

Ink Dances in Limbo

Gao Xingjian's Writing as Cultural Translation

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	<p>Hong Kong University Press is honoured that Xu Bing, whose art explores the complex themes of language across cultures, has written the Press's name in his Square Word Calligraphy. This signals our commitment to cross-cultural thinking and the distinctive nature of our English-language books published in China.</p> <p>“At first glance, Square Word Calligraphy appears to be nothing more unusual than Chinese characters, but in fact it is a new way of rendering English words in the format of a square so they resemble Chinese characters. Chinese viewers expect to be able to read Square word Calligraphy but cannot. Western viewers, however are surprised to find they can read it. Delight erupts when meaning is unexpectedly revealed.”</p>
<p>— Britta Erickson, <i>The Art of Xu Bing</i></p>	

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Introduction: Writing Across Culture

Gao Xingjian's literary works have always functioned in the interstices between China and the "West". For me they somehow evoke an image of the final scene in Bergman's film *The Seventh Seal* in which the character Death leads his train of dancing souls into limbo. Death travels between the realms of the living and the dead, generating some kind of creative power in the liminal space. Sadly in the end the spectacle of the contortions of this bizarre cortege, making such a song and dance in their journey, leads only to the nowhere of limbo. This image of dancing towards limbo cannot help but remind me of Gao's writing career up to the present. Perhaps the use of the word "dances" in my title might sound too positive. However, from the viewer's perspective such dances may appear to be more like contortions or writhing, (Reeling and Writhing) in the Lewis Carroll sense of the word.

Gao Xingjian's Writing Career and the Award of the Nobel Prize in Literature

The award of the 2001 Nobel Prize in Literature to Gao Xingjian has stirred ambivalent responses within Chinese literary circles. Some rejoiced at this news while others considered Gao an inappropriate choice. Two arguments frequently adduced to substantiate the latter response are that Gao's works do not represent the highest achievement of contemporary Chinese literature, and that Gao at the time was relatively unknown to the Chinese reading public (Tam 2001: 1). The first reservation is to do with the literary value of Gao's works, which ought

indeed to be a legitimate concern for a literary award. Before a conclusion can be made in this respect, a detailed analysis of his entire output is needed. This book intends to do exactly that. The second reservation is to do with the popularity of the writer. Whether fame and reputation, sometimes determined by factors beyond literary concerns, should be criteria for the worth of literary works is debatable. After all, the classic case of Kafka shows that visionary and innovative writers might not be even understood, let alone fully appreciated, by their contemporaries. Notwithstanding, a brief survey of the development of Gao's writing career serves as a good starting point to understand his works, since the reader will find out in subsequent chapters that *contextualisation* is a key principle in my analysis of Gao's works.

Before the Nobel Prize was awarded to Gao, there had only been a modest number of critical works analysing his writings, and it is true that their popularity among the general Chinese reading public was limited. The ban on his works in China since 1995 is one reason for this neglect. But his choice of genre is another major factor. Between 1979¹ (the year he published his first piece of writing the novella *Hanye de xingchen* [Stars on a cold night]) and 1990 when his first novel *Lingshan* (translated into English as *Soul Mountain* by Mabel Lee, 2000) was published, his repertoire consisted of both fictions and plays, but it was mainly the plays that attracted critical attention. There is no doubt that *Juedui xin hao* (1982, translated into English as *Alarm Signal* by Shiao-Ling S. Yu, 1996), *Chezhan* (1983, translated into English as *The Bus-stop* by Geremie Barmé, 1984; *Bus Stop* by Carla Kirkwood, 1995, *The Bus Stop* by Shiao-Ling Yu, 1996; *Bus Stop: A Lyrical Comedy on Life in One Act* by Kimberly Besio, 1998) and *Yeren* (1985, translated into English as *Wild Man* by Bruno Roubicek, 1990) created considerable sensation in the Chinese theatre scene. Yet no matter how significant these pieces are, the theatre is restricted by time and space. Only those in the audience at the time were able to experience these works. Others could only hear about them or read commentaries on them. Moreover, theatre performance is a product of teamwork. Gao's contribution to these productions was inseparable from Lin Zhaohua's directing and the production values invested in them by the Beijing People's Art Theatre. As a result, a considerable proportion of the attention these plays attracted has been from theatre critics, who rarely evaluate the play texts on their own, but nearly always in relation to the concepts of staging (directing) and other aesthetic aspects (technical arts and acting); and also from journalists, who write about them as social phenomena in the newspapers. These plays have been published in literary journals and anthologies. But since the reading of plays in published form has not developed into a popular genre among contemporary Chinese readership comparable to fiction and poetry, one has to be prudent in estimating the extent of their influence.

