

Chinese children's literature and the challenges of internationalization. Cao Wenxuan's *Qingtong kuihua* in Italian translation

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摘要: 近几年来,当代中国儿童文学在国外的译介和推广已经成为日益普遍的现象,获得2016年国际安徒生奖的中国儿童文学作家曹文轩可能是这个趋势最具有代表性的例子。曹文轩的作品在中国受到了评论家和读者的热烈欢迎,他富有优雅文风和诗情精神的儿童小说经常描写人生悲剧和一些少年人物的身份建立。在将曹文轩作品翻译成外语时,译者自然必须对原作的形式特点和中国文化内容较浓的成分进行处理,而且出版商经常会要求对译稿进行一定的改写和编译,以便预期的目标读者能够接受。笔者以曹文轩2005年的小说《青铜葵花》和它的意大利文版为例,探索意大利出版商对译稿进行编译的几个方面,专门分析词语、句法、比喻性语言、文本结构和审美因素的处理。最后,笔者还提出对上述编译策略及其在外国读者接受中国儿童文学方面产生的影响的思考。

Abstract: The visibility of contemporary Chinese children's literature among foreign readerships has become a growing phenomenon in recent years, epitomized by the case of the celebrated Chinese writer Cao Wenxuan, the winner of the 2016 Hans Christian Andersen Award. Cao's acclaimed novels are characterized by stylistic sophistication, idyllic overtones, emotionally charged descriptions of tragic events, a deep-rooted pedagogical intent, and the description of the young characters' identity-building against the background of the shifts occurring in Chinese history and society. Such complexity strikingly emerges in translating these works for non-Chinese audiences: the translation must naturally take into account the formal specificity of the original and process its culture-specific traits, but these features often also undergo a degree of editorial rewriting to adapt them to the intended target readership. Using Cao Wenxuan's 2005 novel *Qingtong kuihua* ("Bronze and Sunflower") and its Italian translation as a case study, the publisher's forms and degrees of adaptation of the translator's manuscript will be described, with special reference to the treatment of vocabulary, syntax, figurative language, textual features, and aesthetic factors. Finally, a reflection on the adaptation strategy and its implications for the reception of Chinese children's literature by the foreign readership will be conducted.

关键词: 曹文轩; 《青铜葵花》; 中国儿童文学; 翻译; 编译

Keywords: Cao Wenxuan; *Qingtong kuihua*; Chinese children's literature; translation; adaptation

1. Cao Wenxuan's work and its international emergence

Over the last decade, children's literature (hereinafter ChL) produced in China has gained substantial visibility in the international arena, as witnessed by the growing number of works translated into foreign languages and the popularization endeavors by publishers, agents, academics, and translators. The most representative example of this phenomenon is the work of the prolific author of literature for young readers Cao Wenxuan 曹文轩 (b. 1954). Already domestically acclaimed both by critics and by the market, Cao gained international recognition when the IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People) granted him the prestigious Hans Christian Andersen Award in April 2016.

Cao's stories are noted for their realism: the author does not refrain from portraying life's difficulties, such as death, loss, and pain. As the IBBY jury president has put it, "Cao Wenxuan's

books don't lie about the human condition, they acknowledge that life can often be tragic and that children can suffer" (Aldana). Indeed, they portray the construction of adult identity in times of drastic change, putting the imagined child in relation to the shifts occurring in Chinese history, culture, and society. His books are often set in the years of high Maoism: however, even though his stories are deeply rooted in rural China, the author has repeatedly stressed that they focus on universal values and a shared sense of kindness and compassion. Unsurprisingly enough, they are characterized by a manifest didactic purpose with patent patriotic and nationalist overtones (Xu 76-7) and aim to provide "a good foundation for humanity and a correct and accurate moral outlook" (Qin). On the stylistic level, Cao Wenxuan's prose is invariably praised for its sophistication, elegance, and aesthetic value (Yu): this is especially true of his novels, which suggest a strong orientation towards a relatively mature readership, as opposed to the short stories, which generally appear to address a younger audience. Finally, the idyllic overtones in the depiction of nature and rural landscapes are reminiscent of the native-soil literature (*xiangtu wenxue* 乡土文学) of the Republican era, while the descriptions of the resonance between personal feelings (*qing* 情) and external sceneries (*jing* 景) in the most lyrical passages can be further traced back to the Chinese poetic tradition.

