

**Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale**  
Vol. 51 – Giugno 2015

ISSN 2385-3042

# **Qiu Xiaolong's *Death of a Red Heroine* in Chinese Translation**

## **A Macro-Polysystemic Analysis**

Paolo Magagnin (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia)

**Abstract** Despite the literature available on the linguistic specificity of the works by Chinese authors writing in languages other than their native language, the observable phenomena in the Chinese translations of such works remain generally unexplored. In fact, the analysis of such Chinese-language renditions reveals complex phenomena at the level of linguistic hybridity, translation norms, and political and ideological interference, calling for a more in-depth description of the recontextualization undergone by the prototexts, and for a comprehensive analysis of the 'external politics' involved in the translation process. A brief outline of such factors, as exemplified by *Hong ying zhi si* (2003) – the Chinese translation of Shanghai-born writer Qiu Xiaolong's first English-language detective novel, *Death of a Red Heroine* (2000) – will be herein attempted. To do so, a representative range of linguistic and extra-linguistic features observable in *Hong ying zhi si* will be described and the relevant translation strategies will be commented upon. Finally, by adopting a macro-polysystemic model, a preliminary attempt will be made to reconstruct the network in which the Chinese translation of Qiu's novel is situated.

**Summary** 1. The 'Macro-Polysystemic Hypothesis' in the Analysis of the Chinese Translation of *Death of a Red Heroine*. – 2. Levels of Translation Change. – 2.1. The Local Setting. – 2.2. Idiomatic Expressions. – 2.3. Syntactic Factors. – 2.4. Intertextuality. – 2.5. Cultural Factors. – 2.6. Social, Historical, and Political Factors. – 2.7. Sexual References. – 3. A Reconstruction of the Macro-Polysystemic Network. – 3.1. Political Polysystem. – 3.2. Ideological Polysystem. – 3.3. Economic Polysystem. – 3.4. Linguistic Polysystem. – 3.5. Literary Polysystem. – 3.6. Translational Polysystem. – 4. Conclusion.

**Keywords** Qiu Xiaolong. *Death of a Red Heroine*. Crime fiction. Polysystem studies. Macro-polysystemic hypothesis.

### **1 The 'Macro-Polysystemic Hypothesis' in the Analysis of the Chinese Translation of *Death of a Red Heroine***

Qiu Xiaolong 裘小龙, born in Shanghai in 1953 and based in St. Louis, Missouri, since 1988, is typically known to the Euro-American readership for his English-language crime fiction series featuring Chief Inspector Chen Cao, of the Shanghai Police Bureau.<sup>1</sup> The series began in 2000 with *Death*

---

1 This is a revised and expanded version of the talk *Qiu Xiaolong's «Death of a Red Heroine»*

of a Red Heroine and includes eight books to date; the ninth book of the series, titled *Shanghai Redemption*, is scheduled for publication in September 2015. Qiu is also the author of the non-crime fiction book *Years of Red Dust* (2010), as well as a prolific poet, translator, and scholar.

A number of Qiu Xiaolong's crime novels have already been translated into Chinese over the years: in this article I will examine the Chinese version of the first book of the series, *Death of a Red Heroine*, translated by Yu Lei 俞雷 and prefaced by Qiu himself, published in 2003 under the title *Hong ying zhi si* 红英之死. The novel, set in 1990 Shanghai, focuses on the case of a beautiful young woman found dead in a canal in the outskirts of the metropolis: upon further investigation, it is found that the corpse is that of Guan Hongying, a clerk at Shanghai First Department Store, honored as a National Model Worker. Chief Inspector Chen Cao, in charge of the investigation, discovers that Guan has lived a double life, as a Party member selflessly dedicated to her work, and as a woman with strong sexual desires. The culprit appears to be Wu Xiaoming, the son of a high-ranking Communist Party official: despite the political obstructions, Chen eventually arrests the young man, who is hurriedly tried and executed. The scandal besmirches but does not damage the Party, and, in spite of his bitterness and disillusion, Chen Cao eventually earns a reputation as a trustworthy law enforcement official.

