

Another Type of ‘Old Tales Retold’ Translation and Self-Translation, Intertextuality and Self-Intertextuality in Zhang Ailing’s Works

Nicoletta Pesaro
(Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia, Italia)

Abstract This paper deals with Zhang Ailing’s (1920-1995) posthumous novel, *Xiao tuanyuan* 小团圆 (Little Reunions), written in the 1970s of the last century but completed just before her death, finally published only in 2009, which is an example of the continuous manipulation of the same narrative materials used in previous works, and re-presented here through a politics of self-translation and self-intertextuality. In translating this novel one is confronted with a complex “mosaic of quotations” as Kristeva says, and self-quotations, and is dragged into a forest of meanings derived from the juxtaposition of a variety of external ‘voices’ that mix up with the internal voice of the author. This Bachtinian or babelian quality of the novel, in other words its pluri- and interdiscursivity, challenges the translator, who is called not only to reconstruct the original sources of the allusions, but is also caught between the need of disambiguation and the respect of the intertextual connections implied by the text; he/she has also to cope with the deliberate narrative fragmentation adopted by Zhang.

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Keywords Zhang Ailing’s novels. Translation. Self-translation. Intertextuality. Pluridiscursivity.

1 Introduction

This paper focuses on the intriguing and far from negligible problem of translating a text that derives from a complicated and deliberate politics of assimilation of different texts, calling for a reconstruction of intertextual hints – I take here as a definition Genette’s simple formula that defines intertextuality as “a relationship of copresence between two texts or several texts” (Genette 1997, 1) or “the actual presence of one text within another text” (2). However, in order to better analyse the literary work under scrutiny in this paper, I will also refer to other forms of “transtextuality” or “the textual transcendence of the text”, as Genette (1) defines this phenomenon. In particular, in the novel I will be discussing these

intertextual hints come both from previous texts by the same author and from other texts.

My recent, and as yet-unpublished, Italian translation of the famous Chinese writer Zhang Ailing's posthumous novel *Xiao tuanyuan* 小團圓 (Little Reunions) written in the 1970s but only published in 2009 in China, provides an exemplary case of the apparent clash between literary values and commercial values. It also reveals the asymmetrical relations and the fundamental misunderstanding embodied within the whole process of introducing a foreign literary work into a receiving culture, where the very act of translating is only one part of the process.

A literary testament and résumé of the author's life more than a romantic novel (although Zhang's works have been improperly labelled as 'romantic' in Italy), *Little Reunions* is highly challenging on the narrative level, for it implies a multiplication of voices and texts under one main yet fragmented perspective. It can be defined beyond a shadow of a doubt as the 'summa' of Zhang Ailing's life and work, owing to the strong autobiographical character of the novel and its daring intertextual nature.

The issue I would like to discuss here belongs to both the translational and the deontological sphere. It regards the possibility and advisability for a translator of treating the prototext as a three-dimensional space where the text to be translated is but the final result of a multi-layered process of overlapping of texts. By analysing my translation of the book, I wish to raise the following questions:

- when translating a text, especially a literary one, shall we translate only the 'text' as the final product or shall we also take into account the whole 'process' that leads to the creation of its final version? How is it possible - and is it adequate for the translator - (to attempt) to preserve this three-dimensionality of the text, even if it might make it harder for the readers to receive and to thoroughly understand the text?
- Or is it rather unavoidable and all the more convenient to efface that space and reduce it into a two-dimensional one, for the sake of a reader-oriented translation?

Although Zhang Ailing has been largely researched over the past decades in China and Taiwan, there is a surprising paucity of studies on the Western side. Among the Chinese essays there are many studies referring to Zhang Ailing's translation and self-translation activity (Yang Xue 2010), and I would like to mention a particular article (Bai Yingying, Wang Shuo 2011), which deals with intertextuality and Zhang's English translation of her own novel *Wusi yishi* 五四遺事 (*Stale Mates*, 1956).

Hoping to provide a small contribution to this thread of research, as called for by Leo Lee (2012, 246), I would like to carry out some further reflections on the issue of self-translation and self-intertextuality, when

it comes to translation into a third language. As a matter of fact, when reading and translating *Little Reunions* a reader or translator familiar with Zhang Ailing cannot avoid being influenced by the ‘intertextual knowledge’ of her previous works and life-story.

The novel is indeed a complex and captivating narrative labyrinth, which draws the readers onto the winding paths of Zhang Ailing’s memory. It recalls Zhang’s childhood and youth, her life as a young and passionate writer in Shanghai, through the main female character, Julie, interspersing the description of this early phase of her life with scattered hints of her later experience in the US. As many scholars (Wang D. 2012; Lee 2012) have pointed out, Zhang’s entire literary production is, to a certain extent, part of an incessant work of rewriting her own history and life.