In the 1980s, Gao wrote about two dozen short stories. They were published in literary journals. This was a very exciting period for Chinese fiction writing. The proliferation of highly original works and the experimental creativity of Ah Cheng, Mo Yan, Han Shaogong, Wang Anyi, Liu Sola and many others overwhelmed the critics. Gao Xingjian's short stories by contrast have never captured the same level of attention, and critical works focused on them are still lacking. His first novel *Soul Mountain* and his first and only anthology of short stories *Gei wo laoye mai yugan* (some stories in this anthology are translated into English by Mabel Lee and anthologised in one volume also entitled *Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandfather*, 2004) were published in as late as 1990. Only then were his methods and style of creative writing revealed in a more comprehensive manner to critics and readers alike.

However Gao's literary career took off before his creative talent was widely recognised. In fact, his name was already known in the late 1970s in literary circles, and in the early 1980s he attained a higher profile. These developments were mainly associated with his series of essays published in literary journals in that period, and his theoretical work *Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan* [A preliminary exploration of the techniques of modern fiction] (1981). By introducing European Modernism in these essays, he systematically advocated an anti-Realist stance in contemporary Chinese fiction writing. He consistently championed the writings of French Modernists, especially Sartre, and the Chinese Modernist writings of Wang Meng. In this way, he established a coherent literary position. This stance came directly into conflict with that sanctioned by the State. At the time literature was expected to adhere to a hard-line Socialist Realism in conformity with Mao's 1942 "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art". Gao's subversive position thus established him as an icon of literary dissidence. His first literary achievements were indeed those of a critic, before he put into practice his own literary credo in the capacity of playwright, and later novelist. It would thus be fair to say that before he received the Nobel Prize in 2000, his early theoretical writings on Modernism had been the most notable works in his *oeuvre*.

Gao Xingjian is the first Chinese writer to be awarded a Nobel Prize in Literature, but he was not the first to be nominated for the prize. Literary giants of modern Chinese literature such as Ba Jin, Lao She and Shen Congwen also received nominations. Prestigious international prizes such as the Nobel carry much significance because they attract international attention. One of the by-products of colonialism and globalisation has been the internationalisation of academia and the publishing industry. This has been followed by an extension of the literary canon to include literatures outside the European and American "great traditions", to refer to F. R. Leavis' famous title. Comparativists who aspire to build up a world canon might see themselves as in the process of realising Goethe's ideal of a *Weltliteratur* ["World Literature"], but the presence of some or the

absence of other literary traditions in the international arena has become directly related to the politics of power and representation in international literary studies. Along with other post-colonial critics, Edward Said makes the scathing criticism on Comparative Literature as a discipline that it was a field “epistemologically organized as a sort of hierarchy, with Europe and its Latin Christian literature at its centre and top” (Said 1993: 52). Such critical comments have inspired scrutiny of the power relations involved in the global reception of non-European-North-American literary traditions. Under such circumstances, the first Nobel Award for a Chinese writer has assumed great significance in making visible the entrance of Chinese literature into the international canon, or the canon of “World Literature”. This event also subjects itself to the scrutiny of Post-Colonialist discourses.

Zhang Xudong and Tam Kwok-kan in their respective articles summarise this reality faced by Chinese literature with Charles Taylor's concept of “the Politics of Recognition”. They have both observed a keen anticipation among Chinese literary circles of a Chinese Nobel Laureate (Zhang 2000: 18–23; Tam 2001: 4). One can easily understand such an anticipation, and the frustration caused by previous failed nominations. Had the glory of the first Nobel Prize in Literature award to a Chinese writer befallen some grand literary figure extolled by mainstream discourses of Chinese literary history and accepted as representative of the Chinese tradition, it would have served as a metonym of legitimisation of modern Chinese literature within the international canon. However as it turned out, the glittering prize was awarded to Chinese literature, but not on Chinese terms. Something is being legitimised here, but that something is associated with a body of works that are explicitly allied with the Modernist tradition of western Europe. What is being celebrated by the Award is therefore not the autonomy and achievement of the Chinese tradition, but the influence of the European tradition on “other” literatures. Instead of the grand climax of Chinese literature receiving recognition in the world, the Prize proved to be rather an anti-climax. One might of course question whether the assumption of a “Chinese tradition” is valid, since the existence of heterogeneity within the Chinese canon cannot be ignored. Yet the issue here is not the reality or otherwise of a closed tradition, but the *desire* for recognition for something *Chinese*, as opposed to *Western*. This desire must be understood in the context of China's self-interpellation at the dawn of the new Millennium as it begins to assert itself in the world after more than a century of subordination.

