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A METONYMIC TRANSLATION: BERTOLT BRECHT'S *THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE*

Liu Xiaoqing

The Caucasian Chalk Circle is one of the most important works of the German playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956). It is also one of the most widely performed modern plays in the West. However, this critically acclaimed play is not purely Brecht's "originality" but is indebted to an ancient Chinese play, Li Xingdao's *Hui Lan Ji* 灰阑记 (The Story of the Circle of Chalk).¹ Brecht acknowledged his adaptation in the prologue of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in the voice of the singer: "It is called 'The Chalk Circle' and comes from the Chinese. But we'll do it, of course, in a changed version" (Brecht 1983, 126). The "changed version" Brecht made was for the Broadway stage during his exile in America. Inevitably, he also took influences from American culture and society. Thus, in the creation of the play Brecht had two systems, Chinese and American, as his source and target systems to respond to. In addition, Brecht was not a native speaker in either of the systems; rather, he approached both primarily in German. Therefore, in both the actual and metaphorical senses, Brecht acted as a translator in his writing of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Writing was his way of translating.

1. To Westerners, the story of two mothers claiming one child is a well-known biblical story that showcases King Solomon's wisdom; therefore, critics generally think Brecht takes influence from both the biblical story and the Chinese source for his creation of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. However, Brecht only acknowledged the Chinese source; in addition, there is no clear evidence showing that Li Xingdao had known or was influenced by the biblical story for the writing of his play. Hence, in this article I focus on the relationship between Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and Li Xingdao's *Hui Lan Ji*.

I propose that, in his writing as translation, Brecht adopted a metonymic translation strategy. Following Roman Jakobson's two devices, metaphor and metonymy, in the study of the arrangement of language, Maria Tymoczko propounds that the two modes correspond to the two approaches in translation. Metaphorical translation, which treats "translation as a process of substitution and selection," has been favored by translation theorists, whereas "the metonymic processes of combination, connection, and contexture in translation are not able to be captured with theoretical language restricted to the structuralist binaries" (Tymoczko 1999, 284). However, what has been neglected is actually an important facet of translation, as Tymoczko explicates:

Such metonymies are to be found in the way that translation is always a partial process, whereby some but not all of the source texts is transposed, and in the way that translations represent source texts by highlighting specific segments or parts, or by allowing specific attributes of the source texts to dominate and, hence, to represent the entirety of the work. Metonymy operates also ... in the way that translations, as elements of the receiving literature system, metonymically encode features of the receiving cultures. (1999, 282)

Tymoczko thinks that this feature of metonymy is present in all rewritings and retellings (1999, 42).

Tymoczko's theory of metonymic translation is a useful device for reading Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* because Brecht adopted elements from both the source (Chinese) and target (American) systems and made them into his own. Brecht's creativity was not diminished by his borrowing. Rather, he made his careful and thoughtful selection, in which he highlighted certain elements and rejected others, to serve his purpose of creating a work of his own. In this way, we can see how Brecht turned re-creation into creation.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SOURCE

Brecht rewrote Li Xingdao's story. The connection between Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and Li Xingdao's *Hui Lan Ji* is distinct. Brecht keeps Li's core story: in the case of a lawsuit involving two women claiming one boy as their son, the judge uses a chalk circle as the device to determine the true mother and rules that the boy goes to the mother who truly loves him. In addition, Brecht preserves specific details of Li's writing and distinctive features of Yuan drama (*yuan zaju*), the genre to

which Li's play belongs. At the same time, Brecht deliberately departs from Li's play with his characteristic changes, prominently reflected in his new interpretation of the relationships between mother and motherhood and between law and justice.

REWRITING OF REWRITINGS

In keeping with Tymoczko's proposal that the rewriting of a story evokes metonymically all the previous rewritings of the tale, Brecht's rewriting also bears a relationship with all rewritings of Li Xingdao's story. The "original," Li Xingdao's *Hui Lan Ji*, was produced in Chinese during China's Yuan dynasty in the fourteenth century. The heroine, Haitang, a gentle and beautiful girl from a good family, is sold into a house of prostitution after her father dies. A businessman, Lord Ma, sees her and marries her as his second wife. Haitang bears Lord Ma a son, the only child in the family. Meanwhile, his first wife has a secret lover and has long schemed to obtain Lord Ma's wealth. After she poisons Lord Ma to death, the first wife accuses Haitang of the murder and then snatches away Haitang's child. Haitang is arrested and found guilty by a corrupt judge and the first wife's lover, who works as a clerk at the court. Fortunately, a well-known and impartial judge named Bao Zheng looks into the case and conducts a second trial. He orders a lime circle drawn on the floor and the child placed in the middle of the circle. The two alleged mothers are asked to stand on each side of the child to pull in opposite directions, with the one who pulls the child out of the circle to her to be declared the real mother. The first wife pulls as hard as she can, whereas Haitang remains motionless. When the judge asks them to try a second time, Haitang again does not move. When the judge asks why she does not pull, Haitang states that she cannot bear to hurt her own child. She then relates the whole story. The wise judge finds Haitang innocent and also the true mother to the child. Absolved of the crimes, Haitang returns home to live with her brother and her child.

The Chinese play first became known to the Western world in a French translation by Stanislas Julien, published in London in 1832. Julien substituted "chalk" for the original "lime" and abridged several passages related to the first wife and her lover. Wollheim da Fonseca translated Julien's version into German in 1876 (Tatlow 1977, 293). A German poet and translator, Alfred Henshke, under the pseudonym Klabund, adapted the play into German based on Julien's translation (Williams 1954, 5–10). One of the liberties Klabund took with the play is that he inserted a love theme whereby Haitang and a prince named

Pao are in love before she marries Lord Ma. In fact, the boy is Prince Pao's rather than Lord Ma's. When Prince Pao becomes emperor, he himself conducts a trial in which he finds Haitang innocent and marries her with their son. Reinhardt staged Klabund's play in 1925, and it was a popular success. In addition, a few other playwrights also made German adaptations, of which some assume Brecht might have seen one or two (Tatlow 1977, 293–94).