As we know from the letters she exchanged with her friend and her “quasi-literary agent” (Louie 2012, 11), Stephen Soong, the process that led to the creation of this novel is an extremely troubled one: she was many times on the verge of destroying it, but, according to her last letter to her agent in Taiwan in 1993, in the end she felt she could not betray her readers and chose to finish the novel:

“小团圆”一定要尽早写完, 不会再对读者食言。(Zhang Ailing 2009, 13)

I must complete *Little Reunions* as soon as possible, I won’t disappoint my readers.¹

Carrying out the Italian translation of the novel, I was driven both by an ethic and a translational concern. On the one hand, I was aware that I was handling the fragile material of a controversial autobiography, which involved many sensitive issues and complicated states of mind, many painful relationships the author had entertained with certain people in her lifetime. On the other hand, I believe that such a composite, uneven work, deserves to be respected at the risk of making it harder for the readers to follow its sometimes awkward retelling of the past: the time of the narration is uneven and often abruptly interrupted and pushed forward or backward;² the plot is also highly fragmented and heavily depends on the flow of memories that unfolds throughout her narration, not to mention the point of view, which is based on the author herself and Julie (九莉), her piv-

1 Except when referenced, English translations are mine.

2 “*Little Reunion* is constructed like a maze, with multiple temporal and dramatic lines weaving in and out of one another. Its language is cryptic and understated, deliberately requiring laborious decoding rather than easily ingested and consumed” (Sang 2012, 212).

otal, self-mirroring character.³ Nevertheless, the point of view sometimes shifts to other central figures of the plot, creating a confusing web of inter-subjectivity. The translation process was deeply revelatory, thus opening up many paths for the analysis of this novelist's writing – especially as regards her language and style – which go beyond its autobiographical meaning: as observed by Wang X. (2012, 238), her “derivative poetics” is also an important literary and, for us, translational, issue.

In this paper the different levels of intertextuality of the novel will be categorised as follows:

1. The first and perhaps most striking level is self-intertextuality: in *Little Reunions* one can find a variety of subtexts, details, and even long passages, which have already been used by Zhang Ailing in her previous works (starting from the 1940s and including fiction – both in Chinese and in English – essays and published photo albums). As Kam Louie (2012, 1) puts it: “Chang herself retold her personal stories in different languages and from different perspectives, times and places throughout her life, so these recent renditions build upon a lengthy tradition of retellings”. This “lengthy tradition” and this practice of retelling and rewriting extensive yet fragmented material drawing upon her own biography and her own literary production, therefore, are a unique feature of this author, which cannot be ignored by the translator.
2. A phenomenon of “architextuality” (Genette 1997, 4) is traceable in *Xiaotuan yuan* since the novel is, partially, an attempt to revive the popular tradition of the so-called social novel (*shehui xiaoshuo* 社会小说), as Zhang Ailing herself used to call the novels of manners that were popular from the 1920s to the 1940s in China – an example being Zhang Henshui's works (Zhang 1976, 295; Zhang 2009, 161);
3. We find other examples of intertextuality, both in quotation and dispersed throughout the text, in the allusions to Chinese and Western literary and visual works (such as Chinese classical poetry, quotations from the Confucian classics, musical dramas by Gilbert and Sullivan (Zhang 2009, 19), novels like *The Island of Doctor Moreau* by H. George Wells (Zhang 2009, 282), the Bible, Hollywood movies and songs, etc. Most of these references are deliberately altered, parodied or modified in order to convey Zhang Ailing's subjective mood or to highlight some crucial passages in the narration. Therefore, these examples can also be considered within the category of parody mentioned and analysed by Genette as hypertextual (Genette 1997, 5).

3 In one of his letters to the writer, Stephen Soong expressed his fears that Zhang Ailing herself was much too “thinly veiled” under the character in the novel: “九莉就是张爱玲” (Zhang 2009, 8-9) [Julie is precisely Zhang Ailing].

4. Finally, a separate category is the one to which the title belongs, and which Genette calls “paratext”: it should be remembered that, according to him, “[t]his is probably one of the privileged fields of operation of the pragmatic dimension of the work – i.e. of its impact upon the reader [...] the field of what is now often called [...] the generic contract or pact” (Genette 1997, 3).

The creation of such a polyphonic and self-textualised novel is plausibly the fruit of a deliberate plan Zhang drew up when recollecting her youth memories in the 1970s, rewriting and developing them unceasingly until her death: as we read in her letters to Stephen Soong and his wife, Zhang aimed to rewrite some stories from her own past that she had already told before, by adopting different forms, and especially different perspectives:

“小团圆”因为情结上的需要,无法改头换面。看过“流言”的人,一望而知里面有“私语”、“烬余录”(巷战)的内容,尽管是“罗生门”那样的角度不同。(Zhang Ailing 2009, 4)

For the sake of the plot, I couldn't rewrite *Little Reunions* from the beginning. Those who read *Written on Water*, will be able to recognise at a glance that in this novel there are contents taken from *Whispers* and *From the Ashes* (the war at Hong Kong), although the point of view is different as it is in *Rashomon*.

