stories continually elaborate more details of the events of this traumatic period in Chinese history, acquire more depth in exploring the roots of this political movement and proliferate through the process of narrative accrual. Many reviewers argue that Chinese writers are particularly adept at describing the complex experience of the Cultural Revolution – more so than they are at exploring other topics such as human nature and love relations. Terrence Cheng argues in The Washington Post that Gao Xingjian’s second novel, One Man’s Bible, is a “heavy-handed and pontificating” read and the conversations are often “confusing or overbearing” (Cheng 2002). However, when Gao focuses on discussing the Cultural Revolution, the book is “far more effective”:

He depicts the psychological terror of class struggle and shifting day-to-day loyalties, at home and among the populace. Individual thoughts and feelings are a crime. People are beaten, denounced and sent away to rural labor camps for re-education. True friendships are rare; words are weapons to be used against the speaker. No one can be trusted, because people are always looking for some way to get ahead, often by turning in those closest to them.

(Cheng 2002)

Many reviewers claim that the Cultural Revolution is a hugely important and indispensable element in elaborating an intelligible narrative of modern, contemporary China. The new China has changed beyond recognition, they argue, following the rapid economic boom but there is still continuity with its past; therefore, understanding the Cultural Revolution in recent Chinese history provides alternative channels of understanding modern China. Paul Watkins thus states in The Times that “the face of a new China rises from the smashed pottery of the Cultural Revolution, reinventing itself as it has done 100 times before” (Watkins 2008).
It is also noticeable that the attraction of these Cultural-Revolution-themed novels to reviewers is often related to their depictions of the brutality of political movements. The reviewers are eager to look for signs of authoritarianism from the literary representations of political oppression and mass craziness, thus creating a heavily mediated narrative of Chinese culture and history. The backwardness of the Chinese tradition and the dictatorship of the Communist Party seem to be a source of horror which both disgusts and enchants the reviewers of translated Chinese novels. Ordinary Chinese people are depicted as complicit with political oppression and apparently contributing to their own suffering. This pattern of causal emplotment in reading the Cultural Revolution was prevalent in the 1990s and remained largely unchanged in the 2000s.

Nevertheless, despite the continued appeal of Cultural Revolution novels in the 2000s, some reviewers began to find this set of novels outdated. Writing in *The Times Literary Supplement*, Julia Lovell finds that *One Man’s Bible*, at its best, is “an absorbing historical primer” during the decades of the Cultural Revolution, describing “the appalling process by which individuals suffered, and in turn perpetrated oppression” (Lovell 2002). Similarly, Richard Bernstein seems to tire of the revolutionary jargon of that period, arguing that Gao’s language in *One Man’s Bible* is full of “the jargon-choked meetings, the vocabulary and discourse of the Communist Party nomenklatura”, which he finds quite disturbing and argues that it “weakens [the] narrative power” of the novel (Bernstein 2002).

### 5.4.3 Narrating China and Chinese Literature as Fundamentally Alien

Notwithstanding a few reviewers’ favourable comments on the literary merit of translated Chinese novels, most reviewers find them highly problematic and alien. Even academic reviewers comment that Chinese novels cannot be accommodated within a western context without extensive commentary on their historical background. Chinese writers’ obsession with the theme of death and their excessive depictions of violence and cruelty leave many reviewers very confused. John Updike, in his review of Su Tong’s *My Life as Emperor* and

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96 Some translated Chinese novels have received favourable reviews based on their literary merit. For example, Isabel Hilton, reviewer in *The Los Angeles Times*, argues that Alai’s *Red Poppies* can “stand on its own literary merits, accessible to the reader without the historical background or even a precise geographical fix on the novel’s setting” (Hilton 2002). Frances Wood praises Han Shaogong’s *Dictionary of Maqiao* (2003) as “a wonderful, many-layered novel […] which gains further depth from a good translation” (Wood 2003:22). Henry Zhao criticized Western publishers’ lack of interest in authentic Chinese literature in his review of Gao Xingjian’s *Soul Mountain in The Independent*: “[the] stubborn Anglo-American apathy to true originality in art has long been a puzzle to me” (Zhao 2001). Apart from these positive reviews in terms of literary achievements, Chinese novels only received praise for their political content.
Mo Yan’s *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, expresses this frustration. Reviewing two Chinese novels for the first time in *The New Yorker*, he argues that Mo Yan’s take on the novel is shaped by the fact that in China the novel “had no Victorian heyday to teach it decorum” and had little history behind it (Updike 2005). As a result, Mo Yan is “cheerfully free with the physical details that accompany sex, birth, illness, and violent death” (Updike 2005).