Brecht had seen Klabund's play while living in Germany, and he also read the original Chinese play in translation while exiled at the end of the 1930s (cited in Berg-Pan 1975, 219). In 1940 Brecht wrote a short story titled *Der Augsburger kreidekreis* (The Augsburg Chalk Circle). In this version of the story, the cause of the conflict between the true and false mothers is the religious division between Protestants and Catholics. Brecht omits the imperial intervention and makes the first wife the biological mother who has abandoned the child. The heroine is a servant girl who rescues the child and becomes the "real" mother. In 1944 Brecht worked the story into a play, *Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis* (*The Caucasian Chalk Circle*), moving the events to medieval Georgia and adding a prologue set in Soviet Georgia. It is this version that is widely performed today.

In the prologue to *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, two peasant groups, the goat-raisers and the fruit-growers, dispute the ownership of a valley in Soviet Georgia. The land initially belongs to the goat-raising people. After some arguments, it is decided that the land should go to the fruit-growing party because it will benefit the greatest number of people. As the farmers celebrate their agreement, a singer introduces the main play with a song. This inner play begins with an insurrection during which the tyrannical governor and his wife quickly flee and desert their baby son. A young maid, Grusha, not only saves but goes to great trouble in taking care of the child. Later, when the governor and his wife come back, the wife demands that the child be returned to her for the purpose of inheriting the governor's property. The two women, both claiming the child, confront each other in court. The judge, Azdak, uses the chalk circle in the same way as in Li's Chinese play to determine the true mother.² With the child placed in the middle of the chalk circle, the two

2. Chinese scholars Zhu Bingsun, Tao Wei, Qiu Delai, and Zeng Xin and Sri Lankan scholar E. F. C. Ludowy all have discussed the theme of the two mothers claiming one child in Li Xingdao's and Brecht's plays. They connect the story to three major religions, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Furthermore, Tong Jinghua traces Li Xingdao's play to two Tibetan stories. A Japanese scholar, Nakata

women are asked to pull the child in their direction. Twice the governor's wife pulls hard while Grusha does not move for fear of hurting the child. The judge then rules that the child goes to Grusha. The resulting happy ending mirrors the ending of Li's story.

ADOPTION

Apart from the obvious similarities between the core stories, there are other notable similarities shared by Li's and Brecht's plays. Antony Tatlow is one of the scholars who has made in-depth comparisons between the two works. According to Tatlow, "the structure of the plot of *Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis* stands in a precise relationship to the Chinese model" (1977, 291). He also thinks that the realistic style is distinctive in the two playwrights' treatment of the well-known story, commenting that "[b]oth Brecht and Li assume that human behavior is largely determined by economic conditions and influenced by social position. ... both the Chinese and the German dramatists observe the practical realities of life" (1977, 298). The realism shared by Li and Brecht differentiates them both from Klabund's romanticism and the biblical King Solomon's universal wisdom. Thus, contrary to the "idealizations, fairy-tale creations" in Klabund's character depiction, both Li and Brecht portray Haitang and Grusha realistically (Tatlow 1977, 298). Tatlow also sees that the two judges of Li's play—good and bad—converge in Azdak. Furthermore, Tatlow lines up Azdak with the bandit-hero of Chinese outlaw literature and plays in general and with Judge Bao in particular. According to Tatlow, although Azdak does not take after Bao in Li's play, he follows Bao's other judgments in other Yuan court plays in which Bao defies high officialdom or even the emperor to give justice to common people. Thus Tatlow connects Brecht's concept of justice to the genre of Yuan drama, one of whose themes is to critique social injustice and other social problems in many of its plays.

Tatlow also observes specific details shared by the two plays: both stories are set in the past; in both of them the son is five years old at the time of the trial (he is only three months old in Kabund's version); the relationship between Grusha and her brother resembles the one between Haitang and her brother; and the child goes to the disadvantaged in the end. Further, both Li and Brecht distinctively used vulgar languages in

Wakaba, thinks that Li Xingdao's work influenced a similar play in Japan. See Ceng 2007; Qu 2002; and Nakata 2001.

the dialogues of their characters. These and other similarities show that Brecht transposed aspects of Li's play into his writing.

Tatlow and other scholars also reveal Brecht's indebtedness to the Chinese poetics of Yuan drama. The narrative style of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* follows closely the pattern of Chinese Yuan drama. Generally speaking, Yuan drama is composed of four episodic acts, with the exception that a few plays are made up of five acts and that the acts of a few plays develop with the plot (Shih 1976, 43). Although Brecht's play is made up of five rather than four acts, its structure is much closer to that of the Chinese drama than his other plays. Also, the five acts of his play are episodic rather than sequential. Thus, John Fuegi comments that Brecht's narrative style comprises "non-naturalistic or 'presentational' devices of traditional Chinese dramaturgy, which is both condensed and explicit" (1972, 146). Wenwei Du thinks that the singer, who functions as a narrator in the play, solely accomplishes "all the narrative devices of the traditional Chinese theatre—such as the characters' self-introduction in stylized recitation or chanting, their narration of the plot's development, and their expression of feelings or thoughts in lyric singing" (1995, 316). Furthermore, Du also ascribes the origin of the prologue, which causes contention among Western critics for its unusualness and incongruity with the main play, to Chinese *xiezi* (wedge), which appeared not only in Li's original play but also was frequently used in Yuan drama, functioning to introduce the whole play (1995, 317). Thus, the "exoticism" of the narrative style of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* can be traced to the Chinese poetics of Yuan drama.