The process of translating such a composite novel entails the kind of problems one encounters when working on a text that is already the product of a self-translation – a case of “derivative poetics”, as David Wang puts it. Zhang Ailing constantly rewrites the same episodes and scenes, from *Siyu 私语* (*Whispers*, 1944)⁴ and *Jinyu lu 烬余录* (*From the Ashes*, 1944) to the two novels written in English, *The Fall of the Pagoda* (Chang 2010a) and *The Book of Change* (Chang 2010b). The content of the episodes and characters described are very similar, but at each rewriting one can find some slight changes, either of perspective or just in the characters' names and in the setting. In the Italian translation I tried to take into account the different rewritings, as the previous versions were mostly useful in cognitive terms, as a means of reconstructing the author's mind, and were quite helpful also in dealing with the sometimes unconventional syntax and the ambiguous narrative perspective adopted by Zhang Ailing in the later versions and particularly in *Xiao tuanyuan*. Indeed, in many cases, the scene narrated makes it difficult to understand whose gaze or point

4 A later version of the article, “What a Life! What a Girl's Life” was published in 1938 in the *Shanghai Evening Post*.

of view is being presented, especially in very dramatic scenes where the main character interacts verbally or only psychologically with some other important figures of the novel and of Zhang's own life.

2 Parody

The first case of parody is the novel's title, which is a clear but ironical reminder of the traditional *datuanyuan* 大團圓 (big reunion), the (happy) ending of traditional Chinese popular novels and dramas: the reunion(s) between the young and promising scholar with his wife and his concubines. It is a romantic cliché, which Zhang Ailing deliberately seeks to overthrow, by shifting from a 'big happy ending' (*da* 大), a 'big reunion', to a little (*xiao* 小) one or, to quote the title I unsuccessfully suggested to the publisher for the Italian translation: *Un piccolo lieto fine* (A Little Happy Ending). The intertextuality of this expression is confirmed by the fact that the author repeats it a few times in the text, adapting it ironically to her own (Julie's) experience of unhappy love. In the eighth chapter, when travelling across China's inner provinces in order to meet her fiancé, who is hiding from the Guomindang after the war, the young woman watches a traditional opera, which ends up coinciding with the reunion of the male protagonist with his beloved wife and concubine.

Tuanyuan 團圓 (reunion) is undoubtedly a key word in the novel, which would deserve to be included and properly translated in the title as well, given its suggestiveness throughout the text. The word belongs to the category of

conceptual words, those that are not important for their expressiveness or because they link elements which are remote from the textual structure, but because, with their meaning, they directly express concepts that are poetically important within the text.⁵

The word *tuanyuan* appears four times in the novel: in the first occurrence it is not used in a parodic way, because it belongs to the classical lexicon of the traditional opera Julie watched at the theatre: this episode is an evident hint at or epitome of her own situation (in the opera the young scholar successfully passes the imperial exam and he reunites with his beloved wife and his concubine, whereas in the novel, Shao Zhiyong, Julie's fiancé, maintains his relations with his previous wife and other women while seeing her).

5 "Le parole concettuali, quelle che sono importanti non per la loro espressività, non perché collegano elementi distanti dalla struttura testuale, ma perché esprimono direttamente con il loro significato concetti poeticamente importanti per il testo" (Osimo 2004, 70).

九莉无法再坐下去，只好站起来往外挤，十分惋惜没看到私订终身，考中一并迎娶，二美三美团圆。(Zhang 2009, 230)

Julie couldn't linger any longer. She stood up and jostled her way back of the theatre, deeply regretting not being able to witness the unveiling of the lovers' secret pledge to marry without parental permission, the scholar returning a licentiate and marrying both girls, the joyful reunion with the two beauties (maybe three). (Chang 2018, 262)

The other three occurrences are all in the tenth chapter and refer directly to Julie and her uncomfortable situation of being just one of the women of Shao Zhiyong, who is built upon the real figure of Zhang Ailing's former husband Hu Lancheng (1906-1981). In this case, of course, we can ignore the original meaning of the title, and, as the Italian publisher suggested, entitle the book *Il circolo delle passioni* (The Circle of Passions). However, from a literary viewpoint, in this way, the chance of recognising and offering the readers a *Leitmotiv* of the text, and a key to understanding the real, unromantic nature of Zhang's poetics, is completely wasted.

My choice to maintain Zhang's original intention to debunk the traditional Chinese concept of romantic love apparently clashes with the need to make the book more attractive for a general audience, and with the main politics of the publisher in constructing a different identity of Zhang Ailing, an identity tailored to the Italian readership.

Therefore, while the use of this term is definitely satirical in Zhang's mind, the translation requested by the Italian publisher unavoidably leads to a misinterpretation of her psychological and literary world.