Another good example is Jess Row, a Chinese expert who teaches Chinese literature at the College of New Jersey. In his review of Yu Hua’s *Brothers* in *The New York Times*, he comments that the novel conveys elusive messages which are difficult for western readers to decipher. It is very much a social novel of China in the late 20th century, and it should become a “blockbuster in the West” (Row 2009). Nevertheless, reading *Brothers* can be a “daunting, sometimes vexing and deeply confusing experience” for UK and US readers because it does not fit into any narrative category familiar to the Western reader; it starts as “a sentimental family-epic-cum-romantic-comedy”, but the second volume turns into a “broad historical satire” (Row 2009). Thus, the whole novel reads as “a kind of orgiastic blend of satire, comedy and sober polemic” (Row 2009). In addition, the novel is flooded with “verbal and physical violence – curses, denunciations, black eyes, beatings – and yet Yu Hua describes this violence so matter-of-factly, and repetitively, that through the filter of translation it becomes nearly impossible to absorb” (Row 2009). Row concludes pessimistically that *Brothers* might be neglected by Western readers and not receive the attention it deserves:

> Does this mean “*Brothers*” is untranslatable? Perhaps it’s better to say that the strangeness of this English version demonstrates just how wide the chasm of common reference and understanding between China and the West still is. It’s not so much a matter of how many books are translated as which books are taught and promoted and viewed as essential. I’d like to think that in another generation the heroine of “The Dream of the Red Chamber,” Lin Daiyu, could be as recognizable to English-speaking readers as Emma Bovary or Anna Karenina, but I’m not wildly optimistic. Until then, I’m afraid, “*Brothers*” will fall on ears that, while not entirely deaf, are somewhat hard of hearing.

*(Row 2009)*

Interestingly, many reviewers argue that introductory and other paratextual material necessary to allow the reader to understand this unfamiliar culture and literary tradition may be helpful. Lucy Carlyle, reviewer of Gao Xingjian’s *Buying a Fishing Rod For My Grandfather* in *The Times Literary Supplement*, argues that “[…] non-Chinese readers must
inevitably be aware of another layer of alienation. There are references to objects, places and memoires which a Western readers cannot identify, and some words remain in the original Chinese; some notes at the end of the text might have been helpful to elucidate them” (Carlyle 2004). Writing in The Guardian, Nicholas Lezard, reviewer of Please Don’t Call me Human, expresses similar frustration with the elusive Chinese references in Wang Shuo’s black humour novel and the lack of supplementary material to elucidate them:

Now, I imagine you are well-educated enough to know the significance of 1949 to the Chinese, but 1937 might stump you (the Kuomintang-Communist pact and the start of the Sino-Japanese war); and that is a bit of a problem with this book. It is crammed with allusions which Chinese would get at once, but which are pretty much lost to us; the translator has “chosen not to clutter the text with explanatory notes or other devices that would ultimately contribute little to an appreciation of the novel”.

(Lezard 2000)

To conclude, the new millennium saw a heightening of interest in Chinese literature, with most UK and US mainstream media outlets devoting some attention to translated Chinese novels during the 2000s. Despite the fact that an increasing number of Chinese novels with diverse themes are translated into English, reviewers tend to select for review recurrent themes and storylines such as the Cultural Revolution, and only a few seem willing to promote Chinese novels that engage with other themes. For example, Eileen Chang, whose exquisite language and deep literary sensibility is sui generis in contemporary Chinese literature, received only one review during this period. Both C. T. Hsia and Der-wei Wang, two leading scholars of modern Chinese literature, consider her to be one of the most significant writers of the twentieth century. Her novels, i.e. Lust, Caution (2007) and Love in a Fallen City (2007) eventually appeared in English in 2007, and were immediately included in ‘Penguin Modern Classic’ series. However, both novels failed to gain reviewers’ attention.