On stage, Brecht conscientiously adopted the performative devices of Yuan drama. It is said that pantomime, "a trademark of the Chinese acting style," fascinated Brecht in that it expresses the idea of the Chinese performer's "awareness of being watched" (Du 1995, 317; see also Willett 1964, 91–92). In the scenes when Grusha and the singer appear together on the stage, Brecht has his heroine adopt pantomime to act out what the singer sings in lyrics. Later, when he staged the play in 1954 in Berlin, he had one actor play two roles, the singer and the judge Azdak, with the use of pantomime. The practice not only follows the performing traditions in the Chinese Yuan and Ming periods but also illustrates Brecht's deft use of pantomime (Du 1995, 317). In a rehearsal in 1955 in Leipzig, Brecht again used pantomime to help solve the problem of not having enough actors to play all the characters. If the characters were masked, he gave them Chinese faces; moreover, he insisted that the masks follow the Chinese method of being painted on the actors' faces rather than being worn (Berg-Pan 1975, 225). Attracted

by the music played by the Chinese musical instrument, gong, in Chinese operas, Brecht commissioned his composer to create “Gongspiel” to imitate the sound (Berg-Pan 1975, 225). Brecht’s stage design especially pays homage to the Chinese origin. According to Karl von Appen, stage designer for many of Brecht’s performances staged by the Berlin Ensemble, Brecht was very particular about his stage setting. He ensured that the stage backdrop for *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was done in the particular Chinese manner, which is on a silk screen painted with a Chinese aesthetic style. Brecht even went to the point that he “insisted on helping his stage designer to buy the appropriate type of silk” (Berg-Pan 1975, 226). In this way Brecht made his play thoughtfully respond to his source, Li’s play and Yuan drama.

ADAPTATION

However, just as he purposefully chose to retain some aspects of the source, Brecht also deliberately left others out or substantially changed them. For instance, he moved the setting from Li’s Yuan dynasty of China to medieval Georgia (and Soviet Union in the prologue). He especially gave prominence to the social background, which was rarely touched upon in Li’s play and had little impact on the story, by casting the scene in a warring time that hinted of his own time. Essentially, by rewriting Li’s story Brecht redefined the meaning of law and justice. Brecht first complicated Li’s easy logic that a biological mother is necessarily a good and true mother whereas a woman who claims a child who is not hers is dishonest in the first place and eventually proves to be a morally vicious person. Instead, Brecht showed that the biological mother does not necessarily manifest true motherhood and vice versa. In similar fashion, Brecht confounded the unification of law and justice. By depicting a judge who is both good and bad in a certain sense and who rules against the law but does justice to the people, Brecht questions Li’s clear-cut demarcation that a bad judge corrupts law and justice and a good judge upholds it.

MOTHER/MOTHERHOOD

Brecht kept the pattern of two mothers, one good and the other bad, struggling for one boy but made substantial changes. Following Li’s striking contrast between the two “mothers,” good and bad and virtuous and evil in their own characters, Brecht also opposed the two women characters in their morality. Like the first wife in Li’s play, the governor’s

wife in Brecht's play is an evil character. Also similar to the situation with Lord Ma's first wife, inheritance is the key issue for the governor's wife to fight for the child (Tatlow 1977, 295). However, Brecht reversed the bad character's relationship with the child: in Li's play the bad woman is also the false mother, whereas in Brecht's play the bad woman is the real mother. More important, Brecht portrayed his heroine in a different way from what Li did in his play. Brecht provided no background information about Grusha, except her identification as a maid of the governor's wife. He rarely touched on Grusha's physical features, focusing instead on her character after she adopts the governor's son. In order to raise the child, she is forced to overcome all kinds of difficulties, including jeopardizing her safety and happiness. In a word, Grusha sacrifices herself entirely for the sake of the child.

In this way Brecht disrupts Li's clear-cut relationship between mother and motherhood. In Li's case, Haitang is the biological mother who manifests true motherhood, whereas the first wife is the false mother without any maternal virtues. In Brecht's rewriting, the good and virtuous woman, Grusha, is not the biological mother of the child, in contrast to the governor's wife, who is bad and vicious but is the biological mother. However, the "false" mother, Grusha, manifests true motherhood, while the "true" mother, the governor's wife, shows no maternal love at all to her son, instead using him in her interest. The disparity between Haitang and Grusha highlights Brecht's differentiation and complication between mother and motherhood.

Also, while both Haitang and Grusha manifest true motherhood, it is worth noting their differentiation. Motherliness comes to Haitang naturally, whereas it comes to Grusha socially—which is more admirable as a result of circumstances. Furthermore, the condition of raising the child is much more difficult and dangerous for Grusha than it is in Haitang's safe and comfortable environment. In Haitang's case, except for the time when she fights to win her child back, she enjoys the wealth and love that Lord Ma provides to bring up her child easily. However, what Grusha does is unusual because she jeopardizes her safety, love, happiness, and even life for the child with whom she has no genetic relationship and of whom she voluntarily takes care. This is the point Brecht makes in his rewriting of Haitang into Grusha. By separating motherliness from its integration with biological motherhood in Haitang and making it independent in Grusha, he gives prominence to fostering, nurturing motherliness as the essential quality of a mother. This change points directly to Brecht's central concern in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*: law and justice.

Law and justice are unified in Li's play. When the law is followed, justice prevails; when the law is neglected or breached, injustice dominates. The first judge in Li's play does not abide by the law. In fact, he knows nothing about law but seeks money all the time. Consequently, injustice runs rampant during his rule. By contrast, the second judge, the famous Bao Zheng, follows the law strictly. Also in contrast to the first judge, Bao Zheng is a man of integrity. He never accepts bribes but dedicates himself to the service of the state and the public. The combination of the two—strict adherence to law and noble character—makes him an ideal judge. In fact, this character in the play follows its prototype, Bao Zheng (999–1062), a historical figure in Chinese history who is well known as the symbol of justice both in reality and in Chinese plays.

It is easy to see that Li links morality with the positive relationship of law and justice. In his thinking, “good” and “bad” refer not only to judges' competency but also to their moral character. In fact, Li makes it obvious that honesty and impartiality are prerequisites for a just result. Overriding this idea of justice is the thought that, alongside good judges, the state can absorb some bad judges because in the end the just judges will redress any wrongs. It is interesting to note that there is little involvement of natural law in Li's play. It is more a competition between a good person (or judge) and a bad person (or judge). Fairness and justice come with the person, not by natural right.