Another example of parody in the novel is offered by the description of the traditional Chinese opera attended by Julie. Every movement, every line and the very description of the actors respond to a sardonic remake of classical Chinese opera, which is enhanced by the reaction of the audience, who keep making remarks about the ugly appearance of the actors and their clumsy moves:

观众里不断有人嗤笑，都是女人。“怎么一个个都这么难看？”(Zhang 2009, 228)

“Why is every one of them so ugly?” someone jeered. The hecklers in the audience were mostly women. (Chang 2018, 259)

3 Self Intertextuality

Many examples of material drawn from her own previous books (written both in English and Chinese) are disseminated or embedded within the novel: I will just list a few that are particularly meaningful. The first case

of parody and self-intertextuality concerning the paratext is tied to the use of the word *tuanyuan*, which has already been discussed above as a conceptual word that gives the title of the novel a striking ironical power. It is worth recalling that in a previous work, *Wusi yishi* 五四逸事 – namely the Chinese edition of *Stale Mates: A Short Story Set in the Time When Love Came to China* (1956), which Zhang Ailing herself translated into Chinese in 1958 – Zhang added to the Chinese version a significant subtitle, *Luo Wenshou sanmei tuanyuan* 罗文涛三美团圆 (The Three Reunions of Luo Wenshou), apparently a mockery of the May Fourth's rhetoric of free marriage and anti-traditional love. In the story, Luo, who embodies the May Fourth enlightened young man, after divorcing from his wife in order to marry his true love, ends up in a typical situation of concubinage with three women.

Another remarkable example of self-intertextuality, or rewriting with a slight change, is a passage which Zhang rewrites from *The Fall of The Pagoda*: it reveals the troubled states of mind of both mother (Dew) and daughter (Lute), the daughter being a representative of Zhang Ailing herself. The very same scene appears in *Little Reunions*, where the mother (Rachel) and the daughter (Julie) have an awkward physical contact:

[...] they were faced with the widest and busiest street in Shanghai. 'Be careful crossing the street. Don't run, follow me.' **Dew** said.

She studied the tangle of cars and trams and trucks with rickshaws and delivery bicycles ducking in and out. When her opening came **Lute** sensed her slight hesitation and her almost inaudible cluck of annoyance before **she** reached down and grubbed Lute's hand petulantly, having decided it was too much risk to get her across without holding her by the hand. **She** gripped it tight although fearful that **she** would wriggle away. The bunched bones of her thin fingers made the grip feel steel harder. **Lute** was in a turmoil, it was the first time her mother had ever held her by the hand that **she** could remember. It was a strange feeling but it made **her** very happy. (Chang 2010a, 148; emphases added)

[...] 站在街边等着过马路。蕊秋正说 '跟着我走: 要当心, 两头都看了没车子——' 忽然来了个空隙, 正要走, 又踌躇了一下, 仿佛觉得有牵着她手的必要, 一咬牙, 方才抓住她的手, 抓得太紧了点, 九莉没想到她手指这么瘦, 像一把细竹管横七竖八夹在自己手上: 心里也很乱。在车缝里匆匆穿过南京路, 一到人行道上蕊秋立刻放了手。九莉感到她刚才那一刹那的内心的挣扎, 很震动。这是她这次回来唯一的一次形体上的接触。显然她也有点恶心。(Zhang Ailing 2009, 80)

... stood on the curb about to cross the road. 'Walk with me', instructed **Rachel**, 'and be careful. Look both ways to be sure there are no cars.' Suddenly there was an opening, but just as they were about to cross the road Rachel hesitated. Perhaps she felt the need to hold Julie's hand. She

gnashed her teeth, then seized **Julie**'s hand a little too tightly. **Julie** was bewildered, as she had not expected her mother's fingers to be so bony. **She** felt as if a bunch of thin bamboo canes clenched **her** hand. They hurriedly crossed Nanking Road through a gap in the traffic, and as soon as they reached the footpath on the other side **Rachel** relinquished her grip. **Julie** was overwhelmed by the momentary struggle of her mother's emotions. This was the first time **she**'d had any physical contact with her mother since her return to Shanghai. Obviously **Rachel** also felt a slight revulsion. (Chang 2018, 80)

In a short comparison of the two passages, one can observe that both versions present an ambiguity between the two characters, although it is clear from the text that they are both somehow shocked by the unexpected physical contact. Especially in the Chinese version, where the name of the character is often replaced by the pronoun (*ta* 她 'she'), the reader cannot really be sure whose feelings are being expressed. A difference is noticeable in the last version, where this brief experience apparently produces an opposite result: a strange 'happiness' for Lute in *The Fall of the Pagoda*, whereas in *Little Reunions* the conclusive impression is of revulsion (*e xin* 恶心).⁶ Confirming the psychological importance of this trivial incident, later on in the novel the narrator goes back to it in order to enforce the sense of awkward unfamiliarity.

她忘了小时候那次牵她的手过街的事, 不知道为什么那么怕碰那手上的手指, 横七竖八一把细竹管子。(Zhang 2009, 253)

She had forgotten the time her mother had held her hand on that occasion crossing the road when she was a child, and the way, for some reason, she was so afraid of touching her mother's fingers, so scrawny that they felt like a bunch of thin bamboo canes clenching her own hand. (Chang 2018, 287)

A more subtle but by no means irrelevant case of self-intertextuality is when some characters and scenes of the novel are a development of scenes and characters from the writer's previous fiction: one example is the couple composed by Mr. Pi and Miss Hsiang, marginal characters in *Little Reunion*, who are a basic draft of the main characters of *Qincheng zhi lian* (Love in a Fallen City, 1944). Miss Hsiang is described in some detail in the first chapter, as a divorced Shanghai woman who goes to Hong Kong in order to remarry and ends up flirting with Ambassador Pi, on whom

6 I have provided a narratological analysis of this passage in terms of intersubjectivity in a previous article on the novel (see Pesaro 2014, 668-9).