The analysis of *Hong ying zhi si* reveals complex phenomena in terms of the treatment of linguistic hybridity, translation standards, and political and ideological interference, calling for a more in-depth description of the process of recontextualization undergone by the prototext,<sup>2</sup> as well as for a more comprehensive analysis of the 'external politics' involved in the translation process. In order to illustrate such factors, a representative range of strategies adopted by the Chinese translator at different levels will be presented. In the final part of this article, a preliminary attempt will be made to reconstruct the network in which the metatext is situated, describing the impact of linguistic, translational, cultural, ideological, economic, political, and social factors on the translation process. To do so, I will resort to the macro-polysystemic model elaborated by Chang Nam Fung (2000, 2001), which expands the tools provided by polysystem theory to focus on the 'external politics' of translation, thus encompassing a variety of additional and changing factors involved in the making and handling of a product – in this case, the translated text.

Chang's 'macro-polysystem hypothesis' provides a theoretical frame-

and its Chinese Translation, presented at the EACS XIX Biennial Conference *Deconstructing China: New Experiences, New Vistas* (Paris, Université Paris Diderot, Paris 7; INALCO, 7 September 2012).

2 I will use herein the terms 'prototext' and 'metatext', proposed by Popovič (2006), instead of 'source language' and 'target language'.

work taking into account six polysystems in which the activities and products of literary translators are situated: within each of them, central and peripheral tendencies can be identified, advocated by different institutions, groups or individuals. The six polysystems described by Chang are: 1) the political polysystem (made up of institutions of power and marginalized groups); 2) the ideological polysystem (consisting of competing ideologies that exist within a given culture and are sponsored by different groups); 3) the economic polysystem (entailing the norms binding translation activities to certain economic principles); 4) the linguistic polysystem (requiring conformity to the norms of a specific language variety); 5) the literary polysystem (offering recognized literary models for translations to emulate); 6) the translational polysystem (arising from general concepts of translatability adopted in the receiving community, but often conflicting with the norms originating from the other polysystems) (Chang 2001, p. 321).

This framework, although somewhat simplified, nonetheless allows the researcher to reconstruct the overall normative model and to trace each phenomenon to its polysystemic source, thus emphasizing the power relations at play in the translation process (Chang 2001, p. 327).

## 2 Levels of Translation Change

### 2.1 The Local Setting

One of the most conspicuous changes observable in the passage from the prototext to the metatext is the fact that actual place names, as well as other proper names and details referring to the city of Shanghai (including the very name of the city, as well as names of streets, restaurants, shops, institutions, newspapers, and various landmarks), are systematically replaced by fantasy names, or occasionally deleted altogether, in the metatext.

The city of Shanghai is always referred to as *H shi* 市 throughout the metatext, and all its toponyms undergo a similar treatment. In the very first pages, for instance, the Waibaidu Bridge becomes *Luoyang qiao* 洛阳桥, and the Suzhou and Huangpu rivers become *Mengzhouhe* 蒙州河 and *Zhijiang* 芝江 respectively. Likewise, Tiantong Road and Sichuan Road are baptized *Guoqing lu* 国庆路 and *Jiangzhong lu* 江中路 (Qiu 2000, p. 1; Qiu 2003, p. 1). Even the reference to a *shikumen*, the traditional Shanghai-style house, is deprived of its geographical connotations and neutralized as an «old style dwelling» (*laoshi de* [...] *zhufang* 老式的.....住房) (Qiu 2000, p. 208; Qiu 2003, p. 203).<sup>3</sup>

3 Curiously enough, a small number of details in the metatext almost unequivocally point to a Shanghainese setting, as in the references to the Old City of Shanghai (Qiu 2000, p. 1, preserved in Qiu 2003, p. 1), and the use of linguistic features typical of the Wu dialect

## 2.2 Idiomatic Expressions

The extremely frequent exotic idiomatic expressions and proverbs appearing in English in the prototext are systematically back-translated in the metatext, generally resorting to stock phrases such as *chengyu* 成语 (four-character expressions) and *suyu* 俗语 (proverbs or popular adages):

«Wu and I have parted. Whatever grudge I have against him, I should not throw stones into the well where he is drowning». (Qiu 2000, p. 279)  
 “我跟吴晓明已经分手了。不管我对他有什么怨言，我不会对他落井下石。”  
 (Qiu 2003, p. 272)

As the old saying goes, a rabbit does not browse near its lair. (Qiu 2000, p. 27)  
 就像老话说的，兔子不吃窝边草。(Qiu 2003, p. 26)

Since all these idiomatic expressions – *luo jing xia shi* 落井下石 ‘hit a person while they are down’; *tuzi bu chi wo bian cao* 兔子不吃窝边草 ‘one should not do evil around their homes’ – have a clear Chinese origin, the translator had no difficulty in identifying the original idioms, and decided to back-translate them literally instead than resorting to idiomatic translation. The only intervention adopted – although not systematically – is the omission of the reference to the ‘Chineseness’ of the expression: in the second excerpt above, for instance, the metatext only presents the proverb as an ‘old saying’ (*laohua* 老话) instead of an ‘ancient Chinese saying’.

