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## Novel, Film, and the Art of Translational Storytelling

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*Published in:*

Forum for Modern Language Studies

*DOI:*

[10.1093/fmls/cqz019](https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqz019)

2019

*Document Version:*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Li, S. (2019). Novel, Film, and the Art of Translational Storytelling: Dai Sijie's Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise. *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 55(4), 359–379. <https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqz019>

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# NOVEL, FILM AND THE ART OF TRANSLATIONAL STORYTELLING: DAI SIJIE'S *BALZAC ET LA PETITE TAILLEUSE CHINOISE*

SHUANGYI LI

## ABSTRACT

This article examines the novel and film *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse chinoise*, by the Franco-Chinese writer and filmmaker Dai Sijie, the story of which takes place against the background of the Cultural Revolution. The first part of my analysis will make clear how the film illuminates and dramatizes the special texture, aesthetic and structure of the novel, highlighting the cinematic sensibility of Dai's literary aesthetic. I then move on to investigate the linguistic aspects of the various translations between the novel and the film in French, Mandarin Chinese and Sichuanese. The aesthetic effects of dubbing, in particular, will allow me to investigate new possibilities of reading exophone literature. Finally, this paper highlights the central role of oral storytelling in the Chinese tradition in/through various forms of translation: interlingual as well as intermedial. In so doing, this article aims to add nuance to and enrich current debates on issues such as intercultural misreading and exoticism in Dai's works.

*Keywords:* Dai Sijie; Franco-Chinese literature and film; exophone literature; audio-visual translation; storytelling

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BORN INTO A FAMILY OF DOCTORS, raised in Chengdu – the capital city of Sichuan Province in Southwest China – Dai Sijie was sent to a remote, rural area of the province from 1971 to 1974 for 're-education'. The story of *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* in both his novel (2000) and his film (2002)<sup>1</sup> recounts the vicissitudes of two 'rusticated youths' (*zhijiqing*) – Ma and Luo – as they are sent down from Chengdu to the fictional mountain of Phénix du Ciel. It is largely drawn from Dai's own experience of the political movement during the Cultural Revolution, known as 'Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside' (*shangshan xiixiang yundong*), in which youths who had a secondary or higher education and were deemed pro-bourgeois were sent to the countryside by force to learn from peasants and workers.

Dai began his career as a filmmaker after moving to Paris to study cinema in 1984. He had already made three feature films before publishing his debut novel *Balzac* in 2000. This French-language novel was then adapted by the author as a film in predominantly Sichuanese dialect in 2002. Both the novel and the film have

enjoyed critical acclaim and commercial success around the globe, and a considerable amount of excellent scholarship has been generated on Dai's *Balzac*. However, in those works dealing with the relationship between the novel and the film, there is a general critical tendency to examine the film from the perspective of the novel. Thus, Hsiu-Chuang Deppman comments extensively on the 'key changes Dai made in the film';<sup>2</sup> E. K. Tan speaks of a 'tedious' adaptation which 'involves different levels of negotiation';<sup>3</sup> Flore Chevallier describes the film as 'faithful to the original story' before elaborating on their differences;<sup>4</sup> and Michelle Bloom systematically qualifies the film adaptation as 'a kind of translation' of the novel without, however, engaging with theory used in Translation Studies.<sup>5</sup> With a reversal of perspective, Dai's thorough intellectual training and professional development in filmmaking should leave an indelible cinematic imprint on the texture of his debut novel. The following analysis will hope to make clear, in the first instance, how the film illuminates and dramatizes the special texture and aesthetic and, to some extent, the structure of the novel.

One major blind spot in the current criticism of the story of *Balzac* is the lack of systematic investigation into the linguistic aspects of the various translations between the novel and the film, which reveals a complex picture of Dai's transcultural storytelling. The novelistic version of *Balzac* can be framed as 'exophone literature', i.e. literature written in a language other than the author's native one, and often 'born of an adventurous spirit to go outside [as indicated by the prefix 'exo-'] the mother tongue'.<sup>6</sup> The writing of *Balzac* begins with the translation from a life experience in *Chinese* (and presumably in Sichuanese) to the written word in French, and it is primarily (or at least initially) targeted at a Western readership. It is an example of 'born-translated literature' where translation signals a condition of its production.<sup>7</sup> Although the literature produced is never *de jure* recognized as – nor does it claim to be – a work of translation, translational qualities such as literal translation, glossing and neologism palpably permeate the literary text.<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly, in the transposition from novel to film, most critics acknowledge the adoption of the Sichuan dialect in the latter, without viewing the film script as translation between French, Mandarin Chinese and Sichuanese, in both spoken and written forms. They almost categorically ignore the linguistic material of audiovisual translation in the filmic version, i.e. the subtitles and dubbing. There are two main reasons for us to pay closer attention to such translation material in relation to the novel when debating the issue of cross-cultural (mis)reading in *Balzac*: firstly, most francophone viewers would have to rely on subtitles to understand the film; *so would* the vast majority of sinophone speakers, as the film was shot predominantly in a dialect that is by no means readily intelligible to Mandarin speakers (despite its relative similarity phonetically to Mandarin compared to other major dialects such as Cantonese). In other words, both francophone and sinophone speakers have to *read* the respective subtitles in order to grasp the 'same' story,<sup>9</sup> which makes subtitling 'integral to both the making and the viewing' of such 'accented cinema'.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, francophone viewers have the additional option to experience the 'accent-free' version of the film through dubbing.<sup>11</sup> Consideration of the aesthetic effect of dubbing

also allows me to investigate new possibilities of reading exophone literature, or more precisely, the emerging genre of francophone Chinese literature.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, the audiovisual translation material linguistically (and paralinguistically) further corroborates a fundamental practice in Dai's cross-cultural artistic creation: *auto*-translation. The prefix 'auto-' is understood not only as 'self' from its Greek root, but also as 'author' and 'authority' from its Latin paronym.<sup>13</sup> The *auteur* translates his own life story into the novel and the film, and into different 'accented' languages cross-culturally.

Rather than dwelling on the differences between the novel and the film, in this article I suggest that we treat them as two complementary, mutually illuminating versions of Dai's story of *Balzac*. I will emphasize in particular the central role of oral storytelling through various forms of translation: interlingual as well as intermedial. In so doing, I hope to further nuance and enrich current debates on issues such as intercultural misreading and exoticism in Dai's story.