Julie's mother had also set her eyes. In Zhang's latest novel the romantic couple of *Qingcheng zhi lian* is somewhat reduced to a caricature: she writes about the woman that in the past she

项八小姐做龚家四少奶奶的时候是亲戚间的名美人, [...] 现在胖了些, 双下巴 [...]. (Zhang 2009, 31)

was a renowned beauty among the relatives [...]. Nowadays, Miss Hsiang was a little chubby and had a double chin. (Chang 2018, 23)

Besides, she has a seventeen-year-old son from her first husband. Very distant from the image of the charming and mysterious male protagonist of Zhang's early bestseller, *Fan Liuyuan*,

他六七十岁的人了, [...], 头发秃成月洞门, 更显得脑门子特别高, 戴着玳瑁边眼镜, 蟹壳脸. (Zhang 2009, 32)

Ambassador Pi was well over sixty [...]. His receding hairline made his head look like a moon gate, his forehead appearing especially large. A pair of tortoiseshell-framed spectacles adorned his broad face that resembled a crab's carapace. (Chang 2018, 24)

Episodes depicting Zhang's childhood with the *amahs*, or her controversial relationship with her father and mother (a mixture of affection and hate), which form Zhang's earliest memories, are also reproduced in her late fiction with some variations: generally speaking, these episodes are treated with a sort of cultural mediation approach in the novels *The Fall of the Pagoda* and *The Book of Change*, targeting an English readership, while in *Little Reunions* these fragmented scenes from a remote past are like colourful pieces that recompose the complicated mosaic of Julie/Ailing's psyche in Freudian terms. In the latter case, the use of her mother tongue allows Zhang Ailing to daringly explore the deepest recesses of her mind by means of a broken flow of images and words, which is reflected in her broken grammatical style. As far as the translation is concerned, it is difficult yet essential to preserve the deliberate fragmentariness of Zhang's narrative in terms of syntactic and discourse structure, by resisting the temptation (or the publisher's urge) to reduce it to a more harmonious and coherent narrative style. As a matter of fact, this fragmented, inconsistent style reflects her narrative poetics, which can be resumed as a "poetics of the irrelevant" (不相干 *bu xianggan*) (Pesaro 2014, 660).

4 'External' Intertextuality or Hypertextuality

A rich variety of texts are quoted throughout the novel – sometimes overtly, sometimes by hiding them between the lines. Most of these texts come from the major works of classical Chinese thought and poetry; but some are drawn from the Bible and from modern Western novels as well as from musicals, operettas and dramas. Among the material quoted we find also Hollywood movies, popular Chinese and American songs, aphorisms and idioms from the local culture of Nanjing or Shanghai and even pictures and paintings. This polyphonic structure of the novel makes it very hard for the translator to cope with such an uneven and hybrid language, as Zhang carries out what we could define as a 'cross-medial intertextuality', including not only texts but images and sounds as well. If, on the one hand, this phenomenon testifies to the cosmopolitan quality of Zhang Ailing's culture and background, on the other hand it is also a complicated screen under which she hides her thought and emotions, fragmenting and projecting them as in a multifaceted kaleidoscope. In order to achieve a proper translation, or a "thick translation" in Appiah's⁷ words, the translator needs to reconstruct the pieces of the author's memory one by one.

It is "true that every brief peremptory, and nonargumentative statement—proverb, maxim, aphorism, slogan— inevitably invites an equally peremptory and equally dogmatic refutation" (Genette 1997, 37), the use of these formulaic clichés by Zhang Ailing appears to be as a "form of parody whose function and mood may vary according to the various contexts and situations" (Genette 1997, 37).

There is not enough room in this article to cite all cases in detail. What I will do is list some examples and then analyse only one case, where Zhang Ailing makes use of ancient Chinese poems in order to highlight her disenchantment with human relations. All the hypertexts quoted or referred to in the novel contribute to the author's final intentions of re-enacting her past through a range of multicultural associations with literature, art and music.

4.1 Hollywood Movies, Hollywood Actors and Songs

Zhang Ailing's passion for cinema and theatre is revealed by her frequent use of them as a mirror of the characters' feelings and attitudes. The importance of this field of intertextuality is confirmed by the fact that the

7 "Translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context, is eminently worth doing. I have called this 'thick translation'" (Appiah 2004, 427).

very incipit, significantly repeated in the ending of the novel, is based on a scene taken from the famous film *Spartacus* (1960):

大考的早晨,那惨淡的心情大概只有军队作战前的黎明可以比拟,像‘斯巴达克斯’里奴隶起义的叛军在晨雾中遥望罗马大军摆阵,所有的战争片中最恐怖的一幕,因为完全是等待。(Zhang 2009, 15; 283)

Only the somber mood of troops waiting in the dawn before battle can compare with the morning of final exams, like the rebel slave army in *Spartacus* silently peering through the predawn mist the Roman troops maneuvering [*sic*] in the distance – surely the most chilling moment in any war film – everything charged with anticipation. (Chang 2018, 3; 323)

Beyond the specific reference to the final exams, the sense of long and solemn waiting conveyed by the quotation of the impressionistic pre-battle scene from Kubrick’s film seems to hint to a bigger event in her life, which in Julie’s case never occurred.