Brecht deliberately subverts Li's clear-cut images of judges as well as his positive connection among law, justice, and morality. His judge, Azdak, is a mixture of Li's first and second judges. Azdak is both good and bad. Morally, he is a disputable figure. Like Robin Hood, he takes from the rich to give to the poor. At the same time, he is also “a thief, a timeserver, and a coward” (Gray 1962, 153). He steals rabbits and is chased by the police. He hates the grand duke but is also protected by him. Upon hearing the news that the former governor is coming back, Azdak displays great fear. Also like Li's first judge, who openly acknowledges his love for money, Azdak seeks bribes publicly. Nevertheless, in contrast to Li's first judge's blatant ignorance of law and the second judge's devotion to law, Azdak takes an eclectic attitude. He knows the law well; however, he does not want to be bound by it. In fact, he shows contempt for the form of law; his only use of the law book is to sit on it.

The judgments Azdak makes are unconventional and even odd. Generally speaking, he does not follow the law but breaks it. However, Azdak does this not out of his ignorance of law or merely for his personal

gain or enjoyment (although he does receive some money from it), but to grant fundamental justice to the poor. In the play Brecht lets an outsider, the singer, praise Azdak for what he does:

And he broke the rules to save them.
 Broken law like bread he gave them,
 Brought them to shore upon his crooked back.
 At long last the poor and lowly
 Had someone who was not too holy
 To be bribed by empty hands: Azdak.

For two years it was his pleasure
 To give the beasts of prey short measure:
 He became a wolf to fight the pack.
 From All Hallows to All Hallows
 On his chair beside the gallows
 Dispensing justice in his fashion sat Azdak. (Brecht 1983, 211–12)

By endorsing Azdak's practice, Brecht actually questions whether legality brings about justice. His two stories, happening in modern and ancient Georgia, respectively, explain his thought well. In each of them—one is about land and the other is about a child—the unlawful party wins over the lawful one. Rather than injustice, they both produce justice. In the former, justice benefits the majority of the people; in the latter, it lets the child go to the mother who has true motherliness. Nevertheless, Brecht does not mean that law and justice have to be contradictory and that justice always goes against law. Rather, through the play he makes his point, “[t]hat what there is shall go to those who are good for it, / Children to the motherly, that they prosper, / Carts to good drivers, that they be driven well, / The valley to the waterers, that it yield fruit” (Brecht 1983, 233). This, to a great extent, represents Brecht's social ideal. He rewrites Haitang into Grusha and Li's two judges into Azdak to illustrate how this social justice can be achieved in an unusual way. In other words, Brecht is not content with bringing justice to a single case: a boy returning to his mother; rather, what he cares about is to bring the whole of society to its most reasonable and productive order, which benefits the majority of its people. With this new storyline and new moral, Brecht re-creates Li's story into his own.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TARGET SYSTEM

In his rewriting theory, André Lefevere (1992) holds that writers and rewriters either conform to or fight with their target systems, owing to the tension between the poetics and the ideology of writers and rewriters and those of their target systems. However, I propose that the relationship between writers and rewriters and their target systems is not a clear-cut either/or but an interaction between the two. That is, in writing and rewriting, writers and rewriters can both assimilate to and challenge their target systems, with one outweighing the other.

This is the case with Brecht's creation of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Brecht wrote explicitly in one diary entry that the structure of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was "conditioned in part by a revulsion against the commercialized dramaturgy of Broadway. At the same time it incorporates certain elements of the old American theatre which excelled in burlesque and shows" (cited in Lyon 1999, 239). The diary reveals Brecht's accommodation to and resistance against the American system. Brecht's interest in American performing arts and his eagerness to be recognized by it can be attested by his goal of "conquering Broadway" between 1943 and 1944. To this end, he willingly absorbed its theatrical influences and made concessions to its political and financial pressures. While this adaptation represents one side of his relationship with the American system, the other side, his resistance, prevails over the adaptation and plays a dominating role.

ASSIMILATION

Brecht's assimilation to American culture and society, American movies and theater in particular, is a mixture of choice and pressure. On the one hand, he was attracted to American movies and theater and was willing to adopt them in his plays; on the other hand, because Brecht was an exile in America, the social milieu, the patron, and the audience all exerted pressure and forced him to make concessions.

Brecht was fascinated by American movies. Hanns Eisler recalls that during Brecht's first trip to America in the 1930s he and Brecht went to watch gangster movies regularly and jokingly called their excursion "social studies" (Weber 1997, 344). In addition, Brecht also collected books and newspaper clippings on American movies. During his seven years of exile in America, Brecht was said to go to Hollywood movies once or twice a week, in addition to seeing plays and shows. As a result, American performing arts not only affected Brecht's concept

of theater but also were directly adopted into his creation of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Carl Weber, Brecht's former assistant, studies the impact of American theatrical performance on Brecht. He thinks vaudeville and its offspring, musical comedy, are the "elements of the older American theatre that excelled in burlesque and show," which Brecht acknowledged in the production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in Berlin in 1954 (cited by Weber 1990, 59). Weber also cites Kenneth Tynan, who proposes that Brecht "used the zany exaggeration of facial staging and acting devices to demonstrate socially relevant behavior" (Weber 1990, 59). Tynan especially believes that the wedding scene in act 3 of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* showcases Brecht's appropriation of the American vaudeville tradition. Weber also recalls that Brecht referred to the Marx Brothers' stateroom scene in *A Night at the Opera* as the model for the staging of the wedding scene. In the Ludovica scene in act 4, Weber thinks the actress who played the seductive innkeeper's daughter walked in a way imitating Mae West, and the actor who played the soldier Blockhead was instructed to display an expression resembling Buster Keaton. In addition, Weber remarks that Brecht employed musical theater processions, pantomimes, and visual ideas that "showed the influence of Broadway techniques" (Weber 1990, 63). All this evidence shows that American performance tradition had a direct impact on *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Based on his teaching and research, James Lyon provides a detailed study of American movie components in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Lyon believes that the underdog image of Azdak, who is believed to be the only Robin Hood figure in Brecht's plays, fits very well with the American movies of the time. He explains that "his [Azdak's] antics, both before and after being made judge, not to say his manner of speech, are much like those of Groucho Marx, whose films Brecht also knew" (Lyon 1999, 241). Similarly, unlike the heroines in Brecht's other plays, Grusha goes through development in her character. Lyon's American students find that this characteristic of Grusha is common with American conventional dramas. According to one of Lyon's students, the scene where Grusha's husband sits in the bathtub also recalls the similar scenes of Hollywood westerns. Acknowledged by Brecht himself, the suspenseful plots in this play and others are influenced by Chaplin. The neat and happy ending of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is exceptional for Brecht, since all his other plays have open or ambiguous endings. Lyon attributes this to Brecht's knowledge that an American audience would like upbeat entertainment right after World War II. According to Lyon

