

Subversion in Visual and Verbal Paratexts. A Case Study of the Translation of a Contemporary Chinese Artist's Biography

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Article abstract

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Subversion in Visual and Verbal Paratexts. A Case Study of the Translation of a Contemporary Chinese Artist's Biography

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Abstract

Translation has long been integral to the circulation of art between the East and West (Whyte and Heide, 2011, p. 47). Classical Chinese art was first introduced to the West when a history of classical Chinese painting was translated into English (*ibid.*, pp. 46-47). As indicated by the plethora of books and articles published on the subject, there is now widespread interest in contemporary Chinese art, which has achieved international acclaim since the 1990s. This paper draws on existing scholarship in translation studies and political science to analyze four types of paratext (title, cover design, epigraphs, and translator's preface) in a biography of contemporary Chinese artist Zhang Xiaogang. Based on a comparative visual and verbal paratextual analysis, the paper examines the re-construction of the original title and cover design for the English translation of Zhang's biography. In this "paratranslation" (Pellatt, 2013a), the translator subverts what Valerie Pellatt calls an "Occidentalist approach" in two ways: first, by privileging the source culture—China's soft power—over the Western target readership and, second, by explicitly but subtly using rhetorical and narrative devices to convey his own social-political stance. The translated paratexts thus perform multiple functions. They promote the state's soft power by constructing an image of an underground artist whose work, by resisting autocracy, was once suppressed by the state but is now acclaimed both nationally and internationally. Simultaneously, the translation provides a space for the translator's voice. This study reveals the importance of translation to scholarship on contemporary Chinese art, which here goes beyond translation itself by giving the translator a voice to advocate for social awareness.

Key words: paratext, intersemiotic translation, soft power, patronage, translator's voice

Résumé

La traduction constitue depuis longtemps un vecteur de circulation de l'art entre l'Orient et l'Occident (Whyte et Heide, 2011, p. 47). L'art chinois classique a été introduit pour la première fois en Occident lorsque l'histoire de la peinture chinoise classique a été traduite en anglais (*ibid.*, pp. 46-47). Comme l'indique la pléthore de publications sur le sujet, l'intérêt pour l'art contemporain chinois, qui bénéficie d'une reconnaissance internationale depuis les années 1990, est désormais très répandu. Cet article, qui s'appuie sur des études existantes en traductologie et en politique, analyse quatre types de paratexte (titre, couverture, épigraphes et préface du traducteur) d'une biographie de l'artiste chinois contemporain Zhang Xiaogang. Dans cette « paratraduction » (Pellatt, 2013a), le traducteur subvertit de deux façons « l'approche occidentaliste » de la traduction : premièrement, en déplaçant l'attention des lecteurs cibles occidentaux vers le contexte social de la culture d'origine et, deuxièmement, en utilisant des procédés rhétoriques et des récits historiques explicites, mais subtils, pour transmettre sa position socio-politique. Le paratexte remplit donc de multiples fonctions. Il promeut le pouvoir de convaincre (*soft power*) de l'État, en construisant l'image d'un artiste autrefois clandestin qui a résisté à l'autocratie, dont le travail a été censuré par l'État, et qui est maintenant acclamé aux niveaux national et international. Simultanément, la traduction offre un espace d'expression pour le traducteur, dans un scénario complexe. Cette étude révèle l'importance de la traduction dans l'étude de l'art chinois contemporain, dont la valeur potentielle va au-delà de la traduction elle-même, et dans laquelle la voix du traducteur peut plaider pour une prise de conscience sociale.

Mots clés : paratexte, traduction intersémiotique, pouvoir de convaincre (*soft power*), patronage, voix du traducteur

Introduction: Translation in Contemporary Chinese Art

China and the West have enjoyed a long history of cultural interaction and exchange. These encounters have varied over time and been mediated through visual art, architecture, fashion, interior design, and garden design (Gladston, 2016 [2015], p. 55). Translation is an important tool for introducing the art and artists of one culture to another; in such a process, translation is always unobtrusive. Although translation and art are two distinct disciplines, they are linked in many ways, and art history would not exist without translation (Whyte and Heide 2011, p. 47). For instance, classical Chinese art was first introduced to the West through translations into English. Translation, as an integral part of this Chinese-Western exchange, has been a discreet but important means for disseminating knowledge about both classical but also modern and contemporary Chinese art.

In the context of Western art history, “contemporary art” refers to art created in the second half of the 20th century. It is characterized by a dynamic combination of materials, forms, concepts, and subjects, and it operates within a broader context that heavily influences artistic activity (Harris, 2011; Robertson and McDaniel, 2013; Wilson, 2013). “Contemporary Chinese art” did not emerge until after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 (Lü, 2010; Gao, 2011). Therefore, the term “contemporary Chinese art” is a product of its own sociopolitical context. It encompasses various forms of visual art that were produced as part of the liberalization of culture that occurred within the People’s Republic of China (PRC) from the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 to the economic and social reforms of the 1990s (Gladston, 2016 [2015], p. 59).

Over the past 30 years, many scholars have greatly contributed to our understanding of contemporary Chinese art, especially with regard to the sociopolitical contexts of artistic production. Martina Köppel-Yang’s *Semiotic Warfare: The Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979–1989* (2003) and Paul Gladston’s cultural translations of contemporary Chinese art (2013, 2016 [2015]) are recent notable examples. Köppel-Yang was the first Western scholar to analyze contemporary Chinese art of the avant-garde era, with her book being described as “the first detailed study of one of the most exciting decades in contemporary Chinese art” (Ledderose, 2003, p. 18). Köppel-Yang adopts a semiotic approach, stressing that she does not “focus on the aspect of translation, even though the process of translating the concepts and the visual language of other periods, and fields of the Chinese tradition or of other cultures, namely Western modernity, is a major part of each of [her] analyses” (2003, p. 21). Instead, she focuses on “how translated texts generate new values” and concludes that “contemporary Chinese art should not be understood as a copy of Western modernity or post-modernity, but, to use Stuart Hall’s words, ‘as a set of cultural translations’” (*ibid.*, p. 21).