Cao's 2005 novel *Qingtong kuihua* 青铜葵花 ("Bronze and Sunflower") is largely representative of this set of traits. Set in a rural Chinese village in the early years of the Cultural Revolution, the novel revolves around the character of Sunflower, a 7-year old city girl, who has recently moved to the countryside with her father, a sculptor known for his superb bronze sunflowers. When the latter dies in a boat accident, the orphaned girl is taken in by the poorest family of the village. Here she meets Bronze, an 11-year-old mute boy ostracized by the other kids, who wanders the fields riding a water buffalo: the two become inseparable. The story narrates the bond between the two kids growing together and their efforts to make each other's days as happy as possible, in spite of the harshness of rural life.

When translating Cao Wenxuan's works for a non-Chinese readership, the specificity of his writing becomes strikingly evident, making the rendition process particularly complex. Using *Qingtong kuihua* and the published Italian edition – translated by the author of this article – as a case study, the strategies adopted by the translator and the forms and levels of adaptation carried out by the publisher will be described. Finally, a reflection on such rewriting and its implications for the reception of Chinese ChL by the target readership will be provided.

2. Children's literature between translation and adaptation

In the last half century, as ChL has increasingly become an object of academic research, a substantial number of studies have been devoted to the problem of its translation, focusing specifically on the implications of the translation process on the target language/culture (Tabbert). Shavit was among the first to adopt a polysystemic approach in her target-oriented analysis of translated ChL ("Translation of Children's Literature;" *Poetics of Children's Literature*, ch. 5). Oittinen's *Translating for Children* marked a turning point in the investigation of the subjectivity not only of the translator, but also of the reader of translated ChL, while O'Sullivan's *Comparative Children's Literature* introduced a substantial discussion of the problem of translating ChL from the point of view of comparative literary studies (ch. 4-5).

It was notably after a selection of significant essays in this field were gathered by Lathey (*The Translation of Children's Literature*) that this topic was gradually acknowledged as a noteworthy aspect of translation research in handbooks of translation studies (Alvstad; Lathey, "The Translation of Literature for Children;" O'Sullivan, "Children's Literature and Translation Studies"). More recently, a number of works have appeared that explore the challenges and strategies involved in translating ChL (Van Coillie and Verschueren), the subjectivity of the translator (Lathey, *The Role of Translators; Translating Children's Literature*), and the transformation and adaptation observable in the transfer of writing from one language/culture to another, as a result of the asymmetric relation between providers and readers (Ewers, ch. 18-21; Lefebvre). Ewers also provides a systemic

description of aspects that are intimately linked to the issue of adaptation, namely the distribution, evaluation, and consumption of translated ChL (ch. 7).

The problem of adaptation is particularly relevant to the present inquiry. In the translation of ChL, the translator is naturally called to mediate between the recreation of the textual, linguistic and stylistic specificity of the original and the need to process culture-specific references for their foreign readership. Of course, this is the case with any literary translation project; however, in the translation of ChL, because the intended target readership is often very clearly defined (in terms of age range, linguistic and encyclopedic competence etc.) by the foreign publisher, texts are likely to undergo a higher degree of linguistic, textual, and cultural adaptation than in translation for an adult readership. This adaptation, rewriting, or even *manipulation* (Lefevere) may be implemented by the translator, the publisher (in the person of the editor, reviser, and/or proofreader), or both, in a more or less overt and conscious manner; it can take a variety of forms and be carried out to different degrees.

3. Levels of adaptation in the Italian translation of *Qingtong kuihua*

Qingtong kuihua was first published in China in April 2005: limiting ourselves to European languages, two French editions were published in 2010, followed by translations in German, Russian, and English. The Italian translation was commissioned by Giunti Editore – the third-largest publishing group in Italy, specializing in children’s and young adults’ literature and school texts – in autumn 2014. It was published under the title *Girasole* (“Sunflower”) in May 2015, in time to be showcased at the Bologna Children’s Book Fair (Cao, *Girasole*). As is often the case with Italian mainstream publishers, the availability of an existing translation – namely the first French edition (Cao, *Bronze et Tournesol*), which was provided to the translator as a reference – and significant sales in other European markets may have played a crucial role in the choice of this title. Moreover, the long-standing effort made by the China Children’s Press and Publication Group (*Zhongguo shaonian ertong xinwen chubanshe* 中国少年儿童新闻出版总社) to promote Chinese authors’ works overseas cannot be underestimated. Shortly after Cao Wenxuan won the Andersen Award, Giunti commissioned the translation of two more of his books, namely *Caofangzi* 草房子 (“The Straw House”) and *Ximi* 细米 (“Ximi”): the former was published in January 2018 (Cao, *La scuola dal tetto di paglia*), while the latter is expected to come out in the same year.