The numerous exotic expressions that Qiu Xiaolong translates directly from Chinese without any further explanation, but whose meaning is generally easily understood by the English-speaking reader thanks to the context, fall into the form of hybridity categorized by Yao under the label of ‘mimicry’ (Yao 2003, p. 366). These expressions are also back-translated in the metatext, as in the following reference to an illicit love affair, where the expression ‘peach-colored scandal’ (the reference to the peach having an erotic connotation) is rendered by the literal back-translation *taose chouwen* 桃色丑闻:

So the only card he could play would be that of bluff, one of the effective tactics to bring a potential witness around, especially with the possibility of a ‘peach-colored scandal’. (Qiu 2000, p. 281)

因此，他能打的唯一一张王牌就是吓唬她。这是对付潜在目击证人的有效手段，尤其是当她面对“桃色丑闻”。(Qiu 2003, p. 273)

of Shanghai, such as the second-person singular pronoun *nong* 侬 instead of *ni* 你 ‘you’ (Qiu 2003, p. 9), the negative adverb *wu* 勿 (Qiu 2003, pp. 18, 203) instead of *bu* 不 ‘not’, the form *zaihui* 再会 instead of *zaijian* 再见 ‘goodbye’ (Qiu 2003, pp. 31, 69, 90, 357) etc.

### 2.3 Syntactic Factors

At the syntactic level, a remarkably consistent strategy adopted in the Chinese translation is the preservation of the clause containing the *verbum dicendi* (*shuo* 说, *wen* 问, *dao* 道, *huida* 回答 etc.) in the same position it holds in the prototext, be it placed at the beginning or at the end of the sentence, or as an incidental clause. In the example below, the clauses following the direct speech in the prototext appear in the exact same position in the Chinese translation:

Yu listened to Chen's analysis without interrupting. «As for the first scenario, I don't think it is so likely», he said.

«But it would be impossible for the murderer to get her body to the canal without some sort of transportation at his disposal», Chen said. (Qiu 2000, p. 27)

于光明没有打断他，听完了陈超的分析。“对于第一种假设，我认为不太可能，”他说。

“那么，凶手要是没有某种交通工具的话，是不可能把尸体弄到小河滨里去的，”陈超说。(Qiu 2003, p. 26)

Sometimes even certain syntactic patterns of the English prototext are closely reproduced, privileging similarity in linguistic form rather than in idiomaticity. In the following examples, the elliptic form *weishenme bu ne* 为什么不呢 and the emphatic form *zhe jiu shi weishenme* 这就是为什么 used in the metatext reproduce very closely the English original expressions ('why not' and 'that's why' respectively), in spite of reading awkwardly in standard Chinese:

«Why not, if you are willing to help?» (Qiu 2000, p. 14)

“只要你愿意，为什么不呢？”(Qiu 2003, p. 13)

«My stepdaughter lives with her parents, but she has an eye on this room. That's why she put up all the Hong Kong star pictures». (Qiu 2000, p. 90)

“我的过房女儿和她父母住在一起，但她一只眼睛盯牢这间房子。这就是为什么她把那些香港明星的照片贴在这儿。”(Qiu 2003, p. 86)

### 2.4 Intertextuality

The intertextual factors in the prototext are also exactly reproduced in the Chinese translation. These are mainly quotations from classical Tang and Song poetry in English translation: for the benefit of the non-Chinese reader, they are sometimes accompanied by a brief profile of the author and/or a commentary on the poem itself, which is also methodically preserved in the metatext.