Indeed, some international scholars have looked at contemporary Chinese art through the lens of cultural translation. Gladston offers a critical reflection on the conflation of traditional Chinese cultural thought and practice, and applies the theory and practice of deconstruction to his understanding of contemporary Chinese art (2016 [2015], p. 55). His critical polylogue on the avant-garde art movement in China situates it not only within the period marking the end of the Cultural Revolution, but also within

a more contemporary context (2013, p. 6). While Köppel-Yang's and Gladston's contributions legitimize cultural translation as a valid methodological tool for analyzing art, they also emphasize the importance of contextual analysis for understanding contemporary Chinese art. As Köppel-Yang maintains, the translation of concepts and visual language laid the groundwork for her understanding of contemporary Chinese art within its complex context.

Other scholars have taken an interdisciplinary approach to cultural translation. This approach includes Svetlana Kharchenkova and Olav Velthuis's (2015) social analyses of official art organizations in the emerging markets of China, Linda Pittwood's (2016) research on contemporary Chinese art curation in the UK, and Paul O'Neill's (2007) study of curation through interviews with five Chinese artists and their curators. Pittwood has argued that, as facilitators, curators should acquire sufficient cultural knowledge to present contemporary Chinese art outside mainland China. Although they are not obliged to translate, speak, or read Chinese, they should be able to "take on the responsibility of presenting an artist's work to an audience who may not have much knowledge about contemporary or historical Chinese culture, language, or art history" (2016, p. 92). Pamela Churchill (2016) takes a linguistic perspective, comparing two language versions of an art magazine, outlining issues that affect translation from Chinese to English, and pointing out the lack of possible solutions.

The contributions of the aforementioned scholars have not only increased how contemporary Chinese art is understood in the West, they have also engaged with notions of methodology in the latter's cultural translation. However, this has left a gap in understanding how interlinguistic translation affects contemporary Chinese art and how artistic texts function in linguistic translations.

This paper presents a case study based on the English translation of a biography of the Chinese artist Zhang Xiaogang. The translation is significant in its use of visual and verbal language to construct paratexts anchored in broader sociopolitical contexts. Since the 1990s, contemporary Chinese art has steadily gained international attention. Chinese artists, along with American artists, have dominated the high end of the global art market since 2017. In that year, eleven Chinese artists featured among the world's top fifty contemporary artists, and, in terms of final sale prices, the works of

three of them were ranked in the top twenty (Ehrman, n.d.). From among a handful of Chinese contemporary artists, Zhang Xiaogang emerged as a rising star and has now been internationally acclaimed as one of the top contemporary Chinese artists. Before analyzing Zhang Xiaogang's biography in more detail, however, it is worth outlining some of the key concepts in translation studies that inform this paper.

Roman Jakobson's 1959 essay "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" broadened the definition of translation to include "intra-lingual translation, inter-lingual translation and inter-semiotic translation" (2004 [1959], p. 127). Jakobson further introduced the concept of translation as an interpretation between different signs (*ibid.*). Intra-lingual translation refers to interpretation between verbal signs in the same language; inter-lingual translation refers to interpretation of verbal signs between languages; and inter-semiotic translation refers to interpretation between verbal signs and other non-verbal sign systems (*ibid.*). Jakobson's definition thus set the premise for an enlarged understanding of translation that enabled the interpretation between verbal and non-verbal language such as visual language to be considered a form of translation.

Despite developing the concept of inter-semiotic translation, Jakobson did not construct a detailed framework for its implementation. In addition, some scholars have criticized his breakthrough as being too dualistic and linguistically biased (Gorlee, 1994, p. 227; Kobus, 2019, p. 11). Dinda Gorlée, for example, points to the logical implications of semiosis as a paradigm for translation (of which inter-lingual translation is only one implication), which, even in its linguistic variety, she argues, exemplifies semiosis (1994, pp. 226-227). She concedes, however, that her work has not attempted to address non-verbal sign processes (*ibid.* p. 227). This presents a particular problem when applying Jakobson's concept to discussions of art in which non-verbal signs are often dominant. As Gorlée suggests, "to study fully such [inter-semiotic] processes in their natural interactions with verbal sign-systems within the arts and the sciences is one task within semiotranslation which deserves to be carried out in the future" (*ibid.*).

Nevertheless, this approach has paved the way for further exploration in the arts and the sciences. Marais Kobus has recently drawn on the wider concept of inter-semiotic translation to examine

the reciprocal relationship between modern developments in social and cultural organizations and semiotic processes (2019, p. 9). Kobus describes an “effort to suggest a comprehensive theory of translation that explains not only translational phenomena of all kinds, but also the pragmatic, social embeddedness and creative power of translation” (*ibid.*, p. 4), which makes it possible to explore a broader range of visual and textual phenomena. In modern and contemporary Chinese art, for example, imagery is often accompanied by text, going beyond linguistic equivalence to “draw attention to the pervasively dislocating effects of the translation of meaning from one cultural context to another” (Gladston, 2016 [2015], p. 63). While Köppel-Yang employs a semiotic approach to her cultural translation of contemporary Chinese art, it is my contention that any such study should incorporate visual (sign) language and verbal (sign) language in its analysis.