The public narrative of China as dark and bleak persisted into the 2000s. While Chinese society continues to be framed as harsh and cruel, new elements are woven into this public narrative. As China experiences fast-paced economic transformation, Chinese society in the new century is portrayed as money-worshiping and the Chinese as indifferent to their narrative past, as some of the episodes in Chinese history are supressed or even erased by the Chinese government. Instead of striving to weave neglected but important historical events into a more reflective and responsible public narrative of modern China, the Chinese are merely interested in wealth and taking every opportunity to get rich.
5.5 Conclusions

This chapter examined the reviews of translated Chinese novels published in mainstream UK and US outlets between 1980 and 2010. I adopted a chronological structure to investigate the role played by the reviewers in the construction of narratives of China and Chinese society during the past three decades. As the database shows, the past three decades witnessed a growing interest in translated Chinese novels on the part of UK and US reviewers, who elaborated a public narrative of China as dark, bleak and greedy. China is depicted as a nation driven mad by the political feverishness of the Cultural Revolution and by money-worshiping in the new millennium. Chinese literature is considered as didactic and wooden, despite the fact that UK and US publishers began to invest heavily in translations of Chinese literature since the 2000s.
Chapter 6 Conclusions: Politicising Fiction, Fictionalizing Politics

As this project progressed, the mainland Chinese writer Mo Yan was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012. On the day of the ceremony, the Head of the Nobel Literature Committee told Howard Goldblatt, the translator who made 6 of Mo Yan’s novels available in English, how critical his translations were in selecting Mo Yan as the 2012 laureate (Sparks 2013). While China was celebrating the news of Mo Yan’s award, which was hailed as a significant milestone in Chinese literary history and interpreted as a long-overdue expression of Western recognition of Chinese literature, many western critics and Chinese dissidents were sceptical of the Committee’s choice and some even dismissed the decision as a concession to a totalitarian regime. Herta Müller denounced the Committee’s selection as “a catastrophe” (Flood 2012), and Salman Rushdie described Mo Yan as “a government Patsy” (Mishra 2012). Shortly after the announcement, Mo Yan’s political convictions, rather than his literary writings, began to come under intense scrutiny from the media around the world: he was criticised for being a member of the Communist Party and for holding the position of Vice-chairman in the government-sponsored Writers Association, which almost all Chinese writers must join; he was also attacked for failing to speak for the jailed democratic writer Liu Xiaobo, who received the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2010, and for defending government censorship on all cultural products (Lovell 2012; Osnos 2012a; 2012b; Link 2012). Months after the Nobel Prize controversy in which the new Laureate was trapped erupted, two English translations of Mo Yan’s latest novels, namely *POW!* (2013) and *Sandalwood Death* (2013), appeared in the UK and US. In their reviews, almost every reviewer referred to the controversy but concluded in the end that Mo Yan was a worthy recipient of the literature prize (Tobar 2012; Treisman 2012; Buruma 2013; Cox 2013; Li 2013; Garner 2013; Saval 2013). This debate about whether Mo Yan, a Mainland writer who is supportive of the current regime, deserves the Nobel Prize in Literature reveals the fact that politics still wields tremendous power in conditioning the way in which Chinese literature is read and interpreted in the Anglophone world, and continues to mediate the construction of western public narratives of China.

This study set out to examine the role played by translation in negotiating and mediating public narratives of China in the UK and US, with specific reference to the English translations of Chinese novels commissioned and sold in the UK and US literary markets.
between 1980 and 2010. Narratives of China elaborated through translation are authored collectively by a range of UK and US narrators, including publishers, reviewers, translators and literary agents, in a variety of venues, including book reviews. These narrators have the power both to select and promote specific Chinese novels as more important, representative and marketable than others, and to imbue the selected titles with political significance through a range of textual and visual devices. The analysis carried out in this study attempted to reveal some of the patterns which the publishing industry, together with other powerful institutions such as reviewers, literary prizes, and universities, have given shape to, as these patterns of selective appropriation and framing not only condition the ways in which individual Chinese novels are interpreted and received by English readers, but also evoke and consolidate broader public narratives of China circulating in the UK and US.