In the case of poetry, the translator proves always able to identify the original Chinese text, as in this overt quotation of a couplet by well-known Tang poet Li Shangyin:

Two lines from Li Shangyin's 'Zither' came to his mind:  
 The zither, for no reason, has half of its strings broken,  
 One string, one peg, evoking the memory of the youthful years.  
 A difficult Tang dynasty poet, Li Shangyin was especially known for this  
 elusive couplet. (Qiu 2000, p. 22)

李商隐《锦瑟》中的两句诗一下子从他的脑海中弹了出来。

“锦瑟无端五十弦，  
 一弦一柱思华年。”

李商隐是位令人难以捉摸的唐代诗人，以晦涩的诗句出名。(Qiu 2003, p. 21)

## 2.5 Cultural Factors

Explanations for references to Chinese *realia* and cultural tradition, added in the prototext for the benefit of the English-speaking readership, are almost regularly recreated in the metatext. This is the case even for those with which the Chinese reader is most likely to be familiar, despite the fact that, once reproduced in the metatext, these typical references risk to break the 'to show not to tell' rule of fiction, as well as to sacrifice the sense of reality (Qiu, Yan 2005, p. 78), even more than they do in the English prototext. In the following example, the Buddhist expression 'red dust' (*hong chen* 红尘) – a metaphor used to refer to the material or secular world, as opposed to monastic life – is thoroughly explained in the prototext, even though the possibility of its being unknown to a Chinese is remote, and the explanation is closely preserved in the metatext:

«Miaoyu, a beautiful young nun, lives a life devoted to the abstract ideal of Buddhism. Proud of her religious cultivation, she considered herself above romantic entanglement of the red dust».

«Sorry for interruption again, what is the red dust?»

«Just this mundane world, where the ordinary folk like us live».  
 (Qiu 2000, p. 150)

“妙玉是个漂亮的小尼姑，一生都沉浸在佛教的虚无缥缈中。她对自己的宗教修养感到非常骄傲，认为自己超脱了红尘中的感情纠葛。”

“对不起，打断你一下，什么是红尘？”

“就是这个世俗世界，就像我们这样普通人的生活。” (Qiu 2003, pp. 143-144)

A peculiar strategy is adopted in the numerous references to Chinese food culture. Quite often, a more specific Chinese dish name is found in the metatext in the place of a generic English expression in the prototext,

where the 'mimicry' and 'grafting' strategies (Yao 2003, pp. 366-367) are extensively employed. This strategy is exemplified by the excerpt below (e.g. «eight-treasure rice» is an exact literal translation of the Chinese dish called *ba bao fan* 八宝饭, the latter appearing as an instance of back-translation in the metatext):

In Guangzhou, Chen had heard, there was nothing with four legs that people had not found a way to turn into a delicacy. And he was witnessing such a miracle: Omelet with river clams, meatballs of four happiness, fried rice field eel, peeled shrimp in tomato containers, eight-treasure rice, shark's fin soup, a whole turtle with brown sauce, and bean curd stuffed with crabmeat. (Qiu 2000, p. 262)

陈超以前听说过在广州,只要是四条腿的东西,广州人会想出办法来把它们变成美味佳肴。而眼下,在他面前就上演着这奇妙的一幕:蛤蜊蒸蛋,四喜丸子,酱爆鳝丝,茄汁虾仁,八宝饭,鱼翅汤,红烧甲鱼,还有蟹粉豆腐。(Qiu 2003, p. 273)

The prototext also contains several metalinguistic reflections. Most of them are obviously meant for the non-Chinese reader and account for the transformation of the Chinese language in post-reform China, whereas others focus on the English lexicon and are therefore carried out from a Chinese perspective. Both kinds of reflections are thoroughly reproduced in the metatext, as in the digression on the polysemy of the term *xiansheng* 先生 in Chinese (Qiu 2000, pp. 164-165; preserved in Qiu 2003, p. 159), and on Chen's difficulties in expressing the English words 'nightcap' and 'privacy' in his own language (Qiu 2000, pp. 199, 369; preserved in Qiu 2003, pp. 194, 361 respectively).

## 2.6 Social, Historical, and Political Factors

Explanations for references to social phenomena, historical events, institutions etc. in the prototext are mostly replicated in the metatext, with the exception of those that are likely to be absolutely transparent for the Chinese readership. For example, a long passage explaining the nature of the Residents' Committee (*jumin weiyuanhui* 居民委员会 or, in the abbreviated form, *juweihui* 居委会) appearing in the prototext (Qiu 2000, pp. 134-135) is deleted in the Chinese translation (Qiu 2003, pp. 129-130). The same happens to an account of the serious housing problem in Shanghai (Qiu 2000, pp. 10-11), which is omitted altogether in the metatext (Qiu 2003, p. 10).