According to Katharina Reiss, biography is a hybrid text type reflecting a mix of informative, expressive, and appellative text types (1989 [1977], pp. 124-128). My choice to focus on the translation of a biography is based on the fact that Zhang Xiaogang’s work is one of the few biographies of a contemporary Chinese artist that has been translated into English. The translated biography not only contains both visual and verbal language, but also details on the cultural and social context of the artist’s life and trajectory. The primary sources used for this case study are: (1) the Chinese biography of Zhang Xiaogang by Peng Lü titled 血缘的历史 1996年之前的张晓刚 [*The History of Bloodlines Zhang Xiaogang before 1996*], published in 2016 by Guangxi Normal University Press in China (Lü, 2016b), and (2) its English translation by Bruce Gordon Doar titled *Bloodlines: The Zhang Xiaogang Story*, also published in 2016 by Skira in Milan, Italy (Lü, 2016a). Secondary sources include Chinese-language official archival documents from the PRC and the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) digital database that I translated into English after examining the target paratexts.

Biographies are an important way to understand artists from other cultures. In particular, the proposed case study raises the following questions: what role does the intersemiotic interpretation of visual language play in interlinguistic translation? Do the visual and verbal languages function in the same way? How is visual translation related to verbal translation? What role does the translator play in this relationship? How can a translator’s voice and

methods effectively navigate the source text's complicated social and political externalities?

More specifically, I focus on how visual and verbal paratexts function against the backdrop of a complicated sociopolitical context in the artist's biography and its English translation. André Lefevere proposes a four-function notion of translation: informing, disseminating cultural capital, providing entertainment, and persuading the reader. These functions depend on at least three factors: reader demand, the goals of the patron or initiator, and the relative cultural prestige of both source and target languages (1998, pp. 41-56). Drawing on the theoretical framework outlined above, I argue that, in addition to the accumulation of the artist's individual cultural capital, the translation of an artist's biography can function as a space of cultural diplomacy that ultimately increases a state's soft power. The present case study thus also aims to reveal the extent to which the translation's paratexts correspond to China's ambitious plan to increase its soft power, as Zhang's biography presents him as an acclaimed contemporary artist who is representative of China's cultural and artistic wealth.

1. Cultural Diplomacy through Translation

Zhang Xiaogang was born in 1958 in the Chinese province of Yunnan and graduated from the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in 1982. His works have been internationally acclaimed since 1994, when four from his series *Bloodlines: Big Family* won the bronze medal in the 22nd São Paulo Biennale. Since then, his art has been exhibited in solo and group shows worldwide. The translation of his biography was funded by the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, which is located in the city of Chong Qing, Sichuan Province and is where Zhang Xiaogang studied for four years as a fine arts student in the Department of Oil Painting.

The cover page of the translation states that "this work is an outcome of the Art Stories Project (2016003), administered by the Contemporary Visual Art Research Centre at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute" (Lü, 2016a), which implies either partial or full funding by the state. According to the official website, the Contemporary Visual Art Research Centre was established in September 1989. In December 2006, the centre was approved by The People's Government of Chongqing Municipality as a major research base for the humanities and social sciences (Sichuan Fine Arts Institute,

n.d.). Based on this point, I argue that the translation of Zhang Xiaogang's biography is thus partially an institutional, state-funded translation project, insofar as the CCP controls higher education in China, a widely accepted norm since the founding of the PRC in 1949. This structure presents a clear hierarchical chain:

Chongqing Municipal People's Government—Sichuan Fine Arts Institute—Contemporary Visual Art Research Centre—Research project—Translation of Zhang Xiaogang's biography Project number 2016003. (*ibid.*, p. 6)

After both the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, Chinese universities endorsed the ideology that education should serve society and politics. As indicated on the official website of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2019), the university should function as a front line in the country's soft power strategy. Accordingly, in conjunction with its strategy to appear as an open economy, China has sought to depict itself as culturally enlightened and open. Hence the political importance of Zhang Xiaogang's biography, which consolidated the artist's image as a successful contemporary Chinese artist who showed the world that China had not only achieved economic growth but was also culturally and artistically rich. The reinforcement of this image was especially apparent when Xi Jinping first came to power in 2013, during the period in which Zhang Xiaogang's biography was being written (2012-2015) (Lü, 2016c). At that time, China had already begun to promote soft power as a core political and cultural goal. Following three decades of economic success, Xi Jinping embarked on a campaign to build cultural confidence and strengthen the nation's soft power so as to transform its image as the world's largest manufacturing economy.

The American political scientist Joseph Nye introduced the concept of soft power in 1990. He theorized that, in the post-Cold War era, international conflicts would hinge on differences between civilizations and cultures. Unlike economic and military hard power, whose tools are deterrence and coercion, soft power consists of intangible concepts, encompassing culture, values, and ideology, which can be bolstered by institutions that affect and shape the preferences and images of states. Nye believes that soft power exists mainly in three resources: cultural sites that can become

attractive to other countries, political values that the country strives to practice at home and abroad, and foreign policy that is legally and morally respectable (1990a, 1990b, 2004). Both high culture, such as literature and art, and popular culture, create meaning for society through value and practice (2004, p. 22), although cultural practices like art are not automatically understood between nations and peoples. Understanding between cultures requires a driving force behind it: cultural diplomacy, which includes the “exchange of ideas, information, art, language and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding” (Lenczowski, 2009, p. 74). To obtain soft power through cultural diplomacy abroad, governments use various approaches. For example, China’s Ministry of Culture—rather than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—appoints a cultural counselor in each Chinese embassy and consulate.

The value of soft power has long been recognized by Chinese politicians such as Wang Huning. Wang, a political theorist and member of the Party’s Politburo Standing Committee (China’s top decision-making body), is the head of the Party’s Secretariat and one of the leading architects behind official political ideologies under the presidencies of Jiang Zemin (1989-2002), Hu Jintao (2002-2013), and Xi Jinping (2013-present) (see Lim, 2017). In 1993, Wang was a scholar at Fudan University, one of China’s most elite institutions, where he published an article entitled “Culture as National Strength: Soft Power” (1993, pp. 91-96). Wang invoked Nye’s notion that military and economic power alone cannot effectively represent a state on the international stage. He further argued that culture is an important extension of politics and, hence, that there is a need to increase China’s cultural soft power while building its cultural confidence.