and his American students, other features, such as flashback, action scenarios, and the love scenes between Grusha and Simon, are unusual in Brecht's oeuvre of plays but are close to Hollywood prototypes. The detailed analysis of Weber and Lyon tells convincingly that Brecht conscientiously adopted American artistic elements into his writing of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

While actively adopting American performing poetics, Brecht also complied himself to American society for political and financial reasons. As an exile fleeing from Nazi Germany, Brecht found in America a temporarily stable place to live and write after his changing "countries more often than his shoes" (cited in Fuegi 1987, 86). However, Brecht's relationship with America turned out to be not as an "exile in paradise," as he had expected (Clurman 1958, 228). First, America's long-held isolationism aggravated its fear of immigrants and émigrés, who were already vulnerable to social oppression. Second, the antipathy to communism, which started to gather momentum in the late 1930s, set the foreign-born artists based in Hollywood as targets of suspicion. As an "enemy alien," Brecht, along with other German immigrants, was subject to "close surveillance by the FBI, a ten o'clock curfew during the early years of the war ... and spot check" in his early years of exile (Cook 1982, 72). Brecht's belief in Marxism and his association with the Soviet Union made his situation even worse. The climax came when he was called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1947, where he was interrogated for his affiliation with the Communist Party, his relationship with Hollywood, the political ideology of his works, and so on. Although Brecht was never charged with any crimes in America, his insecure situation made him sensitive and even alert to his social surroundings.

Brecht's change of the prologue of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* can be seen as an instance of his response to the political situation at the time. The Soviet Union and America were allies when the play was written, so the background of the prologue, the Soviet Union and land settlement resolved with the "idealistic Marxist principles," did not provoke unpleasant feelings (Lyon 1999, 240). However, with the outbreak of the Cold War, the allies turned into enemies. Brecht then "instructed Eric Bentley to omit the entire scene from the 1948 printed version, as well as from the world premiere production at Carleton College that same year" (Lyon 1990, 240). Clearly, the ideological situation affected Brecht's dramatic decision.

Most of all, financial restrictions made survival the issue of paramount importance in Brecht's life. The poem "Hollywood," written

during this time period, best illustrates his situation: “Every day, to earn my daily bread / I go to the market where lies are bought / Hopefully / I take up my place among the sellers” (Brecht 1976, 382). Although the poem refers particularly to Brecht’s experience in film-making, it can be applied to his life in general during his exile in America, including his writing of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. In fact, there is no denying that financial reasons account for part of the motivation for Brecht to write *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Contracted with Broadway before the play was written, Brecht received \$800 in advance royalty payments (Hayman 1984, 81; Lyon 1980, 124). The payment and contract made Brecht obliged to his patron as well as to the American audience.

All these constraints were clearly felt in the creation of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. In a diary entry written during this time, Brecht complained about the tension between “art” and “contract” (Lyon 1999, 239). Lyon interprets Brecht’s uncommon use of the word “art” as his “desire to follow his own instinct as a playwright” and the “contract” as his wish to win over the Broadway audience (1999, 239). While taking American theatrical elements willingly and the hostile treatment as a German exile reluctantly, Brecht did not resign himself to his target system in his creation. Rather, he resisted it with his own poetics and ideology.

RESISTANCE

Brecht’s resistance against the American system came from two directions: the revolt against American politics and ideology, particularly those in the show industry, and the assertion of his own ideology and poetics. These two forces converged in Brecht’s writing and rewriting; together they brought out the epic theater and Marxism, Brecht’s hallmark, against the Broadway poetics and anti-Communism prevalent in America at the time.

First of all, Brecht distanced himself from American life, except for his professional involvement with Broadway and Hollywood. Martin Esslin makes a perceptive observation in this regard: “while he [Brecht] admired the productive achievements of the United States, he had no contact with his cultural climate; distrusted its politics, wrongly believing that after the war the U.S.A. would inevitably relapse into isolationism; and disliked its cooking” (Esslin 1984, 65). As a result, after Brecht came to the United States, “the American scene, which had dominated his early works, disappeared from his writing” (1984, 65). In fact, Brecht’s indifference to American culture is reflected in his shunning not only American scenes and subject matters in his plays

but also American poetics as a man of letters. Frederic Ewen regards this as a limitation of Brecht and impugns him for it:

That he [Brecht] did not in the course of his six years' stay deepen his knowledge of the profounder currents of American thought, and of the major literary figures of the past and the present century, and that he remained almost wholly indifferent to the literary upsurge of the twenties and the thirties, many of whose representatives were even then in Hollywood or nearby, reflects the limitation of his mind. That mind, otherwise so alert and so given to ready assimilation, would undoubtedly itself have been deepened by a more positive contact with such movements. He never really discovered Hemingway, Dos Passos, Dreiser, Farrell, Steinbeck, Lillian Hellman; nor for that matter any of the poets of that era. (Ewen 1967, 384)

However, I find that what Ewen considers a fault is actually Brecht's fight. It shows both his character and his attitude toward the target system. Being "at bottom essentially a dissident" and considering himself the "Einstein of the new stage form," Brecht always tried hard to create in his own way rather than being influenced (cited in Lyon 1980, 8, 32). His relationship with his patrons is illustrative in this regard.