Some culture- and period-specific linguistic items are adapted by the translator in order to comply with actual language use in the receiving culture. The most striking example of this strategy is the term of address 'Comrade', appearing almost systematically in the prototext at all levels of social interaction: however, the appellative is typical of the Maoist era

and was already no longer commonly in use at the time in which the novel is set, although it is still used in official discourse. Such inaccuracies and anachronisms – unless intentional, where they serve a specific narrative purpose – may be due to the fact that Qiu does not have the immediate experience of the time in which he sets his novels (Qiu, Yan 2005, p. 80). In the metatext, arguably for purposes of realism, the appellative is preserved (in its Chinese literal translation *tongzhi* 同志) only when the speaker is an ageing person or the utterance takes place in a formal context (cf. Qiu 2000, p. 52; Qiu 2003, p. 50), otherwise it is either deleted or replaced by other terms of address, such as *laobo* 老伯 ‘uncle’ (Qiu 2000, p. 91; Qiu 2003, p. 87), *ayi* 阿姨 ‘aunt’ (Qiu 2000, p. 389; Qiu 2003, p. 382) etc., according to the context and the status of the characters involved.

The ubiquitous remarks about fast-paced changes in the economy, society, value systems, and (to a certain extent) politics of 1990s China, added by the author with an explanatory purpose and meant for a Western readership (e.g. Qiu 2000, pp. 130-131, 149-150, 429), are systematically preserved (Qiu 2003, pp. 126, 143, 421).

A number of more or less explicit references to sensitive political issues are either diluted or deleted. These include references to the 1989 ‘Tian’anmen Incident’ (e.g. Qiu 2000, pp. 246-247, 338, 341; omitted in Qiu 2003, pp. 240-241, 331, 334 respectively); expressions of disillusionment with the socialist system, as well as its myths and symbols (e.g. Qiu 2000, pp. 55, 61, 108, 117, 189; omitted in Qiu 2003, pp. 53, 59, 104, 113, 184); critical, sarcastic or otherwise disrespectful remarks about Mao Zedong and his leadership (e.g. Qiu 2000, pp. 19, 61; omitted in Qiu 2003, pp. 18, 59); reference to forms of ideological surveillance, including media supervision, the action of the Internal Security Bureau (*Guonei anquan baoweiju* 国内安全保卫局 or simply *Guobao* 国保) etc. (e.g. Qiu 2000, pp. 123, 202, 251-252, 312, 335, 400-401, 441; omitted in Qiu 2003, pp. 118, 197, 245, 305, 328, 393-394, 432-433); the very words ‘politics’ or ‘political’, when associated with corrupt behavior (e.g. Qiu 2000, pp. 29, 50, 57, 108, omitted in Qiu 2003, pp. 27, 49, 55, 104); annotations on the emptiness and verbosity of political jargon and propaganda (e.g. Qiu 2000, pp. 53, 107; omitted in Qiu 2003, pp. 51, 103); references to actions being taken ‘in the interest of the Party’ (e.g. including large portions of the two final chapters, dealing with the prompt execution of Wu Xiaoming, and the subsequent disillusionment experienced by Chen Cao: Qiu 2000, pp. 439, 454-455, 457-460, omitted in Qiu 2003, pp. 430, 445-446).

However, a certain number of references to other more or less sensitive socio-political issues are faithfully replicated in the metatext, such as: the scars left by the Great Cultural Proletarian Revolution, the 1957 Anti-Rightist campaigns and other campaigns (e.g. Qiu 2000, pp. 93, 166, 248, 253, 264; preserved in Qiu 2003, pp. 97, 160, 242, 246-247, 256 respectively); specific



and localized episodes of corrupt behavior on the part of the CCP leadership or the people associated with it, as in the case of the illicit conduct of the *gaogan zidi* 高干子弟 ‘high cadre children’ (e.g. Qiu 2000, pp. 220, 419; preserved in Qiu 2003, pp. 214, 411); certain remarks on the negative repercussions brought about by the evolution of the Chinese economy towards a capitalist free market economy, such as cultural and moral impoverishment, unemployment etc. (e.g. Qiu 2000, pp. 161-163, preserved in Qiu 2003, pp. 156-157); a few references to the growing doubts regarding the correct leadership of the Party (e.g. Qiu 2000, pp. 249-250, preserved in Qiu 2003, p. 243) etc.