In a 2007 report to the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, President Hu Jintao stated that culture had become an essential factor in the competition between national powers and argued for the need to increase the country’s cultural soft power (Central People’s Government, 2007, n.p.). In fact, since the 2008 Beijing Olympics, a nation-wide intellectual discussion of China’s image has spread across politics, culture, and media studies. The Ministry of Culture created the *Cultural Industry Revitalization Plan* (Central People’s Government, 2009) to support activities such as book fairs, films and television shows, and the participation of

Chinese artists in international exhibitions. Chinese intellectuals have proposed a “cultural China,” or a strategy for creating a national image (Jing and Li, 2010). Kuang and Ren (2013) have argued that a nation’s image is based on a subjective reflection that is projected onto public awareness, both at home and abroad, and influenced by cultural values, national interests, and the mass media. In 2013, President Xi gave a public speech that advocated the importance of soft power: “To improve the country’s cultural soft power, we must strive to showcase the unique charm of Chinese culture” and “enhance cultural self-confidence and self-confidence in values” (2014, n.p.). The economic-centered policies advocated by Deng Xiaoping (1993) have been extended by these three generations of leaders to include a cultural focus. As a result, contemporary Chinese art has become one of the nation’s few cultural products that has international influence, serving as an important resource for cultural diplomacy (Zhu, 2016). The translation of biographies of acclaimed contemporary Chinese artists such as Zhang Xiaogang thus bolsters China’s efforts to promote its cultural and artistic wealth.

The use of translation as a form of cultural diplomacy to project a positive state image is linked to translation being “one of the most important vehicles of cultural transfer and at the same time one of the least studied” (Von Flotow and Nischik, 2007, p. 1). Scholars of cultural transfer seek “to understand why certain texts are selected for translation and why others are left aside” and which “aesthetic, economic, or ideological considerations enter into the selection” (*ibid.*, p. 9). Studies of translations of Nigerian literature into French, for instance, have revealed translation to be “a negligible presence in Nigeria’s cultural diplomacy” (Madueke, 2019, p. 108). Conversely, translations of Quebec literature from French into Spanish are encouraged for economic reasons (Córdoba Serrano, 2010). Such studies show that the use of translation in cultural diplomacy must take complicated contexts into account. Thus, while translation is an important vehicle for disseminating culture between nations, governments may have the power to determine, strengthen, or weaken a translation’s involvement in this process. Moreover, a publisher can maintain translation rights over a work. Hence, such externalities have to be considered in any study of Zhang Xiaogang’s biography and its translation history.

In this respect, paratexts are an important indicator of cultural influence, because they may contain information that is not found

in the main body of a text. For instance, scholars such as Francesca Piselli and Regina Lupi have explored the extent to which footnotes offer a space in which the translator's and editor's voices may be heard (2021, p. 153), specifically their political views or opinions. As a result, paratexts lend themselves to specific cultural and political analyses that shed light on the context not only of the original, but of the translation as well.

2. Paratexts as Spaces of Soft Power

The concept of paratexts was first proposed by French literary theorist Gérard Genette, who defined them as secondary texts, encompassing the

title, subtitle, inner title; foreword, postscript, announcement, preface, etc.; marginal, off-page and end notes; inscriptions; illustrations; cover, spine and many other types of secondary signs, whether written by someone else or by the author. (1997a, p. 3)

Depending on where paratexts appear, they can be divided into inner textual elements (peritext) and outer textual elements (epitext). The former refers to elements that closely surround the text and form part of the book itself (Genette, 1997b, pp. 4-5). The latter refers to elements that are associated with the book but are not a part of it, such as interviews and conversations between media figures and the author, or the author's private correspondence or personal diary (*ibid.*, p. 5). Paratexts can also be classified according to their semiotic status, which may be verbal, iconic, material, or factual (*ibid.*, p. 7). In translation, the publisher and translator "re-arrange, change and omit verbal and non-verbal paratext" in order to "adapt the work for an audience from a different cultural and educational background" (Pellatt, 2013b, 102). This re-packaging reflects a Western superiority, an Occidentalist discourse. But it also reflects how editors and translators "can bring their own knowledge, schemata and judgement" (*ibid.*) to the target cultural product. Pellatt cites James G. Carrier, who observes that anthropologists

construct stylized images of the occident and orient in the context of complex social, political and economic conflicts and relationships. [...] these stylized images are not inert products. Rather, they have social, political, and economic uses of their own, for they shape people's perceptions, justify policies and so influence people's actions. (Carrier, 1995, p. 11)

Insofar as paratexts often include both verbal and visual signs, they provide readers with an interpretation that goes beyond the text itself. The implications of the paratext include its “cultural significance and political, ideological, and commercial power” (Pellatt, 2013a, p. 1). Drawing on Jakobson’s intersemiotic definition of translation, I compare visual and verbal paratexts and interpret them by investigating a number of government documents published in China. I attempt to demonstrate how these visual and verbal signs work together to increase a state’s soft power through translation functioning as a form of cultural diplomacy.

2.1 The Titles

The Chinese title of Lü’s biography of Zhang Xiaogang emphasizes the strong connection between the artist and his history. In contrast, the English translation of the title, *Bloodlines: The Zhang Xiaogang Story*, separates the artist from his history. My literal translation of the Chinese title 血缘的历史1996年之前的张晓刚 is *The History of Bloodlines Zhang Xiaogang before 1996*. The word “Bloodlines” refers to Zhang Xiaogang’s 1993 series of oil paintings, *Bloodlines: Big Family* (hereafter referred to as *Bloodlines*). According to Lü Peng (2016b, p. 5), Zhang’s biography is a historical narrative that integrates his intriguing, engaging, and relatable paintings. Lü looks at Zhang’s artistic works over three historical periods and provides the social and political context for each (*ibid.*, p. 378), thereby emphasizing that this is not the artist’s personal story, but rather that of a generation’s historical destiny (*ibid.*, p. 15). He explains his reason for writing the biography: “Zhang Xiaogang is an artist of this generation who not only serves as his nation’s historical memory, but is also an integral part of world art history. [...] readers can acquire an understanding of the genuine history [...]” (*ibid.*, p. 19). Therefore, by writing the artist’s biography, the author “参与历史的真正变革 [participates in the real change of history]” (*ibid.*, p. 7; my trans.).