### *Intermedial storytelling*

Let us begin with the role of cinema in the story of *Balzac*. Film-watching and cinema-going are as significant as reading literature in Dai's diegetic configuration of both the novel and the film. Just like the Western literature and musical instrument in this story (i.e. Ma's violin), film is a key sign of 'civilization' used to juxtapose the 'primitive' state of the mountain village: 'La montagne du Phénix du Ciel était si éloignée de la civilisation que la plupart des gens n'avaient jamais eu l'occasion de voir un film de leur vie, et ne savaient pas ce qu'était le cinéma' ('Phoenix mountain was so remote from civilization that most of the inhabitants had never had the opportunity of seeing a film, let alone visit a cinema') (Dai, 2000, p. 29; Dai, 2001, p. 18). The activity of recounting films – what the narrator calls 'cinéma oral' – diegetically precedes the reading and recounting of Balzac's *Ursule Mirouët* (originally published in 1841, translated into Chinese by Fu Lei in 1956) which takes place one third of the way through the novel. One may even argue that the relationships among Ma, Luo and the Petite Tailleuse (the Little Seamstress) are *first* developed through *cinéma oral*, e.g. the Petite Tailleuse's invitation to Luo to recount films (p. 48; pp. 31–2), and then through Western literature. Indeed, literature sometimes has to be recounted in the framework of cinema: in the film, the novel *Ursule Mirouët* is retold to the villagers as an Albanian film (due to Albania's socialist connection to China) to avoid being denounced as a bourgeois reactionary story.

References to filmic images and analogies abound in the novel, and they permeate the narrator's vision of the world. Ma describes the image of a worker's arms as 'aussi gros que ceux de Stallone' ('as thick as Sylvester Stallone's') (p. 15; p. 7). After the fight with Binoclard (Four-Eyes), Luo compares Ma to 'un héros de film de guerre' ('a hero in a war movie') (p. 100; p. 74); interestingly, when Binoclard's mother tells Ma her son's version of the story about their fight, Ma scorns Binoclard, saying that the latter 'aurait dû faire du cinéma; là, il aurait pu passer son temps à inventer ce genre de scènes idiotes' ('should be making films, her son's vivid

imagination would be better suited to create this kind of stupid scene') (p. 110; p. 82).<sup>14</sup> This filmic analogy continues when Ma and Luo try to steal Binoclard's suitcase of books, as Luo states: 'Ça me rappelle la scène d'un film, [...] quand les bandits ouvrent une valise pleine de billets...' ('It reminds me of a scene in a film, [...] when a stolen suitcase turns out to be stuffed with money...') (p. 126; p. 93). The way Ma's nightmare comes back to him is described as 'à la façon d'un film en accéléré' ('like a speed-up film') (p. 144; p. 108). Later, as Ma (on behalf of the Petite Tailleuse) waits for his chance to discreetly meet the gynaecologist at the hospital, he tries to act the fool in front of an ophthalmologist: 'comme dans un film au ralenti' ('like in a film in slow motion'), Ma places his 'main gauche derrière [son] oreille, dans le geste du sourd-muet' ('cupped [his] left hand behind [his] ear in the gesture of the deaf-mute') (p. 204; p. 152).<sup>15</sup> The narrator tells his story as if he were the actor of a film.

The novel itself frequently manifests features of a film script. The most typical example is the use of parenthetical remarks within dialogue, which provide action or attitude direction for a character:

– On continue, me dit-il en se levant. (Ses dents crissaient.)

(– 'Let's press on,' he said, struggling to his feet. [His teeth were chattering.]) (p. 50; p. 34)

– Je sais. La situation du père du Binoclard n'est pas meilleure que la sienne. (Elle baissa la voix, et se mit à chuchoter.) Mais ne vous en faites pas trop.

(– So I've heard. Four-Eyes's father has been having similar problems. [Her voice sank to a whisper.] But I shouldn't let it worry you too much.) (p. 108; p. 80)<sup>16</sup>

– Tu es mignon, mon fils. (La voix de la mère devint sentimentale.) Même dans une situation si dure [...].

(– You are a darling, my son. [The mother's voice waxed sentimental.] Even in such difficult circumstances [...]) (p. 132; p. 97)

Additionally, the three monologues towards the end of the novel resemble three interviews conducted and 'filmed' by Ma. The old miller, Luo and the Petite Tailleuse all repeat the 'interviewer's' questions before answering them. An example from the old miller: 'Oui, c'étaient des corbeaux à bec rouge, comment vous le savez? Ils étaient une dizaine. [...] Votre interprète? Non, je ne l'ai pas reconnu tout de suite [...]' ('Yes, they were ravens with red beaks – how did you guess? There must have been a dozen in all. [...] Your interpreter? No, I did not recognise him at once [...].') (p. 169; pp. 126–27). These monologues are strongly reminiscent of the final scene of the film, where Luo and Ma watch together Ma's video about revisiting the village many years later, filming and interviewing various villagers, including the chief and the old miller. Finally, the narrative structure of the closing section of the novel can be seen as directly informed by the technique of film editing, with fade or dissolve effects. The 'image finale de cette histoire' ('final image of this story') (p. 218; p. 164)<sup>17</sup> – which functions as the *de facto* 'scene heading' (as in a film script) – portrays the farewell of the Petite Tailleuse. The narrator witnesses from a distance the final communication between Luo and the Petite Tailleuse and

mentally mixes this scene with a previous oneiric vision of his. Narrative details of this 'image' gradually unfold as Ma and Luo's book-burning event continues. When we reach the last few paragraphs, we can almost 'see' the superimposition of two moving pictures: the Petite Tailleuse disappears, amid the glow of the book-burning fire.

What ultimately unites the novel and the film is the act of oral storytelling. As far as oral storytelling is concerned, it is especially important *not* to treat the novel and the film as 'two separate projects' or, indeed, as two ends of a translation process.<sup>18</sup> Our understanding and experience of the story is constantly revised by the aesthetic interaction between the two artistic media. Critics have exhaustively studied the cross-cultural intertextual references in *Balzac* and their various diegetic interactions with the story, as well as their extradiegetic implications.<sup>19</sup> But, as Ian McCall helpfully stresses, 'neither the protagonists, nor the narrators, discuss or question the values in the intertexts themselves. Such values are simply presented as superior and worthy of adoption.'<sup>20</sup> The notions of misreading, partial interpretation and textual manipulation – underscored by various critics – centre almost exclusively on the *content* of storytelling. The *performative* aspect of oral storytelling has received little attention. Situating the art of oral storytelling in the Chinese tradition – echoing Dai's insistence on evaluating his story 'from a Chinese viewpoint about a local cultural experience'<sup>21</sup> – I will argue that it is essentially through the representation of the translational performance of storytelling that the literary, visual and aural aesthetics converge in Dai's story of *Balzac*.