After being submitted to the publisher, the draft Italian translation of *Qingtong kuihua* underwent a double revision, by an editor/proof-reader and by the director of the series. The interventions carried out on the translator’s manuscript (hereinafter TM) and subsequently integrated into the printed version (hereinafter PV) notably involved the treatment of lexical items, syntactic structures, figurative language, aesthetic factors, and textual features. In the following section, a number of significant interventions will be illustrated in detail.

3.1 Vocabulary

One of the most far-reaching interventions at the lexical level is the reduction of diminutive and augmentative forms to basic forms in the PV. Such forms were used in the TM to translate lexemes that already expressed an augmented quality or conveyed a sense of smallness or intimacy in the Chinese text; more often, morphologically marked forms expressing such qualities were purposely employed by the translator, for various purposes, according to the specific context. For example, “omone” (“big man”), the augmentative form of “uomo” (“man”), was used to translate *hanzi* 汉子 (Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 230) in the TM, but was changed to its basic form “uomo” (Cao, *Girasole* 295). Diminutive forms originally introduced by the translator, in order either to emphasize a sense of intimacy or to recreate forms of child talk, systematically underwent a similar treatment. The form “quadernetto” (“small notebook”) for *benzi* 本子 (Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 90) was then changed to “quaderno” (“notebook;” Cao, *Girasole* 120), and “tutta la famigliola” (“the whole little family”) for *quan jia ren* 全家人 (Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 77) to “famiglia” (Cao, *Girasole* 104). Examples of this reduction strategy are ubiquitous.

A noteworthy factor is the preliminary instruction, given to the translator by the director of the series, not to use the words “bambino” and “bambina” (“child” in its masculine and feminine form respectively) in the TM, and to use “ragazzo” (“boy”) and “ragazza” (“girl”) instead. The translator chose to use the diminutive forms “ragazzino” (“young man”) and “ragazzina” (“young woman”) to render both the ubiquitous Chinese forms *nanhai* 男孩 and (*xiao*)*nühai* (小)女孩, mainly referring to the leading male and female characters, but the basic forms “ragazzo” and “ragazza” were reinstated throughout the PV.

Another pervasive intervention involves the neutralization of the jocular forms generally used by the translator to render comparable lexical items of the Chinese original. For example, in the description of Limping Liu, the town photographer, the expression *ta de na tao jiahuo* 他的那套家伙 (Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 73) was translated by resorting to the similarly humorous phrase “le sue cianfrusaglie” (“his stuff,” “his odds and ends”) in the TM, but was replaced by a more neutral and even technical “le sue attrezzature” (“his equipment;” Cao, *Girasole* 99). The humorous forms originally introduced by the translator in an attempt to emphasize a lighter passage of the novel or to produce a dynamic effect, even in the absence of jocular forms in the original, underwent the same treatment. In a long passage describing the devastation of an arrowhead field by a flock of ravenous ducks, the translator used “pappato,” the past participle of the Italian verb “pappare” (“to gobble”), a humorous lexical form reminiscing of baby talk, to translate the verb *chi* 吃 (“to eat;” Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 128), but these occurrences were systematically reduced to the standard form “mangiato,” from the verb “mangiare” (“to eat;” Cao, *Girasole* 168). Similarly, the jocular verb “bighellonava” (“he loafed about”) translating *you dang* 游荡 (Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 70) was changed to a non-humorous “vagava” (“he wandered;” Cao, *Girasole* 95), the baby talk form “cacca” (“poo”) for *niaofen* 鸟粪 (“guano;” Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 52) to the more formal “sterco” (“dung;” Cao, *Girasole* 74), and so on.

High-register lexemes were also replaced by their more standard, medium-register counterparts. For example, the adjective “spossato” (“weary,” “exhausted”) used to translate *pibei* 疲惫 (Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 212) was replaced by “stanco” (“tired;” Cao, *Girasole* 237), and the verb “contemplare” (“to gaze upon”) for *guanwang* 观望 (Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 24) by a simple “guardare” (“to look at;” Cao, *Girasole* 37).

As a general rule, non-standard lexical items were systematically standardized: interestingly enough, this lexical levelling sometimes plays havoc with actual language use, as the following example illustrates. The Chinese idiomatic expression *bu zhi suo cuo* 不知所措 (“to be at a loss;” Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 88, 177), which appears twice in the text, was translated with an equivalent Italian idiom, “non sapere che pesci pigliare” (lit. “not to know what fish to catch,” i.e. “to be at one’s wits’ end”), in the TM. Arguably because the verb “pigliare” (“to catch”) was perceived by the revisers to be either outdated or typical of central Italian (notably Tuscan) regional varieties, it was changed to its more standard counterpart “prendere” (Cao, *Girasole* 117, 230) in both instances. However, since the set expression imperatively contains the former lexical item, the phrase resulting from the revision is a non-standard, non-idiomatic one that does not reflect actual usage in the target language.