This is not to say that the Swedish Academy intended such a scenario. In fact there is never any way of knowing anybody's intention about anything for certain, all that we can assess are outcomes and implications. The mission of the Nobel Prize committee is to acknowledge outstanding achievements in literary arts. This general principle is honourable, but the process by which this principle

is put into practice is more complex. The incongruity between the popularity of Gao's works with the Swedish Academy and their lack of popularity among Chinese readers raises doubts as to the validity of the Prize with respect to the Chinese tradition(s). The knee-jerk responses frequently observed in internet discussions at the time of the Award include the following: Are Gao Xingjian's writings really that good? Are they really the most worthy writings in contemporary Chinese literature? Are they representative of the achievements of contemporary Chinese literature? In other words: Does it represent sound judgment on the part of the Swedish Academy to have given him the award? Upon reflection it has to be concluded that all these are irrelevant questions. After all, the Nobel Prize is a European institution. Its criteria and judgments have to be understood within its own conventions, not within the Chinese tradition(s). For a non-Chinese institution, possessing expertise and knowledge of Chinese literature is one thing, whether it adopts the Chinese values and acts on behalf of the Chinese tradition(s) is another thing altogether. The Academy speaks for itself, not for the Chinese tradition(s). It represents its own perspective on Chinese literature, and not a perspective from within the Chinese tradition(s). Furthermore, to assume that the Academy can in any way represent a value system that transcends its own perspective and thereby achieves universality is completely unrealistic. Philosophy in the twentieth century has denounced the teleology of God, so it is surprising that some of us are still bothered by the idea of the teleology of the Swedish Academy. The incongruity between the Academy's opinion of Gao's works and the reception of these works by Chinese readers only serves to accentuate difference rather than to prove universality.

Xihua: “Westernisation”

Perhaps a more relevant question to ask is: What is there in Gao's works that appeals to the Swedish Academy? The obvious answer is that Gao writes in a way that can be understood in the literary convention the Academy is accustomed to. Gao's entire *oeuvre* has evinced considerable western influence. In fact, as mentioned above, his first noted literary project was to advocate European Modernism in Chinese literature. Having graduated in French in 1962, Gao's vision of literature was understandably informed by European, especially French, traditions. Yet Western influence in China, and indeed in many other places subjected to colonial and imperialist domination, is never merely an idiosyncratic or a personal choice, but often takes on more profound significance. Like his May Fourth predecessors who instigated literary and social reform through *xihua*, Westernisation, European Modernism served for Gao as a springboard for literary reform in the 1980s. To understand what *xihua* signifies in China, and

consequently in Gao's works, one needs some understanding of this phenomenon in modern China.

Major nation-building campaigns in China in the late nineteenth and almost the whole of the twentieth centuries were very much the result of China's interaction with Europe and America. Both Li Hongzhang's and Kang Youwei's reform plans in the late Qing Dynasty, and Deng Xiaoping's Economic Reforms in the 1980s, were provoked by the disjuncture between China's political, economic and military power and that of foreign capitalist and imperialist superpowers. The link between Westernisation and modernisation is not a matter of coincidence, but a function of China's being forcibly "opened up" to and exploited by militarily superior foreign powers. In fact, the same dominant world forces led China to upgrade her economic and military power twice in the modern period, first at the turn of the twentieth century, and then after the Cold War. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, Li Hongzhang, serving the Qing Court, aimed to build up strong armed forces with foreign technology in order to strike a military balance with the foreign powers, whilst his contemporary, the republican-leaning Kang Youwei attempted a thorough reform of the social system. Kang advocated the introduction of Western technology to Chinese industries and engineering with the aim of improving China's economic power and ultimately strengthening its political power in the world. Sun Yatsen's model of party politics and the republic reflects his early education and experience in Hawaii. In the early years of the Republic the writings of students and scholars overseas together with translations of foreign books created a strong interest in Europe and the USA, which was most intensely expressed by the May Fourth generation of concerned patriots who clamoured for "total Westernisation" [*quanpan xihua*] of Chinese society. Students on overseas scholarships who held different political and ideological convictions formed new political forces by direct political involvement (Zhou Enlai and Song Jiaoren for example occupied important positions in their own political parties), or by performing the crucial backseat functions of writing and teaching (Lu Xun and Cai Yuanpei for example committed themselves respectively in the fields of writing and education). It is worth noting that it was through the constant reminders of China's political and economic inferiority in a world socio-economic scenario dominated by Europe and the USA, and the various attempts at national modernisation modelled on the latter, that the image of the implacably supreme and infinitely superior West was constructed. In addition, the writings of the first group of Chinese Modernist writers of the 1930s such as Shi Zhecun, Liu Na'ou and Mu Shiyong also constituted the construction of the image of the advanced West through its constant association with the modernised city.