Although *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was the only play that Brecht contracted with Broadway, Brecht broke up with both of his patrons, Broadway and Luise Rainer, the Australian-born Hollywood actress who initiated the project and secured the contract for him. To Rainer, his immediate patron, for whom Brecht intended to write the play, Brecht did not particularly accommodate himself. Shortly after the writing started, the two of them began to clash. On the one hand, Rainer simply found Brecht hard to get along with; on the other, once Brecht started writing, he no longer kept his verbal promise to write the heroine for Rainer but followed his own pursuit. By the time he finished the first draft of the play in June 1944, their relationship had become so strained that Rainer withdrew from the play. The end of the cooperation thus completely released Brecht from the obligation to write for Rainer.

Brecht took an equally uncompromising attitude with his professional patrons in Hollywood and on Broadway, from whom Brecht earned his bread, as Lyon depicts:

Nor did Brecht have a reputation for doing things on anyone's terms but his own. If he had asked Reyber about the conventions of Hollywood film writing, chances are he would have ignored them anyway. Convinced of his own superiority as a writer, he wanted to change public taste, not pander to it. (Lyon 1980, 50–51)

The same was true of his attitude toward Broadway. Although Brecht's own response to the detraction that he had not compromised enough was that he felt exactly the opposite, John Fuegi shares Lyon's opinion on Brecht's insubordination (Fuegi 1987, 90–91). In fact, Lyon believes that “from 1936 till the end of his American exile [Brecht] appeared to be uncompromising in his view,” and that that was the reason that caused his failure on the American stage (Lyon 1980, 13).

I believe that Brecht did compromise, yet not only was his compromise insubstantial, but he also gradually backed away from his initial compromise and returned to his principles. The transformation of the character Grusha is a case in point.

Katja, the early version of Grusha, was originally modeled on Luise Rainer. However, ten days after Brecht sent Rainer the first draft, he began to envision his heroine differently: “She should be artless, look like Brueghel's Dulle Griet, a beast of burden. She should be stubborn instead of rebellious, placid instead of good, dogged instead of incorruptible, etc., etc.” (cited in Hayman 1984, 81). Following his own liking, Brecht started to modify the character until he finally recast her into a new figure by the time Rainer relinquished the role. According to Lyon, the original Katja was much nicer and better suited to the American audience, while Grusha was “less saccharine and more obtuse, a character that bore the stamp of the retarded development of her class” (Lyon 1980, 127). In fact, Brecht made his character so unappealing to the audience that he even used the word “sucker” to describe her. Brecht thus defied the stereotype of the heroines on the Broadway stage and portrayed a character as what he intended her to be. The contract for *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* did not bind Brecht. Although it restricted him in the beginning, he managed to break away from it and wrote on his own terms.

BRECHT'S POETICS AND IDEOLOGY

Generally speaking, epic theater and Marxism, as Brecht's trademark in poetics and ideology, pervade his creation. In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Brecht writes with distinctive features of them not only to resist the target system but also to rewrite Li's play to transform it into his own. In terms of rewriting and translation, Brecht asserted his subjectivity and creativity by flaunting his poetics and ideology.

In dramaturgy, the epic theater and the V-effect are generally acknowledged as the most representative features of Brecht. In contrast to the Aristotelian dramatic tradition, epic theater is characterized by

its dynamic depiction, its resort to the reason rather than the feelings of the audience, and the goal of education over entertainment. Brecht employed these features in almost all his plays. In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, the epic theater can best be seen in its difference from Li's play.

In Li's play, Li restores justice and peace to the world by letting the wrong be redressed. In other words, with the injustice removed, the world remains as it is. However, Brecht creates justice by disrupting the old order. As illustrated by his two cases, the world changes for the better by turning the old standard upside down. This difference between Li's "static" and Brecht's "dynamic" depiction of the world parallels Brecht's contrast between Aristotelian drama and epic theater.

The principle of appealing to the reason rather than the feelings of the audience can be best seen by Brecht's "awarding" the child to the adoptive mother rather than the biological mother. It is one of the biggest alterations Brecht makes with Li's play. Within this revision Brecht radically changes the class and character of the heroines. From Li's beautiful and weak middle-class woman who is at the mercy of fate, Brecht changes his heroine into a maid who is strong and takes control of her own fate. Li portrays Haitang as a sympathetic character. Her beauty and kindness make her likeable. She does not do anything particular to demonstrate her qualities but performs her duties devotedly. Moreover, she is victimized: in the beginning she is sold into prostitution because of her family situation, and later her child is taken from her by the evil first wife. In both situations she has no power over what happens to her. Haitang appeals to the emotion of the audience. The more she suffers, the more people feel sympathy for her. By contrast, Brecht depicts his heroine as a strong woman who elicits admiration rather than sympathy. He deliberately omits the physical features of Grusha to diminish any chance for the audience to be attracted to her because of her beauty. Furthermore, he complicates the relationship between mother and motherhood, posing for the audience a choice between blood relationship and moral character. In this way he achieves his purpose of asking the audience to use their powers of thought rather than their emotions to watch his play.

The third characteristic of epic theater, that the play is to educate more than entertain the audience, is closely related to the second principle: reason over emotion. By letting the child go to the adoptive mother, Brecht reverses both the Chinese original play and social conventions to drive his point home that a true mother is determined by her motherly characteristics rather than the blood relationship. Moreover, because the gist of his rewriting is not the triumph of the true mother but the

justice of society, he especially challenges his audience with the controversial character and ruling of the judge and exposes the audience to a new perspective on law and justice. A morally blemished judge does not necessarily make a bad judge. Similarly, following the law does not always bring justice, and breaching the law does not necessarily cause injustice. With the example of the two circumstances, the modern-day Soviet Union and medieval Georgia, Brecht confronts the conventional view of law and justice and puts forward his point that justice lies wherever it best serves the needs of the people.