6.1 Main Findings and Implications

The two databases constructed specifically for this study showed that a total of 150 Chinese novels have been selected for English translation between 1980 and 2010, and that these received a total of 162 reviews published in 14 mainstream media outlets in the UK and US during the same period. Close analysis of this material has demonstrated some aspects of the inextricable relationship between politics and the reception of Chinese novels in the Anglophone world between 1980 and 2010. Differences in the political systems of China and what is generally referred to as ‘the West’ profoundly inform the ways in which translated Chinese novels are framed, promoted and received in the US and UK. English translations of Chinese novels thus play a significant role in elaborating public narratives of China as a political and cultural Other, and in perpetuating these narratives across time and space. The politicisation of translated Chinese novels, which coalesced after the 1989 Tiananmen Square event, was actively nurtured by publishers and reviewers in the UK and US in a number of ways during the past 3 decades.

The politicisation of Chinese literature is evident in the prioritisation of a cross-cutting pattern of novels on personal trauma in selecting novels for translation into English by UK and US publishers and reviewers. This pattern occupies a dominant position in the Chinese literary landscape in the Anglophone world and has gained increasing currency through a process of narrative accrual since the 1980s. Novels on personal trauma mainly centred on two specific historical moments in modern Chinese history: the Cultural Revolution, and the
1989 Tiananmen Square Event. Featuring characters who have suffered physical as well as mental hardship, the Cultural Revolution novels tell the story of intellectuals as well as educated youths who were uplifted from their urban homes and exiled permanently to China’s rural areas. Similarly, the theme of Tiananmen immediately captured Western readers’ imagination since its introduction into the realm of literature, giving rise to a body of Tiananmen stories that have continued to expand in number since the mid-1990s. Given that the topic of Tiananmen remains under official censorship by the Chinese government, the majority of these works have been published outside mainland China. As Berry points out, “in the years since the crackdown, Beijing 1989 has become one of the most popular time-space coordinates onto which overseas Chinese writers project their fictional worlds, making the portrayal of the Tiananmen Square Massacre one of the central themes in contemporary Chinese American and transnational Chinese fiction” (Berry 2007: 353).

Despite being already embedded in a tragic period of Chinese history, novels on personal trauma in English translation are often explicitly endowed with additional political significance by publishers and reviewers, who embed it in new relational networks that highlight this significance in various ways. First, particularizations of the recurrent storyline of novels on personal trauma, which features suffering, oppression and the struggle for survival, were underscored on book covers, alongside endorsements by Chinese dissidents, lending enhanced political significance to the novels in question (section 4.3.1 and 4.4.1). It was also not uncommon for publishers during the past three decades to draw on paratextual elements such as translators’ notes and prefaces to reframe the translation as a constituent of the public narratives of China as a totalitarian regime. This is evidenced in the analysis of Yang Xianhui’s Women from Shanghai (2009) in section 4.4.1. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Yang’s translator informed English readers in the preface to the translation that in order to ensure the novel would be published in China, Yang’s Chinese editor and publishers had to publish the book “under the category of fiction, even though they were well aware of the journalistic nature of Yang’s works. They knew that the stories were closely based on true events and taken from the author’s interviews with survivors” (Huang 2009: xiii). The generic shift from a fictional to a factual account guides readers’ expectations, as well as their attitude to Chinese literature in the English world. Readers are encouraged to look for ‘truth’ and ‘facts’ in the novels. Consequently, these stories are read as ‘true’ stories about the ‘real’ China and confirm all the negative aspects of its regime and society.
Second, reviewers contribute to the politicisation of Chinese novels by selecting novels that engage with personal trauma, especially in the context of the Cultural Revolution, and stressing their political content in reviews. At the same time, some novels that do not explore the theme of the Cultural Revolution, such as Shen Congwen’s *Border Town* (2006), Lao She’s *Rickshaw Boy: A Novel* (2010) and Ye Zhaoyan’s *Nanjing 1937* (2002), received no reviews during the period under study. Other novels, such as Zhang Ailing’s *Lust, Caution* (2007) and *Love in a Fallen City* (2007), and Wang Anyi’s *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (2008), received only one or two reviews. In addition, many reviewers’ reading of Chinese novels in translation generally concentrates on political controversy, and attempts to reconstruct the Cultural Revolution and other traumatic events such as Tiananmen for readers. Reviewers tend to weave a pattern of causal emplotment that projects the dissident Chinese writers they review as either victims persecuted by the Chinese government and incarcerated in prison/labour camps during the Cultural Revolution, or as dissenting intellectuals who expose the dark side of Chinese society in their novels and are currently banned or are under investigation by the regime (section 4.3.2 and 4.4.1). Casting dissenting Chinese writers in the role of victims enables reviewers to adopt positional superiority and occupy the moral high ground, as they express strong sympathy and support for those who suffer the persecution of a ruthless government. During the 1990s and early 2000s, many reviewers even made use of the review as a venue for explicitly indicting the Chinese government for its imposed silence on important political issues such as the Great Leap Forward and the Tiananmen Square event. This prioritization of a political reading of Chinese literature means that translations of Chinese novels which explore new themes are often ignored, or misread by reviewers. For instance, Penguin’s big financial investment in *Wolf Totem*, a novel which deviates from the familiar storyline of novels on personal trauma, was negatively received by reviewers who were steeped in dominant interpretations of novels on personal trauma. Reviewers thus exercise a covert form of censorship by refusing to acknowledge the literary value of some novels that do not fit the conventional storyline of Cultural-Revolution narratives.