When the narrator regrets near the beginning of the novel that 'dans nos sociétés contemporaines, qu'elles soient socialistes ou capitalistes, conteur n'est malheureusement plus une profession' ('Modern societies everywhere, whether socialist or capitalist, have done away with the old storytellers – more's the pity') (p. 29; p. 18), he is largely contradicting a historical and cultural reality; as Vibeke Børdahl forcefully opens her introduction to *The Eternal Storyteller: Oral Literature in Modern China* (1999):

Storytelling as an oral tradition and a professional art of performing long secular tales in serial instalments, has survived in China through more than a millennium into our own time, while similar orally transmitted and performed arts have fallen into oblivion in the West.<sup>22</sup>

By portraying two educated urban Chinese youths as oral performers of 'foreign' tales in a mountain village, Dai effectively re-enacts a well-established Chinese cultural tradition, yet with a perceptible sense of modernity and alterity. Given the continuous coexistence of 'the written and oral transmission of more or less the same story material' in Chinese history and society,<sup>23</sup> oral storytelling usually plays a role in bridging the supposed gap between literacy and orality, between high and low cultures. It traditionally occasions 'an encounter between the intellectual literary interests of the higher classes and the popular entertainment and folklore of the largely illiterate population'.<sup>24</sup>

Even more revealing, the established Chinese word for ‘storytelling’ literally means ‘book-telling’ (*shuoshu*)<sup>25</sup> and implies a high degree of professionalism. A narrower definition of *shuoshu* refers to ‘the performance of serial stories, told either predominantly in prose or with long prose sections interrupted by sung poetry with a musical accompaniment. The various regions have their own specific traditions of storytelling told in the local dialects.’<sup>26</sup> In the story of *Balzac*, the notion of ‘book-telling’ is of course extended to ‘film-telling’, or ‘cinéma oral’. This notion of *shuoshu* echoes immediately a number of significant details in the story: Lu’s violin accompaniment, the oral performances in Sichuanese (of stories translated from both oral and written Mandarin), and the serialized retelling of *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* in ‘neuf nuits entières’ (‘nine whole nights’) (pp. 157–58; p. 117).

A remarkable amount of Dai’s textual representation of *shuoshu* does not in fact concentrate on the content of any particular story per se, but rather on the performative act of the storyteller and the diegetic configuration of what John Miles Foley terms the ‘performance arena’. The performance arena logically refers to the ‘place’ where the performance occurs. For Foley, the performance arena is ‘not primarily a physical location’ but ‘a “place” created by the speech-act’.<sup>27</sup> In the novel, Dai highlights the act of storytelling by having the same stories repeated in different performance arenas using widely varied speech-acts. Thus, the North Korean propaganda film *La Petite marchande de fleurs* (1972) is first performed orally (mainly by Luo) in front of Luo and Ma’s stilt house, with the chief of the village sitting in the front row of the audience and timing the performance (p. 30; p. 19). The same story is then more awkwardly performed by Ma next to the bed in the Petite Tailleuse’s room, in front of ‘une jolie fille et quatre vieilles sorcières éclairées par une lampe à pétrole qui vacillait, dans un village encaissé entre de hautes montagnes’ (‘a pretty young woman and four old sorcerers in the flickering light of an oil lamp, in that remote village tucked into a cleft in the mountain’) (p. 54; p. 37).<sup>28</sup> Likewise, *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* is first recounted by Ma from his bed, with his two listeners, Luo and the old tailor, in their own beds (p. 153; p. 114); subsequently, a passage of this story is acted out by Luo and the Petite Tailleuse next to a pool, ‘comme si Luo était Monte-Cristo’ (‘with Luo as Monte Cristo’) and the Petite Tailleuse ‘son ancienne fiancée’ (‘his former fiancée’) (p. 180; p. 134).

The prime example of an oral storyteller is of course Luo, ‘conteur de génie’ (‘genius for storytelling’) (p. 31; p. 19); but the fact that Ma is progressively learning to be an accomplished storyteller, who also poses as the novel’s narrator, gives prominence to the quality of a *Künsterroman*, or more precisely, the novel of a storytelling artist. Ma initially contrasts his terrible stage fright (‘trac’), which reduces his existence to ‘le décor de chaque scène’ (‘the setting of each scene’), with Luo’s storytelling genius: ‘[Luo] racontait peu, mais jouait tour à tour chaque personnage, en changeant sa voix et ses gestes. Il dirigeait le récit, ménageait le suspense, posait des questions, faisait réagir le public, et corrigeait les réponses’ (‘[Luo] was sparing with his descriptions, but acted the part of each character in turn, adjusting his tone of voice and gestures accordingly. He took complete control of the narrative, keeping up with the suspense, asking the listeners questions, making them respond and



correcting their answers' (p. 31; p. 19). When Ma, with much difficulty, retells the story, he is first 'dêçu' ('disappointed') by his performance as it does not bring about the same emotional effect in the audience. It is only with the sudden involvement of Luo from his sick bed – his rhetorical question delivered in an affected voice and his rearrangement of 'la phrase finale du film' ('the resounding finale before the story had ended') – that Ma manages to move his audience 'majestueusement' ('majestically') to tears (pp. 54–55; p. 38). Towards the end, not only is Ma able to choose independently a story of his preference – *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* – to tell the old tailor, a story that even Luo does not yet know; he also becomes much more conscious of his strategy of articulation. His sentences become 'plus précises, plus concrètes, plus denses' ('more precise, more concrete, more compact') while he keeps 'le ton sobre de la première phrase' ('the spare tone of the opening sentence') (p. 156, p. 116). In addition, 'toutes les demi-heures' ('every half-hour or so'), he stops, 'souvent à un moment crucial, non plus par fatigue, mais par innocente coquetterie de conteur' ('usually at a cliff-hanger, not because [he] was tired but because [he] couldn't resist showing off some tricks of the storyteller's trade'), to '[se faire] supplier, et [s'y remettre] de nouveau' ('[make the old tailor] beg [him] to go on') (p. 157; p. 117). Ma's performance has improved so much that even Luo whispers to him: 'tu fais mieux que moi. Tu aurais dû être écrivain' ('you're doing better than me. You should have been a writer') (p. 156; p. 116) – and that is what he supposedly becomes in writing the story of *Balzac*. Indeed, the artistic effect of Ma's *shuoshu* goes beyond the emotional catharsis of the audience: the old tailor starts to carry out his *Monte-Cristo*-inspired 'fantaisies' ('details') in fashion with 'des éléments marins' ('some sailor's elements') appearing in 'les nouveaux vêtements des villageois' ('the clothes he was making for the villagers') (p. 158; p. 117).<sup>29</sup>

The act of oral storytelling and the configuration of the performance arena are further dramatized by the film. The film significantly enhances the orality of the story of *Balzac*, as though the act of reading written literature is of secondary importance.<sup>30</sup> In particular, the mise en scène of the aforementioned scene, where Ma recounts the story of Balzac's *Ursule Mirouët* (as an Albanian film) while Luo plays the violin, most recognizably recontextualizes the activity of storytelling in the 'living and never broken tradition' of Chinese oral art.<sup>31</sup> Lu's stage props – a table, a rectangular piece of wood and two other minor items – are a direct reference to a typical modern setting of *shuoshu*. The piece of wood, known as *xingmu* ('attention-catching wood'), is used to knock against the table to begin a performance or to mark crucial moments of the story. Knocking the piece of wood against the table is exactly how Luo starts the scene, and the actor's gesture and facial expression self-consciously imitate those of a real professional Chinese storyteller (see [Figures 1–5](#)).