3.2 Syntax

At the syntactic level, recurrent instances of homogenization of verbal forms can be observed in the PV. Simplification is carried out in a number of passages of the TM where a clause with a verb in the indicative is followed by a clause with the verb in the gerund, as is shown by the following example, where the original is followed by the TM and by the PV:

她在那人的怀里拼命挣扎，两只胳膊在空中胡乱地挥舞不停[...]。 (Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 39)

Girasole si dimenava con tutte le sue forze in quella stretta, agitando senza sosta le braccia come impazzita [...] (“Sunflower struggled with all her strength in their embrace, obstinately waving her arms as if she had gone mad”).

Girasole si dimenava con tutte le sue forze in quella stretta, agitava senza sosta le braccia come impazzita [...] (“Sunflower struggled with all her strength in their embrace, she obstinately waved her arms as if she had gone mad”) (Cao, *Girasole* 56).

The TM contained the verbal form “agitando” (“waving”), translating the verb *huiwu* 挥舞 (“to wave”), instead of the form “agitava” (“waved”) that appears in the PV. The use of a verb in the indicative followed by a verb in the gerund in the TM, instead of two verbs in the indicative, aimed at stylistic variation in rendering the series of juxtaposed clauses found in the Chinese original. It was intended to add dynamism to the narrative flow, as well as to reduce the effect of repetition that an unvarying use of the indicative would have produced in Italian: however, the PV opted for homogenization. The passage below underwent a similar treatment:

晚上，爸爸不让青铜吃饭，也不让他回家，让他就站在门外凛冽的寒风中。(Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 135)

La sera il papà impedì a Bronzo di cenare e di rimettere piede in casa, lasciandolo fuori dalla porta in balia del vento glaciale (“That evening, Dad did not allow Bronze to have dinner and set foot in the house, shutting him out in the ice-cold wind”).

La sera il papà impedì a Bronzo di cenare e di mettere piede in casa, lo lasciò fuori dalla porta in balia del vento glaciale (“That evening, Dad did not allow Bronze to have dinner and set foot in the house, he shut him out in the ice-cold wind”) (Cao, *Girasole* 178).

Here, the gerundive phrase “lasciandolo fuori” (“shutting him out”) in the TM was changed to “lo lasciò fuori” (“he shut him out”) in the PV, thus opting for a more repetitive and static phrasing. Analogous interventions are extremely recurrent.

A reduction strategy involves the frequent removal of markers of verbal aspect in the PV. For example, the inchoative aspect is typically signaled by the construction “V + *qilai* 起来” (“to start to V”) in Chinese, and can be translated into Italian by resorting to phasal periphrases such as “iniziare a,” “mettersi a,” “prendere a” (all meaning “to start to”) etc. followed by an infinitive:

锣鼓家伙忽然响起来了。人群一片哗然，随即转向安静。(Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 119)

Di colpo presero a rimbombare cimbali e tamburi e il clamore della folla si zittì immediatamente (“Cymbals and drums began to resound all of a sudden, and the clamor from the crowd fell silent at once”).

Di colpo rimbombarono cimbali e tamburi e il clamore della folla si zittì immediatamente (“Cymbals and drums resounded all of a sudden, and the clamor from the crowd fell silent at once”) (Cao, *Girasole* 158).

In the TM, the construction *xiang qilai* 响起来 (“to start to echo”) was originally translated by resorting to the corresponding inchoative construction “presero a rimbombare” (“they began to resound”). This solution was replaced by the form “rimbombarono” (“resounded”) in the PV, thus deleting the aspectual feature and neutralizing the dynamic effect it conveyed. A similar strategy was carried out in the following example:

他将青铜拉过来，让青铜坐在他面前，然后用手用力地给青铜搓擦着身上的污垢。(Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 108)

Lo tirò a sé, se lo fece sedere davanti e poi, con la mano, prese a scrollargli energicamente la sporcizia di dosso (“He drew him to himself, made him sit down in front of him and started to vigorously shake the dirt off him with his hand”).

Lo tirò a sé, lo fece sedere e, con la mano, gli scrollò energicamente lo sporco di dosso (“He drew him to himself, made him sit down and vigorously shook the dirt off him with his hand”) (Cao, *Girasole* 145)

Here, an aspectual shift was introduced in the TM by translating *ca zhe* 擦着 (“wiping”) – a “V + *zhe* 着” construction expressing a progressive aspect – by “prese a scrollargli” (“started to shake off”), a phasal predicate expressing inchoativity: in the PV, however, the phrase was reduced to “scrollò” (“shook off”). Again, the deletion of the phasal periphrasis entails a certain loss in dynamic effect.