Censorship imposed by the Chinese government on a variety of themes it deems ‘sensitive’ is a running theme in the way translated Chinese novels are framed by publishers and reviewers. The themes in question, such as labour camps in Mao’s China and the Tiananmen Square event, are central motifs in novels on personal trauma. Many writers made an effort to
reconstruct historical moments of atrocity, in an attempt to compensate for the fact that these memories are suppressed or even completely omitted from official histories, popular culture and the collective unconscious in China. Promoting a particular pattern of causal emplotment by accentuating issues of censorship and political controversy while downplaying the stylistic and aesthetic aspects of translated Chinese novels, publishers often presented the excesses of the Chinese state as the focal point in the novels. Thus, what the Chinese censors seem to succeed in doing by banning a book is to draw the attention of publishers and reviewers abroad to it. Censorship still creates publicity in the UK and US, where the idea of dissidence continues to hold strong appeal for many people. Even in the 2000s, censorship continued to feed into narratives that equate political risqué with literary merit, at the expense of many important literary voices in China that remain unheard, leading some observers to conclude that “the best marketing strategy for Chinese literature is to emblazon ‘banned in China’ on the cover” (Lovell 2006: 34). Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby* (2001) is a case in point. This novel tells a story of a young Chinese woman, Coco, and her triangular love affair with a Chinese man, Tiantian, and the German businessman Mark. The novel is perhaps best known, both inside and outside China, for being banned by the Chinese government in the summer of 2000. The government denounced the novel as ‘vampish’ pornography and the author Weihui as “a decadent and debauched exhibitionist, a slave to foreign culture, an outlandish creature of the night, a writer of bad-taste trash” (Shen 2001). The banning of the novel quickly brought the book and its author to the attention of international publishers, and the English translation appeared less than a year after the book was censored by the Chinese government (Humes 2008). The translation of Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby* clearly benefited from the fact that the original text was censored: the American edition features the following sensational comments on its cover: “the shocking, sensual novel the Chinese government does not want Westerners to read” (Wei Hui 2000). The UK edition similarly emphasises the censorship imposed by the Chinese government in the synopsis on the back cover: “Publicly burned in China for its sensual nature and irreverent style, this novel is the semi-autobiographical story of Coco […]” (Wei Hui 2001). Nevertheless, and despite publishers’ fascination with the issue of censorship and the tendency to capitalise on it, some readers and reviewers saw these novels as clichéd: a review published in *Publishers’ Weekly* pointed out that *Shanghai Baby* “is as alluring as a gossip column, but, alas, as shallow as one, too” (unauthered 2001).
The translation of Shen Congwen’s *Border Town* (2010) is another telling example. Its publisher, Harper Perennial, exploits the narrative of censorship to frame the novel on the back cover: “His novel *Border Town* was banned under Mao’s regime, only to become an inspiration to a new generation of Chinese writers in the late twentieth century” (Shen 2010). Similarly, the introductory remarks on the publisher’s website also foreground the element of censorship: “New in the Harper Perennial Modern Chinese Classics series, *Border Town* is a classic Chinese novel—banned by Mao’s regime—that captures the ideals of rural China through the moving story of a young woman and her grandfather”97. The framing attempts to establish a link between the ban on the novel98 and its literary status as a ‘classic Chinese novel’ which inspired “new generations of Chinese writers”; this association sets up an interpretative framework which equates censorship with good literary merits. While the English translation is made ‘marketable’ to Anglophone readers, it has also lost part of the Chinese original’s formal and thematic sophistication, making it increasingly difficult for the novel to be appreciated from its literary merits, independently of its political history.