### *Storytelling and translation*

Luo and Ma translate both literature and film into oral storytelling, from Mandarin to Sichuanese. This linguistic detail is aurally highlighted in the film, which, in turn, should heighten our sensitivity to the heteroglossic and heterophonic textuality of





**Figure 1.** Luo's performative storytelling



**Figure 2.** Luo's storytelling stage props

the novel.<sup>32</sup> In the novel, when Luo and Ma take the Petite Tailleuse to the screening of the North Korean film, the story of which she has already heard Luo and Ma recount, the Petite Tailleuse tells Ma: 'C'est beaucoup plus intéressant, quand c'est toi qui le racontes' ('It's so much better when it's you telling the story') (p. 104; p. 77), without suggesting any reason. However, this scene in the Chinese version of the

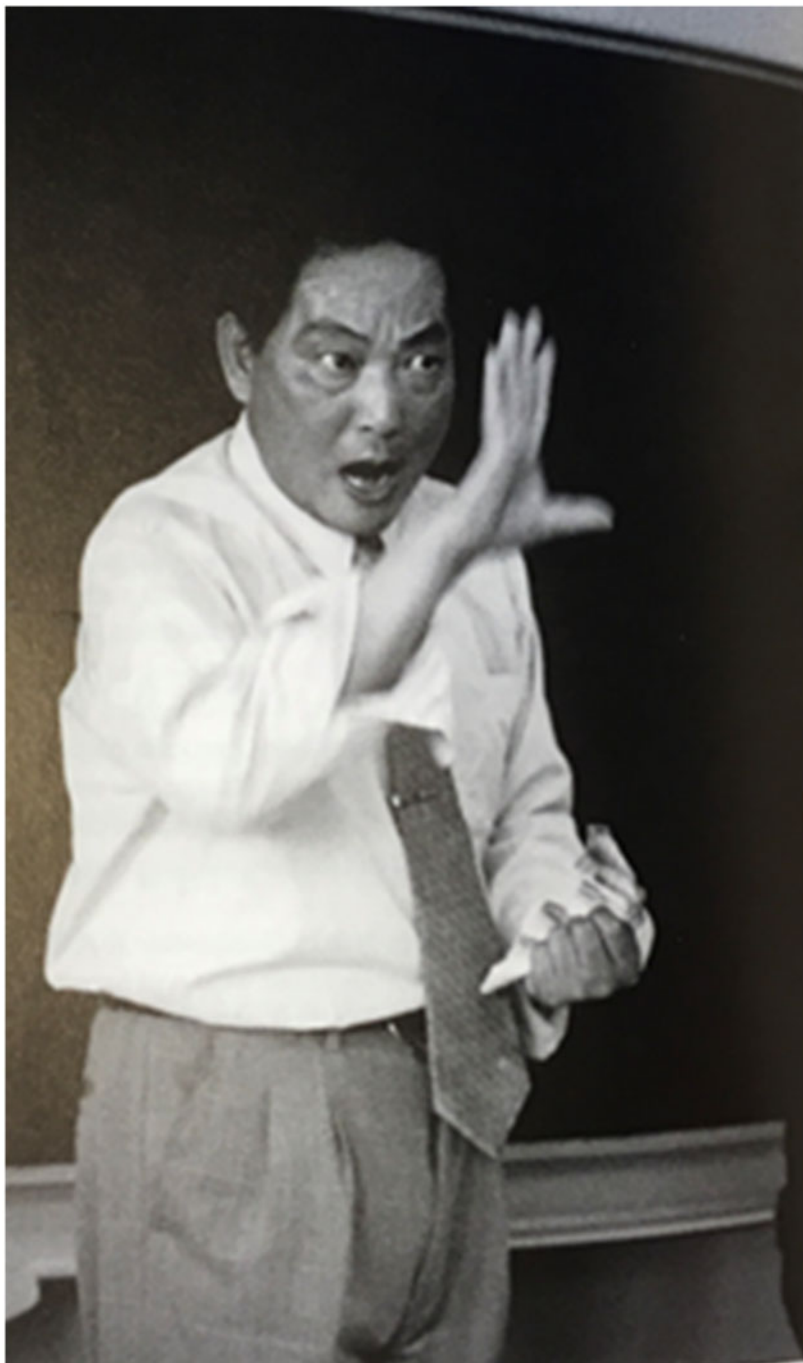


**Figure 3.** The storytelling performance arena

film may help us formulate a couple of possible answers. In the film, we can *hear* that the North Korean propaganda film shown is dubbed into standard Mandarin, which contrasts sharply with the Petite Tailleuse's remark of disappointment in Sichuanese. No Chinese subtitles are on display to compensate for any of the local audience's aural incomprehension. The Petite Tailleuse's strong preference for Luo and Ma's version of the story may have to do with the fact that it is recounted in the regional dialect which brings proximity and presence. The film scholar Philippe Meers comments decidedly: 'Language is a crucial factor influencing film appreciation.'<sup>33</sup> Meers's observation on young Flemish viewers' different attitudes to the 'artificial standard Dutch and spoken (Flemish) dialects' is especially relatable here. He notes that difficulty understanding the dialogue 'does not merely reduce enjoyment in a particular film, it also promotes a negative attitude in general towards films in that language. The preference for a particular language is linked to respondents' familiarity with it and this frequently has to do with the social environment.'<sup>34</sup> Besides the language, we also know that their version (or versions in the novel) is significantly and quite skilfully modified and adapted to suit their performative storytelling (e.g. interacting with the audience and manipulating their emotions). It appears that a good storyteller should be a skilful translator, and a skilful translator does not necessarily remain faithful to the 'original' story. The hierarchy between the original and the translation or adaptation is even more explicitly reversed in the French subtitled or dubbed version of the film: 'quand on le voit *en vrai*, je trouve pas que c'est aussi bien que quand vous le racontez' ('when we watch it *for real*, I don't find it as good as when you're telling it').<sup>35</sup> Through Luo and Ma's performative adaptation, the propaganda film is effectively 'taken out of its original language context



**Figure 4.** The storyteller Li Xintang, photographed during the ‘International Workshop on Oral Literature in Modern China’, 28–30 August 1996, hosted by the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen. Source: Vibeke Bordahl (ed.), *The Eternal Storyteller: Oral Literature in Modern China* (Abgindon: Curzon, 1999), p. 272.



**Figure 5.** The storyteller Hui Zhaolong, photographed during the 'International Workshop on Oral Literature in Modern China', 28–30 August 1996, hosted by the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen. Source: Vibeke Bordahl (ed.), *The Eternal Storyteller: Oral Literature in Modern China* (Abingdon: Curzon, 1999), p. 306.