In an interview preceding the release of the original biography, Lü discusses the meaning of the title:

考虑到“血缘”这个词汇涉及到艺术家的家庭、作品以及所处的历史背景，我将“血缘”的含义放大了，这里不可避免地涉及到政治、意识形态、艺术观念、文化传承以及文明在一个特定历史时期的问题链条。

[...] “Bloodlines” signifies the artist’s family, artwork, and historical background. I broadened the meaning of “Bloodline.” This meaning inevitably involves politics, ideology, artistic concepts, cultural inheritance, and a series of questions about civilization during a specific historical period [...].] (2016c, n.p.; my trans.)

By focusing on history, the Chinese source text is intended to be informative rather than expressive. As noted by Reiss (1989 [1977]), informative texts are usually straightforward and logical; they express ideas as clearly as possible. Therefore, translations of this text type tend to be concise and unemotional; they rarely offer glosses of the original author’s intended meaning. Translations of expressive texts, however, are often more focused on the style of the source text in their attempt to fully express the original author’s attitude and perspective.

Although Reiss provides guidance for translating different text types, Zhang’s biography involves a more complex situation in which the source text and the translated text are inconsistent in terms of both type and function. While they both intend to convey information about a celebrated artist, the English translation, being partially funded by a Chinese state institution, aligns with the soft power strategy even more than the source text. By deleting “history” and “1986” and adding the word “story,” the English title shifts the emphasis from the historical to the personal. This alteration signals that Lü’s biography and its translation perform two different functions: whereas the source text is intended to be informative, the translated biography is an expressive text.

Specifically, the title of the source text contains a double meaning that not only refers to the title of Zhang Xiaogang’s oil painting series but also has historical connotations. On Zhang Xiaogang’s official website, the historical function of the biography is emphasized:

“1996年之前的张晓刚”记录的是一个艺术家的私密故事，是他成为一个时代符号之前的故事。同时，它记录的也是在这个国家的历史大背景下共同成长起来的那一代艺术家的精神历程。(n.d.; n.p.)

[*Zhang Xiaogang before 1996* records the private story of the artist before he became a symbol of an epoch. At the same time, it records a generation of artists, their spiritual journey in light of the country’s historical background.] (my trans.)

Zhang Xiaogang's biography spans the period from 1958 to 1997, detailing political movements and campaigns that emerged and dissipated. By deleting the word "history," the title in the target text attenuates the historical reference in the source text, together with its political undertones. At present, we have no first-hand information on who decided on this title. However, one may assume it was the publisher because Lü Peng was not involved in the editing and publishing of the English translation (Lü, 2022). Nevertheless, the change in title implies that maintaining Western cultural and linguistic hegemony was not the key factor. I would argue that the boundary between informative and expressive texts is blurred in the translation. The subtle change of the title not only aligns with the translation's objective to enhance the state's image through Zhang's artistic stature but also indirectly reinforces the act of cultural diplomacy. This change extends to the cover design, as I shall discuss in the next section.

2.2 The Cover Designs

According to Genette, the function of a book's dust jacket is to attract attention with features that might include an eye-catching illustration, an allusion to a film or television adaptation, a graphic, or a personalized presentation (1997b, p. 32). He adds that removable dust jackets can "wholly or partially provide a new paratext" (1997a, p. 27).

The source text uses Zhang Xiaogang's oil painting *Mother and Son 1993* as its cover image.¹ Created in 1993, this painting is from Zhang Xiaogang's early *Bloodlines—Big Family* series. The images of the mother and adult son have no expression on their faces, and they are both looking to the front. The mother's costume is typical of the Cultural Revolution era—the uniforms and army caps "are fraught with past ideology" (Lü, 2016a, p. 312). A few objects, such as a box and a TV with an image of Tiananmen Square, appear in the background. These objects, which "symbolis[e] their cache of personal experiences," form "a complex background of history and reality" (*ibid.*, p. 302). The artist "gently delineates the classic indicator of State ideology, confident that these insignia will appear intact or emerge as restored memory. He was aware that the same

1. The dust cover of the original is available at: <https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/archive/zhang-xiaogang-archive-1993/object/bloodline-big-family-mother-and-son-no-1> [consulted 27 January 2023].

ideology continued, albeit in a different form” (*ibid.*, p. 312). Lü’s descriptions of the painting construct profound political metaphors while expressing a sentiment of sadness. The foremost colours, black and dark gray, blend smoothly into the greyish colour of the background, creating a melancholic tone that has a cinematographic feel. Interrupted only by the son’s eye-catching yellow face, the colour scheme perhaps reflects China’s tragic and cruel history during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, a history evoked throughout Zhang’s *Bloodline* series.

The English translation of Zhang’s biography uses a different painting on its dust jacket, namely *Bloodline: Big Family No. 3*, created in 1996 after Zhang Xiaogang’s earlier series had captured the world’s attention.²In the painting, a teenage boy and girl are wearing white shirts and red scarves. It is hard to identify exactly which era is represented because white shirts and red scarves are also the uniform of today’s school children. The faces are just as expressionless as in *Mother and Son* but a light grey background with undertones of white and pink evoke a relaxed atmosphere. Beneath this light-grey dust jacket, the book’s hard covers are a high-saturation red. In Western interpretations, red is commonly seen as a symbol of celebration and luck in Chinese culture, or perhaps represents energy and enthusiasm. However, red has its own political symbolism in China: the power of the blood of the revolution. The red scarf worn by the members of the Chinese Junior Vanguard in the image represents a corner of China’s red flag. It is stained with the blood of martyrs and symbolizes the revolutionary tradition of the proletariat.