This connection between the modern and the West was at its most conspicuous in the Chinese theatre. European Naturalistic theatre was introduced

as the progressive form as opposed to the traditional Chinese theatre *xiqu*, which was deemed backward, conservative, and emblematic of feudal values. Although the history of imperialist oppression by these countries often generated certain xenophobic emotions, Westernisation has served as the model for national reform frequently enough to be associated with national rejuvenation. This Chinese-Western dichotomy extends into the binarisms of tradition versus progression, conservatism versus modernisation, even dictatorship versus democracy and thus oppression versus liberation. The construction of such associations has received willing collaboration on the part of the West through numerous apparatuses such as the media, international political organisations, trade and charity institutions, which have contributed to the perpetuation of the dividing image of the Orient and the Occident to the present day. Even nowadays, the Chinese are locked in a dichotomous mode of thinking over the issue of Westernisation: either they support it, or they reject it.

Westernisation took on similar associations right after the Cultural Revolution. In the Communist Party Congress held in August 1977, Deng Xiaoping, once a student in France himself, stressed the development of technology and science in the Ten Years Plan of national growth. In the new constitution promulgated by the Fifth National People's Congress held in March 1978, science and technology occupied an important role in the agenda. On both occasions, the scientific and technological achievements of the European and American world were held up as a model to be emulated. This model of reform aimed at the development of industrialisation and capital accumulation in the Western mode, but reflection on the established political ideology or structure was left aside. The purpose of reform was to strengthen the existing model of government by means of stronger economic and military power. *Xihua*, Westernisation, became a symbol signifying a progressive attitude in Chinese life throughout the entire twentieth century. The identification of Westernisation with modernisation, thus of the West with the modern, is perpetuated in the post-colonial era after the Second World War, and in the new millennium by the increasingly fierce consumerism that operates globally.

The conspicuous association of Gao's writings with the West prompts a reading of them through the prism of the politics discussed above. This is true not only of his early works directly advocating European Modernism, but also of his later works which can be read as displaying features of both Modernist and Post-Modernist writings. The adoption of Western literary models has been evident throughout Gao's entire repertoire and formed the backbone of his creative methods. His early writings show striking resemblance to some European Modernist classics, while his later works attempt to articulate Post-Modernist views on literature and on the world. The intimate intertextuality between Gao's works and those European works demonstrates itself in terms of both concepts

and structures. These writing paradigms were translated into Gao's works. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Swedish Academy recognises its own image in them.

Translation

I understand the close intertextual relationship between Gao's works and European writings as a translational one, and Gao's writings as translation of the European Modernist and Post-Modernist writing paradigms. Translation is not mere cloning. It involves much adaptation and transformation. In Gao's translation of the European writing paradigms into Chinese literature, seemingly similar textual features generate different meanings across cultures. His translations of the Modernist writing paradigm are so successful that through them Modernism made its way into the mainstream Chinese literary system in the 1980s. This phenomenon is examined in Chapters Two, Three and Four. On the contrary, his translation of the Post-Modernist writing paradigm is less successful. This phenomenon is examined in Chapter Five.

Readers will have noticed that my use of the term "translation" goes beyond its most common scope of reference which refers to a one-to-one linguistic transfer of texts. In fact it has been a recent development in translation studies to move away from the product-oriented approach and emphasise the intertextuality between and among texts. Indeed in some cases the texts in question are often not recognised in the traditional view as translations in a strict sense of the word. Translation is now sometimes taken as a critical concept rather than a category of textual equivalence or a linguistic exercise. Some disciplines outside literary studies have already taken advantage of this new approach to the concept of translation and used it to refer to the adaptation of a system from one structure into another structure. These studies often emphasise the changes the system in question goes through in the process of transfer, so that it fulfils the needs and requirements of the target users, and becomes successfully acculturated into the target structure.² Instead of celebrating equivalence, this new approach shows a hermeneutic orientation and focuses on discrepancy (rather than similarity) between the source and the target text. I find a good many concepts and theories in translation studies of this type helpful in my understanding of the relationship between Gao's works, especially the early pieces, and their sources of influence. Among these theories is Itamar Even-Zohar's Polysystem Theory. He situates translated literature within the literary polysystem of the target culture. In this theoretical model, the position of a work of translation within the target system rather than the source system is emphasised. Translated literature is therefore understood as literary-cultural reality in the target society. Gideon Toury, Even-