[i.e. Korean dubbed into Mandarin] and translated into or recontextualized in the language' of the target audience, thereby making better 'social sense' within the fold of the local speech community.<sup>36</sup>

Interestingly, the North Korean film remains in Mandarin in the French dubbed version. Likewise, the revolutionary song honouring 'Chairman Mao's Red Guards' sung by the children's choir at the beginning, the propaganda broadcasting (in Mandarin) through the loudspeaker in Yong Jing, as well as the old miller's riddle song (in Sichuanese), all remain undubbed (and subtitled) in the French version. These untranslated sound and image tracks in the French version seriously disrupt francophone viewers' required 'suspension of disbelief' in 'the discrepancy between nationality and language' during their viewing experience of a dubbed film.<sup>37</sup> They represent a realm of linguistic and cultural knowledge to which many francophone viewers are denied access, but they *can* be meaningful in the sense that they give the 'audience an opportunity to identify with the Other'.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, they create 'an intellectual uncertainty in viewers'.<sup>39</sup> These materials also serve as a key reminder of the linguistic heterogeneity inherent in the genesis of the film: the story of *Balzac* is first written in French, then self-adapted by the artist to the screen in Sichuanese dialect and Mandarin, and finally translated and dubbed 'back' to French. Whether in the Chinese or the French dubbed/subtitled version, the film has a marked 'accent'. Not only does this 'accent' emanate from 'the accented speech of the diegetic characters'; more importantly, it emanates from the displacement of the filmmaker and his diasporic, interstitial and artisanal production mode.<sup>40</sup>

The notions of 'disrupted linguistic suspension of disbelief', 'intellectual uncertainty' and 'accentedness' dramatized by the film (re-)affect our perception of the novelistic texture of *Balzac*. In fact, they crucially reveal the cinematic sensibility of Dai's literary aesthetic. In a way, Dai's French exophone writing of a quintessentially Chinese, semi-autobiographical story about the Cultural Revolution mirrors the process and the effect of dubbing. Dubbing, as Martine Danan explains, 'is an attempt to hide the foreign nature of a film by creating the illusion that actors are speaking the viewer's language. Dubbed movies become, in a way, local productions.'<sup>41</sup> Just as the general tendency in dubbing is to neutralize the variety of accents in the source film and to overlook its speech registers, the language of Dai's exophone writing adheres to the classical form of French with little variation in style and register. Despite the narrator's repeated depiction of the villagers, including the Petite Tailleuse, as 'primitive' and 'savage', their utterances with perfect grammatical constructions are as clear and intelligible as those of the narrator and his companion, who are educated and 'civilized'. The Petite Tailleuse's invitation letter to Luo is a clear example (p. 48; pp. 31–32). Despite the narrator's general characterization of the Petite Tailleuse's writing as of poor quality, the actual letter presented in the novel is well formulated and formatted in a fluent French that demonstrates a wide range of rather sophisticated grammatical features. Textual dramatic irony arises



when the Petite Tailleuse uses an entire paragraph to apologize for her limited primary-school-level education.

Just as dubbing tries to ‘ensure spectatorial comfort’<sup>42</sup> by neutralizing accents and tending to standardize registers, the classical form of French adopted in the novel guarantees accessibility and readability for a francophone readership. As Chaume duly observes, ‘dubbing directors often insist that the target text should be well written and easily understood, without complications or ambiguities. This norm is so strong that this can happen even when the ST [source text] dialogue is purposely – artistically – ambiguous.’<sup>43</sup> In fact, for someone who understands both French and Sichuanese, and who reads the novel before the film, the difference in accents and registers is almost shocking, as is the palpable socio-political dynamic between Mandarin and Sichuanese, which is apparent in the Chinese version of the film but relatively latent in the French novelistic text.<sup>44</sup> It is in the film, supposedly an adaptation or cross-medial translation of the novel, that the sinophone viewers are most directly confronted with the ‘original’ sociolinguistic complexity (rather than ambiguity) of Dai’s storytelling, which also remains buried even in the Chinese translation of the novel (not carried out by the author). Incidentally, Dai’s attitude to and engagement with French as the language of literary creation are consistent with those of other Franco-Chinese migrant writers such as François Cheng and Shan Sa. Their voluntary and personal embrace and even idealization of the classical form of French reveal ‘un principe de création essentiel: le respect’ (‘an essential principle of creation: respect’).<sup>45</sup> Croiset continues:

La langue de l’Autre ne s’est pas imposée. Ils l’ont abordée, empruntée. Position d’autant plus obligeante que l’Autre, le francophone, constitue le public principalement visé. [...] [L]es écrivains se présentent effectivement comme bâtisseurs de passerelles linguistiques, tout en gardant un regard scolaire sur la langue d’accueil.<sup>46</sup>

(The language of the Other is not imposed. They got into it, borrowed it, taking an all the more obliging position that the francophone Other constitutes the main targeted audience. [...] [I]n actuality, these writers make themselves out to be builders of linguistic bridges while keeping a student’s approach to the host language.)

Like those undubbed and unsubtitled materials in the French version of the film, there is also an oft-commented key episode in the novel that disrupts francophone readers’ linguistic ‘suspension of disbelief’, i.e. Ma and Luo’s visit to the old miller’s home – at Binoclard’s request – to obtain some traditional folk ditties, ‘des refrains, avec des paroles à la force primitive et authentique’ (‘the authentic, robustly primitive words of ancient ditties’) (p. 86; p. 64). Ma disguises himself as a Communist official from Beijing and pretends not to be able to understand Sichuanese, while Luo acts as Ma’s interpreter. This is the moment where francophone readers are suddenly reminded that the characters in the novel do not actually speak French. Readers are expected to *imagine* and possibly dwell on the Chinese linguistic geopolitics beneath the standardized French text, which effectively turns the French text into a piece of translation, even though they know that the text was originally written

in French. Therefore, this episode exemplifies a form of linguistic exoticism which, to return to Mingant's observation, gives francophone readers 'an opportunity to identify with the Other'.<sup>47</sup>

As a result, this episode fuels 'intellectual uncertainty' in francophone readers about the text and the story they are reading. Such uncertainty is manifested typically in the question of cultural authenticity. This is at the heart of Tan's investigation:

As a semi-autobiography, Dai's intention can be seen as an innocent desire to capture an important personal memory. However, the fact that *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* is initially a novel written for European readers, mainly the French, certainly raises the question of its textual integrity as reflected through its targeted audience.<sup>48</sup>

The critic then goes on to cite Walter Benjamin's essay, 'The Task of the Translator', to affirm that the distance created between Dai's personal Chinese experience and his French production and reception means that the author's task is 'none other than that of a translator'.<sup>49</sup> However, instead of exploring how the notion of translation at stake becomes an intrinsic part of Dai's literary aesthetic, Tan quickly returns to the discussion of Dai as the author, the 'cultural ambassador' who may or may not truthfully represent China or France.