The red colour and the word “red” itself have been used in special contexts and in language that refers to the Communist Party of China. This is reflected, for example, in the use of the term “red capitalists” to describe those who were co-opted into the party and those who were already party members when they entered the private sector (Dickson, 2003). “Red songs” refer to songs that praise the CCP and the PRC. The cover design of the English translation of Zhang’s biography may convey, therefore, a double meaning: the traditional Chinese notion of luck, energy, and enthusiasm, but also

2. The dust cover of the translation is available at: https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Bloodlines.html?id=XrldvgAACAAJ&source=kp_book_description&redir_esc=y [consulted 27 January 2023].

China's political power. In this way, the changes in both title and cover design create a distance between the source text and the translation, with the black and grey of the historically dark era replaced by the red of revolution and the symbol of good luck. The translation thus subverts the Western hegemonical view and, at the same time, contributes to building China's soft power through the story of a world-renowned Chinese artist. In other words, negative Western conceptions of Chinese history, politics, and culture are subverted, thereby reflecting the publisher's support of state patronage.

2.3 Epigraphs

A poem by Zhang serves as the epigraph for the first page of his biography. This poem was omitted from the English translation. An epigraph is a “quotation at the head of a work or a section of a work,” and when it appears at the beginning of a book, it is usually located “on the first right-hand page after the dedication but before the preface” (Genette, 1997b, p. 144). According to Genette, changing its location may “entail a change in role,” and epigraphs may be deleted by an author's decision or a publisher's oversight” (*ibid.*, p. 150). Genette stresses the importance of identifying who has chosen an epigraph (*ibid.*, pp. 150 et seq.), and who is the potential audience (*ibid.*, p. 155). My objective here is not to identify who made the decision to omit Zhang's poem but rather to analyze the meaning of this omission. However, I should first ask: why did Zhang Xiaogang write the poem?

请把你的琴抚弄，
为死亡唱一首宏伟的赞美诗。
——魔鬼说道。

你看那黎明将临时升起的红月亮，
不，我所要歌咏的是
生命与死亡之间那伟大的存在。
——幽灵说

(Zhang, 2015 [1984], p. 13)

[Touching your zither, Sing an anthem for death
The Devil says.
Seeing the red moon is to rise at dawn
No, sings the great being!
Between life and death

The Specter says.]
(my trans.)

The poem was written in 1984 and expresses Zhang's personal troubles during a period of illness in 1983. It was also during this period that the state's Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign targeted Chinese literature and ideology. From October to December 1983, this short-lived initiative sought to restrain Western-inspired liberal ideas. Those in political power feared that the representatives of a new liberal ideology could become politically autonomous and uncontrollable.

In Zhang's "自述与手记 [Self-Narrative and Notes]," there is a description of when he wrote this poem. Calling the period from 1982 to 1985 "a time of the devil" (2015, pp. 11-12), he describes emotions of

表达一个扭曲的灵魂处于生与死的临界线上所体验到的恐惧和悲壮的感受，也是对我们这一类人的存在状态的一种哀诉。(ibid., p. 12)

[fear and tragedy experienced by a twisted soul at the boundary between life and death, and it is also a sorrowful telling of the state of beings like us.] (my trans.)

Zhang's work during this period incorporated Western modernism and existentialism, reflecting his dismay at the political idea that an artist could depict only certain subjects. The dark expressions of his internal state are intertwined with the external social context and reflected in his art by symbols such as a red moon, the devil, specters, and death.

An epigraph can function obliquely as a sign of culture, a password of intellectuality. Its presence or absence can mark the period, genre, or tenor of a piece of writing (Genette, 1997b, p. 160). Part of the context for Zhang Xiaogang's poem includes the short-lived social and political movement that sought to suppress artistic freedom, together with the artist's internal distress and hesitation during that dark period. Its inclusion in the English translation would not have supported the patron's intention to enhance the effects of soft power by celebrating a successful artist. Moreover, readers of the translation would likely not understand the poem and its background without an in-depth explanation. As with the changes in the title and cover design discussed above, the removal of

the epigraph was an attempt to erase certain historical markers from the translation, thereby blurring the line of opposition between East and West, history and story, while serving the aims of the publisher and the state patron.

The paratexts reviewed thus far downplay certain aspects of China's history in the English translation of the artist's biography. This change implies that the paratext conceals imperceptible cultural and political functions and raises the question of whether, in translating a text about Chinese contemporary art, the translator brings an individual voice to a field that is sometimes governed by complex external constraints such as the patron state's soft-power motivation. The translator inevitably faces the difficulty of connecting contemporary art with socio-political phenomena. In the following section, I shall consider another type of paratext, namely the translator's preface, in an attempt to explain what the translator of Zhang's biography conveys about these phenomena. In particular, to what degree does the translator attempt to subvert restrictions imposed by the source context? Can the translator have a voice in a non-literary translation? Understanding how a translator tackles complex social and political externalities using specific translation methods is essential here.

3. The Translator's Preface

According to some scholars, the translator's voice in any translated text should be treated as a second voice in translation studies (Hermans, 1996). Translators make their authors speak in a new voice while ensuring that the ideological, moral, and other strictures on what the authors can say are conveyed to the reader (Hermans, 2014, p. 92). As Renato Poggioli argues, "the modern translator, like the modern artist, strives after self-expression, although the self-expression may well be a not too literal expression of the self" (cited in Levine, 1992, p. 85). However, I argue, following Maria Tymoczko, that this self-expression can also be regarded as an "elsewhere" where "a translator may speak from—an elsewhere that is somehow different from either the source culture or the receptor culture" (2003, p. 185). More importantly, this elsewhere "affords a translator a valorized ideological stance" (*ibid.*).