Zohar's colleague of the Tel Aviv School, elaborates the linguistic aspect of the systemic correlation between the target text and the target context, suggesting that linguistic norms in the target language and the target culture are determining factors in making translation decisions. Toury's theory meticulously weaves contextual and cultural details into the linguistic constructions of translated texts. He also suggests that other modes of intercultural writings such as "pseudo-translation", a category of original writing disguised as translation, can be analysed with the same model. The objects of investigation in Even-Zohar's and Toury's theoretical models are the "whys" and the "hows" of transformation when writings or modes of writing travel from one culture to another.

A good description of this kind of transfer is offered by Ovidio Carbonell. He makes a distinction between "cultural translation" and "textual translation", emphasising the cultural-contextual dimension rather than the textual-linguistic dimension of a translation (Carbonell 1996: 79). In his theory, translation is understood as "a paradigm of culture contact" (Carbonell 1996: 79). This resonates with the Polysystem and the Systemic Theories of the Tel Aviv School. Carbonell's notion of "cultural translation" signifies more than the translated text itself. It refers to the text and its relation with the whole network of issues surrounding it — be they textual, cultural, hermeneutic or political — which are involved in cross-cultural reproduction and production of meaning. Carbonell in particular pays attention to the activities of cultural transfer against the background of power-play of colonisation and decolonisation. The translational relationship between the source and the target texts is not one of equivalence, or one that seeks equivalence, but an intertextual one that is embedded in existing structures of power, ideology and other cultural and intercultural realities. It is in this sense I refer to the intertextuality of Gao's repertoire and its European source of influence as a *translational* one. Moreover, in order to gauge the degree of translatability of Modernism into Chinese literature in the 1980s, and also to identify Gao's translation strategies, I resort to Even-Zohar's Polysystem Theory. It helps me understand the interplay between Gao's texts and their contexts as a systemic one. Readers will notice that from Chapter Two to Chapter Five, these two theoretical concepts, "cultural translation" and the Polysystem, have significantly informed my approach to Gao's early writings.

It should be noted that there is no existing English translation of Gao's early introductory essays on European Modernism. Therefore a detailed description and study of these texts is provided in Chapter Two. In my analysis of these essays, emphasis is put on what aspects of European Modernism are stressed and what others are played down, so that common ground between this "new"³ and the existing literary paradigms are foregrounded, with the result that this new writing paradigm could make its (re-)entrance into the Chinese polysystem. Chapters Three and Four examine the short stories and plays Gao wrote before

1988 when he took up residence in France. The theory of Gao's works as translation of the European Modernist writing paradigm is followed through in these two chapters.

I need also to stress that my description of Gao's writings as cultural translation carries no derogatory insinuation or intent. Anybody with any experience of translation will agree that translation is as creative as any "creative" writing, and indeed hermeneutically even more complicated, since it has to deal with more levels and realms of reality, namely the primary realities of both source and target culture as well as the secondary reality represented in the source text. And it is exactly this complexity in Gao's works that requires them to be looked at as translations rather than "adaptations" or "re-creations". These last two concepts are unsatisfactory because they tend to be product-oriented. Related ideas such as "importation", "loan" and "influence" carry an innuendo of uni-directionality. By invoking translation as a critical concept, I hope to highlight the following questions: How does the transferred paradigm differ from the source one? Why is this so? What transformations have taken place in order for it to assimilate into the target culture? What functions does this new paradigm perform in the target system? These are exactly the questions I will ask about Gao's early writings. In the three chapters to follow, I will try to answer the following questions: How are Modernism and Post-Modernism negotiated within the texture of Gao's writings in Chinese? Under what conditions are these negotiations made? As a point of cultural contact, what functions have these cultural translations fulfilled in the target culture? I have grouped these three chapters together under the heading of "Translation as Transfer".

Exile

In 1987 Gao left China and has stayed away in the subsequent twenty years, being *persona non grata*. His departure from China has drastically changed the functions of his writing. Following China's proscription of his works in 1989, they have become marginalised in the Chinese polysystem. The conditions for both production and reading of his works have been very much altered. What has remained consistent is the cross-cultural factor. Instead of translating a Western paradigm into China, a Chinese subjectivity is being written under the conditions of writing in the West. In view of the general ban on his works in China, the intended readership has to be those Chinese living in Taiwan, the former European colonies of Hong Kong and Macau, and the Chinese diasporic communities in South East Asia and other continents. These readers, though ethnically Chinese, do not necessarily possess many qualities of an assumed "Chineseness" in terms

of their understanding and values. This is simply because more often than not, the differences in the actual material and cultural lives they live out in their respective countries have outweighed any legacy of Chinese culture they have inherited from their immigrant forefathers. Since leaving China, Gao's writings were predominantly written for such a readership. "China" means something completely different for them from what it does to those who live out the everyday reality of the contemporary nation of China.