In the last part of *Little Reunions* we find quotations of American movies, such as *Fear Strikes Out* (1957), *Mildred Pierce* (1945) and *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1936). The characters of the first two films are taken as a pretext to comment on Julie’s conflictual tie with her family, while the latter provides an ironical setting for her unwanted dream.

又有一次看了电影,在饭桌上讲‘米尔菊德·皮尔丝’,里面琼克劳馥演一个饭店女侍,为了子女奋斗,自己开了饭馆,结果女儿不孝,遗抢她母亲的情人。‘我看了哭得不得了。噯哟,真是——!’感慨的说,嗓音有点沙哑。九莉自己到了三十几岁,看了棒球员吉美·皮尔索的传记片,也哭得呼嗤呼嗤的,几乎一嚎啕起来。安东尼柏金斯演吉美,从小他父亲培养他打棒球,压力太大,无论怎样卖力也讨不了父亲的欢心。(Zhang 2009, 254)

On another occasion after watching a movie, Rachel expounded at the table about Joan Crawford playing a waitress in *Mildred Pierce*. Struggling to support her children, she opened her own restaurant, but in the end her unfilial daughter turned on her, even stealing her mother’s lover. ‘I cried my heart out when I watched that film. Really it was too much,’ she lamented, her voice a little hoarse.

When Julie reached her thirties she cried too, almost wailing while watching *Fear Streaks Out*, the biographical film about the baseball player Jimmy Piersall, whose father groomed him from a young age to be a football player. Anthony Perkins played Jimmy [...]. He experienced enormous pressure, and no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t earn his father’s esteem. (Chang 2018, 288)

While in the first example Julie's mother hints at her "unfilial daughter", in the second one Julie/Ailing feels the same frustration as a son who never lives up to his father's expectations.

Zhang Ailing builds her rewriting of painful memories and conflicting feelings on the suggestive power of movies. In the last example, at the end of the novel, her cinematic imagination helps her translate her antiromantic rejection of the rhetoric of a happy family, which is contrasted with the sense of joy that lingers inside her after the dream.

但是有一次梦见五彩片‘寂寞的松林径’的背景，身入其中，还是她小时候看的，[...]，内容早已不记得了，只知道没什么好，[...]。有好几个小孩在松林中出没，都是她的。之雍出现了，微笑着把她往木屋里拉。非常可笑，她忽然羞涩起来，两人的手臂拉成一条直线，就在这时候醒了。二十年前的影片，十年前的人。她醒来快乐了很久很久。(Zhang 2009, 283)

Once she dreamt that she was in the color movie *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, which she had watched as a child. [...] though Julie had long forgotten the story, only remembering she didn't like it. [...] In her dream some children emerged from the pine forest, and they all belonged to her. Then Chi-yong appeared -elated beaming- and took her hand to lead her back into the cabin. A comical scene. She blushed as their arms stretched out horizontally in a line, at which point she woke up. A movie she saw twenty years ago; a man from ten years ago. Julie floated rapturously for a long, long time after she woke up. (Chang 2018, 323)

Throughout *Little Reunions* songs are quoted with an ironic flavour and used as a term of comparison for the characters and situations in Julie's ordinary life, so they are adapted in order to fit her individual sense of history. In this example, the English song sang softly by her mother and aunt is a sardonic metaphor of her vain love expectations:

[...] 她听着都像小时候二婶三姑常弹唱的一支英文歌：‘泛舟顺流而下 金色的梦之河，唱着个恋歌。’[...] 她不过陪他多走一段路。在金色梦的河上划船，随时可以上岸。[...] 她也有点知道没有这天长地久的感觉，她那金色的永生也不是那样。(Zhang 2009, 149-50)

[...] she thought it resembled an English song Second Aunt and Third Aunt used to sing. *Down the River of Golden Dreams | Drifting Along | humming a Song of Love* [...].

She would merely accompany him a short distance -in a rowboat on the river of golden dreams. She could disembark and go ashore at any time. [...] She also vaguely knew that without the aura of enduring love, her golden eternal life would never be as she envisaged. (Chang 2018, 165-6)

4.2 Confucian Sayings

While Western movies and songs give Zhang the occasion to display her troubled sentimental experience, quotations from the Chinese classics, which are never introduced by the narrator, serve as an ironical counterpart to the reminiscence of her traditional education, which shaped but sometimes also hindered her unconventional spirit. These proverbial sentences are inserted during the recalling of ordinary life's episodes, often in a tone of mockery: one example is a sentence from Confucius's *Analects* used to describe Julie's poor dialectic ability with her mother. Zhang manipulates the original passage by replacing the word *zhong* 中 (hit the target) with the opposite *shi* 失 (miss the target):

一开口就反胜为败。她向来‘夫人不言，’言必有失。(Zhang 2009, 252)

If she were to speak, Julie would have turned victory into defeat. She always adhered to the wisdom of keeping one's own counsel. (Chang 2018, 286)

The English version ignores the Confucian saying (*Analects* 11.14), preferring a normalising translation. However, Zhang Ailing's self-irony would have been better enhanced by keeping the original text: 'She was one who rarely says anything, but when she did, it always missed its target'.