## 2.7 Sexual References

Sexual references are very frequent throughout the prototext, and generally appear also in the metatext (e.g. Qiu 2000, pp. 40, 66-67, 183-188, 194-195, 220, 245, 278, 285, 302-303, 410, 452; preserved in Qiu 2003, pp. 39, 64, 178-183, 189-190, 213, 239, 271, 278, 296, 403, 443 respectively), with the exception of the graphic and explicit depiction of a sexual act in the following passage, where the metatext omits the sentence «her pubic hair T-shaped from that angle», and the whole portion beginning with «Wu entering her from behind»:

The next few [pictures] were of Guan with Wu, both stark naked. [...] One showed Guan in Wu's lap, smiling nervously at the camera. Her arms were around his neck, and his hands on her nipples. In the next, she had turned over, showing a pair of buttocks cupped by his hands, **her pubic hair T-shaped from that angle**, and her bare feet enormous. The rest were of various acts of sexual intercourse: **Wu entering her from behind, his part vanishing in the curve of her ass, and his free hand steadying her pear-shaped breasts; Guan arching herself up under Wu, her arms clasp his back, her face turning aside on the pillow, taut in orgasm, Wu with her legs over his shoulders, entering her...** (Qiu 2000, pp. 410-411, emphasis added)

接下来的几张是关红英和吴晓明在一起的，两个人都一丝不挂。[...] 其中一张，关红英躺在吴晓明的怀里，对着照相机的镜头，笑得有些紧张。她的双臂绕着吴晓明得脖子，而吴晓明的手顺搁在她的胸部。另一张照片，关红英转过了身，看得见她被吴晓明的双手托着的臀部，她的两只光脚丫显得特别的硕大。其余的照片上是他们性交的各种姿势…… (Qiu 2003, p. 403)

### 3 A Reconstruction of the Macro-Polysystemic Network

Applying these findings to a six-fold polysystemic framework as proposed by Chang, the following macro-polysystem in which *Hong ying zhi si* is situated can tentatively be outlined.

#### 3.1 Political Polysystem

Our analysis shows the existence of a central political system that generally does not accept the discussion of sensitive issues, such as the status and authority of the governing party and its leadership, the decline of socialist ideology and the disillusion of the governed, media censorship, the repression of political protest and violation of human rights (such as the Tian'anmen crackdown), the presence of ubiquitous corruption in a Chinese metropolis (as the deletion of the name of the city seems to suggest: the actual setting, however, is an open secret, since reviewers and scholars overtly refer to Qiu's works as being set in Shanghai) etc.

However, the same central political system seems to allow some forms of cautious criticism of the most disastrous political campaigns of the Maoist era (mainly the Cultural Revolution and the Anti-Rightist Campaign), the expression of moderate dissatisfaction with the old or the new political line of the Communist Party, as well as the denunciation of corruption – understood as an umbrella term for «any observed social injustice perceived to be caused by unjust accumulation of power, whether in the hands of an individual, individuals, or a group, not excluding the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) itself» (Kinkley 2007, p. 4) – provided that it addresses specific and localized instances of illicit behavior, and does not question the image of the Party as a whole. In this respect, the evidence from *Hong ying zhi si* shows that more complex and articulated ideological mechanisms are in place than those described by Link – although it must be noted that the scholar refers specifically to the sphere of officialdom and does not investigate literary texts – when pointing out how certain topics are prohibited from public discussion, such as «the disasters of the Mao era, the 1989 June Fourth massacre, misbehavior among top leaders or their family members» (Link 2013, p. 347). Our analysis shows that at least some of these topics, with occasional dilutions, actually made their way into the metatext: we could argue that this openness would not have been possible (or at least not to the same extent) in an original work of fiction, and that the translated nature of the metatext provided it with a sort of ideological safe-conduct. However, this is a working hypothesis and would need to be supported by further evidence.

Finally, the same central political system gives the editor power over the translator (Chang 2000, p. 326), and indeed over the author/reviser himself. In fact, although Qiu Xiaolong wrote a preface to *Hong ying zhi si* in

which he declares having proof-read the draft translation (Qiu 2003, p. i), he obviously could not intervene in the translation process, to the point that, on several occasions, he stated his surprise at the «dramatic changes and cuts» and the «removal of politically sensitive words or sentences» that can be detected in the Chinese version (Black, Qiu 2003).

### 3.2 Ideological Polysystem

In the Chinese ideological polysystem, a central system is in place that forbids overly explicit depiction of sex in literary works, thus overruling the central translational norm of faithfulness (Chang 2001, p. 326). On the other hand, a peripheral ideology exists that accepts the preservation of sexual references, possibly supported by a central ideology advocating the principle that profit-making can be achieved through the depiction of sex in literature: the same reflections can arguably be applied to the depiction of corruption and of other forms of 'realism'.