Any subjects in the diasporic situation could easily find themselves confronted and confounded by an exilic alienation. To remain relevant to the reality of their host countries they would have to review their relationship with their own past and seek new connections with their present communities. The latter half of this process is described by the critic Mary Besemeres as "cultural self-translation" in the context of her discussion on Edward Said's and André Acimén's descriptions of their experience as immigrants (Besemeres 2003: 32). The need to articulate meanings generated from one's native culture and native language in another cultural and linguistic framework involves much re-fashioning of the material, so that the "narrated self" can be understood in the target culture. Gao's works written outside China reveal two impulses: first to articulate China's mythical past and the reminiscence of his life in the past in China; secondly to withdraw into an individualistic isolation. Gao's plays written in the 1990s, instead of simultaneously achieving a double-membership of both cultures, attest to the phenomenon of "non-membership". In the analysis of these works from Chapters Five to Seven, I will ask the following questions: In what ways can these two impulses be understood as the result of exile? In what ways are these texts relevant to China? In what ways are they relevant to their immediate environment? What kind of cultural and political identity has been constructed in them? What light does this phenomenon shed on diaporic writing? I have grouped these three chapters under the headings "The Translated Man" and "Translating the Self" respectively.

There is one more aspect in Gao's works that is related to translation: some of his works are received through translations. Even in the early stage of Gao's writing career, a small but significant proportion of his readers do not belong to the (diasporic) Chinese communities but are sinologists, academics and translators of Chinese literature, cultural critics or simply the more interested members of an international reading and theatre-going public. The latter categories of reader have gained access to his works through translation. The Nobel Prize award has made reception of his works through translation ever more important. There are problematics and politics involved in translation that are relevant to the entrance of Gao's works into the global literary arena. These issues will be examined in the concluding chapter entitled "Reading across Culture".

Methodology

To sum up, in this book, the relationship of Gao Xingjian's writings to the "West" (in terms of both their production and reception) is taken to be the corollary of contextual understanding of the repertoire. His works of different periods have functioned as one kind of mediation or another between the Chinese and the Western literary polysystems. Therefore, the different aspects of the concept of cultural translation are evoked to illustrate those various functions of mediation I note in Gao's works.

There are two points in my methodology that need to be clearly stated. First, I emphasise Gao's works as a repertoire. This perspective has enabled me to conduct internal comparisons and draw internal references within his repertoire. My intention is thus to highlight the importance of interactions between the writings and their conditions of production, which I find particularly pertinent in the case of Gao Xingjian's writing. Second, I have made the decision not to include the plethora of exegeses of his own work by Gao as the object of my study. Although they provide important hints as to the directions one could take in their interpretation, they are inevitably susceptible to subjective bias on the part of the writer. In many instances I find Gao's treatises to be more the expression of the writer's own artistic aspirations than an objective description of the texts. In some other instances, I find his practice simply at odds with his treatises. After all, a text articulates not only the conscious but also the sub-conscious and the unconscious. I see it as the critic's job to go beyond what the writer is conscious of in order to open up other possibilities of interpretation. Having said that, I have consulted that particular body of material and they have served as a reference point in this study.

Except for the first reference to them in each chapter, all titles of Gao's works are referred to in this book in English rather than in the transliteration of their original Chinese titles, simply for the sake of convenient reading. As regards those texts that are published in English translation, I conform to their translated titles as much as possible, also for convenience of reference for non-Chinese readers. A few of his plays have multiple translations, and for these I have chosen the ones I find best translated. In the cases where I find my interpretation of the titles different from existing translations, I provide my own. All quotations of Chinese sources are translated into English by myself, except where otherwise stated.