In a previous passage, the authoritative running of the house by the two *amahs* in Julie's family is jokingly compared to the joint government of the Duke of Zhou and the Duke of Shao during the Zhou dynasty.

‘周召共和’就是像现在韩妈余妈管家，九莉想。(Chang 2009, 182)

The Konghe regency of 841 BC was jointly ruled by two dukes. Auntie Han and Auntie Yu managing the household' thought Julie. (Chang 2018, 205)

In another scene, the unnecessary concern of her family, who asks a famous surgeon to treat Julie's small burn, is ridiculed, again through Confucius' words: "Does one chop up a chicken with a beef cleaver?" (杀鸡焉用牛刀, *Analects*, 17.4):

杨医生是个红外科大夫，杀鸡焉用牛刀，但是给敷了药也不见效。(Zhang 2009, 256)

Asking him to treat a blister was like wielding a slaughterhouse poleax to kill a chicken, but the ointment he applied didn't work either. (Chang 2018, 291)

5 Poetry

A typical example of intertextuality in the novel is the interspersing of some crucial scenes with classical Chinese poetry: the quotations of verses by famous poets of the ancient dynasties makes emotions and love more literary and rarefied, drawing upon the tradition of the Chinese novel which often makes resorts to poetry, especially to signal a change in the narrative scene. However, in the following examples, Zhang Ailing seems to renew the traditional Chinese concept of *yixiang* 意象 (poetic vision),⁸ the use of a figurative symbol to express the fragility of human feelings, and the subtle technique of *bixing* 比兴 (compare and evoke).

Contrary to the conventional function, the intertextual function of these quotations is not predictable. Zhang Ailing always manages to subvert classical symbols and images by framing them within a landscape of anxiety and disappointment.

The first two examples mentioned here are both quoted by Zhiyong, Julie's lover, in the fifth chapter of the novel, which represents the core of their relationship.

[...]高悬着大半个白月亮,裹着一团清光。“‘明明如月,何时可掇?’在这里了!”他作势一把捉住她,两人都笑了。(Zhang 2009, 162)

[...] And suspended in the heavens, a half-moon radiated pure light with a glowing halo. *Brightness, bright as the moon/When can I pluck it from the sky?*

“Here and now,” he said and striking a pose he grabbed hold of Julie. Both of them burst out laughing. (Chang 2018, 180)

The strongly traditional image of the moon, unattainable as love, here appears empty and insincere, just as at the very beginning of the novel, where Julie's mind wanders:

水泥阑干像倒塌了的石碑横卧在那里,浴在晚唐的蓝色的月光中。一千多年前的月色,但是在她三十年已经太多了,墓碑一样沉重的压在心上。(Zhang 2009, 15)

The concrete balusters like overturned stellae, lying in ruins, were bathed in blue moonlight. Moonlight of the late Tang dynasty of a thousand years ago. But for Julie thirty years old already felt too long, weighing heavily on her heart like a tombstone. (Chang 2018, 3)

8 It “refers to a heightened presentation of outer and inner realities, characterized by the beyondness of one kind or another - ‘the meaning beyond words’ (yan wai zhi yi 言外之意), ‘the images beyond images’ (xiang wai zhi xiang 象外只象)” (Cai 2008, 379).

In fact, as Yang Xue (2010, 123) observes,

‘月亮’是张爱玲作品中的意象,张爱玲通过这一较为固定的意象抒发对苍凉世界的观感,这与她年少时的经历和创痛有关,蕴涵着深刻的人生体验。并且,张爱玲笔下的‘月亮’意象每次出现时都不一样。因为她每次都根据创作时的情绪和感觉,去赋予‘月亮’各种不同的色彩 […]

The ‘moonlight’ is a recurrent poetic image in Zhang Ailing’s works: by this rather fixed image she expresses her impression of a desolate world, an impression which is connected with her childhood traumas, implying a profound human experience. Moreover, in her writing the image of the ‘moonlight’ each time occurs with a variety of different shades, according to the creative mood and emotional state.

Besides,

古诗词中传统空灵、清远、孤独的月亮情调被张爱玲放大、变形或强化,给读者强烈的感。

The traditional mood of moonlight in ancient poetry, implying lyricism, purity and loneliness, is amplified, deformed or reinforced by Zhang Ailing, producing strong emotions in the readers.