Censorship, then, does impact the reception of Chinese novels in the UK and US and plays an important role in mediating narratives of China in these regions. From the perspective of Chinese authors, being controversial in China and having one’s work banned has certain advantages, in that it enhances the chances of recognition abroad. And yet, while recognising advantages to being translated into English and written about in English media, Chinese writers are also anxious to be judged for their own literary talents, and realise that being considered as dissidents means being primarily appreciated as oppositional political figures rather than literary authors. The wish to be read beyond China’s borders and to reach a wide range of global readers goes hand in hand with the wish to be judged by different standards from those of political controversy. The attendant anxiety has grown stronger among Chinese writers in recent years. The literary scene in China, which was once impoverished due to a relative lack of contact with the outside world and the stifling political control over literary creativity during the Maoist era, has just seen a burst of vitality unknown in recent Chinese

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97 See [http://www.harpercollins.com/books/Border-Town/?isbn=9780061436918](http://www.harpercollins.com/books/Border-Town/?isbn=9780061436918) [last accessed 30 March 2014].

98 As a conservative writer, Shen Congwen intended to refrain from engaging in political rivalry since the beginning of his writing career in the mid-1930s. He never criticised the nationalists or the Nationalist Party, a position which brought him severe criticism from leading Communists at the end of the civil war in the 1940s. Instead of recounting stories of war and writing for the Communist Party, Shen’s stories are set in idyllic towns far from the scenario of warfare. It was precisely his political stand that resulted in his work being censored in 1953. Until the end of the Cultural Revolution, his novels were republished and rediscovered in the academy in and outside China.
literary history. Chinese writers are no longer confined to the “black and white themes of revolutionary triumphs, super-heroic peasants in conflict with revisionists” (Pan 1987: 200). In addition, it is not just in terms of subject matter that Chinese writing has broadened its horizon, but it has also featured new forms of experimentation with language and style, including black humour, stream of consciousness and other literary styles inspired by the contact with the West. After all the years of being isolated from the global literary world, Chinese writers desperately wanted to be included in mainstream world literature, which is still largely defined by western norms and institutions. The difficulty they now come up against is precisely the fact that being selected for translation into English is still largely decided by the political content of a work or the political controversy it sparks. Can Xue, a Chinese avant-garde writer, comments on the reception of her novel in China and abroad in an interview with Jonathan Griffith thus:

I was very surprised when I was in the United States in April 2009, when I told some of my readers that my novel [the English translation of Five Spice Street, which had been published in spring 2009 by Yale University Press] was not a political thing, they didn’t agree with me. Of course, you could see it from that perspective if you like.

(Griffith 2010: 85)

The emphasis on political content further shapes the canon of Chinese literature in English translation through institutions that award literary prizes. As seen in section 5.4, while the 2000 Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to Gao Xingjian for the “universal validity” of his literary writings, the newsletter of the Swedish Academy tactically drew attention to the political controversy surrounding the author by only praising Gao’s two highly politically-charged novels, namely Soul Mountain and One Man’s Bible, and one play, Escape, which narrates stories of the Tiananmen square event. Gao’s other avant-garde, experimental novels, short stories and plays which have brought him fame and established him as a great artist, especially in France, do not get a mention (Lovell 2006). Similarly, most reviewers only focused on the novels mentioned by the Swedish Academy and attempted to tease out elements relating to the Cultural Revolution.