Another level of syntactic change concerns the treatment of free direct speech not signaled by quotation marks, hardly an uncommon device in modern and contemporary Chinese literature. These clauses, which are translated in the TM with no punctuation added, are occasionally transformed into direct speech graphically signaled by double angle quotation marks in the PV:

好大一个芦苇荡啊! (Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 5)

Ma che immenso canneto! (“What a huge reed marsh!”)

«Ma che immenso canneto!» (“What a huge reed marsh!”) (Cao, *Girasole* 11).

Even though such a change does not necessarily affect the diegetic plane to a significant degree, on the stylistic plane it reflects the pervasive homogenization strategy already observed at other levels.

3.3 Figurative language

The standardizing rewriting of the TM also involves the treatment of figurative language and, more generally, creative phrasing. For example, in the scene of the drowning of Sunflower’s father, the whirlwind that overturns his boat is referred to four times by using the original metaphor *zhuixing (de) guaishou* 锥形(的)怪兽 (“cone-shaped beast;” Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 37-38). This figurative expression was conveyed in the TM first as “mostro conico” (“cone-shaped monster”) and later simply as “mostro” (“monster”) to avoid repetition: however, the theriomorphic image was deleted in the PV and all four instances of the metaphor replaced by “cono” (“cone;” Cao, *Girasole* 54), which only maintains the geometrical element.

The same strategy also applies to creative, non-standard turns of phrase found in the original text, as shown in the example below:

[...]无数的脑袋转了过来。(Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 65)

Una miriade di teste si era girata verso di lui [...] (“A myriad of heads had turned towards him”).

Si erano girati tutti verso di lui [...] (“Everybody had turned towards him”) (Cao, *Girasole* 89).

In the passage above, the Chinese image *wushu de naodai zhuan le guolai* 无数的脑袋转了过来 (“countless heads turned towards [him]”) was translated in the TM as “una miriade di teste si era girata verso di lui” (“a myriad of heads had turned towards him”), in an attempt to reproduce the same deviation from idiomaticity of the original. However, this suggestion was rejected in favor of a more standard phrasing in the PV.

In a number of instances, metaphorical expressions not present in the Chinese original and purposely introduced in the TM by the translator were also altered in favor of non-figurative language in the PV. For example, in the scene describing the big fire that destroys a thatched hut on the beach, the translator replaced the word *huomiao* 火苗 (“flames;” Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 112) by the lexicalized metaphor “lingue di fuoco” (“tongues of fire”) for variation and stylistic reasons, but this solution was eventually replaced by the non-metaphorical expression “fiamme” (“flames;” Cao, *Girasole* 149).

3.4 Textual factors

Besides interventions carried out by the revisers at the level of words, phrases and sentences, substantial changes can be observed at the textual level, concerning specifically the arrangement of

information and the deletion of textual elements. For example, in numerous instances, the revisers decided to group together what were separate paragraphs in the original text; vice versa, elsewhere, they divided single paragraphs into separate ones. By doing so, the structure and arrangement of information of the original was disrupted and reorganized by introducing, in turn, a more compact narrative flow or a certain degree of disconnection and segmentation.

More obtrusive interventions involved the deliberate omission of clauses, sentences, and even longer passages. To only quote one particularly conspicuous example, the translation of the following passage imbued with sentimentalism was excised altogether in the PV:

两个小人儿在田野上的走动、嬉闹，会不时地使大麦地人的心里荡起微微的波澜。那波澜一圈一圈地荡开去，心便湿润起来，温暖起来，纯净与柔和起来。(Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 63)

Quando [Bronzo e Girasole] andavano in giro a spassarsela per la campagna, spesso gli abitanti di Campodigrano si sentivano il cuore come spazzato da onde leggere, onde che si alzavano una dopo l'altra, e da cui il loro cuore veniva bagnato, scaldato, purificato, calmato ("When [Bronze and Sunflower] frolicked about in the fields, the people of Damaidi often felt as if faint waves were rising in their hearts, waves that crashed one after the other, leaving their hearts wet, warm, pure and calm").

Another notable excision in the PV concerns the afterword to the novel, "Meili de tongku" 美丽的痛苦(代后记) ("Beautiful sorrow – By way of an afterword;" Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 244-7), in which the author justifies his thematic choices and criticizes the hedonistic conception of children's literature. The translation of this short essay was first requested by the publishing house, which saw it as a useful tool for promoting the book in schools (Giunti, "Traduzione"), but later it was not included in the PV. The numbers of the different sections within chapters were also deleted in the PV, the division between sections being marked only by a blank line.