Back to the fifth chapter, one of Li Bai’s (701-762) famous poems sketching a utopian world of calm solitude and placid contemplation of nature, on the contrary, provokes in Julie and Zhiyong a sense of inexplicable dismay:

壁上一面大圆镜子像个月洞门。夕阳在镜子上照出两小条五彩的虹影。他们静静的望着它,几乎有点恐惧。他笑道:“没有人像这样一天到晚在一起的。”又道:‘相看两不厌,惟有敬亭山。’”(Zhang 2009, 163)

The large round mirror on the wall resembled a moon gate. The setting sun reflected in the mirror formed two small rainbows. They gazed at the rainbows on silence, almost with a kind of horror. “No one else lives like us, together all day” he chuckled. He recited lines from “Sitting Alone by Ching-t’ing Mountain” by the Tang Dynasty poet Li Po: *Never tiring of watching each other | Mount Ch’ing Ting there is no other.* (Chang 2018, 181)

Again, traditional poetry is but a deforming mirror of the lovers’ awkward entanglement. In *Love in a Fallen City*, Zhang’s ‘cross-cultural’ re-writing reflects, according to Wang Xiaoping (2012, 565), “the predicament of marriage and love as social institutions in a semicolonial, semitrade society”. In her later novel, by contrast, the novelist further adds to it a

profound and cynical disenchantment, which is ironically enhanced by the poetic quotations, already stripped of all romantic flavour. Zhiyong's reciting of Li Bai's poem reminds us of Fan Liuyuan reciting lines from the *Shijing* to Liusu, where the dandy-poet is nostalgic for "a spiritual homeland or city that exist[s] beyond the visible world' and has an internalized 'sense of decay and decline" of culture (Wang 2012, 567). However, in *Little Reunions* the lover's words are even more fraught with a sense of bitter self-mockery and disbelief.

A fallacious and over pedagogical way to translate these lines is to introduce them with an explanatory sentence with the name and dynasty of the poet whose verses are quoted: this explanation (completely superfluous for Zhiyong's fiancée) inserted within the text (and not in a footnote) decidedly effaces the associative effect of these intertextual references. Such a pedestrian and domesticating translation would reduce the motif of the moon (which is one of the most common *yixiang* used by Zhang in all her works) to a falsely romantic cliché.

In fact, to counterbalance the use of some ancient clichés of *wenyan* poetry (put in the mouth of the unfaithful Zhiyong), just a few passages later, at the end of the chapter, we are given Julie's own lines in vernacular. As though to suggest that the flat simplicity of *baihua* could reveal the protagonist's modernist consciousness and restore the true meaning of such a burning but ephemeral love story, Zhang writes:

他的过去里没有我, | 寂寂的流年, | 深深的庭院, | 空房里晒着太阳, | 已经是古代的太阳了。 | 我要一直跑进去, | 大喊'我在这儿。 | 我在这儿呀!' 他没说, 但是显然不喜欢。他的过去有声有色, 不是那么空虚, 在等着她来。(Zhang 2009, 165)

Never have I occupied any places | In his life's bygone phases | As his years of solitude streamed past | He incarcerated himself in a silent courtyard | The empty rooms filled with sunshine | A sunshine left behind from ancient times | I have a good mind to crash into the compound | And shout: "Here I am! Look, here I am!" (Chang 2018, 183-4)

Reasonably enough, building upon the atmosphere created by these poetic interpolations and the 'strategy of meaning' adopted by the author throughout her works, the translator should infer from these subtexts that the key feeling of these passages is a sentiment of solitude and inconsistency and not of romantic passion. We can deduce that while sometimes intertextuality is used to enhance the general mood of the text, more often Zhang Ailing aims to provide a baffling effect.

6 Conclusions

As a conclusion, in an attempt to give a preliminary answer to the questions I raised at the beginning of this paper, it is possible to state that:

1. a fair translation of this novel cannot be carried out without being aware of its composite, self-textualised and multidiscursive nature. The knowledge and analysis of her previous texts and of the transformation of certain themes, motives and characters, is the key to interpret this artistic and psychological process of involution, and hence constitutes an irreplaceable basis for the translation act;
2. the recognition of all the intertextual hints scattered in the text is of primary importance for the translator, if he/she is to create a balanced network of subtexts and intertexts drawn from different literary works and traditions. This composite intertextual texture of the novel is, indeed, a mirror of the double, composite identity of the author, Zhang Ailing or Eileen Chang;
3. as it has been noted elsewhere, this practice of rewriting is often not a simple self-translation; rather, Zhang Ailing seems to exploit all the potentialities of intertextuality. In the very process of rewriting or translating her own works, she often creates shifts in meaning or changes in some details, and almost always modifies the previous version, if only slightly. The aim of such a complex poetics is to debunk and defy any kind of systematic reading of her past and her works. Zhang rejects all labels, offering her readers a dynamic, personal way of experiencing her writing. Ultimately, in a letter to Soong (dated July 7, 1975), talking about *Little Reunions*, she states that

这篇没有碍语。[...]我在《小团圆》里讲到自己也很不客气，这种地方总是自己来揭发的好。当然也并不是否定自己。(Zhang 2009, 2)

In this text I have removed all taboos, in *Little Reunions* I am not self-indulgent at all, I think it is better to expose myself, of course without denying myself.

Therefore, the main approach in translating novels of this kind must be based on an 'intertextual knowledge' of the text and of the author. Every move towards effacing this multi-layered 'narrative fabric', which is indisputably built on the equally composite fabric of the author's self, would cause a significant loss of meaning.

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