Notes

CHAPTER 1

1. Gao started to get published in 1979. His only publication in that year was the first part of the novella *Hanye de xingchen* [Stars on a cold night]. The second part was published in the second issue of the same journal in 1980. His essay “*Guanyu Ba Jin de chuanshua*” [Hearsay about Ba Jin] was published in *Huacheng* (Guangzhou), No. 6, 1980, although it is listed in some biographies of Gao under 1979.
2. One example is Richard Freeman’s description of the “translation” of the British National Health Service into other societies. Each country has made adjustments to the service so that it fits into the social structure of that country. (Freeman 2002) Another example is noted by John Sallis. The term *Übertragung* in psychoanalysis is rendered into “translation”, making the point that dream-content is a translation [*Übertragung*] of the dream-thought into another expression. (Sallis 2002: 7–8).
3. As mentioned earlier, some earlier Chinese writings have already shown influences of European Modernism. Marvelous critical works on the early instances of Modernism in Chinese literature in May Fourth writings have been produced by scholars including Leo Ou-fan Lee, David Der-Wei Wang and Gregory B. Lee on the works they have identified as Modernist by writers such as Lu Xun, Dai Wangshu, and urban writers in Shanghai such as Liu Na’ou, Shi Zhecun and Mu Shiying. Across the Taiwan Strait, Chen Yingzhen, among other critics, has also written on early Modernist writings in Taiwan. Gao’s writings are definitely not the first instance of Modernism in Chinese literature, but they are the first of such attempts after the Cultural Revolution. In this way they represent something “new”.

CHAPTER 2

1. It is important to differentiate between Gorkian Socialist Realism and Mao’s later revision of it. Mao’s 1942 “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art” document laid down the main rule of Maoist revolutionary writing. It stipulates that

revolutionary literature should be easy to read, and should mirror reality. It should not contain difficult literary devices, so that the majority of people could understand and enjoy it. This idea was then escalated to function as criteria for censorship from the 1950s onwards, which dominated the arts and literature until the early 1980s.

2. The term refers to people returning to positions from which they had been removed during the Cultural Revolution.
3. They are: “*Bali guanju suibi*” (Notes on Parisian theatre), “*Nisi — weilanse de yinxiang*” (Nice — a blue impression), “*Bali yingxiangji*” (My impressions of Paris), “*Bajin zai bali*” (Ba Jin in Paris), “*Yidali suixiangqu*” (An Italian rhapsody) and “*Menghai — shi de sanwen*” (Dreaming of the sea — a poetic prose piece). See Bibliography for publication details.
4. It is possible to argue that the selection of material to be described already constitutes an interpretation of the external reality, but this is not the position adopted in Gao’s article.
5. They are Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 16. They are also arranged in the right chronological order in terms of their dates of publication.
6. There is no numbering for the chapters in the book. The numbers are added here for convenience in discussion.
7. There are no intertextual studies which compare their translation and creative work to date, although such studies would bring important insights for translation studies. The main difficulty for such a study would be to identify the titles they have translated and to isolate their translation from the editing imposed on the texts. The only way may be to obtain manuscripts from the translators/writers themselves. But the possibility of acquiring such material is low because in most cases there are no copies of their translation as they were handwritten at a time when the computer was not available to every translator.
8. Leo Ou-fan Lee has given a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between literary experiments and ideological dissidence in this period in an article entitled “The Politics of Techniques: Perspectives of Literary Dissidence in Contemporary Chinese Fiction” (1985).

CHAPTER 3

1. Bradbury and McFarlane, among other critics, have given a very comprehensive account of Modernism of this strand in their seminal work *Modernism — A Guide to European Literature 1890–1930*.
2. According to Terry Siu-han Yip’s chronology (2001), this piece was completed in July 1982, although it was not published until 1984.
3. This was a spontaneous movement that took place in the mid 1980s of cultural reflection by academics, artists, writers and the media. Many of their works adopt highly critical attitudes towards traditional Han-Confucian culture and attribute the unsatisfactory development of the nation to this cultural mode. For details see Han Shaogong, “*Wenxue de ‘gen’*” [The ‘roots’ of literature] (1985); Ah Cheng, “*Wenhua zhiyue zhe renlei*” [Man conditioned by culture] (1985); Chen Sihe, “*Dangdai wenxue zhong de wenhua xungen yishi*” [The conscious search for cultural roots in contemporary literature] (1986) and Li Shulei, “*Cong xunmeng dao xungeng*” [From the search for dreams to the search for roots] (1986).