3.5 Aesthetic features

In a small number of cases, omissions and adjustments were carried out based on what seem to be aesthetic reasons or, in other words, obedience to the norms of perceived acceptability. This could explain the deletion of passages containing references deemed unpleasant by the revisers, according to either the expected aesthetic standards of the target culture or the ideological norms of appropriateness applied by the publisher. This is the case in the following excerpt describing a farmer's surprise in finding out that his geese apparently refused to lay eggs as usual:

他摇了摇头，找不着答案：鸭子们总不会商量好了，一起将屁眼闭上不肯下蛋吧？(Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 137)

Scosse la testa, incapace di trovare una spiegazione: non potevano mica aver deciso di tappare tutte quante il sedere per non deporre uova! ("He shook his head, unable to find an explanation: they couldn't possibly have decided to shut their butts and stop laying eggs!")

Scosse la testa, incapace di trovare una spiegazione: non potevano mica aver deciso di non deporre più uova! ("He shook his head, unable to find an explanation: they couldn't possibly have decided to stop laying eggs!") (Cao, *Girasole* 180)

The TM maintained the humorous anatomical reference in the passage, although the translator refrained from resorting to excessively vulgar vocabulary, considered as inappropriate in a children's book (the original uses an objectively strong expression, i.e. *piyan* 屁眼 "asshole"), opting for the less strong word "sedere" ("butt") instead. Even this mild solution, however, was rejected, and the PV shows no trace of the anatomical reference at all.

A similar intervention can be observed in the following example:

奶奶都这么大年纪了，不管是什么时候，都闻不到她身上有什么老年人的气味。(Cao, *Qingtong kuihua* 140)

Persino alla sua età la nonna, in qualunque momento, non aveva addosso nessun odore di vecchio (“Even at her age, at any time whatsoever, Grandma never gave off an old person’s smell”).

Again, the reference to an “old people’s smell” was probably deemed too jarring in the otherwise almost saintly description of Bronze’s grandmother, and the sentence containing it was purged in the PV.

Finally, an interesting operation based on aesthetic considerations concerns the Italian title of the translation, *Girasole* (“Sunflower”) – which, unlike all the other versions to which I have had access, only contains the name of the female protagonist. The literal translation *Bronzo e Girasole* (“Bronze and Sunflower”) was actually envisaged by the publisher at first, but Giunti eventually decided to remove the name of the male character because of the “unfortunate associations” it may trigger (Giunti, “Titolo italiano”): this was due to the fact that, in Italian, “Bronzo” rhymes with the vulgar word “stronzo” (“turd” or “jerk”).

4. Adaptation and its implications

As Shavit points out, unlike what generally happens in contemporary translation for an adult readership, “the translator of children’s literature can permit [him/herself] great liberties regarding the text, as a result of the peripheral position of children’s literature within the literary polysystem,” and “is permitted to manipulate the text in various ways by changing, enlarging, or abridging it or by deleting or adding to it,” as long as they take social norms of appropriateness into account and the reader’s implied reading abilities (*Poetics* 112-3). Nor are these liberties a prerogative of the translator alone: since ChL “is configured as a product of marketing interest accommodating adult’s demands and interventions as well as their views on children and young people” (Lajolo and Zilberman, qtd. in De Queiroga and Fernandes 65), the agents involved in its publishing and marketing may also push towards accommodation. This is all the more evident when a central political system is in place that grants publishers and editors – who normally do not know the source language and the context in which the original was produced – power over the translator (Chang 326).

However, as Oittinen rightly points out, the adaptation or domestication of ChL is not a negative phenomenon *per se*, this strategy being closely linked to the specific translation project (91). Within a pragmatic view of the process of translation, adaptation may also play a positive role, as a tool for facilitating intercultural flow and successful reception by the new audience (Chan 416-7). Therefore, in order to make sense of the operation carried out by Giunti one must first identify the characteristics of the publisher’s translation project, as opposed to the translator’s own strategic approach. Giunti envisioned the publication of *Girasole* in the “Bestseller dal mondo” (“World Bestsellers”) series, which offers a selection of “masterpieces of extraordinary success from all over the world that have become classics in their country of origin” (Giunti, “Girasole, Cao Wenxuan”). The book is addressed to a 10+-year-old readership, according to the presentation on the publisher’s website, or to 11-99-year-old readers, as stated on its back cover (the original Chinese being meant for 11-14-year-old readers). Other titles in the series include prominent works by Mechthild Gläser (Germany), Ana Maria Machado (Brazil), Francisco Serrano (Mexico), and Norton Juster (USA). Given this framework, the publisher that commissioned the translation could be expected to have a specific agenda, namely the production of a text emphasizing the cultural specificity of the foreign original, and the popularization of international ChL written by renowned, award-winning authors among a curious, culturally aware readership. The translator’s approach was consequently geared towards a twofold aim: on the one hand, to safeguard the cultural and linguistic specificity of the Chinese text, with an eye to readability for the child reader; and, on the other hand, to reproduce stylistic features that are inseparable from the writer’s intentions, taking account of the possibility that the translation might have a dual child-adult readership (Alvstad 24).