#### *Translation and exoticism*

The issue of exoticism in Dai's novel and film tends to divide critics' views, leading to a mixed reception in China, Europe and the United States.<sup>50</sup> However, as Deppman astutely points out,

While detractors and advocates both tend to centre their attention on Dai's Franco-centred perspectives, Dai argues that his work should be read and evaluated in the context of (translated) Chinese literature, because it speaks from a Chinese viewpoint about a local cultural experience.<sup>51</sup>

I very much agree with Deppman's suggestion that it is equally important to examine Dai's *Balzac* from the perspective of Chinese culture.<sup>52</sup> It is simply not enough to use the Western and predominantly French readership and spectatorship as the sole criterion to assess the aesthetic values of Dai's *Balzac*, even though they were primarily targeted. It may be worth mentioning that French publishers did not anticipate at all the immediate commercial success of Dai's story, and according to Dai's Chinese preface, his manuscript was initially rejected by six different publishers in France.<sup>53</sup>

If the fact that a quintessentially Chinese story initially written in French and for a Western readership somehow raises the question of 'textual integrity', I suggest that we first evaluate aspects of Chinese culture in the novel from the perspective of the film. Not only is the film shot in China and in Chinese, the Chinese spectatorship may also outgrow the French one in numbers (despite the film having been officially banned in China).<sup>54</sup> Dai's decision to shoot the film predominantly in the Sichuan dialect rather than the standard Mandarin is highly significant, as it creates a form



of linguistic exoticism for not only Western but also the vast majority of sinophone viewers. As previously mentioned, most sinophone viewers also have to rely on the Chinese subtitles to follow the dialogues in the film. Given the seemingly intrinsic relationship between the 'local' experience and the 'local' language and thereby an enhanced impression of authenticity, it is almost tempting to see the film as the 'original' rather than the 'adaptation' of the novel, and the novel in French as the 'translation' of the film. Note, however, I put 'local' in inverted commas, essentially because the film was not actually shot in Sichuan but in Hunan Province, which has its own Hunan dialect. Many Chinese viewers would be able to quickly identify the iconic Tianmen Mountain ('celestial gate') of Zhangjiajie in Hunan – the mountain with a gigantic hole in the middle – in the background of Luo and Ma's stilt house (Figure 6). The breath-taking natural landscape and attraction of Zhangjiajie creates an exotic world for Chinese viewers too. Moreover, the protagonist-narrator Ma, played by Liu Ye – one of the best-established contemporary mainland Chinese actors – converses and narrates in Sichuanese with a heavy north-eastern accent which could even sound comical to a native Sichuanese speaker.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, due to the additional factor of 'star identification', the truth about this character – a native of Sichuan – is considerably undermined by the reality of the actor playing him.<sup>56</sup> What this aural detail highlights is that the paralinguistic elements such as sound and accent, especially in relation or in contrast to the image, are an intrinsic part of the characterization and of the *performance* of exoticism as well as authenticity. Naficy remarks that 'speech and voice have been treated as the guarantors of immediacy and presence'<sup>57</sup> in film studies, and 'there is a strong tendency in the accented films to preserve the native language as the marker of belonging and authenticity'.<sup>58</sup>



**Figure 6.** The iconic Tianmen Mountain in Hunan in the background

It is in the filmic version of *Balzac* that we most palpably discern Dai's intention to recuperate and reconstruct an ostensibly 'organic' relationship with both his original culture and his community of address,<sup>59</sup> which may have been perceived as 'lost' in his initial novelistic storytelling in French. From film to novel, the former indelibly gives a more pronounced 'accent' to the latter.

The visual exoticization of the natural landscape in the film, together with the sensual portrayal of a romantic relationship revolving around a pretty young Chinese woman, is strikingly at odds with the harsh socio-political reality of the Cultural Revolution. In fact, such a nostalgia-tinged 'cinematic optimism' is even at odds with the 'literary pessimism' generally conveyed in the novel.<sup>60</sup> For instance, the boys' makeshift stilt house described in the novel is repeatedly framed in the film in long shots. In the background, the viewer sees one of the most celebrated and idyllic landscapes in China. Such a visual exoticization establishes a certain critical, stylistic and aesthetic distance from the experience of the Cultural Revolution in Dai's transcultural storytelling, which noticeably diminishes its autobiographical and documentary quality, thereby preventing the auteur from directly confronting the horrors he himself lived through.<sup>61</sup>

This understanding of the auteur filmmaker's visual exoticization should furnish a parallel to our assessment of the protagonists' literary exoticization in the novel, which is thoroughly manifested in the form of intertextual references to Western literature as the protagonists look to French culture as a desirable Other. 'The themes of love, mystery and victory over oppression' in Balzac's novella *Ursule Mirouët*, for example, as Andrew Watts affirms, are directly appropriated by Luo in his portrayal of his romantic relationship with the Petite Tailleuse, and provide Dai's protagonists with new and intoxicating 'exotic escapes'.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, McCall argues that the French intertexts in the novel, albeit presented as unquestionably 'superior', actually provide the protagonists 'with an alternative paradigm of love, sexuality and desire, voicing feelings and emotions that are not discussed, or deemed undesirable in their own cultures'.<sup>63</sup> In many ways, literary exoticization in the novel allows Western literature to serve 'as a *relatively* free-floating signifier, as part of an ironic and aestheticized staging'<sup>64</sup> of the protagonists' self-alienation from the oppressive milieu of the 'primitive' mountain village, and by extension, of Dai's own consciously self-distancing style of transcultural storytelling.

Perhaps the ultimate manifestation of Dai's creative exoticism lies in his exophone writing. Dai himself ascribes the success of his novel in the West to his ability to convey Chinese humour in French through 'self-deprecating mockery'.<sup>65</sup> Importantly, it is in French and in France that Dai allows himself to treat the experience of the Cultural Revolution with humour.<sup>66</sup> In fact, even the apparent linguistic indigenization of the filmic dialogue in Sichuanese may be said to construct a deliberate form of exoticism, or exoticization from *within* 'Chinese' culture, as Shu-mei Shih explains well:

The so-called Chinese-language cinema in general [...] has largely been a story of standard Mandarin spoken with 'perfect' pronunciation and enunciation. Actors who speak

with accents are usually dubbed over so that the illusion of a unified and coherent 'Chinese' community is invented and sustained.<sup>67</sup>

Facing such hegemonic linguistic practice in Chinese-language cinema, Dai decides to articulate that which is 'necessarily other, distant and unfamiliar' within the Chinese context.<sup>68</sup> If the novel is linguistically exoticized in order to embody an 'adventurous spirit to go outside the mother tongue',<sup>69</sup> the film is linguistically exoticized in order that it should seem authentic and indeed to continue to embody this adventurous spirit – that is, the desire to return to a kind of differed, 'accented' mother tongue after a voluntary linguistic exile. If the exophone texture of the novel demonstrates a heightened stylistic tension between French and Chinese, the audio-visual material in the film signals an equally (if not more) heightened socio-political tension between Mandarin and Sichuanese. Between Chinese and French, between novel and film, one defining feature of Dai's transcultural aesthetic is the constant actualization of *autoexoticism* that brings to the forefront the inherent self-translational quality in literary and artistic creations. Autoexoticism reveals 'the fascinating and intriguing distance between the self and self, for we realize that the self, like culture, is multiple and created through diverse discourses, and that self-perception originates from others' perception of oneself'.<sup>70</sup>