Brecht's theoretical technique of *Verfremdungseffekt*, generally considered the core of Brecht's epic theater, is also prominent in the play.³ As critics generally agree, the singer in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is one of the most noticeable symbols of the V-effect. Although the idea is believed to be inspired by the Chinese performing arts, Brecht's singer does not have a counterpart in Li's play. In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, the singer does not belong to any group on the stage, nor does he have an actual role in the plot. Rather, standing between the audience and the actors, he provides what cannot be performed by the actors or to make comments on the story throughout the play. This includes introducing the background and the progress of the story and giving voice to and externalizing the inner thoughts of the characters. In keeping with Brecht's own theory, this role breaks the illusion that what is on the stage is reality. The appearance of the singer constantly reminds the audience that they are watching a play. For instance, before Simon and Grusha enter the stage, the singer introduces them with the five-line song, "The city is still. / Pigeons strut in the church square. / A soldier of the Palace Guard / Is joking with a kitchen maid / As she comes up from the river with a bundle" (Brecht 1983, 131). In traditional theater

3. The term is shortened by Fredric Jameson as V-effect and translated as defamiliarization effect, alienation effect, estrangement effect, or distancing effect. Its roots can be traced to Russian formalism, to Viktor Shklovsky's "priem ostraneniya" (the device of making strange), but it takes its inspiration from Chinese drama performance. According to Brecht, the Chinese play has the distinct V-effect in that "the artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him. He expresses his awareness of being watched.... The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place" (Willett 1964, 91–92). However, the effect does not limit the actors and audience. Brecht thinks that it is achieved "also by the music (choruses, songs) and the setting (placards, film, etc.). It was principally designed to historicize the incidents portrayed" (Willett 1964, 92). Precisely because it tends to distance itself from the audience, the V-effect is regarded as controversial by some critics.

these lines, serving as stage instructions, are unseen by the audience. However, Brecht has the singer sing the lines to the audience to make them aware of the stage and to direct them to the play. At other places the singer supplies what cannot be performed, for instance, the inner thinking of a character, even the baby, who cannot speak. The singer also makes comments on behalf of the author or the audience. Thus, in the whole play the singer plays the role of the “trouble-maker.” He breaks the integrity of the play and constantly brings the audience back to their reality from the “reality” created by the play. In this way Brecht forces his audience to take a detached view of the play.

Ideologically, against the currents of Broadway as well as American society, Brecht made his long-held belief in Marxism and antifascism evident in his writing. Although Lyon suggests that the background of the Soviet Union in the prologue can be a sign that Brecht appealed to his American audience because the Soviet Union entered World War II as America’s ally at the time of his writing, I argue that it derives more from its association with Stalin than from the U.S.-Soviet friendship.

Despite the fact that Brecht was not officially a Communist Party member and had conflicts with the orthodox Marxism doctrines, he was, or at least he considered himself, a veteran Marxist. From the mid-1920s, when he was exposed to and became interested in Marxism, until his death in 1956, Brecht’s most important political thought was Marxism. As a strong opponent of bourgeois society, Brecht believed that Marxism provided “a new [and] critical science of bourgeois society” and at the same time “a practical theory” for the proletarian revolution to overthrow it (Kellner 1997, 284). Antifascism does not stand separate from Marxism in Brecht’s political thought. Rather, he saw the two combined in that the Nazi group, representing the interests of industrialists and the bourgeoisie, stood opposed to the working class and exploited the people. Therefore, in his writing during his exile, the two political thoughts are usually fused.

Although *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is not a noted antifascist or Marxist work, it necessarily bears marks of Marxism and anti-Nazism. On the one hand, the war-torn setting in medieval Georgia and the two authoritarian rulers easily remind readers of Germany under Hitler’s control, the land from which Brecht fled for his exile; on the other hand, the class division and struggle in the play is the biggest signifier of Marxist thought. The two major characters—Grusha and Azdak—both come from the proletarian class, and their opposites—the governor’s wife, the grand duke, doctors, and landlords—all belong to the bourgeoisie. The two classes form a distinct contrast. While the bourgeoisie

are lazy, hypocritical, greedy, and lifeless, the working class, represented by Grusha and Azdak, are full of life and love. The latter group may not be perfectly “good,” but they are much better people than their bourgeois counterparts. Grusha is kind, loving, and altruistic, in contrast to the cold, cruel, and selfish governor’s wife. Azdak is happy-go-lucky and above-board compared to his cunning and hypocritical bourgeois customers. The class division forms the basic contradiction of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and reaches its climax in the dispute over the child in court.

Motivated by this ideological message, Brecht changes the core plot—two women claiming one child—into a class struggle. Darko Suvin expresses similar thinking when he states, “The tug-of-war between the biological upper-class mother and the plebeian ‘social mother’ over the Noble Child is an *exemplum*, standing for a decision which social orientation shall prevail as the parent of posterity, future ages” (Suvin 1989, 165). In this view, the center of the struggle, the child, represents not only a child but also the future of society. To the governor’s wife and her group, the child is closely related to the property they want to repossess and is thus a tool to reproduce their bourgeois life. The immediate benefit of having the child back is to inherit the wealth of the governor. In the long run, it confirms their social status and interests and consequently continues their bourgeois rule. By contrast, Grusha wants to have the child not out of material consideration but out of love. Yet, with the symbolic meaning of the child, her claim for him is not only for the good of the child but also a claim for her class. By taking the child from the governor’s wife, she annuls the latter’s chance of inheriting the wealth and the continuation of the bourgeois life of their group. In this sense, Grusha’s act is revolutionary. Her victory represents the victory of the working class for her time and the future.

CONCLUSION

The perspective of translation and rewriting, especially Tymoczko’s metonymic translation approach, allows us to take a better look at the interrelationship between creative writing and translation in Brecht’s case. Brecht was both a writer and a translator. The two roles are interrelated. Writing and rewriting were his way of translating, and vice versa. In this writing/translation, he challenged traditional translation concepts of “equivalence” and “faithfulness” by forming a dynamic relationship with the source and target systems. He transposed and transformed portions of both systems to construct his own. In other words, by performing

metonymic translation strategy, Brecht creatively turned translation into his creation.