CHAPTER 4

1. Studies on formal features of these plays have been done by Ma Sen (1989), William Tay (1990), Li Jianyi (1991), Xiaomei Chen (1995), Kwok-kan Tam (2001), and Quah Sy Ren (2004).
2. Run Sheng (1983) and Qu Liuyi (1984) have written comprehensive summaries on the debates on these two plays.
3. A useful reference on the accusations against Gao is his article “*Geri huanghua*” (1992; translated into English as “Wilted Chrysanthemums” by Mabel Lee, 2007).
4. All translations of names in *Bus Stop* are taken from Geremie Barmé’s translation of the play.
5. All translations of names and extracts of *Alarm Signal* are taken from Shiao-Ling S. Yu’s translation of the play.
6. In Roubicek’s translation, *Liang duizhang*, literary Team Leader Liang, is changed to “Leader Zhang”.
7. For detailed analysis of the formal features of Gao’s play, see Quah, Sy Ren (2004).
8. Gao has in many occasions explained his intention for this kind of alienation. For a detailed study of theatrical devices in Gao’s play, see Quah (2004).

CHAPTER 5

1. Torbjörn Lodén summarises the six creative tenets of *Soul Mountain* into: 1. The recreation of a literary language; 2. Alienation; 3. Primitivism; 4. Anti-Confucianism; 5. Scepticism; and 6. Chinese and western myths (Lodén, 2001: 268–272).
2. Pascale Casanova in her book *The World Republic of Letters* also uses the expression “Translated Men”. There she refers to authors who are read in dominant languages through translation, self-translation or adopting a foreign language in their writings. (Casanova 2004: 206) My use of the expression here is related but different.

CHAPTER 6

1. The article was published later in the same year in *Mingbao Monthly* in Hong Kong with the new title “*Guojia shenhua yu geren diankuang*”, literally “The myth of the nation and insanity of the individual”.
2. For a detailed description of the formal features of Gao’s plays, also see Quah, 2004.
3. According to Yip’s chronology, this play was written in Beijing in 1987 (Yip 2001:321).
4. The story of Zhuangzi testing his wife’s fidelity has not made any appearance in any biography of the philosopher or in his own writing. Apparently he is used as the protagonist of this story because his writing about confusions of identity in his famous writing about “Butterfly Dream” in “*Qiwu*” [Unity with the Cosmos] is associated with the omnipotence of the husband in controlling life and death and in assuming a double identity to test his wife.

CHAPTER 7

1. One of the criticisms most representative of this position is by Aijaz Ahmad (Ahmad 1994: 95–122).
2. This episode coincides with the events narrated in Gao’s early short story “You Must Stay Alive”.

3. The comparable circumstances of these two characters are also observed in K. K. Tam's analysis of the novel (Tam 2001: 299).
4. On the other hand, cultural and economic domination has taken another form in the "West". It is so enmeshed in consumerism and the overpowering ideologies of "progress" and "development" that it becomes very difficult to recognise. Perhaps this is why different literatures speak about coercion in different ways.
5. This is a Chinese poetic device of repetition of the same word to produce special sound effects. In Li Qingzhao's verse, seven consecutive pairs of reiterative locution are applied to open the verse. Lin Yutang's brilliant translation entitled *Forlorn* recreates in the opening lines not the same but equally interesting sound effects:
"So dim, so dark,
so dense, do dull,
so damp, so dank,
so dead!"
6. In the 2003 Hong Kong production of the play by No Man's Land Theatre Company directed by Tang Shu-wing, the nun played by Lindzay Chan was placed right in the middle of the second level of the two-tiered stage at least 10 feet above the stage floor. Strong lights were cast on her acting out the mime gestures of splitting her belly, taking out the intestines and washing them. Awesome facial expressions of pains and joy merging together to render a most striking stage image.
7. This character is identified as *jinü*, "prostitute", in the play.
8. However, in the French script, speeches are designated as belonging to individual actors/characters.
9. A comprehensive review on the monk figures in Gao's plays in this period is found in Huang Meixu's article "*Shitan Gao Xingjian xiju zhong de chandao renwu*" [A preliminary investigation on the Buddhist and Taoist monk figures in Gao Xingjian's plays].
10. Literary critic Henry Zhao has elaborated on the Buddhist and Zen themes in Gao's plays written in the 1990s and propounded the theory of them being a kind of Zen/*Xieyi* Theatre (Zhao, 2000).
11. The journal was first published in 1978 but suspended in 1980 in Beijing. It was later revived in Stockholm by diasporic writers living there including Chen Maiping and others. Before internet journals became widespread and easily accessible, *Jintian* remained the most important periodical airing works by writers in exile who were not read in China anymore.

CHAPTER 8

1. One example of such a view is Nie Hualing's response to Gao's being awarded the Nobel Prize when interviewed by a magazine. Nie, as a writer herself and co-founder of the International Writing Programme of University of Iowa, is extremely experienced and knowledgeable in the promotion of international writings. She suggests the award to Gao "shows the importance of translation" (Chen Haoquan 2000: 14).

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