The political framing of translated Chinese novels is evident in a pair of labels that are frequently attached to almost every Chinese writer; ‘state’ and ‘dissident’. At the core of the two sets of competing narratives that evolved around ‘state’ and dissident writers is the problem of Chinese writers’ position in relation to the Chinese government and their attitudes to it. Whereas the state writers are typically narrated as totalitarian and tyrannical, the
dissident writers who explicitly express ‘anti-government’ viewpoints in their novels are considered as naturally subversive, progressive, authentic and courageous. The two labels attached to Chinese authors – ‘state writer’ and ‘dissident writer’ – position them on either ‘our’ [the West’s] side or the Chinese government’s side, providing an interpretative frame that guides and constrains responses to the Chinese writer in question and the quality of his or her works. The most telling case is the one that this chapter opened with, namely the award of the 2012 Nobel literary prize to a Chinese ‘state’ writer, Mo Yan, and the huge debate that the Swedish Academy’s decision prompted. The Swedish Academy awarded the Prize to Mo Yan as recognition that his literature merges “folk tales, history and the contemporary” with “hallucinatory realism”99. Far from being a dissident writer, Mo Yan holds the high position of vice chairman of the state-chartered Chinese Writers’ Association. His good relations with the Chinese government, together with his defence of government censorship and his refusal to sign a petition to support Liu Xiaobo, an imprisoned 2010 Nobel Prize in Peace winner, invited severe criticism from many western critics and Chinese dissidents. Perry Link argued in his review of Mo Yan’s novels, entitled ‘Does This Writer Deserve the Prize?’ and published in The New York Review of Books in 2012, that in contemporary China, every Chinese writer, whether living in or outside China, has to decide on their relationship with the Chinese government. Acknowledging Mo Yan’s sympathy for the downtrodden and the suffering peasants who are bullied by local officials, Link contrasted the attention he received with that of dissident writers such as Liu Xiaobo and Zheng Yi, who forcefully condemned the atrocities of the Chinese government in their respective writings in the 1980s and 1990s. He claimed that “Liu and Zheng denounce the entire authoritarian system, including the people at the highest levels. Mo Yan and other insider-the-system writers blame local bullies and leave the top out of the picture” (Link 2012). Link seemed to suggest that a Chinese writer cannot produce literature of good quality if he/she maintains a close relationship with a totalitarian government. In other words, the political content seemed to be the most important, if not the only, value that can be attributed to Chinese literature. His comment endowed Mo Yan’s works with strong political value which is arguably absent from the original Chinese text. On the international literary stage, it seems, Chinese writers are judged by a higher standard than western writers when it comes to speaking ‘truth’ to their governments.

Compared to ‘state’ writers, who do not receive much attention from publishers and reviewers, dissidents are afforded a range of avenues in the US and UK to articulate their personal narratives and highlight their suffering as exiles, as well as express their views of China’s human rights record, as seen in chapter 4 and 5. Recognised as ‘authentic’ voices and legitimate narrators of China, the stories they elaborate give further credence to the US/UK-dominant public narrative of China as a totalitarian regime. By giving greater voice to dissidents who are marginalised, suppressed or even threatened by the Chinese government, UK and US reviewers and publishers not only provide a channel to empower suppressed voices, but also elaborate a counter narrative that challenges the legitimacy of the public narrative elaborated by the Chinese government; the latter projects China as a responsible nation, a peaceful rising power, and a harmonious society. Since the early 2000s, the Chinese government has been drawing on Confucianism, which celebrates the idea of harmony, to promote a narrative that emphasises the country’s determination to integrate into the world system and contribute to global stability. This narrative, which projects China as a reliable and responsible economic power that does not have to be feared, is clearly evoked and communicated to an international audience through a range of avenues, such as the 2008 Beijing Games, the 2010 Shanghai Expo and the 2014 Beijing APEC summit, among others. For example, the grand opening ceremony of Beijing Games were organised around themes, including ‘harmony and peace’, ‘unity’ and ‘power and innovation’, which are derived from Chinese traditional cultural values based on Confucianism (Chen et al. 2009: 191). The credibility of this narrative was seriously undermined as the Chinese government continued to suppress dissenting voices, such as Ma Jian’s. Charles More thus writes in The Telegraph that “spectacular sporting displays are the classic means of projecting totalitarian power without talking about it. […] What we are witnessing is impressive, but also frightening. If China really does become top nation, nothing in our history will have prepared us for such a thing. And nothing in its history suggests that freedom will be on its agenda” (More 2008). Susan Brownell expresses a similar concern; she argues that “China had never promised to address human rights issues, amongst other Western admonitions, in the run-up to the Games. […] What the Beijing Olympics did successfully achieve was the promotion of a particular ‘look and image’, the China brand” (Brownell 2008).