Besides Ma and Luo, both Binoclard and the old miller can also be seen as storytellers, one through writing, the other singing. All storytellers in *Balzac* act as translators across languages and media, but none of their works of translation can be described as 'faithful' to the source contents. While the origin of the old miller's traditional folk songs remains an 'authentic' myth and a 'riddle' (in the film), Binoclard explicitly collects, adapts and modifies these kinds of mountain ditties with a propagandist message and publishes them in an official literary review of the province.<sup>71</sup> The ultimate storyteller of *Balzac* is of course Dai himself, and the story he tells is explicitly authorial and extensively autobiographical. However, drawing on Naficy's formulation of 'accented cinema', it is important to recognize that Dai's relationship to both the novelistic and the filmic versions of the story and to the authoring agency within them (i.e. the narrator Ma) is 'not solely one of parentage but also of performance'.<sup>72</sup> More precisely, it is a translational performance across languages and media, across the visual and aural sensory modes of representation, problematization and understanding. In this regard, Dai's storytelling strongly resonates with Homi Bhabha's conceptualization of 'cultural translation' as an interstitial or liminal way of being that characterizes the condition of diasporic and migrant artistic productions.<sup>73</sup> It is fundamentally performative. Bhabha's 'cultural translation' is not about translating a specific content – literary or visual – from one culture to another, simply ferrying ideas across borders, but constantly performing the act of translating itself at the interstices between cultures in the artistic production. Contrary to Dai's narrator's lamentation in the novel, the profession of *conteur* (storyteller) is alive and well 'dans nos sociétés contemporaines' ('[in our] modern societies everywhere') (p. 29; p. 18). New migrant and transcultural *conteurs* like Dai have gone

simultaneously local and global and have become all the more versatile, with an ever-growing and diverse readership and spectatorship.<sup>74</sup> To borrow Michael Cronin's words, 'the fact of translation, the fact of language, complicates any narrow cultural causality and opens up a space for multiple viewing and multiple interpretations' of those *conteurs*'s art of translational storytelling.<sup>75</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse chinoise*, Folio (Paris: Gallimard, 2000); *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (2 DVDs), dir. by Dai Sijie (Empire Pictures: 2005). The English quotations from the novel used in this article are taken from Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, trans. by Ina Rilke (London: Chatto & Windus, 2001). However, for the purposes of my argument, I will, where necessary, make changes to the published English translation based on the French version. Page references provided in the text refer to Dai's 2000 original, followed by the 2001 translation.

<sup>2</sup> Hsiu-Chuang Deppman, *Adapted for the Screen: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Fiction and Film* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), pp. 133–40.

<sup>3</sup> E. K. Tan, 'From French Chinese Novel to Chinese French Film: Reshaping the Address of Dai Sijie's *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* Across Narrative Forms', in *From Camera Lens to Critical Lens: A Collection of Best Essays on Film Adaptation*, ed. by Rebecca Housel (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), pp. 160–69 (p. 164).

<sup>4</sup> Flore Chevaillier, 'Commercialization and Cultural Misreading in Sijie's *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse chinoise*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 47.1 (2011), 60–74 (p. 70).

<sup>5</sup> Michelle Bloom, *Contemporary Sino-French Cinemas: Absent Fathers, Banned Books, and Red Balloons* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> This 'adventurous spirit', according to the German-Japanese writer Yoko Tawada, is what distinguishes exophone literature from migrant or diasporic literature; see Yiu Angela, 'National Literature and Beyond: Mizumura Minae and Hideo Levy', in *Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese Literature*, ed. by Rachael Hutchinson and Leith Morton (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 227–40 (p. 234). In the post-production interview, Dai clearly highlights the adventurous and experimental aspect of his decision to write the story of *Balzac* directly in French; see *Balzac* (DVD 2).

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 3–4.

<sup>8</sup> I make a tentative distinction here between my assessment of exophone or 'born-translated' literature and what Gideon Toury formulates as 'pseudotranslation'. Whereas the former is a kind of *de facto* translation without being officially recognized or presented as such, the linguistic and stylistic translational qualities of which can be empirically verified (at least in part), 'pseudotranslation' explicitly claims to be a translation in the first place, and the kind of translational qualities displayed in those texts are deliberate constructs by *native* speakers. Nevertheless, both exophone literature and pseudotranslation can be described as 'translation without original', and more often than not, both attempt to introduce changes into the literature of the target language. See Gideon Toury, 'Translation, Literary Translation and Pseudotranslation', in *Comparative Criticism 6* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 73–85; see also Chantal Wright, 'Exophony and Literary Translation: What it Means for the Translator When a Writer Adopts a New Language', *Target*, 22.1 (2010), 22–39.

<sup>9</sup> Most noticeably, there are crucial differences in literary and cultural references between the Chinese and French subtitles.

<sup>10</sup> Naficy's notion of 'accented cinema' refers to a cinematic formation that bears an inextricable relation to exilic and diasporic communities, often in contrast to the dominant cinema which is 'considered universal and without accent'. The subtitles, in this context, are one of the visual indications of the accent. See Hamid Naficy, 'Epistolarity and Textuality in Accented Film', in *Subtitles: On the Foreignness of Film* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 131–51 (p. 143).

<sup>11</sup> France is traditionally a dubbing country (but less so for independent cinema). Foreign-language films shown on TV are routinely dubbed. Outside big cities, it is often difficult to experience foreign-language films in the original version at local cinemas. One should never underestimate the qualitative impact of dubbing on the overall performance of 'foreign' films in France. However, this distinction between dubbing and subtitling countries is far from absolute. For a clarification of the myths and realities of such a distinction, see Frederic Chaume, *Audiovisual Translation: Dubbing* (Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 2012), pp. 6–7.

<sup>12</sup> See Lena Bisinger, *Rencontre interculturelle dans le roman franco-chinois: Invitation au voyage d'un genre émergent* (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2016); Muriel Détrie, 'Exisite-t-il un roman chinois francophone?', *Magazine Littéraire* (March 2004), 65–66.

<sup>13</sup> Alessandra Ferraro and Rainier Grutman, 'L'Autotraduction littéraire: cadres contextuels et dynamiques textuelles', in *L'Autotraduction littéraire: Perspectives théoriques* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2016), pp. 7–17 (p. 10).

<sup>14</sup> The English translation here is mine as the translator of the published English translation cuts out completely the reference to cinema: '[her son's] vivid imagination was better suited to fiction than to faking folk songs'.

<sup>15</sup> I have slightly modified the English translation by adding an explicit reference to film in the French version.

<sup>16</sup> I have added the corresponding parenthesis to this English translation, which is omitted by the translator.

<sup>17</sup> My English translation here, as the translator removes the reference to 'image' – a consistent one in this final chapter – and renders the expression simply as 'now for the ending'.

<sup>18</sup> Tan, 'French Chinese Novel', p. 169.

<sup>19</sup> See Chevaillier, 'Commercialization and Cultural Misreading'; Andrew Watts, 'Mao's China in the Mirror: Reversing the Exotic in Sijie's *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*', *Romance Studies*, 29.1 (2011), 27–39.