### 3.3 Economic Polysystem

The central economic system champions the principle that 'to get rich is glorious' (Chang 2001, p. 323). Therefore, it can be assumed that such a system would govern the selection of texts to be translated according to the expected profit. This assumption seems to be confirmed by the growing number of works by successful Chinese-American authors translated into Chinese (Xiao 2010). In the specific case of Qiu Xiaolong, the global success of the Chen Cao series – as of 2013, his works have already sold over a million copies all over the world (Xie 2013, pp. 14) – naturally makes him a most interesting candidate for publication also in the Chinese market.

### 3.4 Linguistic Polysystem

Despite a central linguistic system that generally imposes its grammar and linguistic standards on prose both in original and in translated texts, our analysis shows the existence of a peripheral linguistic system that accepts consistent deviation from idiomaticity, as in the most striking instances of English-style syntactic patterns. Curiously enough, a number of native Chinese speakers, when asked to assess the Chinese translation of *Death of a Red Heroine*, stated that it read as if it were a 'draft', denoting generally poor accuracy and unnecessary adherence to English syntactic patterns and lexical collocations. This impression is corroborated by many reviews and posts published in Chinese internet forums and BBSs.

### 3.5 Literary Polysystem

In China, the detective novel (in all its declinations: *fanzui xiaoshuo* 犯罪小说 'crime fiction', *zhentan xiaoshuo* 侦探小说, *tuili xiaoshuo* 推理小说, *zhentan tuili xiaoshuo* 侦探推理小说 'detective fiction' etc.) began to develop significantly in the 1980s, instantly finding a broad readership. At the time, most of the crime/detective fiction works published in China were translations, and still are today (cf. the immense popularity of crime novelists such as the Japanese Higashino Keigo 东野圭吾), since a «detective fiction with Chinese characteristics» (*Zhongguo tese de zhentan xiaoshuo* 中国特色的侦探小说) is still in the making, at least according to some scholars (Hu 2011, pp. 20-21). This peripheral literary system offers recognized models for crime fiction, both native and imported, as is the case for Qiu Xiaolong's works.

Moreover, an additional peripheral literary system provides models originating from the so-called 'anticorruption fiction' (*fanfu xiaoshuo* 反腐小说, *fanfubai xiaoshuo* 反腐败小说 etc.). This sub-genre was massively produced in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and was still very popular at the time when *Hong ying zhi si* was published. Qiu Xiaolong's Chen Cao series can be read not so much as crime fiction, but, rather, as a series of books about contemporary China meant for a non-Chinese audience, stressing the entanglement of tradition and dramatic changes in consumption habits, value systems, politics, and economy that have occurred in the country since the launching of Deng's reform policies. From this perspective, as a genre often conjuring up «a general miasma of economic, moral, and sexual indiscretion that bespeaks a general moral lapse [...] and even a loss of regime legitimacy» (Kinkley 2007, p. 5), 'anticorruption fiction' exemplifies a tendency within native Chinese literature into which Qiu's work could easily fit.

### 3.6 Translational Polysystem

In the Chinese translational polysystem, as it emerges from our analysis, a central system generally advocating faithfulness to the prototext in matters that do not involve sensitive ideological and political issues can be recognized. This system seems to be mirrored by a peripheral translational system privileging *adequacy* over *acceptability*, provided that linguistic polysystem norms are not overtly violated, and regardless of the peripheral position of translated literature in the literary polysystem (Chang 2001, p. 325) or of the changed model reader of the metatext. From this perspective, one can suggest that the translation is presented as an 'overt translation' (House 2006) rather than a 'second original', and that the translation process aims at producing a socio-cultural document rather than a purely

literary text. In fact, as stated above, the prototext itself presents a significant referential component addressed to the non-Chinese reader, in spite of its sometimes doubtful accuracy and of the author's «tendency to overplay his native role and cater to preconceptions of the Western reader» (Qiu, Yan 2005, p. 82). A similar referential function – although with very different characteristics, due to the shift in the target readership – appears to be triggered in the metatext, which offers the Chinese reader a wide range of information about how China and the Chinese are represented by native voices abroad. This would account for the almost systematic transposition of details mainly meant for the non-Chinese reader – which a Chinese reader is likely to view as redundant – including historical and cultural explanations, intertextual references, and metalinguistic reflections. On another level, as I suggested above, the fact that the text is a translation may account for the relative freedom in allowing certain delicate ideological and political issues to pass through unaltered.