Finally, the fact that the framing of Chinese novels in English translation was significantly shaped by the 1989 Tiananmen Square event, which had an arguably massive impact on the
fate of public narratives of China around the world (Ang 2001: 299), is one of the most important findings of this study. During the 1980s, the dominant narratives of China circulating in the US and Europe focused on attempts by China’s Communist Party leadership to reform the country’s political as well as its economic systems, and elaborated a pattern of causal emplotment that led to the widespread belief that China will soon embrace a capitalist system, leave its Communist past behind, and the ideologies and lifestyle of the West (Mann 2007: 4). This pattern of narrative emplotment generated considerable academic interest in many UK and US universities, especially in the field of social sciences, which could now profitably study the significance of current developments in China in comparison with its recent history. In this context, academics partly relied on translated Chinese novels as ‘valuable social documents’ for information on social changes in modern China. Novels on personal trauma were also treated as a useful source of information to construct a comprehensible narrative of the Cultural Revolution. For example, the translation of Zhang Xianliang’s labour camp story *Half of Man is Woman* (1988) was accommodated into narratives that reconstructed the Cultural Revolution and reviewed alongside the non-fictional memoir *Ancestors: 900 Years in the Life of a Chinese Family* because these two “vastly different” books “each casts light on the Cultural Revolution” and both reveal the link between the scholarly tradition and modern Chinese society (Fairbank 1988: 31) (section 4.2.1). The 1989 event changed the way reviewers and publishers approached Chinese literature in translation. Zhang Xianliang’s *Getting Used to Dying* (1991) and *Grass Soup* (1994), two labour camp stories with a similar storyline to *Half of Man is Woman* (1988), were framed in a strikingly different manner, as discussed in sections 4.3.1 and 5.3. Particulizations of the theme of brutality and oppression during the Cultural Revolution were foregrounded on the front cover. Zhang Xianliang himself was narrated as a victim of Communist oppression by both UK and US publishers and reviewers, who showed enormous sympathy for his suffering during that period. This narrative shift in China’s reception in the West, brought about by one political event, suggests that the dominant narratives in any spatio-temporal context, including the UK and US, “have tended to accord with, rather than oppose, the interests of the main Western authorities or governments of the day” (Mackerras 1991: 263).
6.2 Suggestions for Future Studies

This project examined the role played by translations in mediating the public narratives of China, with particular reference to the translation of Chinese novels. However, limitations are inevitable in any kind of study. This thesis does not delve into the motivations of Chinese authors and their intended readership; nor does it delve into the intended audiences of the original novels compared to their translations. These issues cannot all be addressed within a single doctoral project, but could be the subject of future studies.

Future research can also look more closely at individual translations and attempt to describe and explain patterns of shifts within and across single texts. This is an important issue that has not been examined in this study. In an article published in The Guardian in 2005, Julia Lovell reminded UK publishers and editors that they must be aware of the inadequacy of editorial input to translations of Chinese novels. While acknowledging some editors’ painstaking work at Chatto & Windus, Faber & Faber and HarperCollins in editing translated Chinese novels such as Red Dust, The Noodle Maker and Village Stone, among other works, she argues that many translations are of unsatisfactory quality: “[i]t is as if they [editors] are already so convinced of its [Chinese literature’s] fundamental aesthetic poverty that when they do finally stir themselves to publish, they seem barely to bother with the quality of the translation. If they do, they certainly don’t apply the kind of rigorous critical standards to be expected in the editing of other books on their lists” (Lovell 2005). Lovell further argues that the lack of editorial effort may only “confirm general readers and other editors in their instinct that China’s recent literature can be safely ignored” (Lovell 2005). Her concerns about the quality of translation and its detrimental effect on the reception of Chinese novels in the UK are confirmed by other translators (Harman 2006; Abrahamsen 2008), and this issue deserves further study in future.

Third, few studies have explored the way Chinese literature is represented in classroom teaching in Anglophone universities. It would be interesting to examine which titles are considered as ‘classic’ and a ‘must read’ and hence included in the university curriculum. By investigating the ways in which Chinese literature is taught, studied, and disseminated in UK and US universities, we should be able to examine the extent to which the academic reading of translated Chinese novels may challenge or reinforce the ways in which these translations are read by the general public.
Last but not least, it would also be interesting to examine narratives of China elaborated through translated literature from a comparative perspective. For instance, future research may compare the ways in which China and Japan are narrated in translations of Chinese/Japanese novels during a particular historical stage, or the ways in which China is narrated in English and French, or English and Japanese, translations today.
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