<sup>20</sup> Ian McCall, 'French Literature and Film in the USSR and Mao's China: Intertexts in Makine's *Au temps du fleuve Amour* and Sijie's *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse chinoise*', *Romance Studies*, 24.2 (2006), 159–70 (p. 163).

<sup>21</sup> Cited in Deppman, *Adapted*, p. 126.

<sup>22</sup> Vibeke Børdahl, 'Introduction', in *The Eternal Storyteller: Oral Literature in Modern China* (Surrey: Curzon, 1999), pp. 1–14 (p. 1).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Shuoshu* is indeed one of the Chinese words used to translate the French word *contour* in the Chinese translation of the novel. See Dai Sijie, *Ba er za ke yu xiao caifeng* (Balzac and the Little Seamstress), trans. by Yu Zhongxian (Beijing: Beijing shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 2016 [2003]), p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> Børdahl, 'Introduction', in *Eternal Storyteller*, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> John Miles Foley, 'A Comparative View of Oral Traditions', in *Eternal Storyteller*, ed. by Børdahl, pp. 15–30 (p. 25).

<sup>28</sup> I have modified this quotation from the published English translation to make it syntactically closer to the French original.

<sup>29</sup> 'Some sailor's elements' is my own translation, as the English translator skips this expression.

<sup>30</sup> As mentioned, for most viewers, reading written texts and intertexts in the subtitles is still an intrinsic part of the viewing experience.

<sup>31</sup> Bordahl, 'Introduction', in *Eternal Storyteller*, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> According to Bakhtin's concept of heterology, while heteroglossia refers to the diversity of languages, heterophony refers to the diversity of individual voices. The latter belongs to the realm of utterance which is 'oriented toward a social horizon' and 'necessarily falls within one or more types of discourses determined by a horizon'. See Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. by Wlad Godvich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 56.

<sup>33</sup> Philippe Meers, "'It's the Language of Film!": Young Film Audiences on Hollywood and Europe', in *Hollywood Abroad: Audiences and Cultural Exchange*, ed. by M. Stokes and R. Maltby (London: British Film Institute, 2004), p. 167.

<sup>34</sup> It must be clarified that the primary focus of Meers's study is the comparison between American English and continental European languages in films. The majority of the young Flemish viewers actually prefer American English as the language of the screen, which betrays a different 'social environment'. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>35</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac* (DVD 1), my italics.

<sup>36</sup> I have largely appropriated Michael Cronin's formulation on the recontextualization of Hollywood blockbusters abroad. Michael Cronin, *Translation Goes to the Movies* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> More concretely, the linguistic 'suspension of disbelief' refers to francophone viewers' tacit acceptance that 'most of the characters should speak French'. See Nolwenn Mingant, 'Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*: A Blueprint for Dubbing Translators?', *Meta*, 55.4 (2010), 712–31 (pp. 715–17).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 717.

<sup>39</sup> Charlotte Bosseaux, *Dubbing, Film and Performance: Uncanny Encounters* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015), p. 80.

<sup>40</sup> Naficy, 'Accented Films', p. 133.

<sup>41</sup> Martine Danan, 'Dubbing as an Expression of Nationalism', *Meta*, 36.4 (1991), 604–14 (p. 612).

<sup>42</sup> Mingant, '*Inglourious Basterds*', p. 713.

<sup>43</sup> Chaume, *Dubbing*, p. 17.

<sup>44</sup> Both Deppman and Bloom comment extensively on the language politics of twentieth-century China reflected in both the novel and the film. See Deppman, *Adapted*, pp. 141–46; Bloom, *Sino-French Cinemas*, pp. 153–54.

<sup>45</sup> Sophie Croiset, 'Passeurs de langues, de cultures et de frontières: la transidentité de Dai Sijie et Shan Sa, auteurs chinois d'expression française', *TRANS*, 8 (2009) <<http://journals.openedition.org/trans/336#quotation>> [accessed 1 February 2018] (paragraph 19 of 40). My translation.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraphs 19–20. My translation.

<sup>47</sup> Mingant, '*Inglourious Basterds*', p. 717.

<sup>48</sup> Tan, 'French Chinese Novel', p. 162.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> For an overview of the critical stances, see Deppman, *Adapted*, pp. 125–26.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>52</sup> Deppman convincingly explores the influence of Shen Congwen's lyricism and Scar Literature's testimonial realism on Dai's novel, and that of the work of the Fifth and Sixth Generation directors on Dai's film.

<sup>53</sup> Dai, *Ba er za ke*, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> As Tan observes, 'a pirated version of the DVD is easily accessible in the mainland'. In fact, the film is nowadays freely available on popular Chinese online platforms such as YouKu.com. See Tan, 'French Chinese Novel', p. 160.

<sup>55</sup> Sinophone speakers from outside the northeast of China often associate this regional dialect and accent with a particular kind of sketch comedy known as *er ren zhuan* ('two-person rotation'), especially due to the popularity of variety shows on TV and the internet.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Dyer, *Stars*, trans. by Paul McDonald (London: British Film Institute, 1998 [1979]), p. 141. Among the three central characters, only Chen Kun (who plays Luo) is a native speaker of Sichuanese. Zhou Xun (who plays the Petite Tailleuse) does a much better job imitating the Sichuanese accent than Liu Ye.

<sup>57</sup> Naficy, 'Accented Films', p. 141.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* I have appropriated Naficy's formulation to suit my context here.

<sup>60</sup> Deppman, *Adapted*, pp. 139–40.

<sup>61</sup> Dai claims that the reason that he decided not to shoot the film in the original village in remote Sichuan where he was 'sent down' was that the place still remained largely inaccessible by vehicles at the time of filming. However, if we were to completely trust Dai's claim, the Tianmen Mountain in Hunan would seem radically different as an alternative. Dai, interview, *Balzac* (DVD 2).

<sup>62</sup> Andrew Watts, 'Mao's China in the Mirror', p. 30.

<sup>63</sup> McCall, 'French Literature and Film in the USSR and Mao's China', p. 162.

<sup>64</sup> I have adapted Christopher Bush's scintillating remark on the function of China in Western literary modernism; Christopher Bush, *Ideographic Modernism: China, Writing, Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. xxv.

<sup>65</sup> Cited in Deppman, *Adapted*, p. 126.

<sup>66</sup> For example, Dai did not self-translate the novel into Chinese.

<sup>67</sup> Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific* (London: University of California Press, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Xianfan Amy Li, 'Introduction: From the Exotic to the Autoexotic', *PMLA*, 132.2 (2017), 392–96 (p. 393).

<sup>69</sup> On the adventurous spirit, see note 6.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 395.

<sup>71</sup> Dai, *Balzac*, p. 107.

<sup>72</sup> Naficy, 'Accented Films', p. 133.

<sup>73</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 224.

<sup>74</sup> François Cheng, Gao Xingjian, Shan Sa, to name but a few in the Franco-Chinese context.

<sup>75</sup> Cronin, *Translation Goes to the Movies*, p. 16.