Thus, paratextual spaces can be "used by the translator to voice reservations about the works they are translating" (Hermans, 2014, p. 285), which may be in conflict with the patron's and/or the publisher's

motives, as I shall also argue. While a patron may be more in favour of detailing the artist's individual story, for example, a translator can choose to highlight their own sociopolitical agenda. At the same time, a publisher may exhibit a cooperative or even a supportive attitude toward the translator, thereby allowing the translator's voice to be heard. These complex and multifaceted paratextual aspects are apparent in the translator's preface to Zhang Xiaogang's biography, which leads us to ask to what extent the preface, like the title, the dust jacket, and the omission of the epigraph, foregrounds the cultural soft power of the source text culture.

The translator's preface is the public space in which the translator can convey all kinds of information that may, according to Maryam Hosseinzadeh (2015), illuminate their methods, sources, and intentions. One important task is to describe and explain the cultural background of the source text, which can give readers considerable insight into the nature of the translator's intervention in the text. More broadly, the mere expression of a translator's voice can promote better understanding between nations and states, insofar as a paratext's

function is the promotion of understanding between cultures [...]. Although translators' prefaces are relatively uncommon today, they have an important role to play as the voice of the translator—the key figure in promoting better understanding among peoples and nations. (McRae, 2006, p. 2)

In this way, the translator's preface can present foreign cultures and construct domestic subjects simultaneously (Venuti, 1994, p. 201).

On the title page of *Bloodlines*, after the title, author's name, and publisher's name, there is a line that reads "edited by Rosa Maria Falvo and Bruce Gordon Doar." Bruce Gordon Doar is an independent scholar, translator, and writer affiliated with the China Studies Centre of the University of Sydney. Doar is fluent in Chinese and has lived in China periodically over the past twenty years. He holds a Ph.D. in Chinese Studies from the University of Sydney, has studied at Peking University, and has served as an editor in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences as well as an academic researcher at a number of universities, including the Australian National University (Lü, 2016a, p. 12). His expertise and credibility have increased over time, enabling him to describe the social and

historical background of the source text and to elevate his voice as a translator.

Following the table of contents page, the name “Bruce Gordon Doar” reappears on the top-left of the translator’s preface. Doar’s dual roles as editor and translator establish his authority to write about the contents of the source text and to critique it through translation. In other words, his preface allows his voice to be heard. Interestingly, Doar’s preface does not contain general information about the translation project or its reference texts. Instead, it begins with a short description of the achievements of Chinese artists in the international art world:

Chinese artists are now also major players at the world’s major art events, including the Venice Biennale, Documenta, the Frieze Art Fair, and Art Basel [...] more remarkably, this rise to international prominence has occurred despite the fact that no assistance was ever really forthcoming for contemporary art from the Chinese government. (Doar, 2016, p. 9)

Doar demonstrates here how he is not only a translator, but also an editor with independent opinions that counter the state’s promotion of soft power in its attempt to offer a more positive image of China to the West. His statement subversively emphasizes the state’s suppression of Chinese artists, thus serving a different cultural and political function from the above examples. Doar further states that “until the second decade of the twenty-first century, the Chinese government did almost everything in its power to thwart the rise of contemporary art in that country” (*ibid.*).

Following this assertion, Doar praises the artist:

Zhang, as one of the greatest national and international living Chinese artists of his generation, has distilled local and international artistic and intellectual trends to present intense and enigmatic portraits of Chinese individuals that encapsulate his vision of “tragedy” in an understated and profound manner. (*ibid.*)

Doar is making two important points here. The first relates to artistic individualism, and the second to the importance of historical context. He goes on to say:

The swift and inexorable rise of contemporary art in China owes much to the calibre of Zhang Xiaogang and other artists born in the 1950s and 1960s, who grew up in a peculiar environment in which advocates

and practitioners of modern art were banned and repressed and had to struggle to win space in which to express themselves. (*ibid.*)

In these two quotations, Doar uses a series of expressive adjectives such as “greatest,” “intense,” “enigmatic,” “profound,” and “inexorable” to describe Zhang’s work and define the repressive cultural conditions under which it was created. Elsewhere, his descriptions of Zhang’s oil painting series *Bloodlines* hint at the artist’s earlier surrealism, symbolism, expressionism, and socialist realism, and refer to the Chinese traditions of “export painting, early photography, and minimalism” (*ibid.*). This is the more dispassionate language of an art critique, but Doar adds his opinion that “the emotional range of his [Zhang’s] characters extended the resonance of the ironic world he created in his paintings” (*ibid.*, p. 10). Doar’s subtle use of language to promote his own voice in the translator’s preface can be regarded as one of his translation strategies. It also reflects the balance that translators are often expected to strike between state patronage, publisher interests, and their own ideological positions.

As the translator of *Bloodlines*, Doar employs several language devices such as rhetorical irony to express his own beliefs, attitudes, and opinions, as evidenced in the following examples from the translation itself:

ST: 林聆只能去描绘领袖的肖像，或者设计领袖的袖章。
(Lü, 2016b, p. 53)

TT: [H]owever, LinLin was only allowed to paint or design badges that were portraits of the *beloved leader* Mao. (Lü, 2016a, p. 47; my italics)

The insertion of the phrase “beloved leader” is an ironic device that creates an incongruity between the literal and the figurative meanings: Doar is implying that Mao’s actions were undeserving of the title “beloved,” because he put restrictions in place that were contrary to the people’s wishes. In this way, he alters the meaning of the source text and challenges the dominant ideology. Even in his use of punctuation, Doar reveals his personal judgment:

ST: 暴露社会主义的“阴暗面” (Lü, 2016b, p. 87; quotation marks in original)

TT: The darker side of the socialist system (Lü, 2016a, p. 70)

In the source text, the author Lü used double quotation marks to emphasize the phrase “darker side.” This suggests that there is no real dark side, perhaps signifying something that Lü did not want to explicitly indicate, possibly in an attempt to avoid censorship. The elimination of the double quotation marks in the target text strongly conveys the translator’s apparent belief that there was a dark side to socialism.