The Caucasian Chalk Circle is not the only work among Brecht's oeuvre that manifests features of translation. *Good Woman of Szechuan*, *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, and others all attest to his talent as a rewriter and a translator. Brecht's unique way of writing provokes much controversy among critics: while some accuse him of being a "plagiarist," others validate it as his characteristic. Brecht's major critic and translator, Eric Bentley, thinks that "[c]ritics ... fail to note how Brecht made his borrowings his own" (Bentley 2008, 358). In a similar vein, Fredric Jameson takes plagiarism as Brecht's "mode of production." He explicates:

Yet in the sense in which it has been affirmed that every thing in Brecht is plagiarism in one way or another—whether from past or present, from other people or the classics—the *Grundgestus* also suggests the uniqueness of some Brechtian "mode of production" in which there is always a preexisting raw material that requires a reworking based on an interpretation. (Jameson 1998, 105)

While regarding Brecht's characteristic way of writing as a way of translating in general, I think the distinction of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is its close relationship with both the source and target systems. From Walter Benjamin's point of view, we can see that Brecht's work gives Li Xingdao's Chinese source an "afterlife". By partially translating Li's play and the Chinese classical drama, Brecht made the famous story of two mothers claiming one child as well as Chinese poetics live on in modern Western society. Yet more prominently, as translated literature, understood from the perspective of descriptive translation studies, Brecht's work became part of the target system—American culture and society—and impacted the latter.⁴

Although it took decades for Brecht to achieve belated success with *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in America, in the long run it fulfills Brecht's aim to "conquer" its target system. The play script, which Brecht wrote initially for Broadway, was not staged as it was expected. When it was finally performed by Carleton College (Northfield, Minnesota) in

4. Gideon Toury in his *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* writes explicitly that "translations are facts of target cultures; on occasion facts of a special status, sometimes even constituting identifiable (sub)system of their own, but of the target culture in any event" (2012, 29).

1948, it attracted only a small audience on account of being “too left-wing, too risqué, too avant-garde, and in some instances, simply too boring” (Connelly 1997, 97). Unsurprisingly, the “epic theater” suffered immediate rejection due to its failure to compromise itself for the target audience. However, today *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is one of Brecht’s most staged plays in the United States. The epic theater has become one of his important legacies and is widely discussed and cited in American art. Brecht produced deep and far-reaching influence on the American theater, as Carl Weber comments:

Even during the slump of the 1980s, however, Brecht maintained his position as one of the four most frequently produced playwrights in translation, in company with Molière, Ibsen, and Chekhov. He also is the only German dramatist who has gained a permanent position in the American professional repertoire. Neither the German classics Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Kleist, Büchner, nor any of their successors have achieved a comparable status. (Weber 1997, 349)

The playwrights Brecht influenced include Tony Kushner, Robert Schenkkan, George C. Wolfe, Anna Deavere Smith, and others (Weber 1997, 353). Visual artists such as Andy Warhol, Dan Graam, Hans Haache, and Martha Rosler have referred to Brecht or his epic theater in their writings. Famous writers and critics such as Roland Barthes, Michael Fried, Clement Greenberg, Herbert Marcuse, and others paid much attention to his poetry and theater as well (Glahn 2006, 29). Eva Goldbeck analyzed *Lehrstück* in detail, and Mordecai Gorelik discussed the “epic theater” at length in his influential 1940 book *New Theatres for Old* (Glahn 2006, 30). Among others, Rainer Fassbinder is a notable filmmaker whose direction followed Brecht’s device of the “alienation effect.” All these examples show the impact of Brecht on American culture.

Brecht’s Marxist beliefs did not present an obstacle to his American audience either; audiences not only accepted it but took it as his hallmark. It turned out that it benefited him rather than damaged him. In his book *Brecht in Exile*, Bruce Cook notes:

In America, especially during the sixties and early seventies, when Brecht was firmly established here, an enthusiasm for his work became a kind of badge of radicalism, a sign that you favored free speech, opposed the war in Vietnam and the Nixon administration. He was at least part of the package—and at the most, to some, a touchstone of radical authenticity. (Cook 1982, 217)

Thus, instead of being converted or ignored, Brecht was recognized and remembered by the American people for his distinctive difference.

Also, with his play Brecht throws in a new perspective in the relationship between law and justice. Adapting Li Xingdao's play provides Brecht a perfect device to illustrate his views on law and justice. Following the same device of the chalk circle, Brecht exemplifies with his play that diversion/digression from the law rather than adherence to it produces justice. But to Brecht the reason that diversion is made is the key. When corrupt judges ruin the law and justice, one must hope, as in the Chinese play, that fair-minded judges like Bao Zheng will overrule them. However, we see Brecht's view emerge in his adaptation of the play that Bao Zheng is not necessarily ideal. With the complicated relationship between law and justice, Brecht deliberately designs the "evil" character, Azdak, to achieve justice by distorting law in an unjust society.

There is no doubt that Brecht's idea on law and justice is unconventional. It does not fit the American circumstance during his time of exile. As Michael Freeman points out,

Brecht was in some ways ahead of his time. There is no way that in the United States (or for that matter in Britain or Germany) a court would have cemented a fostering relationship over one based on a blood tie. There is still a reluctance to do so. Even today, we attach such an importance to the genetic that we see as "real" relationships where the links are tenuous, and as a result, put parentage over parenting. (Freeman 1999, 208–9)

Nevertheless, in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* the split between law and justice does not suffer any changes in performance on the American stage; instead, these changes become its feature and are welcomed. In fact, the fictional legal case established by Brecht—the child goes to his adoptive mother rather than his biological mother—becomes a source for study by Professor Martha in her course on family law at Harvard Law School (Lyon 1999, 245). As literature extends reality, Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* adds a new dimension to our understanding of law and justice and other social and political issues. More important, it achieves Brecht's goal in his life and career: to change the world by changing people. Today, with its wide performance and popularity in America and other countries, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* makes a difference to the world.

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