Besides a system advocating such set of adequacy norms, a peripheral translational system is nonetheless at play that requires correction of manifestly incorrect language use (e.g. the term of address *tongzhi*), and adaptation of generic 'graftings' (Yao 2003, p. 367) to actual usage in the receiving language (as in the case of references to Chinese gastronomy).

#### 4 Conclusion

The analysis carried out above focuses on the Chinese translation of a literary text produced in English by a Chinese writer, namely the Chinese translation of Qiu Xiaolong's debut detective novel *Death of a Red Heroine*. In such a peculiar case, where the original presents a higher degree of complexity at the level of linguistic and cultural hybridity (Yao 2003) on the one hand, and the receiving culture is characterized by a specific political, ideological, and economic context on the other hand, the outcomes of the macro-polysystemic analysis prove particularly noteworthy. Within Chang's six polysystems, a number of distinct systems – be they hierarchically structured or coexisting, competing, overlapping, even conflicting with one another – can be isolated and tentatively described, showing the different tendencies at play: the actions of these different tendencies results in a complex network of norms that «pull the translator in different directions» (Chang 2001, p. 321), until they reach the balance embodied by the metatext in its conclusive, published form.

In the final analysis, although it may still be limited in its scope and its components still need further elaboration and internal articulation, the macro-polysystemic model provides a useful preliminary tool for identifying and construing the factors involved in the translation process of a literary work in the most comprehensive possible way. By resorting to this

framework, the scope of the investigation can go beyond the linguistic, literary, and translational polysystems, and the focus of the analysis can be fruitfully extended to a range of 'external politics' at play in the receiving culture.

## Bibliography

- Black, Cara; Qiu, Xiaolong (2003). *Qiu Xiaolong, Interviewed by Cara Black* [online]. Available at <http://www.mysteryreaders.org/athomeqiu.html> (2014-04-17).
- Chang, Nam Fung (2000). «Towards a Macro-Polysystem Hypothesis». *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, 8 (2), pp. 109-123.
- Chang, Nam Fung (2001). «Polysystem Theory: Its Prospect as a Framework for Translation Research». *Target*, 13 (2), pp. 317-332.
- House, Juliane (2006). «Rethinking the Relationship between Text and Context in Translation». *Journal of Translation Studies*, 9 (1), pp. 77-103.
- Hu Yue 胡玥 (2011). «Zhentan tuili xiaoshuo zai Zhongguo» 侦探推理小说在中国 (Detective Fiction in China). *Renmin gong'an* 人民公安, 10, pp. 18-21.
- Kinkley, Jeffrey C. (2007). *Corruption and Realism in Late Socialist China: The Return of the Political Novel*. Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press.
- Link, Perry (2013). *An Anatomy of Chinese: Rhythm, Metaphor, Politics*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.
- Popovič, Anton (2006). *La scienza della traduzione: Aspetti metodologici: La comunicazione traduttiva*. Trad. di Bruno Osimo. Milano: Hoepli.
- Qiu, Xiaolong (2000). *Death of a Red Heroine*. New York: Soho Press.
- Qiu Xiaolong 裘小龙 (2003). *Hong ying zhi si* 红英之死. Trans. by Yu Lei 俞雷. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe.
- Qiu, Xiaolong; Yan, Ying (2005). «*Death of a Red Heroine; A Loyal Character Dancer; When Red is Black*». *Modern Language Studies*, 35 (1), pp. 75-83.
- Xiao Li 肖丽 (2010). «Meiguo Huayi wenxue zai Zhongguo de yijie» 美国华裔文学在中国的译介 (The Introduction and Translation of Chinese American Literature in China). *Changchun Shifan Xueyuan bao (Renwen shehui kexue ban)* 长春师范学院报 (人文社会科学版), 29 (3), pp. 128-132.
- Xie Huisheng 谢惠生 (2013). «Qiu Xiaolong zai Sheng Luyi yu duzhe zuotan» 裘小龙在圣路易与读者座谈 (Qiu Xiaolong Chats with Readers in St. Louis). *Dongfang zaobao: Shanghai shuping* 东方早报——上海书评, 31 June, p. 14.
- Yao, Steven G. (2003). «Taxonomizing Hybridity». *Textual Practice*, 17 (2), pp. 357-378.