Doar uses similar strategies in a number of places. For instance:

ST: 那些在心中存留冲动的人，仍然会带着早年的理想与责任，继续去领会、支持、赞赏那些具有时代敏感性的作品。如果手中拥有权力，他们将竭力推动可能形成的运动。(Lü, 2016b, p. 100).

TT: [...] people had retained their humane impulses, earlier ideals, and responsibilities, and they applauded and appreciate works that were sensitive to their inner world. If they had had *real* power, they might have initiated a movement. (Lü, 2016a, p. 80; my italics)

Doar adds the word “real” before the word “power” to convey his belief that the people had power, but that it was ineffective. Indeed, during the political and cultural campaigns that have taken place since the first decade of the 21st century, China’s political rule has been dominated by two factions, one from the left and one from the right. The game of maintaining the balance between these factions continues after the new leader is unveiled. However, the winner is always clear from the start (see Li, 2012). Doar thus seems to deeply understand the dynamics of Chinese society and the struggle between the individual and the Party only appears in the English translation:

[...] human warmth, sentiments—and all the private aspects of personal life—were deemed to be unhealthy and incompatible with the requirements of the Party and the revolution, and therefore necessarily subject to denunciation. (Lü, 2016a, p. 43)

These examples are consistent with Doar’s historical narrative, another means through which he elevates his voice. For instance, in the preface, Doar describes the life of the artist and his parents, as well as his artistic practice, starting in 1958, the year that Zhang Xiaogang was born, up to 1989. Doar also refers to a pivotal political phenomenon, namely the beginning of China’s economic and social campaign to accelerate the transition from socialism to communism, which further explains the social context of Zhang Xiaogang’s

childhood and youth, the formation of his personality and, ultimately, his paintings. This summary relates a particular time in Chinese history and is supported by the translator's own experiences in China, which he mentions twice, once in his statement, "when I went to mainland China as a student in 1976" (2016, p. 10), and again in "in 1986, when I returned to China to work as a translator" (*ibid.*, p. 11).

Doar's competence as an expert on China gives him the space to introduce his own views. For example, describing the social context surrounding Zhang Xiaogang's artistic practice in 1988, he writes: "Enthusiasm for political change expressed the public's disgust with corruption that was becoming ubiquitous; by the second half of 1988 social rumblings were becoming ominous" (2016, p. 11). In so doing, Doar's preface surpasses the general role of a translator's preface, namely that of simply introducing the translation project and method. By adding a description of China's historical narrative, Doar at once reinforces the source text author's historical focus, demonstrates his own understanding of contemporary Chinese history and politics, and describes the influence of these elements on the artist for his readers.

Conclusion

The above examples demonstrate how Doar actively uses his own voice throughout the preface and the translation, thereby incorporating his roles as translator, art critic, and editor into his translation process. They also reveal a certain discord between the translator, the publisher, and the patron. On the one hand, the title, the design of the dust jacket, and the decision to omit the epigraph, arguably attributable to the publisher, align with the patron's desire to use the translation of Lü Peng's biography as a tool for enhancing China's soft power abroad. On the other hand, the preface discretely undermines this goal by reflecting the translator's own attitude and experiences, possibly because the publisher granted Doar a greater degree of freedom than he, as a Chinese state-funded publisher, could enjoy. The patron, publisher, and translator occupy complicated and competing positions. Each party is able to achieve their desired effect to some degree through the visual and verbal paratexts, thereby emphasizing the fact that they are from different political systems and ideologies.

That said, since the translation was subject to constraints imposed by both state patronage and the interests of the publisher,

neither the source text nor the target text overshadows the other. While Doar expresses his beliefs and opinions in the preface, he does not overstate these, preferring instead to convey his ideological position via subtle rhetorical strategies and the use of historical narrative. Doar's translation strategies are just as subtle: blending into the expressive tone of the target text, they stealthily convey his position regarding state-sponsored patronage. This perhaps achieves another function identified by Lefevere (1998): that of "convincing the reader of the correctness (or error) of the subject's actions" (cited in Munday, 2012, p. 113). In the case of *Bloodlines*, in which the source and target texts serve somewhat different functions, the translator maintains his own voice by using strategies that subtly subvert the official state policies of cultural soft power. At the same time, however, Doar can evade scrutiny and censorship to portray a formerly neglected and suppressed underground artist's rise to national and international acclaim. In promoting the artist's image internationally, the translation ultimately serves to strengthen China's soft power strategies. The study of visual and verbal paratexts in Zhang Xiaogang's biography reveals not only that translation, as a form of cultural diplomacy, can be a state-sponsored tool by which to strengthen the soft power of the source culture, but also that paratexts can function to suppress the dominance of Anglo-American culture in the translation. The modifications made to the paratexts reflect the publisher's and the translator's ability to resonate with the source text's national, cultural, and political backdrop: in the translated biography, the artist and his work are shown to be inextricably linked to their socio-political and historical contexts.

This case study has shown the extent to which, as a vehicle for promoting soft power, paratexts work multifunctionally on different linguistic, political, national, and individual levels, thereby shedding light on the complex relationships between artists, authors, publishers, and translators within the dual framework of China's centralized government-controlled publishing system and state policies of cultural diplomacy. It has also shown the extent to which paratextual spaces like the translator's preface can be a vehicle for resisting the source culture ideology through references, subtle linguistic devices, and historical narrative that convey the translator's own understanding and ideological bent, thereby ultimately foregrounding his or her own voice.

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