The subsequent revision on the TM, however, reveals a somewhat different project, which carries a number of noteworthy implications. On the lexical level, an analysis of the changes operated at the editing stage shows a general accommodation of the TM towards simplification and

standardization. This simplification entails the almost systematic leveling of morphologically marked lexical forms such as augmentatives and diminutives, jocular and humorous forms (either reproducing lexical items already possessing augmented or diminished qualities in Chinese, or introduced by the translator through compensation devices), medium and high-register vocabulary, and non-standard lexical items. The revisers' interventions at the syntactic level point to a similar strategy, as exemplified by the frequent homogenization of verbal forms (e.g. the change of gerundives – originally employed by the translator for variation – into indicatives) and the deletion of verbal aspects. The result of such far-reaching operations, possibly due to the revisers' increased attention to readability, is linguistic impoverishment, a higher degree of repetition, and a substantial loss in dynamism. This significantly affects both the pleasure of reading (especially in the case of humorous language) and the educational component, as opposed to a vision of ChL as both entertainment and as a tool for developing and expanding the child reader's vocabulary, their linguistic competence, and their reading skills. Moreover, the effort to ensure an imagined 'readability' sometimes paradoxically conflicts with the very idiomaticity of the target language, as the treatment of an idiom discussed above shows.

The consequences of adaptation are even more evident when this strategy affects elements that are the outcome of the author's creative endeavor. At the stylistic level, the treatment of figurative and creative language – again, either present in the original or introduced in translation – often involves the deletion of images in favor of non-figurative expressions, with similar negative repercussions on the reader's experience both in terms of aesthetical enjoyment and linguistic awareness. The reorganization of clauses, sentences, and paragraphs that the author had arranged in a certain manner for stylistic or narrative reasons, the removal of sections, and the deletion of entire passages “to reduce the number of pages of the already very voluminous book” (Giunti, “Girasole”) appear even more problematic, as the publisher's justifications for these intrusions reveal that technical constraints (i.e. the maximum number of pages of the published book, in this case 320) can override the author's intentions. This is especially puzzling if we consider the emphasis placed by the publisher on the literary value and the status of the works appearing in the series.

Finally, the interventions carried out to mitigate a perceived aesthetic dissonance may have to do with editorial policies with respect to ideological acceptability, which prompt revisers to expurgate texts of vulgar or otherwise questionable language or references. However, since such references were obviously deemed acceptable by the Chinese publisher (the low tolerance of vulgar language in the Chinese editorial system is renowned, especially in ChL), one may wonder whether their translation would have proved so disturbing for Italian readers. Indeed, the intended target audience is approximately the same age as the Chinese one, and arguably equipped with a higher awareness of low-register language and aesthetic dissonance in literary texts – not to mention the possibility of an even more alert adult target readership.

On a different note, some features of the original that were transferred into the TM did not undergo substantial accommodation. For example, the onomatopoeic forms systematically used by the translator to reproduce or recreate the echoic forms ubiquitously found in the original were generally maintained in the PV. The use of onomatopoeic devices in Italian is significantly less common than it is in Chinese, and the reproduction of such forms in translation often lowers the register to the point of creating a humorous effect that is absent in the original: therefore, as a general rule, the treatment of such devices in translation must be carefully considered. However, the conservative strategy adopted by the translator appears to have been deemed adequate in the rendition of a text meant for a young readership, and was unreservedly accepted by the revisers. Most culture-specific references – e.g. food names, toponyms, historical and political references etc. – explained through in-text expansion, as well as all the footnotes inserted by the translator (mainly for the adult component of the dual readership mentioned above), were also maintained in the PV.

As a general rule, the strategies carried out by the publisher would appear to outline a sort of 'schizophrenic' adaptation. Such a strategy seems to point to a model readership with average-to-low reading skills and linguistic competence, unable to process metaphorical and non-standard lexicon,

high registers, narrative complexity, unpleasant references etc. At the same time, contradictorily, the systematic excision of language perceived as infantilizing (including humorous forms) seems to cater to a still young but more mature readership, unwilling to identify with ‘childish’ language and stories. A similar paradox appears patent if we consider that the reader imagined by the publisher seems ready to accept a high degree of cultural difference in terms of narrative and content, but, at the same time, is regarded as generally incapable of handling deviations from what appears to the revisers to be linguistically, stylistically, and aesthetically acceptable. Moreover, whereas cultural specificity is generally preserved in the PV and immediate readability is sometimes put aside in the name of adequacy (as in the footnotes clarifying relatively difficult historical and political references), the author’s linguistic creativity and general intention are often sacrificed in both qualitative and quantitative terms, in apparent contradiction with the editorial mission of the series stated by the publisher. In the final analysis, the treatment of the TM may be even construed as an instance of *intralingual translation* carried out by the revisers, rather than as a simple editing process, entailing a high degree of freedom in altering, restructuring, and even omitting textual elements, as well as allowing substantial room for subjectivity (Zethsen 809). The freedom granted to the translator of ChL pointed out by Shavit, among others, reveals interesting similarities to the liberties allowed to the translator – in this case, to the revisers of the translation – in intralingual translation, as described by Zethsen. However, instead of being exclusively aimed at simplification, this rewording is broader and rather inconsistent, as the commentary above shows.

The publisher’s project also has deeper implications that go beyond the scope of this specific text, and may have repercussions on the very understanding of Chinese literature by an Italian readership. The overall leveling of linguistic creativity – again, either resulting from a literal translation of the Chinese text or from the translator’s own compensation strategies – may stem from the widespread emphasis that publishers generally place on fluency and on the documentary function of the literary text, to the detriment of its artistic value and stylistic specificity (Venuti, ch. 1). However, this treatment may create, from a very young age, the feeling of an extremely simple, clichéd and trivial writing, perpetuating the impression of Chinese literature as monotonous and immature, and well below the standards of its global counterparts. Moreover, especially (but not exclusively) for an adult readership, the choice of *Qingtong kuihua* by the publisher has some important consequences at the thematic level. The presentation of another, almost entirely decontextualized Chinese literary work revolving around the harshness of life during the Cultural Revolution may end up perpetuating a clichéd image of China and its literature, already fueled by a well-established repertoire of literary and cinematic works with the same historical setting available to the Italian audience. Indeed, the general historical and political background against which Cao’s story is set has already been absorbed by the readers, hence it does not hamper their understanding of the text and reading experience to a significant degree; however, the downside is the creation of an immovable horizon of expectations that tends towards stereotypization (Magagnin 108-10).

5. Conclusion

The empirical work conducted in this article is a description of the characteristics of the adaptation conducted by the Italian publisher Giunti (in the person of two revisers) on the TM produced by the translator of Cao Wenxuan’s award-winning children’s book *Qingtong kuihua*, in terms of vocabulary, syntax, figurative language, textual factors, and aesthetic features. Moreover, it is an attempt to provide a preliminary description of certain features of the adaptation strategies involved in publishing ChL for a non-Chinese readership, as well as of their implications on the latter. The analyses suggest that such an adaptation strategy involves a general tendency towards the simplification and standardization of stylistic and linguistic traits, even within the framework of an editorial project that overtly aims to promote cultural and literary diversity, as represented by a selection of international ChL classics. These forms of domestication tailored to the reading and encyclopedic skills of a specific age group are hardly an exception in translated ChL. Nevertheless, some interventions applied by the revisers seem to be inconsistent with the domesticating

macrostrategy, bringing about short-circuits that play havoc with the characteristics of the implied readership and reveal the unsystematic nature of the publisher's project.

Despite the growing visibility of ChL – as witnessed, among other things, by the fact that China is the guest of honor at the 2018 edition of the Bologna Children's Book Fair – the number of works translated into Italian is still extremely small, and the publishers' attention for this literary production is still at an embryonic stage in comparison to other, more developed markets such as the English- and French-speaking ones. Given these circumstances, it is impossible to come to a comprehensive understanding of the politics of translation of ChL in the Italian context. However, the features of the editorial project I have analyzed as a case study are also largely common to other projects involving contemporary translated Chinese literature for a general readership, where implications similar to those described in this inquiry are also relevant. Further empirically-based investigation within the field would provide useful insights for a broader understanding of the *external politics* of translation (Chang) – including the role of the various agents involved in the process – and of the impact of translational and editorial choices on the image of Chinese literature among foreign readers.

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